

Resurfacing the *deep six*: representation in the age of logistical capitalism.



Figure 1: Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, “Panorama. Mid Atlantic.” Voyage 167 of the container ship M/V Sea-Land Quality from Elisabeth, New Jersey, to Rotterdam. November 1993.

Where bodies are buried in secret there must also be a buried archive [...] waiting for resurrection. An Archive, not an atlas; the point here is not to take the world upon one’s shoulders, but to crouch down to the earth, and dig.

– Allan Sekula

Globally, over 56 million people work on fishing boats at sea, whilst another 1.6 million are employed on container ships and other merchant vessels.¹ The high seas where these industries operate are often forgotten spaces, and even if under the jurisdiction of international law, are spaces where they are rarely enforced. With over 90% of world trade still occurring on this watery frontier, the ocean of the globalised market-logic imagination is one of utopic capitalist potential; its very historical and contemporaneous study driven by the intersections of military, commercial, and oceanographic interests, connected in their desire to map and utilise the oceanic. This logic of mastery is the realm of deep-sea mining, offshore drilling, and submarine warfare. However, it is trade – the first global enterprise – that is the focus of this essay.

¹ Ian Urbina, *The Outlaw Ocean: Crime and Survival in the Last Untamed Frontier* (London: The Bodley Head, 2019): 185.

Western narratives of trade often imagine it to be a seamless progression of just-in-time logistics, with virtual orders materialising in next-day delivery, with seemingly no hassle, fuss, or friction. In truth, these narratives bely and purposefully distort the lived realities of those millions of people who work across watery, littoral, and transient spaces such as ports, warehouses, and highways. These realities are filled with waiting, precarity, and endurance.² Inhabiting these temporalities is a methodology for this essay, in order to destabilise capitalist imaginaries of speed and flow.

This essay, therefore, looks at how the narratives of “flow” within global capitalism are a continuation of the imperialist project of “progress”: that of structured, spatialised violence against exploited peoples on a planetary scale. Through a focus on seafaring labour and its abuses, I will explore how contradictory narratives of friction, resistance, and waiting are concealed and contained by logics of abstraction. I will achieve this through recourse to the work of Allan Sekula, most notably *Fish Story* (1995). In so doing, I aim to explore new methodologies of “unthinking” the world order of logistical capitalism through oceanic *representation* that is attentive to the archive.

“Flow” is a myth that hides many complex layers of material and spatialised violence. Such representations of tensionless transit and despatialised transfers across global time and space are achieved using the mechanisms of logistics. Logistics is now inherent to the project of global capitalism. Originally developed within traditional warfare, it began in submission to strategy, but now a reversal of dominance has taken place: logistics, as the management science of capitalist circulation, dictates strategy. This logic of our militarised and bunkerised late liberal present, what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri term the era of *global civil war*, is summarised aptly by Fred Moten

² Elena Gorfinkel, “Weariness, Waiting: Endurance and Art Cinema’s Tired Bodies,” in *Discourse*, Volume 34, No 2-3, Spring/Fall 2012, pp. 311-347.

and Stefano Harney: “[i]n war without end, war without battles, only the ability to keep fighting, only logistics, matters.”³ Our logistical present can be spatially represented through oceanic trade. Symbolic of contemporary trade, container ships are continually increasing their capacities year on year, with the largest ship in the world at the time of writing now having the capacity for 23,964 containers (twenty-foot equivalent units, or TEU).⁴ Alongside this continued increase of capacity, are projections and anticipations that global production will continue endlessly to fill this ever-swelling volume. Of course, this is not logical, as proven by the fact that megaships are idled all over the world, with records fluctuating between 10 percent of the world’s fleet in 2016 (an estimated 1.7 million TEU) and five percent in 2019 (an estimated 1.3 million TEU).⁵ The consequences of COVID-19 are already exceeding records for 2020, with an estimated 2 million TEU currently idle worldwide.⁶ This inverted system reveals the gap at the heart of financial capitalism: uncertainty, speculation, and delayed futures. Charmaine Chua uses the metaphor of monsters to explore this speculative industry of megaship expansion, explaining that “[t]he ‘arms race’ of megaships becomes monstrous precisely at the point where it crosses the threshold of economic exaggeration,” arguing that “logistical infrastructures today are more about monumental projections of the durability of capitalism’s future.”⁷ Monstrosity as a descriptor is apt, as such hypothetical bets belong to the realms of fantasy; a fantasy that capital growth will continue,

