

BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Enabling Open Access to Birkbeck's Research Degree output

Constructing visibility: British social documentary photography and eco-criticality during the fossil economy circa 1970-2020

<https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/54535/>

Version: Full Version

Citation: Johnston Drew, Liz (2024) Constructing visibility: British social documentary photography and eco-criticality during the fossil economy circa 1970-2020. [Thesis] (Unpublished)

© 2020 The Author(s)

All material available through BIROn is protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law.

Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

[Deposit Guide](#)
Contact: [email](#)

**Constructing Visibility:
British Social Documentary Photography and Eco-Criticality
during the Fossil Economy circa 1970 - 2020**

Liz Johnston Drew
PhD Thesis
Birkbeck, University of London

The work presented in this thesis is my own work based on my original research

Liz J Drew

Acknowledgments

Patrick Drew (Tynemouth 1929 - 2024)
Theresa Johnson Drew (Wallsend 1934 – 2006)

Thesis Abstract

This is a thesis about British social, documentary photography as emerging and developing over the last fifty years. A period that has seen the escalation of interrelated ecological and social erosion on an uneven global scale. I analyse three examples that have an overall aim to give agency to those who are less seen and heard. All three share objectives to achieve this aim, which are to be as collaborative as possible and to employ the photobook as an apposite form that has the potential for wider distribution; beyond the gallery or museum systems that are not readily accessible, in a meaningful way, to the majority of those depicted in such works. I question if we can view social documentary photography, as a mediated realism that can have any real efficacy, in the face of the unequal experience of social, political and physical environments. I use an ecocritical approach to position these examples as attempting to counter generalising, therefore repressive narratives on 'ordinary' people and places impacted by imposed change. I refer specifically to change as part of the fossil economy that has escalated over the same fifty-year timespan in play. The consequences of this economy have "tentacles everywhere", as Lucy Lippard said of a global capitalism that has become dangerously dependent on this economy that it has created and nurtures. "Everywhere" in my thesis meaning ways of living, working and being, as well as a sense of place. My research is situated in work on documentary projects and debates, that speak to this through a focus on local environments and communities. Due to personal experience, I've focussed mainly on the North East of England and the North Sea (off England and Scotland) as exemplar sites. My three examples are projects from Newcastle-based photographer, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, co-founder of the Amber Film and Photography Collective, working in the Tyneside region from 1969; a collaboration between the photographer (and environmental activist) Fay Godwin and the socialist writer (and journalist) Mervyn Jones, engaging with North Sea oil workers during a portentous heatwave in August 1975, a weather event that is often overlooked as it was quickly superseded by the prolonged heatwave of 1976. Also, contemporary work from artist-activist Mark Neville, as engaged with changing working environments, injustice, and conflict in the North and beyond. My theoretical framing is informed by methodology found in art history. Also drawing upon the energy humanities as more recently emerging from the wider environmental humanities. My analysis is informed by work that allows for expanded interpretation and agency, for documentary past and present. My examples are examined for new insights into their significance as political, pedagogic, and cultural activity

Table of Contents

Introduction

P.12

Theoretical framing, case studies and rationale for the thesis are explained in four sections.

The complex nature of resource politics in the fossil economy.

Definitions of eco-criticality, participation and the photobook are discussed to introduce critical approaches and the three chapters of the thesis.

Reviewing a responsive and growing literature. Notions of participation, plurality and affect, in the ever-developing scholarship on the legitimacy of documentary methods in photography. These are foregrounded to introduce critical contexts for the thesis.

The analysis of agency in social documentary photography.

Introducing key voices on politics, aesthetics and ethics; as discerned in photography operating on a personal and societal level. These include Mathilde Bertrand, Lucy Lippard, Annebella Pollen, Jacques Rancière and Allan Sekula.

The significance of my thesis. I contribute to a growing scholarship on photography that is situated in a fourth industrial era and escalating climate crisis. I employ an original (eco-critical) framework to address the need for new methods of analysis for British social documentary photography in this context.

Illustrations

Introduction

- Fig.1 Patrick Drew (aged 39), 'Hewett' rig blow-out evacuation. Hand injury. North Sea, Nov 1968 Unknown photographer, Photograph, 1968
- Fig.2 Hewett rig. Unknown photographer, Photograph, date unknown
- Fig.3 Oil Industry investment brochure, 2024
- Fig.4 Oil industry investment brochure, 2024
- Fig.5 'Conoco rig - making a connection'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.6 ' In 1979 Margaret Thatcher's ministers allowed BP to supply crude to a subsidiary in South Africa'. *The Times* Unknown photographer, Photograph, 1979
- Fig.7 'John, Texan rigger foreman in Forties Field' Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.8 'Just Stop Oil' Protesters Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland at the National Gallery, 2024 Unknown Photographer, Photograph, 2024
- Fig.9 *Miners' Wives Carrying Sacks of Coal* Vincent Van Gogh. Watercolour 1882
- Fig.10 "Cookie" in the Snow, Seacoal Camp, Lynemouth, Northumberland. Chris Killip, Photograph, 1985
- Fig.11 *Rocker and Rosie going home, Lynemouth, Northumberland* Chris Killip, Photograph, 1984
- Fig.12 Diagram for Sherry R. Arnstein's 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' 1969
- Fig.13 *Sazi Jali, Durban, KwaZulu Natal* Zanele Muholi, Photograph, 2018
- Fig.14 Zanele Muholi, installation view at Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2021 Eike Walkenhorst, Photograph, 2021
- Fig.15 *Amber Film and Photography Collective, Newcastle, 1979*. Unknown Photographer, Photograph, 1979
- Fig.16 *Girl on a Spacehopper*, 1971 Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971
- Fig.17 *Heather Playing Piano in a Derelict House* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971

- Fig.18 *Blacksmiths' tools. Blacksmiths' tools in the forge. Each craftsman designs and makes his own tools* Bruce Rae, Amber Associate Photographer, Photograph, Circa 1980
- Fig.19 'Birmingham 1984 School dinner ladies protest for free school meals and against privatisation'. Caption for *Untitled*, Unknown NUT photographer, Photograph, 1984
- Fig. 20 *School pupils protest against education cuts County Hall, London 1987.* John Harris, Photograph, 1987
- Fig.21 *Who's Next for Privatisation? The Privatisation Series*, 1986. Unknown photographer, Amber Collective, Photograph, Circa 1986
- Fig.22 'Shell construction site at Sullom Voe with crofts in the background'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.23 'Construction of work camp for 1200 Sullom Voe workers. Meanwhile construction workers have to live in mobile homes'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.24 *Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs, 1969* Robert Adams, Photograph, 1969
- Fig.25 *Longmont, Colorado, 1976* Robert Adams, Photograph, 1976
- Fig.26 *Bomb Crater and Destroyed Convoy, Bravo 20 Bombing Range, Nevada, 1986* Richard Misrach, Photograph, 1986
- Fig.27 *Playboy 94 (Ray Charles) 1990-91* Richard Misrach, Photograph, 1990-91
- Fig.28 *Playboy 38 (Warhol) 1990-91* Richard Misrach, Photograph, 1990-91
- Fig.29 *Ferguson's Shipyard 2005* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2005
- Fig.30 *Avdiivka Coke and Chemical Plant (AKHZ) Donetsk Oblast, 2019* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2019
- Fig.31 *Worker, Avdiivka, Donetsk, 2019* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2019
- Fig.32 Installation view of work (on theatre interiors) from Candida Höfer. Ben Brown gallery, London 2020 Unknown Photographer, Photograph, 2020
- Fig.33 *Untitled, 1995* Richard Billingham, Photograph, 1995
- Fig.34 *New Brighton* Martin Parr, Photograph, 1983 - 1986

Chapter One

- Fig.35 Frame from 'Le Quai des Brumes '(Port of Shadows) 1938 Dir. Marcel Carne
- Fig.36 Book cover: *In Fading Light: Films of the Amber Collective*, 2020 Featuring *High Row* Sirkka Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1974
- Fig.37 Film frame from *La Bête Humaine* (The Human Beast) 1938 Dir, Jean Renoir
- Fig.38 *Smith's Dock, North Shields 1980-89* Peter Fryer, Photograph, 1980-89
- Fig.39 *Shipbuilding on the River Tyne, 1974* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1974
- Fig.40 Film frame from *Le Jour se Leve* (Daybreak) 1939 Dir. Marcel Carné
- Fig.41 Film frame from *Le Quai des Brumes* (Port of Shadows) 1938 Dir. Marcel Carné
- Fig.42 *Carville Road at Night, 1971* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971
- Fig.43 Film frame from *Le Quai des Brumes* (Port of Shadows) 1938 Dir. Marcel Carné
- Fig.44 *Wallsend, Tyneside' 1975* Chris Killip, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.45 *Segedunum Roman Fort, Wallsend, 2018* Mike Biles, Photograph, 2018
- Fig.46 Tailpiece vignette (known as 'Man Pissing') from *History of British Birds Volume One*, Thomas Bewick, 1797
- Fig.47 Film frames from *The Last Shift* Amber Films, 1976
- Fig.48 Film frames from *Glassworks*, 1977 Amber Films, 1977
- Fig.49 Film frames from the film *Glassworks*, Amber Films, with *Vulcans Forge* Velasquez, Painting, 1630
- Fig.50 *Jimmy, Smith's Drop Forging Company, Aston, Birmingham* Janine Weidel, Photograph, 1977
- Fig.51 *Maker of small chains, Eliza Tinsley , Cradley Heath* Janine Weidel, Photograph, 1977
- Fig 52 *Florence Allen, gilding using her "secret brew", Turner & Simpson* Janine Weidel, Photograph, 1977
- Fig.53 Film frame from the film *Launch* , Amber Films, 1977

Fig.54 *River Project: Wallsend, 1974* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1974

Fig.55 *Mojdeh Gareb with daughters Sogand and Samen Zendeerooh, from Iran* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 2008

Fig.56 *Demolition, 1971* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971

Fig.57 *Man Gesturing in the Street, 1971* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971

Fig.58 *Kendal Street in the Snow, 1969* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1969

Fig.59 *Tom Collins House, 2008* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 2008

Fig.60 *Najla Bacon, from Lebanon, 2008* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 2008

Fig.61 *William (Willie) Neilson, Lawrence Square, 1971*
Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971

Chapter Two

Fig.62 'Location of the main oilfields and pipelines'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

Fig.63 'Loch Kishorn construction site'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

Fig.64 Book cover. *Petroleum*, 1919.

Fig.65 'Burning Liquid Fuel', advertisement *Petroleum*, 1919

Fig.66 *England's first oil well in Derbyshire* in *Petroleum*, Photograph, 1919

Fig.67 *North Sea Rig, 1967* Maurice Broomfield, Photograph, 1967

Fig.68 'Residential caravan site next to Shell headquarters, south fringe of Aberdeen. Centrally heated caravans cost £2,300 in 1973 and double that by 1975'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

Fig.69 'Private speculative building outside of Aberdeen. 'While working class people can only wait for the council housing to pick up'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

Fig.70 'Prefabs, cabins, and caravans. There are very strict regulations to prevent holiday parks being overrun by long stay oil workers.' Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin 1975

Fig.71 *Tract Housing, 1975* Robert Adams, Photograph, 1975

- Fig.72 *Highway # 5 Los Angeles, California, USA, 2009*
Edward Burtynsky, Photograph, 2009
- Fig.73 *SOACR Oil Fields #1ab Baku, Azerbaijan, 2006*
Edward Burtynsky, Photograph, 2006
- Fig.74 *Launch of The Super Tanker, Everett F. Wells, Wallsend*
Chris Killip, Photograph, 1976
- Fig.75 *Meall Mòr, Glencoe* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1988
- Fig.76 Cover for Mervyn Jones' *Today the Struggle: A Novel*, 1978
- Fig.77 Cover for Mervyn Jones' *Holding on*, 1971
- Fig.78 *Big Money is Moving In* Docklands Community Poster Project (1980-1989)
- Fig.79 *The Oil Rush* Front Cover. *Untitled* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.80 *The Oil Rush* Frontispiece. *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.81 'Conoco Rig - Making a connection' Caption for *Untitled*,
Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.82 'Workers on the rigs come from all over the world. Left: Spanish stewards Above:
French tool-pushers Right: US Supervisors' Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin,
Photographs, 1975
- Fig.83 *The Grenada, Peterhead* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.84 *Just back from Stavanger* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.85 Top image 'Spanish barge workers on a shopping spree in Peterhead
Bottom image: Male boutique: Names like Rigg and Black Gold are
conspicuous'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photographs, 1975
- Fig.86 'Maiden voyage of the concrete transporter from Strome Ferry to
Kishorn site'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.87 'Kishorn: Concrete pouring and trowelling'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin,
Photograph, 1975
- Fig.88 'Duffy's Magic Box' . Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.89 'Speculation'. Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975
- Fig.90 'Teabreak. The wire netting covering the cliff behind is to stop rockfalls'.
Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

- Fig.91 Sue Jane Taylor, celebrating the completion of a ship with the welders of John Brown's shipyard, 1987 . Photographer unknown, Photograph, 1987
- Fig.92 *Piper Alpha Helideck 1987. Infrared* Sue Jane Taylor, Photograph, 1987
- Fig.93 *Piper Alpha supply vessel deck, 1987. Infrared* Sue Jane Taylor, Photograph, 1987
- Fig.94 Final, uncaptioned, image in *The Oil Rush* Fay Godwin, Photograph 1975
- Fig.95 Image of Piper Alpha blaze. Screenshot from ITV Scotland, News, July, 1988
- Fig.96 *Memorial for Piper Alpha* Photographer unknown, Photograph, 1991

Chapter Three

- Fig. 97 *Battle Against Stigma* Mark Neville, Photograph, Circa 2015
- Fig. 98 *Boys at Devant* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2005
- Fig. 99 *Deeds Not Words* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2010
- Fig.100 Exhibition poster for *Deeds Not Words* from The Photographer's Gallery 2013.
- Fig.101 *Sewickley # 1, 2012* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2012
- Fig.102 *Flint is Family- A Creative Solution for the Water Crisis in Flint, Michigan*
LaToya Ruby Frazier, Photograph, 2016
- Fig.103 *London Metal Exchange* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2012
- Fig.104 *Annie and Snowy* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2008
- Fig.105 *On Patrol in Gereshk,1* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2011
- Fig.106 *Bolan Market, Afghanistan* Mark Neville
- Fig.107 *Queue to cross Stanytsia Luhanska Bridge* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2019
- Fig.108 *Lazo and Anna Liudmila at an IDP Camp in Sviatohirsk, Donetsk*
Mark Neville, Photograph, 2016

End.

Introduction

The complex nature of resource politics in the fossil economy

An outline of the rationale and development of the thesis. Definitions of eco-criticality, participation and the photobook are discussed to introduce critical approaches as well as the thesis chapters. I firstly address the generic questions ‘what is this about?’ and ‘why now?’.

What artists do with words, photos, pictures, videos, or installations very often aims no longer to create a work of art as such, but a veritable system of documentation, information and construction of the visibility and conceivability of the world [...] the relationship between the perceptible, the utterable and the thinkable is also significant.¹

I begin with this statement from Jacques Rancière, philosopher on equality, education and human rights who has employed the analysis of visual media, especially film and photography, to communicate his ideas and position. This is chosen to establish that my engagement with visual works featured in this thesis is concerned with the role of such material in this ‘veritable system’, rather than their status as works of art. Furthermore, in this area of photography research, the word ‘ordinary’ is often employed to describe or evoke particular places and the people who dwell there. Sometimes the term ‘working-class’ is not appropriate and so ‘ordinary’ is used, including in my writing, to recognise the non-privileged or non-entitled, rather than to concur with any sense of legitimate hierarchies for ways of being. Judith Butler, the contemporary philosopher on gender, performativity and socio-political ethics, continues to employ phenomenology to theorise inequality, foregrounding increasing social and ecological precarity, to ask ‘What world is this?’ In more recent eco-critical work, arising from the 2020 global pandemic, Butler also evokes Rancière, to insist on the acknowledgment of a shared human existence as being ever more compromised by the inequitable experience of life-worlds, as below:

¹ Jacques Rancière in Jacques Rancière and Peter Engelmann *Politics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009) p.108

Some people work for the common world, keep it going, but are not, for that reason, of it. They might lack property or papers, be sidelined by racism [...] those who are poor, Black or brown, those with unpayable debts that preclude a sense of an open future. The shared world is not equally shared [...] Rancière refers to “the part of those who have no part”— those for whom participation in the commons is not possible, never was, or no longer is. For it is not just resources and companies in which a share is to be had, but a sense of the common, a sense of belonging to a world equally. ²

In this context, including the reference to participation as agency, the questions on the nature and timing of my thesis are summarised thus. It is about British social, documentary photography as emerging and developing over the last fifty years. This is a period that has seen the escalation of interrelated ecological and social erosion on an uneven global scale. I analyse three examples of British documentary activity that have an overall aim to give agency, at least visibility, to those who are less seen and heard. All three share objectives to achieve this aim, these being to be as collaborative as possible and to employ the photobook as an apposite form that has the potential for wider distribution. This distribution is beyond the gallery or museum systems that are not readily accessible, in a meaningful way, to the many of those who ‘have no part’ including as depicted in cultural projects. I question if we can view social documentary photography, as a mediated realism, that can have any real efficacy, in the face of the unequal experience of social, political and physical environments. I use an ecocritical approach to position these examples as attempting to counter generalising, therefore repressive narratives on ‘ordinary’ people and places impacted (however tacitly or overtly) by imposed change. I refer specifically to change as part of the fossil economy that has also escalated over the same fifty-year timespan in play. The consequences of this economy have “tentacles everywhere”, as Lucy Lippard said of a global capitalism, that has become dangerously dependent on this economy, that it

² Judith Butler ‘Creating an inhabitable world for humans means dismantling rigid forms of individuality’ in *Time* magazine April 21, 2021. This short form essay is expanded upon in Butler’s book *What World is this? A Pandemic Phenomenology* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2022)

has created and nurtures. “Everywhere” in my thesis meaning ways of living, working and being, as well as a sense of place.³

My examples comprise a structure of three, largely chronological, chapters. The first is about the emergence, in the 1960s, of the Amber Film and Photography Collective in Newcastle, a major city on the North East coast of England, close to the border with Scotland. Amber (as it is now known as) was co-founded by Murray Martin (1943 – 2007) and Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (1948 -). On first embarking upon this research, in 2010, I found that despite various papers and oral histories on Amber it was Martin, rather than Konttinen, who was perceived and described as the founder and ‘leading figure’. Much of this material was to be found in film history scholarship which had focussed on Martin as a filmmaker, and engaged with Amber as a film collective. The one scholarly book on Amber, that was to discuss the work of Konttinen, did not emerge until more than ten years later, coinciding with the end of my own research that had been publicly shared in various forums by then. As will be discussed later in the thesis, Konttinen, and the photography projects of Amber, are now more recognised, not least due to work from Mathilde Bertrand. As an established scholar of British culture and visual arts Bertrand has often focussed on documentary photography and activism, through the lens of radical politics. In her 2013 paper ‘The English Seen - The Representation of The People in Documentary Photography in England 1966’ Bertrand discusses the work of Amber as responding to ‘a deficiency’ in the representation of working-class places and people, resulting in ‘a socially engaged vision alongside a working class that, in the 1970s, is threatened by increasing deindustrialization, unemployment and the destruction of its cultural forms’. Konttinen’s iconic project *Byker* (1969 - 1980), documenting the demolition of the historic shipbuilding neighbourhood, is offered, with other examples, as ‘emblematic’ of anti-community, neo-liberal agendas, aggressively enacted through applied policy. As will be discussed, Bertrand has researched this further, in the context of the harrowing of smaller, and so more vulnerable, community arts in

³ ‘Once you know the local you realize how connected it is to global capitalism; its tentacles are everywhere. It’s multinational corporations that are buying up local resources’. Lucy R. Lippard interviewed by Lauren O’Neill-Butler in *Artforum* May 12th 2014.

Britain during the 1980s, throughout Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Conservative Prime Minister (1979 – 1990). Here she asserts:

More than physical destructions, the fate of Byker or Quarry Hill represents the evacuation of an industrial past and the symbolic condemnation of working-class lifestyles. It forgets that places of life and work constitute extremely strong identity markers.⁴

In chapter one 'A Poetic Realism in the North?' I set about to specifically address the imbalanced focus on Martin in the wider field, also the lack of any doctoral thesis on, or featuring the work of Konttinen. I particularly look at Konttinen's work with riverside communities, along the historically important River Tyne, where this meets the North Sea, a few miles north of Newcastle. As Konttinen explains:

What brought us together and served us well is our common goals, our egalitarian constitution, self-determination, editorial control, creative freedom, sharing of resources, lasting friendships [...] we moved to the industrial North East with the aim of giving voice to working class and marginalised communities.⁵

Many of these communities were greatly impacted by the rise and fall of long-established coal mining as well as shipbuilding that had produced some of the largest oil tankers in the world. Konttinen also refers to communities of asylum seekers, Newcastle is part of the City of Sanctuary movement. It works with the Government on the Refugee Resettlement Scheme and Dispersal Programme to support those who have mainly come from Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Iran, Eritrea and Afghanistan. These are countries in the global south where violence and war based on ideology is made exponentially worse by climate change. In the case of Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan and Eritrea especially, this includes conflicting interests in substantial and as yet underexploited oil, gas and other reserves key to extractive industries. Even the current UK Government, a controversially conservative political party, acknowledges the urgency of a worsening situation,

⁴ Mathilde Bertrand 'The Representation of The People' in *Imaginaires* Vol.2 eds. Xavier Guidicelli and Gilles Sambras (Reims: Reims University Press) 2013 pp.4-5. Bertrand's personification of 'evacuation' reminds us that ideologically based imposed change is actioned by individuals in power.

⁵ Interview with Michael Grieve in *British Journal of Photography* 15th March 2018 <https://www.1854.photography/2018/03/aakonttinen>.

albeit through the less publicly visible form of a White Paper on international development. With a foreword by then Prime Minister, David Cameron, the paper was written by multiple authors with ‘hundreds of submissions from civil society’. An extract follows:

1.3 The development gains of recent decades are now under threat of reversal. Hard won progress has stalled since 2015. Latest figures show that 701 million people remain in extreme poverty, predominately in Sub-Saharan African countries exasperated by conflict, energy insecurity, loss of nature and environmental degradation

1.4 The impacts of climate change and nature loss are being felt by everyone, everywhere. Extreme weather, sea level rise and ecosystem collapse are accelerating, with the impacts felt most acutely in developing countries.[...] It is estimated that climate change and biodiversity loss by 20% for billions of low income people ⁶

As well as visualising key themes in the thesis, relating to photographic representation in the context of the fossil economy, the images below speak to an evocative autoethnographic method that was a starting point for my work. This is to connect personal experience to the wider political and cultural contexts. I provide a visual reference to this method and visual introduction to the thesis. The top-left image is Patrick Drew, photographed on the Phillips Petroleum oil rig, my recently departed ninety-five year old father who conveyed the experience of a maritime apprentice and highly knowledgeable worker over several decades. The photography was made just thirty years after the child Patrick ran barefoot through his coastal home of Tynemouth village, when many of the boats were still steam powered. How alien these new American rigs must have seemed.

⁶ ‘International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change’. White Paper CP975 p.146
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6576f37e48d7b7001357ca5b/international-development-in-a-contested-world-ending-extreme-poverty-and-tackling-climate-change.pdf> (2023). See also ‘The Afghanistan Heritage and Extractive Industries Development Initiative’. UNESCO and The World Bank - Understanding Poverty – Extractive Industries www.worldbank.org/en/topic/extractiveindustries (accessed 22nd January 2024)



Fig.1 Patrick Drew (aged 39), 'Hewett' rig blow-out evacuation. Hand injury. North Sea, Nov 1968. Unknown photographer Authors' family collection. At this time, Hewett and many other rigs were owned. Phillips Petroleum Exploration (U.S.), later Conoco-Phillips



Fig. 2 Hewett rig. Unknown photographer Author's family collection This rig is to be decommissioned and dismantled in 2025. This involves extensive environmental by Government reports on the removal of toxic components e.g. asbestos as well as the wider impacts.



Figs. 3 and 4. Oil industry investment brochures. For contrast. These two idealised images are typical of those used by the oil industry, these are for investment brochures for example. Blue skies and sunsets usually feature in these glossy impressions of a benign world of extraction that is actually responsible for much destruction, violence and misery. Photographer and artist unknown, Photograph and artwork, 2024

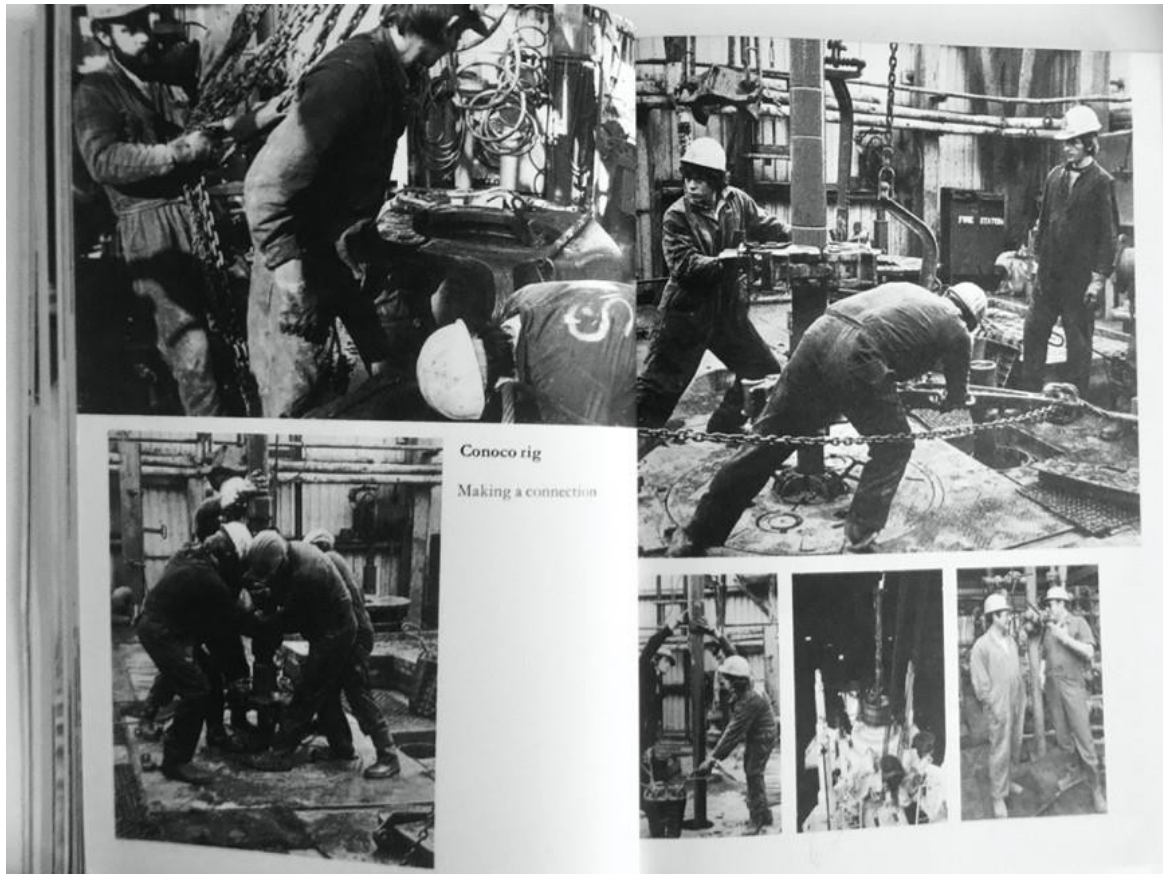


Fig. 5 'Conoco rig - making a connection'. Caption for *Untitled* Fay Godwin, Photographs, 1975. Photobook pages from author's collection.

The rigs were more substantial by the mid-1970s, with larger crews. The significant scaling up of exploration and extraction also resulted in the scaling up of accidents. Godwin's framing is reminiscent of Amber foregrounding the 'choreography' of team working in their lyrical documentation of brick and glass workshops. The theatre of work and monochrome aesthetic is cinematic, a mediated realism. In contrast, the immediacy of the straight on view and unmanipulated colour image of a grimacing Patrick Drew made by a fellow worker, is more in keeping with Mark Neville's approach. Both can be described as social documentary.

In the second chapter 'Prosperity and Pollution in the North Sea', the physical, cultural and economic manifestation of oil is more overtly foregrounded in my case study from the further North. This involves coastal and

off shore communities in Scotland and the Scottish oil fields emerging in the 1970s. I analyse work from Fay Godwin (1931 – 2005) the landscape photographer, including for urban landscapes, who was also an effective environmentalist in the 1980s and 1990s especially. I introduce and analyse her collaboration with Mervyn Jones, the socialist writer. They worked with on and offshore with oil workers of the North Sea sharing the experience of challenging weather and working conditions in 1975, to produce the generally, including critically, completely neglected photobook *The Oil Rush*. In which Godwin and Jones (like Amber and Neville) strategically combine image, text, research and oral histories, working with participants in a conscious attempt to convey emotional, as well as physical experience. As conveyed by this quotation:

There have been several disasters [...] as we come by helicopter the rig looks like a Meccano toy for a giant. Half a mile away the stand-by boat pitches among the grey waves: it is there to warn off fishing trawlers and other shipping when visibility is bad, and also rescue any rig-workers who may happen to be blown into the sea ⁷

The visual and verbal insights provided in *The Oil Rush*, into the dangers of the oil industry at a personal level, include the varied effects on local place; on culture and the built, as well as natural, environment. Godwin's other collaborations with writers are well known, perhaps as these were originally deemed more significant due to the involvement of eminent literary figures at the time. Key examples include *Islands* (1978) with John Fowles, *Remains of Elmet* (1979) with Ted Hughes, and *The Saxon Shore Way* (1983) with Allan Sillitoe. I would also argue that despite sharing a robust eco-critical stance and, particularly in the case of *The Saxon Shore Way* evidencing a concern with class, the landscapes in these collaborations are more traditionally evocative. There are pastoral views with few or no people, a combination of celebration and lament of undeveloped coastal and rural areas. In *The Oil Rush*, the small format of which belies the subject matter of an omnipotent, multinational oil industry, Godwin presents a different view where people, especially the worker,

⁷ Godwin and Jones in the section 'Black Gold' in *The Oil Rush* (London: Quartet Books, 1976) p.28. Godwin was frustrated and angered by the poor quality of the printing for some of her photobooks, especially this one. I have been able to source two or three improved quality prints for the thesis, however, I have also chosen to include images from the actual book to convey the actual materiality.

are central. In the context of mainstream 'landscape photography' books that feature locations of natural beauty *The Oil Rush* must have been perceived as unattractive subject matter on all, including visual, levels. Hence, I posit, the exclusion from critical accounts, exhibition and subsequent obscurity.

For the third and final chapter, I discuss more recent and contemporary work from the artist-activist Mark Neville. His projects also involve working with neglected, side-lined or vulnerable communities, unusually including soldiers and former soldiers. Most are working class and not usually positioned sympathetically in critical work on social documentary photography. Neville also, mainly, works with civilian communities, including those suffering and surviving war and displacement; specifically in Ukraine where he worked and lived for some time, before escaping (the 2022 invasion) to France. He then went to Birmingham, in North West England, working with young Ukrainians who are displaced there. During a six-month project Neville facilitated their self-representation, of what has happened to them. This was supported by GRAIN, the collaborative photography organization and hosted at Centrala Space, a Community Interest Company that 'offers support to all central and Eastern European communities' with stated values that foreground 'Inclusion as a means of preventing individuals from feeling isolated, disaffected or marginalized'.⁸ I also discuss Neville's work with communities in a formerly leading industrial port and formerly central steel making town in the North of England. This third case study will conclude with Neville's activist photobook project *Stop Tanks With Books* (2022). The works discussed over three chapters are produced from 1968 to 2022 and are chosen as exemplars for projects that manifest celebration as well as witness, survival and riposte. To reiterate "why do this now?", as I acknowledge in the thesis, current scholarship and debate in photography history and theory, speaks to the pluralistic nature of this medium and its constitutive activities. The many threads of this exploration and argument include work on the potential efficacy of social documentary photography through the use of participation, collaboration and

⁸ 'Mission and Vision' <https://centrala-space.org.uk/about-us/mission-and-vision/> (accessed 9th November 2023)

distribution. It also addresses the centrality of the 'ordinary' where inequalities and resistance around race, class, gender and the environment reside. As Rebecca Macklin (University of Aberdeen) has noted, there is also increasing scholarship to 'recognize these intersections as crucial concerns for the study, and practice of ecocriticism, the environmental humanities and environmental justice'.⁹ I also concur with Imre Szeman, as a foundational voice in the emerging area of Energy Humanities, who quotes Stuart Hall to ask:

As humanities scholars what form does our politics take? Against the urgency of people dying in the streets, what in God's name is the point of cultural studies [...] anybody who is into cultural studies must feel, on their pulse, its ephemerality, its insubstantiality, how little it registers, how little we've been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything. If you don't feel that as one tension in the work that you are doing, theory has let you off the hook'¹⁰

Following the critical recovery of the social documentary form as valid, potentially effective form on personal and societal levels, my position in this scholarship is as follows. The use of an eco-critical lens, that recognises environment as a central element to intersectional inequalities, is an increasingly important methodology. Work in this area, including my own, contributes a crucial, contemporary perspective in this wider context. Even if individual scholarly works can only register 'a little' it remains important to contribute, to create a critical mass that ensures visibility which can result in change as well as offer evidence, response and critique.

Socio-political context

As previously stated, the choice of timeframe, especially including the last thirty years, speaks to ever evolving technology that facilitates the reach

⁹ <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/people/rebecca.macklin#about>. (accessed 16th October 2023) See also *The Cambridge Companion to Environmental Humanities* eds. Jeffrey Cohen and Stephanie Foote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) Chapter 13 – Extraction pp.170-184

¹⁰ Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer eds. *Energy Humanities: An Anthology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017) Introduction.

and impact of a globalised neo-liberalism operating at a local level. In the 1990s controversial political scientist Francis Fukuyama's famous prediction was that global capitalism, as the last, universally adopted liberal democracy, would result in the 'end of history', potentially the end of nationalism and war in the 21st Century. ¹¹ Fukuyama's argument was situated in the development of neo-liberalism, from the late 1970s, as a mainstream political force manifesting in North America and England particularly. This context elucidates the socio-political paradigm shift that my case study projects evidence and respond to. Neo-liberal agendas revolved around the privatisation of major industries and infrastructure supported by the de-regulated development of physical and financial environments. These were enacted through policy and delivered without any attempt at transitional phasing and despite widespread oppositional political condemnation and civil unrest. The newly elected neo-conservatives, President Ronald Regan (1911-2004) and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) and their administrations were ideologically driven and supported each other in aggressively applying neo-liberalist policy aimed disempowering the industrial working class and a perceived 'threat' of socialism.

In Britain the first targets were the powerful coal-mining and maritime trade unions. In 1982 the key antagonistic figure in the attack on the unions was the Minister for Energy, Nigel Lawson (1932-2023) who used his powerful position at the Department of Trade and Industry to implement and extend the Coal Industry Act of 1980 to close long established mines, ensuring the later privatisation the coal industry. This set a precedent for further Acts for Primary Legislation to drive through privatisation of the largest national employers e.g. British Telecom, British Airways and British Gas. A most pertinent example is The Transport Act, 1981 which had an immediate and significant impact on the ownership, management and delivery of British maritime infrastructure, culture and the lives of coastal communities. This act resulted in the control of all harbours (previously managed together under the national body 'Sealink') being transferred to a new 'Harbours Company' under the management of the

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). This publisher was known, in the 1980s for publishing neo-conservative (the new Right) books.

Railways Board. This was in preparation for the Railway Network and trains to also be privatised in the near future. The conferring of powers became a familiar refrain in discussions in Parliament, in the press and for trade and other unions, here is a typical example from The Transport Act, 1981:

An Act to make provision with respect to the disposal by the British Railways Board of part of their undertaking, property, rights and liabilities; to provide for the reconstitution of the British Transport Docks Board under the name of Associated British Ports and to confer on a company powers over that body corresponding to the powers of a holding company over a wholly-owned subsidiary; to dissolve the National Ports Council and amend the Harbours Act 1964.¹²

The extensive list of harbours in question must have sounded chilling to those that worked on or by the sea, a harbinger of the universal privatisation that has resulted in extensive maritime exploitation and danger that is later discussed in this thesis. Particularly with reference to the body of work from Alan Sekula who dedicated much of his adult life as a scholar, artist and activist to what he, and collaborator Noel Birch termed 'the forgotten space' of the sea.¹³ Hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost; in the ten years after the historic 1985 Miners' Strike against privatisation, two hundred thousand mining jobs, since British Telecom was privatised, 100,000 telecom jobs and further losses as here revisited by The Guardian newspaper in 2013:

the restructuring of Imperial Chemical Industries – ICI – the result of an industry being increasingly to its own devices by the government – led to the loss of 15,000 jobs on Teeside. The government's laissez-faire approach to the changes, and the resultant, sudden mass unemployment led to the transformation of what was a region once booming from the steel industry to one of the most impoverished in the country. By the time it was privatised in 1988 British Steel had shed 20,000 jobs. Supporters of privatisation would reflect upon it as a move that was necessary to adapt to increasing international competition, yet its impact on many communities within the UK is still felt today.¹⁴

For the remaining jobs, wages were cut and working conditions worsened, precariousness was normalised and employee empowerment greatly

¹² The Transport Act, 1981 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/56/enacted> (accessed 20th October 2023)

¹³ *The Forgotten Space* Directed by Allan Sekula and Noel Birch (Icarus Films, 2010)

¹⁴ Henry Kirby 'Privatisation: the good, the bad and the ugly', *The Guardian*, 12th April 2013.

diminished, not least through the loss of membership for the large and impactful unions. The working class was rapidly marginalised in the new neo-liberal narrative propagating individual success in opposition to collective approaches and responsibility to wider communities. This of course favoured those with backgrounds and education that provided an understanding of how to achieve this, and that facilitated personal opportunity and professional progression. The de-regulation of the pursuit of North Sea oil and gas resulted in a particularly physically dangerous situation for these workers, deadly for some. This will be further discussed through analysis of my case studies.

Lawson, as long-term Chancellor of The Exchequer, ‘the main architect of Thatcher’s radical economic reforms’¹⁵ enthusiastically defined ‘Thatcherism’ as revolving around ‘Victorian values, free markets, tax cuts, privatisation, nationalism and a dash of populism’.¹⁶ The highly educated, privileged and ideologically driven Lawson dominated politics throughout the 1980s. However, the long-term legacy of ‘Thatcherism’ continues to impact, not least due to the lack of social housing and plethora of expensive utility and infrastructure companies exploiting workers, customers and the environment. There was also widespread cultural response to Thatcherism, to the severe cuts to public spending on health, education and community projects, to the privatisation of industry and the increased powers and deployment of police forces which resulted in confrontational interactions between large numbers of the public and the state. This response included activist film and photography projects, often based in the most negatively and onerously affected working class communities. These had robust models of engagement, to bear witness to advocate resistance, from the Worker Photography movement (1920s) and the Film and Photograph Leagues (1930s). The extensive work on the analogy between social documentary photography responding to imposed socio-political change in the earlier 20th Century, in the 1970s-80s and again in the 21st

¹⁵ Julia Langdon ‘Nigel Lawson - Obituary’, *The Guardian*, 4th April 2023.

¹⁶ Claire Berlinski *There Is No Alternative. Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008) p115.

Century, has been brought together by writer and curator Jorge Ribalta. His oft cited work on the 'reinvention of documentary' is discussed later in this introduction. In contrast to Fukuyama's vision, there is now further volatile economic and ecological fragility, results of the deregulation central to the 'market fundamentalism' of Capitalism as the governing factor in world economic systems.¹⁷ These remain dominated by the world's largest economies, the United States of America and the 'Marxist Capitalism' of China. Since the 1970s impacts 'on the ground', have escalated into resource and ideological conflicts with mass displacement, as well as sudden changes to the nature and conditions of work. Furthermore, extreme examples of air and water pollution, deforestation and climate change events are regular news items, as are the protests for immediate climate action that are common around the world. Due to the proliferation of photography, film and digital media this universal socio-economic and ecological fragility is literally visible with contemporaneous distribution.

An important motivation for my work is the current rapid deterioration in ecologically stability, predicted in much academic research and signalled campaigners such as Greenpeace and Friends of The Earth since the 1970s. It is twenty years since the first United Nations COP (Council of Parties) gathering. When I began researching for this thesis the COP meetings were directed at producing what became the Paris Agreement, the first global agreement to address climate change. However, it is not ratified by all countries, significantly not by the major oil hub of the Middle East and has not been effective as yet. In 2022, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres famously described the pre-COP 26 report (from over 200 scientists across the world) as a 'code red'.¹⁸ This is borne out with

¹⁷ 'Market fundamentalism; that is, absolute faith in the capacity of the market mechanism to solve all economic and social problems' Andrew Heywood *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*. (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2014)

¹⁸ There is a tangible response to Guterres' comment. COP28 was held in Dubai, December 2023 producing the first 'Global Stocktake' that foregrounds the urgent need to triple renewable energy capacity. This was 'one of the most complex COPs since Paris. The largest attended climate COP in history brought together 97,000 delegates, including over 150 heads of state.' 'COP28: What did it accomplish and what's next?' in *The Global Risks Report 2013* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, December 14, 2023).

news stories on often unprecedented environmental events every day; most recently (in Summer 2023) the hottest June is recorded globally, in over seventy countries, since measurement records began.¹⁹ Images of environmental events proliferate on a global, national and personal scale, through scientific, cultural and political projects as well as through news and social media in real time. In the context of more recent scholarly efforts to theorise equality, participation, and the role of visual media in this context, I focus on photographic examples of work that is especially concerned with particular places and communities affected by imposed change linked to the fossil economy. More specifically I refer to changes resulting from the impact of government policy as part of this economy, including the sanctioning of unsupported deindustrialisation in some areas and targeted industrialisation in others. As instigated by Thatcher and Lawson for example, resulting in the closing of the deep coal mines and major ship building yards, as well as the facilitating of deregulated oil and gas extraction in the North of England and Scotland. Also as evidenced in the works analysed across the chapters, imposed change is also enacted by the policies of local government to change the fabric of local environments and subsequently the lives affected by development, demolition and relocation. The actions of multinational corporations and transnational enterprises central to the fossil economy also result in imposed change. There is a growing body of critical work in photography, on 'petrochemical' and other extractive landscapes around the world, some of which is referred to in the thesis.²⁰ However, I bring an original view to the type of British social documentary on places and people usually considered in an historical, sociological context but not, as yet, discussed in eco-critical terms. Therefore, the relatively new terms 'eco-criticality' and 'fossil economy' will now be discussed as I understand, and have applied them.

¹⁹ 'Abnormal, extreme and unprecedented' Kirsty McCabe 'World's hottest week on record follows UK's hottest June' Royal Meteorological Society <https://www.rmets.org/metmatters/worlds-hottest-week-record-follows-uks-hottest-june-11th-july-2023>. (accessed 10th September 2023)

²⁰ See Caroline Blinder 'Richard Misrach and Kate Orrf's 'Petrochemical America: Cartographies of the Picturesque' in *Journal of American Studies* 54.3 (2020) pp.582- 603

Eco-criticality

The ancient Greek philosopher and physician Hippocrates (circa 460 – 370 BC) who 'noted the effects of food, occupation and climate in causing disease in his treatise *Air, Waters and Places*' is cited as an early example of work concerned with the relationships between people and their environment, meaning conditions of living as much as natural or constructed space. 'If you want to learn about the health of a population, look at the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the places they live'.²¹ However, despite centuries of scientific and cultural engagement the notion of 'environmentalism' is a relatively recent development, as explained here:

It was only in the late nineteenth century that the word 'environment' began to take on its modern ecological meaning [...] the global speed and scale of resource use and environmental destruction have been recognised and understood [...] Today environmentalism influences the language and decisions of government, corporations and individuals to the extent that was not possible or imaginable a century ago²²

As a theoretical method emerging out of environmentalism the term 'eco-criticism' was first proposed and acknowledged as, literary criticism. Acknowledging the significant expansion of environmentalism in political and cultural movements in the 1960's and 70s, and the work of biologist and literary critic Joseph Meeker on 'literary ecology'²³ American scholar William Rueckert coined the term 'ecocriticism' in 1978 as 'The application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature'.²⁴ Rueckert's essay, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' was originally published in 1978. A

²¹ Hippocrates of Kos in *Air, Water and Places*, one of the treaties that make up the Hippocratic Corpus, 5th Century BCE. *Hippocrates, Volume I* Edited and translated by Paul Potter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022) Section II.

²² Gary Haq and Alistair Paul *Environmentalism Since 1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012) pp.1-2

²³ Joseph Meeker *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (New York: Scribner Publishing, 1972). An influential book in which Meeker analyses centuries of writing, an ecology of texts including ancient Greek, Roman, Shakespeare and modern works, as tragic or comic forms that refer to nature as more powerful than humanity. See *Ecocriticism* Derek Gladwin 26th July 2017. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780190221911-0014 (accessed January 8th 2024)

²⁴ William Rueckert 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism'. In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996) pp. 105–123. See also - <https://www.environmentandsociety.org/tools/keywords/william-rueckerts-literature-and-ecology-experiment-ecocriticism> (accessed 7th December 2023)

rediscovery and publication in 1996 are acknowledged as influential to the increasing use of the 'experiment of ecocriticism' across many other fields, including work on visual media. An approach using an environmental lens was not new in the 1990s, however, the terms 'ecocritical' and 'ecocriticism' established a more specific area in humanities research. A contemporary definition, from the Rachel Carson Centre for ecological research, proposes that:

advocates of this school of thought deal with the web of relationships between cultural products and nature. In doing so, they intentionally express their cultural and literary critiques from an environmentally political perspective. Objects of study include texts, poems, plays, and, increasingly, visual productions like films and artwork. While the ecocritical approaches to these formats are diverse, a common and constant goal is to eliminate the dichotomy between nature and society.²⁵

This literary context can be situated in a long-established body of scholarly work, on the relationship between humanity and nature, as a key theme in the arts and humanities as well as sciences. As well as in the scientific and dramatic texts of previous centuries, by the seventeenth century John Milton and William Shakespeare were providing rich sources for thematic and critical readings based on their use of nature; The Garden of Eden is contrasted with the Fires of Hell, the weather is a character, relationships with the sun, moon, stars and seasons feature prominently. In a modern socio-cultural context, the Romantic movement, from the late 18th to late 19th Century, is especially acknowledged as important in this trajectory. This due to the engagement with the increasingly manifest effects, on the environment and quality of life, of the Industrial Revolution.²⁶ Visual artists and writers responding to fast changing landscapes depicted a Romantic sublime through sunsets, and snow, with the power, rather than fragility, of nature conveyed in scenes of mountains, forests and seas. In the development of more dystopian, often more urban scenarios, particularly in a plethora of novels and poetry

²⁵ Definition of ecocriticism. Rachel Carson Centre. Munich. 2003. <https://www.carsoncenter.uni-muenchen.de/index.html>

²⁶ Key and popular 19th Century works are from William Blake and Mary Shelley, William Wordsworth and Charles Dickens in England. Meanwhile, in North America Henry Thoreau, Emily Dickenson and Waldo Emerson establish 'nature writing'. As well as History of Art and Film I have qualification in, and am currently teaching, English Literature, including Shakespeare, Shelley and Blake. Another useful text from the 'eco- turn' in the 1990s is Robert J Werlin *The English novel and the Industrial Revolution: a study in the sociology of literature* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1990). Also see *Nature and Society in Historical Context* eds. Miklaus Teich, Roy Porter and Bo Gustafsson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

and visual works from across the 19th and 20th centuries, this engagement is more overtly concerned with the impact of development and pollution. Mark S. Lussier asserts Blake's famous criticism of 'dark satanic mills', of the ideological as well as the environmental impact of industrialisation. Lussier also insists:

An emergent ecological criticism manifest in a wide range of disciplines – is both controversial and necessary. It is controversial, in that it applies a contemporary political view to past poets and their poetry, which might seem anachronistic at best or pure projection at worst [...] It is necessary, because it directly responds to a physical crisis in which all are implicated and requires us to rethink our intellectual enterprises and institutions. Ecocriticism will not simply slip away into the forests of the night, to paraphrase Blake's "The Tyger", since the crisis with which ecological thought grapples will deepen in relation to the supposed success of what Frederick Jameson terms "late capitalism".²⁷

The work of the 1990s is continued in the early 21st Century, reference is made to another 'pioneer' professor of literature in the establishment of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell, who more specifically refers to multinational destruction and the urgent need to address this in cultural research. As David Lodge explains:

Buell argues that there should be a renewed urgency in re-defining our relationship to nature and our habitat; to an increasing extent, the destructive potential of multi-national commerce and the encroachment of urban development alongside its enabling ideologies have eroded basic instincts about all relationships (to community as well as ecology). This has similarly diluted our sense of the sublime and the wonderful, and supplied the cash-nexus for a more authentic set of values. Quite how literature, and a constructive reading thereof, might rectify this situation should be a contemporary imperative.²⁸

Since Nicéphore Niépce created one of the first known photographic views of an urban landscape, circa 1827, landscape and 'nature' has also been a major genre of photography; film too has engaged with environmental vulnerability across a century, specifically climate change for the last few decades. Although not within the scope of this thesis there is a body of useful work on the intersection between literature and photography, which involves an environmental element or focus and that could be

²⁷ Mark S. Lussier 'Blake's Deep Ecology' in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 35, No. 3 'Green Romanticism' (Cambridge: John Hopkins University Press, 1996) pp. 393-408.

²⁸ *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. ed. David Lodge. Revised and expanded by Nigel Wood. (Abingdon: outledge, 2008) p.665.

investigated to further analyse the development of ecocritical work and application of ecocriticism.²⁹ In the 20th Century the wider development of what became known as ecologism or environmentalism further influenced the production and critique of ecocritical works, as well as eco-critical analysis applied to other texts and cultural objects. As discussed in Chapter Two (on Godwin and Jones' *The Oil Rush*) the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) is regarded as a pivotal moment for the mainstream understanding and use of these terms. A lyrical writer as well as marine biologist, Carson's blending of science and the humanities was as influential to academic activity as was *Silent Spring* on public and government awareness of the toxicity of pesticides, especially as used to scale for industrialised agriculture, namely the fatal effects on wildlife and humans. Carson had been writing on interconnectedness and sustainability since 1941. Her 'biography of the sea' *The Sea Around Us* (1951) was also of international significance, a 'bestseller' (largely due to being serialised in the respected magazine 'The New Yorker', a month before publication). This was also influential to a consciousness that was key to the environmental movement emerging in the 1960s. This in turn has evolved into a global protest and resistance of the environmental and human cost of the multinational fossil economy mainly based on the extraction, transportation and consumption of coal, oil and gas.³⁰ One of the best known quotes from Carson's book is still to be often found, on websites for science and environmental organisations or activities, I include it here:

It is a curious situation that the sea, from which life first arose, should now be threatened by the activities of one form of that life. But the sea, though changed in a sinister way, will continue to exist³¹

²⁹ See *Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century* eds. David Cunningham, Andrew Fisher and Sas Mays. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2005). The work of Caroline Blinder. On Jack Kerouac and photography, as well as the photo-text in America is also of use here.

³⁰ Rachel Carson *The Sea Around Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951). This was a sequel to *Under the Sea Wind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1941). Also see Linda Lear 'Rachel Carson - About' <https://www.rachelcarson.org/>

³¹ Rachel L. Carson *The Sea Around Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951) Preface xiii

The Fossil Economy: context and definition in the thesis



Fig. 6 'In 1979 Margaret Thatcher's ministers allowed BP to supply crude to a subsidiary in South Africa'. Unknown photographer, Photograph, circa 1979. *The Times* newspaper archive.

Marc Horne is an award-winning investigative journalist with *The Times* and *Scotland on Sunday*, his work on the mistreatment of asylum seekers, in facilities supported with public funds, resulted in a government enquiry. Horne tends to keep a close eye on the National Archives at Kew, for the release of declassified political documents and correspondence after the 'thirty-year minimum rule' of non-access is lifted. In a later article on Margaret Thatcher's long tenure as Prime Minister Horne reported on previously embargoed papers relating to a shameful moment in the more recent histories of the fossil economy in a British context. These reveal that five days after the notorious Piper Alpha rig disaster, to be discussed in chapter two, Thatcher's relationship with burgeoning oil company BP (British Petroleum) took precedence over the memorial for the one hundred and sixty workers who had died in the rig's explosions. Many perished from jumping into the sea that was on fire due to the oil spilled all around the rig. Just two days after the tragedy she was advised against responding to immediate demands to improve health and safety in the industry, as explained by Horne:

The prime minister was advised to fly to Aberdeen for the commemoration of the 167 men who lost their lives in the world's worst offshore disaster on July 6, 1988. However, she chose instead to meet Lord McAlpine, the Tory treasurer who raised millions for the party, and attend a lunch for leading industrialists. Thatcher's special adviser on energy — a former BP executive — urged her to ignore demands for significant health and safety improvements following the tragedy. Greg Bourne, a member of the prime minister's policy unit, suggested that union calls for changes in offshore working practices were an attempt to make "political capital" from the catastrophe and should be disregarded. [...] Jake Molloy, regional organiser of the RMT union's offshore energy branch in Aberdeen, said: "People will be saddened and shocked by these revelations. It confirms that Thatcher's priority was keeping industrialists happy."³²

On the discovery of more oil related correspondence from Thatcher's 1979 Government, by an academic researcher at the National Archives at Kew, Horne's follow up article 'North Sea Oil Deal under Thatcher fuelled Apartheid', provides further evidence of the government's inappropriate, and sometimes corrupt, relationship with private industry. As coal and steel were decimated the new British oil industry, aggressively developing international markets, was ripe for exploitation in every sense. Horne again reports the revealing details:

Government correspondence from 1979 reveals that ministers gave their blessing to BP supplying crude oil to a subsidiary in South Africa. The arrangement was made at a time when the UN had urged countries to halt all political, financial and transportation links — as well as cultural and sporting ties — with the country in response to its state-sponsored racism and human rights abuses. [...] The document was unearthed by Dr Ewan Gibbs, University of Glasgow. "It demonstrates that the newly elected Thatcher government was collaborating with BP to support apartheid South Africa at a time of international volatility," The Thatcher government's refusal to endorse sanctions against South Africa prompted 59 nations to boycott the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh in 1986.³³

Also relevant to the thesis, is the significant contribution to the Energy Humanities made by Terry Brotherstone (University of Aberdeen), notably as director of the foundational *Lives in the Oil Industry*. This was an expansive oral history and 'primary evidence' project conducted from circa 2000 – 2015.

Summarised by Brotherstone thus

³² Marc Horne 'Thatcher chose lunch instead of memorial for rig disaster' *The Times* [Friday 21st July, 2017](#)

³³ Marc Horne 'North Sea Oil Deal under Thatcher fuelled Apartheid' in *The Times* [Saturday August 28th, 2021](#)

nearly two hundred people had been recorded for the archive. The average length of the recordings, each in the form of a life history, is approximately four hours. [...] Interviews were recorded in many parts of the UK, with an emphasis on centres such as Aberdeen, the 'Oil Capital of Europe' and the Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft area, centres of the industry before it moved north in the 1970s. Other prominent locations in the recording programme were Shetland and Orkney, hosts to the great Sullom Voe and Flotta oil and gas terminals. ³⁴

Brotherstone particularly focusses on the socio-economic histories, of the discovery of oil in the North Sea and the impact of the operation and administration of this at a local level. As demonstrated in the following quotation from his work on the relationship between the extraction of the oil and Scottish Nationalism:

Oil revenues helped make Thatcherite neoliberalism possible. Scottish working people and their communities were amongst its main victims [...] Thatcher's focus on making the United Kingdom a minimally regulated centre for global finance, at the expense of industrial production, was perceived most negatively in Scotland which is where most of the oil was. ³⁵



Fig. 7 'John, Texan rigger foreman in Forties Field, works 100-125 a week and earns 'fantastic' money on a contract. "it's the only way I could figure to buy a ranch and retire at 40". First visit to shore in three months because of injured shoulder. Safety on board derrick barges "excellent".'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

Mervyn Jones' text, from his conversation with 'forthright Texan' Jim Dunlap is

from the first section 'Black Gold' in *The Oil Rush*, the collaborative project with Fay Godwin. It is worth including the entire exchange, as contextualised by Jones, because this provides further insight into the position on, what is seen as, the threat of British taxation on the oil profits of American companies. Here is that exchange:

When I found myself visiting a rig working for Conoco, the company attitude was expounded to me by the supervisor, Jim Dunlap, "How long", I asked innocently, "did he expect the oil boom to last?". "Well, that depends on your government. So long as it can't decide on the terms to offer companies, so long as it pulls these ridiculous taxes, we don't know we stand. You get some lunatic like this Wedgewood Benn interfering; our work becomes impossible [...] you have another election and it's all changed". Soon afterwards Mrs. Thatcher visited Aberdeen and announced that the terms would indeed be revised under a Conservative Government ³⁶

This text is presented with two other of Godwin's photographs, demonstrating the photo-text strategies at work. One shows a suitably entangled mesh of cable, ropes, and pipes reflecting the relationship between industry, society and government expressed in Jones' example. This image also affords an unusual and intimate glimpse of the rig's surprisingly low-tech entrails, strung over a section of the structure without flooring, open to the spray of waves steaming around the legs below. The other image is a gaseous flash of fire, blasting sideways out of a flare boom into the space (and air) adjacent to the rig, lightening bright in front of the cloudy sky, a mercurial dragon or demon form rises above a dark sea horizon. The dangerous theatre of the naked flare flame is a central feature of drilling rigs since the nineteenth century, 'flaring' burns off unwanted gas from pockets emerging when drilling into the earth for oil. In the 2020s this practice continues on a larger scale, in British North Sea waters the annual burn off would provide heat for a million homes, none of which can see this dramatic offshore vision of environmental harm and waste. 'Britain's oil and gas rigs are the most polluting in the North Sea oil basin [...] the UK emits 21kg of carbon dioxide for every barrel of North

34 [Lives in the Oil Industry](#) Homepage (accessed November 2023)

35 Terry Brotherstone 'A Contribution to Post-Imperial British History: North Sea Oil, Scottish Nationalism and Thatcherite Neo-Liberalism' in Owen Logan and Andrew McNeish.(eds.) *Flammable Societies: Studies on the Socio-Economics of Oil and Gas* (London: Pluto Press, 2012) p.84

36 Fay Godwin and Mervyn Jones *The Oil Rush* (London: Quartet Books, 1975) pp. 35-36

Sea oil produced, compared to only 8kg of CO₂ in Norway, where oil producers run the rigs on renewable energy'.³⁷ The extraction and consumption of coal, gas and oil remain central on a global and local scale; opportunity and wealth for some and, due to subsequent effects on the climate and health, an escalating threat to the majority.

As ever, the conditions are inequitable, as demonstrated in the 2022 documentary *Under Poisoned Skies*, a BBC investigation into the lethal damage caused to the children in communities living next to the oil fields of BP (British Petroleum), and Italian equivalent Eni (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi) - National Hydrocarbons Agency, in Basra, Iraq. Due to the emission of highly toxic, carcinogenic emissions (methane, carbon dioxide, benzene and black soot) in close proximity to their homes and schools, many of the local children suffer bone and blood cancers e.g. leukaemia. Fatima Falah Najem was diagnosed at eleven years, 'drew the "fiery flames" that surrounded her home whilst in hospital' ³⁸ and died at thirteen in November 2021, a "victim of state-business collusion". ³⁹ Nineteen-year old Ali Hussein Julood, a leukaemia survivor sought compensation from an unresponsive BP.

He documented his life in North Rumaila, Southern Iraq, for the BBC in 2021. Rumaila, contracted by BP, is the largest of Basra's oil fields and was found by the BBC to flare more gas than any other site in the world. Following that investigation, the Iraqi government bought forward their end date for routine flaring to 2026. And the government acknowledged, for the first time, a link between the emissions from flaring and high levels of cancer in local communities. Julood died of Leukaemia in April this year, (2023) and his father attended the BP AGM meeting in his place to directly confront then CEO, Bernard Looney with his story. He told the BBC that his son's life was sacrificed for the company's record profits.⁴⁰

The role of fossil extraction industries pertaining to the development and application of Government policy is a significant topic in the histories of economic theory. Not least for the ever-evolving work on the notion of rent and 'rentier' profit, regarding the control of land, sea, space and all resources. ⁴¹ Whilst it is not the task of this thesis to encompass such theory it is necessary to situate and explain the relatively new term 'fossil economy' as I apply this as part of the overall context for my research. In modern economic theory fossil fuels have loomed large for well over a century, a

³⁷ Jillian Ambrose, Energy Correspondent. 'Pollution' in *The Guardian* Monday 28th September 2020

foundational British example being *The Coal Question – An Inquiry Concerning the Progress of the Nation, and the Probable Exhaustion of our Coal Mines* (1866) ‘With a focus on economic scarcity rather than physical reserves [...] emancipated from both geology and engineering’. Jevons, in his analysis through ‘a description of the role of fossil fuels in international trade and British competitiveness’ established the precarity of coal as a central issue for market led national development.⁴² Further expanded upon in his key text *Theory of Political Economy* (1871) highly influential to the Government and socio-economic thought at that time. Javons’ idea of a more nuanced exploitation (for profit) based on the finite nature of fossil fuels is later developed over the 20th Century; this corresponding with the expansion of oil production and related consumer culture as escalated in 1920s North America particularly. As well as coal and other extractive industries emerging or developing (unevenly) on an industrial level across the world in subsequent decades.

In the early twenty first century, in the context of arts and humanities including cultural histories, the interdisciplinary human ecologist Andréas Malm (University of Lund) is one of the first, to discuss and to regularly employ the term ‘Fossil Economy’. His 2016 paper ‘Who Lit This Fire? Approaching the History of the Fossil Economy’ expounds his research based on the escalated burning of fossil fuels over the last two hundred years that has ‘filled the atmosphere with an excess of carbon dioxide unprecedented in several million years’.⁴³ Malm provides an apt definition

³⁸ Jess Kelly, Owen Pinnell and Esme Stallard ‘BP in oil field where ‘cancer is rife’. BBC News 30th September 2022.

³⁹ David Boyd, UN Special Reporter on human rights and the environment, speaking to the BBC investigation for *Under Poisoned Skies* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0d34rtt> (accessed January 12th 2024)

⁴⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2023/bbc-news-arabic-investigations-breathless> BBC Media Centre 29th November 2023 (accessed January 12th 2024)

³⁹ David Boyd, UN Special Reporter on Human Rights and The Environment, speaking to the BBC investigation for *Under Poisoned Skies* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0d34rtt> (accessed January 12th 2024)

⁴⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2023/bbc-news-arabic-investigations-breathless> BBC Media Centre 29th November 2023 (accessed January 12th 2024)

of the term 'fossil economy' as used in this thesis, also situating it in the longer socio-political histories using an ecocritical frame, as he does here

most simply defined as one of self-sustaining growth predicted on the growing consumption of fossil fuels and therefore generating a sustained growth in CO₂ emissions. It is flanked by other processes (notably deforestation) and other greenhouse gases (methane, nitrous oxide, sulphur hexafluoride, etc.), but there can be little doubt about its principal culpability [...] We hone in on the fossil economy as the general driver of climate change and then consider some actual cases from the annals of the British empire, whose projection of steam power onto India and other colonies provided crucial to the diffusion of that peculiar kind of economy ⁴⁴

Malm goes on to discuss quantifiable research into how this specifically links to a model of economic growth and national state power based on fossil fuel production, export and control. Also, how this results in a fossil economy that is now a global phenomenon and experience. Citing geographer Richard Heede's controversial 2013 quantifying database that evidenced

Nearly two thirds of the major industrial greenhouse gas emissions (from fossil fuel use, methane leaks, and cement manufacture) originated in just 90 companies around the world, which either emitted the carbon themselves or supplied carbon ultimately released by consumers and industry ⁴⁵

⁴¹ From the time of the earliest economists, the physiocrats, understanding how to steer growth in ways that maximise the amount of revenue reinvested in 'productive' activities, versus unproductive ones, has been central to economics and policy. [...] The classical economists, Ricardo, Mill, Smith and Marx, put this distinction at the heart of their study of political economy, defining economic rent as income extracted from the ownership of a scarce asset (such as land or other natural resources) [...] that are equally vital for capitalist production and human survival. Unlike land as locational space, which can be reused for different purposes through time, non-renewable natural resources can be — and indeed are being — exhausted. Thus, ownership of such a scarce resource assigns substantial monopoly power and the opportunity for significant rentier income.

Mariana Mazzucato, Josh Ryan-Collins and Giorgos Gouzoulis 'Theorising and Mapping Modern Economic Rents.' *UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, Working Paper Series (IIPP WP 2020-13)*. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/wp2020-13> (accessed 12th December 2023)

⁴² W.S. Jevons *The Coal Question – An Inquiry Concerning the Progress of the Nation, and the Probable Exhaustion of our Coal Mines* (London: MacMillan, 1866) pp. v-vi.

Antoine Missemer 'Fossil Fuels in Economic Theory-Back to the 19th century British Debates' in *French Journal of British Studies* Open Edition Journals XXIX-3 2018 'A Long Awakening? Environmental Concerns in the United Kingdom Since the Nineteenth Century' <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.2685> (accessed 20th December 202)

⁴³ Andreas Malm 'Who Lit this Fire? Approaching the History of the Fossil Economy' in *Critical Historical Studies*, 3:2 Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2016) pp.215-248. p.216

He also foregrounds how Heede's work is from 1751, mapping onto the first (British) industrial revolution (circa 1750-1900) as well as specific global developments, in the US and Saudi Arabia for example. In the following year, Malm offers a robust and motivating eco-critical analysis of literary texts from the nineteenth and mid twentieth century as examples of how we might revisit cultural material, in this case literary work, that predates a more recent and current genre ('Cli-fi' – Climate-Fiction) that is based on a now well established and referenced climate science. In 'This is the Hell that I have heard of' Some dialectical Images in Fossil Fuel Fiction' he makes the case for a 'list' of pertinent novels contemporaneous with the development of the fossil economy, a 'global canon [...] in all involved languages, refracting the history of the fossil economy'. Referencing famous novels from across this history, namely Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) set in 'Coketown' a fictional Northern industrial town, Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon* (1902) set in the North West Pacific as coal powered steam superseded wind (sail) power and Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* (1962). The latter set in the Middle East, largely the Iraq and the Kuwait border where the now familiar extremes of climate change and people smuggling converge in horrific and frequent tragedy. Malm here urges the recognition of:

'dialectical images' in Walter Benjamin's sense of the term, from fossil fuel fiction. Such images might contribute to a critical understanding of our current epoch, fracturing the narrative of the human species as a united entity ascending to bio-spheric dominance in the Anthropocene. The miseries of global warming have been in preparation for a long time. Some have felt the heat from the start' ⁴⁶

Although neither Benjamin or Malm are necessarily referring to visual images the notion of 'dialectical images' has been especially associated, due to Benjamin's engagement with the modern visual media of photography and film, with photography. Whether as art or document the salient point is the acknowledgment of the role for

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.220

⁴⁵ Douglas Starr 'The Carbon Accountant' in *Science* Vol.353. No.6302. 26 Aug (2016) pp.858-861

⁴⁶ Andreas Malm ' "This Is The Hell That I Have Heard Of" Some Dialectical Images in Fossil Fuel Fiction' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* Vol. 53, No. 2. (2017) pp. 121-141.



Fig.8 'Just Stop Oil' protesters Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland at the National Gallery, 2022
Unknown photographer, Photograph, 2024

Plummer and Holland (aged 20 and 19 at the time) threw soup at Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers', then glued themselves to the wall. Each received prison sentences in September 2024 for this protest against new oil extraction licenses.

current and future understanding of a particular era. More recently, in October 2022, writing for the *New York Times*, Malm responds to young Just Stop Oil activists, Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland having thrown tomato soup onto (Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' (1888) at the National Gallery, London. The soup actually landed on the painting's protective glass, he describes how:

one of the young activists cried out before gluing herself to the wall beneath the painting, "Are you more concerned about the protection of a painting or the protection of our planet and people?" Just Stop Oil's actions seem to have offended establishment sensibilities at a time when a third of Pakistan has been underwater.⁴⁷

The Home Secretary at this time, Suella Braverman, notorious for her aggressive position on migrants and climate protesters declared Just Stop Oil radical 'extremists', urging the police to 'interpret' their powers differently at peaceful protests that caused disruption.⁴⁸ She also amended The Public Order Act (1986) to allow arrests at peaceful protests deemed 'disruptive'. "The threshold would be so low that it could lead to police

⁴⁷ Andreas Malm 'History May Absolve the Soup Throwers'. *New York Times* October 20th 2022. Guest Essay.

imposing conditions on protests which would breach the rights of protesters”⁴⁹ In July 2024 five Just Stop Oil protesters, including Roger Hallam, the co-founder of Extinction Rebellion, were jailed for five years each to significant outcry, including statements from Amnesty International and the UN. Plummer and Holland (now aged twenty-two) have now been found guilty of criminal damage and will be sentenced in September 2024, by the same Judge Christopher Hehir that jailed Hallam. They were protesting specifically against the ongoing granting of new licenses to drill for oil and gas in the North Sea, Malm has argued that

Vincent van Gogh is not responsible for our climate breakdown. He was not the C.E.O. of an oil and gas company or a coal merchant. In fact, Van Gogh started drawing and painting while living amid the smoke and cinder in a Belgian coal district. Besides ‘Sunflowers’ one of his most famous paintings is ‘Miners’ Wives Carrying Sacks of Coal,’ their bodies bent under the weight of the bags; art history knows few works that so powerfully capture the fossil economy’s intolerable burden on the living.⁵⁰



Fig. 9 *Miners’ Wives Carrying Sacks of Coal*. Vincent Van Gogh, Watercolour, 1882

⁴⁷ Andreas Malm ‘History May Absolve the Soup Throwers’. New York Times October 20th 2022. Guest Essay. Plummer and Holland each received prison sentences in September 2024 for the National Gallery protest.

⁴⁸ [The Independent](#) Online. Wednesday November 22nd 2022 (accessed July 20th 2024)



Fig.10 *"Cookie" in the Snow, Seacoal Camp, Lynemouth, Northumberland.* Chris Killip, Photograph, 1985



Fig. 11 *Rocker and Rosie going home, Lynemouth, Northumberland* Chris Killip, Photograph, 1984

My response is that, in art history, there are many more visual works from across cultures, locations and decades, some of which are discussed in this thesis, that also 'powerfully capture the fossil economy's intolerable burden on the living'. Images from the 19th and 20th century, including those from Amber, evidence previous harsh realities in the relationships between human life (and

cities of the 19th century, that maimed and killed so many children and as castigated in word and image by William Blake, the sea coal harvesting children of the North East coast are working with and for their families. A close-knit community required personal involvement, as Amber's Graeme Rigby explains

The seacoaling community of Lynemouth Beach in Northumberland was another edgeland. It tended to assume photographers were from the DHSS – or at least providing potential evidence of benefit fraud. It was hard to get access [...] Around 1983 Amber had given a commission to a young Ashington photographer Mike Critchlow. His uncle, Trevor Critchlow, was one of the key community leaders on the site. Amber bought a caravan there. During the week Chris used it; at weekends Amber researched its first major drama there.⁵¹

More recent examples from 'art history' are Neville's contemporary work with the people of the Ukrainian coal basin 'Donbas', trying to survive the violence and displacement of a war where the resources of Ukraine are central. Another is Godwin and Taylor's depictions of workers toiling on and offshore for the oil industry where sometimes fatal accidents loom large. Also, in the work of Amber, including that of associate Chris Killip that also focusses on the literal burden of coal, whether scavenged sea-coal harvested from polluted beaches or the impacts of a closed mine. Let alone the documentary film images of children living and dying with the 'intolerable burden'. However, Malme's example of 'Miners' wives' is indeed a powerful one from the paintings of the 19th century, and a pertinent choice given the role of miners' wives in the protests and strikes against the unsupported closure of coal mines in the North of England and Wales a century after Van Gogh's sympathetic gaze of solidarity.

⁴⁹ Adam Wagner, barrister with Doughty Street Chambers. 'Police in England and Wales could be given 'near total discretion' over protests' *The Guardian Monday* 12th June 2023.

⁵⁰ Andreas Malm 'History May Absolve the Soup Throwers'. *New York Times* October 20th 2022. Guest Essay

Forty years before the protest in the national Gallery, Petra Kelly, one of the founders of what is now the Green Party, had focussed on the relationship between ecological, economic and cultural inequality, in the activist guidebook *Fighting For Hope* (1984). This title reflects a notable shift in tone from Stewart Brand's earlier 'eco-handbook', the influential *Whole Earth Catalog* (sic) 1968. Both are widely referenced into the 1990s as a matrix of connections between ecology and peace groups continued had throughout 1980s, namely concerns with civil and human rights involving race, gender, class, peace and the environment. This resulted in shared affinities across groups and initiatives, including oppositional film and photography hubs. Relationships between inequality and ecological erosion can be discerned across archives, collections and projects in the humanities. Additionally, there is empirical research from many international organizations also using quantitative and qualitative methods, for example the World Economic Forum's annual report (2021) focuses on such relationships as:

societal fractures - manifested through persistent and emerging risks to human health, rising unemployment, widening digital divides, youth disillusionment, and geopolitical fragmentation. Businesses risk a disorderly shakeout which can exclude large cohorts of workers and companies from the markets of the future. Environmental degradation - still an existential threat to humanity—risks intersecting with societal fractures to bring about severe consequences.⁵²

These societal and environmental factors have long been a focus for documentary social photography, albeit from very different perspectives and motivations, as will be demonstrated across my three chapters. Currently, the use of images as witness, evidence and advocacy in this area is ubiquitous. To provide valid examples I apply an historical approach to examine community-based projects relating to imposed change, directly linked to the fossil economy in this timeframe. Due to personal histories and experience, I've focussed mainly, although not exclusively, on the North East coast of England

⁵¹ <https://www.culturematters.org.uk/index.php/itemlist/user/914-graemerigby> (accessed January 7th 2024)

and the North Sea (off England and Scotland) as exemplar sites. These will be examined in three distinct chapters. Chapter one, features photographic work from Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (as co-founder of the Amber film and photography collective) working in the Tyneside region since 1969. Projects made with industrial riverside communities are particularly relevant. Chapter two, is on a collaboration between the photographer (and environmental activist) Fay Godwin and the socialist writer (and journalist) Mervyn Jones, as engaging with an international cohort of North Sea oil workers during the aforementioned prescient heatwave of 1975. To clarify, not least due to references in the media, the 1975 heatwave is overlooked due to the benchmarking temperatures of 1976. These are regularly overtaken in England and around the world, indeed, contemporaneous with the conclusion of this thesis, in Summer 2022 temperatures in the South East of England are reaching forty degrees, doors and windows are closed against the heat.⁵³ Godwin and Jones' extensive immersion in the work and life of oil rig workers resulted in the environmentally and politically timely 1976 publication of *The Oil Rush*. I identify and analyse this as a completely overlooked, eco-critical photobook. The third, concluding chapter is on contemporary photographic works (circa 2010 onwards) from the artist activist Mark Neville, as critically engaged with the experience of changing or challenging environments, injustice, and conflict in the North of England, Scotland and related beyond. Neville's work is produced with diverse communities and individuals, paying careful attention to equitable representation, and is strategically distributed in photobook, as much, if not more than exhibition form.

There is a long history of British photography based in specific communities, initially through the toxic lens of imperial, colonial and hierarchical instrumentalism. The alleged primacy of England and France in the development of such photography, over the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century, can be easily discerned in literature and often military or state backed projects of the time. The pictorialist and documentary depiction of rural and urban environments was also popular. Landscape, as an expanded genre to include much inequitable work

⁵² World Economic Forum 'Global Risks Reports'. 16th edition (2021)

On space and place, is also strongly represented and critically addressed. In Britain, as developing during the 1930s, 'social' documentary resulted in the depiction of local communities and 'types' in situ, notoriously via a middle-class gaze onto working class environments, work and lives.⁵⁴ However, as established in the extensive scholarship in the post-Second world war decades, by the mid to late 1970s British photographic social documentary was (however contested within and central and peripheral constituencies) firmly established as oppositional to this established norm, via community, collaborative and participatory practice as advocacy and, or political activism. Noni Stacey's recent book *Photography of Protest and Community - The Radical Collectives of the 1970s* (2020) is a comprehensive account, including references to the protagonists, histories and critical engagement with the political contexts, groups and projects.⁵⁵ A brief discussion to define these interrelated practices is useful here.

