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2011

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Allan Sekula, Margarita Cabrera and Vik Muniz:
Representations of the Social Conditions and Capital Relations of Labor

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

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December 2011

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Introduction

This analysis draws on art historian T.J. Clark's methodology of the social history of art and applies Karl Marx, Paolo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato's theories of labor to interpret contemporary representations of labor. I refer to labor in this analysis, not only in the representational sense, i.e. the interpretation of images of workers performing physical labor and artistic interventions that engage with labor and workers, but also in the theoretical sense, i.e. the analyses of labor and capital relations, modes of production, and the social conditions of labor as related to artistic engagements.

The representation of the labor has been a long time preoccupation among artists throughout history and a recurring theme in the history of art, extending back to antiquity. From images of slaves at work in Roman wall paintings; to early modern images of labor, such as Annibale Carracci's *The Butcher's Shop* (c. 1580's); to nineteenth-century French Realism, such as Jean-François, Honoré Daumier and Gustave Courbet's images of farmers, peasants and working class subjects; to the Russian revolution and the Russian constructivism; to documentary photography of the 19th and 20th centuries; to the Mexican Muralists, and European, American and Latin American conceptualisms, these genres and traditions in art history have explored and engaged with labor through various modes and in differing contexts.¹ In addition, the relationship between art, artist and the

¹ This survey comes from my own knowledge of representations of labor based on my art historical training and research, and keen interest in the topic, which has prompted my investigations.

working class, and the actual employment of the working class in the service of artistic production has also had a long history in art.

Drawing on T.J. Clark's approach to nineteenth-century French Realist Gustave Courbet's representations of everyday scenes of the working class, this analysis looks, not only at representations of labor, but also social-political contexts, conditions of artistic production, and labor and capital relations in the practices of three contemporary artists.² Beginning in the 1970's during a time when art history was dedicated to connoisseurship, serving the art market (dealers and collectors), and cultivating the canon, T.J. Clark introduced his new groundbreaking methodology; a theoretical approach to art history that was based on Marx and looked beyond the analysis of style and iconography.³ Clark wanted to return to the larger contextual issues and questions in art history began by scholars from the early part of the twentieth century, such as Arnold Hauser's Marxist model and Walter Benjamin's and Theodor Adorno's Marxist analyses of the social function of art.⁴ Clark looked outside the discipline of art history and traditional art historical modes to engage with new forms of critical, political and historical theory, such as French Marxism, semiotics and psychoanalysis.⁵ Clark used these theories to rethink and develop new analyses surrounding "issues of realism,

² John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 22-23 & 175-176.

³ Eric Fernie, ed., *Art History and its Methods: a Critical Anthology* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2008), 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 22.

urbanization and representation, the relations of class to culture, and the conditions of production and reception to specific works of art.”⁶ Through his studies of social context, economic models and detailed historical evidence Clark created a new methodology. Clark’s model shifted away from objects to consider the social context of art, the status of the artist and public, conflicts between classes, ideologies and structures of social power.⁷ Also central to his study were the conditions and relations of artistic production, in other words the relation between the work of art, the means of production and its ideology.⁸ Returning to Courbet, who chose working-class models and subjects, Clark asserted and proved that the specific conditions for realism must be located in a particular historical conjuncture and socio-political context.⁹

In this analysis I adapt Clark’s model when interpreting the different socio-political contexts and conditions of the artistic production vis-à-vis contemporary representations of labor and participatory artistic engagements with workers. With Clark’s method as a foundation, this analysis uses theories of labor – specifically Karl Marx on the political economy, specifically the commodity and wage-labor, and Maurizio Lazzarato and Paolo Virno on immaterial labor of the postindustrial, information economy – as a critical framework through which to understand the artists’

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Fernie, ed., *Art History and its Methods*, 19 & 245.

⁸ T.J. Clark, “The Conditions of Artistic Creation, 1974,” in *Art History and its Methods: a Critical Anthology*, ed. Eric Fernie (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2008), 251-252.

⁹ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 175.

works. This thesis will look at three case studies of contemporary artists Allan Sekula, Margarita Cabrera and Vik Muniz, and their engagements with labor through differing modes and approaches, such as documentation, enactment, employment, production, participation and portraiture.

Historical materialism, couple with Marx's theory of the political economy, are deployed in the interpretation of a series of documentary photographs of maritime labor by Allan Sekula, who comes out of an Avant-garde artistic tradition.¹⁰ Maurizio Lazzarato and Paolo Virno's theories of immaterial labor form a critical framework through which we can understand the labor relations involved in the postmodernist approach and production of contemporary art by Margarita Cabrera. In addition to Clark's method in the representations of labor, immaterial labor theory is also applied when analyzing the enactment of labor and labor relations in the post-modern approach and participatory project of Vik Muniz. In my analyses of Margarita Cabrera and Vik Muniz, I intend to address the ways in which each artist negotiates the labor and capital relations that operate in their participatory projects.

Although the theories of immaterial labor established by Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, among others, were based on a reformulation of Marxism, they originally developed out of Marx's "The Fragment on

¹⁰ For definition of Historical Materialism see: David Macey, *Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2001), 183-184.

Machines” from *Grundrisse*.¹¹ Intellectuals of the Italian “workerism” (*operaismo*) movement, which emerged in Italy in the 1970’s, began to question the capitalism based purely on industrial labor and started to rethink the quality and organization of labor and the nature of laboring processes in the wake of a slowly emerging post-industrial economy.¹²

All the characteristics of the postindustrial economy (both in industry and society as a whole) are highly present within the classic forms of "immaterial" production: audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities, and so forth. The activities of this kind of immaterial labor force us to question the classic definitions of work and workforce, because they combine the results of various different types of work skill: intellectual skills, as regards the cultural-informational content; manual skills for the ability to combine creativity, imagination, and technical and manual labor; and entrepreneurial skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of that social cooperation of which they are a part. This immaterial labor constitutes itself in forms that are immediately collective, and we might say that it exists only in the form of networks and flows.¹³

The passage from an economy dominated by industry to a new post-modern, informational economy, coincided with increasing immaterial laboring processes and immaterial products. Immaterial labor can be defined in simple terms as the labor “that

¹¹ Sylvère Lotringer, “Forward: We, the Multitude,” in *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles/New York: Semiotext[e], 2004), 10-13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7-9.

¹³ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emory, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 137.

produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity,” and shapes and fixes “cultural and artistic standards.”¹⁴ Immaterial labor “produces an immaterial good, such as a service, knowledge, or communication.”¹⁵

That said, we are able to see how contemporary artistic production might fit the definition of immaterial labor. The works by artists Sekula, Cabrera and Muniz, as case studies in the representation of labor, problematize these contemporary conditions of (immaterial) labor. Immaterial labor raises the question of the labor that the artist performs in relation to the laborer with whom she or he engages. Do these theories of immaterial labor shed light on the artists as producers and their relation to their worker subjects and the workers' labor? Are the artists' labor in creating cultural products, an example of immaterial labor and immaterial production? How can we better understand the relationship between the labor of the artists and the labor of their worker subjects and worker participants? Do Sekula, Cabrera and Muniz represent the paradigm of the immaterial worker, as artists? These questions will remain rhetorical and unanswered for the time being, as I hope to introduce an inquiry into some of these questions in the chapters that follow.

This study traces the different ways in which labor is represented, enacted and actualized in the works of contemporary artists Allan Sekula, Margarita Cabrera and Vik

¹⁴ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour,” *Generation Online*, Maurizio Lazzarato, <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm> (accessed February 15, 2011).

¹⁵ Michael Hardt, “Immaterial Labor,” *Vinculo-a*, http://www.vinculo-a.net/english_site/text_hardt.html (accessed August 31, 2011).

Muniz. Each artist draws on different traditions within art practice and different socio-cultural contexts, which inform their engagements with and relations to labor and art history. This first chapter will introduce the methodological approach and political tone of the thesis and begin to map out the shared themes. Through the lens of Marx and historical materialism, I examine how Allan Sekula documents the material and social conditions of maritime labor. The second chapter will unpack and address the participatory art practice of Margarita Cabrera her engagement with laborers. In chapter three the hybrid renderings of laborers by Vik Muniz will be the focus. Muniz, a conceptual artist and photographer, creates a dialogue with labor through a participatory model and photographic portraiture.

Chapter One

Allan Sekula: Documenting the Unseen Sites and Circuits of Labor

Contemporary artist, Allan Sekula, engages with labor through the representational means of photographic documentation. The ways in which Sekula's makes the "unseen" sites and conditions of maritime labor seen through his activism and particular documentary approach in his project *Fish Story*, 1987 – 1995, will be the focus of this analysis. Although Sekula's critical documentary approach, coupled with the everyday scenes of the working class, specifically maritime labor, invite necessary political dialogue concerning the economic effects and social and environmental costs of advanced globalized capitalism, which he hopes will extend beyond the parameters of art and resonate with a wider audience, *Fish Story* was produced for, consumed by and displayed within the cultural institutions of art museums and galleries and universities. The conditions of production for this work included the technical and aesthetic, as related to the process of photographic representation, and the political. Sekula produced *Fish Story* during, and in response to a time of great economic and political change. The years of 1987 to 1995 witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NAFTA, backlash against the opening of global markets, the Gulf war, a severe economic recession and the global expansion and exportation of free-market capitalism

and democracy.¹⁶ The effects of these global events have been felt within maritime culture and have changed the nature and availability of this maritime labor, which are reflected in the images from *Fish Story*. Some of the conditions of display for *Fish Story* were economic, political and social. For example, the exhibition of *Fish Story* at the Henry Gallery at the University of Washington in 1999, was curated and organized in collaboration with a number of cooperative programs, and governmental and public entities, such as the University of Washington Center for Labor Studies, Port of Seattle, King County and Washington State Labor Councils, and labor union organization AFL-CIO, among others.¹⁷ This exhibition was motivated by conversations surrounding the changes to maritime spaces and labor, brought about in part by economic globalization, more generally, and greater automation in the workplace and the effects of containerization, more specifically.

In *Fish Story*, Sekula traces the material links of labor and production that connect maritime spaces to global economies. Sekula reveals these sites and conditions of labor associated with the maritime industry through photographic “serial narratives in sequence,” of which there are seven, geographically organized.¹⁸ Historical and contemporary centers and peripheral zones of maritime power on an international scale

¹⁶ Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (New York: Doubleday, 2003) and Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 2002).

¹⁷ Henry Art Gallery 1999 Exhibitions, “*Fish Story*: Stroum Gallery February 11, 1999 – May 16, 1999,” Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, <http://www.henryart.org/exhibitions/past/79/1999>.

¹⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, “Conversation Between Allan Sekula and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh,” in *Allan Sekula: Performance Under Working Conditions*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2003), 21.

provide foci for each photographic ensemble. *Fish Story* is the product of Sekula's long time interest in documenting the forgotten spaces, cultures and economies of the sea and the "maritime world as a space of class conflict," which has long history and tradition in "western" pictorial regimes, namely seventeenth century Dutch paintings of maritime scenes.¹⁹ Although *Fish Story* was conceived as a singular body of work, I will analyze photographs from three sequences, which resonate with my questions surrounding labor: *Fish Story* (fig. 1.1), Los Angeles harbor, Terminal Island, California, November 1992, *Message in a Bottle* (figs. 1.2 – 1.5), Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992 and *True Cross* (figs. 1.6 – 1.8), Veracruz, Mexico, March 1994. In these ensembles Sekula records specific instances of movement that are indicative of maritime labor, the globalized labor market and global capitalism, such as the flow of goods and people, physical movement, the mobilization of workers, and cases of economic dislocation.

Allan Sekula is a prolific contemporary artist, writer and critic, who has worked predominately in photographic documentation since the early 1970's, with additional experience in performance art, installation and sculpture.²⁰ Sekula's work has been based on economic and sociopolitical themes, such as the workplace and the everyday,

¹⁹ Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen, "Interview with Allan Sekula: Los Angeles, California, October 26, 2002," *International Labor and Working-Class History: New Approaches to Global Labor History* 66 (Fall 2004): 155-56.

²⁰ Some of Sekula's seminal works include: *Meat Mass*, 1972; *The Reagan Tape*, 1981; *Dear Bill Gates*, 1999; *Lottery of the Sea*, 2005. Seminal books include: *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983*; *Fish Story*, 1995, *Performance Under Working Conditions*, 2003. Seminal photo/text works: *Dead Letter Office*; *Black Tide/Marea negra*, 2002/03. For comprehensive bibliographies see Allan Sekula, *Performance Under Working Conditions*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2003), 342-47 and Galerie Traversee website: http://www.traversee.com/Kuenstler/Allan_Sekula/T_AS/asekula_cv_web.pdf.

illustrated in *Aerospace Folktales*, 1973, a project dedicated to representing the labor involved in the aerospace industry, and *This Ain't China*, 1974, a photo-novel that represents the class struggle of kitchen workers.²¹ Beginning in the 1980's Sekula became interested in geopolitics and the "imaginary and material geographies" of advanced global capitalism.²² In simple terms geopolitics can be defined as "politics, especially international relations, as influenced by geographical factors," and as "the study or the application of the influence of political and economic geography on the politics, national power, foreign policy, etc., of a state."²³ With geopolitics as a framework and thematic, Sekula produced three cycles of works: *Sketch for a Geography Lesson*, 1983, *Canadian Notes*, 1986, and *Fish Story*, 1987 – 1995. In *Fish Story*, Sekula documents the effects of advanced global capitalism on the economic and social relations and spaces of international industrial seaports and port cities.

During the 1970's and 80's Sekula aimed to return a social dimension to photography that he saw had been repressed.²⁴ Sekula, along with artists Martha Rosler and Fred Lonidier revived the legacies of American social documentary photography

²¹ Sabine Breitwieser, ed., "Photography between Documentation and Theatricality: Speaking within, alongside, and through Photographs," in *Allan Sekula: Performance Under Working Conditions*, 16-17.

²² Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), 202.

²³ *Oxford Dictionaries*, Oxford University Press, s.v. "Geopolitics," <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/geopolitics?region=us> (accessed July 5, 2011) and *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, based on *Random House Dictionary*, Random House, Inc., "Geopolitics," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/geopolitics+> (accessed July 5, 2011).

²⁴ Bucloh, "Conversation Between Allan Sekula," 25.

after it had been discredited and forgotten.²⁵ They gained inspiration from photographers such as Lewis Hine (1874-1940), whose photographs of laborers were informed by his own role as a sociologist working for liberal-reformist journals, such as *Charities and Commons* and *Survey*.²⁶ Acting as witness, Hine sought to reveal the truth about the site, and used his photographs as evidence to help enact labor reform laws. For example, in Hine's photograph *Addie Card, 12 years*, (fig. 1.9), a young, emaciated spinner stands barefoot, in the context of work, wearing a stained, ill-fitting smock.²⁷ Here, Hine has brought into play the pictorial language of truth and the rhetoric of evidence, as the spinner has been photographed standing frontal, symmetrical and confronting the viewer at eye-level with her direct gaze. The photograph of Addie Card, who has been depicted as a victim, functioned as proof and record of industrialized capitalism's exploitation of child labor.²⁸ Framed in this way, Hine's photograph creates a specific effect, eliciting an emotional response of empathy and compassion from the viewer.

²⁵ Ibid., 35 & 38.

²⁶ Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 17. See Tagg on the documentary genre: John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). Although the documentary genre was constituted as a distinct category in the late 1920's, Hine's earlier work from the early 20th century is associated with that mode.

²⁷ Although the complete, original title of Hine's photograph is "Addie Card, 12 years. Spinner in North Pownal Cotton Mill. Girls in mill say she is ten years. She admitted to me she was twelve; that she started during school vacation and now would "stay". Location: Vermont. Date: August 1910," I have abbreviated it for the purpose of economy. I will, however, return to this elaborate, descriptive caption to address its possible function.

²⁸ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 193-196.

For Sekula, on the other hand, the documentary photograph is not an official document of proof, and does not hold evidential value. For example, in *Fish-market women at the close of the morning auction, Puerto Pesquero, Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992* (fig. 1.2), Sekula lays bare the social conditions of labor without any claim to change them or effect legislation. Here, it is clear that the workers in this image and in this moment are strong, active agents, perhaps not to the point of being liberated from the political economy, but they are not pictured as exploited or as victims, which is evident in the image of Addie Card (fig. 1.10).²⁹

Fish-market women is, in part, a description of strength, which is emphasized, not only technically through Sekula's choice of an upward looking perspective, but through specific aspects of the content. The woman who wears a red sweater and stands just off-center in the picture plane, has a formidable stance. Wearing large, tall boots, the woman stands balanced, almost symmetrically on her two feet, which are anchored to the wet ground and positioned slightly wider than hip width. With both arms straight at her sides, the woman holds two empty plastic bins. Compared with the woman just adjacent to her, who has been captured in-action, stooping slightly to place the fish on the scale; the woman standing has been caught between tasks, in a moment of transition. The four women are absorbed in work, as their gazes are directed at the tasks at hand and none of the workers offer themselves up to the camera. The four women at work are surrounded by bins full of fish, some of which are already packed in ice and will be loaded into the

²⁹ I acknowledge and understand the saliency and purpose of Sekula's descriptive titles and I respect his reason for doing this. I refer to each photograph with the original title once, and every time thereafter the titles will be abbreviated to a manageable shorthand.

van that waits in the background. The full bins couple with the physical labor of lifting, moving and weighing heavy items in what looks like a bleak and precipitous day, speaks to the strength of these women.

In this flat, unsentimental, photo-snapshot of maritime workers toiling, Sekula does not attempt to generate empathy, as Hine does in the photograph of Addie Card, but rather describes a social condition. Whereas Hine chose to photograph the child laborer in the moment of suspension from work, pausing and offering herself up to the camera while resting one arm on the massive looms, Sekula has chosen to photograph his workers in the moment of activity and productivity. In fact, the Fish-market workers appear unaware of Sekula's presence as they actively engage in work, and avoid addressing Sekula, and by extension the viewer, through a direct gaze.

It is worth noting the elaborate descriptive captions created by both Hine and Sekula. Hine generates empathy and manifests a social condition in this evocative image of a child laborer who stands in the context of work and stares back at the viewer. The social condition is then further reinforced through Hine's descriptive title, which also controls the meaning of the photograph: "Addie Card, 12 years. Spinner in North Pownal Cotton Mill. Girls in mill say she is ten years. She admitted to me she was twelve; that she started during school vacation and now would "stay". Location: Vermont. Date: August 1910."³⁰ Sekula is critical of the so-called "reality" of the social documentary photograph and its "ideological field" (which could be one of the reasons why Buchloh

³⁰ Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Works of Art, Online Collection Database, Photographs," http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/photographs (accessed June 5, 2011).

refers to his specific style as “critical realism”), but this is not to imply that Sekula’s images are without mediation, an ideology and a set of intentions.³¹ In fact, like any photographer, Sekula too constructs the image through his decisions on which content to include and exclude within the frame, the perspective, and the incorporation of an elaborate caption. Perhaps borrowing from Hine, Sekula fixes and controls the meaning for the viewer through his descriptive captions, as demonstrated in *Fish-market women at the close of the morning auction, Puerto Pesquero*. It is our task to acknowledge the caption, but then look beyond it in order to extrapolate our own reading and possible meaning. It becomes almost impossible to separate the text/image dyad in each photograph. Sekula has created a photomontage, and this descriptive element is one way to control the viewer’s response to the content, and anchor the meaning of the image.³² Consistent with the photograph of “*Fish-market women*,” the other photographs in *Fish Story* also have lengthy titles that describe specific aspects of their content.

Another example of traditional documentary photography are the works of Walker Evans (1903-1975), who also appropriated the pictorial language of social documentary photography established by Lewis Hine.³³ Some of the main differences between Hine and Walker are found in the function and style of their works, which brings us back to Sekula. For Hine, the photograph had a social utility and was not produced for an art

³¹ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Allan Sekula: Between Discourse and Document,” in *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), 191, and Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 183.

³² I would like to acknowledge Professor Laxton’s insight into the possible meaning and function of Sekula’s elaborate captions.

