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”Warte Mal!”

Construction and Consumption of Female Subjectivity after the Velvet Revolution

AMY CHARLESWORTH

Ann-Sofi Sidén’s *Warte Mal! Prostitution after the Velvet Revolution* was exhibited at the Hayward Gallery, London throughout the winter of 2002. The preface to the exhibition catalogue asserts that in our age of growing technological advancement an enforced and ever-increasing relationship to the human realities of global politics is pushed increasingly from our grasp. The remedy offered is Sidén’s deployment of the camera as a weapon to “uncover” truth, as opposed to keeping it hidden from view¹. Once more we are brought to the familiar crossroads of the two-fold capabilities of the camera; as Harun Farocki neatly assessed, the camera aids and yet obfuscates vision. Concerns remain, who decides if the image reveals or conceals and what discourses is this bolstered within? Moreover, what can the artist do with the question of truth when utilizing the documentary medium and its politics of representation when the image is the mediator, the translation of knowledge to the populous of an increasingly fragmented world? Sidén’s work presents questions that explore the interplay of collective and individual subjectivities, not only of those filmed but of Sidén herself and the (largely) “expert” art audiences in which the piece interacts; the relationship between art and non-art; and lastly the notion of the victim-frame, its articulation, consumption and the interplay of narrative experimentation in critically exploiting this.

The dizzying confluence of material in *Warte Mal!* consists of a thirteen-channel DVD installation that recounts the artist’s interviews with sex-workers who either line the notorious E55 highway, along the Czech Republic/German border, or work in one of the many bordellos that have opened up in the former spa resort town of Dubi. Sidén, in addition to the sex workers, interviews motel owners who charge these women to use their rooms, pimps, the women’s clients and police officials. The research project, undertaken throughout 1999, also consists of photographs, video and Sidén’s own written diary. These devices aid in an effort to understand how large-scale ostensibly evasive political, economic and social processes become actuated in a materialist sense. The re-ordering of lives in small towns and villages in former Czechoslovakia after the Iron Curtain capitulated indicates, once again, a very different construction and production of women’s subjectivity across the western world². Here, Sidén, situates her research in Dubi, although all along the line that demarcates the west from the east, the border delineates a space that is constituted

¹ Susan FERLEGER BRADES, *Warte Mal! Prostitution After the Velvet Revolution*, Hayward Gallery Publishing, London, 2002, p. 6.

² Although reliable statistics are not available due to hidden and covert routes developed by the women and the traffickers it is clear, as detailed by the Global Human Rights Education fact sheet that: “the trafficking has grown expediently in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union”. See Wendy HESFORD, “Global Sex Work and Video Advocacy: The Geopolitics of Rhetorical Identification”, in Ursula BIEMANN, Jan-Erik LUNDSTRÖM (eds.),

by people, particularly young women, who have migrated from other former Eastern Bloc countries. The geopolitics of this region is markedly determined by the living labour of these women when their bodies must aggregate the point when two changed nations, the former GDR and the Czech Republic, converge upon one another.

Formal devices and choices of display are a deeper sedimentation of the subject or content matter itself¹. The transitory and continual movement concomitant in our comprehension of borderlands is married to, and intensified by, the long, linear shots taken from the car window. The camera roves the streets and roads, bar windows, electricity pylons and rows of photographs of missing girls, drawing horizontal threads through the landscape enacting and suggesting a complication of our associated experience of an otherwise time-based, vertically compiled narrative tale. Sidén's captivation with what is inadvertently implied as the spectacle of the girls in this locality and her desire to understand their present is always undermined by the contingencies of time². The horror of the experiences told by the women enforces a perverse voyeurism that can only be managed, accepted or tolerated by the haunting specter of temporality; what the women are, and where they are, is fleeting, the clients too know their time is limited. This has an ameliorative affect on the viewer, it becomes the only manner in which we can watch, and which it seems the people that live and work in Dubi and its surrounding area, can undertake the daily tasks and necessities of everyday life.

