Keepers of the Port: Visualising Place and Identity in a Dublin Dock Community

Moira Sweeney [Thesis]

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Keepers of the Port:
Visualising Place and Identity in a Dublin Dock Community

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This thesis is submitted to the Technological University Dublin
in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisors:
Dr Alan Grossman
Dr Anthony Haughey

School of Media

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Abstract

This practice-based thesis responds to the absence of documentary film or photographic studies and scholarship that embrace the contrasting experiences of different dock working constituencies in the transforming early twenty-first century space of Dublin Port. It is a filmic investigation into how the experiences and memories of this community of workers in Dublin’s surviving port space shape their urban identity and sense of place, undertaken with regard to the sensuous, haptic qualities of documentary and ethnographic filmmaking.

In the ever-shifting world of neoliberalism, its narratives – in relation to labour practices – prioritise faceless markets over the humanity of working life. Therefore, in an attempt to interrogate the lived experiences and memories of working life and how these are central to the shaping of identity, the research is framed within the context of contrasting constituencies within the port community – dockers, crane drivers, stevedores, marine operatives and port managers.

Viewing the working docks through the prism of an imagination situated at the nexus of documentary, ethnography and geography allows me to challenge any reductive understanding of this place. Rather than a humanless zone of digital technology, characterised by web-based movement of trade, the research uncovers an interdependent web of constantly transforming social relations. Using the richness of a visual and scholarly ethnographic approach allows for the meaningful exploration of enactments of masculinity on the docks, enactments which differ from stevedore to dockworker to port manager. I show how any easy correlation between masculinity and men ignores the many complexities of gender and identity.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Technology University Dublin and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute’s guidelines for ethics in research.

Candidate’s Signature _______________________
Date of Signature ________________________
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I dedicate the thesis to the men and women of Dublin Port who allowed me into their worlds.
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<td>aemi</td>
<td>artists experimental moving image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive of the Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDDA</td>
<td>Dublin Docklands Development Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>Dublin Port Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSL</td>
<td>Dublin Stevedores Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAA</td>
<td>Gaelic Athletic Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICTU</td>
<td>Irish Congress of Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTL</td>
<td>Marine Terminals Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAMA</td>
<td>The National Asset Management Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTÉ</td>
<td>Raidió Teilifís Éireann</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIPTU</td>
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Introduction

The ports of many great maritime cities, such as Liverpool, New York or San Francisco have suffered ruination in the era of globalisation. Since the mid 1970s, with the advent of container ships, these once leading European and North American ports failed to modernise and new larger deep water hub ports, that could facilitate ever expanding ship sizes emerged in the cheaper industrial bases of Asia. Dublin’s port however has survived due to it being the key sea route for importing and exporting into and out of Ireland. If the port were to come to a halt, so too would much of the Irish economy.

Narration from the film *Keepers of the Port*, Moira Sweeney, 2017 (Figure 0.1)

Considering the central role of Dublin Port as a hub for transport of commodities and passengers, as well as it’s proximity to the city, vital day-to-day port operations can remain invisible and inaudible to all but those working, living or travelling in the immediate vicinity of the port, or those in transit to and from Ireland by sea. When I commenced this study, the dock labour of Dublin was almost invisible, under represented both on screen and in publishing, while the voices of those engaged in it were largely unheard. In his seminal photographic and textual essay *Fish Story* (1995),
Sekula concluded that visual culture’s denial of the common reality of labour results in the exclusion of its representation.¹ His unique focus on how global capitalism is in the process of destroying maritime life does not allow for the many patterns and rhythms of working life that have survived technological change in ports. This filmic investigation therefore builds upon Sekula’s work through uncovering the contours of working life in Dublin’s port whilst simultaneously responding to the absence of documentary film or photographic studies and scholarship that embrace the contrasting experiences of different dock working constituencies in this transforming early 21st century space. The thesis unravels the processes, productive failures and successes of visualising different constituencies on Dublin’s docks, a critical journey which ultimately serves to disrupt the notion of friction-free capitalism.

When Bill Gates coined the term ‘friction-free capitalism’ in his book The Road Ahead (1995), the founder of Microsoft presented a vision of a future where digital technologies would change the way we buy, work, learn, and communicate. In the mid to late 90’s, the term became a buzzword as the corporate world sought for a perfect market within the worldwide distribution of commodities. Such an idea ‘conjured up images of a dematerialised economy newly enabled by the computer as ‘the sole engine of our progress’’ (Roberts 2012).² Thus, in the ever-shifting world of neoliberalism, its narratives – in relation to labour practices – prioritise faceless markets over the humanity of working life. In this notion of a contemporary friction-free consumerist world, the everyday reality of the labour involved in the movement of trade is relegated to a romantic past: the sea has been tamed and workers are mere appendages of an invisible matrix (Sekula 1995; Roberts 2012).
By contrast, a rejuvenated geographic imagination acknowledges that spaces such as the Dublin’s dock are socially produced and composed of numerous and often overlooked nuanced layers (Gregory 1994; Massey 2005; Anderson 2015). A driving motivation behind this thesis therefore was to explore and identify documentary film and photographic methods with which to depict the largely invisible contemporary labour that sustains the flow of cargo into and out of Dublin’s docks, while simultaneously representing the voices of those who preserve this labour. The distinctive research approach of the thesis is consequently characterised by reflexive audio-visual methods involving the convergence of a number of tributaries: the production skills of a documentary filmmaker and photographer; an inquisitive geographical imagination; and an emerging interest in modes of self-reflective enquiry, while visualising the contemporary lived experience of a port community in Dublin. These research approaches are accompanied with a professional aspiration to define and challenge an established documentary practice honed in the demanding world of broadcast television but also informed by independent, experimental and ethnographic modes of filmmaking. I have aimed to forge an authentic mode of looking at the nexus between broadcast documentary and a more poetic, observational cinema; a mode, that when developed, would allow for a rich representation of a transforming dock constituency.

