

Allan Sekula's Architectures of Industry

Gail Day

With his robust challenge to the occlusion of labour in both capitalist fantasy and visual representation, Allan Sekula's (1951-2013) work is of great significance to the *Industries of Architecture*. Occupying the roles of photographer, artist, filmmaker and writer, Sekula sustained this project from his early *Aerospace Folktales* and *Performance Under Working Conditions* through to his later detailed explorations of the maritime industries, the transformations of global industrial displacements and those of the working experience caused by the introductions of containerisation and the system of 'flag of convenience' (*Fish Story*, *Lottery of the Sea*, *The Dockers' Museum*, and, with Noël Burch, *The Forgotten Space*).

Sekula's approach defies the established genres and the expected modalities of art, as well as those paradigms of cultural theory in which simplistic stand-offs between modernism and realism are preferred. Sekula remained committed to developing a realist project, setting him apart from the dominant trends in critical art. Militant, materialist and partisan, Sekula aspired to develop a dialectically reflexive practice that is externally, rather than internally, directed; to maintain a connection – however troubled or problematic - between representation and reality; to conceive, as he put it, a 'hybrid paraliterary revision of social documentary'.

Taking up the opportunity provided by the conference theme, this talk traces Sekula's critical meditations on architecture, construction, the built environment, with workers as the missing term.

Biography:

Gail Day's *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory* (Columbia University Press) was shortlisted for the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize. She is Senior Lecturer in History of Art in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds.