

WALK DON'T RUN (On "Untitled Slide Sequence")

Marie Muracciole

Workers leaving the factory at the end of a day shift; General Dynamics, Convair Division aerospace factory, San Diego, California, 17 February, 1972.¹

1. A column of silhouettes wends its way towards a stairway in the space between two industrial buildings, preceded by the shadows they cast. The photographer is standing at the top of the stairs. We see the figure of a guard in a hut at the bottom to the left of the stairway. Opposite is a notice that says *Walk Don't Run* in large capitals and *Safety First* in smaller letters. Each slide stays on screen for 10 seconds. In the next two images, two men very close to the camera look at the lens, smiling, followed by two more.

The vast majority of the faces that file by the lens are male and white. Very few are in a suit and tie, many have white hair and many look tired. One man is busy taking off his ID badge. Some employees are to be seen at different stages in their ascension up the stairway in two slides that follow. Gradually, what was a crowd at the beginning becomes sparser in the far background. The photographer's attention turns to the stairway and the foreground. Most of the workers are deep in their own thoughts and pay no attention to their surroundings. Very few are in conversation. Two women pass by, one turned towards the other, and two others are exchanging a look. Another form of complicity appears in the case of two white-collar employees, who look at the camera with irritation.

On the 22nd slide, the photographer takes a close-up of a man who is not smiling. In the next three, the camera has pivoted 45° to the left. In the first of the three, a woman looks back behind her; she is smiling. The sun has overexposed her face and blonde hair, and the rhythm is lost in the blurring due to the movement of her head. This abandonment of the frontal point of view, the shift backwards in focus and the increased luminosity create a slight hiatus in a more fluid sequence of images. We see next, side-on, a group of workers walking, and then simply the ground. In this 25th slide the two shoes of a man walking and his shadow frame the top of the picture, and another shadow stretches out just below, cast by a body about to enter the field from the right. Vertical cracks cross the frame, whose center is empty. This is the only image that sets out to provide information: the flight of the photographer illustrated, in a chance shot taken blind, by the walking feet of a figure the frame has cut off.

These 25 photographs were exhibited for the first time last winter as wall-mounted paper prints.² From the center of a white-walled room, the viewer, by turning around, could make them "file by". By walking along the walls, the viewer could frame them at will within a restricted visual field. By walking, the rhythm and the meaning of their sequence could be defined.

1. The caption accompanying the 25 black and white slides in 24x36 format that make up *Untitled Slide Sequence*.

2. *California Stories*, 5 November 2011–7 January 2012 Christopher Grimes Gallery, Los Angeles.





Each photograph was available for the desired time, like the pages of a book, without abandoning the other 24. Looking at them as they passed by brought to my mind the shifting backwards and forwards of a film on an editing table. The paper prints amounted to cinema in its most basic form – a chronological sequence of descriptive camera images. Sekula used the term “translation”, thus offering up an interplay of difference and similarity. It was therefore quite natural for the idea to arise of exhibiting the two states of *Untitled Slide Sequence* side by side to take a closer look at them. He then suggested that *Performance Under Working Conditions*, a 1973 video, should be shown along with a 1974 video entitled *Talk Given by Mr. Fred Lux (at the Lux Clock MFG Company Plant in Lebanon, Tennessee, on Wednesday, September 15, 1954)*, in which these same photographs appear. Now 34 in number, the images on the film of 17 February 1972 are crossed with another story. They form one of the two visual counterpoints to a speech given by a boss to his workers, read by Sekula wearing a plastic mask. The other counterpoint is the image of a young woman, pictured in profile holding a loudhailer and a sheet of paper. This is Martha Rosler providing a fragmented reading of passages from the *Société du Spectacle*.³

“... and it occurred to me that a sequence of prints would allow the viewer to move back and forth, “rewinding” the flow of human movement and picking out details that go missing in ten seconds. Thus this translation of an older project.”⁴

