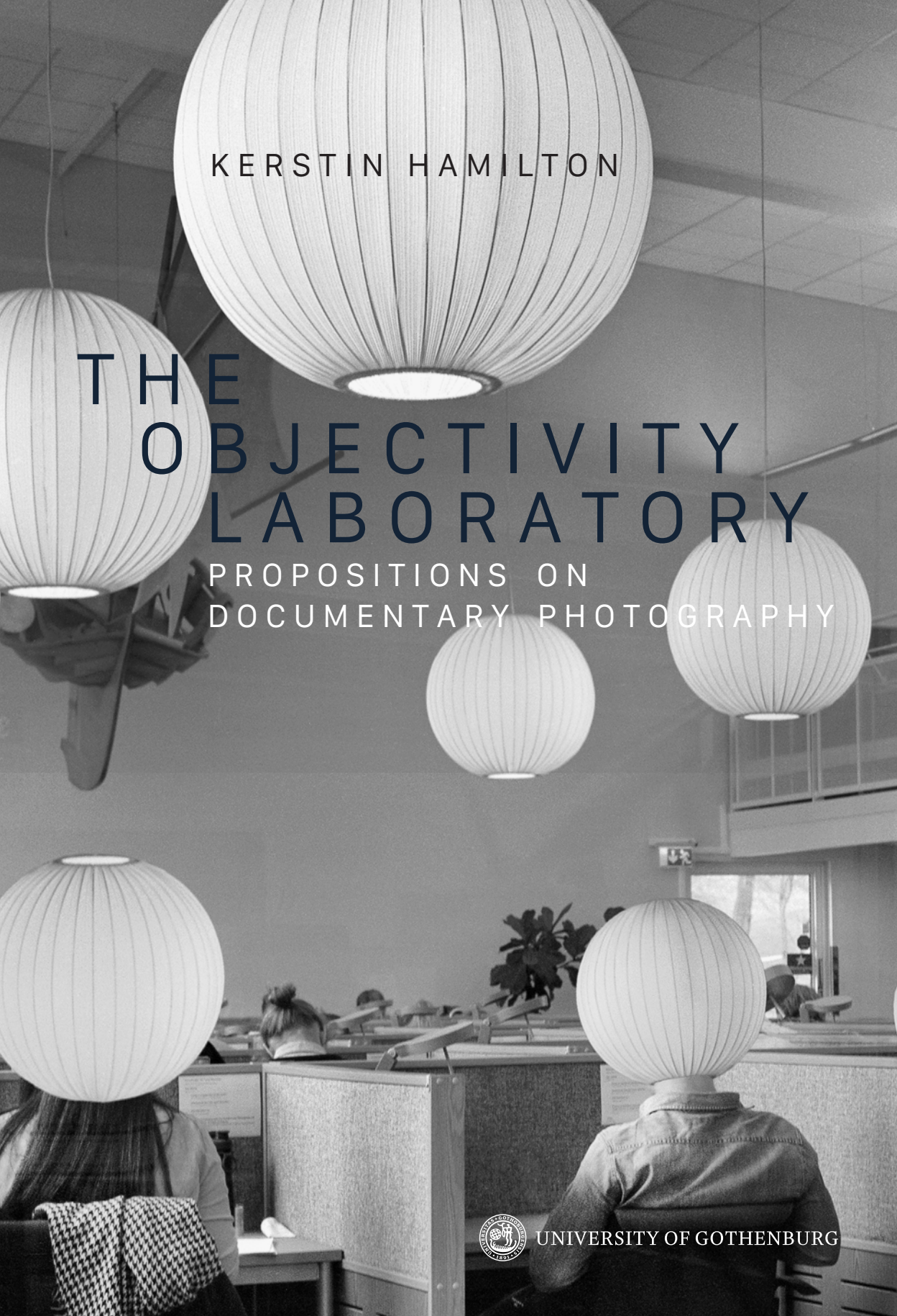


KERSTIN HAMILTON

THE OBJECTIVITY LABORATORY

PROPOSITIONS ON DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

the objectivity laboratory

KERSTIN HAMILTON

THE OBJECTIVITY LABORATORY

PROPOSITIONS ON DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Artistic Practice (konstnärlig gestaltning)
at HDK-Valand—Academy of Art and Design,
Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts,
University of Gothenburg

Published by the University of Gothenburg
(Dissertations)

This doctoral dissertation is No 91 in the series
ArtMonitor Doctoral Dissertations and Licentiate
theses, at the Faculty of Fine, Applied, and
Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg
www.konst.gu.se/artmonitor

Graphic design: Richard Lindmark

Repro: Eva-Teréz Gölin

English proofreading: Helen Runting

Style: The Chicago Manual of Style

Front and back cover: Kerstin Hamilton from
the series *A World Made by Science*, 2018.

All images without caption: Kerstin Hamilton

All quotes without reference are excerpts from
the interviews in the exhibition catalogue *Dear
Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary
Photography* (2021).

Visual material: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/
profile/?person=1559727

**Gothenburg University Publications Electronic Archive
(GUPEA):** http://hdl.handle.net/2077/70822

Print: Stema Specialtryck, Borås, Sweden, 2022

ISBN: 978-91-8009-725-3 (printed version)

ISBN: 978-91-8009-726-0 (digital version)

ABSTRACT

At a moment in history when "post-truth" and "alternative facts" epitomize a political and media landscape that feeds on the circulation of doubt and distrust, *The Objectivity Laboratory: Propositions on Documentary Photography* addresses ethical dilemmas that emerge when artists' approach the realities and experiences of others.

Prominent photography criticism in the 1970s and 1980s brought a heightened awareness to the politics of representation, resulting in the emergence of a "documentary distrust." My main objective in this research is to articulate "propositions" that address the documentary blockages that define photography's framework and possibilities. The propositions—assembled under the headings MONTAGE, INVESTIGATION, RESISTANCE, and NEARBY—seek to contribute to the dynamic dialogue that has evolved in documentary photography in recent years, which has approached photography as an expandable and unfixed practice.

Truth and a "situated objectivity" are investigated as radical tools in the artist's approach of urgent matters in the world. A commitment to credible, rich, situated knowledges with a basis in reality materializes. Through a research project that has aimed to explore and appreciate the possibilities of photography anew, I ultimately suggest that documentary photography has the potential to lead to important knowledges about the world. This potential, I go on to argue, builds on a responsiveness in relation to the violations that photography can inflict. Values of critical reflexivity, ethics, and responsibility unfold as essential

documentary attributes. *The Objectivity Laboratory* has been formulated as a search for considered and considerate procedures in the documentary engagement with the world. In the pursuit of reliable knowledges and counter-narratives, transformation, reflection, and contestation emerge as integral aspects of reliability and credibility.

The research is anchored in practice; developed in dialogue with artists and artworks, it is led by the primary research methods of artistic and curatorial practice. The natural sciences—the setting for my artistic practice—has inspired the theoretical outlooks and overall focus of the research and particularly Karen Barad and Donna Haraway's perspectives, developed within feminist science studies, have acted as a catalyst in the quest for productive takes on contemporary documentary photography.

Keywords: Documentary photography, situated objectivity, montage, truths, ethics, nearby, investigation, resistance

Title: The Objectivity Laboratory: Propositions on Documentary Photography

Language: English with a Swedish Summary

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

I am in a state-of-the-art laboratory that is commonly referred to as a "cleanroom." People in white overalls move in a controlled manner, their voices drowned out by the constant, monotonous sound of machines. They are scientists, engaged in nanotechnology research and nanomanufacturing: they work at the scale of a billionth of a meter.

Nanotechnology is a revolution; it breaks the established boundaries between human and the technological machine, upsetting binary opposed dualisms. Nanoparticles are everywhere. We breathe nanoparticles, but we can't see them. For humans to experience nanoscale societies, we must imagine and image the particles—specialized apparatuses are our link to these miniature worlds. This begs the question: How can an existence so small that no human eye could ever perceive it be portrayed? How does the image correlate with the world that it depicts?

CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

The Objectivity Laboratory: Propositions on Documentary Photography is a practice-based PhD research project that was conducted at HDK-Valand at the University of Gothenburg and carried out by way of artistic and curatorial research. The PhD adopts the submission format of a compilation thesis, consisting of three distinct but interlinked parts:

(i) The three artworks *Zero Point Energy* (2016), *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018), and *A World Made by Science* (2018);

(ii) The curated exhibition project *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography* (2021), which includes an exhibition catalogue;

(iii) A book, or "kappa" (2022).

The kappa—this book—comprises of three main parts, of which the first is titled "Framework." In the six sections (I-VI) of the framework, the essential details of the research project are put forward and the contents of the kappa is outlined. Section I details the research aims and questions; Section II provides a concise overview of the research method and theory; Section III introduces the research field and delimitations; Section IV presents two *backdrops* that reveal key perspectives and circumstances that have impacted the direction of the research; Section V is composed as a timeline, which allows for a narrative account of my method, methodology, and the research setting; and Section VI outlines the kappa's next part, "Propositions," and introduces the artistic perspectives and theoretical deliberations that unfold in the kappa.

Propositions is the second and largest part of the kappa. Here, a series of interlocutors are introduced to contextualize and expand the practice-based research. Theoretical considerations are interconnected with the perspectives that materialized in interviews with the artists involved in *Dear Truth*. The insights gained throughout the research process are put forward as a series of propositions, which the reader is invited to approach as flexible, unsettled, and nondefinitive: what is presented is a framework, rather than a completed case. That said, the montage of propositions put forward here (titled MONTAGE, INVESTIGATION, RESISTANCE, and NEARBY) are not intended to be elusive; they serve as coherent, concrete, and pragmatic provocations that speak to the research aim.

Lastly, the third and final part of the kappa is titled "Closing Notes"; this part sums up the most important contributions of the research.

A series of image spreads precede the three parts outlined above; these spreads present the artworks and the curated exhibition, using visual documentation and information that describes the practical details of the respective works.

IMAGE SPREADS—

—THREE ARTWORKS AND ONE CURATORIAL PROJECT

A WORLD MADE BY SCIENCE

Format Series of nineteen photos mounted on aluminium, each 70×100 cm.

Year 2018

Exhibition premiere The Riga Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA1), Latvia, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 2018. Chief curator: Katerina Gregos.


THE WORLD'S SMALLEST MACHINES

Image from *A World Made by Science* (2018).


IN AIR
IN BODY
IN MIND
IN POLITICS
IN SOCIETY

Image from *A World Made by Science* (2018).

THE DISCOVERY VOID

1928

Penicillin discovered by sir Alexander Flemming

1943-1979

A large number of antibiotics are developed

1987

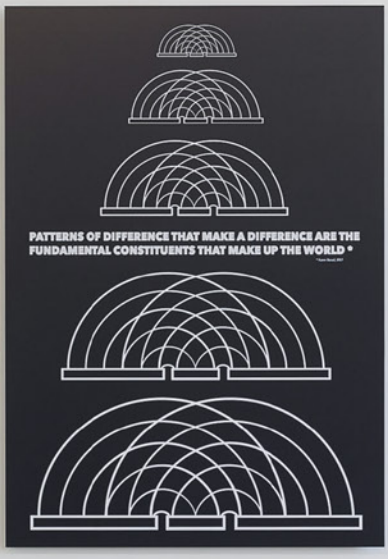
The last successful discovery of a new class of antibiotics

POST-ANTIBIOTIC ERA

Left: Image from *A World Made by Science* (2018).

Following spread: Installation image from the Riga Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA1), Latvia, 2018. Photo: Vladimir Svetlov. Courtesy of the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art.


PROVE-IT-AGAIN & THE TIGHTROPE

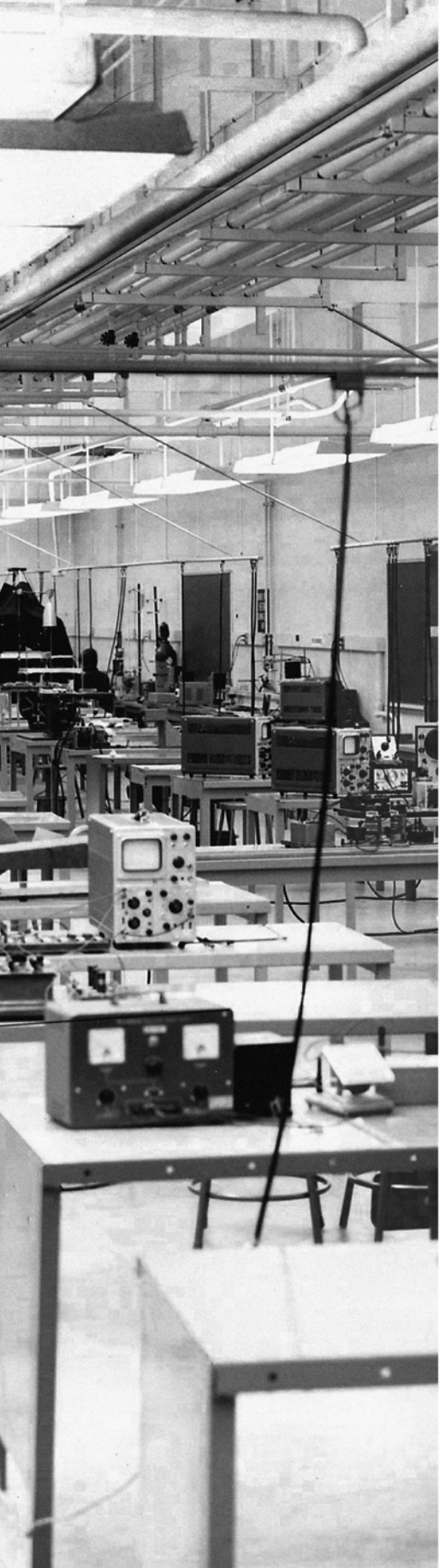

PATTERNS OF DIFFERENCE THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE ARE THE
FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUENTS THAT MAKE UP THE WORLD *

Installation image from the Riga Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA1), Latvia, 2018. Photo: Ivan Erofeev. Courtesy of the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art.

A-T G-C

In nanotechnology, DNA – fundamental to all known forms of life – is used as a non-biological engineering material.

Image from *A World Made by Science* (2018).



We live in a world made by science. But we — the millions of laymen — do not understand or appreciate the knowledge which thus controls daily life.

To obtain wide popular support for science, to that end that we may explore this vast subject even further and bring as yet unexplored areas under control, there needs to be a friendly interpreter between science and the layman.

I believe that photography can be this spokesman, as no other form of expression can be; for photography, the art of our time, the mechanical, scientific medium which matches the pace and character of our era, is attuned to the function. There is an essential unity between photography, science's child, and science, the parent.

Yet so far the task of photographing scientific subjects and endowing them with popular appeal and scientific correctness has not been mastered. The function of the artist is needed here, as well as the function of the recorder. The artist through history has been the spokesman and conservator of human and spiritual energies and ideas. Today science needs its voice. It needs the vivification of the visual image, the warm human quality of imagination added to its austere and stern disciplines. It needs to speak to the people in terms they will understand. They can understand photography preeminently.

To me, this function of photography seems extraordinarily urgent and exciting. Scientific subject matter may well be the most thrilling of today. My hope of moving into this new field comes logically in my own evolution as a photographer.

...

The problem of documenting science, of presenting its realistic subject matter with the same integrity as one portrays the culture morphology of our civilization, and yet of endowing this material so strange and unfamiliar to the public with the poetry of its own vast implications, would seem to me to lead logically from my previous experience.

...

Berenice Abbott
New York City, April 24, 1939

Image from *A World Made by Science* (2018).

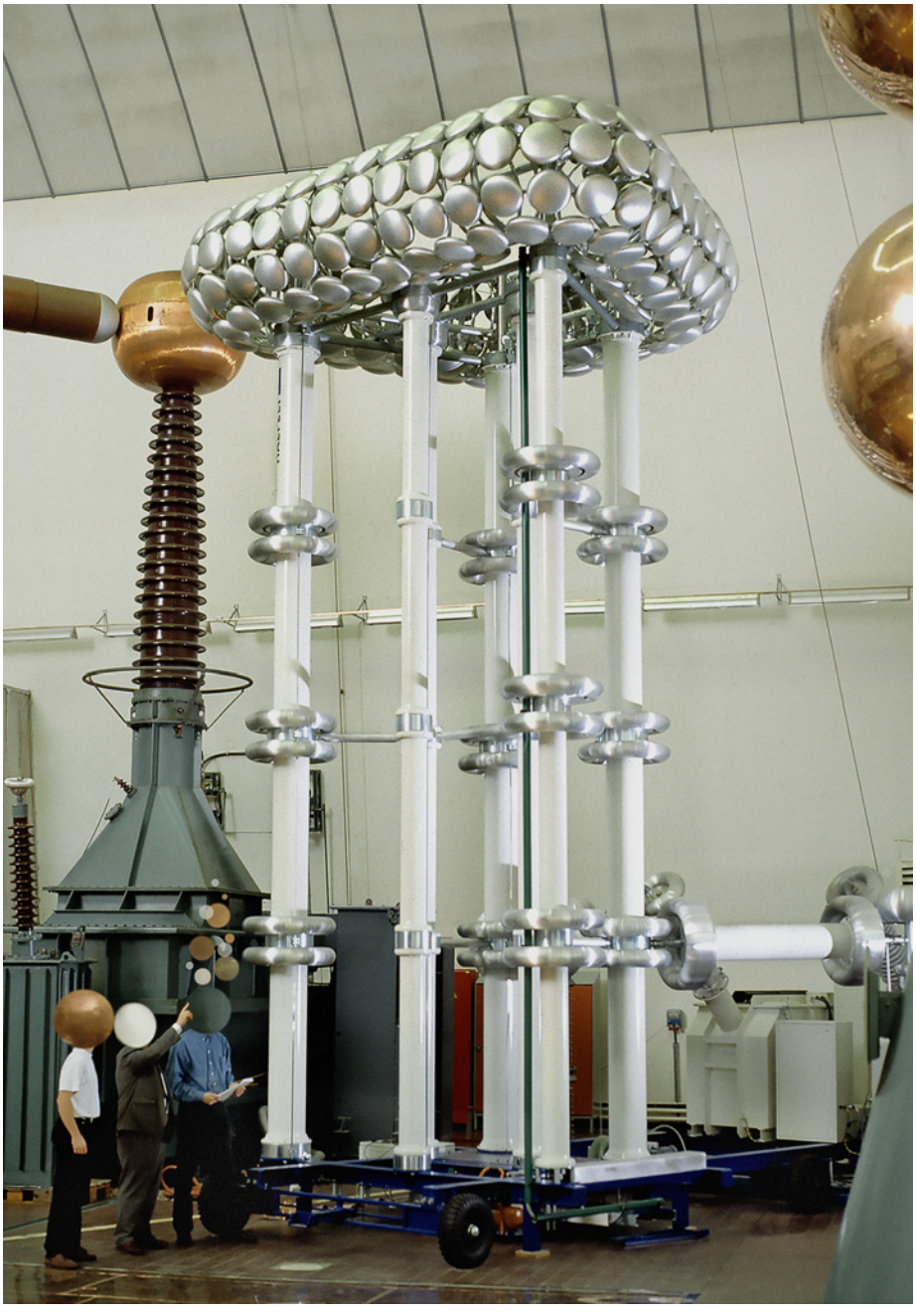
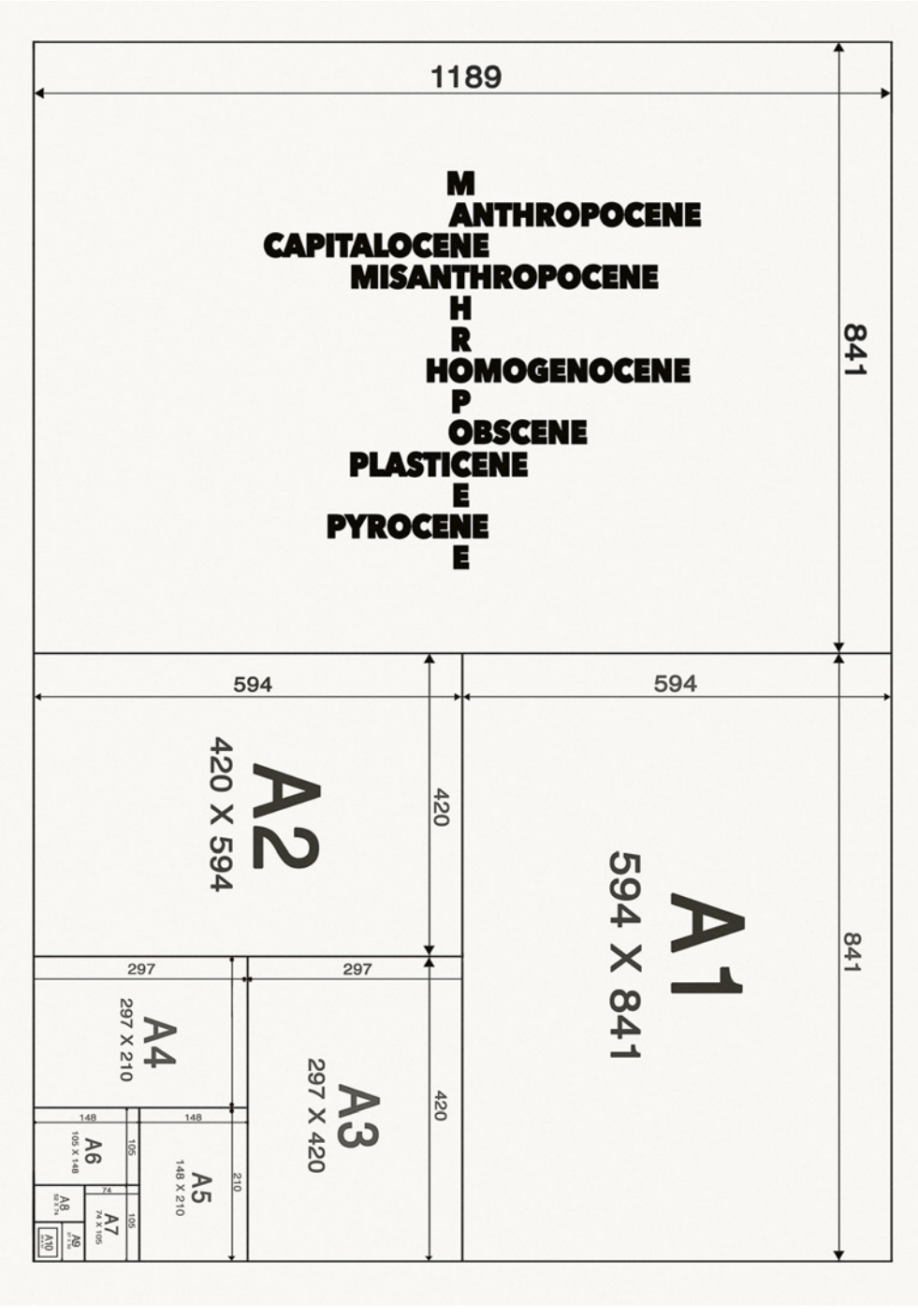


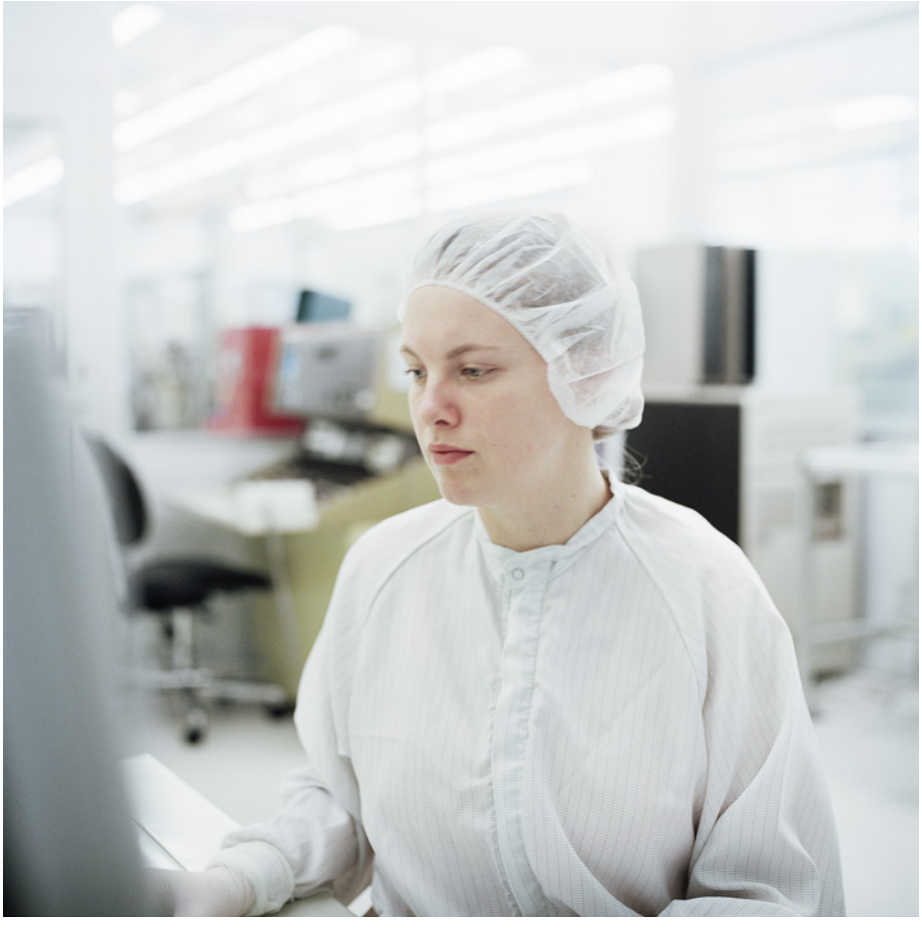
Image from *A World Made by Science* (2018).


1189
841
M
ANTHROPOCENE
CAPITALOCENE
MISANTHROPOCENE
H
R
HOMOGENOCENE
P
OBSCENE
PLASTICENE
E
PYROCENE
E
594
594
841
A1
594 X 841
420
A2
420 X 594
297
297
420
A3
297 X 420
A4
297 X 210
148
148
105
210
A6
105 X 148
A5
148 X 210
74
105
A8
A7
A9
A10

Above: Lena Nyberg, Biology and Biological Engineering, Chemical Biology, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden.

Right: Maria Ekström, Microtechnology and Nanoscience—MC2, Quantum Technology Laboratory, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden.

Images from *A World Made by Science* (2018).



WE LIVE IN A WORLD MADE BY SCIENCE *

* Berenice Abbott, Photography & Science Manifesto (1939)

Image from *A World Made by Science* (2018).

ZERO POINT ENERGY

Format Video, single-channel, color, sound, 18:39 minutes.

Year 2016

Exhibition premiere Moderna Museet in Stockholm and Malmö, Sweden. *The New Human*, 2016. Curator: Joa Ljungberg.

Additional information
Directed by Kerstin Hamilton
Produced by Kerstin Hamilton and Jonas Hannestad
Music composed and performed by Lena Nyberg and Emma Ringqvist
Choreography and dance by Anna Asplind
Production coordinator and editing by Patrik Johansson
Cinematograpy by Victor Ny ker and Camilla Topuntoli
Location sound by Patrik Johansson, Lena Nyberg and Camilla Topuntoli
Additional mixing and mastering by Amir Shoat
Color grading by Nikolai Waldman
Cast Astghik Adamyan, Amin. A Banaeiyan, Marlene Bonmann, Simon Bonmann, Maria Ekström, Oana Georgescu, Gavin Jeffries, Juliane Junesch, Maria Karani, Anna Malmros, Sobhan Sepheri, and Jing Wang

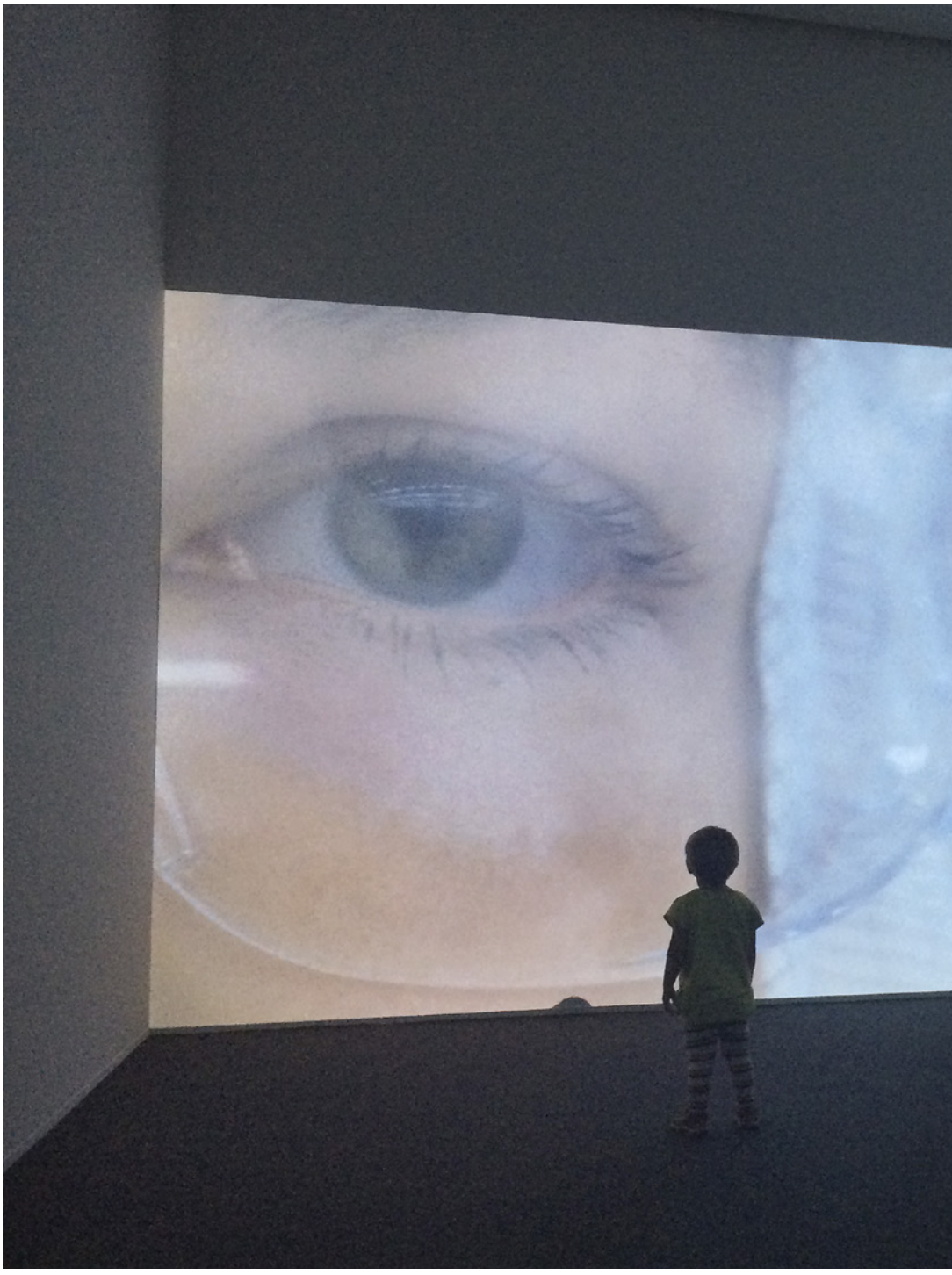
Filmed at the Nanofabrication Laboratory at Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden.

With the support of Hasselblad Foundation, Chalmers University of Technology, and Lund University.

Zero Point Energy is available at https://vimeo.com/230726279.

Left: Still image from the video *Zero Point Energy* (2016).

Following spread: Installation image of *The New Human*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden, 2016.



THE SCIENCE QUESTION IN FEMINISM

Format Seven digital montages printed on birch plywood mounted in glass vitrines, each 21×29×22 cm.

Year 2018

Exhibition premiere The Riga Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA1), Latvia, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 2018. Chief curator: Katerina Gregos.

Following page (left): **LISE MEITNER**

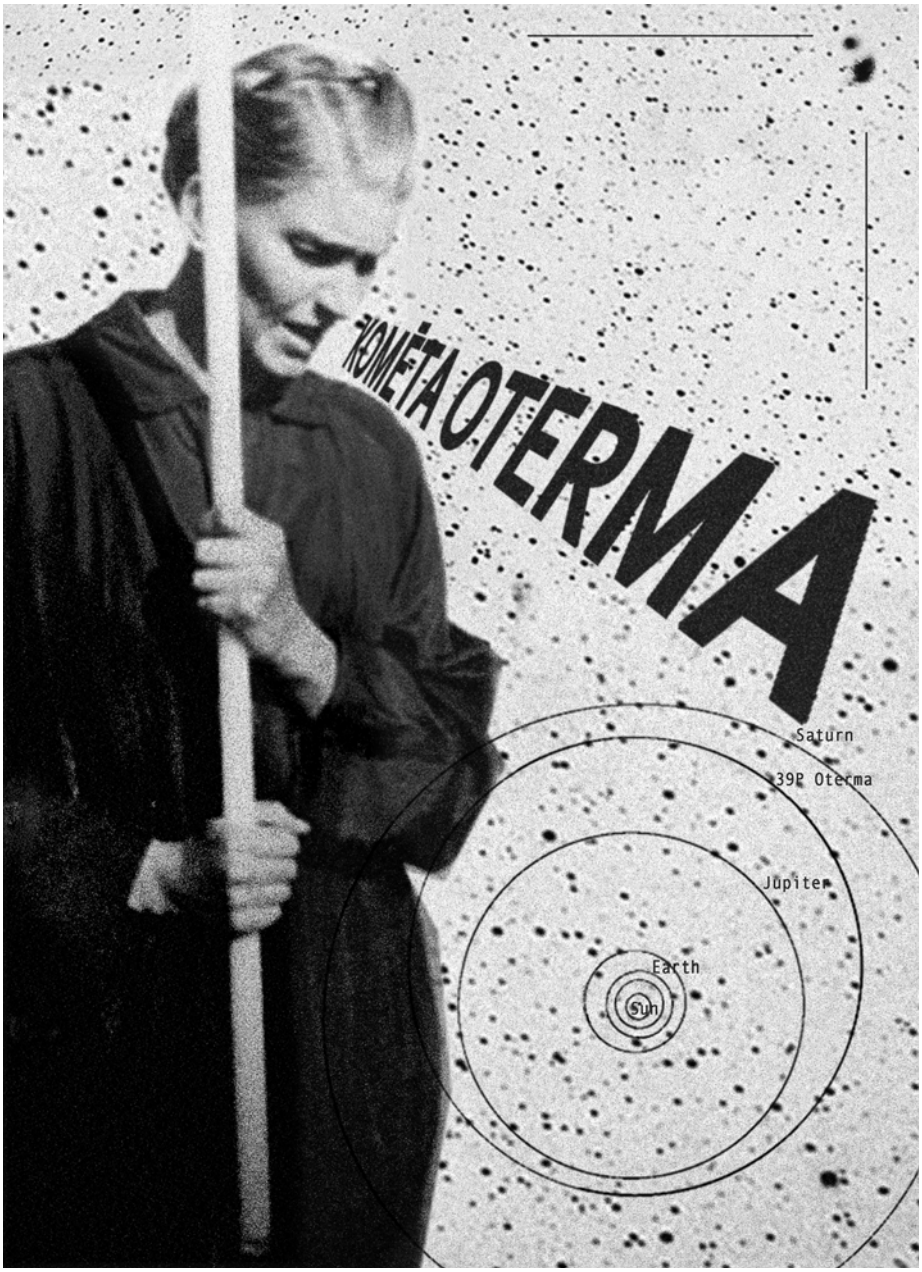
PHYSICIST, AUSTRIA/SWEDEN

b. 1878, VIENNA
d. 1968, CAMBRIDGE

Meitner realized and articulated the physical process of nuclear fission. Nuclear fission was subsequently used by the military industry in the development of nuclear weapon. In the US, the research mission code-named The Manhattan Project was initiated in 1942, with the aim of developing the first atomic bomb. Meitner declined involvement in the project, stating "I will have nothing to do with a bomb."

Meitner was nominated for the Nobel Prize a total of 48 times but never won.

Text and image from *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018).


KOMÉTA OTERMA
Saturn
139P Oterma
Jupiter
Earth
Sun

Previous page (right): **LIISI OTERMA**

ASTRONOMER, FINLAND

b. 1915, TURKU
d. 2001, TURKU

Oterma was the first woman in Finland to obtain a PhD degree in astronomy. She discovered over two hundred small planets and three comets. One of her major discoveries was the comet Oterma, which was captured as a barely noticeable object on a photo plate in 1943. In 1971, she became director of the Tuorla Observatory at the University of Turku, the largest astronomical research institute in Finland.

Right: **VYDA RAGULSKIENĖ**

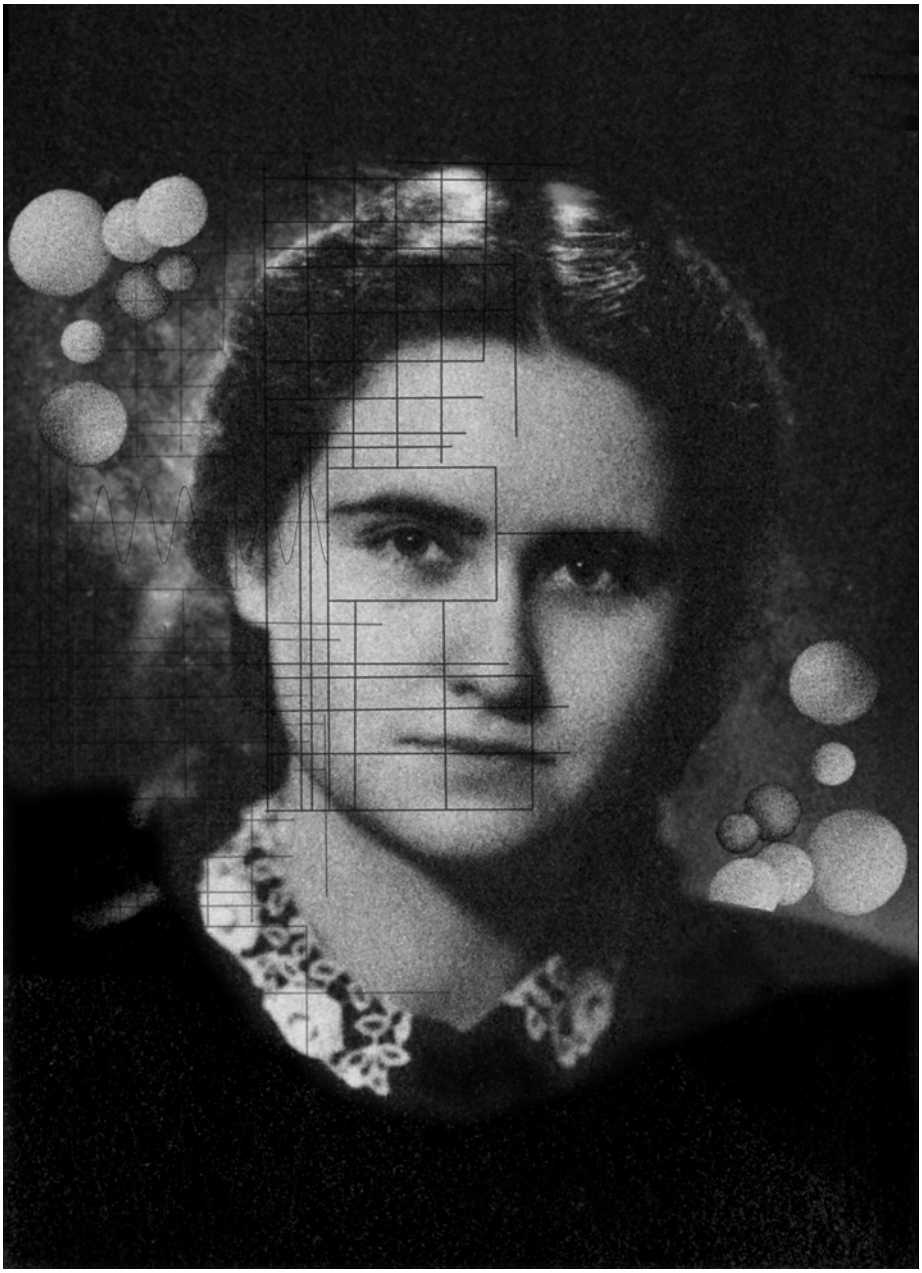
SCIENTIST/INVENTOR, LITHUANIA

b. 1931, DAPŠIAI
d. 2009, MAŽEIKIAI

Ragulskiene's research exposed and illuminated new phenomena of non-linear vibro-impact systems. She was the co-author of six research monographs, two hundred research papers, and ninety-seven patents. Vyda Ragulskiene was the first woman to become Dr. Habil. of Technical Sciences in Lithuania

Texts and images from *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018).

Following spread: Installation image of *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.



The following three pages: Installation images of *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.


KOMÉTA OTERMA
Saturn
Jupiter

DEAR TRUTH: DOCUMENTARY STRATEGIES IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

Format Curated thematic group exhibition and exhibition catalogue.

Year 2021

Exhibition venue Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden

Participating artists Laia Abril, Mathieu Asselin, Lara Baladi, Kerstin Hamilton, Karlsson Rixon, Bouchra Khalili, Frida Orupabo, Trevor Paglen, and Taryn Simon

Additional information
Documentation of the exhibition, a downloadable exhibition catalogue, and further exhibition material (such as video interviews and video introductions) are compiled at https://www.hasselbladfoundation.org/wp/portfolio_page/dear-truth-2/.

Right: Exhibition catalogue, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography* (2021).

Following spread: *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021; façade, Göteborgs Konstmuseum.

Hasselblad Center, Spring 2021

Dear Truth

Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography

Artists:
Laia Abril
Mathieu Asselin
Lara Baladi
Kerstin Hamilton
Karlsson Rixon
Bouchra Khalili
Frida Orupabo
Trevor Paglen
Taryn Simon
Curator:
Kerstin Hamilton


ÖTEBORGS KONSTMUSEUM
entre


DEAR
TRUTH
Documentary Strategies
in Contemporary
Photography

F R A M E

W O R K

I. IN SEARCH OF POTENTIALS: RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The aim of this research project has been to articulate a series of propositions that are able to perform as "tools" in approaching the documentary blockages of past decades—blockages which continue to define photography's framework and possibilities in the contemporary art context.[1] In this way, *The Objectivity Laboratory* constitutes a response to the critical photography discourse that matured in the late 1970s, which has fueled and provoked distrust, skepticism, and hesitancy in relation to photography's capacity to addresses social realities.

