

## CHAPTER 1



# Visualising Late Capitalism's Landscapes

The conception of capital is admittedly a totalizing or systemic concept: no one has ever seen or met the thing itself; it is either the result of scientific reduction [...] or the mark of an imaginary and ideological vision.

— FREDRIC JAMESON<sup>1</sup>

How can the machinations of late capitalism be visualised within moving image practice? How can contemporary non-fiction practices capture and critique the diffuse movements and operations of contemporary transnational capital, an economic system that is itself an increasingly all-enveloping machine of capture? By focusing on a variety of documentary works that all share a concern with examining late capitalism's exploitative spatial logics, this chapter seeks to answer such questions. Additionally, the chapter seeks to examine the political potentialities, and limitations, of such political-aesthetic praxes. Ultimately, what role can the documentary image play in the fight against the savage encroachment of transnational global capital? What strategies of visualisation and critique have been developed? Which remain underexplored or underdeveloped?

Non-fiction moving image work has a crucial role to play in undermining the apparently 'seamless' functioning of logistified and financialised capitalism, helping to throw into sharp relief its fissures, cracks, and contradictions. Indeed, this point returns us to one of the overarching themes of this book. Moving image practice must develop a political praxis that makes the invisible exploitations of spatial power relations legible and, most importantly, resistible. As Edward Soja suggests, spatiality under late capitalism has become a dominant site of exploitation: 'relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life [...] human geographies become filled with politics and ideology'.<sup>2</sup> It is the contention of this chapter that the moving image is a crucial tool of resistance against such exploitative spatial logics. By surveying a variegated set of works that have made steps towards such a critical visual praxis, this chapter hopes to map out some 'lines of flight' for its continued critical development. Through this analysis, I hope to map some aesthetic and political connections between this geographically disparate set of filmmakers, all of whom have attempted to visualise late capitalism's landscapes.

### Defining Late Capitalism

Here, I think it is necessary to historically situate my uptake of the notion of late capitalism, with a more general aim of providing a working definition of the term. For Ernst Mandel, the epoch of late capitalism surfaced after the Second World War and was caused by the convergence and subsequent consolidation of several political and economic forces: the globalisation of labour movement, the concomitant rise of the multinational corporation, and the widening transnational flows of finance capital and globalised trading markets. The development of these new forms of global-economic organisation suggested by Mandel were also structurally aided by shifts towards neoliberal forms of political and fiscal governance. Up until the end of the Second World War, 'market processes and entrepreneurial and corporate activities [...] [had been] surrounded by a web of social and political constraints'.<sup>3</sup> However, as capital's movements were increasingly globalised and fluid, such 'social and political constraints' had to be lifted. Neoliberalism promoted the opening of national markets to global trade and financial speculation, coupled with a massive reduction in state interventionism. Within these new approaches to the political economy, the supposedly 'natural forces' of global trade were normalised and the 'free hand' of the markets began to reign supreme. Within these new configurations of global capitalism, more emphasis had to be placed upon capital fluidity and mobility. As the fixity and embeddedness of traditional forms of constrained political-economic organisation no longer matched the operations of global trade, new strategies of organisation and exploitation had to be developed.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the language of 'fluidity' and 'mobility' marked the discursive *and* material development of late capitalism. For Zygmunt Bauman, the increased 'fluidity' and inequality of the global economic system is exactly where these new global formations of economics derive their strength from. For such a system based on logics of fluidity and inequality to be most effectively realised, Bauman suggests that there had to be effective 'social disintegration'. He writes, 'global powers are bent on dismantling such networks for the sake of their continuous and growing fluidity, that principal source of their strength and the warrant of their invincibility'. Thus, for Bauman, these new global economic forces must necessarily disintegrate 'the social network', those 'effective agencies of collective action [...] particularly a territorially rooted tight network'. It is from here that a system based on 'the new lightness and fluidity of the increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power' could be realised.<sup>5</sup> Fundamentally, for both Mandel and Bauman, late capitalism is defined by such fluid operations, the consequences of which are the rise of multinational corporations (and the complicity of state power in their perpetuation), an increasingly globalised and fragmented labour market, and uneven geographical development (consequences that in turn feed back into, and perpetuate, the extension of such a fluid system).

### Late Capitalist Aesthetics

Such apperceptions of late capitalism as a centralised — yet fundamentally fluid and mobile — system of power have led theorists to suggest that it is a deeply abstracted and interconnected political-economic formation.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the fluidity and mobility of such a system has led many theorists to conclude that late capitalism is an increasingly all-pervasive and invisible system. This poses significant issues at the levels of the aesthetic and representational. As David Hodge and Hamed Yousefi suggest, ‘as abstraction reaches into every crevice of our existence, art increasingly adopts a style that Emily Apter has called *oneworldedness*: “a delirious aesthetics of systematicity ... held in place by the paranoid premise that ‘everything is connected’”’.<sup>7</sup> For Apter, at the level of aesthetic representation, oneworldedness ‘matches the circular form of the globe — imagined as a smooth surface allowing the unimpeded flow of capital, information, and language’.<sup>8</sup> Apter’s conception of ‘oneworldedness’ can be seen as a dangerously homogenising trend within a broader range of contemporary aesthetic practices. The danger of such systems of representation is that the social totality takes on behemoth-esque proportions; indestructible and completely pervasive. Here, the residual cracks and contradictions of late capitalism are abstracted.<sup>9</sup> Thus, within Apter’s conceptualisation, it is increasingly difficult for cultural and aesthetic practice to imagine an ‘outside’ to the all-pervasive nature of late capitalism.

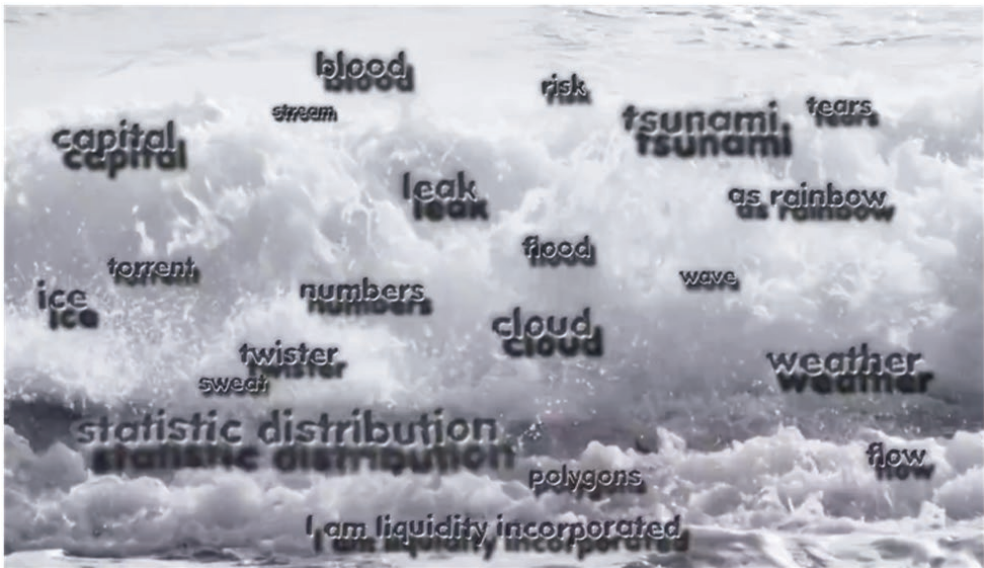


FIG. 1.1. Still from *Liquidity Inc.*, dir. by Hito Steyerl (Germany, 2014).

Apter’s notion of ‘oneworldness’ is perhaps most poignantly (and critically) interrogated in Hito Steyerl’s 2014 film *Liquidity Inc.* Steyerl’s work as a visual artist and filmmaker has focused extensively on visualising and critiquing late capitalism’s exploitative logics. *Liquidity Inc.* imbricates a range of narratives that

focus on different understandings of ‘liquidity’, ranging from the financial to the environmental. We meet Jacob Wood, a former financial advisor, whose career ended with the Lehman Brothers’ crisis. Wood, a practising ‘mixed martial arts’ fighter, discusses the flexible fighting style of Bruce Lee: ‘that’s what makes it exciting, that’s what keeps things liquid, and fluid’. Another recurring narrative is a balaclava-wearing weather reporter — a nod, as Gary Zhang has suggested, to the 1970s militant leftist group The Weather Underground — who maps the Vietnamese-born Wood’s journey to the USA, his life constantly at the mercy of wider geopolitical (Vietnam War) and financial (2008 crash) events. Mixed martial arts clashes with the 2008 financial crash, weather reportage with property foreclosure, all of which are hyperbolically woven together by their shared concerns with liquidity. Zhang suggests:

The interconnections of finance and hydrology affect us all: weather is water plus history. Therein lies also the elemental alignment proposed by Steyerl’s montage [...]. Anxiety is in the water here, not only because of the film’s post-crash moment, but because of the inherent volatility of all the systems to which it alludes.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst Zhang seems to suggest that Steyerl’s emphasis on liquidity is sincere — aiming to present the inherent volatility of inextricably intertwined systems — I would instead suggest that it is more of a self-reflexive critique of the ‘oneworldness’ style that it hyperbolically employs. One particularly memorable image from the start of the film overlays a variety of words — capital, blood, torrent, tsunami, sweat, statistic distribution, amongst others — on top of an image of a crashing wave.



FIG. 1.2. Still from *Liquidity Inc.*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2014).

In a certain respect, Steyerl's film seems to echo Jameson's famous claim that nowadays 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism'.<sup>11</sup> From the Thatcherite-Reaganite discourses of 'market forces' to the reuptake of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand of the market', there has been a prevalent tendency to treat late capitalism as some sort of natural phenomenon. Ultimately, *Liquidity Inc.* points towards a greater tendency in artistic practice to enshrine a particularly abstracted, 'oneworlded' and *liquid* representation of capitalism's contemporary machinations.<sup>12</sup> Hodge and Yousefi also offer the provocative question 'can art help to induce new forms of subjectivity, which might be better equipped to trace the totality?'<sup>13</sup> Clearly, this question is intertwined with the one that opened this chapter. Both seek to understand how we can fight against an aesthetic embrace of late capitalism's 'naturalised' and 'obfuscated' operations. Indeed, the works we will survey in this chapter are concerned with resisting such modes of aesthetic representation. Rather, they are concerned with locating and mapping the concrete spatio-political impacts of such exploitative logics.