³³ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 195.

market or art audience as was the case for later documentary realists such as Walker Evans and Berenice Abbott, and even later, Allan Sekula. Although the iconic photographs of Depression era migrant workers of Walker Evans, such as *Sharecropper, Hale County, Alabama, 1936*, (fig. 1.10) initially had a social utility, and were produced for the Resettlement Administration, later subsumed into the Farm Security Administration (FSA), from an early moment they were images that already belonged to the realm of ‘High Art.’³⁴ One only needs to peruse the online photography collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum to see the vast holdings of the documentary realism of Evans. In addition, Walker’s aestheticized photographs form part of the art historical canon, and are often prominently featured in art history courses.

Evans’ *Coal Dock Worker, Havana, 1932* (fig. 1.11), for example, has the qualities of a portrait, rather than a documentary photo-snapshot of labor. This is a close range photograph of a man isolated from the actual context of the worksite and removed from act of toiling. The worker’s gaze meets the viewer, whose perspective lies slightly above eye-level. Drawing on the long social history of posture and language of gestures in representation, Evans has deployed the pictorial codes of rigid frontality and symmetry, which has historically signified ‘naturalness’ and the embodiment of universal truths and pointed to class content in photographs.³⁵ Judging from the deep wrinkles and texture of the worker’s skin, he is either elderly or weathered by the elements or both. It could be

³⁴ Ibid., 12-13.

³⁵ Ibid., 36, 195, 196.

argued that the demands of hard manual labor and the low wages often paid for this type of labor are conveyed in this image through the worker's lean build, tattered hat, soiled, threadbare shirt and expression of fatigue. But, Evans has aestheticized these aspects of the worker by emphasizing the play of light, such as the strong cast shadows and the dramatic contrast of light and dark, and the various textures of the man's skin, hat, beard, and the grain of the wood in the handles of the shovels that rest on the worker's shoulder. Through the technique of isolating the worker and shooting at close range, coupled with the aestheticization, Evans has constructed a "beautiful" image that honors and celebrates the dignity of this worker.

In contrast to Evans' *Coal Dock Worker*, Havana, 1932 (fig. 1.11), Sekula's *Dockers unloading shipload of frozen fish from Argentina*, Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992 (fig. 1.3) seems almost anti-aesthetic.³⁶ This snap-shot of labor is decisively flat and seemingly unfinished. The lighting in the image is dull with minimal contrast of light and dark. Sekula has not draw any attention to the texture of surfaces, such as the wooden floorboards and palettes and the corrugated metal embedded in the floor. In contrast to Evans, Sekula chose to photograph the stevedores at work in a specific worksite. They do not yield to Sekula and his camera. The most prominently featured dockworker in Sekula's image commands the situation. He is actively engaged in work, rather than oppressed by it. The stevedore carefully guides the cargo into what looks like a

³⁶ I acknowledge that the specific contexts and geographic referents in each photograph are very different. I do not intend to compare the different socio-historical conditions of dock labor in each photograph and discuss the different implications. Rather, the purpose of this comparison is to illustrate the different styles and effects of, and approaches to the representation of dock labor that exist documentary photography.

refrigerated warehouse. Although there are two other stevedores in the image, nearly completely obscured by the cargo or outside of the frame, the emphasis is almost exclusively on one captivating stevedore, who is the only one fully visible and stands just left of center. The worker's graceful movement and poise is the focus of this image. The worker stands up so tall and straight that his upper body seems to pass the point of vertical. With shoulders rolled back, chest facing upward, one arm raised and head tilted slightly back in order to see over the palette of stacked boxes, the worker appears to levitate. Sekula only records specific aspects of this work and worksite. The main subject in this photograph is distilled down to a few specific, detailed gestures and movements, and the work of unloading cargo reduced to a few essential objects. Resembling a musical conductor, this stevedore directs the movement of cargo confidently with his raised hand, which holds a baton. Similar to the entire series of photographs from *Fish Story*, the flat quality of this photograph calls attention to the snapshot effect and contingent nature of the image. In *Dockers unloading*, Sekula has documented one brief moment in the continuum of work, therefore the photograph, in addition to being mediated, is a contingent and unfinished image in relation to the "real," "live" scene that it only partially recorded.

Although early social documentary photographers, like Hine and Walker, may have inspired Sekula, his work self-consciously departs from the liberal reformist documentary approach and the aestheticized documentary style. Even though Sekula's work occupies the institutional spaces of high art and the category of the documentary genre, in terms of style, his work may seem more closely aligned with photojournalism. However, when

comparing Sekula's work to the images of laborers (fig. 1.12, 1.13, 1.14) by photojournalist Eugene Smith (1918 – 1978), who worked for popular news magazines Newsweek and LIFE for many years, we see some crucial differences.³⁷ Although Smith is perhaps best known for his photographs of WWII and Japanese Internment camps, he has an interesting range of compelling photographs that deal with the subject of labor. Similar to Sekula's images, Smith's are also snapshots of workers toiling in the context of work. But, unlike Sekula, Smith has chosen to photograph specific dramatic moments and perspectives that tend to sensationalize labor as illustrated by *Taft and Ohio: Man at Ore Bin*, 1949 (fig. 1.12), spectacularize the laborer in the case of *Steelworker, Pittsburgh*, c. 1955 (fig. 1.13), and exoticize both the worker and the nature of the work in *The Spinner* (From 'Spanish Village Essay'), 1951 (fig. 1.14), which speak to the audience that Smith was trying to reach. As compared with Hine, Walker and Smith, Sekula assumes a more critical distance in relation to the workers he documents.

The workers in the photographs selected from *Fish Story* have not been transformed into victims, ennobled workers, or heroes by overly sentimental, humanizing, aestheticizing or dramatic effects. Sekula honors and respects the workers by taking a critical distance and choosing to photograph them active and engaged in the mundane flow of day-to-day work found at the international seaport. Even though Sekula demonstrates his respect for the workers, the invasive act and exploitative nature of placing a camera in front of workers to view and record them still exists and must be

³⁷ PBS online, "About W. Eugene Smith," *American Masters*, April 18, 2002, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/w-eugene-smith/about-w-eugene-smith/707/> (accessed May 30, 2011).

acknowledged. Power relations, such as those of dominance and subordination, are inscribed in the apparatus of photographic representation. For example, the photographer with the camera has relative power in relation to the subjects documented, which are offered up to the gaze of the viewfinder and ultimately the viewer.³⁸ Rather than a taking a “God”-like omniscient perspective or an invasive voyeuristic view to obtain these photographs, Sekula made the decision to shoot amidst the action, at eyelevel. For example, in *Workers gathering on the waterfront at the end of a nationwide general strike opposing the Socialist government’s cutbacks in unemployment benefits*, Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992 (fig. 1.4), Sekula was clearly amongst the group of workers and took this photo at eyelevel, as though he were a part of the group. By contrast, *Fish-market women* (fig. 1.2) was taken from below looking up; a perspective that honors and emphasizes the strength of the women.

Although Sekula works in a documentary vein, he continually questions the often times unwarranted authority taken up in this quasi-ethnographic approach to photography.³⁹ Sekula is critical of the common notion and misconception that the documentary image is “an unmediated reflection of the world ‘outside’, a true record of the subject stood before it.”⁴⁰ In contrast to the works of Hine, Evans and Smith, Sekula’s work communicates his own acute awareness of the ideology and mediating role of the

³⁸ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 12.

³⁹ Hal Foster, “The Artist As Ethnographer,” in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 190.

⁴⁰ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 195.

photographer, and how this affects the style, content and outcome of photographic representation. Labeled “critical realism” by Benjamin Buchloh, Sekula’s street photography approach lies somewhere between the documentary genre in art history and photojournalism, achieving a style and effect that are uniquely his own.⁴¹ The photographs selected from *Fish Story* (figs. 1.1 – 1.8) reflect this critical realism “of everyday experience in and against the grip of advanced capitalism.”⁴² Sekula frames a realism that is contingent, discursive and experimental, and which shifts with different working conditions and socio-economic contexts. Sekula goes beyond simply recording everything before him, however, to look for and frame certain moments of rupture, resistance, dissonance and strength in the face of the political economy and the control of labor.

For example, in the image “*Pancake,*” a former shipyard sandblaster, scavenging copper from a waterfront scrapyards, Los Angeles harbor, Terminal Island, California, November 1992 (fig. 1.1), the worker sits on the ground with wrench in hand and feet planted firmly against the bulky, metal structure. The framing and perspective are such that the viewer is only given certain amounts of information about this worker, the nature of the work and the location and conditions of the worksite. The photograph is flat, minimal and almost unfinished. We do know, however, that this is a snapshot of a worker in repose, if only for a brief moment. The woman sits slouched, resting her arms heavily on her thighs, telling us that this is physically challenging and tiresome work.

⁴¹ Buchloh, “Allan Sekula,” 191.

⁴² Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, x.

Concentration and gravitas are conveyed through “Pancake’s” furrowed brow, closed and downturned mouth and indirect gaze. The way in which she has positioned her body in relation to the metal structure on which she works, with knees bent for leverage, communicates a sense of resistance and tension. In the background, a truck, and some type of infrastructure are partially obscured by the worker and the alien metal object that dominates the visual field. From the visual information provided, it is almost impossible to identify the metal object, decipher it’s function and envision how it should be properly oriented.

In many of the photographs from *Fish Story*, we see the instability of port landscapes, the contingency of maritime labor and the tension between unemployment, the compulsion to work, and freedom from work. Returning again to “*Pancake*” (fig. 1.1), it is evident that Sekula does not document everything, but rather has captured a brief suspension from physical activity and the tension of a psychological moment. There is a sense that the work is unpaid and that “*Pancake*” is unemployed, in the traditional sense of the term. The scene is evacuated of people, and if this were a thriving worksite, it would be bustling with workers. “*Pancake*” is the only person in the photograph and the object on which she works looks as though it has fallen into disuse, destined for the junkyard. In the image “*Pancake*,” we see both the social conditions of unemployment and the inescapability of work. Rather than portraying the destitution and deprivation that so often accompanies unemployment, Sekula has chosen to document the resistance to unemployment through an alternative, and perhaps clandestine means of working at the port. Judging from her expression of concentration and determination and the aggressive

position of her body, “Pancake” does not appear to be a helpless victim of the shipyards’ closure in the port of Los Angeles. Rather, she has been portrayed as a resourceful and adaptable worker now capitalizing on discarded materials found in the forgotten spaces where remnants of the industrial seaport go to die. We see the ingenuity and resilience of Pancake as she toils at this unpaid work. The metal structure that occupies the majority of the visual field practically overshadows “Pancake,” who sits crouched. That the metal object appears so monumental and immovable could also say something about the burden and difficulty of unemployment. There is no concrete information in the photograph that indicates where this worksite is situated and the type of labor “*Pancake*” performs. In order to know this information, the viewer must rely on Sekula’s elaborate caption, which anchors the meaning of the photograph.

In addition to “*Pancake*,” the photographs *Waterfront Vendors Living in Containers*, Veracruz, Mexico, March 1994 (figs. 1.6 & 1.7), and to a certain extent, *Workers gathering* (fig. 1.4), and *Unsuccessful fishing for sardines off the Portuguese coast*, Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992 (fig. 1.5) represent the contingency of labor and the idea that “labor is always overshadowed by the absence of labor, by labor in the negative, by the nightmare of unemployment on one side, and by the utopian dream of genuine freedom from work on the other.”⁴³

In *Waterfront vendors* (figs. 1.6 & 1.7), we see a thriving micro-economy established by a mobile, self-employed workforce. We also see the precariousness and

⁴³ Bucloh, “Conversation Between Allan Sekula,” 48.

instability of this work due to its reliance on other employed individuals working at the port of Veracruz. The images show one way in which individuals can create alternative living spaces and local economies in and around industrial seaports, in the face of the powerful, physical workings of capitalism, the apparatus of the state and continual evictions by private enterprise.⁴⁴ In the first image of *Waterfront vendors* (1.6) an open metal cart fastened to a bicycle, holding salvaged televisions and radios, occupies most of the visual field and is located in the very foreground of the photograph. Behind it lies the ramshackle, makeshift outdoor living and storage space. Further in the background stand four battered cargo containers, plastered with numeric codes and corporate logos, providing temporary shelter and housing for the vendors. Among the piles of scrap wood and crates of Coca-Cola bottles in the other image *Waterfront vendors* (fig. 1.7) are delicate glass and ceramic vases filled with bouquets of colorful, fresh flowers placed atop ice chests and an improvised cooking space. The flowers signify as something gratuitous in an image that speaks of great need. In this representation the viewer is confronted the social conditions of homelessness, but also a resistance to that status and situation. Sekula's image honors and respects the vendors by emphasizing their resourcefulness and self-determined ways of creating alternative living spaces and work around the port of Veracruz.

In "*Pancake*," (fig. 1.1), *Workers gathering* (fig. 1.4), and *Unsuccessful fishing* (1.5) we see not only the tension between the fear of unemployment, the compulsion to

⁴⁴ The term "State" here refers to the powerful, and relatively independent entity of the government run Port Authority of Veracruz.

work, and the freedom from work, but also the psychological moments that are bound up with potential crisis situations of maritime labor. In *Workers gathering* (fig. 1.4) there is a sense that the large group of people is waiting for something. Sekula has framed a group of predominately middle-aged workers who have congregated for a common purpose in what seems to be in a street or plaza near the waterfront in the city of Vigo. Although the scene is full of people, many of whom engage in conversation as they wait, Sekula has isolated a man from the crowd who stands in the foreground, frontal with his head in profile as he looks away from the camera. He does not speak with anyone, but rather concentrates with seriousness on something outside of the frame and stands alone holding one end of a long banner. None of the workers look directly, or even in the direction of the viewer, or what would have been Sekula's perspective when he took the photo. In fact, it appears as if the maritime workers were unaware of Sekula's presence, which is of course not the case, as he circulated through the crowd to "record" the action that unfolded. These elements of performativity and action in Sekula's approach to documenting issues surrounding geopolitics and labor are techniques that he has employed since the 1970's.⁴⁵ Sekula used the same technique for his project, *Waiting for Tear Gas* [white globe to black], 1999-2000, which depicted demonstrators in Seattle protesting the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference held in 1999.⁴⁶

The stance and expression of the isolated man in the foreground of *Workers Gathering* (fig. 1.4) seem deceptively calm and relaxed, but rather convey a sense of

⁴⁵ Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, 59.

⁴⁶ Breitwieser, "Photography between Documentation and Theatricality," 18.

restlessness and concern. It looks as though he has just shifted his weight, while positioning his obscured hand on his hip or in his pocket, while clenching the banner with his visible, closed fist. Tension is expressed through the worker's tightened jaw and raised, slightly furrowed brow. Sekula has captured the moment in which the worker has turned his head in profile to hone in on something or someone in the distance. The image illustrates the grassroots organizing and democratic struggles of the maritime working class. Although the workers have assumed a pro-active role in the determination of unemployment benefits, there is an element of the unknown. Rather than providing the outcome of the protest and the workers' dissonance in the control of labor and their efforts in protecting workers' rights, Sekula has recorded a moment of anticipation and uncertainty.

In *Unsuccessful fishing* (fig. 1.5), the viewer is confronted with a fisherman who contends with the physical, psychological and economic challenges of maritime labor. In this image, we see the self-fulfilling prophecy of commercial fishing; the imminent loss of work and income due, in part, to limited natural resources caused by over-extraction and the regulations enforced to protect fish-stock. The physical strength of the fisherman featured in the middle ground of the image is felt through his facial expression and body position. Sekula has captured the moment in which the fisherman has bent his knees, braced his legs and leaned back to haul-in the yards and yards of fishing net, which lay at his feet. The sense of determination is expressed through the fisherman's tightened jaw and lips, furrowed brow and downturned mouth. The taught nets against which the fisherman pulls with enormous physical exertion, using all of his body weight, conveys

tension and resistance. Although there are two other fishermen at work in the background, the focus is almost exclusively on the movement and activity of the fisherman in the center, and the unfavorable conditions in which the crew works. The man's bright orange foul-weather gear is intensified by the dark sky, and the flash of Sekula's camera has further highlighted its wet, shiny surfaces, in this description of the working conditions at sea. From the information provided in this photograph we are able to recognize the economic function of a fish boat and how it acts as a material link between the sea and the port, and the potential for a crisis situation, either caused by no fish or the perils of the high seas. Again, there is a sense that Sekula was a part of the activity that unfolded in this image. This photograph reveals not only the often dangerous and extreme conditions that fisherman encounter in this line of work, but Sekula makes this labor felt in a visceral way. Also, in a non-sentimental way, Sekula has recorded the physiognomy of this laborer, the psychological and emotional aspects of labor, specifically a sense of physical exertion, fatigue and utter determination in the face of foul weather, no fish, and the real possibility of little to no compensation for that trip to sea.

The specificity and hyper-specialization of maritime labor forms another theme in this analysis. Arguably each image in this case study reflects this idea, however the photographs *Fish-market women* (fig. 1.2), and *Dockers unloading* (fig. 1.3), are exemplary of Sekula's aims to restore the specificity of labor that the political economy continually reduces to simple, abstract labor through commodity production, distribution and exchange value. In *Fish-market women* the strong sensorial and tangible elements of

a physical labor, economy and live commodity that one can smell and feel are apparent. Revisiting a previously mentioned idea related to context, here we see the social relations and interactions of production of what seems to be the gender specific labor of preparing and selling fish for market in this specific location of Vigo.⁴⁷ This image also portrays the moment at which economic value is measured and calculated, and the moment the fish enters the market and begins circulation as a commodity. The exchange-value of the fish, which is an “abstract relation between persons, but a relation hidden by a material veil,” is rendered visible through the women’s dynamic interaction, labor relations and economic network between themselves, the fish and the unseen third party/buyer.⁴⁸ This photograph frames the social relationships and the material links between economic entities: in this case between the sea and fish, and the commercial fishermen, the market and the consumer.

In *Dockers unloading* (fig. 1.3), the stevedores direct and guide the palette of frozen fish with poise, gesture and command. The representation of the specificity of this work and workplace, challenges global capitalism’s tendency to erase the unique features of an individual’s labor. In this image we see the resistance to the abstraction of labor, which is the process of reducing the quality and individual characteristics of labor to a universal form and general value.⁴⁹ In the face of the political economy’s aims to reduce the

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, “Part One: Capital in General - Chapter 1: The Commodity,” in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Maurice Dobb and trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 30 & 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

working individual to a mere organ of labor, these photographs represent the specificity of labor, production and the conditions of labor within everyday social spaces of the working class. The foci of the photographs are not so much exclusively on the commodities, but rather the social relations of production.⁵⁰

Featured prominently in *Waterfront Vendors* and *Truckload of Volkswagens* (fig. 1.6 – 1.7 and 1.8) are the multiple social and economic uses of the cargo container, the ultimate signifier of commodity flow and the mobility of globalized capitalism. Sekula has framed the ways in which the cargo container impacts and dominates the spaces in and around the commercial seaport of Veracruz, Mexico. In this ensemble we see the ubiquitous nature of the cargo container some sixty years after its invention by an American company.⁵¹ This ultimate ready-made, carried by ship, truck and train, has made unprecedented physical mobility of manufactured goods and machinery possible.

The images *Waterfront Vendors* (figs. 1.6 & 1.7) reveal one of the many uses of the cargo container during the course of its social life. Just inside one of the container's doorways sits a man dwarfed by the monumentality of the cargo container (fig. 1.7). Through their appropriation of private property the waterfront vendors have subverted the intended economic and material function of the cargo container by transforming it into habitable space. The vendors' subversion also includes the temporary seizure of the private space on which the containers are stored, and which the vendors use for outdoor living, cooking and storage space. In the images we also see the inter-related acts of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁵¹ Sekula, *Fish Story*, 49.

labor, in particular the vendors labor in relation to the port and those who work at the port. The local micro-economy that the vendors have created is different and autonomous from the official work at the port, but also dependent on the port workers and infrastructure for business. The viewer is confronted with the ways in which this mobile workforce has adapted to the global space of the commercial seaport through the production of *translocal* spaces and an economy and culture of resistance. Translocal space is an anthropological terms that describes “the production of a local space, with various circulating populations and/or non-sovereigns and/or transnationals, which is divorced from its national context.”⁵² In these images we see some of the tangible textures of the vendors’ economic infrastructure and place making in and around the cargo containers, such as the careful storage of salvaged and recycled objects to be resold, scrap wood materials, televisions, cookware, crates of soda, jugs of water and vases of flowers, sorted and stacked in and around their living space.