II. *Untitled Slide Sequence* is a relatively short slideshow. Its temporal economy is a closed loop that becomes a circle when the pictures are hung. The work comes around again and again, each time making these women and these men climb a stairway, leaving the plant again and again to return to their houses and their apartments. They rise up before the camera lens, moving towards us, at the moment when they are freed of their tasks and their duties, at the intersection between public and private space. It is an exit, an ascension, a level change, and as such the action forms a series of more than one “image”, not simply an image of work as a way of “climbing the social ladder”. None of those we see has a name, and this column of individuals disperses, haloed by the light of the failing day, with the final image showing only shadows and two feet that transform an illegible black and white image into a platform, a common ground for the session’s protagonists: the photographer and those moving through the visual field of his lens. Anchored to that core – the initial situation and its boundaries – the sequence of images has to be shown again so that we see it differently.

3. The text used is an unauthorized translation published in 1970 by publishers Black and Red in Detroit. It alternates with passages from the Manifesto.

4. Allan Sekula in a text accompanying the Christopher Grimes exhibition in Los Angeles, 2011.

These reporting photographs were taken on black and white film, with Sekula retaining the 25 best exposed images. They were taken totally without permission at an aircraft plant exit gate, using a borrowed camera: the number of pictures corresponds roughly to the time the gate guards took to spot an unwanted photographer through the moving crowd of workers. The women and men photographed by Sekula are workers at a company making Atlas and Centaur missiles, which explains the guards and the ban on photography. The historical context to the series is the Nixon era, with its military and economic policy, and its deep mythological background is the film sequence *Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon* (Workers leaving the Lumière factory in Lyon), dating from 1895 – one of the first films ever to be shown in the world, depicting for the first time bodies in movement, those of workers going home. The underlying principle of a slideshow links each photographic image to an overall screening rate, like an elementary form of cinema. It brings to mind firstly the jerky motion of the earliest films, a limping visual gait caused by lack of images, which called for close attention in order to decipher the actions depicted. During these very brief showings – the Lumière brothers' films were just 17 meters long – it was necessary to keep one's eyes on the screen to see what was happening. At the same time, it is the loss of visual information due to speed that produces a motion picture image. In a slideshow, the description is based on the recurring interruption that encourages observation of detail and offers us a series of portraits. Although this is a sequence from which no image can be extracted, each is shown clearly, like a word within a sentence, rather than as just one element in a metamorphosis in time. The motion picture extended the industrial revolution to visual representation by transferring the agitation of



machinery to bodies on the screen – “automating” them. *Untitled Slide Sequence* is a response, a century later, to *La Sortie des usines Lumière à Lyon*, granting a kind of rest, in a paused image, to work-animated bodies. This work is slowing down bodies at work.

The slideshow is not a pure format; it is a hybrid of moving and still photography. The 25 slides are indivisible, which frees them from the history of American documentary photography of the time. None of these images lays claim to the supposed documentary truth of the self-sufficient candid shots of *Street Photography*. None can claim here to reveal a key instant in time, a “*decisive moment*”, setting aside the chronology of which it is one linked component.⁵ These photographs make no claim to innocence and clearly place these bodies at a point in time that governs them all collectively and whose interpretation is not fixed, a context and a situation which we still need to analyze today. The artist does not claim to make his own personal genius spring from this scene – stress on artistic invention here – and nor that he is some demigod or hero offering a revelation of it – stress on elective choice here. He is giving visual presence to a threshold between working and private lives. The medium has not been chosen by chance – slideshows were invented by families, companies and schools for holiday photos and didactic presentations.

5. “The emphasis in these photo works has consistently been on the ensemble, and not on the formal or semantic success or failure of the single image. This seemed the only reasonable way to shift photography away from its affiliations with painting and printmaking and toward an investigation of its shared and unshared ground with literature and cinema. Furthermore, this seemed the only reasonable way to counter the tendency to incorporate photography into the museum, the tendency to produce work designed for judgment and acceptance by that institution.” Allan Sekula, Introduction to *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983, Nova Scotia Series*, Nova Scotia Press, 1984.