### Spatiality and Late Capitalism

Several contemporary theorists have tried to understand how aesthetic practices can be employed to expose the inner workings of late capitalism, from Fredric Jameson's notion of 'cognitive mapping' to Alberto Toscano's formulation of mapping the 'social totality'. As the names of their concepts suggest, geographic and spatial understandings of late capitalism's movements are a critical component of such aesthetic approaches. Such a spatial thrust is representative of the wider spatial turn in social and cultural theory, extending from Henri Lefebvre's canonical *The Production of Space* to David Harvey's notion of the 'spatial fix'. For both these Marxist geographers — and we can include Jameson and Toscano here as well — contemporary finance capital seeks to exploit and bed itself within material space on an unprecedented scale. As Harvey suggests:

The 'spatial fix' (in the sense of geographical expansion to resolve problems of overaccumulation) is in part achieved through fixing investments spatially, embedding them in the land, to create an entirely new landscape (of airports and of cities, for example) for capital accumulation [...] the infrastructures of urbanization are crucial, both as foci of investment to absorb surpluses of capital and labor (providing localized/regional forms of the 'spatial fix' as through the dynamics of suburbanization or the building of airport complexes) and as the necessary fixed capital of an immobile sort to facilitate spatial movement and the temporal dynamics of continued capital accumulation.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, within the epoch of late capitalism's unrelenting expansion, its increasing globalisation requires spatial placeholders to both absorb the surplus of overaccumulation and to create new strategic centres for further movement, expansion, and accumulation. Harvey's examination of capitalism's global expansion — primarily developed through the notion of the 'spatial fix' — led him to conclude that capitalism 'could not survive without being geographically expansionary'.<sup>15</sup>

Neil Smith has also conducted important research into late capitalism's exploitative spatial logics. For Smith, the ascension of late capitalism — particularly over the last three decades — has restructured geographical space on an unprecedented scale.<sup>16</sup> The result of this restructuring is a pervasive and global process of 'uneven development'. As he suggests, uneven development is the:

Hallmark of the geography of capitalism. It is not just that capitalism fails to develop evenly, that due to accidental and random factors the geographical development of capitalism represents some stochastic deviation from a generally even process. The uneven development of capitalism is structural rather than statistical.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the forces of late capitalism that produce uneven development are not restructuring space in any natural or organic way, rather these transformations are the result of a structurally produced inequality, fostered with the complicity of national and supranational governing powers and global corporations. Consequently, the ever-escalating globalisation of capitalism is being built around an ever-increasingly streamlined ability to find and exploit new spaces of accumulation. Thus, from Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, and continuing through into the work of Smith and Harvey (amongst others, such as Massey, Soja, Gregory), there has been a clear theoretical emphasis on trying to understand the spatial transformations wrought by the machinations of late capitalism. What role can moving image practice play in such discursive formations? Can we push for the development of a political praxis within moving image culture that seeks to expose the spatial injustices brought about by late capitalism? What shape would such a praxis take?

One theoretical concept that responds, both directly and indirectly, to such questions is Fredric Jameson's notion of 'cognitive mapping'. Jameson's concept is an aesthetic rallying call, pushing artistic practitioners to develop new modes of praxis that map and figure the spatial logics of late capitalism. Whilst not focused specifically on the aesthetics and politics of the moving image, Jameson's concept is particularly central to this chapter, due to the way it works at the intersection of capitalist critique, spatial theory, and aesthetic praxis. As Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle suggest:

To propose an aesthetic of cognitive mapping under conditions of late capitalism could be taken as an attempt to force into being a certain kind of political visibility and thus to counter the objective, material effects of a dominant regime of representation.<sup>18</sup>

Jameson's aesthetic formulation will provide the theoretical underpinning for the analysis of several key experimental non-fiction works that follows. Ultimately, we will ask how these practitioners respond to, develop, or subvert the principles of a 'cognitive mapping' praxis. However, before we begin this analysis, I feel it is necessary to map out the germination and development of Jameson's concept — framing cognitive mapping's constituent parts and political stakes.

### Jameson's 'Cognitive Mapping'

Elucidations of cognitive mapping's theoretical parameters are scattered somewhat intermittently throughout Jameson's writings.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most sustained exploration of the concept can be found in a chapter entitled 'Cognitive Mapping', which forms part of the edited volume *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Jameson argues that with the rapid expansion of late capitalism after the Second World War, our understandings, and representations, of the spatial have become more and more fractured. Under the double-barrelled (and tightly enmeshed) development of neocolonialism and globalised free market capitalism, we find a 'growing contradiction between lived experience and structure, or between a phenomenological description of the life of an individual and a more properly structural model of the conditions of existence of that experience'.<sup>20</sup> As the individual's subjective life is increasingly bound up with colonial and capitalist exploitation, it becomes ever harder to forge connections between lived experience and the socio-economic forces that shape such an existence. It is here, in the face of such spatial dislocations, that we begin to encounter a crisis of representation and figuration; an 'inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole'.<sup>21</sup> Thus, whilst the transition into this epoch extended certain aspects of imperialist monopolisation, for Jameson it is 'decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive'.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the late capitalist epoch is perhaps centrally defined by an increasingly 'undramatic' and 'imperceptible' acceleration of capitalist exploitation. As touched upon earlier, when the operations of late capitalism are perceived as increasingly illegible, there is a theoretical tendency to embrace such a sense of imperceptibility; admitting powerlessness in front of an invisible social totality. Indeed, Toscano and Kinkle point towards this when they suggest that an apperception of late capitalism:

As an infinitely ramified system of exploitation, an abstract, intangible but overpowering logic, a process without a subject or a subject without a face — poses formidable obstacles to its representation [and] has often been taken in a sublime or tragic key.<sup>23</sup>

Whilst Jameson admits that the machinations of late capitalism may be less immediately visible, he refuses to become defeatist. Indeed, it is precisely *within* the epoch of late capitalism that Jameson's call for a process of cognitive mapping is most concretely situated. For him, a new aesthetic form is needed to visualise and critique late capitalism's increasingly opaque spatial operations and fight back against the culture of lamentation and sublimation that surrounds such discourses of economic totalitarianism. As Jameson himself suggests, through this new political aesthetic 'we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion'.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in the face of a system that is increasingly opaque and omniscient we must struggle for new forms of representation that can reposition individual and collective political action. As

Toscano and Kinkle continue on to suggest, works which would be classifiable under the banner of cognitive mapping would:

Enable individuals and collectivities to render their place in a capitalist world-system intelligible [...] we could argue, to propose an aesthetic of cognitive mapping under conditions of late capitalism could be taken as an attempt to force into being a certain kind of political visibility and thus to counter the objective, material effects of a dominant regime of representation.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, for Toscano and Kinkle there is strong political bite to Jameson's rallying call, aiming as it does to resituate and reorient political struggle against a more visible and definable opposition. Indeed, it is in fact the very representational challenges that such an increasingly imperceptible system presents which engender and foster a new struggle for political legibility.

How is cognitive mapping presented as a variegated aesthetic protocol that can be taken up to aid in visualising late capitalism's socio-spatial injustices? Fundamentally, Jameson's delineation of cognitive mapping weaves together two theoretical concepts: Kevin Lynch's phenomenological urbanist notion of 'cognitive mapping' and Louis Althusser's canonical reformulation of the 'ideological'. Lynch's project of cognitive mapping — unpacked most comprehensively in his book *The Image of the City* (1960) — is concerned with understanding an individual's (predominantly) phenomenological relation to ever changing and morphing urban environments. His central claim is that as urban topography is transformed and expanded, a sense of urban alienation, 'directly proportional to the mental unmapability of local cityscapes', can set in.<sup>26</sup> As for Toscano and Kinkle, 'for an urban space to be successfully cognitively mapped, it "should possess a certain 'imageability'"'.<sup>27</sup> Lynch's resolutely phenomenological — and at times dogmatically utilitarian — approach 'can no doubt be subjected to many criticisms on its own terms (not the least of which is the absence of any conception of political agency or historical process)'.<sup>28</sup> Instead, Jameson is interested in how such a theory might be expanded — and, to a degree de-phenomenologised — to engage with the financialised and globalised spatial reconfigurations wrought by late capitalism. Consequently, Jameson's uptake of Lynch's concept is fundamentally 'emblematic', serving as a basic methodological framework upon which a more overtly political, and wider reaching, strategy could be grafted.

To undertake such an extrapolation, Jameson takes up Althusser's formulation of the ideological. As Jameson writes:

I have always been struck by the way in which Lynch's conception of city experience — the dialectic between the here and now of immediate perception and the imaginative or imaginary sense of the city as an absent totality — presents something like a spatial analogue of Althusser's great formulation of ideology itself, as 'the Imaginary representation of the subject's relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence'.<sup>29</sup>

For Jameson, the great strength of Althusser's formulation — particularly in relation to Lynch's concept — is its articulation of a schism between the location of an individual subject vis-à-vis 'the totality of class structures in which he or she is



situated', thus moving us beyond a bounded phenomenological engagement with particular urban environments.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, as Robert T. Tally suggests:

Althusser provides a theoretical framework for Lynch's more empirical or experiential analysis of the ways in which individuals negotiate their surroundings. 'Ideology' provides a bigger picture than the 'image of the city' [...]. By 'synthesising' Althusser and Lynch, Jameson is able to expand Lynch's city model to a more global terrain.<sup>31</sup>

Consequently, Lynch's spatial theorisation of the city can be extrapolated, shifting us into the realm of late capitalism's globalised and financialised structures and systems. Fundamentally, within Jameson's articulation of cognitive mapping, we can see a desire to keep the spatial and topological components of Lynch's analysis, whilst simultaneously upscaling the site of analysis beyond the city space to the totality of socio-economic relations constructed under late capitalism. Crucially however, this upscaling does not disavow a need to render visible the localised, spatial, and material impacts of such an economic totality. Thus, Jameson's project of cognitive mapping aims — through its synthesis of Lynch and Althusser — to make more visible and tangible the totality of the social structure and class relations within the late capitalist epoch, whilst also remaining attentive to individual's and collective's spatial emplacement within such a system.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, cognitive mapping aims to confront understandings of late capitalism 'as an infinitely ramified system of exploitation, an abstract, intangible but overpowering logic', by forging connections between these overarching structures of power and their grounded, material impacts on localised, material spaces.<sup>33</sup> It is this dialectical synthesis of Lynch's and Althusser's conceptual frameworks that I carry forward into my analysis of the documentary works below. In various ways, these works all aim to forge connections between late capitalism's overarching structures and their localised, material, and spatial modes of exploitation in ways that mirror Jameson's dialectical synthetisation. It is of course arguable that Jameson's theory confronts the unrepresentability of late capitalist social totality with what is ultimately other modes of representation. However, building once again on Fuller and Weizman's concept of 'investigative aesthetics', I argue that to be attuned to the aesthetic and representational is crucial to both sense and make sense of late capitalism's multitudinous manifestations of power and violence that now surround us in seemingly imperceptible, yet wholly structural, ways. Consequently, this conceptual framework of the cognitive map productively interlinks with this book's broader desire to refocus and recentre the importance of the aesthetic as a tool for sensing the spatial as a 'political plastic'. Moreover, the similar attention to issues of the scalar within both Jameson and Fuller and Weizman's concepts are crucial within the modes of documentary practice which we will examine. I argue that the cognitive maps fashioned in the works below forge powerful connections between localised, material sites and spaces of capitalist exploitation and their structural and systemic power relations. Thus, these modes of mapping capital's violent and exploitative movements take up the aesthetic as a tool for both sensing and making-sense of systems of power that are increasingly abstracted and invisible by

regrounding them within material sites of exploitation. In the context of capital's increasing material evaporation, the aesthetic and representational thus become crucial lines of defence and resistance.

