Is the Political Protest Photograph Acceptable as Artwork in British State-Funded Galleries?

By
Shaun Villiers Everett

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Shaun Everett, 'Spitalfields Market, East London, England 1994
following an ANL march to Bethnal Green', FP4 Film and Nikon scanner

Shaun Everett **October 2017**

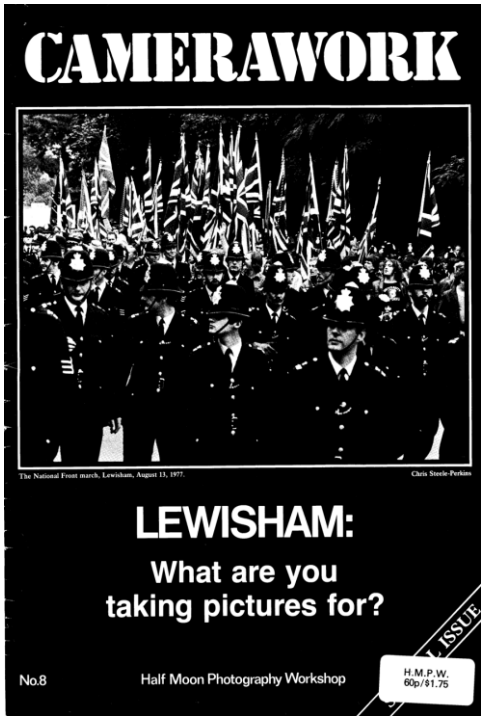

Figure One: Camerawork Front Cover Special Issue: Lewisham What are you taking pictures for? No.8 November 1977

When a front cover of the photographic journal *Camerawork* (*Figure One*) appeared in the 2007 *Who We Are: Photographing Britain* exhibition at Tate Britain in London, its inclusion appeared to support the idea that documentary photography is an acceptable material for inclusion in a major exhibition of photography. Moreover, its inclusion within the confines of an internationally important state funded museum, leads one to also suggest that it is considered a work of art rather than a work of photojournalism on display. Following that exhibition, the inclusion of other political art photographs has appeared in exhibitions in major galleries, including those under the aegis of the state-funded Tate brand.

This is not to say that similar images have *not* appeared in major galleries prior to 2007. Of course, they must have, otherwise I would be gambling with unknowns if I suggested otherwise. Although the accompanying exhibition catalogue refers to *Camerawork*, the 1970s photographic journal, in the section 'Urge to Document', it does not include any mention of the image in *Figure One* above. However, its inclusion in the show has been confirmed in a published press review by Anindya Bhattacharyya in the *Socialist Worker* during July of the same year[1][2].

[1]Anindya Bhattacharyya, 'How We Are: Photographing Britain through the Lens of Class', *Socialist Worker*, 3 Jul 2007 **http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=12305** [Accessed 24th March 2014]

[2]I also asked one of the curators by email if this was so, but received no reply. However, Tate public relations replied to another email suggesting it was not part of the exhibition. My view remains that the journal was included in a section which also included postcards and other types of 1970s ephemera.

In an online interview with *Art and Allusion,* Susan Bright the co-curator of the Tate Britain show, stated that '...What we aimed to do was show a kind of portrait of Britain concentrating on its people and its land. It is a documentary show with recurring themes throughout...'[3].
In Tate Modern, London, another documentary work: *Waiting for Tear Gas 1999–2000* by the American artist Allan Sekula, was currently exhibiting in 2014[4].
Summarising Tate Modern's web based press release:

> *Sekula's work consists of 81 images he photographed during protests against the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference held in Seattle, during 1999. The series is presented as a 16-minute timed slide-sequence and challenges the standard procedures of photojournalism*.

Sekula, an accomplished photographer, theorist, photography historian and critic, appears to be also challenging a major museum space with his images of protest.
Taking the *Camerawork* front cover as *a* starting point (since there is no known definitive starting point), this essay will examine the recent history of photography associated with political protest and discuss the historiography of *Camerawork* and *Waiting for Tear Gas* and their subsequent inclusion in major state-funded art spaces. Using examples from *Camerawork* and Sekula's exhibit, this essay will develop the argument that documentary photography is now acceptable politically based artwork, and, will present the notion that it might in addition, find a stable foundation within the confines of the postmodern equivalent of history painting. In fact, it is argued that a decent protest photograph reeks of History painting.