Viewing the working docks through the prism of an imagination situated at the nexus of documentary, ethnography and geography allows me to challenge any reductive understanding of this space. The richness and diversity of the filmic enquiry easily contradict the neoliberal notion that the port is a friction-free setting. Rather than a humanless zone of digital technology, characterised by web-based movement of trade, the research uncovers an interdependent web of constantly transforming social relations. My filmic investigation identifies the significance, in these circumstances, of memory
being preserved, through interviews, informal conversations as well as my embedded, immersive ethnographic experiences and encounters within the field. Furthermore, enactments of certain masculinities on the docks show how cultural experiences and reflections challenge the uncomplicated notion of class as simply socioeconomic status. Using the richness of a visual and scholarly ethnographic approach, I explore meaningful explorations of enactments of masculinity on the docks, enactments which differ from stevedore to dockworker to port manager. I show how any easy correlation between masculinity and men ignores the many complexities of gender and identity.

The strategy of viewing the transformed space of Dublin’s docks through the prism of a documentary imagination, allowed me to weave local dockworkers’ narratives and histories into the broader tapestry of a complex web of port operations. Moreover, the strategy of depicting a sense of locale through observational, participatory documentary methods of filmmaking facilitated the processes of filmically representing this selected port community. The combined forces of a sensuous locale and an ethnographic documentary imagination made possible an empathetic, exploratory examination of the dock field site. I furthermore came to understand the dock space through the converging lens of a geographic imagination; the filming was a visual mining of an ordered urban space, an attempt to unearth hidden, layered narratives, working with whatever I encountered. In keeping with the filming methodology adopted over the course of the research, the exhibition spaces for the film installations along Dublin’s docks were viewed through a sensory lens. This reading of urban place understands the space to be alive, changeable and dynamic.

As I became enthralled by the various trajectories and the magnitude of this docklands space I was guided by the following topical concerns. How might the multi-faceted
nature of place and working life for a Dublin Port community be sensed, visualised, and re-created beyond broadcast habituation? In this port space, how do workers shape their urban identity and how, despite the technological working transformations that this community face, do they find ways to continue to shape their urban identity? The unique, longitudinal nature of the study facilitated the evolution of these concerns into my key research question. How might the richness of a filmic investigation of identity, memory, experience and social relations in a Dublin port community challenge the neoliberal notion of humanless friction-free movement of trade in a friction-free setting?

The photographic and audio-visual research spanned a five-year period between 2008 and 2013, while the outputs of this work – the installations *Stevedoring Stories* (2012) and *Rhythms of a Port* (2014) and the film *Keepers of the Port* (2017) – were exhibited between 2012 and 2019. In an attempt to interrogate the lived experiences and memories of working life and how these are central to the shaping of identity, the research is framed within the context of different working constituencies within Dublin’s port community. This afforded me the opportunity to observe and document multiple contrasting voices and perceptions of work life and form a picture of how complex identities coexist in this space during times of change. There were fifteen participants, amongst them contemporary and retired dockworkers, stevedores, marine operatives, VTS operators and port managers. The unique longitudinal, immersed nature of the study determined that it followed the economic fortunes of Dublin Port from boom to bust to boom. The imagery cannot claim to be a comprehensive documentation of the lives of selected dockworkers and stevedores; these are moments, instances, scenes, which reveal the coexistence of multiple contrasting voices and perceptions of work life and identity in the Dublin Port space. The concept that the participants were
‘custodians’ or ‘keepers’ of the port only materialised in the latter stages of the critical journey during the editing and writing processes.

Urban identity and place are pertinent subjects in contemporary scholarship and film practice. The research therefore, in the form of a body of distinctive practice-based artefacts – the installations *Stevedoring Stories* (2012), *Rhythms of a Port* (2014) and the film *Keepers of the Port* (2017) – makes a valuable and unique contribution to Sekula’s work and a small body of other international film and photographic projects, as well as to sociological and geographical scholarly studies that address maritime space, port life and globalisation. My study concurrently enriches a series of contemporary research projects, which respond to the specificity of Dublin Port and Dublin Bay and which evolved partially in response to or in parallel with my own work.