This is not to say that the world and its subjectivities are knowable through the futile method of discovering a final and wholly definable truth but rather that reality is construed through the process of mediation; that is construction, in this case by the politics of the image. *Warte Mal!* allows us to think about how the difference between the living and the artificial (the representation) is affirmed through narrative, which produces a form that explicitly tells us that life cannot be shown but that it can be told³. Afterall, a fact is something which is made in its telling and we must always be vigilant to the fictive techniques inherent to its construction.

The Janus-Faced Politico-Aesthetic Tool

Robert Flack's brief mention of the "documentary character" of much of the video work in *Warte Mal!* is pushed further still to the periphery by the branding of the work as a video installation. This permeates Flack's essay, which puts emphasis on a need to justify the work as a piece of art⁴. Fifteen years after Martha Rosler wrote her now infamous essay: "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment", which noted

Mission Reports: Artistic Practice in the Field, Video Works 1998-2008, Bildmuseet, Umeå University, Sweden, 2008, pp. 128-142.

¹ Theodor ADORNO, *Aesthetic Theory*, Continuum, London, 2004, pp. 5-7.

² Phil HUBBARD's essay "In the border-zone: Warte Mal! – A Video Installation by Ann-Sofi Sidén", *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2003, pp. 112-119, notes of the "spectacle of sex workers dotted along the roadside in all weathers, which over the last fifteen years has attracted much media attention".

³ Boris GROYS, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation", *Documenta 11* catalogue, Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2002, pp. 108-114.

⁴ The Hayward Gallery organized a panel discussion on the 19th February 2002: "The Politics of Display: Warte Mal! Art History and Social Documentary" to ascertain, notes their website, this very point.

the manner in which museums and galleries "tame" video, ignoring, or removing its inherent potential for implicit critique, we can still witness the problematics the political produces for the aesthetic in the art institutional sphere¹. As with all modern movements, video art for Rosler has been required to define itself in relation to the apparatuses of society. For Flack, *Warte Mal!* proves that video (installation) art has finally "come of age" and "secured a place in the history of sculpture". Only when video can take up literal spatial concerns, can it compete with art proper. Rosler warned that this all too Modernist obsession with the "essentials" of the "medium" would sever the relationship the video camera has with broadcasting, disregarding the potential of such technology to go beyond the sphere of the confines of the art institution.

The qualities of the moving-image may always present an antagonism for art institutions. Whether it is still or moving, analogue or digital, the indexical to the "real" and thus an interaction with the regimes of truth has meant that the same medium can be utilized for distinctly alternate ends. At one end of the spectrum rests the mass media, more often than not homogenized by the affiliation to government demands. In contrast, if given the technical know-how – of which there is a varied and geographically diverse history – the utopian element present in the medium means it can be used in a revolutionary manner to provide, not only, the counter-images needed for the project of consciousness-raising but also become concomitant to the broader politics of form debates². A continual desire to set the medium of video within the paths already established of the last century has resulted in neglecting to see video within its own terms. This is not to say that we must limit our understanding to its technological determinations but consider the historiography of its systems of distributions, use and sponsorship, which arise from a diverse set of trajectories; its technologies of vision and its procedures of truth are therefore necessary to understand *Warte Mal!* as an engagement with the documentary tradition. In fact, we would do well to remember and accept the ubiquity of the image – particularly the advertising image – in late capitalist society. This is made only too visible in Sidén's diary when she writes of one young woman, Eva, and her penchant for keeping notebooks filled with logos for Nike, Adidas and Coca-Cola, "all [of] her favorite brands"³. For Groys, the postcommunist situation, as we witness played out in this particular narrative sequence, makes all the more visible the artificiality of capitalism, positioning the spotlight on it as a resolutely "political project of social restructuring" as opposed to the natural economical development it purports to be⁴. The brief observation of Eva's diary pays heed to the biopolitical nature of contemporary capitalism. Modern corporations like Nike, for instance, through the power of the brand articulated by the logo, indicate the role of immaterial labour prior to material. For it is with the capture of the cooperation between peoples cognitive abilities that the logo and its associations begin to take shape⁵.