The research investigation began with, and continuously returned to, practice, examining the ways in which contemporary artists have been able to reinvigorate documentary photography by asking: How do contemporary practitioners explicitly and implicitly grapple with the documentary concerns that arise when approaching sociopolitical realities? Which methods, methodologies, and perspectives can be discerned in their work that may advance documentary photography practice and theory?

The Objectivity Laboratory synthesizes a range of theoretical perspectives

1—The idea of the "contemporary" in art has been troubled by art historian Dan Karlholm, who argues that the contemporary has become a permanent state. He suggests rather that contemporary art may be specified as "actualized art"—that is, art which is realized in action/made actual. This is not necessarily dependent on the moment when it was made. Introducing the notion of "contemporaneity" to designate a *qualitative* marker, Karlholm refers to works that address social and political topics that are deemed as urgent, which he argues is of greater consequence than the contemporary label, which simply indicates that works sharing the same time. The notion of contemporaneity as an indication of topicality is relevant to the research. Even though the research primarily focuses on art made in the present, the idea that not only *new* art can be regarded as (potentially) contemporary is a stimulating perspective to be explored in research projects to come. I further note that the "art context," as it is approached in this research, refers to a broad composition of institutions that contain works that are proposed and received *as art* by the artworld. Dan Karlholm, *Kontemporalism: om samtidskonstens historia och framtid* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2014); Dan Karlholm, "After Contemporary Art: Actualization and Anachrony," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 51 (2016): 35–54.

and conceptual positions, contributing to the dynamic and critical dialogue that has evolved in documentary photography in recent years by unfolding generative propositions that are able to reinvigorate the field's practice and language.

II. INTRODUCTION TO METHOD AND THEORY

Artistic practice and curatorial practice constitute the primary research methods employed in *The Objectivity Laboratory*. Both methods allowed me to approach the research questions through experimentation via the instigation of a series of tests, as well as practice-based procedures of making and mapping artworks. The research methods and theoretical framework developed, as a result, causally—that is, the practice-based activities triggered various theoretical inquiries, allowing the project to progress without having to follow a predetermined course of events.

In Section V, a detailed account of the research method and methodology is offered in a discussion which is structured as a narrative, addressing the how, why, where, and when of the research. Section VI outlines the theoretical perspectives that informed the research; these perspectives are interwoven with an outline of the following part of the kappa, "Propositions." Reflections on methods and the theoretical basis of the research are necessary embedded in the conditions with which they are entangled—these reflections are discussed and contextualized in Sections V and VI. However, the present section provides a concise overview of the research method and theoretical framework, condensing a number of central aspects.

Three artworks are included within this PhD: *Zero Point Energy* (2016), *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018), and *A World Made by Science* (2018). Their making combined acts of observation and observational photography, archival research, intervention into physical sites and visual materials, and experimentation. The curated group exhibition, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography* (2021) likewise acted as a site of experimentation and investigation, where empirical knowledge was attained through curatorial explorations. The semi-structured interviews that were carried out with the artists in *Dear Truth* distinguished it from the artistic pro-

jects in terms of method; in my work with the exhibition catalogue, writing emerged as a further primary method of inquiry.

Throughout the research process, an engagement with existing literature impacted on the direction of practice. The literature review thus unfolds across the four parts of Propositions —MONTAGE, INVESTIGATION, RESISTANCE, and NEARBY. The entry of theory into the research in the form of *propositions* accentuates that what is on offer here is a framework of possibilities rather than a complete series of conclusions. Perspectives from a diversity of fields are set in play in Propositions: they are interwoven through discussions anchored in documentary photography practice. The theoretical perspectives that have informed the research draw on feminist science studies, anthropology, journalism, media studies, multidisciplinary research, and of course photography. *The Objectivity Laboratory* sets up interchanges that locate relevant interstices in relation to the various knowledge spheres, deducing possibilities in relation to documentary blockages. It should be acknowledged that of all the views that came into sight in the writing of the kappa, the thinking of the theoretical physicist Karen Barad and that of the biologist and theorist of science Donna Haraway exerted a continuous presence from the early stages of the research: it was to these scholars that I kept returning, and it was these voices that continued to challenge me throughout the course of the work.

III. REALITY RETURNS: RESEARCH FIELD AND DELIMITATIONS

The research's investment in documentary photography builds on an understanding of photography as being radically expandable and unfixed. My own relationship with photography has been shaped by my work as an artist, educator, and practice-based artistic researcher in Sweden and Ireland since 2002, and I have approached this research—its questions, aims, and issues—from a position of familiarity.

The concept of *documentary photography* is broad, flexible, unrelentingly questioned, and in constant transition. At times, it points in the direction of photojournalism and the politically motivated visualizations of dismal realities; at others, it encompasses profoundly subjective and time-consuming per-

sonal explorations. To delineate how the notion of documentary photography is pursued in *The Objectivity Laboratory*, a working definition is called for. In the research, documentary photography refers to artworks[2] that are rooted in discernible sociopolitical experiences, whereby subjects have a basis in reality and something that is not entirely fiction is located; such artworks point to matters of concern that are at least partially outside of subjectivity.[3]

The various ways in which photography has been employed and approached in recent decades have led artists in the direction of the theatrical, the conceptual, and the speculative. The option of working with staged tableaus, fictional accounts, and the accentuation of the artist's subjective position has offered productive alternatives to the challenges connected with photographically approaching social realities. Stressing the performative aspects of photography has largely been understood as offering inspiring possibilities, whereas photography that is seen to be more traditional or "straight" has faced the challenge of being perceived as naïvely putting faith in photography's ability to *represent* reality (an argument which is elaborated below and further contextualized in Section IV, "One: Documentary Distrust").

The tendency to disregard documentary photography penetrated the art context in the late 1970s, when prominent criticism brought a heightened awareness to the politics of representation. The intense, and highly influential, critique that was put forward at the time was not only widely accepted but became all-pervasive: whilst the camera's ability to generate images that visually resemble the reality in front of the lens is here considered to be one of photography's principal strengths, in the art context this capacity has often been theorized as a burden.[4] Although this rejection of the idea of photography as a straight-up record of reality was crucially important, the research has rather been concerned with an observation that artist Martha Rosler

2—The research mainly focuses on the expanded field of lens-based media that includes video, montage, text, digital imagery, and installation. "Artworks" can, reflecting the research focus and delimitation, be approached in line with what the founder of The New Museum in New York, Marcia Tucker, proposed in 1984 when she defined works of art to be "repositories for ideas that reverberate in the larger context of our culture." Marcia Tucker, *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), vii.

3—For examples of literature that introduces perspectives related to this approach to documentary photography, see: Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, eds., *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art* #1 (New York: Sternberg Press, 2008); Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg, *Documentary Across Disciplines* (Berlin: The MIT Press, 2016); Haus der Kulturen der Welt and Julian Stallabrass, ed. *Documentary* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2013).

4—See for instance: John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1988).

made towards the end of the 1980s, namely: "Without some reference to the real, there's no place of departure."[5] Rosler thereby acknowledged "the real" as the genesis of documentary work, specifying a starting point that is notoriously difficult but one that I have been keen to insist upon and to stay with. As such, *The Objectivity Laboratory* explores how our understanding of photography's problematic relation to reality can be updated by paying renewed attention to matters of truth and objectivity. "Why would we (still) want to discuss truth and photography?" one might ask. Because, a response to this question might pose, these matters are crucial to our ability to acknowledge and appreciate the possibilities of photography in new ways. The focus on truth and objectivity in this research has also been augmented by an exploration of the idea of a "present moment" (see Section IV, "Two: Present Truth"), a notion epitomized by the increased presence of terms such as "alternative facts" and "post-truth," which raise other questions in relation to truth than those advanced within postmodernism.[6]

Artworks are often pervaded by a combination of speculation and testimony—positions which are not in opposition to each other—but *The Objectivity Laboratory's* central focus is on undertakings that take the famously labelled "actuality" as their point of departure.[7] Actuality is a term that is as loose around the edges as the idea (advanced previously) of something "having a basis in reality." This looseness is intentional: while this research does not pose reality in being in opposition to fictionalization, theatricality, speculation, or imagination, it does entertain a predisposition towards the former. The research thus seeks to

5—Martha Rosler in an interview from 1989 reprinted in: Glenn Harper, ed. *Interventions and Provocations: Conversations on Art, Culture, and Resistance* (State University of New York Press: New York, 1998), 10.

6—A distinctive feature of postmodernism in art is the ironic, anti-authoritarian critique of universal, objective truths. In philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), postmodernism is analyzed with particular attention to knowledge. The postmodern condition, Lyotard argues, has led to the disappearance of old forms of scientific legitimation with the breakdown of dominant ideals of neutral, universal truths. Largely due to new technology, metanarratives (that is, the attempt to offer totalizing, universal knowledge claims relating to for instance historical events or an unyielding belief in progress) were pushed out and abandoned, giving way instead to localized truths and narratives. Knowledge increasingly becomes a commodity (the *mercantilization* of knowledge); the postmodern condition entails that a knowledge claim's truth-value is exceeded by its market value. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984 {1979}).

7—John Grierson wrote in 1933 that experimentality and theory, as well as "a creative treatment of actuality" are at the very core of the documentary and introduced the phrase "experimental documentary," although he did not expand on this concept further. John Grierson, "The Documentary Producer," *Cinema Quarterly* (1933–34), https://archive.org/details/cinema02gdro/page/n13/mode/2up?view=theater.

expand the vigorous and fruitful documentary discussions that characterize the photography field by introducing new perspectives on the heavily problematized notions of truth and objectivity. In the recent PhD project *Speculative Documentary Photography* (2021), artist-researcher Max Pinckers presents other documentary potentials, suggesting that "speculation is not a lack of truth but the first step in the process of knowledge."[8] In response to this position, *The Objectivity Laboratory* contributes to the field by asking: What may come after the phase of speculation? What follows the speculative? The proven, the safe, or the solid? The truthful, the real, the objective, or the testimonial? The committed, the interested, or the attentive? Or, perhaps, the factual, the responsible, or the credible?

Artist Allan Sekula, a contemporary with Rosler, upheld a critical-affirmative relationship with documentary photography, which art historian Steve Edwards has referred to as a "dialectical documentary"—he explains, "To this effect, [Sekula] refused to pursue the route of staged photography that he helped open."[9] This precise delimitation—that is, the documentary that does not primarily walk the path of staged photography—provides this research with its principal framework, allowing me enough flexibility to avoid conflating fact with fiction, and the not-so-staged with the staged.

In her analysis of the documentary, media scholar Erika Balsom (2017) finds that the idea that reality is best accessed through "artifice" today constitutes a new "orthodoxy."[10] She contends that "we breathe the stale, recirculated air of doubt"—documentary disbelief recirculates, telling us nothing new, since "we" (a "we" which implies a general assembly of artists, critics, historians, and some audiences) are already profoundly skeptical.[11]

Photography criticism has in recent years inserted fresh air into this stale pocket of suspicion and mistrust. Art historian John Roberts has endeavored to restore the discussion of photography as a truth-producing medium; given the epistemological anxiety about photography, photography theorist Ariella Aïsha

8—Max Pinckers, *Speculative Documentary Photography* (Universiteit Gent. Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, 2021), 300.

9—Steve Edwards, "Obituary: Socialism and the sea: Allan Sekula, 1951–2013," *Radical Philosophy* (Nov-Dec 2013), https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/obituary/socialism-and-the-sea.

10—Erika Balsom, "The Reality-Based Community" (2017), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/. In a related vein, philosopher Bruno Latour (2004) has contended in relation to the humanities that the critical spirit seems to have run out of steam. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225–248.

11—Balsom, "The Reality-Based Community."

Azoulay has rewritten the ontology of photography; and feminist theorist of visual culture and contemporary art Tina M. Campt has explored the dismantlement of the white gaze and articulated "a Black Gaze" in search of active ways of seeing *with*, *through*, and *alongside* suffering and joy.[12] Other important recent contributions to the development of photography theory include those made by art historian and cultural critic T. J. Demos, art historian Tanya Sheehan, and Susie Linfield.[13]

While the days of understanding the correspondence between reality and its representation in terms of a mirror image are over, a degree of wariness remains with respect to the relationship between the real and the documentary, which is manifested in the resolute dismissal of observational strategies by many artists.[14] The awareness of the impossibility of achieving wholly noninterventionist representations is today firmly established: "To assert such things is to tell us what we already know. And so why does it happen so often, whether explicitly or implicitly, in documentary theory and practice?"[15] Balsom's question reveals an intricate inconsistency that has been central to this research. Whilst disbelief in the photograph's ability to directly reflect the world is well-founded, the idea that trust in photography as a neutral representation continues to flourish, and that as a result photography itself can be problematized and indeed rejected, should, *The Objectivity Laboratory* argues alongside Balsom, be dismissed outright. This misdirected rejection is particularly noticeable in the reception of more "straight" forms of documentary photography, made both in the past and in the present, where the temptation to disregard "realist" images as naïve and inadequate often seems hard to resist for contemporary commentators.

Photography historian and theorist Mette Sandbye identifies a budding development in recent years wherein more "optimistic" views have begun to emerge.[16] Looking to the socially and politically engaged documentary photography that started to appear in the 2010s,

12—John Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London and New York: Verso, 2012); Tina M. Campt, *A Black Gaze* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2021)

13—T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013); Tanya Sheehan, ed. *Photography and Migration* (London: Routledge, 2018); Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

14—Balsom, "The Reality-Based Community."

15—Ibid.

16—Mette Sandbye, "NEW MIXTURES: Migration, War and Cultural Differences in Contemporary Art-Documentary Photography," *photographies*, 11, no.'s 2-3 (2018): 267–287.

she identifies "new mixtures" in which different approaches within the broad spectrum of photography, ranging from photojournalism to conceptual artistic approaches, comfortably mingle. Sandbye observes a renewed political focus within photography that marks a shift from the critical politics of representation, and this is a progression that is intertwined with an interest in the redefinition of the documentary. It is photography's various forms of expression rather than its (contested) indexicality that, she argues, makes it an appropriate medium for approaching urgent issues. While not disputing Sandbye's assessment, *The Objectivity Laboratory* addresses precisely those photographic qualities that have been framed as "indexical" (without, however, insisting on the notion of indexicality per se).[17] That is, the relationship between the photograph and the photographed subject is crucial to the documentary discussion concerning truth, objectivity, and the artist's responsibilities that the research explores.

17—Media scholar Mary Ann Doane provides a summary statement on indexicality: "Every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface" (2007, p. 75). The photograph bares a visual likeness with the photographed, this is the indexical relationship between the photograph and the object. Arguing that it was with the attacks on the notion of representation that the concept of indexicality was reduced to the terrain of realism, Doane maintains that indexicality is not simply about the trace-like property of the photograph. Rather, the index connects, points, touches. The significance in the relationship between photography and the real crucially lies in the very fact that a photograph has been made which "points to what is *there*," the significance of which will be addressed in the last proposition NEARBY. Mary Ann Doane, ed., "Indexicality: Trace and Sign," special issue, *d i f f e r e n c e s : A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007).

IV. BACKDROPS

The research-led exploration that is documented in *The Objectivity Laboratory* evolved in relation to three key "backdrops," each of which entered the study in a different way. The first backdrop, presented in "One: Documentary Distrust" (below), is the critique of documentary photography that was instigated in the late 1970s and gained force with postmodernism in the 1980s, with the effect that documentary photography became a stigmatized practice surrounded by disregard and distrust. Because the critique still lingers today, often in an oversimplified form, *documentary distrust* is one of the central reasons why *The Documentary Laboratory* came into being.

The second backdrop—"Two: Present Truth"—surfaced with the political turbulence of 2016, which coincided with the early phase of the research and impacted on the direction of the

inquiry.[18] It triggered a desire to cultivate a provocation within the research: namely, that the present moment (of crisis) raises different questions in relation to truths and facts than those posed with postmodernism. Refraining from drawing a straight line between politics, media, and contemporary art, the recent developments sketched below provide an important backdrop for the formulation of the documentary photography propositions posed through *The Documentary Laboratory*.

The third backdrop is the natural sciences, which—as described in Section V—formed the main setting for the research's practice-based investigations; this backdrop has as a result been crucial to the development of theoretical perspectives in *The Documentary Laboratory*.

One: Documentary Distrust

Photography has a past that it cannot and should not overlook: it has been used to legitimize colonialism, racism, and discrimination. The work of writers like Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, John Berger, and John Tagg, as well as the writings of artists such as Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula, show that this history has not gone uncommented.[19] Their forcefully formulated critiques have not only been endorsed but, as already mentioned, have become a pervading norm. Today, photography critics, theorists, and artists alike are acutely aware of the burden of representation; a responsive understanding of the problematic history of photography and the denunciation of transgressions carried out in the present pervades the field.

Susie Linfield's historiography of photography criticism opens with the chapter "A Short History of Photography Criticism;

18—The year 2016 was described as the year of political earthquakes by journalist Decca Aitkenhead. Unexpected results in two major votes signalled that the rules of politics in western liberal democracies had changed: Donald Trump was elected president of the United States and in Great Britain the EU referendum turned in favour of the Brexit side. The campaigns leading up to the victories were characterised by a harsh tone where the factual correctness of a claim was frequently subordinated to the impact that the statement had on the audience. Decca Aitkenhead, "So Long, 2016: The Year of the Political Earthquake," https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/dec/24/2016-in-review-world-news-syria-terrorism-brexit-trump-decca-aitkenhead.

19—Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977); Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Penguin Vintage, 1980); John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1973); John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1988); Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts: On Documentary Photography" {1981} in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); Allan Sekula, "*Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (notes on the Politics of Representation"* in Allan Sekula, *Dismal Science, Photo Works 1972–1996* (Chicago: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1999 {1978}).

Or, Why Do Photography Critics Hate Photography?" a title that manages to capture a generational sentiment towards photography.[20] In fact, ever since the 1970s, photographic theorists have approached photography with "suspicion, mistrust, anger and fear."[21] A distrust in photography as a medium and in oneself as an image-maker has been resolutely established in practitioners, whose skepticism is particularly prominent when it comes to documentary photography in the art context.[22] In the well-educated and self-aware context of contemporary art, it is easy to put one's foot in it. Photographs may violate the integrity of those portrayed, breaking unspoken or articulated ethical agreements. For anyone whose artwork primarily is about someone other than themselves, the risk of one's actions resulting in verbal, visual, or physical mistreatment is a daunting prospect; this risk is palpable throughout the different steps of the artistic process. While documentary distrust prompts practitioners to be considerate, conscious, and attentive, the wariness becomes a burden when it pushes artists to turn away from, rather than to stay with, urgent matters.[23]

The readiness in recent decades to sweepingly deem "straight" or "concerned" documentary photography problematic or archaic has often relied on assessments that, in my view, easily become caricaturing. Artist Paul Graham, an artist who has been linked to documentary photography since the 1980s, puts words to this tendency, noting that "straight" photographs—that is, images that are not obviously constructed, staged, or performed—are often perceived as simple and random observa-

20—Linfield pays specific attention to political violence and predominately writes from the point of view of photojournalism. Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

21—Ibid., 5.

22—See for instance artist Lewis Bush's (2020) discussion of the cynicism that characterises photography, proposing that "the suggestion that photography can change the world is regarded as naïve, an irrational belief." Lewis Bush, "Impact: So You want To Change The World?" (2020), https://fomu.be/trigger/articles/so-you-want-to-change-the-world.

23—It is important to note that despite Rosler and Sekula's critical stance towards the documentary, this did not stop them from making urgent work. Rosler's *Bringing the War Home* (1967–72) is a piercing comment on the war in Vietnam that visually conflates the Vietnamese war zone with domestic US politics and culture. The methodology and visual treatment of the subject differ radically from classical documentary approaches, which was an important contribution to the expansion of documentary photography. Her *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974–75) is a work of refusal—an act of criticism that shows drug addiction and abuse without turning individuals into victims. Sekula's practice was a relentless examination of economic systems, critiquing capitalism using photography to expose injustices. His work is self-reflexive without getting stuck in itself, as in *Meditations on a Triptych* (1973–78), which is simultaneously a deliberation on the medium of photography, exposing the photograph's inherent relation to ideology, and an invitation to consider questions of class and gender. His epic *Fish Story* (1989–1995) spotlights the global economy and the abusive cheap labour industry; his is a body of work that manifests his commitment to "critical realism" and the renewal of documentary photography.

tions.[24] Documentary photography *is* often observational, but it is rarely random, which is of course Graham's point. In fact, documentary photography has always been infused with systematic methods, reflexivity, criticality, empathic outlooks, and comprehensive research. Yet, the figure of the male documentary photographer as a fly on the wall is an attractive caricature, which is remarkably difficult to shake.

A fundamental problem with the widespread documentary photography distrust of today is that it knocks down a straw man. It is the *legacy* of the critical perspectives of the 1970s and 1980s, rather than the criticism itself, that is encumbering. The sweeping discreditations of traditional documentary photographic practice and parodies of the unreflective documentary photographer stimulate an indulgently callous attitude towards documentary photography: it is this attitude which *The Documentary Laboratory* aspires to move beyond.

Two: Present Truth

"Truth," remarks literary critic and former chief book critic for *The New York Times* Michiko Kakutani, is the cornerstone of democracy.[25] Kakutani argues that when a large proportion of the population are blasé about truth-telling, we have a problem: the sense of inhabiting a shared reality is lost, and ultimately, if we cannot agree on facts, rational debate is disabled, giving way to toxic polarization and populist contempt for expert knowledge. Postmodern thinkers and the New Left alike have drawn attention to class, race, and gender as always present factors that cannot be disconnected from knowledge: "For decades now, objectivity—or even the idea that people can aspire towards ascertaining the best available truth—has been falling out of favour."[26] The children of postmodernism and poststructuralism today make up a

24—In a presentation titled "The Unreasonable Apple," made at the first MoMA Photography Forum in 2010, Paul Graham pointed to a review of a Jeff Wall survey book, where the reviewer states that Wall's pictures are both carefully constructed and open-ended as opposed to him simply "snapping" his surroundings. In reaction to this generalizing critique, Graham responds: "Now this was maybe just an unthinking review, but what it does illustrate is how there remains a sizeable part of the art world that simply does not get photography. They get artists who use photography to illustrate their ideas, installations, performances, and concepts, who 'deploy' the medium as one of a range of artistic strategies to complete their work. But photography for and of itself—photographs taken from the world as it is—are misunderstood as a collection of random observations and lucky moments, or muddled up with photojournalism, or tarred with a semi-derogatory 'documentary' tag." Paul Graham, "The Unreasonable Apple," November 26, 2021, https://www.paulgrahamarchive.com/writings_by.html.

25—Michiko Kakutani , *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

26—Ibid., 17.

generation of artists and writers who are deeply hostile towards photography's claim to objective truths.[27] This reaction has indubitably pierced documentary photography. As artist Hito Steyerl contended ten years ago, "the only thing we can say for sure about the documentary mode in our times is that we always already doubt if it is true."[28] The distrust towards photography is firmly inscribed in the documentary consciousness, as argued above, instilling practitioners with important awareness as well as apprehension.

While there is nothing new in truth being contested—in politics, media, and art alike—one thing that distinguishes the contemporary "post-truth"[29] moment from earlier questionings and problematizations of truth, which tended to come from the political Left, is that today's attacks largely serve Right-wing political interests. The pendulum has swung. In the present, postmodern perspectives are amplified with the rise of post-truth agendas wherein facts are outperformed by questions around how people *feel* about something, and objective facts are less influential than appeals to people's emotions.[30]

Scratching the post-truth surface reveals ideological and geopolitical aspects to this issue, prompting questions like: post-truth for whom, and where? There is an Anglo-centric bias to the notion of post-truth, and the undermining of truths is a familiar, authoritarian strategy in many contexts. Joseph Stalin's communist dictatorship in the Soviet Union in the first half of the 20th century and the long-lasting suppression of freedom of speech and freedom of choice in present-day China and Russia are notable examples of institutional and systematic suppressions of truths. Kakutani draws attention to the formation of Nazism and Fascism, as well as the aforementioned postmodern rejection of objective reality, and notes that traits such as lack of reason and cynicism in various forms have long been diagnosed as threats to democracy (by among others Alexis de Tocqueville in the mid-1850s, George Orwell and Hannah Arendt in the early-to-mid-20th century, and more recently Al Gore through

27—Ibid., 5–6.

28—Hito Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty," *Re-visiones*, no.1, (2011), http://re-visiones.net/anteriores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html.

29—Post-truth indicates that appeals to emotions and personal beliefs are more influential in shaping public opinion than objective facts. The President of Oxford Dictionaries speculated that post-truth may well become a defining word of our time. Post-truth indicates that appeals to emotions and personal beliefs are more influential in shaping public opinion than objective facts. "Word of the Year 2016"in *Oxford Dictionaries*, https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016.

30—Lee McIntyre. *Post-Truth (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018), 11.*

his critique of the George W. Bush administration in his 2007 *The Assault on Reason*). There is, however, an intensity with which post-truth and "alternative facts" have surfaced as notions to be reckoned with.

According to Hannah Arendt, the lost "distinction between fact and fiction" and "between true and false" is an ideal environment for totalitarian rule to grow within.[31] In the present, the relativist and constructionist arguments have been appropriated by the populist right as "dumbed-down interpretations of Baudrillard and Lyotard's thinking," applied by Trump and other likeminded figures to excuse their lies.[32] Ignorance has become fashionable. Journalist Peter Pomerantsev notes that the pursuit of "old values" such as accuracy, impartiality, fairness, and reasonableness today lead to accusations of being a liberal crusader.[33] He points to a significant difference between today's disinformation and past propaganda—namely, the role of technology. When the "grand vessels of old media" crack, a growing sense of not knowing what is true surfaces; the solidity that is offered by the printed newspaper is not materialized on the internet.[34] Today, untruthful information and cyber harassment occur in abundance on the internet at a time when authoritative leaders look for and find ways to forcefully undermine beliefs and ideologies. The resulting floods of made-up digital information distort, shatter, speed up and liquify and it is in the midst of this frenzy that the contemporary photograph—made faster and easier than ever by human beings and technological entities—must dwell. It is from this horizon that *The Objectivity Laboratory* unfolds.

31—Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973 {1951}).

32—Kakutani, *The Death of Truth*, 45.

33—Peter Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality (New York: Public Affairs, 2019), 155.*

34—Ibid., 7.

V. TIMELINE: METHOD, METHODOLOGY, AND SETTING

The research investigation has been carried out by way of artistic practice (materialized in three artworks) and curatorial practice (which took the form of a thematic curated group exhibition). The artworks and the curatorial project are introduced in chronological order below. First, though, this section deliberates on how the notion of *the laboratory* sits within the research.

The Laboratory

It was with some reluctance that the term laboratory came to figure as a part of the research title. Placed in direct proximity, "objectivity" and "laboratory" could be read as tautological, and perhaps the "laboratory" in the title may be seen to improperly lean on a term that denotes a specific room where scientific experiments are carried out. However, the idea of the laboratory has, of course, a wide-ranging use which extends beyond the scientific sphere.[35] Art historian Eva Diaz describes the interdisciplinary exhibition *Laboratorium* (2009) as an instance when the museum emerged as a venue of laboratory practice.[36] *Laboratorium* was conceived as a site for experimentation, and collaboration between artists and scientific researchers.[37] In the dissimilar locations of art and science, Diaz identifies experimentation as a common denominator. She suggests an understanding of the "experiment" as testing the past in the present.[38] The idea of testing the past in the present indicates an unsettlement of time that effectively troubles the fixation on newness which the "contemporary" in "*contemporary* documentary photography" may otherwise evoke.

Another, earlier, pioneering project that created a common platform for artistic projects and innovative technology was *Experiments in Art and Technology* (E.A.T.), which was launched by a group of artists and engineers in 1967.[39] The title of the present research, *The Objectivity Laboratory*, is thus in part a reference to curatorial and artistic interdisciplinary projects of the past, which alludes to the laboratory as a site of experimentation beyond scien-

35—Such as the MIT Open Documentary Lab, which "brings storytellers, technologists, and scholars together to explore new documentary forms with a particular focus on collaborative, interactive, and immersive storytelling." The MIT Open Documentary Lab defines their work as a commitment to the sharing of knowledges with an ambition to develop critical discourse and documentary tools. MIT Open Documentary Lab, "About," accessed February 14, 2022, http://opendoclab.mit.edu/about-3/.

36—*Laboratorium* (2009) was an exhibition at the Provinciaal Fotografie Museum in Antwerp curated by Barbara Vanderlinden and Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Eva Diaz, "Futures: Experiment and the Tests of Tomorrow'," *Curating Subjects*, Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.) (London: Open Editions/Occasional Table, 2007).

37—*Laboratorium* was accompanied by the lecture performance "The Theatre of Proof," staged by philosopher Bruno Latour, as well as multiple talks and panels.

38—Diaz problematizes how the notions of "experiment" and experimentation" are often applied to seemingly unproblematically designate interdisciplinarity and progressiveness, and she traces the roots of the word to unfold contradictions. The Latin "expiri," which means to put to test, to try, is the root of both "experiment," "experience," and "empiricism." Until the 1700s, "experiment" and "experience" were interchangeable in the English language. Successively, "experience" has come to refer to the accumulation of knowledge in the past whereas the "experiment" is advanced as a methodology of testing which is applied within both science and art. Diaz, however, promotes an expanded definition of the "experiment" in the search for adequate, new, and satisfactory understandings of the world, where the "experiment" captures both the search for innovative outcomes/experiences *and* a test of the past/tradition. Diaz, "Futures: Experiment and the Tests of Tomorrow."

39—The engineers Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer and the artists Robert Whitman

tific settings. The laboratory has, however, asserted itself in the research in two forms. First and foremost, the natural science laboratory has played an important role as the setting of the artistic practice (discussed below in "2015–2018: The Three Artworks"). Secondly, alluding to similar endeavors in the art context to those that I reference above, the exhibition room has fulfilled the function of a laboratory for investigations that were conducted by way of observation, intervention, contestation, and reflection, in my work with the exhibition *Dear Truth*.[40] As a physical and conceptual site of exploration, the laboratory is, as demonstrated, a recurrent—and perhaps it is fair to even say *overused*—point of reference within art. But the laboratory had it coming. Not only did it prompt the three artworks in this research, but the presence of the natural sciences laboratory also pushed the research to gravitate towards a scientific terminology substantiated by the presence of terms such as "knowledge," "experimentation," and "objectivity."

Following these reflections on the laboratory, it is time to consider method, methodology, and the details of the research settings. As such, I provide an outline of the practice-based works, focusing on questions of why, how, and where they were made, and how they function as research tools.

2015—2018: Three Artworks

The PhD project was formulated as an expansion of an already existing independent research project, in which biophysicist Jonas Hannestad and I pursued an exploration that was based in scientific laboratories with a particular focus on nanotechnology.[41] The nano context stimulated a responsiveness to perspectives from the natural sciences—and as such, questions concerned with objectivity, facts, truth, and reality that became central to the present research inquiry. As research tools, the artworks *Zero Point Energy* (2016), *The Science Question in Feminism*

and Robert Rauschenberg were of important to E.A.T. In 2015, The Museum der Moderne Salzburg presented the retrospective *E.A.T.—Experiments in Art and Technology* as a chronologically structured exhibition accompanied by a substantial catalogue. *E.A.T.—Experiments in Art and Technology*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Salzburg: Museum der Moderne, and Cologne: Walther König, 2015).

40—In "Curating Experimental Entanglements," the exhibition is discussed as a "knowledge technology" and laboratory for inter- or transdisciplinary experimentation wherein artists, scientists, curators, and academics can be summoned for creative and analytic processes with a focus on new relations of meaning. The exchange between art and science in academic settings has large potential, which is a relevant point of exploration for future research projects. Adam Bencard, Louise Whiteley, and Caroline Heje Thon, "Curating Experimental Entanglements," *Curatorial Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2019).

41—Between 2013 until 2016, I worked closely with Jonas Hannestad. We initiated the independently funded, practice-led collaborative work *Nanosocieties*, which on my behalf developed into the present PhD project, which was initiated at the University of Gothenburg in 2015.

(2018), and *A World Made by Science* (2018) persistently brought me back to laboratory settings, both physically and theoretically.

The research that I carried out in the field of nanotechnology was by no means conducted from the natural scientist's point of view and the collaboration with Hannestad was a precondition from the outset of the project. My approach to nanotechnology was that of an "outsider," whereas Jonas was anchored in the subject matter from his previous work within biophysics. To work through an in-depth collaboration across disciplines was an ethical and pragmatic decision. "Ethics" here entailed maintaining integrity in relation to our previous experiences, and our collaboration enabled us to principally remain in our respective areas of knowledge while simultaneously having the benefit of interposing, interfering, and deliberating across disciplines. Our exploration was chiefly carried out on site at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, and at Lund University in southern Sweden.

Zero Point Energy

One laboratory in particular came to play an important role in our collaborative commitment, at the point when for me, *Nanosocieties* had begun to morph into the PhD project: this space was the Nanofabrication Laboratory, commonly referred to as the "cleanroom," at Chalmers University of Technology, a state-of-the-art laboratory for micro and nano fabrication and experimentation. In this setting, the first artwork of the research took shape: the film *Zero Point Energy*, which was included in the group exhibition *The New Human*, curated by Joa Ljungberg, at Moderna Museet in Stockholm and Malmö in 2016.[42]

In *Zero Point Energy*, the laboratory is advanced as a room which adheres to a logic of "science as choreography": this is an assumed choreography which involves human and machine activity. The work is a study and amplification of ordinary experiences such as bodies moving in the laboratory, "the 'goes

42—The curatorial focus of *The New Human* aligned with the way that Jonas Hannestad and I had talked about the themes of *Zero Point Energy*. Upon meeting with the curator Joa Ljungberg, it was decided that *Zero Point Energy* would be included in the exhibition even though the film had not yet been made. Consequently, *Zero Point Energy* developed in dialogue with *The New Human* exhibition themes, and we were cognisant of the other participating artists including Adel Abdessemed, Ed Atkins, Robert Boyd, Esra Ersen, Harun Farocki, Daria Martin, Santiago Mostyn, Ursula Mayer, Adrian Paci, Tomáš Rafa, Frances Stark, Hito Steyerl, Superflex, and Ryan Trecartin. Moderna Museet, "The New Human, 21.5 2016–5.3 2017, Stockholm," https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/the-new-human/.

without saying' matters"[43] and the material dimensions, that is, the "stuff" of the laboratory. Conceptually, it was developed as a comment on the production of knowledge in science.[44] Like Latour and sociologist Steve Woolgar in *Laboratory Life* (1979), the film makes strange that which is taken for granted, drawing attention to the construction of scientific facts.[45] By implanting disturbances through an unfamiliar choreography into the laboratory, the process of solidification by which statements become facts is accentuated.

Zero Point Energy was informed by the methods of field research and direct observation. Being on site in the laboratory was a precondition. In the autumn of 2015, I spent much time on site in the cleanroom, at times side-by-side with choreographer Anna Asplind who was there day and night to study the movements of the humans and machines. The results of her observations and our discussions became a dance that in part resembles the everyday movements of the researchers. The majority of the actors in the film are employed by Chalmers University of Technology and in their everyday life they work as researchers and administrative staff. Their previous experience with scientific contexts visibly impacted on their behavior and movement in the film.

The sound composition also originates from the cleanroom: it is based on recordings of the sound of the apparatuses which Lena Nyberg—a nano researcher and musician who Jonas and I had previously interviewed and followed in her research on DNA molecules and antibiotics resistance—and musician Emma Ringqvist interwove with layers of sound, drawing on vocals and musical instruments.

Like the other two artworks that are part of the research, *Zero Point Energy* was developed in line with a double motivation on my behalf. The film was made with the intention of

43—Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead. A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 2011), 46.

44—The title *Zero Point Energy* refers to the energy of the ground state of any quantum-mechanical system. In the film, this term is used speculatively, suggesting an imagined "ground state" of the cleanroom. Inside the cleanroom, movements and behaviours are strictly regulated to prevent humans from influencing the sensitive processes in undesirable ways. In the choreography where researchers become dancers, this control over the individual in the service of science is both stressed and challenged, by introducing disruptions that moves the cleanroom from its ground state, challenging its inherent choreography.

45—*Laboratory Life* is an anthropological study of a scientific laboratory, an in-depth analysis of the social construction of science. A fictional character, "the observer," enters the laboratory as if it were an alien place, populated by a strange tribe of researchers. Bruno Latour & Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986 {1979}).

being shown to audiences and as such it prioritized aesthetic qualities with the hope of arousing something (such as affect) in the viewer. But it was also executed as a research tool, which I anticipated would provide insights that would be of relevance to the investigation. In the research project, the artwork's primary function was to explore elements of "experimental documentary photography." I wanted to survey the limits of documentary photography, in order to define documentary characteristics and test the usability of the prefix "experimental" in relation to "documentary photography." Adding the prefix, or confining documentary photography with a set of criteria, turned out to be of lesser importance as the research project evolved, but when making *Zero Point Energy*, the questions of what documentary photography *is* and whether the concept of "experimental documentary photography" is productive guided the inquiry and impacted decisions about the artwork's form and content.

Through *Zero Point Energy*, questions concerning truth, facts, and reality came to be progressively important to the research. This was around the same time as the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the United States' presidential election in 2016. Matters related to the distinction between facts and fabrication increasingly infiltrated the political debate as well as the research project's direction and delimitation.[46] The fine-tuning of the research, by way of its reorientation towards more explicit questions about truth and objectivity, gradually evolved; in the two practice-based works presented below, these issues were supplemented by a concern with the montage technique, the archive, the notion of experimental documentary photography, and the question of how artworks can transmit information.

46—In *Sisters! Making Film, Doing Politics*, Petra Bauer refers to Bertolt Brecht in order to argue that while we can learn from others' struggles, "we must adapt the methods and strategies to the times in which we live." Petra Bauer, *Sisters! Making Films, Doing Politics: An Exploration in Artistic Research* (Stockholm: Art and Theory Publishing, 2016), 76.

47—The first Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA1) was entitled *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*. Its chief curator was Katerina Gregos.

A World Made by Science and *The Science Question in Feminism*

The two artworks that followed *Zero Point Energy* were made for the first Riga Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA), which took place in the Latvian capital in 2018.[47]

A World Made by Science was conceived as a contextual framework for *Zero Point Energy*, but it also operates in the

tradition of an informative documentary photography by instructively relating to certain aspects of society. *A World Made by Science* "tries out" the informatory documentary approach and retraces the juxtaposition of text and image reminiscent of 1970s and 1980s documentary and conceptual art.[48] While *Zero Point Energy* is confined to the laboratory, *A World Made by Science* concentrates on instances where nanotechnology intersects with the world. To me, it reads as a disjointed body of work, attempting to cover multiple, ongoing or imminent crises and potentials that can relate to nanotechnology. One of the images speaks about antibiotics resistance, another about artificial intelligence, and a third about climate change. The images aim to be explanatory: "this is nanotechnology," they seem to say, whilst also connecting the scientific field to structural gender issues, hinting at knowledge production, and affirming technology and science as omnipresent in contemporary existence. In this reflection on *A World Made by Science*, artist-researcher Cecilia Grönberg's dissertation *Händelsehorisont || Event Horizon. Distribuerad fotografi* (2016) springs to mind.[49] In particular, it is Grönberg's vivid engagement with the octopus—the eight-limbed mollusk which holds a prominent position in her research—that is fitting: "A question that has preoccupied malacologists is why an octopus does not get entangled in its own arms, and one explanation is that it has a decentralized nervous system," she explains.[50] The images in *A World Made by Science* are decentralized, even though they are contained by the "frame" that rationalizes the artwork; they are scattered, and like the arms of the octopus, the individual images resist entanglement. Grönberg's area of interest concerns montage-based visual historiography, and she proposes that the practice of photography extends beyond individual images; the montage can be traced *between* images, texts, and documents. This portrayal allows *A World Made by Science* to be understood as a body of montage—a montage not only composed

48—Of importance to how *A World Made by Science* unfolded was a mobile exhibition that Jonas Hannestad and I had put together two years previously: *Nanosocieties—A Mobile Exhibition* was inspired by the pedagogical setup of documentary exhibitions of the 1970s, and Gothenburg architect turned photographer Jens S. Jensen was an important reference. In the 1970s, Jensen mounted his images on cardboard and sealed them with a laminate which made them durable and easy to transport. Our mobile exhibition consisted of ten images that were small enough to fit into a medium size suitcase which we brought to a selection of schools in western Sweden. For the exhibition in Riga, I expanded the mobile exhibition and made a poster inspired installation.

49—Cecilia Grönberg, *Händelsehorisont || Event Horizon. Distribuerad fotografi* (Gothenburg: ArtMonitor, 2016).

50—Ibid., 51. Author's own translation from the original Swedish.

of individual images but also encompassing the entirety of the series, with its in-betweens, gaps, and associations.

Some of the twenty-one poster-inspired images were photographed in laboratories during site visits conducted by Jonas and myself. On these occasions, I largely followed a method of observational snapshot photography, using a medium-format, analogue Hasselblad camera. The technical aspects of working with this classical camera commonly slow the photographic process down, but in order to insert an element of spontaneity, I primarily worked with the camera without a shutter release cord and detached it from the tripod. In particular, when it came to the portraits, this perhaps rather minor detail of breaking with the rigidity of the tripod facilitated a procedure where responsiveness, surprise, and uncertainty was introduced. My strategy was to remain attentive to the situation as it played out. By observing the person in the room rather than through the viewfinder, I could spot the moment when the researcher became absorbed in their work, which was the moment that I wanted to photograph. This method also kept me captivated throughout the whole photographic process: since my focus was on the wider scene, rather than the 6x6-inch view, the disclosure of the photographed scene was suspended until the negatives were processed and the images were printed, days or weeks after the moment of exposure.

As noted previously, all three artworks are from a methodological point of view meta-works: they are experiments in the sense that they are instances of interrogating documentary photography. Their agency as research tools mattered when they were developed, and pragmatic deliberations played a key role. This inquisitive incentive, I should add, did not prohibit these artworks from having a presence *as artworks*; rather, the research context stimulated the use of artistic strategies that I had little experience with. I was, for instance, motivated to engage in filmmaking at a scale that was new to me and to indulge in photomontage making, which were both openings that I treasured.

