

Over the last century virtually none of the communication which took place in factories, whether through words, glances, or gestures, was recorded on film.

—Harun Farocki, 2001¹

Situated on the threshold between the United States's longstanding labor history and the country's current crisis-ridden economy, the multipart installation *Lunch Break* (2008) engages the subject of twenty-first-century American blue-collar workers, a slowly but continuously decreasing segment of the workforce in today's postindustrial society.

Sharon Lockhart embarked with *Lunch Break* on an examination of an often overlooked part of contemporary life. She spent one year with factory workers at one of the largest shipyards in the United States, Bath Iron Works in Maine, especially attending to their various activities during their daily midday break from production, and observing them as they left the factory grounds at the end of the workday. This remarkable project resulted in two filmic installations, *Lunch Break* and *Exit*, as well as three distinct series of photographs that document and fictionalize otherwise unnoticed activities at Bath Iron Works. Perched on the shore of the Kennebec River, the town of Bath is one of the country's most attractive tourist destinations, and the region is known to have the oldest shipbuilding history in the United States, its line of production beginning in the mid-eighteenth century. Itself dating back to the nineteenth century, Bath Iron Works is also Maine's largest private employer. About six thousand people populate the facilities of the huge shipyard. Since its founding, more than 245 military ships, torpedoes, destroyers, and other warships have been designed, built, and maintained there in support of the country's war efforts and its status as a world power. Currently the company is involved in constructing new Navy transport amphibious ships and the next generation of surface combatant ships. The factory workers are specialized craftsmen—shipfitters, welders, fabricators, pipefitters—many of whom have recently been laid off as a consequence of the 2008–9 worldwide financial downturn.²

Yet, somewhat surprisingly, neither the films nor the photographs explicitly tell or recapitulate the story of the US armament industry then and now, or the rather bleak circumstances of the American blue-collar working class today. Nor do the artworks dwell on the beautiful environs of Bath, which stand in stark contrast to the spectacular, even overpowering machinery and technology that dominate the sensory experience at the factory. The political and social dimensions of the workplace, however, are at once present and absent, transparent and opaque at the same time. What appears to be at stake in Lockhart's project is a rather distinct inquiry into what J. M. Bernstein has described as a disenchanting world in which exchange values dominate the relation between subject and world, the workers and the factory.³ The factory is doubtless the most paradigmatic emblem of a rationalized society in which sensuous immediacy is impossible and humanity is traded in for functionality, intentionality, and efficiency. Yet as much as art itself is said to have the ability to demonstrate that sensuous particulars matter and mean, a lunch break too exists as

an instance in which workers are released from the rational strictures of productivity. The following then will explore how the camera (still or moving) renders visible everyday activities in which social relations and moments of rest interrupt the routines of labor.

The films and photographs are tied to each other through the ways in which different modes of time and space are employed in distinct yet complementary ways. The central film *Lunch Break* (pages 3–7) originated as a single, unedited, ten-minute shot in which the camera captures a seemingly endless corridor, the space in which banal and mundane activities of workers during their lunch break take place. Lockhart stretched the ten-minute shot into an eighty-minute film by employing digitization and high-definition technology. The effect is an antinarrative film of extreme slowness, a slowness that endows workers' movements and activities, as well as the architectural site itself, with prosaic monumentality. This elongated study, with its many close-ups and attentiveness to surface structure and detail, evokes still life and Magic Realist aesthetics.

In contrast to the fictive slowness of *Lunch Break*, the second film, *Exit* (pages 133–37), relies on “documentary” real time in that it records, in five eight-minute sequences, workers exiting the factory at the end of each workday in a week. And finally the photographs—which depict individual lunch boxes, group portraits of workers during their lunch break, and improvised small business booths in which workers sell lunch items—arrest time and activity so as to create new and decidedly structured spaces that invite viewers to contemplate the singular moments and peculiarities that comprise *Lunch Break*. Experiential time as in *Exit*, decelerated time as in *Lunch Break*, and spatialized time as in the series of photographs connect the three bodies of work, each of which refers on some level to all three temporal visualizations. They alternate and navigate our perceptual experience as we encounter various workers during their free and allegedly unproductive time. Together these three bodies of work offer distinct time and space configurations that move *Lunch Break* into the realm of art and mediations of the everyday.