¹ Martha ROSLER, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment", *BLOCK*, issue 11, 1985/6.

² I would like to draw the reader's attention to groups like Medvedkin group (of which French film-essayist Chris Marker was influential in providing training), Willi Munzenberg's *AIZ* (The Worker's Pictorial Newspaper) and the video co-ops in the U.S throughout the 1960s/70s for documenting grass-root struggles such as: Videofreex; People's Video Theatre; and Raindance Corporation

³ Ann-Sofi Sidén's diary, Motel Hubert, Dubi, the Czech Republic 02.99-10/99.

⁴ Boris GROYS, *Art Power*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2008, p. 166.

⁵ Alberto TOSCANO, "Vital Strategies: Maurizio Lazzarato and the Metaphysics of Contemporary Capitalism", *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 24, no. 6, pp. 71-91.

If the language and technical imperatives of the video camera allows Sidén to get close to the people she films, the question of power relations must be considered as they saturate the very apparatus she adopts. The interview framework in much orthodox documentary work replicates that of testimonial confession. Interviewer and interviewee in *Warte Mal!* appear to endeavor to transgress the presence of the camera by the very notion of the months of research and time Sidén and her translators spent living alongside those who form the basis of the work. It is clear though that no amount of intimacy can produce a purely candid view into the lives and experiences of those caught on film because the issue that should be markedly at the fore here is a concern with construction and not implied direct or neutral recording. This may appear to present problems for Rosler's argument. If the work is overtly preoccupied with formal innovation will it not lead us to narcissistic obsessions and a cinematic language which is only able to speak to those with an already privileged and established sense of aesthetic play in which one is able to recognize the transgressions of set codes? To turn to Brecht, his devices employed in an effort to understand for whom the artwork was for, under what set of circumstances and by whom was it actuated, lead to something that was not constructed to reflect and represent the existing dominant regimes of truth. In asking these questions one is able to break open static assumptions in a dynamic, experimental way which required the audience to be actively engaged in order for these transgressions and their transformative effects to take place. This lacuna in the narrative led to a desire to undo illusionary effect and its associated passivity. The Brechtian turn in much political film-making of the late 1960s and 70s in Britain and Western Europe – which sought to understand the effects of the intersection of race, gender, sex and class on subjectivity at a certain moment – displayed and experimented with devices developed to dispel the illusionary effects seemingly inherent in the medium of film-making and the camera¹.

Crucially Brecht was not an advocate of formal experimentation for experimentations sake, his sardonic statements on the place of the avant-garde indicates his criticality for something he still considered to be of great significance: "For a vanguard can lead the way along a retreat or into an abyss. It can march so far ahead that the main army cannot follow, because it is lost from sight..."². Sidén's chosen medium reminds us to consider that rather than lambasting the TV and video medium as the always assumed partner of corporate owned, government led agendas (ever-increasingly driven by market forces through privatization) the familiarity of its vernacular enforces us to see the power it holds for speaking to the common. For if we are able to maintain that where there is power there is always resistance (in a Foucauldian sense) then the multiplicities and criticalities within a medium begin to open up becoming ripe for a process of deconstruction and re-articulation with lapidary force. If we define our discussion of the medium of the video and TV monitors through the language of an already well established and canonical set of terms and concepts we neglect the fruitful conjunction that it has (and will most likely always exist) with broadcasting and the media. Extensive knowledge of the public sphere when making work, particularly work about women and their representation,

¹ For more detailed information on the key debates of this period see the British film journal *Screen* and the French *Cahiers du Cinéma* journal under the editorial team of Jean Comolli and Jean Narboni.