³ See Mark Duffield, “Total War as Environmental Terror: Linking Liberalism, Resilience, and the Bunker” in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110(3) (2011): 757-769, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2005): 4, and Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013): 88.

⁴ This is the South Korean-owned Hyundai Merchant Marine container ship HMM Algeciras, which was completed in 2020. It flies the flag of Panama. “World’s Largest Containership HMM Algeciras Launched,” in *MarineLink*, <https://www.marinelink.com/news/worlds-largest-containership-hmm-477916> (accessed 29/04/2020).

⁵ Trine Vestergaard, “Over 5 percent of the container fleet is idle,” in *Shipping Watch*, <https://shippingwatch.com/carriers/article11800093.ece> (accessed 29/04/2020). Andre Dieckmann, “Ten Percent of Global Fleet is Idle,” *Ocean Insights*, 2016, <https://www.ocean-insights.com/article/ten-percent-of-global-fleet-is-idle/> (accessed 29/04/2020).

⁶ Estimated at between nine and 13 percent of total global capacity. Greg Knowler, “Coronavirus sends idle container fleet to record high,” in *JOC*, <https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/carrier-capacity-cuts-take-idle-fleet-record-numbers-20200226.html> (accessed 29/04/2020), and Costas Paris, “Ocean Carriers Idle Container Ships in Drove on Falling Trade Demand,” in *The Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/container-ship-operators-idle-ships-in-drove-on-falling-trade-demand-11586359002> (accessed 29/04/2020).

⁷ Charmaine Chua, “Indurable Monstrosities: Megaships, Megaports, and Transpacific Infrastructures of Violence,” in *Futureland Reader*, CRA (2018): 148.

resources will last, and cheaper labour be found *ad infinitum*. This is the fantasy that exists within statecraft and the ever-growing infrastructures of extrastatecraft today, with the role of states in the processes of dispossession and expulsion greater than ever before.⁸

These processes of dispossession in the context of logistics are theorised by Chua through *containerization*: the technologies “by which states control the contradictory flows of goods alongside the regulation of people.”⁹ The very logic of container as form – as material transportation whose utility is founded on global expansionism – means that containerization is both a force of abstraction and a material form of containment that relies on an inherent contradiction of mobility. As such, it is a useful formation through which to comprehend the totalising apparatus of logistical capitalism. Chua describes how technologies of containerization “reorient mobility to productive strategies of partitioning, sequestration, and enclosure, producing a global supply chain system structured by circulatory regimes of containment.”¹⁰ Of key consequence here is that the mobility of capital is aligned with governance and security, as the mobility of people is ever more constrained, surveilled and policed.¹¹

⁸ Of key example here are infrastructural projects invested in by the state that are detrimental to interspecies life; mega-dams, deep-sea mining, and fracking. For more see Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*, (London: Verso, 2016) and Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁹ Charmaine Chua, “Containing the Ship of State: Managing Mobility in an Age of Logistics,” A Dissertation Submitted to The Faculty Of University Of Minnesota (2018): 31

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 356.

¹¹ This ever strengthening logistical-security complex in relation to the mobility of peoples and commodities has been explored by Sandro Mazzadra and Brett Neilson in their study of border *as method*. Sandro Mazzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).



Figure 2: Repurposed for security. Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, “Abandoned shipyard used by Marine Corps Expeditionary Force for “counter-terrorist” exercises. Los Angeles harbor. Terminal Island, California. November 1992.”