A World Made by Science is a practice-based interrogation of archival research and the montage technique as documentary strategies. These attributes were explored further in the third artwork *The Science Question in Feminism*, which is decisively and purposively a montage work based on archival imagery. In

both works, archival research was the central method, as both works relied on interventions into archival material as well as the method of photographing on site. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall has stated that "the moment of the archive represents the end of a certain kind of creative innocence, and the beginning of a new stage of self-consciousness, of self-reflexivity in an artistic movement."[51] Referring to the thinking of philosopher Michel Foucault—who described the archive as a system of statements of formation and transformation to be touched and manipulated—Hall discusses the role of intertwinement and transformations, describing the archive as being marked by rupture and unpredicted departures.[52] In the heterogenous practice of archiving, historical conditions and artistic practice pierce one another.

The Science Question in Feminism is narrower and more systematic than *A World Made by Science*, both in terms of content and appearance. My motivation for making the work was, from a sociopolitical perspective, to speak to issues of structural discrimination; as a research tool, I sought to follow the path paved by Haraway's notion of "situated knowledges."[53] The montages that I made focused on women in the history of science, spotlighting notable scientists in the Baltic region who made important contributions to the natural sciences during the 21st century. Whereas *A World Made by Science* incorporated photographs from a database of historical images stored at Chalmers University of Technology, *The Science Question in Feminism* contained limited, scattered pieces of footage portraying these scientists in images. Both processes involved the assistance of people with familiarity of the respective contexts, chiefly Agnese Pudina, the Research & Artistic Assistant at RIBOCA1, and Michael Nystås, the Communications Officer at Chalmers University of Technology.

Following the production of these two artworks, I turned to curatorial

51—Stuart Hall, "Constituting an archive" in *Third Text*, Vol. 15, No 54 (Spring, 2001), pp. 89–92, p. 89.

52—Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). For further reading concerned with the archival and photography, see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive" in Charles Merewether, ed., *The Archive* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2013 {1986}) and "Reading an Archive: Photography between labour and capital", *The Photography Reader*, Liz Wells, ed. (New York: Routledge, {1983} 2003); Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View", in *The Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4, winter 1982; Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (Göttingen/New York: Steidl/ICP, 2008); Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", October 110 (2004).

53—Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 575–599, p. 583.

practice as a productive method to garner insights that would be relevant for the formulation of the documentary photography propositions that stand as central to *The Objectivity Laboratory*.

2018—2021: Curating a Thematic Group Exhibition

The documentary deliberations and investigations that were instigated through the three artworks were continued in and augmented by the exhibition *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, which took place at the Hasselblad Center in Gothenburg in 2021. While this exhibition entered as an impromptu addition to the research, it came to be of crucial importance to *The Objectivity Laboratory*. The themes that the artists in the exhibition addressed had a basis in urgent concerns facing contemporary society, but as a research tool, the exhibition was primarily invested in questions of photography, exploring how nine contemporary artists approach ideas of truth, facts, and objectivity. The exhibition offered the chance to bring together and address contemporary artists whose works and considerations stimulate the documentary photography trajectory which the current research project was attempting to trace.

The participating artists were Laia Abril, Mathieu Asselin, Lara Baladi, Karlsson Rixon, Bouchra Khalili, Frida Orupabo, Trevor Paglen, Taryn Simon, and myself; I acted as both an artist and a curator in this undertaking.

The exhibition opening date was postponed on several occasions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which steadily annulled any expectancies of a buzzing couple of opening weeks.[54] As a consequence, instead of putting efforts into public and social procedures, *Dear Truth* shifted, adopting an increasingly contemplative process of production and reflection. This conversion allowed for productive analysis to take place in tandem with the exhibition work—and in many cases in dialogue with the artists—instead of leaving the evaluation to a write-up phase to come.

54—The exhibition was originally set to open May 29, 2020, at the Hasselblad Center in Gothenburg, Sweden. The pandemic led to rescheduling, with a new opening set for February of the following year. In December 2020, the decision was made to go ahead and install the artworks come February, even though it was likely that the opening date would need to be shifted again. In the end, *Dear Truth* opened and closed within a few weeks from April 20 until May 9, 2021, but the resolution six month earlier to continue in spite of the uncertainties was important to the research. It was a commitment that allowed for a sense of solidity and solidarity—solidity through dependability, when so much was postponed or cancelled worldwide, and solidarity as an act of mutual support between the institution, the researcher, and the exhibiting artists.

Exhibition as Interrogation

The decision to initiate the curatorial project *Dear Truth* developed halfway through the research, as my attention shifted from making artworks to focusing on others' ways of working. At an early stage, before contact was established with the artists who came to be part of *Dear Truth*, I deliberated at length over the exhibition's function within the research. Not only did the thematic elements of the respective artworks have to be considered, but I had to make sure that the artworks of the constellation of artists that the exhibition would assemble could work together in the exhibition room.[55] Furthermore, artists needed to be identified who employed quite different working methods, to allow for a diverse range of visual and methodological approaches to be put forward through the exhibition. A key objective of the exhibition was to find out new things about artistic strategies and motivations, a task that depended on the artists' readiness to speak about their works and practices.

55—*Dear Truth* was coordinated and developed in close collaboration with the Chief Curator at the Hasselblad Foundation, Dragana Vujanović Östlind, and in continuous dialogue with the Foundation's Research Manager Louise Wolthers.

56—Elena Filipovic, *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology* (London: Koenig Books, 2017).

Curator Elena Filipovic defines the curated exhibition as a tenuous, ontologically impure thing; it is not a collectable product or an artwork but rather a sort of *frame* and a means of interrogation.[56] *Dear Truth* was developed initially as a frame to hold the research's mapping of the field. Progressively, *Dear Truth* developed from a mapping activity to a framework of inquiry in which ideas could be tested; the curated exhibition became a site of interrogation. The exhibition room was approached as a space of experimentation where various contemporary documentary photography perspectives could be juxtaposed and studied.

The curatorial process gave me the chance to spatially explore and challenge my own research questions, materializing the conditions for an empirically-based experiment in which I could also test the viability of a hypothesis. The most dominant supposition that I had come to nurture as the research process had forged ahead was the idea that as a result of the proclaimed post-truth era, artists were, or would soon become, preoccupied with truth on a grand scale. Like a scientist entering her laboratory to discover if an idea holds, I availed myself of the gallery space in order to gain insights and make discoveries related to this assumption. My hunch that artistic practice and thinking would

have shifted suddenly and dramatically, with 2016 acting as a concrete trigger, was falsified. The process of working with *Dear Truth* consequently revealed an "informal fallacy": the research project had come to rest on false assumptions. The exhibition allowed for in-depth understandings and pushed the research project away from a hypothesis-oriented predisposition to a position of open-ended attentiveness. Writer and curator Maria Lind proposes that the curatorial is an "endeavour that encourages you to start from the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away from and against it."[57] The curatorial is approached as an active catalyst, which gives rise to "twist, turns, and tensions," pushing out new ideas in the process.[58] The method of curatorial practice allowed for disruptions and contestations to arise in relation to the research questions, which was imperative after the preceding "undisturbed" procedure of the artistic practice, where challenges in relation to the research's preconceptions were not confronted with the same urgency.

The Curatorial as Contestation

In 2009, Lind introduced an understanding of "the curatorial" as involving "not just representing but presenting and testing; it performs something here and now instead of merely mapping something from there and then. It is serious about addressing the query, What do we want to add to the world and why?"[59] The element of testing—and contesting—the ways that the works and strategies of the artists contributing to the exhibition might be relevant to research into documentary photography was a key task in my work with *Dear Truth*.

The practice of curating entailed stepping into the very field that the research conversed with, providing important opportunities to enter into dialogue with contemporary artists whose practices productively progress the documentary discourse.[60] A *Dear Truth* catalogue in broadsheet format was produced and distributed

57—Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," *Artforum* (October, 2009), https://www.artforum.com/print/200908/the-curatorial-23737.

58—In *Situating the Curatorial* (2021), Lind makes a distinction between curating and the curatorial, where the curatorial is "a more distributed presence aimed at creating friction and pushing new ideas" by raising topical concerns.

59—Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," *Artforum* (October, 2009), https://www.artforum.com/print/200908/the-curatorial-23737.

60—At a workshop focused on exhibition-making as research organized by Mats Jönsson, Louise Wolthers, and Niclas Östlind at HDK-Valand, University of Gothenburg, September 24, 2021, I had the chance to present my ongoing research. Jyoti Mistry, Professor in Film at HDK-Valand, responded by describing the curated exhibition, when approached as a mapping process, as an instance where a new field takes form, which differs from mapping of the field as a practice of *citation*.

free of charge to the audience.[61] A cornerstone of the catalogue was the semi-structured interviews that I carried out with the artists during 2020 and 2021. In the interviews, the artists were asked to reflect upon a set of questions formulated in response to their respective artistic practices; these questions were devised with respect to matters that were of relevance to the research project. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze has described the process of thinking as one which benefits from encounters with that which is unrecognized. In contrast to the dogmatic thinking that he ascribes to Plato, Deleuze promotes "the problematic."[62] The interviews that form the core of the *Dear Truth* catalogue came to be imperative to the formulation of the propositions presented in the kappa—they were also a way to embrace "the problematic." Through the interviews, the artists were given the opportunity to "object."

The diversity of views and formulations that the artists in *Dear Truth* voiced in the interviews for the exhibition catalogue underscore the productive multitude of perspectives and ways of thinking that contribute to contemporary documentary practice. Furthermore, video interviews with a selection of the artists were made, facilitating visual and oral communication in addition to the written material.[63] Important perspectives on their ways of working were revealed, and the artists' ways of speaking about their work has provided the ground for further analysis in the kappa.

Within a short period of time, the exhibition had grown into a large-scale

61—The decision was made to make a publication that was light and not too expensive to produce, to enable wide distribution without compromising layout or content.

62—Michael James Bennett, *Deleuze and Ancient Greek Physics: The Image of Nature* (2017). https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/deleuze-and-ancient-greek-physics-the-image-of-nature/introduction?from=search

63—For the video interviews, students at the photography program at HDK-Valand at the Gothenburg University prepared questions in workshops that took place in the autumn of 2020 and spring of 2021. The video interviews and video introductions to the artworks in *Dear Truth* are presented at the Hasselblad Foundation website together with and a generous amount of installation images from the exhibition. The communication of the exhibition was developed together with Hasselblad Foundation's Curator of Education Emma Botin, assistant Louise Martinsson, Public Relations Officer Jenny Blixt, Conservator/Photographer Cecilia Sandblom and Chief Curator Dragana Vujanović Östlind.

endeavor which was to become the nexus of *The Objectivity Laboratory*. In the *Militant Research Handbook*, Suzahn Ebrahimian writes, "Let me be clear: I want to complicate everything."[64] The term "militancy" signals perseverance and balance rather than violence; it is through action rather than (only) through thinking that change occurs. The "complicatedness" of documentary photography that the *Dear Truth* interviews revealed sharpened and unsettled the research. The perspectives on truth, facts, objectivity, ethics, visuality, and documentary photography itself which were put forward by the artists challenged the research preconceptions and became critical to the analysis that is documented in the kappa.

64—Ebrahimian, Suzahn (2013) in the *Militant Research Handbook* (Suzahn Ebrahimian et al.). New York University Steinhardt.

Lastly, two additional functions of the catalogue and exhibition should be noted. Firstly, the catalogue provided a space for engagement with the theoretical framework of the research project; secondly, the dissemination of a research project is challenging, and doctoral dissertations tend to be read by few—as such, *Dear Truth* offered the opportunity to introduce ongoing research into a space in which a broader range of people might enter. Ultimately, *Dear Truth* was a spatial exploration that enabled critical reflection, experimentation, and investigation with the distinct purpose of making a contribution to contemporary documentary photography in the art context.

VI. PERFORMING AS AN INDEX: FOUR PROPOSITIONS THAT STRUCTURE THE KAPPA

So far, this section, "Framework," has focused on questions that concern the aims, methods, methodologies, background, and the delimitations of the research project. The following section outlines the contents of the second and largest part of the kappa, "Propositions," and in doing so performs as an annotated index, thus replacing the index that is traditionally located at the end of a dissertation. Propositions, as mentioned, forms a literature review that operates in relation to the broader research project. In each proposition, I address a series of relevant sources, synthesizing theoretical outlooks with evaluations that are rooted in artistic practice. The exploration does not unfold from a predetermined strategy, in search of evidence, and what emerges is not a

systematic review that arrives at a set of results or validated findings. Rather, the literature review is approached as an associative summary of a selection of literature, which enters *The Objectivity Laboratory* as a series of "propositions." The propositions are, in turn, introduced in order to arrive at new understandings of a topic—documentary photography—and are gathered under the headings MONTAGE, INVESTIGATION, RESISTANCE, and NEARBY.

The content of Propositions draws upon assessments that I made of my own practice-based research, including an analysis of the exhibition *Dear Truth* (2021) and the three artworks *Zero Point Energy* (2016), *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018), and *A World Made by Science* (2018). In this respect, the four sets of propositions were developed deductively from practice. Each of the four parts follow their own logic, responding to a material/technique (MONTAGE), a methodological procedure (INVESTIGATION), an incentive (RESISTANCE), and a bodily position (NEARBY). Each part contains an assemblage of multiple propositions, and each part examines both theory and practice. A common factor in MONTAGE, INVESTIGATION, RESISTANCE, and NEARBY is that they each start with a commitment to practice—in this way, they all engage in ways of doing. The clear-cut divisions that the titles indicate express a series of essential approaches to documentary photography; in this way, they serve to illuminate ways in which documentary photography materializes in contemporary art. The four parts set up an exchange between artists—with an emphasis on the artists who exhibited in *Dear Truth*—artworks, concepts, and theoretical deliberations.[65] In many cases, theory and practice overlap and some of the most relevant theoretical perspectives are offered by artists in their reflection on their practice.[66]

65—The *Dear Truth* catalogue, which is part of the PhD submission, includes the longer interviews conducted with the artists in 2020 and 2021. Whereas the kappa primarily explores the artists' methodologies and motivations, the catalogue in addition zooms in on the content of the artworks and includes further images. The catalogue can be downloaded at the Hasselblad Foundation's website and, at the time of writing, is available as a printed version from the Hasselblad Foundation in Gothenburg. Kerstin Hamilton, ed., "Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography," exhibition catalogue (Gothenburg: Hasselblad Foundation, 2021), https://www.hasselbladfoundation.org/wp/portfolio_page/dear-truth-2/.

66—I approach the notion of "practice" as applied learning and experience which may support, challenge, or falsify a hypothesis. In Methods, above, the practice-based explorations of the research are discussed as providing room for exploration and experimentation. For example, *Dear Truth* is described as a site for material contestation, dialogue, and discoveries through practice. Theoretical concepts and constructs, on the other hand, are approached as general and abstract; this abstraction assumes things from a remote position. Without practice, the theoretical scaf-

fold of the research would not have been challenged and put to the test. Theory has thus anchored practice. Likewise, without theory, the practice would have been left floating. Practice and theory affix in the exchange between abstractions and experience-based applications; in the course of the research, theory changed in response to practice and practice altered in response to theory.

67—As Maria Udén notes, Donna Haraway introduced the notion of "diffraction" into feminist science studies in the 1990s. However, given *The Objectivity Laboratory's* investment into the field of nanotechnology, Karen Barad's perspectives from their point of view as a theoretical physicist is reason for the research project's particular interest in Barad's way of approaching diffraction. Maria Udén, "The novel feminist diffraction concept: Its application in fifty-one peer-reviewed papers," research report (Luleå: Luleå University of Technology, 2018).

Proposition MONTAGE

In terms of its content and its position in the kappa, MONTAGE is a beginning: it performs a retake, whereby I reconsider a series of recognizable documentary matters from a particular horizon—namely that of feminist science studies. As a setting for the three artworks included in *The Objectivity Laboratory*, the natural sciences have impacted on the direction of the research, stimulating a theoretical discussion that moves back and forth between feminist science studies and documentary photography. In attending to the shared concerns that exist between the two fields, this chapter introduces a number of perspectives that started to appear in feminist science studies in the late 1980s, elucidating the multiple ways in which these positions can operate as catalysts in the research's quest for productive takes on contemporary documentary photography.

The inquiry turns to the montage technique as a practice, a theme which is linked to the work of the politically radical art movement Dada; the exploration then leads to artist Frida Orupabo's and my own montage work, which serves as a point of departure in an exploration of objectivity, consideration, and ethics. I connect Karen Barad's "diffraction,"[67] "agential realism," and "cut" to documentary photography matters and offer a critique of the notion of "difference" as binary and fixed.

The propositions in MONTAGE engage with the work of artist Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, cultural historian Mark Sealy, artist Barbara Kruger, photographer Jacob Riis, filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha, media scholars Joanna Zylinska and Sarah Kember, artist Joy Gregory, historical anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards, art historian Terri Weissman, and artist Martha Rosler. The burden of responsibility here comes up against the potential of photography as a means to stimulate engagement with important issues. In developing this argument, I discuss philosopher Bruno Latour's insistence on the importance of

the continuous revision of one's critical equipment, and explore photographer Berenice Abbott's views on realism.

Given the theoretical framework that is introduced in MONTAGE, the ethics of knowing that comes into view could easily have ventured in directions of posthumanism and nonhuman vision.[68] Instead, I lead the reader to Rosler's views on documentary photography, addressing intervention, participation, and responsibility in order to arrive in Donna Haraway's "situated knowledges," which I rethink in terms of a non-neutral "situated objectivity," a term which can be understood in relation to social scientist Malcolm Williams and philosopher Sandra Harding's "strong objectivity."

68—See, for instance: Joanna Zylinska's *Nonhuman Photography*, where the author draws on Barad and Haraway in her mapping of a posthumanist philosophy of photography, presenting photography as a medium which only sometimes involves humans, expanding from the human-centric notion of photography. Joanna Zylinska, *Nonhuman Photography* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017.

Proposition INVESTIGATION

Whereas MONTAGE incorporates perspectives from feminist science studies to activate a discussion on documentary photography, INVESTIGATION starts in the framework offered by journalism. The propositions that are introduced respond to themes of truthfulness, trust, and credibility; they are advanced through an exploration which takes as its starting point an early instance of digital manipulation. The frame of reference in this part of the kappa includes perspectives by photography writer Fred Ritchin, journalist Maria Ressa, artist-researcher Lars Wallsten, and philosopher Isabelle Stengers.

The research agency Forensic Architecture is approached as a present-day actor in the art context that explicitly, strategically, and carefully articulates a practice wherein truth, facts, testimony, and objectivity are key concerns; the formulations of agency founder Eyal Weizman pervade the analysis. Here, I am not interested in the question of whether Forensic Architecture's "cases" can be described as "documentary photographic work" or not, but rather how the analysis of the research agency's strategies and perspectives can incite productive documentary outlooks and potentials. In the search of documentary potentials, I am attuned to the possibility of "engaged objectivity" and "positional" truth. In this section, I discuss these concepts in relation to the work of artists Taryn Simon, Mathieu Asselin,

and Trevor Paglen, and revisit Abbott and Latour in relation to the "mechanisms of articulation."

Further, the tangibility of the printed and mounted image is discussed in contrast to the fragmented, dispersed messages of the internet. With attention to Simon, Asselin, and Paglen's methodologies and motivations, I explore the value of observation, examination, and attention to detail in artist's engagement with contemporary society. The propositions that I introduce in INVESTIGATION address the significance of fact-based accounts, transparency, and the omnipresence of reflexivity.

Proposition RESISTANCE

The propositions that are introduced in RESISTANCE were triggered by an article written by artist Lara Baladi, which addressed the protests in Tahrir Square in Egypt in 2011. Her reflections on photography, subjectivity, and truth have served as a stimulus in the present research, particularly in directing attention away from the subjectivity of the image. Baladi's perspectives prompts attention to in what ways photographic images demand different evaluations depending on contextual circumstances. Technological development has enabled those who were previously the *subjects* of the photographer's gaze to increasingly make and distribute photographs themselves.[69] This expansion has augmented the reach of photography,[70] which I contextualize by introducing Azoulay's notion of photography as "event." Cultural anthropologist Karen Strassler's "image-event" also figures in this conversation, underscoring an understanding of the image as being in process, rather than being settled.

A series of reflections on the hybridized nature of documentary photography practice is activated

69—Photography, Berenice Abbot commented in the first half of the 20th century, is "a great democratic medium". Photographs "made by the many for the many" were seen to strengthen democracy; this tendency is accentuated today when most images are made and distributed digitally. Berenice Abbott cited in Terri Weissman, *The Realisms of Berenice Abbott: Documentary Photography and Political Action* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 16.

70—The research project does not explicitly address the other side of the coin—in relation to the increased presence of digital camera technology—that is, the spiralling presence of surveillance that follows with photographically related technological innovations. For perspectives on surveillance in the last fifteen years, see the exhibition catalogue produced for *Watched! Surveillance, Art and Photography* at Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, May 27-October 2, 2016; Kunsthal Aarhus, November 16-December 31, 2016; C/O Berlin, February 17-May 21, 2017, eds., Louise Wolthers, Dragana Vujanovic, and Niclas Östlind, *Watched! Surveillance, Art and Photography* (Köln: Walther König, 2016). For further reading, see Lila Lee-Morrison's *Portraits of Automated Facial Recognition: On Machinic Ways of Seeing the Face* (BielefeldTranscript Publishing, 2019) and Sarah Tuck, "Drone Vision and Protest," *photographies* 11,no.'s 2-3 (2018).

which follows the unfixed photograph as it moves between people and platforms; reflections that address the role of the artist as activist, facilitator, curator, pedagogue, and researcher are introduced. I consider the longstanding investment of artists in *the archive* through reference to Azoulay and the Arab Image Foundation, Taryn Simon, Forensic Architecture, curator Okwui Enwezor, and Baladi's perspectives on "archiving as an act of resistance."

I explore film director's Angela J. Aguayo notion of "documentary resistance," which presents that relationship with others as constitutional to the emergence of documentary in processes of political struggle and social transformation. Further, I discuss the work of artist Walid Raad, refer to cultural critic T. J. Demos, explore artist Hito Steyerl's notions of "poor images" and "free fall," and find inspiration in Erika Balsom's outlooks.

RESISTANCE proposes a re-return of the real in contemporary art. This proposition is put forward with particular attention to curator Okwui Enwezor and media studies scholar Andén-Papadopoulos in an exploration that is linked to human rights as a key concern in contemporary art. Central to this conversation are "the looking/not looking dilemma," the notion of "anti-ocularcentric vision," "the refusal to represent," and practices of "resistance by recording."

Proposition NEARBY

NEARBY, the final set of propositions that make up *The Objectivity Laboratory*, explores photographic methodologies that rely on the artist's encounter with people and places. How and why does work made in "the field" trigger different concerns than work which is staged by an artist in a studio? These questions form the basis of the last part of Propositions and pinpoint key documentary matters, in particular the question of how to approach the experiences of others whilst always remaining acutely aware of the ethical dilemmas that the "outsider" position may pose. I tackle the above with support from Trinh T. Minh-ha's notions of "speaking nearby" and "in-between," and integrate outlooks from anthropology in a discussion on fieldwork, which leads, via art historian Hal Foster's "The Artist as Ethnographer," to a "Statement on Ethics" formulated by

the American Anthropological Association (AAA). Anthropologist Laura Nader and artistic researcher Mark Curran enters the analysis, as does information scientist Lisa M. Given's notion of "relational ethics."

The deep-rooted and well-known ethical dilemma that the "outsider" position calls forth in documentary photography evokes photography's capabilities in the 1970s. Here, I address the work of photographers Susan Meiselas and Claudia Gordillo Castellón in a discussion that aims to connect new documentary perspectives and perspectives that emerged in the past. Art historian Ileana-Lucia Selejan, curator Carles Guerra, Azoulay, and theorist Eduardo Cadava inform this exploration.

Historian of ideas Mikela Lundahl Hero's reflections on ethics and the risk of inflicting harm are also considered, drawing on the work that she and Karlsson Rixon made in a refugee camp in Skaramangas, Greece. Artist Laia Abril—whose subjects are rooted in the gruesome, often invisible experiences of women such as rape, eating disorders, and unsafe abortions—testifies of the high stakes that are at play in approaching the atrocious experiences of others: **»It is a stressful situation as an artist and a great responsibility. You are always faced with the possibility of making a mistake when you are working with other people's lives.«**[71] Abril's testimonial brings the perspectives of Andén-Papadopolous, and in particular the "looking/not looking dilemma," as well as Enwezor's abstract question of "when and how does one open oneself up to another's pain?" to the fore. Proceeding by way of Abril's outlooks, I close RESISTANCE, and thus Propositions, with these concrete experiences of artistic practice.

71—All quotes without reference are excerpts from the interviews in the exhibition catalogue Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography (2021). In the text, they are distinguished by font and surrounding "»" "«".

P R O P O

SITION **MON**

T A G E

ROOMS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

In June 1920, the First International Dada Fair, the *Dada-Messe*, opened at the Otto Burchard Gallery in Berlin. Emerging in the midst of a Europe scarred by World War I, Dada was a left-political movement that opposed war, capitalism, reason, and nationalism.[1] The cut-and-paste technique that characterized the work of artists such as Hannah Höch and John Heartfield stood in contrast to the photography movements of the time. Unlike the pictorialism of the late 19th and early 20th century, the satirical and anarchic work of Höch effectively perplexed the viewer, prohibiting logical approaches. Rather than the details, sharp focus, and directness of "straight" photography, the dynamic and hard-hitting montages of Heartfield performed loud shouts of protest.

Through its very materiality, the montage technique relates to the political Dada movement, which conceptually and materially engaged with modern society during the interwar years.[2] The material attributes of the photograph made it a congenial target of the scissors. It was ephemeral, flat, and cheap, and thus well-suited to be cut up. In comparison with artforms such as painting and sculpture, photography was

1—For an analysis of photography's development in Europe, see the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918–1945*, which premiered at National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, US. Writing in *The New York Times*, Roberta Smith described the exhibition and catalogue as an important moment in the rediscovery of photography history. Alongside the well-established hotbeds for photographic experimentality, Germany and Russia, the exhibition highlighted the Central European countries of Austria, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia as the center of new photography during the period 1918–1945. Roberta Smith, "Views of Tumult Between Two Wars," *The New York Times* (2007), available at https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/17/arts/design/17foto.html.

2—The term "montage" is used consistently in the research rather than the related "collage" or "photomontage." Whilst the terms are often used interchangeably, "montage" is here preferred as it alludes to the photomontages of Dada without excluding non-photographic pictures.

a source of novelty, making it perfect as a medium for experimentation. Artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's photographs and photograms presented a variety of angles from which camera technology and contemporary society could be turned inside-out and interrogated. His "Rooms of the Present"—a series of uncompleted period rooms envisaged by Moholy-Nagy in 1930—were imagined as a visualization of the modern world, embracing art side-by-side with technology, for the benefit of humankind.[3] The camera was a means with which to interact with the world—a world that in the images became blurry, warped, and estranged, while simultaneously standing firm in the trenches of realism.

Consider a photograph. Cut it up. Cut up a second image. The by-now fragmented images are broken, but also liberated from the framework that contained them. In a large-scale montage by Frida Orupabo (2018), a light-blue curtain enters the frame from both sides.[4] The pictured blue fabric covers two thirds of the image. Does it serve to conceal something that was originally there, or is the curtain introduced by the artist to speak about our limited access to history? What can a photograph tell us about the present which played out in front of the camera before it became a past? In the center of Orupabo's image, an interior scene asserts itself. Four bodies are seen standing up. Evoking Moholy-Nagy's rooms of the present, Orupabo's montage occurs as a room of the present *and* past. A person, standing to the right in the foreground of the image, touches the arm of the central figure, whose eyes are blocked by a white rectangle; this second person is holding both a syringe and the arm of a third person, who occupies the lefthand side of the image. Orupabo says, **»I am interested in the body—specifically the black female body; how it is interpreted, talked and written about, and how that affects me/us.«** Like feminists of previous generations, Orupabo connects private life with dominant structures, exploring

3—*Moholy-Nagy, Room of the Present*, 1930/2009, audio produced for the exhibition *Moholy-Nagy. Future Present* (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, May 27–September 7, 2016), https://www.guggenheim.org/audio/track/moholy-nagy-room-of-the-present-1930–2009. See also the catalogue for the retrospective, Moholy-Nagy: Future Present. Matthew S. Witkovsky, Carol S. Eliel, and Karole Vail, eds., Moholy-Nagy: Future Present (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016).

4—Exhibition view Frida Orupabo, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

factors that are often linked to social inequalities in today's society: **»I am interrogating myself, my perceptions and ideas about race, gender, sexuality, class, and culture.«** Orupabo places her work in the realm of personal familiarity but the personal is profoundly and purposefully entangled with collective experience. She states: **»A main focus is on how black women are portrayed and perceived (for instance in the mainstream media) and, further, the consequence of these ways of seeing.«** In the video interview that was made in conjunction with *Dear Truth*, Orupabo develops this notion, "For instance what you see when you look at a black body. And how is your way of seeing and interpreting that body linked to the past. I am interested in finding ways to break with certain ways of seeing that I find to be dominant. And violent."[5] The violence of photography as a racialized medium is also in focus in Mark Sealy's address of erasure within photographic histories; he argues that of central concern to decolonizing the camera is the act of challenging and agitating photography's colonial past and cultural legacies.[6]

The relationship between the personal and political, or, more precisely, the revelation that the personal *is* political, was central to the feminist movements of the 1970s: this legacy is made palpable in Orupabo's work.[7] Artist Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)* was made for the 1989 protest "Mobilize for Women's Rights" in Washington in support of abortion rights. This paste-up, just like many of Kruger's by now iconic images, combines white, black, and red colors with a message that is spelled out in a sans-serif typeface such as "Who do you hurt," "Who do you hate," "Belief + doubt = sanity," and "We don't need another hero." "It is always a sense of play, of combinations, and of possibilities," Kruger says about her montages.[8] Orupabo is drawn to the montage technique because it enables putting **»something together that was not originally meant**

5—Frida Orupabo, interviewed by Emma Neha Bobeck, Vera Jörgensen, Camila Manuelsdotter Pino, and Sofia Sandqvist Marjanen, Gothenburg, February, 2021. *Dear Truth: Interview with the artists—Part 2*, for *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography* (Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Spring 2022), https://www.hasselbladfoundation.org/wp/aiovg_videos/dear-truth-interview-with-the-artists-part-2/.

6—Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Times* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited, 2019), 2.

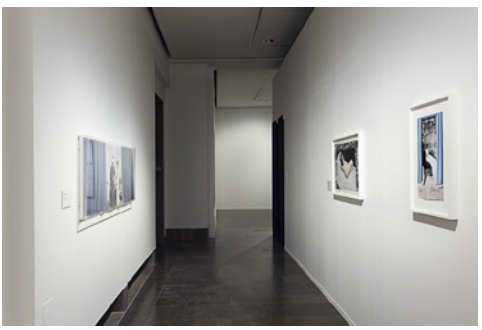
7—The phrase was popularized with Carol Hanisch's 1969 essay "The Personal is Political." Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, eds. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: radical Feminism, 1969).

8—*Barbara Kruger: in her own words*, produced for the exhibition *In the Tower: Barbara Kruger* by the Department of Exhibition Programs (The National Gallery of Art, Washington, September 30, 2016–January 22, 2017), 00:06:14, https://www.nga.gov/audio-video/video/krueger.html.

to stand together. It allows you to create new narratives or counter-narratives and meaning.« The direct address that Kruger makes use of is also evident in Orupabo's work, for instance in her exploration of gender—of "what is understood as masculine and feminine, [and what is] beautiful (what is a desirable body), by mixing up body parts from both women and men, twisting limbs, and so on"—which is simultaneously personal and political.[9]

Orupabo's practice is one of recollection and agitation. By employing the montage technique, Orupabo confronts and destabilizes the history of photography with the haunting ambition of "trying to depict what it means to be a human."[10] In her montages, images are dislocated, and the regime of straight photography is again destabilized, just as it was unsettled by the subversive work by the Dada artists a hundred years earlier.

9—This statement was made by Frida Orupabo in an interview on *En samling blir til* (2020). Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, "Frida Orupabo og historien vi bærer med oss," *YouTube*. Exhibition view Frida Orupabo, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3Vt3KCtDiM.



10—Frida Orupabo, interviewed by Emma Neha Bobeck, Vera Jörgensen, Camila Manuelsdotter Pino, and Sofia Sandqvist Marjanen, Gothenburg, February, 2021. *Dear Truth: Interview with the artists—Part 2*, for *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*.

INTRODUCING DIFFRACTION

This next section focuses on the notion of "diffraction" which is, as we will soon see, an optical phenomenon that works differently than the more common idea of a mirror-like reflection. In the traditional, single-lens reflex camera, the photographer views the world as it is transmitted by the apparatus, wherein a mirror is used to redirect the light reflected by an object before the shutter is released. A reflected image distorts: it provides an identical but reversed mirror image of the world. However, in the single-lens reflex camera, light is reflected several times to

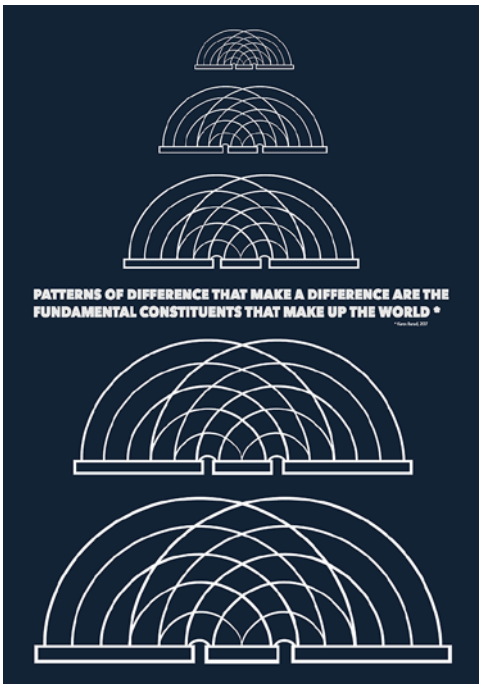
rectify the inversion created by the mirror. The camera body is consequently developed to both reflect and reverse the reflected light, with the consequence that the photograph is not a mirrored image. The implication of this process is that the impression of the photograph as a reflection of the world, engrossed in the semantics of sameness and representation, is reinforced.

The premise that motivates the analysis below proposes that the reasons for artists to *not* photograph reality in a "straight" manner are sometimes, although not always, grounded in an uneasiness with photography's dependence upon "reflection" as a physical and conceptual foundation. Today's cameras are often without mirrors, but what remains is photography's distinctive and essential bond with the reality in front of the lens, which has often been described in terms of its "indexicality."[11] Despite the existence of a widespread consensus that the photograph isn't a reflection of the world, the photograph is captivated ontologically and epistemologically in questions of representation. That the photograph is seen both as reflecting the world *and understood as not being a direct reflection of that world* is not only a contradiction in terms but a fundamental conflict for photography.

Theoretical physicist Karen Barad, inspired by science theorist and biologist Donna Haraway, examines diffraction and reflection as optical phenomena that display significant disparities in relation to one another.[12] Reflection, Barad observes, is "caught up in geometries of sameness," whereas "diffraction attends to the relational nature of difference."[13] While reflection denotes an image made by a mirror (or an image that comes across as if it

11—Andrew Bazin in *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* writes that "No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking, in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its be-coming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model." André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4. (Summer, 1960).

12—Image from *A World Made by Science* (2018).



13—Both quotes are from Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 72.

was), diffractions are described by Barad as "patterns of difference that make a difference."[14] In physics, diffraction refers to a wave's behavior when it encounters an obstacle and a pattern of interference known as a "diffraction pattern" occurs. An illustrative example is an ocean wave hitting a rock; the wave diffracts around the rock, creating a new pattern as a result of the interference. This pattern is quite unlike the mirror image produced by a reflection.

Importantly, diffraction signals active interference, drawing attention to the constant interactions at work in any formation of knowledge. Barad points towards doings and actions rather than the descriptions, and encourages a shift from representationalism to performativity:

> Unlike representationalism, which positions us above or outside the world we allegedly merely reflect on, a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being.[15]

When reading Barad's statement in relation to photography, it leads to a recognition that we can never be entirely outside of that which we photograph. A diffractive methodology thus underscores intervention and relationality as constitutive in knowledge making, emphasizing a shift in attention from descriptions to doings/actions, and from representations to performativity.[16]

A Diffractive Approach to "Difference"

With their background as a physicist, Barad is entrenched in the quantum physical-philosophical perspectives of the microworld and from this angle addresses concerns in science.[17] The spheres of miniscule particles are easily thought of as distinctly different to human existence, Barad cautions, but to approach the

14—Ibid.

15—Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 133.

16—Poet Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect also serves as a relevant reference point here. His concept of "estrangement" (*Verfremdung*) suggests that it is not enough for a political artwork to express truth or to attempt to convey already-known realities to the audience: the audience's criticality must also be activated or "triggered." By consciously "reminding" the spectators that they are confronted with a constructed situation, the illusion of watching reality is disrupted. Estrangement and critical awareness can be activated with rather small means depending on the artist's realist or constructivist preferences, for instance, "breaking the fourth wall" is a manoeuvre that stops the audience from over-identification with the fictional characters, by which the audience is made aware than they are spectators of a film/theatre rather than being confronted directly with reality. For further reading concerned with *Verfremdung* and Brecht, see Petra Bauer, *Sisters! Making Films, Doing Politics: An Exploration in Artistic Research* (Art and Theory Publishing, 2016) and Andjeas Ejiksson, *Television Without Frontiers* (Gothenburg: ArtMonitor, 2021).

17—For anyone who is not a physicist, it is challenging to think "through the details of diffraction as a physical phenomenon, including quantum understandings of diffraction" as Barad urges us to do. However, as an invitation as to how the notion of diffraction can "work" in other fields, Barad suggests that "what is needed are respectful engagements with different disciplinary practices." Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 73, 93.

microworld and the macroworld as separate spheres supports the problematic "story" by which particles and microscopic objects are seen as "singularly exotic Others."[18] If one were to accept that such a separateness exists, Barad argues, one concurrently must accept that "baseballs and rockets and all matter of everyday things are as American as apple pie, if you'll forgive the expression, that is, strictly normal."[19] This line of thinking has bearing on documentary photography.

In the 1880s, photographer and reporter Jacob Riis photographed people in the New York City slums, where Riis also lived for a period of time when he first arrived in New York from Denmark. Riis' book, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (1890) took a journalistic approach, reporting on the living condition in the city.[20] Riis writes of a system "of public neglect and private greed,"[21] where the "other half" lives in the city's growing number of overcrowded tenements. An article in *The New York Times* in 1891 describes Riis' process: "He goes into the slums with his camera and flash light, and in his illustrations he presents what the photograph has produced on the plate."[22] In this way, he exposes the "greed of capital," passionate in his report of a system that had failed.[23]

While Riis' visual and textual report was described as "powerful"[24] at the time, his photographs have later been criticized for aestheticizing the slum as a "spectacle."[25] Riis' categorizing photographs—combined with a language in *How the Other Half Lives* that is pervaded by degrading sentiments, wherein people are classified according to their nationality—are today often perceived as stereotyping the people that they depict. How then, may Barad's reasoning make sense in this context? In photography, a response to the risk of exoticizing people by photographing them—a risk which is a more present when photographing someone

18—Karen Barad in an interview with Malou Juelskjær and Nete Schwennesen. Malou Juelskjær and Nete Schwennesen, "Intra-active Entanglements—An Interview with Karen Barad," *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 1-2 (2012): 18.

19—Juelskjær and Schwennesen, "Intra-active Entanglements," 18.

20—*How the Other Half Lives* has been published in different versions including a version which contain text and illustrations of Riis' photographs (New-York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890); with text only (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957); special illustrated edition including Riis' actual photographs (Scotts Valley, California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009).

21—Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Sagamore Press Inc., 1957 {1890}), 2.

22—The New York Times, "Matters We Ought to Know: How the Other Half Lives," *The New York Times* (January 4, 1891), 19, https://www.nytimes.com/1891/01/04/archives/matters-we-ought-to-know-how-the-other-half-lives-studies-among-the.html.

23—Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1957).

24—The New York Times, "Matters We Ought to Know."

25—Keith Gandal, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane and the Spectacle of the Slum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

in a precarious situation—is to negate such images or to focus on matters that are closer to one's own experiences. Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974–1975) can be seen as an indicative example of an artwork which *traces* social vulnerability rather than directly exposing, as Riis did, those in precarity. Rosler's work draws attention to the fact that the socially concerned photographer has traditionally been an outsider, lacking lived experience and real familiarity with the situation being photographed. Drawing upon Barad's analysis, however, the stipulated dichotomy between the precarious and the privileged can be grasped as a problematic response to a real problem. Arguably, the very idea of a privileged subject, profoundly disconnected from the "exotic other," resides in the undesirable story that holds that one domain could be distinctly separated from another.

To regard subjects as photographable vis-à-vis *un*photographable supports the idea of spheres that are different to the extent that the gap between the two should not be trespassed by the artist. Barad offers a critique of the way in which "difference" often "positions the self on one side, and the other—the not-self—on the other side."[26] Their line of reasoning is inspired by filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha. In "Not You/Like You," Minh-ha offers a view of difference as an instrument of separation, "Many of us still hold on to the concept of difference not as a tool of creativity to question multiple forms of repression and dominance, but as a tool of segregation, to exert power on the basis of racial and sexual essences."[27] Trinh states, "difference as foreground in my film work is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness. Difference, in other words, does not necessarily give rise to separatism."[28] Could the well-grounded anxiety that leads us to *not* photograph certain subjects counterproductively reinforce difference and exclusion? The "exotic other," which Barad sees as an unwanted outcome of seeing the microworld and the macroworld as distinct from one another, in photography points to the sentiment of an "us" that can be photographed, and a "them" that cannot be photographed. The decision to not photograph

26—Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax* 20:3 (2014): 169.

27—Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Question of Identity and Difference," *Inscriptions* 3–4, special issue "Feminism and the Critique of Colonial Discourse" (1988), https://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/inscriptions/volume-34/trinh-t-minh-ha/.

28—Ibid.

could, following this line of thought, be seen to unintentionally uphold difference as a tool of separation and reinforce the notion of otherness.

Both Barad and Trinh are profoundly critical of dualistic divisions: "What is needed, Trinh emphasizes, is a disruption of the binary, a way to figure difference differently."[29] The idea of diffraction works to nuance the understanding of difference: "Difference isn't given. It isn't fixed."[30] A diffractive methodology attends to difference as unfixed and productive, rather than difference as the separateness of solid opposites on either side of impassable boundaries.[31] The undoing of dualisms posits that "subjectivity and objectivity are not opposed to one another; objectivity is not *not*-subjectivity."[32] A diffractive methodology can consequently revitalize how "difference" as well as subjectivity/objectivity are approached. Instead of dogmatically asserting that the privileged "I" cannot approach certain subjects, the notion of diffraction encourages the artist to go beyond binary dichotomies and search for new ways of addressing important issues.