² Bertolt BRECHT, "Against Georg Lukacs", *Aesthetics and Politics*, NLB, London, 1977, p. 72.

enables an artwork like *Warte Mal!* to be acutely mindful of its emergence from, and production within, the social world. This is in opposition to – due to a certain type of formal analysis and politics of display – it occupying a "properly aesthetic sphere", a sphere that although the art establishment fights to separate, is obsolete due to the sheer ubiquitous presence and use of the image in everyday life.

Documentary Realism and its Politics of Truth

Despite Sidén's *Warte Mal!* possessing a very obvious relationship with the documentary genre, discussions focused solely on its installation negate any such considerations of this coterminous rich history; a history very much born within the art field yet perpetually denied any part of it¹. An expanded notion of the documentary is thus required rather than positioning it in the impasse of the mouthpiece of activism, adopting the responsibility to be pedagogical in nature on one hand, and a lambasting of a tendency to be unaware of its own didactic and moralizing hypocrisy on the other. The genealogy of the documentary, as it has become to be understood, is fractured and changeable in its meaning throughout the 20th century in the West. *Warte Mal!* explicitly raises questions that circle realism and its affiliate, the documentary, which as a genre (and by genre I refer to Frederic Jameson's notion of genre as a social determined entity) has a tradition of supposing it can split true statements from false ones². The documentary image needs, therefore, to be understood as historical and not ontological in its origins³. As the film scholar, Bill Nichols states: "The established story of documentary's beginnings continues to perpetuate a false division between the avant-garde and documentary that obscures their necessary proximity"⁴. A series of large-scale events that directly re-structured the western world can be marked as crucial in distinguishing how the format of the documentary became established post-1940 and unchanged prior to the critique in the 1970s in Europe, which saw the displacement of the state from its central position in documentary rhetoric. The impact of socialist realism and the violent objection of the "self-indulgent decadences" of the avant-garde; the rise of Nazi power and its co-option of the camera for Fascist propaganda and subsequent attack on so-called degenerate art, and lastly the onset of the Great Depression and deployment of the documentary medium increasingly as both, a liberal tool in which to relieve the conscience of the middle classes, and a device specifically for the exigencies of the New Deal program in the USA, meant an increased and incrementally ingrained implementation of the camera as a tool for government means⁵.

¹ Olivier LUGON, " 'Documentary': Authority & Ambiguities", *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art 1*, Sternberg Press, CCS Bard, pp. 28-38.

² Hito STEYERL, *Documentarism as Politics of Truth*, <www.repubicart.net/disc/representations/steyerl103_en.pdf>, (accessed on 19.03.2010).

³ John TAGG, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 1988. Tagg's work is steeped in a Foucauldian conception of "truth" wherein which a particular relationship with truth is not a struggle for *finding truth* but rather concerned with a struggle around the *status* of it.

⁴ Bill NICHOLS, "Documentary Film and the Avant-Garde", *Critical Enquiry*, vol. 27, no. 4, Summer 2001, p. 581.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 580-610.

The contestation between Modernist fragmentation and the activist goals linked to photographic realism, once so widely encouraged in the 1920s, provided a tension treated with great distrust post-1930s. The deployment of both formal experimentation and social oratory evident therefore in some European and Soviet film work has been resultantly absent from the documentary's history. Instead a focus on allowing political issues to take centre stage developed as the dominant mode for the documentary, this very notion being a key exponent steeped in the ideals of Giersonian thought¹. Sidén herself is no stranger to the criticisms leveled at the candid camera's seemingly inherent obsession for, and ability to capture, "the real" through indexicality. Her 1998 work *Who Told the Chambermaid?* manipulates precisely the ambiguity present in attempting to pull apart fact and fiction (albeit in a less complex project). The work presented a wall of television monitors which each displayed images of different hotel rooms. The carefully edited CCTV footage played on the acceptance of said images as true and the power of voyeurism in concluding this.

