

REALITIES OF TIME:  
NOTES ON THE FICTIONALITY OF *LUNCH BREAK*

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I. FADE IN

A long, narrow corridor in a factory. On the right, a grinding machine, pipes, cable, and the like; behind that, rows of lockers. On the left, more equipment: switches, cables, hoses, and boxes, on one of which a female worker is sitting.

Beams of fluorescent lights on the ceiling and a grey concrete floor with faded yellow markings lead forward into the depths of a room whose end can only be imagined.

We find ourselves in the assembly hall of Bath Iron Works, a shipyard in Maine. More precisely, we find ourselves in Sharon Lockhart's film *Lunch Break* (2008), which, as the work's full title reveals, was filmed on November 5, 2007 (pages 3–7).<sup>1</sup>

The image before us seems almost static at first. During the initial thirty seconds, the worker is sitting motionless on a tool chest, and even the camera does not enliven the scene. Accompanied by a steady drone and the occasional sound of hammering in the distance, the cinematic recording device moves almost imperceptibly along the corridor: no panning, no zooming, no editing. Continually focused on the end of the corridor—that is, directed at the center of the image in the classic 4:3 film format—the camera, and with it the viewer's gaze, moves slowly, very slowly, into the space.

With the first movements in the assembly hall—in the background, a leg sticking into the corridor is jiggling; closer to the front, the worker is taking a sip from her thermos—the serene and slowed temporality of *Lunch Break* takes concrete form. Both the movement of the camera and the actions it records are delayed: the cinematic image is conveyed with extreme slowness.

A strange tension emerges, an oscillation between stasis and movement, between photography and film, and, consequently, between the image and the viewer. "In the cinema, whose raw material is photographic," says Roland Barthes, "the photograph, taken in flux, is impelled, ceaselessly drawn toward other views; in the cinema, no doubt, there is always a photographic referent, but this referent shifts, it does not make a claim in favor of its reality, it does not protest its former existence; it does not cling to me; it is not a *specter*."<sup>2</sup> Barthes's observation on the relationship of still and moving images overlaps significantly with fundamental aesthetic features of *Lunch Break*, and yet Lockhart's film is more like a "specter" than many photographs. The reason for this resistance of cinematic depiction, in addition to the extreme spatial quality of the image—its frontality, symmetry, and infinite depth—is primarily the temporality with which Lockhart's camera paces through the tunnel-like factory space and focuses on the workers on break and their constructive timeout from productivity. The movement in *Lunch Break* is so slow that the viewer's gaze is emancipated from that of the camera. Whereas the camera and the eye have been repeatedly equated since the early days of cinema, and consequently vision is guided, "pushed and pulled," by the filming, the speed in *Lunch Break* contradicts everyday visual experience in a way that enables viewers to look around at their leisure. This emancipation of the gaze is forced by the relative

“uneventfulness” of the action—a break before the camera during which no narrative tension or evident story demands attention. The gaze in *Lunch Break* does not disengage completely with the movement of the camera, but it is “liberated” to an extent that makes it photographic in Barthes’s sense.

In this film, we are constantly confronted with details, with unspectacular specifics that monopolize us, “cling” to us, yet stubbornly resist an immediate legibility and, as punctum (in Barthes’s sense), form an incomprehensible remnant of the real. Because of the incredible depth of field and the extreme expansion of time, however, these details initially emerge barely perceptibly from the background. Minutes pass before they become completely visible on the edges of the frame, during which we wait expectantly to perceive more and more, and during which powerful questions arise not only about our visual perception but also about the meaning of our observations. These are questions that cannot be answered conclusively, in accordance with Barthes’s explanations of the photographic punctum, and thus the details remain with us as a result of the cinematic progression, in ever-changing form. The camera in *Lunch Break* continues uninterrupted and slowly but inevitably pushes the given, which can only just be seen, out of the picture. Hence the disappearing details of this film—and thus the film’s specific temporality and spatiality—mark both the possibilities of cinematic vision and the limits of cinematic representation. The stubborn “photographic referents” are guided into the mnemonic space off screen, from where they enter into a dialogue with new observations and impressions that come to us.

## II. WORK

The Bath Iron Works shipbuilding company was founded in 1884, around the same time that Auguste and Louis Lumière began operating their factory for producing photographic plates, whose doors would open so spectacularly soon afterward in *La Sortie des usines Lumière* (*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*). This shipyard, which from the outset was kept afloat thanks to orders it received from the United States Navy, is still the largest private employer in the state of Maine. And yet today it seems to be closer to history than to the future.

Lockhart spent a year in Maine, at this shipyard, between 2007 and 2008. She developed a close relationship to the workers there: their union supported her work, and over time her presence in the factory began to seem natural. Lockhart’s “immersion” into this world ultimately made it possible for the camera to move a thousand feet through the corridor of the assembly hall as if unnoticed while twenty-one workers took their lunch break, alone and in groups, drinking, eating, talking or resting, reading, dozing, rummaging through their lockers, or listening to the radio—a cinematic group portrait of American workers and a representation of a culture of break time that is becoming increasingly rare these days in the wake of restructuring to improve efficiency.