The 1970s in Britain was not considered the most auspicious of decades, both economically and culturally. The previous decade's cultural exuberance, with its burgeoning and highly

[3]'Susan Bright interview with Nigel Warburton', *Art and Allusion, July 14th 2007,* http://nigelwarburton.typepad.com/art_and_allusion/2007/07/interview-susan.html [Accessed 24th March 2014]
[4]http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/display/allan-sekula [Accessed 7th March 2014]

exportable British pop culture, had on its decline during the early 1970s, left a cultural vacuum across Britain. Harold Wilson the Labour Prime Minister, had an optimistic view of a socialist Britain, one that he claimed would be forged in the *"white heat"* of technological and scientific revolution[5]. The Labour government though, was entwined in poor labour relations with the unions and was eventually swept aside by Edward Heath's Conservative government at the 1970 general election, overturning Wilson's previously impressive majority of 98 seats. It's not that a technological revolution did not occur of course, it happened and it continues unabated to this day. As for a similarly optimistic revolution in visual culture, this simply did not materialise. Labelled by some writers as the 'undecade', one could almost be forgiven for asking the question 'where was the art? During the 1970s'[6]. Economically, the 1970s was one of the most depressing decades of the twentieth century. Bank interest rates grew rapidly throughout the decade accompanied by high inflation and extensive labour unrest persisted irrespective of which flavour of government was in power. By 1979, Britain had been widely dismissed as 'the sick man of Europe', being judged as having a 'socialist and high cost economy[7] by some European commentators.

Contemporary art had lost its centre ground during that decade, paralleling the wider economy, according to Stuart Bradshaw, writing in 1981[8]. Seemingly fragmentary and devoid of stylistic domination it did however, produce some art that was both politically socialist and feminist in content. The new artists of 1970s Britain at the very least, possessed a social consciousness, producing a body of radical art with their 'almost cavalier disinterest in money'[9].

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[5]Harold Wilson 1st October 1963 Labour Party Conference Speech. http://quotes.dictionary.com/the_white_heat_of_the_technological_revolution [Accessed 7th March 2014]

[6]John A Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (I.B. Taurus, London 2002) p1

[7]Heath's government was replaced in 1974 by Harold Wilson returning to government with a majority of just 3 seats.

[8]John A Walker, p2

[9]John A Walker, p3

Camerawork had been published between 1975 to 1985 in an A3 format and became a central organ for promoting photography within popular culture and forming critical views on the issues of representation in the media[10]. *Camerawork* the organisation, or more correctly *The Half Moon Photography Workshop* (HMPW), was initially based near the city of London and finally in Bethnal Green, providing gallery space and darkroom facilities on the principle of equal access[11]. It had therefore, facilitated both the production and consumption of photography. Some of its early exhibitions had promoted radical viewpoints on subjects such as '*Troops Out in Northern Ireland*' and '*Nicaragua*'. The organisation's community-based and outwardly political concerns, assisted in shaping the future of its accompanying journal throughout its lifespan.

One of the founding aims for the published photograph within *Camerawork,* was the distinction they should have between photographs viewed in media publications, where the viewer is asked to accept the news photograph as documentary evidence, versus the photograph, when viewed in an art gallery, such that the viewer is persuaded to accept it as some form of precious object with an intrinsic monetary value. *Camerawork* strived to publish documentary photographs, but it also demanded they were appraised aesthetically by producing accompanying and supportive articles on the then current theories of art photography. Such articles included texts by notable theorists such as the critic and art historical author John Berger[12].

The *Lewisham* issue (Figure *One*) had been published during a period of intense political unrest in Britain and amid rising racial tensions, particularly in inner city areas. The National Front (NF), an organisation committed to removing non-white immigrants from Britain had this basic principle at the heart of its constitution:

[10]Barbara Hunt, 'Preface', *The Camerawork Essays,* Jessica Evans (ed.) (River Oram, London 1997), p9
[11]Barbara Hunt, p1
[12]John Berger, 'Ways of Remembering', *Camerawork*, Issue no. 10, July 1978

> *The National Front is the movement of British Racial Nationalism. It is committed to preservation of the national and ethnic character of the British people and recognises that the nation must be exclusively of European and predominantly British racial descent.*[13].

Figure Two: National Front participants in Lewisham march. Peter Marlow 1977.

On August 13th, 1977 it attempted to march through the streets of Lewisham in inner London with its high immigrant population. A confrontation was inevitable with the well organised counter-demonstration by the Socialist Workers Party that were opposed to any form of racial discrimination. The resulting battles on the streets between the two factions and between each faction and the Metropolitan Police, became news headlines and the various press photographs available were widely distributed.