These discourses are redolent in *Warte Mal!*, where a decision to document life is paramount. The shots throughout the work show an awareness that they are imbued with cinematic conventions and codes that are potentially dangerous, dangerous in the sense that they insinuate that meaning already resides in the film, creating a passivity in the act of viewing, as opposed to highlighting that meaning is created in the dialogue between the viewer and the filmmaker². Despite this, this mode of filmmaking is still vulnerable to operating in a binary rhetoric that is tempered to practical day-to-day issues, in either agreement or disagreement, bound by finding truths or untruths and staking a claim on those filmed. The paradox Sidén faces is in her aim to document life, and the manner in which it then comes to be displayed as a static art object. By selecting a nation state in the flux of transition from one socio-economic and political system to another, *Warte Mal!* must be conversant of its role in defining otherwise fluid subjectivities and presenting them as available for the voracious consumption of the museum-going public³.

Biopolitics & Documentation: A Symbiosis?

In 1987 Raymond Bellour stated that the video image is best understood *as a practice of writing*, this built on an earlier polemic, "La Camera-Stylo", by Alexander Astruc in 1948 wherein which he ascribed the capabilities of the camera with the same qualities of the pen. In examining the process of narrative and the implication of a story being told through multifarious techniques *Warte Mal!* pays heed to this history. The use of narrative in film and video work has faced much criticism throughout the

¹ Here I am referring to John Grierson, often considered to have spearheaded the formulation of the British documentary alongside Basil Wright. Their work came to have a substantial significance on documentary discourse throughout Europe in the 1930s.

² Annette KUHN, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*, Verso, London, 1994, p. 127.

³ Renzo Martens' work *Episode III Enjoy Poverty* (2009) exploits many of the tropes of "political" art and the documentary project to expose the hypocrisy seemingly always lurking as the undertone in much of this contemporary work. He positions the viewer, as consumer of these images, as complicit in the "business" of recreating and owning the poverty and misery represented by the images. Interesting comparisons can be made between *Episode III Enjoy Poverty* and Luis Bunuel's 1932 *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*.

20th century. Particular devices sought to carve up the chimera of the reality effect, which the image and text, especially in mainstream cinema and advertising, strived to portray through a non-contradictory hermetically sealed account of events¹. Hence the omnipresence of the one defining image, immortalized in print, perpetually un-earthed to provide account for the story. Sidén's use of space in her installation suggests, not only the multitudinous narratives that make up the work, but also explores the physical geography of Dubi². The requirement for one to move through and around the space compels an awareness of ones' own body in said space, this attempts to mimic and enhance the necessary complex formations of the stories told.

The desire and need to document life as it is lived in *Warte Mal!* correlates with a specific conjuncture from the late 1980s to the early 2000s which witnessed the beginnings of the mainstreaming of the biopolitical conceptual framework into the contemporary art sphere. Groys' *Art Power*, puts forth the argument that we now live in a biopolitical age that has effected, in a tangible manner, the way in which we now position value and interest on art documentation as opposed to clearly defined artwork³. Art documentation, he writes, is the most appropriate (and moreover only way) in which to discuss specific artistic activity that might consist of:

"complex and varied artistic interventions in daily life, lengthy and complicated processes of discussion and analysis, the creation of unusual living circumstances, artistic exploration into the reception of art in various cultures and milieus, and politically motivated artistic actions"⁴.

The act of documenting art over presenting it, translates, for Groys, as thus identical to life because art has now, like life, become about continual activity which of course has no end result, no form or object in which it can become a final static product. The varied and diverse strategies of documentation are able to let the eye jump between and acknowledge incontestably the symbiotic relationality between the image and text, introducing considerations of space and sound. This enables a switch from the usual assumption, wherein which art becomes a "life form" and artwork becomes "non-art". This mode of art, for Groys, is symptomatic of the biopolitical age in which we now live. An age, which he states, is characterized by life becoming increasingly the object of "technical and artistic intervention"⁵. If bureaucratic and technological modes are the dominant means for administrating and knowing life through documentation (stats, planning, reports et cetera in the invention of the standards of the 'norm' to be historically ascertained) it is no coincidence that art

¹ See Claire JOHNSTON, Paul WILLEMANN, "Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*)", *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 4, winter 1975-76, p. 107, which provides insight to how social commentary became, once again, closely linked to innovative techniques in filmmaking.