(...) but to a larger extent I am writing because of the limited representational range of the camera one cannot photograph ideology but one can make a photograph step back and say look in that photograph there is ideology (...) ⁶

III. Allan Sekula has transposed guerrilla tactics into the representational domain: moving through ungovernable terrain in the frontier regions between different media, disciplines and subjects – photography, film, writing... –, resisting predetermined positions and systematic display in material and media spaces, and dismantling role hierarchies. All of which is the definition, in the representational field, of what could be called an artistic position – as opposed to public relations or entertainment. Image has always coexisted with text in the artistic practice of Sekula, along with his other activities as visual artist and photography critic. When *Untitled Slide Sequence* was created, this pluralistic practice was determined in critical awareness of the alienation and emancipation operating in society in the historic moment of the Vietnam War and the beginnings of the United States' policy of economic globalization. This awareness stimulates a constant search for forms of movement – of transport, with the importance of extended investigative trips – in looking at the world, and this spreads to include the tools and formats he uses. As a supporter of critical, informed reactivation of descriptive photography, Sekula initially derives more inspiration from the formal and ideological insolence of European engaged cinema ⁷ in mixing fiction and documentary than from American documentary tradition, bogged down by the dominance of modernism and “which had, to take only one crude example, nothing much to say about the Vietnam War.” ⁸ He uses the expression “disassembled movie” in 1973 for an autobiographically based photographic piece: *Aerospace Folktales*. With no access to cinematic resources, he assembles some “spare parts”, photographs and written or recorded texts from the various protagonists in the story: the father, the mother, the narrator. The coexistence of these “fragments” introduces a large degree of formal discontinuity into a simultaneously poetic and social approach to family history. This formal discontinuity, the diversity of the representational regimes used – written commentary, transcribed interviews, photographic images, captions and the interferences between them – make the contradictions and conflicts of meaning of contemporary life a part of the work and define the polyphonic character of his approach, which has prevailed down to the present time.

6. *Aerospace Folktales*, 1973 Photographs, Sound track, texts, chairs and plants. 51 black and white photographs in 23 frames, 3 red canvas director's chairs, 6 potted fan palms, 3 CD players, 3 speakers; 3 simultaneous, unsynchronized CD recordings.
7. Allan Sekula is referring to the influence of the films of Godard, Marker, Straub and Huillet.
8. The introduction of *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983* (1984), page ix, The Nova Scotia series: source materials of the contemporary arts.



IV. "It is precisely the random moment which is comparatively independent of the controversial and unstable orders over which men fight and despair (...). The more it is exploited, the more the elementary things which our lives have in common come to light (...). In this unprejudiced and exploratory type of representation we cannot but see to what an extent—below the surface conflicts—the differences between men's ways of life and forms of thought have already lessened. The strata of societies and their different ways of life have become inextricably mingled. There are no longer even exotic peoples. (...) Beneath the conflicts, and also through them, an economic and cultural leveling process is taking place."⁹

The above sentence is taken from the final page of *Mimesis*, a book on literature written by Erich Auerbach, here in Istanbul in fact, between 1942 and 1945. There is undoubtedly a need to unpack all the various aspects of his view of the notion of the *random moment*, which could be seen as contrary to the mythology of the photographic *decisive moment*. This final page of the book contains an early definition of globalization and a prophecy of some aspects of the world in which we are now living, such as the recycling of exoticism into folklore and the entropic nature of social differences and lifestyles across vast distances – with the exception of the one difference completely resistant to this: the gap between rich and poor. This passage came to mind while watching *The Forgotten Space*, a film made in 2010 with Noel Burch, which is shown in this exhibition in Istanbul program, alternating with what Allan Sekula considers to be its preparatory work, *Lottery of the Sea*.¹⁰

Sekula created *Untitled Slide Sequence* just when Nixon was initiating the system of which *Lottery of the Sea*, followed by *The Forgotten Space*, analyze the effects over time. In order to ensure the expansion of capitalist economic supremacy beyond America's borders, this system extended the law of supply and demand to the entire planet by outsourcing production to low-cost labor – to which we now give the meaningful label of "offshoring".