In direct connection with this film, Lockhart also created a series of photographs showing not the workers but their personal lunch boxes (pages 57–78), as well as several large-format photographs of makeshift self-service stands in the niches of the corridor (pages 32–41), several large-format photographs of

group scenes outside the corridor (pages 17–21), and a second film, titled *Exit*. For more than forty minutes, *Exit* shows workers walking past with lunch boxes, filmed by a still camera placed in front of the gate to the factory, pointed directly outward (pages 133–37).

*Lunch Break* with its component parts is about a time beyond immediate production, and yet these films and photographs ultimately confront us with questions of “industrial work,” with individuals shaped by such work, with a social community that results from it, and with the difficulties of depicting it in art.

As Benjamin Buchloh remarked in a discussion of Allan Sekula’s work, since Pop art the depiction of consumer goods has been considered quite appropriate for art, but the reality of their production, apart from some exceptions, has long been considered artistically obsolete and ultimately unworthy of discussion.<sup>3</sup> If contemporary culture, which “seems to have found one of its essential social functions in the narcissistic system of differentiation,” as Buchloh put it, “is at all still involved in a contact with the ‘real,’ then it constructs this contact...within the reality of consumption, never within the reality of production.”<sup>4</sup> A society that calls itself “postindustrial” or “postproletarian” is in latent conflict with so-called “lower forms” of industrial production.<sup>5</sup> Lockhart’s images do indeed initially seem to contradict the rhetoric of innovation, of efficiency, and of technological progress that the shipyard claims for itself in its promotional materials on the World Wide Web.<sup>6</sup> In an era when high-tech and new media, Web 2.0, YouTube, and virtual social networks characterize the everyday lives of a growing section of the population in the leading industrial nations, the type of work seen indirectly in *Lunch Break* quickly begins to seem antiquated, old-fashioned, and “insufficiently complex.”

Nevertheless, in recent years, the way artists approach the “real” or the reality of industrial production has changed, at least in part. As one voice in the intensifying critique of globalization and society, for several years now art too has had new forms of documentarism and realism on its agenda. *Documenta XI*, for example, once again devoted considerable attention to issues of social conflict and depictions of the typically invisible proletariats—although the conditions and possibilities of these forms of critical realism remain controversial.<sup>7</sup> The present conjuncture of the documentary in art is, not without reason, accompanied by discussions that reach back to Walter Benjamin’s reproach that the photography of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) movement idealizes.<sup>8</sup> Questions of “ideological patronage,” of “voyeuristic exploitation,” or of “false monumentality” form the critical backdrop against which the artistic debate over adequate forms for depicting the real and work takes place.<sup>9</sup>

## III. DOCUMENTARISM

Meanwhile, in the wake of the “documentary mode,” a will to reflexivity, truth, and critique of manipulation has become established, which, starting out from a separation into the real and the fictional, threatens not only to fetishize and naturalize doubt about the veracity of cinematic or photographic recordings, but also “ultimately to call into question, even more strongly than the images themselves, the reality to which documentary images are supposed to refer.”<sup>10</sup>

Lockhart's work as an artist makes a distinction between such exposures of the media apparatus, which are sometimes as self-satisfied as they are virtuosic, and the repeating, increasingly rhetorical doubts about the objectivity and truth content of what is depicted. She does so, first, by ensuring that her films and photographs are indebted crucially to what they depict and specifically to the people they depict. The workers in *Lunch Break*, for example, were just as integrated into the process of representation as were the protagonists of her earlier projects; the preservation of her subjects' integrity forms the basis of each of Lockhart's artistic engagements.<sup>11</sup>

Naturally, even Lockhart cannot help but acknowledge that she is working her way out from inside a system of representation in which the real is a sign, or at least has always mutated into one. Rather than deriving ever-new variations on an all-too-familiar critique of simulation and "manipulation," rather than ostentatiously lamenting or celebrating a lack of objectivity, she turns the relativity of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity into something productive in her films and photographs. The documentary and the fictional are separated by Lockhart in order to reveal elements of one category in the other and to reach, through the experience of the paradoxes of such differentiation, a new "relationship between appearance and reality, the visible and its meaning, the singular and the common."<sup>12</sup> Thus her works permit a reshaping of the experience of the sensory and lead to an aesthetic model recently described by Jacques Rancière that makes it possible to connect "the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility" so that the border between "the logic of facts and the logic of fiction" blurs.<sup>13</sup>

#### IV. FACTS AND FICTIONS

First, the facts: Lockhart's camera movement through the assembly hall of the shipyard promises maximum cinematic objectivity. As we have seen: no panning, no zooming, no editing, no change of tempo, nothing during the filming suggests a subjective decision, activity, or intention. The 35mm camera seems to operate mechanically, indifferently recording whatever comes before its lens. This apparent objectivity is underlined by the specific perspective of the camera. The symmetry, frontality, and depth of the image convey a strict formality that is anything but arbitrary. With analogous objectivity, the parenthetical subtitle likewise references the documentary mode. Much the same is true of the photographs. The workers' lunch boxes are photographed before a neutral, convex background; the light is natural; each lunch box's position is central and the camera's angle uniform. With the series of two or three lunch boxes placed diagonally in the image, the result is a strictly geometric grid conveying rational principles of representation, including sequential temporality by opening the containers, emptying them out, and / or rotating them by 180 degrees. The titles of the photographs and the almost bureaucratic precision of the sequences of images also correspond to this objectifying aesthetic of administration. They give information about the first name, last name, and profession of the owner.