DOCUMENTATION AND FICTION, LIFE AND ART

At first quite conscious of ourselves and our role as observers of a semidocumentary film, we slow down too when watching *Lunch Break*, patiently moving with the camera as it travels the length of the corridor. Even as the specific factory, branch of production, and individual workers resting in niches and on benches to the right and left of the corridor's central axis are never identified, they can all nevertheless be distinguished as being part of the iron and steel industry. We recognize the heavy-duty clothes of workers, we see hard hats lying around, and we hear the sounds of machinery penetrating the space. Very slowly, over the course of the eighty minutes, single workers as well as those who gather in groups gradually and unintentionally enter and exit the visual field of the camera. Doubtless, the deceleration employed to create intimate studies evokes and revokes Brechtian alienation effects, keeping the artifice of the film itself in evidence while also immersing us in a world of persuasive and never-before-seen images. Yet at the same time we cannot help but be sensitive to the film's documentary

characteristics as we look not at actors but at workers who use their break to read newspapers, sleep, eat and drink, chat with each other, or rest from labor in solitude.

Startling are the visually rich and detailed elements that furnish the seemingly endless hallway and affect a specular fascination. Old but colorful lockers adorned with stickers, worn benches, garbage cans, helmets, dials and gauges, pipes, hoses, tubes, and other aspects of industrial machinery exist on two levels: the workers' “real” space utilized for retreat, and, bathed in fluorescent light, the beautiful, rather artificial, and mysterious stage on which *Lunch Break* takes place. The camera's receding perspective never completely abolishes some anticipation of action, surprise, and even cathartic resolution that might await us at the end of the hallway. In concert with the high-definition visuality, the film evokes an almost apocalyptic, baroque-like effect. Daniel Kasman has observed that the film offers no hint of a world outside the corridor. “It may be a dream,” Kasman writes, “but the effect of Lockhart's exploration of closed space...and elongated time is very ambiguous.... The hallway is rather unique in that it seems to be very long but offers no extensions of space or openings to its sides. There's not an open space or door-to-somewhere to be seen.... [It] is an endless length that negates any sense of a world outside of it.”⁴ In addition to emphasizing confined space, visually seductive details, and enhanced colors, the deceleration of the film also calls attention to the self-absorption of the workers; they never intentionally engage with the camera, but to the contrary seem unaware of its presence and of being observed. All of these elements taken together locate the documentary undertaking in which Lockhart and the factory workers collaborated on a level where fact and fiction, life and art enter into a complex relation.

In his latest book *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Michael Fried revisits what he views as the central concepts of theatricality and absorption in relation to contemporary photography and (at times) video art.⁵ At the heart of this endeavor that centers on the relation between viewer and artwork is Fried's insistence that both worlds—that of the artwork and that of the viewer, in short that of art and that of life—have to remain strictly separated. Fried's critical structure highlights the problematic of seeing and being seen, which according to him is tantamount to photography and video as art.⁶ Not unlike in his earlier writings, specifically his seminal 1967 essay “Art and Objecthood,” he privileges absorption over theatricality.⁷ As is well known, Fried defines theatricality in terms of an artwork that includes the beholder as an active, empathetic, and embodied participant who partakes in the creation of the work's meaning, which is necessarily contingent and open ended. Absorption, by contrast, characterizes the autonomous and self-sufficient work. Those depicted in such self-contained photographs or videos are immersed in whatever they do, think, or feel, unaware of the camera, photographer, and viewer. The observer who in response gazes in a detached and disengaged manner assumes a position of critical distance rather than participating in an intimate and affective relation with the photographed subject. The author, however, posits that the quintessential characteristic of contemporary photography (like that of

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting) is its “to-be-seeness.” In the end, it is the variegated method of each artist that has to address both the ontological illusion that the beholder does not exist, and the fact that the photograph or video is made to be beheld.⁸ Fried’s framework is certainly a compelling one, and not only because it bestows photography and video art with significance, but also because it tests the very nature of art itself. Yet what Fried neglects is the possibility of a complex and intricate, most often dialectical, relation between absorption and theatricality that complicates the discrete realms of the everyday and aesthetics, art and life, the viewer and the artwork. He also, and maybe necessarily so (due to his prioritization of the self-contained work of art), passes over documentary practices in contemporary photography and video art.