As Issue No. 8 was dedicated to the *Lewisham* battles, the editors interviewed some of the photographers and additionally, reproduced the speech by John Tyndall, then the chairman of the NF. The speech had been designed to stir up racial hatred within the borough and the wider population. The distinctive cover, bold black with white text, together with a photograph by Chris Steele-Perkins showing marching NF protesters amid a mass of Union Jacks[14]. It conceals much of what happened that day in Lewisham. To get some feel for that, one needs to see the photographs inside the magazine. *Figure Two* and *Three* show examples of the photographs that were published within the issue. The interviews with photographers

[13]Statement of Principles, http://www.national-front.org.uk/constitution [Accessed 4th April 2014]
[14]Chris Steele-Perkins is now a *Magnum Agency* photographer.

appeared under the heading 'What are you taking pictures for?'

Figure Three: Anti-racist protester fighting NF protester(Top) and Anti-racist protester arrest (Bottom, Peter Marlow, Camerawork issue no.8, p.3

Camerawork have interviewed photographers that were not directly employed by any of the British Press, although they admit that some of the photographs were also published in some of the daily newspapers. When asked the question: 'What were they [Police] objecting to, taking pictures?' Peter Marlow, an independent photographer, replies, 'Police never seem to mind...unless they are kicking...somebody. It's almost like a play, with the photographer as the audience '[15].

A photograph, 'captures the visual appearance of a particular place at a specific moment', states John A. Walker in his text 'Context as a Determinant of Photographic Meaning', published in *Camerawork Essays*[16]. It's meaning can be 'determined by such spacial-temporal origins', he continues. This leads to a permanent fixing of meaning associated with its history, the spacial-temporal point of its origin. However, different meanings can occur when the photograph is placed into different 'relationships' as circumstances change[17].

Lewisham's inclusion in the *How We Are* exhibition might be considered such a 'relationship' due to the changed circumstance of exhibition, some thirty years after the original publication date and event.

If the changed context of *Lewisham* is to be considered in the wider community of photographs as art objects, its changed value also needs an explanation. John Tagg, in his text 'The Currency of the Photograph' states that the photograph can be considered to have a

[15]No Author, *Camerawork,* Issue no. 8, November, 1977 p. 11
[16]John A. Walker, 'Context as a Determinant of Photographic Meaning', *Camerawork Essays,* p57
[17]John A. Walker, p57

currency value in much the same way that money has through both its exchange and use value[18]. Tagg, through a long-winded and elaborate treatment of Marxist philosophy, claims for the photograph an absolute continuity of ideological existence and a currency value associated with its circulation through the social institutions of the state. It is of course, easier to claim that the photograph has a value through its collectability within a society. Either way, and *Camerawork* issues do have a current collectability, the *Lewisham* issue is one such example of a now valued art object when incorporated into a major exhibition space such as Tate Britain.

Whereas Marxist philosophy may be considered an authentic idea to establish use values, it does not explain how rapidly photographs came to be precious objects worthy of museum display, given how easy it is to reproduce them in multiple copies which might ordinarily have the effect of devaluing them in the society in which they circulate. To understand the burgeoning exposition of art photographs we must also look further afield than at one national museum's curatorial practices.

Even though many British based artists utilised photography during the 1970s it was in New York, USA that the trend towards the inclusion of the photograph became very popular amongst a new generation of artists. Following decades of abstract expressionism and minimalism, the formalist approach to artwork, was waning in favour of a more conceptually worked basis concerning the art object. As Crimp suggested for photography, in his 1979 text 'Pictures', 'we need no longer regret...the shattered integrity of modernist painting and sculpture'[19]. The medium itself became less important than the conception to an artwork's production. It is this paradigm shift that sparked the move towards the rise of the photographic art object. Crimp had noted a group of artists whose strategies were

[18]John Tagg, 'The Currency of the Photograph', in *Thinking Photography,* Victor Burgin (Ed.), (Palgrave, New York 1982) pp.122

[19] Douglas Crimp, 'Pictures', *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), p. 76

'...grounded in the literal temporality and presence of theatre'[20]. He referred to artists such as Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman who both came to prominence during the mid- to late-1970s for their self-portrayals in various disguises. Sherman's work was eventually bought by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, USA.

The photograph had transformed into 'a privileged commodity' and the photographer had become '...an autonomous *auteur...'*, states Allan Sekula, in his 1978 text 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)'[21]. To be effective, political art will have to be 'grounded in work against [the very] institutions that it serves', continues Sekula. Such an art would have to 'point openly to the social world and to possibilities of concrete social transformation'[22].