But logistics has never been purely concerned with statistics and mobility. Harney explains that its founding – upon the bodies of enslaved Africans as they were forced across the Atlantic – was about a desire for *access*: jurisdictional, bodily, and total.¹² Moten and Harney write that “[logistics] wants to live in the concrete itself in space at once, time at once, form at once.”¹³ In this way, modern logistics desires for the total access it once had. Sekula addresses this totalising objective as such: “Could the desire for the fully automated movement of goods also be a desire for silence, for the tyranny of a single anecdote?”¹⁴ Here Sekula is addressing the aim of logistics, which has always been to destroy all enemies of flow, starting with the subject. As such, inherently linked to violence, logistics can be viewed as the contemporary site of imperialism, with direct consequences for anyone or anything that blocks, inhibits, or resists capital. It was the shipping industry that was

¹² Stefano Harney, “Logistics Genealogies: A Dialogue with Stefano Harney,” in *Social Text* 136, 2018: 97.

¹³ Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons*: 88.

¹⁴ Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, 2018 (1995): 32.

the first trade to be globalised, launching the pattern that has since followed. This began in its modern form with ‘flags of convenience,’ beginning with the ‘open register’ of Liberia in 1948. Ships buy and fly the flag of another country, in order to avoid accountability in relation to seafarers’ wages or treatment, and any safety regulations that might otherwise apply to its country of beneficial ownership. As of 2019, ships flying the flags of Panama, Marshall Islands and Liberia accounted for 41 percent of the entire world fleet.¹⁵ This loophole is ubiquitous and routine. It is of direct consequence that, freed of international regulatory oversight, crimes on the high seas can unaccountably perpetuate, and the 2000 to 6000 seafarers who die annually as a result of lax safety practices continue to be systemically expendable.¹⁶ With no regulation, the tragedies that occur on the oceanic commons are encouraged and exploited by logistics as a by-product of profit and accumulation. The reason that logistics is so easily able to account for these instances of violence is through a logic of abstraction provided by the metaphor of flow, which creates a coalescing of the circulation of goods as a natural process. Deborah Cowen notes that the conflation of trade and nature “[casts] disruption [to trade] as a threat to life itself, ideologically buttressing active efforts to cast acts of piracy, indigenous blockades, and labor actions as matters of security subject to exceptional force.”¹⁷ As a consequence, economic wellbeing is established as a proxy for the wellbeing of people, a fact reflected in gross domestic product (GDP) statistics, the dominant measurement tool of “development” in the global economy.

¹⁵ Whereas 40% of the world’s fleet is owned by Greece, Japan, and China. “Review of Maritime Transport 2019,” UNCTAD (New York: United Nations Publications, 2019): 37 & 40.

¹⁶ Ian Urbina, “The Outlaw Ocean: Stowaways and Crimes Aboard a Scofflaw Ship” in *The New York Times*, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/19/world/stowaway-crime-scofflaw-ship.html> (accessed 16/01/2020).

¹⁷ Deborah Cowen, *Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014): 15.



Figure 3: *Utopia*: economic wellbeing as proxy for human wellbeing.
Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, “The LNG carrier *Hyundai Utopia*,
designed to transport liquified natural gas from Indonesia to South Korea,
nearing completion. Hyundair Heavy Industries shipyard. Ulsan.” September 1993.

This naturalisation of trade is one psychological effect of logistics. By alienating us from each other into individual units of labour power, capitalist sciences of management instil in us a psychology of *progress* that links together supply, production and consumption. The contemporaneous effect of this builds upon what Raymond Williams termed the “morality of improvement” established in the eighteenth century – and what Stefano Harney describes in its modern form as *kaizen*: Japanese for total quality management and continuous improvement.¹⁸ Harney describes *kaizen* as follows:

Now each person is individually responsible not just for the flow of the assembly line — wherever it flows through finance, services, unpaid work, personal health — but also the continuous improvement of that line, regardless of whether you are formally employed

¹⁸ Raymond Williams, “The Morality of Improvement,” in *The Country and the City*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975 [1973]): 60-7.