The development of unemployment, the invisibility of remote labor exploitation, the treatment of individuals as goods on the labor market, all these are issues that works such as *California Stories*, 1970/75, some of which are shown here, *Untitled Slides Sequence*, as well as being raised in *Aerospace Folktales* and *This ain't China* in 1974 and which continue to have topical relevance in a world still to an extent in the process of construction as one giant market and its bankruptcy. Which, as we know, is not cinema, but very real indeed.

Istanbul, September 2012

9. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Trans. Willard Trask. New York: Doubleday, 2003, 552.

10. Sekula's films are *Performance Under Working Conditions* (1973) and *Talk Given by Mr. Fred Lux at the Lux Clock Company Manufacturing Plant in Lebanon, Tennessee, on Wednesday, September 15, 1954* (1974), *Reagan Tape* co-directed with Noël Burch (1981), *Tsukiji* (2001), *Gala* (2005), *A Short Film for Laos and Lottery of the Sea* (2006) and *The Forgotten Space* (2010) co-directed with Noël Burch.



Experiences of Heterogeneity

Ali Akay

Allan Sekula's exhibition in Akbank Sanat despite the fact that is not a retrospective (Disassembled Movies (1972-2012), the fact that some of the works date as early as 1972 connect us to the issue of the war in Vietnam. Allan Sekula, instructed artistically by John Baldessari and philosophically by Herbert Marcuse, seems to be always focusing on the photographic relationship between the individual and the group. Allan Sekula's view seems to be always focusing on the photographic relationships between the individual and the group. In his first videos he presented the relationships between that which actually takes place and that doesn't, or that seemingly is happening and that isn't through ironic everyday statements. "Performance under Working Conditions" realized in 1973 revolves around these statements and the conversations and worries of two young lads making pizza. The conversations of two young workers who are in fact not workers but who work as part of the service sector are examined at a time when the debates on "whether there is a consciousness that would lead to revolution or will the working class make a revolution of its own accord?" were being pursued. The 25 minute video also makes us question how relaxing or boring could having conversations under working conditions be. Do we have to remind ourselves that there are prohibitions on having conversations at some work places? Isn't making conversation one of the ways of unwinding, steering away from the troubles related to work? In terms of work conditions, this period corresponding to the services era that came after the factories was also a period in connection with the ethnic origins of the workers in America. Another sociological struggle of the 1970s was the ethnic struggle as a class war, and here we witness an era when black rights were on the fore. We are in an era of emerging green politics, new mystical societies and anti-war peace movements, an era when Herbert Marcuse's "Freudo-Marxism" (Eros and Civilization, written in 1955) and Hermann Hesse's books were being read, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix's Pop, Folk and Rock music was listened to. These are the "years of revolt" reaching a peak with Siddhartha, the

Indian mysticism, "Les Chemins De Katmandou", The Pudding Shop passing through Istanbul, the Zen inspiration and the gaze directed towards the East, John Lennon's 1971 song "Imagine", and the band Steppenwolf. From the onset we see the individual standing out in reciprocal relationships within the work sphere in Allan Sekula's works, within the collective yet not fully dissolving; as the relationships between these are established not through identity but could be read in terms of the relationships between repetitions and differences.

The Vietnam War and the post-1968 condition somehow seem to be a departing point for both Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula as we could observe in "California Stories". The issues of being marginalized (workers and the world of the labor) on the one hand and the geopolitical situation on the other, the American troops, marine forces, air bases, the drama of the soldiers who had died during the war, the tragedy of the veterans who survived the war but could not readjust to the society that they believed they were serving are all part of Allan Sekula's work. In "Untitled, Slide Sequence", Sekula shows the workers not while working or talking like in the Soviet world, but while traveling to work. He presents them in the outside world, outside of working conditions. And the exhibition, in the situation of war within which we live, drives us towards gazing at the works of Sekula and makes us contemplate on them.