Although film and photography share contested histories in claiming to convey the truth, they are nonetheless regarded as media with the latitude to represent the sensuous, multi-layered nature of working experience and memory. The research draws primarily on documentary film theories, together with discussion of theories of photography and screen-mediated installation. This scholarship is necessarily augmented by material from the social sciences, specifically ethnography and cultural geography. I acknowledge the appeal of filmmaker and scholar Desmond Bell (1992; 2008; 2011; 2016) to professional documentary filmmakers to deconstruct and critique their practice. My approach to documentary filmmaking has been inspired by film theorist Bill Nichols’s original work on modes of documentary filmmaking and ethnographic ideas on embodied filmmaking developed by Anna Grimshaw (2005), David MacDougall (2006) and Jean Rouch (1975). This scholarship acknowledges that the corporeal and multilayered nature of lived experience can be represented through observational and
participatory modes of filmmaking. Film theorist Laura Marks (2000; 2002) advances the idea of a sensuous cinema that can transmit a sense of place and culture, while ethnographer Paul Stoller (1997; 2002; 2008) argues for a sensory approach to understanding being human. Stoller in particular inspired the approach taken in the writing of the text of this thesis. In ‘The Power of Between’ (2008), he observes that there is no one-way to write an ethnographic text. Different textual strategies are required to bring unique ethnographic material, based on long term research, to a wide range of readers. He does however suggest that one key element is required to allow the text to remain open to the world:

One element is a sense of locality. When you read a memorable ethnography, the spaces/places of that book become etched in your memory. After finishing the work, you might say, “I felt like I was there. I felt the pulse of the sun and the itch of dust in my eyes.” Another element involves the construction of character. Who are the people in the ethnography? How distinctive is their talk? What traits and behaviors determine their particular character? What motivates their behavior? Are they memorable? When you read about them, can you say, “I got to know this man or woman.”

(Stoller 2008: 157)

Stoller’s textual strategy of depicting the sensuous nature of locale has been one of the guiding forces behind the writing in chapters two and three of this thesis as it unravels ethnographic encounters with a constituency of dockworkers, stevedores, boatmen, mariners and port managers in Dublin Port.

Having given an overview of this study, the introduction now turns to providing insight into the driving forces behind the research: the Dublin port space and how it captured my imagination; the documentary critical thinking which informed the project and an outline of the components that constitute the written thesis and its accompanying artefacts.
The Rugged Harmonies of the Docks

My first view of the Dublin docks was in April 1996 from the deck of an Irish Ferries passenger ship on which I had travelled the four-hour journey across the Irish Sea from Holyhead in Wales. I was returning home after 15 years living abroad, most recently by the Thames in the heart of London. As the ship moved stealthily through the broad waters of Dublin Bay, Howth Head shimmering to the north and the Dublin Mountains ascending to the south, I experienced a mixture of excitement and cautious anticipation. For all the grace of Dublin Bay’s vistas, it was the short glide through the docks with their rubber tyre gantry crane-lined quays and moored ships, and the allure of the city to the bow that captured my imagination. This striking visual merging of port industry and urban life was amplified by the rugged harmonies of forklift warnings, creaking wood and metal, squeaking ropes and pulleys, and seagulls.

Narration from the film Keepers of the Port, Moira Sweeney, 2017 (Figure 0.2)

In 1844, when Friedrich Engels set out to describe the living and working conditions of the English working-class, he too began by standing on the deck of a ship. Engels (1845) described moving up the river Thames from the open space of the sea: ‘The further one goes up the river the thicker the concentration of ships lying at anchor’. All this is so magnificent and impressive that one is lost in admiration’ (cited in Sekula 1995: 42). This wonder subsides as he moves from the panoramic space of the sea to an
ugly urban scene in the closed slum spaces of London's main streets. If Engels had travelled from the mouth of the Liffey to central Dublin in the 1980s, his narrative shift from a magnificent panoramic maritime space to the ‘brutish frictions’ (ibid.) of urban life might have woken reminiscences of that scene in London of 1845.

Like the London I had left, however, Dublin in the mid-1990s was in the early stages of a financial upturn. The visible docklands, were in the process of being regenerated, those ‘brutish frictions’ of urban life were being glossed over with postmodern developments. Beyond the mellow assault that working dock life made on my senses on the ship deck that balmy April day was the rumbling of the impending explosion, the so-called financial ‘boom.’ My return had coincided with perhaps the most dramatic shift in civil life since the founding of the state: the prowling Celtic Tiger that was to consume every aspect of Irish life – social, cultural, geographic and economic – was just waking up.

On that first day back in Ireland, my sister Michele greeted me off the ferry on the north side of the port and we made our way out past the uninspiring industrial scape of oil and container terminals on the main arterial Alexander Road. Compared to the elegant glide through Dublin Bay, this grittier reality of an operational port was stark, anonymous and uninviting. Trucks and lorries rumbled past at speed, tucked out of sight beyond the beaten tracks of the city. Within a year, and by a curious twist of fate, we found ourselves back in the port in skilled professional capacities: my sister had designed the much-needed, newly commissioned Dublin Port Passenger Terminal Building (Sweeney/Traynor/O’Toole Architects, 1997) and I was directing a television arts programme for the national broadcaster Raidió Téileís Éireann (RTÉ), which traced the construction of the same building (Sweeney/RTÉ 1997).
Only two generations separated my sister and I from our great-grandparents and their siblings, all classed as unskilled labourers and servants when they registered at the immigration centre on Ellis Island in the dazzling metropolis of early 20th century New York. Like many hundreds of thousands of Irish people before and after them, they were lured by the promise of work as longshoremen, construction workers and domestic maids along the Hudson (Fisher 2007). I knew little of this surprising ancestral link to dock work at the time, but over the course of documenting and reflecting on the docks in my own city, curiosity prompted me at each stage to delve deeper into my great-grandparents’ story. Had I not embarked on a research journey on the docks, it is likely that these nuggets of personal history would have remained sealed in the archives and memories of my elders. However, as explained in the thesis, choosing to excavate this particular site from the standpoint of remembered experiences from my own life, as well as from what I had learned of family history, offered an opportunity to elucidate and enrich the research process, whilst also deepening my understanding of the classed and gendered nature of my positionality within the research field site.

Whilst my great grandparents’ rural origins ensured they had a farmstead to which they could return, for most emigrants it was a one-way journey from Ireland to America. In less than a century, the situation had completely reversed: a new passenger terminal was needed in Dublin Port to provide a key arrival point for the hundreds of thousands of immigrants and returning emigrants. Dazzled by a thriving economy and a vibrant cultural scene, an unprecedented number of hopefults landed into Ireland between 1996 and 2007, enriching the country with a hitherto barely existent ethnic diversity (Moore 2008; Boyle et al 2012; O’Callaghan 2012). Ireland’s global position was further strengthened by the fact that it had not experienced the full extent of the Industrial Revolution and had been forced from a chiefly agriculture-based economy into post-
industrialism (Hamond and McMahon 2002). Those who disembarked from the passenger ships were greeted by an increasingly regenerated Dublin Docklands, stretching up to the centre of the city along the quays on either side of the Liffey. Large swathes of formerly ‘ugly’ docklands were well hidden behind the financial developments that now housed the dynamo powering the Celtic Tiger.

Back in 1997, an awareness of the power of visual archive, coupled with a need to contextualise and bring to life the contemporary televisual story of the construction of Dublin Port’s new Passenger Terminal, led me to the RTÉ archive library. Upon scouring the tape-lined shelves, I unearthed rarely seen silent, black and white depictions of the Dublin port from the 1950s: cattle movement across the mouth of the River Liffey onto the docks; tweed-clad dockers; and the loading and unloading of timber and bulk coal cargo. The archival imagery of the visceral workings of Dublin’s docks contrasted poignantly with the contemporary visuals of the sleek, new, modern terminal building. These sensuous depictions of livestock and cargo were the antithesis to the sealed containers now lining the quay walls and roads with no indication of what goods lay inside them. Inspired by this first audio-visual foray into Dublin’s docks, a love affair with the dockland area began and I was to return to it a number of times over the forthcoming years, mapping the transformations along the Liffey and dredging for broadcast stories which explored this part of contemporary Dublin.

**Dublin Port: A Fluctuating Web of Connection**

Until the mid 1990s, Dublin’s docklands were primarily viewed as a maritime district beyond the city centre. Being an island, Ireland’s key means of trading has traditionally been through seaports, with Dublin Port handling over two-thirds of containerised trade to and from Ireland and 50% of all Ireland’s imports and exports. After almost two
decades of the Celtic tiger, the ugly urban scenes along the docks of the 1980s have been replaced by the sheen of postmodern architecture and engineering. Economic internationalisation and rejuvenation of the docklands have resulted in Dublin Port becoming part of ‘a fluctuating web of connections between metropolitan regions and exploitable peripheries’ (Sekula 1995: 48). Globalisation and information technology have therefore contributed to a new spatiality, which centres on cross-border connections (Sassen 2000).

The activity on the Dublin docks, which constitute part of this complex global digitalised structure, is largely invisible to those working and living within a stone’s throw from the port. Cheap goods from South East Asia can be in Dublin within a month. Moreover, the containerisation of cargo movement, pioneered by the US shipping companies in the 1950s, has reduced loading and unloading time. Although there are greatly increased cargo loads along the docklands, it is not necessarily clear what the cargo is, as some 90% of non-bulk cargo transits by sea inside containers. There are no longer smells or sights, just sanitised containers. As Sekula notes, ‘despite increasing international mercantile dependence on ocean transport, and despite advances in oceanography and marine biology, the sea is in many respects less comprehensible to today’s elites that it was before 1945, in the nineteenth century, or even during the Enlightenment’ (ibid.: 54).