29—Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 170.

30—Ibid., 175.

31—Artist and artistic researcher Nina Mangalanayagam highlights the potential of critical theorist Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity," exploring how photography can work to subvert prevailing visual stereotypes of otherness. In an inquiry concerned with identity, representation, belonging, and the de-stabilizing of binaries, Mangalanayagam problematizes the notion of fixity: "I refuse to accept the rules that have been put in place and instead I embrace a freedom of not knowing; an embrace of uncertainty." Mangalanayagam explores her own position as simultaneously a target and mediator, and advocates a space for non-categorical discussion, where normative identities are re-evaluated without the demand of taking of sides, that is, a space of in-between. Nina Mangalanayagam, *Living with Contradictions: Re-Reading the Representation of Hybridity in Visual Art* (London: The University of Westminster, 2015), 168.

32—Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 175, emph. added.

33—Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 328.

CUT || ETHICS || DELIMITATIONS

The text will now turn to the moment of *making*, exploring the potential of Barad's "agential cut" in the context of documentary photography by relating to photographs—or more specifically cut-up photographs (that is: montages)—as a series of cuts. The agential cut enacts a temporary separation—rather than a definite separateness—where some things are placed inside the frame while others are excluded: "There is nothing inherent about this distinction—in fact, this is the whole point!"[33] The cut performs a momentary stabilization and enables us to gain (limited) knowledge about certain aspects of the world; formulated

by someone such as the artist, these knowledges materialize provisionally constructed delineations.

In Orupabo's montages, the material process of disassembling and reassembling is noticeable; the images are visual demonstrations of interference and the artist's agency. Agency is a matter of "intra-acting": it is movement, a relationship, which extends to include the apparatus. Barad introduces the concept "agencies of observation," which they use interchangeable with apparatus, to underscore the multiplicity of the apparatus, which comprises of not only physical equipment but also the social, cultural, and political processes and circumstances that impact on its own production.[34] A scientist who carries out scientific measurements attains meaning through a procedure which involves a physical apparatus and an object of study.[35] The photographer develops meaning using a camera, or indeed a pair of scissors in the construction of montages and meanings. Describing her working process, Orupabo says, **»Except for two collages (that were improvised), all have been made digitally (in Photoshop) first. The next step is to enlarge the collages and print them out, usually at A4 paper scale. Lastly, I cut out the shapes and fasten each layer by using tape and pins.«**

This description unveils a practice that moves across time, scale, and materials, in which the original photograph morphs. The montage is a testimony of the historical moment that formed the original context of the photograph as well as a material trace of the artist's situatedness in the present. Diffraction and the agential cut pave the way for the recognition of the cut-and-paste montage as an instance that refuses to be mistaken for a direct representation. The criticality inherent in the montage technique is significant; it indicates intervention, disturbance, construction, and the unsettling of time and space. The materiality of the image is entangled with the artist and the camera, and the process of making is manifested in the cuts. Media scholars Joanna Zylinska and Sarah Kember have picked up the Baradian cut, referring to photography as a technical, material, and conceptual process of

34—Sofie Sauzet, "Phenomena—Agential Realism" (2018), https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/p/phenomena-agential-realism.html.

35—Offering a productively open perspective when discussing the apparatus and the subject of study, Barad draws on physicist Niels Bohr's philosophy-physics: "While focusing on the lack of an inherent distinction between measuring instrument and measured object, Bohr does not directly address the question of where the apparatus 'ends.'" This is particularly relevant in thinking about the camera apparatus: "What precisely constitutes the limits of the apparatus that gives meaning to certain concepts at the exclusion of others?"; the apparatus, they state, "enact a local cut that produces 'objects' of particular knowledge practices." Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 142, 143, 147.

cutting: "If we must inevitably cut, and if the cut functions as an intrinsic component of any creative, artistic, and especially photographic process […] then what does it mean to *cut well?*"[36] To this question, they provide a concise answer that serves as an entry point to the discussion to follow: they conclude that a good cut is an ethical cut.[37]

Barad states, "ethics cannot be about responding to the other as if the other is the radical outside to the self. Ethics is not a geometrical calculation; 'others' are never very far from 'us'"; what's more, this ethics of knowing postulates "responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part."[38] Our formulations have, in other words, consequences—we are ethically responsible in relation to the knowledges that we construct. Delimitations presume critical reflexivity and the active construction of un-fixed boundaries.[39] When Barad specifies that "it's all a matter of where we place the cut. The solution to the 'measurement problem' is recognizing that what is at stake is accountability […] by attending to how different cuts produce differences that matter," we might conclude that responsibility in relation to the knowledges that are assembled demands active delimitation.[40] Questions arise: Where to cut? What to frame? For the artist who address social realities the question of delimitation is a central ethical concern, connected with responsibility and accountability.

Curator Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger attends to the "ethics of framing narratives"[41] and asks, "Who has the power to decide whose story will be told; and, concomitantly, whose visibility necessitates the invisibility of others?"[42] The archival photographs that Orupabo's images derive from are testimonies of lived experiences. Her interventions testify to the ethical difficulty of working with archival material. Rastenberger again, "Information about the context in which an image was originally used may be preserved […] but it may also disappear."[43] Who are the

36—Joanna Zylinska and Sarah Kember, *Life after New Media* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2012), xix.

37—Inspired primarily by Jacques Derrida, Bernard Steigler, Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, the moment of the cut is described as a technique and as an ethical imperative by Kember and Zylinska. They describe the process of cutting as one where we profoundly "emerge as 'selves' as we engage with matter and attempt to give it (and ourselves) form." While Zylinska and Kember discuss the cut as a relational practice both shaping the universe and ourselves, my research is less so focused on the "emergence" and shaping of the "self." Zylinska and Kember, *Life after New Media*, 75.

38—Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 178–179, 393.

39—Ibid., 179–183.

40—Ibid., 348.

41—Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger, "Why Exhibit?: Affective Spectatorship and the Gaze from Somewhere", Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger and Iris Sikking, eds., *Why Exhibit? Positions on Exhibiting Photographies* (Amsterdam: Fw:-Books, 2018), 108.

42—Ibid.

43—Ibid., 107.

anonymous people in the images, we may ask? How would they perceive their inclusion in a 21st century montage? Is it (symbolically) violent to cut someone's photographed body into pieces? Should somebody—perhaps an unknown photographer—be credited for the original photograph? For Orupabo, ethical considerations are interconnected with aesthetic choices: »One collage usually consists of five to six images,« she says. The original images are consequently substantially transformed. Even though the fragmentary nature of montaged images may serve to conceal original identities, when including people there is always a possibility that the person in the image, or someone related, will take offense. To reproduce or physically interfere with an existing image may violate. However, it is imperative to also consider what the montage can *do*—what it can *awaken*. For the image carries the potential of facilitating engagement with significant aspects of important issues. Orupabo's work discloses an artistic ethos fueled by the urgency of using art to highlight personal and collective histories: her montages speak to real-life physical and psychological violence. Interference into archives and the cutting into images can be violent acts but they can conversely be seen as acts of attention and immense consideration. Following Barad, "they" and "we" are "co-constituted and entangled through the very cuts 'we' help to enact. Cuts cut 'things' together and apart. Cuts are not enacted from the outside, nor are they ever enacted once and for all."[44] The montage bonds the "us" in the present with the "them" in the past. The temporal relationality of being and not being in the present and past appeals to the impulse to "put oneself at risk."[45] Artists who address the painful and the difficult will potentially put themselves and others at risk, but if the subject is deemed important enough, then the risk should perhaps also be deemed worth taking.

44—Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 179.

45—Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," 183.

Touching Other's Stories

To go through archives is to spend time with antecedents. Orupabo encounters people from the past and brings them into the present: her montages present the possibilities of realities that have been. She says about her relationship with the archive that we carry history with us, which we must be attentive about if we

want to achieve change.[46] Orupabo's affection for the montage goes beyond mere thoughtfulness in relation to histories, though: this can be seen in her touching of images, how she loves the smell and the feel of the paper, and the process of cutting.[47] The significance of tactility with reference to the photographic image is commented on by the visual and historical anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards, who maintains that it is arguably the touch on the photograph that fulfils the "desire to get hold of something very closely."[48] In the image, history is traced and felt. Attention to details matters in this process. Barad states, "It is about taking what you find inventive and trying to work carefully with the details of patterns of thinking (in their very materiality) that might take you somewhere interesting that you never would have predicted."[49] While the montage indubitably lends itself to the understanding of making as a practice of cuts, the Baradian agential cut refers to cuts on a material and philosophical level and is not limited to the physical cut. The agential cut is thus useful in thinking through how knowledges can be constructed through photography in a broad sense, regardless of whether the photographs are actually cut or not.

In Orupabo's montages, the people from the past look at us, reactivating times past. The montages set up interactions, triggering emotional responses sparked by the historical photographs' presence. "I think that by using historical material, I am not only trying to show what has happened, but also reflect on some things that are happening now, today," Orupabo states.[50] When artist Joy Gregory talks about her series *Alongside Matron Bell* (2020), it resonates with Orupabo's avowal.[51] Gregory's work contains scanned images from the archive of the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom. In the black

46—Nasjonalmuseet, "Frida Orupabo og historien vi bærer med oss," 2020.

47—Frida Orupabo, interviewed by Emma Neha Bobeck, Vera Jörgensen, Camila Manuelsdotter Pino, and Sofia Sandqvist Marjanen, Gothenburg, February, 2021. *Dear Truth: Interview with the artists—Part 2*, for *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*.

48—Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs and the Sound of History," *Visual Anthropology Review* 21, no.'s 1 and 2 (2005): 40. In the passage quoted, Edwards refers to amongst others anthropologist Michael Taussig's *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. See: Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

49—Juelskjær and Schwennesen "Intra-active Entanglements," 13.

50—Frida Orupabo, interviewed by Emma Neha Bobeck, Vera Jörgensen, Camila Manuelsdotter Pino, and Sofia Sandqvist Marjanen, Gothenburg, February, 2021. *Dear Truth: Interview with the artists—Part 2*, for *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*.

51—Joy Gregory about her work in an interview with Kaia Charles. See: Kaia Charles, "Colour as Memory: Joy Gregory in Conversation with Kaia Charles," recorded March 11, 2021 at Now Gallery, available at https://nowgallery.co.uk/events/colour-as-memory-joy-gregory-in-conversation-with-kaia-charles.

and white photographs, Gregory has colored the individuals who came to the UK from the Commonwealth nations to work within the British healthcare system. Through her intervention in the archival images, Gregory gives visibility to people who were essential in the development of the NHS. The artist's action illuminates not only workers of the 1950s but also brings to attention the tireless labor of healthcare workers in the present.

Referring to science and technology scholar Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Barad argues that "what is needed is not only attention to matters of fact, or even matters of concern—but also, matters of care."[52] Persistence (not "leaving behind or turning away from"),[53] care and responsibility mean something. It is a matter of responding, "to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future)."[54] The montage is not simply a matter of uncovering established facts, but of finding things out and accepting the responsibility to do so with consideration and attention to detail. Montage is a technique to map interference and effects, without pretending reflection; it breaks up and agitates, entangles and consoles.

The ethical positions that have been offered so far resonates throughout *The Objectivity Laboratory* as "a commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter, and for whom."[55] Haraway, who enters the text in the next section, contends that diffraction is "an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world."[56] And with this, the cut leads the way back into the science laboratory.

52—Juelskjær and Nete Schwennesen, "Intra-active Entanglements," 13–14.

53—Ibid., 13.

54—Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 183.

55—Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. 90.

56—Donna J. Haraway, *Modest Witness@Second_Millenium.FemaleMan©_Meets_On coMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York and London: Routledge (1997), 16.

57—Karen Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*, L. Hankinson Nelson and J. Nelson, eds. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 188.

SITUATED KNOWLEDGES

Barad opens her text *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction* (1996) by painting the scene of a laboratory, recounting a sublime experience of watching nanoparticles trough a scanning tunnelling microscope.[57] They relate an anecdote from the laboratory, which illustrates their fascination with the world of atoms while

concurrently positioning them as the theoretical physicist that they are. One paragraph into the text, the reader already has an idea of where the text comes from; it is not a voice from nowhere. Barad's opening narrative is self-conscious while simultaneously remaining open and curious to the world outside of the self. Referring to themselves as a social constructivist with realist tendencies, Barad makes clear that they do not subscribe to either of the extreme positions that social constructivists, on the one hand, or traditional realists, on the other, advocate.[58] This conciliatory dialectic encourages an approach to documentary photography which brings together the constructivist and the realist.

The film *Zero Point Energy* was made in a site that already exists. The film choreography momentarily unsettles everyday procedures and behaviors that break with the routines of the scientific experiments, the daily maintenance work, and the administrative tasks in the cleanroom. The realness of the site was a precondition for the film; it was never an option to construct a milieu staged specifically for this occasion, and to think of the film as anchored in the documentary framework was a way to "stay with" with the real: a question that presented itself as particularly pressing was the level of faithfulness towards the existing site.[59] In deciding on the balance between the obviously

58—Ibid., 161–194, 164.

59—Images from the research in the Nanofabrication Laboratory at Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden, leading up to the film *Zero Point Energy* (2016). A section of the cleanroom is lit up by yellow light to enable certain types of research and keep the samples protected from certain spectrums of light, similarly to the way in which photographic paper is protected in the photographic darkroom. In the darkroom, red or amber colored safelight is used to filter out the blue and green rays that the paper is sensitive to. In the cleanroom, photolithography is an everyday process; research samples are covered with the light sensitive material "photoresist" and without the yellow light, the samples would be damaged.

choreographed movements and the parts of the choreography that resemble everyday behavior, a guiding principle was not to completely withdraw from the routines of the cleanroom: it was a matter of considering both the unmistakably constructed and the seemingly realistic.

In 1988, Haraway presented the article "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," which offers a critique of traditional forms of knowledge production and objectivity in science. Haraway argues that knowledges are always "situated" in the sense that they are always formulated from embodied positions. To be situated means to be located and to have a position, a place from which one speaks, which crucially "allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see."[60] She asks, "How to see?" "sWhat to see for?" and "Whom to see with?"[61] *Zero Point Energy* encompasses the multiple visions of the vastly different perspectives of the film team, renouncing the singularity of the artist's gaze. Importantly, the visions of the choreographer, cinematographers, musicians, artist, and producers were accompanied by the influence of the people who performed the choreography. The "actors" in the film were at the time employed by Chalmers University of Technology and their professions as researchers and administrative staff meant that their relationship with the laboratory exceeded my own familiarity with the site. Their embeddedness in the scientific framework enabled them to bring to the set their experiences, which impacted the direction of the film by allowing (a small part of) the scientific community to object to its description.

60—Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3. (Autumn, 1988): 583.

61—Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 587.

62—Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004).

Revising the Critical Tools

The balance between constructivism and realism is evoked in a succession of statements by Bruno Latour. In 2004, Latour pleaded for less focus on fact claims in favor of paying attention to matters of concern, without neglecting the potential danger of relativizing truth.[62] He contends that in the 1980s, he was in search of a new type of critical empiricism. While he did not strive for the rejection of facts, his work had been picked up by some as being useful for that task; it was this misinterpretation

of his position that led Latour to voice deep concern about the embrace that climate-change deniers had, by 2004, extended to the rhetoric of constructivism. "I am not trying to reverse course, to become reactionary, to regret what I have done, to swear that I will never be a constructivist any more," he says.[63] However, Latour identifies the need to reassess the "critical equipment", since "a certain form of critical spirit has sent us down the wrong path."[64] There is a risk that the wrong enemies are fought if the critical tools are not revised and reset in response to new threats, he contends.[65] In 2018, Latour elaborates this position in an interview with *The New York Times*, where, despite being labelled "the post-truth philosopher," he demonstrates his belief that there *is* such a thing as *reality*.[66] He explains, in relation to his earlier statements, that "I think we were so happy to develop all this critique because we were so *sure* of the authority of science."[67] When commenting, in 2004, on the critique that he formulated in the 1980s, he says, "the question was never to get away from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism."[68] Latour's sequential analysis that spans over multiple decades offers perspectives on the critique of photography that was formulated in the late 1970s and early 1980s: it is important to acknowledge that the battles that motivated the critique in the first place were urgent at that time, but we also need to insist that to be effective today, critique must be formulated differently in response to present conditions. This recognition has been imperative to this research and has stimulated my search for new potentials. In the present, Latour contends, "Even this notion of a common world we didn't have to articulate, because it was obvious [...] Now we have people who no longer share the idea that there is a common world. And that of course changes everything."[69] Echoing Latour: we are continuously faced with new societal challenges and photography has evolved in response to shifts in technology and critical thinking, and this of course changes everything.

63—Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," 231.

64—Ibid.

65—Ibid.

66—Ava Kofman, "Bruno Latour, the Post-Truth Philosopher, Mounts a Defense of Science," *The New York Times* (October 25, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/magazine/bruno-latour-post-truth-philosopher-science.html.

67—Ibid.

68—Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," 231.

69—Kofman, "Bruno Latour, the Post-Truth Philosopher."

Haraway, in an earlier but similar vein to Latour's, portrays a moment in time when she and her peers "started out wanting a strong tool for deconstructing the truth claims of hostile science."[70] The consequence of revealing the doctrines of the scientific objectivity were according to Haraway, that her and her peers' constructivist arguments led to a highly problematic disinterest in truths:

> We unmasked the doctrines of objectivity because they threatened our budding sense of collective historical subjectivity and agency and our "embodied" accounts of truth, and we ended up with one more excuse for not learning any post-Newtonian physics and one more reason to drop the old feminist self-help practices of repairing our own cars. They're just texts anyway, so let the boys have them back.[71]

Haraway's interest did not, as a consequence, lie in finding excuses *not* to learn gravity equations or in discarding truth altogether, but rather in the search of a feminist version: a usable doctrine of objectivity. For documentary photography, Haraway's perspective relevantly encourages "a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world."[72] Our accounts have to be wary of "our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts privilege and oppression that make up all positions."[73] Inspired by Marxism and psychoanalysis, Haraway's embodied objectivity calls for rich, adequate descriptions of the world.[74]

Let us return to Rosler's statement, cited in the introduction, that "Without some reference to the real, there's no place of departure," which was made in an interview conducted in 1989:

> Robert Fichter: Why do you think the documentary should continue to exist?
> Martha Rosler: That's a funny question, because I've written about documentaries as a dead form. But without some reference to the real, there's no place of departure.
> Fichter: Do you think the documentary actually deals with the real?
> Rosler: I think the documentary makes some effort to locate something outside of subjectivity, even if it doesn't ever quite reach that point. It's like an asymptote, a point toward which it tends. The problem with classical documentary was that it acted as though you could stand totally outside your own self and just be the camera or be suspended outside time and space. There's a certain godlike, magical imaginary subject that drives classical, old-fashioned photography.
> Paul Rutkovsky: Do you think it could ever be objective?

70—Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 578.
71—Ibid., 579.
72—Ibid.
73—Ibid.
74—Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

> Rosler: No, I think that belief was very naive. But there is something to be salvaged there. To suggest that it can't be perfect is not to suggest that there was nothing to aim for. There is something to be aimed for, even if the strategies you end up with don't look too much like classical documentary. I still think that the effort to represent the real, or at least to represent something beyond either complete interiority or complete surface, is essential. I think it's the basis for all representation.[75]

The objectivity that Rosler rejects as impossible in relation to the documentary is the objectivity of the outsider, a position which she identifies as a key problem within older documentary photography. Her attitude is illustrative of what I have earlier termed "documentary distrust." Rosler, it might be contended is yet to meet a *diffractive* methodology, which would allow for the *expansion* of objectivity beyond the naïve, mirror-inspired, godlike, stand-outside-your-own-self-position that she condemns.

Using a terminology that resonates with Rosler's, Haraway likewise argues that an objectivity which presumes an inside and an outside is impossible, referring to this illusory objectivity as a "god trick."[76] In this respect, Haraway correspondingly problematizes objectivity. However, rather than coming to a halt, she formulates potentials. She articulates other ways to reclaim vision and salvage objectivity: hers is an embodied feminist vision that does not shy away from objectivity. This objectivity, Haraway states, "means quite simply situated knowledges."[77] The trajectory that unfolds, the undulation that is set in play, does not embrace truth at the expense of fiction, nor objectivity at the sacrifice of subjectivity, but embraces the dance between the two.[78]

Haraway formulated the notion of a reclaimed objectivity around the same time that Rosler made her statements in the interview quoted above. Thirty years later, when putting their assertions next to each other, they enter a productive dialogue:

75—Later in the same interview, Rosler states, "I've never done anything that looks much like documentary, but I still take it as a base line." Further, "What I am doing now is hardly in the line of documentary, because what I've been interested in is the representations of representations [...] You might think of that as a documentary of signs in culture, but that is stretching the meaning of documentary past all usefulness." Martha Rosler is here quoted in an interview with Glenn Harper. See: Glenn Harper, ed. *Interventions and Provocations: Conversations on Art, Culture, and Resistance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 10.

76—Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 581–589.

77—Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 581.

78—The idea of a "dance" is borrowed from Barad and their description of "the dynamic, shifting dance we call science." Drawing upon Trinh T. Minh-ha's perspectives on documentary, Barad refers to science as a "movement between meanings and matter, word and world, interrogating and redefining boundaries, a dance not behind or beyond, but in "the between", where knowledge and being meet." Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction" (Great Britain: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 188.

Rosler formulates the problems from the documentary photography's point of view and Haraway articulates solutions from the scientific horizon. While they were both skeptical of predominant preconceptions of objectivity and documentary respectively, they insisted upon the importance of finding ways to negotiate reality: "I want to argue for a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing," stated Haraway.[79] In photography, the system of knowledge-making *has* transformed; our ways of seeing and making have been challenged. What remains is to reap the benefits of the constructive and deconstructive abilities that have been cultivated in photographic thinking for decades, and indulge in a committed, complex, considerate documentary photography, which contains within it a silver lining of contestable, passionate objectivity.

AGENTIAL REALISM AND OTHER REALISMS

Latour argued in 2004 for what he termed a "stubbornly realist attitude" which was a realism engaged in matters of concern rather than matters of fact, which, in effect was put forward as an effort to *get closer* to the facts.[80] In relation to photography, art historian Terri Weissman, in her study of photographer Berenice Abbott's practice and theory, suggests that realism is "an effect to be produced not a truth to be represented."[81] For Weissman, realism is a critical engagement with the world and the construction of an open-ended statement and space for communication. In seeking to trace productive positions able to respond to photographic blockages in connection with the approach of sociopolitical realities, Abbot's assessment of photography, which was primarily formulated in the 1940s and 1950s, provides a stimulating perspective, and Weissman's investigation of Abbott's writing reveals a great enthusiasm in relation to photography's bond with truth, objectivity, and realism. The optimistic faith in photography from this period traverses time and enters the research in a manner that recalls Karlholm's thinking on *contemporaneity*:

79—Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 584–585.

80—Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,", 231, 244.

81—Terri Weissman, *The Realisms of Berenice Abbott: Documentary Photography and Political Action* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 5, 20, 18.

Abbott's views were formulated at a different time, but the topicality of her formulations intersects with those of this research project.[82] She was a proponent of "straight" photography, which she characterized as "a breath of good, fresh air" in comparison to the sentimentality of pictorialism and the pseudo-sophisticated photography of the surrealists.[83] The straight photograph does not "lie" to the same extent as many other mediums do, Abbott argues: photography has the capacity to present, in a reasonably faithful manner, something as it existed in the external world at a specific moment. In this way, according to Weissman, "Abbott believed that photography should provide the general public with realistic images of a changing world, images designed to foster the kind of historical knowledge indispensable to democratic citizenship."[84] Realism is here entwined with civic responsibility and photography's pedagogical potential as a call to the spectator to act.

Abbott's appreciation of photographic realism relied on a model of photography as communication and thus as a demonstration of social and political engagement.[85] In this, Weissman locates a potential instance of philosopher Hannah Arendt's concept of "action," which, aligning with the public sphere, designates the sphere where politics—including debate and persuasion—happens. This focus on action, on agency, resonates with Karen Barad's "feminist notion of realism," wherein realism is preceded by the "agential" (in correspondence with the agential cut) and builds on participation and relationality.[86] "Agential realism" grounds knowledge claims in experience and doings; by way of actions and observations, we introduce cuts that enact momentary boundaries, introducing temporary separations that allow knowledges to be formulated, as discussed earlier.

82—Dan Karlholm, *Kontemporalism: om samtidskonstens historia och framtid* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2014).

83—Berenice Abbott, *A Guide to Better Photography* (New York: Crown, 1941, 161. Cited in Terri Weissman, *The Realisms of Berenice Abbott: Documentary Photography and Political Action* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 14.

84—Weissman, *The Realisms of Berenice Abbott,* 13.

85—Abbott's photography and writing would serve as a stimulating provocation for a future practice-based artistic research project. Particularly her work at the MIT, documenting the principles of physics, provides a relevant point of departure for research concerned with the role of photography in interdisciplinary collaborations and photography's potential as social and political communication. It should also be noted that Elizabeth McCausland, a contemporary to Abbott and a progressive and popular art critic in New York, who engaged in a longstanding intellectual relationship with Abbot's work, was as arrested as Abbott was by photography, viewing it as an "acute and faithful presentation of what has actually existed in the external world at a particular time and place." Weissman, *The Realisms of Berenice Abbott,* 14.

86—Karen Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," 188.

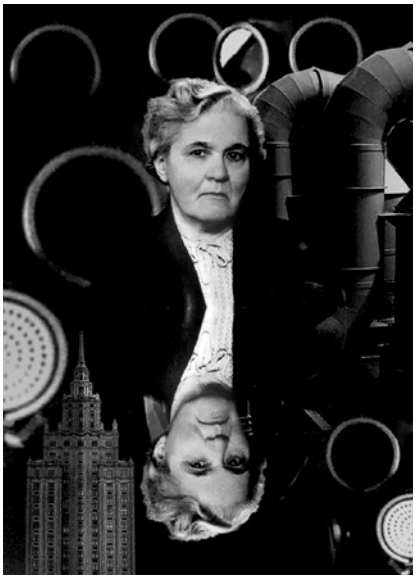
An important aspect of Haraway and Barad's perspectives is the significance that they place on engagement with and within the world in search of "knowledge systems that are both reliable and accountable guides to action."[87] Their outlooks are enabling, encouraging and constructive, stimulating commitment with matters that matter: "Realism is not about representations of an independent reality, but about the real consequences, interventions, creative possibilities, and responsibilities of intra-acting within the world."[88] Photographable realities exist, and through our doings we participate in the realities that we photograph.

The artwork *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018) is a statement formulated to set up an interaction between past scientists who did not get the recognition that they deserved, and a scientific environment in the present which is still marked by structural discrimination.[89] Philosopher Sandra Harding, whose writing inspired the work, is strikingly clear in her observation that *science is gendered*.[90] It is this straight-to-the point underpinning that forms the basis of the series. The economic, political, and psychological mechanisms that keep science sexist through discrimination are maintained informally.[91] The scientists in the montages have existed and each vitrine that the images are installed in contains information about their work and legacy. While montages enable a juxtaposition and layering that is denied by the uncut photograph, ontologically it makes little sense to argue that the realism of a "straight" photograph is greater than that of a montage. The only realism that we can concern ourselves with is the one which is inescapably affected by intervention, since reality cannot take possession of the scientific apparatus, the pencil, or the camera spontaneously, by itself. Haraway states, "there

87—Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," 188.

88—Ibid., 188.

89—Lidija Liepiņa, Chemist, Russia/Latvia, b. 1891, Saint Petersburg, d. 1985, Riga. Lidija Liepiņa was part of the research team that developed the first Russian gasmasks during World War I. She attended the Moscow Higher Women's Courses at a time when women were prohibited from entering universities. She became the first Latvian woman to receive a PhD, as well as the first woman to become a professor in the USSR. Her research concerned the corrosion of metal and colloid chemistry. Image and text from *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018).



90—The title of the artwork is borrowed from Sandra Harding's book of the same name. Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986).

is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds."[92] The images are constructions, but this does not contradict photograph's capability of showing important things in the social world: "Agential realism is a form of social constructivism that is not relativist, does not reduce knowledge to power plays or language, and does not reject objectivity."[93] Realism and relativist outlooks are not opposites. Stepping into the world with a camera is a way of being a part of the world; in this process, the world may crouch, put up a fight, and challenge our preconceptions.

91—Androcentrism in science was one of the important aspects of Jonas Hannestad and my work. Through the interviews that Hannestad carried out during our work with *Nanosocieties*, it became obvious how prevalent off-the-record discrimination is. Such discrimination significantly suppresses women's career opportunities in the natural sciences, even in in one of "the most equal countries in the world," Sweden.

92—Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 583.

93—Ibid.

94—Ibid., 164.

95—Malcolm Williams, "Situated Objectivity," *The Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 35, no. 1 (2005): 99–120.

96—Ibid., 99.

SITUATED OBJECTIVITY

Barad's concern is with the *responsibility* that follows "truth hunting."[94] From the vantage point of documentary photography, agential realism suggests that we can speak of a partial objectivity that demands an ethical responsibility in relation to the images we make. Barad and Haraway's outlooks discussed above led *The Objectivity Laboratory* to the notion of "situated objectivity." The earliest—and still one of the very few—uses of the term can be found in a 2005 article by Malcolm Williams, from the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University.[95] Williams argues that "value freedom is indeed impossible, but a version of objectivity that begins from values and is therefore situated within particular social contexts is possible."[96] He reasons that if social and natural sciences are desirable, then objectivity must also be a desirable possibility. This argument is not possible to translate directly to the broader field of artistic practice but when narrowed down to documentary photography, it could read as follows: if we desire a documentary photography that deals with sociopolitical realities, then objectivity should be a desirable possibility rather than a notion to be avoided.

Berenice Abbott's commitment to objectivity and realism "provides a model for how she wanted her photographs to behave in the world, as socially committed persuasive action."[97] Objectivity here emerges as having less to do with representation, and more to do with insisting on photography's social implications in the public sphere and civil society. Photographs are to be regarded as propositions that demand a response, whatever the response may be.[98] When Williams similarly argues for realism "as a regulatory ideal underpinning objectivity and one which can lead us to novel truths about social reality," situated objectivity can be seen to exist as a socially constructed value that is present in our engagements with social realities.[99] His arguments resonate with those of Sandra Harding who in the 1990s presented the idea of "strong objectivity," a reflexive and conscious attitude towards the researcher's own position, which rules out absolute neutrality.[100] In response to the question "How can the notion of objectivity be updated and made useful for contemporary knowledge-seeking projects?" Harding argues for an objectivity that does not aspire to be neutral, pointing out that neutrality is not only an obstacle but an impossibility.[101]

Whereas the idea of situated objectivity carries potential, it is important to underscore the legitimate and rightful critique of the concept of objectivity itself. Frida Orupabo gives voice to an aversion in relation to the ways in which objective claims have developed within hegemonies: **"The word 'objectivity' always gives me goosebumps because it makes me think of whiteness, power, neutrality, and knowledge production."** She refers to artist and psychologist Grada Kilomba, who has stated, "When they speak it is scientific, when we speak it is unscientific; universal/specific; objective/subjective; neutral/personal; rational/emotional; impartial/partial; they have facts, we have opinions; they have knowledge, we have experiences."[102] The definition of objectivity

97—Weissman, *The Realisms of Berenice Abbott*, 24.

98—Ibid., 27.

99—Malcolm Williams, "Situated Objectivity, Values and Realism," *European Journal of Social Theory* 18, no. 1 (2015): 76.

100—Sandra Harding, "'Strong Objectivity': A Response to the New Objectivity Question," *Synthese* 104 (1995).

101—Harding's position is rooted in standpoint feminist perspectives, prioritizing the lived experienced of traditionally marginalized groups of people. Sandra Harding, "'Strong Objectivity': A Response to the New Objectivity Question," *Synthese* 104 (1995): 341.

102—Grada Kilomba quoted in the essay "To Decolonize Is to Perform: The Theory-in-Praxis of Grada Kilomba." Inês Beleza Barreiros and Joacine Katar Moreira, "To Decolonize Is to Perform: The Theory-in-Praxis of Grada Kilomba," *Challenging Memories and Rebuilding Identities: Literary and Artistic Voices*, eds. Margarida Rendeiro and Federica Lupati (London: Routledge, 2019).

as a neutral measure, a universal tool of quantification, is not one that the perspectives presented above embrace or evoke. On the contrary, the dualistic model of organizing knowledge that Kilomba refers to also draws Barad and Haraway's skepticism. Haraway and Barad rather advise a vision that demands responsibility and respectful relations. Barad asks, "How did language become more trustworthy than matter?" noting that the only thing "that does not seem to matter anymore is matter."[103] They go on to comment that "just because science is exposed as being socially constructed doesn't mean that it doesn't work."[104] Knowledges can be teased out through scientific experiments and photographic images alike. Documentary photographs are not transparent windows on the world; they don't mirror reality and they don't encompass every perspective, but they can still "work." If we think with Barad, the point is that "it is the fact that scientific knowledge is socially constructed that leads to reliable knowledges [...] which is just what we are interested in."[105] Thus, the things that we can find out about reality through photographs have a legitimacy *because* they are embedded in the social constructedness of everything: this is what leads to reliable knowledges.

103—Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3. (2003): 801.

104—Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," 186.

105—Ibid., 186.

P R O P O S I T I

ON **INVEST**

I G A T I 0 N

DIGITAL DOCUMENTARY DESTABILIZATION

The cover of the February 1982 issue of *National Geographics* shows two pyramids; the gap between them was modified through digital manipulation. The magazine editor Wilbur E. Garrett argued that digitally shifting the pyramids was not an act of "falsification" but rather the establishment of "a new point of view."[1] This new leeway, the flexibility to digitally determine a new standpoint, is designated by photography writer Fred Ritchin as the start of the digital revolution. In an early article on the subject from 1984, Ritchin notes that in the future, "realistic-looking photographic images, now prized for their veracity, may be harder to trust."[2] The previously trustworthy photography thus resolutely engaged in a liaison with infidelity and deceit.

At a symposium concerned with photography and ethics, which took place in Landskrona, Sweden, in the autumn of 2021, Ritchin made a keynote presentation in which he argued that with "deep fakes" and other products of digital imaging procedures using AI in circulation, we must look for new ways to relate to the photographic image.[3] The move from analogue to digital has profoundly changed how we are informed about the world; as a result, we cannot evaluate photographs the same way that we did before the advent of the digital age. In the book *After Photography*, Ritchin argues that like quantum physics, digital photography

1—Fred Ritchin "Photography's New Bag of Tricks," *The New York Times Magazine* (4 November 1984), https://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/04/magazine/photography-s-new-bag-of-tricks.html?auth=link-dismiss-google1tap.

2—Ibid.

3—Fred Ritchin, "Expanding the Frame in the 21st century", keynote presentation at the international symposium "A System Among Others? Power, Balance, Self-Reflection: On and With the Photographic Image," hosted by the Department of Sociology, Lund University, in collaboration with the Hasselblad Foundation and Landskrona Foto, in Landskrona, Sweden (September 30 and October 1, 2021), https://www.facebook.com/LandskronaFoto.

begs for *other* understandings than those invited by Newtonian physics and analogue photography.[4] To search for the truth of a photograph—if "truth" refers to the non-manipulated, un-biased photograph—is outmoded and nonsensical. However, just as it would be "foolish and self-defeating" to completely abandon Newtonian physics, we should not "deny photography's strengths as we have known them."[5] The digital revolution within photography rather "reinstates some of the uncertainty that surrounded the first photographs," appealing to indeterminacy, the rejection of authority, and multiple perspectives.[6] Ritchin proposes that the 21st century potentials of photography can be seen to reactivate the photograph as both "malleable and resilient": the photograph may house a fruitfully *in*decisive moment, inspiring imaginations, and new possibilities.[7] Digital photography has thereby forced a productive discourse of complexity, uncertainty, and declassification into view, destabilizing documentary photography and providing a welcomed opportunity for new critical perspectives.

4—Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).

5—Ibid., 183.

6—Ibid., 181.

7—Ibid., 183.

8—Fred Ritchin, "What a Photograph Can Accomplish: Bending the Frame," *Time* (May 29, 2013), https://time.com/3799860/what-a-photograph-can-accomplish-bending-the-frame-by-fred-ritchin/.

9—As mentioned previously Fred Ritchin was a keynote speaker at the international symposium "A System Among Others? Power, Balance, Self-Reflection: On and With the Photographic Image" in 2021; at the same symposium, photographer Kent Klich in a similar line of thought as Ritchin's, highlighted the notion of credibility in speaking about his own documentary photographic projects, which usually involve long-term engagement with people in social vulnerability. See: Kent Klich, "Panel discussion 'Photographing the person in context—the ethics and process of creating subject and object' moderated by journalist Kalle Kniivilä, at "A System Among Others? Power, Balance, Self-Reflection: On and With the Photographic Image."

ASSEMBLING EVIDENCE

Ritchin is invested in photography as a means of addressing urgent questions is society; he provides perspectives to contribute to the revitalization of "a medium that has lost much of its power to engage society on larger issues."[8] Critical of the almost inescapable impulse to dismiss and classify as naïve and passé those who place any esteem in the photograph's link with reality, Ritchin proposes a move that is akin to Haraway's "rich, adequate descriptions of the world" in the form of what he terms a responsiveness to "credibility."[9] *Credibility* could consequently be comprehended as one of many coexisting components that may play an important role within ethically considerate contemporary documentary practice.

In 2021, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Filipino journalist Maria Ressa and Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov. Ressa commented in conjunction with the prize: "When you don't have facts, you don't have truth, when you don't have truth, you don't have trust. Trust is what holds us together to be able to solve the complex problems our world is facing today."[10] This assessment serves to situate trust as a constituent of truth, which is relevant to several of the outlooks articulated in the research.[11] Ever since 2016, journalists around the world have been fighting a battle for facts at a time when lies spread faster and further than facts: in this context, journalism becomes activism, Ressa contends.[12] Ressa's reasoning relates to Ritchin's: we need to find new ways to ensure that images can remain credible, for if we rule out the possibility of *trusting* photographs, images such as those from the Holocaust are perpetually undermined.[13]

A photograph is not "an automatic proof of anything," but it is proficient as a "rhetorical strategy" and has potential to serve as credible evidence.[14] To progress with and from, Ritchin's perspectives, the enquiry moves on to a specific occurrence with a significant presence in the art world in recent years. At Goldsmiths University of London, the Forensic Architecture research agency uses high-tech methods to present information in a "convincing, precise, and accessible manner—qualities which are crucial for the pursuit of accountability."[15] In line with what Ritchin terms *credibility*, the Program Manager at Forensic Architecture, Sarah Nankivell, declares that Forensic Architecture is dedicated to the presentation of information and "the truth of things in a way that is going to be taken seriously."[16] The term "forensic" indicates "the appli-

10—Ressa's assessment was presented at the Swedish radio Sveriges Radio's *lunchekot* at 12:30, 8 October 2021. A similar statement has been reproduced in *The New York Times*. The New York Times, "Nobel Peace Prize Awarded to 2 Journalists, Highlighting Fight for Press Freedom," https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/08/world/nobel-prize.

11—The relationship between journalism and documentary photography is longstanding and photojournalistic values often find their way into documentary discussions. For a distinction between "documentary photography and its cousin photojournalism", see for instance Max Pinckers' definition: "These two terms [documentary photography and photojournalism] are often interchanged and confused as being one and the same thing, whereas in fact they assume quite opposing attitudes." Max Pinckers, *Speculative Documentary Photography*, open edition (Universiteit Gent. Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, 2021), 10.

12—Rappler, "A conversation with 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zm3UvvyD2Xc.

13—Fred Ritchin, "Expanding the Frame in the 21st century."

14—Ritchin,"What a Photograph Can Accomplish."

15—Forensic Architecture, accessed February 14, 2022, https://forensic-architecture.org/.

16—Christie, Caroline. (2018) 'Forensic Architecture are rebuilding objective truths in a subjective world', 6 June 2018 in *Document,* https://www.documentjournal.com/2018/06/forensic-architecture-are-rebuilding-objective-truths-in-a-subjective-world/.

cation of scientific methods and techniques to the investigation of crime."[17] The agency was founded in 2010 by Eyal Weizman, who has described the Forensic Architecture headquarters as a hybrid between a newsroom and an artist's studio, which amalgamates a commitment to both content and form.[18]

Sites of Investigation: Art Institutions and Courtrooms

Forensic Architecture's cases approach human rights violations and are realized by an interdisciplinary team consisting of architects, artists, filmmakers, software developers, investigative journalists, lawyers, scholars, and scientists. The agency's position within contemporary art was made apparent not least when they were nominated for the prestigious Turner Prize in 2018. The group has in fact been a fixture in the art world for a number of years. During the period that the exhibition *Dear Truth*—which is described in depth in Section V, "2018–2021: Curating a Thematic Group Exhibition"—was scheduled to take place, Forensic Architecture held a solo exhibition at the Rhösska Museum of Design and Craft in central Gothenburg. A series of joint activities were thus initiated to build on the thematic exchange between the two exhibitions, the first of which (and the only event possible due the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic at that time) took place on February 17, 2020, prior to *Dear Truth* eventual opening. The title of that event, "Objectivity in Times of Post-Truth" (*Objektivitet i tider av post-truth*), which I participated in framing and spoke at, demonstrates the relevance of this practice to the broader discussion staged with *The Objectivity Laboratory*; this is a relevance which I unpick below.

Forensic Architecture's practice is significant for the present conversation less because of *what* they work with (their cases) and more because of *how* they

17—Oxford University Press, *Lexico* (online dictionary), accessed February 14, 2022, https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/forensic.

18—Megan O'Grady, "The Artists Bringing Activism Into and Beyond Gallery Spaces," *The New York Times Style Magazine* (October 1, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/01/t-magazine/art-activism-forensic-architecture.html.