and tied to that line by a labor contract. The metric of the economy is a brutal one, and it works because logistics produces access, and access inserts the metric, in a vicious circle.”¹⁹

So self-improvement and systemic-improvement are conflated under logistical capitalism. A necessary feminist extension here comes from Anna Tsing, who argues that within the particularities of independent contracting so ubiquitous and central to supply chain capitalism, there is a blurring of boundaries between what Tsing terms ‘superexploitation’ and ‘self-exploitation.’ Superexploitation is exploitation that goes beyond general economic principles (like use-value), and depends upon “factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, age, and citizenship status,” and self-exploitation is the way in which workers “perform” these very factors in order to get by under supply chain capitalism.²⁰ Tsing gives the examples of a day labourer who must perform strength and readiness and a sex worker who must perform sexual charm. Crucially, these very performances both bring contracts and make it more and more difficult to negotiate *difference* (outside factors of gender, sexuality, and race). This irony further entrenches logistical principles of simplification, smoothing-out, what Harney terms “straightening”: as every worker is forced to perform *similarity* in order to be ‘successful.’²¹

As such, through the metaphor of flow and its conflation with *life*, and through the entrenched performance of exploitation, the space of logistics is one that is profoundly biopolitical. Humans are the “invisible connectors” in *eerie* littoral and maritime landscapes.²² To make invisible is to cast adrift, to forget, to *deep six*.²³ It is important to represent and to resurface the violence and exploitations of the high seas, and to acknowledge what hides them in the first place: to rematerialize these abstracted spaces. Examples of crises within maritime labour include crews

¹⁹ Stefano Harney, “Logistics Genealogies: A Dialogue with Stefano Harney,” in *Social Text* 136, 2018: 107.

²⁰ Anna Tsing, “Supply chains and the human condition.” *Rethinking Marxism* 21(2) (2009): 158.

²¹ Harney, “Logistics Genealogies: A Dialogue with Stefano Harney”: 108.

²² Mark Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016): 76-77.

²³ “Deep Six” is the title and theme of Allan Sekula’s work *Deep Six/Passer au Bleu* (1998). “A nautical expression indicating a water depth of six fathoms (36 feet/10.97 metres) as measured by a sounding line; “deep six” acquired its idiomatic meaning because something thrown overboard at or greater than this depth would be difficult, if not impossible, to recover.” “deep six,” *wiktionary*, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/deep_six (accessed 03/05/20).

being routinely abandoned at sea when their shipping company goes bankrupt; left with no wages or supplies and not allowed to make landfall as they are deemed illegal migrants.²⁴ Another is the prevalence of debt bondage and sea slavery. This is of direct consequence to the insatiable global demand for seafood, which institutes the human trafficking of thousands of Cambodian and Myanma seafarers to make up the yearly shortfall of fifty thousand mariners in Thailand's fishing industry.²⁵ Once at sea, these mariners are bought and sold by captains and do not return to land for years at a time, exposed to horrific conditions and even death.²⁶ The precariousness of maritime labour is a direct result of logistical infrastructures that encourage work at the extreme edge of legality and visibility: exploitation that pushes ever further for totalising access.



Figure 4: Migrant maritime Labour. Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, “Chinese dismantling crew being

²⁴ See the case of Captain Ayyappan Swaminathan and his crew from 2019 and the Hanjin bankruptcy in 2016 where 3000 crew members across the world were stranded at sea: Karen McVeigh, “Abandoned at Sea: The Crews Cast Adrift Without Fuel or Pay” in *The Guardian*, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/apr/12/abandoned-at-sea-the-crews-cast-adrift-without-food-fuel-or-pay> (accessed 16/01/2020), and “Hanjin Shipping bankruptcy causes turmoil in global sea freight,” in *The Guardian*, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/sep/02/hanjin-shipping-bankruptcy-causes-turmoil-in-global-sea-freight> (accessed 16/01/2020).

²⁵ Ian Urbina, *The Outlaw Ocean: Crime and Survival in the Last Untamed Frontier* (London: The Bodley Head, 2019): 227.