As detailed in chapter two, the fieldwork of this thesis began informally when I arrived onto the South Coal Quay on Dublin’s docks in late 2008, having gained access through the man who was to become one of my key informants and effective gatekeepers of the subsequent research undertaken – stevedore John Nolan. John hailed from one of the local working-class communities that since the early nineteenth century have supplied
the Dublin docks with its labour force. However, Dublin had witnessed a dramatic decline in the demand for dockers since the 1970s, largely due to the mechanisation and containerisation of transnational shipping. This economic decline resulted in social malaise in the 1980s accompanied by a flood of heroin into the inner-city areas surrounding the docklands and the further rupturing of once close-knit neighbourhoods.9

The residential port workers’ communities had originally developed along the north and south quays, with most working men employed as labourers and carters on the docks and women as domestic workers in other parts of the city. In Dublin, as with other global ports, there has been a gradual loss of the ‘symbiotic relationship’ between port and city – a separation which has resulted in an ‘interstitial area’ between the hub of the city and the sea (Moore 2008:16). By the nineteenth century, the dockland communities were further east of the city centre, in Ringsend, North Wall or Sheriff Street. They were considered to be on ‘the wrong side of the tracks’, literally meaning that they were the other side of the main railway line (Moore 2010:12).

By the twentieth century the area had become home to the poorer strata of society, with insufficient amenities or recreational facilities and a lack of open space (Moore 2004). The post-World War II international growth of container traffic and shift from rail to road led to loss of employment on the Dublin docks. This gave rise to rapid physical degeneration, poverty and intolerable housing conditions considered at the time as reminiscent of Third World cities (ibid.). By the 1980s, the rupturing of the traditionally tight-knit communities resulted in the emergence of serious socio-economic difficulties, social disorder, vandalism and the area yielded to a flood of heroin and drug dealing as an alternative way of life. Global technological and economic changes resulted in increased mechanisation and labour decasualisation on Dublin’s docks.
Whilst the so-called ‘new world’ practices as performed on the docks were considered progress by, amongst others, the shipping companies, since the 1980s they have been a devastating blow for former dockers. In order for stevedore companies to survive the demands of a once militant workforce, following deregulation labourers were disciplined and controlled by lower wages, whilst automation lessened employment opportunities (Sekula 1995). As described earlier, the plight of the resident dock communities was further compounded by migration from the area with the neighbourhood profile becoming one of vulnerable and largely elderly, unemployed and educationally disadvantaged people (Hogan 2005). Within the fabric of the dockland and inner city communities, ‘violent histories of displacement’ had created a ‘wounded’ urban space (Till 2012: 257). Karen Till unravels her concept of a ‘wounded’ space when she writes:

> If cities and their inhabitants are understood as having been wounded by state and dominant social political practices, other imaginaries of place, temporality, and the city might focus attention on why places, peoples, groups, environments, and non-human natures continue to be injured.  

(ibid.)

And as my research unravels, it is this contested history and sense of place that informs the urban identity of many of today’s dockworkers. My first explorations of the docks as a professional broadcaster at the turn of the twenty-first century remained with me, later prompting me to filmically investigate such richness further before it disappeared altogether.

**Situating my Practice within the Documentary Discussion**

The origins of the methodological approach adopted in the study lie in a professional documentary film and photographic practice, and while an exhaustive account of this is unnecessary, the overview addresses subjective creative formation and positionality.
Intrinsic to this telling is a cognisance of the impact of my presence in the field as a woman – mine is a ‘gender inflected voice’ (Bell 1993) exploring a masculinist culture. Along with Caplan I recognise however that gender is not a thing in itself; it articulates with numerous other aspects of selfhood including age, sexuality, class, cultural affiliation and profession (1993). I dismiss crude relativism, opting to speak instead with a gendered voice that acknowledges the ‘invigorating tensions generated by rigorous scholarship’ and understands difference rather than being debilitated by it (Bell 1993: 30).

Incorporating and foregrounding subjective history and creative formation within the macro geography and history of the docks affords me the integrity with which to reflect on the processes of visually documenting and examining the labour practices and identities of my selected dock constituency in Dublin. There is a reciprocal process whereby the research illuminates personal history, just as piecing together the clues and facts of personal creativity and history illuminates the research. Bending back on my own formation allows me to understand the experiences and performances of personhood in my key research agents. In this regard, I understand personhood to be an open-ended classification wherein human beings experience constant change and can be differently constructed in different cultural settings (Beynon 2002; Cornall and Lindisfarne 1994; Marriot 1976; Strathern 1988). I therefore try to move beyond the essentialist dichotomies of male/female, man/woman or masculinity/femininity, whilst acknowledging that relations of power can still exist in any setting (ibid.). Moreover as is elaborated upon in chapter one, television itself is a site where images of gender and class are not only depicted but also actually constructed (Feasy 2008).
My formation as a documentary photographer and filmmaker occurred within a Fine Art educational setting a stone’s throw from the declining dock communities of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. Disheartened by the bleak outlook and troubled atmosphere of 1980s Northern Ireland, like my parents and great grandparents before me, I emigrated from Northern Ireland, moving to the north of England for my third level art education. When socialism, republicanism and civil rights became muddied with political violence, I chose carefully when to communicate my personal humanitarian convictions born of the historical and contemporary injustices in Northern Ireland. Treading cautiously in such a volatile and sometimes racist environment, I found a home in a hybrid form of humanitarianism.