Community, Participation and Collaboration in Photography

Stacey's discussion of the 'tenets of community photography' is based on three key articles from the Camerawork archive including the leader article for the issue 'Photography in the Community' (Camerawork 13, March 1979). 'The Politics of Photography' by Jo Spence (1976) in the same issue, and a subsequent response 'The Politics of Community Photography' (Camerawork 20, December 1980) by Don Slater. This to provide context for her analysis of North Paddington Community Darkroom and Blackfriars Photography Project as exemplars of community photography as defined and advocated by Camerawork. These were situated in community centres that were a 'raft of existing community activist groups that demonstrated the depth and breadth of local political action in the area'. Both areas were then typical of many inner London and other cities, home to many marginalised and underprivileged people, some living in 'streets, which were disfigured by dereliction [...] rising damp, vermin and intermittent or non-existent heating and hot water'.⁵⁶ The groups included Paddington Campaign Against

⁵³ www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/july-heat-review

(accessed 10th January 2024)

⁵⁴ Most succinctly discussed by Steve Edwards in 'Disastrous Documents' in *Ten*.8, No.15, pp.12- 23 (1984). An influential paper that progressed critical work (emerging in the 1970s) on class and representation in British documentary photography.

Racism, North Paddington Claimants Union, Westminster Empty Homes Campaign and, Stacey adds, a food group and a women's group. Stacey quotes both Spence and Slater extensively to demonstrate that participation, to enable visibility and self-expression, was the defining factor in the impetus and methods for community photography, as demonstrated by her choice of quotation from Spence:

Community photographers are encouraging people to photograph each other, friends and family, then their social environment. This provides immediate feedback for discussion, provides aids for storytelling and reading, and makes it possible to look at the world differently. People can discover how to relate to themselves and to others more positively when armed with images of themselves: images which counteract the stereotypes usually seen in mass media.⁵⁷

This definition remains influential to community as participatory photography, such as that currently practiced at Photovoice (Tiffany Fairey) and in the work of Anthony Luvera, both of whom have described photography as a collaborative tool for socially engaged projects. Fairey has voiced the aim 'to support marginalised groups to self-represent through photography, to tackle injustice and stigma and to be seen and heard'⁵⁸. The Photovoice organisation provides an explanation of how it defines and applies 'participatory', as below:

Participatory photography is an approach to community engagement where cameras are provided to individuals, who are then supported to share their perspectives through photography [...] Photovoice has developed six categories of engagement [...] combining elements of skills-building, research and co-production⁵⁹

Photovoice is often hired (by University research centres or local councils for example) to deliver training, workshops or longer projects on mental, physical and social wellbeing to specific cohorts, rather than communities in the geographical sense. Recent work has been around alcohol dependence, children at risk of sexual exploitation, the experience of racism and of leaving care. This work is obviously situated in sociology, the six categories echo an established model of

⁵⁵ Surprisingly there is no mention of environmental or eco-protest at all, given the prevalence at the time, as evidenced in oppositional photography projects. Stacey's focus is on London; however, this was an issue addressed by city-based photographers and groups in the 1970s. e.g. Greenpeace had dedicated photographers.

⁵⁶ Noni Stacey *Photography of Protest and Community: The Radical Collectives of the 1970s*, (London: Lund Humphries, 2020) p.147

of eight 'rungs' to demonstrate types of citizen non-participation to meaningful and impactful participation. This refers to Sherry Arnstein working on citizen involvement in the planning process in North America, writing, in 1969, about a 'ladder of participation'.⁶⁰

The ladder is a guide to seeing who has power when important decisions are being made. It has survived for so long because people continue to confront processes that refuse to consider anything beyond the bottom rungs.⁶¹

This is most usefully demonstrated by the following diagram from Arnstein's original text, that has been an important factor in developing projects that result in, or at least attempt to facilitate, agency for participants. However, it has also been a factor, along with 1970s and 80s literature on 'concerned' photography, for some of the more general critique of social documentary that favoured more conceptual work. This is later discussed in relation to the photographic work from the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, that became known as 'the Dusseldorf school'.

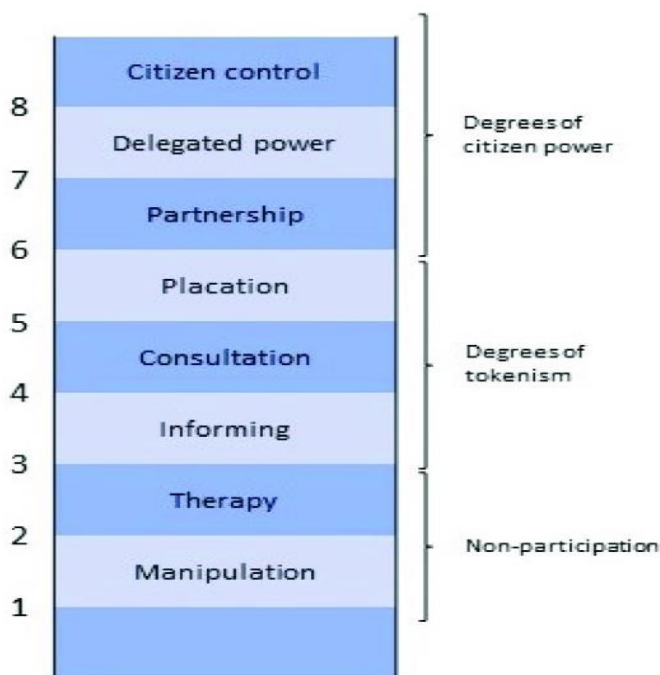


Fig.12 *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* Sherry R. Arnstein, Diagram, 1969

⁵⁷ Jo Spence 'Politics of Photography' 1976, p.1 in Noni Stacey *Photography of Protest and Community: The Radical Collectives of the 1970s*, (London: Lund Humphries, 2020) p.142.

⁵⁸ Tiffany Fairey 'Photovoice' www.tiffanyfairey.co.uk 'About'. (accessed July 16th 2024)

⁵⁹ 'What is Participatory Photography?' photovoice.org (accessed July 20th 2024) The six categories are research, communications, campaigns and advocacy, co-produced resource development, and consultation, monitoring and evaluation.

Levura, when asked about the meaning of 'community photography' gives an appraisal of the 'community photography movement' developing over the 1970s and 80s as an aspiration to 'enable a form of cultural democracy'.⁶²

In detailing the conception and development of his long durational project, 'Assisted Self-Portraits' (2001-), Levura articulates an ethical awareness of the rungs of the ladder. A longer account, in the photographic review *Source* (2006), a special issue on community photography, recalls how over ninety homeless people became participants in the first iteration. Keeping in mind the unstable housing condition, addiction problems, mental health issues and many other complex and chaotic situations those I met were faced with'⁶³ The following excerpts demonstrate how Levura endeavoured to ensure that the top three rungs of partnership, delegated power and citizen (participant) control, were made available.

I had never wanted to photograph homeless people before. I'd read (de)constructive writings by photo critics on 'others', poverty and representation. I knew about the complexities of the find-a-bum school of photography trounced by Martha Rosler. So, in December 2001, when it was put to me by a friend to get involved as a photographer at Crisis Open Christmas, the annual event for homeless people in London, the invitation threw me. "I'd much prefer to see what the people I met would photograph". I sourced 1,000 cameras and processing vouchers, and spent every day and many late nights at the following Crisis Open Christmas [...] 1,200 homeless people provided with rows of bedding, cooked meals and all kinds of support services.

In order to research and determine the production methodology for an Assisted Self-Portrait, I worked with one participant, Phil Robinson, for over a year. To experiment with technical setups, and to closely examine the negotiations played out during the photographic transaction [...] crucial in workshopping the instructional aspect of the portrait making. To enable the participant to take control of the process, calling upon me as an assistant to their image making.

The final image is edited with the participant and the use of the Assisted Self-Portrait is always with their consent [...] the participant/subject became co-creator of the image, and I, as the photographer, acted as a facilitator and technical advisor.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Sherry R. Arnstein 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' *Journal of the American Planning Association* Vol. 35, No. 4, July (1969) pp. 216-224. With thanks to Mathilde Bertrand and Annebella Pollen for alerting me to this as well as to work in the 1980s. Specifically Su Braden *Committing Photography* (London: Pluto Books, 1983) and Stevie Bezencenet and Phillip Corrigan (eds.) *Photographic Practices: Towards a Different Image* (London: Comedia, 1987). These two books and their authors, form part of the development as well as literature of community photography, part of the matrix of practice and key voices including Jo Spence and Terry Dennett, John Tagg, Simon Watney, Peter Dunn and Lorraine Leeson, as well as the workshops and collectives that have been so well researched in various theses, projects and books in the last decade. The work of Steve Edwards, Jorge Ribalta and Mathilde Bertrand is most apposite and robust. As well as avoiding duplication the main objective of this thesis is to foreground eco-criticality and so this work is acknowledged rather than further analysed.

⁶¹ <https://www.citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html> (accessed 20th September 2023)

His discussion of the challenge to move beyond the degrees of tokenism acts as a guide as well as contemporary case study, also evoking work from Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. Especially for her return to the Byker estate, in the early 2000s. Working with residents forty years after living and working with the community in her original documentation project. 'I give out cameras to the families on the refugee project and a few weeks later we select an exhibition for the Civic Centre'.⁶⁵ Even more so the voice of Mark Neville, whose 2004 *Port Glasgow* project also features in the same special issue of *Source* and as will be evidenced in chapter three. Meanwhile, the scholar Daniel Palmer examined a 'collaborative turn' in photography circa 2013,⁶⁶ in the context of the omnipotence of digital and networked images where there is much scope for an abusive gaze, also for increased interaction and collaboration. Palmer explains how his book on the matter:

examines the prevalence of collaboration in photographic art since the late 1960s— that is, forms of expanded authorship in photography from conceptual art to our contemporary moment. More radically, it seeks to reconceive the act of photography as inherently dialogical and thus always potentially collaborative. By emphasizing photography as a social rather than solitary act I want to test the Canadian communications theorist Marshall McLuhan's declaration, made in reference to what he calls "corporate and collective art forms such as the film and the press," that "nobody can commit photography alone" (McLuhan 1964 : 183)⁶⁷

Providing a contemporary example, this notion of photography as 'always potentially collaborative' is borne out by the contemporary work of Zanele Muholi who prefers to use 'participatory' in their discussions of 'expanded authorship'. Muholi is a South African photographer 'Describing themselves as a visual activist, Muholi documents and celebrates queer communities who often don't see themselves reflected in society' citing *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992) by bell hooks (sic) as their 'beginning' as a photographer concerned with identity, inequality and society.⁶⁸ In an interview with Isobel Van Dyke, Muholi echoes the previous generation of practitioners, Konttinen, Neville, Levura and Daniel Meadows

⁶² Anthony Luvera. Interview with Nicola Homer. [Studio International 15th August 2019](#) (accessed 24th September 2023)

⁶³ Anthony Luvera 'Photographs and Assisted Self Portraits' *Source - The Photographic Review*. Issue 47, Summer (2006) pp.14-18

⁶⁴ Ibid.

as well as Jo Spence as the exemplar from the 1970s and Ariella Azoulay's position on the returned gaze (as will be explained later). This interview was to mark the first major retrospective at Tate Modern, London (June 2024 – January 2025).

IVD

Why do you choose the word 'participant' over 'subject' for those you photograph?

ZM

If a person is part of this project, they are playing a bigger role than just being a subject. To me, the person in the photograph is more important than the photographer themselves. The person in front of you is the one who made the project possible.

IVD

What's the significance of asking your participants to look directly at the camera?

ZM

It's a way of talking back. Because as Black people, we were never in the position where we were able to talk back. But also, to give people strength. It's about resilience. Talking back, looking back, eye contact is such a powerful stance.⁶⁹

Muholi always refers to working with 'participants', in conversation with the critic Brion Dillon they discuss how this position first emerged through the documentation of hate crimes. Muholi was increasingly witness to the aftermath of such crimes, after founding the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (2002). They first trained at David Goldblatt's famous Market Photography Workshop, Johannesburg, part of his riposte to the apartheid regime, under which Muholi grew up before moving to Toronto, USA for post graduate study in documentary photography at Ryerson University. Referring to the long durational 'lifetime project' *Faces and Phases* (2006 -), the first years of which were published as a photo-book in 2014, Dillon

⁶⁵ Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen *Byker Revisited* (Newcastle: Northumbria Press, 2009) p.89. As will be again referenced and discussed in more detail later in the introduction.

⁶⁶ Daniel Palmer 'A Collaborative Turn in Contemporary Photography' *Photographies* Vol 6:1 (2013) pp. 117-25

⁶⁷ Daniel Palmer *Photography and Collaboration - From Conceptual Art to Crowdsourcing* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020) p.10

analyses the work as ‘a matter of the most arduous labour, care and unceasing advocacy’ in which people, he asserts:

make frequent reference to the real and metaphorical shelter they’ve found among activists like Muholi. Portraiture itself is a sort of refuge or protection [...] Time and again the participants comment on the importance of being part of Muholi’s project – the photographs propose a community among women isolated by geography, class and the need for secrecy [...] Muholi’s work is complexly oriented towards the long history of colonial photography of black faces and bodies, as well as the efforts of black artists and intellectuals to project counter-images.⁷⁰

As in the work of my three case studies, Amber, Godwin and Neville, it is crucial to Muholi’s comprehensive project ‘Faces and Phases’ that the photographs are accompanied by information on where and when the photograph is made, as well as who is involved. In this case the portrait might include a written testimonial of abuse and injustice ‘Each of my projects is about giving participants the most dignified representation possible [...] everyone is asserting their place in history and the world; and so naming, placing and timing are necessary’.⁷¹ This is reviewed by Kimber Chewing as

one of the artist’s most enduring projects, the second room of *Faces and Phases* reveals the power of display, as portraits from the 500-work series are shown in a grid. “Faces” refers to the person being photographed, while “phases” documents transition: in sexuality, gender expression, or stages in life. Trust is at the heart of the project, as Muholi often returns to photograph the same person over time. An entire wall is dedicated to participants who have passed away.⁷²

⁶⁸ ‘In the studio with Zanele Muholi’ *Apollo* 6th February 2024 <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/zanele-muholi-sfmoma-queer-photography/> (Accessed 21st March 2024)

⁶⁹ Zanele Muholi with journalist Isobel Van Dyke ‘The Eyes Have it: Charting the history of South Africa’s queer community starts with their gaze’. *Evening Standard* (magazine) 24th May 2024 p.23.

⁷⁰ Brion Dillon ‘Zanele Muholi the Fire -Eater’ *Art Review* Summer (2017) <https://artreview.com/ar-summer-2017-feature-zanele-muholi/> (Accessed 7th January 2024).

⁷¹ Hannah Abel-Hirsch ‘Zanele Muholi: Art and Activism’ *British Journal of Photography* [Zanele Muholi: Art and activism - 1854 Photography](#) (last Accessed 1st February 2024)

⁷² Kimber Chewing. *College Art Association* ‘Zanele Muholi Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2021’ Review November 18th 2022 <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/4025> (accessed 5th May 2024)



Fig. 13 *Sazi Jali, Durban, KwaZulu Natal, 2018*
Zanele Muholi, Photograph, 2018



Fig. 14 *Zanele Muholi, installation view at Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2021*
Eike Walkenhorst, Photograph, 2021

Having considered definitions of the sometime converging notions of community, collaboration, and participation in photography it is clear that there are elements of each in my three case studies from across the last fifty odd years. The earlier work of Amber, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is closer to a model of community photography inspired by the Worker Photography Movement and film and photography leagues of the 1920s-30s. Documenting labour in consultation with those involved. Amber's multiple projects later mirror critical developments, resonating with the calls to give voice and agency through a more collaborative approach. My second example of *The Oil Rush*, from Godwin and Jones, also resonates visually with Worker Photography as it is so focussed on the experience of manual labour. Mark Neville's engagement, also with specific communities, for long durational projects are collaborative and participatory in terms of partnership, albeit to various degrees as he has acknowledged. That said, I posit that all of my case studies also reflect an important factor in the wider attempt to collapse the distance between non-participation and agency. As employed by other social documentary photography projects they rely upon oral histories, the literal voices of the individuals involved. Later in the introduction I discuss my main application of 'participatory' that results in a shared impetus and impact for my examples. That is, the photography and film theorist André Bazin's conception of cultural work as 'participating in its times', meaning in, as well as constituting the politics and the aesthetics of experience of that time. This being so influential to the philosophy of Jacques Rancière and his proposal of a 'distribution of the sensible' that also motivates and supports my application and is explained in the forthcoming review of critical literature.

Following a widespread cultural and scholarly marginalization of documentary form and discourse, throughout the 1990s when conceptual art took precedence in most colleges of art as well as many galleries, Jacques Rancière's notion of a valid 'construction of the visibility and conceivability of the world' through documentary photography (as both form and subject) was recovered as an expanding critical area of attention. By the early twenty first century, more nuanced and complex approaches to documentary had regained critical status. For example, Mark Sealy, founding director of Autograph (the British photography and film organization concerned with photographic representation framed by human rights

and social justice) provides an example of (and has made major contribution to) these changing perspectives. Writing in 2009, on 'not Natasha', Dana Popa's harrowing, long durational project on the human trafficking, forced degradation and prostitution of Eastern European women, he identifies the documentary images as 'signifiers', declaring that:

These photographs offer no reprieve from the violence experienced by these women and their families [...] Popa's investment is therefore beyond the lens. Her photographs operate as markers of her intention to take action and responsibility [...] Documentary photography has in many regards taken a theoretical battering over the last few decades, however in a celebrity-obsessed globalised world, the real value of documentary photography is that it reminds us of a privileged self. It will always tell us as much about ourselves as it does about the subject in focus.⁷³

Sealy's work is situated in the scholarship that revisits and critiques the histories, including the late 20th century marginalization, of documentary and social realism. Ergo also the people depicted, or depicting themselves, as well as the role of the viewer. His notion of 'investment beyond the lens' resonates with other projects that take action to convey and demonstrate social and moral responsibility. As will be discussed in my examples that attempt this through an engagement with particular communities and environments.

These examples mainly employ the photobook (also the photo film and short form documentary) as the most apposite documentary form and so work on the British photobook, particularly from Patrizia Di Bello and Gerry Badger, Martin Parr and most recently Paul Edwards on the wider 'photobook world' is most salient. Whilst there has been a focus on providing definitions with analysis of particular photo-books, positioned as objects in the cultural and commercial spheres, I respond to Edwards' offering a more open and inclusive vision, she proposes that:

the photobook is best understood as a collective endeavour, a confluence of individuals, interests and events, as well as a confluence of image and story [...] once the emphasis has been removed from the auteur, the photobook, viewed simply as any book containing one or more photographs becomes more alive [...] The way forward in

⁷³ Mark Sealy 'Beyond the Lens' (critical essay for Impressions Gallery (Bradford) exhibiting 'not Natasha' in 2009) p.4

photobook studies is without a doubt to engage in micro-histories, and to relinquish hubris of attempting a History ⁷⁴

My theoretical framing is largely informed by such cultural critique and methodology found in art history, particularly critical work on the interactions between politics and aesthetics. My analysis is inspired by scholars that propose pluralist and reflective perspectives, as allowing for expanded interpretation and agency for documentary past and present. There are several key theorists of influence to the thesis, that have, through visual media, explored interactions between politics and aesthetics in documentary photography: Philosopher Jacques Rancière, the photographer, filmmaker and writer, Allan Sekula, the photo-historian and visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards, the latter positing photography as also conveying an 'intense awareness of the past and its potential loss'.⁷⁵ In terms of subject, key voices are Steve Edwards, on photography, class, and social theory, Julian Stallabrass on the renewed status of documentary, including in the context of conflict and war and ,especially, Mathilde Bertrand, on collaborative and participatory work in British community photography. Annebella Pollen's work on British cultural histories, on the validity of even the most 'ordinary' or most esoteric aspects, often using photography as a starting point, is an inspiration. Her accounts lead to a portal, through detailed engagement with the often overlooked particulars of life. Furthermore, my choice of examples and framing is also informed by eco-critical analysis, as to be found in the growing academic area of energy humanities, as emerging from the wider environmental humanities where visual media is emerging as a distinct research area. i.e., On the multiple roles of photography relating to resistance, activism, and exploitation connected to a global fossil economy, as escalating in scale and reach since circa 1970. Therefore, some of the work of artist and writer Lucy R. Lippard (as an environmental activist concerned with the local experience of place) is useful, also that of the cultural theorist, Imre Szeman, specifically on

⁷⁴ Paul Edwards (ed.) *The Photobook World: Artist's Books and forgotten Social Objects* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023). Introduction. With thanks, once again, to Mathilde Bertrand and Annebella Pollen for suggesting this book. It speaks to the work of Pollen, on making visible the often overlooked (as, ironically, too esoteric or quotidian) aspects the micro-histories of people or communities. Also, to Bertrand's foregrounding of images and projects that are also important, often overlooked, oppositional 'micro-histories'.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Edwards 'Photography and The Material Performance of The Past' in *History and Theory*, Vol. 48, No. 4, (Wesleyan University: Wiley) 2009, p.131

'Petrocultres' relating to the representation of oil and the fossil economy. Over three chapters my example projects are examined in these critical contexts, for new insights into their significance as political, pedagogic, and cultural activity.

Aims and objectives of the thesis

To reiterate, the overall aim of the thesis is to contribute to the ongoing debates on the efficacy of documentary photography, using material evidencing imposed change, particularly on ways of life, as linked to the fossil economy in differing ways. To support this aim my objective is to introduce and analyse example photo-works as complex, consciously political works, made during times when the presence of this pernicious global economy is more tangible at a local level. More specifically relating to the oil industry as the centrifugal force, driving the impacts of globally connected commerce, conflict, or climate change. I posit such photography as contributing to an effective challenging of the 'authority of visualization'. This can then be identified as part of a 'countervisuality' using these terms as proposed by cultural theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff who clarifies 'Visuality is an old word for an old project. It is not a trendy theory word meaning the totality of all visual images and devices but is in fact an early-nineteenth century term meaning the visualization of history'.⁷⁷ To achieve this objective, I'll discuss this challenge as discernible in the aforementioned documentary practice, as emerging over the last fifty years. This time frame maps onto the escalating development and consequences of the fossil economy. All of the example projects engage with the aesthetics of the 'everyday' experience to consciously counter generalizing (and thus repressive) accounts of work, life, and environment. They are also produced and operate on an activist level (to evidence, protest, celebrate, collaborate or advocate) with varying degrees of success. As such they are most apt to the aim of a thesis that considers interactions between aesthetics and politics and the efficacy of documentary photography.

In terms of the uneven relationships between the global and local Amartya Sen is well known for his major contributions to welfare economics, social justice, and

⁷⁷ Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.) *Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge 2013) p.4

social choice theory. Writing, in useful opposition, on the imposition of “austerity” as a notorious ideologically driven response to the global economic crisis of 2008-9, he asserts ‘Democracy has to be judged not just by the institutions that formally exist but by the extent to which different voices from diverse sections of the people can actually be heard.’⁷⁸ The term itself and application of “Austerity Measures” has since been normalised with ongoing repercussion on the most vulnerable countries and communities. Sen was also writing with much prescience a decade before a positive shift in the mainstream with regard to the lack of voice, visibility, and agency for millions of people. This development emerges in response to a parallel rise in racism, sexism and a cynically cultivated nationalism in the increasingly polarized populations and communities of a globalized world. The shift facilitates a widespread public dialogue, significantly escalated by the sharing of evidence (of repression and misrepresentation) disseminated through mass and immediate distribution via mainly visual social media.

The rapid nature of this distribution has supported some international movements, against shared injustices, in having at least some degree of positive influence. Particularly in the global North where contemporary activism around race, gender, and the environment results, by the early 2020s, in more mainstream visibility of structural inequality, the abuse of communities and of the planet. At this moment in time a global pandemic, in the second deadly year, results in further exposure of intersectional inequalities. As more wealthy countries and demographics begin to physically recover, mainly through welfare supported lockdowns and comprehensive vaccine programmes, others continue to suffer massive loss of life and livelihood.⁸¹ As well as ongoing “austerity” for some, the inequality of life expectation and experience is thrown into sharper relief.

⁷⁸ Amartya Sen *The Idea of Justice* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2010) Preface xiii

⁸¹ Currently (April 2021) the populations of India and Nepal are in desperate need of more resources, including oxygen tanks. Major cities Delhi, Mumbai and Lucknow are described as ‘devastated’ as the virus spreads to smaller towns and villages without resource. Car parks are full of makeshift funeral pyres as hospitals and crematoriums are unable to cope with the numbers of sick and dying. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-56913047> (accessed 29th April 2021)

For an updated analysis see: William Davies and Sahil Dutta, Nick Taylor and Martina Tazzioli *Unprecedented? How Covid-19 Revealed the Politics of Our Economy* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2022) pp. 58 – 64

The inequity and consequences of the precarity of freelance employment, zero hours contracts, and project-based work on which many are reliant across a variety of industries have also been exposed in the arts and cultural sectors ⁸²

Anthony Luvera speaks specifically on collaborative arts projects; the communities and groups involved being most likely to be affected. Given that we now live in a miasma of images that instantly communicate (also mis-communicate) every aspect of our life and times, these first two, turbulent decades of the twenty-first century provide a most pertinent context in which to consider the nature and role of collaboration and distribution in the debates and practices of social documentary photography as a complex realism resulting from a synergy of politics and aesthetics.

Examining contexts with analysis of the examples



Fig.15 *Amber Film and Photography Collective, Newcastle, 1979*
Photographer Unknown, Photograph, 1979

⁸² Anthony Luvera in *Photography For Whom* Issue 02 March 2021 p.11.

In chapter one I historicise the Amber Film and Photography Collective based in Tyneside (on the North East coast of England) as the locus of their long durational work. Amber are known for their community based projects, with working class maritime and mining communities for example. Also notable is their attempts at targeted distribution through inexpensive hiring of film and photography projects to schools and community groups for example, as inspired by the workers' photography groups and film and photography leagues of the 1920s and 30s. This developed into the creation of education programmes, which has been a key strategy for fifty years. I especially focus on the trajectory of co-founders Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen and Murray Martin, particularly on projects created (from circa 1970) by Konttinen, working with Tyneside communities living in and around the deep-water port of North Shields, and in nearby Byker and in Wallsend, by the River Tyne, a few miles North of the city of Newcastle. These sites are on the edge of a wider world facing coast, closer by sea to Amsterdam than to the English power base of London. The routes from the River Tyne to the Norwegian coast are of equal distance to those leading to London's River Thames. As well as the significant Irish and Scottish migration to this area, there are historical relationships with Finland and Norway, also centuries of further interaction with other countries and cultures is facilitated through the ever-present ferries, cargo ships, oil tankers and the relatively recent development of international leisure cruise shipping. For example, in the late nineteenth century one of the first Muslim communities in Britain settled in maritime Tyneside (South Shields).

A substantial Yemeni community was established after many sea workers stayed (in this and other port towns and cities around the coast) having worked in British commercial shipping and, or served in the British Army or Navy.⁸³ Amber associate and independent documentary photographer Peter Fryer (who was part of the group's important five year residency (1986 – 1991)

⁸³ There is a longer history between Britain and the ports (and refineries) of Yemen. In 1839 Britain had occupied then colonized Aden (now part of Yemen). The eventual return of independence in 1959 was finalized after the first international oil crisis, the 'Suez Crisis', 1956. If born in the 'protectorate' a person could gain British nationality. See Imperial War Museum 'A Short History of The Aden Emergency' www.iwm.org.uk (accessed September 2021)

See also Kate Proctor *History of South Shields Yemeni Community to be Preserved in The Chronicle*, Newcastle, 17th July 2015 . p.4

in North Shields) has documented the demise of once central boarding houses set up by the Yemeni for want of local accommodation. His projects 'The Last Arab Boarding House' (photography, c.2000 - 2010) and 'The Boarding House' (photo-film, 2009 a collaboration with David Campbell and the community, providing oral histories and personal visual material) have been exhibited in South Shields, at Side Gallery and in Yemen.⁸⁴ By the late twentieth century Tyneside is increasingly diverse, Newcastle is officially recognized in local authority network as a 'City of Sanctuary'. Byker estate has been used to accommodate multi-national refugees, as will be further discussed in relation to Konttinen's work with asylum seekers. Despite a disparaging reputation (constructed through cliched media and cultural accounts of 'Tyneside' as generally insular) this has never been the case, although, as Amber acknowledges there are tensions, including racist aggression, in elements of under resourced and educationally supported changing communities as to be found in most towns and cities. Historian David Renton details a modern history of growing diversity:

North-east England has been a major centre of migration in two modern periods: first, between 1880 and 1920, the region was a major centre of migration from Scotland and Ireland [...] 37 per cent of the 1911 population of the north-east was foreign-born, (sic) or the children of migrants. Second, since 1997 [...] as a result of the government's dispersal scheme, which broke up refugee communities in London and south-east England and relocated the new arrivals throughout the country. By 2000 there were communities in Newcastle of people who spoke as their first language Farsi, Kurdish, Afghani, Albanian, French, Russian, Czech, Turkish, Somali, Arabic, Spanish, Turkish, Gujarati, Sinhalese, Tamil and Serbo-Croat.⁸⁵

The main projects to be discussed in chapter one are Konttinen's now iconic *Byker* (exhibition, photobook, and photo-film 1969 to 1983) as well subsequent works *Byker Revisited: Portrait of a Community* (Photobook, exhibition 2003-2009) and *Today I'm With You* (Photo-film, 2010).

⁸⁴ 'The Arab Boarding House' project is not available via the Ambe website, this and Fryer's significant contribution to the Amber corpus through projects 'Let Go' (over the 1980s) and 'Smith's Docks' c. 1990-91 can be seen via <https://www.peter-fryer.com/main> (accessed May 5th 2021)

⁸⁵ David Renton *Colour Blind: Race and Migration in North East England since 1945* (Sunderland: University of Sunderland Press, 2007) p.32

This first chapter will critically contextualize Konttinen by situating Amber as a site-specific collective of growing interest to the scholarly photography community. An early (2002) academic paper 'Documentary Practices and Working-Class Culture (Amber Films and Side Photographic Gallery)' from Darren Newbury, has become a key source for research relating to Amber. This foregrounds community and creative collaboration as central, how Amber (referred to as Amber/Side to include the group's independent gallery) was 'collective because it did not promote the vision of a single photographer but instead involved many photographers and film-makers'. Newbury cites Konttinen's co-founder of Amber, the film maker Murray Martin, to further propose that they were always working beyond the lens:

It was collaborative because film and photography were part of a dialogue with those communities. The images, Martin argues, were only part of the project, only a "symptom" [...] Amber Side has remained committed to the region and has always been accessible to the people represented in the work.⁸⁶

A 'single vision' was not promoted by Amber members, who have always cited collective authorship, Martin explains further:

The story's never told through the individual [...] there are always other people that contributed to that, and to any really significant work of art, particularly in film and often in photography, there are other influences in play and other contexts that have made that thing possible, and to ignore those is a real mistake [...] they're arguing for documentary⁸⁷

However, a perception of Martin as the key individual has persisted until more recently. James Leggott comments on this stance as having compromised their visibility and status 'the speculation here is that the identification of a clear figurehead, or two, to rank alongside other noted auteurs [...] such as Ken Loach [...] may have improved Amber's standing' Leggott goes on to quote Amber members (Konttinen, Graham Rigby and Peter Roberts) explaining their commitment and strategies in this regard. He also postulates 'the question remains of whether Amber have flown beneath the

⁸⁶ Darren Newbury 'Documentary Practice and Working-Class Culture: An Interview with Murray Martin (Amber Films and Side Photographic Gallery)' *Visual Studies* 17.2 (2002) p.116

⁸⁷ Murray Martin interviewed by Shirley Read (Oral History of British Photography ,British Library, 2002) C459/156 .Part 10 of 10.

critical radar, willingly or otherwise, as a result of being perceived as 'regional'.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, Konttinen, as well as the under researched Amber film makers Elaine Drainville and director Ellin Hare, bring undeniably distinct, individual experience to particular projects and aspects of the group's corpus. Films were made with local people, working at sea, or gathering sea coal, with miners, with the women's darts team, at dance schools. Long-term Amber member Hare had brought her experience of film workshops (e.g. with Front Room, London, and the Belfast Film Workshop) further developing collective approaches where participants would also be involved as writers and actors, to teach professional actors about the reality and spirit of the experience.^{89 90} Arguably, it is largely due to the work of Konttinen, Drainville and Hare that the Amber output is now equally associated with intimate community portraits, including more often celebratory and diverse elements, as with the earlier work to document industry and de-industrialization through the 'epic' motifs of iron bridges, shipyard cranes and coal staithes. Indeed, the single image now often used (by external galleries and museums, at conferences or in the media) to represent Amber is Konttinen's popular photograph 'Girl on a Space Hopper, 1971'.

This image is from her first photobook *Byker*, 1983 and is also emblematic of the Amber locale, on a more domestic and personal scale. The accompanying text in the photobook demonstrates Konttinen's emotionally present participation in her work with the community, as Konttinen describes the moment when the girl in the photograph makes contact more than thirty years later. She is careful to include the woman's own situating of the representation of her young self.

⁸⁸ See James Leggott, *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020) p.36

⁸⁹ Margaret Dickinson, *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999) Dickinson also discusses the role of alternative distribution. pp 31-32. See also Elaine Drainville *Articulating the Liminal: Enabling Access to Voice* (unpublished doctoral thesis) University of Sunderland, 2018. Drainville, unlike most Amber members is self-researched in an academic context.

⁹⁰ *Amber - A Short History*. Booklet (Newcastle: Amber Side, 2005) p.13



Fig. 16 *Girl on a Spacehopper*, 1971 Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971

There is a phone call, that makes my heart take a leap: the Girl on the Spacehopper. The photograph of the little girl has been my most published picture [...] She bounced past my camera in 1971 to disappear down the cobbled lane with her dreams; her exuberant journeying and maverick splendour personifying the spirit of the old Byker community. “I was six years old and always dressing up in my mother’s spangly clothes. A wild child! Almost as soon as you took the picture, my family moved out of Byker. I now have a family of my own and a good job; my life has turned out well ‘⁹¹

⁹¹ Sirkka, Liisa Konttinen *Byker Revisited* (Newcastle: Northumbria Press, 2009) p.182

The 'dressing up' with sequins and bow (an older person's dress slung over her jumper and self-propelled, inflated vinyl rubber steed) is repurposed in to a magical chainmail. Tousled hair flies around as she grips the hopper's front horns and takes flight, on the 'space age' toy of the era, above the nineteenth century vernacular. The sense of freedom is conveyed, in the car free lanes of 1971, and decades later the girl is able to further participate in the depiction of a transitional moment in her own life.⁹² A quieter, lesser-known image is made inside one of the houses, most of which are now empty, due to forced or assisted evictions, as about to be demolished for 'master planning' development in the Byker area.



Fig. 17 *Heather Playing a Piano in a Derelict House, 1971* Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971

From the photobook *Byker*, 1983. Also presented in *Byker Revisited*, 2003 as 'Heather Playing a Piano in a Derelict House, 1971'. Part of Konttinen's 2003 project was to work with local people, to gain additional identification and to reconnect with people from the original Byker images.

⁹² The 'Space Hopper' of the 1970s was always a bright tangerine orange. As the photograph was made in black and white there is an accent on light and composition. However, assuming contrasting colours for the child's clothes and outsized ribbon bow, also luminous on a background of grey stone cobbles, in reality Konttinen must have been struck by a riotous intervention of colour. The image is a typically celebratory contribution to ensure representation of other realities, in tandem with de-industrialization and imposed change and clichéd associations of 'black and white' photography with nostalgia.

In contrast to the outdoor image, of the girl letting loose, traversing forward into the air (and beyond the streets of Byker as it turned out) Heather stands firm and strikes a still chord by a dusty piano. The image is complex, rescued from whimsy by a note of theatrical defiance. A tear in the knee of her jeans, a long frock coat and concerned gaze, beyond the ragged window, whilst standing very upright, slight fingers poised above the broken keys. Her poise and garb reminiscent of a young communard, the debris around the window is her small barricade, between the creative moment with Konttinen and the destruction and uncertainty outside. An anxious dignity in taking a moment to look out and back (rather than bouncing away from) the disintegrating community. There is a safety question as to how people, including children, were able to access a semi-derelict house, and a hope that Heather left the scene with Konttinen after they had made the photograph. Konttinen has discussed, in the context of ethics, hearing the piano from the street, not expecting to see the girl on entering. She has been careful, as is Amber's policy, to always discuss the work with participants and to provide detail on how the image, and usually conversations, might be presented, also asking permission to proceed with development, display or publication.⁹³

Despite Amber's often interrelated photography-film workshop methods there has often been, until relatively recently, disproportionate focus on the catalogue of Amber films, not least due to their relationship with the culturally active union, the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACCT, 1933-1991). Also due to Martin's keen communication of their work, through extensive interviews in the journals of film and television. However, in the last few years the prolific photography, oral history, and curatorial work, as well as other individual profiles (notably for Ellin Hare, Sirikka

⁹³ During the pandemic lockdowns of 2020-2021 Amber's open 'Side Talks' were held online. I participated in a series of three: 'Ethics of Documentary', 19th and 26th March and 9th April 2021. The first featured Konttinen who discussed key projects including Byker and Byker Revisited, introduced as 'sharing the stories and images that reflect the rich connections she maintains both with the people within the image and the wider communities that are represented'. Amber continue to seek communication with those depicted but not identified, in works from previous decades.

- Liisa Konttinen and Graham Rigby) are more recognized and discussed.⁹⁴ In chapter one I give further attention to propose Konttinen's particular vision and output as key to some of Amber's major community-based projects, as well as her own oeuvre. As mentioned, despite having suffered on a societal level, from unequal fiscal policy and appropriate support from central (London) government, this area was never a parochial North, as invoked in various disparaging political and cultural narratives. I use an historical approach to situate works made by, and with Konttinen that engage with the complex realities of the region as an exemplar of societal and environmental change in Britain, from the mid twentieth century onwards. Focussing on changing maritime environments, as well as an often overlooked diversity in the related communities. These provide a suitably multifaceted engagement with the experience of interactions between the global and local specifically relating to the fossil economy, in an area where coal, shipping and oil still loom large in the fabric of the environment as well collective cultural memory. My analysis in chapter one results in a new contribution to existing analyses of Amber, where the focus has been (understandably) on de-industrialization, post-industrialization, and the significance for class, including individual, identity. This has often involved extensive attention to the images relating to coalmining, fishing, shipping, and industrial infrastructure, without any eco-critical discussion on the inter-related oil and gas developments and their impact, central to life by (and on) the North Sea. Therefore, it is now useful to include a brief history of this environment and summary of the critical work (thus far) on Amber, to provide further context for my thesis.

Over the central industrializing centuries, from the 17th to 20th Century, fishing, shipbuilding, coal mining, and related steel and lead manufacturing famously dominated work and life in this area. There was a corresponding vernacular infrastructure of railway connections and transportation. Many smaller,

⁹⁴ These developments not least due to the increasing development of resources and events, talks and symposia, disseminated by a much- expanded online presence and more conscious exploitation of their archive. The influence of incoming professional archive and curatorial staff is tangible, however, part of the rationale for work in this thesis is that as yet there is not one that examines the substantial body of work by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen.

artisanal glassworks, brickworks and potteries, ironmongery and printmaking workshops also proliferated.



Fig. 18 *Blacksmiths' tools. Blacksmiths' tools in the forge. Each craftsman designs and makes his own tools* Bruce Rae, Amber associate photographer, Photograph, Circa 1980

By the mid to late 20th century much of this was greatly reduced due to environmental, cultural, and political change. By the 1980s, devastated by the escalation of free market policy, the larger remaining industries, were in steep decline. Such policy had resulted in an aggressive globalized market, that soon normalized competitive undercutting on an unprecedented scale, especially for local shipbuilding. Meanwhile, the decimation of coal mining was mainly due to an unmediated de-industrialisation, imposed by a hostile Conservative government. The latter is a notorious example of the brutal application of an ideologically driven programme to commodify and cheapen labour, whilst hastily imposing a new service-based society and economy, at whatever cost to community wellbeing. The radical dissolution of coal was not based on a concern for the development of fossil fuel production and consumption, in terms of health or climate change. Rather, it was infamously part of imposed change to destroy the culture and power of the trade unions, ergo an empowered working class. The constitution and practice of the Amber collective were part of what Mathilde Bertrand has analysed as the

'cultural battles' of the time.⁹⁵ This era was dominated by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Conservative 'New Right' government, the arts and cultural sectors were negatively targeted and impacted by an infamous fiscal austerity, delivered and known as 'the cuts'. 'Public sector employment also fell sharply in the 1980s, but this was largely driven by the privatisation of state-owned industries'.⁹⁶ Hundreds of thousands of people protested all over the country as services suffered from severe reductions in budgets and staff. The general public joined nurses, teachers, transport workers, fire brigades, maritime workers, miners and council workers for marches, occupations and strikes, some of which lasted for months. The homeless were joined by the unemployed in protesting cuts to the Department of Health and Social Security before that too was restructured and disappeared in 1988.



Fig. 19 'Birmingham 1984 School dinner ladies protest for free school meals and against privatisation' Unknown NUT photographer, Photograph, 1984



Fig. 20 'School pupils protest against education cuts County Hall, London 1987' John Harris, Photograph, 1987

⁹⁵ Mathilde Bertrand 'Cultural Battles: Margaret Thatcher, The Greater London Council and the British Community Arts Movement' in *French Journal of British Studies* XXV1-3 2021 Open Edition Journals: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.8435> (accessed October 1st 2022)

⁹⁶ Jonathan Cribb, Richard Disney and Luke Sibieta. *The public sector workforce :past, present and future* (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2014) p.2

Articulating their affinity and solidarity with the North East, Amber understood the situation as a matrix of specific physical environments, work, traditions, and cultures, threatened by distant, uncomprehending and often hostile protagonists. As Darren Newbury observed in his interview with Amber's Murray Martin

with the return of mass unemployment for the first time since the 1930s, the position of many working-class communities, and the articulation of working-class culture, entered a period of crisis. Given their commitment to documenting working class culture in a region where coalmining and shipbuilding were major sources of employment, it is inevitable that the documentary work at Amber/Side is closely related to this social, economic, and political context ⁹⁷

The employment and opportunity afforded by the erstwhile primacy of these industries was abruptly curtailed. This in contrast to the slow and haltering pace of political efforts toward environmental and social repair. The familiar iconography of a geographically based industrial symbiosis (of fishing, shipping, and coal) is well established and critiqued through a substantial body of work in British arts, including painting, literature, theatre and folk music, latterly photography as well as film and television. Such representations are also part of the fabric of local histories and cultures, Elizabeth Edwards has argued that

Text, as an historical moment is now for better or worse the predominant output of global histories however this position is being increasingly challenged as oral, visual, literary, autobiography and material forms, re-enactment, and arts practice, become prisms and foci for multiple histories. These are also linked to histories of emotion, the senses and affect which are becoming increasingly prevalent [...] Likewise, others have considered the ways in which touch, voice, or song in relation to photographs enhance historical modalities and interpretations. ⁹⁸

As there was much cultural response to these harshly imposed changes, there is too a corresponding critical corpus. Especially, in photography scholarship, in relation to coalmining. However, my focus in chapter one is contained to maritime related

⁹⁷ Darren Newbury, 'Documentary Practice and Working-Class Culture: An Interview with Murray Martin (Amber Films and Side Photographic Gallery)' *Visual Studies* 17.2 (2002) p.2

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Edwards *Photographs and the Practice of History: A Short Primer* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022) pp. 3-4 Nb. Amber have engaged with all of these various forms. Although not within the scope of this thesis, I believe there is more work to be done, to research the interactions between photography and other media as expressive of the further and more recent past, including contemporary life in the North East and other post-industrial and post agricultural regions. Val Williams, as well as Edwards has mooted this.

projects. Hence the work of Allan Sekula's decades of engagement with the sea and maritime workers as a 'forgotten space'⁹⁹ (of economic, political, and environmental exploitation) has also informed my analysis on works of resilience and recovery; as well as disaffection and injustice, as conveyed through long- durational projects that engage with changing life along the River Tyne that Amber have situated in a local/global context through the use of personal stories that are employed to assert a shared universal experience of changes imposed as part of the Capitaloscene.

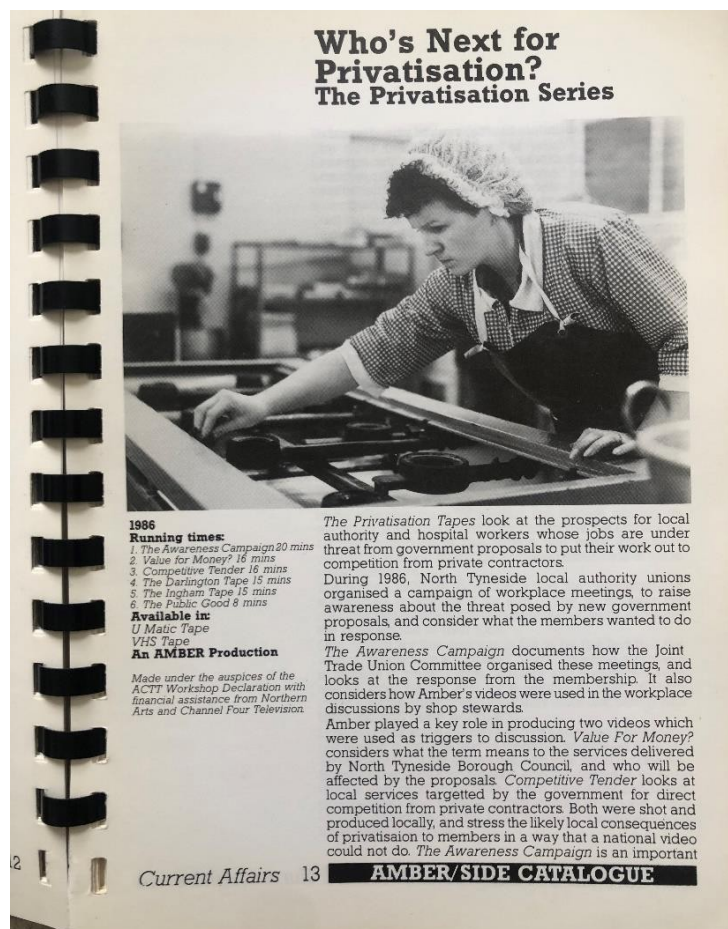


Fig. 21 *Who's Next for Privatisation? The Privatisation Series*
Amber Side catalogue page. Photographer unknown, Photograph, 1986

⁹⁹ Allan Sekula and Noel Birch *The Forgotten Space* (film) 2010. Among the many reviews and papers referring to this work it is most useful to hear Sekula himself, discussing his film in critical and political context, with Benjamin Buchloh and David Harvey as part of 'Forgotten Spaces' the Public platform of 'Foreclosed: Between Crisis and Possibility' at Cooper Union, New York, May 15, 2011. Curated by Jennifer Burris, who introduces the film as a response to the 'current financial crisis, of which home foreclosures are a both a symptom and powerful symbol, a starting point from which to examine systems of global capital and intimate moments of exclusion or loss' <https://www.afterall.org/article/material-resistance-allan-sekula-s-forgotten-space> (accessed September 2021)

The 'privatisation' image above is a page from an original copy of the Amber Side Catalogue, produced in 1987 to promote and provide access to twenty years of photography and film projects, to schools and community groups for example. Like Mark Neville the group employed distribution as an activist tactic, the catalogue will be discussed in my first chapter which will be an additional contribution to the erstwhile scant, now developing, scholarship where the work of Bertrand is key; relating directly to the photography rather than film projects of Amber. As the collective has repeatedly asserted and explained, these are of equal import to their filmmaking and often part of it through the 'structural use of still imagery'.¹¹⁴ I also draw new attention to the lack of eco-critical context for much of their engagement with the oil industry and related activity, especially with the construction of oil tankers and sites of transportation central to the iconography of the locale.



Fig. 22 'Shell construction site at Sullom Voe with crofts in the background'
Caption for *Untitled* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

¹¹⁴ James Leggott *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020). Shell construction image and caption in *The Oil Rush* P.192

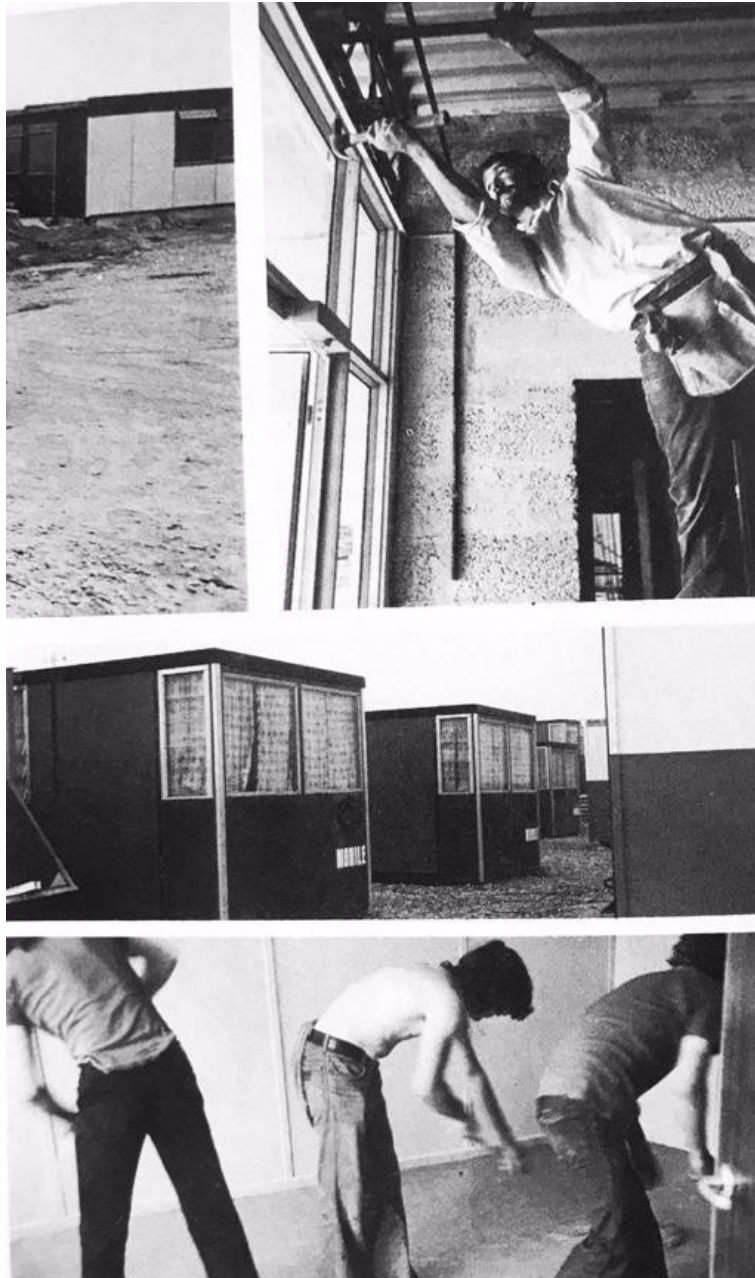


Fig. 23 'Construction of work camp for 1200 Sullom Voe workers. Meanwhile construction workers have to live in mobile homes' Caption for *Untitled* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

In chapter two 'Prosperity and Pollution in the North Sea' I will introduce and examine the neglected photobook *The Oil Rush* (1976) by Fay Godwin and Mervyn Jones. The image and caption above are from page two hundred and one and provide an example of the form, content and tone of the carefully composed, if not printed, pages throughout. My focus in this chapter changes to address the surprising lack of British art historical research (based in the histories and theories of photography) on a significant element for work and life in many

environments and communities on the North Sea coast. I have discovered, in the major exhibitions and critical work on social, documentary photography relating to the region, there is an absence. Even the long durational corpus of Amber, so much of which relates to shipping and coalmining, has not engaged with the other central element of the fossil economy in Britain. This being the presence of the currently oscillating (yet ultimately declining) British North Sea Oil and Gas industry (and the hundreds of thousands of workers directly and indirectly, historically and currently involved) as developing from initial exploration in 1960s. Although Amber's stated mission to document 'disappearing industries' many of their works feature or include highly visible, gargantuan oil tankers. The building of these 'super-tankers' on Tyneside was indeed disappearing, undermined by government policy and related, global developments. While shipbuilding itself, the yards and cranes and thousands of local jobs were dismantled the presence of international oil tankers was ever more tangible on the North East coast.

This continues to be, part of the local fabric, the daily seascape, and the night-time horizon. When the tankers wash out their tanks at sea a foamy residue laps the beaches, sometimes drifting into a tideline merengue, sculpted by coastal winds. At night the bright lights of the ships (anchored for free while waiting to set off to the dock properly when the next mooring is negotiated) seem much closer in the rare view of otherwise uninterrupted dark sea. Occasionally a clear night at full moon will highlight the closer waves, further distancing the tankers and cargo ships that are actually very close to shore, where wildlife and people swim in an increasingly polluted North Sea. Currently the deep-water Port of Tyne can handle, among much else, 57,000 square meters of liquid bulk cargo, including oil and petrochemicals.¹¹⁵ Amber have discussed their fascination with the 'visual theatre' of these huge vessels, and empathetic engagement with the shipyards and dock areas along the Tyne. Speaking in 2011, on the site of the iconic Swan Hunter yard, which had produced the largest ships, Peter Roberts recalls working, with Murray Martin and Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, to record as much as they could. He was struck at how quickly, within a year or so, the giant cranes, such a dominant feature of the landscape had been taken down

¹¹⁵ <https://www.portoftyne.co.uk> From which the 'Port of Tyne Oil Spill Contingency Plan' can be downloaded. There are also details of the 2050 Maritime Innovation Hub underway as will be referenced in Chapter two. (accessed June 8th 2022)

shipped to India to begin a new life there [...] and all the industrial areas, look at the mining industry, it's incredible how quickly any remnant of industry was obliterated of the landscape [...] it's almost like it's wilful, this desperate urgency to wipe this past of the map ¹¹⁶

However, other than Martin once identifying the vessel *World Unicorn* (at the centre of their well-known 1974 shipyard film *Launch*) as an oil tanker, there is no further comment or critique, in any Amber material, or material on Amber, of the equally monumental discovery, processing, and transportation of oil. Despite this being highly visible in the immediate area and in other communities by the North Sea. Nor is there any contextualizing in the fossil economy, as will be further discussed in chapter two. 'The Last Ships' (2018) by Chris Killip can be eco-critically viewed in this context. In the 1970s Killip (when an Amber associate photographer and initial curator at the Side Gallery) documented the last years of Tyneside giant shipbuilding, including the 'Everett F. Wells' (commissioned by Ashland Oil Inc. Panama) the last super tanker to be built on the Tyne. Killip has explained the circumstance and rationale for the work in detail, donated to Newcastle's The Laing Gallery and dedicated to the shipyard workers, but without any reference to the ship's trajectory and cargo and rationale. The ship, completed in 1977, was a memorial to the sixty-seven year old Wells (president of Ashland Oil) who had been killed by a car crash, in 1972. An obituary in the press notes his long tenure, 'from 1947 to 1965, a period in which the company's annual sales grew to nearly \$400-million and its interests expanded into chemicals, highway construction and other fields' ¹¹⁷ The term 'oil industry' encompasses a vast material, economic and political ecosystem, as robust as the biological ecosystem it erodes is fragile.

Crude oil is one of the most sought-after commodities in the world today [...] array of uses ranges from energy generation to its application as a feedstock, for transportation fuels and petrochemical products such as plastics, solvents, and adhesives. Hence the oil industry is one of the most powerful branches in the world

¹¹⁶ See *The Making of Launch* (film, 2011) produced for the BFI by Gemma Starkey and Poppy Simpson https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pK_ZbVSK90o (accessed 7th June 2021). See Also Stafford M. Lindsey *North East Industries Through Time* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011) . Linsey was a mentor and inspiration to Amber.

¹¹⁷ 'Everett F Well'. Obituaries *New York Times*, February 27th (1972 pp.63

economy and changes in benchmark oil prices have great implications for most manufacturing sectors and consumers.¹¹⁸

The ecological, as well as economic fallout is also universally experienced.¹¹⁹ Oil is also weaponised and as such has played a central role in most wars across the last century. The oil industry is a global matrix employs tens of millions of people, the UN's International Labour Organization estimates around sixty-six million. This includes all the varied work (from scientific research to dangerous manual labour) entailed in the exploration, extraction, refining, distribution and trading of oil and gas. Even more people and communities are dependent on related jobs in the immediate locales of production. This is a world-wide politically and culturally divisive, environmentally destructive phenomenon, simultaneously a major employer, as well as a key player and analogy for the obscene disparity in wealth and wellbeing on a global and local scale.¹²⁰

In regard to photography, there is a long physical and conceptual relationship with oil, developing as a contemporaneous aspect of modernity. From the materiality of production and processes, to the plethora of twentieth century photo-projects that relate to the now cliched fixture of 'the road trip' and the architectural vernacular around ubiquitous car centred environments linked by ever increasing road, signage and lighting systems; Interrelated sprawling

¹¹⁸ (*Statista* March 4th, 2022) <https://www.statista.com> (accessed 2nd August 2022) . In summer 2022 this seems an understatement. On 2nd August 2022 the second-quarter profits of British Petroleum (BP) one of the largest Oil companies, were £6.9 billion – the highest for fourteen years. At the same time household energy bills are rapidly increasing by 100%. Millions will be unable to pay, even though the Government will provide emergency energy funding to mitigate winter bills. As this is inadequate, community groups, local councils, theatres and libraries etc. are offering 'warm hubs' across the country. The phrase 'heat or eat' (as well as 'heat nor eat') has become common parlance as warmth banks, as well as food banks, proliferate.

¹¹⁹ Mark Hoosen and Kevin Pratt *Forbes Advisor* www.forbes.com (accessed 2nd August 2022)

Peter Foster 'England's Council's Plan 'Heat Hubs' as Residents Fear Soaring Bills' *Financial Times* August 30th (2022) pp.4

Bella McRae 'What is a Warm Bank and Why are they Needed This Winter?' *Big Issue* 16th September (2022) pp.6

¹²⁰ There is much research into assisting oil industry, particularly skilled off shore, workers transitioning into work for renewable energy, including offshore wind 'more than half would be interested' although over half 'deemed government support at all levels "nowhere near enough". *OFFSHORE: Oil and Gas Workers' views on Industry Conditions and Energy Transition 2020-21* Report published by Platform, Friends of The Earth Scotland and Greenpeace <https://platformlondon.org/publications-and-multimedia/> (accessed 3rd August 2022)

retail parks, fast food 'drive throughs' petrol stations and car dependent housing developments are built over urban and rural green spaces, flood plains, agricultural land are permitted, across most of Britain, by the same local authorities who have, as foregrounded on their websites, 'declared a climate emergency'. This despite a ratified policy to prioritise brownfield sites to preserve nature and mitigate pollution, most councils are in need of funding and most of the businesses involved are multinationals who, facilitated by central government, can provide this, in return for access to the land and already overwhelmed infrastructure with scant, if any, genuine benefit to local communities. This worldwide phenomenon of a particular type of asphalt creep first developed in North America with the mass production of cars and tract housing, hence an influential engagement in American photography.¹²¹ Notably from Robert Adams, working, from the late 1960s, on the over development of the North American West (California, Oregon, and Colorado) through carefully composed 'documentary' of tract housing, traffic, and freeways (motorways). Another approach had been taken by Ed Ruscha, focussing on the physical vernacular, often employing photography with a focus on roadside places and signage, famously in the much analysed, conceptual photobook *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1962).

Ruscha's book is described by Ian Walker as 'a subtle mix of factuality and artifice, flatness and depth, dumbness, and intelligence [...] a key work of its own time'.¹²² Walker, in his discussion of both projects as influential to the development of the pivotal 1975 *New Topographics* exhibition (in which they were also to be included) describes Robert Adams as offering 'a dispassionate look at the suburbanization of the landscape'.¹²³ Whilst I agree about an element of 'calmness', these works (consciously) recall the manipulated light and sightlines in the earlier landscapes of controversial advocate for

¹²¹ The medium was already established, since the nineteenth century, as a factor in the development as well as the conservation of land, as evidenced in the substantial body of work from American geological survey photography.

¹²² Ian Walker 'A Kind of a Huh? The Siting of Twenty-six Gasoline Stations' in Patrizia Di Bello, Colette Wilson and Shamoon Zamir (eds.) *The Photo Book from Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2011) pp.118

¹²³ Ibid.

conservation, Ansel Adams. They also exude quiet rage, a long hard look, rather than dispassion. Following these more nuanced responses, to an inequitable modernity, an increasingly car centric society and the degradation of environments, photography projects from the 1970s onwards become more common in overtly eco-critical investigations.



Fig. 24 *Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs, 1969* Robert Adams, Photograph, 1969



Fig. 25 *Longmont, Colorado, 1976* Robert Adams, Photograph, 1976

In 1979 American photographer Richard Misrach began the project 'Desert Cantos' (ongoing) to foreground 'the collision between "civilization" and nature'. Repeated trips to the deserts of the South West reveal extreme sites of pollution, erosion and abjection on military testing sites, through photography. Misrach is also careful to qualify his own position in aiming to 'bear witness, and of sounding an alarm'. For the one of the 'cantos' (a section of a poem, the 'Bravo 20' project, he spent nearly two years, working with the local residents to gain access, in a huge area of land in Nevada which, since 1952 had been used illegally by the U.S. Navy, to test high-explosive bombs. As explained by Jeffrey Fraenkel, a gallerist who represents Misrach

The land had long been sacred to the Northern Paiute Indians, who called it the "Source of Creation." The Navy called it "Bravo 20." [...] Misrach gained access to the area using a 1972 mining law to claim a tract of land at the heart of the bombing range. Despite initial fears of unexploded bombs or wayward Navy bombers, Misrach "worked his claim [...] The photographs capture both the natural beauty and the man-made devastation unique to the remote Nevada landscape. Scattered across the great alkali flat, rusted wrecks of military vehicles lie as if on a battle field. A bomb crater is filled with crimson liquid where the earth itself seems to bleed.¹²⁴



Fig. 26 *Bomb Crater and Destroyed Convoy, Bravo 20 Bombing Range, Nevada, 1986*
Richard Misrach, Photograph, 1986

¹²⁴ <https://fraenkelgallery.com/artists/richard-misrach> (accessed 2nd September 2023)

These eco-critical aftermath images, the ground littered with empty shells, destroyed vehicles and landscapes, including 'Wolf's Peak'. This is a natural rock structure, a small mountain that the Navy had reduced in height through repeatedly using it as target practice. Misrach, with local people, placed the American flag on the top of the remaining landmark to deter the bombers.

Being a white, male, American artist affects or skews my perspective on everything I do from the outset. The best I can do is to try to keep this self-consciousness at the forefront [...] The Desert Cantos has shifted somewhat in the nature of its representation. (from) more or less aesthetic metaphors [...] more explicitly political. The "Bravo 20" project points a finger directly at military abuse of the environment ¹²⁵

The project resulted in *Bravo 20: The Bombing of The American West (Creating the North American Landscape)*, one of a series of books for the Desert Cantos. An even more disturbing output from Misrach's engagement the impact of illegal military activity on erstwhile public land is *Violent Legacies: Three Cantos* (1992) with an introductory short story, 'the view from the ark' from Susan Sontag. This is critical of environmental abuse while maintaining a level of wit, ending on a note of optimism, based on the idea that people might to at least try to start doing, if they can start seeing. "yes," said the gloomy bird, brightening a little. "It is just barely possible that the world will be saved". ¹²⁶ On turning the page the three picture sections begin, beginning with 'Project w-47 (the secret), followed by 'The Pit' and 'The Playboys'. The impact of the mainly apocalyptic and dystopian images has been heightened by Sontag's relatively mellow start, an obviously deliberate strategy. Project W - 47 remains officially classified, this was the testing of the atomic bomb (later used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan) 'conducted in a remote, sparsely populated region of Western Utah'. Misrach's images of the abandoned Wendover Air Base evidence not only the operations evidenced by bunkers, craters and contorted metal, they also convey the attitude. A large graffiti image of an atomic 'mushroom cloud' covers part of the interior of the

¹²⁵ Richard Misrach and Susan Sontag *Violent Legacies: Three Cantos* (New York: Aperture, 1992) p.90.

Rischar Misrach in an interview with Melissa Miles in 1992. The transcript is published as a postscript in *Violent Legacies*. As illustrated in this book, race (racism), landscape and photography are visibly and conceptually intertwined. For a most pertinent example see Mathilde Bertrand 'The Politics of Representation and The Subversion of Landscape in Ingrid Pollard's Pastoral Interlude' (1987)' *E-Crini Centre for Research on Identities, Nations and Interculturality Journal* 7 (2014)

¹²⁶ Ibid. p.12

'administrative and tech- building', red spray paint has been used to write 'eat my fallout' at the top of the white cloud. Almost cartoon planes and bombs have been painted on the outside of the building, also the 'A-Bomb Assembly and Testing Building' which is also disconcertingly reminiscent of a farm building, homely wooden barns with gently pitching roofing and plenty of natural light. Much of next section, 'The Pit' is quite sickening, a selection from hundreds of images, each called 'DEAD ANIMALS' with a number. Graphic and visceral, mainly cattle and calves rot in the open air, most are bloated, partly decomposed or skeletal. Many lie alone where they fell, some are in piles or pits, a jumbled mass of peachy reds (number seventy-eight) shows flayed heads, hooves, and entrails as if a scene from a horror film. The final image is of heavy vehicle tracks in the otherwise empty sandy desert across which they come and go with grim cargo. The only text explains how, in 1953, the Bulloch brothers were herding two thousand sheep in the area. Also, the effects on the animals after exposure to an illegal atomic test in the area; premature and deformed births, painful toxic adult bodies of sores and burns with four thousand three hundred and ninety deaths from radiation.

Today, county-designated dead-animal pits can be found throughout the West. They function like trash dumps in which locals are encouraged to deposit livestock that die suddenly. The causes of the animal's deaths are often unknown ¹²⁷

However, the final section 'The Playboys' is the most awful in the physical, also 'cultural violence' enacted on dozens of images from two Playboy magazines, all are of women except for a couple of men. One is black, this is the singer Ray Charles, the prolific pioneer of Soul music, the other is gay, the famous artist Andy Warhol wearing his iconic silver wig. Their images are desecrated with bullet holes, not randomly, specifically across the mouth of Charles and the eye of Warhol. The women, many of whom are naked, are also target in the head, the breast, the crotch. Madonna's youthful cheekbone and blonde hair have been expertly hit, a

¹²⁷ Richard Misrach and Susan Sontag *Violent Legacies: Three Cantos* (New York: Aperture, 1992) p.39.

third, tearing through her jawline creates a frame around her open mouth. Eco-criticality has increasingly incorporated intersectional methods to examine the cultural as well as physical conditions of an environment or situation. Race, gender and class are acknowledged as factors in the different experience of these.



Fig. 27 *Playboy 94 (Ray Charles) 1990-91*
Richard Misrach, Photograph, 1990-91

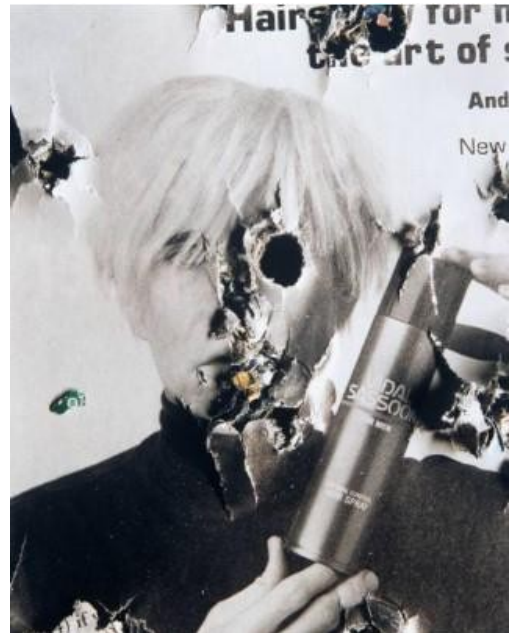


Fig. 28 *Playboy 38 (Warhol) 1990-91*
Richard Misrach, Photograph, 1990-91

Speaking about his discovery of the Playboy magazines “near the northwest corner of the Nuclear test Site in Nevada, lies a typical desert target range used by the locals”. Misrach identifies them as part of the ‘found metaphor’ that the Desert Cantos is based upon

I realized that the women on covers of both magazines were the intended targets, but that in the bullet’s passage through the remaining pages, other symbols of our culture were randomly violated too. The violence that was directed specifically at the women penetrated every layer of our society [...] gender, race, class, the environment, even language itself-was riddled with violence¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Ibid. p.88

From the early nineteen eighties the equally influential Canadian artist Edward Burtynsky has also worked with landscape as transformed by human activity, particularly ‘the largest industrial incursions.’ In discussing his forty-year commitment to the depiction of fracking, mining, deforestation, aquaculture, and especially various manifestations of oil extraction, he has articulated a central contradiction

I’m not against the corporations [...] but I am also for sustainability [...] because when we start looking at the collective appetite for our lifestyles and what we’re doing to that landscape that is a very sobering moment ¹²⁹

Environmental writer and activist Rebecca Solnit is known for her work on photography framed through environmental concerns from circa 1990, with the publication of an early essay in *Aperture* (Summer 1990) on ‘Richard Misrach and The Politics of Landscape Photography’ that engages with the cause and consequence of damaged and poisoned environments, and the role of the imaging of this. Her 2003 book *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* is well-known as a photography history, contemporaneous with the major Muybridge exhibition at Tate Britain in 2010, and as part of a related television documentary in the same year. ¹³⁰ Solnit’s most recent work *Orwell’s Roses* (2022) offers new insights on the writer so associated with the experience and critique of class, labour (coal mining) and civil, world and cold war. The book also offers a poetics and politics of the rose, including an analysis of Tina Modotti’s celebratory photographs of roses from the streets of Mexico in 1924, as revolution evolved into constitution. Also of the less visible yet well established, highly exploitative global flower harvesting industry, involving child labour, skin and eye infections to provide tons of mainly jasmine and rose petals to the luxury perfume industry. Comparing similarities and differences between Burtynsky and Misrach (as operating a century later when the role of oil is far more recognized as central

¹²⁹ Edward Burtynsky TED Talk 15th April 2008. Also noting the ongoing comments (in response to the video upload). Burtynsky has been criticized for his honesty in not declaring his work as anti-corporate activism, rather as foregrounding the issues around the ‘collective appetite’ and how might things change. Much of his work is strategically dramatic and accessible, the elements of damning evidence more foregrounded than notions of any ambiguous relationship with corporate liability.

¹³⁰ *The Weird World of Eadweard Muybridge* ‘Imagine’ television series, 2010. Director Jill Nichols. Researcher Tracy Drew

to socio-political issues in these contested geographic and cultural areas) Solnit notes that the work of Misrach

differs from Burtynsky's in its interest in conceptual and philosophical questions – an inspection of systems rather than places. His oil fields oil refineries, tyre dumps, oil pipelines and dismantled tankers, begin to get at the cycle of oil, nasty at every turn, even without politics and wars ¹³¹

Reviewing the book *Manufactured Landscapes: The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky* she also addresses his hesitance to actually advocate (as Misrach does), along with the lack of acknowledgement in photography of its own toxicity 'Kodak in Rochester – not far from Burtynsky's Ontario home – is New York State's number one polluter [...] in a typical year 2.5 million pounds of airborne methylene chloride as well as enough dioxin to cause more than half a million cancer deaths' ¹³² Solnit suggests that while this might explain, as co-editor Lori Pauli had put it, his wanting to avoid the hypocrisy of using 'his photographs as a diatribe against industry' the nature of the work already results in activism, through the distributing images of the 'poison that remains out of site' . ¹³³Solnit writes at the end of the dominance of analogue photography, in 2007 when the first i-phone was 'released', creating the mass market for 'smart phones' that so changed how digital images could be made, and crucially, distributed. In terms of pollution, aside from the manufacture and distribution (and frequency of new versions) the carbon footprint of sending an image is far higher than a text or audio file. Billions of people now do this 24/7. The required data centres and server farms are mainly fuelled by fossil fuels. Research indicates that behavioural change (sending less images, memes and emojis) has limited effect 'it is more important to make sure the companies building the internet are switching to renewables and phasing out fossil fuels' ¹³⁴

¹³¹ Lori Pauli, Edward Burtynsky, Mark Haworth-Booth et al (eds.) *Manufactured Landscapes: The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). See also the documentary film *Manufactured Landscapes* . Dir. Jennifer Baichwal (Zeitgesit Films, 2006)

¹³² Rebecca Solnit *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) pp.135-139

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Jardim in Sarah Griffiths 'Why your internet habits are not as clean as you think' BBC Online 6th March 2020. Steve Edwards (in *The Making of English Photography, Allegories*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006) and Michelle Henning (in *Photography: The Unfettered*

Despite its own interactions, the imaging of the destructive effects of oil, and the wider fossil, including extractive, economy on all communities, environments, and ways of life is now a major theme in contemporary documentary photography, including as part of activist projects that develop more from the overtly oppositional environmental work of the 1960s and 70s. Lippard, working in this area from that time explains that her most recent book *Undermining: A Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics and Art in the Changing West* (2014) was influenced by

mainly local activism [...] our battle, in 2008, to keep oil drilling and fracking for natural gas out [...] Another influence was artists' books. I wanted to do a small book for a change—an extended essay with a lot of images, a parallel visual/verbal narrative [...] Once you know the local you realize how connected it is to global capitalism; its tentacles are everywhere. ¹³⁵

There is an expansion in corresponding critical attention, the Environmental Humanities are well established and, due to the volume of research in particular areas, a growing specialism is now recognized as the Energy Humanities, where oil is a major strand. This is also interdisciplinary, inclusive of visual media and art history. ¹³⁶ Unsurprisingly, this heterogenous discipline is more developed in the global North, in places around the world where there are longer histories and a greater scale of fossil energy operations. Also as having an established infrastructure for the development and dissemination of professionalized research. In Canada and North America particularly, where photography has long been of use in this context (to facilitate exploration as well as conservation and critical work). Since the 1970s a focus on ecology results in much photographic activity via agencies, individuals, and oppositional groups; Including influential eco-feminist critiques of injustice and inequality (such as from Lippard and Solnit) resulting from

Image, (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018) have, without employing the term, also provided eco-critical discussion on the use of chemicals (and animals) in photography materials and processes.

¹³⁵ Lucy R. Lippard interviewed by Lauren O'Niell-Butler *Artforum Online* May 12th, 2014 <https://www.artforum.com> (accessed June 6th 2021)

¹³⁶ Casey Williams 'Energy Humanities' in *The John Hopkins Guide to Critical and Cultural Theory* (excerpt from forthcoming edition) Available via <https://www.energyhumanities.ca> accessed June 7th 2021)

environmental and community destruction, as major outcomes of the oil industry.¹³⁷ In terms of more recent visual practice 'OIL IMAG(E) INARIES: Critical Realism and The Oil Sands', a text-image collaboration between Imre Szeman (a foundational voice in Energy Humanities) and artist Maria Whiteman is a pertinent example, employing Sekula's 'aesthetico-political' framing, as they put it below, to

map out the forces and dynamics of capital at work in Fort McMurray, Alberta - a primary site of global oil extraction... in order to better understand the city's specific socio-political challenges and to grasp the broader implications of oil for contemporary politics, culture and representation.¹³⁸

The oil industry in Canada mirrors developments, from the mid-nineteenth Century, in North America, where the 1950s are recognized as an 'oil boom'. This is reflected in the popular, including visual culture of the time. By the 1960s it is made visible through the alternative lens of the burgeoning environmental movement, and subsequent cultural output.¹³⁹ In Britain, the key decades for discovery and extraction and for the subsequent North Sea 'oil boom', were the 1970s and 80s, a time of particularly visible socio-economic tumult. Depictions of changing employment, unemployment, widespread industrial action, and protest along with increasingly contrasting lifestyles, continue to provide material for special exhibitions and, more recently, permanent collections in major, as well as independent galleries. This often

¹³⁷ E.g., The project 'Documerica' (Environmental Protection Agency, 1971-76) was the only federal commission since the Farm Security Administration project (1935-44). This comprised 'tens of thousands of images covering every state in America, evidencing environmental damage. Ten years ago, a major exhibition and various initiatives sought to raise the profile of the project'. The images must have influenced photographers working in this area, through their original circulation and then re-discovery. Alison Meir 'Photographing The State of The Environment in the 1970s' in *Hyperallergic* October 4th (2013) <https://hyperallergic.com/86543/photographing-the-state-of-the-environment-in-the-1970s/> (accessed June 7th 2021)

¹³⁸ Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman 'Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies' 3.2 University of Alberta, Canada (2012) pp. 46-67

¹³⁹ In North America there were dozens of other, generally romanticising, and supportive 'oil' feature films, produced since 1920s. Oil was given centre stage. A huge success in the 1950s 'boom' was *Giant* (1956) starring James Dean, who was posthumously nominated for an Oscar. Given the environmental and economic importance of oil in Britain, from the 1960s onwards, there was and is not the equivalent production of popular 'oil entertainment'. Although there have been many documentaries and very recently the well-researched (including visually) Norwegian fictional series 'Lykkeland' ('State of Happiness', 2018-2022 NRK TV) on the discovery of oil in the North Sea and lives of those involved, was a niche success.

features the imaging of working lives intrinsically bound to place, as will be referred to across all three chapters.