²⁶ See the case of Eiril Andrade, who died in suspicious circumstances on a Taiwanese tuna boat in 2011. Ian Urbina, “Tricked and Indebted on Land, Abused or Abandoned at Sea” *The New York Times*, 2015, (accessed 16/01/2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/09/world/asia/philippines-fishing-ships-illegal-manning-agencies.html>

bussed to their motel at the end of the day shift. Kaiser steel mill. Fontana, California. December 1993.”

So how can representation resurface such exploitations? And how can we document the supply chain without reproducing the “logistical image”; those representations which Jonathan Stafford argues are a “[f]etish for the maritime as spectacle,” in which “the container takes centre stage as the overdetermined object, a synecdochic emblem for the incomprehensible totality of capital”?²⁷ If images of the infrastructures serve only to further remove us from material realities, it becomes necessary to interrogate that which is ‘invisible’ – starting with the seafarers themselves and their labour – in order to undo the collective affect of apathy surrounding these spaces. The critical realism at work in the photography and films of Allan Sekula act to break through such representations in order to make these abstract worlds more concrete before us.

In *Fish Story*, sequential montage acts as a way to connect seafaring industries across the world, from South Korea to Galicia to California, bringing collective experience together in a way the single image cannot (see figures 2-7). The successive depiction of abandoned shipyards, unemployment offices, and a “doomed shipping village” work to establish a connection and stark interplay between a global industry and its respective systems of neglect. This creates a sense of *totality*; an inherent disregard of capitalism as the *sum of its parts* but rather as an interconnected, *planetary* sociomaterial system. We see not just one aspect of logistical neglect, but rather its varied and multi-layered form. Crucially, these interconnected but separate environs are given a *face*, as Sekula engages collective portraiture in order to establish and unite labourers across the world. These photographs are *not* eerie maritime spectacles devoid of people, but instead portraits of the very visible human linkages that simultaneously hold together the supply chain across the world. Throughout *Fish Story*, some of these portraits are shown as diptychs (figure 5 and 6), which has the effect of establishing motion and rhythm in an otherwise static form. Often these diptychs

²⁷ Jonathan Stafford, “Breaking Open the Container: The Logistical Image and the Specter of Maritime Labour,” in *“Disassembled” Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art*, edited by Alexander Streitberger and Hilde Van Gelder. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019: 164.

move between the person engaged in an activity faced away from the camera, and then a photograph of them engaged with the camera, which establishes both a sense of self-consciousness and an implication of consent in being photographed. If these photographs were just singular depictions of the work being performed, the loss of this self-consciousness would work only to create more abstract images of labour, devoid of connectedness and individual human endeavour. And if these photographs were just singular conscious portraits, we would lose the layer of rhythm and motion which tells us so much about the lived temporality of the work depicted before us. These are photographic examples of inhabiting a laborious temporality.



Figure 5-6: Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, “Cutting steel in the plate and sub-assembly shop. Hyundai Shipyards.” South Korea. September 1993.

It is this mode of critical dialogue in Sekula’s work, in which individual photographs respond to and enrich others, that provides a methodology of representational solidarity and insight. However, to look at a collection of images such as those within *Fish Story* without considering the systems that produced them would be to miss some of Sekula’s deeper work. Sekula determines that “[a] truly critical social documentary will frame the crime, the trial, and the system of justice and its official myths.”²⁸ This necessitates a look at the archive, as a vital dimension of representation.

²⁸ Allan Sekula, “Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary,” (Notes on the Politics of Representation)” in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Photography (Winter, 1978): 864.

At the heart of this concern is how photography has historically been abstracted from its context in the development of the modern archive. Crucially within his work, Sekula is conscious of the abstracting qualities that photography can impose in its attempt to create a universalising language, and he interrogates the role of the archive in its contribution to create an “*abstract visual equivalence*” between photographs and images from different contexts.²⁹ Sekula, in tracking the history of photography, notes that photographic portraiture since the nineteenth century has produced both an honorific bourgeois archive of social hierarchy and a repressive “shadow archive”: “every proper portrait has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the files of the police.”³⁰ Photography transformed the archive: the mechanical accuracy of the camera meant there was a way to ‘tame’ representation into a single symbolic order. The archive therefore haunts photographic practise today, imposing this symbolic regime upon all representation, forcing every new image to relate back to imposed institutional ‘meaning.’ This is how representation itself is “straightened” by logistics: tamed through symbolism, and filed away.