19—An illustrative instance of a distinctly conceptual approach is the artist duo Broomberg and Chanarin's work *The Day Nobody Died* (2008), which received harsh critique from *The Guardian*'s Picture Editor Sean O'Hagen, who said: "When you read the text about it, it seems like a very serious piece of work [...] and then, every time something happens, instead of taking photographs they expose part of the role of photographic paper to the light and you get this huge abstract photo. Now... did it not dawn on them at any point, the arrogance of this? That they are in a war zone and that they're dicking about with some conceptual joke?" (Sean O'Hagen, "What is Conceptual Photography," September 18, 2012, *YouTube* available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TvpxG9fLqo.) The artwork referred to by O'Hagen was made in Afghanistan when Broomberg and Chanarin travelled there for a close encounter with the British Army during the war. They made a series of six-meter-long camera-less images: rolled up photographic paper that was exposed to the sun for 20 seconds. The images are described as "radically non-figurative, unique, action-photographs" on the artists'

work (their method). By way of comprehensive investigations, the team assemble evidence (legal, historical, and material) to produce critical arguments to counter and confront state crimes. While in contemporary art, conceptual and enigmatic procedures and vocabulary have long been embraced,[19] Forensic Architecture are in contrast distinctly concerned with the *usability* of their undertakings: "To develop, disseminate, and employ new techniques for evidence gathering and presentation in the service of human rights and environmental investigations and in support of communities exposed to state violence and persecution."[20] They carry out analysis and document incidents that have happened, but they also work with human rights activists to stop things from taking place, a task that they describe in terms of an "archaeology of the very recent past" and "a form of assembling for the future."[21] A statement voiced by philosopher Isabelle Stengers in 2016—wherein she asks "What can we compose to the next generation? The kind of imaginations that are necessary, that makes a difference. […] The main question could be: Does the research create generative situations, or not?"[22]—encircles Forensic Architecture's concern for "consequences" that extend across time.

Forensic Architecture's cases are put forward in a range of contexts, such as courtroom trials and United Nations assemblies. "The forum" and "the field" constitute two important sites in the agency's investigations (the field as the site for artistic work is further explored in NEARBY). While the former is presented as the staged and unfixed place "where the results of an investigation are presented and con-

website, intended to act as a critique of conflict photography. Rather than providing the audience with a glimpse of the conflict, the artists favour "an analytical process" that fundamentally denies representation. It is a "deliberate evacuation of content." (Broomberg and Chanarin, "The Day Nobody Died," accessed February 14, 2022, http://www.broombergchanarin.com/the-day-nobody-died-1-1.) The provocation arguably lies in the circumstances: the artists placed themselves in a location and situation where a certain type of photographs is expected and—by some—desired. A related strategy, that of negating expected images, can be found in artists Klara Källström and Thobias Fäldt's *Wikiland* (2011), wherein they gained access to photograph inside activist and journalist Julian Assange's home in Norfolk, England, where he was placed under house arrest in 2010. Källström and Fäldt made the decision to not make images of the central figure of the narrative, instead photographing the interior and exterior of the building, as well as focusing on the spectacle of news reporting: "The series doesn't reveal any close portraits of Assange and by these means, the gaze is turned towards media's reporting during this time as well as our own expectations on documentary photography when events like these are depicted." (Klara Källström and Thobias Fäldt, *Wikiland* (2011), https://kk-tf.com/project-001/.)

20—Forensic Architecture, "About," accessed February 14, 2022, https://forensic-architecture.org/about/agency.

21—Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Notes from Fields and Forums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 10.

22—Isabelle Stengers, "Plenary 3: 'Catastrophes and promises of science and technology by other means'," keynote presentation at the 4S/EASST' Conference Barcelona, organized by the Society for the Social Study of Science (4S), September 2, 2016. Personal notes.

tested," the field constitutes "the site of investigation"; both are imperative in the process of formulating persuasions, convictions, and probabilities.[23] As Weizman puts it, "Rather than putting aesthetics in a separate place or even in opposition to knowledge production, we need to find new ways of aligning them."[24] Someone who has explored photography's capacity to provide evidence and knowledges but from a distinctly personal perspective —in contrast to the strategically formulated conceptual approach communicated by the Forensic Architecture team—is artistic researcher Lars Wallsten. His *Notes on Traces: Photography. Evidence. Image*.[25] provides an analysis of forensic aesthetics, which, when compared to the large-scale, intricate productions of Forensic Architecture, comes across as restrained and subtly delicate. With a background in the Swedish Police, Wallsten distinguishes the photograph's relation to the subject as a fragmentary and suggestive "trace" (in Swedish: *spår*). Incomplete as it is, the trace reveals something which is concurrently present and absent. Understandings can surface when visual and conceptual patterns are noticed and exposed; the patterns are potentially evidentiary. Wallsten's images —visual deliberations on actual crime scenes—are presented in series, connected by composition or the presence of measuring sticks and arrows that point to something unnoticeable. The photograph as a trace is deliberated by Wallsten to have the capacity to show (*visa*), point (*påvisa*), and prove (*bevisa*). To *show* is to enable someone to see something. To *point* to something is dependent on the presence of visual support to back a claim up. Lastly, to *prove* something entails the establishment of facts.[26]

23—Anselm Franke and Eyal Weizman, *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 9–14.

24—Eyal Weizman, "Open Verification," *e-flux architecture* (June 2019), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248062/open-verification/.

25—Lars Wallsten, *Notes on Traces: Photography. Evidence. Image* (Gothenburg: ArtMonitor, 2011).

26—Ibid., 151.

27—Forensic Architecture, accessed February 14, 2022, https://forensic-architecture.org/.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE MECHANISMS OF ARTICULATION

Transparency in relation to the procedures of making and formulating knowledges is demonstrated through Forensic Architecture's website, where each case is meticulously outlined and its methodology (be it situated testimony, photogrammetry, or 3D modelling) is defined alongside an assembly of details that concern the construction and presentation of each case.[27] The

website thus constitutes a record which aspires to, as Weizman puts it, "expose every step by which the work was carried out."[28] This includes charting the people who were involved in the production and the materials used in each investigation, as well as an account of how the evidentiary material was established and pieced together in the assemblage of the case: "Doing this allows for the public domain to function in an analogous process to a scientific peer-review; that is, for the underlying data to be examined by others, and the processes to be replicated and tested."[29] While this outlook is not feasible nor desirable for every artist, it encourages responsiveness in relation to accuracy and credibility.

"Because objects cannot actually speak, there is a need for a 'translator' or an 'interpreter'—a person or a set of technologies to mediate between the thing and the forum," Weizman states.[30] In New York City, April 24, 1939, Abbott wrote a manifesto where she assigned a similar role to photography, which she saw as a "friendly interpreter between science and the layman."[31] Abbott's and Weizman's respective responsiveness to the "mechanisms of articulation"[32] relate to what Latour and Woolgar define as "inscription devices": the scientific instrument used to "transform a material substance into a figure or diagram which is directly usable."[33] As discussed in the chapter MONTAGE Barad's attentiveness to the apparatus —the agencies of observation—specifies that material technologies are integral to the process of constructing knowledges. These different evaluations, that were formulated at different times and in different fields, have in common that they serve to point explicitly to the process, the act, the person, and the instrument that lies between the subject and the proposition which has been articulated in response to the subject. Barad's reading of the work of physicist Niels Bohr can be drawn on here, because it stresses the importance of providing

28—Eyal Weizman, "Open Verification."

29—Eyal Weizman, "Open Verification."

30—Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Notes from Fields and Forums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 9.

31—Abbott contends that we live in a world made by science, which inspired the title of one of the three artworks of the research project. Photography, the mechanical tool—"science's child"—has the capacity to be the spokesperson between science and the layman, "as no other form of expression can be; for photography, the art of our time, the mechanical, scientific medium which matches the pace and character of our era, is attuned to the function." Seeing Science, "Berenice Abbott and Science 1939," accessed February 14, 2022, http://seeingscience.umbc.edu/2016/10/berenice-abbott-photography-and-science-1939/.

32—Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture,* 9.

33—Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986 {1979}).

descriptions of all the important components that are included in the experimental arrangement.[34] The integrity and ethics of the investigation/experiment consequently relies on contextualization and responsiveness to the entangled material specifics.

ENGAGED OBJECTIVITY WITHOUT IMPARTIAL EXPERTS

Signals of truth can be frail and hard to distinguish. Being observant of the "great, messy flood of testimonies and pixels" is central.[35] Weizman argues against the conventional idea that scientific investigation brings a tyranny of experts, in line with the phantasm of a rigid, objective scientist, dismissing this as a feeble argument: "Throughout our investigations, the experts we encountered were nothing like the authoritarian figures who are featured in such concerns."[36] This assertion lays bare an assumption which is close to the caricature of the documentary photographer as a naïve, ignorant person with a camera who puts unyielding trust in the photograph as an objective, neutral representation (a straw man, who may in fact be so uncommon that responsiveness to other concerns is more productive).

Weizman introduces the idea of "engaged objectivity" not only to draw attention to, but to advocate "the necessity of taking sides, of fighting for and defending claims."[37] Forensic Architecture's work starts from the research agency members' personal motivations and aspirations, and in this context, "political motivations must not be an obstacle to gathering knowledge, but rather the precondition for attaining it."[38] According to this view, objectivity is never neutral, a discission that *The Objectivity Laboratory* engages in the MONTAGE chapter.

34—Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," 170. It may be noted here, that in quantum theory, to which Bohr made significant contributions, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle states that it is not possible to know everything about a quantum mechanical system with absolute certainty. When observational apparatuses are introduced, the measurement will by necessity impact the system that is measured, thus making it impossible to gain full understanding of the properties that are measured.

35—Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 128.

36—Ibid., 74.

37—Ibid.

38—Ibid.

POSITIONAL TRUTH

Photographs will always fail to depict reality in all its complexity; images are always inadequate and they "are always questions more than answers," as artist Trevor Paglen suggests,[39] but atten-

tion to the details of production and transparency with regard to relevant material and conceptual circumstances can lead one step closer to trustworthiness. Criticality in relation to the technologies and processes of making materializes as a prerequisite for integrity, ethics, or indeed, objectivity. This suggests that testimonies should be understood as evidence because they are presented as such and follow procedures that are set up to confirm their reliability. In the case of Forensic Architecture, their claims gain credibility thanks to the detailed accounts of the conditions of the investigations, a procedure which complies with the scientific principle of reproducibility and transparency.

This next section introduces artists Taryn Simon, Trevor Paglen, and Mathieu Asselin's practices as instances where the construction of truth and the establishment of facts lie at the heart of the artworks' importance.[40] Just as Forensic Architecture's investigations are aimed to increase public awareness, Paglen, Asselin, and Simon's artworks facilitate knowledges, unveiling systems of power, technology, and suffering that have deliberately been concealed and intentionally disremembered. Asselin's *Monsanto®: A Photographic Investigation* details the misconducts of the multinational biotechnology company Monsanto, one of the world's most powerful agrochemical giants. Monsanto was founded in the United States in 1901 and has manufactured products such as the herbicide Agent Orange, which was used by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War, exposing millions of people in Vietnam to the toxic herbicide. **»When I see what Monsanto has done, I ask myself: what are the mechanisms that allow this to happen?«** Asselin says when interviewed for the *Dear Truth* exhibition.[41] He continues,

39—The Photographers' Gallery, "An Interview with Trevor Paglen on the occasion of the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize 2016," published by The Photographers' Gallery, https://thesandpitdotorg1.wordpress.com/2016/04/22/an-interview-with-trevor-paglen-on-the-occasion-of-the-deutsche-borse-photography-foundation-prize-2016/.

40—Exhibition view Trevor Paglen (to the left) and Taryn Simon (to the right), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Mathieu Asselin, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

41—Exhibition view Mathieu Asselin (to the right) and Kerstin Hamilton (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Mathieu Asselin (to the left), Laia Abril (in the middle) and Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero (to the right), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Mathieu Asselin (detail), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography* Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

»I really feel this need to scream, but of course screaming for the sake of screaming is not very effective.« Asselin describes his motivation as **»outrage,«** which caused him to spend five years investigating the consequences of Monsanto's business. His approach leaves no room for obscurity in relation to the artwork's message: **»I am choosing to tell only one side of the story because I believe nothing that Monsanto have done good can make up for all the bad things that they have done.«** Asselin's position is clearly not neutral (it is "engaged," in Weizman's terms). He states, **»I could have put myself in a more comfortable position by letting the public decide, but no, this is a protest work. It is fact-based and *against* Monsanto, and the message needs to be clear.«** The political motivations—which are openly disclosed by the artist—serve as a requirement for the being and legitimacy of the work.

Asselin's practice relies on reflexivity, but the sincerity and resolution of the artwork resides in the research-based methodology. A critical yet productive attitude that does not prioritize reflexivity over subject matter, nor subject matter over reflexivity, emerges; I find the interplay between self-conscious awareness and a steady commitment to urgent issues encouraging, which will be deliberated further in "Restrained Reflexivity" below. Engaged objectivity and systematic investigation signal dedication to the establishment of knowledges that are reliable. Stressing the relevance of ascertaining facts by way of comprehensive investigation, Asselin says: **»You need to back what you say. Photography needs to be embedded within a bigger movement of scientists, journalists, activists, etc. For the type of**

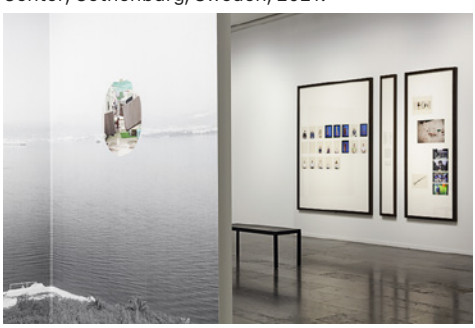
work I do, working as the lonely documentary photographer, trying to fight the world, it's romantic but not very effective. My work is a small contribution to the bigger fight against Monsanto.« These perspectives have a relevance in contemporary documentary photography because they provide openings for the practitioner who wants to engage with the realities of others without working with fiction or theatricality as a central part of the methodology.

Asselin prefers to use the word "fact-based" rather than "true" when asked about his relationship with truth: **»Everybody has their own truths, depending on their moral grounds. The full story is that Monsanto did good things, too. I am telling *part* of the truth about Monsanto«.**[42] Taryn Simon has similarly said that the camera provides "what appears to be evidence of a truth. But there are multiple truths attached to every image depending on the creator's intention, the viewer, and the context in which it is presented."[43] Simon's visual approach and methodology insists that the photographer's gaze can never capture or represent a life or story, but she accentuates in a phone interview for *Dear Truth* that **»through the accumulation of so many photographs, something unknowable and unspeakable can be found in the gaps.«**[44] Trevor Paglen, also speaking in conjunction with the *Dear Truth* exhibition, states that **«particularly within photography there is a long tradition of people wanting to believe that photographs can tell the truth. I understand why people want that, but I don't think that it is true.«** However, Paglen adds an important disclaimer: **»I am not questioning truth in some kind of vulgar, postmodern, 'nothing matters' kind of way, but I am questioning the relationship between truth and authority. What sort of truths are claimed, and how, and who do those truths benefit at whose expense?«** Paglen's disassociation from "vulgar" negations of photography's relation to truth is a cue that leads back to Forensic Architecture.

42—Exhibition view (below) Mathieu Asselin, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

43—Taryn Simon, "Photographs of Secret Lies," *TEDGlobal* (2009), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Anw8JA_qDrg.

44—Exhibition view Taryn Simon (to the right) and Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.



Weizman relates to truth as a "common resource," which is not owned by a particular interest but rather serves the benefit of society; it is "something that we all need in order to understand our position on earth."[45] Weizman's perspectives constructively serve as a rejoinder to Asselin, Simon, and Paglen's statements: "In trying to interpret and present the evidence before us, we must continually try to steer between the two opposing tendencies into which all discussions of truth gravitate—a totalizing view of a single, privileged position, and a relativist, anti-universalist perspective that regards all truths as multiple, relative or non-existent."[46] Weizman terms this "positional" truth. The positional truth includes divergences, and refrains from regarding conflicting views, errors, and confusions as obstacles on a straight track to a preferred master narrative. Instead, the only narrative which reasonably can be derived is one that contains gaps, contradictions, and disagreements. From the collection of a variety of accounts, "a more or less coherent narrative (or a counternarrative)" can be assembled.[47]

45—The Tate, "Forensic Architecture, Turner Prize Nominee 2018," https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turner-prize-2018/forensic-architecture.

46—Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 128.

47—Ibid.

48—Eyal Weizman, "Open Verification," *e-flux architecture* (June 2019), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248062/open-verification/.

REASONABLE TRUTH

Weizman proposes to approach truth not as a noun, but as a verb and thus a practice; truth as *verification*, a practice of effectively breaking the monopoly of predominating institutional conceptions and productions of truth. The notions of trust and transparency, that have already surfaced repeatedly in *The Objectivity Laboratory*, appear again: "The burden of open verification is to gain trust and keep as open and transparent as possible the processes by which truth claims are made and facts established."[48] Such verification can be achieved by direct engagement and proximity, through establishing contact with communities and individuals who are affected by violence. Declaring a shift in attitude, Weizman says: "Coming from the field of left activism and critical spatial practice, I felt instinctively oriented against the authority of established truths. [...] Today, counter-intuitively perhaps, I find myself running Foren-

sic Architecture," a reorientation he puts down to "the nature of contemporary conflict" and developments in "the texture of the present."[49] The post-truth moment could, argues Weizman, "give rise to an alternative set of truth practices that can challenge both the dark epistemology of the present as well as traditional notions of truth production."[50] A dark epistemology is intended to obscure and cast doubt. Ultimately, post-truth is not simply about lying. It is an attack aimed at institutions such as universities, media, and government experts; "when people no longer know what to think, how to establish facts, or when to trust them, those in power can fill this void by whatever they want to fill it with."[51] In order to resist institutional lies, false statements voiced by officials need to be deconstructed and counteracted with reconstructed accounts of what actually happened.

49—Eyal Weizman, "Open Verification."
50—Ibid.
51—Ibid.
52—Peter Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019), 26.
53—Ibid., 30.

THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR THE TANGIBLE

In the contemporary political and media landscape, technology plays a key role. Peter Pomerantsev points to the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines as an example. During the 2016 election campaign, falsehoods were constructed by "Manila's disinformation architects" and the tone was characterized by a harsh language that rejected "established and linguistic norms."[52] During Ferdinand Marcos rule (1968–1986), journalists were arrested, and Marcos was in control of the media throughout the Philippines. By controlling the "truths" that were published, he could rewrite history. In line with present-day successors, Marcos portrayed himself as a masculine, strong leader, but Pomerantsev notes that even though the similarities are many between past and present methods and leaders, a vital dissimilarity lies in their visibility. Before the digital era, the enemy was commonly observable—they were a physical opponent with a distinct body; today's antagonists are "anonymous, everywhere and nowhere."[53] In the frenzy of a social media enabled by digital technology that spreads disinformation and vulgarities at an unprecedented rate, the solidity of a physical photographic project can present itself as a sober

voice and counter position.[54] Taryn Simon's *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII* is one such work. When first exhibited in 2011, it marked a new route for socially-engaged photography, vast in terms of scale, conceptual magnitude, and research. Simon and her team went through an extensive process of obtaining permissions, interviewing participants, and recording histories related to wide-ranging subjects such as colonial conquest and persecution, political power disputes, religious rituals, and war atrocities.

A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII is the image of a deliberate, methodological approach that relies on an analytical process, where care is in the details and the time and effort that the artist puts into the work. A monumental installation of two-meter-high "panels" are structured systematically, with each of the eighteen Chapters containing three segments: to the left are portraits; in the center, a text panel communicates narratives and lists names, professions, date of birth and place of residence; on the right, "footnote images" provide photographic evidence and fragmented material that speaks with the overall story.[55] In comparison to Simon's systematic and rigid presentation, the weakly underpinned posts that flourish on social media come across as a rhizomatic nightmare.[56] Online disinformation travels at the speed of an algorithm, in stark contrast to the transport of Simon's work. Moving *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII* is a physical process which requires time and logistic planning. Materials are assembled in the construction of boxes to hold the artworks safe, transport networks are utilized, freight companies travel across national borders, moving the physical objects

54—Exhibition view Taryn Simon (to the left) and Kerstin Hamilton (to the right), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

55—Exhibition view Taryn Simon, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

56—"Rhizome" is a botanical term which has been further developed by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to describe non-hierarchical knowledge such as that found in the internet, an example of an infinite knowledge structure without a beginning and an end, and without the linear organisation of chronological narratives.

in trucks and by sea.[57] The colossal artwork materializes as the antithesis to the weightless Tweets on Twitter. Facebook comments that nomadically crisscross the world wide web meet their counterpart in all that is solid in *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII*.

Over the course of four years, before the panels were constructed, Simon spent a vast amount of time travelling to a significant number of geographic locations with seven cases of photographic equipment. She used the cumbersome, large-format, analogue film camera as well as a modified version which allowed for digital images: **»The photographic technologies were radically shifting at the time of the project. While tracing the bloodlines in the narratives it [*A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII*] constructs, it is simultaneously capturing machine evolution.«** The attentiveness to the technological and material properties of photography relates to Paglen's interest in what the photograph is and can be: **»Typically, we think about a photograph as an image, but we don't have to look at it that way: we can think about it as gelatin and silver nitrate that have been activated in certain kinds of ways or as paper that has been made out of trees. There is a whole different way that we can approach the question of what a photograph is.«** He continues, **»Materials themselves have stories embedded in them.«** This attentiveness to material realities that are not primarily dependent on human subjectivities marks a shift from the preoccupation with language, representations, and ideologies that has been prominent in critical thinking—certainly within art—since the 1970s. With more recent schools of thought such as new materialism, object-oriented ontology (OOO), actor-network theory, speculative realism, and post-humanist theory, attention is placed on *matter*. For Forensic Architecture, buildings have "the capacity to act and interact with their surroundings and shape events around them. They structure and condition rather than simply frame human action, they actively—sometimes violently—shape incidents and events."[58] Matters and objects are seen as active agents rather than as either social constructs or passive things.

57—See for instance: Andrew Dickson, "How to Move a Masterpiece: The Secret Business of Shipping Priceless Artworks," *The Guardian* March 21, 2019), https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/21/how-to-move-a-masterpiece-secret-business-shipping-priceless-artworks-art-handling.

58—Franke and Weizman, *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, 16.

RESTRAINED REFLEXIVITY

Consideration in relation to materials acknowledges non-human agency, and manifests apparatuses and procedures as non-passive agents. Further, the alertness to materialities shifts attention away from human subjectivity: that is, away from the self. The artworks in *Dear Truth* are infused with criticality and reflection both upon the position of the maker and the shortcomings of photography, but none of them contain overtly self-referential traces. Rather than opting for meta-documentaries or quasi-historical accounts, the importance of substantial research and collaborations, often across fields, is stressed. Paglen, who is educated in photography and holds a PhD in Geography, reflects on his role: **»Part of your job and responsibility as a professional artist is to be a part of the society, and engage with society, and take on the responsibilities that have been conferred to you as a result of the enormous amount of freedom that you are granted in being an artist.«** His views on the artist's role consequently implicates the responsibility to engage with society. Further, **»I am curious, and I want to learn how to see the world around us. It's an endlessly interesting question: what is seen?«** The camera is a tool in this quest, and in Paglen's photographs the unseen is made available for the audience to examine.[59] Society rather than the artistic process is what is at stake; art is **»the way that I understand what the world looks like at different moments in history.«** Paglen articulates the world through art, and **»when we make images, we create a kind of common sense; we change the common sense, in a way.«** The ability to contextualize and problematize the different aspects that constitutes the photographic process is symptomatic of contemporary art: Asselin, Paglen, and Simon are part of a generation of artists who work with documentary strategies—without necessarily defining them as such—that display a critical awareness of their situated position. Their reflexivity is established in methodological considerations and visual choices rather than explicitly manifested.

59—Exhibition view Trevor Paglen, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

IN THE DETAILS

Asselin describes his incentive as the urge to raise questions with the help of photography: **»People see the Monsanto work and ask: why, where, to whom did this happen, and who is responsible? And, from there, maybe if I am lucky enough and do my work right, they ask, how can we change things?«** He continues, **»For me as a photographer, the artistic tools are important in the articulation of questions that maybe would not be asked otherwise. The important thing with art is the potential it gives you to tell stories—complicated stories.«** Simon's work takes the viewer to the hidden and unfamiliar, speaking to fundamental issues in contemporary society.[60] Paglen in his practice of "trying to deal with the historical moment that we live in" spends years finding people that are, in his own words, smarter than him telling him how to think of his area of interest in clearer ways.[61] This is a matter of offering artworks that can contribute to intelligibility in relation to contemporary society, and in this action, Paglen collaborates since he finds it is inconceivable to understand the world depending on knowledges from one discipline at a time.[62]

As is becoming increasingly clear, *The Objectivity Laboratory* is interested in retrieving truths and objectivities from the documentary maelstrom where fabrications and fictionalizations have become *à la mode* and documentary truth claims *faux pas*. While the unsettlement of the documentary genre was an achievement, Erika Balsom argues that the liberating "potential that initially accompanied the articulation of this critique has dissipated."[63] The research is in search of documentary perspectives where observation, empiricism, and examination plays a substantial role. Asselin, Simon, and Paglen's perspectives and practices transmit a belief in the photograph. Not a naïve trust in the photograph as a representation of the world, but an encouraging expectation of the photograph's ability to show something important. Weizman states that an important insight from their forensic work is that "rather than numbing our

60—In *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (2007), Simon explores the privilege of access in the United States by documenting inaccessible sites in spheres such as science, medicine, and security, http://tarynsimon.com/works/aihu/#1.

61—Trevor Paglen, "Clarice Smith Distinguished Lecture: artist Trevor Paglen," *YouTube* (September 10, 2015), https://www.youtube.com/embed/DnwfZOzzyWg.

62—The Photographers' Gallery, "An Interview with Trevor Paglen."

63—Erika Balsom, "The Reality-Based Community," *e-flux* (2017), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/.

perceptions of the pain of others"—on the contrary, "the facts of violence and destruction has, in fact, further sensitized us to the world around us."[64] This comment relates to Susan Sontag's famous argument that rather than being touched and informed by looking at an abundance of photographs of atrocities, we are becoming desensitized.[65] Photography is assuredly a medium capable of both and it is today's challenge to invigorate and question photographic conventions in theory and practice. Ariella Azoulay argues that if we get too comfortable with looking at photograph a certain way—a way of looking that is about categorization and sorting out—then we will overlook relevant information contained within the frame and the usage of the photograph will become limited: "This insight requires us to ask anew: what is a photograph? What does it enable, and what does it not enable one to see?"[66] The works that have been discussed in INVESTIGATION share little visual correspondence with the engaged photography of the 20th century or with the photographs of atrocities that have been accused of desensitizing us. Laborious photography-based artworks, which are profoundly and explicitly complex, are today prominent in contemporary art. The presence of such works paves the way for documentary photography potentials that push towards the possibility to alert, sensitize, and draw attention to various aspects of contemporary society.

64—Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 129.

65—Susan Sontag. *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977).

66—Ariella Azoulay, "What is a photograph? What is photography?" *Philosophy of Photography* 1, no. 1 (2010): 10–11.

P R O P O S

ITION **RESI**

S T A N C E

SITE OF STRUGGLE: THE STREETS

In January 2011, artist Lara Baladi was one of the hundreds of thousands of people across Egypt who took to the streets in protest against President Hosni Mubarak. In her text "When Seeing Is Belonging: The Photography of Tahrir Square," Baladi departs from the events that played out in and around Tahrir Square, the public square in Cairo that served as an epicenter of the protests. "Ultimately, photographing in Tahrir was an act of faith," she writes, "as if recording the ecstatic reality of the present would remind us, in the future, of the Square's utopian promise."[1] The camera became a tool in the political fight when the protestors took action through photography. Photography theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay states that "when cameras are in the hands of so many, new modes of questioning and arguing," as well as what she refers to as "the citizenry of photography," emerge.[2] Such new approaches in relation to photography can be discerned in Baladi's outlooks. The existence of photography *by* the many protesters *for* the many geographically scattered spectators was, Baladi notes, extraordinary in the Egyptian context, Egypt being a country permeated by suspicion towards cameras, and where photography had historically been linked to state propaganda. The camera became in this instance a "non-violent weapon" which was directed at the state by the people. At this moment, "photographing was a political act, equal in importance to demonstrating, constituting civil disobedience and defiance."[3] When asked today to elaborate on her earlier statements, Baladi comments that, in the

1—Lara Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging: The Photography of Tahrir Square," *Contemporary Visual Art + Culture BROADSHEET* 43, no. 1 (2014): 67.

2—Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books: New York, 2008), 142–143.

3—Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging," 66.

context of Tahrir Square, **»where (anti-camera) propaganda helped generate paranoia, fear, and mistrust between people, literally overnight, the camera became one of the most efficient ways to counter the state and its security apparatus.«** This role of photography is facilitated by the availability of mobile phones and access to the internet: social media enabled the logistical organization of protest as well as serving as a platform to inform the world about the uprisings and violence committed by authorities.[4]

It is, however, not the images of protest in themselves that *The Objectivity Laboratory* is concerned with, but rather how and why they surface and above all, how they inspire new evaluations. Baladi deliberates on the changing conditions of photography: "In the midst of the emergency, all theories on the subjectivity of photography suddenly became irrelevant."[5] Her perspectives invite considerations that are of relevance to documentary assesments: when images emanate from the heart of political struggles, the subjectivity of photography is not the principal focus. Rather, at the heart of the matter is the "old" potential of photography: to show to people the events that play out in front of the camera. When photographs are made and spread in line with motivations like those referred to by Baladi, the images' function as a part of resistance movements. In such revolutionary settings, the multiple truths that photographs can convey are interlinked with communication, connectivity, and credibility.

4—Social media's role as a new source of information was a distinguishing trait of the uprisings in the early 2010s in countries including Egypt, Tunisia, and Bahrain. Even though it is debated what role social media played in *instigating* the protests, the uprisings have widely been recognized as the "Facebook revolution" or "Twitter uprising." See, for instance: Agence France-Presse (AFP), "Debate Flares on 'Twitter Revolutions,' Arab Spring," *Hindustan Times* (March 10, 2013), https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/debate-flares-on-twitter-revolutions-arab-spring/story-QHhYoIMIujzHQrO9HAoijL.html; Maeve Shearlaw "Egypt Five Years On: Was It Ever a 'Social Media Revolution'?" *The Guardian* (January 25, 2016), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/egypt-5-years-on-was-it-ever-a-social-media-revolution.

5—Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging," 66.

6—Sontag, Susan. (1977) *On Photography*. Penguin Books Ltd: London.

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO RESIST BY RECORDING

In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag refers to the camera as a "predatory weapon"; objectification and aggression are embedded in the photographic act.[6] Sontag's metaphorical outlooks are compelling, they have captivated readers and stimulated valuable deliberations on photography as potentially violent. Even though Baladi's reference to the camera as a *nonviolent*

weapon adopts a rhetoric that is linked to Sontag's, she shifts attention to the camera's potential to take a stand against a regime; the camera is approached as a means by which to fight and expose the powerful. Media studies scholar Kari Andén-Papadopoulos describes the camera, when used to attack authorities, as a means of "resistance by recording."[7] Solidarities beyond the streets can be triggered by the presence of cameras and in Cairo in January 2011, photography became a political tool in the hands of the people.[8]

The idea of resistance by recording is an invitation which relates to Trevor Paglen's reflection concerning the artist's responsibility to engage and be a part of society. But here, the impetus extends beyond the artistic realm to accentuate the many applications of photography. In Tahrir Square, the major news networks failed to reflect "the reality on the ground,"[9] as Baladi argues, and the protestors who refused to be misrepresented photographed their own experiences. "The citizen of photography enjoys the right to see because she has a responsibility toward what she sees," states Azoulay.[10] Her affirmations are perceivable in Baladi's description of the scenes in Tahrir square: "During the 18 days, people in the square took photos because they felt the social responsibility to do so."[11] Baladi continues: "Thousands of people moved, photographed and stood together in solidarity against totalitarianism. Protesters held above their heads signs and slogans by day, and the blue glowing lights of mobile phones, iPads and even laptops, by night."[12] The sharing, and consequently the archiving, of an incident often takes place minutes or even seconds later, when the footage is uploaded online and thereby distributed globally; as the photograph travels, it informs spectators across the globe of the events it describes.

Reflecting on documentary photography as a form of resistance led me to the concept of "documentary resistance"—a concept introduced by film director Angela J. Aguayo, which designates the fight for social justice through images and videos that are disseminated online—in the course of the research.[13]

7—Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, "Imaging Human Rights: On the Ethical and Political Implications of Picturing Pain," *The Routledge Companion to Media and Human Rights*, eds. Howard Tumber and Silvio Waisbord (Oxon: Routledge, 2017).

8—Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging," 66.

9—Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging," 68.

10—Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 144.

11—Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging," 66.

12—Ibid., 67.

13—Angela J. Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance: Social Change and Participatory Media* (New York: Oxford University Press:, 2019), 238.

Documentary resistance moves beyond mere recognition, pointing to visual engagement with the world. Drawing upon the work of Lars Wallsten, introduced in the previous INVESTIGATION, it could be stipulated that the act of visual resistance demands more than merely "showing": in its capacity to "point," documentary resistance relies on visual backing to support and strengthen the photographic statement. In the section below, the notion of visual backing will be explored with reference to reproducibility as a condition for objectivity.

OBJECTIVITY AND REPRODUCIBILITY

We know that photographs can easily be manipulated, so how can we trust them? Human subjectivity and the impact of the camera, which marks every image, are undeniable traits of photography. As such, viewpoints that hold that manipulation disqualifies objectivity can be disregarded and effectively dismissed as obsolete. This is also what Fred Ritchin suggests, as I discuss in INVESTIGATION: the search for a non-manipulated truth in the image is outmoded. How then, can images act as credible testimonies? One option is to look to an attribute that is central to scientific inquiry, which is also at the heart of photography, namely reproducibility. Barad proposes that to be "objective" is to be "*reproducible* and unambiguously communicable."[14] Drawing on Barad's definition: for a photograph to be valid as an objective testimony it arguably needs to be reproducible and unambiguously communicable. This criterion of reproducibility could be understood as being *less about the ability to reproduce a single photograph repeatedly* (which is of course a fundamentally photographic characteristic) and more to do with a single motif being reproduced by a multitude of different cameras. That is, when a mass of photographs depicts the same event in a close-to-identical manner but from slightly different angles, if they unambiguously communicate matching information, then *the visual backing is offered by the numerous perspectives that support the accuracy of the photographic statement*.[15]

14—Karen Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*, L. Hankinson Nelson and J. Nelson, eds. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 171, emph. added.

15—An example of when the volume of photographs from the same event appears to support the accuracy of the photographic statement is the aftermath of Donald Trump's inauguration in 2017, when it was reported by the media that the crowd that showed up to witness the inauguration was relatively small. The Trump administration denounced these claims at a press conference where the then

Images photographed in a context like the protests in Tahrir Square are biased, but they are not independent of the reality of the events that played out, just as scientific knowledge is not "an arbitrary construction independent of 'what is out there'."[16] Just as Ritchin encourages the rejection of authority, and values the significance of multiple perspectives, the connection between objectivity and reproducibility suggests that the sheer number of protestors with cameras locates credibility in the images, credibility which Ritchin identifies as an important component of contemporary photography that approaches urgent matters in society.[17] The protestors' urge to photograph—the sense of responsibility towards what they saw—is from this perspective indispensable in understanding contemporary photography *as resistance*.

Press Secretary Sean Spicer claimed that it "was the largest audience to witness an inauguration, period. Both in person and around the globe." Spicer was later fired from his position—for reasons that had nothing to with the inauguration—and admitted regretting this statement. In an analysis of Trump's first year in power, *The Independent* published the article "A Year of Donald Trump's Presidency, Told in Fake News," arguing that while it is hard to determine the exact number that attended the inauguration "evidence points in one precise direction: that the Trump administration was wrong, that relatively few people turned up, and that it was shown clearly in pictures." The many photographs from different positions by a multitude of people thus provided accountable visual backing of the factual circumstances. "Trump White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer blasts the media at first press conference" (January 22, 2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2ewy0uNmgQ; Andrew Griffin, "A Year of Donald Trump's Presidency, Told in Fake News," *The Independent* (January 17, 2018), https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-fake-news-real-explained-debunked-cnn-tax-bill-obamacare-a8164696.html.

16—Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway," 185.

17—See chapter INVESTIGATION.

18—Angela J. Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance: Social Change and Participatory Media* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2019), 238.

PHOTOGRAPHY MOVES: DOCUMENTARY AS BELONGING

Aguayo's assessment of the documentary emphasizes the way that it connects people with each other: "Documentary assures us that we are not alone."[18] Aguayo's statement emphasizes a trait of documentary photography that is central to *The Objectivity Laboratory*: the encounter. Undoubtably, encounters have always been a key aspect of photography, particularly socially committed and documentary-oriented photography. However, the presence and popularity of expressly conceptual and speculative documentary photography in recent decades has served to re-direct attention from observational strategies; the unpredictability of encounters has been outwitted by more startling approaches that rely on staging, careful deliberation, and ingenuity. Baladi finds that the revolution unleashed photography

as a participatory act, showing photography as being capable of evoking other confrontations, collaborations, and solidarities than those prompted by more conceptual approaches. In Tahrir Square, photographing entailed belonging.[19] Images from the protest movements travelled online but also acted at local level: bringing the images back to where they originated was a means of providing a local space for reflection, dialogue—and belonging.[20]

Aguayo finds that in our relations with others, our senses of responsibility, concern, and affective care[21] are stimulated and allowed to develop.[22] She introduces the notion of "documentary commons" as a critical site of antagonism and intervention, to confront the structures of power.[23] The documentary commons is presented as an activity, not a result; it is a domain of political struggle which give rise to participatory potential that originates in documenting everyday life. The recording of truths is here approached as a means of persuasion, and the documentary is perceived as a material force of social transformation which provides points of shared identification for audiences to make sense of realities that are not necessarily their own.

Photography, Azoulay argues, is a generative *event* which "ontologically resembles action more than work."[24] Photography traces the encounters of people; the act of being present with a camera is a promise of photography: "The event of photography is subject to a unique form of temporality—it is

19—Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging," 66.

20—An example is the *Tahrir Cinema*—co-founded by Baladi as part of her *Vox Populi* archive—where artists, activists, civilians, and filmmakers were able to share their stories with each other. Baladi reflects: "During the summer-2011 Tahrir sit-in, there was much screaming and shouting into microphones on stage. Diffuse information floated about but with no focus. In all this noise, I felt a strong need for imagery in the square. Serendipity brought me together with people with a similar impulse. I co-founded Tahrir Cinema, a pop-up cinema, with the non-profit Egyptian media initiative Mosireen. I fabricated a screen with an old plastic banner and bits and pieces of wood. I borrowed equipment from the Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art. Together we organized, in Tahrir, day by day, the program and the screenings." Tahrir Archive, "Media Initiatives: Tahrir Cinema," accessed February 13, 2022, available at http://tahrirarchives.com/what-we-do.

21—Art historian Erika Larsson explores photography and the processes through which human and non-human relations are experienced and generated. Her analysis introduces the ethics of care, situated, embodied, and affective aspects with a particular focus on *belonging* as emotional and physical attachment with attention to photography (belonging which Baladi also underscores as a function of photography as a participatory act): "What comes into focus through the framing of photography as a relational art is not so much photographs in themselves, what they portray or how they portray, but rather the different ways through which people interact, engage or make or break connections through them." Erika Larsson, *Photographic Engagements: Belonging and Affective Encounters in Contemporary Photography* (Gothenburg and Stockholm: Makadam Förlag, 2018), 128.

22—Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance*, 22.

23—Aguayo's notion of documentary commons "puts weight on our collective capacity to express ourselves and listen in a variety of forms and contexts," which relies on "the articulated truth of vernacular voices" (2019, p. 7). It connects the "underrepresented with a larger political and cultural horizon." Ibid., 228, 51.

24—Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 137.

made up of an infinite series of encounters."[25] No one can claim sovereignty in the encounter that derives from/in/around the camera, argues Azouly, and the "point of view" inscribed with the event of photography cannot be appropriated. The event of photography never stagnates, "the photo acts, thus making others act."[26] These perspectives recall the diffraction patterns discussed in MONTAGE—patterns that spring from the interference caused by encounters. In a related vein, cultural anthropologist Karen Strassler contends that images are eventful and unfinished; "images unfold as emergent processes rather than fixed objects."[27] The unfixed images from Tahrir Square can, following Strassler, be seen as "image-events,"[28] political happenings where the image presents itself as the material ground for struggle, through which collectivities are called into being.[29] Image-events work as "generators of political conditions rather than reflections."[30] Like a model of diffraction, the image-event reverberates across time and space, it "is an open-ended 'vibration' that resonates with and give rise to other, related images and texts, deepening certain tones and deafening others."[31] Images can be traced as "effects that have effects,"[32] encouraging commitment with matters that matter. The event of photography is never over.

It is senseless to insinuate the existence of the rigid binaries of "inside" and "outside," since that would imply that the spectator is external to the event. The time that elapses between the moment when the photograph was made to the instant when it meets a spectator is a time of suspension, wherein the photograph is "caught in the anticipation of the next encounter that will allow for its actualisation."[33] Azoulay's focus on the spectator extends photography into a process of unending renewal: "The notion of closure is overthrown thanks to the agency of

25—Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 26.

26—Ibid.

27—Karen Strassler, *Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), 243.

28—Ibid.

The hyphenated compound "image-event" denotes images that generate political effect. In *Demanding Images*, Strassler's particular focus is on the making of political imaginaries during a turbulent time of democratization in Indonesia after President Suharto's "New Order" regime in the years 1966–98. Karen Strassler, *Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020).

29—For further reading on how collective belonging, and particularly the queer community, can emerge through "photographic acts," see artist-researcher Karlsson Rixon's dissertation. Annica Karlsson Rixon, *Queer Community through Photographic Acts: Three Entrances to an Artistic Research Project Approaching LGBTQIA Russia (Stockholm: Art and Theory Publishing,* 2016).

30—Strassler, *Demanding Images*, 243.

31—Ibid., 14–15.

32—Ibid., 26.

33—Azoulay, *Civil Imagination,* 25.

the spectator."[34] Crucially, the presence of a camera can disrupt and prevent events from happening, with or without a photographic outcome which Azoulay refers to as the "potentially penetrating effect of the camera."[35] The photograph emerges as always in the process of becoming.

MATERIALLY NON-ELITIST

Azoulay consequently shifts attention from the "canonical discourse on photography"[36] to focus on photography as being ontologically "in motion." The ontology of photography that Azoulay introduces includes the non-expert—that is, the civic sphere, where those who have previously been excluded from the privileged act of photographing have the capacity to act through photography. The expansion of photography in turn calls for alterations in relation to the images' visuality and materiality. The photographs from Tahrir Square were not necessarily carefully executed, nor presented meticulously, nor critically underpinned. They could be shaky, pixelated, poor. "Poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images," argues Hito Steyerl.[37] Steyerl references film director Juan García Espinosa, who in Cuba in the late 1960s wrote the manifesto *For an Imperfect Cinema*, where he makes the case for a cinema which is imperfect since artistically and technically "perfect cinema" persistently is reactionary.[38] The low quality of certain images can in line with the heralding of imperfection be understood as a physical manifestation of the ideological struggle that they are part of, "The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility."[39] Whereas the professional and commercial sphere of documentary photography in contemporary art and media adheres to standards, logics, and commercial interests that have developed over time, the circulation of non-elitist digi-

34—Ibid., 27.