A most recent example is a new display at London's Tate Britain 'After Industry: Communities in Northern England 1960s to 1980s' in which forty-seven, mainly black and white, images depict particular areas in Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, and Manchester. These historic cities of the North are selectively represented by these few iconic works (urban industrial landscapes, street scenes, back yards, shop fronts) from documentary photographers Konttinen, as well as from Shirley Baker and Amber associates Killip, Tish Murtha and Peter Mitchell. Reflecting the locus and narrative of my own research ¹⁴⁰ these are described as efforts to 'challenge stereotypical narratives [...] reveal the challenges these communities faced, the resilience they showed and the joy they continued to find in their daily lives'. ¹⁴¹ The Tate display, and title, re-contextualizes works from the original projects (such as Konttinen's *Byker* and Shirley Baker's *Hulme*, 1965), the result is reductive. The title 'after industry' and timescale, '1960s to 1980s', indicates a general misconception about a 'post-industrial' Britain, and lack of engagement, in documentary photography, with the most demanding new oil and gas industry. Despite this emerging over these exact same decades, displacing work and workers, changing communities, individuals, home life and environment as labour and skills were re-deployed and local places transformed. In the many critical histories and the re-presenting of British social documentary photography of this time, even when the focus is on the industrial maritime environment, there is this unequivocal absence. Although there was sustained visibility across the national media at the time, and a lasting centrality for politics and economics, the British oil boom and the oil workers were not visible in the canonical British social documentary photography projects of this time. There is a substantial presence in other visual arts and media, in the mainstream as well as specialist trade press, a catalogue of oil related titles television and in film building over several decades. There are, of course, thousands of images of work on oil platforms (oil rigs), pipes

¹⁴⁰ I have presented my research at various international conferences and online over the last decade (2012 – 2022) See bibliography.

¹⁴¹ 'After Industry: Communities in Northern England 1960s to 1980s' Tate Britain 'Spotlights' Room 7 Display Text 2021-22

and refineries, however, these are usually situated in photojournalism or ‘industrial photography’ (a term and genre deserving of renewed investigation) even when included in museum exhibitions or displays. Despite visual critique in other countries of extraction, the ongoing offshore and onshore industrial activity in Britain is so overshadowed by the attention paid to that of British coalmining, fishing, and manufacturing, as to be invisible. ¹⁴²

In chapter two I address this absence with an analysis of a collaboration between the photographer (and environmental activist) Fay Godwin and the writer (and socialist journalist) Mervyn Jones. Theirs was a literally exceptional engagement with North Sea oil workers and related communities, during a heatwave in 1975, to produce *The Oil Rush* (1976) a photobook that was critically and generally overlooked at the time and has been ever since. I will situate *The Oil Rush* as an important, neglected project in this area. I propose that it gives voice to the local workers and communities involved at the time, as well as prescient insights into the longer socio-economic and environmental significance of the twentieth century oil industry. Godwin and Jones were responding politically, to the new British industry that was greatly facilitated by a notoriously partisan Conservative government with a ‘focus on making the UK a minimally regulated centre for global for global finance at the expense of industrial production’ ¹⁴³ The key economic and political role of North Sea oil at that time is increasingly scrutinized in the energy humanities, following on from the pivotal humanities project ‘Lives in the Oil Industry’ (University of Aberdeen) ¹⁴⁴ In film and television (ergo studies too) ‘oil’ is an established cultural subject, as will also be further discussed. Currently, public debate on North Sea Oil is currently reignited as a beleaguered Conservative government grant new

¹⁴² Chapter two will conclude with a discussion on two notable exceptions to the lack of engagement in social photography, contemporary practitioners Sue Jane Taylor and Peter Iain Campbell have been specifically working with oil workers in Britain.

¹⁴³ Terry Brotherstone ‘A contribution to the critique of Post Imperial British History: North Sea Oil, Scottish Nationalism and Thatcherite Neoliberalism’ in *Flammable Societies: Studies on the Socioeconomics of Oil and Gas* John Andrew McNeish and Owen Logan (eds.) (London and New York: Pluto Press, 2012) pp.84

¹⁴⁴ Research project directed by Terry Brotherstone Circa 1990 – 2005. <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/oillives/> (accessed 1st June 2023)

licenses for excavation. The protest group Just Stop Oil are conducting highly visible campaigns and have been threatened (with other direct-action groups such as Extinction Rebellion) by the current controversial Home Secretary, Suella Braverman. She has 'enabled' physical intervention from police along with longer gaol sentences (up to ten years) and criminal records. Meanwhile, the visual and material culture, through photographic imaging, of the British oil industry and associated activity (including opposition) as well as the places, communities and workers relating to ongoing and new energy industries need further research in an art historical context.



Fig. 29 *Ferguson's Shipyard 2005* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2005
From *The Port Glasgow Book Project*, 2004-6



Fig. 30 Avdiivka Coke and Chemical Plant (AKHZ) Donetsk Oblast, 2019
Mark Neville, Photograph, 2019. From *Stop Tanks with Books* 2022

In contrast to the preceding chapters, chapter three will be devoted to images of contemporary work and life. Whilst the more recently produced example works are related (in subject and form to the projects from Amber and Godwin) they are less situated in historical context. In the twenty first century, individuals, as well as collectives, continue to utilize photography to work with and within communities. Sometimes simultaneously producing and distributing material online as a current method for relatively inexpensive, accessible distribution. Projects are often only enacted via social media. However, the physical photobook continues as an established form. In this third and final chapter, I conclude with more recent and contemporary photographic work from the artist Mark Neville, engaging with communities in the North and beyond.

From the seas around Amber's coal coast and from Godwin's oil rush in Shetland (now a UNESCO Global Geopark, where the oil retains a central position) fossil fuel seeps through, in various guises ¹⁴⁵ . Neville's more well-known works can all be framed as eco-critical i.e. *The Port Glasgow Book Project*, 2004-6 *Deeds Not Words*, 2010-12 and *Parade*, 2019. I am mainly concerned with his projects that specifically engage with conflict and war, specifically *The Helmand Work*, 2011 *Battle Against Stigma*, 2015-18 and *Stop Tanks With Books*, 2022. These three are most overtly linked to the fossil economy as will be discussed in chapter three.

Neville's projects, like those of Amber, are long durational and, like the work of Godwin, is produced as specific issue activism. These are often built up through seriality, multiple slide installations or photo-essays (still and moving) rather than single images and a strategic use of the photobook with distribution as an activist tactic. Neville's lens-based work is specifically conceived and designed to operate, as in Sealy, 'beyond the lens' through the use of conjoined image and text as well as targeted distribution. Subjects range from injustice and survival in urban and rural environments, including conflict and war, to celebration of community and individual lives in small towns in the North of England and Scotland. Fossil fuel is evidenced once again, to be responsible for invidious effects of pollution and, as central to violence and war on major scale, experienced on a personal, local, national and international level. In *Stop Tanks With Books* (2022) Neville writes with an awful prescience

¹⁴⁵ 'total government revenues from UK oil and gas production were £1.4 billion in the tax year 2021 to 2022, compared to £0.3 billion in the previous year, an increase of 1.1 billion' <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/government-revenues-from-uk-oil-and-gas-production--2/statistics-of-government-revenues-from-uk-oil-and-gas-production-july-2022> (accessed 12th May 2023) . In addition there are further billions from related taxes. The increase is due to the destabilizing of oil and gas resource supply, specifically since the war in Ukraine (February 2022 -) This (mainly Scottish) oil revenue is key to London government plans, and to those of Scottish nationalists.



Fig. 31 Worker, Avdiivka, Donetsk, 2019 Mark Neville, Photograph, 2019 From *Stop Tanks With Books*, 2022

For decades, the people of Donbas have been oppressed and exploited. For them, the war is a continuation of this experience, and once again they are the victims of political and socio-political forces. At the heart of this recurrent exploitation are the largest coal reserves in Ukraine, estimated at 60 billion tonnes. The Region of Donbas takes its name from an abbreviation of the term “Donets Coal Basin”.¹⁴⁶

At first glance, my choice of examples, in spanning half a century and involving culturally diverse projects, may seem somewhat disparate. However, they share a highly conscientious, collaborative approach, importantly employing oral as well as visual histories, contextualized by critical narratives and reliable information on the subject and circumstance involved. Although there is a body of work on exhibitions

¹⁴⁶ Mark Neville *Stop Tanks With Books* (Istanbul: Nazareli Press, 2022) p.38.

in this area (of British social documentary concerned with place specific work and life) my focus is rather on the strategic use of the photobook evidencing the myriad social and aesthetic nuances, the 'micro-histories' that Paul Edwards advocates, to be found in the diverse forms of social documentary. My examples also constitute (in comparable ways) concerned and complex response to inter-related issues of equality and representation from the mid twentieth century onwards. They are all related (in contrasting ways) to the cultural, political, and existential impact of the fossil economy, with the production and consumption of oil especially. Therefore, I examine these three examples of practice, as linked through correlating aspects of conception and production. Each engage with the experience of vulnerability to change at local level, also, as noted by the practitioners concerned, with survival, riposte, resilience and celebration at community and individual levels. In their conception, making and distribution (as photobooks) my example works are functioning far beyond a varied representation of the diverse working-class experience. Thus constituting collaborative histories and activism with ongoing relevance they can be framed as active according to Rancière's notion of politics in the context of the 'partage du sensible', the 'distribution of the sensible'. As usefully summarised by Sean Sayers:

He is referring to the way in which roles and modes of participation in a common social world are determined by establishing possible modes of perception (in this context 'sensible' refers to what is apprehended by the senses) Thus the distribution of the sensible sets the divisions between what is visible and invisible, sayable, and unsayable, audible, and inaudible. The social order is conceived as an anti-democratic, anti-political order, which attempts to maintain the existing pattern of inclusions and exclusions. Politics essentially involves opposition [...] a challenge to established order by the excluded¹⁴⁸

This opposition is manifest in these works that aim to facilitate voice and to subvert negative stereotyping of the evicted and the displaced, the survivors and rebuilders, among Tyneside residents working with Amber. Also, for the disrupted and bewildered small coastal communities and newly valuable, often reviled, nomad

¹⁴⁸ Sean Sayer's review of Rancière's *Politics of Aesthetics* in 'The Culture Machine' <https://culturemachine.net> (accessed 20th April 2017)

workers swept up in the unexpected discovery of gas and oil in the North Sea, as seen to be heard in work from Godwin and Jones. Also, as witnessed, lamented and celebrated by Mark Neville, for the poisoned families fighting recognition and compensation for the awful results of exposure to toxic waste in their home town. Also, with the traumatised civilians and soldiers who can't escape the direct experience of war, where the production and control of energy lethally combine with conflicting agendas and ideologies, even if returned home to such 'ordinary' communities in the North East and beyond.

Reviewing a responsive and growing literature.

Notions of participation, plurality and affect in the changing scholarship on the legitimacy of documentary in photography. These are foregrounded to introduce critical contexts for the thesis.

Rancière's ideas, as conveyed through his discussions on visual media, are employed to critique the orthodoxy and can be particularly useful in the analysis of social documentary works. As just proposed, these can be framed by his concept of the 'distribution of the sensible' referring to an artificial dividing of sensibility, shared out, rather than understood as equitably shared. Discussing the development of his initial thesis (based on the archival discovery of the diaries of a 19th Century carpenter) his own explanation implies, even whilst there may be exclusion that is inaudible and invisible on societal levels, there is a personal equality of experience, an empowerment, as conveyed in this quote from his thesis

The texts of the carpenter Gauny [...] there's a moment in his description when he says he moves his gaze away from his hands. His gaze wanders to the window and takes in the perspective, the buildings, the gardens around him [...] class struggle begins with the ability of the gaze to separate itself from the hands; that is, the worker makes themselves the material, concrete, aesthetic owner of this world in which they sell their labour power [...] what I actually discovered was this intellectual and aesthetic dimension ¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Jacques Rancière and Peter Engelman *Politics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) p.29

It is this notion of aesthetic ownership (a consciousness) that I discern as evidenced not only in the work of Amber and Neville, but also in the self-representation (through words offered to accompany images of their work and rest) of Godwin's oil workers. Rancière concludes,

what the class struggle really calls into question is one's belonging to a class as the assignment to a particular presence in the world, a particular perception of the world [...] this dimension, which I called 'aesthetic', is very important. 'Aesthetic' not in the sense of viewing works of art, but rather in the strong sense of one's relationship with the perceived world ¹⁵⁰

This demonstrates his two-fold meaning of 'distribution of the sensible' and recalls the 'aesthetics of the everyday' as developing from John Dewey's foundational *Art and Experience* (1934). Dewey's influential proposals proposed a universal aesthetic experience, unrelated to the work of art or notions of 'beauty'. Although visual analysis could be employed to my examples as they do evidence (visually) aesthetic strategies, I choose to foreground their simultaneous realisms: social, critical, lyrical, all of which engage with this class assignment, the assignment of our relationships to the 'perceived world'. Therefore, they advocate for continued practice and research in photographic social documentary, as democracy in practice. Ergo, my examples are not primarily chosen as depictions of place and people, rather I propose, they operate as more nuanced and complex bodies of activist material, expanded by their photobook form. The analysis of their production, circulation, reception, and critique in terms of 'aesthetic ownership' results in an active role, following Elizabeth Edwards, 'doing' meaningful history through emotional as well as socio-cultural engagement. She argues:

Photographs exist as history not only on a forensic plane, or as semiotically charged representations [...] but also as material performances that enact a complex range of historiographical desires [...] on the one hand ideas of truth, accuracy, inscription and statement and, on the other, an intense awareness of the past and its potential loss. ¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p.31

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth Edwards "Photography and The Material Performance of The Past" in *History and Theory*, 48:4 pp. 130–50 (2009)

These approaches provide pertinent models by which to consider the critical status of documentary, as an important ongoing enquiry. They also support a clarification of my twofold use of 'poetic' in relation to their visual, cultural, and political realism. Firstly, I refer to the term 'poetic' as used in literary criticism, to consider how the work is, as literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov asserted, 'constituted' from varied elements and what this can reveal in addition to any interpretative readings. Todorov's definition was famously foregrounded by Victor Burgin's canonical collection of essays *Thinking Photography* (1977) presenting the trajectory and influence of key critical debates on visual realism emerging at time. 'The efflorescence of 'Structuralism' in France in the 1960s was extensively fed by this intellectual current from the East (not least through the physical presence of such emigres as Roman Jakobson and Tzvetan Todorov'.¹⁵² Burgin particularly refers to the development and application of semiotics (as applied to photography, from Roland Barthes' seminal 1964 'Rhetoric of the Image' onwards) also the complexities of a 'plurality of codes' at play. He also offers Sekula's foundational essay from *Artforum*, 1975 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' 'in which he examines the mythological and monolithic opposition between 'realism' and 'expression'. Sekula's essay, chiming with earlier (1920s) debates on formalism, is highly critical of notions of 'aesthetic mysticism' rightly asserting that 'it would be a mistake to identify liberal and 'concerned' documentary entirely with realism'. His damning conclusion for a type of documentary that 'can be appropriated by bourgeois aesthetic discourse', famously using the examples of Lewis Hine and Paul Strand as producing work that is a

celebration of the dignity of the passive victim. This is the final outcome of the appropriation of the photographic image for liberal political ends; the oppressed are granted a bogus Subjecthood when such status can be secured only from within, on their own terms¹⁵³

¹⁵² Victor Burgin, ed.) *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. ,1982) p.13

¹⁵³ Allan Sekula 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' (in) Burgin. (ed.) *Thinking Photography*,1982. pp., 108 – 9 .Sekula's critique is of Lewis Hine's image of an injured fifteen-year old labourer ('Noel Gallagher, Worked Two Years in Breakage, Leg Crushed Between Cars, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. November, 1909') The image is explained as an example of the problem 'of the appropriation of the photographic image for liberal political ends' in terms of 'Subjecthood'. This is salient, but so is Ariella Azoulay in terms of self-witness.

With thanks here to Steve Edwards here, for alerting me to Todorov's *Introduction to Poetics* at a post upgrade advisory meeting. For further discussion on Jakobson's work on the development and application of structuralism (in the practice and debates of film and photography) see Nicolas Helm Grovas' thesis on

This is a key statement regarding my position in the thesis as my examples across three chapters are chosen and analysed as pluralistic, inclusive documentary produced and received (on the terms of participants) as complex witness and expression. Also as evidencing 'aesthetic ownership' rather than manifesting oppression and 'subjecthood' by virtue of being documentary. I choose to also support the notion that 'to be photographed is to bear witness to one's presence'¹⁵⁴ and read the complex realism of Neville's image of the worker from Donetsk (as an example of works and multiple debates in play) through the lens of Sekula, Elizabeth Edwards and Ariella Azoulay. All three articulate major issues in the consideration of photography that provide a triangulation that facilitates a comprehensive understanding of a still 'powerful medium' (as Lenin put it) in historic or contemporary form.¹⁵⁵

Hence, in addition to considering poetics as Todorov's 'constitutive elements' in play, my application of 'poetic' also refers to the French film genre Poetic Realism. I specifically appropriate this term, to consider my examples in chapter one, as attempts at the inclusive depiction of place and experience employing politics and aesthetics on multiple levels. Originally proposed, as far more than a style, by key film theorist on photographic realism, André Bazin, his renowned writings on visual realism have been recognized as especially developmental for analysis concerning the psychology at work in the experience of the photographic. He is acknowledged for sophisticated proposals into the affectiveness at work in photographic aesthetics, on what might constitute a pertinent realism through phenomenological as well as social critique. His socialist impetus more recently revisited as equally influential to a youthful

'Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Theory and Practice, Aesthetics and Politics, 1963-1983'. Royal Holloway, University of London, 2018. Also, Gail Day on Jakobson, especially in relation to Sekula's 'realist poetics' e.g. Gail Day 'Allan Sekula's Transitive Poetics: Metonymy and Metaphor' in Hilde Van Gelder (ed.) *Allan Sekula Ship of Fools/The Dockers' Museum* (Leven: Leven University Press, 2015) pp58.

¹⁵⁴ 'Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2015) See also 'What is a Photograph? What is Photography?' in *Philosophy of Photography* 1:1, pp 9-13 (2010).

¹⁵⁵ For a critical discussion on the 1970s as a particular time in which such debates emerge, co-ordinated by John Tagg (as a major protagonist) see 'Exit Theory: Thinking Photography and Thinking History from One Crisis to Another'. November 2016. <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-4/exit-theory-photography> (accessed August 2018)

engagement with more 'spiritual' notions.¹⁵⁶ I therefore apply the term as denoting a complex, inclusive and critical approach in documentary photography. Bazin had defined Poetic Realism, a leftist film genre of the 1930s and 40s and brief, but hugely influential, cultural moment for European and Anglo-American visual culture) as 'answering questions' and, crucially, as 'participating in its time'.¹⁵⁷ Poetic Realism is usually associated with highly constructed sets, often analysed as part of the psychological tone of the films¹⁵⁸ However, I use the term, not so much in reference to a visual style per se. Rather, like Bazin's more complex assessment of the films themselves, I employ 'Poetic Realism' as a type of critical activity, part of a multifaceted realism employed to convey the affective as well as socio-political experience of particular communities, individuals and locales, as part of a particular era. Indeed, this thesis does not much involve traditional formal visual analysis of individual images.

The analysis of agency in social documentary photography

Introducing key critical voices for work on politics, aesthetics and ethics as operating in photography on a personal and societal level. These include Mathilde Bertrand, Lucy Lippard, Annebella Pollen, Jacques Rancière and Allan Sekula.

The politics, aesthetics and ethics of representation (in relation to photographic realism whether aspiring or interpreted as poetic, lyrical, magical or social) remain a central concern in the ever-evolving production and critique of collaborative activities. Work has continued, among practitioners and researchers, throughout the 2020-22 pandemic, much of it online during long periods of physical distancing. A prime example is the seminar series *Collaboration and Photography*, conceived and convened by Mathilde Bertrand and Karine Chambeft-Kay. Their programme evidences the 'spectrum of

¹⁵⁶ Famously through 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', first available in English in *What Is Cinema ? Volume One* (1967).

¹⁵⁷ Andre Bazin *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1967)

¹⁵⁸ See Ben McCann *Set Design, Spatial Configurations and the Architectonics of 1930s Poetic Realist cinema*. (Unpublished doctoral thesis) University of Bristol 2002

collective working methods which have defined and keep informing some of the independent practices in the field of photography in the twentieth and twenty first centuries’¹⁷⁷ Various critical voices from this spectrum, not least influenced by work, such as Rancière’s, on ethics, perception and feelings, are employed in my research. This area is usefully posited in ‘three main tendencies’ in photography scholarship, as developing from the earlier debates emanating from questions on medium authorship and status. The first and second tendencies being well established and

linked to the rise of social movements such as feminism, the civil rights movement and gay rights in the mid to late twentieth century [...] to consider photography’s place in forming identities, social hierarchies and patterns of exclusion [...] the second tendency centres on the ‘cultural turn’ [...] the constitutive power of culture as part of social life.¹⁷⁸

This leads to an important current relevance for a third tendency where materiality, memory, and affect can return us to the potential of the emotional conception and perception of the photographic image, to lead to meaning and relevance within and beyond, stating this as ‘inseparable from the increasing significance attributed to witness and testimony in contemporary culture’.¹⁷⁹ Recognised in this area of research (on photography and feelings) as related to Barthes’ foundational work where there is ‘a back and forth meandering that is guided by emotion and affect as much as intellectual inquiry’.¹⁸⁰ Work on Barthes and photography and on his text *Camera Lucida*, first published in 1980, is an expansive and familiar territory. However, recent work on boxes of photographs, pursued to, and within, the Barthes archive, by Humboldt Research Fellow Kathrin Yacavone, provides new insights into his

¹⁷⁷ I presented a summary of this thesis for this event, with a focus on the work of Neville and alternative distribution. See <https://climas.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr/colloques/484-photography-as-collaboration-collaborer-en-photographie-online-seminar-2020-21> I later developed and contributed this as a chapter in Mathilde Bertrand and Karine Chambeffort-Kay *Contemporary Photography as Collaboration* (Switzerland: Palgrave - Macmillan, 2024) Chapter 6 ‘Commercially Unavailable: Distribution as an Activist Tactic’ pp.99 - 122

¹⁷⁸ Melissa Miles ‘The Eye-Witness of Photography: Changing Approaches to Photography’s Relationship to Society and Culture’ in Gil Pasternak (ed.) *The Handbook of Photography Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) p.60

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. Nb. This ‘inseparability’ speaks to Rancière’s work on aesthetics and politics to theorise equality.

¹⁸⁰ Kathrin Yacavone ‘Image, affect, and autobiography’ in Mark Durden and Jane Tormey (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020) p.317 This refers to Barthes’ *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980) proposing the differentiation between the symbolic ‘studium’ and personal ‘punctum’ in the experience of a photographic image.

ideas on the 'ethical and existential aspects' of photography.¹⁸¹ Meanwhile Rancière has also acknowledged Barthes' work on the role of the 'affective force' of photography as 'the bearer of this tendency to break the historical complicity between the art of the photographer and the aesthetic capacity of his (sic) subjects.'¹⁸² Although my work is certainly influenced by critical analysis, where meaning is primarily socio-political and deemed to be mainly produced outside of the image, it is also informed by more recent work on photography and affect. i.e., From visual anthropologist, Elizabeth Edwards and visual studies scholar, Thy Phu, as positing that emotion and feeling can be readmitted as valid and useful factors in the analysis of socially concerned works. This is despite a long-established critical wariness, as expressed by David Bate who opines

Personal opinion [...] is rarely of use unless it is worked through, studied and related to the critical understanding of visual experience. In photography criticism, such effects are understood primarily as a matter of personal and emotive response, which tell us something of the affect of the image, but little or nothing about the effects of photography.¹⁸³

As will later be demonstrated in each chapter, the role of visual works, in their production, distribution and reception, can be revisited on an experiential, personal, as well as societal level to 'work through' to the effects of such work. As asserted below by Thy Phu, Elsbeth H. Brown and Andrea Noble

Feeling then is more than just [...] a description of responses to images. Feeling is an analytic tool for thinking and interpreting photography [...] affect concerns the idea of 'presence' [...] situated in the contemporary turn to memory, remembrance, and trauma [...] it is an inscription of lived experience [...] no matter how asymmetrical the power relations between those on either side of the camera are: the subject is never passive.¹⁸⁴

As well as emerging from a phenomenological view, this work on affect is recognized as having various trajectories, for example, from anthropology and

¹⁸¹ See Yacavone's project 'Portrait of the Writer' (University of Cologne) for further details on methods and findings. <https://www.portraitofthewriter.com/other-work-1> (accessed November 2021)

¹⁸² Jacques Rancière 'Notes on the Photographic Image' in *Radical Philosophy* 156 Jul/Aug p.15 (2009)

¹⁸³ Bate, David *Photography: The key Concepts* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019) p.8

¹⁸⁴ Thy Phu, Elsbeth H. Brown and Andrea Noble 'Feeling in photography, the affective turn, and the history of emotions' in Durden and Tormey *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020) p.25

memory studies. Anabella Pollen's work on mass photography and 'non-canonical' visual and material culture has foregrounded these approaches in her body of work in that area. Writing (in 2016) on the 'affective turn' and how, rather than formal analysis 'attentiveness to the activity, agency and affect of photographs as embodied acts and relationships can animate their understanding'.¹⁸⁵ I also read it as related to somewhat discredited notions of abstraction and surrealism as well as evoking Bazin's analysis of Poetic Realism. When discussed as elements in documentary photography these can suffer from an historical association, in critical terms, with 'modern bourgeois aesthetic mysticism' as Sekula put it. However, he also goes on to alert us to the 'binary folklore' between documentary and art photography, as much debated in photography history and theory in the later twentieth century, especially that which is concerned with the nature and status of realism in documentary (such as work from Barthes and Rosler) and as later echoed in Rancière's 2009 'Notes on the Photographic Image', itself a reference to Bazin's foundational 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image'.¹⁸⁶

Michelle Henning has since written on affect and '“unfixing” photographic history' citing John Tresch's work on developments in science (in early 19th Century Paris) 'Tresch's argument [...] points to the limits of the binary opposition between the positivist notion of photography as fixing or capturing reality and the idea of it as subjective and unstable'¹⁸⁷ This notion of instability (conceptual arising from material) results from, also informs changing theoretical concepts in relation to societal change. That which continues to examine the production, role and efficacy of photographic documentary in a wider socio-political context of widespread intersectional inequality, polarizing

¹⁸⁵ Anabella Pollen *Mass Photography: Collective Histories of Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) p.22 See also Professor Anabella Pollen for research and publications <https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/persons/annebella-pollen> (accessed 19th April 2024)

¹⁸⁶ Allan Sekula 'On The Invention of Photographic Meaning' in *Artforum*, January 1975 p.41 and p.45. See also <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-4/exit-theory-photography> for a multi-authored 'conversation' on photography, culture and politics on the 1970s (as instigated by John Tagg) and Jacques Rancière, 'Notes on the Photographic Image' in *Radical Philosophy* 156 Jul/Aug p.15 (2009)

¹⁸⁷ Michele Henning *Photography: The Unfettered Image* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018) p.40. See also Gil Pasternak on the development of a 'photographic literature with no pictures' Pasternak, Gil (ed.) *The Handbook of Photography Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) Preface. Also the conference 'Photographic History without Photographs' De Montfort University, 13-14th June 2022.

ideological and literal conflict. Thus, I also use the term 'photographic realism' throughout as appropriately nebulous (in the sense of unfixed, rather than vague) for my contribution to documentary as an increasingly important (rather than exhausted) area of photographic research. Sekula's influential fault lines of enquiry into the contradictory roles for photography therefore remain key to a thesis situated in debates on the currency and critique of documentary realism and photography in the later twentieth and early twenty-first century, not least due his engagement with the representation of fossil labour and implications of this to ask:

How does photography serve to legitimate and normalise existing power relationships? [...] What resistances are encouraged and strengthened? How is historical and social memory preserved, transformed, restricted and obliterated by photographs? What futures are promised; what futures are forgotten? ¹⁸⁸

It is thirty-five years after Sekula posed these his telling questions. Since then, the heterogeneity of photography is evidenced and explored through ever expanding forms and debates on the contradictory and multiple roles in play. Various scholars have identified this as being particularly recognized since the late twentieth century when it was 'the work of John Tagg that did most to begin the argument for a history of photography that recognizes its plurality'.¹⁸⁹ More recently Steve Edwards also elaborates on the move away from the idea of the image as central, stating that 'there is no inherent reason why the study of photography needed to become a history of pictures [...] the images might not be the most important aspect of the practice'¹⁹⁰ Edwards also extends the

¹⁸⁸ Allan Sekula 'Photography between Labour and Capital' in *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Sheddon Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton 1948 – 1968. Photographs by Leslie Sheddon* Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (eds.) (Nova Scotia: Press of the University of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and The University College of Cape Breton Press, 1983). P.193.

Sekula's essay, especially the introduction 'Reading An Archive' which begins with quotations from both Walter Benjamin (writing in 1940 on recognizing the past as the present) and Jean Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin writing in 1972 on 'the invention of photography. For whom? Against whom?'. The latter employed by Sekula for the influential essay 'On the invention of Photographic Meaning' in *Artforum* (1975) before being re-presented by Victor Burgin in *Thinking Photography* (1982). Despite Sekula's careful explanation of his choice of the history of (coal) mining as the case study here, the original context is overlooked as eco-critical and so is important to include here.

¹⁸⁹ David Bate *Photography: The key Concepts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2016) p.15

¹⁹⁰ Steve Edwards 'Why pictures? From art history to business history and back again' in *History of Photography* 44:1 .pp. 3-15 (2020)

possibilities for analysis, in discussing his use of the 19th Century photographic press as an archive, also explaining the germaneness of the Foucauldian archaeology' of the 'throwaway and the dubious' adding that rather than focus on

individual images [...] my analysis aims to explore the constitutive discourse of photography' through 'different voices' [...] to pay attention to the kinds of photographs that Roland Barthes once described as "one thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'.¹⁹¹

In the much earlier, and much cited 'Disastrous Documents' Edwards also analyses an iconography of 'Northernness' through the objectifying gaze of upper middle-class documentarians of the 1930s.¹⁹² An important contribution to the counter-visualisation of class, place and people which can be employed beyond depictions of 'the North'.

The 'throwaway', in any analysis intersecting class, environment and imposed change is of course important (pivotal for the early work of Rancière) affording socio-political insights into material and intangible culture. Although not within the scope of this thesis to investigate collections of such material, it is manifest in my example visual projects which convey the experience of rapidly changing environments in a context of tangibly linked economic and ecological precarity. These engage with the street, the living room, the dance hall, the pub, the beach; also with the shipyard, the ships, the industrial river, the sea, the oil rig and the war zone. Sites, jobs, lives at are also deemed throwaway, expendable in the larger machinations of the market and the warmonger. The critical texts in discussion are evoked to reveal the environmental, emotional and political entangled threads in these enduring and illuminating histories. I have stated that my main aim is to assert the ongoing currency for social realism (in its

¹⁹¹ Steve Edwards *The Making of English Photography, Allegories* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006)

¹⁹² Steve Edwards 'Disastrous Documents' in *Ten.8* No.15 1984. Pp.12-23
See Also Macpherson and Willemen (eds.) *Traditions of Independence* (London: BFI, 1980). p.5 This book also notes the similarities and differences in circumstance, aspirations and 'problem of interrelations between the aesthetics of realism, the state and notions of independence' for documentary (films) in the 1930s and 1970s. Much of the premise and case studies can also be applied, as 'Disastrous Documents' demonstrates, to documentary photography.

various visual forms) in a contemporary socio-political, eco-critical context. Whilst I agree with Steve Edwards' assertion that the image might not be the focus of analysis, for me the lens-based image also remains central as a fascinating (often affecting) visual object (or body of images) and experience. To reiterate, following Pollen, in provoking emotional and political response on a personal level, also through circumstances of their production they retain currency, sometimes facilitating agency.

Meanwhile, as discussed, in theoretical work, the notion of 'Photographies', incorporating the non-visual aspects, rather than photography, is now well established ¹⁹³, the visual theorist and artist David Bate has noted how the work of Rancière

offers a different conceptual framework in which photography can be addressed not as a singular form, but as forms of identification [...] The value of Rancière's tripartite schema of the aesthetic, representative and ethical regimes is plain to see ¹⁹⁴

These points support my reference to Rancière's position (in his critique of the orthodox) as particularly useful in the analysis of social documentary works that can be discussed in terms of his concept of the 'distribution of the sensible'. The aforementioned writers and curators continue a body of work, on the possibilities for the 're-invention' of documentary photography, that has particularly benefited from the publication of Sekula's seminal essays references to which feature across this area of research. The essays first appeared in the critical magazine *Artforum* in 1975, edited at the time by John

¹⁹³ As well as from aforementioned Bate and Edwards, recent examples are from: Michelle Henning in *Photography: The Unfettered Image* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018) pp131 and Durden and Tormey citing Batchen, Kelsey, Stimson et al to posit that 'The implications of what it means to 'see' an image are now understood to encompass not only the optical, but the conceptual, ethical, and haptic experience'. Mark Durden and Jane Tormey (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory* pp3.

Gil Pasternak has also discussed an expanding academic activity (beyond a discipline) and the development of "photographic literature with no pictures". Providing examples that evidence an increasing focus on contexts and conditions, rather than images per se. Gil Pasternak (ed.) *The Handbook of Photography Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020) Preface.

¹⁹⁴ Mark Durden and Jane Tormey (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020) p.50

Coplans who was dedicated to 'stimulating debate and awareness at a popular, rather than elite level'¹⁹⁵ As much discussed in the literature, in 1984 a further collection, was published as the now key book *Photography Against The Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983*. These widely influential texts were followed, in the 1990s, by visual photo and later film works that demonstrated the application of the photographic critical realism he is so associated with.¹⁹⁶

Sekula continually pointed out the exclusions on which this canon and its formalist criteria for entry were based, opening the charmed circle of modernist auteurs to a comparative analysis with other photographic modes [...] a materialist social history of photography¹⁹⁷

This is later revisited in 2014, by Sarah James in a discussion on the growing impulse to revisit documentary photography in a context of - growing inequality and social unrest. 'an exploration of the positions of different photographic modernisms and their necessary dismantling [...] in the global post war context - is what has clearly been demanded in the last few decades' James was responding to Jorge Ribalta's comments on the specificity of photography and place.¹⁹⁸ The much earlier and sustained

¹⁹⁵ Beginning with the oft cited 'The Invention of Photographic Meaning' (later re-produced to significant reaction in Burgin's *Thinking Photography*) and other essays for Artforum, Sekula, started to publish his work to critique photography as fine art in league with the institutional museum and international art market. Also to challenge the inequitable gaze as employed in erstwhile iconic American documentary projects.

Steve Edwards developed this in a British context, starting, as discussed, with the essay 'Disastrous Documents' (in 1984) which discusses documentary photography in the 1930s interacting with the decline of industry in the North of England as an 'economic geography'. See also Edwards' comprehensive account of the practice, debates and the revisiting of 1970s photography in 'Dirty Realism: documentary photography in 1970s Britain – a maquette' in Malcom Baker and Andrew Hemingway (eds.) *Art as worldmaking: Critical Essays on Realism and Naturalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) p.248

¹⁹⁶ The term, critical realism, now so widely referenced in academia and cultural spheres, is often used in the context of photography concerned with representations of equality/inequality. For a discussion on its origins and application see Jan Baetens And Hilde Van Gelder 'A note on critical realism today' in *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art: Around Allan Sekula's Photography* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006) Introduction.

¹⁹⁷ Marie Muracciole and Benjamin J. Young 'Editor's Introduction: Allan Sekula and The Traffic in Photographs' in *Grey Room: Allan Sekula and The Traffic in Photographs* Special Issue No.55 Spring (2014) p6. <https://www.greyroom.org/issues/55/> (accessed June 4th 2020)

¹⁹⁸ Sarah James, 'in Either/And' as part of a research dialogue set up by 'Ph: The Photography Research Network' and the (host) National Media Museum. I contributed to the planning discussions of this as a member, now convenor, of Ph. See <http://eitherand.org> and <https://www.ph-research.net>

work of Gisele Freund (1908 – 2000) should also be mentioned here ‘on the role of context in creating meaning’ as cited by Walter Benjamin ‘praising its materialist dialectic’. Referring to Freund's key text *French Photography in the Nineteenth Century* Patrizia Di Bello also points out Freund’s early proposal and demonstration of the interaction between ‘photography, politics and economics.’¹⁹⁹

It is also acknowledged that the marginalization of social realism and documentary had also facilitated the extreme commodification and primacy of ‘fine art’, often conceptual works, via an influence on the symbiotic relationship between the (public) cultural institutions and (private) gallery systems that had also held sway in many departments of fine art and art history. In an ever expanding international, events driven ‘luxury’ art market, such photography also became an investment asset (also facilitating tax ‘relief’) in corporate and private collections. Sekula had, from the 1970s, critiqued the growing art fair industry, as part of his wider concern ‘with the many intersections between art, photography, and the shifting terrain of power struggles from both a local and international perspective’. Creating *Art Isn't Fair* in 2012, his final film work, ‘a work commenting on the rise of art fairs, as yet another international gathering of moneyed elites.’²⁰⁰ Stallabrass also recalls a longer uneasy relationship, foregrounding the role of class inequality

from the moment when ‘documentary’ was formulated as a category in the 1930s, its relations with the art world were troubled and contentious [...] thought of as transparent reflection of the world, in which subjectivity, creativity and expression were necessarily suppressed. This idea was lined to the general association of documentary with ‘lower’ classes of producers.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Patrizia Di Bello ‘Gisele Freund (1908-2000)’ in Mark Durden (ed.) *Fifty Key Writers on Photography* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013) p.112. I would also highlight Freund's *Photography and Society* (1974) as a foundational text, crucially described by Di Bello ‘it discusses [...] the industrialization of portraiture’ in parallel to the ‘expansion of capitalism’. The uneven spread of daguerreotype thus repositioned as a highly political event’ Patrizia Di Bello ‘Gisele Freund’ in *Fifty Key Writers on Photography* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013) p.110.

²⁰⁰ Description of the video work for the corresponding book Sally Stein and Ida Steiner (eds.) *Allan Sekula, Art Isn't Fair: Further Essays in the Traffic in Photographs and Related Media* (London: Mack Books, 2020)

²⁰¹ Julian Stallabrass *Documentary* (London, Cambridge and Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT, 2013)

He explains how in the 1990s the notion of documentary as 'influential' and significant 'would have seemed absurd', like Edwards, Ribalta, James et al, he also points out the extent to which the issue of class had been previously far more visible before the further marginalization of class in the British politics and cultures from the 1990s. Despite a negative reception for social documentary in the fine art world, the media, cultural institutions and in Higher Education, across the fields of film and photography, critical writing had, from 1960s onwards, had persisted in a more sophisticated examination of earlier iterations. Much of it focusing on the documentary practice of earlier twentieth century, on iconic projects, e.g., from Dorothea Lange, Bill Brandt and Paul Strand, as well as subsequent developments in documentary. Such work was usefully interrogated work by those wishing to develop a 'critical realism', there is a large body of research that references the development of this by Rosler, Sekula and Fred Lonidier especially, as first engaging with this as students in 1970s San Diego, North America. They were to explore what could be salvaged (as Rosler put it in conversation with Ribalta) in developing new documentary methods.²⁰²

As discussed by Edwards and Stallabrass, by the late 1980s issues around nostalgia and victimhood had overwhelmed such debates in some quarters. Others continue to revisit the critiques of twentieth century notably Ribalta, who also cites work of, and on, Strand as typical of the problem, as 'structural contradiction [...] between 'revolutionary politics and conservative aesthetics (that) had major consequences for the post war humanist reframing and de- politicization of documentary discourse'.²⁰³ Ribalta's work is itself

²⁰² 'Encounter with Martha Rosler: In Conversation with Jorge Ribalta' February 11th, 2015, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/activities/encounter-martha-rosler> (accessed January 8th 2020)

²⁰³ For further debates on Paul Strand see Blake Stimson, Andrew Hemingway, Jorge Ribalta et al in *Oxford Art Journal*, 38:1 March 2015. Special Issue: 'Modernism after Paul Strand' Pp.11–35. This was edited by Stephanie Schwartz who also organized the preceding conference 'Retracing America: Modernism after Paul Strand' UCL March 2013. On attending this conference, I noted Tamar Garb robustly challenging the sometimes overtly male lens and language in play, including when Stimson was defending his own defence of Strand's 'romantic socialism'. This was a useful exchange regarding the depiction (visual and otherwise) of manual labour predominately through an almost generic male working-class body, focussing on the back and the hands in physical work.

much referenced by those researching documentary photography, especially his expansion of Rosler's notion of 'the unfulfilled historical promise of documentary' as expressed in the seminal exhibitions 'Not Yet. On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism' (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 2015) an exhibition that he curated as a 'continuation' of the previous 2011 exhibition at the Reina Sofia 'A Hard, Merciless Light. The Worker Photography Movement, 1928-1939'.

Both offered extensive research and (international) examples to present a narrative of photographic culture in which epistemic, aesthetic and political tensions between documentary discourse and changing ideas of modernity and the avant-garde are pivotal, insofar as they are determined by the historical transformations of social movements.²⁰⁴ This is demonstrated throughout 'Not Yet' (the accompanying essays and documents as well as exhibition spaces) including in the section 'Documentary Struggles and Political Movements in Britain' in which Siona Wilson and Duncan Forbes discuss the 'great significance' of workshop practice as developing over the 1970s. Forbes details the increasing difficulty to gain funding as socio-political contexts changed. Also, the implications and efforts (of trying to survive without interacting with the art market) made by independent groups that 'an extraordinary breadth of political knowledge was shared in the work of the documentary organizations that were formed in Britain in the early 1970s - including the Amber Film (sic) Collective, The Exit Photography Group, The Poster Film Collective and early *Camerawork*, Bootle Arts and Action, and Photography Workshop.'²⁰⁵

See also Jorge Ribalta (ed.) *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism: Essays and Documents, 1972-1991* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia 2015)

²⁰⁴ Jorge Ribalta (ed.) *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism: Essays and Documents, 1972-1991* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia 2015). Preface.

²⁰⁵ Siona Wilson and Duncan Forbes 'Documentary Struggles and Political Movements in Britain' in Jorge Ribalta (ed.) *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism: Essays and Documents, 1972-1991* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2015) pp.67-74. Ribalta explains the title as a 'double reference' to Sekula's essay 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary' (1978) and Rosler's 'In, Around and Afterthoughts' (1981): 'The reinvention of documentary formulated by Rosler, Sekula and others was parallel to a critique of post war depoliticised and institutionalized photographic modernism' Jorge Ribalta, Exhibition text for the exhibition *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2015.

This resurgence in 'socially engaged' British photography during the 1970s was followed (by the 1990s) by the shift in the cultural and commercial status of photography as an established academic area of study, as well as art market leader. The first undergraduate degrees merged in Britain, some orientated to documentary (sometimes aligned with photojournalism courses). Not least significant were developments in particular hubs of practice i.e., Vancouver in the 1980s, where, among others, Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham and Stan Douglas (independently of each other) produced referentially conceptual photographic works. Also, of far-reaching influence was work emerging from the School of Photography, at Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, where a group of students applied new digital printing technologies to extend the possibilities of photographic exhibition. By the 1990s works of museum wall or 'billboard' scale proliferated in art schools, galleries, art fairs and was indeed 'museum ready'. As well as instigating much critical response and emulation, the work of Dusseldorf alumni Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff, Candida Höfer, Andréas Gursky et al, famously contributed to, eventually dominating, a new global market for contemporary fine art photography. Based on a 'new' documentary approach to particular types of post war, largely urban, environments and experience that tended to evoke sublime, epic or cinematic banality. Digital processes (including editing) developed in Dusseldorf as a centre of innovation in printing, allowed for suitably dramatic, large scale printing.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Dusseldorf is two hours away from Mainz, Germany, where Gutenberg invented the printing press. See also Stefan Gronert *The Dusseldorf School of Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009) Particularly the foreword by Lothar Schirmer. A less than critical account of the 'domination' of such work in the 'sale rooms and museums of our times'. This book and statement must have sang out to Sekula, Stallabrass, Wilson et al. The 'Dusseldorf School' was a central point of discussion in photography (and the art world) at this time.



Fig. 32 Installation view of work (on theatre interiors) from Candida Höfer. Ben Brown gallery, London 2020

From the parochial perspective of the late 1970s art worlds, photography appeared as a watershed [...] new principles of photography connoisseurship were devised; the canon of master photographer was vastly expanded; prices on the photography market skyrocketed. Counterpoised against this were two coincident developments: a materialist history of photography and dissident photographic practices.²⁰⁷

As Crimp importantly confirmed, 'dissident' and socially engaged work had continued, despite (and in opposition to) the new market for 'master' photography. In Britain through many groups, including Amber, Autograph and Women Artist's Slide Library. However, social documentary, was sometimes less visible, actually obscured by the art market and major gallery systems overpromotion of conceptual 'Young British Artists', as developing from the 1980s, except for the most sensational individual examples such as Martin Parr's series 'The Last Resort' (1986) and Richard Billingham's 'Ray's A Laugh' (2000); High-definition scenes from working class life, both projects remain highly divisive and will be further discussed in my conclusion.

²⁰⁷ Douglas Crimp 'Photographs at the End of Modernism' in *On the Museum's Ruins* (: Massachusetts MIT Press, 1995) p.2



Fig. 33 *Untitled*, 1995 Richard Billingham, Photograph, 1995



Fig. 34 *New Brighton* Martin Parr, Photograph, 1983-86

At this point it is useful to clarify that my focus is on documentary and photo-realisms as mainly engaged with the industrial working class and related environments. Projects that, as witness, empowerment and/or celebration, attempt to give, or at least facilitate, agency in their production and strategic distribution as well as content. There were also elements of dissident, oppositional scholarship that continued to progress critical histories, thus countering the wider marginalization of social realism and documentary. As will be evidenced in chapter one, throughout these decades Amber have pursued an activist visual documentation of places and lives vulnerable to socio-economic changes linked to globalization and environmental change. They are aware that some of the work is discussed, and has been critically rejected, as typically problematic i.e. as perpetuating the issues around the legitimacy of the documentary. They have publicly discussed projects that did not succeed in positive or equitable representation, and they continue to maintain ethics and feelings, as much as aesthetics and politics are central to their work. Mark Neville has also articulated this reflective position, and in discussion of, projects and specifically in relation to the use of the photobook to circumnavigate the tripart monopoly of museums, galleries and academia. More relevant to chapters two and three will be recent scholarship on British social documentary as more overtly engaged with environmental issues, specifically oil, the fossil economy, and the imposition of change (including related conflict) on communities and environs. As well as aforementioned Stallabrass and Lippard a pertinent voice from energy humanities is that of Imre Szeman, particularly on the imaging of 'oil cultures'.²⁰⁸

The significance of my thesis.

I contribute to a growing scholarship on photography that is situated in a fourth industrial era and worsening climate crisis. I employ an original (eco-critical) framework to address the need for new methods of analysis for social documentary photography in this context.

²⁰⁸ See Ross Barrett and Darren Worden (eds.) *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

People and places across the world continue to share common histories of being subject to inescapable interactions between local experience and global developments. However, in the early 2020s the world is far from achieving progress toward a shared goal to address the resulting inequality. Millions suffer displacement due to environmental and economic shifts, as well as related conflict and war. Borders have manifestly increased (physically and otherwise) over the recent decades in question. There are now fissures in a globalization that has been based on the ‘successes of the market, rather than on the survival and security of the planet and its interdependent atmosphere and inhabitants. The resulting precarity (as is the case for globalization at its most commercially ‘successful’) is, of course as unequal as ever.²⁰⁹ Imposed changes to work and ways of life are a universal experience. Some regions and communities suffer on a greater scale, the loss of habitat, home and actual lives. Whilst not within the scope of this thesis to offer deep analyses of these ongoing inequitable relationships at a geopolitical level, the long histories of ‘colonialism and capitalism’s racializing processes’²¹⁰ are recognized here, as an area of research (in the history and theory of photography) on misrepresentation and inequality. Especially as my own work is concerned with fossil fuel driven social and environmental change and is situated in British art and cultural histories. As critiqued by humanities scholar Sria Chatterjee who calls for greater eco-critical awareness, to develop new research methods in the humanities, for art history in particular, to acknowledge a widely held view:

The Anthropocene is a geological term with deeply political implications [...] itself being a product of colonial geology, in which spikes are named after a universalizing Anthropos, while the Anthropocene is best viewed as a racial process that has produced and continues to produce racially uneven vulnerability and death. Alternative terms such as Capitalocene [...] insist that it is not humanity as a homogenous acting unit that can be held responsible for the Anthropocene, but accumulation and investment of capital in the fossil

²⁰⁹ Editorial Board, *Financial Times* ‘For Markets, inflation fears are joined by Recession Risks’ 22nd May, 2022.

²¹⁰ Sria Chatterjee, ‘The Arts, Environmental Justice, and the Ecological Crisis’ , *British Art Studies*, Issue 18. (Paul Mellon Centre, London and Yale Centre for British Art, Newhaven) <https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-18/conversation>. (accessed 5th May 2021). N.b.Rancière is critical of the idea of a ‘Capitalocene’, considering it a socio-political distraction. This will be further discussed in my conclusion.

economy in certain parts of the Western world that triggered an epochal change²¹¹

I assert that this eco-critical position indicates further current significance for my thesis, as it is also generally acknowledged that over the last fifty years there has been a technology driven escalation in this 'Capitalocene', as facilitated by repressive forms of ideologically driven expansionism around the world. Neo-liberalism is applied as a societal mode of operation, with ubiquitous presence and reach. This is addressed, internationally, in many visual documentary projects on extraction industries. Indeed, the first publication of Sekula's early, eco-critical essay here 'Photography Between Labour and Capital', was in a 1983 critique of an archive of two decades of negatives made in an industrial mining town. Known more as a critique of photographic archives and even more specifically

To provide certain conceptual tools for the unified understanding of the social workings of photography in an industrial environment [...] the archive has to be read from below, from a position of solidarity with those displaced, deformed or made invisible by the machineries of profit and progress²¹²

A contemporary example in documentary photography (from a wide-ranging choice) is the ongoing 'Traces of Nitrate' project. Originally a research project hosted by the University of Brighton 'Traces of Nitrate: Mining History and Photography between Britain and Chile'. This was to 'locate nitrate within a process of globalization shaped not only by the expansion of consumer culture but also by the extraction and depletion of non-renewable resources' with case studies evidencing a clear analogy with the extraction of coal and oil in Britain.²¹³

²¹¹ Ibid.

Beyond 'the West' we need to also at least include Russia, China and Saudi Arabia. There is a global network of fossil economies, whether working together or against each other Chatterjee's point remains salient, especially for more 'developed' regions.

²¹² Allan Sekula 'Photography Between Labour and Capital' in *Allan Sekula Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photoworks 1973 – 1983* (London: MACK, 2016) First published in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (eds.) *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures-A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton 1948-1968 - Photographs by Leslie Shedden* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design 1983)

²¹³ <https://www.brighton.ac.uk/cdh/what-we-do/projects/nitrate.aspx> and <https://tracesofnitrate.org> (accessed March 2020)

Since the 1980s, a key feature of this era is the development of an overarching policy and operational practice underpinned by this complex and aggressive philosophy as applied to the public, as well as private, sector. Such policy has been widely visualized across mainstream political parties as 'the norm' and is increasingly detrimental to the fabric and experience of the environment at a general and personal level for the majority. This too is reflected in contemporaneous, visual documentary projects, my examples can be viewed as part of a corpus of their age. To clarify the use of the contested term 'neo-liberal', I specifically refer to the this as more visibly emerging in British politics from the late 20th Century as here described by Ben Jackson who cautions on the notion of a 'rigid' dogma through analysis of a more insidious

body of ideas, capable of colonising territory right across the political spectrum [...] The global rise of the uninhibited model of capitalist political economy that we now call 'neo-liberalism' was one of the most significant historical developments of the late twentieth century. It has been explained [...] in predominantly materialist terms, as the expression of the powerful class interests of a resurgent financial elite ²¹⁴

This resurgence has registered in most areas of life, in a class entrenched British society, where and how this can be lived has, for centuries, been prescribed according to intersectional inequalities. In our own era, environmental degradation is a more foregrounded element and continues to be facilitated by the activity of (and political support for) the financial elite. There is research, including across academic disciplines, on how, by the twenty-first century, one hundred companies, led by global behemoths extracting and trading in fossil fuels around the world, such as Shell, Exxon Mobile, Gazprom, China National Petroleum Corporation and

²¹⁴ Ben Jackson 'Currents of Neo-Liberalism: British Political Ideologies and the New Right, c.1955-79' in *The English Historical Review* 131:551 (Oxford: Oxford University Press pp.823-850 (2016)
See also: Stuart Hall on the contested term 'neo-liberalism' as not satisfactory yet 'politically necessary to give the resistance to its onward march, content, focus and a cutting edge' Stuart Hall 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution' in *Cultural Studies* 25:6 November (2011) p.705-728
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2011.619886> (accessed 19th February 2021)

Aramco) are responsible for the majority share of the world's harmful emissions and the inequitable experience of this.²¹⁵

The richest ten percent accounted for over half (52 percent) of the emissions added to the atmosphere between 1990 and 2015. The richest one percent were responsible for 15 percent of emissions during this time – more than all the citizens of the EU and more than twice that of the poorest half of humanity (7 percent)²¹⁶

In terms of current significance for my thesis, I reiterate that my position also reflects a real time context. I discuss work made in an ongoing (fourth) industrial era and worsening climate crisis whereby the global fossil economy results in ecological harm and violent conflict at a national and local levels. Displacement on a variety of scales, is a predominant feature, part of the intersectional inequality that is of central concern to current arts and humanities research. However, despite an established presence (in activist and cultural projects) and a trajectory of cultural engagement that can be traced to the first industrial era in the 18th Century, the relationship between ecological degradation and inequality is only more recently regularly foregrounded in the mainstream media. This has also been largely absent in art historical accounts of the type of British social documentary photography examined in this thesis. This despite an established critical area on more literal landscape photography, including eco-feminist and environmental foci. The work of Liz Wells (Co-Convenor for the Land/Water and The Visual Arts Research Group (University of Plymouth) has addressed this for many years through her curating, writing

²¹⁵ Tess Riley 'Just One Hundred Companies Responsible' in *The Guardian* Monday 10th July 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors-responsible-71-global-emissions-cdp-study-climate-change> (accessed January 20th 2021)

²¹⁶ Tim Gore, Mira Alestig and Anna Ratcliff 'Confronting Carbon Inequality. Putting Climate Justice at the Heart of the Covid 19 Recovery' Oxfam International Policy Research Paper, Media Briefing 21st September 2020. See also the many research references therein.

and educating.²¹⁷ Most recently she is editor of the new publishing series 'Photography, Place and Environment' curating the launch of the series (May,2022) which included contributions from three (I would describe as eco-critical) works

noting specific histories, geographies and contemporary critical issues relevant, respectively, to images of miners and mining communities, to photography's relationship with extraction industries and industrial pollution, and to photography's contribution within processes of reconciliation and memorialisation in Southern Africa ²¹⁸

My own industrial maritime focus, as specifically relating to the oil industry, speaks to an under researched area in this territory

What happens offshore matters. Currently more than a quarter of the world's oil and a rapidly growing proportion of gas are produced from beneath the seas. The offshore fuel industry is, thus, a crucial point of origin for carbon emissions, as well as other environmental harms, notwithstanding this significance, humanities and social science scholars have so far made only sporadic efforts to comprehend the socio-cultural discourses that attend its operations ²¹⁹

I especially address this in chapter two by introducing and examining the 1976 photobook *The Oil Rush* as an eco-critical collaboration that makes visible environmental, as well as economic and cultural change. To conclude my introduction: the multifaceted roles of photography include the perpetuating, evidencing or challenging the abuse of communities and the environment. The dynamics between the photographer, the photographed and viewer also constitute 'photography' as a 'pluralistic event'. This always demands attention due to the scale and reach of the image. As my thesis also concludes, at this time of escalated instability, but with the possibility, although not certainty, of progress for ecological and societal equality it is important to continue, to

²¹⁷ Key texts are Liz Wells, Kate Newton and Catherine Fehily *Shifting Horizons Women's Landscape Photography Now* (London and New York: Taurus, 2000) which accompanied the exhibition 'Shifting Horizons' with the IRIS Women's Photography Project 2000-2001. Also Liz Wells *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

²¹⁸ Event description from the launch of the Routledge series, as hosted by 'History and Theory of Photography Research Centre', Birkbeck, University of London.
<https://www.bbk.ac.uk/research/centres/history-and-theory-of-photography>

²¹⁹ Fiona Pollock and Danine Farquarson (eds.) 'Heading Offshore' in *Cold Water Oil: Offshore Petroleum Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022) Introduction.

question 'the veracity of the photograph, the history and the system' Meanwhile I begin my first chapter with an historical account to situate work from the Amber film and Photography collective in a longer history of a robust culture concerned with the 'everyday' industrial experience by, and on, the North Sea as a key site of fossil extraction and of hope for sustainable alternative.

Chapter One

A Poetic Realism in the North?

Documentary activity from the Amber Film and Photography Collective
and the people of Tyneside

A Poetic Realism?

I begin this chapter by considering how this term can be appropriated and applied to my examples of British documentary photography that, engaging with the industrial and the military, might seem at odds with an already contested amalgamation. My use goes beyond a generally accepted, albeit imprecise definition as used in relation to the twentieth century French films. This is to foreground the nature of my examples of photographic projects that operate as, and beyond, documentary, although not on any 'aesthetically mystic' level as Sekula railed against. Rather, as is demonstrated across my three chapters, as allowing for new critical positioning. This contributes to a growing impulse to recognize collaborative, participatory and affective works that, even if such works are eventually commodified (culturally or otherwise) can constitute, as well illustrate opposition and empowerment. I will also now address a criticism of the use of Poetic Realism in regard to the work of Amber, in a recent book that fails to acknowledge my work on this (as the single example, presented in public and online). This indicates that the otherwise very well - informed author, a long-time researcher into Amber films, has overlooked some of the more contemporary research in this area.²²⁰ I refer to the aforementioned James Leggott's 2020 publication *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* which (although a robust example of film studies in general) does not offer an adequate explanation. Nor does Leggott engage with the historical and ongoing discourses on Poetic Realism yet takes issue with the contention that the term is applicable on any constructive level to the work of Amber.

A brief summary of Poetic Realism is useful here, as even this reveals parallels between the socio-political time and tone for the evolution of the films and that of the documentary photography, and its significance as at stake in this thesis. Poetic Realism emerged during the tumultuous period of the 1930s, involving many socio-political elements that are invoked in the politically and environmentally unstable 1970s and again in the 2020s. Economic depression, war and genocide had followed a brief decade of uneven recovery from the First World War (1914-18) and global influenza pandemic (1918-20). The polarization between the wealthy and poor was pronounced, class is a central issue, visible in oppositional politics and cultural response. A fleeting and fragmented optimism had changed to anxious tones and sadness with the demise of the Popular Front, the defeat of the Republicans in the brutal Spanish Civil War and the approach of a second world war provoked by rising nationalism and fascism. The films reflected this in the form and content of a mercurial realism that particularly evoked issues of class and marginalized lives as having depth and meaning, through a complex combination of celebration, support, metaphor and lament.

The tradition of the thirties films about working class backgrounds is more difficult to find today. What you might see as an equivalent from the eighties onwards are films about ethnic minorities – a film like *La Haine*, which Film historian Ginette Vincendeau was speaking about film in France, however, in British film the white, male working-class protagonist continued as central, key examples can be seen in the corpus of Ken Loach, most recently

²²⁰ The publication emerged as I concluded my writing up of many years of research, however, I must intervene to challenge this newly articulated view as I believe a defence will strengthen my unaltered position and application of the term Poetic Real

and notably *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) and *Sorry We Missed You* (2019). Also, in all productions from Amber Films produced over the last fifty years, from their first film *Maybe* (1969) (about the iconic Shields Ferry, featuring the boiler stoker) to *The Art of Shipbuilding* (2017) which revisits and re-presents decades of documentary work with the local Tyneside community. The path of the Poetic Realism genre 'perhaps most legitimately characterised as a movement',²²² as was the case for documentary film in the 1930s and, to some extent, community and documentary photography in the 1970s, corresponded to the rise and fall of the inter-war Popular Front political movement that had inspired the main protagonists.

Poetic Realism involved a particular group of writers, directors, designers and actors collaborating on the films which resulted in an identity and approach, in a poetic yet accessible realism, empathetic to the working-class majority. A dockside location glimpsed through fog, with moments of metaphorical sunshine, is cited as typical. The popular male actor Jean Gabin (1904-1976) was himself working class and through his acting style and comparable roles came to represent an archetypal working-class anti-hero

²²¹ Film historian Ginette Vincendeau in discussion (on realism in French film) with Paul Risker in 2014 <https://thequietus.com/articles/16556-le-jour-se-leve-interview>

See also Loach's essay film 'The Spirit of '45'. A review from the British Film Institute is typical in noting the foregrounding the role of education (in politics) to the majority working class population whilst conscripted as troops in the second world war. To the consternation, later bitter resistance of the political and social elite as well as the upper middle and upper classes. 1945 being a key moment, when all major industries were nationalized, the National Health Service and universal education was established, a significant degree of progress was achieved in facilitating equality of opportunity and living conditions. In a neo-liberal era where infrastructure and industry is privatised and all public services subject to damaging commodification 'Loach challenges us to resist, to fight back against the forces of private greed and indifference. The film ends with shots of mass protests from Occupy and Defend the NHS' <https://www2.bfi.org.uk>

²²² Ben McCann *Set Design, Spatial Configurations and the Architectonics of 1930s Poetic Realist cinema*. (Unpublished doctoral thesis) University of Bristol) 2002 p.19

in many of the films, whilst female actors Michele Morgan and Leonie Bathiat (Arletty) provided further critique on inequalities. Poetic Realism, as engaging more overtly with social issues (beyond class) also employed diverse language (visual and otherwise) to engage with various examples of marginalized status, notably as based on gender as well as class. Wendy Donnan's research paper focusses on women in Poetic Realism, as she asserts here

while women in 1930s France inhabited a patriarchal politicised environment that they had little involvement in creating, the narratives of poetic realism are infused with an aesthetic and metaphorical criticism of women's place in French society ²²³

As a most committed critic of the special effects of 'melodrama and spectacles [...] the photographic tricks of montage' Bazin identifies the films as suitably equitable in facilitating a participatory role for the viewer. In 1951, referring to the work of Marcel Carné, director of the definitive film *Le Quai Des Brumes - Port Of Shadows* (1938) Bazin also identifies the 'cultural surplus of poetic realism

A work should not be defined only in relation to itself and without reference to its time. It would be pure abstraction to place [...] the sensibility of the public on the other (side) [...] this accord is not a simple passive connection but one of the indirect creative components of the work. ²²⁴

He was exploring the collaborative relationship, between an attempted empathetic photographic realism and the viewer as part of this, as an exemplar of work, as he put it, that participated in the period, answered its questions. This at a time when fascism gathered pace and the role of intersectional inequality (due to the experience of war) was increasingly visible. A similar line of enquiry is later echoed by others attempting to theorise the relationships between photography and reality, including between depiction and perception. i.e., by Rancière in his own response to Bazin's foundational essay

²²³ Wendy Donnan 'Women in Poetic Realism: Transformation versus tradition. Reflections of social reality or Emblems of the Ideal, Rational Social Order'. Research Paper 2013 p.17 (<https://www.academia.edu/40069781/>)

Key titles of Poetic Realism include *The Port of Shadows*, Dir. Marcel Carne, 1938, *Daybreak*, Dir. Marcel Carne, 1939 *The Rules of The Game*, Dir. Jean Renoir, 1939 and *Children of Paradise*, Dir. Marcel Carne, 1945.

²²⁴ In Dudley Andrew's *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French film*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) p320. Andrew cites 'Carne et la desincarnation' *Esprit* 19:9 September (1951)

'Photography is exemplarily an art of aesthetic ideas [...] through its participation in the construction of a sensible environment which extends beyond its own specificity'.²²⁵



Fig.35 Frame from 'Le Quai des Brumes' (Port of Shadows) 1938 Dir. Marcel Carne

It is this conceptual and contextual definition of a Poetic Realism, as participatory on various levels (of time, place, politics and experience) rather than the more obvious visual style associations (whether positive or negative regarding the vernacular) that I evoke in this thesis. Before my proposal, as presented at seminars, conference and online since circa 2015, the films (let alone photography) of Amber had not much been discussed in terms of, or in comparison to Poetic Realism, despite a specific reference made by Murray Martin in a key interview. Leggott's comprehensive account of Amber films surprisingly dismissed such a notion forthwith. Despite the choice of cover image for his book evokes images of labour from Paul Strand as a 'romantic socialist' (to cite Stimson) and is clearly more than a nod to Poetic Realism. The dismissal is even more surprising as Leggott makes extensive use of the

²²⁵ Jacques Rancière 'Notes on the Photographic Image' in *Radical Philosophy* 156: July/August (2009) pp. 8- 30. See also Roland Barthes, Martha Rosler, Susan Sontag and Ariella Azoulay on the ongoing dynamics between the camera, photographer, the photographed, viewer and distribution that constitute 'photography' dynamics as a participatory, political aesthetic experience, a pluralistic 'event' (as described by Azoulay).

interview in question, in which Murray makes the short but clear allusion. The first of Leggott's three references to poetic realism quotes Ewa Mazierska writing on Northern England as featured in television and film

The tradition of 'poetic realism' casts a long shadow on more contemporary representations of the North. Not only are artists interested in depicting this region expected to focus on its drabness, economic deprivation, dignity of its inhabitants and their sense of belonging to their milieu, but critics and historians privilege works conforming to this stereotype²²⁶

While acknowledging the 'sweeping' nature of the statement, he essentially agrees with Mazierska's negative interpretation and use of the term in the context of the marginalization of the North, concurring that 'It is easy to imagine how a casual observer of Amber's work and reputation might align it with the apparently regressive school of 'northern realism' 'He goes on to align 'poetic realism' purely with the Griersonian tradition, strangely without any reference, in the rest of the entire book, to the French film genre, or single films, that the term specifically refers to. There is no reference to Bazin as one of the most renowned and contested voices on realism in film history and visual studies. There is a specific discussion of Amber's earlier films, later collated by the group as *The Tyne Documentaries*, which is used for Leggott's chapter title. This includes descriptions of the short films *Last Shift* (1976) and *Glassworks* (1977) that share similarities with my own analyses. This is due in some part to the referencing of the same recorded interview in which these films are discussed at length by lead creators from the collective; Murray Martin (direction) Peter Roberts (cinematography) and industrial archaeologist and historian Stafford Linsley (inspiration, advice and consultancy).²²⁷ However, there is also a proposition that (based on my own repeated close listening,

²²⁶ Ewa Mazierska *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) p.11 in James Leggott, *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020) p.33

²²⁷ The conversation *Making The Tyne Documentaries* (Amber Films, 2007) is convened by Amber's Graeme Rigby and made available as a twenty nine minute 'special feature' with the films on DVD format. Although unidentified a female voice is heard at times (by the camera), this indicates sound and production member Elaine Drainville, or possibly director Ellin Hare, as present.

After a screening and discussion session with Amber at Birkbeck Cinema (for which I was on the design team and involved (creatively and supportively) in various events for many years) I purchased a copy of this and other newly available DVDs. Ellin Hare (when asked about any advice Amber might have for aspiring documentary makers in a far more expensive and constrained contemporary city) advised with a smile, 'just stay angry'. A few years later the insightful interview made was available online via the Amber website and additionally named 'About Amber – Part 3', this later title is cited by Leggott.

understanding of the interview and interactions with Amber) I find an unconvincing conjecture. In a section on their very first film ('Maybe', 1969) as 'a student work that lays some foundations for the Amber approach' ²²⁸ Leggott surmises:

Martin acknowledged that, with his background as an art historian, he was not 'particularly aware' of the Griersonian tradition at the time [...] furthermore, Martin would query whether, by the 1970s, a robust tradition of 'poetic realism' was even in existence at all, if defined according to the Griersonian credo of the 'creative treatment of actuality'. ²²⁹

This is a combined reference to Martin speaking (at different times) in 'The Making of Tyne Documentaries' and in the extensive oral history recordings made with (and available through) the British Library. In the former we hear Martin's reference to Poetic Realism, but not in the context presented by Leggott, who uses the famous quote from Grierson on documentary as the 'creative treatment of actuality', for his proposition at the non-existence of a poetic realism by the 1970s. Ergo, he asserts that the Amber work in discussion, from this era and beyond, cannot be considered in relation to this. However, it is clear to me that this is not the point made by Martin and Roberts in the interview, indeed quite the opposite position is taken. At a point where the discussion is about the further demise of industries and their previous efforts to document the sites that are also disappearing, also how they wished they had recorded more, Linsley points out how there might at least be a few more oral histories yet to be made. Roberts responds, foregrounding the important role of photography projects in a continued documentation:

Just going back to the recording – although the films are limited in a way, in their number, it was carried on in a way with the photographic practice - I mean like the shipyards, now certainly Bruce Rae covered a lot of elements of shipbuilding that we didn't cover – amazing [...] steel plates that are drawn out

²²⁸ James Leggott, *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020) p.52

I would argue that Konttinen's photography work, underway in Byker while the film *Maybe* was in completion at this time, is even more foundational, in style and approach, for the following decades of Amber's oeuvre.

²²⁹ Ibid. p.53

to such precision – those elements that we didn't do are covered elsewhere in a different form.²³⁰

Martin agrees, also responding that

film does it somewhat differently [...] I think that the achievement of the films is that they held up visually - partly down to you Peter – there's a poetic quality to them – you can record things badly or record them well and the visual sensibility is a very important element²³¹

Rigby then asks Roberts to elaborate, reminding him that when he first joined Amber he was not keen on documentary. Roberts recalls some off-putting, dull, factually based, information films screened at primary school and on television (advising people to drink milk for example). Also recalling his own discovery of (Grierson's) British Documentary Movement leading to his (and Amber's) growing experience during the 1970s, including visiting international documentary festivals. He describes the role of this in developing a 'non-factual' tone 'It was about watching what people do – and celebrating - in a way to which I referred to earlier on - discovering what was happening in your own back yard was something to be preserved and enjoyed and celebrated'.²³² Martin interjects to say, 'and it's called, often given this label of Poetic Realism'. He then elaborates on how difficult it was to acquire funding (from either local authorities, to work with heritage sites, or via Northern Arts and the Arts Council, who did not see the work as primarily 'art' projects. 'We've always worked in spite of the system, there is no tradition of poetic realism, other than in documentary film which was seen as being finished by the 1950s'.²³³ Both repeatedly make this point, that there is a lack of tradition, after post war demise of the documentary movement, of a poetic realism in Britain, except that is, in their own oeuvre. It is clear that they view Amber's work as such and so thought it deserving of arts council funding, not forthcoming at the time. Although the context is implied by Leggott, and Martin does mention he was 'not particularly aware' of Grierson in his much earlier youth, there is no

²³⁰ Peter Roberts, Murray Martin, Stafford Linsey in discussion in *Making The Tyne Documentaries* Dir. Amber / Graeme Rigby (Amber Films, 2007)

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

mention at all, in this interview, of Martin's experience in the study and teaching of Art History and nothing that links the idea of this as a factor in a lack of awareness of a 'Griersonian tradition'.

It is in a different interview with Shirley Read (former management committee for Camerawork (London) in the 1980s) that Martin has discussed his art historical teaching. Confirming that, in contrast to Leggott's interpretation, it was because of his initial art history studies that he was actually well aware of the 'Griersonian tradition'. Although in terms of an art historical training, his views on fine art are controversial (the Impressionists are dismissed as 'weekend amateurs' for example) Martin confirms that there was 'an interface'. As I've discussed in conference papers and elsewhere in this thesis, he recounts, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, the arrival of a television at home, and his delight (not knowing about Grierson at that stage) in discovering Grierson's documentary series *This Wonderful World*, singled out as watched, and remembered, soon joined (and challenged) by the more experimental, radical 'verité' of Dziga Vertov.²³⁴ Then, describing his later attending art college (Newcastle) and studying of Art History, including 'Art and Politics and Art and Society, which is very important and is one of the reasons I became interested in film'. While careful to distance themselves from a simplistic 'Griersonian' label Amber have always referred to their independent approach as evolving even before leaving college. Martin discusses his trajectory from Newcastle to Regent Street Polytechnic in London to study film technique and how the pioneering professor of photography and photography education, Margaret Harker photography education,²³⁵ asked if he

²³⁴ 'Grierson's movement consistently held the middle ground of aesthetic innovation and political liberalism during the period, bringing together aesthetes, socially conscious but displaced intellectuals, and technicians to produce hymns to a much vaunted British Golden Age of democracy. But Grierson's allegiance to the status quo has marginalized the alternative areas of political and avant-garde cinema in Britain' Don Macpherson writing at the end of the 1970s, when the work of Amber was often viewed as 'Griersonian'. However, the more avant-garde elements (as to be found in Vertov's work) can be seen from Amber's first film *Maybe Dir. Amber* (Amber Films, 1968), before, as Peter Roberts has explained, they started to visit international festivals for further experience of alternative forms of documentary, beyond the over exposed Griersonian. Macpherson et al make the point about disproportionate attention resulting in such documentary being seen as 'essentially British'. Don Macpherson and Paul Willemen (eds.) *Traditions of Independence: British Cinema in the Thirties* (London: BFI Publishing, 1980).

²³⁵ Margaret Harker is renowned for (among many academic and creative achievements) as having established the first photography degree course in Britain (at Regent Street Poly), as being the first female professor of photography and first woman president of the Royal Photographic Society. 'A distinguished

needed money (he did) and if he would be willing to work as well as study at the college:

She asked me “could you teach philosophy or aesthetics in the school of photography?” So, when I was getting quite excited about things as an art historian, what I did was I started a film course, teaching first and third years, while I was in the second year [...] I was more mature than many of the students ²³⁶

My own conjecture, supported by this, and further, archival material that evidences Martin (as well as other members of Amber) as consciously engaged with aesthetics and politics conjoined. Also, that Martin would have engaged in a lively debate on my application of Poetic Realism, specifically as defined by Bazin, to the photography as well as films of Amber. Visual and other parallels can be clearly made through even a small selection of material from key poetic realist films and major projects from Amber, including as used for the book cover image of Leggott’s *In Fading Light*. The book cover features a photograph by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, from ‘High Row’ (mining) from The Rover Project 1974. A visually corresponding film stars Jean Gabin (as featured in) who plays the lead working class character in what is described as a Poetic Realist ‘noir’ that also features the ‘geometric splendours of an immense railyard’.²³⁷ Amber have repeatedly explained their visual ‘fascination’ with similar splendours of the shipyard and other industrial infrastructure, around the River Tyne especially.

photographic historian, she was instrumental in the development of photographic education [...] she was a kind and generous person’. Michael Pritchard ‘My Friend Margaret Harker’ Obituary *The Guardian*, 13th March, 2013

²³⁶ ‘Murray Martin interviewed by Shirley Read’ The British Library: Oral History of British Photography (C459/156 10.10, 2002)

²³⁷ Geoffrey O’Brien ‘La Bête Humaine: Renoir On and Off The Rails’ . Criterion Essays February 2013 www.criterion.com (accessed May 2020)

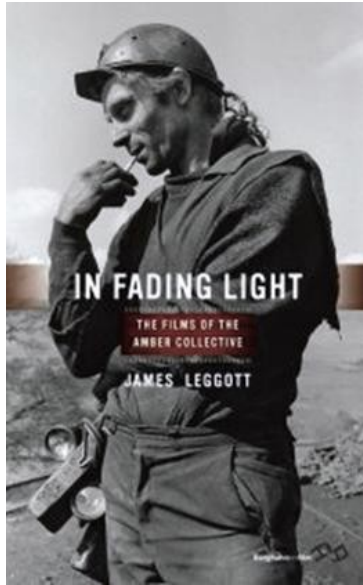


Fig.36 Book cover: *In Fading Light: Films of the Amber Collective*, 2020



Fig.37 Film frame from *La Bête Humaine* (The Human Beast) 1938 Dir, Jean Renoir



Fig.38 *Smith's Dock, North Shields 1980-89* Peter Fryer, Photograph, 1980-89

Part of the work from Amber's five residency in North Shields. This image also recalls Fay Godwin's earlier images of oil workers in the 1970s.