The world that Allan Sekula deals with in his presentation of the circulation of "transnational capitalism" today is, in a sense, as much a world of containers, as it is a world of war, migration, civil war and workforce circulation. Social situations such as the solitude of people, of immigrants, families breaking up through migration, people that strive to keep friendships alive in conditions of destitution are being presented. While demonstrating the movement rendered by the integrated world capitalism on the



one hand, he highlights the fact that, similarly, how the art world is also merging with this world of the relations between labor and capital. This revolves around, on the one hand, capitalistic relations circulating goods and labor, and around the industry of war, on the other.

In his work "Untitled", made in 1972, Allan Sekula concentrates on the workers working in the massive firm General Dynamics Convair Division Aerospace, located in San Diego, manufacturing the F-111 planes. He expresses the contradiction behind the use of these bombs manufactured by the labor of the workers in the attacks on Vietnam. The arms industry and the 'containerization' of the world, the free circulation of goods and workforce. In a significant work of his, "Fish Story" (1995) -that has been exhibited in Documenta in 2002- the documentary is presented with an 'aesthetical' perspective much like his sometimes poetic and sometimes ethnographical looking photographic works. He scrutinizes the difference and rupture between art and documentary photography. Looking into the works of the American photographer Steigltz and finding a symbolic romanticism in them Allan Sekula criticized these works and pursued a "critical social realism", if not a socialist realism, perhaps under the influence of the Frankfurt school, he gazed towards the real.¹

1. Sukhdev Sandhu, Allan Sekula: filming the forgotten resistance at sea; Guardian.co.uk Friday 20 April 2012. The comment related to Stieglitz is taken from him, while the connection with the Frankfurt School is mine. (A.A.)

What has changed since 1972? The companies producing weapons of war and employing workers are still in existence and continuing to produce these apparatuses. The state, its ideology and "ideological apparatuses" still persist, just like Althusser had put forward many years ago. But there is something else today: the fact that ideology is an illusion is now being revealed. In the face of the materiality of the conditions of organization we begin to perceive how religion-like and mystical the concept of ideology is and how much it is there to conceal the violence of material conditions, at least theoretically so in an Althusserian way, and as an apparatus or in the form of material assemblages after Foucault and Deleuze-Guattari. In "Waiting for Tear Gas", when Allan Sekula shows us the demonstrators in the United States in Seattle and in front of the World Trade Center in 1999, in Washington, he highlights, again, the relationships of conflict and opposition between the demonstrators and the police, and groups of people and individuals. In these works Allan Sekula is striving to present what is happening as it is; he does not wear a gas mask during the demonstrations, does not alter photographs, does not use a zoom, he is not producing photographic works by making use of technology. He is trying to free himself of all sorts of symbolism in his photographic language.

We left behind the period of the Vietnam War; but we are still going through a state of war and civil war for quite some time now. Divisions are becoming plural. Let us now direct our attention towards two thinkers of our day who have taken over the concept of "multitude" from Spinoza and brought it up to date, in reading the future of the world of our present day: Negri and Hardt propose that the state of war we are experiencing is progressing not like a war between dominant states but rather like a civil war; so, in a way we have left the days of war between states in the past and moved on to an alliance between the countries that are part of the civil war and a discourse of "terrorist" attacks on that alliance and "counter terrorist" campaigns that would be more appropriate in explaining the worldwide politics of today.

So we are talking about a civil war, therefore, about, rhizomatic wars not taking place within a single sovereign state but functioning as inter-states networks. This war is not within the boundaries of a single state, it continues in an international arena among and within states. A new type of civil war seems indicative as opposed to the beginning of the 20th century, which established borders in accordance with nation-states cutting through ethnic populations, leaving one family on one side and another family on the other. International law and international authorities cannot respond to this situation and therefore, attacks and acts of bombing and terrorist actions that are not bound by international legal agreements occur. State terror on the one hand and guerrilla terror on the other makes a multitude of actors of a bilateral civil war confront one another.