In differing contextual settings, photographic meaning can be engineered to suit alternative narratives. The language of photography is not set in stone and within a capitalist society, multiple alternative meanings exist through such communications mediums as advertising and newsprint.

> *They sell us the President the same way*
> *They sell us our clothes and our cars*
> *They sell us everything from youth to religion*
> *The same time they sell us our wars*[23].

What to the singer Jackson Browne was a protest, presents itself as an opportunity to some political artists. Sekula, for instance, saw the value of its promotion in society in 1978. Paraphrasing Sekula, to be a valid political art, it must elicit a dialogue. Documentary is only art when it transcends its reference to the world and is regarded as an act of artistic self-expression[24].

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[20]Douglas Crimp, 'Pictures', p. 77
[21]Allan Sekula, 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)', *The Massachusetts Review,* Vol. 19, No. 4, Photography (Winter, 1978), p. 860
[22]Allan Sekula, p. 862
[23]Words and music by Jackson Browne © 1986 Swallow Turn Music ASCAP
[24]Allan Sekula, p. 864

Following Sekula's death, Tate Modern in London staged one of Sekula's works - *Waiting for Tear Gas 1999–2000*. The darkened exhibition space is given over to an almost theatrical installation that consists of 81 transparency images that Sekula photographed during the widespread protests against the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference held in Seattle, USA during November 1999. The series is presented as a 16-minute timed slide-sequence. Tate's curatorial staff, Stuart Comer and Valentina Ravaglia suggest in their web based press release, that the installation challenges the standard procedures of photojournalism[25]. The visitor is offered a free seat in a small, darkened theatre-like space where every 12 seconds or so an image will appear on a screen at one end of this space as the projector on the opposite wall, moves with its intermittent distinctive low technology *clunk click* between transparencies. Sekula might also have referred to this low technology as having 'neo-Luddite' qualities[26]. The transparencies consist of visual records throughout the day of protest including some clashes between the protesters and the local police force.

Figure Four: Allan Sekula, 'Waiting for Tear Gas', Slide Presentation, Tate Modern, 2014

It appears to cover a period between before dawn and after dusk. It represents a seemingly endless display of aggression and discomfort interspersed with periods of waiting. No obvious narrative unfolds throughout the 16-minute period and it appears not to unfold as an objective documentary. There's no 'choc-

[25]http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/display/allan-sekula [Accessed 8th April 2014]
[26]Allan Sekula, 'Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs)' *October*, Vol. 102 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 6

ices' either on sale in this mini-theatre, but I cannot help thinking that Sekula would have anyway, preferred an intermission Albatross[27].

'Rambunctious, anarchic, internationalist [and] well informed', is how Sekula's co-authors described the protesters in a book *5 Days That Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond* [28]. 'I met a significant number of people in the crowd', says Sekula, '...They would ask me *who I was photographing for* [my italics] and I would explain that I was working with the dockworkers. Sekula was speaking during an interview with Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen for *International Labor and Working-Class History* in 2002[29].

Sekula - *Who was I photographing for?*

Lewisham - *What are you taking pictures for?*

Two questions of a similar nature and from two separate sources. *Camerawork's* original objective was to facilitate the display of works of a 'radical and social nature' such as the independent photographers covering the battles of Lewisham and additionally questioning them about their presence[30]. Sekula's desire was to have photography expose social relations, especially from the side of labour[31]. *Waiting for Tear Gas* chronicles the marginality of protest, questioning the uncertainty of events as they unfolded between protester and police. For both works to have appeared in major UK institutions in the twenty first century cannot be coincidental. The gallery spaces themselves must have undergone a transformation to facilitate their appearance. However, such changes do not happen readily, or even obviously, in the conservative world of the art curator and their respective institutions. In this respect I

[27]Reference to Monty Python sketch in which John Cleese attempts to sell Albatross to cinema goers since he has nothing else to sell.
[28]No Author, 'Book Review', *The Nation,* January 22nd 2001, p. 36
[29]Allan Sekula and Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen, 'Interview with Allan Sekula: Los Angeles, California, October 26, 2002', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 66, 'New Approaches to Global Labor History' (Fall, 2004), p. 170
[30]Barbara Hunt, p9
[31]Gail Day, 'Allan Sekula 1951- 2013', *Journal of Visual Culture,* Vol. 12(3), p. 517

contend that the two Tate displays were sanctioned for similar reasons despite their original production having been separated by several decades.

The answer appears to lie in the changing attitudes within a post-modern society to the photograph, especially to the documentary photograph. For over one hundred years photography has brought a 'reflective stillness' to a particular scene or event[32]. Time stops in the image, but continues unabated in the real world with the effect that the photograph obtains its historicity. In consequence, the photographic image had been labelled as a 'truth-telling' medium, as John Roberts explained in his 2009 text, 'Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive, and the Non-Symbolic'[33].

What is recovered for the viewer is a certain 'pastness' that was embedded within the photograph that Roberts refers to as its 'singular event' and as a 'space of historical disclosure'. Rolande Barthes had previously referred to this phenomenon as its 'authentication' and its ability to 'ratify what it represents'[34].

This innate 'objectiveness' has been seen to be declined during the last three decades of photography, giving way a more subjective nature. The significant objectivity of the photograph has deteriorated to a large extent by way of the rise in popularity of mass communications within the post-modern world. The result, referring to documentary and paraphrasing Roberts, is the appearance of a convergent 'depoliticised public culture', to a commodity culture where the 'non-symbolic tends to crowd out the symbolic' and where the non-symbolic means in this case, the photograph's lack of any connection to external social and historical forces.[35]. In the age of mass culture, the more we are bombarded with documents, e.g. photographs, the less likely is needed a definitive interpretation or a single

[32]John Roberts, 'Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive, and the Non-Symbolic' *Oxford Art Journal,* 32.2, 2009 p. 283
[33] John Roberts, p. 283
[34]Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage, London 2000) p. 85
[35]John Roberts, p. 285

judgement. Consequently, both *Waiting for Tear Gas* and Camerawork's *Lewisham* issue, have lost some of their labour concentric historicity and status under the aegis and authority of the major gallery in which they appear.

If photographers can be asked *what are you taking pictures for?* then it is a logical conclusion that curators can be asked the question *why did you choose these photographs for your exhibition?* In the interview, with Nigel Warburton, *How We Are* joint curator Susan Bright explained that the aim was to 'show a kind of portrait of Britain concentrating on its people and its land'[36]. The overall exhibition theme was documentary and it showed the curators' own perceptions of the country. 'Most importantly, we wanted to be inclusive', Bright continues. The *Camerawork* magazine cover thus became an important part of the whole exhibition together with the postcards, etc. Its inclusion assisted in formulating the narrative within the exhibition and added context to the historical events in the 1970s. Sekula's artwork in Tate Modern provided a platform to show Sekula's 'nuanced representation of protest' as their publicity web page states it[37]. Since Sekula passed away during 2013, my assumption is that it was also on display as a tribute to the late photographer. Possibly incidentally, *Waiting for Tear Gas* is on long-term loan to Tate Modern from the Tate Americas Foundation[38].

In the USA, a questionnaire had been circulated to a range of artists, academics and curators that had been originally formulated by Benjamin Buchloh concerning artistic reaction to the Iraq war. The revised and edited responses were then published in the formidable *October* journal at the end of 2008[39]. Primarily concerned with artistic responses to the Iraq war, the weighty text is still pertinent to exhibitions including political protest as artwork. In Britain,

[36]http://nigelwarburton.typepad.com/art_and_allusion/2007/07/interview-susan.html [Accessed 13th April 2014]
[37]http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/display/allan-sekula [Accessed 13th April 2014]
[38]http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sekula-waiting-for-tear-gas-l03355 [Accessed 13th April 2014]
[39]Benjamin Buchloh and others, 'Questionnaire: In What Ways Have Artists, Academics, and Cultural Institutions Responded to the U.S.-Led Invasion and Occupation of Iraq?', *October*, Vol. 123, Winter 2008, pp. 3-184

one work that was singled out by some of the respondents for its critique of the Iraq war was Mark Wallinger's *State Britain* (Figure Five) also shown at Tate Britain during 2007[40]. Wallinger had meticulously reconstructed Brian Haw's long running protest against the Iraq war outside of the UK parliament in London, after the original placards, etc. were dismantled and confiscated by the police as the protest had been deemed illegal[41].

Figure Five: Mark Wallinger: Section of 'State Britain', Tate Britain, 2007

Technically the recreation, heavily reliant on photographic technology, also contravened the same new law forbidding unauthorised protest within a kilometre radius of parliament, but no action was taken against the state-run gallery.