### Cognitive Mapping in Practice

Now that the theoretical foundations of cognitive mapping have been laid out, I will move into the analysis of several contemporary experimental non-fiction works that, either explicitly or implicitly, embrace the aesthetic and political principles laid out by Jameson. As Toscano suggests:

Across the contemporary arts and social theory — in domains of production and practice difficult to pigeonhole and categorize — the past years have witnessed, alongside a resurgent concern with politics, a veritable efflorescence in efforts to provide models, diagrams or narratives that might allow us to orient ourselves around the world-system.<sup>34</sup>

The following case studies will offer us an opportunity to interrogate the political potentialities of such spatio-political praxes. Here, I am also concerned with staking out the importance of non-fiction moving image work within the constellation of aesthetic approaches to cognitive mapping. As stated earlier, not only do I wish to examine those strategies that have already been developed, but also map out some 'lines of flight' for their continued critical development. Ultimately, through this analytical work, I hope to examine how the documentary image can play a crucial role in the fight against the savage encroachment of transnational global capital — examining strategies of visualisation and critique that have already been developed, whilst also gesturing towards to those which remain underexplored or underdeveloped.

This analysis will begin by focusing on Thomas Kneubühler's *Land Claim* project, which examines the impact of resource extraction on First Nations communities in northern Quebec and the Philippines. I will argue that within the moving image works that form part of this larger multimedia project, the speculative flows of global capital encounter the materiality of the landscapes they wish to exploit. By embracing the Deleuzian notion of the 'stratigraphic image', I argue that Kneubühler cognitively maps the relationship between abstract financial speculation and a topographical engagement with its proposed sites of future spatial fixing and exploitation. Next, the focus will shift to Ursula Biemann's *Black Sea Files*, a work that explores the socio-geographical re-composition of the territories carved apart by the creation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline — which extends from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli oil field in the Caspian Sea to Ceyhan, a port city on the south-eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey — and the connections to national and supranational governance. Here, I will argue that Biemann utilises an aesthetic of 'soft montage', originally conceived by filmmaker and theorist Harun Farocki, to oscillate between the micro and macro spatial-geographical injustices brought about by the pipeline's construction. Such a strategy ultimately aims to bridge the gap between larger homogenised forms of financial and governmental power and their impact upon the myriad 'local textures' and communities along

the route of the pipeline. Finally, we will examine Allan Sekula's photo essay *Fish Story* and Sekula and Noël Burch's *The Forgotten Space*, both of which focus on visualising the logisitification of maritime space. Here, I will argue that Sekula's concept of 'critical realism' structures his (and Burch's) attempt to map cognitively the materiality of human labour in increasingly automatised and logistified spaces of circulation. As we shall see, all these works move between micro and macro spatio-politics in their attempts to map the matrixes of contemporary domination.

### Thomas Kneubühler's *Land Claim Project*

To begin this analysis, let us return to Harvey's notion of the spatial fix. For him:

The 'spatial fix' (in the sense of geographical expansion to resolve problems of overaccumulation) is in part achieved through fixing investments spatially, embedding them in the land, to create an entirely new landscape (of airports and of cities, for example) for capital accumulation.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, within the epoch of finance capital's unrelenting expansion, its increasing globalisation requires spatial placeholders to both absorb the surplus of overaccumulation and to create new strategic centres for further movement and expansion. This section aims to examine how Thomas Kneubühler's *Land Claim* project tackles such spatial exploitations by visualising the transnational operations — and attendant spatial impacts — of several multinational mining companies operating within both northern Quebec and the Philippines. Across several of the project's C-Print photographs, Kneubühler examines the interrelations between three seemingly disparate locations: Raglan, a nickel mine in northern Quebec; Aupaluk, an Inuit village in Nunavik (under threat from a planned iron mine); and Zug, Switzerland, where the headquarters of several Swiss mining companies are located. In addition, *Forward Looking Statements* — the first of two video works that formed a part of this larger multimedia project — directly juxtaposes an extended visual examination of a traditional hunting-ground for the Aupaluk community with audio extracts from the Canada-based mining company Oceanic Iron Ore Corporation's conference calls with its investors, where the discussion circulates around the possibilities for resource extraction from this site. The second video work, *Relocation (FPIC)* contains a similar visual-aural juxtaposition, this time focusing on the relationship between Anglo-Swiss multinational mining company Xstrata's (now merged with Glencore) headquarters in Zug, Switzerland, and their mining operations in the Philippines. Here, I contest that such visual and aural juxtapositions function as a polemical spatio-political critique of these multinationals' planned appropriation and exploitation of such imperilled spaces. Ultimately, through the employment of a rigorous spatio-political aesthetic, Kneubühler aims to throw into sharp relief the obfuscated socio-economic machinations of such multinational organisations: the speculative flows of global capital encounter the materiality of the landscapes they wish to exploit.

The Raglan mine, located approximately sixty-two miles south of Deception Bay in the Nunavik region of Quebec, has been operated by Glencore since 1997.

Glencore is a Swiss multinational commodity trading and mining company with headquarters in Zug, Switzerland. As stated on Glencore's website, the Raglan mine 'takes up an area of nearly 70 kilometres and consists of a series of high-grade ore deposits composed mostly of nickel and copper [...] four active underground mines, a concentrator, as well as administrative and accommodation facilities'.<sup>36</sup> Development of the mine was approved after the signing of an Impacts and Benefits Agreement — called the 'Raglan Agreement' for short — by both the companies involved in the mine's operations and five Inuit groups.<sup>37</sup> *Land Claim* brings together a range of C-Printed images of the Raglan site. We are presented with images of miners, mining camps, exploratory drill holes, company jets, helicopters, and offices. Kneubühler's images seem to oscillate between a close, localised examination of these individual sites and a broader focus on the logistical and economic infrastructures supporting their connections to global capital and trade. Two images that are directly juxtaposed here are *Miners* and *Traders*. Within the first image, *Miners*, we are presented with a set of miners' headsets charging in docks at the Raglan mine. The second image, *Traders*, presents us with the exterior of a corporate building in Zug. Across these images, the material sites of resource extraction are drawn into a close comparative dialogue with the abstract modes of financial operation that both undergird and facilitate their operation. This simple strategy of juxtaposition forges connections between two sites that might otherwise have remained materially and conceptually detached. Thus, by drawing these two spaces together, Kneubühler forces us to consider the interrelations between these, and other, locales that form part of a much wider and complex network of exploitation.

Such a strategy of juxtaposition and interrelation also marks the project's moving image works. For example, throughout *Forward Looking Statements*, Kneubühler's GoPro camera — mounted on top of his guide Charlie Angutinguak's ATV — moves across a section of the Aupaluk landscape, where another potential mining site is being explored, this time by the Vancouver-based resource extraction multinational the Oceanic Iron Ore Corporation. Unstable and juddering over the uneven terrain, the camera seems to render the materiality of the landscape. As previously mentioned, the audio accompanying this work comes from a conference call describing the possible future extraction from this site by the multinational. Approximately halfway through the call, we hear from the company's Chief Operating Officer, Alan Gorman:

The prefeasibility study delivers positive economic results. We have assumed a price for iron of \$100. All amounts have been recorded in US dollars with a one-to-one exchange rate and the base case, pre-tax net present value of \$5.6 billion.

As Gorman continues to speak, the camera snakes along the side of a rocky outcrop, seemingly searching for an appropriate place to scale this incline. How then does Kneubühler's visual-aural juxtaposition seek to map the interconnections between the abstract extractive future speculation of the Oceanic Iron Ore Corporation and the materiality of the sites it wishes to exploit?



FIG. 1.3. Still from *Forward Looking Statements*, dir. by Thomas Kneubühler (Canada, 2014).

To answer this question, it is useful to turn to another aesthetic-topographic notion: the stratigraphic image. As Tom Conley suggests, ‘Gilles Deleuze speculates that modern cinema accedes to a “new visibility of things”’. The visibility he describes is of a character that accompanies what he calls the new and unforeseen presence of the ‘stratigraphic’ image.<sup>38</sup> For Deleuze, with the shift from the movement-image to the time-image, ‘the visual image becomes archaeological, stratigraphic, tectonic. Not that we are taken back to prehistory (there is an archaeology of the present), but to the deserted layers of our time which bury our own phantoms.’<sup>39</sup> As the durational temporality of the time-image came to dominate modern moving image practice, there was a fundamental shift in the visual representation of space: a change that pushed to the fore the archaeological, stratigraphic, and tectonic qualities of cinema’s rendering of landscape. As Conley continues:

Deleuze sketches out what seems to be a thumbnail treatise of the landscape of contemporary cinema. He writes of a layered and metamorphic landscape, a landscape composed of so many deposits of time that it indicates the presence of an extremely long duration.<sup>40</sup>

In Deleuze’s formulation, this new cinematic stratigraphy fits into the larger function of the time-image, which was supposed to foster a new ‘cinematic visibility of the world’. In certain ways, the notion of the stratigraphic image can be read as a precursor to the contemporary practice of deep mapping — long-form multimedia documentations of particular spaces that aim to render ‘inherent instabilities’ as well as ‘the ongoing development of a place’s identity, and its capacity to reveal historical and contemporary human experience’ in an almost palimpsestic fashion.<sup>41</sup> For Deleuze, the formally rigorous and avowedly modernist filmmakers Danièle

Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub were the primary practitioners of this new cinematic stratigraphy. Their images traced 'the abstract curve of what has happened, and where the earth stands for what is buried in it'.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the works of Huillet and Straub constituted a 'manual of stratigraphy', with each shot 'functioning as a cross section revealing little pointed lines of absent facies and full lines of those we continue to touch'.<sup>43</sup> Conley readily acknowledges the metaphorical thrust of Deleuze's conceptualisation. He argues that the stratigraphic image works in a dialectical fashion, causing 'one to think of the impossibility of being able to think about or through it in all its totality [...]. Yet we are able to perceive to some degree what we cannot perceive'.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the process of stratigraphy makes us confront the impossibility of comprehending the precise functioning of the social totality, whilst also allowing us to discover the cracks and fissures left behind by such macro movements. Huillet and Straub's 1981 essay film *Trop tôt/Trop tard* [Too Early/Too Late] is a prime example of this oscillatory dialectic. The film is divided into two parts: the first is shot across various locations in rural France. Landscapes dominate, figures remain fleeting. Accompanying these rural landscape shots is Huillet's voiceover, reading extracts from a letter written by Friedrich Engels to Karl Kautsky in 1889, describing the impoverished condition of the French peasantry. In addition, excerpts are read from the 'Notebooks of Grievances', written by the mayors of these same rural areas in protest at the establishment of the seigneurial system (a model of semi-feudal subsistence farming) in 1789.<sup>45</sup> The second section, shot throughout Egypt, contains extracts from a Marxist text by Mahmoud Hussein, focusing on the Egyptian peasants' 'resistance to English occupation prior to the "petit-bourgeois" revolution of Neguib in 1952'.<sup>46</sup> As Jonathan Rosenbaum has suggested, both sections 'suggest that the peasants revolted too soon and succeeded too late'.<sup>47</sup> Within both sections, the voiceover undermines any 'neat' or 'pictorial' rendering of the landscape, instead examining, interrogating, and excavating palimpsestic spaces of historical significance in peasant resistance movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is arguable that within *Forward Looking Statements* there is a similar stratigraphic impulse at work. Kneubühler seeks to examine the topographic transformation of the landscape and the concomitant impact upon its inhabitants, both of which are under threat from the machinations of extractive capitalism. However, there is a fundamental difference that places Kneubühler's work somewhat apart from the particularities of both Deleuze's theorisation and Huillet and Straub's practice. The stratigraphy of the latter two is centrally concerned with a palimpsestic deep mapping of the *historical* landscape, unearthing often partially uncovered or socio-politically unacknowledged past injustices and horrors. Alternatively, Kneubühler's work is less of an archaeological examination of the palimpsestical histories of the Nunavik landscape. Instead, the film offers a mediation on the precarious and 'unknown' *future* exploitations and injustices that might take place within this space. In certain ways, this ties us back to our earlier examination of Harvey's spatial fix. When we confront the precarious 'unknown' futures of the landscape and its inhabitants we are also confronting how these are inextricably bound up with late



FIG. 1.4. Still from *Trop tôt/Trop tard*, dir. by Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub (France, 1981).

capitalism's own 'projections' and 'risks'. Therefore, instead of an excavatory look back, we are instead offered a precarious look forward at a landscape and people in flux; unsettled by capital's spatial fixing. Kneubühler's work is interested in examining how forms of late capitalist speculation imbue these spaces with future precarity — a projection of possible exploitation that is always intimately tied to the fickle machinations of transnational global capital. Perhaps development will begin, perhaps it won't. A landscape may be destroyed, and afterward, investment removed.