Fig. 39 Amber photograph of shipbuilding on the River Tyne from Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. Part the expansive River Project, 1974.



Fig. 40 Film frame from *Le Jour se Leve* (Daybreak) 1939
Dir. Marcel Carné



Fig. 41 Film frame from *Le Quai des Brumes* (Port of Shadows) 1938
Dir. Marcel Carné

In *Daybreak* Jean Gabin plays a doomed orphan worker who commits suicide as the police close in after he was 'provoked' into a fatal shooting. In *Port of Shadows* Gabin plays a weary soldier absent without leave in the industrial port of Le Havre, which was evoked through a combination of set design by Alexander Trauner and excerpts of documentary material, of docks, ships and labour at these sites. Unsurprisingly the film frames resemble the cinematic photography from Amber's Fryer and Konttinen.



Fig. 42 'Carville Road at Night, 1971' in *Byker* (1983) Photograph Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen



Fig.43 Film frame from *Le Quai des Brumes* (Port of Shadows) 1938 Dir. Marcel Carne.



Fig.44 'Wallsend, Tyneside' 1975

Chosen by Killip for his 2017 project
The Last Ships'. Donated to The Laing.
Gallery in honour of the shipyard workers.
Photograph Chris Killip

Fig.45 'Segedunum Roman Fort, Wallsend' 2018

Situated at the east end of Hadrian's Wall
re-discovered during the demolition of the Swan
Hunter shipyard and surrounding streets, Wallsend.
Photograph Mike Biles

Historicising Amber in the Tyneside locale

More concerned with the 'longue durée' Paul Barlow has reasonably argued 'the radical de-industrialization of Tyneside during the last thirty years of the twentieth century has accompanied an equally radical realignment of its

relationship with its own past'²³⁸ As well as a crucible of the industrial era, Newcastle, and its Northumbrian Tyneside hinterlands, have been strategically important for centuries. A corresponding cultural heritage has developed, reflecting the experience, resistance and benefits involved in such histories.²³⁹ Barlow then looks much further back, to especially focus on the role of Roman histories regarding notions of regional cultural identity for Tyneside, with specific reference to Wallsend and Jarrow. The former being famous for the once internationally significant Swan Hunter shipyard operational from 1880-2006, producing some of the largest oil tankers in the world, and as a World Heritage site, the easterly most end of the (emperor) Hadrian's Wall AD122. Jarrow is also famous, in the modern era, for shipbuilding as well as the starting point for the historic Jarrow Hunger March of 1936, when high inter-war unemployment, with no government support, resulted in extreme hardship for the British working class, especially in the North.

Amber have engaged extensively with these riverside sites on opposite banks of the Tyne, including the production of the short but important documentary films *Wallsend 72* (1972) *Launch* (1974) and *Bowes Line* (1975).²⁴⁰ Moreover, this work expanded into *River Project* (circa 1972-6), which also involved Chris Killip. It was this project (I assert) as well as Konttinen's *Byker* that was to define Amber as a photography, as much as film, collective who were also employing other art forms and distribution, in the attempt at comprehensive representation of local lives. This ambition also resulted in the establishment of their own Side Gallery ('committed to documentary photography') and later a small cinema (also used as a theatre and debating

²³⁸ Paul Barlow 'Tyneside's Modern Rome: the North East's Image of its Roman Past and its Lost Englishness' in Hilary Fawcett (ed.) *Made in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Northumbria University Press) 2007 pp.136

²³⁹ Geographic location results in a coastline of multiple and iconic walls, castles and keeps representing two thousand years of fortification (and militarism) on the North Sea coast. The long expanses of sand and dunes stretching between solid rock cliffs is echoed by the epic scale of the structures. There is a disconnect in scale between the density and intensity of the built environment and the panoramic coastal contexts. This, to me, foregrounds the geographic as well as populated locale. Corresponding cultural, as well as military and political outcomes, had emerged from these garrisons and influential monastic equivalents (such as the Lindisfarne AD635, and Bede's Wearside-Jarrow AD681). This continues through centuries of borderland tensions into towns later developing, over the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, into industrial hubs.

²⁴⁰ *Launch* Dir. Amber (Amber Films, 1974) refers to the launch of the 'World Unicorn' tanker at the Swan Hunter shipyard, Wallsend. The Bowes Line was a 'George Stephenson designed, rope hauled railway that ran down to Jarrow Staithes' Amber Film and Photography Collective *Forever Amber: Stories from a Film and Photography Collection* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2015) p.18

space) with darkrooms and workshops. Both now fixtures in the cultural topography of Tyneside as well as the wider documentary photography and film communities.²⁴¹ *River Project* was 'Amber's first major group project, widening out from filmmaking. It involved photography, writing, visual arts and Amber Films. The touring project was shown in various communities from both sides of the industrial Tyne. The inability to find a venue in Newcastle that would show the tour was one of the key reasons that the group opened a gallery in the quayside property it bought in 1975. The creation of Side Gallery (1977) was soon followed by the Side Cinema, for screenings and public debate, near to the space for their collection of socially concerned, international documentary photography.²⁴²

As well as the collective filmmaking for River Project (involving Martin, Konttinen, Peter Roberts and Graham Denman) Amber photographers Konttinen and Graham Smith, artists Laurie Wheatley and Peter Engel, writers Tom Pickard and Rodney Pybus and well-known workshop theatre playwright Tom Hadaway joined in 'documenting and touring' the shipbuilding, fishing and coalmining sites and communities along the Tyne.²⁴³ In addition to offering a comprehensive account the project includes much material of the sort that has been perceived as problematic and typical of Amber as lacking in critical rigour, proposing that for some the 'dedication to the cause of realism renders their work distasteful (and even archaic)'. He also repeats their own acknowledgement of such perceptions 'conceding that one of their most famous early documentaries *Launch* [...] is open to charges of Romanticism' also that they explain their work with communities is to ensure collaborative representation. Thus, the work shows how those involved 'perceive their own

²⁴¹ For a detailed account see *Amber: A Short History* Collective authorship (Amber booklet) pp 4-8. See also Amber Collection: *River Project* Collective authorship. www.amber-online.com (accessed February 2021)

²⁴² *Amber Film and Photography Collective Forever Amber : Stories from a Film and Photography Collection* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2015) p.11

environment and work' ²⁴⁴ (even if that is deemed romanticised). Amber's practice, reflecting notions of affect as discussed by Sealy and Elizabeth Edwards, calls upon their own experience and feelings. It is also about their perception as well as that of the participant and viewer and so, rather than a distancing romanticism, the work is collaborative on multiple levels. Meanwhile, Barlow attempts to re-contextualize the role and status of local industrial histories in his longer view:

When Tyneside's industrial urban landscape expanded rapidly and completely along both sides of the Tyne [...] the areas more ancient past was also absorbed into this new densely urbanised strip along the Riverside [...] the rediscovery of lost Roman glory as a form of leisure is closely bound up with the transformation of the area and the emergence of the "weightless economy" and knowledge-based service and entertainment industries ²⁴⁵

Discussing the development of a local heritage 'industry' centred on the development of venues such as Bede's World (in Jarrow) and Segedunum Fort (in Wallsend) Barlow, somewhat less reasonably, positions these against the industrial histories and artefacts at the popular Beamish Museum. This being, at the time, largely outdoor and devoted to industrial heritage, salvaging, and contextualizing heavy machinery, rail tracks and even working-class houses. He goes further, to challenge the pivotal History Workshop methods, developed and employed by Raphael Samuel (in his own engagement with the emerging culture of heritage 'visitor' centres, including in the North) as focussing too much on labour histories and 'classically Marxist ideology' whilst:

²⁴⁴ Tobias Hochscherf and James Leggett ' From *Launch to Shooting Magpies* Locating the Amber Film Collective' in Hilary Fawcett (ed.) *Made in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Northumbria University Press, 2007) p.101

²⁴⁵ Paul Barlow 'Tyneside's Modern Rome: the North East's Image of its Roman Past and its Lost Englishness' in Hilary Fawcett (ed.) *Made in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Northumbria University Press, 2007) pp.140

Rome comes increasingly to represent a kind of consumer society [...] represents the current self-images of the North East more fully than the now slightly embarrassing lost utopia, represented by the solidarities of mining and shipbuilding industries: communal values sanctified by the Museum of Beamish and the writings of Raphael Samuel ²⁴⁶

Barlow's analysis of the new visitor centres provides an interesting perspective on the recovery and exploitation of the (admittedly significant) Roman history in a particular area. However, I argue against his conclusion which provocatively asserts that in Newcastle: 'far more than mining, shipbuilding, lost Anglo-Saxon kingdoms [...] the modern city seeks to represent itself as the loyal citizenship of the Roman Empire, whose newly renewed wall protects it from the descent back into irretrievable provincialism' ²⁴⁷

Furthermore, I would include, rather than dismiss, 'self-images' of industrial solidarities as central to any historical view, especially as developed, qua Samuel, from the ground, also central to Amber's rationale and methodology. Although Barlow cites Samuel's influential text *Theatres of Memory* (1994) he misconstrues Samuel's position which was actually positive. ²⁴⁸ Elizabeth Edwards more usefully situates this text as emerging from an anti-elitist position. Unlike Barlow, she recognises Samuel's support for the new visitor centres, (we can here include their outreach work as 'the like') where photography often takes centre stage; in displays, exhibitions and for activities based on modern history and experience of the quotidian

the rise of photographic interest emerged not in mainstream academic history but in community local and bottom up histories of the 1970s [...] in connection to popular histories that British historian Raphael Samuel famously articulated the work of photographs as the eye of history [...] in his theatres of memory. In this he explored the work of photographs in engaging popular historical imagination, their presence in the everyday and in numerous

²⁴⁶ Ibid. p.149

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ For a longer discussion on how Samuel came to support the now ubiquitous and popular heritage centres see 'Stranger Memories of Who We Really Are: History, The Nation and The Historian' in Sophie Scott-Brown *The Histories of Raphael Samuel: A Portrait of a People's Historian* (Canberra: Australian University Press, 2017) pp. 201-230

community projects run out of public libraries adult education classes and the like.²⁴⁹

Therefore, I take leave of the ruins of Roman occupation as a significant context to refocus on the modern, including early industrial era. Here, the development of a pre-photographic infrastructure, for the production and reception of visual media, can be discerned in images of local places and working people as circulated in community settings as well as personal homes. When literacy was not available to the majority, popular woodcut printing and lithography facilitated the emergence of an inclusive cultural transmission, including response to local environs, life and to imposed change. i.e., Alongside illustrations of secular or religious significance, centuries of visual representations of the life and work of local people (relating to farming, fishing, shipbuilding, and coal mining, later to steel making, ironworks, glassworks and engineering) precede 'documentary' response in modern media. There are useful histories, including art histories of the North East, specifically for Newcastle and its surrounds, that evidence the technical evolution of visual, as well as literary media. This can demonstrate why, and how, this region became an important centre in the development and production of printmaking, subsequently photography. The eighteenth to nineteenth century infrastructure for engraving and print workshops was already in place, established through the skills and experience brought to Northumberland, in the seventeenth Century, by the Huguenot refugees.²⁵⁰ Historian Dan Jackson enthuses on the later significance of this, as well as earlier and later developments: 'the intellectual tradition of the region is often overlooked [...] in the early modern period it was arguably the most literate part of England. Moreover, literacy and

²⁴⁹ Elizabeth Edwards *Photographs and the Practice of History: A Short Primer* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022) Introduction.

²⁵⁰ The Huguenot were escaping religious persecution at the time. Work and education, including Science, was a central feature to this culture. Many chemists settled in the region due to access to local, and (through significant maritime trade) resources necessary for innovation in arts as well as industry, further evolving at this time. These communities progressed key crafts and industries including paper mills, glass works, silk weaving, dyeing and, of particular significance, printing.

industry [...] and trade unionism, meant there was a deep respect for learning throughout Northumbrian society ²⁵¹

By the eighteenth century, Newcastle (outside of London, Oxford and Cambridge) was the largest centre of print, emerging from a strong culture of earlier oral, as well as visual traditions, through vernacular poetry and song. Jackson details the numerous (illustrated) newspapers and periodicals 'rare outside of London, Dublin or Edinburgh' as established from 1710, preceding the founding of The Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society (the 'Lit & Phil') by 1793. The technical prominence continued to build, the resources facilitating practitioners who refined and extended their use, including for visual media into the nineteenth century. Newcastle was by then an established cultural, as well as industrial centre. Visual arts were prominent, not least due to the national profile and legacy of local and prolific naturalist, engraver and printmaker, Thomas Bewick (1753 - 1828). This celebrated artist (a farmer's son with a social conscience) was well known in his lifetime and ever since. Mainly for the famous images of birds and animals, there was less attention on the bathos and pathos in his 'vignettes' of the everyday. 'Man Pissing', circa 1797 is an apposite example. ²⁵² The tailpieces (at the end of each chapter) are often irreverent, witty or sardonic scenes. ²⁵³

²⁵¹ Dan Jackson *The Northumbrians: North East England and Its People: A New History* (London: Hurst and Co., 2019) p. 66

²⁵² Since the first exhibition at the IKON gallery (Birmingham, 2009) the vignettes have attracted more attention. Contemporary artist of the quotidian, George Shaw, has noted the significance of the man (probably Bewick) as also 'pissing' onto his own shadow, 'as a jocular warning by the revered engraver to himself and others not to get too big-headed and carried away by success' George Shaw in conversation with David Whetstone, July 2022. <https://www.culturednortheast.co.uk/2022/07/31/george-shaw-and-thomas-bewick-at-cherryburn/> (accessed 2nd May 2023)

²⁵³ Dan Jackson *The Northumbrians: North East England and Its People: A New History* (London: Hurst and Co., 2019) pp.76 – 77. Jackson provides details of the surprising role of Bewick in the founding of the Newcastle 'Lit and Phil'. In 1775, in a drunken argument (after a meeting at the Newcastle Philosophical Society) Bewick had punched 'radical political thinker' Thomas Spence. It was decided a new space was needed for rationale argument, where talk of religion and politics was banned. Hence the founding and building of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society. This is still to be found, next to the equally monumental, stone-built gravitas of the central train station and The Mining Institute. Other 'Lit and Phils' in smaller towns, such as nearby North Shields, were operating by the mid-19th century, some remain an active forum for progressive thinkers, speakers, artists and poets.



Fig.46 Tailpiece vignette (known as 'Man Pissing') from *History of British Birds Volume One*, Thomas Bewick, 1797

The woodcut engraving workshops, preceding, later incorporating photography, involved teams of skilled workers, thirty of these are documented as being part of the Bewick Workshop. This 5.08cm wide vignette was drawn by Bewick and engraved (into hard boxwood) by artisan Luke Clennell, the wall has been suggested as a section of Hadrian's Wall:

not far across the Tyne from where Bewick grew up [...] There are hundreds of such scenes: boys flying kites, sailing boats on puddles, tumbling off carts; women chasing geese; men mending nets; old soldiers in unheroic rags; fishermen tangling their lines in trees. Together these scenes make a world [...] Bewick's woodcuts were far cheaper, and this made his books more widely available ²⁵⁴

As well as a concern for depicting ordinary life (as vital) and for the accessible distribution of this visual social realism, Bewick, like Murray Martin and other members and associates of Amber, was an advocate for the class from which he came. As detailed by historian Jenny Uglow, he engaged in political debate, especially lamenting the enclosure of land (and resulting displacement of

²⁵⁴ Jenny Uglow *Nature's Engraver: A Life of Thomas Bewick* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007) Prologue: xiv-xvi.

agricultural families) especially. The Bewick Workshop also produced a wide range of material (beyond the well-known books) for associations, such as the Tyne Fire Office, pubs (inns) and theatres across the region, including for Amber loci Newcastle, Tynemouth and North Shields. 'tickets for benefit concerts for grand causes such as the widows and children of sea-men, and for smaller ones, like 'the family of the Late Mr Claggett' ²⁵⁵

After his death the output and influence of Bewick's quayside workshops continued as a hub for emerging visual technologies, playing a key role in the development of print into photography as a significant part of life and work in Newcastle. By the 19th Century photography was a significant presence through small yet prolific studios and larger industrialized operations: Exemplars being Auty's of Tynemouth (opening circa 1880) credited with introducing picture postcards to Northern England. Matthew Auty specialised in local views and celebratory studio portraits, of new babies for example. Being an expensive experience, it was quite a feat for most locals to have an 'Autys'. ²⁵⁶ By the twentieth century Turners of Newcastle developed, in 1938, from a modest chemist shop to a far more accessible photography business (than the smaller town studios such as Auty's) with four large buildings in the city and several branches across the Tyneside region employing hundreds of people. Turners were processing over five million photographs a year by 1976, later focussing on film and video until eventual closure (in 1996) as digital photography became ubiquitous. The huge warehouse buildings with their environmentally imposing signage, as well as the mass employment and many photography events instigated by Turners (especially in the post war decades circa 1950 – 80) results in a significant physical as well as socio-economic presence for photography. Long before Amber emerged to ensure an ongoing, vernacular based, practice, a culture of photography was part of the fabric

²⁵⁵ Ibid. p.234

²⁵⁶ Eric Hollerton *Tynemouth in Old Picture Postcards* (Baarn: Europese Bibliotheek, 1997)

of Tyneside, part of the longer histories of visual culture resulting from interactions of place, arts, and technology.²⁵⁷

As well as productively interacting with the wider world for centuries and recovering from two world wars, including as a target for aerial bombing (of the docks and shipyards), the maritime locations, industries and related culture in this locale (as an example of many such hubs) have more recently been subject to the more destructive aspects of globalization. As seen in works from Amber, also Sekula, who visited (from an extraordinary physical and cultural distance) and included North Shields in his work on the worker experience of globalized maritime activity. He recognised, in its heritage as well as industrial precarity, a type of location and community, recoiling and responding to an escalating pace of change, also as having strong cultural histories based in worker experience. The experience on the North East coast has motivated the close engagement by Amber for over fifty years, including the ‘solidarity of mining and shipbuilding’ as important political and cultural history, rather than, as posited by Barlow, an ‘embarrassing lost utopia’.²⁵⁸ The trajectory, of Martin and Konttinen especially, from their decision to move from London to Newcastle, is central to a salient history of the collective.

A Socio-Political Ferment

Newly supported by public funding, in 1891 the Royal Polytechnic Institution in central London was reimagined and renamed as the Regent Street Polytechnic (RSP). This provided a national model for vocational, eventually progressive education, including for new and emerging technologies, including

²⁵⁷ Whilst not within the scope of this thesis a comparative study of Auty's and Turners' studios alone would raise questions on material, socio-economic and technological histories, an opportunity for further research into cultural and political history in the North East. The work of Michael Pritchard and Michelle Henning in this area (of histories and roles for British photographic industries) is useful. Also see, Steve Edwards *The Making of English Photography, Allegories* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006)

²⁵⁸ Amber also acted upon a concern for local histories and vernacular as important political and cultural heritage. As well as campaigning, successfully, against the demolition of medieval, Tudor, eighteenth and nineteenth century Newcastle quayside, Konttinen's education resource (started to raise income for the collective) 'Lantern Visual Aids' provides an eclectic archive of art and architecture, including local built environment and cultural activities.

film and photography. Despite further changes in name and status (University of Westminster since 1992) personal, professional, and academic accounts of post war education and practice in visual media continue to refer to the popular 'Regent Street Poly' as a hub for radical and critical practice. By the 1960s (based on an earlier 'vocational' photography department) the 'School of Photography' was established as one of the key sites for photography in England. Since then, notable educators and practitioners are associated as previous staff and students, for example, Jo Spence (1934- 1992), Victor Burgin (1941 -) and Karen Knorr (1954 -) ²⁵⁹ All three becoming prominent in photography, through their critical work engaged with politics and representation, emerging in the 1970s and 80s. It's not surprising that the (by now well known) facilities for film and photography, at 'the poly' circa 1968, attracted a number of politicized young people. ²⁶⁰ One student group, having worked together to produce *All You Need is Dynamite* (1968) a twenty minute film of working class youth involved in the anti-Vietnam war 'Grosvenor Square' protest, began discussions on ways in which to continue working together outside of the college. Murray Martin (1943-2007) had moved to London (from Newcastle upon Tyne) specifically to study at 'the poly', as had Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (1948 -), from Finland.

As film students Martin and Graham Denman had secured funds (from Northern Arts) to travel to Newcastle (where Martin had previously been studying fine art and film) to create footage for the short documentary film 'Maybe'. This was a project based on the iconic passenger (mainly workers) ferry crossing, for centuries, between North and South Shields on the River

²⁵⁹ The role of certain hubs of radical cultural and political activity (in further and higher education in this era) cannot be understated: As well as RSP the London School of Economics, Hornsey College of Art, The London College of Printing, Centre for Contemporary Studies, University of Birmingham and many 'Art Schools' around the country were centres of experimentation, opposition and protest. Staff and students moved on from these institutions, disseminating critical practice, establishing other departments, workshops, galleries, networks (a crucial physical infrastructure before the internet).

See Lisa Tickner *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution* (London: Frances Lincoln Publishing, 2008) See also John A. Walker *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus: 2002) pp.12-19

²⁶⁰ *The Polytechnic: Young Men's Christian Institute, 309, Regent Street, W. Syllabus and Prospectus, 1888-1889* Bishopsgate Institute; Special Collection and Archives. POL D87.3

Frederick A. McKenzie *The Regent Street Polytechnic: England's largest educational institute* Bishopsgate Institute. Special Collection and Archives. London Collection Pamphlets Box 288 D87.3

Tyne. Work on this continued at the college until, in 1969 they finally moved, with Konttinen 'against the prevailing tide' to Newcastle upon Tyne, on the North East coast of England. Martin proposed the idea of a working group, lamenting the waste of carefully built relationships, only for people to then leave to "work for the BBC or whatever", confirming that "a key idea was that it would be interesting to try for a collective practice, also to get out of London, which even then was too expensive".²⁶¹ As well as sharing Martin's ideological position in wanting to work outside of the mainstream media industry (the centre of which was London) the group responded to a pragmatic rationale, to exploit established contacts who could provide part time teaching work. Martin (during previous study at Newcastle University) and others had previously worked as part time tutors. Martin had continued as tutor and student in London too, at RSP, commenting that this excluded him from the first-year courses as he was sometimes teaching that same student group.

In Newcastle, soon joined by other like-minded associates, a film and photography collective emerged, named Amber, after a local pale ale, the popular alternative (especially for women) to the famous dark brown brew. This choice of name very much reflected the group's objective to document, through intense and personal engagement with, working class life. Newcastle Brown Ale was then considered a working-class staple that was promoted (in a highly visible way across the region as well as the city) as part of a macho culture of 'toughness' synonymous with the industrial workshop area in which, since 1868, the brewery was situated.²⁶² The choice of the Amber ale resonates with

²⁶¹ Murray Martin interviewed by Shirley Read (Oral History of British Photography - The British Library: C459/156 10.10 (2002)

²⁶² 1868 was a most significant moment in the expansion in scale of industrial infrastructure and activity on the River Tyne, manifested by the replacement of a major 17th Century stone bridge (the third iteration (1781) of the original Roman Pons Aelius 112) with a new 'state of the art' iron bridge. This involved extensive dredging to deepen the river around the bridge, allowing for much larger shipping and facilitating rapid expansion of trade and industry in and beyond Newcastle, including London due to the increased traffic in coal, to fuel the industrial era, later facilitating the building and docking of oil tankers.

The bridges of the Tyne are iconic structures, central to the cultural as well as socio economic life of the region, the quayside area an historic quarter into which Amber moved, were instrumental (in the late 1970s) in saving from demolition and are still based. See Frank Manders *Crossing the Tyne* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2001)

initial feminist as well as class concerns. The aesthetics of a North East coast in transition contributed to the decision to relocate to Newcastle Quayside. The group had considered other affordable cities, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Bristol, where the employment and lives of working-class communities were still embedded in the fabric of the particular places and vice versa. There was an awareness that the physical and cultural environment, including 'traditional industries' once driving the industrial age, was now at a pivotal moment. Increasingly powerless, rather than powerful, subject to, rather than drivers of, national and global change. Although still dominant as producers of national and international wealth, many local trades and industries were also on the cusp of imminent or longer-term change. All of this could be keenly experienced, as visibly changing environments and communities, on the North East coast. Interwoven places of work and lives were shifting, sometimes torturously, over years of strikes and reductions in workforce, sometimes brutally swift as vulnerability to global markets

Murray Martin had rejected Newcastle School of Art for the London Polytechnic, although, part of the decision to return to the North was his further rejection of methods at 'the poly' too. Martin's earlier vision was anchored in documentary photography and film of the 1920s and 1930s, rather than the contemporary methods or critical debates emerging in the art schools of Britain in the late 1960s. He very much rejected the development of photography and film as conceptual art and, although passionate about giving expression to working class lives, and about the role of art in depicting emotion, notions of more abstract representations were problematic for him. Until 1963, rather than a department in Newcastle University, the Newcastle School of Art, was part of King's College, Durham. At this time, from 1953 to 1966, radical approaches to education, art and architecture, influenced by European Modernism, the Bauhaus and abstract and conceptual art, were developed at Newcastle by lead tutors who were also major contemporary artists, Victor Passmore (1908 –

1998) and Richard Hamilton (1922 – 2011). This was the antithesis of Martin's interest in, mainly British and Soviet documentary, and social realism. In London, at 'the poly', Martin attended, then left, as the focus changed from professional technical skills to more conceptual and critical theory.²⁶³ Martin has also proposed a return to 'community life' where the collective could pursue community-based projects to document changing industries and working-class life. 'I sought to reconnect myself with the working-class culture and community which had nurtured me'²⁶⁴ This strong echo of a Griersonian approach was at the core of his personal vision from an early age. Over a series of interviews, for the British Library, he explains how, as young boy (born into the mining and pottery communities in Stoke on Trent) he would go to local cinemas, 'like an internet junkie' up to five times a week, sometimes twice a day, to experience a wide range of feature films, newsreel and documentary at The Empire or The Alhambra or The Broadway. Within two miles of his home were actually five cinemas with different programmes that changed twice a week. This habit was encouraged and facilitated by his 'tactician' mother who provided enough 'pocket money' for the cinema tickets, this to keep him in post compulsory education while his peer group were leaving school, at fourteen or fifteen years old, for the option of then still plentiful paid (and hard, dangerous) work in the shipyards and docks. In the British Library interviews Martin also recalls that 'TV didn't come in until 1953, not in the house 'til 57'. This was a crucial year in the transition of documentary film to television with the launch, in October 1957, of Grierson's 'This Wonderful World' that 'introduced audiences to international documentary in an 'inter-generic' magazine format'. Grierson and others were

²⁶³ These were developed by staff that became influential (to education and practice) such as Nicholas Garnham (1937 -) who, as a scholar of mass media established the first Media Studies BA and was the founder of the key journal 'Media, Culture and Society' with others working on media histories and politics such as James Curran (1936-). Key RSP tutor, Victor Burgin (1941-) in his teaching, writing and practice, moved towards the conceptual.

This was part of a transformative decade for arts education. Other centres of pivotal activity for photography included 'Trent/Derby' (Derby College of Higher Education and Nottingham Trent Polytechnic), and Newport, Gwent. For further on Trent /Derby and 1970s photography, including education, see Paul Hill 'How British Photography Found it's Voice' <http://www.hillonphotography.co.uk/writings.php> (accessed October 2019)

²⁶⁴ Murray Martin in *Amber Film and Photography Collective - Forever Amber: Stories from a Film and Photography Collection* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2015) p.7

moving into the new medium of television 'exploited the memory of the 1930s in order to carve out their place in the genre's history'.²⁶⁵ Martin was now able to watch at home, steeped in the aesthetics of British 1930s documentary, but also including 'all the stuff from eastern Europe', meaning 1920s experimental social realism in documentary and film, as developed by Lev Kuleshov (pioneer in montage and depiction of space), Sergei Eisenstein (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925) and Dziga Vertov (*Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929).

'This Wonderful World' ran until 1965, by which time Martin was enrolled at Newcastle School of Art, he goes on to explain that, as well as his earlier exposure to hours and hours of film in the cinemas, it was his excitement at the discovery of Grierson, on television, that inspired him, as a student at Newcastle, to start a Film course, becoming a tutor, he points out, of Art History as well as Film, whilst still a student. The significance of Martin's delight in the discovery of 'This Wonderful World' is key to understanding his defence, not always academically critical, of Amber's core principle. Based on the historian R G Collingwood's (1889 – 1943) vision of the artist as speaking for and with the community remains central.²⁶⁶ There is an element of contradiction in Martin's rejection of the critical developments reinvigorating post war arts education, as these chime with Amber's position and activism, that was to address issues of race and gender as well as class, also as insisting on accessibility to academic education for all, including those previously 'destined' for vocational study. Other contradictory statements, for example on how images of the working class were not 'fashionable' in the 1960s and 70s (despite this being the height of success for British social realism through 'kitchen sink' theatre, film, and photography projects) are as disappointing (in the tone and language used) as his assertion that 'much fine art is mumbo jumbo, still is'.²⁶⁷ Martin was committed to the depiction of the reality of experience (even if through

²⁶⁵ Jo Fox 'From Documentary Film to Television Documentaries; John Grierson and This Wonderful World' in *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10.3 p.74 (2013)

²⁶⁶ Collingwood's *Principles of Art* (1938) evidences the influence of John Ruskin, connected through Collingwood's artist father being close to Ruskin for some years. Many Amber publications and interviews, not just by Martin, cite Collingwood's vision as key to their own.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Shirley Read . Oral History of British Photography - The British Library C45 9/156 10.10 (2002)

innovative methods). As a tutor he persuaded students at Newcastle to learn how to make films through engaging directly with equipment (rather than theory or training manuals) and to use their own experience of daily life as subject e.g., on 'trips to the fish and chip shop'. He had himself acquired an 8mm camera and was self-taught in technical knowledge. A background and continued engagement with community theatre workshops also contributed to what became a key factor for the ethos and style of Amber.²⁶⁸ He describes how the Fine Art department were getting 'fed up with us stealing all their students' and how students from other colleges had begun to attend the 'hands on' film sessions. As expressed during the British Library interviews, feeling that he was outgrowing the situation, Martin decided to look for further (technical) training for himself, citing the Royal College of Art and the National Film School in London as possibilities. He had decided upon Regent Street Polytechnic as 'the poly was the only one with a technical course, one thing I didn't want, or need was ideas'.²⁶⁹ Meeting with photographer Konttinen was a highly fortuitous development, through her personal vision and practice, photography became as central as film, to the founding and subsequent work of the collective over the next fifty years. Without Konttinen also moving from London to Newcastle Amber would have started out, at least, as another film workshop. The immediate start (in 1969) for the long durational community project 'Byker' arguably establishes the rationale and identity of the group. From the start it has been the combination of film and photography and oral history that has been significant and accessible.²⁷⁰

Yet, despite an established profile, since circa 1980, in the history and study of British documentary film, it was not until two decades later that Amber, as a

²⁶⁸ As well as facilitating a crucial relationship with Channel 4's commissioning editor when the new 'arts' channel was launched in the early 1980s

²⁶⁹ Interview with Shirley Read Oral History of British Photography - The British Library C45 9/156 10.10 (2002)

²⁷⁰ Konttinen established a comprehensive collection of visual culture for educational use (Lambton Visual Aids) Photography also instigated the Amber collection of international documentary, including historical and contemporary work, from August Sander (early 20th Century Germany) to Shahidul Alam (21st Century Bangladesh).

developmental site of socially engaged photographic practice, began to emerge in major exhibitions and catalogues of neglected British post war social realism, e.g. In *How We Are: Photographing Britain - From the 1840 to the Present* (Tate Britain, 2007) incredibly, the first exhibition dedicated to photography in the hundred-year history of this national gallery, curated by prolific writers on photography Susan Bright and Val Williams. Also, in *No Such Thing as Society: Photography in Britain* (1967–87) featuring works from the British Council and the Arts Council Collections, curated by David A. Mellor. In 2008 this now widely cited exhibition toured Britain, including Leeds and Newcastle, before moving on to Poland and Sweden, contributing to the revisiting of much marginalized realism.

Mellor's work on the social documentary of this time, as 'visions of abraded catastrophe' is discussed, (by Alice Compton) in context of other exhibitions, and practitioners, of social documentary, as having a 'focus on the 'disturbing' state of abject social and economic despair responding to governmental forms of creative destruction'.²⁷¹ However, 'the group have much preferred the term "celebratory" ' and (referring to films on shipbuilding as an example) 'felt that the working class achievement under review had not been recorded in a sufficiently celebratory way'.²⁷² Margaret Dickenson's key text (for post war independent film) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90* appeared in 1999. Dickenson, herself a protagonist of radical film in the 1970s and 80s, provides details on the interaction between Amber's collaborative agenda, and application of that over many years, thus providing one of the few accounts to situate them in the wider network of oppositional practice at the time. This included an extensive interview (recorded in 1995)

²⁷¹ Alice Compton 'Waste of a Nation: Photography, Abjection and Crisis in Thatcher's Britain' (Unpublished doctoral thesis) University of Sussex. 2016

²⁷² Murray Martin quoted in James Leggott *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020) p.43 and p.64

N.b. The celebratory element of the Amber's photographic projects continued to be overlooked until they themselves began to more overtly and repeatedly foreground this, and the misperception of their work, via their own publications and online histories. 'The way I feel about people is in the pictures, all the work I have done, you could say is a celebration' Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen Tateshots, 2016 <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/sirkka-liisa-konttinen-9246/sirkka-liisa-konttinen-you-always-reveal-yourself-pictures> (accessed 1st March 2019)

with Martin as a 'spokesperson' and the first chronological account of their work, albeit just a briefly annotated list of films with no mention of the significant role of photography in creating these, or of separate and related photography projects. Even so, Amber's profile is importantly positioned by Dickenson, as they are presented (in the section Oral Histories) with critically recognized groups such as Liberation Films, Cinema Action, and Black Audio Film Collective who mobilised film to engender political socio-political debate.²⁷³ This situates Amber as part of an avant-garde that was to eventually exert an influence within the British media, reflecting and contributing to changing practice and attitudes.

In the discussion with Dickenson, Martin had lamented the perception, and dismissal (in critical writing) of Amber's work as nostalgic and romantic, elements that he defended as accessible.²⁷⁴ This was also noted by film scholar Annabelle Honess Roe in her 2007 analysis of 'Byker' (the film). However, Roe insists 'that there is also a way to read Amber's films [...] as oppositional and political contestations'²⁷⁵ I would argue that the lyrical, rather than 'just' sentimental, tone in the photographs, as well as films, supports an affective aesthetic. This results in these works constituting a mediated realism, as well as a poetics of Tyneside, through detailed engagement with specific areas, sites, and with working class life. Therefore, a contemporary relevance is retained. Together with Amber's *Ellin Hare*, in discussion with Neil Young (film critic and programmer), Martin again addresses negative perceptions of the work as 'romantic', explaining how they worked together with local drift miners:

this is frightening and dangerous. The men read the script and said, look, if we felt that we wouldn't be miners – we could be farmers [...] We

²⁷³ 'We have a small 53 seat cinema designed when [...] a debate based film culture was fashionable. It was designed around that idea, as was *Four Corners* and the one in Nottingham'. Murray Martin questioned on the opening of Side Cinema and Gallery. Margaret Dickenson (ed.) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90* (London: British Film Institute, 1999) p.253

²⁷⁴ 'we wouldn't apologise for that. Because we would say that nostalgia is experiences held in affection and we think there's nothing wrong with that' Murray Martin questioned on Amber's aesthetic. *Ibid.* p.254

²⁷⁵ Annabelle Honess-Roe 'Spatial Contestation and Loss of place in Amber's *Byker*' *Journal of British Cinema and television* 4.2.307 2007 pp. 307-321

have this view of ourselves as challenging the earth (our terms, not theirs, but that's the way they saw it) [...] and the satisfaction is actually in achieving that task [...] Their vision of themselves was a romantic one, by outsiders' standards, and the question you have to ask yourself is whether it's your job to represent people's view of themselves, of how they see the world and want to be represented, or do you retain the right to see it you see fit, which is only your view, after all. We've always felt that you have to take into account people's vision of themselves ²⁷⁶

Despite the group's self-description as 'a film and photography practice' the longer focus on film has influenced the perception of Amber as a subject situated, and much analysed, in film studies. It has been the films (rather than the photography) of Amber that has long garnered the most critical attention, especially through the years of interviews with impassioned and articulate filmmaker Martin. More recently, in 2017, *Towards Other Cinemas: A Critical Re-assessment of 1970s Independent Film and Video* was curated (in partnership with independent film agency LUX, at the Whitechapel Gallery, London) by Laura Mulvey, Sue Clayton and Claire M. Holdsworth. ²⁷⁷ The first section of the event 'Activated Spaces: Representing 1970s radical politics – and the new politics of representation' was to explore 'counter-documenting' and began with a rare London screening of *Last Shift* (Amber Films, 1976). This short film, for which Amber worked with a small, recently made redundant, workforce to document their last shift at a traditional brickworks, is a seventeen minute, 16mm colour film that combines a sophisticated abstraction with social realism. The collectively written programme notes describe

a small self-contained operation housed in an ancient collection of buildings in Swalwell-on-Tyne, where a handful of men produced high quality refractory bricks in a process untouched by the industrial revolution [...] The brickworks having just closed and the owners either unaware or unconcerned. Amber employed the workers for a further week so that the processes could be documented. ²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Neil Young 'Forever Amber: An interview with Ellin Hare and Murray Martin of the Amber Film Collective' *Critical Quarterly* 43.4 December (2001) pp. 61-80. See also the insightful essay from Young, as a local son of a pit worker, 'A Culture Preserved in Amber – H'away Amber, North East England's Finest Film Collective!' *Sight and Sound* (London: British Film Institute Digital Edition) 2018 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/culture-preserved-amber> (accessed May 2021). Young points out that Amber actually worked closely for over a decade with the miners and communities of the East Durham coalfield area of Easington.

²⁷⁷ Nb. LUX was a merger of the resources of the previous London Filmmakers Co-Operative and London Video Artists/London Electronic Arts, representing fifty years of independent practice. In 1997 LUX housed in a purpose built building, The LUX Centre in Hoxton Square, London N1 until being priced out of the area.



Fig.47 Film frames from *The Last Shift* Amber Films, 1976

As is the case in foundries, forges and glassworks, until more recent mechanical and digital developments, the brickworks involved a process, requiring the long-term honing of skills, unchanged for centuries. Men and horses, by necessity strong until they no longer were, shared back breaking labour in heat and dust to produce beautiful and enduring materials by hand. This literally was a last shift, the workers collaborating with Amber in the planning and making of the film (as was always the case, Amber paying for a few more days salary, after a workshop or factory was closed, to continue the work, to make the film. The film starts with a heart-breaking scene where the men (just men, as this was a predominately white working-class male dominated environment) discuss the ominous future of the long-suffering horse. Obviously loved as well as made to work hard, its every sinew strained in resistance to pulling the next heavy load coming into view. Their own future is

²⁷⁸ <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/events/towards-other-cinemas/> Programme and notes (accessed June 20th 2023)

precarious, their present has been suddenly ended. Their inherited masculinity as well as skilled work and livelihood is threatened and negated in every way. At the Whitechapel event, Clayton, in discussion with Steve Presence (of the Radical Film Network) foregrounded the work as one of 'close and intimate' collaboration, also situating the work as employing visual aesthetics as a radical form.²⁷⁸ Amber created a multifaceted critique, employing this radical visual as well as political strategy. As can be discerned in subsequent analyses, the 'critical re-assessment' by Mulvey et al moved beyond the preceding approaches to the Amber film documentaries. Foregrounding the techniques employed to shift focus, where the form repositions the content to allow for more conceptual and affective readings of the wider socio-political and personal contexts. This results in the possibility to discern an affective (including emotional) and thus participatory viewing experience, including for the photo-films where still images are used, via innovative editing transitions to construct short, yet arresting films.²⁷⁹ 'Last Shift' is one of a collection of Amber films, curated as The Tyne Documentaries, that also includes 'Launch' (1974) and 'Glassworks' (1977). These accompany and are extensions of long-term photography projects and are included (in the case of 'Launch') or emerge from (in the case of the latter two) from the first major, photography based, 'River Project', some of which will be analysed in this first chapter.

However, Bertrand is one of the first to critically engage with the photography of Amber (in the context of British radical practice in documentary and community photography) in a sustained and scholarly way.²⁸⁰ In her 2013

²⁷⁹ My discussion of *Last Shift*, like much other material of Amber repurposed for chapter one of this thesis, was presented at 'The Left Conference (Film and Photography on The Left)' Lisbon, in 2017 and 2018. A version of my paper, on 'Amber and Poetic Realism', has also been delivered and discussed in London (Ph Photography Network workshops) and was available online 2017 -2019.

²⁸⁰ One of many examples from Bertrand's work on British photography: Mathilde Bertrand. 'The Half Moon Photography Workshop and Camerawork: Catalysts in the British Photographic Landscape (1972-1985)' *Photography and Culture*, 11.3 2018 pp 239-259 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17514517.2018.1465649> (accessed June 1st 2023)

Relevant talks from Bertrand include *Radical Visions: The Cultural Politics of Camerawork 1972-85* at Birkbeck Cinema, University of London, 2018. This was to compliment the exhibition *Radical Visions* at Four Corners London. The Birkbeck event was chaired by the Photography History and Research Centre (Directors: Patrizia

paper, on post World War Two documentary in England, Amber photographers (specifically Konttinen, Chris Killip and Graham Smith) are situated with others such as Daniel Meadows, Tony Ray -Jones and Don McCullin. Importantly, as well as offering proposals on how and why (socially and politically) there was a 'predominance' of documentary at this time, Bertrand extends the significance:

The question of the representation of the English people in documentary photography during the seventies is a prism through which it is possible to study the evolution of the cultural and intellectual field as well as the critical questioning of the approach of photographic representation itself.²⁸¹

In this rare art historical analysis of Amber, she has recovered the photography work, including in reference to feminist practice, as integral and important. The notion of exploring the wider intellectual area through such work is a crucial point and supports my own interest in the role of documentary photography in terms of philosophy. More specifically, through critical argument, as framed by Rancière, his work on equality, aesthetics and politics and therefore provides a robust element of rationale. Meanwhile, the first book on Amber, *Forever Amber: Stories from a Film and Photography Collection*, was self-published by Amber Side in 2015. Despite Bertrand's extensive research on 'photography and the condition of Britain'²⁸² which has situated the photography of Amber into academic histories of independent and radical practice in British documentary; and despite over fifty years of continuous activity by Amber, with a rising profile in national and international exhibitions, the first academic book devoted to the group has just (in 2020) been published. Again, there is a focus

Di Bello and Steve Edwards) in the School of Arts, and co-ordinated by myself as staff and PhD candidate at Birkbeck at the time.

As part of another public output for my research, I had recently spent some time as a volunteer on the Four Corners Archive project (underway after a successful first round of funding) producing an initial research guide (bibliography and related organizations) as well as oral histories (with Chris Steele Perkins and Joanne O'Brien) working with Ruby Rees Sheridan) and feedback on the emerging website research facility. As organized by staff at Four Corners, participants from Camerawork and Half Moon Photography Workshop, working in the 1970s and 80s, were a core part of the symposium. <https://vimeo.com/277895314>

²⁸¹ Mathilde Bertrand 'The English Seen: The Representation of The People in Documentary Photography in England 1966-79' in *Imaginaires: The Representation of The People, Vol.2 Xavier Guidicelli and Gilles Sambras (Reims: Reims University Press, 2013) p.1*

²⁸² 'Photography and the Condition of Britain' was the title of Bertrand's contribution to the 'Photography and Britishness' conference (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Newhaven November 2016). She changed the title to better reflect the focus of her research: 'The Photographic Archive of the Community Developments Projects, 1969-1978'. The title page image is most apposite: *Early Morning Shift at Swan Hunters Ship Repair Factory, North Shields, 1976*, North Shields CDP by Ken Grint. This choice of image provides useful functional comparison to the more lyrical work of Amber and Killip.

on the corpus of film, because *In Fading Light: The Films of The Amber Collective* is written by James Leggott, as previously mentioned, a scholar of television and film. Named after one of their most critically acclaimed full length works (*In Fading Light*, 1989) This book expands on Amber's own first comprehensive booklet *A Short History* (Circa 2006) and book *Forever Amber* (2015)²⁸³ as well as the aforementioned foundational papers e.g., from Newbury and Honess-Roe, and the many Amber interviews now online. As reviewed by Leuan Franklin who notes a somewhat limiting chronological approach and focus on film, also an important absence: Given the collaborative nature of their work and citing of R.G. Collingwood's 1938 *Principles of Art*, where audience is central, and the artist must be 'a spokesman' (sic) of the community as an inspiration. Leuan explains:

the book is very insightful in terms of its textual analysis of Amber's output – which is bookended by scrupulous research and historiography – one thing which did feel somewhat lacking was a sense of the reception of the films by audiences and critics. How, and to what extent, did the output resonate?'²⁸⁴

Before discussing the work of Konttinen I will now provide an analysis of the aforementioned earlier (film) work of collective authorship which, as Martin has discussed with Darren Newbury, developed by using photography projects to build rapport with participants as well as these contributing to formal elements.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ *Amber: A Short History* (Booklet 2006 Provided with the purchase of DVDs at the Side Gallery,) pp.5. *Forever Amber: Stories from a Film and Photography Collection* (Newcastle: Amber Side, 2015). A fully illustrated chronological account. Detailed information is provided from their archival records e.g., significant dates, full and associate memberships, funding, contexts for the making of work. However, there is no contextualizing academic content.

This is not a fault, the book, through facts, figures, and selection of images, imparts social and political insights. See also O'Reilly 'I will Survive: Forty Years of Amber Films and the Evolution of Regional Film Policy' in *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Network* 1:2 2009

²⁸⁴ Leuan Franklin 'James Leggott, 'In Fading Light: The Films of The Amber Collective' Review in *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 18. 2 pp. 255-258, (<https://doi.org/10.3366/jbctv.2021.0571>)

²⁸⁵ Photography was also used, as discussed by Amber, as a 'way in' for film projects, to develop a rapport and visual method of research as to be developed with participants. Daniel Meadows, Mark Neville and Tiffany Fairey among others have since discussed working with this approach in community based, especially long durational, documentary projects.

Class Acts: Bodies, skills and identities.

My analysis of *Glassworks* (1977) provides a most pertinent example of participatory work emerging from such rapport, this work is situated in two sets of short 16mm films that Amber have digitised and curated as *The Tyne Documentaries*.²⁸⁶ Many of these films emerge from and compliment the long-term photo projects made in the same areas over the preceding years, setting out to capture the focussed sensibility and rigour of skilled industrial and artisanal work as it was closed down. Despite ending a physical, economic and cultural presence for decades, sometimes centuries, the latest imposed changes happened quite rapidly. In terms of the many traditional work environments involved Leggott acknowledges Darren Newbury as having coined the term ‘the ‘salvage documentaries’ that were made during the 1970s as a decade of loss. This also heralded a particular change of direction for an already much manipulated and exploited landscape, where glass had been produced for over two hundred years. The site is Lemington which, like much of industrial North Tyneside, west of Newcastle, is now a largely residential area. The vernacular is increasingly of cost saving ‘value engineering’, as applied to retail structures that punctuate developer’s estates that are mostly car dependent. Previously there were many river communities until a section of the River Tyne was redirected in the 19th Century to allow development, involving dredging and clearing for what is now the deep-water Port of Tyne.²⁸⁷ Change has been imposed here for some time.

Although the one-word title is straightforward, on the DVD case cover Amber’s three-line description for *Glassworks* indicates a lyrical piece, a tribute as well as lament for a particular environment. ‘A wordless record of the

²⁸⁶ See *The Tyne Documentaries* DVD (2008) 102 minutes comprising - *Launch* 1973, *Bowes Line* (197), *Last Shift* (1976) *Glassworks* (1977) and special feature *Making The Tyne Documentaries*, 2007. Also, *The Tyne Documentaries 2* (DVD (2011) 85 minutes comprising - *Maybe* (1969) *Wallsend 72* (1972) *High Row* (1973) *6 To Midnight* (1974) and *Quayside* (1979).

²⁸⁷ Leona Skelton *Tyne after Tyne An Environmental History of A River’s Battle for Protection* (Newcastle: University of Northumbria, 2018) pp.15-24

extraordinary, measured ballet of an industrial glassblowing works at Lemington'.²⁸⁸

At first the realism of the film seems quite literal, mainly due to the unmediated soundtrack of the machines and labour underway. Meanwhile, echoing the discussion at 'Towards Other Cinemas' (the 2017 event at the Whitechapel Gallery involving the Radical Cinema Network (that I refer to in my introduction)) Leggott reiterates how the 'visual abstraction' of *Glassworks* is achieved 'through its invitation to the viewer to marvel at the co-ordination and breathing skills on display' He goes on to discuss how Amber's technique 'establishes an editing rhythm [...] that has as much an experiential as narrative impact'²⁸⁹

Glassworks is analysed here as demonstrating a merger of politics and aesthetics, meaning both visual, and in the Ranciérian sense, conscious sensibility. As well as offering a twenty-minute documentation of industry *Glassworks* evidences the trajectory of empathetic interaction through formal experiment. This developed further in Amber's later works, particularly the 'magic realism' of the film *Dream On* (1991) and particularly Konttinen's more abstracted realism working with traces and fragments of previous industry on the beaches of Tyneside, in *Writing in the Sand* (photo-film 1991), *The Coal Coast* (exhibition and book 2003) and *Song For Billy* (photo-film 2017) all of which are eco-critical works responding to changed and changing environments. Even a brief analysis of the performative *Glassworks*, through the formal devices in play, a political as well visual complexity is conveyed. We are able to perceive, through the lens of Sekula, what is revealed and what is submerged in what is ostensibly a short documentation of a glass making workshop. Based on aspects of a collaborative process that moves towards a finale of a dangerous smelting pot change 'the pot being placed in the furnace;

²⁸⁸ *Glassworks* Amber Films. DVD cover text. The work sites are identified as Glass Tubes and Components Ltd. and clay kiln makers Joe McCarthy & Sons in *Amber Film and Photography Collective - Forever Amber: Stories from a Film and Photography Collection* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2015) p.19

²⁸⁹ James Leggott *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020) p.75

the sight of a large group of men heaving out a massive refractory piece [...] being the embodiment of collectivity, might, achievement and spectacle'.²⁹⁰

As well as this masculine, corporeal element a crucial participatory factor is that the key issue of aesthetic experience is manifest through the agency of the camera: it is not neutral, and by default the filmmakers are not just observers, the filmed are not just the observed. The relationship with the careful, skilled activities of the glassmakers and the visual devices in play, the positioning of the camera and editing aspires to create agency for the subject participants. For example, the camera is often looking down and around to convey the choreography at work (Amber's 'measured ballet') that is demonstrated by the physical participation of the moving camera, ergo the filmmakers too. Importantly this is juxtaposed with intimate close ups of gesture, particularly skilled hands at work, that evidence the dexterity, highly practiced, highly artisanal movement of the workers. This has taken years and years in a tradition of education and development as being central to work. Ten to fifteen-year apprenticeships result in what is sometimes called, in the relevant workplaces, 'muscle memory', this is actually a physiological training of the brain to work with the body, developing the techniques of skilled labour that is not always recognized as such.

²⁹⁰ James Leggott *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020) p.75

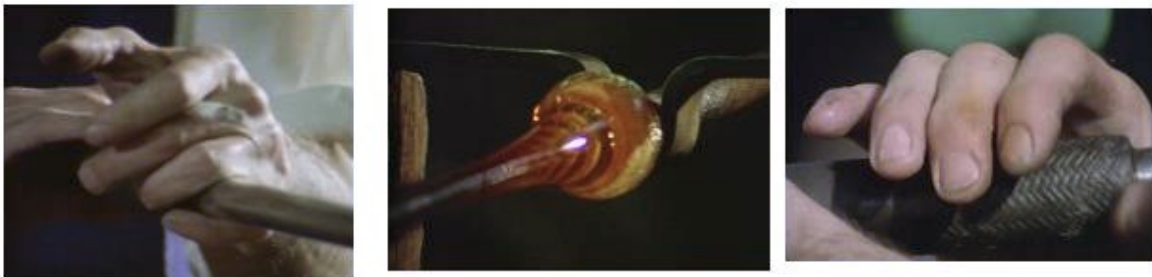


Fig.48 Film frames from the film *Glassworks*, 1977 Amber Films

I am the Cine-Eye, I am a mechanical eye, I, a machine show you the world as only I see it [...] I am in constant motion, I draw near, then away from objects, I crawl under, I climb onto them [...] My path leads to the creation of fresh perception of the world ²⁹¹

In a discussion on the relevance of *Glassworks* as a case study, the editing techniques, for films of workers at work, in Soviet filmmaking is evoked by film historian David Parkinson

Vertov and his co-editor, Elizaveta Svilova, used prismatic lenses, dissolves, multiple superimpositions, split screens, tints, animation, microcinematography and staccato editing, thus disregarding reality and entering the realm of cine-poetry in order to show both the spirit of the Revolution and the vital role of cinema within it ²⁹²

Amber certainly used some of these techniques across their work, albeit not all at once, to create mediated rather than discarded realism This is not surprising,

²⁹¹ Dziga Vertov, "The Council of Three (1923)," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley/LA, London: The University of California Press, 1984), pp.14–21

²⁹² David Parkinson *History of Film*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) p.72. I refer here to a 2018 telephone discussion with artist and filmmaker Tracy Drew.

given, as previously discussed, Martin's multiple references to the work of Serge Eisenstein and Vertov of which Martin was a student, teacher and self-confessed fan.



Fig. 49 Film frames from the film *Glassworks*, 1977 Amber Films, with *Vulcans Forge* Velasquez (1630) Top Right

A less expected reference to the Roman world is to suggest that the 1970s glassworkers can also recall the surprised figures in *Vulcan's Forge* (also known as *Apollo in the Forge of Vulcan*) (1630) by the Spanish artist Diego Velasquez.²⁹³ An analogy is made between the poise of 'sudden realization' by

²⁹³ Referring back to my introduction, Barlow was wrong to disconnect the twentieth century industrial life from the longer labour histories in play in this particular region. Considering the *Longue Durée*, centuries of glass and metal production can be traced in this area of much Roman occupation and history.

'Vulcan (like the ancient Greek counterpart Hephaestus) as the Roman god of fire (including metalwork and then key technology of the forge) was worshipped to encourage his supportive, rather than destructive use of fire, the success of the hearth or forge and to mitigate effects the high summer fires (destructive to crops if not homes and lives of Southern Europe or volcanic eruption'. *Velasquez October 28th – February 15th 2015* (Vienna: Kunst Historisches Museum Wien, 2014) pp.301-302. Exhibition catalogue. In the Velasquez painting Vulcan is in the form of a human form blacksmith.

Vulcan, as Apollo brings news of marital betrayal, and the stance of a younger glassworker, as the only one to look into the camera.

It is as if he undergoes a moment of revelation or realization that reveals systems of power are connected to the gaze of the camera [...] that the industrial process, and the masculinity being performed by the workers all around him, is suddenly outdated.²⁹⁴

Where did these young apprentices go when the colmines and shipyards and workshops were closed down? A few years later, in the 1980s and into the 1990s the area was blighted by unemployment. Disaffected youth erupted in 1991 at the notorious Meadow Well Estate riots, a sprawling suburb built on land outside of North Shields. The cinematography and editing of *Glassworks* reflect the grace and gravitas of the workshop through the focus on movement. Thus, through a conscious interaction between the subject (the work), the camera and the filmmakers, the glassworkers of the River Tyne (an icon of the North, also of industrial river environments and cultures) are also empowered by the agency of camera, even as they are disenfranchised by the ideology of a hostile Government based in London and the new, increasingly automated productions of multinationals who could find somewhere else to exploit cheaper labour. Meanwhile in the hands of Amber the camera as 'mechanical eye' draws us in to participate in a 'fresh perception of the world'. Velaquez's large scale history painting is known for evidencing the artist's aim to convey human experience rather than 'devotional questions'. The main subject is emotion 'an immediate response to the local context' using the depiction of semi-nude figures to 'transform the entire body, not just the face and hands) into a bearer of emotions'²⁹⁵ Amber's Murray Martin has employed his art historical knowledge and Amber, as previously discussed, have

²⁹⁴ Tracy Drew, in conversation with Liz Drew, London 2017. From an expanded appraisal and analysis sent after our discussion. With thanks for the 'counterpoise' image in reference to Velasquez and her professional and academically experienced comments on aspects of the editing.

²⁹⁵ Javier Portus et al *Velasquez* (London: National Gallery, 2006) pp.154

defended romanticism as a valid element in their work, *Glassworks* particularly demonstrates, through its complex realism in the context of working life, as posited by Elizabeth Edwards, the legitimate role for feelings in preserving what will soon be the past.

Contemporaneous with the film, a more direct reference to Velazquez in the unlikely context of an industrial documentary in the North, is the very relevant work of Janine Weidel. Known for her work documenting the Black Power movement in North America before moving to England in 1970. Long durational projects included work at the Greenham Common Women's Camp and a five- year project with Irish travellers. In the 1970s Weidel comprehensively documented industry in the West Midlands, sometimes living out of a camper van (with a dark room) and with a bursary from West Midlands Arts to be near the communities involved. This resulted in a critically successful exhibition at The Photographer's Gallery in 1979 with the catalogue *Vulcan's Forge*. The West Midlands were as targeted, by neo-liberal agendas, as the North East and suffering the same blows.

A region that was home to thousands of businesses – from potteries and jewelers to coal mines, steel and iron works – was in steep decline; underinvestment over many decades in both premises and machinery had created a depressing situation where once world-leading businesses were no longer competitive internationally and facing a grim future. Janine realised that this was a critical turning point in Britain's industrial history and she set out to document the workers [...] She was given remarkable access by the factories and was welcomed by the workforce, who greatly appreciated her interest in recording not just their daily work routines but also the bonding and social interaction that was so important in often grim factory environments.²⁹⁶

Despite the familiar territory and rationale, Weidel's work is visually in more in keeping with that of Daniel Meadows than that of Amber. Even in the busy working environment these are sometimes intimate portraits, made close up, with a sense of a more personal rather than poetic gaze. The result is a body of work that compliments Amber's corpus, also resonating with some of Neville's 'tableux'.

²⁹⁶ *Vulcan's Forge*. Press Release and sales text from Bluecoat Press, that specialises in British social documentary. In April 2024 Bluecoat re- published *Vulcan's Forge* with 'new insights from the past 45 years.



Fig.50 'Jimmy, Smith's Drop Forging Company, Aston, Birmingham' Janine Weidel, Photograph, 1977



Fig.51 'Maker of small chains, Eliza Tinsley Cradley Heath' Janine Weidel, Photograph, 1977



Fig.52 'Florence Allen, gilding using her "secret brew", Turner & Simpson, Birmingham' Janine Weidel, Photograph, 1977

'Elites are stupider than need be. Everyone else is smarter than allowed to be'.²⁹⁹ Simultaneously raising a smile and blood boiling, this astute and incisive statement from Sekula is demonstrated through his own long engagements with local sites and workers: From 'Fish Story' (1988-1995) , comprised of multiple works and exhibitions on maritime labour on and off shore (from the docks of Warsaw to California, from South Korea to North Tyneside) to his late, unfinished project 'The Dockers' Museum', a dynamic archive of ephemera, evidence and curation, referring to the entirety of maritime culture as a site of global, local and personal gain and loss.

Often absent, obscured, or incidental, sometimes central, mostly at work on specific tasks, and occasionally dwarfed by some hulking industrial apparatus, the subjects include welders, dockers, market traders, scavengers, rescue workers and fishermen, as well as the unemployed, children and families. Sekula here offers a model of photographic visibility that, by recognising its own inescapable inadequacy, thereby strives to be adequate to the magnitude and complexity of the subject at hand.³⁰⁰

A Sekulian framing facilitates a corresponding view of Amber's 'River Project' film, *Launch*. Unlike the brick and glassworkers (even just their hands fill the screen at times) here the streetscapes and wide angles result in the people (ship workers and the community) being marginalised in scale by the ship they have built. This will soon be gone, and others built elsewhere. Until mass demolition (as documented by Kontinen and Killip) the terraced streets of workers' homes in Wallsend slope down to the emblematic shipyard, Swan Hunter. By the 1960s the ships under construction were oil tankers, rising up as work progressed, the view of the river and the wider world into which they would sail, was gradually obscured until the dramatic launch days that were central to the community calendar of events.

²⁹⁹ Text from a sample of Ship of Fools/Dockers' Museum project in: *Allan Sekula: Ship of Fools/Dockers' Museum* Hilde Van Gelder (ed.) Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015). This book also offers useful detailed description and critique of the complex 'Fish Story', seven chapters of twenty-six text panels, two slide projections and one hundred and five colour photographs.



Fig.53 Film frame from the film *Launch* 1977 Amber Films

The cumulative effect of the visual devices used in *Launch* provides a different register. They have lost control to the monolithic, the short film is meant to be celebratory, the result is not. The place, the homes and streets, as well as lives are also marginalised by the machine, the giant vessel World Unicorn, an oil and chemical tanker with a deadweight of 256,632 tons, now reported as destroyed or lost, also in the wider sense. The hostile presence of globalized labour and production is more tangible here, albeit almost disguised by the hypnotic images that juxtapose various realities. Rather than Romanticism (with which *Launch*, rather than *Glassworks*, is often associated), as well as the tribute (as intended by Amber, to the achievement of the shipbuilders) I mainly discern the further threat of imminent, imposed change and a metaphor for the ecological threat, as facilitated by these imposing vessels. The tankers dominate, visually and existentially, in the global context from which they are commissioned and into which they will sail. Newbury's key research paper, that includes an oft cited interview with Martin,

'Fish Story' was previously described thus by Lippard 'Striking workers, fishmongers [...] detailed views of tools and technology, shutdown shipyards and industrial seascapes constitute the maritime epic [...] even as the power of place is diminished or lost, it continues – as an absence – to define culture and identity' Lippard (*Lure of the Local*, 1997) p.20. See also the related film essay 'The Forgotten Space' (2010, Directors: Allan Sekula and Noel Burch).

³⁰⁰ Bill Roberts, 'Production in View: Allan Sekula's *Fish Story* and the Thawing of Postmodernism', in *Tate Papers no. 18*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/18/production-in-view-allan-sekulas-fish-story-and-the-thawing-of-postmodernism> (accessed 20 June 2020)

features one of Konttinen's River Project photographs, also named *Launch* (featuring yet another looming oil tanker) to illustrate the point: 'The scale of these industries lent a kind of monumental identity to working class life' Newbury goes on to discuss the film with Martin who describes how Konttinen, Peter Roberts and himself came across the tanker on a drive to the Wallsend shipyard. How they wanted to make a celebratory film, also how it was rather received, when shown on German television as political, a lament 'because it showed how impoverished British shipyards were, and they realised it couldn't last'. Also, on another level as the German audience noted how the 'dignitaries' invited to launch the ship (by smashing the obligatory magnum of champagne (on a rope) into the bow) were transported to the scene via a red carpeted covered walkway 'the people that built it, the works, are excluded, they have to stand behind the wall, outside of the shipyard'. Murray agrees when Newbury suggest they were working with a cultural 'sense of class'.³⁰¹ The River Project is an example of Amber going to great lengths to create a body of work with multiple perspectives, a constitutive poetics of Tyneside.

Counterpoise: Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen – Witness and Activism in the Community



Fig.54 *River Project: Wallsend, 1974* Photograph, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, 1974

³⁰¹ Darren Newbury 'Documentary Practice and Working-Class Culture: An Interview with Murray Martin (Amber Films and Side Photographic Gallery)' in *Visual Studies* Vol.17 No.2 (2002) pp. 113-128

The children are playing by the shipyard, they seem delighted to have transgressed the barbed wire security fence (such as it was) and to get nearer to ship, which is framed to look as if it too could breach the wire, released by the children, not away into the sea, onto the global stage through the ports of Lisbon or Shanghai or Odesa, but into their familiar streets and lives. Their ownership of the situation is also reflected in their participation in the image, offering their pleased sense of achievement, smiling at the prospect of photographic evidence. Only one young boy is not smiling, he looks away, perched on a post as the lookout perhaps, precariously clinging on, he is an obvious metaphor. As are the workers in the background, they look tiny, atop a remaining scaffold, against the mass of the nearly completed oil tanker. By 1994 the shipyards (and related employment) as well as adjacent streets would be long gone, although almost certainly not in the memories of these, by then, young adults living wherever, for better or worse, they were dispersed to.



Fig.55 *Mojdeh Gareb with daughters Sogand and Samen Zendeeroh, from Iran, 2006* From the photobook *Byker Revisited: Portrait of a Community*, 2009
Photograph Sirkka-Liisa Kontinen, 2006

These two young girls and their mother also look happy, gesturing to themselves and the traditional homely scene in a Byker property. A Christmas tree, cards and decorations neatly arranged along with a Union Jack flag and small yet prominently placed crucifix. In between the two sisters, on a dining table and next to a box of 'Family Circle' biscuits (a popular and inexpensive brand) and a glass vase of colourful silk flowers, is a silver framed, formal but friendly photograph of a man in a suit. He also looks Iranian and of an age that means he could be their father, absent in person but present in the family composition. The interior view is more typical of Konttinen's later work, new devices are employed to convey possible circumstance and mood, now, as she has discussed, street photography is less possible. Writing in *Byker Revisited: Portrait of a Community* (from here on *Byker Revisited*) Konttinen recounts her return to the Byker estate in 2003 'I no longer remember where I left my exhibition five years ago [...] surprised I stumble on the premises on the Byker Community Education Project. My pictures are still hanging on its walls!'. She is greeted by a project manager who explains 'Byker is again at a very interesting point: on the latest count there were twenty-eight languages spoken here. You'll have to come back with your camera'.³⁰² Konttinen returns as a volunteer with the Refugee Support Group 'until its end, when the funding ran out'. From 2003 to 2010 she revisits the new Byker, working with the new residents including with those, from around the world, 'arriving through the asylum seekers dispersal policy introduced in 2002'.³⁰³ As well as intense work to assist in the changing community, sometimes challenging and harrowing, sometimes jovial and life affirming, she is able to re-connect with the new twenty first century community. Also locating a few residents from the original

³⁰² Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen *Byker Revisited* (Newcastle: Northumbria Press, 2009) p.8

³⁰³ Collective authorship *Forever Amber* (Newcastle, Amber-Side, 2015) p.90

Nb. Once again working in a consciously collaborative capacity, on invitation to create a portrait of the new Byker Wall estate Konttinen in turn 'invited people to imagine their lives in 'just one picture', then developed the ideas in improvised and occasionally chaotic sessions with the participants' This is documented in the photo-film *Today I'm With You*, Dir. Amber / Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (Amber Films, 2010). See also *Byker Revisited* (Newcastle: Northumbria Press, 2009)

streets of Byker, to create new works where global / local interaction is more tangible.

In the case of Amber, the work of Konttinen especially, is most representative of a place and people not just defined by their employment or unemployment. Works such as *Byker* (1983), *Byker Revisited: A Portrait of a Community* (2009), *Written in the Sand* (1991, 2000), and *Step by Step* (1989), the last being the inspiration and visual reference for the very successful film (2000) and musical (2009) *Billy Elliot*, are not only an obvious riposte to clichés of a 'grim' Northern working-class aesthetic but also to accusations of nostalgia and sentimentality. Through her empathetic lens we see contentment and aspiration as well as frustration and resignation, through life on the beach and at the allotment, in the Connell-Brown dancing school in former fishing and shipbuilding town of North Shields. Local and highly successful playwright and scriptwriter (for *Billy Elliot* as well as *The Pitmen Painters*, 2007) Lee Hall has acknowledged the influence of Konttinen.

Through Sirkka's eyes I saw that Byker was as romantic and important as Doisneau's Banlieue or Wegee's Bowery. Here was great art. Pathos, humour, beauty, ugliness, hard social reality, unwitting surreality [...] the subjects of Economics, Class, Globalization, Identity are thoroughly worked into every picture [...] lives are lived in juxtaposition to the landscape they find themselves in³⁰⁴

At an 'early age', Konttinen was inspired and facilitated by an Aunt Oili, she remembers Oili had extensively documented the family and allowed a teenage Konttinen to borrow a camera (she was then able to join a camera club) The original ambition was to train as a journalist at Helsinki University, however, she moved from Finland to London to study film making in London. This was a pragmatic choice based on expectations, and need, of employment in London.

I came to study film but became involved in the 'Ideas Factory', the embryonic amber collective forming around the visionary final year student Murray Martin I left with the group for Newcastle soon after. What brought us

³⁰⁴ Lee Hall. In Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen *Byker Revisited* (Newcastle: Northumbria Press, 2009) Foreword.

together and served us well is our common goals. Our egalitarian constitution, self-determination, editorial control, creative freedom, sharing of resources, lasting friendships [...] we moved to the industrial North East with the aim of giving voice to working class and marginalised communities ³⁰⁵

On leaving London for Newcastle, to develop Amber Associates into the film and photography collective Amber, in 1969 she moved to Byker, just north of the city, and has written about her delight at having what she calls her 'first home' and the support received, albeit within 'a set of conventions, a stranger in more than one sense'. Konttinen then embarked on a portrait and response to her new environment, she wrote and recorded as well as photographed every aspect of the community for ten years until it was dispersed, through demolition, and re-developed as Byker Wall. However, the relationship to Byker was to continue for over forty years.³⁰⁶

The first night I sat alone in the 'Hare and Hounds' I was taken under the collective wing. The drinks arrived with but a smile and a nod from an assortment of kindly faces around the room. Mrs. Dunn tucked me to her bosom (she already had thirteen children of her own and managed many waifs and strays). (Introduction to the photobook *Byker*, 1983).

Byker: Long form collaboration by the River Tyne

Officially dating from the 12th Century, the original riverside settlement Byker developed with industrial activity, densely populated rows of terraced houses were built over the 19th Century and occupied by workers of the industrializing River Tyne. Close communities grew over the next hundred years, not all surviving two world wars due to the numbers conscripted in the first, and the regular bombing of the strategically important Tyneside docks (and surrounding towns) in the second. After the second war Byker returned, for two decades, to relative peace and stability, as reflected in the local bakers,

³⁰⁵ Interview with Michael Grieve *British Journal of Photography* 15th March 2018 <https://www.1854.photography/2018/03/aakonttinen/> (accessed March 14th 2021)

³⁰⁶ The original exhibition was, in May 2017, revisited as part of the re-opening of the Side gallery. This included musical responses to the work, collaboration resulted in an audio-visual piece 'Song for Billy' and the production of a new film, based on the now digitized images and music based around the photographs of a miner's boot, a fossil in the sandy mud, in her images for *Coal Coast*.

butchers, fish shop, book shop, pubs, hairdressers, doctors', dog parlour and second-hand shops, these facilities were integrated among the houses, you could walk from one to the other. This was the place of work as well as life, the tall cranes of the shipyards on the riverbanks were always visible at the bottom of the hill upon which the streets of Byker were developed. The close community was made up of mainly families, with extended members living with, or close to, each other, friends and co-workers made up a further extension of the work and family-based life. However, by the 1960s the district was deemed, by Newcastle City Council, unsanitary for body and mind and plans were enacted for compulsory clearance, demolition and rehousing in a contemporary alternative. As a postscript to her photo book *Byker*, Konttinen quotes local authority officer Wilfred Burns

In a huge city, it is a fairly common observation that the dwellers in a slum are almost a separate race of people [...]one result of slum clearance is that a considerable movement of people takes place over a considerable distance with devastating effect on the social groupings built up over the years. But, one might argue, this is a good thing when we are dealing with people who have no initiative or civic pride. The task, surely is to break up such groupings even though the people seem satisfied with their miserable environment and seem to enjoy an extrovert social life in their locality ³⁰⁷

This typically offensive example of the British class system in full voice is from a person in public office (i.e., in the service of the public). Burns was the City Planning Officer, and the plans were approved. The new Byker, not fully completed until 1982, comprised of blocks of experimental homes designed by the architect Ralph Erskine (1914-2005); ironically, another alumnus of Regent Street Polytechnic, as well as Cambridge University where he was later commissioned to design halls of residence (Clare Hall, 1967-9). Archive interviews with Erskine offer motivations similar to those expressed by Amber at the time, that is a hope to engage with working class communities. In his case influenced by progressive teaching on improving quality of life through architecture and design. However, based on my listening to his many detailed accounts from Erskine I argue as well as advocating for post war development

³⁰⁷ Konttinen, *Byker*, 1983. Introduction. Quoting Wilfred Burns in his book *New towns for Old: The technique of Urban Renewal* (London: L. Hill, 1963). There is a copy in the Wellcome Collection, London.

as 'urban renewal' he was defending his part in the dispersal of Byker. Erskine has explained that the idea for the redevelopment emerged when he was part of an intellectual 'humanist' enclave in the Department of Art History and Architecture at Cambridge University. Similar plans for a village outside of Cambridge had been rejected, Erskine proposed that, rather than the usual focus on the South East or 'home counties', 'the North' could be visited as a possible site for the ambitious proposal. There was already a relationship with the North East coast. He was familiar as a frequent traveller, returning home to Scandinavia, with the ferries of Newcastle and had been previously commissioned by the council.³⁰⁸ Erskine had also completed projects in the new town of Killingworth although he admitted, a few years later, that this was 'a horror due to the economic slump', meaning it was not maintained. However, it was not the local authority that provided the productive link to the Byker opportunity, but a building firm based in Newcastle at time of aggressive and controversial development that saw the demolition of many historic buildings for municipal buildings and retail space. The firm's director, Stanley Beal, had been pleased by Erskine's commissioned work to 'develop land around a lake'. At the time Erskine also had 'good contact' with the head of the Conservatives in Newcastle, Arthur Grey, with whom he had discussed the development of Byker just North of Newcastle, sloping down to the river, to industries that were to all but disappear'.³⁰⁹

Erskine talked about the 'good luck' of him being Scandinavian. The sea connection between Newcastle and Scandinavia has resulted in strong links. Much earlier Viking interactions aside, Norwegians and Finns would send children to the Newcastle region to attend the many schools available, there was a mutual respect and fondness between certain communities of each side of the sea, there were (and continue to be) many marriages between workers on the ferries and cruise ships, and shipbuilding added to a shared maritime culture. The conditions were favourable to Erskine being given the commission

³⁰⁸ Ralph Erskine, 1914-2005. Interviewed by Jill Lever British Library Sound Archives: BL 0:31:40 48000. 2002.

³⁰⁹ Ralph Erskine, 1914-2005 Interviewed by Jill Lever, British Library Sound Archives: BL 0:31:40 48000. 2002.

to develop an entire neighbourhood. 'The ambition of those politicians – unbelievable' he adds in one detailed interview describing how the city architects had already drawn up 'Corbusier' type plans for Byker 'and I thought, for heaven's sake, (they're) English, they want houses'.³¹⁰ Erskine articulates (albeit with a sometimes patriarchal tone, typical of his milieu at the time) some understanding of working with, and for, a community, refusing the commission until he had

talked to the people down there [...] because the first client is the people who will use the buildings, the homes and the schools. The highest priority is the client with less resources, the rich can get what they want [...] give me a month to talk to them.³¹¹

A small team, including Erskine's interior architect daughter, set up in Byker, researching how much of the community preferred 'one family houses' to flats, how some flats would still be needed, and wanted, and could be designed as a 'wall' against the wet cold North Sea wind, which travels inland, up the river Tyne in winter months. Also, in anticipation of the traffic to come: Much of old Byker was demolished for a new motorway and the local 'Metro' (underground train) system. A work space was established (opposite the council's official Development Information Office) into which the children of Byker were welcome to come to play, hiding under tables, drawing and making things. This ensured that parents became involved, the studio became a 'centre of action' where the architects learned about working class life, what was and what was not acceptable, the hierarchies of place involved, of going to the Doctors surgery and shops at the top of the hill, or those at the bottom. Forty-eight families were invited to contribute, to comment on proposals. He also noted the 'dreams to have plants and flowers around them'. Erskine's modern and bright design was to inject colour 'into the filthy town, full of soot'. Using coloured wood that would brighten Winter as well as Summer, he also installed many birdhouses on the south, sun-facing side of the new Byker.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

The bricks may have, like any others in an era of coal fires, been blackened further by years of industrial activity too. However, 'filthy town' is not a good perception of old Byker: The residents had rejected a sandy play area set up by Erskine's team due to the children's shoes 'dragging sand into the house'. There is no litter on the streets of Byker photographed so extensively by Konttinen. Despite presenting a sympathetic ethos, much else of what Erskine says about the old Byker is at odds with the visual and written descriptions produced in the photographs by Konttinen who had, in 1970, preceding and probably inspiring the architects' studio, set up a portrait studio in an empty hairdresser's shop in Raby Street using a grant secured from Northern Arts. As well as living in Byker, her work was physically based in the community for nearly a decade, engaging with folk histories as well as current developments. We hear, in her introduction her first photo book, *Byker*, how the images began to circulate, becoming part of the fabric of the place

I invited passers-by for a free photograph. The studio, with a beautiful hand painted sign 'Siar Fyeld Hinny' (the title of an historic Northumbrian ballad about the sadness of getting old) was raided by scrap men [...] I moved on to photograph families at home. It grew to be my ambition to photograph every household in my street [...] my photographs began to appear in my photographs. Framed on walls, standing on mantelpieces, carried in wallets, sent overseas. (*Byker*, page 6)

The details of names, characters, intimate moments of everyday life in the homes, on the streets, in the butchers', the bakers', in the pub 'unhurried Saturday shoppers in Raby Street. Bursts of merriment outside the grocer's shop [...] The baker's tray cooling off by the door' is enhanced by the anecdotes and vernacular quips from residents, resulting in a convincing context for the images. She herself is often called 'hinny', a local term of acceptance and endearment. It is clear, that in contrast to the various contradictory accounts from Erskine and council officers, Konttinen's presentation of the clearance, and the community's reaction, is most accurate. As a deeper engagement develops, with invitations into lives as well as homes, an empathetic realism is extended by Konttinen's personal experience and response. Twelve years of participatory work is later distilled through highly conscious editing: As the first *Byker* book progresses there is a change of tone,

from jovial stories, larking and laughing, to solemn pages, images of demolition as it gets underway around the residents.