35—Ibid., 22.

36—Ibid., 14.

37—Hito Steyerl's 2009 essay "In Defence of the Poor Image" discusses digital technology and the neoliberal restructuring of media as generative of new cultures and traditions, wherein new histories and archives are created: "Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction. The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them." Hito Steyerl, "In Defence of the Poor Image," *e-flux* (November 2009), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/.

38—Similar assessments were prominent in documentary photography in the 1970s, which can be illustrated through Swedish photographer Stig T. Karlsson's view that the images should not be too good since the form may then outshine the content.

39—Steyerl, "In Defence of the Poor Image."

tal images such as those taken by the protestors in Tahrir Square is a newer phenomenon, significantly less burdened by tradition. Whilst "poor images" have the capacity to assist in the process of belonging,[40] their appearance is also about reality—not the reality of "the real thing," Steyerl contends, but the reality of the images' own conditions of existence.

Steyerl's analysis in fact pinpoints something which is contrary to the function of the images from the midst of the emergency, and in so doing serves to draw attention to the role that reality plays in those images: in the protestors' images, matters to do with the ontology of pixels are exceeded by the reality of the urgencies that the images communicate. The reality aspect is here concerned with truthfulness and reliability in relation to the course of the events that they depict. If the non-elitist image is underexposed, out of focus, blurry, or composed in an unexpected manner, it is likely to be a consequence of the circumstances that were in play when it was photographed. The quality denotes directness and testifies to the situated objectivity of the photographing protestor and the image's visual and material attributes are aspects of their credibility.

40—The notion of belonging can be seen to relate to documentary film director and theorist Dziga Vertov's notion of "visual bonds" described by Steyerl as intended to "link the workers of the world with each other." Ibid.

41—Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging," 66.

TO (NOT) LOOK, TO (NOT) PHOTOGRAPH

I first encountered Baladi's article "When Seeing is Belonging: The Photography of Tahrir" in 2016, and her statements read as well-timed and long awaited. The article was written from and about a specific context, but her words "in the midst of the emergency" seemed to connote a broader range of ongoing emergencies that have materialized and escalated in recent years. People in Tahrir Square performed citizen journalism and, in this moment, "photography became objective; photography showed the truth—yes, a truth made of as many truths as there were protesters in the square, but nonetheless one that urgently had to be revealed at this turning point in history."[41] As far as photography theory in the art context goes, the idea of photography as objectively capable of showing truth resounded (to me) like a Big Bang. And, like the cosmological model proposed through the Big Bang theory, the objectivity and truth bang of Baladi's

article marks an expansion rather than an explosion. The idea that the photography universe might be expanding is a thrilling prospect if the space of what can be imagined is expanding with it. To close in on the question of how the *artist* may approach images that stem from protest movements and extend beyond non-expert viewpoints, it is essential to recount another shift in focus in the art context, which I describe below.

Rewind to ten years before Baladi's article: in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall that signaled the collapse of communism, and the 9/11 attacks in New York in 2001 which marked the dissolution of liberalism, curator Okwui Enwezor identifies a significant change of attitude in contemporary art.[42] He finds that engagement with social life makes its entrance as a mounting concern. In reflection after documenta 11, to which Enwezor served as artistic director, he proposed that while class struggle used to be the significant battle within the political and cultural domain, this is no longer the case.[43] Instead, political motivations in contemporary art were becoming increasingly attuned to questions of human rights, a development which he traces to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in Paris in December 1948.

Enwezor identifies the emergence of new subjectivities and artworks that are "unbounded" in the wake of the breakdown of traditional political systems such as communism and liberalism.[44] The narrative that Enwezor recounts locates a deterritorialized, hybrid art that transcends the traditional institutions of art in its unbounded juxtaposition of politics, art, and aesthetics.[45] This is an art which speaks to issues of globalization, human rights, racism, and nationalism, that "neither sensationalises aesthetics nor spectacu-

42—Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights," in "Art & Ethics," special issue, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 5, no. 1 (2004): 14.

43—As the first non-European curator of documenta, Enwezor, along with the curatorial team of documenta 11, redrew the contours of contemporary art. The goal was a postcolonial and interdisciplinary exhibition with a global transnational presence. The exhibition was realised as the fifth and final platform of the project, preceded by platforms launched in four different continents a year before the exhibition. Documenta 11 has been described as a marker of a documentary turn in art, which is reflected by Enwezor: "To many observers, documenta 11 was the culmination of a development in contemporary art in which increasingly the documentary form became the dominant artistic language, particularly in photographic, film and video work represented in its fifth platform: the exhibition." Ibid., 23. It should be noted that already documenta X, with artistic director Catherine David, marked a shift towards a more positive view towards documentary photography.

44—Enwezor draws upon Professor of Visual Culture Irit Rogoff's notion of "unbounded" to signal the "undisciplined" and "unhomeliness" of transnational contemporary activist, politically positioned art.

45—For perspectives on political functions of photography and the politics of aesthetics, see for instance the work by philosopher Jacques Rancière. An overview of Rancière's writing is provided by David Bate, "Aesthetics and Photography", *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory*, eds. Mark Durden and Jane Tormey (New York: Routledge, 2020): 37–51.

larises the ethical."[46] The path to human rights and the focus on social life in contemporary art, Enwezor contends, went via the documentary, where the basic rights of all people to a dignified existence has long been a concern that stirs documentary attention.

As deliberated above, the expectations that are placed on the trained photographer's images and procedures differ from those present in the reception and comprehension of photographs made by non-professional people with cameras. The privileged position of the photographer as an "expert"—that is, an actor within a commercialized context—also entails the rather less favored position of being subject to scrutiny and condemnation. Enwezor presents two central issues that have contributed to the critique of the documentary that photographers must grapple with: firstly, the image's connection with reality produces a conception of documentary work as "a massive body of evidence".[47] Secondly, the overemotional righteousness of the documentary seems to unremittingly advise moral questions about what is documented.[48] In reaction to these concerns connected with the documentary, the rejection of vision matured. The downgrading of the importance of seeing and depicting which Enwezor identified in 2004—that is, the *disinclination* to photograph—is relevant to the research. Enwezor diagnosed the documentary as suffering from an "anti-ocularcentric vision"[49] that relates to the documentary distrust discussed in the *Framework* section of the kappa. Andén-Papadopoulos notes, aligning with Enwezor's assessment, that an iconophobic disbelief gained force already after World War II. Images of the Holocaust became excruciatingly exemplary for the position that "every realistic rendering of trauma betrays reality,"[50] which speaks with Theodor Adorno's well-known statement that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.

46—Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights," 20.

Kein Mensch ist Illegal (in English No Person Is Illegal) is introduced by Enwezor as an example of an international network which moves beyond the limits of activism and art. The network was founded at documenta X in 1997, working for the rights of refugees and migrants.

47—Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights," 28.

On a further note, in Enwezor's text: since documentary images often deals with human suffering, targeting "what it sees as recordable reality," it subsequently carries the burden of truth, "it appears quite the case that a documentary can record something that is true but fail to reveal the truth of that something, in the sense that it may actually misrepresent the subject in question." Ibid., 32.

48—Ibid., 27.

49—Ibid. 28.

The crisis of ocularcentrism is explored by Martin Jay. See Martin Jay, "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism," in "The Rhetoric of Interpretation and the Interpretation of Rhetoric," special issue, *Poetics Today* 9, no. 2 (1988): 307–326.

50—Andén-Papadopoulos, "Imaging Human Rights," 338.

Balsom maps a similar trail to that indicated by Enwezor and Andén-Papadopoulos.[51] Documentary is and has been a battleground largely because of the indexical qualities that links it to reality, wherein the relationship between reality and the documentary has come to be characterized by suspicion, distrust, and a rejection of observational strategies.[52] The conviction that mimetic representations reduce, simplify, and violate the subject's dignity affects whom and what is, and is not, photographed. Andén-Papadopoulos relates to a "looking/not looking dilemma," whereby we should and must look at images of others' pain since it inspires engagement, but at the same time, looking at these images is/can be a violation of those depicted. Whereas a central view of the iconophobic regime is that the image should refrain from realistically "representing" the suffering of others, since images are perpetually unable to fulfil their purpose, today—as is shown in *Dear Truth*—resourceful attitudes can be discerned.

THE COMING COMMON OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The artworks assembled in the exhibition *Dear Truth* are related to the efforts of previous artists who insistently challenged representational photography and searched for ways to avoid objectifying subjects. New documentary forms that resided in reflexivity, questioning, and performativity began to emerge in the latter part of the 20th century and by the early 2000s a documentary "turn" was reached, typified by perspectives where, as Balsom notes, "the 'blurring of boundaries' was held to be an inviolably noble goal."[53] The development of fiction-infused documentary work has been addressed by art historian and cultural critic T. J. Demos, who highlights the "innovative documentary poetics" personified in the artworks of a generation of Lebanese artists—peaking in the works of Walid Raad—that approached the Lebanese civil wars by inventing new logics.[54]

Raad creates documents, incidents, and characters that *could* have existed, in

51—Erika Balsom, "The Reality-Based Community" (2017), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/.

52—Ibid.

53—Ibid.

54—T, J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013). For more recent perspectives on documentary fictions, the already mentioned *Speculative Documentary Photography* (2021) by Max Pinckers explores speculation, re-enactment, staging, and theatricality as part of documentary photography practice from a point of view that makes no clear distinction between fact and fiction, imagination, or observation: "the boundaries between fact and fiction are transgressed, alleviated, unimportant." Max Pinckers, *Speculative Documentary Photography* (Universiteit Gent. Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, 2021), 136.

works that have been referred to as "an archive of sorts."[55] The archives are based on the artist's imagination of the Lebanese wars; Raad constructs imaginary documents in the formulation of an alternative history and for a spectator, it is uncertain if what is presented is a factual or fictional account. The act of engaging with Raad's work generates a sense of instability that evokes what Steyerl refers to as a free fall: "As you are falling, your sense of orientation may start to play additional tricks on you. The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries."[56] If Raad's work can be approached in terms of free fall, how may the protestors' images that Baladi addresses be understood? Is the notion of "common," which has figured on various occasions thus far, expedient in this exposition? Eyal Weizman reflects on truth as a common resource for the benefit of society. Angela L. Aguayo's documentary commons relate to our collective capacity to listen and express ourselves in the articulation of truths, which serves to connect people from different contexts. Trevor Paglen suggests that with art, we can create and change the common sense. Bruno Latour finds that the very notion of a common world seems to be lost. In addition to these voices, the notion of "common" appears in a broad range of contexts including the instance of the Creative Commons (CC) license, which is a flexible public copyright license intended to facilitate the sharing of knowledges, and the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences laureate Elinor Ostrom's *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*.[57] Forensic Architecture together with the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and FORENSIS initiated the interdisciplinary practice *Investigative Commons* as a space to come together to work with human rights crimes, seeking knowledges from a range of collaborators

55—Stedelijk Museum, "*Walid Raad—Let's be honest, the weather helped*: First-ever solo exhibition of the Lebanese-American artist Walid Raad in the Netherlands", April 17, 2019, https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/walid-raad-2.

56—Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," *e-flux* 24 (April 2011), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/.

57—Elinor Ostrom re-examined biologist Garrett Hardin's 1968 theory of the "tragedy of the commons" in a study concerned with trust, cooperation, and collectivity as constitutive in how people in small local community's share natural resources (such as water) that nobody owns but everybody depends on. Instead of overexploiting the resources, she found—through her field studies—that ecologically and economically sustainable rules for joint benefits could develop in cooperative institutions that were organized by the interdependent resource users themselves. Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

such as activists, lawyers, journalists and organizations including Bellingcat and Praxis Films/Laura Poitras.[58]

The commons thus emerges as a notion which speaks to the struggle for knowledges and truths in the advantage of contemporary society; it activates the idea of documentary photography perspectives that affirms the image's effectiveness as testimony. The basis for the propositioned "documentary photography commons"—encompassing visual statements made by artists as well as non-experts—could be understood as the aspiration to connect, assemble, react, and inform. The sensation of instability and uncertainty evoked by the innovative documentary poetic works described by T. J. Demos paved the way for these outlooks. The photography discourse has changed profoundly in the last twenty years and again, Steyerl's words appear as appropriate to invoke: "Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise."[59] Works such as Raad's have altered the conditions of how photography ought to be theorized. Today, alongside the protestors' images are those in free fall, and neither "straight" photographs nor "traditional" documentary approaches can or should be dismissed according to the same logics as they habitually have been in the past.

58—See for instance the *Investigative Commons'* coordinator from European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), Ann Schroeter's presentation "Investigative Commons: A New Era for Human Rights Investigations," at the "Investigation is Collaboration: Exposing the Invisible Together" online conference (2–6 August 2021), https://exposingtheinvisible.org/en/articles/investigation-is-collaboration-conference-agenda/. Also, European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, "Investigative Commons," accessed February 1, 2022, https://www.ecchr.eu/en/case/investigative-commons/.

59—Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective."

THE RE-RETURN OF THE REAL

To catch sight of the present-day potentials of documentary photography in the art context, the responsiveness to images that emerges from people on the streets is indispensable. The suggestion of a documentary seriousness can be unearthed, infused with a sense of urgency that relates to the credibility of the image and denotes a responsibility amidst the citizenry of photography. Demos stipulated that the innovative strategies of Raad differed significantly from the "now out-dated regimes of truth" that he traced to the 1990s engaged documentary, arguing that "truth must be reinvented on the grounds of un-

certainty." [60] He found that "the deepest understanding of reality, particularly a traumatic one, necessitates an engagement with the fictional and conflictual aspects of images."[61] While the research that underpinned the exhibition *Dear Truth* agrees with Demos on the point that images carry contradictions and ambiguities (which does not disallow situated objectivity), I question the necessity of fictional attributes as a fundamental feature in artworks that approaches reality.[62] Much has changed (in politics, media, and art) in the last decade and as Balsom notes, "What was once oppositional is now commonplace," as today "no one assumes any longer, if they ever did, that there is a mirrored isomorphism between reality and representation."[63] The visuality and conceptual approaches of the iconophobic regime certainly avoided turning the viewer into a (presumed) passive consumer of transparent representations of atrocities. Rather, the concerned, photojournalism-inspired, at times sensationalistic documentary drove artists to turn away, with the consequence that a "refusal to represent" settled, a refusal which Andén-Papadopoulos argues ought to be understood as an ethical stance.[64] An "allusive or distanced realism" appeared more apposite than images that resembled photojournalism, in the approach of human suffering.[65] To challenge dominant visual regimes, it was important to construct new ways of picturing the painful, but as Andén-Papadopoulos suggests, there remains a risk that suffering continues to go unseen: "If we hope to redress human rights abuses, we must first truly understand them—and to do that, we must begin to look."[66] The question is, in the words of Enwezor: When and how does one open oneself up to another's pain?[67] Enwezor contends that the spectatorship "which averts its gaze and turns askance from the documentary because it deeply distrusts it as a moral accusation, cannot at the same time judge it."[68] That is,

60—Demos, *The Migrant Image*, xxi.

61—Ibid.

62—It should be noted that Demos narrowed this particular analysis to the experiences of trauma, but it serves as a reminder of a wider impression of the idea of a reactionary "regime of truth" that documentary presumably had to be liberated from.

63—Balsom, "The Reality-Based Community."

64—Andén-Papadopoulos refers to T. J. Demos (2013), Frank Möller (2009) and Gil S. Hochberg (2015) in contextualizing the desire to counter the dominant visual regime by a refusing to represent. The refusal to represent prioritizes "interruption and reworking of dominant ways of looking and being seen." Ibid., 340–341.

65—Andén-Papadopoulos mentions Alfredo Jaar and Jeff Wall in relation to the distanced and allusive realism, "inviting the viewer to engage in questions of human suffering without repeating the injury done to the victim." Andén-Papadopoulos, "Imaging Human Rights," 341.

66—Ibid., 342.

67—Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights," 31.

68—Ibid.

to disapprovingly turn away from the documentary "is to ask not to be accused; not to be contaminated, to not exist purely for the other, to be cleansed from the guilt of looking at human misery; relieved from the burden of being-for-the-other."[69] The denunciation of documentary photography makes sense when images are sensationalist, but with the many innovative visualities that have emerged in the last twenty years, the conditions for both photographing and not photographing have changed. These propositions, when considered from the perspective of the research aim which informed *The Objectivity Laboratory* contains the invitation to move forward, to formulate new positions.

SITE OF STRUGGLE: THE ARCHIVE

Frida Orupabo's images discussed in MONTAGE are constructed from photographs that are drawn from a plurality of contexts; a collective of dispersed images that are archive-ized by the artist who assembles them. Both Orupabo and Baladi's work in *Dear Truth* started in images made by some of the many often unknown citizens of photography. Images by people on the streets are also imperative to the work of Forensic Architecture. In one of their cases, Forensic Architecture investigated the fire in the 24-storey Grenfell Tower block of flats in London in 2017 with the aim "to create a powerful and freely-available resource for members of the public to explore and better understand the events of the night of the fire."[70] The method for creating this source for, and of, public understanding of the catastrophe, was to collect the peoples' own visual records of what happened. The Grenfell Tower fire was witnessed by hundreds of thousands of Londoners, and many recorded events as they unfolded: "Each of these recordings might have captured only a small part of the event, but together they add up to an extensive and powerful picture of what happened that night."[71] Forensic Architecture's role and the archivists in this case conjoins. Azuolay localizes the time when archives—often those of institutions such as prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and family collections—became a focus for artist's research and exhibitions to the late-20th century.[72]

69—Ibid.

70—Forensic Architecture, "New Project Launched on The Grenfell Tower Fire," *Forensic Architectecture* (March 21, 2018), https://forensic-architecture.org/programme/news/new-project-launched-grenfell-tower-fire.

71—Forensic Architecture, "Grenfell Media Archive," *Forensic Architecture*, http://www.grenfellmediaarchive.org/.

72—Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 13–14.

Baladi works with the vernacular imagery that emerges in times of revolution. In *Dear Truth* a part of her ongoing archive of *vox populi*, the voice of the people, was presented: **»In 2011, I started an ongoing process of collecting data—especially photos and videos—related to Egypt's and other Arab uprisings. I titled the archive *Vox Populi, Tahrir Archives* as a reference to the main focus of my research: media produced by citizens,«** Baladi says. The installation in *Dear Truth* was **"inspired by 1950s propagandist educational books."**[73] The twenty-eight "plates" (for the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet) were printed by means of an analogue cyanotype process in a vivid blue.

In Baladi's work, *ABC: A Lesson in History*, key moments in history are illustrated through the use of iconic images. The original images surfaced in contexts ranging from the recent Egyptian and Iraqi uprisings to the early days of queer activism and the 1969 Stonewall protests in New York City. She says, **»Learning from history allows us to raise our consciousness and move forward with greater awareness.«** While *Vox Populi* is an archive which was collected and organized by the artist in response to an event that unfolded in her direct proximity, Baladi has worked with the archive in other forms: the Arab Image Foundation collects images from North Africa and the Middle East with the aim of rethinking and activating archival images though

73—Exhibition view Lara Baladi (in the middle), Frida Orupabo (to the left) and Mathieu Asselin (to the right), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Lara Baladi, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Lara Baladi (to the right) and Frida Orupabo (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

(73—cont.) Exhibition view Lara Baladi, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

74—The Arab image Foundation, accessed November 23, 2021, https://stories.arabimagefoundation.org/.

75—The Arab image Foundation, "AIF Statement on Archiving and Language," accessed November 23, 2021, http://arabimagefoundation.com/.

76—Lara Baladi, "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistance," *IBRAAZ* 10, no. 03 (July 28, 2016), https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/163/.

77—Ibid.

concentrating on photographs by the people who have lived in the region. The Arab Image Foundation work in the intersection of the archive, art, and research to explore and confront "the complex social and political realities of our times."[74] The Arab Image Foundation specify that their archival practice entails accountability and brings with it the responsibility of being critically reflective and answerable towards both the creators of the images and the people who are depicted, as well as being mindful of how the images are presented.[75]

Vox Populi was conceived as an interactive timeline linked to the Egypt uprising and related events. When I asked Baladi about the transformative potential of art, she responded: **»Art has always had the ability to impact and change society, however, *how* art changes society depends on the place and the socio-political context it is made in.«** Baladi's response elucidates reflections from her 2016 article "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistance," where she contends that during the uprisings in Egypt, archiving in itself was "an act of resistance."[76] Seeing and recording was immediately followed by archiving, as the physical location of Tahrir Square leaped into the virtual, and at a pivotal moment in time the act of resistance entailed "archiving history as it unfolded."[77] Photography displayed "intrinsic factory-like quality", amplified in the process of photography made by the thousands of protestors. The high volume of photographs is a great potential, but also a potential risk: "On the one hand, anyone who owns a camera can produce limitless images for free. On the other hand, the abundance of rapidly distributed images is accompanied by a lack

of critical distance."[78] The artist is summoned into the equation of the political potential of photography made by people on the streets amidst emergencies, as an umbrella-like accumulator of the infinitude of images, with the parachute-like ability to slow down, take control, and create flotation rather than free fall. Baladi's artistic practice entails moving between protesters' movements and institutional contexts, between photographic archives and public squares. The artist as a curator of archival material has an important role to play, as someone who collects, collates, and makes available, but also as a figure who introduces critical perspectives and analytical reflections.

Enwezor has referred to the archive as a "mnemonic machine."[79] In the archive, fragments are assembled, "inducting new flows and transactions between images, texts, narratives, documents, statements, events, communities, institutions, audiences."[80] To archive images from the eighteen days of revolution was urgent: the risk was imminent that the images would wither after the rising. Archiving was embedded in the persistence of ascertaining "another tool against the regime."[81] When the archive goes viral and images spread online in tandem with events unfolding on the ground, the archive becomes a site of struggle and resistance.

Archiving can be a weapon in the fight against a regime, but it can also be conceptualized as a process of "unlearning," a concept which is introduced by Azoulay. She has described the archive as a laboratory, a site where she has found the opportunity to ask questions and been stimulated to "generate something that seemed like history but at the same time refused to be history, and was actually what I started to call 'potential history.'"[82] The idea of unlearning is pertinent in relation to *ABC: A Lesson in History*, a title that alludes to an impossible educational aspiration. The artwork presents the spectator with archival images put forward as they have not been seen before. Unlearning is not about inventing or innovating a new history, Azoulay argues, but it is an effort to "join and reiterate previous attempts."[83] This task of the archive, to set up connections and reiterations, has in the

78—Baladi, "When Seeing Is Belonging," 67.

79—Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights," 30.

80—Ibid., 37.

81—Baladi, "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age."

82—Filipa Lowndes Vicente, "Ariella Aïsha Azoulay—Unlearning, An interview with Ariella Aïsha Azoulay," *Análise Social*, 2, no. 235 (2020): 417–436, 430.

83—Ariella Azoulay and Justin Carville, "Interview with Ariella Azoulay", *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory*, eds. Mark Durden and Jane Tormey (New York: Routledge, 2020), 191.

context of Baladi's other work discussed here, *Vox Populi*, come to be increasingly challenging. When Baladi wrote "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistance" in 2016, she contended that the restrictions on freedom of speech and artistic expression in Egypt had become more forceful than ever. *Vox Populi* still exists, but many of the platforms that the archive points to "have already either been censored, their activity slowed down or discontinued, or have been deactivated."[84] The possibility and impossibility of images evokes Taryn Simon's *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII*, where empty portraits stand in for individual members of a bloodline who could not be photographed because of reasons such as a woman not being allowed in front of the camera for religious reasons or an individual being in prison. On other occasions, the work's images have been censored by the exhibiting institution.[85]

84—Baladi, "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age."

85—Exhibition view Taryn Simon, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021. Chapter V from Taryn Simon's *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII* was in *Dear Truth* presented as three black fields on the wall, painted where the chapter's panels would have been. The black fields represent the censorship that this chapter was subjected to when Simon's work was exhibited at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, China. Chapter V, which chronicles the story of South Korean citizen Choe Janggeun who was reportedly kidnapped at sea by North Korean forces in 1977, was denied entry to China. Simon decided to paint black fields on the wall in its place as a comment on censorship.

In Simon's *Chapter VII*,[86] absence is represented differently. Here, mothers are pictured alongside the mortal remains of their children, who were killed in the Srebrenica massacre that took place during five days in July 1995 in the city of Srebrenica, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Photographs of tooth and bone samples recovered from mass graves mark the voids left by the victims. The stories remain fragmented, suspended in the archive that is the artwork. Connecting the past with the present, the future is evoked: empty portraits are painful reminders of people who have lost their lives or are denied auto-

nomy, but they are also blank spaces waiting to be occupied by the unborn, the newly born, or the dispossessed who have (re) gained their independence. The inclusion of the empty portraits in Simon's work, or the reminisce of "dead" sites in Baladi's *Vox Populi*, is a reminder that photography is an event that does not stop, even when the visual manifestations are banned, displaced, or erased.

86—Exhibition view Taryn Simon, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

P R O P O S I T I O N

N E A R B Y

JUST SPEAK NEARBY

Trinh T. Minh-ha's account of the documentary positions it as a *perceived* outside-in movement, and whilst the term is often read in contrast to *fiction*'s tendency to connect with the world from the inside out, Trinh finds that these categories constantly overlap—as such, she approaches her films as "fluid, interacting movements."[1] The notion of the "in-between" challenges the idea that something is "out there" waiting to be captured, and thus the documentary as an outside-in movement.[2] By looking to the in-between rather than to division, the socially oriented artist is unbound from a tradition of the documentarian as an "almighty voice-giver" that relies on the separation of subject and object which "perpetuates a dualistic inside-versus-outside."[3] In such a situation, it is then important to ask: How do different entry points trigger different consequences?

The exploration that unfolds below focuses on artistic methodologies that involve encounters with people and places, which are referred to in the social sciences as "fieldwork." I use the term "fieldwork" somewhat reluctantly, since the artistic context offers a different framework than that of the social sciences, where common field research methods include interviews, oral history, and participant observation. For an artistic work, *going into the field* does not necessarily imply procedures that adhere to scientific standards. Nevertheless, the notion of fieldwork is an unmistakable conceptual indicator of a practice that requires the artist to move in order to get close to the subject. Action

1—Erika Balsom, "'There is No Such Thing as Documentary': An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Frieze* 199 (2018), https://www.frieze.com/article/there-no-such-thing-documentary-interview-trinh-t-minh-ha.

2—Ibid.

3—Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name," *October* 52 (Spring, 1990): 76–98, 83.

and movement are prerequisites not only for the positions explored here but also for documentary photography historically, and the concept of fieldwork productively locates the examination as being engaged in something other than *studio* work.

This final part of the kappa picks up where MONTAGE left off: in the cut. The palpable cuts and the sporadic rhythm of the narrator voice in Trinh T. Minh-ha's film *Reassemblage* (1982) unsettles what could have been a "smooth" anthropological narrative. The Baradian agential cut was introduced in MONTAGE as a stabilization performed long enough for meanings to be created. In Trinh's work, the cut rather underscores the fragmentary, constructed nature of the narrative: "The space of language and meaning is constantly interrupted or effaced by the gaps of non-senses, absences, and silences."[4] The cuts *de*stabilize what might otherwise have been perceived as known. The narrator in the film asks: "A film about what?"[5] The voice keeps inserting questions and assertions: "What I see, is life looking at me."[6] Life gazes back. At whom: the artist, the anthropologist, the spectator? The statements catch the onlooker, turning the tables, and the possibility of comfortableness in watching is disturbed.[7] "Reality is delicate," the voice says.[8]

Reassemblage opens with the statement, "I do not intend to speak about. Just speak nearby."[9] The proposition to speak nearby offers a receptive and constructive attitude to fieldwork. Trinh elaborates, noting that this is "a speaking that does not objectify," a speaking which "can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it."[10] The artist will never be part of or completely comprehend someone else's reality, but to recognize the impossibility of fully grasping that reality is not reason to turn away. To accept limited understanding is an ethical prerequisite that allows the artist to pursue; to acknowledge that one's situated position entails restricted access is the fundament for action. Trinh's notion of speaking nearby offers the invitation to forge ahead and move beyond documentary cul-de-sacs. Not entirely devoid of traits familiar to more traditional

4—Nancy N. Chen, "Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1992): 86.

5—Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*, 1982, 16-mm film, 40 minutes: 00:14:05.

6—Ibid.: 00:34:30.

7—The French filmmakers Chris Marker and Jean Rouch have both been connected to the style of documentary filmmaking known as *Cinéma verité*, which translates into "truthful cinema". Availing of the observational method to get close to an objective truth is a method connected with *Cinéma verité*: signalling the presence of the filmmaker through obvious interference is a means of getting closer to disclosing the truth, that is, the filmmakers' truth.

8—Trinh, *Reassemblage*: 00:06:00 min.

9—Ibid: 00:01:30.

10—Chen, "Speaking Nearby," 87.

documentaries, *Reassemblage* shows snippets, albeit fragmentary, close-ups of the everyday life which appears in front of the camera. As a provocation, Trinh has suggested that "there is no such thing as documentary," while asserting that there clearly is a documentary existence.[11] She says: "You can borrow the master's tools, as long as you know that you are merely borrowing for strategic purposes," that is, use them when necessary, which is very different to unhesitatingly allowing them to define one's viewpoints.[12] Trinh's critique targets the documentary pretense to inform people of "the real world: so real that the Real becomes the one basic referent-pure, concrete, fixed, visible, all-too-visible. The result is the advent of a whole aesthetic of objectivity."[13] The fixity, the too solid, requests the spectator to trust that if something is presented as evidence, it unequivocally *is* evidence. Trinh identifies the importance of destabilizing fixed meanings and authoritarian claims: "By not trying to assume a position of authority in relation to the other, you are actually freeing yourself from the endless criteria generated with such an all-knowing claim and its hierarchies in knowledge."[14] With cuts and ostensibly nonsensical disruptions, the voice of mastery breaks up and fades out. To avoid fixing meaning, the spectator is permitted to fill in the unfinished and granted the freedom of contemplation.

11—Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name," 76.

12—Balsom: "'There is No Such Thing as Documentary': An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha."

13—Trinh, "Documentary Is/Not a Name," 80.

14—Balsom, "'There is No Such Thing as Documentary': An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha."

15—Karlsson Rixon, *Queer Community through Photographic Acts*, 65.

INSTEAD OF FIXED: IN-BETWEEN

In Karlsson Rixon's PhD research, an ethically reflective documentary approach surfaces. Their dissertation explores how queer community can emerge through photography, detailing an inquiry which took place in various locations in Russia: "What felt important throughout the process was never 'why' we picked Russia as the target for making art, but rather 'how' we worked with the project: to constantly consider and reconsider ethical questions in relation to what we were doing."[15] The work raises important concerns in relation to the responsibility that follows when engaging other people.

The positionings of Karlsson Rixon and fellow artist Viola Hallberg (with whom the work was made) are multilayered,

"moving between *outsiders* as artist visitors from abroad to being *insiders* belonging to a queer community."[16] Karlsson Rixon draws upon Trinh's notion of "in-between," acknowledging the multiplicity of positions that one person embodies simultaneously and stressing the tensions and potentials that arise: "To live queer is to live a constant double life, as a temporal and situational event. Because of society's heteronormative gaze, as queers we are often hidden in our bodies, no matter whether we desire to be recognized or not."[17] They describe this as a vagueness of queer visuality, which is one of the embodied positions that coexists in the complex web of identities. Karlsson Rixon refers to other positions of theirs that "can be lined up," including their nationality and role as artist, describing how these factors impacted how they navigated in St. Petersburg: "As simple a thing as us being read as middle-aged *babushkas*, the Russian word for an elderly woman, was helpful when we travelled around the city with all the ridiculously expensive technical equipment stuffed into a worn army bag."[18] Throughout the dissertation, a reluctance to engage binary opposed dualisms surfaces, and Karlsson Rixon's intersectional responsiveness to the many embodied positions that they as an artist making work in Russia inhabit sheds light on the complexity of identity.

Trinh's criticism of "rigid enclosures" and "forms of essentialism" with regards to identity is longstanding, and she finds it discouraging to see fixed and pure identity categories emerge as foundation for political action.[19] In an earlier interview in 1992, Trinh reflects upon the question of categories and identity, and states that in an individualistic society, "it is very comforting for a reader to consume difference as a commodity by starting with the personal difference in culture or background."[20] As a woman from Vietnam, these attributes would frequently be seen as instructive in relation to her work, but "my past in Vietnam does not just belong to me" and simplistic dualisms "can never come close to the complexity of the Vietnam reality."[21] Rather than fixed boundaries, she advocates intersectional perspectives. Binary systems remains divisive at its core, as the discussion staged through *The Objectivity Laboratory* repeatedly shows.

16—Ibid.

17—Ibid., 67.

18—Ibid., 68.

19—Balsom, "'There is No Such Thing as Documentary': An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha."

20—Chen, "'Speaking Nearby': A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha," 83.

21—Ibid.

SHIFTING LOCATION: PERSPECTIVES ON FIELDWORK

There are different ways to address urgent matters, and these different artistic responses bring up distinct challenges and demand different commitments. The poetic and indirect work balances the risk of dodging an important subject matter, turning too far away in its eagerness to poeticize reality: "It is always difficult to draw that fine line between what is merely individualistic and what may be relevant to a wider number of people."[22] The direct, and visually and conceptually less ambiguous, work may instead appear dogmatic, seemingly presenting a matter as a closed case leaving little room for alternative imaginable perspectives.

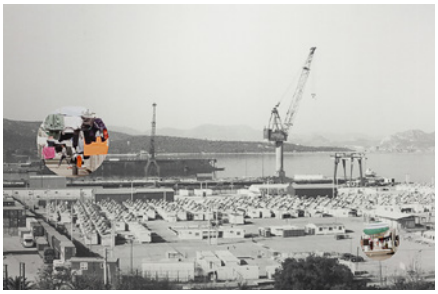
In *Dear Truth*, a sort of undeviating indirectness can be discerned in artist Karlsson Rixon and historian of ideas Mikela Lundahl Hero's work, which was made in a refugee camp in Skaramangas, Greece. The photographs were originally published in a magazine, where a selection of the images were cropped into circles that claustrophobically mimic a peephole.[23] Likewise, in the exhibition installation, the view is masked—suggestive of the aperture opening of the camera—and the people are often facing away from the camera.[24] The images make no attempt to offer comprehensive insight; they don't bring the viewer close or pretend familiarity with the situation that they depict. But they are intimate and touching in a subtle and unassuming way, facilitating gentle observation, rather than sanctioning objectifying voyeurism. The frustration of being allowed to see so

22—Ibid., 82.

23—Axel Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero, *"Några veckor i Grekland," Ord & Bild* 2 (2019).

24—Exhibition view Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.



(24—cont.) Exhibition view Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero (to the right) and Laia Abril (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero (to the right) and Kerstin Hamilton (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero (to the right), Laia Abril (in the middle) and Frida Orupabo (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

little is overshadowed by the appreciation of being shown anything at all. The experiences of the people in the images, who have fled war, violence, and persecution, cannot be captured in an artwork, but Karlsson Rixon's photographs and Lundahl-Hero's texts do not attempt to seize or represent the people that they depict.

Within anthropology, sociology, and geography, fieldwork is carried out in interaction with others through interviews, observation, participation, and the analysis of gathered data. As has been noted previously, in photography in the art context, the observational approach has been challenged. Artworks such as Walid Raad's archives (discussed in RESISTANCE) and strategies like artist Jeff Wall's "near documentary" have materialized as alternatives to more traditional excursions into the field. In the research, the concept of *fieldwork* is introduced to discuss what the movement away from the staged, away from studio, away from the archive, away from the keyboard may set in play. In what ways might encounters in existing sites rather than staged tableaus trigger consciousnesses in other ways than Wall's (re)constructed near documentary images do? Fieldwork, it can be argued, allows the world to suggest to us what it is and can become.[25] In photography, the practice of fieldwork can be seen as being anchored in what John Grierson refer to as "actuality": it insinuates physical proximity and attends to the experiential, denoting learning and knowing based

in experience that derives from encounters. To carry out fieldwork is to arrive at something that is there—it is to point to the lived experience of people in a refugee camp in a Greek port town, or the procedures in a laboratory that existed before the observer/artist entered, or a geographically dispersed association of women connected by related experiences of abortion. To shift location, to move oneself, is to circumvent the limitations of the already known, to push beyond your own consciousness. An important reason to step outside of the studio is that by placing yourself elsewhere, the very experience of being there is likely to provide new propositions that can trouble preconceived assumptions. When the people and materials in the field can resist or object, it impacts on the narrative, and speaking with Barad (who I cite in MONTAGE): it may take you in directions that you had not expected. By paying attention to the details of other's stories, their living conditions, and situated knowledges, the pregiven is challenged.

25—The perspectives on fieldwork presented below are inspired by conversations with sociologist Karl Palmås, whose text "Studiowork and Fieldwork," which was written for Gothenburg International Biennale for Contemporary Art (GIBCA) in 2011, has served as a reference. Karl Palmås, "Studiowork and Fieldwork," *The Reader: North/South, River Run*, ed. Kerstin Hamilton (Gothenburg: School of Photography, Gothenburg University, 2011).

26—Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), 171.

27—Foster describes the developments within contemporary art as an "ethnographic turn." Foster, *The Return of the Real*.

28—Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," *The Traffic in Culture Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 302–303.

29—Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 203.

ARTIST—ETHNOGRAPHER

Art historian Hal Foster opens his chapter "The Artist as Ethnographer" with a reference to Walter Benjamin's 1934 request to the artist—in "The Artist as Producer"—to side with the proletariat.[26] Foster notes a related tendency sixty years down the line wherein the artist appears instead as an ethnographer, fighting on the side of the ethnic, cultural, social other.[27] He refers to this as the "quasi-anthropological" model built on a "primitivist fantasy," which—although often well-intended—postulates otherness by assuming the presence of a socially oppressed subject who is on the outside (seen from the artists' point of view), elsewhere, in the real.[28] Foster specifies that "reflexivity is needed to protect against an over-identification with the other."[29] The risk of over-identification is real, just as the probability of not

getting close enough is. Lundahl Hero describes some of the apprehensions that were present in her and Karlsson Rixon's work in Skaramangas: **»we tried to make sense of the so-called migration crisis, what it did to places, how it affected people already there and those who arrived there.«** This is a difficult balancing act: **»In the end, I am just one privileged first-world person reporting from the fringes with a vain hope of producing a critical narrative that will be a part of a change. But am I? Will it? And can it justify using their stories, their lives, their voices? Will it do more harm than good?«** The "vignettes," the texts that Lundahl Hero wrote for their installation, communicate a series of emotional responses and personal thoughts,[30] deviating from how she commonly approaches a text: **»I usually write in a more academic or essayistic tone, where there is a narrative and an effort to get somewhere. Here I couldn't get anywhere. There is nowhere to go. The migration politics is a trap with no closure.«** When asked about the role of ethical considerations, she responds, **»Oh, they are everything. I think it is so difficult to publish or show anything that includes other people that I rather would not, since I cannot be sure that it will actually do anything for them—or, rather, since I can be sure that it will do nothing for them.«** Lundahl Hero's statements, from her position as a historian of ideas, highlight a challenge shared by many photographers: how to deal with the often privilege position of photographing anyone other than yourself, with the intention of showing the work in art institutions, when there is always the risk that you will do more harm than good.

30—Exhibition view Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Lundahl Hero's reflection is identifiable: I would rather not. It is a statement which pinpoints an important question of the research project: how to approach other people's realities? It links to Enwezor's assessment, which I address in RESISTANCE, that the disapproving rejection of documentary approaches escapes the risk of being accused. This is undoubtably the case: when faced with the choice of being accused, or the alternative of

not being accused, the latter is less complicated, less risky. The documentary impulse to go somewhere other than inwards is necessarily one which implies risks; the risk of violating those who are photographed but also the risk of being accused (of exploiting, intruding, exoticizing, misrepresenting). For the artist, the documentary approach is a daunting invitation to be blamed for ethical trespassing, liable of breaking the unwritten rules of whom "I" have the right/not right to approach.

I have addressed this honest dilemma in MONTAGE, where I problematize the idea of a "them" that cannot/should not be photographed. In response to this issue, I there introduced Barad's *diffractive* methodology, which positions "difference" as non-dualistic and relational, inviting the reader to give weight to encounters and dialogue. The notion of diffraction promotes an outlook which designates the rigidity of dualistic thinking in the pursue of documentary dialogue as non-productive, troubling binaries such as those between "us" and "them," "inside" and "outside," "self" and "other." Trinh's "speaking nearby" offers a further constructive alternative to "speaking about." Speaking nearby suggests that the act of speaking in proximity, rather than from a far-away distance, is an important move. From a close distance—nearby but without claiming or seizing—knowledges may be generated in relation to what Stuart Hall has referred to as the "real problems in the dirty world."[31]

31—In Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance,* 235.

32—Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), 203.

STATEMENT ON / AND RELATIONAL / ETHICS

One central proposition that materialized in the course of curating the *Dear Truth* exhibition revolved around the concept of *reflexivity*; with its close links to ethics, reflexivity emerged a key point of consideration in relation to contemporary documentary photography. Reflexivity can be achieved with small means such as "a caption to a photograph," argues Foster, since there is a risk that reflexivity otherwise leads to "narcissism, in which the other is obscured, the self pronounced; it can also lead to a refusal of engagement altogether."[32] Rather than refusing engagement, *The Objectivity Laboratory* seeks to affirm perspectives that propose ways forward. Whilst notions of *re-*

sponsibility and *care* have already been discussed in relation to the obligations and commitments of the artist, I now turn to the issue of *ethics*.[33]

From an ethical point of view, there are different sets of stakes at play when studying the milieus of the privileged elite as compared to approaching people in precarious positions. Anthropologist Laura Nader was an early protagonist of "studying up" to challenge the prevailing dominant power relationship in anthropological studies.[34] Nader asked what if anthropologists were to study the colonizers and the culture of power and affluence, rather than the culture of the powerless, poverty, and the colonized.[35] An artistic research project which adopts this attitude is Mark Curran's ethnographically informed artwork *The Breathing Factory* (2006), carried out in the highly technological environment of the Hewlett-Packard Manufacturing and Research complex in Leixlip, Ireland.[36] Curran places emphasis on the important role that "access" plays, discussing the process of negotiating admission as, despite being prolonged and extensive, a procedure which the artist can gain important insights from. The process of establishing trust and negotiating access are challenges shared by artists, sociologists, and anthropologists and there is, argues Foster, an alternate envy between artists and anthropologists. The anthropologist regards the artist as "a paragon of formal reflexivity, a self-aware reader of culture understood as text," whereas the artist desirously looks to the anthropologist's contextual anchoring through fieldwork.[37] Foster's suggestion is an invite to look closer to the field that allegedly draws the artist's envy.