Thatcherism’s deindustrialisation and dismantling of the close-knit working-class communities in which I now lived, the arrival of US cruise missiles in England and a burgeoning awareness, through the writings of Laura Mulvey (1975), of cultural sexism and misogyny in film combined to move me towards an active alignment with socialism, feminism and passivism. In such a context, the unfolding of a documentary practice was informed by a concern not only with aesthetics, but also with the humanist qualities displayed by social realist photographers and filmmakers such as Dorothea Lange, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Lewis Hine and in particular the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne based Amber film and photography collective. The Amber photographers and filmmakers considered it their job to authentically record the communities bearing the brunt of the industrial decline in the North of England (Figure 0.3) and entered into dialogue with the communities they documented to avoid sentimentalising them (Newbury 2002).
As elaborated upon in chapter one, documentary was already under attack at that fledgling stage of my entry into the art world, an on-going assault that extended back to the early days of photography and film, when the claim that an image could give an accurate or authentic view of the world had been, deservedly, rigorously contested. The already identified well-worn path of criticism, which began with filmmaker Grierson, remains pertinent in the context of this research project. He believed in the informative capacity of film, viewing it as a means of encouraging the public to participate in running a democratic society. His admirable but sometimes ideologically flawed vision assumed that the world was a series of facts, which could be communicated in a transparent manner, free of the problematics, ambiguities and codes through which any narrative is constructed (Stott 1986; Wells 2015).

However flawed Grierson’s vision may have been, he helped to frame the field of documentary by integrating various philosophical and theoretical ideas and his work has had a lasting impact on media education.
Likewise, Humphrey Spender and the photographers of the Mass Observation Project of 1930s working-class Britain perhaps exemplified the best and worst of documentary photography.\textsuperscript{13} As a practitioner, the approach of the women documentarists of the Mass Observation project resonates strongly with me. Although I have documented high profile events and people in broadcast documentaries, I have tended to gravitate towards the lesser-known stories hovering below the radar. What differentiated the Amber collective’s practice from early British social realism and also informed my own practice as a photographer and filmmaker, was their ‘scrupulous engagement with their subjects’, rather than taking advantage of communities for their own end (ibid.).\textsuperscript{14} It is not the intention of this thesis to represent communities or individuals with complex social needs, to which such pejorative terms as the ‘repressed’ or ‘the undocumented’ can be applied, or indeed to speak for those who are severely compromised by unjust laws, regulations and governance. Nonetheless, I aspire to the humanitarian drive described in this section.

The backdrop of contested documentary representational practices has provided a rich and provocative springboard for my own photographic and film practice. Freely adopting and rejecting conventions from documentary, as well as portraiture and landscape, the photographic series \textit{Arbroath Fishermen} (1984) (Figure 0.4), \textit{Mesta} (1999) (Figure 0.5) and \textit{Crann Beatha} (2008) (Figure 0.6) respectively bring into focus aspects of cultural life hovering well below the radar; a dying Scottish fishing village; a medieval village off the Turkish coast; and the threatened tree life of the low Pyrenees.
Figure 0.4  ‘Arbroath Fishermen’, Moira Sweeney, Arbroath, 1984

Figure 0.5: ‘Medieval Mesta’, ‘Mesta’ Series, Moira Sweeney, Chios, 1999
The fluid marrying of genres, typical of photography practice, still comes under the broad umbrella of documentary photography; documentary, portraiture and landscape share many of the same problematics and ambiguities (Badger 2010; Clarke 97; Wells 2009).

My entry into television was as an artist filmmaker with *Coming Home* (Sweeney 1994) – a forty-minute experimental documentary commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain and Channel 4. The film takes the form of a travelogue in which I attempt to understand my own ‘diasporic existence’ and ‘production through violence’ from having grown up in Northern Ireland (McAleer 1994). It was commissioned at a time when Channel Four was ‘committed to facilitating the emergence of new voice . . . encouraging a redefinition of television broadcast through the critique of professional hierarchy and dominant modes of representation’ (Bell 1992: 29). Arriving into the broadcast industry in Ireland in 1996 from this more experimental British independent film sector, I was initially given the freedom to employ a variety of creative and
experimental approaches, telling the stories of established and celebrated figures in the public eye as well as the quiet, often overlooked, ‘smaller’ tales. My particular Fine Art background, which involved filming and editing all my own material, meant that a concern with aesthetics or the ‘forms and techniques of imaginative creativity and the pleasures and satisfactions these generate generally underpinned the content (Corner 2008: 21). In other words, as becomes apparent over the course of the thesis, the practice was guided by Grierson’s concept of the ‘creative treatment of reality’ (1933:8).