When the camera's movement comes to an end in *Lunch Break*, the foundations of the order and objectivity described

thus far begin to falter. Whereas for a long time everything indicates that the depiction and depicted are equated in this work—as the camera moves through the corridor—the filming breaks off just before the end of the corridor is reached. It is unclear whether the film ran out after the original ten-minute shot—which is possible, given the length of conventional film rolls, and would also underscore the objectivity and inherent laws of film<sup>14</sup>—or whether this "breaking off" represents a conscious decision on the part of the artist, a subjective ending point that disrupts the rationality of what has so far occurred and the expectations it has triggered.

The objectivity of the film is also qualified by the space, the subjects, and the action before the camera. The dimensions of the corridor in the factory, whose end cannot be seen for such a long time, also seem so vast that the question of staging arises, generating a retrospective effect on the film's emphatically objective and rational forms of representation.

Much the same is true of the workers and their behavior. It can hardly be a coincidence that a woman is shown, almost programmatically, at the beginning of the film, though subsequently only men are seen. Moreover, with only a few exceptions, the workers appear not to notice the oncoming camera, and yet, miraculously, people and obstacles in the narrow corridor always get out of its way just in time. The workers never stand in the camera's way, but neither do they react to it. They neither observe it nor obviously present themselves to it; nor do they appear to make way for it.

This "coexistence" without conflict is dubious not only because the space of the narrow corridor is so constricted but also, and especially, in light of the fact that the subject is inevitably constituted as a spectacle before the camera. "The subject engages at the behest of the camera / gaze, and in response to the impossibility of avoiding specularly," as Kaja Silverman has so aptly put it.<sup>15</sup> The subject presents him- or herself to the camera, posing and becoming an image even before the camera's mechanism records it.

Lockhart has been reflecting on this unavoidable connection between documentation and theater, fact and fiction, for several years. When asked by Scott MacDonald about her early films, she explained: "I had become particularly interested in the way pop culture borrowed the look of the objective or the scientific, and the way the clinical borrowed theatrical narrative empathetic strategies." She became fascinated with ethnographic film, especially Jean Rouch: "His ideas of collaboration and being a catalyst are especially interesting to me, like the way he lets his subjects choose fictional characters or roles, through which something very real comes out."<sup>16</sup>

Whereas in her project *Pine Flat* (2005), which immediately preceded this current work, Lockhart responded to the inevitable self-staging before the camera, in the manner of Rouch, with an excess staging and further emphasis on these roles, in *Lunch Break* she seems to have taken the opposite tack. The film *Pine Flat* shows young people in the country, filmed with a stationary 16mm camera. The girls and boys "play" themselves for the duration of a ten-minute roll of

film, performing in their favorite places in nature such typical actions as reading, playing the harmonica, hunting, and so on. They hardly move, acting alone in the first shots and then in groups. The result is cinematic portraits that seem as idyllic as they do artificial, even as the form of representation promises objectivity. Behind the objectivity of the medium, a stylization of nature is revealed; behind the staging and fictionalization of the facts, the true basis or the reality of the young people and their surroundings emerges.

In *Lunch Break*, the camera now seems to have a different role. Rather than reacting to its interpellations and inevitable fictionalizations with yet another staging, Lockhart makes it disappear thanks to the form of her collaboration and her involvement in the daily life and realities of the shipyard. Whereas the months-long presence of the camera rendered it normal and natural so that the workers no longer perceived it and as a rule “blindly” made room for it, for viewers of the film, the resulting “naturalness” becomes just the reverse. Because it seems impossible under normal conditions for the workers not to react to a camera in their midst and pointed at them, their actions as recorded by it come to be read as theater.

The crucial artistic element of *Lunch Break* is no doubt the fact that the film is slowed down to an eighth of normal speed. Consequently, Lockhart’s effort to come to terms with the reality of work, with production and reproduction, becomes an obvious media construction, a fiction that nonetheless also satisfies Rancière’s criteria for a documentary.<sup>17</sup> “Fiction means using the means of art to construct a ‘system’ of represented actions, assembled forms, and internally coherent signs.” For Rancière, the difference between a documentary film and a fictional one is not “that the documentary sides with the real against the interventions of fiction, it’s just that the documentary, instead of treating the real as an effect to be produced, treats it as a fact to be understood.”<sup>18</sup> This is precisely what happens in *Lunch Break*. Lockhart does not assert that everything is fiction, construction, or manipulation. True, her use of extreme slowness is manipulation—unreal—and yet it is not freely invented. The altered temporality of film necessitates a reordering of the experience of reality, a new approach to and a new way of dealing with images and signs, and ultimately a redesign of the territory of the visible, the thinkable, and the possible. In this process, slowed-down motion, which is closely connected to the history of scientific observation, does not reveal, does not demonstrate—more precisely and objectively, in the scientific sense—the truth that lies beyond the limitations of the senses or the deceptions of the medium. Lockhart does not discover reality or the political reality behind the illusion of images, but rather just the opposite: with the both scientific and theatrical method of exaggerated slowness she achieves an aesthetic form of perception in which political insight is obtained through the image itself. To quote Rancière again: “Where appearance melts into reality, so too do art and politics merge together. Because both of them are tied to the consistency of an appearance, to the power of an appearance to reconfigure the ‘givens’ of reality, to reconfigure the relationship itself between appearance and reality.”<sup>19</sup>