In the *October* special issue, Hans Haake comments:

> *It is worth noting that Tate Britain is a public institution, that Wallinger's work is a commission by the museum, and that Sir Nicolas Serota, the director, is a British public servant. Is there a director of a museum in the U.S. who would dare - or could afford - to do anything like this?*[42]

This highlights the difference between attitudes to protest on both sides of the Atlantic. Sanctioned by Tate Britain, *State Britain* provided protest art a positive stimulus during 2007. Taking a straw poll from the many responses submitted to *October,* it is apparent the majority of curators and artists practice prudent self-censorship concerning controversial forms of political art, 'putting the legitimacy of

[40]Commissioned by and shown between January – August 2007 at Tate Britain, London
[41]Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2006
[42] Hans Haake, 'Questionnaire: In What Ways Have Artists, Academics, and Cultural Institutions Responded to the U.S.-Led Invasion and Occupation of Iraq?', *October* 123, Winter 2008, pp. 79-80

any critique beyond bounds' as the Nigerian-born curator Okwui Enwezor stated it[43]. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, *Lewisham* and *Waiting for Tear Gas* emerged within the mainstream art establishment to become new markers for the display of political protest within the public gallery. Two ends of a temporal scale that one might suggest is still to have its place fully defined in the art environment.

If protest photography is to find a stable niche it is likely to be as the natural descendant to history painting. Few noteworthy examples of modern history painting exist today other than say, Gerhard Richter's paintings cycle *18th October 1977* which concerns the former German activists known as the Baader Meinhof group. Within Richter's cycle there are echoes of the history painter Géricault and of Manet, the painter of modern life. Both artists' work is well documented by art historians and critics and set the accepted markers for the period of transformation to modernism. Georges Bataille in 1953 remarked that it was Manet who ended the rhetoric within painting and had also promoted the notion of an 'utter freedom in natural silence'[44].

In the tradition of history painting, a question of representation is always asked of the painter. Photographers and artists of protest, as we have seen, are asked similar questions. What remains to be asked is what are we fighting for? What is our objective? Without those answers such socially nuanced art could be considered a failure. Camerawork's *Lewisham* cover, only glimpses at a social revolution hidden amongst the fluttering union jacks of the National Front. The invitation is always there though, to seek further knowledge within its pages. Sekula's theatrically staged

[43] Okwui Enwezor, 'Questionnaire: In What Ways Have Artists, Academics, and Cultural Institutions Responded to the U.S.-Led Invasion and Occupation of Iraq?', *October* 123, Winter 2008, p. 41

[44] Emily A. Beeny, 'Christ and the Angels: Manet, the Morgue, and the Death of History Painting?', *Representations*, Vol. 122, No. 1 (Spring 2013), p. 51

involvement draws in the crowd unto itself like the grand scale of Gericault's *The Raft of the Medusa* does in Paris[45]. In Paris, of course, Gericault's *Raft* has a whole salon to itself as did Sekula's work at Tate Modern. The scale difference though is vast in favour of Gericault's colossal work. Even so, Sekula's installation positively surrounds the audience with knowledge. The danger is that *Waiting for Tear Gas* might openly project a Barthian myth[46]. That it defends protest for protest sake and forgoes any moral or social responsibilities that the artist had in mind. In becoming the descendent of the History painting, Sekula's work is transformed from a representation of protest to an artwork by its very presence, in a state-run museum. It may have been the same in Gericault's day too. From what was considered by critics as the moment after the wreck of the French naval frigate Méduse which ran aground off the coast of Mauritania on 2 July 1816. On 5 July 1816, at least 147 people were set adrift on a hurriedly constructed raft. 15 survived for 13 days before their rescue, enduring starvation and dehydration together with the practise of cannibalism. The event became an international scandal, but how many visitors to the salon today, really appreciate this history?

But what of the curator and the state museum? Where are their moral responsibilities? I suggest these are few and far between given their primary task of filling exhibition spaces with tourists. Sensationalism seems never to have stopped them short in the past. Sekula's work might easily run the risk of passing from its 'closed, silent state, to one open to appropriation by society', as Barthe warns us with his discussion on the mythical object[47]. Whatever the morals, the documentary

[45] Théodore Géricault (1791-1824), *Raft of the Medusa* (1819), Oil on Canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris

[46]Victor Burgin, *Thinking Photography* (Palgrave MacMillan, New York 1982) pp. 47-9

[47]Victor Burgin, p. 48

protest photograph, appearing in national museums and galleries, immediately become artwork, effectively losing their former documentary selves, in favour of historical representations. Documentary photographers with ambition beware!

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