Truckload of Volkswagens (fig. 1.8) depicts the moment just prior to loading the cargo into the containers that presumably wait on the docks. Stacked up in the background, dominating the landscape in which they are stored, are containers that are not in use. The semi-trailer truck in the image is made colossal by Sekula’s relative close

⁵² Arjun Appadurai, “Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography,” in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003), 339. Also see definition of translocal space in Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, “Locating Culture,” in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003), 25. “Globalization also radically changes social relations and local places due to interventions of electronic media and migration, and the consequent breakdown in the isomorphism of space, place, and culture. This process of cultural globalization creates new translocal spaces and forms of public culture embedded in the imaginings of people that dissolves notion of state-based territoriality.”

range and slightly upward looking perspective of the front of the truck and the underneath side of the front of the car carrier. The formidable steel frame that firmly affixes the car carrier to the truck is overlapped by the back-end of a Volkswagen Jetta. The rest of the Jetta lies outside the of the frame, but judging from its elevated position and the chains near the back tire, it likely sits on the back of another semi-trailer truck that waits in front. The truck has been photographed on the side of the road where port infrastructure borders some semblance of natural environment in this industrial landscape of trucks, cars, containers and cranes. The image speaks to the ways in which commodity flow and advanced global capitalism have altered the physical landscape to accommodate the industrial, commercial seaport through construction of infrastructure, manipulation, disposal of materials, waste and pollution. The glimpse of natural environment provided in the image is far from pristine. The sand dunes have been littered with cardboard and other human-made waste and debris. In the distant background of the image, along the horizon line, rows of stacked cargo containers in disuse appear to be stored in the sand dunes, preventing their ability to shift and take new shapes with the changing winds and elements.

As illustrated in *Truckload of Volkswagens* (fig. 1.8), the sheer size of this monumental object speaks to its volume and capacity in holding vast quantities of goods, and it hints at the material operations of exchange value in commodities and the labor that produces and distributes them. The large-scale rectangular steel frame and standardized form has dictated the design of cargo ships. In addition to ship design, an entire network of transportation and storage infrastructure has been designed and built

across sea and land to accommodate the cargo container, such as the vast flat storage areas around the port and train terminals, large flat deck ships, and the flat shipping cradles and attachment mechanisms on trains and trucks that provide long distant terrestrial transport.⁵³ The cargo container provides the material link between peripheral enclaves of poorly paid wage labor and cheap manufacture, and centers of consumption.

The shared theme of visibility and invisibility is also expressed implicitly in the photographs from *Fish Story*. Sekula makes labor, which is often hidden from common view, visible to a larger, mainstream audience (the middle-upper class art viewing subject) through the documentation of sites in and around the industrial, commercial seaport. The majority of people would not have contact with or enter the spaces of the working seaports, such as, Los Angeles, Vigo and Veracruz, which are largely concealed from and inaccessible to those who work outside of these ports due to the restricted access and specialized infrastructure especially geared for containerization and the commercial shipping industry. These working ports require specialized spaces and infrastructure, including easy, unobstructed access from freeways and other terrestrial transportation arteries, to accommodate the cargo terminals and the different labor processes and operations that sustain the commercial shipping and fishing industries. These spaces and the supporting infrastructure are often isolated from the associated port city and the waterfront spaces and functions of leisure.⁵⁴ Sekula's depictions of cargo

⁵³ Caroline Owen: my observations during many train rides from Riverside to Los Angeles, Los Angeles to Northern California.

⁵⁴ Sekula, *Fish Story*, 53-54.

containers, vendors and cargo make implicit references to the hidden, exploitable “geopolitical margins” of global economy.⁵⁵ The photographs selected from *Fish Story* depict the hands and maritime spaces through which so many commodities pass and are often never seen by most consumers before arriving at their various points of consumption. The images from *Fish Story* and the billboard project portray the hidden industrial functions and hyperspecialization of the working seaport, such as shipbuilding, commercial fishing and cargo handling (stevedoring, longshoreing, cargo movement), which produce and facilitate the flow of commodities.⁵⁶

The movement of capital, labor, people and goods form another important theme in this analysis. Perhaps less obvious, is the physical movement required of Allan Sekula over years and many geographical locations to shoot this expansive body of work. In the images “*Pancake* (fig. 1.1), *Workers gathering* (fig. 1.4) and *Waterfront Vendors* (figs. 1.6 & 1.7), movement is conveyed explicitly and implicitly through people, labor and capital. In “*Pancake*” the sense of flux is communicated through the precarious nature of her work. “*Pancake*” represents the mobile worker as a consequence of economic dislocation and joblessness due to the eviction of the shipbuilding industry, which was brought on by the increasing automation of labor and the economic dominance of shipping and cargo handling at the port of Los Angeles.⁵⁷ “*Pancake*” was also the victim of the political economy’s continual search for cheap labor and

⁵⁵ Buchloh, “Allan Sekula,” 190.

⁵⁶ Tchen, “Interview with Allan Sekula,” 161.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 160-61.

manufacture of commodities in what it sees as the exploitable peripheries of the world. A different type of movement is depicted in *Workers gathering* (fig. 1.4). The mobilization of workers to organize regarding concerns about the welfare state creates a sense of stirring activity and unfolding socio-political dialogue in the streets of Vigo. In *Waterfront Vendors* (figs. 1.6 & 1.7), we see the mobility of the vendors' local economy, as they literally reach their customers by bike and cart or on foot. The temporary nature of the vendor's living conditions, as a consequence of their continual displacement and relocation to the next vacant shipping container along the border of international trade, also expresses a sense of flux.⁵⁸

Arguably, the flow of commodities (fish and cars) and the mobility of globalized economies (fishing industry and car assembly and manufacture) are the foci in the images *Fish-market women* (fig. 1.2), *Dockers unloading* (fig. 1.3), *Unsuccessful fishing* (fig. 1.5), and *Truckload of Volkswagens* (fig. 1.8). The image of the stevedore (fig. 1.3), who unloads the boxes of "pescado congelado" (frozen fish), points to the movement of this fluid commodity, merluza (hake), from Argentina to the port in Vigo to supply predominantly the markets and tables of Spain. These seemingly endless amounts of boxes full of merluza from Argentina is of another era, as the fishstock there has rapidly declined along with the disappearance of the Argentine fishermen who fish them.⁵⁹ Now

⁵⁸ Sekula, *Fish Story*, 167.

⁵⁹ Marcela Valente, "Local hake on the brink of collapse," *Buenos Aires Herald*, June 9, 2010, Argentina Section, <http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/35805/local-hake-on-the-brink-of-collapse>.

the bulk of the merluza exported to Spain is from Namibia.⁶⁰ In *Unsuccessful fishing* (fig. 1.5), we see the physical movement involved in harvesting the high seas for this highly mobile, live commodity. The image also hints at what would have been the moment of extraction, initiating the life cycle and social life of the fish as a commodity.⁶¹ In *Truckload of Volkswagens* (fig. 1.8), movement is more explicitly expressed through the image of the truck with a delivery of Volkswagens on one of its many repeat journeys from factory in Puebla to port in Veracruz, and back again. Through the presence of the cargo containers in this image, the flow of goods is more implicitly referenced. The image also points to the circuit of the commodity, in this specific case the Volkswagen, beginning with the site of production in Puebla, to its transportation to and through the port, into containers and onto ships bound for the centers of global economic power.

Regarding the exhibitionary staging and reception of *Fish Story*, does Sekula deliver his claim to broaden the audience base and invite political dialogue in ways that contribute to an alternative form of the public sphere? Since the 1970's Sekula has sought to expand the field of potential readers of his photography through content and by virtue of the photograph's reproducibility and ease of circulation. In conjunction with his photography, Sekula has also contributed to creating forums and platforms in public spaces, for example union halls, churches, the streets, high schools, community centers,

⁶⁰ Allan Sekula, "Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs)," *October* 102 (2002): 20.

⁶¹ Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3 & 13.

colleges, and public museums.⁶² When considering the production, exhibition and circulation of *Fish Story* I believe Sekula is able to deliver his claims. Sekula's choice of content and the alternative spaces and modes of presentation broaden the audience base and invite dialogue. For example, one of the exhibitions of *Fish Story* at the Henry Art Gallery at University of Washington in Seattle was organized and curated by an interdisciplinary and diverse team and supported by a union. The curator, Sheryl Conkelton collaborated with political scientist Margaret Levi, who at the time was the Harry Bridges Chair of Labor Studies at the Labor Studies Center of the University of Washington, a chair endowed by a trade union.⁶³ For this particular museum exhibition of *Fish Story*, working and retired dockworkers served as guides to the exhibition and gave talks about the works, initiating "a whole series of discussions about working-class responses to globalization, about whether or not the strike weapon is a useful one in the new context, how do deal with runaway shops, international organizing, and the organizing of casualized workers."⁶⁴

Allan Sekula's *Fish Story*, in its circulation and exhibition participate in what Rosalyn Deutsche suggests is the survival of a democratic society, which relies on the support and avocation of public practices, activities and functions that elicit dialogue. To create dialogue and support democratic societies, the dialogue must not be one of

⁶² Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, 70.

⁶³ Tchen, "Interview with Allan Sekula," 170.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

consensus but one of dissent, resistance and uncertainty, among heterogeneous and plural publics that extend beyond the parameters of the art world.⁶⁵

In my opinion, the individual narratives that emerge from the photo-snapshots from *Fish Story* speak to the varied conditions of maritime labor, and the economic circumstances, social relations and daily struggles in these workplaces. Furthermore Sekula adds another layer of complexity to his photographs from *Fish Story* through the “sociological mapping” of these sites of labor.⁶⁶ The photographs reveal the entangled relationship between each worker and worksite, the social relations and interactions that transpire in these sites, and the different ways in which each worker experiences the various contexts and conditions of maritime labor.

Sekula approaches documentary photography as a social practice.⁶⁷ The images from *Fish Story* are products of Sekula’s extensive engagements with workers and sites of maritime labor. His process could be understood as a collaborative process between himself as documentarian, the workers and the viewing audience; a triad necessary in completing the many meanings of his contingent works. The social relations of his practice are reflected in the interactions and engagements between Sekula and the subject, the subject and the viewer and in some cases viewer and Sekula. It could be argued that Sekula’s own work in the process represents the conceptual, immaterial labor that projects, plans and documents the physical, material labor of maritime workers. The

⁶⁵ Rosalyn Deutsche, “Agoraphobia” in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 324-27.

⁶⁶ Foster, “The Artist As Ethnographer,” 81.

⁶⁷ Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, ix.

contemporary representations of labor from *Fish Story* are further complicated by the immaterial work (and class) of Sekula as the artist. This raises the question of the nature of the labor relations between the artists in this study and the workers with whom they engage; a question that will be explored in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two

Margarita Cabrera: Mimicking Transnational and Corporatized Labor

“The postmodern phase of global capitalism is not so much a rupture from the modern world order but a reinauguration of its imperial design.”⁶⁸

- Alicia Schmidt Camacho

Maurizio Lazzarato and Paolo Virno’s theories of immaterial labor form a critical framework through which we can understand the labor relations involved in the production of contemporary art by Margarita Cabrera. Building on the definition and discussion of immaterial labor and production that was previously established in the introduction to this thesis, immaterial labor and the products that it produces is defined by Lazzarato in the following way:

Commodities in capitalist society have come to be less material, that is, more defined by cultural, informational, or knowledge components or by qualities of service and care. The labor that produces these commodities has also changed in a corresponding way. Immaterial labor might thus be conceived as the labor that produces the informational, cultural or affective element of the commodity. One central characteristic of the new forms of labor that this term tries to capture is that the labor is increasingly difficult to quantify in capitalist schemata of valorization: in other words, labor time is more difficult to measure and less distinct from time

⁶⁸ Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 240.

outside of work. Much of the value produced today thus arises from activities outside the production process proper, in the sphere of nonwork.⁶⁹

The participatory artworks and value produced by the creative thoughts and conceptual labor of artist Margarita Cabrera exemplify immaterial production.

The transition to the new postindustrial economy of information, communication, and digital technology necessitated a change in the quality and nature of laboring processes. These new forms of labor produce do not necessarily produce a durable commodity, but rather produce services, knowledge, and communication, which in turn provide the informational, affective, communicative and cultural content of the product. Immaterial production is not confined to the four walls of factory space, but rather is found outside in society at large, in various types and sizes of “productive units,” with variable durations.⁷⁰ Immaterial labor has blurred the boundaries between work time and leisure time, with many people working from home, digitally from their computers, phones and other electronic and digital devices from any location in the world.

After recapitulating and expanding the definition of immaterial labor, I would like to point out, at this juncture, that which is suppressed in the theories, or at least that which is not entirely clear. The literature on immaterial labor fails to acknowledge that industrial/material labor still exists alongside immaterial labor in this new post-Fordist,

⁶⁹ Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 262.

⁷⁰ Michael Hardt, “Immaterial Labor,” *Vinculo-a*, http://www.vinculo-a.net/english_site/text_hardt.html (accessed August 31, 2011).

post-Taylorist economy. Enclaves of industrial labor have been relegated to and sustained in under-developing countries, to enable rich countries and quasi-autonomous corporations to capitalize on cheap manufacture and the exploitation of wage-labor. The theories perhaps suppress the argument that industrial labor exists, because what is relevant to the immaterial argument is that what creates profit is the creativity that produces the product.

Also, what does not seem to be clear in the literature is that there are different forms of immaterial labor and an entire hierarchy that operates within this structure. Immaterial labor can come in affective, informational, communicative and cultural forms, the later being the focus of the analysis at hand. Existing in all of these different forms and processes of immaterial labor, are divisions, such as knowledge, class, gender, racial, cultural, and international divisions, just to name a few.⁷¹ In fact, we see the division of knowledge, class, gender and culture operating within Cabrera's projects.

What also seems to go unaccounted for in the literature is the fact that many forms of immaterial labor have physical aspects, such as jobs in the care sector, which usually provide a service. For example, the work of a caretaker, though it is affective, is also quite physical. That said, however, it does not produce an actual, durable commodity, nor is the value of the caretaker's labor measured in the same way as the material/physical labor of an assembly-line worker. Therefore the value of the caretaker's work could be determined by immaterial production.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Immaterial labor and production, however, is not limited to specific forms and workforces. For example, immaterial labor can range from service jobs in virtual technology, such as the work of an agent in a call center in India who provides global tech support or customer service; to informational labor of digital textile manufacture; to academic and artistic labor, such as a professor's knowledge and conceptualization of a written work, and an artist's creative thought that goes into the construction of an artwork; to finally labor that communicates taste and trends to consumers, such as jobs in the advertising and fashion industries.⁷²

As we can see, artistic practice is exemplary of the means of immaterial production, as it is one of the cultural activities that provides the creative, cultural and informational content of a certain type of product. And the artist produces value through his/hers creative thought and name. Cabrera participates in the new economy of immaterial labor and production through her participatory projects. This analysis will focus on the labor relations in two works by Margarita Cabrera exhibited under the title *Pulso y Martillo* at the University of California Riverside's Sweeney Gallery, February 5 – April 2, 2011. This exhibition was a retrospective, surveying some of Cabrera's past works, as well as showcasing new performances and installations.⁷³ Some objects

⁷² Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emory, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 142.

⁷³ For exhibition details see: University of California Riverside Sweeney Gallery, "Margarita Cabrera: Pulso y Martillo (Pulse and Hammer)," Sweeney, <http://www.sweeney.ucr.edu/exhibitions/cabrera/>. Previous works include: *Soft Sculptures*, 2003-2006, *Espacio entre Culturas* (Space in Between), 2007-2010, *Arbol de la Vida* (Tree of Life), 2008, and *The Craft of Resistance*, 2008-2011. New works include: *Pulso y Martillo*, 2011, *Mexico Abre la Boca*, 2011 and *Florezca Board of Directors: Performance*, 2011.

included in this exhibition were products of Cabrera's two labor workshops, *The Craft of Resistance* 2008 – 2011 (figs. 2.4 – 2.7), and *Espacio entre Culturas*, 2010. These works are products of the creative industry that Cabrera builds through her labor workshops and her for-profit corporation, Florezca, Inc., which Cabrera asserts is “creatively changing the world.”⁷⁴

One performance, also titled *Pulso y Martillo*, 2011 (fig. 2.1) consisted of a wooden platform, custom made to Cabrera's specifications, several large sheets of copper and large heavy sledgehammers made in Mexico and used by the performers (fig. 2.2).⁷⁵ The performance was held in the center of the main atrium of the Culver Center of the Arts, the night of the exhibition opening. The performers, including Cabrera, gathered around the wooden platform rigged with the copper sheets and the hammers, and covered with a tarp. The performers unveiled the platform and took position along its sides and ends. One of the participants, situated at one end of the platform, initiated the performance with a hand gesture. The group clapped in unison and then picked up their hammers to beat the copper sheets, which they did in a methodical and orchestrated manner. Composer Jason Heath from the UCR Music Department worked with the performers to control the force and cadence of their hammering to create rhythm, crescendo and overall cohesive composition. During the performance, the performers

⁷⁴ Margarita Cabrera, “Projects: *Florezca*,” Margarita Cabrera, <http://www.margaritacabrera.com/?cat=4> (accessed June 1, 2011).

⁷⁵ Wooden platform measures approximately 32 x 8 x 3 feet, constructed by UCR Sweeney Gallery exhibition designer Jeff Cain. UCR Culver Center of the Arts: walk-through and rehearsal session with Tyler Stallings and Margarita Cabrera on February 4, 2011.

alternated between beating and scraping the copper sheets individually, sequentially and synchronously according to cues (fig. 2.1). After beating the copper, the performers set down their hammers and threw pennies onto the beaten sheets of copper (fig. 2.2).

This gratuitous gesture of throwing pennies did not seem to have any relevance or relation to the meaning and content of the work, but it does raise some interesting questions about value and possible interpretations (fig. 2.2). Is there a corollary between the symbolic value of the penny and the significance of Cabrera's work? The value of this iconographic unit of circulation is contested, as copper is worth more than the penny's actual monetary unit, and the penny itself is copper plated zinc. Its symbolic value and significance are also contested, and depend on the intended audience and function, which could range from an economic transaction to art projects, personal collections, and the act of sheer hoarding.⁷⁶ The deceptive material nature and hollow value of the penny could point to the lack of meaning in Cabrera's copper beating performance. The gesture at the end of the performance could also hint at the labor and capital relations at work in Cabrera's art, which she has either intentionally or unintentionally suppressed. It could also remind the viewer of how the performance is invested with value. The cultural capital and economic value that the performance will potentially acquire as it circulates on the art market was produced by Cabrera's creative/intellectual labor, and depended on the physical work and gestures of the group

⁷⁶ I want to thank Professor Laxton for pointing out the significance of the penny, an iconographic unit of circulation and value.

of anonymous participants. And, this cultural capital and economic value will ultimately fed back into the institutional system from where it came.⁷⁷

After the performance, elements were installed in the gallery (fig. 2.3). The hammers were installed on the North wall of the Culver Center atrium, alongside the video installation of the performance.⁷⁸ The platform has been recycled and transformed into a rough-hewn round table later used in Cabrera's second performance, *Florezca Board of Directors: Performance (Mesa Directive: Performance)* 2011. The planks of wood that made up the tabletop for the Florezca performance, bare the impressions made by the hammers, and thus physically record the hammering performance.

Cabrera's installation project, *The Craft of Resistance*, 2008 – 2011 (figs. 2.4 – 2.7) consisted of a series of wooden workstations, painted bright blue, which were intended to evoke the assembly line workspace commonly found in the *maquiladora*, an export processing plant.⁷⁹ This workstation was originally designed for her first exhibited craft workshop at ArtPace studio and gallery in San Antonio, Texas during Cabrera's

⁷⁷ Kenneth Rogers, "Capital Implications: the Function of Labor in the Video Art of Juan Devis and Yoshua Okón," in *Digital Media, Cultural Production and Speculative Capitalism*, ed. Freya Schiwy, Alessandro Fornazzari and Susan Antebi (London: Routledge, 2011), 51.