## V. OBSERVATIONS

Like every film, *Lunch Break* is based on a connection between a medium that is inherently disinterested—the unconscious eye of the camera—and the conscious gaze of the director or artist. While Lockhart orders, selects, and processes, the mechanical gaze of the camera captures everything that happens before its lens. In *Lunch Break*, this dualism, this tension between the artist and her apparatus, which is also the basis for the cinematic dovetailing of documentation and fiction, itself becomes the theme.

Out of this interplay of camera and artist, of restrictions imposed by the camera and artificial limits, the tension between objectivity and subjectivity that results ultimately shifts the focus to the flipside of the relationship of image and viewer, of the thing to be seen and the autonomy of the seer, and especially to the precarious interplay of freedom and determination with regard to perception and the reality of work and workers.

Without tying the viewers to the events through identification with the protagonists (the characters and action are too unclear and open for that) or guiding them clearly with the camera’s gaze (it moves too slowly for that), the camera movement in *Lunch Break* produces such a vortex and paradoxical hypnotic fascination that at the end of the first public showing of this work, several viewers exited the installation in slow motion.

## VI. ECONOMIES OF TIME

Wherever one looks and wherever one turns, *Lunch Break* and the complex of works associated with it inevitably confront viewers with the economy of time, or with its political and aesthetic meaning—a time between the heteronomous and the autonomous, which reigns over both the world of work and how it is perceived—a time neither subject to the constraints of rationally imposed circumstances nor fully liberated and self-determined.

Questions of time are encountered first in these films and photographs in the connection between heavy industrial production and the laws that govern the schedule by which it is structured. The duration of the lunch break, which serves to maintain and reproduce the capacity for work and evolves its own social dynamic as a kind of “time out” or “free space,” is stipulated by labor law. In *Exit*, the camera installed at the factory gate marks the boundary between work time and free time for each of the five workdays of the week.

We encounter questions of time in parallel with this on the level of cinematic and photographic representation. Lockhart’s use of slowed-down motion and still camera techniques defines temporally how and what we see—determines the time that remains to the viewers to look around more or less freely, and also reflects the relationship of cinematic and photographic perception, of movement and stasis, which is made even more complex by her combining cinematic and photographic works within a single project.

In the film *Lunch Break*, the tempo of the camera regulates how the visual details disappear and, hence, the relationship between the mnemonic space off screen and the presence of what is seen. The series and sequences of photographs, such as *Gary Gilpatrick, Insulator* (pages 59–61), indicate processes and temporal shifts; dynamics within the image, as in *Outside AB Tool Crib: Matt, Mike, Carey, Steven, John, Mel and Karl* (page 19), point to a before and after of what is shown and thereby to a history in the image.

Coming to terms with the relationship between presence and absence, the present and history, ultimately leads us back to the subject matter of Lockhart's documentary fiction, back into a factory and to a form of Fordist production that seems to have become anachronistic and stands in clear contradiction to the economy of the semiotic exchange value that dominates today. Lockhart's films and photographs put the presence of history before our eyes, reveal the nonsimultaneities and paradoxes of society. They bring to light realities repressed from collective consciousness without branding them as "low" or early forms of exploitation or idealizing them historically in any way.

At the same time, Lockhart's artistic docu-fiction of a form of production that seems anachronistic today reflects on the associated tension between historical materiality and present immaterial ways of work, as well as reflecting on itself—that is, on cinema as a medium. *Lunch Break* was shot in the historic medium of 35mm analog film, but then the ten-minute-long roll of film was digitalized in order to stretch it out enormously. The eighty-minute film is then presented using a state-of-the-art, high-definition projector. The result is a picture of labor that has clearly been manipulated digitally—such a long, slow track could not be realized using analog techniques—and reveals a hybrid aesthetic: whereas the depth of field and wealth of detail in particular indicate a classic 35mm look, the color temperature, intensity of light, and contrasts point to a digital projection. As a result, in *Lunch Break* there is a parallelism of artistic and industrial evolutions, of historical and contemporary, analog / material and digital / immaterial forms of production that reflect on each other and thus reactivate the current reordering of the economic and social implications resulting from changes in the relationship between production and reproduction, between the reality of work and its political and artistic documentations and fictions.