David Harvey has examined how the spatial fixing response is riven through with its own contradictions:

It has to build a fixed space [...] necessary for its own functioning at a certain point in its history only to have to destroy that space (and devalue much of the capital invested therein) at a later point in order to make way for a new 'spatial fix' [...] at a later point in its history.<sup>48</sup>

The reason for such destruction is the speculative and fickle nature of financial capital that underpins such spatial machinations. As Harvey goes on to suggest, these are always 'speculative developments', and if they prove unprofitable, they may be devalued and, ultimately, destroyed.<sup>49</sup> Within *Forward Looking Statements*, the speculative flows of global capital encounter the materiality of the landscapes they wish to exploit. Thus, the cognitive map constructed by Kneubühler takes up aspects of Deleuze's stratigraphy, whilst simultaneously moving beyond it — constructing a dialectical relationship between abstract financial speculation

and a topographical engagement with its proposed sites of future spatial fixing and exploitation. Telescoping the abstract, opaque and, invisible with a material traversal of the spaces of future exploitation, Kneubühler aims to visualise and critique extractive capitalism's increasingly opaque spatial machinations that almost serve to colonise the future. Whilst the central polemic of Kneubühler's project may seem deceptively simple, its emphasis on the need to constantly apprehend the link between abstract financial flows and the appropriation and exploitation of material and social space is an important example of just one strategy of cognitive mapping and of how futurity is examined and critiqued in his work. It is through such strategies that we can begin to examine the slow cultivation of precarious futurities that extend from such extractive speculation.

*Relocation (FPIC)*, the second moving image work that forms part of the *Land Claim* project, embraces a similar oscillatory dialectic to *Forward Looking Statements*. The work is a looped video of a single forty-one-second static shot of Anglo-Swiss multinational mining company Xstrata's office in Zug, Switzerland. The audio comes from a Xstrata shareholder meeting, with discussion centring on the merger with Glencore. As Kneubühler suggests, Zug is a known 'tax haven', used to take advantage of Switzerland's generous tax breaks for large multinationals (a common, and widely acknowledged, strategy amongst global firms). As Jane G. Gravelle suggests, 'multinational firms can artificially shift profits from high-tax to low-tax jurisdictions using a variety of techniques, such as shifting debt to high-tax jurisdiction'.<sup>50</sup>

Glencore (now merged with Xstrata) has been implicated in such forms of financial 'shifting'. For example, in Zambia, the company holds a majority stake in the Mopani copper mines, alongside the Canadian mining company First Quantum and the Zambian government. A leaked report from 2011, commissioned by the Zambia Revenue Authority, found that 'Mopani's operations included tax planning strategies "equal to moving taxable revenue out of the country"'.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the ownership structure of the mine means that 90% of the company is located in 'secrecy jurisdictions'. Mopani is '90% owned by a company registered in the British Virgin Islands, which in turn is majority owned by Glencore Finance, registered in Bermuda'.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, through the transfer of ownership of profitable assets to international subsidiaries, multinational corporations can capitalise on their geographical and spatial flexibility and mobility.<sup>53</sup>

The specific section of audio included within *Relocation (FPIC)* is the voice of Mick Davis, a British politician and former South African businessman and then CEO of Xstrata, to a question from a representative of MultiWatch — an organisation which aims to raise awareness about the human rights violations of Swiss multinationals — regarding Xstrata's involvement with another mining company, Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI) in the Philippines. SMI are a contractor of the Philippine Government and, as of 2012, Xstrata held a majority share of 62.5% in the company.<sup>54</sup> The involvement of the government in the company came about through the signing of a Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement. The catalyst for the agreement was the development of the Tampakan Copper-Gold





FIG. 1.5. Still from *Relocation (FPIC)*, dir. by Thomas Kneubühler (Canada, 2014).

Project, which aimed to excavate the Tampakan copper-gold deposit, one of the largest undeveloped copper-gold deposits in the world, located in the south of the island of Mindanao. The MultiWatch representative at the Xstrata shareholder meeting questions the impact the TGCP would have on five ancestral domains of the Indigenous Bla'an people. Two separate reports from 2007 and 2008 highlighted that levels of pollution in the area could be significantly increased by the mining operation.<sup>55</sup> The 2008 report ultimately recommended 'that mining in the area be banned, considering the risk of pollution, erosion, siltation, and continuing devastating flash floods and landslides'.<sup>56</sup> In addition, reports from 2013 and 2014 highlighted that three 'extra-judicial killings' were 'concentrated in areas where national and transnational companies have become involved in conflicts over land and natural resources'.<sup>57</sup> These killings, carried out by military or para-military groups, evidence the interconnections between state power and extractive capital in the expansion of TGCP. In addition, the 2014 report also stated that:

All the victims are families and relatives of Daguil Capion, the Bla'an chief entrusted with defending the ancestral lands, particularly against the entry of the Tampakan mining project. Daguil Capion has been wrongfully tagged as a communist insurgent by the military.

As the report continues, it is precisely through such a discourse of illegitimacy — labelling community rights activists as 'insurgents', 'bandits' or 'criminals' — 'that the state justifies the arrests and attacks on the community'.<sup>58</sup>

The bracketed 'FPIC' in the film's title refers to Section 7, point C in the Philippines Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997.<sup>59</sup> 'FPIC' stands for 'free, prior and informed consent', which must be obtained by a party before any relocation of an Indigenous group is enacted. Section 7, point C, 'Right to Stay in the Territories',

provides 'the right to stay in the territory and not to be removed therefrom. No Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples will be relocated without their free and prior informed consent, nor through any means other than eminent domain'.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the FPIC clause aims to prevent any attempts to coerce or misinform Indigenous populations when they are considering relocation offers. However, as the 2014 report states, Xstrata have failed to secure FPIC. They have also regularly engaged in activities that attempted to divide the Bla'an peoples, including offers of misleading social development projects and scholarships, as well as the forced installation of corrupt Indigenous leaders.<sup>61</sup> As of August 2023, the TGCP had still not begun commercial operations; however, SMI are still pushing for this to begin in late 2026.<sup>62</sup>

Within *Relocation (FPIC)*, the small Xstrata office in Zug is centrally framed, presenting three lit floors of the building. Several workers can be seen moving around this clinical corporate space, as Davis's words repeat twice during the forty-one-second duration: 'we have not commenced any relocation activities and will not do so unless we have received the free, prior and informed consent of the affected Indigenous people'. Davis's words remain somewhat detached: a vacuous corporate-speak structures his intonation and, additionally, he speaks of the impact on a community far away from this offshored space. It is arguable that *Relocation (FPIC)* functions as an inverted diptych of *Forward Looking Statements*, within which we are offered a voiceover that speaks directly to the potential transformation of the material space through which the camera moves. Within *Relocation (FPIC)*, the camera presents a space at a remove from the location being described. However, this space is still intimately connected through the potential social, economic, and geographic violence that could be inflicted on the Tampakan region by the extractive capital that flows through Xstrata's offices.

Within *Relocation (FPIC)* the camera remains static, offering a degree of stability and fixity to the space where Xstrata-Glencore have their offices. This sense of fixity offered by the camera of course belies the logistical transience that structures such processes. Being 'on the move' is a prerequisite for offshoring practices — whilst one national or sub-national zone may tighten regulation, another will open up elsewhere to take its place. As Keller Easterling suggests, within such infrastructural spaces:

Buildings are often no longer singularly crafted enclosures, uniquely imagined by an architect, but reproducible products [...] they constitute an infrastructural technology with elaborate routines and schedules for organizing consumption. Ironically, the more rationalized these spatial products become the better suited they are to irrational fictions.<sup>63</sup>

Here, Easterling highlights the fact that such spaces take on a purely infrastructural role, aiding in the logistification of finance capital's movements. In addition, the reproducibility of such clinical corporate spaces has, for her, a rationalising logic that masks the irrational and extraterritorial financial exploitations that they facilitate.

Through the visual-aural juxtaposition found within *Relocation (FPIC)*, an interesting spatial dialectic is set up that explores tensions between socio-economic

constructions of 'mobility' and 'fixity' under late capitalism's relentless globalisation. Several theorists have highlighted how, by the turn of the millennium, globalisation had become a totalising — and, by extension, opaque — theoretical concept.<sup>64</sup> In *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*, Zygmunt Bauman aims to undermine the apperception of 'unity' within late capitalism's relentless globalisation. As Winnie Lem and Pauline Gardiner Barber have suggested, for Bauman:

A more profound understanding of the global forces at work in contemporary capitalism, in its varying manifestations, requires a consideration of the forces that produce mobility as well as immobility... and categories of people who remain tied to particular locations.<sup>65</sup>

For him, one of the central tensions centres on the notion of 'space/time compression', a discursive metaphor that 'encapsulates the ongoing multifaceted transformation of the parameters of the human condition'.<sup>66</sup> However, through his deconstructive socio-economic analysis, Bauman aims to pick apart this notion:

Once the social causes and outcomes of that compression are looked into, it will become evident that the globalising processes lack the commonly assumed unity of effects. The uses of time and space are sharply differentiated as well as differentiating. Globalisation divides as much as it unites; it divides as it unites.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, whilst certain socio-economic forces 'take on planetary dimensions', through intensive logistification and financialisation, the opposite — fixation and localisation of certain populations — also occurs, and is in fact a structural necessity for the alternative's growth. As Bauman states, 'what appears as globalisation for some means localisation for others; signalling a new freedom for some, upon many others it descends as an uninvited and cruel fate'.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, in the age of globalisation, mobility becomes the dominant 'stratifying factor'. Thus, whilst we are experiencing the increasing 'planetary dimensions' of trade, finance and logistics, simultaneously, 'a "localising", space-fixing process is set in motion'. For Bauman, this 'progressive spatial segregation, separation and exclusion' is due to 'the progressive breakdown in communication between the increasingly global and extraterritorial elites and the even more 'localised' rest'.<sup>69</sup> As the centres of 'meaning and value production' become increasingly 'extraterritorial', localised constraints, and populations, become increasingly unimportant.