⁷⁸ *Pulso y Martillo*, 2011, exhibition opening: Saturday, February 5, 2011 at 7:30pm, lasting about 20 minutes.

⁷⁹ *Maquiladora*: an assembly plant and multinational corporation located along the border region between Mexico and the U.S. For more on the *maquiladora* see: Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 246-254.

residency there in 2008.⁸⁰ The mock *maquiladora* workstation exhibited at the Sweeney (fig. 2.4), however, did not involve a live session of workers crafting copper butterflies for Cabrera. Rather, the Sweeney installation staged recreation of the ArtPace workshop; an object on display, rather than a time-sensitive, working piece. The installed workstation was equipped with the necessary tools and materials for safely beating, cutting, bending and welding the copper sheets and wires to create small copper butterflies that bear impressions of the wing pattern of the monarch butterfly on one side, and impressions of the U.S. penny on the other (fig. 2.5). *The Craft of Resistance* installation included almost one thousand copper butterflies nailed to the walls and soffit of the atrium in swarm-like patterns (fig. 2.6).

These copper butterflies had been made previously and were the product of Cabrera's workshop at ArtPace.⁸¹ Cabrera taught the workers the coppersmith techniques that she learned at the CECATI No. 166 school (Adolfo Best Maugard Center for Creative Technical and Industrial Training), which in-turn, they used to construct twenty-five hundred copper butterflies in Cabrera's mock *maquiladora*.⁸² In the ArtPace workshop installation Cabrera attempted to recreate the assembly-line production and factory environment by dividing the workspace into twelve separate stations, each with

⁸⁰ Margarita Cabrera, interview by author, Riverside, CA, March 4, 2011. ArtPace: a non-profit contemporary visual arts center based in San Antonio, Texas that offers residencies, exhibitions, and education programs. Website: <http://www.artpace.org/>.

⁸¹ Margarita Cabrera, "Projects: *The Craft of Resistance*," Margarita Cabrera, <http://www.margaritacabrera.com/?p=81#more-81> (accessed January 25, 2011).

⁸² Ibid.

its own step in the fabrication process, positioning each worker in one of these isolated cubicles, and by illuminating the space with sterile florescent lighting.⁸³

Cabrera as the artist, entrepreneur and project director and manager, is the paradigm of the immaterial laborer. “A polymorphous self-employed autonomous work has emerged as the dominant form, a kind of ‘intellectual worker’ who is him- or herself an entrepreneur, inserted within the market that is constantly shifting and within networks that are changeable in time and space.”⁸⁴ The conceptualization, planning and execution of the performance and installation *Puslo y Martillo*, workshop and installation *The Craft of Resistance*, and the entrepreneurial and management skills needed to develop the multi-national, for profit corporation, *Florezca*, illustrate Cabrera’s immaterial labor. In addition to the creative processes to design and plan her art, the organization between Cabrera, curator, gallery staff and participants, coupled with the verbal and written communications necessary to execute and orchestrate Cabrera’s projects exemplify the immaterial aspects of artistic production. Cabrera’s creative thoughts and conceptual processes is the immaterial labor “that produces the informational and cultural content” of the aesthetic objects.⁸⁵ What is particular to artistic production is the way in which profit is created by an artist, and in this case, Cabrera. If the product, of this combined immaterial labor of Cabrera and material labor of the workers, were not an authored,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” 139.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 133.

authentic and reified artwork, it would not have the same value and generate the same type and amount of profit.⁸⁶ The immaterial labor of Cabrera's creative thoughts and the immaterial product of her name associated with the artwork, create the profit. The actual finished material artwork itself, which circulates on the art market, is exchanged through loans and/or sales and is exhibited, is a product of the combined immaterial and material labor skills.⁸⁷

Another characteristic of immaterial labor, which I believe is particularly well illustrated by Cabrera's artistic production, is its particular relationship to consumption:

Immaterial labor finds itself at the crossroads (or rather, it is the interface) of a new relationship between production and consumption. The activation of both productive cooperation and the social relationship with the consumer is materialized within and by the process of communication. The role of immaterial labor is to promote continual innovation in the forms and conditions of communication (and thus in work and consumption).⁸⁸

Cabrera's immaterial labor together with the material labor of the participants in order to produce her art and communicate her ideology to the viewing subject, reflect this

⁸⁶ Arguably, the way in which value is produced in an authored artwork through the author's name and notions of authenticity, and how it goes on to generate profit is very similar to corporate branding. The difference lies in the fact that the artwork tends to be perceived as a reified, one of a kind cultural object, which generates a disproportionate amount of profit if it is a genuine authentic work of a specific artist; whereas the name-brand commodity tends to be a mass-produced item of popular culture that perhaps does not generate the amount of profit an artwork could, even though the value lies in it being an authentic brand.

⁸⁷ The artwork's exhibition value should also be considered. To be elaborated at a later date.

⁸⁸ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 138.

interface between “productive cooperation” and “the social relationship with the consumer.”⁸⁹ “Immaterial labor continually creates and modifies the forms and conditions of communication, which in turn acts as the interface that negotiates the relationship between production and consumption.”⁹⁰ Cabrera communicates her vision, ideology and knowledge to the viewer and consumer through her art, which was manifested through her immaterial labor. Also exemplified by artistic production is the fact that the art, produced by immaterial labor, “is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the ‘ideological’ and cultural environment of the consumer,” which is a different process and relationship from what we see operating in the industrial manufacture of commodities for example.⁹¹ Because immaterial labor creates the informational and cultural aspects of a product, or in this case aesthetic object, we could assume that this creative, conceptual work of the artist has a specific ideology, and thus produces an “*ideological product*.”⁹²

Cabrera’s participatory aesthetic projects, *Pulso y Martillo* and *The Craft of Resistance*, and her multi-national corporation, *Florezca*, are exemplary of immaterial production. In these projects labor operates on two levels, both as immaterial/conceptual and material/physical labor. And, both works reflect this division between manual labor

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 143.

⁹¹ Ibid., 138.

⁹² Ibid., 144.

and intellectual labor that is so characteristic of immaterial production. The performance and workshop are syntheses of the participants' physical, technical, and creative skills needed to execute the performances and construct the copper butterflies, and Cabrera's conceptual labor and "entrepreneurial skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of that social cooperation."⁹³ The aesthetic objects produced by Cabrera's participatory performance and workshop (from ArtPace), exhibited at the Sweeney, embody the labor of the participants who produced them. The material components of Cabrera's projects, the physical objects, objectify the social labor on which Cabrera has capitalized. These durable, material commodities have exchange-value, which is a relation between persons hidden behind a material veil, and represents the social relation of production.⁹⁴

By simply observing Cabrera's performance *Pulso y Martillo* unfold, the labor relations were not immediately obvious or explicit, as Cabrera herself participated alongside the volunteers who enacted manual labor, thus symbolically aligning herself with the proletariat. Whereas the performance did not have an economic relation, because the participants were unpaid, the workshop, *The Craft of Resistance* did. Cabrera, who

⁹³ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," *Generation Online*, Maurizio Lazzarato, <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm> (accessed February 15, 2011).

⁹⁴ Karl Marx, "Part One: Capital in General - Chapter 1: The Commodity," in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Maurice Dobb & trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 34-35.

conceptualizes and then directs and instructs the participants to execute her artistic ideas in the performance, reflects Maurizio Lazzarato's discussion on the managerial functions of immaterial labor:

This labor form is also characterized by real managerial functions that consist in (1) a certain ability to manage its social relations and (2) the eliciting of social cooperation within the structures of the basin of immaterial labor. The quality of this kind of labor power is thus defined not only by its professional capacities (which make possible the construction of the cultural-informational content of the commodity), but also by its ability to 'manage' its own activity and activity and act as the coordinator of the immaterial labor of others (production and management of the cycle). This immaterial labor appears as a real mutation of 'living labor'.⁹⁵

Pulso y Martillo illustrates the immaterial aspects of artistic production, specifically Cabrera's creative thought, the conceptualization and design of the performance in its entirety; her communication with, management and directing of human power to execute the performance; and her communication, coordination and collaboration with art dealer, collector, curator, gallery staff and media in order to manifest the exhibition and circulate and publicize the work.

The participants in Cabrera's performance *Pulso y Martillo* were unpaid volunteers and students from the University of California Riverside and members of the Riverside community. The nature of the collaborators' legal status in this project was

⁹⁵ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 138.

neither clear nor made explicit. The didactics circulating for this exhibition, as well as Cabrera's statements in an interview of March 4, 2011, indicated that the students and community members with whom she worked in were undocumented, which was also the case in her labor workshop *The Craft of Resistance*.⁹⁶ Cabrera claims that the legal status of the students and community members remained intentionally ambiguous, in order to protect them from incrimination and the possibility of deportation.⁹⁷ A local immigration lawyer in Riverside provided legal counsel and current literature on the rights of undocumented individuals during the rehearsals and performance of *Pulso y Martillo* at the Sweeney.⁹⁸

The performance, *Pulso y Martillo* depended on the non-remunerated physical, material labor of the participants beating the copper, and creating gestures, motion and sounds (fig. 2.1). Cabrera performed alongside the participants in the performance to signify collaborative, non-hierarchical artistic production, but this was not the case. The performance was not displayed and marketed as a collaborative piece that had been co-created, co-produced and co-authored by the participants, as Cabrera claims. In fact the work was not collaborative in anyway, only participatory. During rehearsals the participants were not given the freedom to contribute, but instead they executed Cabrera's orchestrated and premeditated choreography. Also contrary to the collaborative

⁹⁶ Margarita Cabrera, interview by author, Riverside, CA, March 4, 2011.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

model, was the anonymity of the participants. They were neither credited and introduced by name before or after the performance, nor mentioned in the didactics for the installation. Regarding the content and meaning of *Pulso y Martillo*, there is a discrepancy between Cabrera's rhetoric and the representational means. Cabrera claims that:

The sound performance deals with a layering of memories, as it is through memory that one addresses the loss or distortion of the disappearing cultural traditional crafts in Mexico; in *Pulso y Martillo*, this loss and distortion is specifically related to the copper production ritual in Santa Clara Del Cobre, Michoacan. Some layers of the performance also address archetypes within each audience member's personal experience—here related to immigrants, student and art communities, musical ritual, the history of craft, the history of the labor, its struggles, and exploitation. Claiming territory through the discovery and production of sound and sensation, vital immigrant participation is central to the inherent meaning of *Pulso y Martillo*.⁹⁹

While it is doubtful that sheer beating is able to communicate such localized histories and individual narratives to the middle class art audience at the Sweeney, that failing, pales in comparison to Cabrera's universalizing statement regarding labor history and cultural production, her generalizing assertions about the loss of artisanal craft traditions in Mexico, and her essentializing assumptions about immigrant experiences and memories. Such claims are not manifested in the work. For example, personal narratives delivered by each of the participants about their personal experiences of being an immigrant and

⁹⁹ Margarita Cabrera, Projects, "Projects: *Pulso y Martillo*," Margarita Cabrera, <http://www.margaritacabrera.com/?cat=4> (accessed May 1, 2011).

some sort of interview or documentary component, among other things, would have needed to be present in the work to evoke these types of specific, localized histories, experiences and traditions.

What the viewers see in the installation at the Sweeney, i.e. the didactics and exhibited material products of the craft workshop, do not immediately reveal the capital relation between Cabrera and the workers in the participatory engagement that produced the objects on display. But when looking into the immaterial work of Cabrera – the planning of her artistic production and the hiring, managing and directing the workers, etc. – we see the capital relation clearly. “This activity makes immediately apparent something that material production had ‘hidden,’ namely, that labor produces not only commodities, but first and foremost it produces the capital relation.”¹⁰⁰ The capital relation is the relationship between Cabrera, as capitalist on the one hand, and the participants and supporting staff (wage-workers, volunteers, paid gallery staff) on the other; a relation that is obscured by the actual physical construction of the aesthetic objects. Immaterial production is built on social relations, cooperative interactions and communication between entities, therefore this type of production reveals the capital relation that has been buried by the material production.¹⁰¹ If we look beyond the physical, aesthetic objects on display at the Sweeney, which do not reveal the capital relation operating behind the material veil, and examine the relations of production that

¹⁰⁰ Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” 138.

¹⁰¹ Paolo Virno, “Day Two: Labor, Action, Intellect,” in *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2004), 106-107.

went into creating the objects and the installation, the capital relation comes into focus. The production of Cabrera's projects and the creation, design and installation of her exhibition at the Sweeney Cabrera required the interaction of Cabrera's immaterial labor with the participants material labor to actualize, and manifest her works in a physical form.

The division of labor between Cabrera's immaterial labor and the participants material labor is clearly operating in her participatory art, but perhaps in the workshop *The Craft of Resistance*, this hierarchy is most explicit. Cabrera's own conceptual, immaterial labor "stands in stark contrast to other forms of undervalued labor necessary to [her] respective project[s]; [her] exchange obviates the mechanisms of cultural, class, and institutional privilege that enable artistic labor in becoming a speculative sign, capitalized far beyond the capacity of its material production."¹⁰² The relationship, specifically the capital relation, between Cabrera as capitalist/director and the workers who are hired and directed by Cabrera, correlates to the difference between immaterial/intellectual labor of the supervisor/managerial role of the artist and the subordinate material, manual labor of the workers.¹⁰³ This "invisible" immaterial/material labor hierarchy and the division of labor operate in all of Cabrera's participatory works, however it is best illustrated in her craft workshop. Cabrera, as the artist in this context, is the exploiter of the material labor of those she hired in her workshop. Although the

¹⁰² Kenneth Rogers, "Capital Implications," 53.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 50.

anonymous workers produced the copper butterflies for the installation *The Craft of Resistance* they are not the authors, or the producers of the value. Rather, it is Cabrera, with her authorship, who produces the value of the artwork.

In *The Craft of Resistance* workshop, the labor relations are one of capitalist and proletariat (*obrera*). The workers involved in Cabrera's workshop at ArtPace were previously unemployed individuals who Cabrera hired at minimum wage as contract laborers and whose legal status remains unknown.¹⁰⁴ In the original, "live" workshop exhibited at Artpace and the installation at the Sweeney (fig. 2.4), Cabrera obfuscated the economic and labor relations functioning in this project between she and the workers she hired. Information regarding her contractual relationship with the workers are in no way transparent, and is not found in any publications, didactic material or Cabrera's website. The employment of the workers was negotiated through short-term contracts and Cabrera paid them minimum wage. I was informed in our interview only because I asked Cabrera directly. This contractual relationship between Cabrera and the workers reveals the division of labor and exchange and the way in which the money-system alienates the worker and his/her labor.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Margarita Cabrera, interview by author, Riverside, CA, March 4, 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor," in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. & trans. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 288.

The structure of Cabrera's workshop reflects the classic social relations of production, which are based upon the exchange of labor-power for a wage.¹⁰⁶ The actual hand-made, artisanal labor executed in the workshop, which produced the representations of butterflies installed on the walls of the Culver Center could be considered "productive labor" because, although Cabrera has paid the workers wages, their labor produces an end-product with surplus value.¹⁰⁷ For Cabrera, the value in the workers' labor lies in its potential for capital exploitation.¹⁰⁸ Through the creation of these material, aesthetic objects (copper butterflies), the workers' reproduce the cost of their wage-labor, and then produce surplus-value, which is appropriated and circulated by the capitalist (Cabrera) to produce profit. The copper butterflies, which are the products of the worker's wage-labor, embody surplus-value and become separate and alien to the workers that produced them.¹⁰⁹

The labor executed in Cabrera's participatory workshop *The Craft of Resistance*, could be considered "uncapitalized craft labor," which then enters the art market and becomes "capitalized abstract labor."¹¹⁰ The cultural products, in this case copper butterflies stand as alien and separate from the wage-labor and the workers that produced

¹⁰⁶ Macey, *Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 183.

¹⁰⁷ Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2004), 53.

¹⁰⁸ Rogers, "Capital Implications," 46.

¹⁰⁹ Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 54.

¹¹⁰ Rogers, "Capital Implications," 46.

them, and therein lies their power.¹¹¹ These products (fig. 2.7) assume power through their circulation, exhibition and sale, after they leave the workshop context and site of production. They become separate from and independent of the worker and take on the status of capital, which can be exchanged.¹¹² It is Cabrera who profits from the sale and circulation of these aesthetic objects, which were initially conceived through the immaterial labor of creative thoughts and conceptual processes. The way in which Cabrera sets up and manages the workshop, and circulates and markets the installation of *The Craft of Resistance*, replicates the capitalist model, by exploiting already underserved (undocumented, underclass) workers to create products that ultimately benefit Cabrera as an artist.

Rather than providing genuine opportunities, such as long-term employment with the chance for promotions or the training of marketable skill sets, the economic infrastructure of Cabrera's workshops and the products created in the workshops, work against the laborers, as a result of short-term wages, thus putting the workers at a further disadvantage.¹¹³ These ideological products form a part of the creative industry that Cabrera is building, *Florezca*, "a for-profit, multinational corporation."¹¹⁴ In this corporation Cabrera seeks to provide "fair wages, shared commission, immersive training

¹¹¹ Marx, "Alienated Labor," 289.

¹¹² Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 54.

¹¹³ Marx, "Alienated Labor," 290.

¹¹⁴ Margarita Cabrera, "Projects: *Florezca*," Margarita Cabrera, <http://www.margaritacabrera.com/?cat=4> (accessed June 1, 2011).

in art and craft, access to legal counsel, access to legal protection, foreign workers visas, employee shareholders options and help with immigrant issues.”¹¹⁵ Cabrera’s highly unrealistic agenda includes creating pathways to legal status for immigrants and undocumented workers in the U.S., and job opportunities with a living wage and fair working conditions to individuals in Mexico. Cabrera claims to provide job opportunities and sustained employment through her craft workshops: *The Craft of Resistance*, *Espacio Entre Culturas* and *Cultural Prosthetics*, (which are structurally contained and economically managed within *Florezca*), but instead she is reproducing and affirming the exploitative conditions of capitalism in its least refined form. The immaterial labor of Cabrera in the context of *Florezca* operates at the level of the microeconomic. Cabrera has produced a micro-economy by replicating the corporate model. The authored artworks, which Cabrera claims are co-authored by the workers, and products of her so-called socio-economically ameliorative workshops, become a source of profit and a part of the creative industry that she seeks to establish.

In *Pulso y Martillo* and *The Craft of Resistance*, Cabrera references the artisanal, so-called indigenous, copper craft-making tradition of Santa Clara del Cobre in Michoacán, Mexico. Cabrera appropriated and recast the coppersmith techniques that she learned at the CECATI No. 166 school (Adolfo Best Maugard Center for Creative Technical and Industrial Training), by incorporating and teaching certain techniques in

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

her performance, *Pulso y Martillo*, and labor workshop, *The Craft of Resistance*.¹¹⁶

Expatriate James Metcalf, an American artist from New York, founded the CECATI craft school in Santa Clara del Cobre. This school boasts itself as a place of exchange between traditional local metal working techniques of the P'urhépecha and European metal working traditions, producing new generations of craft artisans. In addition, the school teaches traditional European jewelry-making techniques. The structure and pedagogy of the school is based on the legacy of the European craft workshop tradition of the master and apprentice.¹¹⁷

The principles and pedagogy of this craft school engage neo-colonial relations, and evoke the exploitative colonial history upon which the current copper industry in Mexico is built. The CECATI school has become implicated in a long colonial history of “cultural mixing” between the Spanish and the P'urhépecha in Santa Clara del Cobre that began in the sixteenth-century.¹¹⁸ Driven by the colonial extraction and plunder economy, and the accumulation of wealth, the Spanish appropriated and exploited the local, pre-colonial, copper mining and copper smith techniques of central Mexico. The Spanish then fused them with the European tradition of metalworking and the European guild system

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Daniel Kornhauser, “Designing a Craft Computing Environment for Non-Industrial Settings,” (M.A. Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002), 14-17, <http://ilk.media.mit.edu/papers/dkor-thesis.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2011).

¹¹⁸ Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, “Hybridity and its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 12:1 (2003): 5.

to create a “new” coppersmith tradition that produced “hybrid” copper objects.¹¹⁹

Through her own appropriation and teaching of these copper craft-making techniques, Cabrera perpetuates the colonial and neo-colonial relations that are deeply embedded in this hybrid coppersmith tradition of CECATI.

Cabrera’s approach to the acquisition and teaching of these copper craft-making techniques of Santa Clara del Cobre, by going directly to the source, is exemplary of primitivist ideology, which has been historically constructed by colonial discourse.¹²⁰ This primitivist thinking often goes overlooked or unquestioned, as it has become so naturalized in the current post-colonial, post-modern culture of eco-tourism, multiculturalism and global spiritual tourism. By learning the so-called indigenous craft tradition at the source, Cabrera assumes that it is culturally authentic and somehow isolated from exterior influences, and subsequently unchanging. Cabrera problematizes the authenticity of her own art by failing to question the authenticity of the hybrid craft tradition that she appropriates and incorporates into her work. The coppersmithing and

¹¹⁹ Karen Spalding, “The Crisis and Transformations of Invaded Societies: Andean Area (1500-1580),” in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas: South America*, ed. Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 962. Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, “Hybridity and its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 12:1 (2003): 5. Thomas B.F. Cummins, “Let Me See! Reading is for Them: Colonial Andean Images and Objects “como es costumbre tener los caciques Senores”,” in *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone and Thomas B.F. Cummins (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998), 96.

¹²⁰ Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 55-6, 89, 120, 146, 156, 184, 212-13.

craft techniques that Cabrera has learned are then further mediated by the process of being taught to and then performed by participants within her art projects *Pulso y Martillo* and *The Craft of Resistance*. There is something unsettling about Cabrera's quasi-ethnographic study of the copper craft tradition of Santa Clara del Cobre, which she then sublimates into high-art, authored and circulated by Cabrera herself.

In *The Craft of Resistance*, Cabrera blurs the boundaries between craft and industrial labor, and raises the question again of authenticity, by collapsing these two different types of labor, and their associated conditions and subsequent spaces. Cabrera artificially relates the concept of industrial material labor found in the *maquiladora*, to the handmade, material craft labor in her workshop, both of which are feminized labor. In the workshop, although it is craft labor that is carried out, there is a very strained reference to the industrial, assembly-line mode of manufacture and workplace setting found in an actual *maquiladora* in Mexico, made through the structure of the workshop (figs. 2.4 & 2.5). Both craft production and the industrial labor of the *maquiladora* are commonly known and accepted as the domain of women. By hiring an all female workforce for her workshop, Cabrera reinforces the division of labor between the sexes, rather than subverting and critiquing these existing structures of power.

It is not entirely clear whether Cabrera engages in the mimicry or parody of the labor conditions and relations that exist in *maquiladoras* located along the Mexico-U.S. border through her workshop and installation, *The Craft of Resistance* (figs. 2.4 – 2.7). The installation itself, a small, open and flimsy series of connected workstations (fig.

2.4), designed for craft production and temporarily situated inside the gallery space, is incongruous with the vast and undifferentiated commercial space of industrial labor concealed behind the walls of the permanent, gargantuan structure of the *maquiladora*. The handcrafted workstation, made of hand-painted wood, is a unique and reified aesthetic object unable to communicate the monumental, industrial infrastructure and commercial design of this opaque, hermetic structure. In addition, the globalized industrial labor of *maquiladoras*, such as the manufacture and assembly of digital hardware, electronics and automobiles, among others, could not be further from the craft labor of coppersmithing required to construct precious copper butterflies in Cabrera's aesthetic mock *maquiladora*.¹²¹ Not only is there a discrepancy between the structure, design and function of actual *maquiladoras* and Cabrera's representational means, but also any discourse on, or critique of the human and environmental costs of export processing are absent from Cabrera's work. In addition, the aestheticized workstation not only lacks the geographic referent of the Mexico-U.S. border, but it lacks any socio-political context.

We burnt our hands everyday. No one had ever told us that the liquids were dangerous - to this day the warning labels are always in English.... we were washing components with methyl chloride, a substance which causes miscarriages, cancer, and extreme skin irritation. I spent eighteen years

¹²¹ Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 246, and Coco Fusco, "The Unbearable Weightness of Beings: Art in Mexico after NAFTA," in *The Bodies That Were Not Ours: And Other Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 195.

washing components in methyl chloride, dipping my hands
in it without gloves or any kind of protection.¹²²

- María Guadalupe Torres Martínez

The export-processing system that began in the mid-nineteen sixties ushered in rapid industrialization along the Mexico-U.S. border, a region that saw physical, social and economic transformations during this time.¹²³ Three decades later, the advent of NAFTA (The North American Free Trade Agreement) brought about the expansion of this manufacturing sector and the growth of *maquiladoras*, which encouraged continued migration to northern Mexican cities for work, causing further displacement of people.¹²⁴ The space along the Mexico-U.S. border has been referred to as “maquilatitlán [Maquilalánd],” where workers assemble hardware for digital technology and other commodities for the American and European consumer markets from which the workers

¹²² Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 240-241.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 288. Definition of NAFTA: With the launch of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in January 1994, the governments of Canada, the United States, and Mexico heralded the establishment of the world’s largest ‘free trade area,’ a zone of investment and commerce that would facilitate both ‘the special bonds of friendship and cooperation among their nations’ and ‘contribute to the harmonious development and expansion of world trade and provide a catalyst to broader international cooperation.’ The multilateral agreement oversaw trade liberalization among the three countries, canceling tariffs and setting terms for the integration of North American commerce, industry and agriculture. The text of the accord weds commerce to progress, enlightened governance, and international good will. As many observers have noted, the legislation made no provision for the movement of people within its pledge to ‘facilitate the cross-border movement of goods and services between the territories of the Parties.’ Although the trade pact includes side agreements on environmental and labor cooperation, they were not designed to create uniform levels of labor and environmental protections among the three nations. Labor was not invisible to the negotiations over market integration; still, workers were not to enjoy the same freedom of mobility as the commodities that they helped produce.

are excluded.¹²⁵ The economy and labor market in Mexico at the Mexico-U.S. border are largely sustained by export processing plants, which are products of the political and economic imperatives of neoliberal reform. These multinational corporations, typically owned by American companies, maximize their profits by avoiding any investment in mechanized assembly and instead exploiting low-wage labor pools of poor people.¹²⁶ The *maquiladora*-based economy of Mexico, the circuit of migrant workers and the undocumented individuals and immigrants in and between Mexico and the U.S. have been created and perpetuated by (the failure of) NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and neo-liberalism's super fluidity and mobility of globalized capital and labor.¹²⁷

The gendered and racialized bodies of the Mexican, working women (*obreras*) make up approximately seventy percent of the industrial workforce in *maquiladoras*.¹²⁸ Contractors in Mexico hire “‘jóvenes, bonitas, y baratas’ [young, pretty, cheap women],” who for the capitalist, are the ideal workers with a subordinate status in the transborder labor market. It is assumed that young women are less likely to demand a family wage and will obediently endure factory discipline without recourse to union support or legal

¹²⁵ Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 251, and Fusco, “The Unbearable Weightness of Beings,” 188.

¹²⁶ Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 242-246.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 298-299.

¹²⁸ Fusco, “The Unbearable Weightness of Beings,” 195-196.

protection.¹²⁹ Young women are able to begin working in *maquiladoras* as early as age fourteen, and are usually forced to leave the assembly plants by thirty-five, which forecloses any opportunities to assume leadership roles, and proves that these jobs are truly dead-end. In terms of labor, these are highly productive years of person's life. In fact, regarding the staggering productivity levels, it has been reported that plant managers apparently "can double or triple production every six or eight weeks."¹³⁰ The *obreras* are usually paid \$30-40 a week, which is higher than the country's minimum wage, but is nowhere close to a living wage required to support a small family.¹³¹

In the confinement of these industrial plants, women are subjected to the rigors of the assembly line and capitalism's control of labor. "The women stand in a straight row in white lab coats, their heads bent before the advanced technologies of the new factory system. They are the vision of an efficient and submissive workforce, the embodiment of productivity."¹³² The actual conditions of labor in the *maquiladoras* consist of long hours of repetitive, timed tasks involving the assembly and manufacture of commodities and the use of toxic and hazardous materials. The violation of privacy, "unwarranted searches of personal belongings, sexual intimidation, and the gratuitous control of bathroom breaks" by the management of *maquiladoras* are commonplace. A violation of

¹²⁹ Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 246.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹³¹ Fusco, "The Unbearable Weightness of Beings," 197. This statistical information regarding minimum wage is dated by approximately 10 years.

¹³² Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 250.

international law, management requires that women workers take pregnancy tests as a stipulation for employment. Once hired women workers are given contraceptives to prevent pregnancy.¹³³ Work is performed under complete surveillance, as conversations among workers during their breaks are monitored, and communication between workers, despite their close proximity, is strictly prohibited. Access to *maquiladoras*, especially by the media, is restricted by both state and corporate officials. “Special visas are required for foreigners to enter assembly plants in free trade zones, recording devices other than internal surveillance cameras are generally banned inside plants except for during specially planned press conferences to showcase new equipment, and public relations offices provide strategic image management.”¹³⁴ In addition to the health hazards, breaches in privacy and human rights violations, these plants generate toxic waste that is dumped surreptitiously and without regulation into the Rio Grande, polluting the environment far beyond a localized area.¹³⁵

There is a discrepancy between the actual, specific conditions of industrial labor found in *maquiladoras* located along the Mexico-U.S. border and the representational means of Cabrera’s installation and workshop *The Craft of Resistance* (figs. 2.4 – 2.7). The project aestheticizes the real space of the *maquiladora* and trivializes the actual labor conditions and relations that exist there. Cabrera’s shoddily constructed and poor

¹³³ Fusco, “The Unbearable Weightness of Beings,” 198.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 194 & 198.

¹³⁵ Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 204.

imitation of the *maquiladora*, lacks any critical apparatus by simply avoiding the discourse of industrial assembly-line labor altogether and strangely displacing the argument onto the changing traditional of craft production in Mexico. The project thus fails to address the human and environmental costs of the export-processing plants and the physical and psychological damage that they inflict on workers. Rather than exposing the abject conditions of labor specific to the highly concealed space and place of the transnational assembly plant in a critical and subversive way, Cabrera's work buries these conditions further. In relation to the concealed nature of *maquiladoras*, which are intentionally hidden from common view along the border and behind impenetrable, opaque walls, Cabrera's very open and visible series of conjoined workstations situated in the transparent and public University gallery space is misleading (fig. 2.4). The work fails to communicate the surveilled work conditions in the *maquiladora*, the physical dangers, psychological pain, long hours, and the chemical and safety hazards as a result of factory discipline. The installation of Cabrera's workstations at the Sweeney was rendered more ineffective with the absence of bodies toiling in the workshop (fig. 2.4). This strange absence of bodies at work in the workshop created a void in the Sweeney installation, subsequently further diminishing the work's intended connection to real exploitation of laboring bodies in the *maquiladora*.

The exploitative and deeply embedded neo-colonial relations that operate in the economic system of multinational corporations – the same system responsible for putting up *maquiladoras* along the border in Mexico – is testimony that colonialism never left

Latin America. These neo-colonial relations extend to the upper-classes in Latin America and the underclass, and The United States and Latin America.

The economic linkages between multinational corporations and factories in industrializing countries followed established patterns of colonial extraction: companies employed poor worker for labor-intensive operations, manufacturing commodities on the other side of the border for consumption by advanced capitalist countries.¹³⁶

Although Cabrera hired workers for craft production in her workshop and not industrial manufacture and assembly, the way in which Cabrera structured the economic relations mimics and reinforces the neocolonial relationship between the capitalist, who has replaced the colonial extractor, and the exploitation of labor power of the underclass. Although the workers in Cabrera's workshop earned more than they would if they worked at an actual *maquiladora*, Cabrera only paid them the U.S. standard for minimum wage for a short-term period, which provided neither a living wage nor sustained employment. Not only does Cabrera's work trivialize the exploitative labor conditions at the *maquiladora* but also it fails to acknowledge the people who reside in and traverse the borderlands, and the living and working conditions that exist there.¹³⁷ The gap between the context of labor in the *maquiladora* and the content of Cabrera's installation is deepened by the isolated, aesthetic context of the gallery, in which the mock *maquiladora* was situated. Here, within the pristine white walls of the gallery space, with the middle to

¹³⁶ Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 246.

¹³⁷ For more on the working and living conditions (including *femicidio*) at the border between U.S. and Mexico see: Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, and Fusco, "The Unbearable Weightness of Beings."

upper class viewing subject, the real site of the *maquiladora* and industrial labor found in the free-trade zone along the Mexico-U.S. border became an abstract and aestheticized concept, taking on new implications. In this context the real issue of labor exploitation in the name of commodity production was neutralized through Cabrera's aesthetic imitation of a *maquiladora*, and as a result the issues lost their socio-political urgency.

The dislocated and displaced workforce that Cabrera hired for the workshop *The Craft of Resistance* is the product of the economic forces of free-market capitalism, which has drawn people to the border zone and across the border into the U.S. Through their different migrations, each worker that Cabrera hired in San Antonio, inevitably has had their own encounter and experience with the transborder zone. Rather than a subversive gesture commenting on how the U.S and Mexico rely on the contracted labor and "the transnational movement of Mexican workers," Cabrera's work has become complicit in perpetuating the culturally constructed category of "Mexicans as a transborder laboring class;" a workforce upon which Cabrera's work depends for its content and meaning.¹³⁸ By intentionally hiring undocumented workers on short-term contracts without any arrangement for sustained employment, Cabrera exploited the workforce that she purported to help, and reinforced "the historical racialization of Mexican migrants as temporary workers ineligible for naturalization."¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 9.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

When looking more closely at the collaboration that Cabrera claims is operating in her performance and workshop, we see that, in fact there is no collaborative component. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” given the existing structures of language and power in our post-colonial and post-modern culture, the subaltern “other” is still kept silent on many levels and through various forms of representation, and Cabrera’s work is complicit in this.¹⁴⁰ Cabrera seems to set up and orchestrate the projects in such a way that precludes any possibility of true collaboration, only participation. Cabrera speaks for the subaltern other (in this case immigrant, migrant, undocumented and unemployed workers predominantly from Mexico) through her representations, subsequently rendering them more invisible.¹⁴¹ She reinforces the “silence” of subaltern others, rather than empower and give them voice, or at least call into question the systems that take their voices.¹⁴² Cabrera’s participatory art “struggles in its ability to open a...non-hierarchical, and interactive space and often reverts to a voice that speaks for rather than from the groups and subjects who are institutionally excluded from access to these forms of culture.”¹⁴³ In both Cabrera’s workshop and performance, the participants were not given agency and

¹⁴⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

¹⁴¹ This analysis could benefit from and be strengthened by a complete reading and application of Spivak’s postcolonial, subaltern theory, however time and space does not permit at this juncture. I bring the literature in only peripherally because I want to acknowledge the future theoretical work that I intend to pursue and incorporate into this study.

¹⁴² Thanks to Professor Morton for her insight into Spivak’s theory.

¹⁴³ Rogers, “Capital Implications,” 41.

simply helped execute Cabrera's creative vision. Whereas the participants in the workshop were paid a fixed hourly rate, and as a result had no agency, the performance perhaps allowed the participants strictly "performative agency."¹⁴⁴

In addition, the labor force that Cabrera hired to participate in her workshops was historically constructed under European colonialism. Although the conditions under new globalization (after 1492) have changed, the labor relations have remained fixed in that European dominance, in which Cabrera partakes. Knowledge, genealogies and theories have been formed by that dominance.¹⁴⁵ Cabrera has been trained in the European and American traditions of the artistic Avant-garde, and this is the filter through which she engages the subaltern other in her works. The dominant position of power that Cabrera commands, vis-à-vis her participants, has been formed through her knowledge, training and social class. The immaterial labor of the artist (conceptual creativity and thought processes) is ascribed to a dominant position, thus reinforcing the established structure of power. To push this further, arguably, the theory of immaterial labor itself, which I have used as a critical framework through which to interpret Cabrera's mode of production for her participatory art, could also be considered a product of European dominance.

By contrast with Cabrera's work, an example of a truly collaborative approach to contemporary cultural production is artist Cristen Crujido's *El Proyecto Milagro* 1999. In

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴⁵ I would like to acknowledge Professor Schiwy's input on how power and knowledge vis-à-vis Latin America have been historically constructed through European dominance.

this project the subaltern other was able to speak and was empowered by the exchange with the artist, rather than further silenced and suppressed, as is the case in Cabrera's participatory work. In *El Proyecto Milagro*, Crujido employed a dialogical approach to collaboration with a community of migrant workers in Arizona, which was achieved through conversations.¹⁴⁶ The artist did not seek to ameliorate the socio-economic conditions of the community of workers through her artistic intervention, but rather listened to their personal narratives concerning collectivity in migrant life. Through the act of listening and conversing, Crujido was guided by the workers voices to create a piece that was essentially designed by them, and would therefore have a specific purpose and meaning for that community of workers. Additionally, this work was not intended for the exhibitionary space of the gallery, but rather was designed and created for an outdoor, public site, in close proximity to where the community of migrants lived and worked, so to be easily accessed by them.¹⁴⁷

When considering participatory projects that provide employment to underserved or unemployed individuals, contemporary artist Santiago Sierra comes to mind. By contrast with Cabrera's work, Sierra draws attention to and exposes the labor and economic relations between himself, his projects and those he hires for his projects. Whereas Cabrera attempts to bury the capital relation in her participatory projects, which is made immediately obvious through her own work as an immaterial worker, Sierra does

¹⁴⁶ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004), 165.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 163-165.

not hide the capital relation operating in his work, in *Person Remunerated for Cleaning Shoes of Attendees to an Opening Without Their Consent*, 2000, for example.¹⁴⁸ Sierra makes the information about the amount that he pays his participants visible and available, and, in fact, their remuneration becomes the focus of the work.¹⁴⁹ He makes a point to inform the viewer, in the documentation of his work, that he pays his participants “slightly above the day rate that comparable workers in non-art situations would receive.”¹⁵⁰ Unlike Cabrera, Sierra does not claim to change the socio-economic situation of those he hires and provide them with sustained employment through his art, as does Cabrera. Rather, Sierra exposes the abjection of the poor, underclass and unemployed individuals living in Mexico City, and their continual exploitation in a very public way. Similarly, Oscar Bony, a conceptual artist from Argentina, made the fact that he paid the working class family double the wages of their regular jobs to pose as a work of art in a gallery during exhibition hours in *La Familia Obrera* (Proletarian Family) 1968, visible to the viewing audience.¹⁵¹ Another example is the work of collaborative duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, who transferred their material work and tasks as artists to two unemployed house painters in Leipzig. The artists paid the workers to execute their performance *12 Hours of White Paint*, 1999, which involved painting the gallery walls

¹⁴⁸ Fusco, “The Unbearable Weightness of Beings,” 67.

¹⁴⁹ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 120.

¹⁵⁰ Fusco, “The Unbearable Weightness of Beings,” 65.

¹⁵¹ Mari Carmen Ramirez, “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980,” in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950’s-1980’s*, ed. Luis Camnitzer, J. Farve and R. Weiss (New York: Queen’s Museum of Art, 1999), 61.

white seven hours a day for seven consecutive days.¹⁵² Also by contrast with Cabrera's approach to participatory art, Sierra, Bony and Elmgreen and Dragset chose to make the actual underclass and unemployed subjects and the work that they executed the focus of their ephemeral art. The content of their art was the actual physical bodies of workers enacting different types of labor. And unlike Cabrera's art, none of the aforementioned participatory projects that provided employment to various workers produced a durable, material aesthetic objects that went on to circulate and be further exchanged and displayed.

Cabrera's works *Pulso y Martillo* and *The Craft of Resistance*, lack a geographic referent. Although Cabrera's art reflects her interest and investment in borderlands rhetoric and cultural identity; her personal trajectory and artistic training communicate something different. Cabrera, who is of the upper class, emigrated with her family from Monterrey, Mexico to the United States, settling in New York. A product of the artistic Avant-garde, Cabrera received both her BFA and MFA from Hunter College of the City University of New York.¹⁵³ Although Cabrera's work appears to belong to the category of Chicana Art, and the cultural identity of the borderlands, and perhaps this is the desired effect, the work remains difficult to pin down. Cabrera's hybrid, rootless art draws on the Mexican Muralists and their indigenous utopianism, North American pop

¹⁵² Fusco, "The Unbearable Weightness of Beings," 66.