The demolition gnawed around the corner; e/o (electricity off) occasionally daubed into f/off, as door after door received the stamp of death” and, echoing the circumstance and psychology of House (1993), the sculptor Rachel Whiteread’s much later work produced and demolished in a redevelopment of East London: “Bricked up, deaf and dumb facades of empty streets invited fleeting dark thoughts: I wonder if they all got out...the demolition was catching up with Byker. The countdown on the streets and houses and friends began; the melancholia set in. (*Byker*, page 8)

The book had begun with Konttinen’s account of how she found a home and then a Northern Arts grant to set up her studio to make portraits with the community. This develops into a deeper engagement with invitations into homes and lives. However, after that introduction, until the postscript on the last page, the text is entirely comprised of anecdotes from the citizens of Byker. Tragic as well as comic episodes from the local people have been selected and presented as a kind of phonetic transcript. These read like parts from a play, with images usually in juxtaposition, jolly scenes with tales of endurance. Her introduction also sets an auto-ethnographical tone for this and many projects for years to come. Creating a meaningful blend of personal and social history in what Paul Jobling has called ‘the third effect’, referring to her distinctive juxtaposition of text, image and vernacular voice to provide a tangible sense of time and place.

One of the chief devices that Konttinen uses to make her account more complex is the third effect, whereby two apparently oppositional or incongruous elements are set down side by side to elicit a supplementary or synthetic meaning. [...] In 1936 Brandt produced a photo-essay in book form, *The English at Home*, in which he arranged briefly captioned images of different subjects into pairs on facing pages; an image of sheep grazing on Hampstead Heath, for instance, was coupled with another of hounds gathered at the start of a foxhunt. The aim was to implicate the spectator into a more reactive reading of the work so that he or she could extrapolate a supplementary meaning for photographs³¹²

³¹² Paul Jobling ‘Sirikka-Liisa Konttinen: The Meaning of Urban Culture in Byker’ in *History of Photography* 17.3 (1993) pp.253-262

Juxtaposition, as used in documentary projects, was already established in the 1920s and 30s, in the Workers Photography Movement and for political photomontage for example. Amber and Konttinen were well aware of such work. Also evidenced in their use of the distinctive North Tyneside accent, used for the local anecdotes, which include some harsh realities as well as sometimes sardonic wit, while the photographs convey vibrancy as well as indignation. There is lots of social life, with quite an emphasis on dressing up, images of happy clothes and hair (people and pets) punctuated by a few unhappy dramas. The realism is also a personal and lyrical response while 'muttering the secrets' of the community, twelve years of participatory work, distilled through highly conscious editing.



Fig.56 *Demolition, 1971* in *Byker, 1983* p.120. Photograph, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen 1971



Fig.57 *Man Gesturing in the Street* 1971 in *Byker*, 1983 p.120 Photograph, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen 1971

As the book progresses there is a change of tone, faces are anxious, the demolitions are underway. Towards the end, on pages 120 and 121, the choice and positioning of image and anecdote increasingly implies anger. In the foreground the space is filled, by the end wall of a terrace that has been ripped away. A huge pile of bricks and debris seem to hold up the exposed interior to view one more time. The wallpaper and fireplaces, previously featured as homely interiors, still visible, are now open to a cold looking fog. This is at the top of a hill, the rest of the terrace falls away, doors and chimneys repeated and shrinking until they recede into shadow, negated. The street and surrounding area is completely empty. All of the cats and dogs and kids and pigeons and characters have gone. Konttinen has discussed her feelings of devastation, documenting until the end. The text is suitably elegiac, the clearing of residents and the piecemeal demolition was protracted, wearing down those trying to stay or waiting to leave the now unsupported, half derelict area. We hear of 'poor Emily' who was clean and houseproud, wore a wig, looking forward to 'summer and the new house, but she never saw neither. She died three weeks ago'. An anonymous neighbour explains. This time the juxtaposition is with Konttinen's opening text:

For me in 1970 the vision began from the hill, sweeping down along the steep cobbled streets with row upon row of terraced flats [...] into the town, over the river and the bridges beyond. The streets of Byker serene in the morning sun with smoking chimney pots, offered me no paradise; but I was looking for a home [...] was put under a spell (Byker, page 20)

Opposite, on page 121, one of the final images is 'Man Gesturing in a Demolished Street, 1971'. A slim man in a dark suit, who appears to be a surveyor or an architect, stands in the centre of a wide cleared space, sizing distance, looking down his outstretched arm, his hands in the exact position of a sniper taking aim. The significant body of work on *Byker* (comprising photo-exhibitions, also *Byker* (photobook and film, 1983), *Byker Revisited: A Portrait of a Community* (book, 2009) and *Today I'm With You*, (photo-film 2010) constitutes a representation of time and place not just defined by employment or unemployment, eviction or displacement. Konttinen's work foregrounds lives lived at the local level, often with a background of global concerns. The tall cranes of the shipyards on the riverbanks were always visible at the bottom of the hill upon which the streets of Byker were developed and demolished. The terraced houses, once mainly home to the worker families of Swan Hunter and other shipbuilding operations on the River Tyne, shrinking back when the massive hulks of international shipping filled the view. Sekula's careful juxtapositions of scale later recall this physical and metaphorical scenario. On modernist estate of Byker, the balconies and living rooms, filled with people and domestic possessions from all over the world, evidence a far more diverse community, some prevented from working while they are 'processed' as new as new citizens, others engaged in a wider variety of work and activities, not only by necessity.

The streets of lateral living, sweeping down to the ever-present sounds and dramatic sights of shipyards and oil tankers have been cleared away, the central building for the new Byker is 'Tom Collins House' A vertical arrangement sweeping some residents, on the top floors and sunny days, up into blue skies and fresh air.



Fig.58 *Kendal Street in the Snow*, 1969 from *Byker* (1983)
Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1969



Fig.59 *Tom Collins House*, 2008
Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 2008

Both of these photographs feature in *Byker Revisited* (2009), the Tom Collins building is now an iconic brand image, used by the Newcastle council and local media companies as aspirational, to promote a changed perception of the area as highly desirable (and increasingly expensive) appearing in marketing campaigns for the thriving tourism and commodified higher education market in 21st Century Tyneside. Now known as Byker Wall (as well as referencing the extensive Roman excavations around the starting point for Hadrian's Wall, in adjacent riverside area Wallsend) the design of the estate creates a wall, ostensibly against weather and noise pollution. However, the Metro train that runs alongside it (day and night) on the journey from Newcastle to North Shields, results in a constant soundtrack. The estate includes (as noted and photographed by Konttinen) twenty-one screens of CCTV in the concierge's office, located in the perimeter wall structure around the new estate. This manifesting a warped version of visual interaction with the Byker residents; surveillance and hidden storage replacing Konttinen's shared gaze and openly circulated material. *Byker Revisited* comprises a community project 2003-2009, photobook 2009, photo-film 2010, and various exhibitions including at Side gallery, 2009 and 2017. Having returned for her project with the new residents, she depicts a far more diverse community in terms of ethnicity and class, most of whom are happy with and proud of their houses and apartments, despite the new text noting that 'contacts from the old community are petering out. The

elderly died from the shock of their uprooting; my exiled neighbours built their lives elsewhere'. Not many have prior knowledge of old Byker and those survivors who do are not nostalgic. A positive conclusion to her previous association when, as well as her portraits and documentation of a changing environment and ways of living, she had also shared aspects of life in a community with a sense of time and place that she had become part of, watching even her own house being demolished, expressing her sense of personal and shared loss. In her project to revisit the new Byker a conscious move, from working in grey- scale to vibrant colour, contributes to the exorcism of nostalgia, replaced with something far more immediate and convincing (for a digital era saturated with high definition, instantaneous colour imagery) as both visual record and response.



Fig.60 *Najla Bacon, from Lebanon, 2008* in *Byker Revisited* (2009) Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 2008



Fig.61 *William (Willie) Neilson, Lawrence Square, 1971* in *Byker* (1983) Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Photograph, 1971

The domestic pride and efforts of Willie, as one of the long term original Byker residents and part of a culture that was so grossly misunderstood and insulted by Burns as the 'local authority', is manifest in every aspect of this image. The mirror reflects the welcoming space for the photographer, the door is open, the table laid for tea, with his best china (saucers and side plates) and fresh flowers. Konttinen would have been invited for tea over which the oral history with Willie was made, a mutual rapport is carefully developed, as well as photographs. He also features in Amber films, sometimes playing spoons with friends in a local pub. In the two interiors the new and old Byker come together. In the embroidered cushions, antimacassars, laundered table cloths, framed portraits, and figurines. With curtains carefully draped, the shared domestic and cultural pride of Najla and Willie is revealed. Both choosing to be seen, formally dressed, with their religious, secular and family mementos, prized ornaments on polished dressers. Both are old enough to have been displaced and survived world war as well as threatened by socio - economic fluctuations in the North and beyond.

I first met Willie when he was playing a mouth organ at a street wedding [...] As a young man he worked in the Royal Victoria Infirmary, and in a boiler room explosion lost acres of his skin [...] he survived to tell one tall story after

another. He used to turn up in my studio with a plastic parrot, and a fiddle [...] a fine instrument that he couldn't play but loved to be photographed with (Byker, page 7)

Najla has lived most of her life in Byker, for the past sixty-three years. She is originally from Beirut. Her home is a gallery of loved ones, displaced around the globe

I arrived at Newcastle Central Station on the midnight train, 23rd September, 1945 [...] Arthur's family took me to their home in Byker, there was a great big fire in the range – and they took me into their hearts, the curtains in the street were twitching [...] but nobody ever said I don't know what you're talking about, when I muddled up my English" (Byker Revisited, page 105)

These images, also Konttinen's oral histories (theirs and hers) constitute a resonant documentary as memory, as Rancière has proposed, 'not the subjective experience of the past by an individual, but poetic arrangements of knowledge and sensibility that belie the storehouse of static information'³¹³

The first publishers for the photobook *Byker* are also significant here, published by poetry focussed Bloodaxe Books Ltd. in 1985, the first edition was produced with Jonathan Cape in 1983. Cape had published fiction and poetry since 1921, supporting radical modern writers Hemingway, Isherwood and Joyce, Mary Webb and Radclyffe Hall. By the 1970s it 'had become internationally recognized literary hothouse' working with writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Doris Lessing. Bloodaxe is a local imprint, referencing an oppositional, elected King of Northumbria circa 947. The book's landscape format is modest but an unusual, almost 10 x 8 inches, the sketchbook sequence exactly mirrors Konttinen's method used in the 2016 keynote as well as most other works: Sometimes the text is adjacent (never wrapped around) the images, usually it precedes a series or section of images, without text or caption. I've seen her use this device in public presentations, a combination of anecdote and personal, with often lyrical, humorous, and reflective interjections, will be followed by silent presentation of the images,

³¹³ Nico Baumbach 'Jacques Rancière and the Fictional Capacity of Documentary' in *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 8:1, (2010) pp. 57-72

thus they are given space and time for audience participation through self-led comprehension and contemplation. The Byker project was a celebration of a culture and an activist riposte to the city planners of Newcastle in the 1960s. The book begins and ends with well researched history of the place and proposed change. Her position is made clear by the choice of material for the postscript (on page 125) which is an extract from a 1975 Department of Environment commissioned research study, on Byker as an 'experiment in community-based redevelopment

Years of neglect by private landlords and prevarication by the city council had turned a once vital neighbourhood into an increasingly miserable environment for a community who did not lack initiative or civic pride. Forced out of their homes, people in Byker expressed a firm desire to be rehoused together in the new Byker, and to have their community spirit left intact. [...] The homes of 3000 people were cleared for a motorway that was never built [...] Over 17,000 people lived in Byker at the start of the redevelopment. Fewer than 20 per cent of them were living in the New Byker by 1976 (Byker ...page)

Konttinen points out that this information was part of a council commissioned report that was never published, except as part of a later book by the researcher.³¹⁴ The same extract is used again twenty-six years later, for the preface of *Byker Revisited*. This is still sadly echoed and amplified in continued, now ubiquitous, social cleansing and privatization projects, including the criminal neglect of health and safety measures to cut costs.³¹⁵ The 1983 photobook *Byker* was the result of twelve years of work and published in the same year that Konttinen produced *Byker* as an Amber film, described as one of Amber's early 'photo films', i.e. a constructed documentary. The book also implied a sound as well as visual track, the film is able to extend the vernacular realism of the book, the content and role of the pictures gaining further resonance, it literally gives voice by part dramatization. Konttinen presented the motivation and methods of her work as the keynote speaker at Urban PhotoFest (March 2016). This was at Tate Modern to mark the surprising acquisition of twenty four (of the one hundred and twenty six photographs) that

³¹⁴ The research was published in book form: Peter Malpass and Alan Murie *Housing Policy and Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1982)

³¹⁵ This situation is further discussed in the conclusion.

Were the visual element of her now iconic 1980s photobook *Byker*. Surprising as this sample set of silver-gelatin prints were purchased in 2014, thirty one years after their first publication as contemporary work.³¹⁶ and a decade after Tate had presented *Cruel and Tender -The Real in The Twentieth Century Photograph* (2003) as it's 'first major exhibition dedicated purely to the medium'.³¹⁷ This also reflected the primacy of, especially 'fine art' photography in the art market as developing over the 1990s. The literature on British social documentary photography acknowledges the acute cultural and practical challenges for social documentary during the 1980s, not least the impact of the Thatcher Government's financial cuts. Duncan Forbes in conversation with Siona Wilson, on the political contexts as hindering social practice, also notes that

the support on offer would often die away as the decade wore on [...] By the 1980s, community arts programmes were folding across the country or depoliticising their programmes in order to survive³¹⁸

A most pertinent example is from 1989 when Amber's annual Side Gallery funding was cut by Northern Arts from £120,000 to £25,000.³¹⁹ In this obstructive context work continued during the 1980s and 90s, as well as through visual practice significant acquisitions were made by organisations

³¹⁶ It wasn't until 2009 that Tate appointed its first curator of photography (Simon Baker) who worked to establish a new Photography Acquisitions Committee. By way of comparison, The Museum of Modern Art (New York) collected photography from the beginning of the museum, circa 1930 and by 1940 a dedicated department was established. See Beaumont Newhall Papers 1934-1957. Series II: Department of Photography, 1938-1945. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, USA.

In preparing my thesis proposal in 2009, I conducted two days of research in this archive, the role of Victoria as well as Ansel Adams was clear, also the contribution of other photographers at the time, through correspondence such as that to, and from, Dorothea Lange.

³¹⁷ *Cruel and Tender -The Real in The Twentieth Century Photograph* Exhibition at Tate Modern 5th June-7th September 2003.

³¹⁸ Siona Wilson and Duncan Forbes 'Documentary Struggles and Political Movements in Britain' in Jorge Ribalta (ed.) *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism: Essays and Documents, 1972-1991* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015) p.74

such as the British Council and the Arts Council during the 1980s. A key example is from Brett Rogers (Director of The Photographers' Gallery 2005 – 2022) and her work (as Deputy Director at the Department of Visual Arts, British Council 1982-2005) in the populating of collections that informed the key touring exhibition and corresponding publication *No Such Thing As Society: Photography in Britain, 1967-87* (Hayward Publishing, London 2008).³²⁰

The 'Byker' acquisitions were displayed in a small, almost square windowless space, in black frames, hung around the four walls at eye level, as if a display of fine art. It was odd to see the dislocated, single photographs, when so familiar with the book where these same images functioned as part of such a different, integral whole. Konttinen was conscious of this new context, explaining that the Tate's conservation and storage would ensure a long, safe future for the prints. Adding that Amber's setting up of the Amber Side Trust was so that they could manage more of that independently. The keynote presentation, screenings and anecdotes are followed by a conversation, mainly on *Byker* and the later *Byker Revisited* which had further engaged with the vulnerable plight as well as successful survival of the marginalized and powerless. Many of those participating are asylum seekers and refugees. Seeking to maintain her strategy for participation, on invitation to create a portrait of the new Byker Wall estate Konttinen in turn 'invited people to imagine their lives in "just one picture", then developed the ideas in improvised and occasionally chaotic sessions with the participants'. In her 2009 photo-book *Byker Revisited*, Konttinen foregrounds the picture she

³¹⁹ '1979-1991-Landscapes, Lives, Struggles' in *Forever Amber - Stories from a Film and Photography Collection* (Newcastle: Amber Side, 2015) p29.

³²⁰ With thanks to Mathilde Bertrand and Annabella Pollen for clarifying this point, foregrounding the role of certain people and institutions in the support British social documentary at this time.

could never hope to take. On their final evening before their expulsion from Byker, failed asylum seeker parents from Chad had come together with their closest friends [...] their barren bedroom dwarfed by its double bed, and on it they snuggle, seeking comfort' This was brought along to the Civic Centre where Konttinen was working with the Refugee Support Group, organizing a community exhibition. She had provided cameras to the participants, to create the one definitive image, to represent themselves, as later documented in the photo-film *Today I'm With You*, 2010. ³²¹

At the Tate keynote Konttinen is now more impassioned about the new Byker Wall, than the old Byker demolition. Her work with refugees resulted in physical violence against one of the families (due to images broadcast on local TV), she provides honest insights into the difficult realities of trying to collaborate with a community that is sometimes under great pressure and suffering hostility from others, themselves feeling marginalized and threatened through fear and ignorance of their own situation. An assistant curator tries to make a point about Konttinen engaging with 'difficult situations in urban societies'. The response begins with 'Hmmm' - then a refusal of comparisons between her own experience (as a Finn) of living in Byker, with that of the 'asylum seekers' as portrayed in *Byker Revisited*. Konttinen insisted on her having being part of a community and refuting the emphasis on the negative result of the work in *Byker Revisited*, before deftly ending that line of questioning, obviously irked to some extent

Byker may be 'marginal', and other communities with it, but they were entire universes to the people that lived there...it had everything people needed for a good hundred years [...] wherever you are in the world that's where it's at [...] people think that the North East is another planet! ³²²

'The baby is called Tengis, and he chuckles like a dove', she writes, in relation to three years of photographs made with a Mongolian family of three which she had supported, intervening to stop a deportation. She describes telephoning the notorious Yarl's Wood Detention Centre (more recently, even more

³²¹ Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen *Byker Revisited* (Newcastle: Northumbria Press, 2009) p .89, p.100

³²² Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen 'In Conservation' in the Starr Auditorium, Tate Modern, London 2016. This is now a cinema

offensively, renamed Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre) to where they had been taken, from their beds, by eight policemen. She then called the regional Home Office and the local Member of Parliament, providing practical and moral support. This, and other detailed accounts, on what was going on, behind the baby's smile or Union Jack T-shirt or 'the best kept balcony garden', again evidence anger (about injustice and inequality) and humour, retaining hope and optimism, at work in an attempt at meaningful collaborations. Other 'new' residents include artists, designers, a film producer, nurses, a storekeeper, a reflexologist, a carer, a peace activist, the young, the old, and their pets.

Byker Revisited offers many scenes from these 'ordinary' lives, settled or settling in happy homes, or struggling to achieve this, however this project is more overtly political in tone and subject. Konttinen had introduced her Tate keynote as 'Stories from the North East of England 1969 – 2010', a significant end date as it is in 2010 that the Amber Collective finally move into a more mainstream cultural context. She explained their decision to become a Community Interest Company (CIC) was based on how to survive the latest funding cuts to arts, and how the formation of the Amber-Side Trust would be able to protect collection and develop new work. Konttinen quotes historian R G Collingwood (1889 – 1943, still cited by Amber as a key inspiration) to confirm the idea of her own work as aiming to be a service.

His business as an artist is to speak out [...] But what he has to utter is not, as the individualistic theory of art would have us think, his own secrets. As spokesman for his community, the secrets he must utter are theirs' ³²³

The 'secrets' of the community, told through Byker are now offered as historical insight, however, the original project was clearly also auto-ethnographic. As Konttinen had earlier explained in her first photo-book *Byker* in 1983, evidenced on page six

³²³ R .G. Collingwood (1889 – 1943), his *Principles of Art* (1938). An extensive quote from Collingwood is also to be found in Amber Film and Photography Collective *Forever Amber: Stories from a Film and Photography Collection* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2015) p.5.

An oddball, I was hurled into a peculiar net of relationships; shortcutting into friendships and unquestioned loyalty [...] One way or another I had grown to be part of my street, and the community. It had been my first real home

As well as Konttinen's more personal time in Byker, Amber, as a collective, had sometimes relocated to collaborate other communities subject to imposed change where tension and conflict as well as resilience was in play. For example, spending five years living and working with the people of deep-water port North Shields. Once key for shipbuilding as well as fishing, this was a vibrant community in transition, robust (sometimes enmeshed) in cultural traditions and new developments. Amber invested in the community to fund themselves, to remain free to pursue their work, on their own terms. They famously purchased a functioning pub, fishing vessel and former chapel in North Shields to develop and produce works with and for local people, including their involvement with the radical Live Theatre group. This facilitated much collaboration with the playwright and dramatist, Tom Hadaway (1923 – 2005). Well known for his work with Live Theatre (working with Amber, (particularly Martin who describes the theatre group as part of Amber). Martin also left Amber for a short time, to work on the Fish Quay, to experience the local work he was so engaged with, politically and creatively. Hadaway wrote many successful film and television works, in the aesthetic and oral vernacular of Tyneside, such as acclaimed series *When the Boat Comes In* (1976) although he was less prolific than local novelist Catherine Cookson. Her extensive body of written and televised works, including her use of photography, draws upon an auto-ethnographic method. Notably, Allan Sekula visited and photographed Cookson's grave, also revisiting the sites and subjects of Amber's work in North Shields for his own critical realist photographic projects on the role of the sea in the conditions and results of globalization. He created a slide sequence that included a diagram showing a 'map' of incidents during serious rioting at the Meadow Well estate North Shields. An extraordinary range of projects then emerged: docudrama, documentary portfolios and even a magic realism

feature film from Meadow Well. Notorious for the serious riot in 1991, depicted on national TV as a firebombed territory, stalked by gangs of youths and police. A typical post world war two, urban sprawl built outside of the town which, with the closure of shipyards and coalmines, and withdrawing of community funding (for the youth club for example) became a hub of frustration, typical of the inequality and discontent resulting from a decade of aggressive government policy.

However, Amber's feature film *Dream On* (Dir. Ellin Hare, 1991) moves us into the homes and lives of a more complex Meadow Well. A disarming supernatural thread runs through narratives framed through the experience of women, the script is based on humanity, humour (and magic) from the real 'Meadow Well Women's Writing Workshop'. *Dream On* is a community collaboration, first screened to participants and other residents, some of whom report life changing effects from the workshop and the film in terms of emancipation and empowerment through the opportunity for creative production, based on their own experience, on their own terms.³²⁴ Part of the overall objective of the thesis is to identify, analyse and situate photographic activity that can support the aim to evidence a countervisuality through complex social realism. This chapter discusses projects in particular environments, that provided a home, livelihood, and way of life. Because these places have been, and continue to be, subject to transformative

³²⁴ 'Meadow Well: An English Estate, 1988 to 1990', is a photographic documentation and exhibition by Amber associate Steve Conlan. This was commissioned as part of the group's five-year North Shields residency. As noted by Leggott, the photography is more overtly concerned with representation as activism. 'the film's representative of tenant activism is prevented from access to Rita's house. The same actress, the real life campaigner Nancy Peters, is granted more visibility in the 1991 photographic exhibition 'Meadow Well : An English Estate'. James Leggott *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020) p.236.

See also The Meadow Well Estate, North Shields II: 'decent people living on a decent estate' on <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com> Tuesday 23rd February 2016 .A critical blog based on John Boughton *Municipal Dreams: the rise and fall of Council Housing* (London : Verso, 2018) (accessed March 3rd 2021)

socio-economic as well as environmental change. Historical context is provided through which to discern the trajectory of a countervisuality that is as part of the development of visual culture for a specific area of the Northumbrian coast that was, in 1974, designated 'North Tyneside', this allowed for significantly escalated commercial development. More vulnerable communities were subject to changes to the area redrawn as a metropolitan borough (of the city of Newcastle, rather than part of the county of Northumberland) as now less environmentally protected and supported than the Northumbrian towns and villages.³²⁵ As well as empty Tyneside shipyards, the Meadow Well estate riots (1991) were noted by Sekula, as manifestations of displacement and inequality. This foregrounds the relevance of my case studies of critical hybrid practice insisting, as in the work of Sekula

on the viability of realism and the 'social referentiality' of photography [...] beyond the habitual lapse of the discourse of documentary into either a scientific objectivism or a romantic and expressive subjectivism.³²⁶

Konttinen's activism resides in the long-term projects that avoid either pitfall, also countering many negative and simplistic visualizations of Tyneside whilst confronts the fear or negation of people based on their social circumstance, age, gender, or ethnicity. The realism in *Byker* and *Byker Revisited* particularly is complex and convincing, achieving universal resonance through its deeply local nature. This is achieved by an approach, comparable to Andrew's definition of poetic realist film, where there is a 'rapport' set up with the cultures in question. Konttinen's work is not always or entirely free of problematic content or aesthetic, however, it succeeds in having 'cultural surplus' (as defined by Bazin) and

³²⁵ There is now, in 2022, a proliferation of such 'super councils', more local councils (and representatives) are disempowered. This greatly encumbers physical and cultural environments under the guise of economic savings and parity of provision.

³²⁶ Bill Roberts 'Production in View: Allan Sekula's Fish Story and the Thawing of Postmodernism' in *Tate Papers* No.18 (Autumn 2012)

is participatory on personal and societal levels. Important to this thesis, as well as her urban juxtapositions and community work Konttinen is also engaged with the enduring and changing aesthetics of the North East landscapes. This work in the rural and coastal areas of Tyneside, also in the yards and gardens of participating communities, is the most tangibly eco-critical, again complicating cliched perceptions and representations of the region. The idea of 'The Grim North' has been extensive across English arts since the region developed as the hub for industrialization. This developed a prevailing image of a significant region, in terms of cultural and political and religious influence, into a vision of 'dark satanic mills'. The 19th Century novel is a particular site of visualization for hard, cold, grimness although sometimes also setting the North as honest and 'solid', against other generalisations such as equally generalizing 'frivolous' aspects of the South East.³²⁷

Photographer Isabella Jedrzejczyk should also be considered here, an Amber associate photographer, described on their website as 'part of the Side Gallery team in its early days'. As well as her 1985 photobook 'Striking Women: Communities and Coal' Jedrzejczyk's 'Northumbrian Landscapes' project (early 1980s) demonstrates and contributes to the more literal landscape work within the Amber corpus. 'There are many issues embodied in the land, ecological as well as financial [...] the landscape is our heritage and our future. We can read the past in it, and if we protect it, it offers us a future.' Her exhibition text for the project, as above, also reflects Amber's general objective to capture places and people for posterity and particularly

³²⁷ De-industrialization amplified reports of a miserable place and people to be pitied at best, easily lampooned. Although born in Bradford the writer J.B. Priestley (1894 - 1984), provided a damning and influential portrait of Tyneside in *English Journey, Being a Rambling but Truthful Account of What One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought During a Journey Through England During the Autumn of the Year 1933* (published 1934). He found even the accent to be a "most barbarous, monotonous and irritating twang".

This provides one of the most influential sources for post war cliché. A recent and useful summary of *English Journey* (on the occasion of an event at the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society by Chris Phipps) is provided by Duncan Leatherdale via BBC News (Tyne and Wear) 26th November 2014. Phipps, a 'local media historian' works to challenge derogatory depictions of Newcastle e.g. 'Forget Carter: The North East on Screen' (A public talk at The Black Gate, Newcastle, 4th November 2016) to mark the 45th anniversary of the release of the 'iconic' film *Get Carter* Dir. Mike Hodges (MGM-British Studios, 1971). The film famously depicts a grim and threatening Newcastle of concrete and fog.

echoes Elizabeth Edwards on the role of photography in the 'intense awareness of the past and its potential loss'. Also referring to another project for which Jedrzejczyk, with other long term Amber associate John Davies, was commissioned by Amber. This was to produce *For Druridge* a photographic documentation of Druridge Bay, a 'five mile stretch of undeveloped coastline' further North from the industrial and fishing Ports of Blyth and North Shields. The project is one of the few not to involve people directly, although the traces of community 'farms and hamlets and fields. The fisherman, beachcombers, and day-trippers' are depicted as integral. Part of the (successful) campaigning against a proposed Nuclear Power Station to be built on the bay,³²⁸

Konttinen continued to work through an environmental lens and goes on to develop the use of voice, also sound, in her multi award winning photo film *Writing in the Sand* (1991). Forty three minutes of footage is created from photographs on the coast of North Tyneside. The sandy beaches, cliff tops and rock formations of Whitley Bay, of King Edwards Bay and Long Sands in Tynemouth, are the closest to Newcastle and to the smaller towns of North Shields, Byker and Wallsend on the River Tyne. As well as central to the earlier photographic activity (of Auty and Turners) these were sites of Konttinen's visual and audio documentation between 1973 and 1998. The film was released in 1991, a visual track is composed of an extensive mix of black and white images of mostly happy day trippers. The busy soundtrack of related, but not quite corresponding, sounds of the beach is importantly off register throughout: Screeching bathers, yelping dogs, children and parents, picnics, and games drift in and out of range. However, there is a sudden break into abstract images and ambient sounds of water, sky and wind, with ominous tones moving from realism into surrealism. The sound editing extends the work into a more visceral affective experience, the engagement is again sustained over many years, the corresponding book *Writing in the Sand* offers twenty-five

³²⁸ Druridge Bay is actually a longer stretch and was recently (2020) again saved by local protest. This time a seven year battle over the proposal to commence open cast mining. For images and details see 'Northumbrian Landscapes' and 'For Druridge Bay' www.amberonline.com recently updated with Jedrzejczyk's text. (accessed 2nd July 2023)

years of photographs and is eventually published in 2000. Coastal work, with much participation of local people in more overtly (I assert) eco-critical projects that specifically concern the conditions and consequences (on the environment) of coalmining. A major exhibition 'The Coal Coast' (BALTIC, Newcastle-Gateshead, 2003) with a corresponding photobook is dedicated to the 'memory of coal'. There are no page numbers, however, an account of how Konttinen worked with retired miners is provided as a preface to the illuminating images. 'Their entire working lives spent underground hewing coal, and their leisure time digging the soil above it, had given the men an unusually strong bond with their environment' She refers to their allotments and regular walks in woods and on the beach 'that's for every sixty years [...] I can tell you where every pebble on this beach is from'.³²⁹ Their town, once revolving around the colliery, and their way of life, is about to be subject to imposed change once again. She explains how the beaches (with the sculptural and colourful, sometimes toxic remains of coal mining are to be re-purposed, cleaned-up for tourism, unfortunately also the 'manifestly idiosyncratic' allotments as these 'simply did not into the planner's vision of a new era.'³³⁰ As much as Misrach and Burtynsky reading the sprawling spaces of industrial sublime in South West America or Canada; As much as Sekula discerned a meaningful, domestic culture of maritime work and workers, in his inclusive and eclectic acquisitions of seemingly unimportant ephemera for *The Dockers' Museum* (2010 - 2013) Konttinen identifies associations (between land, work and life) in the part elegiac, part celebratory and part contradictory, a visual, textual and later filmic account of coastal coalmining in North East England.

Led by the miners' intimate knowledge of the beaches, I begin to see narratives in this blighted landscape. Glistening black sands of fools' gold, purple rocks of burnt shale, pebbles glowing with iron sulphate. Embedded in fused colliery spoil, among the emerald green seaweed, the nuts and bolts of a deposited industry are rusting into riotous colour [...] a miners' boot quietly disintegrates in the clay. The landscape is most eloquent in its post-industrial

³²⁹ Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, *The Coal Coast* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2003) Preface to photographs. There no page numbers in this photobook.

³³⁰ Ibid.

science. As in a shop window at Seaham figurines of miners, pressed from coal dust, commemorate a lost world ³³¹

The three-year project (1999-2002) was the first shift into the use of colour, a metaphor for the moving on from to the more historical contexts and into more contemporary situations and form, as later employed for *Byker Revisited*. *Coal Coast* was typical in being part of a larger complicated project, 'Coalfield Stories, a wide-ranging documentation of the post-industrial experience [...] involving dozens of photographers and film makers'. A multimedia magazine of the same name explains the celebration of 'forty years of Amber's collaboration with communities in the Durham Coalfields'. ³³² Although the coalmines are largely gone, and the 'memory of coal' now presents in museums more than on the local beaches, there are ongoing efforts, despite the government acknowledging a climate crisis, by some companies and politicians, to allow new coal mines, as well licensing new zones of extraction for oil and gas in the North Sea. It is therefore timely to draw more attention to some of the eco-critical work of this hitherto fiercely independent group that, after nearly half a century, can now be said to feature more in the cultural (and local socio-economic) mainstream. However, earlier works continue to be circulated through Amber's online presentations and in archival exhibitions, as well as in some academic contexts, participating in the wider efforts to debate and oppose environmental as well as social inequalities. The work with the beaches of Druridge and miners' allotments, as threatened by corporate development and changing policies, are seemingly minor protest in a niche form, nevertheless these provide important example, fragments, that contribute to a larger visibility and continuity of dissent, holes in the fabric as Rancière would have it:

we find ourselves not facing capital but inside it. All we can do is dig holes, try to create, and enlarge spaces of non-consent. The challenge is to manage to maintain dissensus, maintain a distance. What can this distance produce in the future? I don't know. But even these figures of distance are a

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Text from *Coalfield Stories* Amber's 'multimedia magazine [...] threading together the films and the photographic bodies of work that informed them' https://issuu.com/side-gallery-and-cinema/docs/coalfield_stories (accessed March 12th 2021)

way of living differently in the world we challenge. I've tried to explain this in my historical research: workers' emancipation was a way of living in the capitalist world as much as a way of preparing for the future.³³³

This new era of critical and cultural status was heralded by the extraordinarily belated recognition, at their long-term locus, in the form of a major photographic exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery (2015), just before the aforementioned purchase of images from Konttinen's *Byker* by Tate, for the inaugural displays at the £260 million Tate Modern extension (2016) Also well after Konttinen had again worked with the BALTIC, on the major exhibition 'The Idea of The North' (2013) that sought to:

make the connections between counter-cultural moments, combining moments of protest with individual stories of community and collective belonging. Within the exhibition, interpretations of the recent past are recomposed in order to inform future thinking. Through architecture, photography, music, design and culture the enduring resilience and transforming spirit of 'northern' identity is celebrated.³³⁴

As one of the few women acknowledged as consistently working in British social documentary film and photography over such a sustained timeframe, fifty years in 2018 Konttinen was an apt choice. She curated the section 'Women by Women', an exchange of images from the 1970s onwards.³³⁵ Killip also contributed, photographs of the underground music scene in 1980s Gateshead, Newcastle. Both were described as Amber photographers and so the profile continued to rise. Established in central Newcastle since 1901 'The Laing' has important permanent art collections of international status also hosting major touring exhibitions of historical and contemporary art. *Forever Amber* (June 27th - September 19th, 2015) was

³³³ Jacques Rancière 'The issue is to manage to maintain dissensus'. Interview with Jacques Rancière by Mathieu Dejean and Jean-Marc Lalanne Verso Blog 17th February 2021. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/5132> (accessed March 4th 2021)

³³⁴ 'Idea of The North', BALTIC Newcastle-Gateshead .May-September 2018. Exhibition display text.

³³⁵ Long term practitioners Ingrid Pollard, Joanne O'Brien, Rosy Martin are also still active and recognised in the field. Pollard has gained international as well as scholarly recognition for her work on identity, landscape and Britishness.

favourably reviewed in the local and national media as well as journals of art and photography as 'the first major account of the Amber Side Collection.'³³⁶ During my own visit to the exhibition a group of local school children shared their reactions, intrigued, and amazed, exclaiming (while looking closely at black and white photographs of adults and children foraging beaches for sea coal) that they were completely unaware of the local culture depicted. The documentary work was functioning as collective memory, including for those without access to such a long and prominent history in their home town. Despite the long presence of Amber in the north, and Konttinen's Coal Coast exhibition at BALTIC in 2003 in November 2010, when I identified Amber as one of the case studies for my initial research proposal (on the role of photography in the depiction and perception of landscape) there was scarcely any art historical research specifically on their photographic work, including in relation to changing environments. BALTIC had just opened in 2002, although a new major national museum, at a time state-funded refurbishments of former industrial buildings, with a huge local response, BALTIC (Flour Mill) did not gain the critical and media attention given to new Tate Modern (Bankside Power Station) in London. The latter had opened in 2000, as a much promoted millennial regeneration project. As previously discussed, Newbury's 2002 paper had focussed on film maker Murray Martin and the few other references were in the field of film studies. Until Mathilde Bertrand included Amber in a study of radical British documentary photography, surprisingly, the most sustained academic engagement, outside of film studies, had emerged in social science. One thesis, mainly a response to the 'Foot and Mouth' diseased cattle crisis in Northern England at the time, also discussed Amber's work on the decline of coal mining in County Durham. This was used as a case study to support the idea of landscape contributing to a cultural construction of communal trauma.³³⁷ Also, in Spring 2015 Robert Hollands (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University) was awarded a Major Research Fellowship Grant (Leverhulme Trust) for a two-year study 'Urban Cultural Movements and the Struggle for Alternative Creative Spaces' after situating Amber

³³⁶ Laing Gallery, exhibition text, *Forever Amber*, 2015.

³³⁷ Rupert Ashmore 'Landscape and crisis in Northern England: The representation of communal trauma in film and photography' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Northumbria University) 2011.

in the context of 'cultural opportunity' based on their inhabiting and saving of Quayside.

The main aim of the project is to assess the potential of alternative artistic and culture-based movements and activities for enacting urban socio-political and spatial change. In doing so, it will explore the degree to which these struggles can challenge how we currently live, play, and work in our increasingly corporate/entrepreneurial cities, and look at how urban spaces might be made more inclusive, socially productive, and creative³³⁸

Since 2015 Amber are increasingly professionalized a visible in public and academic contexts. Newcastle City Council, as part of the 'local heroes' project honored Konttinen with a bronze plaque, reserved for 'inspiring people nominated by the public [...] installed on one of the destination's most iconic visitor sites – the Quayside'.³³⁹ The location is significant as an early example of urban 'regeneration' through artist occupation and activity. As a community focused group, the founding members had been instrumental in rescuing a great deal of historic (Medieval, Tudor, 18th and 19th century) buildings along the Newcastle quayside during a period of notorious demolition and development. Whilst geography is also a key factor in my approach, I situate the work in a longer history of the visual culture of North East coast of England. This also positions the participatory work as useful in analysing relationships between politics and aesthetics, specifically between photography, place, and equitable representation. Amber's quayside gallery reopened in October 2016, following a major three-year refurbishment having secured capital funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England. Konttinen, in a departure from a previous

³³⁸ Robert Hollands, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University. As part of the project Hollands has co-authored (with John Vail, senior lecturer in sociology) various papers, including on artists and urban regeneration. See also Hollands And Vail, J. 'Place Imprinting, and the Arts: A case study of the Amber Collective' (Newcastle: University of Newcastle, 2015) See also: James Leggott *The North East of England on Film and Television* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) on 'how the communities and landscapes of the region have been used to explore processes of cultural change and legacies of de-industrialization' (Leggott, summary description)

³³⁹ <https://newcastlegateshead.com/explore/local-heroes> (accessed 1st June 2021)

The extensive and controversial demolitions were largely driven by the infamous politician and leader of Newcastle City Council in the 1960s, T Dan Smith (1915 - 1993), about (and with) whom Amber would later produce a revealing film detailing his plans to demolish the Georgian centre of Newcastle to create a modern concrete and glass 'Brasilia of the North'. Also discussing his six years of imprisonment for charges of corruption, although he always claimed his innocence.

stance against becoming involved with the art market, is now represented by L. Parker Stephenson Gallery on Madison Avenue, New York and is increasingly visible beyond Amber.³⁴⁰ Amber continue to distribute and develop earlier works as a strategy for continued, mutual participation. e.g., In 2021 Amber are working with local people and community centres (including Meadow Well Connect) reaching out to make contact with anyone featuring in their audio-visual projects from the last thirty years. This to ensure the work is reconfigured and further credited in a contemporary context. It is significant that Amber has continued to evolve after the premature death (in 2007) of co-founding member Murray Martin. In 2009, still based at the quayside in Newcastle upon Tyne, they began to work with 'other Tyneside partners on projects such as 'Reinventing the City' a programme of exhibitions, screenings and talks in key cultural sites to explore 'Tyneside's re-imagining of itself' mainly through architecture and various cultural developments in Newcastle. This was indicative of the notion of a post-industrial identity and repositions the work of Amber in a long and continuing trajectory of visual culture rather than with 'outgoing industries' and ways of life, also problematic in a distancing from the current working-class population. The new partners included most of the established cultural and educational organizations as well as local authorities e.g. Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, Northern Rock Foundation, The Laing Gallery and Northumbria University. On the cusp of a new era and position, as much core and mainstream as deliberately peripheral to any official cultural infrastructure, in 2010, in the face of severe Government funding cuts Amber collective had 'restructured itself as a Community Interest Company'. This strategic move facilitated their survival during a time of transition, as discussed in the introduction to this section. After decades of independence, Amber is now, in the early 2020s, far more publicly recognized and supported, increasingly integrated into the canon of British photography and film history. Amber have demonstrated robust credentials as, for documenting the cultures of local

³⁴⁰ Parker Stephenson states on her website that she represents "photographers who, through experimentation and questioning of conventions, are seminal figures in the development of photography both as an art form and an influential medium" Kontinen is included as a gallery artist with Chris Killip and Jedrzejczyk, alongside some of the key figures of the 19th and 20th century photography e.g. Walker Evans, Eugene Atget, Berenice Abbott.

industries and workers, for inclusive creative practice and a long record of activism in local issues. Producing a remarkable amount and important archive of work on coal mining with proven environmental concern for related landscapes. However, despite this and the numerous mentions of 'oil tankers' in images of shipyards and shipbuilding communities, there is no discussion on these as central to the fossil economy, no mention of the related gas and oil industries that have been, since the 1960s, also part of the industrial histories of the North East. Not just due to River Tyne and its deep-water ports providing access to lucrative areas of energy development in the North Sea, relevant skills and working cultures are also long established and transferable.

The facilities companies tend to recruit from Aberdeen, so you do find a number of these positions taken up by people from the North East of Scotland and this can extend into other areas across the rig. There are strong links between the oil and gas, fishing and shipbuilding industries and people can gravitate from one to the other, or follow the path taken by relatives past and present, so it's not uncommon to hear Geordie and Liverpudlian accents mixed in with the strong Doric dialect from those heralding from the North East.

341

There is much government financial support and major initiatives to repurpose the skills and sites into 'the offshore energy sector' sadly this means including, rather than exclusively the huge arrays of wind turbines at nearby Dogger Bank. Increasing acres of the quaysides, in the former industrial areas of North Shields, South Shields and Jarrow, become inaccessible the public as they 'remediated' into 'enterprise zones' for a renewed industrial era. Amber have stated that theirs was an interest in outgoing industries and have for some years been more concerned with re-presenting older projects through popular 'living archive' activity, as are comparable social photography organizations such as Four Corners and Autograph in London, Stills in Edinburgh, Impressions Gallery in Bradford (and National Media Museum and photographers, notably Daniel Meadows through his Photobus blog. All of these continue to work with new artists and groups, often around identity and social issues.

³⁴¹ Peter Iain Campbell . Interviewed for 'Exposure: Lives at Sea'. A National Maritime exhibition (2020) featuring the photography of those who work on, or in the sea. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/life-on-north-sea-oil-rig> (accessed 3rd August 2021)

The region's heritage of engineering excellence in heavy and marine engineering, shipbuilding and offshore oil and gas extraction has resulted in a highly skilled, available workforce, benefitting from labour costs for an engineer almost 15% lower than that of Aberdeen. Its capacity in production engineering is particularly relevant to high-volume offshore development.³⁴²

It remains to be seen if the emerging generation of Amber will be as focussed on the continuing and new physical industrial work (I include the proliferation of inhuman shift work in delivery depots, call centres and industrialized agriculture here) as well as the lives of contemporary Tyneside communities. Especially if this includes newly licensed oil and gas extraction as well as transportation because it is so contested and reviled by so many, in the face of climate change and global instability. As was the case for coal (as central to the previous modern fossil economy) the resources, processes and consequences to local communities and lives, for an even more globalized iteration, should also be recorded and interpreted in critical documentary work. Sekula has inspired many others to engage with global maritime shipping and the industrial in this context, and there are many examples of place specific works dealing with extraction. However, as discussed in my introduction, this gap in the otherwise comprehensive visual histories of industry from Amber, and in the increasing critical engagement with their work, speaks of a more general absence of the expansive British oil industry in art historical accounts of documentary photography of place, work and class. My next chapter will address this by looking further North to a project contemporaneous with Amber at the height of their industrial period, embarking on and touring The River Project, producing what became the Tyne Documentaries (*Bowes Line, Last Shift, Glassworks, Launch*). As seen in this chapter, the mid 1970s and 1980s was a devastating time for industries that had, for hundreds of years been culturally central and a life line to paid, skilled employment as well as environmentally damaging to place and person. This was also the time that the oil industry dramatically, and highly visibly, emerged out of the North Sea.

³⁴² <https://www.portoftyne.co.uk/cargoes/offshore> (accessed 10th January 2022)

Chapter Two

Prosperity and Pollution in the North Sea

The Oil Rush. An overlooked collaboration from Fay Godwin and Mervyn Jones

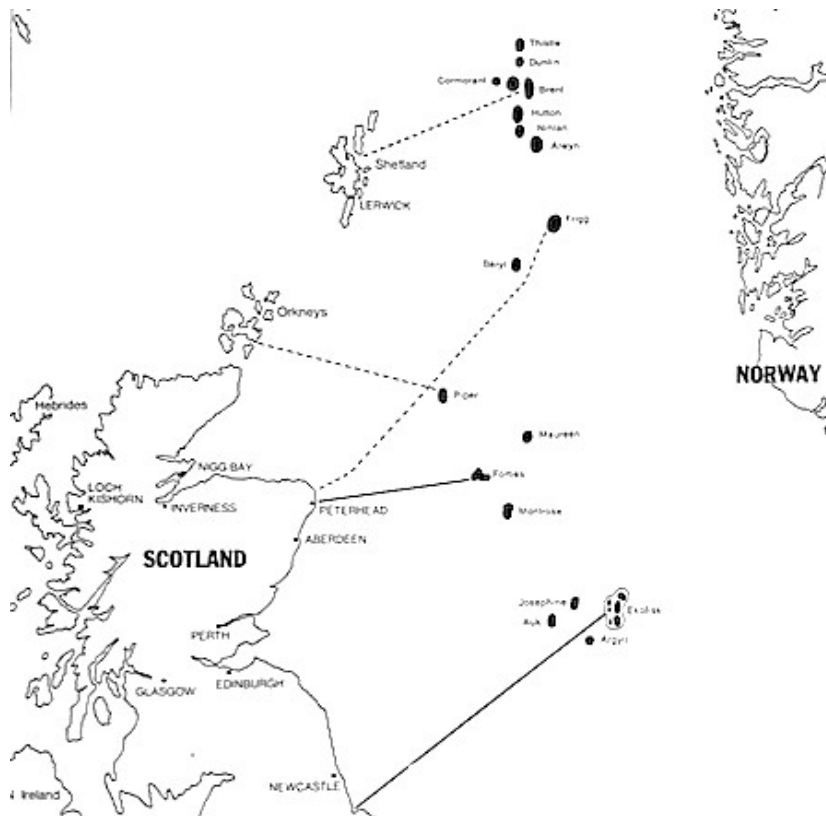


Fig.62 'Location of the main oilfields and pipelines' *The Oil Rush* p.17



Fig.63 'Loch Kishorn construction site' Caption for *Untitled*
Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

In chapter two I analyse a 1976 paperback photobook, *The Oil Rush* by Fay Godwin and Mervyn Jones. As was the case for *Byker* and *Byker Revisited* in chapter one, sections of texts, as well as images, will be offered, as example components rather than as supporting quotations. Once again, the focus is on work made in local environments and with particular communities, in this case the oil workers of the North Sea, mainly on and off the shores of Shetland and the 'oil boom' towns of northern England and Scotland. I discuss British documentary work (that is, or aspires to be, on various levels participatory) on the 'ordinary'. These are depictions of local places and lives (meaning specific communities) during periods of escalated change, be they situated in the shifting (and interrelated) territories of commerce, conflict, or climate. In this second chapter a case of 'industrial photography' is also redefined as a more

consciously political and aesthetic intervention. Godwin and Jones strategically employ multimedia, combining research, image, text and oral history, working with participants in the creation these components, in the sense of Todorov's constitutive elements. In terms of changes imposed on place, and corresponding ways of life, this project is obviously more overtly eco-critically concerned with the fossil economy than the less direct work from Amber and Neville. However, in common with my other examples there is a conscious attempt to convey the emotional, as well as physical experience. From the section 'Black Gold' in *The Oil Rush*

In bad North Sea storms, gusts can reach the terrifying speed of 130 miles an hour. Storm waves can reach a height of 100 feet [...] Rigs have to be built to resist a heavy battering, and there have been several disasters [...] As we come by helicopter, the rig looks like a Meccano toy for a giant. Half a mile away the stand-by boat pitches among the grey waves; it is there to warn off fishing trawlers and other shipping when visibility is bad, and also to rescue any rig-workers who may happen to be blown into the sea. Otherwise, there's nothing but an expanse of rolling, dangerous looking water.³⁴³

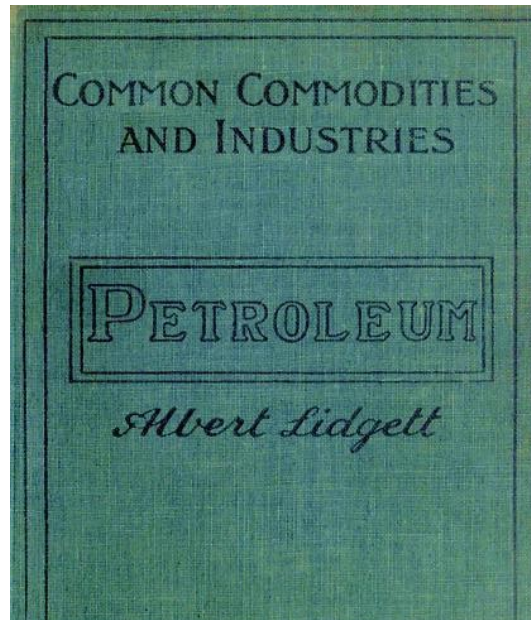


Fig.64 *Petroleum*, 1919 Cover

³⁴³ Fay Godwin and Melvyn Jones *The Oil Rush* (London: Quartet Books, 1976) In the section 'Black Gold' p.26

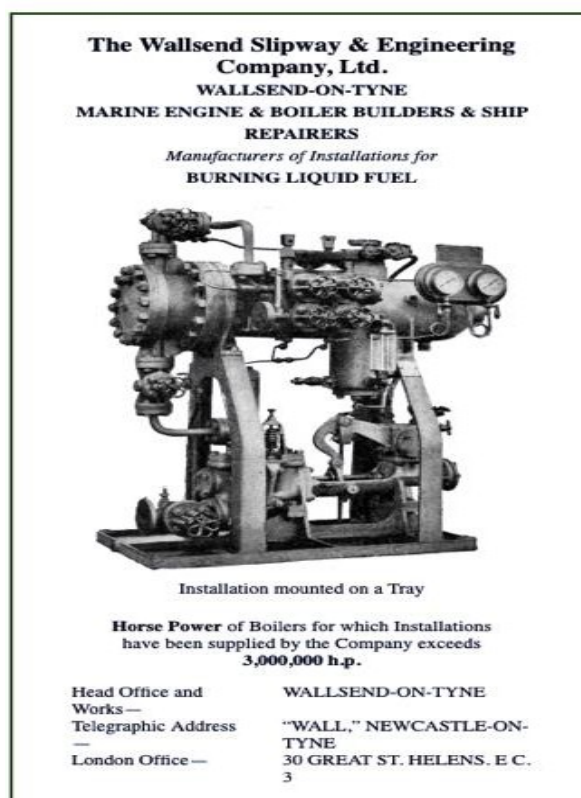
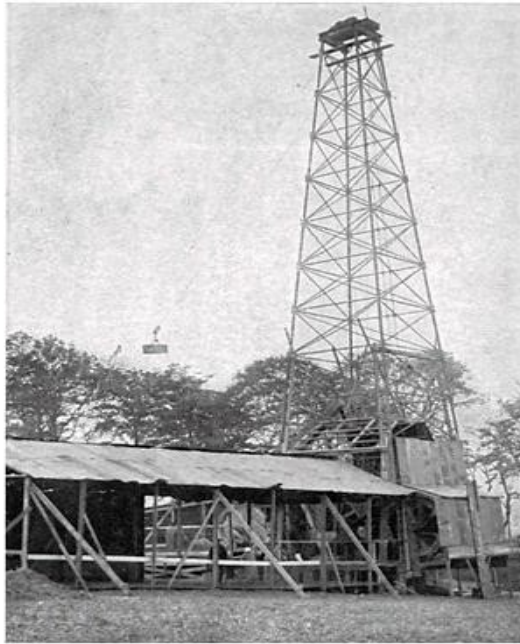


Fig.65 'Burning Liquid Fuel' advertisement
Petroleum, 1919,

A century ago, in 1919, the inexpensive book *Petroleum* was published by the well-regarded, Bath based Pitman and Sons Ltd. Pitman's 'Common Commodities and Industries' was a visually robust series e.g., on the production of glass, silk, wool, carpets, matches, gloves and production of oil, coal, iron and steel. This reflected (and contributed to narratives on) the skilled, artisanal British work-base of the early twentieth century and developments in British society in the interwar period. *Petroleum* was written in a 'language free from technicalities', the book was conceived, and produced, to be as accessible as possible for a general, rather than specialist or professional audience. The author, Albert Lidgett (editor of the weekly international journal 'The Petroleum Times') provides a convincing rationale, to explain an all too familiar centrality.

Of a truth, we today live in an age of Oil, for the products of petroleum are inseparable from our daily life. Refined petroleum breathes the breath of power to the internal combustion engine which claims a realm of its own on land and sea, in the air, and under ocean waters; it also gives artificial light to countless millions in all corners of the world under a variety of circumstances and dissimilar conditions, while the wheels of industry unceasingly revolve consequent upon oil lubrication.³⁴



ENGLAND'S FIRST OIL WELL IN DERBYSHIRE
(Drilled under Government authority and brought into production in June, 1919)

Fig.66 *England's first oil well in Derbyshire* in *Petroleum*, 1919. Frontispiece



Fig.67 *North Sea Rig, 1967* Maurice Broomfield (for the Gas Council) Photograph, 1967

In Lidgett's book we can see, through many advertisements and photographs, the long and very visible relationship to the oil industry that was part of life and work in Wallsend and most of Tyneside, as selectively photographed by Amber and associates. He provides fascinating and horrifying statistical detail, on the scale of operations, and finance, involved. For example, with corresponding images on the early topographies and production of oil around the world as well as Britain as part of the early international matrix dependent on local points of extraction, refining and transportation and their diverse local, as well as mobile, workforces. Well-illustrated with maps and diagrams, due to the notable use of photographs, it sometimes looks more like a mid-twentieth century production, a precursor of post war photography as exemplified by Maurice Broomfield's 'industrial sublime'

Broomfield was often commissioned by manufacturers to produce photographs of a company's product, facilities and workers. One approach that lent a special force to his photographs of industry was his attitude towards workers; instead of emphasizing the mechanical or repetitive qualities of modern work, he chose to illuminate the strength and sensitivity of individuals.³⁴⁵

Despite the generally enthusiastic tone, Lidgett's material also points to other narratives of oil in the early twentieth century e.g. Children are photographed working on a hand dug oil well for the Burmah (sic) Oil company, landscapes are blasted, already apocalyptic in some areas. Also, although not at all written from an oppositional view, the destruction of environment is well Underway and noted. Discussing the town of Baku and how the proliferation of refineries (built in the middle of the town to deal with crude oil) 'made it almost uninhabitable by their smoke, smell, and refuse, the latter flowing into the streets and harbour'. In an unfortunately overly optimistic section on then revolutionary Russia, conflicts on the oilfields of Baku are also highlighted by Lidgett. From the book *Petroleum*

Recent events in the conduct of affairs in Russia do not suggest that great improvements may be expected in the near future [...] Even before the European War, the Russian petroleum industry was rather on the decline. The

³⁴⁵ As described by the V&A Photography Centre, London who have a selection of Broomfield's work, displayed (and published) as *Industrial Sublime: The Photographs of Maurice Bloomfield* (London; V&A, 2021).

only hope that can be expressed at this juncture is that when Russia possesses a stable government, and the country enters upon a period of peaceful progress, the Mining Department will take care that Russia takes its proper position as one of the most important oil-producing countries in the world [...] The destruction, however, wrought in Baku towards the end of 1918 will take several years to make good.³⁴⁶

Another section of *Petroleum* is devoted to an account of the development, and paradigm shift (for the world) in oil transportation. From the first 'oil carrying vessel' (sailing from Kent in 1863) to the superseding of oak barrels with iron tanks, and from building of the first fleet of oil tankers in 1913, to the emergence of major maritime pollution. As Lidgett notes, 'Should severe storms beset their passage in Mid- Atlantic, then a little oil pumped overboard will quell the most turbulent sea and permit a safe passage onward'.³⁴⁷ Other images evidence violence enacted upon land as well as sea when oil production is targeted in conflict and war. As also noted by Lidgett a century ago, the results of fossil fuel production and consumption in the modern era pervade most aspects of life and is one of the most universally experienced of volatile interactions between the global and local. Conflicting consequences are on planetary, national, and personal levels; employment and displacement and stability; conflict, pollution, and harm, exploitation, and aspiration. These can be discerned in global North and South, affecting all nations and cultures, as will be further discussed in chapter three through the work, in Helmand, Afghanistan. The trajectory of the oil industry is ultimately one of decline (due to resource exhaustion and climate action) However, there is fluctuation, especially now in the face of another brutal war where oil plays a central, including weaponized role. This leading to sudden reversal of policy to move away from fossil fuel, permission denied in 2021 is now granted, as a direct result of the war in Ukraine, for the new Jackdaw Gas Field in the North Sea, off Aberdeen.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ Albert Lidgett *Petroleum* (Bath: Pitman and Sons Ltd.1919) p.23, p.28

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p.78

³⁴⁸ Mark McSherry 'UK Approves Shell's Giant Jackdaw Gas Field' in *Scottish Financial Review* June 2nd 2022

In *The Oil Rush*, the section 'Oil Capital' focusses on Aberdeen, most specifically on the housing needs for thousands of the incoming workers of fifty years ago. It is also a critique, on how this affected the local populations where there was already shortage of suitable and affordable homes. It is explained (with statistical and visual evidence) how, despite drawing up ambitious plans for a significant increase in social housing 'the council could hardly find a contractor willing to tender, the money's all in private housing' also how many construction workers were finding far better paid work in the new oil industry. The following extract pages, demonstrate text, images and captions working together, as intended by Godwin and Jones, to convey the mood as well as facts and figures. These are from pages one hundred and fifty four to fifty nine in the 'Oil Capital ' section. The actual photo-book is, as will be discussed later, so poorly printed that I offer the following as presentation of the pages as well referencing the images.

As for short-term letting, rents sometimes have the element of the fantastic, and reached a dizzy height with the approach of the Offshore Oil Exhibition held in September 1975. Aberdeen was expecting 20,000 visitors, some of them to be hosted, if that's the word, on a cruise liner.



Fig. 68 'Residential caravan site next to Shell headquarters, south fringe of Aberdeen. Centrally heated caravans cost £2,300 in 1973 and double that by 1975'. Caption for *Untitled* Fay Godwin, Photograph 1975

No one - certainly no one in the labour movement of Aberdeen would wish to either deny or forfeit the benefits that the oil rush has brought, primarily in jobs and wages. But there are other entries in the balance-sheet: The housing market and its attendant rackets, the uncertainties and the planlessness, the harsh and dangerous life on the rigs. 'Poor working conditions, poor living conditions, and a general reduction in the quality of life'.



Fig. 69 'Private speculative building outside of Aberdeen. 'While working class people can only wait for the council housing to pick up'. Caption for *Untitled* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975



Fig. 70 'Prefabs, cabins, and caravans
There are very strict regulations to prevent holiday parks being overrun by long stay oil workers'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975



Fig.71 *Tract Housing, 1975*
Robert Adams, Photograph, 1975

Exhibited in 'New Topographics
Photographs of a Man Altered
Landscape' Rochester, New York

The discovery of oil and gas (where this is one, there is the other) in the late 1960s, in the North Sea, is a particular and ongoing energy history. Any related images, from this pivotal moment and socio-culturally intense fifty-year history, must bear thinking about, worthy of analysis for their cultural and political agency. Photography has an established relationship in overt energy histories, albeit (as discussed in my introduction) mainly in the larger 'pioneering' oil hubs of North America and Canada. It is useful to recount here. During the 1970s, new critical discourse had converged with geopolitics and activism in a particularly influential period. A resurgence of scholarly and popular interest around ecology, climate and finite natural resources had already emerged following campaigns for nuclear finite natural resources had already emerged following campaigns for nuclear disarmament in the 1950s and counter-cultural

narratives in the 1960s.³⁴⁹ By the 1970s environmental writing and imaging were invigorated in a context of increasing visibility (through environmental and socio-economic consequences) of fossil economies, including, in 1973, the politically and ideologically driven oil embargo on an international scale known as 'the first oil crisis. Cultural impact is also evidenced by projects relating to fast-changing natural and built environments.



Fig.72 Highway # 5 Los Angeles, California, USA

2009 Edward Burtynsky, Photograph,

2009

³⁴⁹ Other influential events included the publication (and worldwide reactions to) Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), and 'Earthrise', the first colour photograph of planet Earth from space by astronaut photographer William Andres, Apollo 8 mission, 1968. Also see James Lovelock's publication *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).



Fig.73 SOACR Oil Fields #1ab Baku, Azerbaijan, 2006.

Edward Burtynsky, Photograph, 2006

The iconic centre point for photography in this context is the highly influential 1975 exhibition 'New Topographics: Photographs of a Man Altered Landscape'. From here expanded notions of 'landscape' furthered a genre, especially as developing in North America, of what Catherine Zuromskis has called 'Petroaesthetics', this was evident in New Topographics as 'a range of attitudes displayed toward the landscapes of petromodernity [...] somewhat tacitly'. She compares this to the type of later, specifically focussed engagement exemplified by Canadian photographer, Edward Burtynsky, with her analysis of his widely exhibited, highly aestheticized, project *Oil*. As below

If 'New Topographics' distilled its historical moment in its sense of unease [...] a tension between the domestic comforts of petromodernity and a creeping realization of the finiteness of fossil fuels [...] then Burtynsky's photographs offer an unsettling sense of permanence ³⁵⁰

Zuromskis, referring to Raymond Williams rather than Elizabeth Edwards, also proposes the work as operating beyond the lens (or even intention) for such works, wherein 'Lies a new state of possibility for understanding landscape and its relation to history'. She too cites Sekula's *Fish Story* as well as Maria Whiteman and Imre Szeman's 'Sekula inspired photo

³⁵⁰ Catherine Zuromskis 'Petroaesthetics and Landscape Photography: New Topographics, Edward Burtynsky and the Culture of Peak Oil' in Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Eds.) *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) p.304

essay'³⁵¹ 'Oil Imag(e)inaries: Critical Realism and The Oil Sands' ³⁵² (a collaboration on the Alberta oil fields,) as related work that also offers "insights into the "structures of feeling". The essay also recalls the conditions found in Godwin and Jones photobook. Discussing Alberta as if boom town Aberdeen (or any others that also suddenly gouge a place in local landscapes and culture) Whiteman and Szeman describe the 'incredible infrastructure needed to manage and enable work in the oil fields' as being more visible than the inaccessible sites of extraction

These companies occupy hastily constructed light industrial buildings either side of the city; the strip malls that stretch between them contain bars, liquor stores and those few companies in the city that can afford the high rents and uncertain economics of the place [...] on the outskirts of town clumps of young men live in trailer homes [...] it comes as no surprise that PTI built the military camps used by Canadian forces in Afghanistan ³⁵³

In Britain, in the 1970s, multiple documentary photography projects mobilized to document the decline of hitherto central industries of fishing, coal mining and shipbuilding. Despite an expansive corpus of insightful work, made with the communities of the industrial North, as I've previously mentioned and will now elaborate upon, there is an absence. There is a lack of eco-critical comment or analysis (the focus is rather on labour and lifestyle in a socio-economic context), including on the very many images of the hulking vessels depicted at this time, sometimes identified yet not discussed as oil tankers. An example that at least mentions the oil factor is the gallery text, by Simon Baker, for Chris Killip's collection of photographs of the North East of England acquired by Tate.

Killip decided to settle in Newcastle when the oil and IMF crises, de-industrialisation and redundancy became the defining conditions of life in northern England. The overriding theme in most of the photographs taken in the north-east is the industrial decline of the manufacturing towns and the social

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman ' Oil Imag(e)inaries: Critical Realism and The Oil Sands' in *Imaginations: Journal of Cross Cultural Image Studies* September 2012 Open Source: DOI:10.17742/IMAGE.sightoil.3-2.5 (accessed 4th February 2021)

³⁵³ Ibid. p.61. See also Szeman's analysis of documentary films dealing with the toxicity of oil in 'Crude Aesthetics: The Politics of Oil Documentaries' in *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) pp.350 - 365

disintegration that resulted in some parts of the country. This can be felt in the dereliction portrayed in images such as *Demolished Housing, Wallsend, Tyneside 1981* [...] Many of Killip's photographs summarise his fascination with the dying local shipbuilding industry and the changing nature of the north-east in general.³⁵⁴



Fig 74 *Launch of The Super Tanker, Everett F. Wells, Wallsend, 1976* Chris Killip, Photograph, 1976
This was not printed until 2012 as part of one of Killip's final projects, *The Last Ships*, a body of work dedicated to the shipbuilders and donated to The Laing Gallery, Newcastle where it is on permanent display.

However, there is no further discussion of local environmental consequences, nor of the contrasting celebratory lens of Amber, of which Killip was a long-time associate. This absence is the subject of the multiple projects on 'de-industrialization' being the unemployed miners, engineers, deckhands, and skippers that had often provided skilled labour as a new industrial landscape emerged, literally out of the North Sea, into the collective consciousness. In 1975 the oil had reached land, piped from the transforming seascapes. Despite huge visibility across the national media, and tangible changes to ways of life, the oil, and oil

³⁵⁴ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/killip-launch-of-the-supertanker-everett-f-wells-wallsend-tyneside-p81035> (Last accessed June 2021)

workers, were not visible in the now iconic British social documentary photography projects of this time. The ongoing offshore and onshore activity in Britain is so overshadowed by the attention paid to that of British coal mining, fishing, and manufacturing, as to be invisible.

A notable exception to the lack of projects is a modestly sized yet rigorous photobook. Entirely neglected in British photo histories *The Oil Rush* (1976) was the result of a collaboration between the photographer (and environmental activist) Fay Godwin and the writer (and socialist journalist) Mervyn Jones. Through arduous research, on and offshore, theirs was an engagement with North Sea oil workers, and related communities, in challenging environmental conditions in 1975, to produce a photobook that was critically and generally overlooked at the time and has been ever since. This provides an early example of an eco-critical approach that redefines the possibilities for researching British 'industrial' and landscape photography. I introduce the work as an important, overlooked participatory project in this area, as giving voice to the local workers and communities involved at the time, as well as providing prescient insights into the longer ecological and economic implications of the 20th century British 'oil boom'. It is worth noting that they rather chose to use the term 'oil rush', evoking connotations with the original 'gold rush' starting in North America in the 19th Century which had immediate and long reaching influence on land, lives, and histories. transforming cities into 'high rents, and hoc urban development [...] the rushes are a foundation of economic, industrial and environmental change'.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ Historians Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell discuss the displacement of indigenous communities, the massive influx of 'miners and merchants, bankers and builders, engineers' and others that later built new towns and cities following the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1848 as a 'turning point in global history. The rush for gold redirected the technologies of transportation and communication and accelerated the American and British Empires'. They expand this into the 'phenomenon of rushing' with the example of 'fracking' (for shale gas) with examples of other rushes, even a sand rush, needed to blast open 'energy bearing rock'. Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell (eds.) *A Global History of Gold Rushes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018) pp.19. See also <https://theconversation.com/uk> (accessed 4th May 2023)



Fig.75 *Meall Mòr, Glencoe 1988* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1988

This image was used for the cover of Godwin's 1990 photobook *Our Forbidden Land*, also included inside with the text 'The Government plans to spend £12 billion on building new roads throughout Britain and widening trunk roads by the end of the century; so what will be left?' Godwin then quotes 'Mrs Thatcher'. 'We are not going to do away with the great car economy'.³⁵⁶

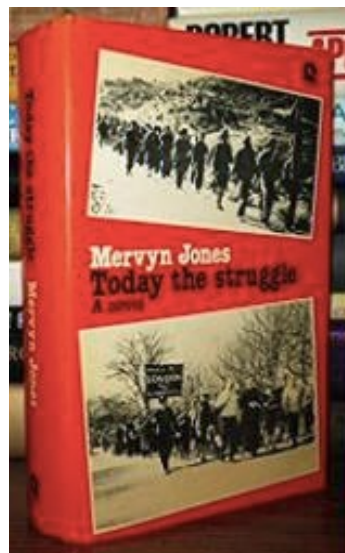


Fig.76 Cover for Mervyn Jones' *Today the Struggle: A Novel* 1978

Fay Godwin needs little introduction, to anyone engaged with British photography in later 20th Century, especially with landscape photography. That said, although there has been some critical attention, notably from Val Williams and Liz Wells, and focus, like my own, on particular projects, to date there is just one doctoral thesis dedicated to her body of work 'The People in The Pictures: Episodes from Fay Godwin's Archive, 1970-2005' by Geraldine Alexander. This archive is held in British Library (somewhat obscurely in the in the Asian and African Print Room, although no Godwin material relates to either continent), rather than, as you might expect, in the Tate archives or V&A Photography collections. This literary home is no doubt due to her work, especially for long established publishing house Faber and Faber, in creating portraits of well-known authors, some of whom she later worked with, on introductory or accompanying texts for her photobooks. Described as comprising eleven thousand exhibition prints, contact sheets and negatives with 'no linguistic content' - despite also explaining 'extensive correspondence' with various authors. Particularly with the Poet laureate Ted Hughes, whose own work is centred on a visceral metaphorical imaging of British landscape. Hughes, in a correspondence with Godwin that spanned twenty-nine years, acknowledged her photography as the inspiration for one of his most critically acclaimed works, the 1979 Hughes/Godwin collaboration *Remains of Elmet – A Pennine Sequence*.³⁵⁷ Working through this long correspondence, a sometimes intimate and intricate development of critical, and emotional, working process is apparent. An approach honed through her work as an environmental activist, and in extensive engagements for her photography of place, especially her strong feelings for the sea and coast. Godwin, who died in 2005, is best known for landscape photography, much of it concerned with vulnerable or spoiled rural and coastal places, also ancient places and roads, and areas where public access (due to private or military ownership) is blocked. There is also celebratory and eco-critical work on urban as well as wilder places. Alexander, without reference to *The Oil Rush*, notes that a focus for Godwin was the use of oil 'for fuel, in terms of increased road schemes and volume of traffic' but that 'a more

³⁵⁶ Fay Godwin *Our Forbidden Land* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1990) p.123

³⁵⁷ Fay Godwin Archive. Correspondence from Ted Hughes (British Library Archives and Manuscripts MS 88614:1976-1985)

direct link to Godwin's environmental concerns could be found in her images of different allotment sites around Bradford'³⁵⁸ I posit that her work on, and around, the oil platforms provides a more overt link to her environmental activism. Furthermore, Alexander, in discussing the personal and professional dynamic between Godwin and the writer Allan Sillitoe, in the production of images and text for *The Saxon Shore Way* asserts that 'Hughes was the only co-author Godwin worked with in an integrative way' fn GA thesis p174. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, Godwin herself has written on *The Oil Rush* as a thoroughly equal and combined effort between herself and Jones.

Walking (as it is for environmental activist and writer Solnit) was a key methodology for Godwin, in tandem with her visual research and photography she was also an effective activist, especially for the important, national 'Right to Roam' movement. By the late 1980s she was president of the highly successful campaign group, the Rambler's Association, as Val Williams has noted, foregrounding Godwin's eco-critical work at the end of the twentieth century.

Producing a remarkable visual polemic *Our Forbidden Land* [...] The photo historian Philip Stokes noted that her photographic studies of the landscape have a felicity which flows from their rightness, rather from any gentling of her view of the places photographed. Indeed, some convey a sense of formidable, cold hardness [...] *Our Forbidden Land* was published in 1990 and won the first Green Book of the Year award; the Royal Photographic Society organised an exhibition of prints from the project and Godwin became an Honorary Fellow of the Society.³⁵⁹

In the 1970s, as Williams and Alexander have discussed, Godwin began to engage with the wider British photography community, notably through an involvement with the Co-Optic group. An increasing individual profile (through the Faber work, which was to provide an income, much needed as a single mother) led to her being able to focus on her own interests. Although not

³⁵⁸ Geraldine Alexander *The People in the Pictures: Episodes from Fay Godwin's Archive 1970 – 2005* (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2014) p. 242

³⁵⁹ Val Williams 'Fay Godwin-Obituary' in *The Independent*, 2nd June, 2005

discussed, I argue that her work in 1975, to produce *The Oil Rush* precedes, and develops, her attention to later eco critical and more literal landscape projects. Meanwhile, Mervyn Jones at first seems an unlikely collaborator, except that he also had an established profile in the 1970s, as a successful novelist, later respected journalist. Godwin was also part of the literary scene and will have been aware of such a success. As well as mainly social realism novels, Jones wrote as a prolific journalist on a huge range of topics, framed by a socially concerned commitment to history from the ground up. His non-fiction also included: *Potbank: A Social Enquiry into Life in the Potteries* (1961), *Two Ears of Corn – Oxfam in Action* (1965) and *Life on the Dole* (1972). Jones died in 2010, and is remembered as ‘a chronicler of his times [...] Probably his finest and most widely read work was *Holding On* (1971). It portrayed the loves and hates in a working-class family, told through the eyes of a London docker’³⁶⁰



Fig.77 Cover image for Mervyn Jones' *Holding on* (1971) Unknown photographer, 1938

³⁶⁰ Geoffrey Goodman 'Mervyn Jones-Obituary' in *The Guardian* 25th February, 2010.