However, by returning to Harvey, we still see that immobility and fixity is a crucial component of capital's geographical expansion. As touched upon earlier, late capitalism's explosive expansions are primarily due to its 'insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring'.<sup>70</sup> For Harvey, this is the basic principle for his conception of the 'spatial fix': whilst needing to be highly mobile, at particular points in time capital also needs to be fixed and secured in space. This contradictory operation is thus another cause of the divisions between mobility and fixity mapped out above. As Harvey continues to suggest:

Capitalism has to fix space (in immovable structures of transport and communication nets, as well as in built environments of factories, roads, houses,

water supplies, and other physical infrastructures) in order to overcome space (achieve a liberty of movement through low transport and communication costs).<sup>71</sup>

The specificities of such fixings rest upon whether capital searches 'for markets, fresh labor powers [or] resources (raw materials)'.<sup>72</sup>

This tension between fixity and mobility is something that is powerfully rendered within *Relocation (FPIC)*. The location of the office in Zug is a strategic logistical site for Xstrata, it is a use of space that is built around a desire for financial mobility. It is a perfect encapsulation of a site used by the 'global and extraterritorial' elite. Directly opposed to such elitist logics of mobility and extraterritoriality are, of course, the impacted communities in the Tampakan region who, by desire or necessity, remain firmly fixed to the site of proposed exploitation — their ancestral lands. Within *Relocation (FPIC)*, these two sites are directly juxtaposed. Visually, we are presented with a clinical corporate site that encapsulates extractive capital's mobility, whilst the audio track speaks of a deep locality that is increasingly violated by capital's global movements. When movement is undesired or impossible, flexibility and mobility are increasingly weaponised by the extractive industries. Thus, the cognitive map fashioned by Kneubühler highlights the process of stratification built around zones of financial exception and mobility. Across both these works, Kneubühler constantly focuses on issues of globality-locality and mobility-fixity, deploying different aesthetic techniques to emphasise the exploitative work of these multinational organisations.

Both video works, as well as the *Land Claim* project more broadly, make palpable the material connections between seemingly disconnected sites and spaces. Once again, we are drawn back to the dialectical model offered by Jameson's cognitive mapping, and its emphasis on different scalar and spatial zones of capital's circulatory movement. Moreover, and drawing us back to Fuller and Weizman's 'investigative' model of the aesthetic, Kneubühler's project takes up the visual as a powerful dialectical mode of both spatial sensing and sense-making. These material sites are not blankly rendered, instead they are riven through with the deep injustices and violence that structure, on the one hand, their existence, and on the other, their potential destruction. Such forms of violence, which frequently operate in geographically detached and obfuscated ways, are brought into close and intimate relation with the sites and communities that they will potentially affect. Thus, the spatio-political aesthetic developed by Kneubühler is heavily invested in modes of aesthetic sensing, producing a visually legible model of these violent networks of power. Now let us turn to the next case study of this chapter, Ursula Biemann's *Black Sea Files*, a work that also seeks to connect global and local spatial injustices.

### Ursula Biemann's *Black Sea Files*

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline extends from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli oil field in the Caspian Sea to Ceyhan, a port city on the south-eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey. The pipeline is 1,099 miles long and carries crude oil out from the land-locked Caspian Sea. The line also travels through Georgia, with a terminal in Tbilisi. The primary shareholders in the project are British Petroleum (BP) and Azerbaijan BTC (AzBTC). The smaller-stake shareholders included Chevron, Statoil, and Total. The Azerbaijan section was constructed by the Greek company Consolidated Contractors International, Georgia's section was a joint venture between France's Spie Capag and Britain's Petrofac International, whilst Turkey's section was constructed by the Turkish crude oil/natural gas trading company BOTAŞ Petroleum Pipeline Corporation.

The collective funding for the project was a mix of private finance and what BP CEO Sir John Browne called 'free public money'.<sup>73</sup> As Daphne Eviatar suggested back in 2003, 'regional conflicts and uncertain production make the \$3.5 billion pipeline so risky that the oil executives who devised the venture don't want to pay for it — and the commercial banks they normally deal with don't want to lend them the money'.<sup>74</sup> These multinationals looked to the US government for financial assistance. The Bush administration's involvement in oil investment was well publicised, with several figures previously holding key positions in major oil companies (Vice President Dick Cheney was chief executive of Haliburton, Commerce Secretary Donald Evans had investments in oil and gas exploration company Tom Brown Inc., and National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice was a director at Chevron). The saturation of the administration by oil connections led to an energy policy programme built around investment into foreign private oil.<sup>75</sup> Funds for investments came from two wholly owned federal government corporations, the Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im) and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). Whilst the investment was justified through neoliberal discourses of 'trade boosts' and job creation — alongside the need to 'reduce dependence on OPEC oil producers in the Middle East, create a secure supply of oil to Israel, and begin to end dependence on Russian and Iranian oil transportation networks from the Caspian region' — the administration's investment tactics ultimately enriched only a select few oil companies.<sup>76</sup>

This is the starting-point for Ursula Biemann's *Black Sea Files*, a film which explores the socio-geographical recomposition of the territories carved apart by the creation of this subterranean pipeline and the connections to national and supranational governance. Biemann, a multidisciplinary artist and researcher, has always been concerned with developing an aesthetic praxis that explores the ecological, sociological, and environmental impacts of natural resource extraction. For Biemann, a central concern of such a praxis is to understand the large-scale power relations and investments — both national and supranational — embedded within such extraction projects. For example, as she states in the opening of *Black Sea Files*:

These records are about the new Caspian oil and the deep incision made through the Caucasus to secure the precious fluid for the West. They speak

of power that no longer resides in weapon technology but in the possession of vital resources or the ability to procure them. Building the oil pipeline means more than the invisible transfer of fluid, it is an economic project with military objectives.

Consequently, *Black Sea Files* is invested in mapping the power relations at play within new zones of oil extraction, focusing particularly on the tight imbrication of global-financial and national-governmental interests. Alongside this attempt to map the deeply interconnected financial and governmental machinations, Biemann also attempts to render visible the micro-impacts upon a range of communities along the pipeline. This imperative is signalled within Biemann's short summary of the work, where she suggests that:

The video sheds light on a multitude of secondary sceneries. Oil workers, farmers, refugees and prostitutes who live along the pipeline come into profile and contribute to a wider human geography that displaces the singular and powerful signifying practices of oil corporations and oil politicians.<sup>77</sup>

This oscillation between micro and macro spatial-geographical injustices becomes a structuring concern of *Black Sea Files*. Examining the spatio-political aesthetic that Biemann utilises to cognitively map such a 'hidden matrix of [...] political space', moving between the micro and the macro, will be the central focus of this section. Here, much like in *Land Claim*, there is a strong emphasis on cultivating an aesthetic of cognitive mapping that aims at both spatial sensing and sense-making.

The film is built around a series of nine field recordings, each marked as a separate 'file'. Each file — ranging in length from approximately fifty seconds to five minutes — jumps to a different location impacted by the creation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline: Baku, Azerbaijan; Zeytinburnu, Turkey; Tsalka, Georgia; Ankara, Turkey; Yevlakh, Azerbaijan; Trabzon, Turkey; Yumurталık, Turkey; and Kurtkulagi, Turkey. Across this range of locations, Biemann attempts to understand both the macro and micro economic, social, and political impacts of the pipeline. Alongside the constantly shifting focus on different socio-political stakeholders in the pipeline's construction — displaced Kurds, migrant workers from Columbia, Azerbaijani farmers, Turkish sex workers — Biemann also moves between different modes of non-fiction address, from found-footage news reportage to ethnographic documentation, which aids her ability to shift between different scales of impact.

'File 1', filmed at the Baku oil extraction zone in Azerbaijan, opens with a close-up shot of a slew of oil passing the camera, with the 'field note' summary overlaid. Next, we are presented with a split screen image of several pump jacks extracting oil. Biemann's voiceover states:

The place is literally soaked in oil, for over one hundred years the earth has been pierced down to the fossil fuel. First by the Europeans, then the Soviets and now by a transnational consortium. Powers have changed, but the problem remains of how to pump the Caspian crude to the west.

As the image on the right of the screen remains focused upon a solitary pump jack, the images on the left begin to depict a variety of labourers working on the site.

This thematic split — with images alternatively rendering the technological and



FIGS. 1.6 and 1.7. Stills from *Black Sea Files*, dir. by Ursula Biemann (Switzerland, 2005).

industrial infrastructure of the mining site and the human labour that supports it — remains in place for the duration of the file's three-minute and twenty-six-second length. After a brief fade to black roughly half way through the file, we are presented with a series of shots that depict the workers' downtime, chatting and playing football. Over these images, Biemann asks:

What will it take to write the hidden matrix of this political space? When transnational relations increasingly take place in the invisibility of electronic spaces, off-road terrains, and classified zones. And when international media only features political elites and large economic stakes in the region, offering little insight into local textures.

As these shots of the labourers' recreational activities on the site continue to unfold, Biemann introduces several scrolling, and often overlapping, passages of text across the screen, rendered in a large bright yellow font, each of which presents a particular news headline, evidence, perhaps, of this mediated 'macro political-economic' focus: '1992 - Five Memoranda signed by SOCAR and Foreign Oil Companies for joint infrastructure: export pipeline, offshore pipeline, onshore processing facilities, offshore marine fleet and onshore supply base'; '1993 - Foreign Oil Companies Amoco, BP, Statoil, Pennzoil, McDermott, Ramco, Turkish Petroleum and Unocal sign contract'; '1994 - \$7.14 B Oil contract signed by FOCs and leaders from UK, Norway, Saudi Arabia, US, Turkey and Russia'; '1994 — SOCAR and Foreign Oil

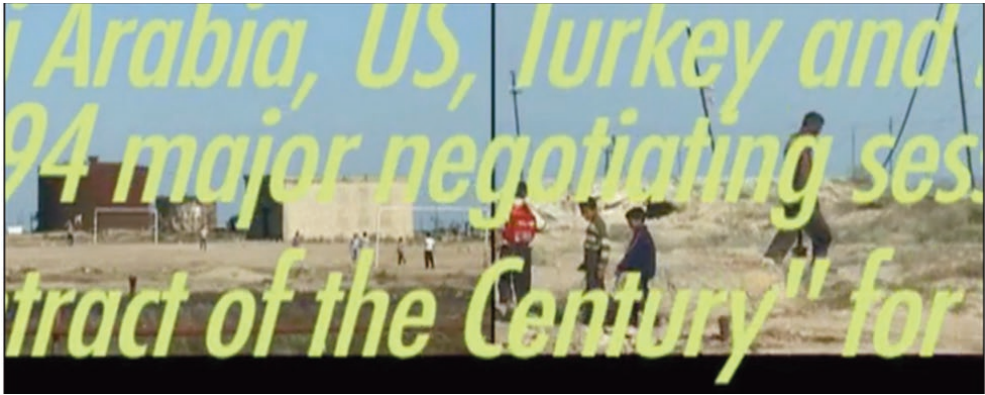


FIG. 1.8. Still from *Black Sea Files*, dir. by Biemann (Switzerland, 2005).

Companies sign ‘Contract of the Century’ for the offshore fields’; ‘1994 — major negotiating sessions with FOCs in Baku and Istanbul’.