To overcome this infinite regress to the symbolic, this bourgeois abstraction, Sekula argues that context must always be present and we must always engage with any archive “from below”: “[t]he archive has to be read from below from a position of solidarity with those displaced, deformed, silenced, or made invisible by the machineries of profit and progress.”³¹ The images in *Fish Story* are deeply contextualised through their material grounding in space and time: every image has a descriptive caption, time and location. Further than this, each section of images is between essays, which both historicise and establish narratives between the photographs, linking to Sekula’s own earlier argument that the project of building a useable archive relies on the formula: *stories-photographs-stories*.³² These essays range from the more academic to the poetic, undermining

²⁹ Original emphasis. Allan Sekula, “Photography Between Labour and Capital,” in *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures 1948-1968*, edited by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983): 195.

³⁰ Allan Sekula, Sekula, Allan. “The Body and the Archive,” in *October*, Vol. 39 (Winter, 1986):

³¹ Allan Sekula, “Photography Between Labour and Capital”: 202.

³² Original emphasis. Allan Sekula, “Photography and the Limits of National Identity,” *Grey Room* no. 55, Spring 2014 [1993]: 31

authoritative writing styles from within itself. The care and detail in these essays work to show how the image alone will not suffice to tell these stories of alienation and exploitation, as, as Martha Rosler writes, “one can handle imagery by leaving it behind.”³³

But Sekula’s work is not just notable for its planetary labour solidarities. The oceanic is integral to its formulation. Writing in 2002, Sekula identified a *return to the sea* in late modern representation through the guise of the romantic and the gothic: think *Titanic* (1999), the proliferation of cruise ships, and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise (since 2003). This sense of *return* is a nostalgia for a past imagined and idealised. In its selective, romantic nature, nostalgia sanitises the irrecoverable past. The narrative of *return* has captured the collective imagination precisely in a time of political turmoil and endless war, as an escapism from the present moment. Significantly, this turn has been fed and reinforced by representation as held within the institutional archive, in which images are already separated from context, already cleansed. Sekula writes that “[t]he archive, with its presumably watertight bulkheads between iconic categories, is offered up as a space of vicarious liquid immersion, dry-land two-dimensional thalassa therapy.”³⁴ As a result, the abundance and saturation of romanticised oceanic representation further mystifies and makes abstract the tangible realities of the space of the high seas in the collective imagination. As a result, the sea becomes a blank space, what Sekula describes as “a vast reservoir of anachronisms, its representation redundant and overcoded.”³⁵

There is another thread of thinking, here, in the representational *return to the sea*. As a material witness to the abuses of logistical capitalism, perhaps the ocean itself can be reconstituted as *subject*. The oceanic, as Hester Blum argues, “in its geophysical, historical, and imaginative properties, [...] provides a new epistemology – a new dimension – for thinking about surfaces, depths, and the

³³ Martha Rosler, “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography),” *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004 [1981]): 179.

³⁴ Allan Sekula, “Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs),” in *October*, Vol. 102 (Autumn, 2002): 12.