¹⁵³ Rita Gonzalez, Howard N. Fox and Chon A. Noriega, *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and University of California Press, 2008), 120.

art and European, North American, and Latin American conceptualisms, yet it is strangely ambivalent toward these artistic traditions.¹⁵⁴ Cabrera's training reflects a global, cosmopolitan perspective, rather than localized Latin American or indigenous point of view, culturally rooted in the border region. This perhaps tenuous identification with Latin American and Chicana art and borderlands identity raises the question of authenticity in Cabrera's art. To blur the lines even further, Cabrera fuses the coppersmithing and craft making tradition of Santa Clara del Cobre, Mexico with her own contemporary art practice, which again brings us to the issue of authenticity.¹⁵⁵ Cabrera has had to construct her own borderlands experience by intentionally situating herself at one of the crossroads between Mexico and the U.S. Cabrera has chosen to live and work in the liminal and rootless, transnational space of El Paso, Texas. Although Cabrera is an immigrant herself, judging from her upper class background, it would seem that Cabrera's narrative of emigration was quite different from the experiences of immigrants who deal with the perils and challenges of traversing the physical border between these two nations. And it is this same social constituency of underclass Mexican migrants, immigrants and undocumented workers that Cabrera targets for her participatory projects, which speak for rather than directly from the voices of the subjects.

¹⁵⁴ Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 94, and Margarita Cabrera, interview by author, Riverside, CA, March 4, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ An area that could be developed further in this study, and could potentially yield a rich and interesting analysis.

Although Cabrera's work is influenced by the venerable tradition in modern and contemporary Mexican art "of celebrating the creativity of the oppressed in the face of adversity...[and] the romanticizing of indigenous tradition," there is a crucial difference.¹⁵⁶ This difference between Cabrera and these artists who subscribe to this approach, such as the Mexican Muralists and contemporary artists Felipe Ehrenberg, Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Ruben Ortiz, lies in the cynicism and the exploitative capitalist corporate model that her work follows.¹⁵⁷

In her performance *Pulso y Martillo*, and her workshop and installation *The Craft of Resistance*, we see the intersection of immaterial and material labor and the interface between "productive cooperation and the social relationship with the consumer."¹⁵⁸ Cabrera's immaterial work of creative, intellectual thought are responsible for the informational and cultural content of the projects, which are physically manifested, by the participants material labor of manual craft production, movement and gesture. Symbolically aligning herself with the workers, Cabrera joined the participants in the physical execution of the performance and workshop displayed for the viewing subject. Cabrera, as artist, exemplifies the immaterial worker, who produces value that circulates. What creates profit is the creativity (Cabrera's immaterial labor) that produces Cabrera's aesthetic projects and objects.

¹⁵⁶ Fusco, "The Unbearable Weightness of Beings," 66.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 138.

As illustrated by her participatory works, *Pulso y Martillo* and *The Craft of Resistance*, and her for-profit corporation, *Florezca*, through which she manages these so-called collaborative ameliorative projects, Cabrera appropriates and replicates the capitalistic corporate model and reinforces the exploitation of a transnational workforce. Rather than engaging in a critique or parody, Cabrera engages in the mimicry of globalized and corporatized labor. Cabrera hides the labor and capital relations between she and the workers she hires behind the material veil of her art. That said, when analyzing her participatory approach through the critical framework of immaterial labor, the material veil is lifted, and we are able to see and better understand the labor and capital relations involved in the production of contemporary art by Margarita Cabrera.

Chapter Three

Vik Muniz: Recycling and Reimaging Globalized Labor

The project studied here consists of seven large-scale photographic portraits of Brazilian garbage recyclers (*catadores*), entitled *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008 (figs. 3.1 – 3.10). The *catadores* are self-designated collectors of recyclable materials and the subjects of and participants in this portrait series. For this project Vik Muniz traveled from his current home in Brooklyn, New York to his home country of Brazil, and *Jardim Gramacho*, a three hundred and twenty-one acre, open-air dumpsite, the largest in the world and located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁵⁹ Not employed in the conventional sense, more than twenty-five hundred *catadores* sort through seven thousand tons of waste that arrives daily and reclaim two-hundred tons of recyclable materials each day.¹⁶⁰ Providing one of the crucial links to recycling companies, the *catadores* sell the collected materials, such as metal, plastic, PVC, paper and rags, to wholesalers.¹⁶¹ The labor carried out by the *catadores* at *Jardim Gramacho* helps remediate the effects of

¹⁵⁹ Carol Kino, “Where Art Meets Trash and Transforms Life,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2010, Arts section, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/arts/design/24muniz.html>, and [i]ndependent Lens Pressroom, “Waste Land: About the Film,” *Public Broadcasting Service*, February 25, 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/waste-land/film.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Neal Conan, “Recyclers Turn Rio ‘Waste Land’ into High Art.” *National Public Radio*, February 21, 2011, Arts and Life section, <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/21/133941168/Trash-Pickers-Turn-Rio-Waste-Land-Into-High-Art>.

¹⁶¹ Jason Edward Kaufman, “Oscar-nominated ‘Waste Land’ Gives Grace (and Art) to Garbage,” *The Washington Post*, March 12, 2011, Lifestyle section, http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/oscar-nominated-waste-land-gives-grace-and-art-to-garbage/2011/03/07/ABY7XAS_story.html.

overconsumption and careless disposal symptomatic of contemporary culture. The *catadores* of *Jardim Gramacho*, and their cooperative *ACAMJG* (Association of Collectors of the Metropolitan Landfill of *Jardim Gramacho*), have become a model for recycling initiatives at national and global levels.

Seven out of thirty-five possible participants were selected to collaborate in Muniz's project.¹⁶² Although Valter dos Santos was an initial participant in Muniz's project and was prominently featured in the documentary film that was made in conjunction with Muniz's project, he unfortunately passed away during the course of the Muniz's two-year stay, so the seventh participant and portrait is of Carlão (fig. 3.10). For the project, *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008 (figs. 3.1 – 3.10), Muniz had initially planned to observe the *catadores* at work and "paint" their portraits with items found at *Jardim Gramacho*.¹⁶³ The plans swiftly changed, however, after Muniz began to work alongside the *catadores*, picking through garbage, to become acquainted and to develop a rapport with the individual workers. Muniz thus began to treat the site as a social and formal framework.¹⁶⁴ This interaction led Muniz in the direction of creating a collaborative

¹⁶² *Waste Land*, "About: Catadores," *Waste Land*, <http://www.wastelandmovie.com/index.html> (accessed March 25, 2011). In addition to Tião (Sebastiao Carols dos Santos), the representative of the social constituency of *catadores* and manager of their cooperative, the other *catadores* who participated in Muniz's project included: Magna (Magna de França Santos), Irma (Leide Laurentina da Silva), Isis (Isis Rodrigues Garros), Suelem (Suelem Pereira Dias), Zumbi (Jose Carlos da Silva Bala Lopes), and Valter (Valter dos Santos).

¹⁶³ PBS online, "Waste Land," [i]ndependent Lens Pressroom, <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/waste-land/film.html> (accessed March 25, 2011).

¹⁶⁴ Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum* 44: 6 (February, 2006): 179.

project, which is a relatively new method of working for Muniz. The production of Muniz's project consisted of first photographing the *catadores* on-site, in the working milieu of *Jardim Gramacho* (figs. 3.2). Muniz then enlarged the portrait series to the approximate size of approximately thirty by fifteen feet, and projected the images onto the painted floor of a nearby warehouse (figs. 3.3 & 3.6). There, Muniz directed the *catadores* to follow and fill in the contours lines and shaded regions of each oversized portrait with the recyclable materials that Muniz and the *catadores* gathered together from the waste site. After the arrangement of objects was complete, Muniz photographed the rendering to produce a final portrait series, (figs. 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7 – 3.10). The photographs taken of the process-based, ephemeral project became the authored aesthetic objects that Muniz took directly to auction rather than circulating first through one of his galleries.¹⁶⁵ Muniz gave the proceeds from the sale of the portraits at auction to the original group of seven *catadores*. Muniz also donated an addition sum of his own money to the *catadores*' cooperative *ACAMJG* to benefit and to be distributed to the entire community of *catadores*.¹⁶⁶ In the course of the production of Muniz's project a documentary film was made. *Waste Land*, 2010, the second feature documentary of filmmaker and director Lucy Walker, was nominated for an academy award in Best Feature Documentary, which helps to circulate Muniz's portrait series, in the form of

¹⁶⁵ *Waste Land*, director Sally Walker, film screening at The Culver Center of the Arts, January 7, 2011.

¹⁶⁶ Brad Balfour, "Vik Muniz's Garbage-Art Transforms a Waste Land into a Nominee & Award Winner," *Huffington Post*, February 22, 2011, Arts section, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-balfour/vik-munizs-garbage-art-tr_b_826816.html.

reproductions and exhibitions, to a much wider audience.¹⁶⁷ In addition to Muniz's financial contribution, the filmmakers, producers and distributors also donated a large sum to the *catadores* and their cooperative.

This particular process of creating an ephemeral work, which is then discarded after it has been recorded by means of photographic representation, illustrated in *Pictures of Garbage*, is consistent with Muniz's previous works and his unconventional artistic approach.¹⁶⁸ Before entering the visual arts, Vik Muniz, a Brazilian born, Brooklyn based, contemporary conceptual artist, worked in advertising and theater in Brazil, with intentions of pursuing theater when he moved to New York in his early twenties.¹⁶⁹ Muniz's training and experience in advertising and theater, as well as his formal fine arts training in painting and sculpture, informs his layered, hybrid art and his current practice, which combines drawing and painting with found objects and other unconventional materials, and photographic representation.¹⁷⁰ While growing up in Brazil in the 1970's

¹⁶⁷ *Waste Land*, "Home, About: Synopsis," *Waste Land*, <http://www.wastelandmovie.com/index.html>.

¹⁶⁸ The aesthetic and conceptual approach of Vik Muniz see: Dan Cameron and Miguel Fernández-Cid, eds., *Vik Muniz* (Santiago de Compostela: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 2004), Emma Dexter, ed., *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing* (London/New York: Phaidon, 2005), Régis Durand, Peter Galassi and Vik Muniz, eds., *Vik Muniz* (Paris: Centre National de la Photographie, 1999). Matthew Drutt, *Vik Muniz: Model Pictures: The Menil Collection* (Houston: Menil Foundation, Inc., 2002), Lesley A. Martin, ed., *Reflex: A Vik Muniz Primer* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2005), Vik Muniz, Andy Grundberg and Linda Benedict-Jones, eds., *Clayton Days: Picture Stories* (Pittsburgh: Frick Art & Historical Center, Inc., 2000), Vik Muniz, Charles Ashley Stainback and Mark

¹⁶⁹ Vik Muniz: Born in 1961 in São Paulo, Brazil. Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY, Rio de Janeiro and Bocaina de Minas, Brazil. Emma Dexter, ed., *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing* (London/New York: Phaidon, 2005), 344.

¹⁷⁰ Vik Muniz, Charles Ashley Stainback and Mark Alice Durant, eds., *Vik Muniz: Seeing is Believing* (Santa Fe: Arena Editions, 1998), 35.

and 80's under a military regime with repression and censorship, Muniz learned the methods of communicating through metaphor.¹⁷¹ This combined with Muniz's experience with the interpretive elements of theater and the layered, encoded messages and meanings in advertising, accounts for the visual illusions, double entendres and reproductions of reproductions apparent in the content of his work and his methods.

Muniz paints and draws with found objects and items culled from the everyday, such as chocolate syrup, dirt, thread, wire and toy soldiers to create original artworks, which he then photographs to produce "photographic delusions."¹⁷² Muniz's photographs are considered delusions because they are visually deceptive on several levels. From a distance Muniz's work *Luiz*, from *Pictures of Magazines*, 2003, for example, appears to be a representational portrait, possibly a painting, of former Brazilian President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva.¹⁷³ However, upon closer inspection, Muniz's work is much less literal and the viewer begins to discover the nature of the misleading medium. Muniz has worked from his memory of the original photographic image of Lula da Silva, likely sourced from a popular magazine, to hand-rendered his recreation *Luiz* with the circular pieces of paper punched out of a magazine by a hole punch. These material remnants,

¹⁷¹ Vik Muniz, Andy Grundberg and Linda Benedict-Jones, eds., *Clayton Days: Picture Stories* (Pittsburgh: Frick Art & Historical Center, Inc., 2000), 80.

¹⁷² Dexter, *Vitamin D*, 210.

¹⁷³ Lesley A. Martin, ed., *Reflex: A Vik Muniz Primer* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2005), 145-7.

which are normally destined to the waste bin, are not actually there before the viewer, but instead are being mediated through Muniz's photographic reproduction of this hand-rendered work.

Another method central to Muniz's practice, as illustrated in the series *Pictures of Garbage*, is the quotation of iconic, widely reproduced imagery, as well as references to canonical art historical works solely from memory.¹⁷⁴ Through this reliance on memory and the transformation of mundane objects into shapes that read as textures and lines, Muniz reveals "the unstable territory between object and image, material and representation, fact and metaphor," within a single structure.¹⁷⁵ Through his hybrid renderings and simple illusions, Muniz emphasizes the mediated nature of representation by setting up situations for the viewer to unveil his visual tricks to discover "how representation happens."¹⁷⁶ For example, in *Double Mona Lisa, After Warhol, (Peanut Butter + Jelly)*, 1999, Muniz synthesizes layers of art historical references in one single image, through the medium of peanut butter and jelly, which he then photographs for the final product. Muniz's obvious reference and homage to Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is made through Andy Warhol's own recreation of Da Vinci's work; his print from 1970, entitled *Mona Lisa*, which Muniz appropriates and parodies by recasting it in peanut

¹⁷⁴ Régis Durand, Peter Galassi and Vik Muniz, eds., *Vik Muniz* (Paris: Centre National de la Photographie, 1999), 109, and Muniz, Stainback and Durant, *Vik Muniz*, 24-26.

¹⁷⁵ Luc Sante and Vik Muniz, eds., *Making It Real* (New York: Independent Curators Incorporated, 1997), 24, 25, 27 & 151.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

butter and jelly.¹⁷⁷ Muniz's final photograph of his double image of the Mona Lisa, one rendered in peanut butter and the other in jelly, is a reproduction of his own ephemeral recreation of Warhol's recreation of Da Vinci's original.¹⁷⁸ When viewing the works of Muniz it is no wonder that we as viewers doubt our initial visual perception, and stop to take a closer look.

The social aspect of Muniz's *Pictures of Garbage*, specifically the attempt to benefit a social constituency through the employment and involvement in participatory aesthetic projects, is not a new engagement. According to Muniz, for the past fourteen years much of his staff at his studios in Brazil have been young people from *favelas*, whom he hires on a rotating basis.¹⁷⁹ Prior to his work with the *catadores* project and the documentary film, Muniz has worked with non-profits, most of which are located in Rio de Janeiro and are dedicated to providing education and job training for children living on the streets.¹⁸⁰ Another example of Muniz's engagement with socio-ethical or the so-called socially ameliorative type of project was his participatory work and photographic series, *Invisible Objects*, 1999. In this project he worked again with children who used to live on

¹⁷⁷ Los Angeles County Museum of Art collection, Andy Warhol, *Mona Lisa*, 1970, LACMA, <http://collectiononline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=132231;type=101> (accessed April 4, 2011).

¹⁷⁸ Martin, *Reflex*, 80, and Matthew Drutt, *Vik Muniz: Model Pictures: The Menil Collection* (Houston: Menil Foundation, Inc., 2002), 14.

¹⁷⁹ Michael Slenske, "Vik Muniz's Trash Pick Up," *Art in America* (October 28, 2010), <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/finer-things/2010-10-28/vik-muniz-waste-land/>.

¹⁸⁰ Kino, "Where Art Meets Trash," <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/arts/design/24muniz.html>.

the streets, during his month residency with the institution *Projecto Axé*.¹⁸¹ Founded in 1990 in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil after the collapse of the military dictatorship, *Projecto Axé, Centro de Defesa e Proteção a Crianças e a Adolescentes* (Centre for the Defense and Protection of Children and Adolescents), is an organization that provides resources and opportunities for children living on the streets.¹⁸² The organization provides job training and education, with cultural activities and visual arts projects as a focus, health care, protection and civil rights education, and job opportunities. *Projecto Axé* currently serves around one thousand children ranging in age five to eighteen.¹⁸³

Muniz's former engagements with socially ameliorative projects, coupled with his interest in creating art from garbage, brought him to his project *Pictures of Garbage*. While other found objects and items culled from the everyday are common to Muniz's work, "garbage" was something new.¹⁸⁴ Muniz also came to this project to work with the *catadores* in particular, because he wanted to distance himself from the exclusive and restrictive realm of fine arts, which is a rather contradictory position because it is this same art market upon which he relies to circulate, distribute and sell his portrait series, *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008.

¹⁸¹ Martin, *Reflex*, 134-138.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁸³ The Quiet in the Land, "Brazil: Projecto Axé, Brazil 1997-2000," The Quiet in the Land, <http://www.thequietintheland.org/brazil/category.php?id=projeto-axe>, and Projecto Axé, "Quem Somos," Projecto Axé, <http://www.projetoaxe.org.br/quemsomos.php>.

¹⁸⁴ Slenske, "Vik Muniz's Trash Pick Up," <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/finer-things/2010-10-28/vik-muniz-waste-land/>.

The *catadores* cannot be neatly defined, described and classified. Prior to their designation as *catadores*, each individual came to work at *Jardim Gramacho* from different socio-economic situations and under different circumstances. Tião and Suellem, for example, have been *catadores* since they were eleven and seven respectively, and came to *Jardim Gramacho* because they found it to be safer place to live and work compared to collecting on the streets and in other *favelas*, and a better alternative to prostitution and drug trafficking.¹⁸⁵ In the case of Magna, she began working as a *catador* when her husband lost his job, and Isis turned to collecting at *Jardim Gramacho* after her son died and she and her husband separated.¹⁸⁶

It is through their work at *Jardim Gramacho* that brought this once contingent group of *catadores* to form a collective identity. This is not an essentialist identity, necessarily constructed by the oppressive categorization of a dominant social order, but rather a self-designated identification.¹⁸⁷ Although the *catadores* share class status, nationality and cultural identification, they form a community through their labor at *Jardim Gramacho* and the cooperative that they have established, ACAMJG.¹⁸⁸ And, through this labor and collective organization, the *catadores* have established themselves

¹⁸⁵ *Waste Land*, "About: Catadores," *Waste Land*, <http://www.wastelandmovie.com/index.html> (accessed March 25, 2011).

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004), 162, 165-166.

¹⁸⁸ My understanding of community is informed by Jean-Luc Nancy's theory on the "Inoperative Community." Jean Luc Nancy, "The Inoperative Community," in *Participation*, ed., Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel Ventures Limited, 2006).

as a “politically coherent community.”¹⁸⁹ They have organized a worker’s cooperative and labor association that represents upwards of twenty-five hundred *catadores*, with a representative, Tião, a long time *catador* himself and advocate for the community.¹⁹⁰ Through the cooperative the *catadores* have found methods for pooling labor, funds and resources to maximize their income with the intent to invest in technology, educational resources, specifically the creation of a library and computer lab, and infrastructure, equipment and truck maintenance. Some of the specific roles taken-up by *catadores* in the community, which were revealed in the film and through Muniz’s interaction with them include, the resident chef, Irma, who uses past-date food items from the waste site to prepare meals for the workers; and librarian, Zumbi, who salvages books and has created a lending library.¹⁹¹

Through their labor association, cooperative and coherence as a community the *catadores* of *Jardim Gramacho* have also created a thriving local, micro economy that has benefitted the recycling and environmental sectors respectively. The *catadores* at *Jardim Gramacho* were already an established ad hoc collective and politically coherent community with voice and representation before the exchange with Muniz. The *catadores* found a way to access and harness physical and spatial resources and produce their own source of power through the creation of a cooperative, labor organization and a

¹⁸⁹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 147-151.

¹⁹⁰ Kaufman, “Oscar-nominated ‘Waste Land’,” http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/oscar-nominated-waste-land-gives-grace-and-art-to-garbage/2011/03/07/ABY7XAS_story.html.