Both the speed of the text and its overlapping structure make it often illegible, passing by as a slew of multinational and governmental legislative news — much like the crude oil that rushed past the screen earlier in the segment. This visual-textual juxtaposition serves to reinforce Biemann’s argument that the international media’s focus upon the macro politics of oil extraction mask ‘local textures’. Indeed, Biemann reinforces this point after the text has finished scrolling, suggesting that ‘the pushing of resources on a macro level is bound to be accompanied by a myriad of human trajectories on the ground’. Thus, throughout this sequence, Biemann not only juxtaposes the on-site relationships between workers and machines, labour, and infrastructure but also begins to unpack how the abstracted macro politics of the pipeline infrastructure masks over local textures and micro politics. For her, such ‘local textures’ must be made visible and directly connectable to these larger supranational operations. The split screen is a constant presence throughout the film. It is my contention that such an aesthetic strategy allows Biemann to create several of these oscillatory juxtapositions, all of which are primarily concerned with bridging the gap between larger homogenised forms of financial and governmental power and their impact upon the myriad of local sites, spaces, and communities along the route of the pipeline.

To unpack more fully the strategy deployed by Biemann, it is productive to place it in dialogue with German filmmaker and theorist Harun Farocki’s notion of ‘soft montage’. I believe that when we frame Biemann’s split screen aesthetic through the lens of such a ‘soft montage’ praxis, we can begin to more concretely comprehend her aesthetic-political approach to cognitive mapping. The first serious elucidation of the term is found in *Speaking About Godard*, a dialogue between Farocki and Kaja Silverman centring on Godard’s *œuvre*. The pair discuss Godard’s 1975 film *Numéro deux* [Number Two], which focuses on ‘the domestic life of three generations of a proletarian family living in a social housing apartment’. Most of the film’s sequences were shot on video and then reshot from video monitors in 35mm. Throughout the



film, Godard often has two monitors on screen, showing separate video images. As Farocki suggests, this 'doubling' of the image is likely a result of Godard's shift from film to video:

Video editing is usually done while sitting in front of two monitors. One monitor shows the already edited material, and the other monitor raw material, which the videomaker may or may not add to the work-in-progress. He or she becomes accustomed to thinking of two images at the same time, rather than sequentially.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, for Farocki, Godard's use of dual screens is representative of a wider shift in his approach to image construction and editing practice, from the sequential to the simultaneous. It is this shift that provides the foundation for the development of the 'soft montage'.

As Nora M. Alter suggests, soft montage 'comprises a general relatedness of images, rather than a strict equation of opposition produced by a linear montage of sharp cuts [...] soft montage operates according to a logic of difference'.<sup>79</sup> Thus, for Alter, the technique of soft montage is structured around the creation of 'relations' and 'differences' rather than the dialectical oppositions of sequential cinematic montage. Three years prior to this engagement with Godard's work, Farocki had begun to embrace a similar strategy of image construction in his own work. In *Interface* (1995), Farocki reflected on his own transition from film to video. The film begins with dual overlapping images of a sheet of paper and a video monitor. The voiceover states, 'I can hardly write a word these days if there isn't an image on the screen at the same time. Actually, on both screens'. Farocki then appears on screen, presenting his video editing station and explaining how it has restructured



FIG. 1.9. Still from *Interface*, dir. by Harun Farocki (Germany, 1995).

his editing process. Next, we are presented with another set of dual overlapping images of two video monitors. The image in the top left of the frame is duplicated on the video screen in the bottom left, which Farocki partially masks with his hands, further nesting frames within frames.

The voiceover states that 'Paul Cozighian shot this footage in Bucharest, on December 21st 1989, shortly before the revolution began'. Across both images, the camera pans up from the video set and focuses on the scene outside the room, as crowds of protestors flood past. In the bottom right image, Farocki follows the pan of the camera with his hands. Farocki's voiceover suggests:

With his camera he established a connection between the TV set and the street [...] Cozighian moved his camera from the TV screen to the window. He juxtaposed the official image with the street image: image with counter-image. It was now time to abandon the TV set and go into the streets.

Thus, for Farocki, the simple juxtaposition and nesting of images that Cozighian undertook with his pan from the television set to the window functioned as a potent 'soft montage' between the mediated coverage of the Romanian revolution and the 'local texture' of events immediately outside his domestic space. Clearly, this sequence from *Interface* ties back to the previous analysis of Biemann's *Black Sea Files*. Within both, the strategy of the soft montaging — created by image nesting and simultaneous presentation — affords a space to juxtapose the traditionally mediated and mediated macro politics with the impacts and local textures 'on the streets' or 'in the fields'. Farocki, reflecting on his soft montage praxis some fourteen years later, in a 2009 article entitled 'Cross Influence/Soft Montage', suggests:

There is a succession as well as simultaneity in a double project, the relationship of an image to the one that follows as well as the one beside it; a relationship to the preceding as well as to the concurrent one. Imagine three double bonds jumping back and forth between the six carbon atoms of a benzene ring; I envisage the same ambiguity in the relationship of an element in an image track to the one succeeding or accompanying it.<sup>80</sup>

Another key example of how Biemann develops her own oscillatory montage strategy — with a specific emphasis on trying to map cognitively the spatial machinations of multinational resource extraction — can be found within 'File 5', which focuses on a range of farming communities in rural Azerbaijan. Within the first pair of images we are presented with a slow tracking close-up on a map that shows the pipeline's route through Azerbaijan (left) and a portrait of an Azerbaijani farmer and his daughters (right).

Over this pair of juxtaposed images, Biemann's voiceover states:

It seemed so easy to draw a long red line on a map, but contrary to the corporate fantasy, the space was not void. Twenty thousand farmers along the trajectory had to yield their land. But eventually the oil company gained the right of way for the pipeline across all three territories.

The image on the right then cuts to a woman cleaning a table in an outhouse, the image on the left continues to track along the map. The voiceover continues: 'they launched a campaign that would define the land use politics for the corridor,



FIG. 1.10. Still from *Black Sea Files*, dir. by Biemann (Switzerland, 2005).

which is as much governed by the production, dissemination, and withholding of knowledge, as it is by direct interventions in national legislations'. Next, both images present slightly different framings of the same woman from the previous shot, one with her standing next to her daughter and the other slightly blurred. She states, 'I don't know exactly how much land we had to give for the pipeline. My husband knows'. Biemann then asks her what the family have done with the money they have received from BP. The woman replies that they have bought a car and started work on a house, but the money ran out before this project could be completed.

Within this sequence, Biemann's soft montage constructs a juxtaposition between what Henri Lefebvre would term the 'conceived space' of the pipeline (representations, renderings, and mappings of space by dominant social groups, such as logistical engineers who determine routes and distributive networks for natural resource extraction) and its 'lived' and 'perceived' spatial formations and impacts (both of which arise from the daily inhabitation, and material engagement with, a particular socio-spatial formation, in this case the micro 'local textures' that arise from the communities living and working on the land). The images of cartographic mapping become representative of BP and AzBTC's conceived 'corporate fantasy', which aimed to reimagine and restructure social space and land-use politics along the route of the pipeline through the 'production, dissemination, and withholding of knowledge'. Simultaneously, we witness the impacts that such conceived spatial formations have upon the communities living along the pipeline, forced to yield their land through pressure tactics and coercion. Indeed, the 'ease' of mapping the pipeline's route was ultimately matched by the logistical 'ease' with which these multinationals forced through the yielding of land by communities living along the pipeline's path. Thus, the macro and micro spatio-politics of multinational resource extraction are cognitively mapped by Biemann here, rendering the localised impacts of large-scale transnational exploitations. Ultimately, this juxtaposition leads Biemann to suggest, 'what is the farmers imaginary of this same space? Those who have inhabited and laboured the land for generations, what is their agency in this moment of contact with transnational interests?'

The next sequence of the film further develops this oscillatory strategy of cognitive mapping. The image on the left presents two pairs of legs seemingly 'standing atop' a superimposed image that presents an animated cross section of the pipeline in full flow. The image on the right presents another portrait of a farming family. A passage of text then moves across both images, which reads: 'the transcaucasian post-kolkhoz subterranean energy tunnel sucks out the black fluid from Caspian reservoirs and connects it to a distant elsewhere. Silently. Invisibly. Highspeed'. As this text scrolls, the top left image cuts to a travelling shot that depicts a rural landscape. The image on the right then cuts to another farmer who holds various images of the pipeline's proposed route through his land. Next, this farmer is interviewed and states: 'I don't know the exact sum they will pay, it isn't mentioned in the contract. There was no space for negotiation, they had fixed the price on their own'. The image on the right then cuts to a close up of the same land yield proposals, and the farmer suggests: 'the first time they came, the proposal was for a much wider land strip. The second time it was reduced to 8 meters. The security area is much less now'. Here, Biemann confronts how the coercion of local communities along the pipeline is structured around a 'masking' or 'making invisible' of oil infrastructure itself. The second part of the sequence highlights how a key strategy of coercion by BP and AzBTC was to marginally reduce the geographical size of their proposed land yield requests. Within the first part of the sequence, Biemann emphasises how the completed pipeline will ultimately function as a largely invisible transportation infrastructure, moving oil 'Silently. Invisibly. Highspeed' — quite literally under the feet of the communities it has irrevocably impacted.

Biemann argues that through such techniques of abstraction and invisibility 'BTC gained the right-of-way for the pipeline across all three territories. It gives BP effective governing power over a strip of land 750km long. Where the company may override all national, environmental, social, and human rights laws for the next forty years'. Thus, whilst the logistical infrastructures of the oil pipeline may ultimately remain physically invisible, the myriad governmental powers ceded to BP and AzBTC through their land grabs have given them tangible and legal control of this space. Consequently, through the process of soft montage, Biemann attempts to bridge the gap between the tangible and intangible structures of spatial dominance and governance fostered by pipeline's planning, logistics, and infrastructure.

Biemann also interrogates issues of visibility and invisibility surrounding the pipeline's structures of power within the film's previous section, 'File 4'. Here, she is primarily concerned with understanding the ways in which the involved multinationals have constructed their own mediated 'image regimes'. Over images that depict both Biemann recording her narration and 3D renderings of the planned pipeline, the voiceover suggests:

It sounds odd, but it's risky to simply record a pipeline. Oil companies run a severe image regime. During construction, image making is prohibited; later it will be invisible anyway. What is the meaning of this tube in the hidden corporate imaginary of this space? What function does it have in their own secret bordering system of the Caucasus?



FIG. 1.II. Still from *Black Sea Files*, dir. by Biemann (Switzerland, 2005).

As this section of voiceover ends, text scrolls across both images: 'Local bypass through network design', 'Seamless connection between resources and premium consumers', 'Logistics based on spatial division', 'Silent and invisible transfer of energy', 'Linking and delinking', 'Space of flow'.

Next, we are presented with images that show Biemann shooting a section of the pipeline under construction. The voiceover states that to generate images of oil infrastructures:

Is not an aesthetic project, it is an undercover mission. The challenge is to go undetected, probing for hidden, secret and restricted knowledge. Are these cognitive methods any different from the ones used by geologists, anthropologists, or secret intelligence agents?

Next, we are offered a pair of images where Biemann's camera traverses the land yielded to the pipeline. Over these images, the voiceover states 'they all probe different sorts of sediments and plots that could give meaning to this space'. The way Biemann's camera moves across this space links us back to the stratigraphic impulse found within Kneubühler's *Forward Looking Statements*. Moreover, in her voiceover, Biemann subsumes the aesthetic into a broader project of 'undercover' investigation. Such an approach once again links us back to Fuller and Weizman's call for an operationalisation of the aesthetic as an investigative modality, a praxis of spatial sensing and sense-making.