In May 2012, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) approved a "Statement on Ethics" which presented seven principles of responsibility for professional anthropologists.[38] The statement

33—Ethics is in *The Objectivity Laboratory* not conceptualised as a set of moral philosophical knowledge principles, but as a process concretely anchored in artists' actions and deliberations with implications on documentary photography.

34—An example of "studying up" is the aforementioned mentioned *Laboratory Life* (1979); an in-depth ethnographic description of the practice of scientific work in which the authors study a scientific laboratory as if it were an alien place, populated by an association of researchers. Latour & Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The construction of scientific facts*.

35—Laura Nader, "Up the Anthropologist--Perspectives Gained from Studying Up," *Reinventing Anthropology*, Dell Hymes, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972 {1969}).

36—The artwork *The Breathing Factory* is discussed in Mark Curran's dissertation. Mark Curran, "A Globalised Vulnerability: 'Re-representing' the Labouring Body of Ireland's Newly Industrialised Landscape," PhD Diss., Dublin Institute of Technology, Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice School of Media Faculty of Applied Arts, Dublin (2011).

37—Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 180.

38—I am grateful to visual anthropologist Alyssa Grossman who brought the statement on ethics to a class where she was invited to teach as part of the Ethics and representation course, which I developed in 2016 during my PhD position at HDK-Valand (then the Valand Academy), the University of Gothenburg.

on ethics opens with a preamble where it is clarified that anthropology aims to solve human problems. In the study of human experience, anthropologists "face myriad ethical quandaries," difficult ethical concerns "that inevitably arise in the production of knowledge.[39] Anthropology is outlined as a social enterprise which always involves others, be they humans or non-humans: "Anthropologists must be sensitive to the power differentials, constraints, interests and expectations characteristic of all relationships."[40] The relational nature of their research, which attends to interactions with humans and non-humans, is given serious consideration with regards to the ethics which permeates the different stages of anthropological research.

Before looking closer at the seven ethical guidelines in the statement, the articulations thus far invite further attention to be paid to two key notions—namely, the "relational" and "ethics." Information scientist Lisa M. Given outlines "relational ethics" as the ethical actions that are situated in relationship: "If ethics is about how we should live, then it is essentially about how we should live together."[41] Originating from health care, relational ethics stresses attentiveness and responsiveness, "mutual respect, engagement, embodied knowledge, attention to the interdependent environment, and uncertainty/vulnerability."[42] The answer to the question "How should I act?" is discovered in dialogue with others. Learning to be ethical *in the interactions* with other people entails addressing issues of power and seeking informed autonomous consent to minimize the risk of creating damage.

In the AAA's statement on ethics, the first proclamation reads "Do No Harm," which is particularly important when research is carried out "among vulnerable populations." Statement Two is a call to "Be Open and Honest Regarding Your Work"—that is, be transparent about methods, purpose, and outcomes. The third statement reads "Obtain Informed Consent and Necessary Permissions," whereafter the statement specifies that "anthropological researchers working with living human communities must obtain the voluntary and informed consent of research participants." Fourthly, the researcher is urged to "Weigh Competing Ethical Obligations Due Collaborators and Affected Parties" in acknowledgement

39—The American Anthropological Association (AAA), "Statement on Ethics," accessed November 18, 2021, https://www.americananthro.org/ethics-and-methods.

40—The American Anthropological Association, "Statement on Ethics."

41—Lisa M. Given, "Relational Ethics," *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2008)

42—Ibid.

that "obligations to vulnerable populations are particularly important." The fifth statement is a reminder that it is an ethical responsibility to "Make Your Results Accessible." Further, Statement Six urges the researcher to "Protect and Preserve Your Records" and lastly, Statement Seven is a call to "Maintain Respectful and Ethical Professional Relationships"—that is, anthropologists "must not exploit individuals, groups, animals, or cultural or biological materials."

Should less be expected of the artist's practice than of the anthropologist in terms of ethical considerations? A statement on ethics may potentially undermine artistic freedom. But the relational ethics perspectives by Given and AAA's statement make clear that relations with others requires responsibility, especially if the artist/researcher enters from a position of privilege. In health care and anthropology, rules and regulations are formulated not only to protect other's security and integrity but also to assist the researcher by encouraging ethically appropriate conduct. A documentary responsibility, even though not regulated by a code of ethics, may benefit from looking to methodical reflections such as the AAA's statement on ethics; the structured rules that supervise the anthropologist's ethical deliberations enables the documentary photographer who would wish to break rules, or engage in ethical trespass, to at least do so *from an informed position*.

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTARY POTENTIALS

The perspectives presented above in relation to the AAA's statement on ethics are reminiscent of several reflexive and insightful contributions that were made to documentary photography in the 1970s and 1980s. In particular, the work two photographers are introduced here to cast light on the progressive transformations that transpired. Art historian Ileana-Lucia Selejan explores the development of documentary photography of the time in relation to photographer Claudia Gordillo Castellón's work in Nicaragua.[43] The *Consejo Mexicano de Foto-*

43—Ileana-Lucia Selejan is a research fellow with the Decolonising Arts Institute at the University of the Arts London and a member of the PhotoDemos project "Citizens of Photography: The Camera and the Political Imagination" which is based at the University College London. The PhotoDemos Collective is a group of researchers that explores the camera and political imagination through ethnographic fieldwork in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Greece, India, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, "looking at how different groups of people actually use photography and what they have to say (and what they do) about politics." "PhotoDemos," The University College London, accessed February 14, 2022, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/research/photodemos.

grafía, which was organized in Mexico City in 1978 and 1981, and in Havana in 1984 brought together photographers who were invested in documentary photography and the communication of social problems, inequalities, and political abuses in the region. In conjunction with the *Consejo,* photography was put forward as "an element of resistance on the one hand and as a committed form of art on the other."[44] This was a time when documentary practices and fine art approaches became increasingly entangled, and complex criticism of traditional modes of documentary photography emerged. "Abandoning the heroics of World War II black and white documentary, the 'new' documentarians sought more direct, engaging aesthetic means that would allow the insertion of criticality without compromising the evidentiary value of their work," Selejan writes.[45] Photography's factual authority was undermined, and new documentary capacities were advanced.

More ambiguously and less ideologically assertive than many of the contemporary photographers in the revolutionary context of Nicaragua, Gordillo's documentary work took a novel approach to the 1980s Sandinista revolution. Selejan traces in Gordillo's images distinctive sociological perspectives, combined with a conceptual and fragmentary aesthetic vocabulary informed by the postmodern context. Gordillo's images were an important body of documentary work, while concurrently being aesthetically experimental; she documented armed conflict *and* the daily rituals of everyday life "from a close yet critical distance."[46] At the time, these seemingly incoherent attributes led to a public debate about aesthetics, revolutionary ideology, and the role of arts in Sandinista Nicaragua and Gordillo's work was criticized for not serving the purpose of the revolution and not being ideological enough by the politically revolutionary but photographically conservative phalanx.

In geographic and temporal proximity to Gordillo, another photographer, Susan Meiselas, similarly made photographs of the revolution in Nicaragua.[47] A retrospective exhibition in 2018 of Meiselas' work—which included Meiselas' projects from

44—Ileana-Lucia Selejan, "Pictures in Dispute: Documentary photography in Sandinista Nicaragua," *photographies*, 10, no. 3 (2017): 297.

45—Ibid., 298.

46—Ileana-Lucia Selejan, "How Claudia Gordillo Documented the Realities of Life in Nicaragua," *Aperture* (January 28, 2022), https://aperture.org/editorial/how-claudia-gordillo-documented-the-realities-of-life-in-nicaragua/.

47—See: Susan Meiselas, *Nicaragua, June 1978—July 1979* (New York: Aperture, 2008 {1981}).

numerous conflicts in a range of countries—was accompanied by a catalogue, and a number of the perspectives presented in the catalogue essays serve to demonstrate Meiselas to be simultaneously an influential proponent *and* critic of documentary photography.[48] "We could say that Meiselas ignited her own revolution by defying the expectations of those who idealized the language of news, and in particular the language of photojournalism," says curator Carles Guerra.[49] Meiselas' practice was dialogic and inquisitorial, and she frequently included essays in her published books to undermine her own narrative.[50] Photography became a new form of political action when Meiselas developed "potential histories" (Azoulay).

In the 1983 exhibition *Mediations*, Meiselas presented an installation that drew attention to political violence but also to the spectacle of media, and the photographer's position. Images were installed in three layers: book pages presented in a sequence, an assortment of cuttings from magazines where images from the work had been published, and Xerox copies of contact sheets. The installation "refuted any one-sided interpretations."[51] Images were presented vertically and horizontally, in grids and irregular clusters. By constantly challenging the conventions of documentary photography, Meiselas disrupted "the order of a chronological discourse that turns the revolution into a finite event."[52] While the individual photographs made by Meiselas have a photojournalist presence, it is in the multi-layered materializations in exhibitions and books that her works perform disruptions and destabilize linearity.

Azoulay sees in Meiselas' work the process of unlearning: she enters conversation with people in sites of disaster and destruction, but renounces immediacy and does not rush to make photographs. Unlike institutionalized "concerned photographers," Meiselas is not caught in either the banal or sensational.[53] There is a absent presence of destruction in Meiselas work, Azoulay suggests, which offers the chance to explore the "impe-

48—The exhibition *Susan Meiselas: Mediations* was coproduced by Tàpies Foundation in Barcelona, Jeu de Paume in Paris, and SFMOMA in San Francisco. Curators: Carles Guerra and Pia Viewing.

49—Carles Guerra, "Past Immediate Memory, *Susan Meiselas: Mediations* (Paris, Barcelona and Bologna: Jeu de Paume, Fundació Tàpies, and Damiaani, 2018), 81.

50—Ibid., 75.

51—Ibid., 77.

52—Ibid., 89.

53—Ariella Azoulay, "Unlearning the Position of the Photographer as Expert," *Susan Meiselas: Mediations* (Paris, Barcelona and Bologna: Jeu de Paume, Fundació Tàpies, and Damiaani, 2018), 105.

rial gestures of destruction" as a terrain of struggle rather than as iconic visual representations.[54] In response to the destruction that she saw in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 1991-92, Meiselas' "non-imperial response took shape" as she rejected the imperial impulse to move on from the ruins to the next site of destruction.[55] In this process, Azoulay finds that the villagers became interlocutors in the event of photography: however, even though Meiselas enters conversation with people in sites of disaster and destruction and does not rush to make photographs, the images do not misleadingly present the villagers as having more power than they concretely have.[56] In a world dominated by experts, Azoulay finds that Meiselas' images mark the photographer's discontent with the position of the photographer as an expert, recognizing the knowledges held by multiple actors.[57]

Concretely, the collaborative and participatory aspects of Meiselas' works are imperative to unlearn photography's institutionalized division of labor. In the early 1970s, Meiselas worked through a method where she returned the photographs to where they were originally made, a process of "repatriation" which was guided by questions concerned with for whom the pictures were made, and what purpose they served.[58] Theorist Eduardo Cadava describes Meiselas' *Reframing History* project, where she returned to the sites in Nicaragua twenty-five years after first having been there to photograph. On her original visit, she had gone to places where assassinations were carried out and where search parties on a daily basis tried to locate missing persons.[59] On her return to the same places, Meiselas brough the images from twenty-five years earlier and installed them mural-sized in the landscape, at the same spot as the original photographs were made.[60] In doing so, the bodies of the dead and missing were recalled "in a landscape that no longer seems to remember it."[61] The photographs serves to prevent atrocities from being forgotten, keeping the "singular death and everything it represents

54—Ibid., 99.

55—Ibid., 110.

56—Ibid., 103.

57—The photographer is implicated as an expert since photography emerged into a world shaped by divisions, characterized by imperialism. Ibid.

58—Guerra, "Past Immediate Memory," 74.

59—Eduardo Cadava, "Learning to See," *Susan Meiselas: Mediations* (Paris, Barcelona and Bologna: Jeu de Paume, Fundació Tàpies, and Damiaani, 2018), 57.

60—Artistic researcher Tyrone Martinsson uses the method of "rephotography" in his work with environmental photography and the visualization of climate change. In *Spitsbergen—Past and Present* (2015), Martinsson documents the dramatic changes in the landscape of Arctic Svalbard. He introduces historical photographs into the landscape where they were photographed more than a century ago and rephotographs the sites to by comparison visualise transformations in the landscape.

61—Cadava, "Learning to See," 57.

62—Cadava, "Learning to See," 46–54. The book that Cadava refers to is: Susan Meiselas, *Learn to See: A Sourcebook of Photography Projects by Teachers and Students* (Cambridge: Polaroid Foundation, 1974).

63—Ibid., 47.

from being lost to history."[62] In a contemplation related to Paglen's (described in INVESTIGATION), Cadava notes that Meiselas finds images to always be insufficient in themselves. In attending to the inevitable failure of the single image, Meiselas included a range of materials such as sound recordings, interviews, statistics, documents, and poems.[63] One photograph is not enough on its own, it needs to be read with historical images, contextual understanding, and the captions which tells its history.

FACING THE EXPERIENCES OF OTHERS

64—Exhibition view Laia Abril (in the middle), Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero (to the right), and Mathieu Asselin (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

Exhibition view Laia Abril (in the middle and to the far right), Karlsson Rixon and Mikela Lundahl Hero (in the middle/background), and Frida Orupabo (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

In INVESTIGATION, Asselin is quoted as being clear about whose side he is on: his investigation of Monsanto does not strive to be neutral. His priority is to inform the spectator of the consequences of the company's deeds, a priority which is evident in the presentation of text and images. Even though the work is reflexive and visually complex, it is not first and foremost a reflection on its own existence as a documentary work. The same is true for Meiselas, and for the work of artist Laia Abril, which is last in the line of the artists that I invited to exhibit in *Dear Truth* which I will discuss in *The Objectivity Laboratory*. In Abril's longstanding pursuit of misogyny, materialized in *On Abortion*, there is a directness which quite possibly appeals to the audience differently than a more ambiguous approach perhaps would: the texts that accompany Baladi's images are informative and detail horrific truths. The artworks are formulated convincingly, and they persuasively target the offences that they address.[64]

Looking at images, especially those of atrocities, has been seen to implicate the

viewer as a voyeur, complicit in the re-establishment of the original offence. From this perspective, photography is violent, repeating the violence which is already imposed upon the suffering subjects.[65] However, to accept that photography is violent (Sontag's proposition) and voyeuristic (Berger's assessment) is to consent to an approach that risks reinforcing the idea of an exotic, submissive other—a risk that I have discussed in MONTAGE.[66] To not photograph can conceivably uphold the solidification of otherness rather than work against it. Karen Barad's notion of "diffraction" and Trinh T. Minh-ha's invitation to "figure difference differently" offer a critique of the idea that certain subjects are unphotographable. The inclination to routinely dismiss photographs that address the pain of others as voyeuristic, violent, and immoral dwells in a moral high ground which Andén-Papadopoulos, following the propositions in RESISTANCE, argues is a predisposition that ought to be problematized: "The pervasive assumption that the integrity of a suffering subject is violated simply because she is pictured relies on a normative—and thus debatable—perception of human dignity as incommensurate with weakness, despair and powerlessness." Instead, Andén-Papadopoulos projects an "alternative framework of recognition", where vulnerability acts as a basis for human solidarity.[67] It is time to recall Abril's statement from the framework of the kappa, as it illustrates the basis of solidarity that Andén-Papadopoulos' draws attention to: **»It is a stressful situation as an artist and a great responsibility. You are always faced with the possibility of making a mistake when you are working with other people's lives.«** Abril's outlook is empathic and perceptive. The stakes are high when she is trying to figure out **»how to represent the pain of others.«**

Abril's research involves confronting atrocious experiences, which she reflects upon in the following terms: **»I can only spend**

(64—cont.) Exhibition view Laia Abril (to the right) and Mathieu Asselin (to the left), *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

65—Andén-Papadopoulos, "Imaging Human Rights," 339.

66—Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977); John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1973).

67—Andén-Papadopoulos here introduces perspectives inspired by Judith Butler (2003), Carolyn J. Dean (2015), Sharon Sliwinski (2011) and Susie Linfield (2010). Ibid., 339.

the time and energy,« she recounts, »if something really, really motivates me in my guts. Otherwise, there is no way that I would put myself through it.« Describing the research process as a journey where she learns things and becomes (politically) educated, she challenges her own preconceptions through reading and reflecting and by going to places, speaking to people, and exploring materials. She does not attempt to represent or document reality but neither does she think of any parts of her work as fiction: **»I am so interested in what is *actually* happening that I don't need the made-up stories.«** Her works are based in real experiences, but she does not go out of her way to convince the spectator that the work conveys the truth: **»I often confirm that I work with facts so that people know that it is true. I understand that they want to know, and I say, 'Yes, it did take place.' But I also say: let us focus on what it *means* that it happened and why it still happens.«** To ensure that what she states in her works is correct, Abril fact-checks, but she does not account for her source material: **»The audience has to trust that I am being honest.«**

The specifics of each encounter are important; Abril attends to the particulars of the stories told by the women that she meets. She describes a three-step process that begins with an initial procedure of investigation, which is followed by a process of reacting to the material. The third step lies in creating something, **»An emotional response to something that actually happened.«** The artwork, she says, is often gentler than reality: **»For a long time, I thought of myself as a filter. Things that were very hard to look at … I would put myself in that situation and create something for the audience, bearable to look at.«** Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger has stated, "As a maker of photography exhibitions, I repeatedly return to spectatorship and emotions."[68] Abril constantly considers the audience, but **»I don't 'cuddle' them.«** The artists in *Dear Truth* attend to the presentation of their artworks with a carefulness that reveals a responsiveness in relation the audience: how to enable visitors to comprehend and engage with the works' subject matter is a pressing question.

68—Rastenberger, "Why Exhibit?: Affective Spectatorship and the Gaze from Somewhere", 111.

Karlsson Rixon says: "I am interested in how the photographic can be challenged and criticized in relation to reality and representation, when reality is at the same time meaningful to the work. To use the pictorial qualities of the photograph and

its immediate connection to a visible reality I see as the media's most burning potential and challenge."[69] This *is* a challenge. The question of the image's relation to visible realities is pressing when the artist step outside of the studio to make photographs that approach other people's traumas. How is the documentary photographer to connect photographically with a visible reality without inflicting pain and expectations, and without objectifying, violating, and exploiting the people who enters, sometimes as interlocutors, and sometimes as more fleeting encounters? Ever-present is the issue of trust, which Abril in line with numerous of accounts throughout the text, draws attention to. One aspect of trust lies in how women have been disbelieved and silenced throughout history: **»the politics of the undermining of trust.«** In addition, there is the trust between the artist and the audience. Lastly, Abril points to the process that leads up to the exhibited work: her practice relies on conversations with people who trust her with their stories. While Karlsson Rixon's images from Skaramangas are photographed from a close yet marked distance, Abril's are up close. The portraits show individuals who are aware of the photographer's presence, and they often look straight into the camera.[70] Portraiture is a direct form of photography where the spectator is allowed to look carefully at the image of another person. They have looked at us from the photograph; they have been introduced to our cognition. To work with fieldwork is to meet people, to ask questions, and to be positioned nearby; It is to find new things out and not settle for the already known.

69—Annica Karlsson Rixon and Lena Martinsson, "Trots allt," *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 1 (2013): 9. My translation from Swedish to English.

70—Exhibition view Laia Abril, *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2021.

C L O S I N G

N O T E S

FROM DISTRUST TO DIALOGUE

When this research project began, I did not yet know that truth and objectivity would end up playing a key role in the work. The practice-based research components, however, traced a trajectory that would lead me to these themes: the three artworks that I developed during the first phase of the research—*Zero Point Energy* (2016), *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018), and *A World Made by Science* (2018)—all took the natural sciences as a point of departure and this context came to influence the theoretical outlooks and the overall focus of the research. Out of the various theoretical approaches that I explored within the research, the feminist science perspectives of Karen Barad and Donna Haraway have been particularly valuable. In their writings, whilst the notion of objectivity remains unsettled, *it is not abandoned*—and neither is the possibility of attaining truths. Haraway and Barad's deconstructions of the processes of knowledge do not result in destruction, but in a commitment to rich, adequate, contestable, embodied descriptions of the world. When applied to the familiar concerns of documentary photography, the work of these two thinkers opened up new pathways for thinking and doing; these are the routes that *The Objectivity Laboratory* traces.

The perspectives that are offered in the kappa have unfolded through a process of practice-based research, combining artistic practice, curatorial practice, and theoretical deliberation. As the research developed, it became clear that one of photographic practice's problems is that the critical assessment of photographic work—particularly with respect to artworks that are concerned with sociopolitically urgent issues with a basis in the

real—habitually draws on photography criticism formulated in the 1970s and 1980s. While earlier critique *can* hold vast potential in the present, as Bruno Latour argues (through a position that I discuss in MONTAGE), it is important to reassess our critical equipment in response to new challenges. Aligned with this position, the research has sought to formulate constructive and applicable documentary photography outlooks, that inquire into truth and objectivity from new perspectives, at a time when notions such as post-truth and alternative facts have surfaced to epitomize a political and media landscape where untruths flourish. The dissertation title, *The Objectivity Laboratory*, and the curated exhibition *Dear Truth* signal an exploratory and affirmative approach in relation to objectivity and truth.

Berenice Abbott's theoretical perspectives, which appear throughout the four parts of Propositions, and her photographs from MIT in the 1950s when she documented the principles of physics, testify to a keen belief in photography. A few years ahead of Abbott, Bauhaus-connected Hungarian artist György Kepes came to MIT in 1946 with a vision of art as a practice by which to intervene in the challenges and pressing issues of the world, a view which is also in accordance with the present research.[1] As the research progressed, I was smitten with Abbott's enthusiastic embrace of photography as a proficient tool for social and political engagement and an effective means of communication—which is evident in her writings and photographic work at the MIT.

In Trinh T. Minh-ha's film *Surname Viêt Given Name Nam* (1989), a woman declares, "From distrust, we have come to dialogue." This statement is made with reference to the speaker's encounters with women of "the south" and in the film it signals a shift that occurred through a process that saw political understandings on both sides radically alter. In the present research, the curated exhibition instigated a dialogue between myself and the invited artists, wherein I was both able to speak with them and to spatially interact with their works; in this way, the exhibition emerged as an invaluable research tool. In the kappa, the artists'

1—Curator Ute Meta Bauer, Founding Director (2009-2012) of the MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT), describes Kepes' vision of art, emphasizing that the political practices of artists—often manifested through interdisciplinary collaborations—are important contributions to universities' knowledge production. Ute Meta Bauer, "Re_ACT: Research-Based Artistic Practice at MIT's Program in Art, Culture and Technology," *Art as a Thinking Process: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, eds. Mara Ambrožič and Angela Vettese (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).

perspectives have served as the basis for further associations and considerations, by which I have sought to articulate the terms of a shift from documentary distrust to documentary dialogue. *The Objectivity Laboratory* framed the documentary photography potentials that the research has explored for the reader in terms of a series of propositions. In Closing Notes, the kappa's final part, I review a series of those propositions.

UNFOLDING DOCUMENTARY POTENTIALS

Through the present research, within contemporary artistic practice I have focused on documentary photography that maintains a basis in social realities. The exploration has been conceptualized and interwoven with theoretical perspectives in search of productive documentary positions. The exhibition *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography* provided me with the opportunity to explore a range of artists' motivations and ways of working, through their different thematic and methodological approaches.

So, what has unfolded? As it materialized in *Dear Truth*, documentary photography is revealed to constitute a field infused with a sense of responsibility. Ethical considerations are ever-present; contemporary artists are acutely aware of the violations that photography can inflict. Ethics is manifested in the attention that artists pay to detail and active delimitations; it also surfaces in relation to consideration, care, and credibility. When encounters with other people constitute the basis of the artwork—that is, when the artwork contains an ambition to relate to others' lives and stories—ethical considerations become especially central.

Approaching the lives of others is, further, important; dialogue and encounters are linked to the artwork's relevance. The practice of stepping outside of the artist's studio to engage with the world gives the world the opportunity to object to the descriptions that are subsequently made of it, through the suggestion of what it is and what it can become. Whilst ethically challenging, the process of moving oneself and the "agencies of observation"—that is, the technical equipment such as a camera—to the field can, I argue, be understood as a process of inquisitiveness and, ultimately, an act of consideration. Drawing

on Trinh, the shift from speaking *about* to speaking *nearby* indicates a position which does not aim to *represent*, or to seize, a subject. I have addressed the challenges that photographing others entail—which I see as constitutive of the documentary—by looking to the field of anthropology, where the method of fieldwork is overseen by a ratified and systematic statement on ethics. *The Objectivity Laboratory* also unsettles the dualistic idea of an "us" and a "them"; I propose that the act of *not* photographing—that is, to negate images of certain subjects—out of fear of exoticizing can in fact, and in a deeply problematic way, feed categorization and the notion of "difference."

I introduce the notion of "diffraction" as an optical metaphor to challenge the more common concept of reflection. Rather than calling into play the image of a mirror-like reproduction, or indeed the idea of a straightforward reflection, diffraction signals active interference; with the words of Barad, diffraction draws attention to patterns of difference that make a difference. Documentary photography has the potential to lead to the production of important knowledges about the world. The works explored in this research advance matters of concern in contemporary society with an urgency that originates in facts and in real bodily and structural exploitation and violence. Rather than primarily illuminating personal feelings—and instead of predominantly placing emphasis on philosophical considerations—the artworks that I discuss in the research address questions that are anchored in social realities. Extensive procedures often preceded the materialization of these works of art, and they are underpinned by layers of information; the laborious, research-based artistic procedures that have surfaced in recent years are embodied in several of the artworks that were exhibited in *Dear Truth* and addressed here in *The Objectivity Laboratory*.

In some of the works, the intent and position of the artist is clear; in others, the artist's motivation is more obscure. However, critical reflexivity—that is, attentiveness to how one's situated position impacts a situation—pervades all the works and constitutes an essential basis in contemporary documentary photography. Upon reviewing the works in *Dear Truth*, I have identified in the montage a model for reflexivity which is manifested in the *materiality* of the images: the cuts and the obvious layers are testimonies of the artistic process. The physical application

of the montage technique bears traces of the artist's intervention; montages are inherently reflexive in this respect. Critical awareness pervades the cuts, and the glue of the image, and reflexivity transpires in the details of the interventions and their cuts, joints, and layers. In the creative construction of documentary work, deconstruction resides.

Whereas artworks today often require the time-consuming method of going to places to stage encounters with people and materials, the montage emerges as a more immediate engagement: it traverses time and collapses geographic locations. By cutting up images from different archives, artists form new narratives and counter-narratives.

Documentary photography as it is approached in *The Objectivity Laboratory* often develops with the benefit of insights from other fields. Artists engage in collaborations which yield new understandings that feed into the works; these relationships facilitate conversations and companionship. In the dissertation, sociology, geography, architecture, gender studies, anthropology, journalism, and the natural sciences have all appeared as areas of significance to documentary photography.

In *Dear Truth*, truth played a leading part. Truth was approached not as an absolute and unquestionable endpoint, but rather as an open-ended beginning and a possibility for social commitment. In INVESTIGATION, truth is described in terms of its vanguard role in relation to contemporary art. Truth, I suggested in this section, is not a reactionary or naïve ideal but rather a radical weapon against dominant narratives in the production of counter-narratives. The idea of a "positional" truth undoes the singular Truth and credits the multiple perspectives that each situation invites. The materiality not only of images but of image-making technologies is fundamental to the documentary process.

Having reviewed Barad and Haraway's writings, I began to entertain the prospect of an *embodied* objectivity, which would commit to matters of urgency, and pay attention to matters of facts, in the world. Barad and Haraway's perspectives emphasize the possibility that reliable knowledges—infused with ethical considerations, responsibility, and constructivist tendencies—might at their very core also contain a critique of authority, dogmatism, and neutrality. The notion of situated objectivity

that has been put forward in this work presents a model of objectivity that is engaged, embodied, and partial. Objectivity, the inquiry suggests, may matter because it can lead us to reliable knowledges and adequate descriptions of the world. A situated objectivity would incite ethically considerate procedures in the documentary engagement with sociopolitical realities, privileging openness, transformation, and contestation as integral to reliability—as such, *The Objectivity Laboratory* forcefully materializes a commitment to credible, rich, situated knowledges.

This research has cultivated perspectives and potentials for documentary photographic practice and theory in the present, which inspire outlooks that stay nearby the real. The inquiry has explicated a range of artistic methodologies, theoretical perspectives, and conceptual considerations that stimulate the continued reinvention of documentary photography in the 21st century. Facts—which are not always disclosed—are often vital for the reliability of documentary work: a rigorous research process is a regular feature in contemporary documentary photography. When political systems feed on the circulation of doubt and distrust, the accretion of trust can be approached as an act of resistance and defiance. Trust, accountability, and credibility thus play a role when the factual and the actual is what is at stake. Despite the inherent inadequacy of photographs, the propositions presented in *The Objectivity Laboratory* ultimately affirm the view that documentary photography can reveal important truths about the social realities that we find ourselves within and in this way hint at how those realities might be changed.

—ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Objectivity Laboratory: Propositions on Documentary Photography was developed and formulated with the intention to serves as a form of practical reference for those already familiar with—and with practical experience of—the general dilemmas that the investigation explores. Throughout the research process, I have kept asking how this exploration might matter in the context of photography education at art schools. I would therefore like to thank the many students in different contexts that I have encounter throughout the years: I hope that you will find that the perspectives put forward resonate with the challenges and possibilities that are continuously addressed in the classrooms and beyond.

Heartfelt thanks to my first supervisor Niclas Östlind who, apart from his knowledges in relation to the subject, has contributed with a calm and confident approach; a level of trust which I have perceived as an act of profound care immensely important in the PhD process. Annika Elisabeth von Hausswolff who was my initial secondary supervisor brought invaluably refreshing perspectives at critical moments in the practice-based process, thank you. My gratitude to Martin McCabe, who arrived as secondary supervisor in the intense phase when I was writing *The Objectivity Laboratory*, for inspiring viewpoints and insightful comments that invigorated the project. His presence also entailed a connection with the many years that I spent in Ireland, which provides the opportunity to extend my warm and deep gratitude to my photographic peers and other beloved peeps in Ireland. Mark Curran, Ann Curran and Ángel Luis González have been particularly important in their support and friendship. With Mick Wilson, Ireland arrived in Gothenburg when

Mick in 2012 became prefect at the School of Photography and Valand (which later became HDK-Valand—Academy of Art and Design), University of Gothenburg. His approach to artistic research was central to the development of the dynamic PhD milieu at the institution. This entailed, for me, having the privilege to be surrounded by an extraordinary group of PhD companions, including Nick Aikens, André Alves, Andjeas Ejiksson, Jennifer Hayashida, Khashayar Naderehvandi, Ram Krishna Ranjan, Imri Sandström, Åsa Sonjasdotter and Eva Weinmayer. The PhD journey would not have been half as rewarding had it not been for Anna Frisk, who is a bearer of indispensable knowledges and affability.

Dragana Vujanović Östlind of the Hasselblad Foundation, my rock and confidant both professionally and personally, thank you. The entire team at Hasselblad Foundation: Christina Backman, Jenny Blixt, Emma Botin, Andréas Hagström, Annika Leandersson, Cecilia Sandblom, Louise Wolthers and Dragana Vujanović Östlind (again) who provide one of the most dynamic places for contemporary photography in Northern Europe, thank you all—a thank you which extends to former employees Anna Fagerlind, Elsa Modin, and Gunilla Knape as well as the personnel who works more intermittently with pedagogy and the physical construction of exhibitions. Thank you to Chalmers University of Technology, Lund University and the Hasselblad Foundation for supporting the *Nanosocieties* project, which for me developed into the PhD research; in this project, my special thanks to biophysicist Jonas Hannestad with whom I collaborated in the exploration of the physical and conceptual aspects of the natural sciences. My thanks also to Lena Nyberg and Anna Asplind, as well as Emma Ringqvist, Patrik Johansson, Victor Nyåker and Camilla Topuntoli, for your work with the film *Zero Point Energy*, and the staff at The Nanofabrication Laboratory at Chalmers, especially Svante Pålsson and Ulf Södervall, and the AHA! Festival and Fredrik Höök at Chalmers.

Thank you, curators Joa Ljungberg at Moderna Museet and Katerina Gregos at the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art, and Lena Malm at Iaspis/Konstnärsnämnden. My warm thanks to past and present colleagues at HDK-Valand, including Kalle Sanner, Nina Mangalanayagam, Stefan Jensen, Hendrik

Zeitler, Juila Tedroff, Anna Strand, Johannes Samuelsson, Ann Eringstam, Helga Härenstam, Klara Källström, Eva-Teréz Gölin, Annika von Hausswolff (again), Niclas Östlind (again), Pelle Kronestedt, and Tyrone Martinsson. Acknowledgment is due to Andreas Gedin, opponent in the early days of the PhD research. My gratitude to Petra Bauer and Kari Andén-Papadopoulos—my opponents as the project forged ahead—for you for attentive and constructive input, and Jyoti Mistry and Mick Wilson (again)

To graphic designer Richard Lindmark, thank you for your considerate responsiveness to the words and images in the published versions of this research, both in the *Dear Truth* catalogue and *The Objectivity Laboratory*, a process which was supported by the repro magic by Eva-Teréz Gölin (again). My gratitude to Helen Runting for entering as proof-reader of *The Objectivity Laboratory*, which was an exchange that came to be important beyond the textual during the last, hectic weeks of the research.

Lastly, and most affectionately, thank you with love to mamma, pappa, Martin, and Lars. Thank you, Ulla-Britt, and Göran, the consideration materialized as dinners have been invaluable at just the right moments. My Kristinehamn gang and other dear friends. And, to my loved ones, thank you darlings Karl, Lou, Abbe, and Bonnie (for keeping my feet warm and spirit up).

—BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Berenice. *A Guide to Better Photography*. New York: Crown, 1941.

Agence France-Presse. "Debate Flares on 'Twitter Revolutions,' Arab Spring." *Hindustan Times*, Agence France-Presse, March 10, 2013, https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/debate-flares-on-twitter-revolutions-arab-spring/story-QHhYoIMIujzHQrO9HAoijL.html.

Aguayo, Angela J. *Documentary Resistance: Social Change and Participatory Media*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

The American Anthropological Association (AAA). "Statement on Ethics." The American Anthropological Association (AAA), accessed November 18, 2021, https://www.americananthro.org/ethics-and-methods.

Arab Image Foundation, "AIF Statement on Archiving and Language." *The Arab Image Foundation*, November 23, 2021, http://arabimagefoundation.com/.

Aitkenhead, Decca. "So Long, 2016: The Year of the Political Earthquake." *The Guardian*, December 24, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/dec/24/2016-in-review-world-news-syria-terrorism-brexit-trump-decca-aitkenhead.

Andén-Papadopoulos, Kari. "Imaging Human Rights: On the Ethical and Political Implications of Picturing Pain." In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Human Rights*, edited by Howard Tumber and Silvio Waisbord. Oxon: Routledge, 2017.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: HarperCollins, 1973 {1951}.

Azoulay, Ariella. "What is a photograph? What is photography?" *Philosophy of Photography* 1, no. 1 (2010): 9–13.

Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography.* Zone Books: New York, 2008.

Azoulay, Ariella. *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. London and New York: Verso, 2012.

Azoulay, Ariella. "Unlearning the Position of the Photographer as Expert." *Susan Meiselas: Mediations*. 95–120. Paris, Barcelona and Bologna: Jeu de Paume, Fundació Tàpies, and Damiaani, 2018.

Baladi, Lara. "When Seeing Is Belonging: The Photography of Tahrir Square." *Contemporary Visual Art + Culture BROADSHEET* 43, no. 1 (2014): 65–68.

Baladi, Lara. "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistance." *IBRAAZ* 10, no. 03 (July 28, 2016), https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/163/.

Balsom, Erika and Hila Peleg, eds. *Documentary Across Disciplines.* Berlin: The MIT Press, 2016.

Balsom, Erika. "The Reality-Based Community." *e-flux,* June 2017, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/.

Balsom, Erika. "'There is No Such Thing as Documentary': An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha." *Frieze* 199 (2018), https://www.frieze.com/article/there-no-such-thing-documentary-interview-trinh-t-minh-ha.

Barad, Karen. "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction." *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*, edited by Lynn Hankinson Nelson and Jack Nelson, 161–194. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996.

Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–831.

Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Barad, Karen. "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart." *Parallax* 20:3 (2014): 168–187.

Barreiros, Inês Beleza and Joacine Katar Moreira. "To Decolonize Is to Perform: The Theory-in-Praxis of Grada Kilomba." *Challenging Memories and Rebuilding Identities: Literary and Artistic Voices*, edited by Margarida Rendeiro and Federica Lupati, London: Routledge, 2019.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. London: Penguin Vintage, 1980.

Bate, David. "Aesthetics and Photography." In *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory*, edited by Mark Durden and Jane Tormey. New York: Routledge, 2020: 37–51.

Bauer, Petra. *Sisters! Making Films, Doing Politics: An Exploration in Artistic Research*. Stockholm: Art and Theory Publishing, 2016.

Bazin, André. "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4, Summer, 1960: 4–9.

Bauer, Ute Meta. "Re_ACT: Research-Based Artistic Practice at MIT's Program in Art, Culture and Technology." In *Art as a Thinking Process: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, editors Mara Ambrožič and Angela Vettese. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013.

Bencard, Adam, Louise Whiteley and Caroline Heje Thon. "Curating Experimental Entanglements." *Curatorial Challenges*, edited by Malene Vest Hansen, Anne Folke Henningsen, Anne Gregersen, 133–146. London: Routledge, 2019.

Bennett, Michael James. *Deleuze and Ancient Greek Physics: The Image of Nature*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

"Berenice Abbott and Science 1939." *Seeing Science: Photography, Science and Visual Culture*, October 11, 2016, http://seeingscience.umbc.edu/2016/10/berenice-abbott-photography-and-science-1939/.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1973.

Breitwieser, Sabine, ed. *E.A.T.—Experiments in Art and Technology*. Salzburg: Museum der Moderne, and Cologne: Walther König, 2015.

Broomberg and Chanarin. "The Day Nobody Died." Accessed February 14, 2022, http://www.broombergchanarin.com/the-day-nobody-died-1-1.

Bush, Lewis. "Impact: So You want To Change The World?" *Trigger,* September 1, 2020, https://fomu.be/trigger/articles/so-you-want-to-change-the-world.

Cadava, Eduardo. "Learning to See." In *Susan Meiselas: Mediations*. 41–70. Paris, Barcelona and Bologna: Jeu de Paume, Fundació Tàpies, and Damiaani, 2018.

Campt, Tina M. *A Black Gaze*. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2021.

Carville, Justin. "Interview with Ariella Azoulay." *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory*, edited by Mark Durden and Jane Tormey. New York: Routledge, 2020.

Chen, Nancy N. "Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha." *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1992): 82–91.

Christie, Caroline. "Forensic Architecture are rebuilding objective truths in a subjective world." *Document*, June 6, 2018, https://www.documentjournal.com/2018/06/forensic-architecture-are-rebuilding-objective-truths-in-a-subjective-world/.

Curran, Mark. "A Globalised Vulnerability: 'Re-representing' the Labouring Body of Ireland's Newly Industrialised Landscape." Dublin Institute of Technology, Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice School of Media Faculty of Applied Arts, Dublin, 2011.

Demos, T. J. *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013.

Diaz, Eva. "Futures: Experiment and the Tests of Tomorrow'." *Curating Subjects*, edited by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, 92–99. London: Open Editions/Occasional Table, 2007.

Dickson, Andrew. "How to Move a Masterpiece: The Secret Business of Shipping Priceless Artworks." *The Guardian* March 21, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/21/how-to-move-a-masterpiece-secret-business-shipping-priceless-artworks-art-handling.

Doane, Mary Ann, ed. "Indexicality: Trace and Sign." *d i f f e r e n c e s : A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 1–6.

Ebrahimian, Suzahn, et al. *Militant Research Handbook.* New York University Steinhardt.

Edwards, Elizabeth. "Photographs and the Sound of History." *Visual Anthropology Review* 21, no.'s 1 and 2 (2005): 27–46.

Edwards, Steve. "Obituary: Socialism and the sea: Allan Sekula, 1951–2013." *Radical Philosophy*, Nov-Dec 2013. https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/obituary/socialism-and-the-sea.

Ejiksson, Andjeas. *Television Without Frontiers.* Gothenburg: ArtMonitor, 2021.

Enwezor, Okwui. "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights." "Art & Ethics," special issue, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 5, no. 1 (2004): 11–42.

Enwezor, Okwui. *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. Göttingen/New York: Steidl/ICP, 2008.

Filipovic, Elena. *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology*. London: Koenig Books, 2017.

"Forensic Architecture, Turner Prize Nominee 2018." *The Tate*, September 14, 2018, https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turner-prize-2018/forensic-architecture.

Forensic Architecture. "Forensic Architecture." Accessed February 14, 2022, https://forensic-architecture.org/.

Forensic Architecture. "New Project Launched on The Grenfell Tower Fire." March 21, 2018, https://forensic-architecture.org/programme/news/new-project-launched-grenfell-tower-fire.

Foster, Hal. "The Artist as Ethnographer." *The Traffic in Culture Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, edited by George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995: 302–309.

Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996.

Foster, Hal. "An Archival Impulse." *October* 110 (2004).

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Franke, Anselm and Eyal Weizman. *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014.

Given, Lisa M. "Relational Ethics." *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2008.

Gandal, Keith. *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane and the Spectacle of the Slum*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Graham, Paul. "The Unreasonable Apple." November 26, 2021, https://www.paulgrahamarchive.com/writings_by.html.

Gregory, Joy. "Colour as Memory: Joy Gregory in Conversation with Kaia Charles." Interviewed by Kaia Charles, Now Gallery, March 11, 2021, https://nowgallery.co.uk/events/colour-as-memory-joy-gregory-in-conversation-with-kaia-charles.