## VII. HISTORY AND REFERENTIALISM

"The aesthetic revolution rearranges the rules of the game by making two things interdependent: the blurring of the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fictions and the new mode of rationality that characterizes the science of history.... The 'fictionality' specific to the aesthetic age is...distributed between two poles: the potential meaning inherent in everything silent and the proliferation of modes of speech and levels of meaning."<sup>20</sup>

The correspondences between Jacques Rancière's aesthetic model that blurs divisions between the fictional and the documentary, between visuality and meaning and Lockhart's artistic engagement with reality, fiction, and history

are, as we have seen, as diverse as they are striking. The "fictionality" specific to *Lunch Break*, for example, unfolds between the images in the factory captured mechanically by the camera and the media modalities by which they were produced, and a precisely coordinated set of (art) historical references, conventions of representation, and levels of meaning. In addition to the level of content, on which social repressions, nonsimultaneities, and questions of visibility, power, and self-determination are addressed, and a corresponding media level, on which the historical shift from materiality to immateriality and the relationship of art and work, representation and production are reflected on again, in Lockhart's complex of works we encounter questions of semantic shifts or assignments in the form of a dense network of modes of artistic idioms and historical references.

Lockhart's referentialism ranges from the birth of cinema to contemporary art production, from the Lumière brothers' film in 1895 to the structural films of the 1960s and 1970s, and from anthropological photography to the contemporary art of Christopher Williams or Allan Sekula. In *Exit*, when she marks the boundary between free time and work time by positioning a camera at the factory gate, it inevitably recalls *La Sortie des usines Lumière*, widely considered the first film ever made (also known in the United States under various titles, including *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* and *Exiting the Factory*). Auguste and Louis Lumière took as the theme of their first demonstration of film the end of the workday at their factory and the threshold between their profit-oriented production place and public space. They did so by directing a fixed film camera at a factory gate opening, from which men and women streamed out, exiting to the left and right of the screen (page 104). In *Exit*, another fixed camera shows this border, not as a spectacle before the lens, but rather embodies it, as it were; that is, the camera defines the border by its own position and presence. In addition to renegotiating the relationship of subject and object of film, an essential aspect of this reversal is that in Lockhart's work, inside and outside, work and free time are not clearly defined. Although the direction and habitus of the majority of the people walking past enable us to guess that the activities of heavy industry are behind them and the camera, there are also workers with lunch boxes moving toward the camera, so this ambiguous inside–outside relationship provides occasion for ever-new observations.

One crucial motivating force behind the invention of cinematography was the Lumières' will to see and show more than photography had permitted. As producers of photographic plates, they had a strong interest in the relationship between the static and dynamic, and "a very pronounced scientific interest in the laws of movement, that is, the possibilities for exactly recording the course of movements and natural phenomena that are not accessible to the human eye, and in making it possible to represent them."<sup>21</sup> This analytical, experimental approach also coincides with Lockhart's interest in the conventions and limits of forms of scientific representation as well as with her studies of the fictionality of the still and moving image.<sup>22</sup>

Since the first presentations of *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, now more than a hundred years ago, film has provided occasion for extensive discussions of realism.

Initially, audiences were so impressed by the fidelity of the projection to reality that they thought the scenes were completely real and were actually occurring: "Imagine a screen on which a photographic projection appears. So far, so good—and nothing new. But suddenly the image begins to move, and the gate of a factory opens and hundreds of workers stream out, bicycles, running dogs, carriages, everything moves and streams. It is life itself; it is movement coming directly from life."<sup>23</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, structuralist filmmakers applied critical focus to the realism of the Lumière film, emphasizing not only the precisely chosen camera position but also "the almost uncanny precision with which the technical and material limitations (above all the predetermined film length of seventeen meters and the fixed camera) were made productive as a stylistic will and formal organizational principles of the operator-director."<sup>24</sup>

From our present perspective, it is possible to detect in *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* a tension between the neutrality of the medium, which creates immediate access to reality, and the artist's distinct will to shape things, between the camera and the author, between objectivity and subjectivity. This is also the basis for Lockhart's contemporary effort to come to terms with reality and fictionality.

Already in Auguste and Louis Lumière's film there is, within the poles of artificiality and fidelity to reality, a complex approach to the spatial and temporal determinants of the medium, to which advocates of structural film would later refer enthusiastically as part of their rejection of classic cinema, the narrative film, and illusionism in the style of Hollywood. In her work, Lockhart appeals both to this history of the structural film and to the Lumière brothers themselves, deriving from them her discursive background, her own historicity and legitimacy, and her formal rigor. In addition to the Lumières' conscious approach to the beginning, the duration (as determined by the length of the film roll), and the end of the film, their framing and handling of the relation between on- and off-screen is of central importance to both *Exit* and *Lunch Break*. The combination of depth of field and the passage of people—appearing out of the middle of the screen or from off screen, then disappearing on the edges—results in a connection of present to past, of perception to memory that generates a specific form of narrativity and goes hand in hand with a staging and fictionalization of history.