Consequently, a comparable mode of spatial sensing and sense-making is in operation here, drawing us back once again to the dialectical synthesis of Jameson's cognitive mapping. Indeed, this material traversal of the landscape sits in marked contrast to the preceding 3D renderings and cartographic projections of these same spaces. The smooth corporate gloss of the latter's imagery is continually undermined and broken down by Biemann's intense focus upon the material 'local textures', both social and topographic. Through the oscillatory strategies adopted by Biemann — which shuttle between the macro and micro impacts — she also seems to fold her images together, opening a space for new configurations and understandings of how natural resource extraction functions at several socio-



FIG. 1.12. Still from *Black Sea Files*, dir. by Biemann (Switzerland, 2005).

economic and political levels. As Alter suggests later:

The segments are meant to be taken together, as a succession and simultaneous with one another. This play of images constructs temporal as well as spatial relationships [...] each concurrent image no more significant than the one beside it, the recto always dependent on the verso.<sup>81</sup>

To conclude, let us return to one of the questions that Biemann poses at the opening of *Black Sea Files*: ‘what will it take to write the hidden matrix of this political space?’ I would contend that Biemann — through the aesthetic praxis of soft montage — fashions the ‘spatial relationships’ that Alter sees as key, precisely as a method that tries to expose the hidden matrix of the pipeline’s logistical and infrastructural space. Spatial operations at the macro level are always intimately wedded to their micro-impacts. Through an aesthetic of Farockian soft montaging, Biemann fashions powerful connections between these different scales of exploitation and violence. Such a strategy ultimately aims to bridge the gap between larger homogenised forms of financial and governmental power and their impact upon the myriad ‘local textures’ and communities along the route of the pipeline. Through the dialectical mode of address in *Black Sea Files*, the work’s spatio-political aesthetic emerges as a powerful tool for political contestation in a moment where the material world is riven through with contesting formations of power that are typically undetectable or obfuscated. The visual-aesthetic organisation of the work becomes, once again, a critical tool within its spatial investigation. Thus, in a manner akin to Kneubühler’s work, *Black Sea Files* is continually concerned with the ways in which spatial violence operates at different scales. The juxtaposition of these different scales of violence is where these works’ affective and effective power comes from. Once more, we are drawn back to the dialectical synthesis of Jameson’s cognitive map.

### Allan Sekula's *Fish Story* and Allan Sekula and Noël Burch's *The Forgotten Space*

The two case studies examined thus far in this chapter have focused on the spatio-politics of resource extraction, arguably one of the more tangible and visible forms of contemporary capitalism's exploitations. Consequently, the final pair of case studies to be examined will focus on a less immediately visible form of late capitalism's spatial machinations, global trade logistics. Firstly, however, how do we define the concept of logistics, and, moreover, how is it wedded to — and structured by — the logics of late capitalism? For Jesse LeCavalier, logistics 'concerns the entire life of a product and works to flatten, connect, smooth, and lubricate as it organizes material in both space and time'.<sup>82</sup> In a certain sense, the increasing importance of logistics is deeply imbricated with global capital's contradictory search for spatial fixes (examined in some detail above, through the lens of Harvey's conceptualisation). As new spaces, markets, and labour pools are exploited globally, the supply chains that connect these geographically fragmented sites rely on (typically ruthless) strategies of logistical streamlining to maximise profitability. As LeCavalier suggests, 'rather than encouraging congestion, logistics pursues unencumbered movement. Rather than seeking density, logistics aspires to coverage. It is a horizontalizing and externalizing industry, not a vertical and integrating one'.<sup>83</sup> For Deborah Cowen, the rise of logistics is 'a highly specialized form of spatial calculation [that] has been crucial but overlooked in the process of time-space compression that has remade geographies of capitalist production and distribution at a global scale'.<sup>84</sup> Here, Cowen invokes Harvey's notion of 'time-space compression' — the necessary condensing or eliding of spatial and temporal distance by late capitalism's globalisation and the simultaneous reduction in the turnover time of capital.

The rise of logistics as a structuring component of global trade under late capitalism is not only ruthless but structurally violent. Cowen is concerned with unpacking 'how the seemingly banal and technocratic management of the movement of stuff through space has become a driving force of war and trade [...] examin[ing] [...] the military art of moving stuff'.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Cowen traces the militaristic origins of logistics, arguing that it was 'adopted into the corporate world of management in the wake of World War II'. Within the epoch of late capitalism, 'corporate and military logistics are increasingly entangled; this is a matter of not only military forces clearing the way for corporate trade but corporations actively supporting militaries as well'. Whilst the art and tactics of logistics was historically a militaristic enterprise, contemporary capitalism's desire to connect ever-more disparate spatial fixes meant that 'military logisticians' were increasingly employed in the commercial logistics sector.<sup>86</sup> This deep imbrication of the militaristic and commercial under late capitalism extends from logistics' historical military imperative to not only 'circulate stuff' but 'sustain life... [by] fuelling the battlefield'. Thus, the extreme and often violent securitisation of logistics space results chiefly from the fact that:

Threats to circulation are treated not only as criminal acts but as profound threats to the *life* of trade [...]. Those on the outside of the system, who aim to

contest its flows, face the raw force of rough trade without recourse to normal laws and protections.<sup>87</sup>

Logistics infrastructures are not only violent, they largely go unseen. Whilst the infrastructure of resource extraction examined above, either planned or enacted, leave material scars upon the landscape (both geographical and social), the infrastructure of logistics operates within what Toscano terms an 'increasingly Taylorized and militarized "forgotten space"'.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the logistical frequently operates in hidden ways, disguising its operations and movements. It operates within and across material spaces that exist at the peripheries and margins of different regimes of control and governance. Consequently, it becomes apparent that the smooth and fluid functioning of logistics infrastructure is crucial for the continued expansion of its own supranational governance and violence.

Often the ocean is perceived as the ultimate peripheral and hidden space. As Brett Story suggests:

The sea ('and its ancient terribleness') is the forgotten space par excellence of our age; that space with which it is no longer possible to relate, except by a few as yet another commodified vista during annual seaside vacations, or for even fewer, traded on as value-added to beachside luxury real estate.<sup>89</sup>

Philip E. Steinberg makes a similar claim about the imaginative 'cognitive blankness' that surrounds ocean space, suggesting, 'under capitalism, the sea is idealised as a denatured and seemingly immaterial surface of latitude-longitude coordinates'.<sup>90</sup> Both these scholars rearticulate, either explicitly or implicitly, Deleuze and Guattari's 1987 claim that the sea had become the 'smooth space par excellence'.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, the ever-increasing movement of commodities across maritime space ('95 percent of U.S.-bound global trade moves through ports and more than 11 million containers enter') is similarly abstracted: 'still remote is the maritime movement of commodity capitalism; the ocean's role in the concrete movement of goods and the abstracted circulation of capital, displaced in our imagination of the ocean by an intractable, cognitive blankness'.<sup>92</sup> Thus, in particular ways, the ocean — now dominated by the movements of global trade — seems to completely resist constructions of territory or national governance.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the obfuscation of ocean space under late capitalism, we have also witnessed the increasing invisibility of the commodities that move across its network of supply chains, chiefly through the process of containerisation. Nested within the wider rise of the global logistics infrastructure, containerisation also had militaristic roots, experimented with during the Second World War to reduce the friction involved in transporting military supplies. The efficiency of this militaristic system soon attracted the logisticians of global commodity trading. Indeed, as several scholars have noted, one central feature of logistics 'is the drive to maximise the capacities of existing infrastructures [...] containerisation is an emergent global system which "piggy-backs" on top of existing infrastructures'.<sup>94</sup> Thus, global trade logistics' appropriation of existing infrastructure is intimately related to the abstraction of the commodities it transports; funnelling commodities through pre-established supply networks helps to mask their movements, "smoothing"



the interfaces between them, and [...] reorganising material flow'.<sup>95</sup> Under late capitalism, containerisation has become a crucial tool to 'flatten, connect, smooth, and lubricate' global trade networks.

Attempting to render visible the functioning of an ever-logistified and containerised maritime economy was a central preoccupation of photographer, filmmaker, and theorist Allan Sekula. His 1995 exhibition and photo-essay project *Fish Story* sought to visualise the functioning of the maritime economy across a geographically diverse set of spaces. However, from the outset of this photo-essay, Sekula readily acknowledged the representational challenges posed by such 'flattened' and 'smooth' spaces. Within the essay 'Dismal Science Part I', Sekula poses the question, 'why would anyone be foolish enough to argue today that the world economy might be intelligently viewed from the deck of a ship?' Elsewhere, Sekula writes, 'use values slide by in the channel [...] the more regularised, literally containerised, the movement of goods in harbours, that is, the more rationalised and automated, the more the harbour comes to resemble the stock market'.<sup>96</sup> Thus, for Sekula, the inherent abstractions of finance capital's machinations are increasingly reflected in the sequestered infrastructures of containerisation. How does Sekula seek to tackle this 'crisis of representation'? The bulk of the photographs contained within the collection seek to capture the materialities of human labour expended in support of such global trade networks. Sekula moves between a variety of geographically disparate locales, visualising a wide range of labour activities: we shift from a welder working on a fast combat support ship for the US Navy in San Diego, California, to welders working in a privatised section of the former Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, Poland, to a man salvaging bricks from a demolished waterfront warehouse in Rotterdam, Holland.

Sekula's materialist rendering of human labour moves between activities that are alternatively state-funded, privatised, and 'illicit'. In the early 1990s, Sekula had developed his concept of a photographic 'critical realism'. As Bill Roberts notes, Sekula's critical realism sought to fight against 'postmodern "hyperreality"' and instead insisted upon 'the historical, social and institutional inscription of photographic meaning'. For Roberts, this meant Sekula desired not only to bring home to 'his audience some of the myriad local effects of global capitalism, but to relate his necessarily incomplete impressions of the totality dialectically [...] this means to recognise the inherent contradictions of a complex and continuously changing world-system'.<sup>97</sup> Thus, through the myriad of 'local effects' and labour forms captured by Sekula's camera — moving between different geographical, sovereign, economic, and juridical frames — we come to recognise the 'social contradictions' and 'economic disparities' at the heart of the operative logics of logistics infrastructure.

The emphasis that Sekula's critical realism places on rendering the 'local effects' of a structurally 'global' system draws us back to Biemann's micro-macro praxis of soft montage and Kneubühler's audio-visual dialectic, both of which, I've argued, can be read through Jameson's theory of cognitive mapping. Toscano and Kinkle frame this in different, yet relatable, terms when they suggest that 'Sekula's photographs



FIG. 1.13. Image from *Fish Story*, photographed by Allan Sekula (Germany, 1995).

resist, with their attention to the slowness and materiality of labour at sea, the immaterialization of global capitalism into a smooth space of flows, his essays track the passage from the panorama to the detail'.<sup>98</sup> Micro-macro/'panorama'-detail'; *Fish Story* develops an aesthetic praxis of cognitive mapping that pinpoints localised labour conditions and social effects within the broader matrix of global capitalism's extractive and logistical infrastructures. This critical realist approach is not simply about bland representation of human labour, but rather a dialectical juxtaposition between the global machinations of logistics and the localised sites of exploitation and violence upon which they are predicated. It is not a valorisation of labour but more an attempt to perceive its presence in a disappearing space of mobility and fluidity.