Grierson, John. "The Documentary Producer." *Cinema Quarterly*, 1933-34. https://archive.org/details/cinema02gdro/page/n13/mode/2up?view=theater.

Griffin , Andrew. "A Year of Donald Trump's Presidency, Told in Fake News." *The Independent,* January 17, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-fake-news-real-explained-debunked-cnn-tax-bill-obamacare-a8164696.html.

Grönberg, Cecilia. *Händelsehorisont || Event Horizon. Distribuerad fotografi*. Gothenburg: ArtMonitor, 2016.

Guerra, Carles. "Past Immediate Memory." In *Susan Meiselas: Mediations*. 71–94. Paris, Barcelona and Bologna: Jeu de Paume, Fundació Tàpies, and Damiaani, 2018.

Hall, Stuart. "Constituting an archive." *Third Text*, Vol. 15, No 54 (Spring, 2001): 89–92.

Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal is Political." In *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt. New York: radical Feminism, 1969.

Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988): 575–599.

Haraway, Donna J. *Modest Witness@Second_Millenium.FemaleMan©_Meets_On co-Mouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986.

Harding, Sandra. "'Strong Objectivity': A Response to the New Objectivity Question." *Synthese* 104 (1995): 331–349.

Harper, Glenn, ed. *Interventions and Provocations: Conversations on Art, Culture, and Resistance*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Hochberg, Gil Z. *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

Jay, Martin. "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism." "The Rhetoric of Interpretation and the Interpretation of Rhetoric," special issue, *Poetics Today* 9, no. 2 (1988): 307–326.

Juelskjær, Malou and Nete Schwennesen. "Intra-active Entanglements—An Interview with Karen Barad." *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 1-2 (2012): 10–23.

Kakutani, Michiko. *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump*. New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018.

Karlholm, Dan. *Kontemporalism: om samtidskonstens historia och framtid*. Stockholm: Axl Books, 2014)

Karlholm, Dan. "After Contemporary Art: Actualization and Anachrony." *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 51 (2016): 35–54.

Karlsson Rixon, Axel and Lena Martinsson. "Trots allt." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*, No 1 (2013): 7–22.

Karlsson Rixon, Annica. *Queer Community through Photographic Acts: Three Entrances to an Artistic Research Project Approaching LGBTQIA Russia*. Stockholm: Art and Theory Publishing, 2016.

Karlsson Rixon, Axel and Mikela Lundahl Hero. "Några veckor i Grekland." *Ord & Bild* 2 (2019).

Klich, Kent. "Panel discussion 'Photographing the person in context—the ethics and process of creating subject and object'." "A System Among Others? Power, Balance, Self-Reflection: On and With the Photographic Image," the Department of Sociology, Lund University, the Hasselblad Foundation and Landskrona Foto, September 30-October 1, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/LandskronaFoto.

Kofman, Ava. "Bruno Latour, the Post-Truth Philosopher, Mounts a Defense of Science." *The New York Times,* October 25, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/magazine/bruno-latour-post-truth-philosopher-science.html.

Krauss, Rosalind. "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View." *The Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4 (winter 1982): 311–319.

Kruger, Barabara. "Barbara Kruger: in her own words." The National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2017, video, 06:14, https://www.nga.gov/audio-video/video/krueger.html.

Källström, Klara and Thobias Fäldt. *Wikiland* (2011), https://kk-tf.com/project-001/.

Latour, Bruno and Steve Woolgar. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986 {1979}.

Latour, Bruno. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 235–248.

Larsson, Erika. *Photographic Engagements: Belonging and Affective Encounters in Contemporary Photography*. Gothenburg and Stockholm: Makadam Förlag, 2018.

Lee-Morrison, Lila. *Portraits of Automated Facial Recognition: On Machinic Ways of Seeing the Face*. BielefeldTranscript Publishing, 2019.

Lind, Maria and Hito Steyerl, eds. *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art* #1. New York: Sternberg Press, 2008.

Lind, Maria. "The Curatorial." *Artforum* (October, 2009), https://www.artforum.com/print/200908/the-curatorial-23737.

Lind, Maria. "Situating the Curatorial." *e-flux*, March 2021, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/116/378689/situating-the-curatorial/.

Linfield, Susie. *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984 {1979}.

"Lunchekot." Sveriges Radio, 12:30, 8 October 2021.

Mangalanayagam, Nina. *Living with Contradictions: Re-Reading the Representation of Hybridity in Visual Art*. London: The University of Westminster, 2015.

McIntyre, Lee. *Post-Truth*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018.

Meiselas, Susan. *Nicaragua, June 1978—July 1979*. New York: Aperture, 2008 {1981}.

MIT Open Documentary Lab. "About." Accessed February 9, 2022. http://opendoc-lab.mit.edu/about-3/.

"Moholy-Nagy, Room of the Present, 1930/2009." Audio, 2016, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, video, 01:46, https://www.guggenheim.org/audio/track/moholy-nagy-room-of-the-present-1930–2009.

Möller, Frank. "The Looking/Not Looking Dilemma." *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (October 2009): 781–794.

Nader, Laura. "Up the Anthropologist--Perspectives Gained from Studying Up." In *Reinventing Anthropology,* editor Dell Hymes. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972 {1969}.

The New York Times, "Matters We Ought to Know: How the Other Half Lives." *The New York Times*, January 4, 1891, accessed February 16, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/1891/01/04/archives/matters-we-ought-to-know-how-the-other-half-lives-studies-among-the.html.

"Nobel Peace Prize Awarded to 2 Journalists, Highlighting Fight for Press Freedom." *The New York Times*, October 8, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/08/world/nobel-prize.

O'Grady, Megan. "The Artists Bringing Activism Into and Beyond Gallery Spaces." *The New York Times Style Magazine* (October 1, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/01/t-magazine/art-activism-forensic-architecture.html.

O'Hagen, Sean. '"What is Conceptual Photography." Interview, *YouTube,* September 18, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TvpxG9fLqo.

Orupabo, Frida. "Frida Orupabo og historien vi bærer med oss." *En samling blir til*, Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, 2020, *YouTube*, 04:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3Vt3KCtDiM.

Ostrom, Elinor. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Oxford Dictionaries. "Word of the Year 2016." Accessed February 14, 2022. https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016.

Paglen, Trevor. "Clarice Smith Distinguished Lecture: artist Trevor Paglen," *YouTube*, September 10, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/embed/DnwfZOzzyWg.

Paglen, Trevor. "An Interview with Trevor Paglen on the occasion of the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize 2016." At *The Photographers' Gallery*, https://thesandpitdotorg1.wordpress.com/2016/04/22/an-interview-with-trevor-paglen-on-the-occasion-of-the-deutsche-borse-photography-foundation-prize-2016/.

Palmås, Karl. "Studiowork and Fieldwork." *The Reader: North/South, River Run*, editor Kerstin Hamilton. Gothenburg: School of Photography, Gothenburg University, 2011.

Pinckers, Max. *Speculative Documentary Photography*. Universiteit Gent: Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, 2021.

Pomerantsev, Peter. *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*. New York: Public Affairs, 2019.

Rastenberger, Anna-Kaisa. "Why Exhibit?: Affective Spectatorship and the Gaze from Somewhere." In *Why Exhibit? Positions on Exhibiting Photographies*, edited by Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger and Iris Sikking. Amsterdam: Fw:Books, 2018.

Ressa, Maria. "A Conversation with 2021 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Maria Ressa." *YouTube*, October 8, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zm3UvvyD2Xc.

Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York.* New York: Sagamore Press Inc., 1957 {1890}.

Ritchin, Fred. "Photography's New Bag of Tricks." *The New York Times Magazine*, November 4, 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/04/magazine/photography-s-new-bag-of-tricks.html?auth=link-dismiss-google1tap.

Ritchin, Fred. *After Photography*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.

Ritchin, Fred. "What a Photograph Can Accomplish: Bending the Frame." *Time*, May 29, 2013, https://time.com/3799860/what-a-photograph-can-accomplish-bending-the-frame-by-fred-ritchin/.

Ritchin, Fred. "Expanding the Frame in the 21st century." Keynote presentation, "A System Among Others? Power, Balance, Self-Reflection: On and With the Photographic Image," the Department of Sociology, Lund University, the Hasselblad Foundation and Landskrona Foto, September 30-October 1, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/LandskronaFoto.

Roberts, John. *Photography and Its Violations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Rosler, Martha. "In, Around, and Afterthoughts: On Documentary Photography." *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, edited by Richard Bolton, 303–342. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990 {1981}.

Rosler, Martha. "Martha Rosler Interviewed by Robert Fichter and Paul Rutkovsky." *Interventions and Provocations: Conversations on Art, Culture, and Resistance*, edited by Glenn Harper, 9–18. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Sandbye, Mette. "NEW MIXTURES: Migration, War and Cultural Differences in Contemporary Art-Documentary Photography." *photographies*, 11, no.'s 2–3 (2018): 267–287.

Sauzet, Sofie. "Phenomena—Agential Realism," 2018, https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/p/phenomena-agential-realism.html.

Sealy, Mark. *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Times*. London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited, 2019.

Sekula, Allan. "*Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (notes on the Politics of Representation." Dismal Science, Photo Works 1972–1996* by Allan Sekula. Chicago: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1999 {1978}.

Sekula, Allan. "Reading an Archive: Photography between labour and capital." *The Photography Reader*, edited by Liz Wells, 443–452. New York: Routledge, 2003 {1983}.

Sekula, Allan. "The Body and the Archive." In *The Archive*, edited by Charles Merewether, 70–75. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2013 {1986}.

Selejan, Ileana-Lucia. "Pictures in Dispute: Documentary photography in Sandinista Nicaragua." *photographies*, 10, no. 3 (2017): 283–302.

Selejan, Ileana-Lucia. "How Claudia Gordillo Documented the Realities of Life in Nicaragua." *Aperture*, January 28, 2022, https://aperture.org/editorial/how-claudia-gordillo-documented-the-realities-of-life-in-nicaragua/.

Sheehan, Tanya, ed. *Photography and Migration*. London: Routledge, 2018.

Shearlaw, Maeve. "Egypt Five Years On: Was It Ever a 'Social Media Revolution'?" *The Guardian*, January 25, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/egypt-5-years-on-was-it-ever-a-social-media-revolution.

Simon, Taryn. "Photographs of Secret Lies," *TEDGlobal*, July, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Anw8JA_qDrg.

Simon, Taryn. Accessed February 14, 2022, http://tarynsimon.com/works/aihu/#1.

Smith, Roberta. "Views of Tumult Between Two Wars." *The New York Times*, October 17, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/17/arts/design/17foto.html.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977.

Stallabrass, Julian, ed. *Documentary*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2013.

Stedelijk Museum, "*Walid Raad—Let's be honest, the weather helped*: First-ever solo exhibition of the Lebanese-American artist Walid Raad in the Netherlands", April 17, 2019, https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/walid-raad-2.

Stengers, Isabelle. *Thinking with Whitehead. A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Stengers, Isabelle. "Plenary 3: 'Catastrophes and promises of science and technology by other means'." Keynote presentation, 4S/EASST Conference Barcelona, the Society for the Social Study of Science (4S), September 2, 2016. Personal notes.

Steyerl, Hito. "In Defence of the Poor Image." *e-flux*, November 2009, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/.

Steyerl, Hito. "Documentary Uncertainty." *Re-visiones*, no.1, 2011, http://re-visiones.net/anteriores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html.

Steyerl, Hito. "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective." *e-flux*, April 2011, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/.

Strassler, Karen. *Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020.

Tagg, John. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1988.

Tahrir Archives. "Media Initiatives: Tahrir Cinema," accessed February 14, 2022, http://tahrirarchives.com/what-we-do.

Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Reassemblage.* Video, 16-mm film, 40:00, 1982.

Trinh T. Minh-ha. "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Question of Identity and Difference." *Inscriptions* 3–4, "Feminism and the Critique of Colonial Discourse" (1988), https://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/inscriptions/volume-34/trinh-t-minh-ha/.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name." *October* 52 (Spring, 1990): 76–98.

"Trump White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer blasts the media at first press conference," *YouTube*, January 22, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2ewy0uNmgQ.

Tuck, Sarah. "Drone Vision and Protest." *photographies* 11, no.'s 2-3 (2018): 169–175.

Tucker, Marcia. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

Udén, Maria. "The novel feminist diffraction concept: Its application in fifty-one peer-reviewed papers." Research report. Luleå: Luleå University of Technology, 2018.

Vicente, Filipa Lowndes. "Ariella Aïsha Azoulay—Unlearning, An interview with Ariella Aïsha Azoulay." *Análise Social*, 2, no. 235 (2020): 417–436.

Wallsten, Lars. *Notes on Traces: Photography. Evidence. Image.* Gothenburg: ArtMonitor, 2011.

Weissman, Terri. *The Realisms of Berenice Abbott: Documentary Photography and Political Action*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011.

Weizman, Eyal. *Forensic Architecture: Notes from Fields and Forums*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012.

Weizman, Eyal. "Open Verification." *e-flux architecture,* June 2019, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248062/open-verification/.

Williams, Malcolm. "Situated Objectivity." *The Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 35, no. 1 (2005): 99 -120.

Williams, Malcolm. "Situated Objectivity, Values and Realism." *European Journal of Social Theory* 18, no. 1 (2015): 76–92.

Witkovsky, Matthew S., Carol S. Eliel and Karole Vail, eds. *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016.

Wolthers, Louise, Dragana Vujanovic and Niclas Östlind, eds. *Watched! Surveillance, Art and Photography*. Köln: Walther König, 2016.

Zylinska, Joanna and Sarah Kember. *Life after New Media*. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2012.

Zylinska, Joanna. *Nonhuman Photography*. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017.

—SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

Avhandlingen utgår från antagandet att nya och tillämpliga perspektiv, som utgår ifrån konstnärlig praktik, är välbehövliga i relation till dokumentärfotografi. I avhandlingen har jag främst behandlat idén om objektivitet, sanning, och etiska dilemman kopplade till en dokumentärfotografisk praxis. Undersökningen har ett konkret syfte: att identifiera och formulera praktiska och teoretiska verktyg, som kan användas för att på ett konstruktivt sätt närma sig dokumentärfotografins problemkomplex.

Den misstro gentemot dokumentärfotografi som växte fram vid 1970-talets slut och befästes under 1980-talet präglar än idag det fotografiska fältet och bidrar till låsningar specifika för den dokumentära genren. Det finns inom samtidskonsten en utbredd skepsis mot fotografier som utgår ifrån observation, det vill säga fotografier som på ett relativt ”rakt” sätt skildrar andras verkligheter. Under de senaste decennierna har många konstnärer istället valt att arbeta med teatrala, konceptuella och spekulativa strategier. Att använda iscensatta tablåer, fiktiva skildringar och ett betonande av konstnärens subjektivitet har erbjudit alternativ till – och en väg bort från – utmaningarna som är förknippade med att på ett dokumentärt sätt rikta blicken mot sociala verkligheter. Med avhandlingen försöker jag möta den misstro som riktas mot dokumentärfotografin, en misstro som existerar inte minst hos konstnärer och praktiker själva, genom att utifrån en samtida kontext undersöka hur dokumentärfotografiska dilemman kan bemötas från nya infallsvinklar. Tyngdpunkten ligger på frågor om dialog, kredibilitet och efterforskning som potentiellt viktiga för ett konstverks relevans.

Avhandlingen fokuserar på hur idén om sanning och objektivitet i relation till fotografi kan uppdateras med hjälp av perspektiv

som inte nödvändigtvis utgår från det fotografiska fältet. Min konstnärliga praktik var under avhandlingens första hälft förankrad i naturvetenskapliga miljöer – främst inom nanoteknologin – vilket spelade en avgörande roll för de perspektiv som avhandlingen lanserar för att bidra till att formulera användbara och relevanta analyser för dokumentärfotografin. I mötet mellan dokumentärfotografin och Karen Barads och Donna Haraways tankar, formulerade i ett helt annat fält, kan nya möjligheter identifieras. Utöver de infallsvinklar och möjligheter som tog form via naturvetenskapen kom ytterligare ett sammanhang att påverka avhandlingens inriktning och avgränsningar. Under forskningsprojektets andra år, 2016, kom begreppet ”postsanning” att kännetecknа ett politiskt och medialt landskap som närs av cirkulationen av ”alternativa fakta”. I en situation där det strategiska spridandet av tvivel och misstro ger näring åt politiskt motiverade konflikter väcktes frågan om trovärdighet och fakta kan utgöra grunden för radikala dokumentära arbeten som manar till motstånd och medvetenhet.

Utifrån dessa tre bakgrunder – misstron mot det dokumentära, nanovetenskapen och en samtid präglad av idén om postsanning – växte avhandlingen fram. Undersökningen bedrevs genom konstnärlig och curatoriell praktik och består av konstverk, en curaterad grupputställning och en kappa, vilka utgör de olika delarna av sammanläggningsavhandlingen *The Obectivity Laboratory: Propositions on Documentary Photography*. I kappan presenteras en serie propositioner som samlas under rubrikerna MONTAGE, INVESTIGATION, RESISTANCE och NEARBY. Konstverken i avhandlingen, *Zero Point Energy* (2016), *The Science Question in Feminism* (2018) och *A World Made by Science* (2018), tar alla sin utgångspunkt i naturvetenskapen; de närmar sig fysiska laboratoriemiljöer, nanovetenskapens verkningar i samhället, och frågor som berör kunskapsproduktion och strukturell diskriminering inom vetenskapen. Den tematiska grupputställningen *Dear Truth: Documentary Strategies in Contemporary Photography* (2021) fungerade som en kartläggning av fältet, och genom utställningen kunde jag utforska aktörer inom samtidskonsten vilkas arbeten och perspektiv berikade, fördjupade eller utmanade forskningen. En central fråga i det curatoriella projektet var: Hur kan samtidskonstnärers motivationer och arbeten med förankring i samhällsfrågor

förstås och analyseras i syfte att identifiera framkomliga vägar för dokumentärfotografin, utifrån de ramar som avhandlingen satt upp?

Forskningen är rotad i *praktik* – både andras och min egen – och syftar, som tidigare nämnts, till att framställa konkreta och användbara förslag för att möta de utmaningar som dokumentärfotografin rymmer. I avhandlingen pekar begreppet dokumentärfotografi på ett fält som definieras av dess mångsidighet: dokumentärfotografin är i ständig rörelse, det är ett flexibelt och tänjbart begrepp och fält. I avhandlingen avgränsas det dokumentära till konstnärliga arbeten som utgår från samhällspolitiska frågor med förankring i reella verkligheter, och som inte primärt utgår ifrån den egna subjektiviteten. Vilka former av dokumentärfotografi blir synlig i forskningsarbetet utifrån de definitioner, avgränsningar och sammanhang som används i avhandlingen? Två utmärkande drag är reflexivitet och ansvar. De konstnärer och konstnärliga verk som avhandlingen går i dialog med kännetecknas av en vilja och förmåga till analys och reflektion i relation till den egna rollen och den konstnärliga processen, men också i förhållande till den fotografiska historien och de oförrätter fotografiska arbeten som närmar sig andras verkligheter riskerar att ge upphov till. De arbeten som jag har intresserat mig för bygger ofta på efterforskning, reflektion och påtagliga ansträngningar att möta de berörda med respekt; här har etiska övervägande en framträdande plats. I avhandlingen syftar etik i första hand på etiska dilemman kopplade till perspektiv och situationer som är konkret förankrade i konstnärers handlingar och överväganden. Den etiska aspekten blir särskilt angelägen när möten med andra människor utgör grunden för konstverket. Just detta, att närma sig andra människors liv och berättelser, är centralt både för tidigare generationers dokumentärfotografer och för samtidskonstnärer idag, vilka arbetar i en tradition som – även om de konstnärliga uttrycken skiftar – följer i spåren av tidigare, samhällsengagerad dokumentärfotografi. Min undersökning går tillbaka i historien för att söka perspektiv som är relevanta för samtida dokumentärfotografi; den blickar dels mot sjuttiotalets progressiva dokumentärfotografi, dels mot decennierna mellan första och andra världskriget då en stark tilltro till fotografin är tydlig inte minst i Berenice Abbotts texter och bilder av vetenskapliga experiment.

Att närma sig världen är ett sätt att ge den möjlighet att invända mot de beskrivningar som görs av den. Att flytta sig själv och kamerautrustningen till platser som varken är i ens direkta fysiska, självupplevda eller välbekanta närhet kan vara utmanande och riskfyllt. Jag har i avhandlingen sett denna rörelse – från studion till fältet – som en av dokumentärfotografins viktigaste kapaciteter, men också som en av dess största utmaning: Hur närma sig andras verkligheter utan att exotisera, klassificera och skapa stereotypa bilder? En viktig del av arbetet handlar om att vända på den problemformulering som lutar sig mot 1970- och 1980-talets kritik och där kameran liknas vid ett vapen. Istället bidrar jag med perspektiv där tonvikten ligger på när, hur och varför konstnärliga arbeten som riktar uppmärksamhet mot någon annans verklighet än den egna snarare borde bemötas och tolkas utifrån den omtanke, solidaritet och intresse som ryms i dem. Att rutinmässigt betona kamerans och fotografens voyeuristiska och våldsamma tendenser riskerar att leda till en kontraproduktiv ängslighet. Det finns en uppenbar risk att fotografins potential inte nyttjas om de kritiska verktygen inte uppdateras, vilket är fallet när kritik som formulerades utifrån teknologiska förutsättningar och konceptuella kapaciteter som skiljer sig från dagens fortfarande definierar fotografins möjligheter och begränsningar.

De samtidskonstnärer som ingår i avhandlingen visar prov på en stor medvetenhet i relation till de risker som fotografin medför. Mångfacetterade dokumentärfotografiska uttryck har vuxit fram och det är i ljuset av denna förskjutning av det dokumentära som avhandlingen utforskar sanning och objektivitet – inte som naiva ideal, utan som radikala verktyg konstnärens använder i formulerandet av berättelser och motberättelser som griper in i viktiga samhällsfrågor och utmaningar världen står inför. Avsikten med att närma sig laddade begrepp som sanning och objektivitet är att utforska hur trovärdiga och viktiga kunskaper, som bidrar till att åskådliggöra samtida fenomen och problem, kan formuleras inom konsten.

I sökandet efter nya kritiska verktyg för att bidra till det fotografiska fältets teori och praktik har feministiska vetenskapsstudier spelat en viktig roll. Det gäller, som tidigare nämnts, framförallt Karen Barads och Donna Haraways idéer om objektivitet och sanning. Haraways situerade kunskap, som postulerar

att kunskapen alltid har en kropp och att den aldrig är neutral ledde mig till idén om en situerad objektivitet. Den situerade eller förkroppsligade objektiviteten betonar vikten av tillförlitliga, men inte kategoriska, kunskaper. I avhandlingen används begreppet som en modell för en objektivitet som är engagerad, förkroppsligad och partiell, som kan leda till viktiga förståelser präglade av etiska överväganden och en kritik av auktoritet och neutralitet.

I intervjuerna med konstnärerna i *Dear Truth* – som presenteras i utställningskatalogen och i urval i avhandlingens kappa – och i mitt eget konstnärliga arbete, framträder vissa perspektiv som särskilt viktiga. Dels har möjligheten till en situerad objektivitet varit värdefull, vilket också gäller det närbesläktade förslaget om en *positional truth*, som förutsätter en förståelse av sanningen som alltid påverkad av subjektiva uppfattningar och som inte förmodar eller förespråkar att obestridliga sanningsutsagor är möjliga eller eftersträvansvärda. Dessa begrepp erbjuder möjligheten att närma sig fakta, sanning och objektivitet inom dokumentärfotografin utifrån perspektiv som inte utgår ifrån en dogmatisk och dualistisk position. När faktabaserade uppgifter och ett forskningsbaserat angreppssätt införlivas i konstnärliga arbeten kan sanning och objektivitet vara relevanta verktyg i framställandet av trovärdiga beskrivningar av världen.

Den situerade objektiviteten och positionella sanningen implicerar ett åtagande att reflektera över den egna rollen i den konstnärliga processen. I de arbeten som diskuterats i avhandlingen finns, som konstaterades ovan, en ständigt närvarande självreflexivitet. Reflexiviteten utgör en väsentlig bas i samtida dokumentärfotografi, men snarare än att i första hand belysa den egna konstnärsrollen eller lägga tonvikt vid filosofiska eller materiella reflektioner, tar de aktuella konstverken sin utgångspunkt i faktiska erfarenheter av exploatering, våld och strukturell diskriminering; de har en konkret förankring i sociala verkligheter.

Vidare har Barads användning av det optiska fenomenet ”diffraktion” – som utmanar den vanligare optiska metaforen ”reflektion” – varit särskilt produktiv i analysen av ”skillnad” (*difference*). Här leder mitt resonemang till en kritik av den dualistiska idén om ett ”vi” som kan fotograferas och ett ”dem” som inte bör fotograferas. Återigen betonar avhandlingen värdet

av att närma sig andras verklighet, eftersom handlingen att *inte* fotografera – att ta avstånd från vissa bilder innan de har blivit till av rädslan att exotisera – på ett djupt problematiskt sätt riskerar att befästa utanförskap och stigmatisering.

I arbetet med avhandlingen så har fotografins inneboende otillräcklighet ständigt pockat på min uppmärksamhet – en otillräcklighet som jag inte tillbakavisar. Vad avhandlingen bidrar med är att identifiera och formulera dokumentärfotografiska positioner och potentialer – riskerna och otillräckligheten till trots. Avhandlingen visar att dokumentärfotografin i dess expanderade och experimentella form kan leda till samtal, engagemang och angelägen kunskap. Dokumentärfotografi kan bidra till att lyfta viktiga sanningar, rikta uppmärksamhet mot samtida utmaningar, samt antyda hur dessa verkligheter kan förstås och bemötas.

ArtMonitor Doctoral dissertations and licentiate theses published

at the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg

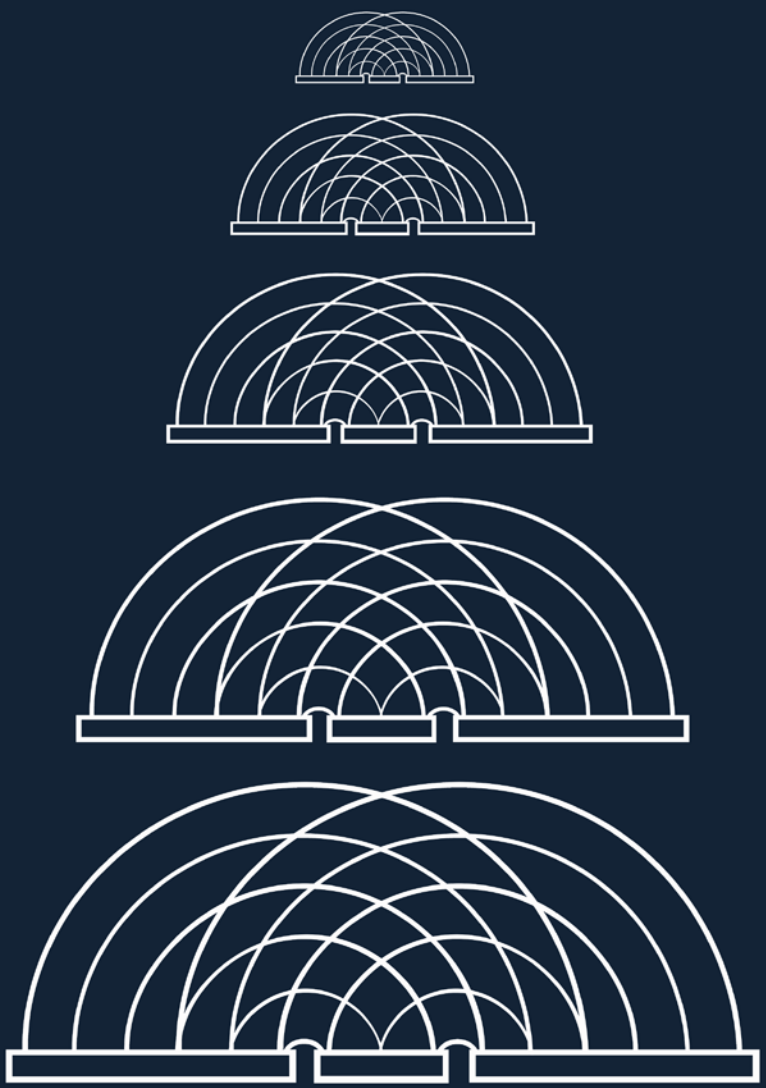
1. **Monica Lindgren** (Music Education), *Att skapa ordning för det estetiska i skolan. Diskursiva positioneringar i samtal med lärare och skolledare,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2006
2. **Jeoung-Ah Kim** (Design), *Paper-Composite Porcelain. Characterisation of Material Properties and, Workability from a Ceramic Art Design Perspective,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2006
3. **Kaja Tooming** (Design), *Toward a Poetics of Fibre Art and Design. Aesthetic and Acoustic, Qualities of Hand-tufted Materials in Interior Spatial Design,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2007
4. **Vidar Vikören** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Studier omkring artikulasjon i tysk romantisk orgelmusikk, 1800–1850, Med et tillegg om registreringspraksis,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2007
5. **Maria Bania** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *"Sweetenings" and "Babylonish Gabble": Flute Vibrato and Articulation of, Fast Passages in the 18th and 19th centuries,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2008
6. **Svein Erik Tandberg** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Imagination, Form, Movement and Sound—Studies in Musical, Improvisation,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2008
7. **Mike Bode and Staffan Schmidt** (Fine Arts), *Off the Grid,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2008
8. **Otto von Busch** (Design), *Fashion-Able: Hacktivism and Engaged Fashion Design,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2008
9. **Magali Ljungar Chapelon** (Digital Representation), *Actor-Spectator in a Virtual Reality Arts Play. Towards new artistic experiences in between illusion and reality in immersive virtual environments,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2008
10. **Marie-Helene Zimmerman Nilsson** (Music Education), *Musiklärares val av undervisningsinnehåll. En studie om musikundervisning i ensemble och gehörs- och musiklära inom gymnasieskolan,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2009
11. **Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir** (Fine Arts), *Spaces of Encounter: Art and Revision in Human-Animal Relations,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2009
12. **Anders Tykesson** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Musik som handling: Verkanalys, interpretation och musikalisk gestaltning. Med ett studium av Anders Eliassons* Quartetto d'Archi, ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2009
13. **Harald Stenström** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Free Ensemble Improvisation,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2009
14. **Ragnhild Sandberg Jurström** (Music Education), *Att ge form åt musikaliska gestaltningar. En socialsemiotisk studie av körledares multimodala kommunikation i kör,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2009
15. **David Crawford** (Digital Representation), *Art and the Real-time Archive: Relocation, Remix, Response,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2009

16. **Kajsa G Eriksson** (Design), *Concrete Fashion: Dress, Art, and Engagement in Public Space,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2009
17. **Henric Benesch** (Design), *Kroppar under träd – en miljö för konstnärlig forskning,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2010
18. **Olle Zandén** (Music Education), *Samtal om samspel. Kvalitetsuppfattningar i musiklärares dialoger om ensemblespel på gymnasiet,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2010
19. **Magnus Bärtås** (Fine Arts), *You Told Me—work stories and video essays / verkberättelser och videoessäer,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2010
20. **Sven Kristersson** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Sångaren på den tomma spelplatsen—en poetik. Att gestalta Gilgamesheposet och sånger av John Dowland och Evert Taube,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2010
21. **Cecilia Wallerstedt** (Research on Arts Education), *Att peka ut det osynliga i rörelse. En didaktisk studie av taktart i musik,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2010
22. **Cecilia Björck** (Music Education), *Claiming Space: Discourses on Gender, Popular Music, and Social Change*, ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2011
23. **Andreas Gedin** (Fine Arts), *Jag hör röster överallt—Step by Step,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2011
24. **Lars Wallsten** (Photographic Representation), *Anteckningar om Spår,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2011
25. **Elisabeth Belgrano** (Performance in Theatre and Drama), *"Lasciatemi morire" o farò "La Finta Pazza": Embodying Vocal Nothingness on Stage in Italian and French 17th century Operatic Laments and Mad Scenes*, ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2011
26. **Christian Wideberg** (Research on Arts Education), *Ateljésamtalets utmaning—ett bildningsperspektiv,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2011
27. **Katharina Dahlbäck** (Research on Arts Education), *Musik och språk i samverkan. En aktionsforskningsstudie i årskurs 1,* ArtMonitor, licentiate thesis. Göteborg, 2011
28. **Katharina Wetter Edman** (Design), *Service design—a conceptualization of an emerging practice,* ArtMonitor, licentiate thesis. Göteborg, 2011
29. **Tina Carlsson** (Fine Arts), *the sky is blue,* Kning Disk, diss. Göteborg, 2011
30. **Per Anders Nilsson** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *A Field of Possibilities: Designing and Playing Digital Musical Instruments,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2011
31. **Katarina A Karlsson** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Think'st thou to seduce me then? Impersonating female personas in songs by Thomas Campion (1567–1620),* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2011
32. **Lena Dahlén** (Performance in Theatre and Drama), *Jag går från läsning till gestaltning—beskrivningar ur en monologpraktik,* Gidlunds förlag, diss. Göteborg, 2012
33. **Martín Ávila** (Design), *Devices. On Hospitality, Hostility and Design,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2012
34. **Anniqa Lagergren** (Research on Arts Education), *Barns musikkomponerande i tradition och förändring,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2012
35. **Ulrika Wänström Lindh** (Design), *Light Shapes Spaces: Experience of Distribution of Light and Visual Spatial Boundaries,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2012
36. **Sten Sandel**l (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *På insidan av tystnaden,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2013
37. **Per Högber**g (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Orgelsång och psalmspel. Musikalisk gestaltning av församlingssång,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2013
38. **Fredrik Nyberg** (Literary Composition, Poetry and Prose), *Hur låter dikten? Att bli ved II,* Autor, diss. Göteborg, 2013
39. **Marco Muñoz** (Digital Representation), *Infrafaces: Essays on the Artistic Interaction,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2013
40. **Kim Hedås** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Linjer. Musikens rörelser—komposition i förändring,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2013

41. **Annika Hellman** (Research on Arts Education), *Intermezzon i medieundervisningen—gymnasieelevers visuella röster och subjektspositioneringar,* ArtMonitor, licentiate thesis. Göteborg, 2013
42. **Marcus Jahnke** (Design), *Meaning in the Making. An Experimental Study on Conveying the Innovation Potential of Design Practice to Non-designerly Companies,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2013
43. **Anders Hultqvist** (Musicology. Artistic track), *Komposition. Trädgården—som förgrenar sig. Några ingångar till en kompositorisk praktik,* Skrifter från musikvetenskap nr.102, diss. Göteborg 2013, Department of Cultural Sciences, Faculty of Arts, in cooperation with Academy of Music and Drama, Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts
44. **Ulf Friberg** (Performance in Theatre and Drama), *Den kapitalistiska skådespelaren—aktör eller leverantör?,* Bokförlaget Korpen, diss. Göteborg 2014
45. **Katarina Wetter Edman** (Design), *Design for Service: A framework for exploring designers' contribution as interpreter of users' experience*, ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2014
46. **Niclas Östlind** (Photography), *Performing History. Fotografi i Sverige 1970–2014,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2014
47. **Carina Borgström Källén** (Research on Arts Education), *När musik gör skillnad—genus och genrepraktiker i samspel,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2014
48. **Tina Kullenberg** (Research on Arts Education), *Signing and Singing—Children in Teaching Dialogues,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2014
49 **Helga Krook** (Literary Composition, Poetry and Prose), *Minnesrörelser,* Autor, diss. Göteborg 2015
50. **Mara Lee Gerdén** (Literary Composition, Poetry and Prose), *När andra skriver: skrivande som motstånd, ansvar och tid,* Glänta produktion, diss. Göteborg 2014
51. **João Segurado** (Musical Performance and Interpretation, in cooperation with Luleå University of Technology), *Never Heard Before—A Musical Exploration of Organ Voicing,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg/Luleå 2015
52. **Marie-Louise Hansson Stenhammar** (Research on Arts Education), *En avestetiserad skol- och lärandekultur. En studie om lärprocessers estetiska dimensioner,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2015
53. **Lisa Tan** (Fine Arts), *For every word has its own shadow,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2015
54. **Elke Marhöfer** (Fine Arts), *Ecologies of Practices and Thinking,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2015
55. **Birgitta Nordström** (Crafts), *I ritens rum—om mötet mellan tyg och människa,* ArtMonitor, licentiate thesis. Göteborg 2016
56. **Thomas Laurien** (Design), *Händelser på ytan—shibori som kunskapande rörelse,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2016
57. **Annica Karlsson Rixon** (Photography), *Queer Community through Photographic Acts. Three Entrances to an Artistic Research Project Approaching LGBTQIA Russia,* Art and Theory Publishing, diss. Stockholm 2016
58. **Johan Petri** (Performance in Theatre and Music Drama), *The Rhythm of Thinking. Immanence and Ethics in Theater Performance,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2016
59. **Cecilia Grönberg** (Photography), *Händelsehorisont || Event horizon. Distribuerad fotografi,* OEI editör, diss. Stockholm 2016
60. **Andrew Whitcomb** (Design), *(re)Forming Accounts of Ethics in Design: Anecdote as a Way to Express the Experience of Designing Together,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2016
61. **Märtha Pastorek Gripson** (Research on Arts Education), *Positioner i dans—om genus, handlingsutrymme och dansrörelser i grundskolans praktik,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2016
62. **Mårten Medbo** (Crafts), *Lerbaserad erfarenhet och språklighet,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2016
63. **Ariana Amacker** (Design), *Embodying Openness: A Pragmatist Exploration into the Aesthetic Experience of Design Form-Giving,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2017

64. **Lena O Magnusson** (Research on Arts Education), *Treåringar, kameror och förskola —en serie diffraktiva rörelser,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2017
65. **Arne Kjell Vikhagen** (Digital Representation), *When Art Is Put Into Play. A Practice-based Research Project on Game Art,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2017
66. **Helena Kraff** (Design), *Exploring pitfalls of participation and ways towards just practices through a participatory design process in Kisumu, Kenya,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2018
67. **Hanna Nordenhök** (Literary Composition, Poetry and Prose), *Det svarta blocket I världen. Läsningar, samtal, transkript,* Rámus., diss. Göteborg 2018
68. **David N.E. McCallum** (Digital Representation), *Glitching the Fabric: Strategies of New Media Art Applied to the Codes of Knitting and Weaving,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg 2018
69. **Åsa Stjerna** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Before Sound: Transversal Processes in Site-Specific Sonic Practice,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2018
70. **Frida Hållander** (Crafts), *Vems hand är det som gör? En systertext om konst/hantverk, klass, feminism och om viljan att ta strid,* ArtMonitor/Konstfack Collection, diss. Stockholm, 2019, HDK—Academy of Design and Crafts, University of Gothenburg, in cooperation with Konstfack, University of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm
71. **Thomas Nyström** (Design), *Adaptive Design for Circular Business Models in the Automotive Manufacturing Industry,* ArtMonitor, licentiate thesis. Göteborg, 2019
72. **Marina Cyrino** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *An Inexplicable Hunger – flutist) body(flute (dis)encounters*, ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2019
73. **Imri Sandström** (Literary Composition, Poetry and Prose), *Tvärsöver otysta tider: Att skriva genom Västerbottens och New Englands historier och språk tillsammans med texter av Susan Howe / Across Unquiet Times: Writing Through the Histories and Languages of Västerbotten and New England in the Company of Works by Susan Howe*, Autor, diss. Göteborg, 2019
74. **Patrik Eriksson** (Independent Filmmaking), *Melankoliska fragment: om essäfilm och tänkande,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2019
75. **Nicolas Cheng** (Crafts), *World Wide Workshop: The Craft of Noticing,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg
76. **Magdalena Mayas** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Orchestrating timbre – Unfolding processes of timbre and memory in improvisational piano performance,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2020
77. **Ingrid Hedin Wahlberg** (Music Education), *Att göra plats för traditioner. Antagonism och kunskapsproduktion inom folk- och världsmusik,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2020
78. **Cecilia Jeppsson** (Research on Arts Education), *"Rörlig och stabil, bred och spetsig". Kulturell reproduktion och strategier för breddat deltagande i den svenska kulturskolan,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2020
79. **Annelies Vaneycken** (Design), *Designing 'for' and 'with' ambiguity: actualising democratic processes in participatory design practices with children ,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2020
80. **Niklas Rudbäck** (Research on Arts Education), *Circumscribing Tonality: Upper Secondary Music Students Learning the Circle of Fifths ,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2020
81. **Eva Weinmayr** (Artistic Practice), *Noun to Verb: an investigation into the micro-politics of publishing through artistic practice,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2020
82. **Khashayar Naderehvandi** (Artistic Practice), *Vem vittnar för vittnet? Det litterära verket som vittnesmål och översättning,* Autor, diss. Göteborg 2020
83. **Joakim Andersson** (Research on Arts Education), *Kommunikation i slöjd och hantverksbaserad undervisning,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2021
84. **Andjeas Ejiksson** (Artistic Practice), *Television Without Frontiers,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2021
85. **Monica Frick Alexandersson** (Research on Arts Education), *Omsorg, välvilja och tystnadskultur—diskursiva dilemman och strategier i lärarutbildningens undervisningspraktik i musik mot yngre åldrar,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2021

86. **Uwe Steinmetz** (Musical Performance and Interpretation), *Jazz in Worship and Worship in Jazz: The musical language of Liturgical, Sacred, and Spiritual Jazz in a Postsecular Age,* ArtMonitor, diss. Göteborg, 2021
87. **Helena Hansson** (Design), *Designing Together: A Frugal Design Approach. Exploring Participatory Design in a Global North-South Cooperation Context (Sweden—Kenya),* ArtMonitor, diss Göteborg 2021
88. **André Alves** (Artistic Practice), *A Never-Ending Thirst: Artistic* Re*forms to Neoliberal-Teflon Imperviousness,* ArtMonitor, diss Göteborg 2021
89. **Hedvig Jalhed** (Performance Practices), *An Operatic Game-Changer: The Opera Maker as Game Designer and the Potentials of Ludo-Immersive Opera,* ArtMonitor, diss Göteborg 2022
90. **Eva La Cour** (Artistic Practice), *Geo-Aesthetical Discontent: The Figure of the Guide, Svalbard and Skilled Visions,* ArtMonitor, diss Göteborg 2022
91. **Kerstin Hamilton** (Artistic Practice), *The Objectivity Laboratory: Propositions on Documentary Photography,* ArtMonitor, diss Göteborg 2022



ArtMonitor
Doctoral dissertations
and licentiate theses No 91