³⁵ Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, 2018 (1995): 51.

extra-terrestrial dimensions of planetary resources and relations.”³⁶ Therefore, thinking *through* the ocean – as a space of flux and impermanence – helps us to think about scale, from the geological to the local; a method of comprehension that provides us with a space for understanding the *totality* of capital as an interconnected sociomaterial system. Sekula writes:

“In an age that denies the very existence of society, to insist on the scandal of the world's increasingly grotesque "connectedness," the hidden merciless grinding away beneath the slick superficial liquidity of markets, is akin to putting oneself in the position of the ocean swimmer, timing one's strokes to the swell, turning one's submerged ear with every breath to the deep rumble of stones rolling on the bottom far below. To insist on the social is simply to practice purposeful immersion.”³⁷

Purposeful immersion in this context is the empathic identification and creation of solidarities through points of weakness across the supply chain, and it is through these that we can begin to envision alternative futures and imaginations. Chua describes these points of vulnerability as the chokepoints, where organised resistance at concentrated points of the supply chain can literally ground circulation to a halt.³⁸ These are spaces where “the bottle of representation can burst and the sea again exceeds the limits imposed upon it by [...] romanticism.”³⁹

Another formulation of “purposeful immersion” from the Black Radical Tradition can be seen in what Moten and Harney term *hapticality*. Hapticality is the result of the Atlantic slave trade and exists as a result of the horrors of the middle passage. Hapticality is:

³⁶ Hester Blum, “Introduction: Oceanic Studies,” in *Atlantic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 151.

³⁷ Allan Sekula, “Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs)”, in *October*, Vol. 102 (Autumn, 2002), 8.

³⁸ Charmaine Chua, “Logistics, Capitalist Circulation, Chokepoints,” *The Disorder of Things*, 2014. <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2014/09/09/logistics-capitalist-circulation-chokepoints/> (accessed 29/04/2020).

³⁹ Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*: 107.

“a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you. This is modernity’s insurgent feel, its inherited caress, its skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh. This is the feel that no individual can stand, and no state abide.”⁴⁰

Crucially, Moten and Harney argue that the *practise* of hapticality is the form they refer to as *logisticality*. Logisticality is “the ability to find each other, to move together, to break the rule of Newtonian time and space, disorder it, and legislate new time and space to disorder, to gather, stranded into refuge together.”⁴¹ Counter-logistics – targeting chokepoints through blockades and strikes – is an integral approach to resisting logistical capitalism, but logisticality is positioned by Moten and Harney as a mode of resistance that exceeds the limits of the counter/logistics binary. Logisticality is instead a suggestion of our “capacity to anticipate and exceed logistics” through the collective organisation of our sensorial engagement with the world and with each other.⁴² In the practise of hapticality, Moten and Harney argue that logistics “misses most of our capacity to be a means for each other,” and it is through these means – all our “curves and swerves and reverses” – that we can deny logistics *access*, and assemble active resistance.⁴³ Logisticality – the practise of radical empathy, awareness, and care – can make us appear opaque and impenetrable to logistics. To embrace the ways we can appear opaque to logistics is another mode of resistance, as Harney argues:

Could we plot a general strike against logistical capitalism through the radical self-organization, collective organization of our senses, a commune of the senses with what Manolo Callahan calls new habits of assembly? This would be a renewed habit of the assembly of means, by any means necessary, our haptical, subnautical assembly.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons*: 98.

⁴¹ Stefano Harney, “Logistics Genealogies: A Dialogue with Stefano Harney,” in *Social Text* 136, 2018: 98.

⁴² *Ibid.*: 108.

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 108.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 110.



Figure 7: Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, “Workers gathering on the waterfront at the end of a nationwide general strike opposing the Socialist government’s cutbacks in unemployment benefits.”
Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992.

The work of resurfacing is the work of undermining logistics through deliberate recourse to collective solidarities that rehumanise, rematerialize, respatialise. The work of Sekula combines context and connections across spaces to critique the globalised narrative of flow in logistical capitalism, in order to concretise the lived realities of those dispossessed and excluded from the limited and unsustainable benefits of the capitalist *world order*. As Sekula says in the opening quote, this is the work of digging in the earth in order to establish a *counter-forensic* archive. The site of the ocean is a vital site in this project, as Moten and Harney argue, as “what might look like smooth sailing, flat waters, flat being, is not so undisturbed. Uncertainty surrounds the holding of things and...logistics discovers too late that the sea has no back door.”⁴⁵ The hidden, concealed, contained will one day wash up on shore.

⁴⁵ Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*: 91.

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