

Emmanuelle Léonard
Working

Text by Kika Thorne

These are mad times, insecure times, formless, union-busting, short-term-contract, no-benefits, loss-of-rights times. The flexible economy pits workers against one another while cultivating the notion we have little to gain by solidarity. In education, communications, the service industry, manufacturing, you hear it everywhere, “nothing lasts forever.”(1)

“GM doesn't want thirty-year agreements any more,” said François Poiré, a 17-year veteran with GM, “They want temporary workers for lower wages.”(2)

Emmanuelle Léonard's project *Statistical Landscape (in the eye of the worker)* utilises the real estate, infrastructure, labour and audience of Mercer Union to perform a critical political project: clarify the image of the local working mass. “Twenty workers are invited to produce their own images following two parameters: that they do it in their workplace and that this place be deserted (in order to privilege a relation to the space rather than to inter-personal relations).”

“Each image represents a field of labour.” From retail to administration, farming, healthcare and food services, across the spectrum, these divisions account for almost all of us. “Together these photographs construct a statistical landscape of work in Toronto. The size of the print corresponds to the percentage of workers in that industry.” Seventy square inches of image equals one percent of the workforce.

9,425 Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, **2,660** Mining and oil and gas extraction, **15,765** Utilities, **124,395** Construction, **395,970** Manufacturing, **151,870** Wholesale trade, **272,680** Retail trade, **123,135** Transportation and warehousing, **100,760** Information and cultural industries, **177,210** Finance and insurance, **56,890** Real estate and rental and leasing, **246,655** Professional, scientific and technical services, **4,840** Management of companies and enterprises, **121,490** Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services, **143,985** Educational services, **189,450** Health care and social assistance, **47,870** Arts, entertainment and recreation, **141,560** Accommodation and food services, **110,745** Other services (except public administration), **84,655** Public administration, **2,522,020** All industries, **2,564,585** Total Toronto Labour Force

When Léonard relinquishes power as photographer, she adopts a contemporary technique in the field of visual sociology: “give the kids a camera!” But when she collects this photographic research and transforms it into proportional representation, she frames qualitative imagery with quantitative measure, and in so doing, she gives back an invention.

In the logic of hieroglyphics, the scale of the king's pictogram matched his power. In the logic of *Statistical Landscape*, the scale of the information and cultural industries matches our power. Now visible, the fields of data conceive “the emerging picture language”(3) of local capitalism. Allan Sekula argues, “The archive has to be read from below, from a position of solidarity with those displaced, silenced or made invisible by the machineries of profit and progress.”(4)

If there is a narrative to this exhibition, it observes a bitter arrival in *The Walkers*. Of this photo-series Léonard writes, “A kind of introspective gaze links with the fight of the body in the cold.” These photographs are melancholy, understated. They sing an increment of sorrow for the embodied

economies of immigration, the dematerialization of the Canadian Dream. If there is a silence that runs through this narrative, it is one of many.

When asked how she can return to the camera after *Statistical Landscape* (in the eye of the worker), Léonard responds by disregarding the rigidity of “one correct process,” proposing instead to open multiple approaches—“crossing paths of view” to provoke questions about representation’s links to the working sphere.

As public space is squeezed out by capitalist momentum, Emmanuelle Léonard asks how photography can expose our collaborative granularity, our social life, when all we can afford, both ethically and economically is empty streets.

In *Statistical Landscape*, the artist’s subtle intervention suggests that the place of work is the self. We are not merely hand/eye coordination or even other people; we are also objects, light and architecture. The worker is a particular force within and against a set of conditions. The absence of the human makes a conceptual afterimage, but more clearly and more radically, it is an image of an empty place. The immediate experience of *Statistical Landscape* is of a population that has abandoned the workplace.

“Whereas in the disciplinary era, sabotage was the fundamental notion of resistance, in the era of imperial control it may be desertion. Battles against the Empire might be won through subtraction and defection. This desertion does not have a place; it is the evacuation of the places of power.”(5)

"...this time however I come as the victorious Dionysus, who will turn the world into a holiday... Not that I have much time..." —Frederich Nietzsche (from his last "insane" letter to Cosima Wagner)

Notes

(1) Most recently as a line in Outkast’s latest hit songs: *Hey Ya!* Outkast. Speakerboxxx/The Love Below. 2003.

(2) Joanne Wallador. GM Workers End Strike In Canada. *The Militant*. 1996; Vol.60/No.39.

(3) Allan Sekula. *Photography between Labour and Capital. Mining Photographs and Other Pictures: 1948-1968*. NSCAD/UCCB Press. 1983; p. 193.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Hardt M, Negri A. *Empire*. Harvard University Press: 2001; p. 212.