Negri and Hardt state that although the local wars everywhere retain their locality and originality, in fact they also progress in a network of connections that are linked to one another in a rhizomatic framework²: A worldwide civil war. They defend this structural condition so much so that they prefer to perceive the collapse

2. Negri and Hardt, Multitude, La decouverte, Paris, 2004





of the World Trade Center twin towers on September 11th, 2001 not as a specific situation but as an extension of this systemic crisis.³ According to them, the crisis of the condition that they call the Empire is not a crisis of the sovereignty of a state but rather the crisis of a systemic political and economical sovereignty. Then, we are dealing with a systemic and epistemological transformation of Europe; that is to say that we have evolved from a modernity that established nation-states into postmodernity. It is no longer possible to comprehend the present time through similar concepts and events, by way of modern analyses. We are no longer in a time of imperialism, but in the Empire; we no longer experience orientalism, but post-orientalism; we are not making sociology based on facts but focusing on symptoms, and we have set foot in a transnational sociality that is not based on a system/structure homogeneity but operating as heterogeneous regulations/assemblages. Unlike those times Hobbes had written about, this is no longer an enclosed and isolated war, but we are in a worldwide war. The modern era had separated war and peace, and declared peace as a state that has to be ever present and war as an exception. Behind this state of affairs going all the way back to the emergence of the modern period is an idea of steering away from Machiavelli: That is, from the idea of Machiavelli that a Sovereign must be as dominant and mighty as a lion, and as cunning as a fox in the face of the wolves.⁴ Here we see sovereignty as bi-cephalous: The lion and the fox, that is, strength and craftiness working hand in hand. Wasn't it Clausewitz who wrote that "war is the continuation of politics by other means" in his motto developed for the modern times? And for this reason he had made an analysis of the condition of war between states. War is a form of external struggle of a state in the international arena. In the modern era war is considered as an act taking place not within but outside the borders, just as the cemeteries and death in western history that were moved away from cities into invisible areas together with the coming of the modern times, as examined by Aries. Shaped around friend and foe, and the distinctions between the inside and outside of the city, this leads towards an analysis of the modern period again: Carl Schmitt's policy based on ally and enemy is read through binary oppositions. However, when we look at the sociology of Gabriel Tarde, we see that the social lives of people based on imitation do not rely on a categorization of enemies and friends but on a regulation that one might call rhizomatic networks "between their brains". Here, instead of binary oppositions and international law between nations and states there is a unity between brains that function in networks.

Allan Sekula's work shows us the "new world order" assuming a new form since the beginning of the 1970s (alongside the end of Bretton Woods 1971, which was the end of the dollar parity and when the dollar's indexation to gold finally ended), and its conflicts and the poverty of working conditions in an artistic way. His photographs (no matter how sociological, anthropological, ethnographical, political and poetic they may be) are not works of photojournalism, but part of "social art". Following in the footsteps of Sanders and the master of American documentary photography, Walker Evans (1958) and carrying this line into another direction, Allan Sekula's work sheds light on our day. According to Chevrier, Walker Evans had a "dandy" gaze, whereas Sekula approaches us "truthfully", with a need to "tell the truth" (parrhèsia). His narrative touches on the reality that is being experienced.

3. So much that, they draw a comparison between the beginning of the "Thirty Years" wars by the throwing of two noble members of the Holy Roman Empire out of the window of the Hradany castle in Prague in 1618, with the collapse of the Twin Towers on September 11th, 2001. They also state that the war between Catholics and Protestants at that time has transformed into the war between Christians and the Muslims today.

4. In his book "Machiavelli and Us" (Machiavel et nous) (Texto, Stock/IMEC 1994), Althusser reminds us that Marx calls the devout and the ethicists "the professionals of ideology".

In this sense ideology seems nothing different than a religious perspective. Religion that conceals the material appears to be an ideology in itself.