This critical realist approach to labour in maritime economies is further developed within the non-fiction feature *The Forgotten Space*, co-directed by Sekula with Noël Burch. Jumping back and forth between four port cities — Los Angeles, Rotterdam, Hong Kong, Bilbao — the film similarly resists the 'immaterialization of global capitalism' through a focus on the transformed materialities of human labour. Whilst acknowledging the structural impacts that the rise of global trade logistics and post-Fordist production have had upon the form of human labour,



FIG. 1.14. Still from *The Forgotten Space*, dir. by Allan Sekula and Noël Burch (USA, 2010)

Sekula and Burch are still keen to focus on the ‘slow materiality’ of work within a global trading network that increasingly hides its labour force. The opening section of the film focuses on the port of Rotterdam and the ever-increasing levels of automation involved in its shift to containerisation. Over shots that present the movement of containers through the port, Sekula’s narration states: ‘in the outer terminals in Rotterdam, the physical human labour that remains has become a literal appendage to the machine’.

Next, the film presents a brief interview with a dock worker. In response to Sekula’s question ‘there’s a new terminal here which is completely automated. Why?’, the dock worker responds, ‘I think that’s because they wanted to get rid of the human factor. Workers may become ill and so on’. Next, we are presented with several shots of rearticulated forms of labour that are generated with the shift to automation: a worker at a centralised control centre, another controlling a container spreader. Sekula’s voiceover continues:

Starting in the late 1980s, Dutch terminal operators took container handling to a new level of automation. Some of the new land became intelligent. Robot vehicles are guided by transponders in the pavement. We speak of labour-saving machines, and yet what is really saved by automation? Automation does not guarantee freedom from drudgery. It merely raises drudgery to a higher power. The skilled workers who remain work in isolation. Lonely aristocrats of labour.

With the human labour nested within such logistics infrastructures appearing more abstracted, Sekula and Burch focus heavily upon the sites where it has been rearticulated and rehoused. Thus, the camera moves into the spreader’s control cabin, where an interview is conducted with the controller. As he continues to move containers, he states:



FIG. 1.15. Still from *The Forgotten Space*, dir. by Sekula and Burch (USA, 2010)

You actually need to work here peacefully in your own little world. If there's trouble at home you go crazy simply because you have to focus all the time here. I'm looking down 30 metres through a dirty window and I still have to get those containers out at a specific time.

Sequestered in this space of logistics infrastructure par excellence, Sekula and Burch are keen to render the 'slow materiality' of his labour, primarily through a focus on the cognitive and affective demands placed on the controller by his isolation and the temporal regulation of his work. Indeed, as he states, 'I still have to get those containers out at a specific time'. From here, *The Forgotten Space* moves through its other disparate locations, always concerned with oscillating between the larger logistical infrastructures of global trade and their connected impact upon the material labour embedded within them. Consequently, we move between interviews with Mexican truckers in Los Angeles, to deckhands in Bilbao, to factory workers in Beijing, all the time concerned with trying to understand the relationality at work between labourer and infrastructure.

It is my contention that *Fish Story* and *The Forgotten Space* are both intrinsically built around Sekula's 'critical realist' approach to image making, and through this conceptual framework they seek to render the deep instabilities and exploitations of a system that we often never see. Indeed, as Story has suggested, *The Forgotten Space* 'is a study in social institutions, experiences, and relationships; its curious digressions now recognized as realism's partiality for those on the outer margins or left behind, the potency of their "mutinous longings" recalled and historicized'.<sup>99</sup> It is arguable that Sekula's 'critical realist' approach dovetails productively with Fuller and Weizman's previously examined framework of 'investigative aesthetics'. Sekula's aesthetic approach, which melds together radically opposing scales of investigation aims to both sense and make sense of these multitudinous manifestations of power

and violence that surround the operations of logistics infrastructure and mobility. The repeated focus on the materialities of human labour across *Fish Story* and *The Forgotten Space* attempt to juxtapose regimes of mobility and flexibility with the human labour that always, at various levels of abstraction and alienation, undergirds it (and here again, we are also brought back to the dialectic relationship between mobility and fixity that structured much of Kneubühler's *Land Claim*).

Fundamentally, both Sekula's critical realism and Fuller and Weizman's investigative aesthetics are concerned with pushing for a documentary practice that seeks to examine and critique dominant structures of power not through a 'panoramic' or 'abstracted' world view, but by focusing on the myriad forensic impacts that such infrastructures and networks of domination cause. Thus, Sekula's construction of a critical realist praxis is built around observational engagement with the 'slow materialities' of the labour force that supports the hidden power structures of global trade logistics. The micro, local textures of labour begin to paint a picture of the wider structures of power at play within global maritime economy. Labour thus becomes the site of micro investigation, but always with a critical eye towards how such localised conditions feedback into broader networks and systems of power. Across both *Fish Story* and *The Forgotten Space*, a model of cognitive mapping is built that attempts to render a geographically disparate range of material labour forms, disrupting the apperception of global trade logistics as a smooth, lubricated, and flattened infrastructure through the insertion of these instances of belaboured alterity and contingency. As with the previous case studies examined in this chapter, here there is a similar investment in imbuing the visual and aesthetic with a radical spatio-political potentiality. As the networks of capital flow are ever more sequestered, hidden, and insidiously violent, the visual has a key role to play in sensing and making sense of its spatial-geographical impacts across multiple sites and scales.

## Conclusion

Whilst not focused specifically on the aesthetics and politics of the moving image, Jameson's conceptual framework of cognitive mapping has been central to this chapter. The works examined here share a desire to synthesise dialectically different scales of visualisation and mapping — a crucial structuring element of Jameson's theoretical framework. Across the works of Kneubühler, Biemann, Sekula, and Burch we find a shared preoccupation with constructing cognitive maps that dialectically oscillate between micro and macro spatio-politics; moving between what Toscano calls the 'panorama and detail'. Whether it is Kneubühler's 'stratigraphic' approach, Biemann's use of 'soft montage', or Sekula's 'critical realism', these films, through their presentation of the local, textural, and material impacts of the machinations of transnational global capital, insert points of rupture into a system that is typically read as 'smoothed', 'flattening', and all-pervasive.

It is precisely here, within these sites of tension, that we can begin to tease open the fissures, cracks, and contradictions embedded within the operative logics of late capitalism. For Toscano, we must 'understand the "aesthetic" dimension of

social research not as a supplement or an ornament, but as a matter of our modes of representing, figuring or imaging the social'.<sup>100</sup> Here, once again, we are drawn back to the broader emphasis that this book places on a renewed attention to the aesthetic. It is through these new modes of aesthetic sensing and experimentation that the spatial is rendered in all its complexity and contradictions; an alive form of 'political plastic'. When the logistics of late capitalism rely on an increasing aperception of material space as flattened, liquidised, and compressed, the aesthetic modes of experimentation we have examined seek to expose the deep, violent complexities that have been ever-present, only partially disguised and obfuscated by capital's desire for imperceptibility and liquid movement.

### Notes to Chapter 1

1. Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 347-57 (p. 354).
2. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 6.
3. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 11.
4. I would like to thank my colleague Patrick Brodie for the many discussions and collaborations that helped me to think through these issues.
5. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 14.
6. Indeed, as David Hodge and Hamed Yousefi suggest, 'the internationalisation of finance and other aspects of globalisation [...] can make it feel as if everything has become completely interconnected, and there is nowhere left to hide from the encroachment of capital', in Martin John Callahan and others, 'Paranoid Subjectivity and the Challenges of Cognitive Mapping — How Is Capitalism to Be Represented?', *e-flux* <<https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/paranoid-subjectivity-and-the-challenges-of-cognitive-mapping-how-is-capitalism-to-be-represented/1080>> [accessed 16 May 2017].
7. Ibid.
8. Emily Apter, 'On Oneworldedness: Or Paranoia as a World System', *American Literary History*, 18.2 (2006), 365-89 (p. 370).
9. A similar argument is made by Mark Fisher in his 2009 book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Fisher — building on Jameson's definition of postmodernism — defines the concept of 'capitalist realism' as 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it': *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Verso Books, 2009), p. 2.
10. Gary Zhang, 'Hito Steyerl's *Liquidity Inc.* and Art Under Neoliberalism', *King's Review Magazine* [blog] <<http://kingsreview.co.uk/articles/hito-steyerl-liquidity-inc/>> [accessed 12 July 2017].
11. Fredric Jameson, 'Future City', *New Left Review*, 21 (2003), 65-79 (p. 76).
12. Callahan and others, 'Paranoid Subjectivity and the Challenges of Cognitive Mapping — How Is Capitalism to Be Represented?'.
13. Ibid.
14. Harvey, 'Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"', p. 28.
15. Ibid., pp. 25-26.
16. Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 6.
17. Ibid., p. 4.
18. Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 26.
19. According to Colin MacCabe, cognitive mapping is 'the least articulated but also the most crucial of the Jamesonian categories': Colin MacCabe, 'Preface', in Fredric Jameson, *The*

- Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. ix–xvi (p. xiv).
20. Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', p. 349.
  21. Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso Books, 2007), 157.
  22. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1992), xxi.
  23. Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 40.
  24. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 54.
  25. Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 40.
  26. Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', p. 353.
  27. Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 11.
  28. Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', p. 353. As Robert T. Tally notes, Lynch's notion of cognitive mapping is locked within a phenomenological analysis of an individual's location in particular urban spaces, and does little to account for the wider socio-politics of such a situatedness: 'Jameson's Project of Cognitive Mapping', in *Social Cartography: Mapping Ways of Seeing Educational and Social Change*, ed. by Rolland G. Paulston (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 399–416.
  29. Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', p. 349.
  30. *Ibid.*, p. 353.
  31. Tally, 'Jameson's Project of Cognitive Mapping', p. 403.
  32. Tally's essay was crucial to my understanding of cognitive mapping's theoretical basis.
  33. Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 40.
  34. Alberto Toscano, 'Seeing It Whole: Staging Totality in Social Theory and Art', *The Sociological Review*, 60 (2012), 64–83 (p. 64).
  35. Harvey, 'Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"', p. 28.
  36. Glencore, 'Raglan Mine', *Glencore Mine Raglan*, 2017 <<http://www.mineraglan.ca/en/about-us/raglan-mine/Pages/default.aspx>> [accessed 4 November 2023].
  37. These documents often risk exacerbating further exploitation. As Michael Hitch and Courtney Riley Fidler suggest, 'IBAs can perpetuate injustices if benefits are not equally distributed to the community or if monitoring and follow-up on behalf of both parties are not continuous': 'Impact and Benefit Agreements: A Contentious Issue for Environmental and Aboriginal Justice', *Environments Journal*, 35.2 (2007), 45–69.
  38. Tom Conley, 'The Strategist and the Stratigrapher', in *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy*, ed. by D. N. Rodowick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 193–212 (p. 193).
  39. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 243–44.
  40. Conley, 'The Strategist and the Stratigrapher', pp. 193–94.
  41. *Geospatial Innovation in the Digital Humanities: A Deep Map of the English Lake District* <<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/lakesdeepmap/the-project/gis-deep-mapping/>> [accessed 4 November 2023].
  42. Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 244.
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