In *Lunch Break*, Lockhart’s unedited, continuous shot of a single scene problematizes the separation between art and life, “to-be-seeness” and seeing from the very outset, as her deployment of documentary elements calls into question the autonomy of art. At the same time, the artistic methods of radical deceleration, high-definition resolution, saturated colors, minute details, and the moving camera obscure the relation between the documentary and the fictional to the extent that the viewer is immersed (the film here plays with the affective qualities of the cinema) and expelled at the same time.⁹ The self-absorbed aspect of the workers, together with the emphasis on the confined space of the hallway, underscore the viewer’s role as a disengaged yet critical beholder. The soundtrack of *Lunch Break*, a collaboration with Becky Allen and James Benning, further complicates the distinction between fiction and the documentary. In contrast to the radically slowed-down action of the moving images, the sound is recorded in real time and creates a surprising gap between the visual and the aural. We listen to a composition that effectively and slowly increases and decreases in volume and intensity, keeping the viewer in constant anticipation of some pending action that might occur at any moment. The sound itself is foremost, comprised of industrial noises that are penetrated by snippets of conversation between the workers. Once during the film the sound is suddenly interrupted by a Led Zeppelin song. As Jörg Heiser has remarked, it is not entirely clear whether the song plays from one of the workers’ radios or if it is part of the sound composition detached from the “documentary reality” of the lunch break scene.¹⁰ Both sound and image are carefully yet distinctly deployed to keep our attention balanced in between immersion in the scenario that is the factory corridor and awareness of ourselves as critical observers of an art film. This is a result of the separation between the real time of the sound and the decelerated time of the moving images on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the effect of both experiential and abstracted time guiding our perceptual experience between growing anticipation and its discharge. How far real time moments are as much an artifice as the technological deceleration is very often ambiguous as well, leaving the viewer positioned on both a reflexive and absorptive level from which she not only contemplates what she sees but also how the film reveals itself as film.¹¹ Importantly, moments of absorption stem from cinematic anticipation rather than narrative consistency or the main actors, the factory workers. In fact, the absorptive stance deliberately serves to enforce a

distance between “actors” and viewers, the filmed subjects and their audience, those “to-be-seen” and those seeing.

Yet this complex artistic language hovering between different modes of decelerated time and experiential time, between magic spaces and particular places, between fiction and the documentary, accomplishes a multifaceted relation between the film and the reality of the workers’ lives, between aesthetics and the experience of the American working class. In *Lunch Break*, the workers enter and exit the visual field of the camera in a manner that seems both casual and controlled. The camera merely passes by them while moving through the central corridor. Despite the immediacy of the behind-the-scenes setting, we don’t gain knowledge about who these workers are, what they feel, or even what their role in the factory is. What complicates matters further is the fact that they appear at once natural, being nothing other than themselves, and choreographed through the unnatural deceleration of their movements.

Striking are some rare moments when the digitization shapes our perception of the workers to the extent that their movements appear to be machine controlled. In this context, Rainer Bellenbaum has queried the man–machine relation and its meaning in Lockhart’s film. In his review of the exhibition as presented at Vienna’s seminal Secession exhibition hall, he considered how far the camera-as-machine transforms the workers themselves into machines.¹² This machine metaphor underscores not only the time away from production that the film actually records, but also thematizes what we do not see in the film itself, namely purposeful labor in the factory. Suggesting that Lockhart’s film therefore takes a critical stance against factory labor as a means that transforms man into a machine, Bellenbaum’s proposal remains vague and inconclusive, as the film does not offer much visual evidence to highlight such signification.