The fact that *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* was by no means solely about the original perception of film as a veritable expression of reality, life, or nature is unmistakably evident from the fact that there are multiple versions of the film.<sup>25</sup> Not only was the camera consciously placed and manipulated, but the events themselves were staged and repeated in versions with slight deviations. Thus the history of film begins with a conscious staging, a docu-fiction that also came with an economic background: even before the Lumière brothers' film was shown to a paying audience and thus became a product of the leisure industry, its makers presented it to a private audience. Significantly, the premiere was at the Société d'encouragement pour l'industrie nationale—a trade association. The film thus primarily served to promote a new product, whose place of manufacture was illustrated along with its producers and potential consumers

as they are released into their leisure time. For *Lunch Break*, this history not only results in a more subtle differentiation of the meanings of artificiality and fidelity to reality, it also reveals economic entanglements that open up additional layers of meaning in the relationship between art and work, reproduction and production, or freedom and determination, all of which are powerful for Lockhart as well.

The film by the Lumière brothers presages a number of artistic and historical references that were worked into *Lunch Break*. Discussing all of them in detail would far exceed the scope of the present text; nevertheless, the points of reference most crucial to Lockhart's realism should be mentioned at least briefly. The first of these is the work of James Benning, who has dealt with the history of the United States to an extent few other experimental filmmakers have, and who has collaborated with Lockhart several times before. Additionally, his handling of the fixed camera, of cinematic time, and of sound in such a way that supposedly objective depictions raise questions of aesthetic perception or subjectivity is of relevance here. The minimalism of Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) is another important point of reference. In Snow's epochal grappling with the determinants of film as a medium, the camera also generates a progression and vortex that follow their own rules, placing the edges of the cinematic image and the space off-screen into a complex relationship of events to be perceived individually and of actions that can be interpreted in multiple ways. This work combines a critique of illusionism and a critique of the medium with new forms of narration, creating a story, and fictionality, that balances out illusion and facticity anew.<sup>26</sup>

Forms of staging and questioning realism are ultimately crucial for Lockhart's photographic references as well. For example, when Christopher Williams reveals, in an almost cinematic sequence of seven photographs in *Grande Dixence, Val de Dix, Switzerland, August 2, 1993* (1993) the significance of point of view and light for the photographic perception of a supposedly neutral and functional industrial moment—which was, moreover, the subject of Jean-Luc Godard's first documentary film, in which he explored the relationship of the power of the machine to human power when building a dam—objectivity of depiction is revealed to be a historical convention, and the foundations of the concept of photographic objectivity are shaken in a lasting way. Much the same is true of Williams's attempt to come to terms with the photographic aesthetic of New Objectivity, which can be observed especially in commercial and product photography these days, into whose flawless surfaces he works in subtle voids and disruptive moments. Questions this raises of aesthetic conventionality and subjectivity correspond closely to the objectivity and aesthetic of classic product photography, of which Lockhart's series of photographs of lunch boxes is characteristic. These photographs function as indirect portraits of the workers / producers, as reproductions of objects that for all their austerity and perfection reveal forms of subjective self-presentation and identification.

A final point of reference worth noting is Allan Sekula, who sets himself the task of developing his critical realism out of living situations and in doing so consciously employs the resources of the history of photography. His photographic



*Lunch Break*, Vienna Secession, Grafisches Kabinett, 2008, installation view

project is concerned with representing “social subjects and their forms of experience under certain socioeconomic conditions”<sup>27</sup> while at the same time reflecting on linguistic conventions and institutional regulations. His juxtaposition of numerous photographic genres, which seems to lead to an analysis of various rhetorics of photography, and a close relationship to the figures depicted reveal further parallels between his work and *Lunch Break*. As part of her collaboration with workers, Lockhart, too, consciously works with various conventions of representation, with the emphatically objective but also with the narrative, and in doing so she points to the institutional context of the presentation of her artistic work.

#### VIII. DISTRIBUTIONS AND ARRANGEMENTS

At the beginning of *Lunch Break* stood *Lunch Break Installation*. By that I do not so much mean that the point of departure for Lockhart’s work on the reality of labor was the possibility of presenting it in an exhibition space, even if this aspect is of central importance within the overall context of her project. What I mean, rather, is that as early as 2003 she dedicated herself to the subject of the lunch or work break within the framework of her continual occupation with the economy of time in art and everyday life. The work that resulted—*Lunch Break Installation*, “*Duane Hanson: Sculptures of Life*,” 14 December 2002–23 February 2003, *Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art* (2003)—became the foundation for developing her new films and photographs. Thus it is not surprising that this early series of large-format photographs (pages 92–99) reflects central aspects of her current concerns: a negotiation of realism, which goes hand in hand with a reevaluation of the fictional; an analysis of the medial determinants of artistic representation; historical and artistic referentialism; and reflection on the social reality and culture of American workers. *Lunch Break Installation* shows how museum workers reinstalled artist Duane Hanson’s 1989 installation *Lunch Break (Three Workers with Scaffold)* for a retrospective exhibition—that is, how they re-presented it. Through Lockhart’s artistic representation of this process, the museum employees themselves mutate into “sculptures of life,” and in the process Hanson’s historical, sociocritical hyperrealism is turned into a contemporary photographic docu-fiction; the stasis of the sculptures with their artistic materials of fiberglass and polyester resin corresponds to the stasis of the photographic reproduction of life; and the economies of art and work reflect on each other. A crucial significance is attributed here to the white cube of the museum—that is, to the artistic institution into which life, the reality of the quotidian, enters while at the same time is brought to a standstill. Whereas Hanson, coming out of the tradition of the “social documentary” in the late 1960s, depicted the “American way of life” and explosive themes from the reality of America in hyperrealistic presentations in museums and galleries, Lockhart reflects on the reality of this realism, the practice of this combination of art and everyday reality; she relates it to her own photographic explorations of reality and thus grapples with the meaning of documentarism and fictionality in the framework of a contemporary, socially concerned, and politically reflective production of art in a way that is both self-critical and critical of institutions.<sup>28</sup>