² See Phil HUBBARD's essay "In the Border Zone: *Warte Mal!* – A Video Installation by Ann-Sofi Sidén", *Cultural Geographies in Practice*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2003, pp. 112-119, for an exploration into the "ethno-mimetic" spatial dimensions of the work when installed at *The Hayward* gallery which, for him, enforces a dialectical interplay between performance and documentary.

³ Boris GROYS, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation", *Art Power*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2008, pp. 53-65.

⁴ IDEM, *Art Power*, cit., p. 54.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

has begun to deploy such strategies in order to attempt to know and make sense of the world.

Groys' consideration of the document as art, because it refers to life, which is in opposition to the dominant conception of art that is conceived as art because it is "something which embodies art in itself", presents an interesting question for the Sidén's *Warte Mal!* The document and/or the documentary is conceived as a device that positions its aims at situating the present in its history. In recent art discourse the archival, and arguably, evidential document has become a privileged form of communication. Historically, through its ethnographic mode, documentation has become part of a methodology that can aid in the administration of life; it can take stock, record, act as a means of intelligibility in which to understand the body of the population. If one is to follow Groys' trajectory, perhaps the intensification – due to the demands of a neo liberal social and political project – of the biopolitical subject and the technological innovation of the digital image has meant a shift in how one now *perceives* the possibilities of documentary medium, hence the proliferation of its deployment in contemporary art throughout the last several years¹.

Groys' perception of art documentation as art, however, does have a somewhat utopian drive at the center of its thesis. The possibilities for making art concerned with life, prioritizing documentation, shows multiple and continual deviations in form. Benjamin's "The Author as Producer" (1934) stated the importance of the author or artist considering their commitment under a set of specific social conditions, by which I mean to consider what attitude a work might, or should have, to the relations of production in which it is made, provides us with a way to avoid using the concepts of biopolitics in an un-critical manner. The implementation of this concept in Groys' work is at risk, at times, of conflating biopolitics to being anything that is concerned with life, as opposed to specific moments, bound to the socio-economic fabric that present new ways to cultivate life. This is due perhaps to the Giorgio Agamben inflection present in Groys' argument. Taken in its Foucauldian inception, one should give attention to specific moments that present new ways to cultivate life. For Foucault the focus lies at the historical process, the dynamic and mobile elements by which life becomes the target of relations of power/knowledge.

Viewing and Consuming at the Border

The "victim frame" is sovereign in providing in-roads for possession of the subject, the close-up of the face and the isolation of pain articulated on the expressions of those filmed creates powerful affect in those watching. The power of the victimisation narrative runs deep, with many legal and cultural representations relying heavily on it for providing the grounds on which to incite awareness and action. In a practical sense some trafficked and enslaved persons are only able to gain access to justice and related services if they are able to prove their status precisely as victims through the

¹ Documenta 11 (2002) and the research project led by Maria LIND & Hito STEYERL at Bard College from 2008-2010, consolidated in a number of essays collected in the book *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art 1*, CCS Bard: Sternberg Press, 2008, mark a decade of interest in a re-turn to the documentary.

confessional testimonial¹. The interaction between word and image runs parallel at this point; images wait to be confirmed, falsified and explained by the narrative or captions that accompany the image, working in as much the same as the photograph². Exploitation of the danger that lies in this apparent natural relationship is made palpable by Chris Marker's *Lettre d'Siberie* (1957), which explores how the same image can be manipulated to very different ends. An image sequence shows four variations of sound and narration read over a Yukutsk town bus passing a Zim luxury car, road-levellers and a squinting passer-by, each variation purposefully conflicts the other. Firstly we view this as a silent image, and then a pro-Soviet eulogy, a darkly anti-Communist critique, lastly a report of the narrator's own impressions completes the arrangement³. Marker neatly clarifies how the truth of an image and the reality it represents is subject, always, to ideological interpretation.