The slowness of the workers’ movements first and foremost addresses documentary and aesthetic realms. Considering how the deceleration exaggerates the workers’ movements during their lunch break, these activities assume greater significance than the actual labor. The slowness then reverses the common values of economic progress accomplished through labor and production. Or one could also agree with Daniel Kasman, who interprets the slowness as “cinematic magic which we wish we could conjure in real life: slowing down those precious eleven minutes of your break until they stretch to eighty-three.”¹³ These allusions taken together certainly form a critical voice, one though that never fully or centrally enters the stage of *Lunch Break*. But they certainly instill (or encourage) critical consideration of the situation of blue-collar workers in American society at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

DOCUMENTATION AND REPETITION—THE RHYTHM OF LIFE

Exit, in contrast to *Lunch Break*, uses a stationary camera that records workers leaving the factory at the end of each workday during the course of a week. Each day the camera is positioned at exactly the same location, slightly off center from the central walkway leading to the exit gates of the factory. Rather than viewing the workers frontally, we watch

their backs as they enter the frame of the camera from left and right, a direction that emphasizes the random stream of their movements.¹⁴ Limited to five eight-minute intervals, *Exit* concentrates on the pace and patterns of the workers' movements in real time. Each of the five short sections of the film operates within the parameters of repetition and difference, compositional choice and chance encounters, structuralist film and everyday routine.

After the radically decelerated movement in the contained space of the long corridor in *Lunch Break*, *Exit* exalts relief in more ways than one. Not only are the workers finally exiting the factory, but we are also brought back to experiential time that appears free flowing and full of uncontrolled and fleeting moments. While *Lunch Break* confines the workers within the space of the factory corridor, continuously piquing yet diverting our attention and desire for action, *Exit* provides a form of resolution when we watch the workers leaving the restrictive container that is the factory. At times, they acknowledge the camera, but more often they negate any direct interaction with it. This hint at theatricality barely distracts from the structural form of the film that determines how and what we see. Our relation to the workers remains minimized as they go about their daily routine.

One of the first films in the history of moving images records workers leaving a factory, famously made by Louis and Auguste Lumière. Simply entitled *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, the forty-six-second film was shot in 1895 and shows approximately one hundred workers exiting the factory through two gates.¹⁵ In contrast to Lockhart's film, the Lumière workers exit rather than enter the visual field of the camera from two sides: they are filmed frontally as a steadily moving crowd heading toward the camera, which is pointed at the factory gate.¹⁶ While Lockhart filmed from within the factory grounds, choosing a long and deep perspective that ends somewhere beyond the entrance, transforming the walkway and tunnel into a place of activity for the workers, the Lumière brothers used the marching masses of the workers themselves as perspectival orientation (page 104). Accordingly, the workers in the Lumière film are rendered as a fast-moving collective, not as individuals who form spontaneous groups as in *Exit*. Lockhart's focus is more on the liberating rhythmic flow of time, pace, and movement than on streaming crowds that have no time to lose when leaving the confines of timed and regulated labor. What distinguishes Lockhart's film fundamentally, then, is not only the reversed perspective but, more importantly, the fact that the heightened drama of the "society of the masses" in the Lumière film is transformed back into an everyday situation that involves individuals and groups. While, as Harun Farocki observed, "the work structure" in the Lumière film "synchronizes the workers, the factory gates group them, and this process of compression produces the image of a work force," *Exit* captures snippets of conversation and laughter, shows individual workers drifting together and apart, and brings specific lunch boxes into focus during a continuous yet unrushed move toward the exit.¹⁷

The dominant principle of *Exit* is repetition, which underscores the cyclical structure of daily experience that we share with the workers in the film. Yet this approach also references the repetitive component of production in the factory itself,

hence connecting form and content on distinctive planes. As we only glimpse the workers' backs as they exit the factory, it is first and foremost the repetitive form that determines our perceptual experience and reflection. With heightened attention we attempt to distinguish differences that make up the daily routine. We observe various light conditions, notice rainy and sunny days, and gaze with close focus at the rhythmic flow of people to make out how they sometimes move more slowly and at other times more quickly, how the groups are sometimes more and at other times less crowded. What slowly materializes is the image of a community that establishes its identity through everyday practices that are both repetitive yet full of unpredictable variations. After observing this community comprised of individual members day after day, we believe we have come to know them quite well, once the last sequence finishes on a Friday afternoon.