In his essay “Die Erscheinung des Dokumentarischen” (“The Appearance of the Documentary”), in which he explores the background and consequences of the “documentary mode” in contemporary art, Tom Holert remarked: “Not all that long ago, people were saying that authenticity had tied down the documentary film long enough, whereas reality was only consumed and no longer produced. Hence it had to ‘become evident that reality, even of the documentary, should be sought not outside the images but within them.’ But now we see that reality does indeed continue to lie ‘outside’ of the images—namely, in the (historically and culturally specific) discursive fields that, on the one hand, surround the images and, on the other hand, are shaped and altered by the images.”<sup>29</sup> The reference is to discursive fields such as that of the visual arts, in which symbolic communication results from a combination of linguistic conventions and institutional regulations and in which docu-fictions like those of Lockhart represent a practice whose meanings and economy are determined by symbolic procedures as well as real or material ones, by mechanisms of arranging and distributing.

With a multilayered and assertive referentialism, Lockhart expresses her awareness both of the conventions for representing the real and of the role discursive context plays in the meaning of her work. She also does so through her continual attempt to come to terms with the “reality” and limits of art as an institution. When she associates the work hours of the security guards in the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo with On Kawara’s reflections on time in artworks that they are guarding (pages 86–87), or when she takes photographs of a worker installing a display case in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City and thereby turns the worker into an object in that display (pages 82–83),<sup>30</sup> it is always forms of work, regulations, and economies within the institution of art that she thematizes, not only in the images themselves but also in the form of their production and presentation.

*Lunch Break* was first presented in the Vienna Secession building, the first white cube in the history of art. Lockhart used this building, which dates from the late nineteenth century, in a way that gives the impression that her films and photographs were created especially for the exhibition there. Through the form of their presentation and several site-specific interventions, the works and the art space fused into a single, all-embracing installation.

Working with the architects Escher GuneWardena, Lockhart created a corridor-like space, sixty-five feet long, as a direct extension of the entrance to the Hauptraum, or main gallery, and *Lunch Break* was projected to fill the wall at the end of this space (pages 124–25). The main room of the Secession, which can often have a sacrosanct effect otherwise, was thus transformed into symmetrical spaces circumscribing the massive presence in the middle and relating directly to the architecture of the projection space. Various series of photographs were installed along the room’s perimeter, pointedly distributed and hung strikingly low, further underscoring the overall installation, that is, the interaction of concrete space and artistic work.

In the second floor gallery, the Grafisches Kabinett, as an essential part of the exhibition, Lockhart displayed an earlier



*Lunch Break*, Vienna Secession, Galerie, 2008, installation view

series of photographs, *Eight Samples from James Benning's Beer Bottle Collection: Schlitz, Leinenkugel's, Peoples, Pabst Blue Ribbon, Chief, Miller High Life, Point, Blatz*, which she had made in 2007 as a contribution to a comprehensive James Benning retrospective at the Österreichisches Filmmuseum in Vienna (pages 112–19). Also installed were three vitrines of baseball cards (page 49) from his collection that grew out of the research he did for his film *American Dreams* (1984).<sup>31</sup> She thus made clear the historicity of her occupation with working class economies in the United States, expressed homage to James Benning, and also pointed to a possible “life” for her photographs and films beyond the art space.<sup>32</sup>

## IX. FADE OUT

In the lower level Galerie, the four large-scale photographs of *Lunch Break Installation* (page 51) were shown in the antechamber to *Exit*, which once again underscored the question of the installation, the relationship of art to everyday work, and hence the history and reality of Lockhart's own questioning of reality. As with the installation of *Lunch Break*, an open relationship of inside and outside also characterized the projection of *Exit*, and here too the gallery transitioned fluidly into projection space, although in reverse. Rather than projecting inside a space installed within a room, the film *Exit* was projected out of a small hole in a large box—around which visitors could walk—onto one of the walls of the darkened gallery (pages 120). Finally, after *Exit*, after the end of work and at the end of the exhibition, the viewers, led by the building's exit signs that the artist discreetly altered (page 53), returned to the gate of the Secession, above which the phrase “To every time its art, to art its freedom” still gleams in gold letters as it did over one hundred years ago.