The focus on an individual's experience, however, whilst directing attention to narratives of personal woe and failure, begins to take on much of the same likeness of others' stories, thus an archetype begins to take shape. What arises, therefore, is a personalised story that becomes interchangeable with all other stories; the devices that enforce this rhetoric of victimisation become standardised obscuring the polysemic nature of the image. This results in a general tendency to feel we know the stories before we are told them; the complexities of cultural, economic, social and historical circumstances are erased in many such narratives as one story seamlessly replaces another. In order to negate the often assumed and induced passivity when watching film or video work it is important to query what Sidén asks and expects of the viewer in their engagement with *Warte Mal!* The depiction of female sex workers in both the art and media of the last three centuries has typically given rise to the "fallen" women, codified as either deviant or helpless. By codifying the prostitute in either or both of these two clichés the female sex worker is positioned as the "other" and the tropes of victimhood prevail⁴. The focus on the alterity of the individual deflects attention away from the cultural conditions, policies, both national and international and the socio-political and economic forces that form the material conditions that enforce many women to work in the sex industry⁵. The viewer, in much documentary work is incited predominantly to feel empathy and sympathy resulting in the potential to neglect analysis and anger.

What space then is carved out for the viewer in this work? Are we only able to exist as voyeur and if so what does this mean for the objectification and resulting consumption of these women's lives? There are certainly moments of seductive fascination presented, through the affectivity of the monologues delivered, but more unmistakably through Sidén's diary utterances. We hear Sidén's "insider" knowledge and familiarity frequently; what the girls like and dislike, judgments and assessments of them, their

¹ See the US-based Freedom Network as discussed in Hesford's aforementioned essay.

² Susan SONTAG, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 9.

³ Catherine LUPTON, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*, Reaktion Books, London, 2005, p. 57.

⁴ See Hesford's discussion of *Open Your Eyes* a film made by International Organization for Migration made in 2001 in the above cited text.

⁵ Wendy HESFORD, "Global Sex Work and Video Advocacy: The Geopolitics of Rhetorical Identification", in Ursula BIEMANN, Jan-Erik LUNDSTRÖM (eds.), *Mission Reports: Artistic Practice in the Field, Video Works 1998-2008*, Bildmuseet, Umeå University, Sweden, 2008, pp. 128-142.

clients and pimps. We are drawn to reading the semi-private musings and accounts of Sidén's time spent in Dubi, compelled by the ordinary and extraordinary lives of those filmed. Whilst these issues are clearly still one of the most exposed aspects of the work, Sidén selects two devices that aim to counter the above concerns. The first is the installation of the works in such a manner that the viewer must physically move through the space in order to gain some sense of the whole. Perhaps if we view the choice of installation in this light we are still able to pay attention to Rosler's demand for not neglecting relationship between broadcasting history and video work such as this but rather acknowledge the different roles the spectator has historically taken when watching television or walking around an exhibition. Secondly are the moments at which the dialectical play between hope and despair become inescapable. Shots and/or dialogue in which the girls are playful and humorous and displays of loyalty and solidarity permeate the work; the inhabitants of Dubi devise and illustrate how there are always new ways to live in the fissures of our changed nation states. This is the place in which the instrumentality of Sidén as the author of the work is clearly figured. When we are told that one of the girls has a fondness for the artist, perhaps as a "mother figure", suggests Sidén, it could be construed as a display of unnecessary solipsism, however, it serves to remind us that we can only know of this research through the highly mediated subjectivity of the artist, of Sidén herself. This is not to make an argument for a return to restricting the proliferation of meaning by only hearing the voice of the author, but rather to state that it is only ever possible to know the world and its histories as a faction of fiction told by another.