In contradistinction to the many filmic precursors that show workers leaving a factory or as a group,¹⁸ *Exit* is not so much concerned with workers as a metaphor of the production force of modern society and the politics and long history of its suppression, but with how individual members of a group form a communality (maybe through the lunch boxes they all use). *Exit* compellingly inhabits a place between the unseen (the faces of individual workers, their day's labor in the factory) and the seen (the documentation of them leaving the factory), in short between the imaginary and the indexical trace. Through glimpses of the everyday—movement, clothing, lunch boxes, factory grounds—we grasp a common history and a common world. French philosopher Jacques Rancière has recently connected the trace, as opposed to the metaphorical and signifying image, to a neohumanist tendency in contemporary art. Rather than dwelling on a disenchanted world and mourning the loss of meaningful images, he asserts that we should rediscover the pure enchantment of images. Images that hover between the pleasure of pure presence and the bite of the absolute Other, between the "mythical identity of the *that* and the alterity of the *was*."¹⁹ Likewise, Lockhart, rather than criticizing and analyzing the ideology inherent in all images (moving or still) that depict the working class, creates new images—images obviously rooted in the history of films but that deliberately shift the focus from the alienating context of regimented labor to the humanity of those who carry out this kind of work.

The different temporal modalities evinced in *Lunch Break* and *Exit* advance careful attentiveness to the experience of the passing of time. In contradistinction to the modernist obsession with speed and movement, continuous change and impermanence as emphasized in the Lumière brothers' film and metaphorically embedded in the then-new medium of the moving image, Lockhart instead calls attention to how rhythmic flow and duration, repetition and difference structure our contemporary world and our everyday habitual practices. In this way she reinforces the significance of the here and now and creates art that insists on and discovers individual human worlds despite a reality of alienating circumstances.

MUNDANE OBJECTS AND SITUATIONS

The three series of photographs that make up the third part of this project arrest time: they capture moments that

instantaneously have become part of the past and are now conserved. Or so it seems at first.

Photographs of individual lunch boxes (pages 57–78) are joined by images of some of the independent businesses that appear in the film *Lunch Break*, small booths located on the sides of the long corridor that some workers utilize to sell lunch items to other workers (pages 32–41). In addition, Lockhart presents group portraits that capture workers during their breaks in deliberately staged poses (pages 3–7). The consistence of conceptual structure, compositional control, visual intensity, and sharpened material presence in these photographs is complicated through elements that introduce narrative and sequence, including allusions to film stills and the many contextual details. The artist in these series of photographs probes the photograph as an indexical trace, its self-absorbed qualities and its “to-be-seenness,” without ever candidly embracing theatricality or intention. Instead, she maintains a tension between narrative content that plays with meaning and conceptual form devoid of signification.

The photographs of the lunch boxes—in addition to their presence as documents—assume a double role as detailed, beautiful still lifes and (maybe contradictorily) as portraits of workers. The images bear as their titles the names of the owners of the depicted lunch boxes, and they appear singly, as diptychs, and as triptychs. Each box and, at times, its contents bespeak of some peculiarity of its owner, either through the materials of which the boxes are made, or the stickers and logos that adorn them. For example, tinsmith Mike Dicky’s lunch box is a hand-welded metal box (pages 66–67); machinist Butch Greenleaf uses an old-fashioned braided wooden box (pages 74–75); and Gary McDorr, a stage builder, has a simple plastic box onto which many Chiquita banana stickers have been plastered (page 63). Other lunch boxes reference the fact that the factory is part of the military industry through decals and stickers with naval references. Moreover, the photographs’ careful and crisp rendition of the material qualities of these objects and their minute details add some (although oblique) information about the workers and their environment, and may be seen to visualize what Roland Barthes has described as the *studium* in relation to photography.²⁰