The cover of *Holding On* is an extraordinary black and white image of dock workers by the River Thames. Using pitchforks to move piles of what seems to be waist high straw that has come loose from bales, giving the impression that a field has somehow been transported to central London. This is foregrounded, like the two lean men, in sharp focus compared to the fog and smog that drifts over the river behind them. A bus crosses the river on a bridge that spans the water from the workers' side, the South Bank over to the Houses of Parliament. The bulk and spires of this seat of power loom over and behind the harvested piles and the men whose gaze is turned to the work rather than the source of the policy which governs the harvest, the transportation, the pollution and their lives. In the publishing credits the photographer is not credited, just the 'owners' (Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS) with a simple title 'Rural Scene in Urban London'. I research the image and find that the cover image is cropped, the whole image includes two more workers, bent over more bales to lift by hand, behind them is more of the river flowing past the Houses of Parliament. Between the working men and the buildings is a long barge, belching a huge plume of thick black smoke that drifts to the height of the clocktower of Big Ben, that marks the hours with portentous chimes. The image has been included in *Time Magazine* , in a review of a new Taschen Art book 'Portrait of a City: A Look at London' 1938. 'Unloading hay at warehouses on the South Bank. London still had horses to feed'.³⁶¹ I research further, the actual use of the 'hay' is explained 'A group of men unload esparto grass from barges at a wharf near Lambeth on the River Thames, 1938'. Esparto grass was used to make textiles and bank notes.³⁶²

The choice of this well observed scene of labour in the service of capital evidences an understanding of Jones as much as the book, a story about a working-class family in London's Docklands, when it was still a site of docks

³⁶¹ Megan Gibson 'Portrait of a City: A Look at London' 1938. <https://time.com/3790927/london-portrait-of-a-city-photo-history/> (accessed January 2024)

³⁶² Karin Andréasson 'Picture's from the Past. Picture of the Day -Life on the Thames' *The Guardian Online* May 13, 2013 (accessed September 17th 2023)

and dockers rather than the site of international banking and luxury flats it became when Thatcher's government formed the LDDC (The London Docklands Development Corporation) 'declaring the area an enterprise zone with various incentives to attract businesses. It made an attractive proposition for investors'.³⁶³ The closure of docks to make way for the towering offices of international banking resulted in significant unemployment and poverty in East London as well documented by, and researched through, the Docklands Community Poster Project (1980 – 1989). The area came to be known as Canary Wharf, also home to the UK offices of British Petroleum.



Fig. 78 *Big Money is Moving In* Docklands Community Poster Project (1980 – 1989)

The careful situating, through the images and texts of *The Oil Rush* as empathetic to workers across the spectrum, as well as the local population that did not benefit from the oil, the weaving of oral history with scientific data and socio-economic insights and fact that Jones collaborated with a woman on such a venture, is no surprise. Nor is it that the photobook was published by Quartet, dedicated to the non-mainstream and alternative, especially at that time. This project manifestly involved extensive, logistically complicated work,

³⁶³ David Tucker 'London Walks' January 2024. <https://www.walks.com/blog/london-docklands-history/> (accessed 20th July 2024)

reliant upon much participant interaction. The work was mainly conducted in Aberdeen, Peterhead and the Shetlands Isles of Scotland, as well as on the North Sea of England itself, including on supply vessels and an actual drilling platform, known as a rig. Given the limited opportunity for return journeys by chartered helicopter, there was just one month (a record-breaking hot August in 1975) during which to engage with the places and people involved. *The Oil Rush* provides two hundred and eight pages of documentation, and aesthetic experience, of a significant socio-economic and environmental development that had immediate and long- term effect on a national and very local scale. Although the design at first looks like one, it is not quite the size of a classic 1970s paperback novel, slightly larger at 13 x 19 cm. Divided into sections, rather than chapters, with no introduction, this also indicates a photobook, an attempt at an alternative format.

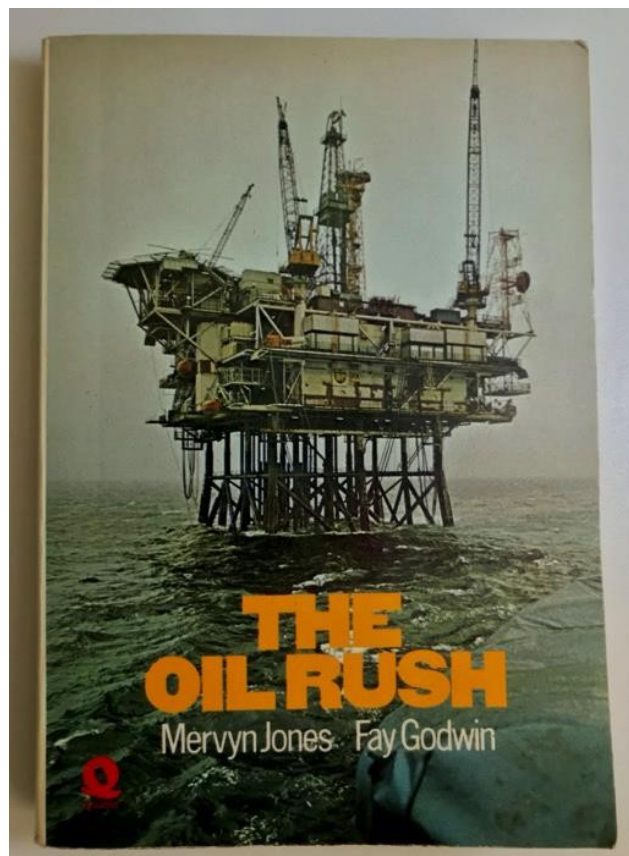


Fig.79 Front Cover of *The Oil Rush Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

The front cover is the single colour image in the book, although this too is mainly shades of slate overall. The oil rig looms large, filling the centre as we glimpse the approaching vessel, from which the photograph is made, heading through the churning water around its monumental legs. Despite being an obviously contemporary, industrial hulk, the scale and demeanor of the rig is reminiscent of the maritime paintings of empire, a skeletal galleon dominating the sea, intent on aggressive domination. The waves are an impressionistic blue- green, receding into grey as they merge with a just discernible horizon. The choice to use this foggy sky is highly significant as later in the book we learn of the hours, days and weeks spent waiting for the helicopter, after an exhausting two, or sometimes four week or even longer shift. The simple title, in block capitals, is in the arresting, universal 'safety orange', the colour used to ensure a person (in overalls) or object will stand out, against sky or sea for example) Flecks of citrus punctuate the steel and concrete of the rig and crane bases, these are from the familiar graphic for British Petroleum a yellow BP on a green shield. This shield logo is part of an overtly masculine iconography, the visual and other language in the oil industry constructs and conveys a macho world of Pioneers, Vikings, Alpha, Olympus, Petronius, Berkut (Golden Eagle) and so on. The photograph is credited to Godwin, who will have joined one of the precarious supply vessels (there were eighty a week in the summer) to achieve this ominous but exciting viewpoint. The soundtrack of waves, wind, engines, machines, and the shouting to be heard over this industrious cacophony can only be imagined. The rest of the book is black and white, adding to the mistaken identity (in libraries in which it can be found) of this an industrial text book, with industrial photography illustrating a technical text. It begins with an unusual frontispiece, in that it is a stand-alone photograph (opposite a blank inside front cover, not, as is usual, opposite the title page which is also largely visual and comes afterwards) there is no text at all on, or near, this frontispiece. The striking full page photograph bleeds off the page and is a zooming in, from the front cover image, from the seemingly unpopulated, sculptural structure and the inhuman scale of the towering alien architecture of the oil rig. Straight into a close up of an intently focussed worker, awkwardly crouching down, leaning forward to engage with

large, heavy metal mechanism, a giant pully block perhaps? The hard hat and large protective eye 'goggles' indicate a welder.

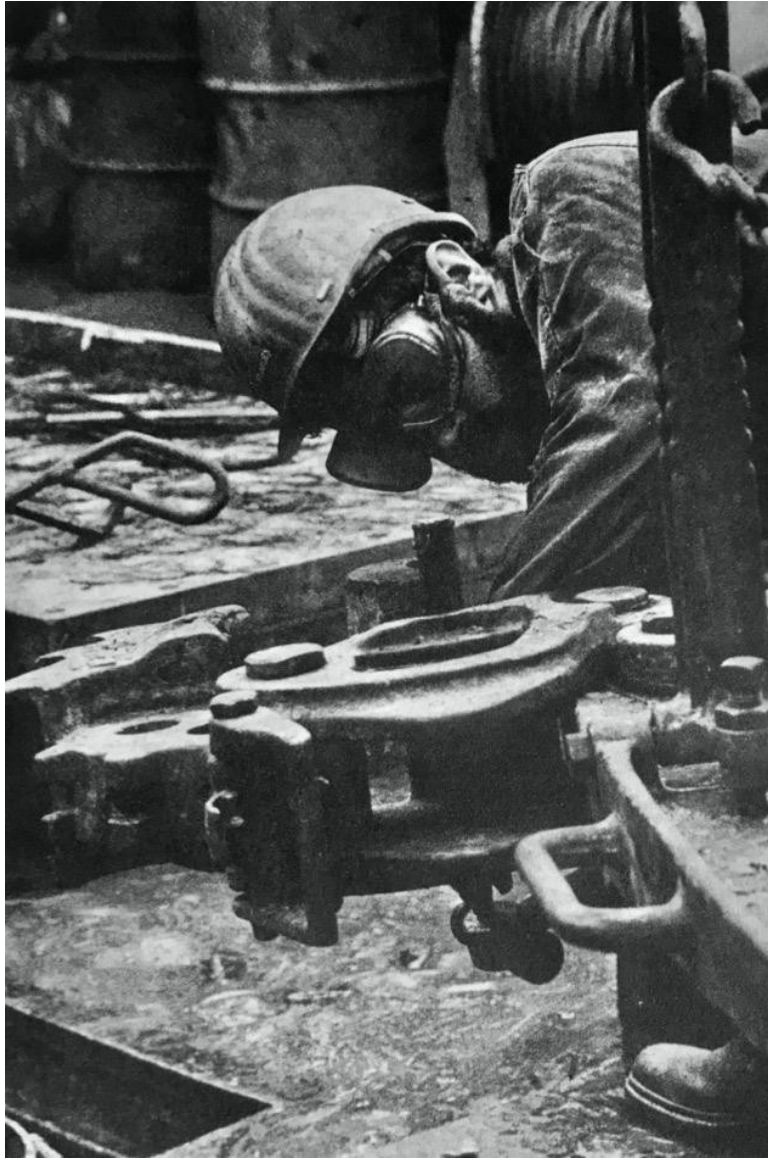


Fig.80 Frontispiece of *The Oil Rush* *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

On page forty-five the conditions for such work are described thus

It might be raining, and the steel floor would be slippery. The rig might be rising and falling. It might be dark, and in winter it usually is; the drilling floor has powerful floodlights, but roughnecks say that the derrick casts deceptive shadows.

This image embodies the oil industry at ground level, involving physical labour, danger, exploitation, and aspiration (to afford a better time if not life). Oil drums, bolts and a huge cable-spool provide a background, a working environment. The expanse of sky and sea are now obscured by machines and industry. Two things are immediately clear, firstly that this first photograph, chosen to establish a critical position and to situate the work, also sets the scene and the tone for the project. The view of the worker, in their locale, is then foregrounded throughout. Secondly, that this photography is to have at least equal status to the text, this (as much as Konttinen's or Neville's projects) is a photobook, as defined by Patrizia Di Bello and Shamoan Zamir on how, in a photobook,

photographs certainly move beyond the role of illustrations or transmitters of evidence to claim an active role in generating an independent meaning grounded in the unique ontology of their visual form. But at the same time, they do not transcend the texts that accompany them; rather, image and text work in a dialectical relationship ³⁶⁴

A short, informative statement from Godwin confirms this, in a 'photographer's note' preceding the first section of *The Oil Rush* she explains how the 'words and the images in this book are different comments, each reinforcing and adding to the other. Together, I hope they illustrate more than each could on its own'. The powerful front cover image has transported us over a cinematic seascape into the detail, into the work at hand, the precarious hands-on labour of the exploration and extraction of oil. Through the first two images, and first three words, we enter another, offshore, world. From the section *On the Rigs* (pages forty-six to forty-seven) an indication of the conditions in which Godwin and Jones were also working is a typical example of how their photobook combines fact and feeling to convey the experience.

³⁶⁴ Di Bello, Patrizia, Colette Wilson and Shamoan Zamsir (eds.) *The Photo Book from Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2011) p. 4.

Work on the rigs goes on round the clock [...] everyone works for 12 hours a day (or night) 7 days per week [...] you're filthy, you're freezing, you're wet it is forbidden to go indoors during the shift [...] if the helicopter with the relief crew is delayed by bad weather, the men simply have to carry on (six weeks instead of two) [...] The Conoco rig is off The Shetlands – so we have an unexpected chance to visit these distant islands - Then we fly back to Aberdeen. The 180-mile journey takes two and a quarter-hours on the return trip, in the teeth of the wind

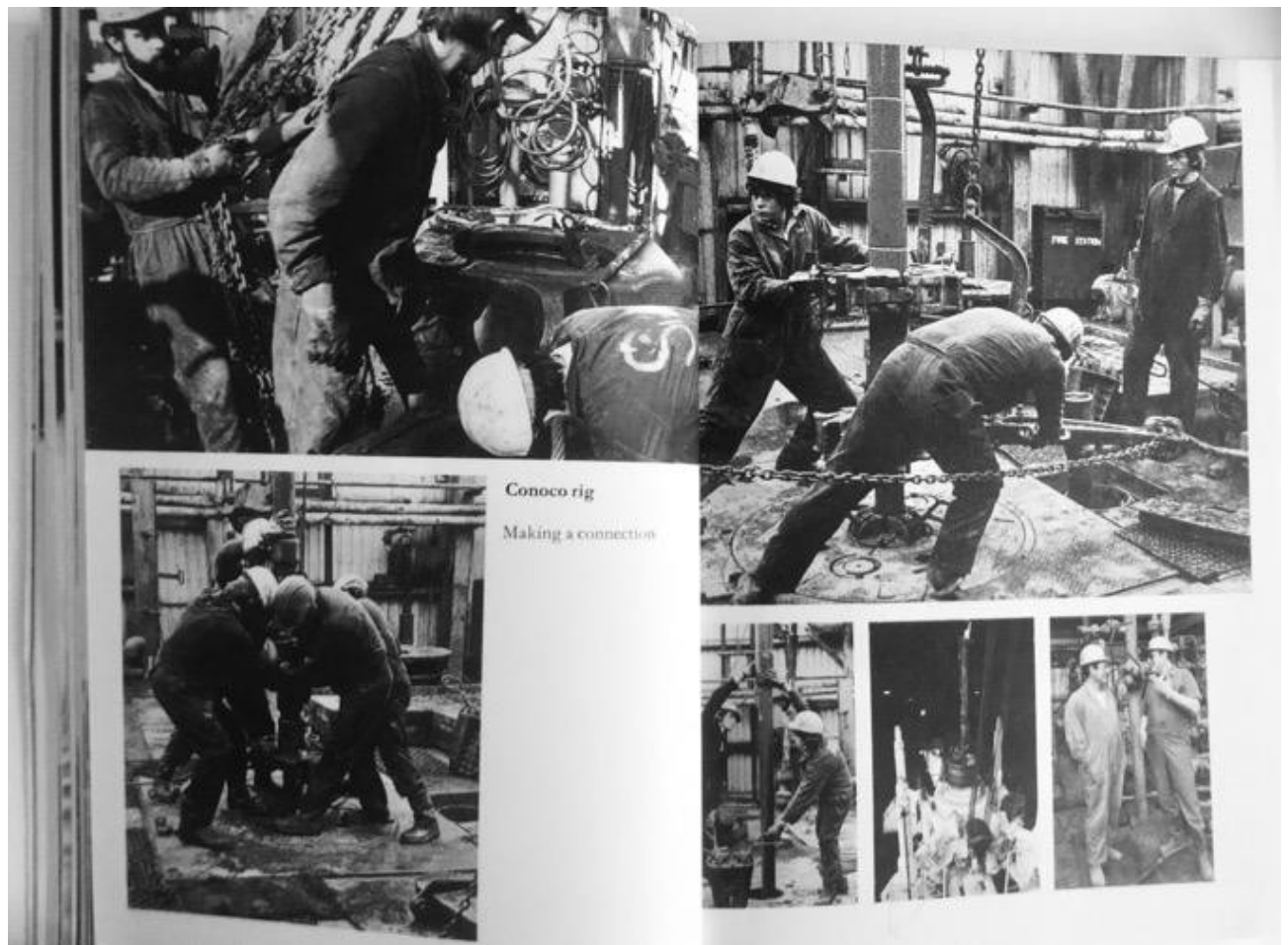


Fig.81 'Conoco Rig - Making a connection'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

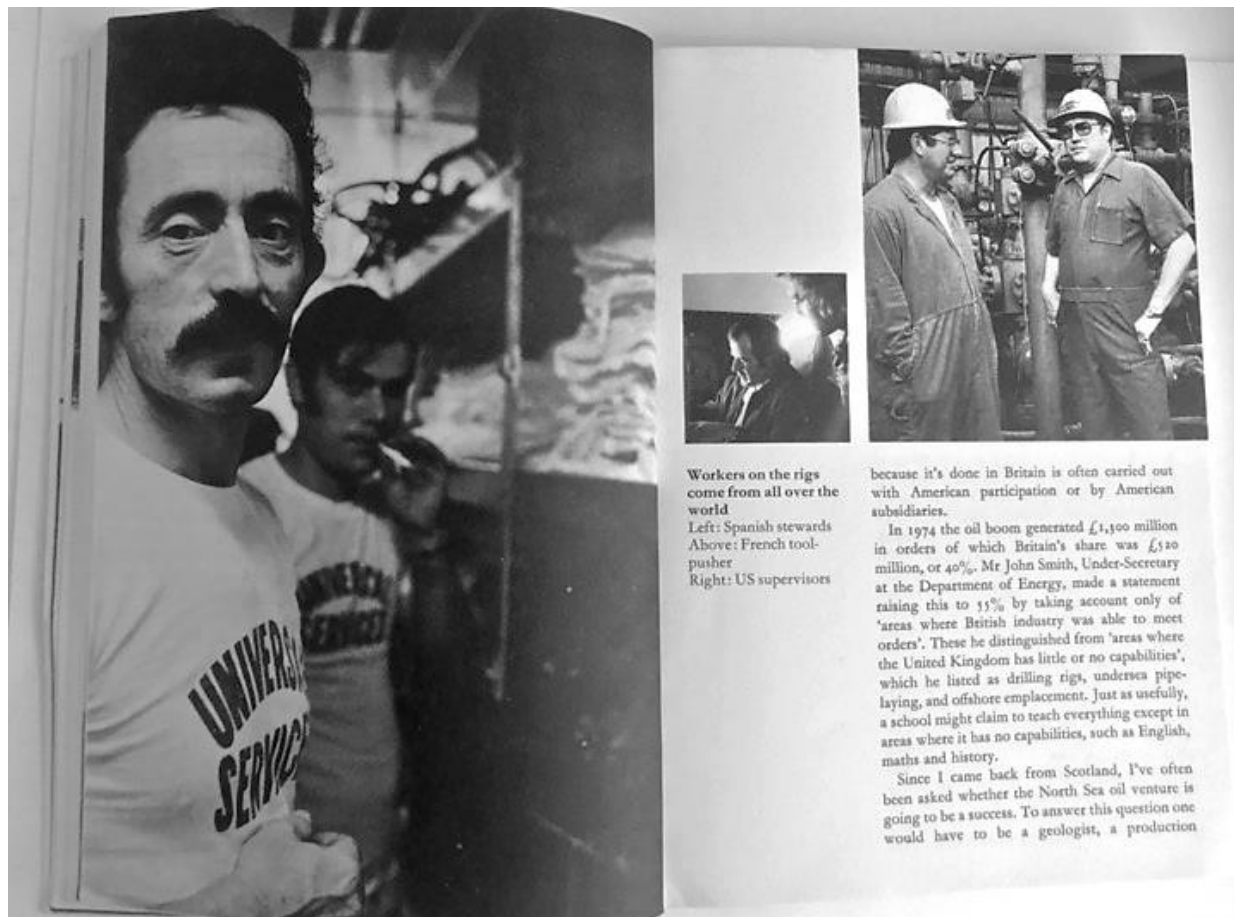


Fig.82 'Workers on the rigs come from all over the world. Left: Spanish stewards
Above: French tool- pushers Right: US Supervisors'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

The number of interviews and variety of photographs, despite some obviously made in haste, in unstable conditions, while there was a chance belies a hectic itinerary, navigating boats, helicopters, day and night shifts, 'Boom Town' culture and the North Sea weather. The book also conveys an intense immersion in a Ranciérian aesthetic experience, the quotidian culture of oil with the related workers and community: from deckhand 'roustabouts' to divers, provisions suppliers to foremen and managers. There is a hierarchy of roles, from lower deck 'roustabouts' (general labourers) to more skilled 'roughnecks' on the drilling-floor, including the important 'tool-pusher' as described on page thirty-nine in the section 'On the Rigs'

he pushes tools along, keeps the rhythm of the work going, and decides (consultation with the supervisor from the oil company) when drilling is to start or stop [...] there are crane drivers, mechanics, geologists [...] men in senior jobs are usually Americans or Canadians. The drilling company is likely to be American [...] However, a roughneck who has worked in the North Sea for five years feels resentful when he has to take orders from a tool-pusher straight from the USA, whose experience has been in smaller rigs and easier conditions where conditions are easier [...] Americans working the North Sea, of course, pay tax at US rates.

A participation in the artificially domestic life on land as well as sea, where food and films, smoking, reading and card-playing fill the brief 'downtime' hours, or long 'hanging around' hours on the rigs, until the homebound helicopters can land or take off. Time out from drilling, diving, sampling for the deck workers, also the chefs and stewards (the conscious gaze of Godwin foregrounds the outsourced catering men's T-Shirts, from 'Universal Service') is more possible back on land, relatively highly paid and well received in some quarters a diverse international workforce contributes a modern cosmopolitanism.



Fig. 83 'The Grenada, Peterhead' . From the section 'Boom Town'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975



Just back from Stavanger, Norway, American construction workers await further work in an Aberdeen b&b hotel. 'The money on Shell's Condeep (platform) was *fantastic*, but we didn't save any'

Right: Five minutes before opening time outside rig-workers' pub, Aberdeen



Fig.84 'Just back from Stavanger'. From the section 'On the Rigs'
Caption for Untitled, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

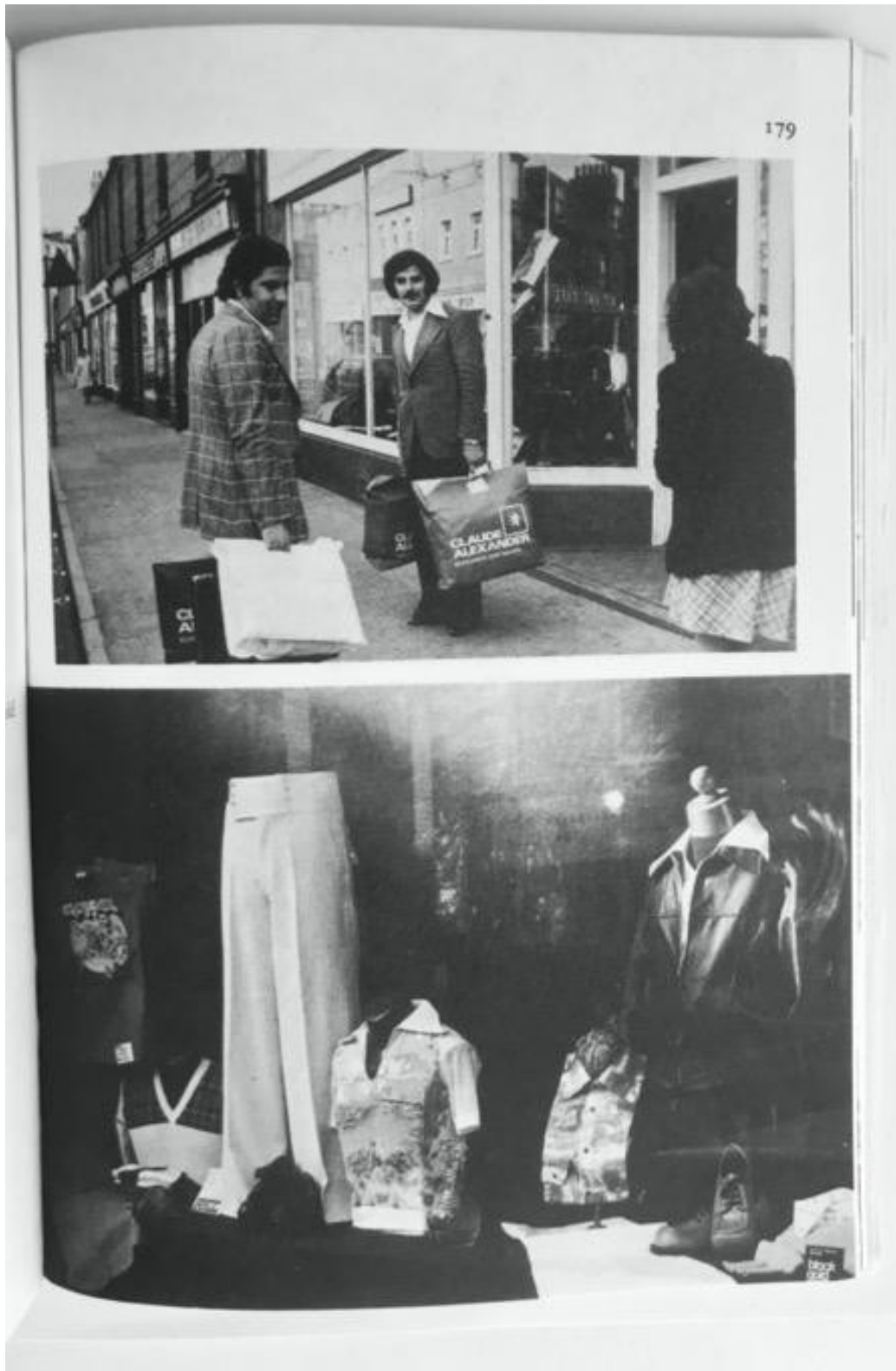


Fig.85 'Top image Spanish barge workers on a shopping spree in Peterhead Bottom image: Male boutique: Names like Rigg and Black Gold are conspicuous' From the section 'Boom Town'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph,

1975

227

Godwin and Jones toured the hastily constructed accommodation for the incoming, international workforce, also the new fashionable clothes shops, nightclub and pubs, where the new high salaries were used to compensate for the grueling shifts, that were often very far from home. High spirits and camaraderie as well as tensions and conflict in a confined, intense world. The experience is relayed with forensic detail, including oral history on the societal costs and implications, on the likely accidents and huge environmental changes. The images also speaking with the well-researched words, extending facts and observations into evocative elicitation, we are to feel something as well as learn something through this photography contextualized as 'material performance'.

Through her extensive analysis of the meticulous work of the 19th Century survey movement that was, from 1885-1918, to document another moment in a fast-changing England, Elizabeth Edwards provides an important contribution to 'interpretive approaches to the relationship between photographs and history'. As mentioned, she focuses on the performative materiality in practices of photography to make an eloquent case for a physical engagement; in the handling and reading of boxes, files, negatives, with the notes and information to be found on, and around, the images, This to facilitate the haptic and emotional affectiveness of photography through archival practices and experience. This emotional affectiveness can be applied to *The Oil Rush* as a performative project that is clearly offered to a future as well as (then) contemporary audience. A future audience identified by Edwards as a central rationale for photography as 'concerned with the potential loss of a future that might have no sense of its past'. *The Oil Rush* offers a cultural and environmental fore-warning, most overtly proffered in Godwin's images for the sections 'The Concrete Platform' (pages ninety-one to one hundred and eighteen) followed by 'The Steel Platform' (pages one hundred and nineteen to one hundred and thirty-nine).

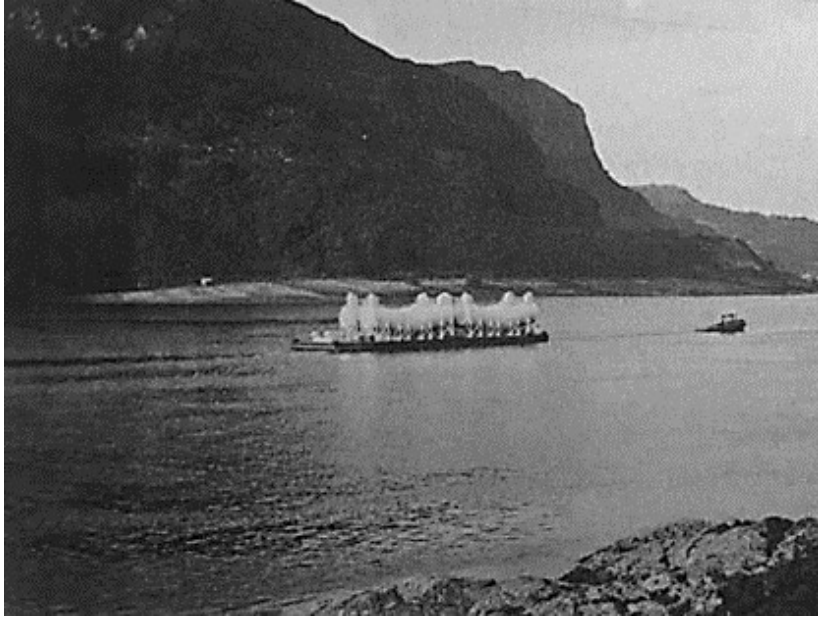


Fig.86 'Maiden voyage of the concrete transporter from Strome Ferry to Kishorn site' From the section 'The Concrete Platform'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

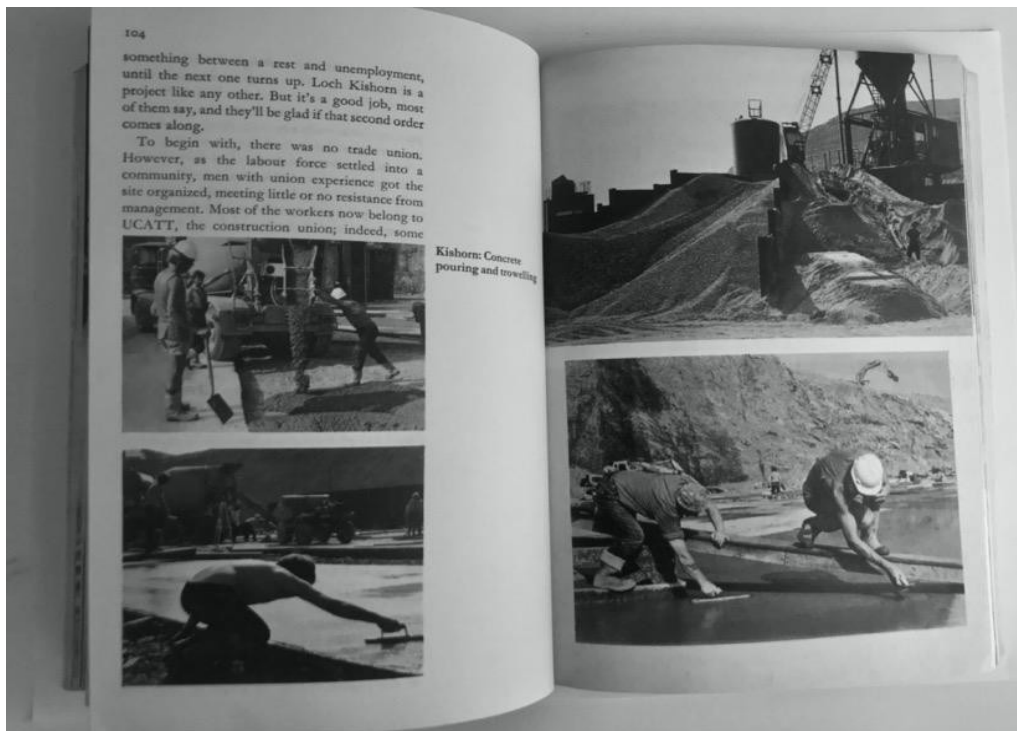


Fig.87 'Kishorn: Concrete pouring and trowelling' From the section 'The Concrete Platform'. Note the text on this page, how 'the labour force settled into a community' and became unionised'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

Meanwhile, the 'material practice', can (I assert) include the huge physical endeavour in the making of this small documentary photobook. It also evidences traces of personal interactions, between Godwin, Jones and the communities involved (also within these groups) as well as their haptic experience of the oil industry. Participation, in this oral and visual history, is manifest throughout. As Edwards argues

by paying attention to things and practices, moving the analysis of photographs from questions of representation alone to questions of material practice, we can actually comprehend the role of photography in the discipline of history. This role consists not only in producing historical evidence in a forensic sense, but also in expressing a self-conscious historiographical desire to inscribe, narrate, and connect to the past³⁶⁵

Other, more overtly political, rather than phenomenological, readings can also be made. While not within the scope of this introduction to *The Oil Rush* as a photo-history, my thesis elaborates on this by discussing the work in terms of critical realism, as a photographic method and concept, to critique and extend traditional documentary. As developed by Sekula in his sustained work on globalized capitalism, where the imaging of the maritime world of container shipping is central. An exemplar is the aforementioned long durational project *Fish Story*, another multifaceted, serial production:

In opposition to this fantasy of a dematerialised economy flowing through the airwaves - Sekula insists on materiality, telling us the vast bulk of the world's goods are transported as ship's cargo. Seafarers and port labourers make the world economy go round. In taking the briny world as a medium, Sekula connects the material and immaterial, production and consumption, violence and the quiet life, the struggle for survival and affluence³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Elizabeth Edwards 'Photography and The Material Performance of The Past' in *History and Theory of Photography*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Wesleyan University: Wiley) 2009 pp. 130–50

³⁶⁶ Steve Edwards 'Allan Sekula's 'Chronotypes: Uneven and Combined Capitalism' in *Allan Sekula Ship of Fools/The Dockers' Museum* Hilde Van Gelder (ed.) (Leuven: Leuven, University Press, 2015) pp.31- 43

The analogy with the oil industry is also clear, seafarers include rig and related workers, one of the most shipped cargoes, around the world, is mineral fuel (oil and bitumen). To further situate *The Oil Rush* in an eco-critical analysis I also draw upon Energy Humanities (in which photography is increasingly featured) to foreground the significance of the specific time and place from which Godwin and Jones' environmentally, aesthetically, and politically conscious (and conscientious venture) emerged and responded to. Jones' text, working in tandem with Godwin's photography, details the money being made, spent, and lost at government and individual levels, with astute observations and predications on the global, national, and local results. Their work is echoed, nearly forty years later, in the literature of Energy Humanities. The aforementioned Terry Brotherstone (University of Aberdeen) is a key voice here, director of the foundational *Lives in the Oil Industry*, an expansive oral history and 'primary evidence' project. He particularly focusses on the socio-economic histories, of the discovery of oil in the North Sea

the ways in which the prospect of oil wealth helped frame British political aspirations in the 1970s [...] Oil revenues helped make Thatcherite neoliberalism possible. Scottish working people and their communities were amongst its main victims [...] Thatcher's focus on making the United Kingdom a minimally regulated centre for global finance, at the expense of industrial production, was perceived most negatively in Scotland which is where most of the oil was.³⁶⁷

Brotherstone discusses the role of this in Scottish and English nationalist politics, how the 'historic moment' of British oil flowing in 1975, the projected and actual revenues were diverted from a nationally promoted vision of support for public services to ideologically driven plans and an almost rogue industry.

³⁶⁷ Terry Brotherstone 'A Contribution to Post-Imperial British History: North Sea Oil, Scottish Nationalism and Thatcherite Neo-Liberalism' in Owen Logan and Andrew McNeish.(eds.) *Flammable Societies: Studies on the Socio-Economics of Oil and Gas* (London: Pluto Press, 2012) p.70, p.81

This was evidenced in 1988, with the catastrophic disaster of the Piper Alpha rig explosion that killed nearly two hundred oil workers including those on the rescue vessel. 'By then North Sea oil had already delivered much of [...] the strategic advantage to the Thatcher government acknowledged in 1982 but at the expense, it was now horrifyingly clear of the failure to prioritise human life'.³⁶⁸ The human costs, inequitable experience and environmental impact are very much the concerns of Godwin and Jones as eco-critical researchers and practitioners. Despite the critical possibilities through analysis of *The Oil Rush* there is scant mention, let alone sustained discussion in academic research for art and photography history. As Brotherstone also points out the 'lacuna', the relative lack of academic work on the industry (in contemporary history), reflecting the operations of oil, far from public view 'There are no oil communities as there were coal communities [...] the oil, unlike coal, remains underground delivered largely unseen.'³⁶⁹

In Alexander's thesis, as the single comprehensive academic account of Godwin's output, there is a robust section on Godwin as an environmentalist. Alexander discusses the influence of the 1973 bestselling book *Small is Beautiful: A study of Economics as if People Mattered* by E F Schumacher.

In 1991, Godwin was amongst a number of speakers invited to take part in the renown Schumacher Lectures in Bristol. Her identification with the founding tenets of Schumacher's philosophy - the idea that many areas of human activity could and should be conducted on a human scale, rather than through powerful and faceless authorities, or via big technology [...] she introduced herself as representing "the ordinary person – working on a normal level" in order to report back on the condition of the British countryside³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ *Flammable Societies: Studies on the Socio- Economics of Oil and Gas* (London: Pluto Press, 2012) p.80

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

However, despite this account of environmentalism *The Oil Rush* is not addressed by Alexander at all, just one short quote, from the 'Photographer's Note' at the start of the photobook, is used. This makes a point about Godwin's awareness of gender-based bias and challenges in 1970s-80s photography, as a male dominated industry and cultural scene. The note is useful to resituate here: although she was forty-one years of age at the time: 'Several times I was refused permission to make trips to rigs, platforms, pipelaying barges and other facilities because I am a woman'. Godwin adds, importantly, in a separated out and final comment, that 'The photographs were taken during the heatwave in August 1975'. Alexander also mentions Godwin sometimes employing a 'discreet humour' when dealing with images of environmental pollution, I would say more of a dry wit is discernible, when people are involved, including in the harsh habitat of the oil rigs where the workers' interventions, in the experience of their surroundings and routines are observed along with other contiguous elements.

³⁷⁰ Geraldine Alexander 'The People in the Pictures: Episodes from Fay Godwin's Archive 1970- 2005' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2014) p.147

There was a resurgence of interest and eco-activism in Britain from the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. I also attended this lecture, as, at the time, working on the *EcoDesign* journal for the Ecological Design Association. Based in Stroud, Gloucestershire. Stroud also known for Extinction Rebellion, who formed there in 2018. <https://schumachersociety.net/governance/history-and-mission/> (accessed June 4th 2023)



Fig. 88 'The men get one meal after six hours, eaten in a little hut on the deck. "I've known what it is to work twelve hours, get three hours sleep, and be woken to start again".' From the section 'On the Rigs' Nb. 'Duffy' is a pun on 'Duff', a robust pudding, made of dough.

Caption for *Untitled* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975



Fig.89 'Speculation'

'There is anxiety about pollution from the tanker terminal and the ammonia plant. And oil is bad news for the owners and skippers of fishing boats [...] crews are leaving the trawlers to work on the supply boats, or else to stay on shore and take the jobs now available'.

From the section 'Boom Town'

Caption for *Untitled*, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

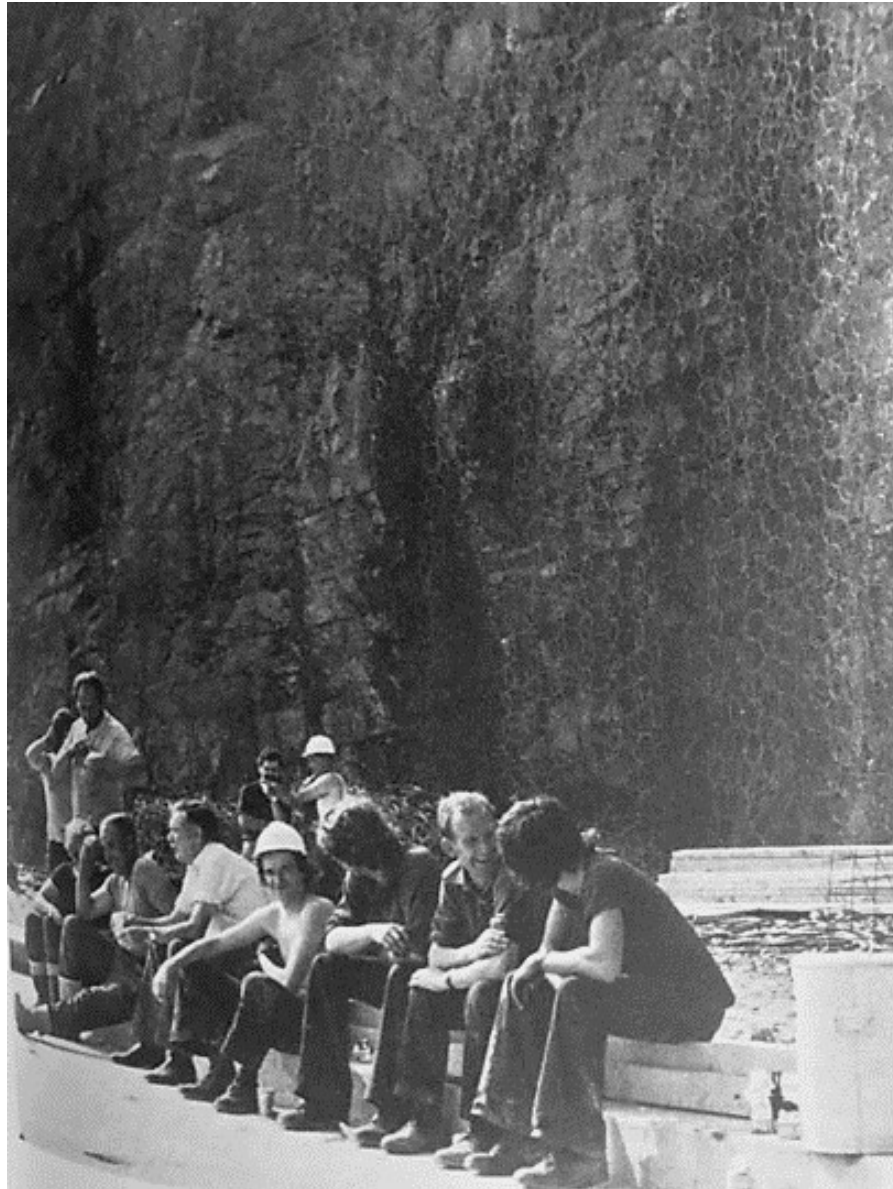


Fig.90 'Teabreak. The wire netting covering the cliff behind is to stop rockfalls' in the section 'The Concrete Platform'

Caption for *Untitled* Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

Due to the conditions in which the men work, as well as the nature of a resource rush, and despite the chorus line of strong forearms and sturdy boots, the physical and employment precarity looms in the unstable cliff face. The text that accompanies the image and caption for 'Teabreak' is as follows

The boldest decision, undoubtedly was to set up a construction site on the shore of Loch Kishorn [...] the wildest and emptiest countryside[...] Here, the Highland clearances were carried out with utter ruthlessness, an economy of peasant farming was destroyed [...] There's no shade except just under the cliff and seldom a vestige of a breeze [...] "your face is itching, your eyes are watering from dust, your hands are sticky with cement and you carry your midge cloud wherever you go [...] you've earned your £150.

During extensive searching for scholarly engagement with *The Oil Rush* I discover an old link to some recommended reading for a course module at Warwick University, where the History department had once included a specialism on the socio-cultural histories of oil. A good use of the British Petroleum (BP) archive held at the university. I find a very brief mention, the photobook is described thus: 'Mervyn Jones of the New Statesman wrote a sharp piece of reportage, *The Oil Rush*, in 1976, with grim photos by Fay Godwin; then there was silence'.³⁷¹ Albeit written a few years ago this statement (which clearly marginalizes Godwin as co-creator) referring to the histories of North Sea Oil, is not accurate. As well as emerging academic work, in environmental humanities, there was a growing body of work on the oil 'genre' in film and television. A long personal engagement by the widely exhibited artist Sue Jane Taylor particularly ensures that the histories of North Sea oil in visual art (if not social documentary photography), including the Piper Alpha disaster, are not silenced. Taylor grew up in the 70s 'when the oil boom hit the highlands of Scotland' and has spent over thirty years drawing and painting the people of the industrial North Sea.

Visually these offshore installations are brutal, not bonnie, built for pure function, crude oil and gas production [...] Located in ever changing remote natural environments, over the years they have taken on their own individual social atmosphere created by people who have personalised their offshore work spaces. They have brought these places to life by their banter and stories, adding richness to contemporary North Sea seafaring folklore.³⁷²

³⁷¹ Module description: 'The Story of North Sea Oil'. See also Modern Records Centre, Warwick <https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/> (accessed June 4th 2023)

³⁷² Sue Jane Taylor's own exhibition text for 'The Age of Oil' 21st July – 5th November 2017. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Taylor's multi-media book *Oilwork: North Sea Diaries* is not a photobook, being comprised of her drawings, paintings and diary entries as well as photography, as she recounts and reflects upon her time spent, as a young woman with the then exclusively male workers, on the rigs, including Piper Alpha shortly before the July 1988 disaster in which the rig exploded and sank, one hundred and sixty-seven people died within hours.³⁷³ Recording their work and life as individuals, including through the use of oral histories, sometimes there are striking similarities with moments in *The Oil Rush*, although these images are in colour, with the text from Taylors own diaries as well as contribution from the workers. There is a whole section on Kishorn for example

All the superlatives were used to convey the scale of what went on at the Howard Doris Loch Kishorn construction site in the mid 1970s [...] After four frenetic years of activity, the platform departed for its North Sea destination, described as the largest man made object ever to move across the face of the Earth [...] 3000 men and women worked hard[...] The camp and fabrication sheds have been levelled, the ground landscaped to hide the scars, the workforce dispersed and except for the great hole blasted from the rock on the locks northern shore, nothing remains.³⁷⁴

Taylor's images revisit Godwin's caravans and oil worker housing, just ten years later, after huge environmental disruption 'The camp was now deserted, littered with empty, gutted portcabins tipped onto their sides'.³⁷⁵ Extracts from her diary tell of the few remaining workers, joking and despairing about their imminent redundancy, also more gruesome detail than offered by Godwin and Jones, on the culture of terrible sexism and hard drinking when the rough camp had attracted thousands in the 'oil rush' of the 1970s. Following the work

³⁷³ Taylor's work has been influential to a rare example, work from Peter Iain Campbell who is a photographer and offshore worker. Described (by the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich) in the same feature as 'commercial photographer' and 'artist'. An example of the confusion around images of contemporary industrial work, as if, because it is contemporary it can't be 'documentary' photography but must be 'commercial' or 'industrial'. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/life-on-north-sea-oil-rig> (accessed July 3rd 2023)

³⁷⁴ Ronnie McDonald 'Loch Kishorn Construction Yard Wester Ross, 1986' in *Oilwork: North Sea Diaries* Sue Jane Taylor (Edinburgh: Berlinn Ltd., 2005) p.39

³⁷⁵ Sue Jane Taylor *Oilwork: North Sea Diaries* (Edinburgh: Berlinn Ltd., 2005) p.46

Taylor moves offshore, via a BP helicopter and then safety vessel 'for me this was an utterly strange, unknown, all male territory [...] listing from side to side from the strong current and force of the sea below'³⁷⁶ By July 1987 she had arrived on the Piper Alpha platform, building rapport with the workers and this time taking more photographs, including infra-red to portray the night as well as daytime conditions, activity and experience.

Many evocative images of gas flares illuminating the outdoor (twenty-four hour) workspace at night, some are simply captioned 'infra-red'. These are used as reference for, and in contrast to, the artworks, although I see these as equally complex as documentation, also interpretive, critical images. Having been later commissioned, in a highly sensitive local context, to work with survivors (there were sixty-one, out of two hundred and twenty six rig workers, also two rescue boat crew), to create permanent sculptural memorial, she is invited, seventeen years after the Piper Alpha disaster, back to the Piper field (by a new company) and onto Piper Bravo to witness a much changed culture and working environment, including for health and safety. Taylor's project, for the most tragic of reasons, unexpectedly developed into a moment of participatory resistance and longer memorial.



Fig.91 Sue Jane Taylor (centre) celebrating the completion of a ship with the welders of John Brown's shipyard, 1987. Unknown photographer, Photograph, 1987

³⁷⁶ Ibid p.57



Fig.92 *Piper Alpha Helideck 1987. Infrared.*

Sue Jane Taylor, Photograph, 1987

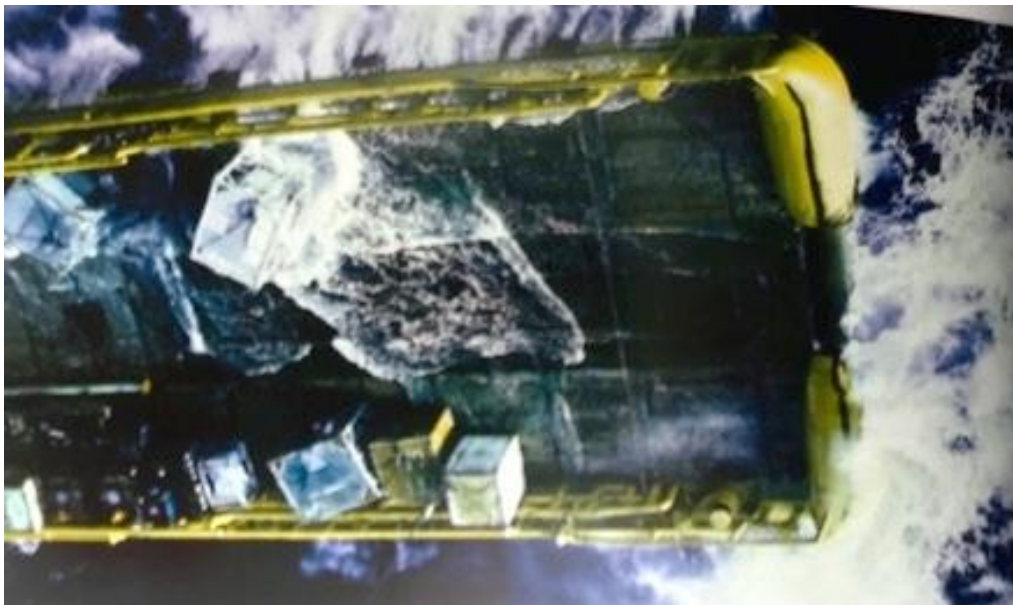


Fig.93 *Piper Alpha supply vessel deck, 1987. Infrared.*

Sue Jane Taylor, Photograph, 1987

Recalling her horror on hearing the news (and seeing the 'inferno' on television) she also explains how Occidental (the owners of Piper Alpha) contacted her: She could 'name her price' as they wanted to purchase all photographs, drawings, any recordings made on the rig. These were to be used for an

exhibition in Edinburgh, depending on the feelings of survivors and relatives. Taylor describes her incredulity and fear at this attention from a corporate multinational who wanted any evidence that might be used in the (already overwhelming) case for corporate liability. With the support of the bereaved families 'they regarded these works as part of a visual memorial to the men who perished that night', the Piper Alpha Outreach Team and Aberdeen City Council the exhibition went ahead and on to tour in twelve other iterations.³⁷⁷

A humanising frame is also employed in *The Oil Rush* which, (of course can't be compared to searing experience of the Piper Alpha) is still a far more complex than a 'sharp piece of reportage' by Jones. While I concur to an extent (it is meticulously researched, complex aspects of the global oil industry are illuminated for the unfamiliar) , in terms of authorship the collaboration comprises oral and visual history by Godwin, as well as Jones. As for 'grim photographs', If only I could reach those Warwick students, to facilitate an interactive seminar (or two) on photography and aesthetics, realism and representation, affect and feelings. Certainly, the print quality suffers from the worse sort of paper for image printing, and Godwin has discussed her vexation at the results of poor printing on some of her work in exhibitions as well as other books. However, these images (as is the case for Taylor's well printed *Oilwork*) were not conceived or produced as 'grim'. Despite the modest size and lack of colour images *The Oil Rush* conveys conscious bathos and pathos, sometimes rapport and wit, there are depictions of degraded landscapes and hard labour, with elements of sympathy, indignation also respect. We'll give the benefit of the doubt and assume that the course description 'grim' referred to some of the industrial blight visited upon the seas and beaches of the Shetlands and West Highlands, and of course, there are grim tasks, a combination of the dangerous and tedious. However, in *The Oil Rush* there is mainly a palpable sense of a charged moment in modern history, a dynamic working culture and atmospheric urban and rural scenery in play. In the section

³⁷⁷ Sue-Jane Taylor, *Oilwork: North Sea Diaries* (Edinburgh: Berlinn, 2005) pp.149 – 150 For a visceral docudrama of the Piper Alpha disaster, see '*Piper Alpha: Fire in the Night*' Director Anthony Wonke, (Berry McGinty Films, 2013). BAFTA Scotland award for best documentary 2013, the Audience Award at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, 2013. Sue Jane Taylor contributes, as herself.

Boom Town (actually Peterhead, the 'secondary centre' to Aberdeen's Oil Capital) anxieties about the decline of fishing and new pollution is outweighed by the exuberance for this change in fortune; for unexpected wealth and a knowledge that it might not last (saving as well as spending, on houses, cars, clothes and dancing, on good 'nights out'). *The Oil Rush* is informative and provocative, even when dealing with the actual grim element; the shadow of human harm and environmental disaster is present in each section, whether this relates to physical, economic or cultural iterations. I conclude this introduction to this long overlooked work with the image and text from the final page, as below, indicative of the continued relevance as further oilfields are, in 2024, approved in the North Sea and young people are jailed for protesting against this.



Fig.94 The final, uncaptioned, image in the section 'The Last Frontier' on the last page of *The Oil Rush*
Untitled, Fay Godwin, Photograph, 1975

It is idle to wish the oil boom out of existence, and idle to deny its obvious economic advantages. It is illusory, for reasons of investment and technical expertise, to imagine that the North Sea operation can be carried through by anyone except the great multinational oil companies. But it is foolish - knowing what we ought to know about these companies - to expect them to give priority to social responsibility and human well-being. As the phrase goes, they are not in business for their health. Nor yet for ours.



Fig.95 Image of the Piper Alpha explosions. Rescue efforts and firefighting were disturbingly broadcast live on television, causing much distress, especially to unprepared maritime workers and families, including my own. See ITV Scotland for one example:

<https://youtu.be/llqcRt0zIF4>

Also <https://youtu.be/VXZRx7sE1gc> from the The Smithsonian Channel.



Fig.96 Memorial for Piper Alpha. Bronze sculpture by Sue Jane Taylor, based on her drawings, paintings and photographs made on the rig, as well as with survivors.
Unknown photographer, Photograph, 1991

For my own research the auto-ethnographic element and maritime focus of Sekula, also the work on affect in photography theory and energy

humanities, is motivational. Many of my case studies are from working sites and situations, images and oral histories of work and life, around the North Sea. I respond to, and here employ, an element of auto-ethnography in my own research and visual practice. Coming from a working class, largely maritime background, subjects such as the Flags of Convenience, the machinations of globalized shipping, working on ships (from the 1940s) and oil rigs (from the late 1960s) including on working conditions and how and where to live, has long been the focus of discussion with retired sea worker, my father, Patrick Drew (1929 - 2024) The backdrop of nautical charts and maps, paintings and photographs, framed sailors knots, a prized 19th Century document (a great grandfather indentured to a sailing ship), a 'safety orange' lifebuoy hanging on an internal door, lengths of rope, shipping zone tea-towels and more besides, provide the visual reference for stories of success and disaster, survival, (including as an injured rig worker) and reactions to the complex role of maritime activity as emerging in newspapers, film and television. I immediately recognized and was moved by Sekula's items for *The Dockers' Museum* as manifestation and metaphor, for work and culture and sensibility. Also, by *The Oil Rush*, and also later, Sue Jane Taylor's work on the rigs of the North Sea.

The anxiety at the homecoming of rig workers at the heliport is a vivid childhood memory. Due to the often tight schedule, based on weather conditions and company pressure the blades kept spinning as the workers jumped out and ran underneath these to waiting cars. Usually to partners and children (like me and a younger sibling). The anxiety was all forgotten in the excitement back at home, as was the case in the shipping years. The same large, somewhat beaten-up holdall, containing diesel pungent boots and jumpers, would also contain new books and 'foreign language' comics. Sometimes a small national costumed doll (from Europe or America) emerged, and there were always new foods and sweets from other worlds, swapped between crews or bought at (seemingly) distant ports with exciting names, the promise of future travel. Zeebrugge, Stavanger, Ostend, a taste of a much wider world. Stories from further afield, before I was born, from the 1940s and 50s; the Middle East, Cyprus, Canada, Russia and about the effects of international politics on the global sea work during the Cold War. Dad often

recounts the time that the Suez Canal, Port Said, Egypt was closed to British shipping 'and they had to sail right round the horn of Africa'. This refers to the 'Suez Crisis', part of a short but hugely significant war that progressed the end of the British Empire, shifted global politics and foregrounded a post war fossil economy. Oil, and the transportation of oil and fuel was central. In 1956 there was a British, Israeli – French invasion of Egypt to gain control of the Suez Canal, responding to the nationalisation of the this strategically important sea trade route by the Egyptian President Nassar, who these allies wanted to overthrow as a threat to their economic and political power. Nassar had closed access to the canal by blocking the entrance to Port Said with sunken ships. The canal was closed for five months, between October 1956 to March 1957 when Dad happened to be in a merchant navy vessel which had to take the alternative route around the Cape of Good Hope on the southern coast of Africa. Britain had also engaged in aerial bombing of targets in Egypt, there were over a thousand Egyptian civilian and over one thousand, six hundred Egyptian military casualties.³⁷⁸ Following international pressure, mainly from the U.S. and the United Nations, who threatened sanctions, the three allies withdrew their forces. As explained by The Imperial War Museum that has a dedicated section on their website

Britain's declining status was highlighted and its Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, resigned. Egypt was granted ownership and sovereignty of Suez Canal and it was re-opened in April 1957 [...] British access to fuel and oil became limited and resulted in shortages. Petrol rationing was introduced [...] it emboldened Arab nationalists and spurred the Egyptian president to aid rebel groups seeking independence in British territories across the Middle East³⁷⁹

The alternative route was thousands of extra nautical miles, requiring much extra fuel and provision. Rather than the politics that raged onshore, with protests against the war and government, my Dad's main concern was that there were no extra provisions, as ships were not even able to dock for extra water or food. The legacy of the years on these routes was increasing recurrences of skin cancer in old age. Another was the development of super-

³⁷⁸ Derek Varble *The Suez Crisis 1956* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014) p.17

³⁷⁹ 'Why was the Suez crisis so important?' Imperial War Museum <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/why-was-the-suez-crisis-so-important> (accessed 20th July 2024)
Collective authorship. Names not supplied.

tankers to mediate the extra costs and time, to respond to the ever-growing demand for oil and related products. Far away, in the shipyards on the River Tyne the orders for huge new vessels resulted secure employment for another decade before the decline that was to be sympathetically documented by Amber, particularly through the film *Launch* and in the work of Chris Killip who captured some of the 'last ships' as discussed in chapter one. Half a century later the longer route is again in play for international shipping, citing war, piracy and environmental concerns the sea-freight company Westbound Global provides a 2024 disclaimer regarding the extra time and costs involved. Here is a section from their longer report, it is useful to include the entire paragraph as the combination of political, economic and ecological factors are evidenced

As a result of the war and the targeting of merchant vessels by Houthi rebels, shipping companies are now diverting to the longer but seemingly safer journey around the Cape to avoid the area. One of the primary concerns is the increased travel distance, leading to higher fuel consumption and operational costs. The Cape of Good Hope route adds thousands of nautical miles to a journey, resulting in longer transit times and potential delays in cargo deliveries. As fuel prices continue to fluctuate, shipping companies are faced with the economic strain of increased operating expenses. Moreover, the Cape route presents maritime vessels with unpredictable weather patterns and treacherous seas. The region is known for its strong winds and rough seas, posing a threat to both the safety of the crew and the integrity of the cargo. Navigating these challenging conditions requires advanced technology and skilled seafarers, adding further complexity to an already demanding task.³⁸⁰

By the 1970s dad was off the ships and 'on the rigs', returning home after weeks away at a time with new books, unfamiliar sweets, international costume dolls and other intriguing items often acquired through swaps at sea. Two Russian Ushanka (winter hats) were memorable for their dense fur and ear flaps. As I was interested in history and the sea I was once given an ancient rock sample, from a geologist on the exploratory rig, mounted in a cylinder of transparent Perspex. I proudly too this to my local junior school for the 'show and tell' class. This was received with horror by some, bored indifference by most and an attempt by the teacher to keep it. I wish I still had it. The rigs

³⁸⁰ Westbound Global Services <https://westboundglobal.com/sea-freight/the-cape-of-good-hope-the-best-solution-in-a-worst-case-scenario2/#:~:text=This%20alternative%20route%2C%20while%20historically,Sea%20and%20the%20Suez%20Canal.> (accessed July 20th 2024)

loomed large in our lives for more than a decade. Dad was quite badly injured once, on an American rig in the North Sea. His hand crushed while working to secure a leak. Luckily the weather allowed a prompt helicopter pick up and even more 'luckily' no spark or flame resulted in a leak explosion. Despite the effects being life-long, this injury was treated as unexceptional. Meanwhile, an uncle, a deep-sea diver 'on the rigs' had not survived his accident. Childhood mischief and complaints were unsurprisingly indulged, in contrast to life on the early rigs these were obviously experienced as the comfort of minor, normal domestic incidents.

When I was nearly six years old, the family moved, in 1968 from Tyneside in the North East to coastal Suffolk, the most Easterly county in England. This was to be near the heliport at Ellough, Beccles, as servicing the rigs emerging slightly further up the coast, off Great Yarmouth. Less daunting and physically demanding work for an aging Dad, was secured for a time on the ships sailing out of the major Port of Felixtowe. Home, created in various houses by Joyce and Paddy, parents with little formal education but very well informed and read, was filled with hundreds of books, illustrated trade and maritime association magazines that were rich in photographic insights, as well as broadsheet newspapers that at that time included carefully edited photo-journalism in Sunday magazine supplements. The leisure time of both working parents was mainly spent reading, watching films, occasionally talking about their much more challenging 1930s childhoods in Tynemouth, North Shields, and Wallsend. School had ended for Joyce at a very young age after her father had died from tuberculosis and the local priest, to 'support' her young mother, arranged for her and her three sisters to be placed in the local Nazareth House. These were convent orphanages, to be found across England and Ireland and ran by the Poor Sisters of Nazareth since the 19th Century. Many had a reputation for brutality and cruelty and have since been investigated. Joyce confirmed this with various detailed accounts, also defending one or two of the nuns and claiming that she avoided involvement as much as possible by

'mainly looking after the geese outside'.³⁸¹ Paddy's formal education ended around age thirteen, due to the second world war and bombing of the Tyne shipyards and inseparable towns. The school had mercifully been bombed during the night rather than day, Paddy was temporarily evacuated to the Rothbury countryside soon after. His experience there was very happy, cared for by a highly educated women in a supportive and attractive environment, in contrast to the harsh home life dominated by a violent and unpredictable father who was undoubtedly suffering Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome from the First World War. Unfortunately, he was soon returned from Rothbury at the insistence of his mother and joined a ship as an apprentice as soon as he could after surviving the bombing raids over Tynemouth and North Shields.

The sea has been responsible for family and individual stability and displacement, upward and downward mobility and back again, subject to the ebb and flow of economic and cultural tides. For at least two centuries it seems, mother's family being displaced from the Highlands, Scotland. My theoretical framing is, while informed by photo historians is unsurprisingly, inspired by philosophical proposals on notions of equality: From Michel de Certeau, his foundational analysis of the practices of everyday life and proposal that everyone is creative, capable of escaping whilst inescapably enmeshed in a matrix of survival strategies, management, and control. Mainly from the work of Rancière, his multifaceted critique of the orthodoxy, be that pedagogic or political and how that can be challenged by an awareness of the 'distribution of the sensible' (meaning divided out, not shared). His proposals insist on 'equality without conditions' and that the link between politics and aesthetics must 'always be constructed'.³⁸² Rancière has provided his own definition of

³⁸¹ *'The allegations stretch back as far as 50 years and are as recent as the 1970s. Claims of abuse have been made about homes run by the order in places including Newcastle upon Tyne, Plymouth, Swansea, Manchester and Sunderland'. Barry Wood 'Nuns 'abused hundreds of children' Independent Sunday 16th August 1998.*

³⁸² Baumbach contextualizes the work as not necessarily about film, but how the work returns to realism, in this case through documentary film. Nico Baumbach 'Jacques Rancière and the Fictional Capacity of Documentary' in the *New Review of Film and Television Studies* Vol.8, No.1, March 2010, pp.57-72. Another view is provided David Bate who refers to Rancière's engagement with photography in relation to 'art photography' rather than documentary. Bate presents examples of his own early digital works whilst considering Rancière's essay 'The Future of The Image' (2002) as 'playfully' referencing key texts and

what he means by 'aesthetics', 'not in the sense of viewing works of art, but rather in the strong sense of one's relationship with the perceived world'.

Describing how his doctoral thesis, first published in 1981 as 'Proletarian Nights: The Worker's Dream in 19th Century France' presented a poetics of working-class life.

stories, narratives, a kind of montage of letters, poems, workers' newspapers and pamphlets that tried to give an account of this struggle [...] it seeks to make visible - the efforts people undertook - to escape the simplest and most immediate form of coercion that burdened their lives -- which dictates that if someone works all day -they have to sleep at night - so that they can carry on working the next morning...the emancipation of the workers begins when where the workers decide not to sleep, but to read, to write, to gather at night [...] it allowed me to define both my view of politics and aesthetics ³⁸³

Since then, and now in the 2020s, critical cultural projects, such as from Lippard and Sekula, on the damage wrought by deregulation and globalized exploitation, foreground the contemporary inequality manifested in rural, coastal and urban environments. There is much, appropriately dystopian work on ecological as well as economic erosion, on manifestations of polarized of wealth and poverty, on structural inequalities across gender, race, class and the effects of climate change. Yet, there is also evidence of resistance and celebration. In everyday lives and in collaborative projects that seek to counter invisibility, injustice and/or misrepresentation. As explored in the following chapter, through the collaborative practice from Mark Neville, in which oil remains a covert yet powerful presence and when 'ordinary' people can, once again, be seen to do more than work and sleep.

titles from both psychoanalysis (Freud) and postmodernism (Jameson). He proposes that whilst Rancière challenges the medium specificity of Modernism he doesn't advocate an Avant Garde alternative. David Bate 'The Alterity of Images', Nida Art Colony, Vilnius Academy of Arts. Published online 27th August 2014. Meanwhile, Rancière himself has pointed out that he has not tried to provide a theory of film or photography but tried to engage with the nature of art (Mednarodna Konfernce, ARA, Ljubljana, November 2015)

³⁸³ Jacques Rancière and Peter Engelman *Politics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) p.11

Chapter Three: Commercially Unavailable: Distribution as an Activist Tactic
Celebration, survival, and advocacy in the North and beyond. Contemporary practice with a focus on Mark Neville.

Let's play football together, let's make some photos together, let's make a song together. Mark Neville 2020 ³⁸⁴

To introduce chapter three, I return to Rancière's concept of political equality which is fundamental to his philosophical work on the 'aesthetic regime'. Wherein, he asserts, 'the unrecognizable' should be recognized and made visible.³⁸⁵ This chimes, for my thesis, with Mirzoeff's notion of countervisuality, as he explains:

This practice must be imaginary, rather than perceptual, because what is being visualized is too substantial for any one person to see and is created from information, images, and ideas. This ability to assemble a visualization manifests the authority of the visualizer. In turn, the authorizing of authority requires permanent renewal in order to win consent as the "normal", or everyday, because it is always already contested. The autonomy claimed by the right to look is thus opposed by the authority of visibility. But the right to look came first and we should not forget it. ³⁸⁶

Considering this in the context of the creation and distribution of images, In reviewing developments in countervisuality, over the 19th and 20th Centuries Mirzoeff cites Charles Baudelaire's influential (Western European) view on a central role for photography as a powerful visual medium in the service of modernization, famously as 'a tool of commerce, science and industry' in a then imperial (rapidly developing into a capitalist) 'society of spectacle'. Guy

³⁸⁴ Mark Neville. Interview with Liz J Drew. London: February 21st, 2020.

³⁸⁵ In *The Politics of Aesthetics* Rancière argues that aesthetics is not a discipline as it is 'integrally' linked to politics. 'Rancière's concern in aesthetics is the same as that in politics: to establish, on the basis of a productive contradiction at the heart of the modern world, the possibility of free, creative expression'. Jean Philippe Deranty in *Jacques Rancière, Key Concepts (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014)* p.131 . This is about having a voice, being able to express oneself against consensus, rather than producing works of art of course.

³⁸⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011) pp. 2, 24, 25. See also Mirzoeff (ed.) *The Visual Culture Reader* 3rd edition (London and New York: Routledge 2013) pp3-4. N.b. Mirzoeff has acknowledged the origins of the phrase 'the right to look' from the work of W.J.T. Mitchell.

See also: W.J.T. Mitchell *Cloning Terror, The War on Images, 9/11 to Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)

Debord's influential definition is not only invoked for a history of applied
visuality, Mirzoeff points out the extension of such predictions into the 21st
Century context. He especially cites escalated, hyper- globalization as well as
contemporary conflicts, particularly the Gulf War 1990 – 1991, and subsequent
war in Iraq (2003-2015), Afghanistan (2001-2021) (we can now add Ukraine,
2022 -) as a product of oil trading and weaponization as well as ideological
agendas. Their role includes contribution to the further development and
application of imaging technology, and communication networks, as
orchestrated spectacle to establish 'authorised' realities. Hamid Dabashi has
discussed Mirzoeff (expanding on Debord, as expanding on Karl Marx) on the
'saturation of images' in relation to war in Iraq (2003-11) involving 'visual
fetishism' that, results in 'null, numb, makes their audiences care less'.³⁸⁷
Conversely, Susan Sontag has famously re-positioned and argued (about
'regarding the pain of others') in one of her last essays, against the 'spectacle'
of conflict as normalising

To speak of reality becoming a spectacle is a breathtaking provincialism.
It universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the
rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment [...] It
assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, unseriously, that
there is no real suffering in the world. [...] it is absurd to generalize about the
ability to respond to the sufferings of others on the basis of the mind-set of
those consumers of news who know nothing at first-hand about war and terror.
There are hundreds of millions of television watchers who are far from inured to
what they see on television. They do not have the luxury of patronizing
reality.³⁸⁸

Mirzoeff's reference to 'spectacle' is not necessarily as Sontag states, as
confined to small, educated populations, however, her salient point includes the
defence of often maligned realism in photography (including in film, television,
online video) although, she asserts the photograph, 'has the deeper bite.
Memory freeze-frames [...] In an era of information overload, the photograph
provides a quick way of apprehending something'. As will be analysed in this
chapter. The imaging and normalising of 'authorised' realities, and of war as

³⁸⁷ See Hamid Dabashi in Julie Carlson and Elisabeth Weber *Speaking About Torture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) Chapter Two.

³⁸⁸ Susan Sontag *Regarding The Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004)

spectacle, is clearly challenged by the work of Mark Neville, especially through three main projects *The Helman Work*, 2010-2011, *Battle Against Stigma*, 2015-2018 and *Stop Tanks With Books*, 2016 -. Firstly, a more detailed discussion of countervisuality to further contextualize the work. The development of photography and film as 'powerful' visual medium included a key role in the development of communication theory³⁸⁹ and is relevant to my referencing Mirzoeff and Rancière, as well as documentary realism and affect. A brief history of that role is useful here: The nature of visual media and their ability to affect was of much interest to 19th Century theorists whose work developed into socio-psychology and modern communication research. Photography had emerged from science and art in the 1830s at a time when August Comte (1798-1857) was working on 'Positivism'. Although his ideas further degenerated into a form of esoteric 'new religion' (with secular saints selected from artists and philosophers) this was a serious development for 19th Century thought; centering on the idea of a modern society based on the principles and findings of a new 'social' science that called for a focus upon secular, scientific evidence, and to see society in terms of cause and effect. This was further developed by Emile Durkheim and others into a science of society. The influence of this 'sociological' thought especially relates, in terms of documentary photography and war, to diffusionist theories of communication, notably mass visual communication through photography and film as emerging in early 20th century Europe, Russia and later North America. Here, biological concepts of networks, lead to the notion of a dominant paradigm.³⁹⁰ In relation to visual media and the role of psychology this was progressed by émigré

³⁸⁹ In the early twentieth century this was especially supported by Lenin who saw photography and the new medium of film as important tools for communication, to counter possible illiteracy. He also recognized the potential emotional and psychological affectiveness. The psychological aspects of visual media were more focussed upon as this work developed in the West, mainly in the American universities after the influx of émigré European scholars including, for example, Siegfried Kracauer on photography and film. See Christine Mehring 'Siegfried Kracauer's Theories on Photography: From Weimar to New York' in *History of Photography*, 21:2 pp129-136 (1997)

³⁹⁰ For histories and theories of communication and networked society, framed through class especially, see Herbert Schiller *Mass Communications and American Empire* (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1969), Manuel Castells *The Information Age. Economy, Society and Culture. Vol.1 : The Rise of The Network Society* (Oxford: Malden MA: Wiley Blackwell, 1999) and Frank Webster *Theories of The Information Society* (London: Routledge, 2005)

scholars (notably Siegfried Kracauer and others from the Frankfurt School) arriving at American research centres in the 1930s and 40s.³⁹¹

Diffusionist theory was increasingly challenged as the American 'Core- Periphery' model failed from the 1960s onwards. However, as Mirzoeff, and referring specifically to war photography, Julian Stallabrass have evidenced, this model continues to influence military and media strategy for the 'imaging' and visualization of war. The military conflicts of the 19th and 20th Centuries were also significant in the development of (mass) communication strategies and networks. Sociologists Armand and Michele Mattelart, writing towards the end of the 20th Century, detail the influence of communication as 'development [...] based on the use of technology to aid progress, to ensure the continuity of a largely Western/Northern dominant paradigm'. Mattelart acknowledges a continued, yet more complex development of alternative paradigms, consisting of a wider variety of oppositional theories and practices.³⁹² During the 1980s overly optimistic proposals indicated that increasingly media literate audiences could actively undermine hegemonic media power by deconstructing (audio visual) texts through semiotic readings. The notion of cultural imperialism (from Herbert Schiller's 1969 pivotal text *Mass Communication and American Empire*) was reconsidered.³⁹³ This recognized the limitations of cultural dominance arising from a lack of recognition of 'counter flows' emerging around the world.

³⁹¹ Tom Bottomore *Frankfurt School and Its Critics* (London: Routledge, 2002). Also, Haidee Wasson on the escape of scholars, from Nazi Germany to North America: *Museum Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005),

³⁹² See Armand and Michele Mattelart *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)

³⁹³ By the 1980s the 'digital revolution' was debated as such. Contrasting possibilities of 'postmodern' utopias (e.g., technical societies 'leapfrogging' industrialization, the democratization of knowledge, ergo power, through access to the internet) Key critics were Herbert Schiller, Jerry Salvaggio and Frank Webster, (previously head of the last iteration of the 'Birmingham School'). A new era for communication in a post-industrial 'information society' (as predicated by sociologist Daniel Bell in the 1950s and 60s) is further critiqued over the 1990s' as the realities of a networked, global world (and the exclusion from this) emerge. Key texts being *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Frederic Jameson, 1991 and *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Vol.1 The Network Society*, 1999) Manuel Castells. I draw upon my postgraduate studies at London Metropolitan University circa 2004-6 and my unpublished paper on the influence of photography and film on the development of communication studies in the mid 20th Century.

Nb. In recognition of Frank Webster (and many more since) See:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2002/aug/15/highereducation.sociology> (accessed July 2nd 2023)

The power and resilience of local audiences have undermined simplistic notions of global uniformity [...] But they do not lay to rest continuing concerns: that cultural globalization is tending to support the growing neo-liberal hegemony of our times ³⁹⁴

However, despite more complex media flows and constant challenge, the core-periphery model, now part of an established hyper-globalization, is still largely intact. By 2008 there was debate around the world-wide economic crisis and how the alleged 'failure of socialism' was now mirrored by a possible failure of late capitalism. (Unfortunately, since then, populist, and nationalist trends are a mistaken response to ever more aggressive economic policies for 'austerity' and unregulated development). David Morley outlines how a review of ideas was emerging at this time, from the counter proposals and activities of the 1970s, also from some of the work and critique of the original Frankfurt School of the 1930s. This provides further context for parallel responses in arts and humanities, specifically, for this thesis, ideas on countervisuality, and maps onto the revisiting of documentary photography as discussed in my introduction. This has included renewed notions of representation, including core and peripheral, central and marginal and projects that engage with these. To reiterate: as a theorist of visual culture Mirzoeff has explored the notion of 'countervisuality' as the attempt to reconfigure visuality as a whole'. As John Roberts argues in discussing the 'social ontology of photography' Photography, the photographic (included as central to notions of a 'digital era') has also had a role in this reconfiguration. In practice, on an individual or collective scale, and perhaps more so as debate including 'to reassert a resistive role within the dominant relations of technological production'. ³⁹⁵

A trajectory of critical photographic activity as 'countervisuality' can be discerned through an expanding body of critical work. Kelsey and Stimson also discuss 'photography's place within an amalgam of trends that emerged

³⁹⁴ James Curran and David Morley (eds.) *Media and Cultural Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) p.4

³⁹⁵ John Roberts *Photography and Its Violations* (Chichester and New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) p.42

with the accelerated globalization brought about by the end of the cold war'.³⁹⁶ This can be seen in the work of the critical writing cited earlier, particularly on debates around realism and the case for a relevant documentary. Visual works that attempt to provide counter narratives and elements of activism have been demonstrated in projects from the mid to late twentieth century, as analysed in chapters one and two. Sarah James provided an example of critical work in the cultural sphere that anticipates the return and rise of the Right, including applied neo-liberalism. Highlighting how, in Britain, the Left had floundered after military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, 'the war on terror' had been conducted largely under a Labour 'Centre left' government. In chapter three, I respond to work that evidences pollution and war as central to 21st Century globalized capitalism, with some examples from communities in the North. In this concluding chapter an overtly activist contemporary example is provided by Mark Neville.

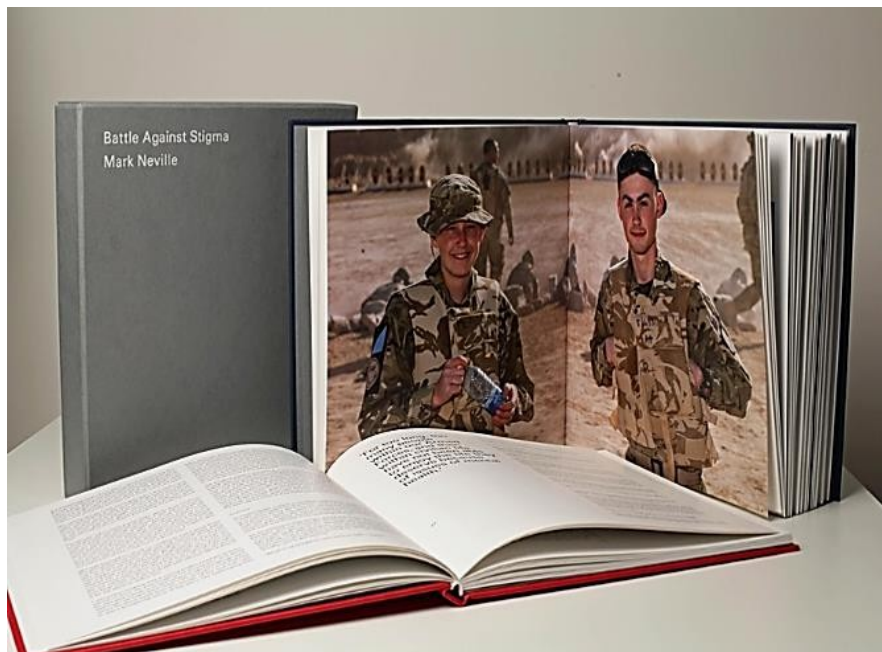


Fig.97 *Battle Against Stigma* Mark Neville, 2015 – 18

A two-volume book project, not commercially available. Open pages showing *Firing Range 2010* from *The Helmand Work 2010-11*
'People this young should not be there'.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson *The Meaning of Photography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008) Introduction.

³⁹⁷ Mark Neville. Interview with Liz J Drew. London, February 2020,

Precedents and Theory for Neville's Distribution of Participatory Photography

In a context of a wide scholarship on digital methods for the production and distribution of socially engaged photography, the purpose of this chapter is to foreground work from artist-activist Mark Neville who chooses to employ the larger format, carefully printed photobook, as an appropriately conjoining form for his sustained commitment to strategic, targeted distribution. Neville's work has, over the last twenty years, engaged with the experience of changing working environments, injustice and conflict and is produced with close attention to equitable representation. He is committed to achieving this by working together with participants in his projects, often including elements of resistance and celebration, as well as meaningful dissemination. His most prominent works include *The Port Glasgow Book Project*, 2004-6 *Deeds Not Words*, 2010-12 and *Parade*, 2019. Also, as specifically engaging with conflict and war *The Helmand Work*, 2011 *Battle Against Stigma*, 2015-18 and *Stop Tanks With Books*, 2022. The latter produced in Ukraine, to plead for international prevention before, and as a major conflict escalated into an invasion and war where the global fossil fuel economy and increasingly fervent nationalism plays a central role.

One of the things about any kind of social practice...is a tension between the process of working with participants and the products that are created and then circulated to audiences. To look at what is made within any form of social practice as being solely the outcome is to disavow the unique dialogue that the practice hinges on.³⁹⁸

Neville has pointing out, while acknowledging the 'tension' that Anthony Luvera has foregrounded here, that his works are developed with a highly targeted audience in mind. Indeed, it is the process, including distribution, that is central to his work, as will be discussed in this chapter. To contextualize Neville's work as part of a longer trajectory of work on the role of distribution in participatory contexts, I'll first refer to exemplary artist/activists from the mid to late twentieth

³⁹⁸ Anthony Luvera interviewed by Nicola Homer for *Studio Internazionale*, <https://www.studiointernazionale.com>, (accessed August 15th, 2020)

century, specifically Lucy R. Lippard and Allan Sekula. Lippard has worked collaboratively for decades, with a sustained interest in the impact of war, pollution, and commercial over-development on comparable local areas and communities, internationally. Meanwhile, Sekula's influential oeuvre provides a critique that demands a consideration of the responsibilities and limitations of photography, as well as the possibilities for interaction on a local level, especially those involving manual workers.

Photography for Sekula was haunted by both human labour and the hegemonic disregard for such agency and transaction from below [...] while questioning many documentary conventions, Sekula continued to see photography as a social practice, answerable to the world and its problems.³⁹⁹

In regarding photography as 'social practice' (specifically in the case of Neville who has used his work to disrupt misconception or lack of advocacy to tangible effect) I also call upon Jacques Rancière, as a philosopher of politics, aesthetics and equality who is concerned with how artists 'interfere with the consensual view.'⁴⁰⁰ It is this interference that is central to Rancière's definition of politics where 'the essence of politics is dissensus'.⁴⁰¹ Although, he does not mean that he thinks art per se 'can stand up against power' rather he asserts that the point is in the act itself.⁴⁰²

Roles and modes of participation in a common social world are determined by establishing possible modes of perception [...] Thus the distribution of the sensible sets the divisions between what is visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible. ..Politics essentially involves opposition [...] a challenge to established order by the excluded, 'the part which has no part', in the name of equality⁴⁰³

³⁹⁹ Sally Stein and Ina Steiner. Allan Sekula Studio homepage <https://www.allansekulastudio.org> (accessed 3rd May 2023)

⁴⁰⁰ Jacques Rancière and Peter Engelmann *Politics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) p.108

⁴⁰¹ Jacques Rancière *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* Edited and translated by Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

⁴⁰² 'The Issue is To Maintain The Dissensus'. Interview with Jacques Rancière from Mathieu Dejean and Jean-Marc Lalanne. Verso Blog. February 17th 2021. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/5132> (accessed 5th September 2022)

⁴⁰³ Sean Sayers' review of *Jacques Rancière The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of The Sensible*. Gabriel Rockhill (trans.) (London and New York: Continuum, 2004) <https://culturemachine.net/reviews/Rancière> (accessed 20th April 2017)

The literal distribution, by artists, of ideas, experience, and information (whether oppositional or celebratory or both) can therefore map onto the conceptual 'distribution of the sensible' whereby such divisions can be made visible and therefore challenged. A recurring question, in critical theory addressing documentary photography, has been: who and what is seen and heard? For Lippard, as described in her 1984 book *Get The Message – A Decade of Art For Social Change* 'The framework [...] is always social concern and responsibility'.⁴⁰⁴ The decade in question is the 1970s as on the cusp of an era of market-led globalization soon to be further facilitated by the exploitation of digital technologies and aggressive, deregulating socio-economic policies. The consequences began to manifest themselves in losses of jobs, livelihoods, homes, and environments, and was more literally visible than in previous centuries and decades. Not least due to the proliferation of the ever more mobile and widespread use of cameras in the general population, including the development of citizen journalism, as well as a persistence of documentary in dedicated groups.⁴⁰⁵ Feminist strategies are also acknowledged as having a significant part in the development of oppositional practice and alternative distribution in visual arts at this time. as demonstrated by Lippard, a founder member of the Heresies Collective (1976 – 1993) whose radical agenda, to question the production and consumption of art, was distributed through the journal *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*. Lippard details the contribution of feminist 'interaction techniques' in terms of empowerment and self-representation.

video and photography are often used not so much to stimulate a passive audience as to welcome an actively participating audience, to help

⁴⁰⁴ Lucy R. Lippard *Get The Message: A Decade of Social Change* (New York :E.P Dutton Inc.) 1984
I use this book as a primary resource.

⁴⁰⁵ There has been a growth in scholarship on documentary and community photography groups from the 1960s-1990s, key publications on British examples are from Val Williams, Steve Edwards, Mathilde Bertrand, Jorge Ribalta and Noni Stacey. Long established Four Corners in East London are particularly active in curating new presentations from their archives of work from this time and Patrizia Di Bello has also curated an archive and exhibition of Jo Spence with students at Birkbeck College. Many of the groups and individuals from that generation have more recently engaged with critical accounts, sometimes articulating their own histories at gallery events and in publications. i.e. As well as Val Williams, Daniel Meadows, members from the Half Moon/Camerawork and Autograph groups in London, also from the Amber Collective in the North of England.

people discover who they are, where their own power lies and. How they can make their own exchanges.⁴⁰⁶

Providing both a reflective personal account and handbook for activists *Get The Message* presents and critiques a variety of community based projects. Some are described as strategically delivered outside of major galleries or museums. Otherwise, the protests, alerts and messages are discussed by Lippard as having been strategically distributed on the streets: in vacant shop windows, as interactive performance, via artist's books, billboards, photocopy handouts, murals and photo-text posters, as she investigates 'the dilemma... of how to integrate art and politics.'⁴⁰⁷ Participation and distribution form key elements for successful integration, evidenced by the projects in each section of *Get The Message*. Alternative distribution (as disruptive) is the book's central concept. A powerful, iconic example, in a section on political posters, is introduced by a photograph of members of the pivotal The Art Workers' Coalition, of which Lippard was a founding member, standing outside of the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1969. Each holds up the notorious anti-Vietnam War photo-text work: *Q: AND BABIES? A: AND BABIES* known as the My-Lai massacre poster 'collectively designed and distributed worldwide through the independent network'⁴⁰⁸ Obviously, since their original context of production, this image, and poster, have featured in much research and many debates around photography and the ethics of seeing, notably by Steve Edwards as he discusses the repression of distribution and makes the case against a sometimes virulent criticism of documentary photography

⁴⁰⁶ Lippard *Get The Message: A Decade of Social Change* 1984 p.150

⁴⁰⁷ Lippard *Get The Message: A Decade of Social Change* 1984 p.151
See also *Martha Rosler's Protest*, a recent article by Stephanie Schwartz:

Rosler's photomontages were conceived of as protest flyers. Neither dated nor signed, they were xeroxed, piled up and carried into the street. Mobile and mobilised, they were moved between hands, presumably they were crumpled up and folded, as well as shoved into pockets. They were also, most likely, dropped and stepped on, swept up and away by the movements of bodies marching and working together to produce another image of war - of dissent and solidarity. Stephanie Schwartz *Martha Rosler's Protest* in *Arts*, 9, 92 MPDI Open Journal - Arts 2020

⁴⁰⁸ Lucy R. Lippard *Get The Message: A Decade of Social Change* (New York : E.P Dutton Inc. 1984) p.151

documentary in some of its forms, can be seen as an analytic vision capable of great critical acuity. The powers that be have long understood this potential and have repeatedly censored documentary images. In the case of dictatorial regimes, with a vested interest in their nefarious deeds going unrecorded, this should be obvious enough. But liberal-capitalist states also increasingly attempt to police the circulation of documentary photographs.⁴⁰⁹

Lippard goes on to lament the contrasting creation of political photo-posters by distanced, successful artists, pointing out that the resulting commodification misses the critical point of collaboration and fails to adopt appropriate distribution in terms of potential empowerment. She also identifies a more specific role for photography, for example in the section *Print and Page as Battleground*. Referring to the women's collective Hackney Flashers that was part of the wide network of independent, oppositional film and photography activity around Britain, developing from the late 1960s to 80s that 'had jettisoned top-down power structures in favour of collective action and non-hierarchical modes of organizing – side by side rather than looking up or down'.⁴¹⁰ Lippard's concluding section in *Get The Message is Activist Art Now - A Picture Essay* sampling 'a fraction of the work that was being done in 1982 around the world to develop a form, theory and distribution system for activist art'.⁴¹¹ The issues in play, towards the end of the 20th Century, persist, namely, inequalities based on class, race and gender; the lasting effects of environmental and community destruction and many kinds of displacement. Local examples are again chosen to demonstrate a globally shared experience of exploitation and injustice. However, there is also a clear thread of resistance and celebration, including the wit and canniness that Neville also cites as an important part of socially concerned participatory practice where a 'distribution system' is key. Neville has also foregrounded the value of mutual experience, when discussing his long durational projects that aim to manifest and provoke

⁴⁰⁹ Steve Edwards *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.37

⁴¹⁰ Noni Stacey *Photography of Protest and Community: The Radical Collectives of the 1970s*, (London: Lund Humphries, 2020) p.11.

⁴¹¹ Lucy R. Lippard *Get The Message: A Decade of Social Change* (New York: E.P Dutton Inc. 1984) p.324.

'moral discourse',⁴¹² emerging when living, as he has done, in Glasgow, or London or Kyiv in the first decades of the 21st century.

Meanwhile, in terms of developing strategies for countervisuality and alternative distribution, Allan Sekula, like Lippard, engaged with people and place on an empathetic, activist level, to achieve the production and distribution of projects as testimony, response, and record. A key example is his relationship with the MV (Merchant Vessel) Global Mariner. This extended over many years, during the actual sailing (1998-2000) and by producing a complex series of works (*Ship of Fools / Dockers' Museum*, 1999-2013). The mission of the voyage was to raise awareness (in hope of solidarity) among and beyond the shipworkers' communities. Through touring the photographic exhibits on board that evidenced the cruel experience and plight of maritime workers exploited under the Flag of Convenience, 'a flimsy legal construct' for ships' owners 'to transform their vessels into virtually lawless entities'.⁴¹³ Sekula has described how the MV Global Mariner was converted into spaces of exhibition and "discussion platform" with the changing cohorts from each port welcome to participate in a meeting room, in a re-purposed upper hold. He wryly recalled 'the gothic turn'⁴¹⁴ taken as the exhibition developed down through the levels of the ship, from the optimism of maritime adventure and camaraderie to scenes of physical exploitation and danger.

For Sekula it was the "Good Ship" as it intended to awaken consciousness in the port cities where it moored. He explicitly opposed it to the 'bad ships' that sail under the Flag of Convenience, with a view to

⁴¹² By the late 1980s Lippard's work is increasingly concerned with ecological erosion and working with effected communities of which she is, or has been, a part. A comprehensive account was published in 1997: *The Lure of The Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society* 'is embedded in land, history, and culture and the possibilities they hold for place specific, place-responsible "public art" and photography that share the goals of a "humanistic geography" to introduce "moral discourse" Lucy R. Lippard *The Lure of The Local: Senses of Place in a Multi-Centred Society* (New York: The New Press, 1984) p.14.

⁴¹³ Johann Jacobs Museum, Zurich, Switzerland. Exhibition text for *The Dockers' Museum* December 2014 to March 2015.

⁴¹⁴ Allan Sekula during an interview with Grant Watson, then curator of Contemporary Art Antwerp (the first to exhibit *Ship of Fools*) <https://vimeo.com/12397261> (accessed 7th May 2023)

compromising safety and training standards, and imposing living and working conditions too harsh to be humanely acceptable.⁴¹⁵

As well as Lippard's concern with the precarity of local experience, the maritime focus of Sekula has been motivational to my interest in visual and cultural histories. Coming from a working class, maritime background my theoretical framing is, unsurprisingly, shaped by philosophical notions of equality and representation. Particularly from Rancière's multifaceted critique of the orthodoxy, be that pedagogic or political. His proposals insist on 'equality without conditions' and that the link between politics and aesthetics must 'always be constructed',⁴¹⁶ as he has especially demonstrated with his work on the 'distribution of the sensible'.

So, there's work to achieve a change of perspective, which I consider to be very important [...] showing that the manifold ways in which artists put words and images together suddenly interfere with the consensual view that's constructed by governments and the dominant media.⁴¹⁷

In terms of interference, the development and distribution of Mark Neville's socio-politically charged photobooks provide an exemplar of such 'work to achieve a change of perspective'. As a sustained attempt at meaningful practice, produced over two decades of escalating structural inequality and global instability, the work of Neville has also been discussed as engaging with the ethics of representation through community projects and highly targeted distribution. His work can be viewed as a transformative approach, as also attempted by Lippard and Sekula in previous decades, where alternative formats and strategies are developed to realise the elusive goal of equitable collaboration, and to achieve genuine and meaningful impact. My chapter title

⁴¹⁵ Hilde Van Gelder 'Allan Sekula's Labor of Giants' in *Allan Sekula: Ship of Fools/The Dockers' Museum* ed. Hilde Van Gelder (Leuven: University Press, 2015) p.81 Nb. In 2019 the International Maritime Organisation planned to remove seventy five of one hundred and twenty nine, countries from the so-called 'White List' for failing to meet the necessary conditions, set by International Convention on Standards of Training - Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978. <https://seafarersrights.org> (accessed 8th May 2023)

⁴¹⁶ Nico Baumbach 'Jacques Rancière and the Fictional Capacity of Documentary' in the *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 8:1, 5 pp7-72. (2010)

⁴¹⁷ Jacques Rancière in Peter Engelmann *Politics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) pp.108

emerged after looking at Neville's website, I was struck that much of his well-known work was marked 'Commercially Unavailable'. This at a stage when others, with a rising international profile, could be commanding very high art market prices. Neville too was critically well received, an award winning artist, nominated for the prestigious Pulitzer Prize and shortlisted for the 2020 Deutsche Börse prize. His motivation and methods, as expressed in his photobook texts, were confirmed when I visited his work-live studio home, where he discussed his commitment and experience as a socially and morally concerned practitioner.

Commercially Unavailable

Neville is critically aware and articulate on the issues and contradictions of attempting to work in a participatory mode. Primarily, on the contradiction in working to achieve meaningful, equitable engagement with, and representation of, communities or individuals who might be less empowered than the artist. This could be on a social, emotional, or physical level. As he explains when I asked him about this during the interview at his live/work studio in London, 2020.

In my experience, the best ideas, in terms of documenting a community, but also theoretically, the concept of the work, is actually infinitely enhanced by the journey with the demographic you're working with [...] the whole point of social documentary, as I see it, is the development of relationships with people, and that's very time dependent. I'm trying to examine what the collaborative possibilities are and be directed as much as possible by the people. ⁴¹⁸

This chimes with a statement from 'Photovoice', Neville's position and work evidencing that 'careful balancing' to achieve ethical practice

The main contradiction is that the participation might result in 'an unwanted social label. It is often the very label that groups look to challenge [...] Advocacy-based projects go on to develop a public communications dimension, in which photographs are taken for and viewed by a wider, public audience in order to influence attitudes or policies. This may be in the form of an exhibition, display, slideshow, book, and website or through the media. The relationship between the relatively private and more public aspects of a project is a dynamic and delicate one, which requires careful balancing. ⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ Mark Neville. Interview with Liz J Drew . London, February 2020

⁴¹⁹ Photovoice. Statement of Ethical Practice. <https://photovoice.org/about-us/photovoice-statement-of-ethical-practice/> (accessed 15th September 2022)

Cultural collaboration has frequently involved living and working with community to facilitate mutual participation in order to create a work of advocacy or celebration, to ensure mutual participation in the development of the work and, sometimes, the targeted distribution itself. As responding to my questions in the interview, Neville has also been clear to identify as ‘an artist, who wants to make powerful pictures.’⁴²⁰ Much of his work fits into the documentary category, ranging from social realism and community activism to images made in military contexts, including war zones. However, the visual style, sometimes cinematic or employing the ‘tableau vivant’, or framed as genre painting, often consciously recalls other art, as well as photographic histories. This, as well as the content, can indeed evoke a compelling experience, circumstances are seen to be shared over time and place, along with insights into less visible lives, described as working between registers

at the intersection of art and documentary [...] His work has consistently looked to subvert the traditional role of documentary practice, seeking to find new ways to empower the position of its subject over that of the author [...] in a collaborative process intended to be of direct, practical benefit to the subject.

⁴²¹

Neville has also contextualized his work, for example, grouping together three of his major projects (*The Port Glasgow Book Project*, 2004-6, *Deeds Not Words*, 2010-12 and *Braddock/Sewickley*, 2012) as a ‘trilogy of works which explore notions of post-industrial identity in working-class communities’ in this case Northern American, Northern English and Scottish. *The Port Glasgow Book Project* and *Deeds Not Words* established his use of distribution as an activist tactic, central to these and subsequent participatory projects. For *Port Glasgow*, described by Neville as having ‘a unique dissemination as a public artwork’, he relocated to Glasgow, about half an hour away from the working-class industrial port in steep decline, due to the devastating loss of a once international status for shipbuilding. He was to be ‘artist in residence’ for a year. Through several workshops, he introduced himself to, then worked closely with

⁴²⁰ Mark Neville. Interview with Liz J Drew . London, February 2020

⁴²¹ David Company ‘Mark Neville: The Battle Against Stigma Project’. <https://davidcompany.com/tag/book/> (accessed 15th September 2022)

the local community during, and for several months after, the residency. We see much exuberance in images of team sport, social clubs and community parties, there is more dancing than despair, in spite of the socio-economic challenges at the time. Neville describes the eventual output:

The result of this stay was a beautifully produced coffee table-style book conceived as a symbolic gift to the community. The book was uniquely delivered, free, to the eight thousand households. In this way, rather than having a public artwork imposed upon them, the Portonians received a document of their lives and of their participation as both hosts and protagonists. The book is not available anywhere else, commercially, or otherwise, in shops or by mail order.⁴²²



Fig.98 *Boys at Devant* from the *Port Glasgow Book Project* 2005

Mark Neville, Photograph, 2005

He also has insisted high production values for his photobooks, as usually employed for 'middle-class coffee table documentary books' found 'not in the homes of those depicted in them'. This is in order to 'intercept and undermine this hierarchical, class-based relationship between images and their audience' During my visit, an insightful anecdote was recounted in detail:

The best ideas, both in terms of practicalities, but also theoretically, the concept of the work, the idea is actually infinitely enhanced by the journey with the demographic you're working with. The prime example of that is the *Port Glasgow Book Project*. Half way through, I realized that the

⁴²² Mark Neville www.markneville.com (accessed 14th September 2022)

budget that was allocated for the delivery of the books (I'd allocated fourteen thousand pounds to deliver eight thousand books to each of the homes in Port Glasgow, that was a quote from Royal Mail) as a direct result of meeting and talking with the Boys Football Team. The idea came from a conversation: the manager of the Boys Football Team said "How you gonna deliver these books? Y'know, how you gonna get them out to people?" and I was like Royal Mail, and he said "How much is that costing you?" and I said fourteen thousand pounds and he said "fourteen thousand pounds! God, we could really use fourteen thousand pounds" - and then it hit me. Of course, you could, and why the hell am I paying Royal Mail fourteen thousand pounds to deliver these books when the books could go directly back into the community in a real way. Conceptually and ethically, that fed perfectly into an existing framework that I wanted to serve, which was about how can books, social documentary practice serve the 'subject matter' ⁴²³

David Campany was one of the first curators to engage with Neville both critically and creatively. Writing in 2006, he recognized the Port Glasgow work as part of a 'turn to a more reflexive, performative approach [...] So often documentarists play mere lip service to this ethical demand. Neville made it the whole point of the project'.⁴²⁴ The community reaction was varied, from (mainly) extremely pleased to public book burnings, due to a perceived religious bias (although there are actually equal numbers of images of Catholics and Protestants in the book). Much of the subsequent engagement, in the form of emails, letters and news coverage, was then also incorporated into an exhibition to ensure the continued presence and distribution of the community's voice. As discussed with Neville, fifteen years after the Boys Football Club delivery (on bicycles, arranged with the club manager, as described above) in order to redirect the payment for distribution, from Royal Mail to the community), Port Glasgow undergoes the same changes that can be seen in most 'post-industrial' cities. Also, in many post fishing and post small scale farming communities. Expensive flats and houses, unattainable to the majority, are built by the water (or on the fields, including flood plains) such views are now privatized. Workplaces, homes, and communities are displaced as they were in Byker in the 1960s; and all along the Tyne since the 1990s, and

⁴²³ Mark Neville .Interview with Liz J Drew. London, February 2020

⁴²⁴ David Campany *Deep Surfaces* . Talk at The Dick Institute, Scotland 2006.

in Liverpool, along the Mersey, and along ever further reaches of the Thames as 'luxury' development, leisure and retail are developed on the spaces that were shipyards, docks, and related communities.

Over development and inequitable access are main (usually futile) objections to developers' activity in many coastal and country, as well as 'desirable' and 'up and coming' areas in cities. Leisure and retail land investments are invasive private equity ventures with far more financial resource and power than underfunded local authorities who need the income from land sales and licensing. Most towns, however small, in the UK are now bookended by globalized retail. Erstwhile affordable holiday park sites, (previously family, locally or nationally owned) ubiquitous around the coast, are similarly bought up, merged, 'upgraded', and made less accessible due to price rises.⁴²⁵ The polarisation of wealth and power, and consequences of deregulation (including rampant pollution) continues to manifest in the natural as well as built environment. A typical sprawling and growing Retail Park (on the site of a former shipyard) dominates the harbour approach in Port Glasgow, with multinational chains operating out of huge featureless structures. Filled with cheap goods delivered by the maritime exploitation so keenly observed by Sekula, 'Drive Through' fast-food outlets also provide 'flexible', often zero-hour contracts. The shipyards are gone, the main employment is in factories, retail, and health care, but Ferguson Marine Engineering, the last of its kind, as documented by Neville, has survived for now.⁴²⁶

In part two of the trilogy *Deeds Not Words* (2010-12), Neville further develops the distribution strategy employed for *Port Glasgow*.

⁴²⁵ Just two recent examples are American firms Blackstock Inc. and Sun Communities who paid £3bn and £1.3bn respectively for nationwide sites including Haven Holidays and Park Holidays. 'Private equity groups are piling in' Alice Hancock, also 'Private Equity Steps Up Push into UK Holiday Parks' Kaye Wiggins in *Financial Times* January 15th, 2022. The historic 'Butlins' holiday park company is currently under auction, having sold its 'underlying real estate assets' for £300m (to USS Universities Superannuation Scheme) in 2022. Mark Kleinman, City Editor, Sky News. 13th August 2022.

⁴²⁶ 'Understanding Scottish Places'. CLES (National Organisation for Local Economies) Carnegie Trust and University of Stirling. <https://cles.org.uk> (accessed 14th September 2022)

The photobook is not being commercially distributed. Instead it was sent out to each of the 433 local authorities in the UK, and to environmental agencies internationally, to raise awareness of issues around the handling of toxic waste and the reuse of contaminated land; it deals specifically with a court case that was brought in Corby, Northamptonshire, by a group of families [...] affected by toxic waste following the reclamation of the town's now defunct steel works in the 1980s [...] it is not simply a 'photo book', it includes more than 20 pages of scientific evidence concerning the link between chemical pollutants and birth defects.⁴²⁷

To people less familiar with this history, it is hard to convey the scale and significance of Corby Steelworks as a long-term hub of stable industrial employment. Or the sense of disbelief about the scale of precarity and suffering that ensued when it became a prime example of the sudden and shocking dismantling of (especially) Northern English working-class life (centred on manufacturing and industry) in the late twentieth century. A caveat here on the use of working-class in this context, as identified by E.P. Thompson, 'I do not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships.'⁴²⁸ Corby (known as Little Scotland due to the many Scottish workers and families settled there in search of work) was one of Europe's largest steelworks until British Steel, supported by a new, London centric, Conservative government, closed it down in 1981. The rationale was not based on environmental concern, many similar steelmaking, coal mining or shipbuilding communities in the North were of Irish or Scottish descent, with strong cultural identities and traditions that accompany displacement a self and community support mechanism. This

⁴²⁷ Mark Neville. www.markneville.com (accessed 14th September 2022)

⁴²⁸ E.P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963) Preface. P.8. Thompson ends his preface with a disclaimer, as he has not much included the Irish, Welsh, or Scottish experience. He posits that, before the links forged by Trade Unions and the Labour movement, England was culturally 'distinct' and too diverse to apply such a generalizing term.

Nb. Neville, speaking to me in February 2020, also explained his upbringing as 'lower middle class', with working parents 'my dad ran a pub and my mum's a nurse' also his background in (critically focussed) art school education. Including attending Rijksakademie, Amsterdam and Goldsmiths, London. This was the 1990s, while the 'Young British Art' (YBA) conceptual generation were at the height of success and influence, clearly he was developing an alternative vision: The spectrum of the work, albeit often in a seemingly familiar documentary tradition, also sometimes chimes with the fairy tale or universal myth. The scholar Jack Zipes (on the Marxist study of fairy tales) is most pertinent here. It's not within the scope of the thesis to discuss such projects, as often made in ancient landscapes with modern challenges, although this can be discerned in work from Neville, Godwin and Amber, where eco-criticism could be applied to projects in rural or coastal communities.

included organized and powerful union membership. A sense of social and political community was regarded as obstructive, to the new wave of 'service industry' visions of monetarism at the centre of the ideologically driven, de-regulating government. Whilst these damaging (to personal and environmental health) industries needed to eventually close, there was no support for transition to meaningful alternatives or the immediate loss of livelihood. Ten thousand jobs were suddenly ended in Corby, with many more in related areas. The continued lack of care, in the later, unsafe and unsupervised movement of hazardous waste from the hurriedly dismantled steelworks, resulted in a poisoning of residents as well as land. The 'Corby 16' court case, involving eighteen families against the local authority, was, after an intense eleven years, eventually won in 2009. I asked Neville about his initial involvement

The project began in 2009 with an interest in Corby and the people who live there. As I talked to people, I heard about the Corby 16 court case. Corby had been the centre of a really outrageous case of land reclamation and many kids were born with birth defects. I wanted to address certain ethical, chemical, and biomedical issues.⁴²⁹



Fig.99 *Deeds Not Words*

Mark Neville, Photograph, 2010-2012

⁴²⁹ Mark Neville. Interview with Liz J Drew ,London, February 2020

See also: ' The aim of the book is to effect a real policy change regarding land reclamation, and to alter the attitude towards the disposal and management of toxic waste in the UK ...It was accompanied by a symposium upon government policy regarding contaminated land, organised by environmental activist group 'ClientEarth'. Chaired by MP Joan Walley, the discussion led to the creation of a manifesto which will be presented to Parliament.' Mark Neville www.markneville.com (accessed September 13th 2022)

Neville creates a carefully nuanced and supportive narrative on the persistence of a Scottish identity [...] on various manifestations of 'beauty' [...] industrial growth and decline, subsequent regeneration, and community solidarity'.⁴³⁰ It is a portrait made with the residents of Corby, including those at the centre of the court case which was the impetus for the wider project to achieve change at local, if not national policy level. The images from *Deeds Not Words* are typically empathetic and celebratory, displaying pride and joy, couples waltzing, women and girls bowling. Others are highly sensitive but clear in their intent, which is to counter depictions of some of the Corby children, 'he had been struck how journalists and photographers covering the courtcase has crudely captured the boys' disabilities on film.'⁴³¹ Neville worked with two of the young people, Ben Vissian and George Taylor (both missing fingers at birth) to create dignified and normalising portraits. Most telling in that, if you didn't know, you might not notice.

Neville wanted something more balanced and multi layered. So, he used high speed film equipment with a sonic trigger to record the moment the balloon burst [...] although their hands are visible in the pictures, they are not the main focus. "The balloon bursting is a metaphor for the court case. You can't see toxins; you can only see the birth defects that result from them. A high-speed photo allows you to see something the naked can't normally perceive. That's what the court case was about".⁴³²

Socially engaged photographer Anthony Luvera (editor of *Photography For Whom*) has discussed how a lack of success (in engaging those in power with participatory projects that directly address the relevant 'authorities', such as local councils) can be all the more revealing when those authorities do not respond. He posits that this exposes the inequity of power dynamics between a community in need, and an authority that is empowered but might not support and assist. Also that this can lend more strength to the ongoing effort of activist projects and support the need to keep working, to maintain dissensus is also thus exposed by the disinterest. Neville has also explained the disappointing response from the local councils in receipt of *Deeds Not Words*

⁴³⁰ Daniel Jewesbury 'Deeds Not Words'. *Source Magazine*. 67:.. pp. 18-20 (2011)

⁴³¹ Katie Razzall 'Art and Politics – Can photos of Corby change public policy?' Channel 4 News. September 5th, 2013.

⁴³² Mark Neville and Katie Razzall in conversation. Channel 4 News. September 5th 2013.

(and in his subsequent phone calls) and so the project was extended. He proceeded to organise an exhibition (with curator David Company) at The Photographer's Gallery in London. The gallery was very supportive of his idea to create an exhibition, a video (with witnesses from the court case) and a symposium to involve the Corby 16, as well as 'public and commercial' stakeholders'. Neville also brought together 'activist environmental lawyers' ClientEarth, politician Joan Walley (MP) and experts from the equally supportive Wellcome Trust into the gallery symposium. ⁴³³

For me, the only way forward is to challenge existing ways of disseminating your work [...] You've got to think hard about who is seeing your images, who those images impact, whether they're really reaching their target audience, and why you're doing what you're doing. When you start to challenge those existing structures and modes, you can come up with new ways of working within documentary practice. ⁴³⁴

Clearly, the project was successful, in the inclusive imaging of a particular community through a different perspective, also as an example of Neville's tactical use of collaboration and robust use of research. Art Historian Sarah E. James later reviewed both projects, identifying Neville's work, as 'based on an affirmative, activist understanding of Brecht' in comparison to much work at the time that claimed to be so whilst

failing to register what was at the heart of Brecht's project: an understanding that gaining distance or alienating capitalism itself should not be based only in scepticism, irony or even mimicry, but in 'responsible intellectual action [...] Neville's approach to his photographic and filmic production is embedded in the need to collaborate and complicate the relationships between artistic authorship and art's audiences while maintaining a belief in the transformative effects and affects of the aesthetic experience peculiar to the image. ⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Gemma Padley. 'Mark Neville Documents Corby 16 Toxic Waste Case'. *British Journal of Photography*. December. 160: pp.89-93 (2013)

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Sarah James 'Brecht Redux' in *Art Monthly* February. pp.6-10 (2015)

Nb. Despite his intellectual rigour and political /anti-fascist integrity, Brecht was also part of a white male western milieu, ironically patriarchal. An example is traced in copious letters, from his side, on a withdrawing from recognition of a collaborative contribution (with Ruth Berlau) that I discerned was not

THE
PHOTOGRAPHERS'
GALLERY

MASS
OBSERVATION:
THIS IS YOUR
PHOTO

MARK
NEVILLE:
DEEDS NOT
WORDS



PRIVATE VIEW
1 AUG 2013 19.00 – 21.00

RSVP essential to Elena Holtum
by Wednesday 24 July
rsvp@tpg.org.uk
+44 (0)20 7087 9302

Exhibition continues until
29 September 2013

Also showing on The Wall

#CITIZENCURATORS

Ramillies Street, W1
📍 Oxford Circus
thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Supported by
ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Drink sponsor
Asahi POL ROGER

Mark Neville Deeds Not Words supported by
STANLEY THOMAS
JOHNSON FOUNDATION

Photo image © Mark Neville. © Copyright of Deeds Not Words 2011

Fig.100 Exhibition poster for *Deeds Not Words* from The Photographer's Gallery 2013. Featuring *Corby Carnival Queens Go Bowling*, 2011

Corby Carnival Queens Go Bowling Mark Neville, Photograph, 2011



Fig.101 *Sewickley # 1*, 2012

Mark Neville, Photograph, 2012

This is more in evidence following the third project in the trilogy on post-industrial identity, where Neville attempted a different working method for *Braddock/Sewickley 2012*. Comprising fifty images, initially a slide projection series, later re-presented as C- type and silver gelatin prints, as Neville explains, this project ‘examines the legacy of the steel industry in Pittsburgh, focusing on the impact it has had in forming the contrasting culture and lifestyles of its two boroughs’.⁴³⁶ Vivid depictions offer the similarities as well as differences between residents. Mature women ‘dressed for the occasion’ in large elaborate hats, teenagers drinking and dancing with similar abandon, yet dressed in contrasting social camouflage: pseudo-adult in long shiny satin and formal shirts and ties, or more casual and youthful in denim and vest tops. The differences are mainly manifest via the cultures on display: Sewickley, still revolving around County Club events, hosting the Father and Daughter Dance (for under twelve-year old girls) and various Republican fundraisers so symbolic of wealth and conservatism, still boasting its wealth from the steelmaking hey-day. Meanwhile, Braddock, having survived post-industrial

recognized as collaborative instead is marginalized by Brecht, as he thanked his erstwhile partner for the ‘model photobooks’ and ‘little colour photos’ sent over some years. *Bertolt Brecht: Letters 1913- 1956* (London: Methuen, 1990) pp 493 and 551.

⁴³⁶ Mark Neville *London/Pittsburgh* (London: Alan Cristea Gallery, 2015)

poverty and desperation (drug epidemics, homelessness) on the loss of steelmaking, the main local employment, is (like Port Glasgow and Corby) beginning to recover, unevenly, through local regeneration. We see a fishmonger, a nightclub and an organic farm, people wilting as their well-tended vegetables thrive in the heat.

The *Braddock/Sewickley* work was instigated by the Andy Warhol Museum which is situated five miles away from Braddock in the city of Pittsburgh (where Warhol was born and grew up). Pittsburgh can be understood as sharing histories with Sheffield or Newcastle in the North of England and Glasgow in Scotland, in its transitioning, unevenly, from a once pivotal industrial hub. The museum has supported other projects in Braddock that reflect its commitment, 'to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in every aspect of our work'.⁴³⁷ For example, contemporaneous with Neville-activist LaToya Ruby Frazier, who also employs photography for social, often environmental, projects. Frazier also produces long durational, eco-critical activist projects such as *Campaign for Braddock Hospital (Save Our Community Hospital)*, 2001 and *Flint is Family*, 2016. She is described as working with working class families [...] and workers, inequality, racism, health care and environmentalism, particularly fossil fuel, and industrial pollution.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ Andy Warhol Museum Mission Statement. Mission: Vision and Values. <https://www.warhol.org/museum/> (accessed September 13th 2022)

⁴³⁸ LaToya Ruby Frazier 'About the speaker', Ted Talks. 2019. This talk, corresponding to 'Flint is Family- A Creative Solution for the Water Crisis in Flint, Michigan' has received over two million visits. Frazier, like Neville, underpins her work with much research as well as community participation. <https://latoyarubyfrazier.com/work/a-despoliation-of-water/> (accessed August 13th 2022)



Fig.102 *Flint is Family- A Creative Solution for the Water Crisis in Flint, Michigan, 2016*

LaToya Ruby Frazier, Photograph, 2016

Neville was contacted by the Warhol museum shortly after The New York Times published *Here is London*, 2012. This was Neville's depiction of the contrasting lives from city bankers to Occupy protesters in London, 2011, as the era of 'austerity' was imposed. He has described how both the London and Pittsburgh projects raised issues of class, race with an emphasis on class inequalities in Britain and race inequalities in America, also the issues around not being able to live or be among a community for the usual duration of at least a year.

I had never worked for a publication before, nor had I ever produced work for immediate exhibition in an American museum. I had also never worked so quickly [...] Up until then, and subsequently, I have been realizing projects whose primary audience, beneficiaries and recipients are the very communities which featured in my films and photographs [...] here I was interested to understand what happened when the work was disseminated to a broader audience...Would it be possible to explore themes of social division without employing the targeted book and image dissemination? ⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Mark Neville. *London/Pittsburgh* (London: Alan Cristea Gallery, 2015) p.5



Fig.103 *London Metal Exchange, 2012* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2012.
From the photo-book *This is London, 2012*

Although *This is London* was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 2013, Neville returned to his established way of working for future projects, such as *Child's Play* (2016), a symposium, exhibition, distributed book, and continued relationship with The Foundling Museum in London. This to make the case, to hundreds of local authorities, against the closing of playgrounds and lack of opportunity for children to exercise and play for the sake of their mental, as well as physical, wellbeing. Also *Parade*, 2016-2019, made with the people of Guingamp, Brittany, France as a divisive 'Brexit' reframed views on fishing and agricultural 'deals', (exploited in the British campaign to 'leave Europe') Neville explores, in a small town where food production and processing is central, how difficult it is, despite the desire, to establish local scale, quality food production. Let alone live sustainably off the land, instead of depending on the multinational supermarket system and all of the cruelty, pollution and exploitation that is entailed. The project seems a continuation of previous, ambitious project with rural communities, on their relationship with the land, the locale, and the animals central to their lives.



Fig. 104 *Annie and Snowy* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2008
From the Audio slide installation *Tula Fancies* 2008

At once overtly eco-critical, esoteric and accessible *Fancy Pictures* and *Tula Fancies* 2008 were created over a twelve-month residency on Isle of Bute, a fifteen by five mile island to the west of the southern coast of Scotland. Here Neville brings an art historical conceptual element into a community photography project, reclaiming the erstwhile aristocratic application of 'fancy'. At the studio we discuss ecotopia, as a thread running through much of his work, also as less utopian fantasy and more an important element to physical and mental health. As Konttinen recognized in the miners' allotments about to be lost to development, and as documented by Godwin's project on oil industry construction in Shetland, equitable access to land for humans and animals on a domestic scale, from enclosures and clearances to prohibitive costs and policies is yet increasingly obstructed and denied. For *Parade*, Neville once again includes supplementary research, and distribution strategy in hope of response to the photobook.

now accompanied by a special publication containing interviews with Britany farmers and a call to action written by Terre de Liens / Access to Land Network. The book urges support for a sustainable, humane, even ecotopian type of agriculture and greater access to land. Along with the photo book *Parade*, I have sent out this new publication *Parade Texts* free to the UK and

European ministries of agriculture and food, key policymakers, and to both rural and urban schools and libraries both in Britain and France. ⁴⁴⁰

To conclude this chapter, with the key example in which dissemination becomes the rationale, I turn to Neville's most unlikely, simultaneously most successful, and unsuccessful work as a 'war artist'. Successful as the eventual result was of important practical use to many neglected sufferers of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Unsuccessful due to Neville being unable to work in a participatory way with the local civilian people in the war zone. I use the term 'war artist' as applied when an artist is commissioned to accompany military personnel in active conflict. The following, somewhat dispassionate statement, confirms this as an ongoing practice in public museums.

In Britain official government-sponsored schemes were established for artists to record both the First and Second World Wars. The Imperial War Museum has continued to commission artists to record the events of war in more recent conflicts. As well as providing fascinating documentation of war time activities and events, much of the work produced by war artists is also interesting and important as art. ⁴⁴¹



Fig. 105 *On Patrol in Gereshk,1, 2011* Mark Neville, Photograph, 2011

⁴⁴⁰ Mark Neville www.markneville.com (accessed 8th August 2022)

⁴⁴¹ Tate. War Artists. www.tate.org (Accessed September 2022) Nb. Photography used propaganda to support or dispute war, or as evidence or for instrumental uses (reconnaissance, identity checks) from the mid 19th century, also includes 'a demand for millions of 'likenesses' of the young men marching off to the front'. Berenice Abbott (writing on the role and status of photography in 1951) was referring to the American Civil War. This continues through official military portraiture and extended to children and civilians) via the social media of millions of men and women involved in contemporary conflict. Likenesses more often offered as evidence of distress and loss. See Berenice Abbott 'Photography at the Crossroads' in *Classic Essays on Photography* ed. Alan Trachtenberg (originally in *Universal Photo Album*, 1951) Reproduced in Leetes Island Books, Inc. Connecticut, 1980. p.180.

War and photography, particularly with regard to distribution, have a long-established, symbiotic relationship. There is a substantial critical literature on the development and circulation of photographic propaganda, in military and civilian contexts, throughout the history of the medium.⁴⁴² Out of the many modern conflicts depicted by the media over the last thirty years (until more recently in Ukraine) it has been the wars conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan that have been especially visible. The clarity of images, of devastated towns, cities, hillsides, and bodies, distributed via increasingly high-definition screens, in the home and in the hand, results in a terrible false familiarity. Visual material is, however, mediated by mainstream media, presented with varying narratives, harrowing detail not always forthcoming on prime-time television or in daily newspapers. In circumstances that resulted in his developing a debilitating adjustment disorder, a long form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Neville arrived in Helmand, Afghanistan in December 2010.

During our discussion of this, he is visibly moved and unsettled. After assuring me that he wanted to continue, to communicate the experience and situation he described how he did not feel he had been physically or mentally prepared for war on the ground (in a professional military sense) with soldiers who, despite some of them being very young, had undergone much challenging training to be de-sensitized to an extremely harsh and lethal situation. Other soldiers were not only experienced but seasoned 'elite' airborne paratroopers (the 'paras'). Even so, many of these soldiers were to also develop PTSD, such was the severity of the experience in Helmand and beyond. Colchester, in the East of England, has been a garrison town for centuries, the base of the 'paras'. Neville had been approached by public arts organization, Firstsite Colchester, in October 2010; the commission was in association with the Imperial War Museum, London, for Neville to be 'artist in residence' with the 16 Air Assault Brigade. By

⁴⁴² Julian Stallabrass. *Killing For Show: Photography, War and The Media in Vietnam and Iraq*. (Maryland and London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group Inc. 2020). Photographs discussed include those (known as) 'My Lai Massacre', 1968 (Ron Haerberle), 'The execution of Nguyen Van Lem, 1968' (Eddie Adams) and Abu Ghraib, 2003 (various North American soldiers). Also, unseen or far less distributed images from Vietnamese and Iraqi photographers. The book is an extensive account of the role of 'image strategy', including dissemination or the repression of that, as applied during, and after, military action. See also: Julian Stallabrass (ed.) *Memory of Fire: Images of War and The War of Images* (Brighton: Photoworks, 2013). The book is an output from the 2008 Brighton Photo Biennial of the same name.

December he had arrived, with the soldiers on a military plane, at the epicentre Camp Bastion.⁴⁴³

Neville further complicated the relationship between photographer and photographed, author and public. The ethics of embedded journalism [...] are fraught and hotly debated. The argument is familiar: enjoying the protection of troops operating in dangerous situations, photographers gain uncensored access to conflict zones while strongly identifying with soldiers. This intimate exposure comes at a cost: it produces a positive view of the war, one that promotes consensus and panders to the media [...] Made over a period of three months, *The Battle Against Stigma* offers a spare and haunting departure in the relentless portrayal of this international conflict.⁴⁴⁴

The experience, from the shock of the first hours onwards, also the difficult return, is described by Neville in various forthright interviews and through his own accounts. The work itself, in methods of production and content, responded to a frustrated expectation to work with local communities and soldiers in a participatory way, by interacting on a personal, normal civilian level. This was not at all possible, although, a variety of equipment (for example crash testing cameras) was brought, an attempt to avoid replicating any kind of clichéd misrepresentation. Although not 'successful' (in his terms, as collaboration), Neville was able to produce a body of 'Helmand Work' including the powerful film *Bolan Market* (2011). The short length belies the sophisticated technical strategies at work to convey the distorted sense of time and perception when in an extremely stressful situation.

The film is only made possible through the deployment of an armoured vehicle and its crew: The footage is mediated through an apparatus of war and an occupying force, forming a disturbing mediation on the relationship between subject and viewer.⁴⁴⁵

The Imperial War Museum (IWM London) has a copy of the work, although not on view except for a still which is devoid of people. Noting the slow motion and 'soundless, timeless scenes [...] The technique gives a fluid, lyrical grace to its

⁴⁴³ Mark Neville. Interview with Liz J Drew. London: February 21st, 2020.

⁴⁴⁴ Terracciano, Emilia. 2015. Review of Battle of Stigma. <https://photomonitor.co.uk> (accessed September 12th 2022)

⁴⁴⁵ Mark Neville www.markneville.com (accessed July 7th 2022)

subject, opening our eyes [...] we are enabled to perceive details we would otherwise miss'. IWM also puts the soldiers into the frame by mentioning the shadow of the tank sometimes casting over the market. 'The movement in the film, the slow journey past faces looking across and up to the tank, the loud silence is important. The people at the market are seen to insist on their agency through the camera'.⁴⁴⁶



Fig.106 *Bolan Market, Afghanistan, 2011*

Mark Neville, 16mm slow motion, silent film / Digital copy, 6.3 minutes., 2011

Neville explains that he was taken to Bolan Market (in Lashkar Gah) to record a post-Taliban 'success story' for British and ISAF (International Security Assistance Force). Also, how he travelled by tank and was positioned by the gun turret, right next to a front facing machine gunner, both hands holding onto the weapon. He describes to me in detail, how his film camera was held, by necessity in the same way, resulting in excruciating parallels.

pointing at people, looking at the tank – I remember like that happened this morning – still – one of my most vivid – and I just remember feeling ashamed to be an artist – as war artist (although) before that it was Taliban run – and now you start to see the beginning of commerce – mobile phones – still – I felt ashamed.⁴⁴⁷

However, this work is very different from any sort of photojournalism, or the many misrepresentations of the people and place and war depicted. It was made in extremely fragile circumstances using a 16mm 1960s film camera.

⁴⁴⁶ Imperial War Museum object label: Catalogue no. IWM.ART 17631.

⁴⁴⁷ Mark Neville Interview with Liz J Drew. London: February 21st, 2020.

I did everything I could to confound the conventions of news reporting in Afghanistan – no sound - because in all the news reports you're fed these images and told what to think - it's that combination of mis-information and images that's so pernicious - it's silent, it's about giving – trusting the viewer to respond to what was there' (Neville) 'it was humanizing, people that look like us, the viewer, they just look like contemporaries - but it's a returned gaze' (Drew) 'yes, exactly.'⁴⁴⁸

In a review of *Helmand Work* (eventually exhibited at the Imperial War Museum in 2014) Melanie Vandenbrouk also notes Neville's distress at Bolan Market (as one of three *Helmand* films) in exposing

a chasm all the more challenging for an artist whose work is about people and their communities. The film's freedom and the uncomfortable absence of sound convey Neville's feeling of being "trapped in a silent nightmare" [...] faced with the powerful gaze of the film's subjects, the artist/viewer becomes, in a reversal of long-established orientalist conventions, the 'other'.⁴⁴⁹

Having embarked on treatment for his prolonged adjustment disorder, Neville was able to re-orientate the project, applying his alternative distribution strategy to produce *The Battle Against Stigma Book Project* (2015). A collaboration with Jamie Hacker Hughes (professor and practitioner of clinical psychology and expert in veterans as survivors of trauma) to confront the professional and social stigma of PTSD and to raise awareness and support. It is a two-volume publication as the Ministry of Defence barred him from creating a single book where the images from *Helmand* and accounts of PTSD (from serving and ex serving soldiers) would be seen together.⁴⁵⁰ It is not commercially available but free of charge, only by request, to individuals who are affected by PTSD, and to services that might react with tangible support.

The Battle Against Stigma exhibition features photographs, films, emails, and copies of a book [...] The first 500 copies of the book were seized at

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. I refer to the Imperial War Museum catalogue entry here.

⁴⁴⁹ Melanie Vandenbrouk. 'Mark Neville's *Helmand Work* at the IWM London'. *Apollo Magazine*. August 13:24 (2014)

⁴⁵⁰ David Company <https://davidcompany.com> (accessed 8th June 2022)

customs by UK Border Force. However, a second consignment of one thousand copies entered the UK via a different route thus escaping seizure and arriving safely at Neville's studio.⁴⁵¹ Despite this most challenging and contested project, a positive element was wrought, in the participation and response of fellow victims of PTSD. Although officially 'embedded', Neville went to Afghanistan with his own agenda to 'see what was happening' and despite the efforts of the Ministry of Defence, he managed to subvert censorship. The outcome counters any notion of Neville being involved the sort of military-media collaboration that was virulent at this time, as analysed by Julian Stallabrass in his discussion of the notorious 'Shock and Awe' campaign that opened the Iraq War. 'The whole system of 'embedding' journalists and photographers with troop units was used to generate the images that the military wanted seen [...] used as 'force multipliers' [...] to persuade the enemy that resistance was useless.'⁴⁵² . Although too often horribly graphic and intrusive the work Don McCullin, specifically in the 1971 photobook *The Destruction Business*, includes images that the military would not want seen. Sections of the book are in war zones that precede Neville's vivid communication, in Helmand, of the terrible proximity of civilians and soldiers. However, Neville does not ever include graphic images of mutilation or death, evidencing the possibility to work in far different ways as an 'embedded' photographer. His images responding to one of McCullin's photo-captions featuring American soldiers in action, with guns, in South East Asia. 'Soldiers firing rifles in war make ordinary pictures because without the action, the smell and the noise, you have no truth'.⁴⁵³ Rather than soldiers firing rifles Neville offers images of individuals as such, even if uniformed and armed, no one is firing or fired upon even if this is an obvious context.

⁴⁵¹ Mark Neville www.markneville.com (accessed 6th July 2022)

⁴⁵² Stallabrass. *Killing For Show: Photography, War and The Media in Vietnam and Iraq*. (Connecticut: Roman and Littlefield, 2020) Preface.

⁴⁵³ Donald McCullin *The Destruction Business* (London and Basingstoke: Open Gate Books and Macmillan London Ltd., 1971) p.28. For an alternative example of a contemporary photographer 'embedded' in Afghanistan Lynsey Addario leans more toward McCullin's photojournalism and, like him, using the term 'war photographer' and 'reporter'. See Lynsey Addario *It's What I Do: A photographer's Life of Love and War* (London and New York: Corsair and Penguin Group, 2015)

Neville voiced concern and regret that the Helmand project ever occurred and assured me that he doesn't blame anyone: 'the people that sent me there didn't have any real idea of what was going on there either.' One of the most significant interviews (these are also used as a form of distribution, of insights in to Helmand and the life changing PTSD) was provided to *The Independent* newspaper in May 2015. He references anti-Vietnam artwork (rather than the copious amount of 'war photography' from the Vietnam and other wars, as important in his aspiration to communicate the situation, to raise awareness, while also opening up about the frustrated effort to distribute the work as planned.

Soldiers were losing limbs every day, sometimes three or four, yet these devastating injuries were barely reported in the UK [...] I had made it clear to the organisation that commissioned my war residency that I would be making work which commented upon the situation as it was in Helmand and that, for the work to achieve maximum impact, it needed to be disseminated and exhibited soon after my return, like news [...] But there was no such exhibition opportunity [...] it was to take a further three years for my work to be seen, in a solo exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. It was a missed opportunity [...] this agonising wait meant I felt I had to stay embedded in the war experience for three years, while I carried the work.⁴⁵⁴

Whilst Neville was unsuccessful in being able to interact with local people or being able to have the work promptly exhibited on his return, an interview with *The Independent*, where he offered free copies on request to those effected by PTSD, was featured in print and online and proved to be a pivotal moment for the work to succeed as intended. In the interview his account is impassioned

As soon as that went live – in May 2015 – I got an email every ten minutes for three months – from a veteran saying – not just can I have a free

⁴⁵⁴ Mark Neville 'Battling Stigma: The British war artist who suffered Post Traumatic Stress after stint on Helmand Frontline'. *Independent on Sunday*. May 24th. Online Saturday 23rd May. 2015
Neville refers to New York artist Martha Rosler's series 'House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home 1967-72' produced at the same time as the Art Workers' Coalition 'My Lai massacre' poster, at the height of the conflict, also having an immediate and lasting influence.

See also 'Martha Rosler's Protest' a recent article by Stephanie Schwartz: 'Rosler's photomontages were conceived of as protest flyers. Neither dated nor signed, they were xeroxed, piled up and carried into the street Mobile and mobilized, they were moved between hands. Presumably, they were crumpled up and folded as well as shoved into pockets. They were also, most likely, dropped and stepped on, swept up and away by the movements of bodies marching and working together to produce another image of war—of dissent and solidarity'. Stephanie Schwartz 'Martha Rosler's Protest', *Arts*, 9, 92. MPDI Open Journal - Arts 2020.

copy of your book – *Battle Against Stigma* – but going into incredible personal detail about what happened to them in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo - and what happened when they came back. ⁴⁵⁵

As we conclude this part of the discussion, he is clear in wanting to reiterate the outcome of this work, he shares his conviction that although his other projects are about things he feels and cares about this project had other outcomes, in a straightforward way: ‘other people felt empowered to share - and then those responses – thousands of emails – became a new archive effectively – you can see you’ve tapped into some hidden pain which people aren’t articulating or don’t feel entitled to articulate’. ⁴⁵⁶

More recently, Neville has explained how the 2015 email response to the distribution of *Battle Against Stigma* included an unexpected invitation to Ukraine. The Kyiv Military Hospital had requested copies of *Battle Against Stigma* (in Ukrainian) for the traumatized and injured ‘who were, even then, returning from the frontline of Donbas’. After dozens of visits, this eventually resulted in his leaving London to live in Kyiv, until forced to flee in Spring 2022. Neville continues:

When I flew to Ukraine for the first time to meet people at the Military Hospital, I immediately understood that this was a country traumatized by war. Even in its vibrant, modern capital Kyiv, I felt and saw in people’s faces the weight of the conflict raging 600 km away. I recognised a trauma in them. I immediately decided to make a book which attempted to stop the war in Donbas. ⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Mark Neville. Interview with Liz J Drew. London: February 21st, 2020.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Mark Neville *Stop Tanks With Books* (Istanbul: Nazraeli Press, 2022) p.10



Fig.107 Queue to Cross Stanytsia Luhanska Bridge ,2019
Mark Neville, Photograph, 2019 In *Stop Tanks With Books* (2020)

Following the completion of the project *Conflict Dynamics and Border Regions: Displaced Ukrainians 2016-2017* (a collaboration with The Centre of Eastern European and International Studies, Berlin), as a matter of urgency Neville began work on the photobook *Stop Tanks with Books* (2022) Again, edited with David Campany, there is an arresting introduction by Neville: ‘the collective sense of trauma in that basement was palpable.’ He distinguishes the roles and position of the state, including Britain, from that of the people who must live (and die) with political agendas.

I have many Russian friends, and I have loved exhibiting my work in Moscow. Yet realizing this book project may well prevent me from ever obtaining a visa to visit Russia again. Principles only mean something if you stick by them when they are inconvenient.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid. p 40.

The Ukrainian novelist, poet and screenwriter (well-known and influential in Ukraine) Lyuba Yakimchuk collaborates on the book, employing harrowing anecdotes in short story form, but the text (in Ukrainian, Russian and English) begins with two pages of timelines, grim facts and figures, and proposals for international intervention to prevent further conflict, for sanctions and assistance. Addressed to policy makers, politicians and powerful commentators, a frantic effort, to despatch seven hundred and fifty photobooks, was underway when the long-predicted missile attacks began in February 2022.

Having visited Donbas many times, what stands out for me are the recurring threats that continue to make the lives of normal people in the region precarious, both during times of war and peace. Mental health issues amongst the population of the Donbas region have risen exponentially due to the incredible stress and pressure of living on the frontline of war for nearly eight years (at the time of writing).⁴⁵⁹

Neville remains committed to disseminating this collection of affecting portraits and stories to convey the humanity at risk and to urge support, not least widespread mental trauma, including in children, who feature in the book as surviving challenging and horrific situations. From mid-September 2022 an updated 'post invasion' 2nd edition is to expand the distribution as this is available, in limited numbers, to the public.⁴⁶⁰ The second book is not produced in order to recover the financial and other costs of the venture, as Joanna L Cresswell notes on her review of the first edition, as below

⁴⁵⁹ Mark Neville *Stop Tanks With Books* (Istanbul: Nazraeli Press, 2022)

human empathy can certainly be a powerful drive [...] A publication like *Stop Tanks with Books* may be a small beat of the butterfly's wing in the grand picture, but it's a tangible, active gesture [...] as it's sent out and lands on desks across the world, it has a cumulative effect, with the capacity to gain momentum and shift the narrative over time. [...] so, while media images get bumped further down feeds and fall from front pages, this book remains, and takes up space.⁴⁶¹



Fig. 108 *Lazo and Anna Liudmila at an IDP Camp in Sviatohirsk, Donetsk, 2016*

Mark Neville, Photograph, 2016 In *Stop Tanks With Books* (2020)

In this final chapter I have referred to 'distribution' as a conceptual as well as literal activity, to encompass the sharing of ideas and experience as well as the dissemination of physical works. My example of the work of Neville demonstrates a more visceral experience in participatory projects where the locale of interaction is also of central significance. To even attend a warzone with a camera, embedded with military forces could be discerned as a form of collaboration with the military. As Stallabrass has demonstrated, it usually is,

⁴⁶⁰ Nazraeli Press statement (David Company)

⁴⁶¹ Joanna, L. Cresswell. Review of *Stop Tanks With Books*. *Lensculture*. 2022. <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/mark-neville-stop-tanks-with-books> (accessed 9th September 2022)

therefore work produced in war zones is difficult to navigate in the production of counter narratives. In the aforementioned *Memory of Fire* Stallabrass offers critique and other exceptions to embedding to 'cover urgent issues on the depiction of war'. He points to the title as 'borrowed' from Eduardo Galeano's long history of (colonial) conflict in Latin America 'structured as a long sequence of affecting snapshots, flashes of illumination in a history that remains obscure to those who confine themselves to conservative accounts which dwell on the powerful'.⁴⁶² The rarity of non-commercially available output (that, in this case, dwells on the disempowered and endangered) ensures a shift in our attention, even in this violent and disturbing situation, through Neville's pursuit of meaningful affective projects. Participatory and social documentary photography, to create and offer depictions of communities, that you may or may not be part of, continues to be discussed in terms of ethics.⁴⁶³ In all cases the mode of distribution is crucial in supporting the rationale and efficacy of any attempts 'social practice, answerable to the world'.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶² Stallabrass. *Memory of Fire: Images of War and The War of Images* (Brighton, Photoworks, 2013) p.15.

For a usefully (visually) illustrated specific discussion on the 'war of images' as part, and in the aftermath of '9/11' (New York, 2001) see Diane Smyth 'Blind Leading the Blind' in *British Journal of Photography* 158:7791, August 2011 pp. 37-45

⁴⁶³ Mathilde Bertrand 'More than one finger on the Shutter: Photography as collaboration and the legacies of Community Photography in Contemporary Practice' in *Photography For Whom?* 1.2 (2021) pp. 37-55.

Mark Sealy at 'Ethics of Documentary Photography' Side Gallery Talks. A series of three online events during the Covid pandemic lockdown. 19th and 26th March and 9th April 2021.

Photovoice. 2022. Statement of Ethical Practice. <https://photovoice.org/about-us/photovoice-statement-of-ethical-practice/> (accessed February 2nd 2024)

⁴⁶⁴ 'Both his writings and art aimed to bridge the gap between conceptual and documentary practices, focusing on economic and social themes ranging from family life, work and unemployment to schooling and the military-industrial complex. While questioning many documentary conventions, Sekula continued to see photography as a social practice, answerable to the world and its problems'. Sally Stein and Ina Steiner. Allan Sekula Studio www.allansekulastudio.org Homepage. (accessed May 5th 2021)

Conclusion

To recap on the context for the thesis: A centre point, before and after the years of production in discussion, was a pivotal moment for an escalation in political and cultural hegemony. In February 1975 Margaret Thatcher (1925 - 2013) became the leader of a Conservative party that went on to win the general election of 1979. In Government, these radical Conservatives were to implement socio economic policies of major significance, especially to particular working-class communities, on the cusp of a second, accelerated era of globalization. As evidenced in projects discussed throughout this thesis, such policies were based on an applied monetarism, an experiment that transitioned a theory (of 20th century neo-liberalism) into a political doctrine and established the implementation of inescapable de-regulation, privatization and “austerity”. This word was initially mis-appropriated as an alternative to “severe public spending cuts”. There was an immediate and sustained impact on the fabric and experience of place, the material as well as immaterial ways of work and life intrinsically linked to specific environments. This escalated an ongoing inequality of life experience and opportunity for the majority of British citizens (i.e., the working class), whether in rural, urban or coastal regions. Similar types of places have been historically subject to exploitative or repressive policy; From corn laws, clearances and enclosures to the more recent commodification of public space including rampant commercial property development (rather than the maintenance and development of social housing and buildings) with a flipside of callous, widespread foreclosures and ‘re-possession’. New extremes of polarized wealth and poverty are seen ‘cheek by jowl’ in high density cities, or in picturesque coastal and rural communities with not enough housing stock. Second (or third) holiday houses proliferate at the expense of affordable, decent local homes to rent or purchase. In the first quarter of the 21st century there is a renewed escalation in the exploitation and abuse of every kind of environment. Cadastral mapping to facilitate place zoning is utilized and misused for an inescapable commodification of space at public and personal levels; To allow for mainly

commercial development (including environmentally polluting communication, retail, road and lighting systems imposed by multinational corporations) extending into the smallest hamlet, village, town or city street. Night skies, tree canopy, birdsong and wildlife (along with the physical and mental health properties they afford) have long been the preserve of the rich or the 'lucky' few, rather than a normal, universal experience. Social cleansing is (once again) rife, furthermore, privatization and deregulation as delivered by beleaguered local government (the latter now having to resort to outsourcing services as well selling public assets) has subjected the support for social housing, including building safety regulations, to such erosion that lives, as well as ways of living, have been lost or destroyed due to criminal neglect. There is a consensus on issues around relationships between social cleansing and environmental exploitation, as to be found across the mainstream and more specialist media. This can be traced back through 'threads' of topics in newspaper archives, academic work and cultural projects for decades, with an escalation in the loss or degradation of suitable homes, hitherto public space (from state school playing fields to national parks and a return to highly polluted seas and rivers) as evidential sites.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ Since the 1980s 're-generation' as (property) development for profit emerges as a key driver for extreme inequality. A recent 'spike' in the size of the gap between poverty and wealth was immediately after the result of the UK general election in May 2015: A contested Conservative majority. See <https://www.jrf.org.uk/political-mindsets/talking-about-poverty-how-experts-and-the-public-understand-uk-poverty> (accessed 2nd May 2024)

Zed Nelson 'The more deprived and edgy the better: The two sides of London's Property Boom' (*The Guardian*: Saturday May 30th, 2015). For more on the 'the cadastral frontline' see 'Who Owns England?' Guy Shrubsole (*The Land*: Issue 21, 2017) pp10-11. This includes an illuminating interactive map by Anna Powell-Smith <http://map.whoownsengland.org>. (accessed 10th June 2021)

Criminal neglect. e.g., 'Grenfell Tower: Murder by Neglect and Profiteering' *Class Struggle: Journal for the Internationalist Communist Union*, Britain (Summer 2017) pp10-15. Collective authorship.

Imaging the Results and Response

Photography, including as practice and debate in film and digital media, has, throughout its history, been an agent in the complex relationship between the depiction, perception and experience of place and continues to play a central role. Images propose and perpetuate 'development' and 'regeneration' as beneficial, nevertheless there is also countervisuality, resistance and riposte that can also be detected through overtly or tacitly oppositional visual media. Although not exclusive, a major locus of activity for analysis in my thesis has been the North and North Sea. The North East of England particularly has often been simplistically portrayed as 'The Grim North', depicted as a place and people of suffering, 'falling behind' in a misery of industrial monochrome. As discussed in my introduction, this (usually middle class) gaze has been identified as detrimental in a significant corpus of documentary photograph. Amounting (even when 'comedic' or 'supportive') to a lazy and repressive ridicule or pity, propagated by imaging across arts as well as mainstream media. However, more local, participatory work based in documentary projects have been seen to have interrupted prolific narratives of marginalization that imply cultural and well as economic poverty. In particular, the 20th Century working class experience in the North is more empathetically critiqued, as well as celebrated, in projects that emerge from local communities. This has resulted in more positive cultural and political perceptions, if not as yet resulting in equitable government support across the regions of Britain. As discussed in chapters one and two, and proposed by Sekula and Birch, the 'forgotten space' of the sea is a central site of economic and environmental inequity. Land, sea and all communities are also increasingly subject to the effects of climate change, much of which is related to ways of life developed and imposed by profit-based systems revolving around a global fossil economy, established and

perpetuated by de-regulation. Over the previous two and half centuries, during the rise of industrial capitalism and globalization, the trajectory of this economy can also be traced in the corresponding development of visual technologies, imaged and distributed from the earliest to contemporary forms of photography. The type of visual material I have examined contributes to a sociology of place, be that the riverside and coastal spaces of industrial Tyneside, the off shore oil rig and related landscapes of the North Sea or the war zone and more conceptual spaces of the experience of a particular community.⁴⁶⁶ I propose that it is not enough to see these as 're-invented' documentary, that the production and reception of these works is, as much as, if not sometimes more than, the works themselves of contemporary cultural and political significance. i.e., Whilst varied in content and style a civic intent results in their being far more participatory and active in their inception, making and sometimes alternative distribution rather than through retrospective curatorial contexts that can perpetuate issues of victimization or misrepresentation in documentary photography. As Stallabrass recounts

The reawakening of documentary has been a product of the over-reach of the neoliberal power [...] The launching of controversial wars, starkly dividing the globe into allies and enemies, and violating democratic principles, thrust photojournalism and documentary into renewed prominence in the news media and beyond. This produced, of necessity, a substantial wave of theoretical re-evaluation of documentary for its new roles and its new social and political situation.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ Dan Jackson has discussed the presence of the high number of Northern working class (miners and sailors for example) in centuries of British war, the 'interdependence of the home front and the battlefield was especially obvious [...] a vital role in the replacement of war material, in particular shipping and heavy weaponry'. He goes on to describe the usefulness (at the front) of the physicality and skills of industrial workers in the first and second world wars, and how 'The Northumbrian martial tradition is one of the strongest markers of a cultural *longue durée*'. Dan Jackson *The Northumbrians* pp 58-59. As noted and imaged by Mark Neville, this tradition is seen to continue with the deployment of very young people, including in Afghanistan during the conflict 2001 – 2014.

⁴⁶⁷ Julian Stallabrass *Documentary* (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT, 2013) Introduction. pp15-16.

I have considered and contributed to work that has responded to and facilitated the development of concepts and methods for social documentary, including collaborative projects, that has engaged with socio-political conditions as prevailing from the later 20th and into the first decades of 21st Century. This has involved the revisiting of, or first engagement with overlooked or mis-represented activity as part of a wider and ongoing re-evaluation in this area. The ever-evolving complexity of visual representation and the multifaceted role of photography continues to be discussed across academic areas, documentary photography is at the centre of these debates. Jae Emerling also provides a relevant summary of how this came to be revisited and challenged in the last fifteen years or so. In the chapter 'Documentary, or Instants of Truth' Emerling discusses how Mark Reinhardt 'challenges the presuppositions operative in the anti-aesthetic position [...] reconnects with theoretical work by Barthes, Rancière and others and explores the trajectory of this position from well-known and critiqued writers on photography and realism, from Walter Benjamin to Rosler and Sekula'⁴⁶⁸. Emerling also acknowledges that these writers, especially later Susan Sontag and Sekula, grappled with problematic distinctions between documentary and art photography as part of the subordination of the visual to the textual. As discussed, especially in chapters two and three, providing examples with the work of Fay Godwin and Mark Neville, I assert that the production and distribution of the social documentary photobook, in concept and form, has addressed this subordination.

It also has a reassuring dimension as something we can store [...] safely on the bookshelf, containing within its covers the possibility of opening our domestic space into the imaginative space.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ Jae Emerling *Photography History and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2012) pp105

⁴⁶⁹ Patrizia di Bello in *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* pp105. Di Bello was discussing my gift of Brassai's 1949 photobook *The Sculptures of Picasso*. I extend the notion of the 'imaginative space' (referred to here as 'sculpture and the artist's studio' to the engagement, through the photobook, with other times, lives and places.

In contemporary work, as video and short form moving image essays are now long established as mainstream visual activity, the critical literature on documentary photography can further interact with history and theory in film studies. I have called upon this relationship to include some works, also theory and methods, for moving as well as still images. Chapter one provides a specific example as to analyse my chosen type of material from the industrial North East I have appropriated and reapplied the term 'poetic realism' from the 1930's film genre, as speaking to collective experience and memory through depictions of working-class life and characters and 'narratives that function as critiques of society'.⁴⁷⁰ This to further validate the case, and to extend the possible meanings, for social documentary photography (particularly that which aspires to be participatory) as a continuing project of cultural pluralism in the attempt to progress equality in an era of polarizing extremes.

Despite the critical marginalization during the late 20th Century, work in the areas of community and participatory projects continued during the 1970s, 80s and over the 1990s. This involving the working-class experience including the collection and dissemination of local and international documentary. As referred to in this thesis, increasing scholarly attention is now paid to this era, also to the renewed attention itself. However, just one academic book and two other British doctoral theses that are specifically related to my own thesis i.e., discussing some of practice that I have analysed (albeit through different framing) have emerged.⁴⁷¹ The book is the aforementioned *In Fading Light*:

⁴⁷⁰ Michael Glover Smith in conversation (including on Poetic Realism films) with Adrian Nambo May 18th, 2012. <https://whitecitycinema.com/about/> (accessed 12th September 2022)

⁴⁷¹ Alice Compton 'Waste of a Nation: Photography, Abjection and Crisis in Thatcher's Britain' (Unpublished thesis) 2016 and Stephanie King 'The Less acceptable face of Capitalism: a study of British Documentary During the Rise of Thatcherism' (Unpublished thesis) 2020. My own part time research was underway in 2014. Work on Amber, framed by Mirzoeff's countervisuality, as situated in both a marginalized locale (the North East) and anti-documentary critical context has been presented at national and international forums, and online from 2014.

The Films of The Amber Collective (2020) by film and television scholar James Leggott. The theses, from two full time research students, produced in 2016 and 2020 are contemporaneous with my own part time long durational research.⁴⁷² The first of the two theses being from Alice Compton, 'Waste of a Nation: Photography, Abjection and Crisis in Thatcher's Britain' as will be now discussed. Compton shares some of my research interests and concerns around photographic aesthetics, politics and class. However, her research specifically focusses on the 'Thatcher Years' of the 1980s, rather than over my fifty-year timeframe and draws upon the work of Imogen Tyler (on 'social abjection'). The visual examples are situated in the wider imaging (through media, advertising and propaganda) of abjection to consider 'the role photographic representations have played in bolstering or resisting the abject narratives of the sick and the healthy society'.⁴⁷³ An analogy is made between the demise of socially concerned documentary and the defeat of the late twentieth century defeat of the labour movement, the latter famously apparent in the violent (ideologically and physically) suppression of the British coal miners in the mid-1980s. She too describes how a new generation (her main examples are Martin Parr, Paul Graham and Anna Fox) were reading texts (such as those from Burgin and Tagg) on the 'suspect nature of the 'concerned' photographer' in the context of a rapidly changing society where consumerism was ideologically and physically imposed as never before. Referring to work by Parr, and his student Paul Reas:

In the work of these new colourists, the working class were no longer corralled within the frame of the concerned photographer's picture [...] no longer seriously rendered as nobly suffering but as alive with their own deprivations. Fleshed out in the synaesthetic odours of colour [...] these manic

⁴⁷² Long durational: Building on a postgraduate dissertation on the role of photography and film in the development of communication theory (London Metropolitan University 2004-6) in 2010 I began work on my research proposal for this thesis in the print room of the British Library and the (landscape) photography archives of Museum of Modern Art and International Centre of Photography, New York. I've been engaged in this research area for over a decade, although taking over four years of breaks from the thesis due to full time work and caring responsibilities, also during the Covid 19 Pandemic. A much earlier undergraduate degree in (modern) English Literature (with minors in Theatre and Visual Art) proved useful, as did the even earlier British secondary school experience late 1970s) which, unusually, offered an 'O' Level in Photography that involved writing essays (on photographers and genres) as well as practical training.