Sidén's aim to examine ordinary peoples' lives in the face of huge structural re-adjustment, the transgression from being a former Eastern Bloc communist state to a "democratic" capitalist state, explores how it happens at the site of the body, here it is the women's bodies that are the site of exchange, their bodies code and determine how life gets played out on the border. In light of the uneasy ground in which Sidén carefully navigates throughout *Warte Mal!* the transparency of her role as author must operate un-ambiguously. As discussed, this surfaces most clearly through her analysis of the voice, whether it is through the interviewing or the seductive diary entries, the over-determinative effects of speaking for the other and the danger to re-victimize, silence and marginalize further is given due care (in light of feminist and post-colonial criticism). Sidén makes difficult, through her presence in the work, not only through voice, but also as images (the artist and her translators are not always positioned as periphery or un-consequential to the frame) the role of artist as "ethnographic reporter" of sorts. In the act of selecting a group for the object of study one always already positions oneself on the outside looking in. For Sidén though, her own subjectivity is tangled, sometimes purposefully, other times abstractedly into the fabric of *Warte Mal!*

The work's careful confluence and movement between image and text transgress the pitfalls of mainstream media and the obsessive search for that one defining image that tells the truth; rhetoric still annexed, for many, to the documentary project, which has over the past decade or so had a re-investment of interest due to the work of Mark Nash, Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (to name only a few key figures). It is a subtle project that, despite its focus on individual stories, the myriad and complex ways in which these interact and contradict result in a shift from the isolating of individual misfortune, assigning blame or sympathy at that specific juncture to the systematic failures of a broader political, social and economic spheres. Personal testimonies, as *Warte Mal!* explores, do play a substantially important role in breaking dominant

discourse, however it notes that on its own this is not enough, it enforces us to pay attention to how we read and disseminate them, aiming for a sustainable and innovative form of representation. The resurrection of the visibility of the author and the complexities of the subjects' position for speaking in the shifting geographies of late capitalism is both a product and a symptom of a need for a redefinition of agency of which *Warte Mal!* attempts to explore.

Warte Mal! is considered here as opening up two main issues for address, both tied to the politics of form. The wider project of the documentary is in a sense, biopolitical, in that it appropriates trying to gain knowledge of those filmed. It is not, therefore, unusual that Sidén aims to utilize the documentary in order to gain an understanding of how life is embodied and played out at a transformative juncture.

The often referred to "documentary turn" in art discourse of the last decade is entangled (as outlined above with the deployment of Groys) with the biopolitical character of neoliberal capitalism post-1970. Certainly part of this work is a desire to humanize the postcommunist condition. In this text I have attempted to map out the issues the project must negotiate in order to produce a kind of sustainable mode of representation that maintains the specificity of the aesthetic as a device for enabling one to see differently through a re-organized register. Despite the rather grand task of crystallizing subjectivity in Dubi, grand narratives do not distinguish this work, they function in an evocatory and suggestive capacity. For instance, had the work focused more explicitly on the men that travel through Dubi the work may have attended to more of a totalizing narrative.

Certain images used appeal to our sense of humanity; the close-ups of the women's faces, the panoramic stretches depicting the sparsity of the landscape are unfamiliar and yet not. The women that wait on the roadsides indicate that although former industries have closed, the altered and relocated labour of this locality is embodied in the exchange of money and sex. Sidén's focus on the people, particularly the women, and the use of certain shots presents difficulties that become visible when the aesthetic and formal strategies of the documentary are taken, or referred to, in the discussion and dissemination of the work, as un-critical and un-historical. The fractious history of the moveable category of "documentary", its periods of critique and reformulation and its use to *know* life even if only in a relative sense has meant a stringent focus on history, its narrative telling and a unavoidable engagement with the indiscernibly artistic and commercial components of the video camera and its relationship to the politics of truth.