The display of the boxes not only refers to their respective owners, but also plays with difference that, beyond compositional choice, implies sequence and some kind of story or intention—in other words, that includes context. Some boxes are open, others are closed; some are shown from the backside, others from the front. The passing of time is also at stake, for example, in the two triptychs that capture Larry Conklin’s and Gary Gilpatrick’s boxes sequentially disclosing their content (pages 68–70, 59–61). With each triptych, the first photo shows the lunch box closed, in the second photo the box is open, and in the third photo the lunch items are placed outside the box. Others, such as the Stephen Bade triptych, negate chronological time structures: the box in the center is closed, while the left and right sides show the open box from front and back (pages 76–78). With the exception of one box, which is frontally positioned (page 57), all are placed at diagonal angles in relation to the picture plane, a position that foregrounds their still life character and condition as pure image. The allusions to the workers, their peculiarities,

and their environment bring into focus the startling contrast between the reality of the workers’ lives and the poetics and visual intensity of the photographs, challenging how these two worlds may be connected.

The photographs of independent businesses display equal attention to composition, surface structures, and detail, but counter the poetics of the lunch boxes and our curious ruminations about their owners. Although the titles of the small businesses also name the individual operators, the stands themselves primarily evince the broader context of the factory, its historical standing and contemporary popular and material culture: the many details depicted range from photos of baseball players, to images of cars, to food items sold such as cheeseburgers, hot dogs, candy bars, and coffee creamer. Some items, such as the DVD “Ride Maine,” a motorcycle vacation guide for exploring Maine, or phone numbers scribbled on the wall, give us information about the operator. Other items, like industrial earplugs and slogans—“good jobs, safe jobs,” “no farms, no food”—bespeak of the social and political context of the factory environment within rural Maine. The particularities of the individualized details of these booths—their names, which evoke personalities as well as identities (“Dirty Don’s Delicious Dogs,” “Moody Mart”) and the honor system of payment (“please don’t forget to put money in bank”)—are antithetical to the anonymity and depersonalized regulations of the conditions of mass production.

These photographs that disclose personal, social, and cultural contexts within the parameters of conceptual art photography, which values structure over meaning, also—subtly and distantly—evoke historical genre paintings. One might think of the many paintings that display personal interiors of affluent people, depicting libraries or art collections not only as a sign of intellectual authority or upper-class affiliation but also as an unexpected inside view into someone’s private world. Yet with Lockhart’s images, it is not the possessing class that we encounter, but those whose lives conventionally do not appear in the realm of art. We explore social aspects of factory life few other than the workers themselves know exist. Importantly, it is through the photographs’ inconspicuous allusions to the art historical archive that their subject matter—these overlooked and excluded arenas of modern life—all the more powerfully enters the realms of the visible and art. Having done so, these unfamiliar arrangements refer to nothing other than themselves, through what Rancière has described as “alteration of resemblance,” or the ways in which the images produce both likeness to and dissemblance from the situation in the factory at the same time.²¹ It is exactly in this interspace where we may perceive the *punctum*, the affective power of the photograph as material presence that transcends narrativization and concrete meaning.²²

While Lockhart draws upon the (un)conventions of art history to endow her photographs of independent lunch break businesses with significance, she also endeavors to rewrite the history of group portraiture by showing workers in different, yet strangely all-too-familiar, poses during their break. While the diptych of workers sitting in a break room (*Panel Line Break Room: Roland, Phil, John and Shermie*) (pages 20–21) recalls filmic practices—the two images bring