The documentary practice extended to shooting my own films and eventually directing for primetime television on RTÉ. Whilst I am concerned about the individuals in the communities in my films, and furthermore believe in the power of visual narrative to highlight and even bring about social change, I do not consider these works as acts of liberalism or pornography. Nor do I undertake such projects to alleviate my conscience. Although Sekula has been a source of inspiration for me, I do not view the documentary form as adopted in my work as being necessarily a ‘clinical, brutal instrumentality of all aspects of social life: reproduction, childbearing, education, labour and consumption’ (Sekula 1978: 240). I align myself instead with his plea for an art that can document ‘monopoly capitalism’s inability to deliver the conditions of a fully human life’ (ibid.: 255). Within Sekula’s seminal critique of the privileged subjectivity of the artist he still offers significant hope for the documentarian. He writes that although ‘Documentary is thought to be art when it transcends its reference to the world, when the work can be regarded, first and foremost, as an act of self- expression on the part of the artist' it can be salvaged with the adoption of ‘a critical representational art, an art that is open to the social world and to the possibilities of concrete social transformation’ (Sekula 1978: 234-236). The imagery is of course always going to be in
part a perception, a reality constructed and informed by all the modalities at play. Nor, as Tagg (1997) observes, can it fully explain civil inequality, for such a direct replica of humanity is an impossibility.

Within the context of this discussion on documentary, I position myself then close to the ‘careful realism’ that Rosler (2000) espouses, whereby a sense of human life can be observed and recorded ethically. In the twenty years since my first televiusal inroads into the Dublin docks, I have produced and directed feature and observational documentaries and documentary series, both in house and freelance for RTÉ, as well as for TG4 and the BBC. By the early years of the twenty-first century, the broadcasting constructs that I had become accustomed to utilising had sharpened my journalistic instincts. There was, however, a creative and critical need however to challenge some of the conditioning. For as Bell observes: ‘Those who have mastered the fundamentals of construction/production are surely in a better position to tackle the demands of deconstruction/criticism’ (1992: 33).

Outline of Chapters and Submitted Artefacts

There are three chapters in the thesis, each of which is subdivided into distinct parts to facilitate temporal and thematic clarity. In order to trace the evolution and expansion of the underlying documentary impulse that drove this practice-based project, Part I of chapter one frames my practice within specific documentary film and photography critical theories. As the methodological approach is that of a documentary practitioner concerned with illuminating the creative and critical auspices of this research rather than that of a film theorist per se, Part I draws on the critical writing of both academics and filmmakers. In order to facilitate an understanding of the social history and contemporary reality of Dublin port and how it is enmeshed in wider global systems,
Part II considers academic understandings of place and ports in the fields of cultural geography and urban sociology; drawing on the critical thinking of cultural geographers facilitates a macro view of Dublin’s docks. Part II also necessarily situates the research within the context of artistic and film projects that explore the representation of lived experience in urban dock settings as well as at sea.

Chapter two, in three parts, narrates the processes of evolving visual methodologies that facilitated the conveying of the rhythms of Dublin port life: the geography; the people; the nature of the work; and the transformations. This work evolved over time through a process of assimilation as connections and chances opened up during the fieldwork phase – the five years between 2008 and 2013. Accordingly, Part I recounts my meeting on the docks with the key social actors, Part II explores the process of negotiating trust with my participants and Part III focuses on the broader fluctuating economic environment of the quays. I was guided by a desire to experiment and challenge my film practice and therefore made myself vulnerable as a filmmaker. Rather than set out with a fixed plan or destination, this was a flexible process of slow revelation and the evolving methodologies are reflective of the corporeal nature of the journey. Ethnographic scholarship guided me in critically reflecting on the methods involved in negotiating trust with the participants in the field site. Paul Stoller’s (1997) illumination of ‘sensuous description’ provided me with an approach with which to represent these different encounters textually.

Chapter three chart the ways in which the haptic sensibility of the documentary filmmaking and photography was carried over into the dissemination of the film and photographic content between 2012 and 2018 and how forms of exhibition outside broadcasting were explored. It examines how successful the artefacts were in depicting
the rich tapestry of a transforming port scape, the various working constituencies and
the ways in which they shape and perform their urban identity. Guided by a desire to
experiment with my established broadcast film practice, the form and content of the
artefacts is reflective of an organic process; each artefact builds upon the preceding
work, evolving and expanding into more empathetic, richer screen representations of the
participants, their concerns and their locale. Part I of this chapter follows on from
chapter one’s introduction to the curatorial and representational strategies of artists
whose work on ports informed the structuring of their art installations. The current
growth in single and expanded cinema within the gallery setting is identified; film
artists, such as John Akomfrah and Isaac Julien, are taking on material traditionally the
territory of documentary film. This chapter places my research in the context of those
who work with the moving image and adopt documentary as a means of exploring
contemporary reality in moving image works.