¹⁹¹ PBS online, “Waste Land,” <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/waste-land/film.html>.

thriving local economy. Muniz recognized this, and in fact interviewed the *catadores* to know how they developed this socio-economic structure. With this in mind, Muniz brought the pictorial code of heroism into play when he planned the composition and content of the *catadores*' portraits, which will be elaborated later in the chapter.

Since the recent distribution and screenings of the film *Waste Land*, the lives and labor of the *catadores* involved in Muniz's project have changed drastically, with many of them from the original group leaving *Jardim Gramacho* to pursue other endeavors. It is also very possible that the lives of all of the twenty-five hundred *catadores* currently working and living at *Jardim Gramacho* will soon be altered with the recent law that passed in Brazil to abolish open-air dumpsites, which will close *Jardim Gramacho* by 2012.¹⁹² In the face of this eminent change, the job training and educational resources that the *catadores* have created and utilized through their cooperative ACAMJG, and have further expanded with new investments since the Muniz project and film, could help to prepare and transition the *catadores* into new job sectors. In addition, Tião and ACAMJG, and other organizations such as WIEGO, a global policy research group, advocate an alternative for the many *catadores* who will be faced with potential displacement and unemployment, which involves incorporating the *catadores* with their expertise and specialized knowledge into the new municipal recycling initiatives.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Kino, "Where Art Meets Trash," <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/arts/design/24muniz.html>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Muniz came to work with the *catadores* at *Jardim Gramacho* because of his interest in their particular socio-economic infrastructure and their extensive specialized knowledge of recyclable materials. According to Muniz, he has reached the point in his career where he is more receptive to a broad range of publics and looks to produce “art that is really relevant.”¹⁹⁴ Muniz states in the film: “I grew up poor.” “Now I’ve reached the point where I want to give back.” Referring to the *catadores*, Muniz says, “They just weren’t born very lucky,” “But we’re going to change that.”¹⁹⁵ Muniz was primarily drawn to the *catadores* because of his socio-ethical commitment to work with some of the most marginalized groups of people in Brazilian society and “to change the lives of a group of people with the same material that they deal with everyday.”¹⁹⁶ The social change that Muniz claims to make is well defined. When Muniz met Tião for the first time, Muniz indicated that his intentions were to make portraits of the *catadores*, and compensate them financially by giving all of the proceeds made from the sale of the portraits back to the community of *catadores*. Muniz’s aims were to transform the *catadores* socio-economic situation by using the *catadores* material labor of collecting in the service of another form of work or “non-work,” the immaterial labor of cultural production, which was only possible because of their preexisting social structure.

¹⁹⁴ Slenske, “Vik Muniz’s Trash Pick Up,” <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/finer-things/2010-10-28/vik-muniz-waste-land/>.

¹⁹⁵ *Waste Land*, director Sally Walker, film screening at The Culver Center of the Arts, January 7, 2011.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

In an interview for a periodical article, Muniz expresses implicitly, the *catadores*'s skepticism in giving priority to a participatory aesthetic project over their livelihood.¹⁹⁷ Muniz's project did not unfold initially as simply collective and "happy interactivity: among 'aesthetic objects.'"¹⁹⁸ The idea of not working for pay while participating in an artistic project was not met with immediate voluntary participation from the *catadores* at *Jardim Gramacho*, but rather with some skepticism and resistance.¹⁹⁹ This project required a process and enough time for Muniz to develop a working relationship with the group of *catadores* at *Jardim Gramacho* in order to convince them to collect recyclable materials for his project rather than collect for cash. Muniz proposed that the *catadores* consider and experience a different type of labor, the "productive labor of surplus," which is so characteristic of post-Fordist production.²⁰⁰

In the course of creating this project, Muniz was interested in knowing the *catadores*' opinions on art. After the production was complete, Muniz revealed some of the exclusive functions of the art market by taking Tião to the auction of his portrait in London, and the group of seven *catadores* to the opening night and reception of the first exhibition of *Pictures of Garbage* at the *Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro*,

¹⁹⁷ Balfour, "Vik Muniz's Garbage-Art," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-balfour/vik-munizs-garbage-art-tr_b_826816.html.

¹⁹⁸ Hal Foster, "Chat Rooms," in *Participation*, ed. Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel Ventures Limited, 2006), 195.

¹⁹⁹ Slenske, "Vik Muniz's Trash Pick Up," <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/finer-things/2010-10-28/vik-muniz-waste-land/>.

²⁰⁰ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2004), 51.

where they were interviewed and spoke about their experiences.²⁰¹ This post-production, “non-work” of attending art auctions and participating in exhibition openings for *Pictures of Garbage*, which are essential to the circulation and consumption of cultural production, could be considered the immaterial labor engaged by the *catadores*.

Although Muniz spent a relatively significant amount of time familiarizing himself with this context and workforce, I believe that the specificity of the *catadores*' labor and the complexity of their socio-economic infrastructure are lost in Muniz's staged and romanticized portrait series (figs. 3.1 – 3.10). While this context may be somewhat retained in *Waste Land*, as the film “documents” the *catadores* lives and labor at *Jardim Gramacho* and some of the process and exchange operating in Muniz's project, it is obscured in the final product, the photographic portrait series. The decontextualization of the *catadores* and the effacement of their labor within the portrait series operates on several levels: through dramatic scale shifts, the recreation from Muniz's memory of canonical works culled from art history, and the romanticization of laborers through iconic imagery.

The fact that the portrait series of the seven *catadores* is made of garbage and entitled *Pictures of Garbage* raises some deeply problematic questions. The portrait is “a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social

²⁰¹ *Waste Land*, director Sally Walker, film screening at The Culver Center of the Arts, January 7, 2011.

identity.”²⁰² Muniz essentializes the *catadores* as garbage, which he attempts to handle by sublimating the garbage into art historical motifs. Muniz heroicizes and ennobles the *catadores* through his manipulation of art historical models and pictorial codes, which perhaps allows Muniz and the viewer to disavow the direct association between garbage and subject. However, I believe these portraits – or constructions of identity – otherize, and marginalize the *catadores*, reinforcing existing structures of power, and neo-colonial class and race relations that exist between Muniz and the *catadores*.

The process of adding a garbage overlay to the photographs of the *catadores* began first with the enlargement of the images. Muniz used the floor of a large warehouse to enlarge each portrait in order to accommodate some of the most massive items of garbage, like shopping carts and steel oil drums. As the *catadores* filled-in the negative and positive spaces with the recyclables that they gathered with Muniz, the portraits began to transform: plastic bottles end-on-end line the shadows of drapery folds; tarps, dolls and televisions outline the contours of head scarves; stuffed animals, plastic cones fill the positive space of vessels and bags; large stereo speakers, toilet seats, and car tires fill negative space and backgrounds; while thousands of plastic bottle caps follow the contour lines of the wrinkles on faces. Due to the grand scale of each portrait and the *catadores* close proximity to them as they worked on the ground, the images were invisible to them, as they could not see the whole. Only Muniz, in the omniscient “God” position, could see the images take form. From the upper level of the warehouse Muniz

²⁰² John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 37.

oversaw and orchestrated the construction of each composition, and after the *catadores* completed each one, Muniz then photographed them from an upper level. This illustrates the clear hierarchy of power operating in the production of Muniz's works. The photographed images were then reproduced at a significantly smaller scale. This aerial perspective of the camera shot, coupled with the reduction of scale through production rendered the recyclables unrecognizable. These everyday materials, now the scale of beads, have been defamiliarized to the point of resembling a texture. Although Muniz brought the specificity of the *catadores*' "real" daily labor at *Jardim Gramacho* to the portrait series through the materiality of the recyclables, the nature and conditions of this labor are erased through its sublimation into art and art history. Through these destabilizing shifts in scale Muniz seems to deny context. This scale shift in the process of creating the portraits could also be in dialogue with the enormous scale of the waste site itself, which renders the *catadores* practically invisible while working on the site.

In the portraits of Tião (fig. 3.1), Suelem (fig. 3.8), and Zumbi (fig. 3.9), Muniz references canonical works from art history, and by so doing decontextualizes and romanticizes the *catadores* and their labor. In *Marat (Sebastião)*, (figs. 3.1 – 3.3), Muniz recreates Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Death of Marat*, 1793 (fig. 3.11), and restages the composition, based on his memory, in the waste site with reclaimed materials. Muniz directs and photographs Tião as he poses as Marat lying in a bathtub, with tarps, garbage bags and a t-shirt serving as drapery. In *Mother and Children (Suelem)* (fig. 3.8), Muniz recasts the image of the Madonna and child in the warehouse come-studio, with Suelem and her two children and reclaimed materials. Muniz does not

seem to be quoting a specific artwork, but rather the ubiquitous image of the Madonna and child of Western art history, and commonly the subject of paintings from the early modern period. In *The Sower (Zumbi)* (fig. 3.10), Muniz, again from memory, recreates the composition of Jean-François Millet's painting *The Sower*, c.1850 (fig. 3.12). There is long tradition and history of romanticizing labor in art, however Muniz's makes a direct reference to the nineteenth-century genre of Realism, which often depicted the essentializing idea and category of the "noble peasant" or "noble worker" in painting, for example, some of Jean-François Millet's other works of "noble peasants and workers" *Les Glaneuses (The Gleaners)*, 1857, and *The Potato Planters*, 1861 among others; Gustave Courbet's *The Stone Breakers*, 1849-50 and Gustave Caillebotte's *Les raboteurs de parquet (The Floor Scrapers)*, 1875.²⁰³ Here Muniz engages in a double romanticization. Muniz references Millet's nineteenth-century romanticization of the worker sowing a field by directing Zumbi to enact this type of labor, which he photographs, creating his own "noble worker" evacuated from the context of reclamation.

Another method that Muniz uses, which also effaces and romanticizes the *catadores'* labor, is to recreate images of the worker and general iconic images that are based on essentializing and universalizing categories. Though these images are common in visual culture, they do not necessarily reference any specific artworks. In the portraits, *The Bearer (Irmã)* (figs. 3.5 & 3.6) and *Woman Ironing (Isis)* (fig. 3.7), Muniz has directed Irmã and Isis to enact the types of labor often associated with women: the act of

²⁰³ T.J Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

transporting water or goods in a vessel atop one's head and ironing. Muniz portrays Irmã (fig. 3.5 & 3.6) in a heroic and honorific manner, emphasizing her strength and statuesque pose through the upward shooting camera angle. Interestingly, the portrait of Irmã is the only representation of the portrait series that relates to the *catadores*' real labor at *Jardim Gramacho*, more specifically Irma's work. The title, *The Bearer*, denotes Irmã's role as provider of food and water. As the resident chef, Irmã is represented with her large saucepan that she uses in the preparation of meals for the *catadores* on-site while they work. In the portrait *Woman Ironing (Isis)* (fig. 3.7), Muniz romanticizes the mundane work of ironing, through the dramatic, overly staged and contrived composition and position of Isis's body. The portrait of Magna *The Gypsy (Magna)* (fig. 3.4) is perhaps the least staged from the series, judging by Magna's seemingly candid expression and lack of pose and staged activity. Magna does, however, assume the essentializing identity of the gypsy, complete with a headscarf and shawl fashioned from reclaimed materials. Although Muniz may not have drawn specifically on art history for this portrait, and perhaps instead relied on his memory of the many iconic images circulating in visual and popular culture, there is still a long tradition and history in representing the gypsy figure in art, which may have influenced Muniz. As a signifier, the gypsy image communicates the Bohemian release from repressive conventions, a theme that recurs throughout art history. Some examples include: Frans Hals, *Gypsy Girl*, c. 1628-30, Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot's multiple representations of gypsies in oil from the nineteenth-century, Pablo Picasso, *Gypsy Outside "La Musciera,"* 1900, and Amedeo Modigliani, *Gypsy Woman with Baby*, 1919, among others. In the portrait, *Atlas (Carlão)*

(fig. 3.10), Muniz recasts an iconic image from Greek mythology, the Titan Atlas, by directing Carlão to carry his bag of collected recyclables on his shoulders, above his head. Again, common to art history and popular culture, the image of Atlas is found in a variety of media, ranging from the most reified ancient Greek and Roman sculptures, preserved and housed in museum spaces, to the most mass produced and distributed images, found in on-line photo sharing sites such as “flickr.”

In all of the portraits there are elements of theatricality, staging and reenactment. Each of the seven *catadores* engage in role playing and the enactment of labor for their portraits, which could stem from Muniz’s training and experience in theater and performance. Muniz’s set-up approach to photography, coupled with his controlled and directed arrangement of the garbage with the *catadores*, reflects his orchestrated and manipulated method of production and intervention.²⁰⁴ Through his process of overly staging photographic representations and recreating artworks with the added layer of scaled down garbage, Muniz constructs simple illusions and visual tricks for the viewer to uncover. While exposing the artifice and mediated mechanism of representation, Muniz actually renders the context of the *catadores* labor more invisible. Although Muniz incorporates the material context of *Jardim Gramacho* through a layer of reclaimed items in each portrait, the reduction in scale renders the recyclables, the source of the *catadores*’ labor, illegible. Muniz not only effaces their labor through scale

²⁰⁴ Muniz, Grundberg and Benedict-Jones, *Clayton Days*, 77.

reduction, but he decontextualizes and romanticizes their labor at *Jardim Gramacho* through references to art history and iconic images of labor.

When considering Muniz's position in relation to the *catadores* in this project, I suggest that Muniz does not use a general anthropological approach but rather an ethnographic method, often times a problematic and contested territory within anthropology. Art historian and critic Hal Foster proposed the idea of the artist as ethnographer in, *The Return of the Real*.²⁰⁵ Foster's ethnographer paradigm draws on Walter Benjamin's notion of "The Author as Producer" from 1934, which addresses artistic authority and the artist's intervening role in relation to cultural politics and the proletariat.²⁰⁶ Yet Foster takes a different approach based on the new set of concerns of contemporary conceptual artists beginning in the 1990's, when artists began taking an anthropological approach toward a new subject of study, the cultural and/or ethnic other.²⁰⁷ Foster references anthropologist James Clifford, who asks "Is not every ethnographer something of a surrealist, a reinventor and reshuffler of realities?" Foster brings Clifford's idea of "ethnographic self-fashioning" and "ethnographic surrealism" to bear on quasi-anthropological art practices and artists who have assumed the ethnographic role of cultural authority and engage in cultural and sociological

²⁰⁵ Hal Foster, "The Artist As Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

mapping.²⁰⁸ The ethnographic approach is specific to contemporary site-specific, installation, collaborative and ephemeral art practices, and concerned with politically or socially marginalized groups, specifically the postcolonial subaltern or subcultural.²⁰⁹ In this quasi-anthropological turn in contemporary art, Foster warns against the danger and possibility of cultural othering, self-othering and the inadvertent embracing of the primitivist fantasy, which I think, to a certain extent happens in *Pictures of Garbage*. Consistent with the ethnographic approach is a horizontal way of working, whereby the artist “selects a site, enters its culture and learns its language, conceives and presents a project, only to move on to the next site where the cycle is repeated.”²¹⁰ Other characteristics of this horizontal way of working in art, are to not only map out the culture and site, but also work in terms of interdisciplinary frames, themes and topics, and to familiarize oneself with the structure and history of the selected culture well enough to narrate it through art practice.²¹¹ In my view, Muniz’s approach to *Pictures of Garbage* evokes Foster’s paradigm of the artist as ethnographer. For this project, Muniz sought out this particular community, geographically situated in the spatial and so-called social margins of Rio de Janeiro, thus setting up and reinforcing the binary of center and

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 180, 181 & 185.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 174.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 202.

²¹¹ Ibid., 202.

periphery. Muniz treats *Jardim Gramacho* as an ethnographic site with an entire context (social, cultural and economic) to be mapped out prior to beginning his project.²¹²

Although Muniz had a fairly extensive engagement with the community of *catadores* on-site at *Jardim Gramacho*, he worked with only seven out of more than twenty-five hundred, which is not necessarily representative of the entire community and context. And this is not the first time he has done this. This social mapping and quasi-anthropological project, I would propose, began with his portrait series of children drawn in sugar entitled, *Sugar Children*, 1996. While on vacation, Muniz's project was inspired by his interaction with a group of children living in St. Kitts whose parents worked in the sugar industry there, which represents one of the vestiges of colonial occupation, oppression and the colonial economy of extraction.²¹³ This earlier portrait project, *Sugar Children* and the *catadores* project *Pictures of Garbage* Muniz, both recast "the other in neo-primitivist guise."²¹⁴ In my view, these projects are laden with neo-colonial race, class relations and essentializing categories and binaries. In addition, these projects suggest that the materials, sugar and garbage, with their subsequent associations, define and dictate the lives and work of the individuals portrayed. In *Pictures of Garbage* Muniz synthesizes the relationship between work, materiality and person in a single narrative, however, as previously discussed, he does so in a decontextualizing and romanticizing

²¹² Ibid., 182 & 185.

²¹³ Martin, *Reflex*, 58-63.

²¹⁴ Foster, "The Artist As Ethnographer," 197.

manner. Rather than questioning and reflecting on the authority that is often assumed in the ethnographic observation, interpretation and representation of the “other,” Muniz seems to embrace the notion of, “preserv(ing) a romanticism of the other at the margins.”²¹⁵

One way to analyze the *catadores*' material labor within the production of *Pictures of Garbage* is to consider its relation to the immaterial labor operating in the project. Departing from Marx's formulation of material labor and industrialized production, which necessarily produces commodities and itself and the worker as commodities, the *catadores*' labor of physically collecting and reclaiming materials by hand is associated with a preindustrial, archaic form of labor.²¹⁶ It is difficult to determine if this particular occupation within the informal sector provides a service to an entire network of wholesalers and recycling companies or a product. But, when the *catadores* collect items for Muniz's project, their labor clearly produces a product. The *catadores*' material labor of reclamation is transformed into the illusion of immaterial labor in the context of Muniz's project. The *catadores*' participation in the creative process of enacting labor activities, role playing and sitting for Muniz's photographic portraits and selecting and arranging the recyclables on the compositions is material labor, as they are still doing the labor. Muniz's conceptual work in the project (brainstorming and planning) and his management of the *catadores*' work in the production process

²¹⁵ Ibid., 182 & 185.

²¹⁶ Karl Marx, “Alienated Labor,” in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. & trans. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 289.

(directing and dictating the execution) are the types of immaterial labor that characterize post-Fordist production and the post-industrial economy.²¹⁷ For example, when Muniz stood on the upper level of the warehouse to look down on his project and dictate its composition to the *catadores*, he represented the paradigm of the immaterial worker. This also illustrates the hierarchy that operates within Muniz's project, and this type of participatory art production more generally, which corresponds to the immaterial labor of the middle-upper class artist, Muniz, and the manual/material labor of the under-working class participants, the *catadores*. Defined in this way, Muniz represents the artist as exploiter of the *catadores*' material labor, and producer of surplus value that circulates. It is Muniz's immaterial labor of thought processes and conceptual creativity that produces the authored portraits, which then circulate to produce profit.

Muniz, as a contemporary conceptual artist, fits Paolo Virno's definition of an "immaterial worker," who is "mobile and detached, adaptable, curious, opportunistic and cynical, also toward institutions; they are inventive and share knowledge through communication and language; they are mostly de-politicized, also disobedient."²¹⁸ The immaterial labor of Muniz as an artist and the *catadores*' in the collaborative production of *Pictures of Garbage* "forces us to question the classical definitions of *work* and *workforce*, because it results from a synthesis of different types of know-how: intellectual

²¹⁷ Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 106-107.

²¹⁸ Sylvère Lotringer, "Forward: We, the Multitude," in *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles/New York: Semiotext[e], 2004), 17.

skills, manual skills, and entrepreneurial skills.”²¹⁹ Muniz’s project illustrates the different types of immaterial and material labor skill sets, and the hierarchy that operates within immaterial labor relations. Muniz’s conceptual and intellectual faculties and manual and technical skills combined, which went into designing and creating the cultural-informational content of *Pictures of Garbage*, exemplifies the post-Fordist means of production. Muniz also acts as the entrepreneur and coordinator, combining the ability to direct the project and organize and oversee the *catadores*’ material labor upon which the project relies. Muniz’s cultural entrepreneurial role extends beyond the parameters of the project production to include his interaction with filmmakers and directors and his gallery manager in planning the process and execution, as well as with the auction house, Phillips de Pury & Company in London in the sale of the art. This “non-work” is also immaterial labor, which, combined with the production of *Pictures of Garbage*, contributes to the creation and accumulation of cultural capital.²²⁰ The *catadores* assume the roles of co-creators and executors, combining manual, technical and creative skills. Also characteristic of post-Fordist immaterial labor are the collaborative and interactive aspects of labor and the importance of communication in the productive process, which are reflected in the collaboration between Muniz and the *catadores* in *Picture’s of Garbage*. The product of this complex relationship between

²¹⁹ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emory, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 145.