to mind film stills capturing slightly different moments in time—the two single and large-scale photographs, *Old Boiler Shop: Proud and Shaun* (page 17) and *Outside AB Tool Crib: Matt, Mike, Carey, Steven, John, Mel and Karl* (page 19), with their strong emphasis on composition—the careful way the workers are positioned in relation to each other and to the spaces they inhabit—seem more tangibly embedded in the art historical genre of group portraiture. The attention to surface structures of clothing, objects, and the built environment is evocative of painterly practices. Yet in contrast to well-established traditions of group portraiture in general and recent portraits in particular (one might think of photographs by such artists as Thomas Struth, Rineke Dijkstra, and Catherine Opie), Lockhart’s workers never look out of the photograph or at the viewer. In all four photographs we see workers either engaging with each other or remaining self-absorbed, a strategy that underscores a deromanticizing effect. This is particularly evident when considering the overtly emphatic and idealizing images of workers in past art, from the nineteenth century (Constantin Meunier, Jean-François Millet, Adolph Menzel) through the twentieth (Käthe Kollwitz and John Heartfield, to name a few). Lockhart also modifies the history of recent photography when workers rather than actors—think of the work of Jeff Wall, for example—appear in overtly staged poses. These elements taken together divert attention away from intention and meaning and emphasize the matter of how to transform a world, in this case workers during a lunch break at the beginning of the twenty-first century, into a permanent image.

The group portraits oscillate between a reanimation of the art history of group portraiture, specifically the various realisms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially the paintings of modern life as visualized by Menzel, Gustave Courbet, and Édouard Manet, for example, and images that by contrast are attentive to the traces of an actual and contemporary lunch break. What I propose here is what Hal Foster in his essay “The Dialectics of Seeing” described as the memory structure of art.²³ He asserts that art is not art without inserting itself visually and structurally into existing artistic traditions, without, however, necessarily making these connections overtly visible. This subtextuality of afterimages, which may include citations, alterations, or obscure allusions (as in Lockhart’s case), prevents a reification of tradition through the reassembly and revitalization of earlier practices in a way that articulates new meaning.²⁴ We then may understand art’s history as an archive of images that supplies the discourse for all artistic practices. The significance of Lockhart’s group portraits becomes apparent through this loose referential system that she employs in order to address the limits of representation. By means of this subtextuality, she metaphorically removes the workers from their context, allowing her to integrate traces—of their concrete stories and culture, such as a crossed-out “No Smoking” sign—without exposing the individuals as sole documents of their history.

The material presence and poetics of the lunch boxes as well as the unexpected existence of the workers’ individual businesses are complemented by these thought-provoking portraits whose inner artistic logic detaches their sitters from the realm of interpretation and concrete meaning.

BRINGING IT TO THE WHITE CUBE

In the white cube, all elements—the three series of photographs and the two films—take on additional layers of meaning. For example, the massive box that houses the film *Lunch Break* functions as a large-scale architectural object that penetrates the museum’s white box setting, yet it also replicates the monumentality of the factory’s large corridor where common lunch breaks take place (pages 124–25). In this way, the box, an enormous object in which a not-so-ordinary lunch break is screened, privileges social activity over the importance usually ascribed to work and labor.

The installation itself is distinguished as being positioned between installation art and the installation of artworks: it enhances the meaning of the individual bodies of work through a spatial setting that is strictly formal and allusionistic at the same time. Similar to the individual artworks, the installation is minimalist, monumental, and formally consistent, yet it encourages reflections on how everyday practices filtered through the lens of art may acquire new meaning and substance. Lockhart uses isolated temporal modes (slowness and experiential yet repetitive time) and spatialized time configurations in the photographs that underscore difference from everyday experiences in order to add new participants and situations to the realm of the visible.

Her multidisciplinary endeavor might be best summarized by Rancière, who argued in 2007 that photography (and I would add film) “did not become an art because it employed a device opposing the imprint of bodies to their copy. It became one by exploiting a double poetics of the image, by making its images, simultaneously or separately, two things: the legible testimony of a written history on faces or objects and pure blocs of visibility, impervious to any narrativization, any intersection of meaning.”²⁵