⁴⁷³ Alice Compton 'Waste of a Nation: Photography, Abjection and Crisis in Thatcher's Britain' (Unpublished thesis) 2016 p.168

subjects high on credit embody the capitalist ideal of the credit drained consumer⁴⁷⁴

This is in reference to images of 'frenzied shopping' at inexpensive retail outlets created for the series 'I Can Help' (Reas, 1988)) and by 'One Day Trip' (Parr, 1989). Compton presents these brash representations as aptly reflecting the offensive cruelty of a crude and unforgiving capitalism, whilst also suggesting a continued tradition. Drawing on the work of Susan Beardmore (director, from 1983-89, of the progressive Ffotogallery, Cardiff) to focus on Parr she notes:

The strain and laboriousness of consumerism on the bodies of his subjects references the toil more commonly rendered through the social documentary works of photographic history. (Beardmore) argued that morality remained a core concern [...] often rooted, she argued, in 'humanitarian or socialist ideas' [...] By highlighting the corporeal stresses of consumerism in its excessive ugliness they generated a visual language of unbridled consumption defined by its grotesque characteristics.⁴⁷⁵

However, despite Compton's astute observations on a relationship between 'corporeal stresses of consumerism' and the conceptual use of lurid colour in 1980s photography, I'm unable to concur with the notion that Beardmore's reading of Parr's work as 'humanitarian', especially I would argue, if considered alongside work from the later 'colourist' work from Konttinen and Neville. The central issue (for me) remains the harsh depictions of vulnerable people as a trope in a corpus of such work that is distributed through the media and even more so in the lucrative fine art world. Parr's most notorious project 'The Last Resort', 1983-1985 (photographs of people at New Brighton beach, Liverpool) is the influential and divisive exemplar. Much discussed in the histories of 20th century British photography, it is here described, with breath taking arrogance and classism by Tate (as a leading national arts organization and gallery for modern and contemporary art) that has purchased and often displayed some of the images:

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. p.133

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. p.135

The photographs comprising *The Last Resort* were taken between 1983 and 1985, a period of economic decline in northwest England. They depict a seaside resort past its prime with attractions designed to appeal to an economically depressed working class: overcrowded beaches, video arcades, beauty competitions, tea rooms and chip shops [...] Traditionally, documentary photography in Britain sought to glorify the working class; here Parr shows a warts-and-all picture of a down-at-heel resort populated by day trippers seeking cheap thrills. The series contains many images of people dressed in the day-glow lycra fashions of the time, eating junk food in the crumbling remains of a seaside town.⁴⁷⁶

Famously decried, by some at the time of production, as 'cruel and voyeuristic' the project is still revisited and critiqued in terms of encapsulating the raw experience of 1980s decline. Most of the images in 'The Last Resort' feature women and young children. The young female mother (sometimes very young) 'captured' as sullen or raucous or dis-engaged, part of a visual parade that foregrounds inexpensive prams, fractious toddlers, chips, seagulls and cigarettes. Meanwhile, more mature women are photographed in the glare of a bright sun, and his use of a camera flash outdoors. Their sunburned skin, tinted hair, jovial leisure outfits and demeanour also foregrounded through careful technique, to exploit and extend colourful juxtapositions into garish jokes ergo, offered for potential judgement. This does not seem 'witty' or celebratory to me, or, as the case has been made (by Val Williams) in the tradition of noting eccentricities in British life, in the vein of Tony Ray Jones for example, and is far removed from the highly empathetic and celebratory work of Parr's original working partner, Daniel Meadows. For fifty years Meadows has worked to convey the uncontrived pathos, rather than seeking bathos, in the British quotidian. As well as earlier photographic projects (cotemporaneous and comparable to the community work of Konttinen) his later 'multi-media sonnets from the people' provide an audio-visual equivalent of the photobook,

these stories can be created by people everywhere [...] and shared electronically all over the world [...] a gaggle of invisible histories which, when viewed together, tell the bigger story of our time'.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parr-the-last-resort-25-p78703> (accessed 20th May 2023)

Chambefort-Kay, writing on Parr, refers to 'The Last Resort' and other examples of Parr's work from the 1980s, citing Stephen Dawber as one of the critics who saw the work as being 'in full breach of the codes and ethics of social documentary photography' let alone being empathetic. She also asserts that it is 'reaching beyond social documentary photography as it had been known so far, the photographer manages to provide an "antidote" to consumer culture—although the medicine may feel hard to swallow' ⁴⁷⁸ Compton also concludes that Parr's work is within the tradition of opposition. 'Parr's photographs served to embarrass not only the political state but also the state of 'concerned' documentary image making overall'. ⁴⁷⁹ I agree with Chambefort-Kay, on the work as a new departure, admire the thoroughness of Compton's analysis and agree on many political points regarding the insidious emergence of an 'hygienic governmentality'. Compton sometimes chimes with my own approach, citing Azoulay's controversial notion of a 'civil contract', by which persons as subjects for non-participatory photography 'even as merely photographed persons, they take part in the power play on which they leave their photographed mark, even as they remain excluded from the hegemonic

⁴⁷⁷ John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009)

Daniel Meadows 'Digital Storytelling: Research Based Practice in New Media' in *Visual Communication* 2.2 June 2003 pp189-193

Daniel Meadows describing DS 'The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling' University of Houston, Texas. See also Daniel Meadows <https://www.photobus.co.uk/home>

It is not within the scope of this thesis, to further discuss and analyse the work of Meadows and the substantial output on this from Val Williams. However, further work could be done, using an eco-critical frame. Especially on Meadows' engagement with the industrial experience, also with the more rural, oppositional Welfare State International theatre group. Having discussed my interest in the politics and aesthetics of the environment, and the notion of a Poetic Realism (being applicable to his work) with a most interested and approving Meadows (at his home/studio in 2018) I had intended to include some of his work made in the North of England. His archive had been moved to Birmingham City Library, under the rigorous care of renown photography archivist Peter James. However, after a brutal restructuring the archives were closed for some time. The archive was eventually safely moved, circa 2019-20 to the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, which were closed during the pandemic (2020 and 2021) too late for me access and to work on for this thesis.

⁴⁷⁸ Karine Chambefort-Kay 'Martin Parr's Signs of The Times, A Portrait of the Nation's Tastes: Antidote Pictures to Consumerism?' in *InMedia The French Journal of Media Studies* 7.1 2018
doi.org/10.4000/inmedia.1216

⁴⁷⁹ Compton, 2016. p.165

game'.⁴⁸⁰ However, my contrasting position is that, in the 1980's work of Parr, 'they' are indeed present, but as garishly framed avatars, to be circulated in the symbiotic spheres of academic art histories, the museum and gallery systems, including the auction houses. Therefore, I can't agree with the premise that Parr's images were oppositional or subversive in this context. I rather see the constructed, over stylized visions of 'abjection' as evolving from post structural theory gleaned on university courses and subsequently circulated via largely exclusive institutions. For all the powerful presence and robust interpretation, most notably from Val Williams, of such work as being actively oppositional, the gulf in agency and benefit is pronounced.

Azoulay's example was of images of people in areas of conflict and violence (especially when this is not the focus, when a moment of relatively normal life is possible) where the case for a 'photographic mark' is more overtly made. In the 1980s colourist work from Parr et al 'social abjection' refers to working class life and culture. Meanwhile, in Neville's portraits we see the more accurately abject, specifically in this context, in his images of the dissolute rich cavorting in the exclusive Boujis 'a nightclub in South Kensington frequented by Prince Harry, Lloyd's Insurance Market and the London Metal Exchange speak of a perennially class-based establishment'⁴⁸¹ These images were part of 'Here Is London' (2012), part of his Pulitzer prize nomination, 2013. Neville is commenting on the different inequalities foregrounded when the London work was juxtaposed with the corresponding project Braddock/Sewickley, Pittsburgh. As I have discussed in chapter three, Neville notes the centrality of race in America and of class in Britain and explains that he 'worked to make the images look timeless or historically indeterminate' in dealing with the socio-economic conditions and effects (of recession and imposed austerity) imaged by photographers in the 1970s and 1980s. His being a more subtle and respectful approach than that taken by those who offer lurid images of the

⁴⁸⁰ Azoulay in Compton, 2016. p.165.

⁴⁸¹ Mark Neville 'Here is London' (Photo Essay, 2012). The exhibition text is in Mark Neville *London/Pittsburgh* (London: Alan Cristea Gallery, 2014).

‘economically depressed’ ‘accused’ – badly described as seeking the ‘cheap thrills’ of chips and seagulls and cigarettes as just discussed.

My response (to Compton’s proposal) is that the case for the subject having oblique, almost abstract agency is not enough to ‘embarrass [...] the state of ‘concerned’ documentary photography’ as mobilized at the time, and since. The Amber Collective (referenced as an example of problematic ‘concerned photographers’ by Compton) even in their very early work (from 1968) were indeed concerned with the equality of representation. As I have evidenced in chapter one, Amber were highly conscious of working with multiple registers to engage creatively with political contexts as impacting the individual and social body. Also, although there are many articles on and by Mark Neville (as a self-critical practitioner), with notable contribution from David Campany, there is, to date, no doctoral work, except for my own engagement to theorise his work in an art historical context. This oversight is surely soon to change given the dreadful further significance of his work as resulting from the ongoing war in Ukraine. Neville has cited ‘Dickensian’ framing for the ‘London/Pittsburgh’ work, this and other projects will hopefully be theorised as cultural politics, including through the lens of an historicised Birmingham School, as a foundational development in the literal and critical area. There is more work to be done on Neville and the complexities of ‘concern’.

The second of the two theses to emerge towards the end of my own is from Stephanie King. ‘The Less acceptable face of Capitalism: a study of British Documentary during the rise of Thatcherism (2020)’ is actually the first sustained academic engagement with the iconic ‘Survival Programmes: In Britain’s Inner Cities’ a photobook from the Exit group (Chris Steele Perkins, Paul Trevor and Nicholas Batty, from which the title ‘the less acceptable face of capitalism’ is taken. There is a focus on the political conditions, for the conception and production of the work with a detailed analysis of the book, which echoes my own choice of work as combining of image, oral histories and text. King’s choice of a relevant quote from Exit is comparable to those I employ from Amber, Godwin and Jones, and Neville when articulating their use such methods:

We consider', the group observed in their project proposal, 'that photographs and text are both essential: one medium doing what the other can't and together making some statements possible that previously have been impossible'. For Exit, the juxtaposition of photographs with the transcribed oral testimonies of the people they encountered in areas of economic deprivation, functioned as a means through which to move beyond simply "recording" social exclusion. ⁴⁸³

However, King's position is in contrast to my own (which calls upon the work of Badger, Elizabeth Edwards and Di Bello) on this method as producing 'more nuanced and complex bodies of participatory material, expanded by their photobook form' to quote myself in the introduction. Whilst King posits that such combination might expose the 'limits of visual and textual representational registers.' Although her thesis is an original focussed study of the Exit group and 'Survival Programmes' King also refers to a number of related projects, concluding (somewhat surprisingly) with a long visual analysis of two Amber productions, 'Not Just Tea and Sandwiches' (Amber Films / Trade Films, Miner's Campaign Tapes, 1984) and 'The Scar' (Amber Films, 1997) as examples that allow a summary of her theorising of Exit. Indeed, the closing paragraph of that thesis exhorts

Amber's corpus, like Exit Photography Group's, is yet to receive the serious critical attention that it warrants. It is perhaps easier to dismiss such objects as mere reflections of the system that they seek to contest and to consign them, literally and metaphorically, to the dust laden shelves of the library's Store, than it is to begin to account for them in all their complexity. ⁴⁸⁴

As I have referred to in my own work, there has actually been serious critical attention, a robust and growing scholarly literature on Amber, since circa 2010, when their visibility was enhanced by a growing digital presence, the attention of major galleries, museums and key interviews and papers. These were notably from Martin, Newbury and Bertrand and were being more widely distributed, at conferences and online. It therefore seemed bizarrely contrary when, on Sunday April 9th 2023, the Side Gallery (which is also the study room and offices for Amber) suddenly announced its immediate closure. The website notice adding the further shocking news that this would be for at least eighteen months, possibly permanently due to funding cuts as well as a cost of living

⁴⁸³ Stephanie King. 'The Less acceptable face of Capitalism: a study of British Documentary during the rise of Thatcherism' (PhD Thesis, 2020) p.21

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. p.198

crisis. At this time fuel bills had risen so high and fast that thousands of businesses and organisations had to close or scale back their operation, opening for just the weekend or part of the week, catering options were stopped. This was the time when warm hubs emerged as many could not afford to heat their homes adequately. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was a significant factor, effecting oil and gas supplies, the 2020-21 pandemic had also impacted global supply chains and the 2022 mis-management of the budget by the unashamedly ‘Thatcherite’, very short term Prime Minister, Liz Truss resulted in financial chaos and a sharp rise in interest rates. Amber were by no means alone in having to take drastic measures, the loss of Arts Council NPO (National Portfolio Organisation) status, worth a crucial £120,000 per year, meant no staff as well as running costs. Given the highly visible successes since 2018, when the gallery was re-opened after a major Lottery funded refurbishment, the decision to not renew funding was unexpected. The rise in profile for members past and present such as Konttinen (exhibited at Tate) and Chris Killip (a critically acclaimed retrospective at The Photographer’s Gallery in London and at Baltic in Gateshead, Newcastle) was in a context of renewed cultural and commercial interest in British social documentary of the kind that Amber exemplified. Newcastle City Council were approached for help by way of ‘transitional funding’ to pay utility bills and pay a small staff to close down the space and communicate the situation to the wider world. As noted by Christina Riggs (university of Durham)

The incongruous timing points to tensions about where and how social documentary photography is valued: in art centres and in the art market, where signed prints can fetch five-figure sums, or in the post-industrial regions whose hollowing out these images have depicted in haunting and humane detail [...] judging by reaction to its news and the crowdfunding campaign, supporters of Side share the Amber Collective’s original conviction, namely that documentary can shape a more just society ⁴⁸⁵

Fortunately, the nineteen hundred supporters donated over £65,000 through the Crowdfunder appeal that staff promoted through the ‘Save Side’ campaign

⁴⁸⁵ Christina Riggs Newcastle’s Side Gallery is too important to close *Apollo The International Art Magazine* Features, 16th April (2023) <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/side-gallery-closure-newcastle-photography/> (accessed September 2023)

this may have helped the decision by The Heritage Fund to provide a grant of £236,000 to pay for the running of the building, an increase in cataloguing (to facilitate further access to collections) and 'pop-up' exhibitions. From June 2024 Amber, as a Community Interest Company (CIC), have a twelve-month reprieve. This situation has developed, with the decision, in September 2024, by the remaining original members (Sirikka-Liisa Konttinen, Peter Roberts, Ellin Hare, Richard Grassick and Pat McCarthy) to retire from Amber CIC. A short section of their comprehensive final statement 'A Fond Farewell' follows

All of the tools of Amber's film and photography production were donated by the partnership, as well as the right to use our work from the archive. Thus, we the 5 remaining partners are left only with the buildings we originally bought in 1974. A long-term lease for the new Amber CIC is in place. So now it is time for us to fully retire from the caretaking responsibilities and sell the buildings. The premises have been an amazing resource over the years and it is good to know that they will continue to facilitate important creative work. It is time for a new generation to take up the challenge. We wish the CIC all the best on its forward journey. Finally, we want to say a big thank you to all those communities and organisations with which we have worked over more than 50 years. Your voices have meant everything to us, and we are confident that they will continue to be heard through the work of Amber/Side. ⁴⁸⁶

There are expectations including to produce 'Business and Resilience Development resilience' and, as Amber explain 'to explore 'new ways to collaborate with new artists, audiences and lifelong supporters' as well as create 'new exhibitions representing many viewpoints, nurturing an inclusive culture' ⁴⁸⁷

My thesis also provides an account of this as, as well as a new contribution based on my work presented over many years as invited or accepted academic participant. Public outcome, as well as at afore-mentioned symposia, workshops and conferences has included a short essay film, made with the Derek Jarman Lab, London and later screened by invitation at a conference on 'open education' at the University of Galway, 2019. Also, a group exhibition (with corresponding talks) in central London. 'Bridging The Distance' (Four Corners, 2021 sought to collapse the distance between

⁴⁸⁶ <https://www.amber-online.com/a-fond-farewell/> (accessed September 12th 2024)

practice and theory included work on documentary from myself and fellow convenors of Ph: The Photography Research Network, a

If we can write social histories of documentary after 1979 without reverting to the duality between the naive celebration of so-called “community photography” on the one hand and, on the other, deterministic accounts of the inevitable critical and political failure of the documentary modality. ⁴⁸⁸

My response is that we can, and we are. My contribution avoids any ‘naive celebration’ through a deliberately varied approach that has been inspired and informed by critiques and proposals that revisit documentary as part of a critical and philosophical response to the time of production. ‘Can we even still say “documentary”, and if not, how can we avoid the trap of (the term) contemporary art?’ asked Jan Babnik, introducing his paper at ‘Photography On The Left’ in Lisbon, June 2016.⁴⁸⁹ The conference title refers to an iconic film text ‘Film On The Left: American Documentary Film from 1931 to 1942’,⁴⁹⁰ social documentary film as well as photography was also critically discredited for some time. Babnik’s question is well established and repeatedly heard; the sense of urgency, the will to re-examine possible meanings and results was another instance of the growing field of enquiry that evidenced a need to revisit critical theory of the late 20th Century, especially as applied to visual works of documentary and social realism. In my work I have consciously set out to ‘avoid the trap’ and unhelpful constraints of binary categorisation. I also draw upon the wider literature on aesthetics, politics and (unusually) eco-criticism as applicable to the theorising and historicising the visual social documentary practice in question. My thesis works within the plurality of photography, intersecting with deliberately varied theoretical texts, explained here as a conscious position by Adrian Rifkin

⁴⁸⁷ Amber quoted by Michael Pritchard in *Newcastle’s Side Gallery – update* British Photographic History June 5th 2024 www.britishphotohistory.ning.com (accessed July 20th 2024)

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5

In Rancièrian terms, Rifkin rejects the police dimensions of disciplinarity, the way disciplinary structures, categories, fantasies and discursive fetishes work to partition and to police and discipline the perceptible and the sayable [...] Rifkin deliberately privileges approaches which demand the “reconstruction of something in its difficulty”, the refusal of simplification, and in a sense of conclusion, if only to “disrupt the ways in which studies can settle down into their own genre”⁴⁹¹

My chosen British photography projects, that span fifty years of social and environmental upheaval, as experienced at the ‘ordinary’ level, are participatory to various degrees. To analyse these, I have drawn upon notions of equality from three sources; From the philosopher Jacques Rancière, his proposal for what constitutes ‘politics’ as well as his ‘insistence’ on equality and the meaning and role of aesthetics (both experiential and visual) in that context. As noted by Nick Hewlit ‘enthusiasm for this work [...] seems to indicate a moving on from the post-structuralist moment and a renewal of interest in theory that has egalitarian politics at its heart’.⁴⁹² This is borne out by the visual and written work referenced in the thesis, summarised by Elizabeth Edwards, on ‘feelings’ as a recovery and extension of notions of presence as a desirable, affecting element in photography as experience as well material form relating to person, place or community.

Analytically there has, perhaps too often, been a slippage between the human relations of curiosity and the ideologically determined gaze. This is not to elide the politics of either, but if we hold these concepts apart analytically, we might find a space in which the gentle desire for human understanding [...] might find an interpretative resting place⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ I had been invited to attend by photographer/ researcher Andreia Alves de Oliveira. The work of Alves de Oliveira includes a concern with theories of representation in a service-based society as well environmental focus. An eloquent example of her visual work is ‘The Politics of the Office’. ‘A series investigating work and working conditions in service-based society, through the examination of its dominant space of work - the office. The photographs document the offices of financial, corporate, and legal institutions based in the City and Canary Wharf, London’ <http://www.andreiaoliveira.net/index.php/work/office/> As previously mentioned, I subsequently attended ‘The Left Conference’ as a speaker in 2017 and 2018 to speak on Amber, Meadows and Poetic Realism.

⁴⁹⁰ William Alexander, *Film on the Left: American Documentary Film from 1931-1942* (Guilford and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981)

⁴⁹¹ Paul Bowman ‘Auto-didactics of Bits: Adrian Rifkin’s Rancièrian Cultural Studies and the patrician of the pedagogical’ in *Interdisciplinary Encounters: Hidden and Visible explorations of the work of Adrian Rifkin* Dana Arnold (ed.) (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2015) p.159

In contrast to comparable work on British social documentary from the last fifty years, including more recent examples from Leggott, Compton and King, I have foregrounded the importance of eco-critical framing of the equality of experience, agency and representation in terms of place and environment.

Especially as to be found in the emerging energy humanities where Imre Szeman and others are thinking these issues through the visual, often the photographic. I have mapped this onto Sekula's 'transitive poetics'⁴⁹⁴ mindful of Rifkin's 'refusal of simplification, and in a sense of conclusion'. My thesis indicates that there is far more work to do, to bring an eco-critical frame to historical and contemporary works of, and on, British documentary photography generally categorised as social realism. The longer historical context, used in the introduction to the thesis, was employed to evidence the trajectory of a cultural representation of place that has included reciprocity and riposte, part of an ongoing, robust countervisuality.

To reiterate in this conclusion, the rationale for this thesis is also based on my experience as a working-class person, even now, after many years of education and full-time employment, increasingly vulnerable to marginalization due to ageism and circumstance.⁴⁹⁵ An auto-ethnographic element also contributes to an original contribution to a growing body of critical work that engages with social documentary work produced in England over the last fifty years, the main span of my adult life. One of the key sites of my research has been Northumberland/ North Tyneside, where I was born into a family with a history of displacement and a long, corresponding relationship with the sea. I

⁴⁹² Nick Hewlett 'Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts' in *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 66:4, 2012) p.583-584

⁴⁹³ Elizabeth Edwards in Matthew Finn *Mother* (Manchester: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2017). A copy of Edwards' accompanying essay to Finn's photobook is also available online: <https://www.1000wordsmag.com/tag/elizabeth-edwards/>

⁴⁹⁴ In her chapter 'Transitive Poetics' Gail Day identifies and explains Sekula's analysis and use of Jakobson's theory on realism (in film) in the development of his own work on 'rhetorical forms' and the rejection of 'binary fantasy'. See *Allan Sekula. Ship of Fools/The Dockers' Museum* ed. Hilde Van Gelder. Lucy R. Lippard, various articles and books in a fifty-year body of work, see especially *The Lure of the Local: The Sense of Place in a Multicentred Society* (The New Press, New York, 1997)

I have intimate personal knowledge and insights into the places of work, life and circumstances portrayed and as well positioned as anyone to comment on their production, distribution and significance. This extends the notion of participatory as posited by Bazin and further theorised by Rancière

The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators. ⁴⁹⁶

Auto ethnographic work from Lippard and Sekula, their written and visual texts on the importance of agency in the local and on the political and social implications of escalated globalization as discerned and demonstrated through depictions of maritime labour, have been especially resonant. As an exemplar that most exposes and critiques this escalation, Sekula's critical realist work examines symbiotic relationships between photography, representation and politics. Hilde Van Gelder's long engagement with Sekula's work is of note here as is that of Steve Edwards who foregrounds the work of Sekula on the 'retreat from class', Edwards reminds us of the political context for personal interpretations and expression, explaining how some of the complexities of his work are overlooked

Sekula avoids transcendental framing; his work tends to the setting forth of people, things and space [...] While metropolitan intellectuals fantasize about cognitive capitalism, immaterial labour and the end of class, Sekula returns us to Taylorism, but now spatialized, fugitive, desperate. ⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ For over two decades (Circa 1999-2019) I was full time staff (in Arts and Humanities) in institutions of Higher Education, much of this in a department of History of Art, Film and Visual Media. For twelve of those sixteen years I was supporting, designing and teaching modules on the visual across the wider School of Arts (later Historical Studies) also contributing to the development of two research centres. Eventually a PhD application was supported as staff development, I successfully applied for funding for approximately half the fees until my job ended at the end of 2019. I hold an accredited teaching qualification and have previously worked (before working as a qualified art (including slide) librarian) with excluded pupils (secondary school teenagers). I planned to use my PhD to contribute to a national 'Research into Teach' programme to work with disadvantaged secondary schools (of the sort I attended as a teenager) and in Further Education. This scheme was cancelled by the Conservative government and so, as a 'later life' PhD (59 at time of writing up) rather than as the development of an 'early career academic' this work is now mainly a matter of dignity and supports my independent research and practice. My position reflected the current hostility to arts education (and to the aging educated working class) in an increasingly commodified and thus negatively competitive HE system. I am pleased to now be working again, teaching and researching part time in Further and Higher Education, as well as completing a co-authored book with Routledge. My college is in an officially zoned 'deprived' post-code however, the majority of the students are imaginative achievers. There is a new Labour Government (in 2024) who have promised thousands of more teaching jobs to support more less privileged. I hope they can action this, there is a great need

This 'setting forth' chimes with Rancière's key ideas that support my position in the thesis and provides further rationale for my choice of case studies, his work as described by Sophie Berrebi

designed to provoke a series of counter-histories [...] Rancière's aesthetic regime carries us from the end of the eighteenth century into the contemporary period. It attempts to demonstrate how two periods, thought to be separated by a rupture, can be united at what Foucault called the archaeological level, the network of historical a prioris shaping what can be seen and said [...] It is this form of art that promises to be more than art that also carries the promise of political emancipation ⁴⁹⁸

I consider my research to be relevant in this wider context (of the importance of the possibility if not promise of political emancipation) due to society, at global and local level, being increasingly subject, as digital technologies proliferate, to a constant flow of visual information, misinformation and propositions. Also, from the mid-19th century the development of audio visual, especially photographic technologies and practices coincides with the growing universal debate on issues of sustainability, survival even, of natural and urban environments, debates often driven by visual reference. Universally, the environment is increasingly experienced, perceived and shaped by imagery, particularly these visual representations. Concepts of the local, and on the experience of the local, from Lippard on the 'historical narrative as it is written in the landscape or place by the people who live or lived there' has been motivational. Lippard also quotes Foucault, whose work on power relations is generally acknowledged as an influence for Rancière who asserts

⁴⁹⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* trans. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 2009). See also a 'slightly revised' version of the original lecture 'The Emancipated Spectator' presented in Frankfurt in 2004 in *Artforum* 45:7, 2007 p.305

⁴⁹⁷ Steve Edwards 'Allan Sekula's Chronotypes: Uneven and Combined Capitalism' in *Allan Sekula -Ship of Fools / The Dockers Museum* (ed. Hilde Van Gelder) (Leuven: Leuven University Press: 2015) p. 40-42.

⁴⁹⁸ Sophie Berrebi 'Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics is Politics' in *ART & RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*. 2:1. Summer 2008

'We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed'.⁴⁹⁹

In her introduction Lippard also features Sekula's 'Staten Island Ferry, February 1990', one of the pair of images that start 'Fish Story'. This is featured in her previously discussed, part autoethnographic reflection (*The Lure of the Local*, 1997) as a demonstration of Sekula's own self-reflection, foregrounding how his harbour-side upbringing informed his work on place and people, to reiterate 'as he questions the veracity of the photograph, the history, and the system'.⁵⁰⁰ My thesis on '*Constructing Visibility*' has employed eco-critical framing as facilitating an empathetic mediated realism that results in a usefully and appropriately open-ended conclusion. That is to assert that poetics, aesthetics and politics are related and shifting factors that demand ongoing work, on the production and reception of social documentary photography in opposition, as well as part of, intersectional systems that have tangible effects on environment, society and the individual.

END.

⁴⁹⁹ Lippard *The Lure of the Local: Sense of place in a multi-centred society* (New York: The New Press, 1997) p.4, p.7

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. p.20

Bibliography

A

Abel-Hirsch, Hannah 'Zanele Muholi: Art and Activism' *British Journal of Photography* [Zanele Muholi: Art and activism - 1854 Photography](#) (last Accessed 1st February 2024)

Adorno, Theodore, Benjamin, Walter. Bloch, Ernst, Brecht, Bertolt and Lukacs, G. *Aesthetics and Politics. The Key Texts of The Classic Debate within German Marxism.* (London and New York: Verso, 1986)

Addario, Lynsey. *It's What I Do: A photographer's Life of Love and War* (London and New York: Corsair and Penguin Group, 2015)

Alestig, Mira, Tim Gore and Anna Ratcliff 'Confronting Carbon Inequality' Oxfam International Policy Research Paper (Oxford: Oxfam, 2020)

Alexander, Geraldine 'The People in the Pictures: Episodes from Fay Godwin's Archive 1970 – 2005' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2014)

Alexander, William *Film on the Left: American Documentary Film from 1931-1942* (Guilford and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981)

Amber Side Catalogue (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 1987)

Amber Film and Photography Collective *Amber: A Short History* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2005)

Amber Side gallery text *Byker Revisited*, (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2009)

Amber Film and Photography Collective *Forever Amber: Stories from a Film and Photography Collection* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2015)

Amber Side gallery text *True/Grit: Representation and The North* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, June 2013)

Amber Side and John Davies gallery text *Urban Dreams / City State* (Newcastle: Amber/Side March 2014)

Amber Side gallery text *Work and Workers* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2019)

Amber Film and Photography Collective: Various conversations e.g. with Ellin Hare, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Graeme Rigby, Peter Roberts and others in the Side Gallery and Side Cinema circa 2009 – 2019. See also talks and interviews via AmberSide Collection – Film and Video <https://www.amber-online.com/collection/amber/>

Amber Film and Photography Collective 'Save Side' campaign
<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/saveside> (accessed 20th July 2023)

Andréw, Dudley *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton: University Press, 1995)

Arnstein, Sherry R 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' *Journal of the American Planning Association* Vol. 35, No. 4, July (1969)

Ashmore, Rupert 'Landscape and Crisis in Northern England: The Representation of Communal Trauma in Film and Photography' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Northumbria, 2011)

Azoulay, Ariella *The Civil Contract of Photography* (London: Zone Books, 2008)

Azoulay, Ariella *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2015)

Azoulay, Ariella 'What is a Photograph? What is Photography?' in *Philosophy of Photography* 1:1, pp 9-13 (2010)

B

Backhouse, Janet *The Lindisfarne Gospels* (London and New York: Phaidon, 1993)

Badger, Gerry *Another Country: Documentary Photography Since 1945* (London: Thames & Hudson, with the Martin Parr Foundation, 2022)

Badger, Gerry and Martin Parr *The Photobook: A History: Volume One* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2004)

Badger, Gerry and Benton-Harris, John *Through the Looking Glass: Photographic Art in Britain 1945 - 1989* (London: Barbican Art Gallery and Lund-Humphries, 1989)

BALTIC Newcastle-Gateshead, *The Coal Coast* – Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. Exhibition press release 17th June 2003.

Barthes, Roland *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Books, 1993)

Barrell, John *The Dark Side of The Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Paintings 1730-1840* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press 1989)

Barrett, Ross and Darren Worden (eds.) *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

Barson, Tanya et al *Making History: Art and Documentary in Britain from 1929 to Now* (London, Tate, 2006)

Batchen, Geoffrey *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1997)

Batchen, Geoffrey. (ed.) *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections On Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011)

Bate, David 'The Real Aesthetic: Documentary Noise' Introductory essay in *Portfolio: Contemporary Photography in Britain* (Edinburgh: Photography Workshop (Edinburgh) Ltd. 51, May 2010)

Bate, David 'The Alterity of Images' at 'The Future of The Image' event at Nida Doctoral School at Vilnius Academy of Arts (August 2014) online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynDzmVz1tOs>

Bate, David *Photography: The Key Concepts* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016)

Baumbach, Nico 'Jacques Rancière and the Fictional Capacity of Documentary' in the *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 8:1, 5 2010 pp7-72.

Bazin, André. *What is cinema?* Volumes 1 and 2. (Oakland: University of California Press, 1967 and 1971)

Bazin, André and Hugh Gray (trans.) 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' in *Film Quarterly* 13.4 pp 4-9 (Summer 1960)

Bell, Daniel *The Coming of The Post-Industrial Society* (London: Penguin Books, 1976)

Benjamin, Walter 'The Author as Producer' via *New Left Review* archive online <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i62> last accessed July 1st, 2022

Bentwich, Norman *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars: The Story of Displaced Scholars and Scientists 1933 – 1953* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1953)

Berlinski, Claire *There Is No Alternative. Why Margaret Thatcher Matter* (New York: Basic Books, 2008)

Berman, Marshall *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Verso, 1985)

Bertrand, Mathilde 'The Politics of Representation and The Subversion of Landscape in Ingrid Pollard's 'Pastoral Interlude' (1987)' E-Crini Centre for Research on Identities, Nations and Interculturality *Journal 7* (2014)

Bertrand, Mathilde 'Photographing the Miner's Strike at Lea Hall Colliery, 1984-1987: Interview with photographer Nigel Dickenson' *Angles 1* (online) 2015
<https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.2162>

Bertrand, Mathilde, Lynda Nead et al *Photography and Britishness* International conference Yale Centre for British Art, Newhaven November 2016
<https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-4/ycba-conference>

Bertrand, Mathilde 'The English Seen: The Representation of The People in Documentary Photography in England 1966-79' in *Imaginaires The Representation of The People, Vol.2 Xavier Guidicelli and Gilles Sambras* (Reims: Reims University Press, 2013)

Bertrand, Mathilde 'Cultural Battles: Margaret Thatcher, The Greater London Council and the British Community Arts Movement' *French Journal of British Studies XXV1-3* 2021 Open Edition Journals: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.8435>

Bertrand, Mathilde 'The Half Moon Photography Workshop and Camerawork: Catalysts in the British Photographic Landscape (1972-1985)' *Photography and Culture*, 11.3 2018 pp 239-259
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17514517.2018.1465649>

Bertrand, Mathilde 'More than one finger on the Shutter: Photography as collaboration and the legacies of Community Photography in Contemporary Practice' in *Photography For Whom? 2* 2021 pp37-55

Bertrand, Mathilde and Karine Chambefort-Kay (eds.) *Contemporary Photography as Collaboration* (Switzerland: Palgrave -Macmillan, 2024)

Bezencenet, Stevie and Philip Corrigan (eds.) *Photographic Practices: Towards a Different Image* (London : Comedia, 1987)

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

Blinder, Caroline 'Richard Misrach and Kate Orrf's 'Petrochemical America: Cartographies of the Picturesque' *Journal of American Studies* 54.3 2020 pp582-603

- Bloch, Ernst *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* Trans. Jack Zipes (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1988)
- Bottomore, Frank *The Frankfurt School and It's Critics* (London: Routledge, 2003)
- Braden, Su *Committing Photography* (London: Pluto Press, 1983)
- Branch, Michael P., Cheryll Glotfelty, Sean O'Grady et al 'Defining Ecocritical Theory and Practice: Sixteen Position Papers from the 1994 Western Literature Association Meeting'. Salt Lake City, Utah, USA 6th October 1994. https://www.asle.org/wp-content/uploads/ASLE_Primer_DefiningEcocrit.pdf (last accessed 1st September 2023)
- Brand, Stuart *Whole Earth Catalog* (California: Self-published series, 1968-72)
- Braudy, Leo, Marshall Cohen and Gerald Mast (eds.) *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 1992)
- Bright, Susan and Val Williams *How We Are: Photographing Britain - From the 1840 to the Present* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007)
- Bryan-Wilson, Julia *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2011)
- Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. and Robert Wilkie (eds.) *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Sheddon Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton 1948-1968. Photographs by Leslie Sheddon* (Nova Scotia: Press of the University of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and The University College of Cape Breton Press, 1983)
- Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. 'Allan Sekula: Photography between Discourse and Document' in Allan Sekula *Fish Story* (Dusseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995)
- Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. 'Allan Sekula: or What Is Photography?' *Grey Room*, 55 Spring 2014 pp 116-129
- Burbridge, Ben and Annebella Pollen *Photography Reframed: New Visions in Contemporary Photographic Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019)
- Burbridge, Ben et al, 'Photography and Community' *Photoworks Annual*, 21, 2014-15, p. 126-149
- Burgin, Victor (ed.) *Thinking Photography* (Hampshire and London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982)
- Burtynsky, Edward *Oil* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2014)

C

- Campany, David 'The Time of Chris Killip' *Chris Killip: Arbeit/Work* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012) online davidcampany.com/chris-killip-work
- Campany, David 'The Work of Mark Neville - Deep Surfaces' The Dick Institute, Scotland 2006
- Campany, David *Photography and Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 2012)
- Campany, David 'Mark Neville in Conversation with David Campany' *Trigger # 1* (Antwerp: FotoMuseum, 2019)
- Campany, David et al *Dorothy Lange The Politics of Seeing* (London and New York: Prestel, 2018)
- Carson, Rachel., *Silent Spring* (London, Penguin Classics) 2000)
- Carlson, Julie and Elisabeth Weber *Speaking about Torture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012)
- Castells, Manuel *The Information Age. Economy, Society and Culture. Vol.1: The Rise of The Network Society* (Oxford: Malden MA: Wiley Blackwell 1999)
- Cerbrano, Rica 'Stop Tanks With Books? Mark Neville Thinks We Can, and He Tells Us Why' *PhotoVogue* March 22, 2022
- Chambefort Kay, Karine 'Martin Parr's Signs of The Times, A Portrait of the Nation's Tastes: Antidote Pictures to Consumerism?' *InMedia The French Journal of Media Studies* 7.1 2018 doi.org/10.4000/inmedia.1216
- Chatterjee, Sira 'The Arts, Environmental Injustice, and the Ecological Crisis' *British Art Studies* 18, 2020 doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue- 18/conversation
- Chewing, Kimber *College Art Association 'Zanele Muholi Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2021'* Review November 18th 2022 <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/4025> (accessed 5th May 2024)
- Class Struggle (Journal for the Internationalist Communist Union, Britain)* 'Grenfell Tower- Murder by Neglect and Profiteering' (Summer 2017) pp 10-15. Collective Authorship
- Compton, Alice *Waste of a Nation: Photography, Abjection and Crisis in Thatcher's Britain* Doctoral thesis (University of Sussex 2016)
- Conlan, Steve *Meadow Well - An English Estate* (Newcastle: Side Gallery, 1991) Exhibition texts. See also <https://www.steveconlanphotography.co.uk>
- Cookson, Catherine *Our Kate* (London: Corgi, 1974)

Cookson, Catherine *Catherine Cookson Country: Her Pictorial Memoir* (London: Corgi, Pilot Productions Ltd.1986)

Cookson, Catherine *Let Me Make Myself Plain: A Personal Anthology* (Anstey: F.A. Thorpe Publishing Ltd,1988)

Cousins, Mark. 'The aesthetics of Documentary' *Tate etc.* Spring 2006

Crampton, Jeremy and Stuart Elden *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010)

Crimp, Douglas *On the Museum's Ruins* (London, Massachusetts: The MIT Press,1995).

Curran, James, and David Morley (eds.) *Media and Cultural Theory* (London and New York: Routledge,2006)

D

Day, Gail 'Transitive Poetics: Metonymy and Metaphor in *Lottery of The Sea, Ship of Fools* and *The Dockers' Museum*' in *Allan Sekula Ship of Fools/The Dockers' Museum* Hilde Van Gelder (ed.) (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015)

Davies, William and Sahil Dutta, Nick Taylor and Martina Tazzioli *Unprecedented? How Covid-19 Revealed the Politics of Our Economy* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2022)

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008)

De Cuyper, Sheila 'On the Future of Photographic Representation in Anthropology: Lessons from the Practice of Community Photography in Britain' *Visual Anthropology Review* 13.2 September 1997

Dennett Terry and Jo Spence (eds.) *Photography/ Politics One* (London: Photography Workshop / Comedia,1979)

Deranty, Jean Philippe *Jacques Rancière, Key Concepts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014)

Dexter, Emma and Thomas Weski *Cruel and Tender: The Real in the 20th Century Photograph* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003)

Di Bello, Patrizia, Colette Wilson and Shamoan Zamir (eds.) *The Photo Book from Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2011)

Di Bello, Patrizia 'Mechanised Work or Artistic Creation: Nineteenth Century Debates on Class and Photography' Review of *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* by Steve Edwards *Oxford Art Journal* 31:1 (2008) pp161-164

Dillon, Brian 'Zanele Muholi the Fire -Eater' *Art Review* Summer (2017) <https://artreview.com/ar-summer-2017-feature-zanele-muholi/> (Accessed 7th January 2024).

Cresswell, Joanna 'Review of *Stop Tanks With Books*' in *Lens Culture* <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/mark-neville-stop-tanks-with-books> Last accessed September 2022

Dickenson, Margaret (ed.) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90* (London: British Film Institute, 1999)

Drainville, Elaine *Articulating the Liminal: Enabling Access to Voice* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Sunderland) 2018

Durden, Mark *Fifty Key Writers on Photography* (London, Routledge, 2013)

Durden, Mark, and Jane Tomey (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020)

E

Eagleton, Terry 'Wallpaper and Barricades' *London Review of Books* 17.4 (1995) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/archive>

Eco, Umberto: *How To Write A Thesis* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015)

Edwards, Elizabeth 'Photography and The Material Performance of The Past' in *History and Theory*, Vol. 48, No. 4, (Wesleyan University, Wiley) 2009, pp. 130–50

Edwards, Elizabeth *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012)

Edwards, Elizabeth *Photographs and the Practice of History: A Short Primer* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022)

Edwards, Paul (ed.) *The Photobook World: Artist's Books and forgotten Social Objects* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

Edwards, Steve 'Disastrous Documents' *Ten.8* 15 1984

Edwards, Steve *The Making of English Photography, Allegories* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006)

Edwards, Steve *Photography, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Edwards, Steve Allan Sekula's 'Chronotypes: Uneven and Combined Capitalism' in *Allan Sekula Ship of Fools/The Dockers' Museum* Hilde Van Gelder (ed.) (Leuven: Leuven, University Press, 2015)

Edwards, Steve 'The Fires Last Time: Documentary and Politics in 1970s Britain' FotoMuseum Blog <https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/blog/>

Edwards, Steve 'Dirty Realism: documentary photography in 1970s Britain – a maquette' in Malcom Baker and Andréw Hemingway (eds.) *Art as worldmaking: Critical Essays on Realism and Naturalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press)

Elkins, James and Harper Montgomery *Beyond the Aesthetic and Antiaesthetic* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2013)

Emerling, Jae *Photography: History And Theory* (Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2012)

Emerling, J. 'Jacques Rancière, The Future of the Image' review in *Journal of Visual Culture* 7.3 2008 pp 376-381

Evans, Jessica (ed.) *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography*. (London and New York: Rivers Oram Press and New York University Press, 1997)

Exit Photography Group (Chris Steele Perkins, Paul Trevor and Nicholas Battye) *Survival Programmes in Britain's Inner Cities* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982)

F

Fairey, Tiffany and Liz Orton 'Photography as Dialogue' *Photography and Culture* 12.3 2019 pp 299-305

Fairey, Tiffany 'These Photos Were My Life: Understanding the Impact of Participatory Photography projects' *Community Development Journal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) doi Last accessed November 2019

Fairley, Simon 'In Search of the English Cadastre' *The Land: An Occasional Magazine about Land Rights* 14 Summer 2013

Farmer, Derek *The Age of Bede* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998)

Farquharson, Danine and Fiona Pollock (eds.) 'Heading Offshore' in *Cold Water Oil: Offshore Petroleum Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022)

Fawcett, Hilary (ed.) *Made in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Northumbria University Press) 2007

Foreman, Susan *Loaves and Fishes An illustrated History of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food 1889-1989* (London: HMSO) 1989

Fox, Jo 'From Documentary Film to Television Documentaries; John Grierson and *This Wonderful World*' *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10.3 2013 pp498-523

Frascina, Francis *Art, Politics and Dissent Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999)

Freund, Gisèle *Photography and Society* (Boston: D.R. Godine, 1980)

Friday, Jonathan André 'Bazin's Ontology of Photographic and Film Imagery' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63.4 2005 pp339-350 <https://philpapers.org/rec/FRIABO>

Fuke, Oliver and Nicolas Helm-Grovas *Art at the Frontier of Film Theory: Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen Exhibition* texts (London: Printed by Aldgate Press, 2019)

Fukuyama, Francis *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

G

Gaunt, Richard *Industry and The Coast: Images of the North East in the 1960s* (Stroud: Fonthill Media Ltd., 2015)

Gee, Gabriel *Art in Northern England 1979-2008* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017)

Gernsheim, Helmut *Creative Photography and Aesthetic Trends 1839-1960* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1962)

Giddens, Anthony *The Politics of Climate Change* (London: Polity Press, 2011)

Giddens, Anthony *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986)

Godwin, Fay and Melvyn Jones *The Oil Rush* (London: Quartet Books, 1976)

Godwin, Fay *On the Edge of the Land* (London: Cape, 1995)

Godwin, Fay *Land* (London: Heinemann, 1985)

Godwin, Fay and Ted Hughes *Remains of Elmet – A Pennine Sequence* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994, 1979)

Godwin, Fay Archive material: Letters from Ted Hughes (British Library Archives and Manuscripts MS 88614: 1976-1985)

Goodman, Geoffrey Mervyn Jones-Obituary *The Guardian* 25th February, 2010

Green, David and Lowry, Joanna (eds.) *Stillness and Time Photography and the Moving Image* (Brighton: Photoforum and Photoworks, 2006)

Grenfell, Michael *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2014)

Gronberg, Tag *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

Grierson, John, and Ian Lockerbie *Eyes of Democracy* Occasional Paper No.3 John Grierson Archive (Stirling: University of Stirling, 1990)

H

Hall, Stuart, 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution' *Cultural Studies* 25.6 October 2011 pp 705-728

Hall, Stuart, and David Morley *Essential Essays Foundations of Cultural Studies & Identity and Diaspora (Stuart Hall: Selected Writings)* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press 2018)

Haq, Gary and Alistair Paul *Environmentalism Since 1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012)

Hartley, John and Kelly McWilliam *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around The World* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009)

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

Harvey, Graham. *The Killing of the Countryside* (London: Vintage Books, 1998)

Haworth Booth, Mark 'Chris Killip: Scenes From Another Country' *Aperture*, Issue 103 Summer 1986

Haworth-Booth, Mark Interview with Chris Killip (London: Oral History of British Photography, British Library Sound Archive, C459/92, 1997)

Hayward, Susan *Cinema Studies; The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003)

Hedges, Nick. *The Fishing Industry* (Newcastle: Side Gallery, 1981)

Heller, Michael 'The Institute and The Polytechnic' in *Educating Mind Body and Spirit* Eileen Penn (ed.) (London, University of Westminster Press, 2013) pp 45-80

Henning, Michele *Photography: The Unfettered Image* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018)

Hepple, Leslie *A History of Northumberland and Newcastle Upon Tyne* (Chichester: Phillimore and Oxford University Press, 1988)

Heron, Liz and Val Williams *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996)

Higson, Andréw 'Space, Place, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the Kitchen Sink Film' in Andréw Higson (ed.) *Dissolving Views, Key Writings on the British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996)

Hill, Paul and Joshua Thomas Cooper (eds.) *Dialogue with Photography* (London: Dewi Lewis, 2005)

Holland, Patricia, Jo Spence and Simon Watney (eds.) *Photography/Politics Two* (London: Comedia and Photography Workshop, 1987)

Hollands, Robert and John Vail *Place Imprinting and the Arts: A case study of the Amber Collective* (Newcastle: University of Newcastle, 2015)

Hollerton, Eric *Tynemouth in Old Picture Postcards* (Baarn: Europese Bibliotheek, 1997)

Honess-Roe, Annabelle 'Spatial Contestation and Loss of place in Amber's Byker' *Journal of British Cinema and television* 4.2.307 (2007) pp 307-321

Horne, Marc 'Thatcher chose lunch instead of memorial for rig disaster' *The Times* [Friday 21st July, 2017](#) (accessed September 28th 2023)

Horne, Marc 'North Sea Oil Deal under Thatcher fuelled Apartheid' in *The Times* [Saturday August 28th 2021](#) (accessed 28th September 2023)

I -

J

Jack, Ian 'Introduction' and introduction to picture essay by Simon Norfolk *GRANTA* 96 'War Zones' (Winter 2006)

Jackson, Ben 'Currents of Neo-Liberalism: British Political Ideologies and the New Right, c.1955-79' in *The English Historical Review* 131:551 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) pp.823-850

Jackson, Dan *The Northumbrians: North East England and Its People: A New History* (London: Hurst and Co., 2019)

James, Sarah 'Brecht Redux' in *Art Monthly* (February 2015) pp 6-10

Jameson, Fredric (Afterward) *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of The Classic Debate within German Marxism* (London and New York: Verso, 1986)

Jameson, Fredric 'Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' in *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984) pp. 53-92 <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i146> (Last accessed June 2020)

Jeffrey, Ian, Mark Howarth Booth and Johnathan Williams *Photographs by Raymond Moore: Murmurs at Every Turn* (London: Travelling Light Photography, 1981)

Jobling, Paul 'Sirikka-Liisa Konttinen: The Meaning of Urban Culture in Byker' in *History of Photography* 17.3 1993

K

Keighley, Tom 'Oil components firm still booming after acquisition ' in *The Journal* (Newcastle) Business Section Monday April 13th, 2015

Kelly, Petra *Fighting For Hope* (Massachusetts: South End Press, 1984)

Kelsey, Robin and Blake Stimson *The Meaning of Photography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008)

Kennedy, Liam and Caitlin Patrick *The Violence of The Image: Photography and International Conflict* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2014)

Killip, Chris *The Last Ships* (London: Ponybox Ltd. 2018)

Killip, Chris *Seacoal* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011)

King, Stephanie *The Less Acceptable Face of Capitalism: A Study of Documentary During the Rise of Thatcherism* Unpublished thesis. University College London, 2020

Kirby, Henry 'Privatisation: the good, the bad and the ugly', *The Guardian*, 12th April 2013.

Kismaric, Susan *British Photography from the Thatcher Years* Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Museum of Modern Art and H.N. Abrams, 1991)

Konttinen, Sirikka-Liisa *Byker* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books Ltd. in association with Amber/Side, 1988) First published by Jonathan Cape Ltd. 1983

Konttinen, Sirikka-Liisa *Byker Revisited* (Newcastle: Northumbria Press, 2009)

Konttinen, Sirikka-Liisa *Step by Step* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books Ltd. and Amber/Side, 1989)

Konttinen, Sirikka-Liisa *The Coal Coast* (Newcastle: Amber/Side, 2003)

Konttinen, Sirikka-Liisa *Writing in the Sand* (Dewi Lewis and Amber/Side, 2000)

Konttinen, Sirkka-Liisa *Photographing Byker* Interview BBC Nationwide, 15th January BBC Archive <https://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/> (Last accessed June 2020)

Kohn, Ralph. 'Nazi Persecution: Britain's Rescue of Academic Refugees' in *European Review* 19.2 (2022) pp 255-283

Kracauer, Siegfried *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997)

Kuhn, Annette 'Photography and Cultural Memory: A Methodological Exploration' in *Visual Studies* 22.3 2007 pp283-292

L

Lalvani, Suren *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies* (New York, State University of New York Press) 1996

Langdon, Julia 'Nigel Lawson - Obituary', *The Guardian*, 4th April 2023.

Lecht, John *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism To Post-Humanism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008)

Leggott, James *In Fading Light: The Films of the Amber Collective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020)

Levinson, J. *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Levura, Anthony (ed.) 'Photography For Whom' Issue 01 and Issue 02 (Coventry: *Photography For Whom*, 2019 and 2021)

Luvera, Anthony 'Photographs and Assisted Self Portraits' *Source - The Photographic Review*. Issue 47, Summer (2006) pp.14-18

Luvera, Anthony Interview with Nicola Homer. [Studio International 15th August 2019](#) (accessed 24th September 2023)

Lidgett, Albert *Petroleum* (Bath: Pitman and Sons Ltd..1919)

Linsley, Stafford M. *North East Industries Through Time* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing) 2011

Lippard, Lucy R. *The Lure of the Local: Sense of place in a multi-centred society* (New York: The New Press, 1997)

Lippard, Lucy R. *Get The Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: The New Press, 2014)

Lippard, Lucy R. et al 'In What Ways have Artists, Academics and Cultural Institutions Responded to the US -Led Invasion and Occupation of Iraq? in *October* 123 (Winter 2008)

Lippard, Lucy R. *Undermining: A Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics and Art in the Changing West* (New York: E.P. Dutton Inc.,1984)

Logan, Owen and McNeish Andréw. (eds.) *Flammable Societies: Studies on the Socio- Economics of Oil and Gas* (London: Pluto Press, 2012)

Lovelock, James *GAIA: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1979)

M

Macnab, Natasha and Ian Grosvenor 'Photography as an agent of Transformation: Education, Community and Documentary Photography in post-war Britain' *Paedagogica Historica* 51:1-2 (2015) pp117-135

Mackenzie, Eneas 'Trade and Manufactures in Historical Account of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Including the Borough of Gateshead' (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: 1987) pp 715-730 via *British History Online*

Manners, Ian *North Sea Oil and Environmental Planning: The UK Experience* (Texas: University of Texas Press,1982)

Marwick, Arthur *Culture in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford and Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Ltd.,1991)

Marwick, Arthur *British Society Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books Ltd. ,1996)

Mattelart, Armand and Mattelart Michele *Theories of Communication: A Short Introduction* (London: Sage,2004)

Mattelart, A. and Mattelart, M. *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1994)

Massumi, Brian *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2015)

Mc Cann, Ben *Le Jour se Léve: French Film Guide* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2014)

Mc Cullin, Don *The Destruction Business* (London and Basingstoke: Open Gate Books,1971)

McQuail, Dan *Mass Communication Theory* (London: Sage, 2005)

Meadows, Dan 'Digital Storytelling: Research Based Practice in New Media' in *Visual Communication* 2.2 June 2003

Meadows, Dan *The Bus: The Free Photographic Omnibus 1973 -2001 An Adventure in Documentary* (London: The Harvill Press) 2001

Meadows, Dan *Living Like This: Around Britain in the Seventies* London: Arrow Books, 1975)

Meadows, Dan *Now and Then: England 1970-2015* (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2019)

Meadows, Dan Photobus Blog <https://www.photobus.co.uk>

Mehring, Christine 'Siegfried Kracauer's Theories on Photography: From Weimar to New York' in *History of Photography*, 21:2 1997 pp129-136

Meir, Alison 'Photographing The State of The Environment in the 1970s' in (*Hyperallergic*, October 4th, 2013)

Mellor, David *No Such Thing As Society: Photography in Britain 1967-87* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2007)

Memou, Antigone *Photography and Social Movements: From the globalization of the movement (1968) to the movement against globalization (2001)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017)

Misrach, Richard and Jason Berry 'Cancer Alley: The Poisoning of the American South' in *Aperture* 162 (Winter 2001) pp 30-43

Misrach, Richard and Susan Sontag *Violent Legacies: Three Cantos* (Manchester: Cornerhouse, 1992)

Mistra, Arun 'Where is Photography Headed?' in *fLIP* 46, Summer 2020. P.9. London Independent Photography: London, 2020)

Mitchell, William J.T. *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to The Present* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011)

Mitchell, William J.T. *Landscape and Power* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press) 1994

Mirtzoeff, Nikolas (ed.) *The Visual Culture Reader* (Oxon and New York) 2013

Mirtzoeff, Nikolas *The Right To Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, Carolina,: Duke University Press, 2011)

Moore-Gilbert, Bart (ed.) *The Arts in the 1970s: Cultural Closure* (London and New York: Routledge ,1994)

Morley, David *Media, Modernity and Technology: The Geography of the New* (London: Routledge, 2007)

Mulvey, Laura *Death 24 x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006)

Mulvey, Laura 'The Striking of The Hour' in *New German Critique* 41:2 122, 2014 pp.17-20

Murtha, Tish *Youth Unemployment* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 2017)

N

Neal, R.S. *Class in English History 1680-1850* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell) 1982

Nelson, Zed 'The More deprived and edgy the better: The Two Sides of London's Property Boom' in *The Guardian*: Saturday May 30th, 2015

Newbury, Darren 'Documentary Practice and Working Class Culture: An Interview with Murray Martin (Amber Films and Side Photographic Gallery)' in *Visual Studies* 17.2 (2002) pp113-28

Newbury, Darren 'Photography and the Visualization of Working Class Lives in Britain' in *Visual Anthropology Review* 15.1 (March 1999) pp.21-44

Newhall, Beaumont 'Documentary Approach to Photography' *Parnassus* 10.3 March 1938

Newsinger, Jack 'The Interface of Documentary and Fiction: The Amber Film Workshop and Regional Documentary Practice' in *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 6.3 (2009) pp387-406

Neville, Mark *Stop Tanks With Books* (Istanbul: Nazareli Press, 2022)

Neville, Mark *The Port Glasgow Book Project 2004-6 - Selected works*: <http://www.markneville.com/the-port-glasgow-book-project>

Neville, Mark *Deeds Not Words* (London: Self-published, 2011) Available to view in BALTIC+ (Library and Archives) Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle-Gateshead

Neville, Mark *Braddock/Sewickley* Selected text and works from slide installation of fifty looped images at Factory Direct exhibition Andy Warhol Museum 2012

Neville, Mark *London/Pittsburgh* (London: Alan Cristea Gallery, 2015)

Neville, Mark *Parade* (London: Sentana Books, 2019)

Neville, Mark *Fancy Pictures* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2016) Selections from six photobooks, including *Battle Against Stigma* 2015

Neville, Mark 'Battling Stigma: The British war artist who suffered Post Traumatic Stress after stint on Helmand Frontline' Interview with Mark Neville in *The Independent* (May 23rd, 2015, online) and *Independent on Sunday* (24th May 2015 in print)

Neville, Mark, Interview with Liz Drew, London, February 2020

Neville, Mark 'Photographer hopes Ukrainian photo collection will change public opinion' (Lviv: Associated Press recording of Neville speaking about *Stop Tanks with Books*) March 1st, 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HGvJfhk4w>

Neville, Mark 'Mark Neville in Conversation with Jeremy Deller' Alan Cristea Gallery 10th December 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSPGISZB8Pw>

Nichols, Bill *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991)

O

O'Brien, Geoffrey 'La Bête Humaine: Renoir On and Off The Rails' . Criterion Essays, February 2013 www.criterion.com (accessed May 2020)

O'Reilly 'I will Survive: Forty Years of Amber Films and the Evolution of Regional Film Policy' in *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*. 1:2 2009

Ou, Arthur 'The Omnipotent Sea: Allan Sekula and Noël Burch's The Forgotten Space' in *Aperture* 209 Winter 2012, pp75-77

P

Palmer, Daniel *Photography and Collaboration - From Conceptual Art to Crowdsourcing* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020)

Palmer, Daniel 'Corresponding Associations: The Poetics and Limits of Photography as Dialogue' in Tiffany Fairey and Liz Orton (eds.) *Photography as Dialogue* special issue of *Photography and Culture* 12.3 (September 2019) pp 321-335

Parr, Martin and Ian Walker *The Last Resort: Photographs of New Brighton* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis, 2002) original edition 1986

Pasternak, Gil (ed.) *The Handbook of Photography Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020)

Pauli, Lori, Edward Burtynsky, Mark Haworth-Booth et al (eds.) *Manufactured Landscapes: The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Pauly, Rebecca. M. *The Transparent Illusion Image and Ideology in French Text and Film* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1993)

Pevsner, Nikolaus *The Buildings of England: Northumberland* (London: Penguin Books, 1957).

Ph The Photography Research Network *Either/And* <http://eitherand.org>

Pollen, Annebella *Mass Photography: Collective Histories of Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

Pollen, Annebella *The Kindred of the Kibble Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* (London: Donlon, 2015)

Priestly, J.B. *English Journey: Being a Rambling but Truthful Account of One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought During a Journey Through England During the Autumn of The Year 1933* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1934)

Pritchard, Michael *British Photographic History* www.britishphotohistory.ning.com

Pritchard, Michael 'My Friend Margaret Harker' Obituary *The Guardian*, 13th March, 2013

Pucci, Lara. 'History, Myth and the Everyday: Luchino Visconti, Renato Guttso and The Fishing Communities of the Italian South' in *Oxford Art Journal* 36.3 2013

Phu, Thy and Elizabeth Brown *Feeling Photography* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014)

Q-

R

Rancière, Jacques *Proletarian Nights: The Worker's Dream in 19th Century France* (London: Verso, 2012)

Rancière, Jacques *The Emancipated Spectator* trans. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 2009)

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of The Sensible* trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004)

Rancière, Jacques *The Future of The Image* (London: Verso, 2009)

Rancière, Jacques and Peter Engelman *Politics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009)

Rancière, Jacques 'Notes on the Photographic Image' in *Radical Philosophy* 156 Jul/Aug 2009

Rancière, Jacques *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* Edited and translated by Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

Rancière, Jacques 'The issue is to maintain dissensus' Interview with Mathieu Dejean and Jean-Marc Lalanne Verso Blog 17th February 2021

Read, Shirley 'Murray Martin interviewed by Shirley Read' (The British Library: Oral History of British Photography C459/156 10.10 2002)

Renton, David *Colour Blind: Race and Migration in the North East of England since 1945* (Sunderland: University of Sunderland Press, 2008)

Rosenthal, A. *New Challenges for Documentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)

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

Ribalta, Jorge 'The Strand Symptom: A Modernist Disease?' in *Oxford Art Journal* 38.1 March 2015 pp. 55-71

Ribalta, Jorge, Erika Wolf and Mikhail Koltsov *The Worker Photography Movement 1926-1939* (Madrid: TF Editores, 2011)

Riggs, Christina Newcastle's Side Gallery is too important to close *Apollo The International Art Magazine* Features, 16th April (2023) <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/side-gallery-closure-newcastle-photography/> (accessed September 2023)

Riley, Tess 'Just One Hundred Companies Responsible' in *The Guardian* Monday 10th July 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors>

Roberts, Bill. 'Production in View: Allan Sekula's Fish Story and the Thawing of Postmodernism' in *Tate Papers* No.18 (Autumn 2012)

Roberts, John *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain 1966 – 1976* (London: Camerawork, 1997)

Roberts, John *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

Roberts, John *Photography, and Its Violations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014)

Rockhill, Gabriel *Radical History and the Politics of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014)

Romano, Sergio *Desert Storm: The Gulf War in Colour* (London: Greenhill Books, 1991)

Rosler, Martha *Martha Rosler, 3 Works* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College Press, 2006)

Rosler, Martha *In, Around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)* in *Martha Rosler Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975-2001* (Massachusetts, London, New York; 2004)

Rosler, Martha and Jorge Ribalta 'Encounter with Martha Rosler' at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid February 11th, 2015, <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/multimedia/encounter-martha-rosler>

Rueckert, William., (1978) 'Into and out of the Void: Two Essays', *The Iowa Review* 9(1), 62–86. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2334> (The second essay is 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' pp.71-85).

S

Salvaggio, Jerry (ed.) *The Information Society: Economic, Social and Structural Issues* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2019) Original 1989

Salvesen, Britt et al *New Topographics* (Göttingen, New York, Tucson: Steidl, George Eastman House, University of Arizona, 2010)

Samuel, Raphael *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso Books, 1994)

Samuel, Raphael *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain Theatres of Memory Vol.2* (London: Verso Books, 1998)

Samuels, Sefton. *Northerners: Portrait of a No-Nonsense People* (London: Ebury Press, Random House) 2011

Sargeant, Amy *British Cinema A Critical History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005)

Schiller, Herbert *Mass Communications and American Empire* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1992) First published 1969

Schumacher, Ernst *Small is Beautiful: A study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Harper Collins, 2010) Original 1973 with Blond and Briggs)

Schwartz, Stephanie. 'Martha Rosler's Protest' in *Arts*, 9.92 MPDI Open Journal - Arts (2020)

Scott-Brown, Sophie. *The Histories of Raphael Samuel: A Portrait of the People's Historian* (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2017)

- Sealy, Mark et al 'The Anxiety of Images' in *Aperture* 204 (Fall 2011) pp 50-73
- Sealy, Mark. *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2019)
- Sekula, Allan 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' in Victor Burgin (ed.) *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1982) pp.84-109
- Sekula, Allan *Fish Story* (Dusseldorf, Stockholm, Glasgow, Calais: Witte de With, 2014)
- Sekula, Allan *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photoworks* (London: MACK, 2016) First published in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (eds,) *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures-A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton 1948-1968 - Photographs by Leslie Shedden* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design 1983)
- Sekula, Allan and Noel Birch *The Forgotten Space* (Film, 112mins.) 2010
- Sekula, Allan Interview with curator Grant Watson <https://vimeo.com/12397261> (Last accessed August 2022)
- Sekula, Allan *Titanic's Wake* (Cherbourg: Le Point du Jour, 2003)
- Sen, Amartya *The Idea of Justice* (London and New York: Penguin, 2010)
- Sen, Amartya *Collective Choice and Social Welfare: An Expanded Edition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017)
- Shaw, George in conversation with David Whetstone, July 2022.
<https://www.culturednortheast.co.uk/2022/07/31/george-shaw-and-thomas-bewick-at-cherryburn/>
- Shrubsole, Guy 'Who Owns England?' in *The Land* Issue 21, 2017. pp10-11
- Simpson, Blake 'Photography and God' in *Oxford Art Journal*, 38:1 March 2015. Pp.11–35
- Solnit, Rebecca. et al 'Protest Now: The Age of Dissent' in *The Guardian Review* special issue (1st June 2019)
- Solnit, Rebecca *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2002)
- Solnit, Rebecca *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)
- Sontag, Susan *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1979)
- Sontag, Susan *Regarding The Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004)

Soloman-Godeau, Abigail *Photography at the Dock. Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

Stacey, Noni *Photography of Protest and Community: The Radical Collectives of the 1970s* (London, Lund Humphries, 2020)

Stallabrass, Julian *Killing For Show: Photography, War and The Media in Vietnam and Iraq* (Connecticut: Roman and Littlefield, 2020)

Stallabrass, Julian *Memory of Fire: Images of War and The War of Images* (Brighton, Photoworks) 2013

Stallabrass, Julian *Documentary* (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT, 2013)

Stallabrass, Julian *Paris Pictured* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002)

Standing, Guy. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011 pp 116-127 Available online via Open Access: [10.5040/9781849664554](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781849664554))

Stein, Sally, David Company et al Book Launch discussion for *Allan Sekula, Art Isn't Fair, Further Essays in the Traffic in Photographs and Related Media* (London: Mack Books, 2020) 14th January 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psGL1qvD-VU>

Stimson, Blake *The Pivot of the World: Photography and It's Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006)

Strauss, David Levi 'The Documentary Debate: Aesthetic or Anaesthetic?' Between The Eyes in *Photography and Politics* (New York: Aperture, 2003)

Szeman, Imre 'Crude Aesthetics: The Politics of Oil Documentaries' in *Journal of American Studies* 46.2 (May 2012) pp 423-439

Szeman, Imre and Maria Whiteman 'Oil Imag(e)inaries Critical Realism and The Oil Sands' in *Journal of Cross Cultural Image Studies* September 2012
DOI:[10.17742/IMAGE.sightoil.3-2.5](https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.sightoil.3-2.5) (Last accessed July 2022)

Szeman, Imre and Jenifer Wenzel 'What do we talk about when we talk about extractivism' in *Textual Practice* Vol.35 Issue 3 Writing Extractivism 2021 pp.505-523
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2021.1889829> (Last accessed September 2023)

T

Tagg, John *The Burden of Representation: Essay on Photographies and Histories* (Hampshire and London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1988)

Taylor, Sue-Jane, 'The Age of Oil' Exhibition text National Museums Of Scotland, 2017

Taylor, Sue-Jane, *Oilwork: North Sea Diaries* (Edinburgh: Berliinn, 2005)

Terracciano. Emilia. 'Review of *Battle of Stigma*' in *Photomonitor* 2015
<https://photomonitor.co.uk>

Thompson E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968)

Tickner, Lisa *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution* (London: Frances Lincoln Publishing, 2008)

Todorov, Tzvetan *Introduction to Poetics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1981)

Trachtenberg, Alan (ed.) *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven: Leetes Island Books, 1980)

Trumper, Camilo, D. 'Political Palimpsests: Posters, Murals, and the Ephemeral Practice of Urban Politics' in *Ephemeral Histories: Public Art, Politics, and the Struggle for the Streets in Chile* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016)

Tucker, David (ed.) *British Social Realism in the Arts Since 1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Tudor, Andréw *Theories of Film* (London: Secker and Warburg) 1974

Turk, Edward-Baron *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carne and The Golden Age of French Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989)

Turner, Daniel. *Life on The Tyne* (North Shields, White Wings Publishing) 2016

U

Ugnow, Jenny *Nature's Engraver A Life of Thomas Bewick* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)

UK Parliament Archives

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/parliamentary-archives> (accessed July 20th 2024)

UNESCO Department of Mass Communication: Register of Mass Communication 'Projects in Progress and in Plan, Paris, 1955 – 1957' BFI archive UNESCO HFO 3

V

Van Dyke 'The Eyes Have it: Charting the history of South Africa's queer community starts with their gaze'. *Evening Standard* (magazine) 24th May 2024 p.23.

Van Gelder, Hilde (ed.) *Allan Sekula: Ship of Fools/The Dockers Museum* (Leuven and Lisbon: Leuven University Press) 2015

Van Gelder, Hilde 'Allan Sekula's Labor of Giants' In *Allan Sekula: Ship of Fools/ The Dockers' Museum* (ed.) Hilde Van Gelder (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015)

Vincendeau, Ginette and Andréw Phillips *A Companion to Jean Renoir* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013)

Vincendeau, Ginette 'Review of *Mists of Regret Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* by Andréw Dudley' *Screen* 37.2 1996 pp. 218-220

W

Walker, J. A. *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London and New York I.B Tauris)

Wasson, Haidee *Museum Movies The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2005)

Wells, Liz *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011)

Wells, Liz, Kate Newton and Catherine Fehily *Shifting Horizons Women's Landscape Photography Now* (London and New York: Taurus, 2000)

Williams, Raymond *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976)

Williams, Raymond *Communications* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979)

Williams, Raymond *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Chatto & Windus, 1971).

Williams, Val *Daniel Meadows: Edited Photographs from the 70s and 80s* (Maidstone: Photoworks, 2011)

Williams, Val 'Fay Godwin-Obituary' *The Independent*, Thursday June 2, 2005

Williams, Val *Warworks: Women, Photography and The Iconography of War* (London: Virago Press, 1995)

World Economic Forum *The Global Risks Report 2021* (Geneva: WEF, 2021_

X-

Y

Yacavone, Kathrine. 'Reading through Photography: Roland Barthes's Last Seminar "Proust et la photographie"' in *French Forum* 34.1 (2009) pp 97-112

Young, Neil 'A Culture Preserved in Amber – H'away Amber, North East England's Finest Film Collective' in *Sight and Sound* (London: British Film Institute (BFI) Online) Last updated 2017 (Last accessed May 2021)

Young, Neil 'Forever Amber: An interview with Ellin Hare and Murray Martin of the Amber Film Collective' *Critical Quarterly* 43.4 (December 2001) pp 61-80

Z

Zuromskis, Catherine 'Petroaesthetics and Landscape Photography: 'New Topographics, Edward Burtynsky, and the Culture of Peak Oil' in Ross Barrett and Darren Worden *Oil Cultures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) pp 289-308

Filmography

Amber Films:

Maybe, 1969

Launch, 1974

Last Shift, 1976

Glassworks, 1977

Byker, 1983 *Keeping Time*, 1983

Sea Coal, 1985

Dan T Smith, 1987 *Shield Stories*, 1987

In Fading Light, 1989

Writing in the Sand, 1991 *Dream On*, 1991

Today I'm With You, 2010

Poetic Realism Films

Marcel Carné (Dir.) :

Le Quai Des Brumes (Port of Shadows) 1938

Le Jour Se Lève (Daybreak) 1939

Les Enfants Du Paradis (Children Of Paradise) 1945

Jean Renoir (Dir.) :

Les Bas-Fonds (The Lower Depths) 1936

La Règle Du Jeu (Rules Of The Game) 1939

Selected Film

Giant, 1956

A Taste of Honey, 1961

Kes, 1969

Billy Elliott, 2000

Syriana, 2005

George Stevens (Dir.)

Tony Richardson (Dir.)

Ken Loach (Dir)

Stephen Daldry (Dir.)

Stephen Gaghan (Dir.)

<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> 2006	Davis Guggenheim (Dir.)
<i>Manufactured Landscapes</i> 2006	Jennifer Baichwal.(Dir.)
<i>Under the Cranes</i> , 2011	Emma-Louise Williams (Dir.)
<i>Making the Tyne Documentaries</i> 2007	Amber Films
<i>The Spirit of 1945</i> , 2013	Ken Loach (Dir.)
<i>I, Daniel Blake</i> , 2016.	Ken Loach (Dir.)
<i>Deepwater Horizon</i> , 2016	Peter Berg (Dir.)

Selected Television

When The Boat Comes In

James Mitchell, Tom Hadaway, Sidney Chaplin et al, 1976-1981

Our Friends in the North : Peter Flannery, 1996

North and South: Sandy Welch, 2004

Fay Godwin :The South Bank Show, November 1986

Every So Often: (Raymond Moore –Photographer):

Jonathan Williams BBC 1983

Lykkeland (State of Happiness) 2018-22: Various Directors, Maipo Films

Selected Conversations / Interviews

Tania Cullen - On her maritime career at Port of Blyth and Helsinki links. Blyth, 2015

Daniel Meadows (interview with Liz Drew) At his home/studio, 2017

on his methods and memories of specific projects

Colin Jacobson (interview with Liz Drew at RADA) London, 2017

on his work at *Reportage* (founder) and *The Observer Magazine* (Picture Editor) and *Independent Magazine* (Picture Editor)

Chris Steele Perkins (Oral History for Four Corners Archive)

<https://vimeo.com/269627725>, At his home/Studio, London, 2018

Mark Neville (interview with Liz Drew in his home/studio, London, 2020

Ph: The Photography Research Network. Peer conversations on photography, aesthetics, politics 2012 – 2022. Meetings and seminars at The Photographers Gallery, Space Studios (Annalisa Sonzogni studio), UCL History of Art Department, Birkbeck School of Arts.

Family discussions over several decades:

Patrick W. Drew (1928-2024) On pre-war childhood in Tynemouth and North Shields, World War Two evacuation experience, lifetime work in ships and shipping.

Merchant Navy, international routes and ports, Smiths Docks. Oil, Oil tankers, Oil platforms.

Theresa J. Johnston Drew (1934 – 2006) Wallsend and Nazareth House childhood.

Moving from the North East to East coast. Spouse travelling for maritime work.

Heliport transport.

W. P. Drew (1956 -) Shipping and port operations. Oil workers rescue at sea.

H.L. Drew (1968 -) Moving from North East to East coast. Father at sea.

T. M. Drew (1958 -) Moving from North East to East coast. Art, politics, class.

Selected Conferences / Seminars / Events

'Emerging Landscapes'	University of Westminster June 2010
'Exhibiting Photography'	University of Westminster April 2011
'Cloning Tom: An audience with W.J.T. Mitchell'	University of Westminster, June 2011
'Retracing America: Modernism after Paul Strand'	University College London March 2013
'Rachel Carson Workshops' (AHRC Skills project)	University of York at Birkbeck, 2013
'A Cyclical Poem': Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Paul Hill, Dorothy Bohm et al	Photo50 at London Art Fair, 2013
'Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen -Stories from the North East of England 1969 – 2010'	Tate Modern, London 2016
'Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20 th Century'	V&A, London March 2016
'The Left Conference: Photography and Film Criticism' Lisbon <i>Speaker 2017 and 2018</i>	National Museum of Contemporary Art, and University of Lisbon 2016, 2017,2018
'Urban Change - Current Research in Film, Television and Media Studies''	BIMI, Birkbeck, London May 2017
'Radical Visions: The Cultural Politics of Camerawork 1972-85' (<i>Organiser</i>)	Birkbeck, June 2018
'Jacques Rancière and Farshid Moussavi On Space and Politics'	Royal Academy of Arts, October 2018
'Re-centering Open: Critical and Global Perspectives' (<i>Speaker</i>) 2019	National University of Ireland, Galway, April
'Bridging The Distance' (<i>Speaker</i>)	Birkbeck, (Arts Week) May 2019
'Photography as Collaboration' (<i>Speaker</i>) (2020 - online)	Université Paris-Est Créteil IMAGER Université Bordeaux Montaigne CLIMAS
'Ethics of Documentary Photography' (online)	Amber Side Gallery March – April 2021
'British Photography since 1972' (<i>Speaker</i>)	Royal Photographic Society July 2022

Archival Research

Tyne and Wear Archives (Discovery Museum), Newcastle
The Lit and Phil, Newcastle (previously Literary and Philosophical Society)
Amber Side gallery (Study Room), Newcastle

North Shields Library and Archives (Discover North Tyneside), North Shields
People's History Museum (Labour History Archive), Manchester
Suffolk Archives Lowestoft
British Library (Fay Godwin Archive), London
British Library Sound Archives, London
Tate Archive (Tate Britain), London
Bishopsgate Institute (Special Collections and Archives) London
British Film Institute (BFI) National Archive, London
Four Corners Archive (Camerawork magazine and Oral Histories) London
The Women's Library ,London
National Maritime Museum (Caird Library and Archive), London
London Metropolitan Archives: Guildhall Library, London

Faculty of Philosophy (Folklore Museum and Archive) University of Aristotle,
Thessaloniki International Centre for Photography Library and Archives, New York
Museum of Modern Art (Archives, Library and Research Collections), New York

End of bibliography