²²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 7 & 83.

immaterial and material labor is Muniz's portrait series. When the artwork leaves the phase of production and is taken to auction by Muniz it circulates on the market in a system of exchange and economic relations. The series is invested with value, exchange value to be exact, which embodies social labor.²²¹ The participatory labor of the *catadores* is diminished and rendered invisible in the exchange value of this portrait series.

The way in which Muniz went about initially compensating the *catadores* for their participation in his portrait series is neither explicit nor transparent in any of the sources—from periodical articles to the documentary film *Waste Land*—but perhaps this lack of information is intentional. The New York Times and the Washington Post articles were the only sources, which I have found that mention, parenthetically, that the *catadores* were remunerated for their participation, however, they do not mention any further information. This reveals the inherent assumption that any labor relation is necessarily one of capitalist/proletariat, founded on the monetary-system of exchange value, producing alienation of the worker and commodities for the consumer.²²² Whereas the workers in Cabrera's collaborative projects were hired as contract labor, earning minimum wage, an example of alienated labor, the labor expended and the economic relationship in Muniz's participatory project, was slightly different. However, if in fact

²²¹ Karl Marx, "Part One: Capital in General - Chapter 1: The Commodity," in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Maurice Dobb & trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 29.

²²² Marx, "Alienated Labor," 288 & 289.

Muniz compensated the *catadores* initially for their participation in the project through wages, then their material labor becomes alienated labor. According to Marx, the product that labor produces stands as a separate power and alien to the labor and worker that produced it, and the worker becomes subject to the potential domination of his or hers product, which is capital.²²³ If the *catadores*' participation in Muniz's project was alienated labor, how does this relate to their material labor and to the immaterial product of the portrait series that they helped to produce? In addition, how do we account for Muniz's further compensation with the monies received from the sale of the portrait series at auction?

Although the compensation for the *catadores* participation is not transparent, the final compensation is quite explicit. The portrait of Tião, entitled *Marat (Sebastião), Pictures of Garbage*, 2008 (fig. 3.1), sold at the auction house Phillips de Pury & Company in London for £34,850, approximately \$50,000.²²⁴ Muniz then gave this amount to the *catadores*, who participated in the project, while Muniz and the filmmakers donated \$276,000 jointly to the cooperative ACAMJG. For this project Muniz does not to claim or intend to relinquish authorship, but rather Muniz uses his authorship to generate funds for this particular community. With that being said, Muniz still benefits greatly

²²³ Ibid., 289.

²²⁴ Phillips de Pury & Company, "Auctions: Lot 272," Phillips de Pury & Company, <http://www.phillipsdepur.com/auctions/lot-detail/VIK-MUNIZ/UK010308/272/6/1/12/detail.aspx>

from this project, both in terms of current and future profit gains from the global tour of the exhibition, the sale of reproductions, as well as from the film, and gains in additional notoriety.

Judging from some of the investments in, and further advocacy of the *catadores* and their cooperative during and after the project with Muniz, and the reception and sales of the portrait series in the art market, Muniz's project could very well be deemed successful on the level of social intervention and aesthetics.²²⁵ It could be argued that Muniz's project brought more awareness about the *catadores* and the global phenomena and informal economic sector of trash and rag picking to a wider audience, which may have created further advocacy and promotion in a larger context. The media has suggested that Muniz's project and the film *Waste Land* have alleviated some of the social stigma surrounding the *catadores'* profession, helped Tião continue to gain professional recognition for the *catadores* and advocate recycling as ecologically and economically sound public policy and prompted the Brazilian government to use the *catadores* at *Jardim Gramacho* as a model to promote recycling at the state level.²²⁶ In addition, ACAMJG has helped establish recycling cooperatives in neighboring municipalities and convened the first international conference of *catadores* in Sao Paulo in November 2009.²²⁷ Media has also reported that the proceeds collected from the sales

²²⁵ Bishop, "The Social Turn," 181.

²²⁶ PBS online, "Waste Land," <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/waste-land/film.html>.

²²⁷ Kaufman, "Oscar-nominated 'Waste Land'," http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/oscar-nominated-waste-land-gives-grace-and-art-to-garbage/2011/03/07/ABY7XAS_story.html.

and other donations have been invested in the *catadores*' co-op to improve housing and infrastructure, bolster their school, build a library and expand other educational resources, establish medical and day-care centers, provide a small-business training program and maintain their trucks and equipment.²²⁸ Muniz's participatory project *Pictures of Garbage* could be perceived as being situated in "an activist lineage, in which art is marshaled to effect social change."²²⁹ How do we respond to this? Does Muniz deliver his claim to change the lives of the *catadores* with the same material that they work with everyday?

I take a contrarian position to the common public response that Muniz's so-called socially ameliorative project has brought positive change and visibility to the *catadores*, and further representation. Muniz's project did not give voice and representation to the *catadores*, because long before Muniz ever met them and began an engagement, the *catadores* already had voice. Muniz exploited the *catadores*' pre-existing socio-economic structure and labor in the service of Muniz's artistic production. Ultimately, capital and labor, operating at visible and invisible levels, were the basis of this project. The project revealed the synthesis of immaterial labor and exploitation of material labor, the hierarchy that operates within these structures and systems, and the products that they produce. Muniz, perhaps inadvertently exposed the inner-workings of the art market, the circle of belief and myth of the artist that is constructed around the artwork in its

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Bishop, "The Social Turn," 181.

exhibition and economic exchanges. Muniz's project also laid bare the value that is invested in cultural production, which is affected and determined by speculative capital, and revealed one process by which cultural production is conceived, produced, circulated and consumed.

Conclusion

This analysis has attempted to provide an alternative way to think about contemporary representations of labor of Allan Sekula, Margarita Cabrera and Vik Muniz, by using T.J. Clark's method of the social history of art, combined with the labor theories of Karl Marx, Paolo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato. As demonstrated in this thesis each model approaches the representation of labor and engagement with material and immaterial labor differently. The ethnographic mode, of either distance or direct involvement and interaction, seems to link the seemingly disparate approaches: the documentary vein and photomontage approach of Sekula; the participatory performance, workshop and installations of Cabrera and her direct employment of workers in these processes; and the participatory project of Muniz involving the staged and synthesized photographic portraiture series.

Beginning with a more critical and distanced approach of Allan Sekula, chapter one aimed to lay a theoretical foundation and introduce some of the themes of the thesis through a selection of photographs, which documents the sites, conditions and movement of labor in and around the contemporary commercial seaport. With Sekula, we see a critical documentarian, who departs from Cabrera and Muniz's interventionist and participatory approaches. Chapter one examined the ways in which Sekula frames the specificity of labor that is often obscured by the homogenizing system of commodity production and exchange. Through his specific documentary mode, Sekula "records" forgotten spaces associated with maritime labor and life, which facilitate the large scale

flow of goods. In these spaces, Sekula looks for specific moments of dissonance and rupture in advanced global capitalism and the control of labor to record concrete situations located in the everyday, such as, workplace struggles, the mobilization of workers and grass roots organizing, and the creation and sustainment of local economies. Already informed by studies in Marx and historical materialism, Sekula's work seemed to be an appropriate match to Clark's method.

Chapter two attempted to untangle and unveil the labor and capital relations operating in the participatory works of Margarita Cabrera, by applying the critical framework of immaterial labor. In these projects, Cabrera isolated specific social constituencies with which to work: previously unemployed individuals from immigrant communities, migrant workers and undocumented individuals. This chapter aimed to uncover the inherent incongruities and contradictions that exist between Cabrera's rhetoric and the representational means. This study also attempted to expose the exploitative nature of *Florezca*, Cabrera's multi-national, for-profit corporation. I adapted Clark's method in my discussion of Cabrera's engagement with workers and references to worksites. I considered the class, status and ideology of Cabrera, vis-à-vis her projects and in relation to the workers with whom she engaged. By analyzing the labor and capital relations at work in Cabrera's participatory art and locating it in a historical context of colonialism and relating it to the socio-cultural status of the artist and the worker participants, it becomes clear that the existing structures of power are reinforced in the work.

In chapter three I hope to have elucidated the ways in which Vik Muniz engaged with different aspects of labor through a combination of photographic portraiture, an ephemeral process-based approach and a participatory model. Through an quasi-ethnographic approach, Muniz sought out the specific community of Brazilian *catadores* with which to collaborate. There, on-site Muniz, studied the work of the *catadores*, became acquainted with them on a personal basis and began to work with them in the collection of trash for his projects. Muniz created multi-layered representations that incorporated the products of the *catadores* daily labor, enacted labor and made art historical and popular references to labor. This chapter explored the many socio-economic exchanges and relations that unfolded in Muniz's project, which in the course of its production, was the subject of the documentary film *Waste Land*.

The economic relationships and labor relations between actors and artists, in the cases of Cabrera and Muniz, is a theme that was explored in chapters two and three respectively. Through very different intervening approaches and roles, Cabrera and Muniz used labor in the service of participatory cultural production, by employing or monetarily compensating specific social constituencies. Muniz, for example, intervenes in and reappropriates the actual labor and working conditions of the *catadores* and creates art outside of the traditional institutional aesthetic space. Labor is actualized, enacted and referenced in the aesthetic environments and situations that Cabrera creates within the gallery walls with the employment of workers and the volunteer help of students and community members. Although both Muniz and Cabrera claim ameliorative intentions, they exploit labor to varying degrees.

Some of the more implicit themes related to labor, which I don't actively develop, but nonetheless take shape and link the three chapters concern cultural geographies and the life cycles of commodities. The different cultural geographies that are either documented, referenced, recreated or used in the artists' works are the industrial seaport, the transborder zone between Mexico and the United States, and one of the worlds largest open-air waste-sites, located in Rio de Janeiro. Arguably, these spaces, which have hybrid qualities and characteristics, could be defined as heterotopias. These spaces are both real and could be perceive as completely "other."²³⁰

Another theme linking all three chapters is the life cycle or social life of the commodity in relation to labor and within the context of three artists' works.²³¹ Each stage of the commodity's lifecycle (production, transportation and distribution, consumption and disposal) is either documented, referenced, or directly used in the representations of labor. In the case of Allan Sekula, the different types of maritime labor that facilitate the flow of goods, and in some images the transformation of fish into a commodity, and its insertion into the commodity circuit are documented. Cabrera, on the other hand, attempts to reference the assembly-line production of household items in *maquiladoras* located along the Mexico/U.S. border in her one of her installations and

²³⁰ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997).

²³¹ Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

workshops. Muniz's work references and incorporates the forgotten commodity. Muniz goes directly to the site of the commodity's death, the municipal waste-site, and gives the disposed items an afterlife in his artwork.



Figure 1.1 Allan Sekula, *"Pancake,"* a former shipyard sandblaster, scavenging copper from a waterfront scrapyards, Los Angeles harbor, Terminal Island, California, November 1992. Type-c print.



Figure 1.2. Allan Sekula, *Fish-market women at the close of the morning auction, Puerto Pesquero*. Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992. Type-c print.



Figure 1.3. Allan Sekula, *Dockers unloading shipload of frozen fish from Argentina, Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992*. Type-c print.



Figure 1.4. Allan Sekula, *Workers gathering on the waterfront at the end of a nationwide general strike opposing the Socialist government's cutbacks in unemployment benefits, Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992.* Type-c print.



Figure 1.5. Allan Sekula, *Unsuccessful fishing for sardines off the Portuguese coast, Vigo, Galicia, Spain, May 1992*. Type-c print.



Figure 1.6. Allan Sekula, *Waterfront Vendors Living in Containers*, Veracruz, Mexico, March 1994. Type-c print.



Figure 1.7. Allan Sekula, *Waterfront Vendors Living in Containers*, Veracruz, Mexico, March 1994. Type-c print.



Figure 1.8. Allan Sekula, *Truckload of Volkswagens from factory in Puebla awaiting arrival of car-carrier ship for export, Veracruz, Mexico, March 1994*. Type-c print.



Figure 1.9. Lewis Hine, *Addie Card, 12 years. Spinner in North Pownal Cotton Mill. Girls in mill say she is ten years. She admitted to me she was twelve; that she started during school vacation and now would "stay," Vermont, August 1910.*

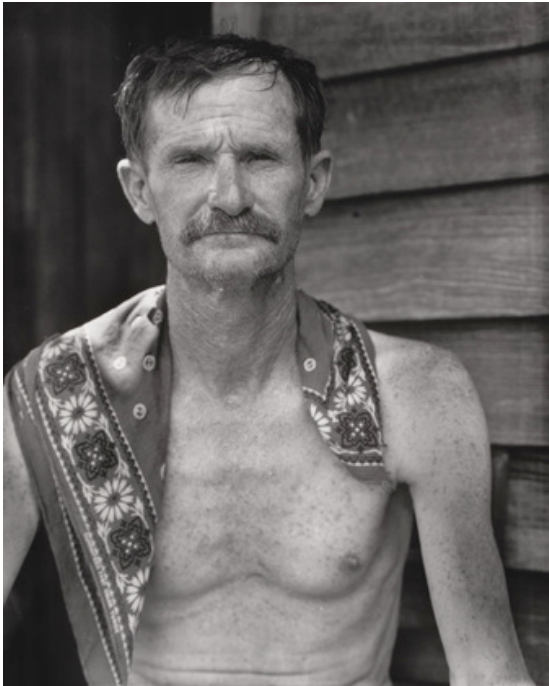


Figure 1.10. Walker Evans, *Sharecropper*, Hale County, Alabama, 1936.



Figure 1.11. Walker Evans, *Coal Dock Worker*, Havana, Cuba, 1932.



Figure 1.12. Eugene Smith, *Taft and Ohio: Man at Ore Bin*, 1949.



Figure 1.13. Eugene Smith, *Steelworker, Pittsburgh*, c. 1955.



Figure 1.14. Eugene Smith, *The Spinner* (From 'Spanish Village Essay'), 1951.



Figure 2.1. Margarita Cabrera, *Pulso y Martillo* (Pulse and Hammer), 2011. Performance.



Figure 2.2. Margarita Cabrera, *Pulso y Martillo*, 2011. Performance and multi-media installation (platform, hammers and copper sheets).



Figure 2.3. Margarita Cabrera, *Pulso y Martillo*, 2011. Multi-media installation.



Figure 2.4. Margarita Cabrera, *The Craft of Resistance*, 2008-2011. Multi-media installation.



Figure 2.5. Margarita Cabrera, *The Craft of Resistance*, 2008-2011. Multi-media installation.



Figure 2.6. Margarita Cabrera, *The Craft of Resistance*, 2008-2011. Multi-media installation (copper).



Figure 2.7. Margarita Cabrera, *The Craft of Resistance*, 2008-2011. Multi-media installation (copper).



Figure 3.1. Vik Muniz, *Marat (Sebastião)*, from the series *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008. Digital C-Print.



Figure 3.2. Screen grab from the film *Waste Land*.



Figure 3.3. Screen grab from the film *Waste Land*.



Figure 3.4. Vik Muniz, *The Gypsy (Magna)*, from the series *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008. Digital C-Print.



Figure 3.5. Vik Muniz, *The Bearer (Irmã)*, from the series *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008. Digital C-Print.



Figure 3.6. Screen grab from the film *Waste Land*.



Figure 3.7. Vik Muniz, *Woman Ironing (Isis)*, from the series *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008. Digital C-Print.



Figure 3.8. Vik Muniz, *Mother and Children (Suelem)*, from the series *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008. Digital C-Print.



Figure 3.9. Vik Muniz, *The Sower (Zumbi)*, from the series *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008. Digital C-Print.



Figure 3.10. Vik Muniz, *Atlas (Carlão)*, 2008, from the series *Pictures of Garbage*. Digital C-Print.



Figure 3.11. Jacques-Louis David, *Death of Marat*, 1793. Oil on canvas.

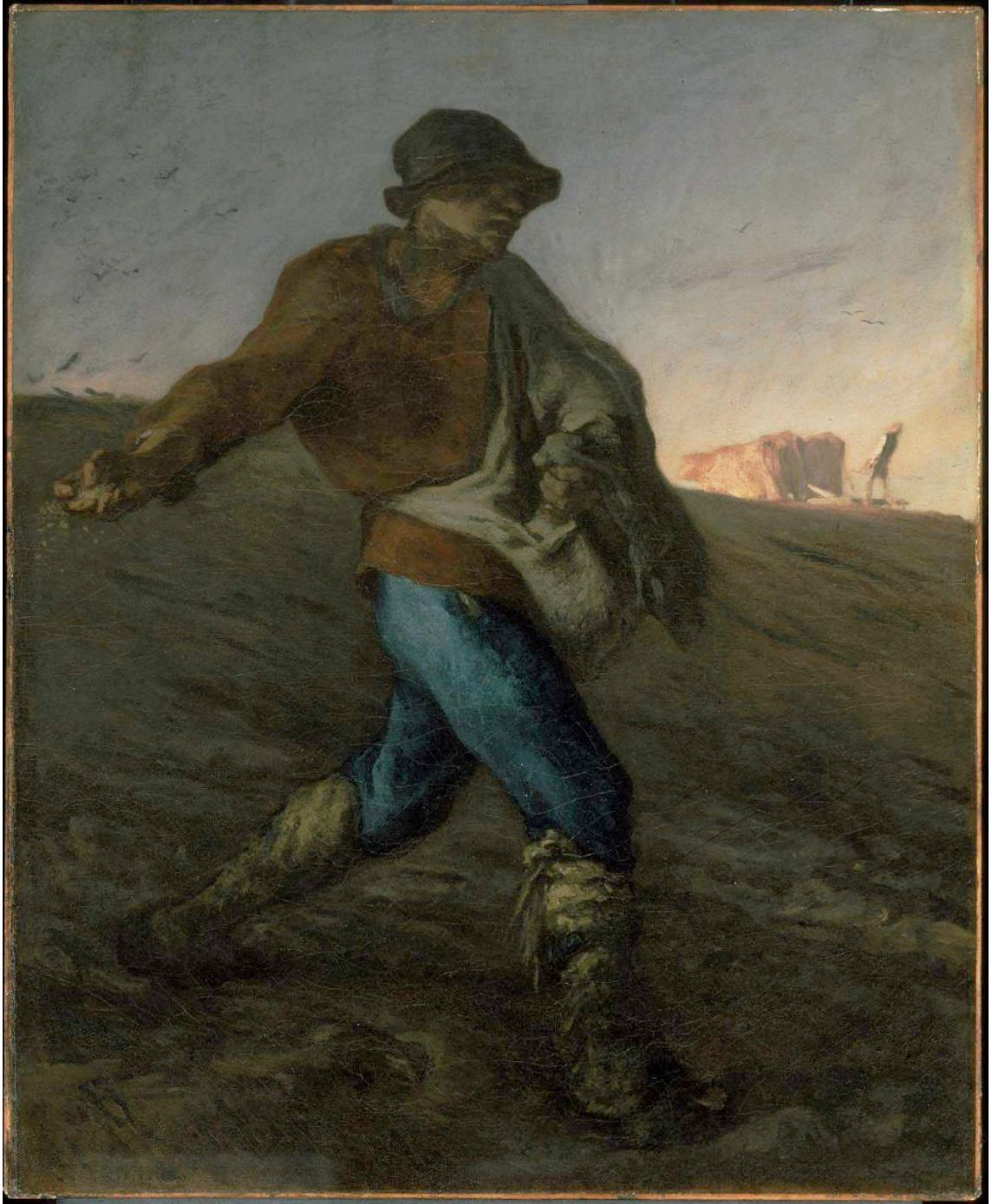


Figure 3.12. Jean-François Millet, *The Sower*, 1850. Oil on canvas.

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