How things are going with this freedom, how real it is, which fictions can be developed about and from it, what meaning it has for the not-so-free realms of life—these were the themes of Lockhart's installation in Vienna. With a subtle nod to the title of George Brecht's Fluxus film *Entrance to Exit, Lunch Break* in the Secession building led from a specific point of entrance, through the exhibition / factory, and back to the exit. By doing so, Lockhart marked and dovetailed several boundaries of art and space, relationships of inside and outside, which at the same time revealed relationships among art, work, and the distribution of social space. Her films, photographs, and installations produce fictions (or dissent), mutual references of heterogeneous orders of the sensory, which, in Rancière's aesthetic model for art, ensure their significance for society. They restructure a specific place and a specific time and enable a specific form of visibility that brings with it “a modification of the relations between sensible forms and regimes of signification, specific speeds, but also and foremost forms of assembly or of solitude.”<sup>33</sup>

Translated by Steven Lindberg

### Notes

- 1 The full title of the film's installation is *Lunch Break (Assembly Hall, Bath Iron Works, November 5, 2007, Bath, Maine)*.
- 2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 89.
- 3 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Allan Sekula: Fotografie zwischen Diskurs und Dokument,” in *Allan Sekula: Seemannsgarn* (Düsseldorf: Richter, 2002), 192. This was originally

published in English in 1995 in a slightly different version in conjunction with an exhibition at Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam.

- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid., 191.
- 6 The website refers to “a continuous pattern of innovation, new technology and process improvements.” “Company Overview: Introduction,” <http://www.gdbiw.com> (accessed September 27, 2009).
- 7 *Documenta XI* presented documentary works by Ravi Agarwal, Pavel Braila, Igloolik Isuma Productions, Amar Kanwar, and Allan Sekula, among others.
- 8 See Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in his *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (1927–34), ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999), 768–82.
- 9 For more on this, see, among others, Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” in his *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 173; and Buchloh, “Allan Sekula,” 196.
- 10 Tom Holert, “Die Erscheinung des Dokumentarischen,” in Karin Gludovatz, ed., *Auf den Spuren des Realen: Kunst und Dokumentarismus* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst / Stiftung Ludwig Wien 2002), 55.
- 11 For more on this, see “James Benning Interviews Sharon Lockhart” in the present volume, 101–9.
- 12 Jacques Rancière, “The Politics of Art and Its Paradoxes,” trans. David Quigley, *Brunaria* 9 (Fall 2007): 336.
- 13 Jacques Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 38. On the relationship of documentation and fiction, see also Jacques Rancière, “Documentary Fiction: Marker and the Fiction of Memory,” in his *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Berg, 2006), 157.
- 14 That was the case in Lockhart's recent film, *Pine Flat* (2005).
- 15 Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 195, 204.
- 16 Sharon Lockhart, in Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 5: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 316, 323.
- 17 The fictional character of the film is further heightened by the fact that the sound is not replayed in slow motion but is nevertheless synchronized with the images. The symmetry of the realistic sound and the largely manipulated image ultimately makes even the apparently “real” elements of the cinematic presentation dubious. The sound was designed by composer Becky Allen and filmmaker James Benning with Sharon Lockhart.
- 18 Rancière, “Documentary Fiction,” 158.
- 19 Rancière, “Politics of Art,” 336.
- 20 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 36–37.
- 21 Thomas Elsaesser, “Eine Erfindung ohne Zukunft: Thomas A. Edison und die Gebrüder Lumière,” in his *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino: Archäologie eines Medienwandels* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2002), 61.
- 22 The tension between photographic and cinematic vision, which is central to Lockhart's work, is also characteristic of the Lumières' film. Before the people in the film begin to move, the projected image is motionless for several seconds.
- 23 Elsaesser, “Eine Erfindung ohne Zukunft,” 56.
- 24 Ibid., 57.
- 25 “No less than three versions of the film exist. There are a number of differences between them (for example, the clothing styles worn by the workers change to reflect the different seasons the three versions were shot in), but they are most commonly referred to as the “one horse,” “two horses,” and “no horse” versions, in reference to a horse-drawn carriage that appears in the first two versions (pulled by one horse in the original and two horses in the first remake), Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0000010/alternateversions>.
- 26 See Annette Michelson, “Toward Snow,” *Artforum* 9, no. 10 (June 1971): 31ff.
- 27 Buchloh, “Allan Sekula,” 198.
- 28 Significantly, Lockhart called her work referring to Hanson an “installation.” This term refers both to a form of artistic presentation in whose framework grappling with real space is particularly important and to a banal form of work or service—namely, the installation of an artwork—and thus mediates precisely the tension between art and work that is constitutive of Lockhart's films and photographs.
- 29 Holert, “Die Erscheinung des Dokumentarischen,” 61.
- 30 Lockhart shows a worker who looks back and thus rebalances the relationship of self and other, subjectivity and objectivity, but at the same time refers to the practice and economic reality of our dealings with the other in museums.
- 31 See Barbara Pichler and Claudia Slanar, eds., *James Benning*, exh. cat., Österreichisches Filmmuseum (Vienna: SYNEMA, 2007).
- 32 By including her photographs for the James Benning publication in the exhibition at the Secession, Lockhart thematized once again the various contexts and economies for her work. This relationship of art and the outside world becomes active again through the presentation of *Lunch Break* in the cinema. For example, after her exhibition at the Secession, Lockhart showed *Lunch Break*, among other places, at the Berlinale, a film festival in Berlin whose economy differs significantly from that of an art exhibition.
- 33 Rancière, “Politics of Art,” 331.