Notes

- 1 Harun Farocki, “Workers Leaving the Factory,” http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/21/farocki_workers.html. Originally published in Harun Farocki, *Nachdruck / Imprint* (Berlin: Verlag Vorwerk; New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2001).
- 2 For more information about the history and current activities at Bath Iron Works, see <http://www.gdbiw.com/>.
- 3 J. M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 144–64.
- 4 Daniel Kasman, “Berlinaline 2009: ‘Lunch Break’ – So Much Time and So Little Space,” <http://www.theauteurs.com/notebook/posts/528>.
- 5 Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). Fried discusses artists Jeff Wall, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Cindy Sherman, Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff, Andreas Gursky, Rineke Dijkstra, Thomas Demand, Candida Höfer, Douglas Gordon, and Philippe Parreno, among others. While this volume sheds much light on photography and contemporary art, the author does not clearly differentiate between the mediums of photography and video art.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 26, 29, 35, 335–41.
- 7 Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 12–23. In this seminal essay, Fried argues that, through their penetration into experiential spaces, minimalist objects refute medium-specific qualities that would support modernist sculpture as an autonomous and self-absorbed medium. Instead, minimalism offers an experience of “theatricality” in which the viewer must negotiate a contingent and unfinished artwork that is positioned between sculpture and installation art. Fried actually introduced the critical term “absorption” only later, in his 1980 book *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- 8 Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, 26.
- 9 The extreme slowness of the film, according to Jörg Heiser, generates a hypnotizing quality. See Jörg Heiser, “Trading Places,” *Frieze* (February 17, 2009),

- http://www.frieze.com/comment/article/trading_places/. In a similar vein, Tom Holert has characterized the slowness as "psychedelic morphing." See Tom Holert, "Sharon Lockhart: Lunch Break," *Camera Austria* 105 (March 2009): 74.
- 10 Heiser, "Trading Places," 4.
 - 11 Heiser has described this perceptive process as a rewarding one, an experience involving a dynamic situation between joy, struggle, and gratification. See *ibid.*, 6–7.
 - 12 Rainer Bellenbaum, "Exit to Enter: Über Sharon Lockhart in der Secession, Wien," *Texte zur Kunst* 73 (March 2009): 231.
 - 13 Kasman, "Berlinale 2009: 'Lunch Break.'" While the standard duration of a full, four-hundred foot shot is approximately 11 minutes, for *Lunch Break* Lockhart slightly shortened it to approximately 10 minutes. The cinematic version of the film with credits runs 83 minutes; the exhibition version without credits is 80 minutes long.
 - 14 This rendition of the workers' backs is unusual in the history of film and blurs whether the workers are entering or exiting the factory. Consequentially, interpretations of the film have dwelt on the ambivalence between outside and inside. See Bellenbaum, "Exit to Enter," 232.
 - 15 Considered by many to be the first real motion picture, it employs the grounds of the Lumière factory, the leading European manufacturer of photographic products. The cinematography that was used for the film was invented by Louis Lumière in 1894. See Eric Barnouw, *A History of Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6–10. In addition, Harun Farocki has investigated the filmic history of labor and workers, focusing on this film. He concludes that labor and the factory itself have not become one of the main genres of fiction film. He also produced a film that includes this research, entitled *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* (*Workers Leaving the Factory*, video, black-and-white and color, 37 minutes, 1995). See Harun Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory."
 - 16 Farocki also observed that the position of the Lumière brothers' camera is a precursor to today's surveillance cameras and their task to silently and invisibly observe and record for the protection of property. See *ibid.*
 - 17 *Ibid.*
 - 18 Among notable films that focus on or include workers as a group are D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Accattone!* (1961), all of which are part of Harun Farocki's film montage *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* from 1995.
 - 19 Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2007), 22–23; see also 67.
 - 20 Roland Barthes famously distinguishes between the studium and the punctum in photography. While the studium relates to the photograph's indexical nature, conveying information and establishing cultural, social, and political meaning, the punctum is the piercing element through which the viewer establishes an empathetic and subjective relation to some aspect of the photograph. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 25–47.
 - 21 Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 7.
 - 22 See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 25–47.
 - 23 Hal Foster, "The Dialectics of Seeing," in *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, ed. Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 215–20.
 - 24 Whereas Foster limits the memory structure of art to the medium of painting, I would argue that since photography has been established as a fully fledged medium since the late 1960s, photographers also work with and rework earlier artworks.
 - 25 Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 11.