A substantial body of the ethnographically inflected documentary fieldwork was
conducted in 2012 and 2013 and explored the world of the dockworkers, mariners and
port managers in the port of Dublin through the camera lens. The many hours of film
generated during this period were preceded by two years of preparatory fieldwork
between 2008 and 2010, during which 300 photographic images were gathered. A
selection of these images is integrated throughout the thesis to provide firstly, a sense of
the people and space of docks and thus enrich the text and secondly, an opportunity to
critically reflect on the visual methodologies adopted.

The research culminated in the structuring of two multi-screen art installations in 2012
and 2014 and a single screen documentary film, which was premiered in the Irish Film
Institute in 2017. In the installations, projected films explored the changing patterns of
the working and communal relations in this distinctive setting. These installations were presented to diverse audiences, numbering tens of thousands, at key national arts festivals including PhotoIreland (2012, 2014); Tall Ships Dublin, (2012); Riverfest 2013, 2014; and at scholarly conferences including Media and The City, Milan (2012); Conference of Irish Geographers (2014, 2016, 2018); Royal Geographic Society International Conference, London (2016); and UCD’s conference ‘Women and The Sea’ (2016). The digital documentation of the installation is currently available for viewing on a number of online sites related to the port and the docks. The film *Keepers of the Port* (Sweeney 2017) has been screened in ‘traditional’ cinema settings and festivals, as well as in an art gallery setting.

Previously I have worked with standard linear and non-interactive multimedia such as cinema, broadcast television and photography for publication and exhibition. For this doctoral study, however, I extend this work and employ a hypermedia approach, integrating multimedia in the authored artefact that accompanies the thesis and enabling users to access edited film sequences as well documentation of the film installations – an outcome of the audio visual research material. The artefacts are designed as an essential and intrinsic part of my project, offering the reader/viewer a viewing source of all moving and still image material. I invite the reader/viewer to work with the text and the artefact media simultaneously. The clearly indexed film sequences embedded within the chapters correspond with the file names on the accompanying USB drive. These film sequences are central to the critical analysis of this thesis and can be viewed using widely available digital players for Mac and PC. I recommend platforms such as QuickTime Player or VLC. Alternatively, the reader can now access the entire thesis on the USB drive and view it online; the links to film clips within the text serve as hyperlinks to all of the same material in online digital form in this album: [Keepers of
the Port]. The password is: Sensuous Film. In addition to the audio-visual clips, photographic images are integrated throughout the written thesis, offering a deeper sense of the participants in the study and the dock space that they occupy. The full-length version of each artefact (the two installations and the film) is available to view on the accompanying USB as well as online here:

[The Installation ‘Stevedoring Stories’ 2012, 16 mins]
[The Installation ‘Rhythms of a Port’, 2014, 25 mins]
[The Film ‘Keepers of the Port’, 2017, 72 mins]

Password: Sensuous Film
Notes

2 ibid.
3 Taking Ian Borden’s The City of Psychogeography as a starting point, cultural geographer Bryonie Reid considers that the dérive central to psychogeography is a ‘a kind of alert, constructive and transgressive “drift”’(Reid 2011a). For further reading see: <http://www.walkingsilvermines.net/essay> [Accessed 10 June 2018].
4 The Celtic Tiger is a metaphor coined by US Investment Bank Morgan Stanley in August 1994; it has become an accepted term for the rapid growth and transformation of the Irish economy in the 1990s.
5 The item on the new passenger terminal was produced and directed for the programme Cúrsai Ealaine (Arts Affairs), RTÉ’s flagship arts series between 1995 and 2001.
7 Shipping Containerisation was introduced in 1956 with international standards for container sizes established between 1968 and 1970. It is now a system of standardised transport, using common size steel containers for the transportation of goods. The container has had an enormous impact on the geography of production and distribution, with 90% of non-bulk goods now carried globally in containers. According to Notteboom and Rodrigue:

**Although the container was an innovation initially applied for maritime transportation,** the emergence of global supply chains has placed intense pressures to implement containerisation over inland freight distribution systems. Box – containerised – logistics is increasingly challenged to deal with the ever-increasing time, reliability and costs requirements of global supply chains. Imbalances in trade flows and accessibility and capacity constraints are among some of the developments that are making it increasingly difficult to reap the full benefits of containerization. (2008: 152)

9 For further reading on the plight of residential docking communities, see Hogan (2005; 2006).
10 For further information, see Darren Newbury (2002).
11 Liz Wells’s summary of documentary is pertinent here:

Following Grierson, documentary was regarded as a tool of education that would militate against foolish distractions and anchor people in a rational world of work and social obligation. It would offer an exciting form, facts about the social order that everyone would be able to play a part in society. He stressed the educative function of film, which he saw as one means of creating an informed public able to play an active part in running a democratic society. (2015: 107)

12 For further reading om Grierson’s work, see Zoe Druick’s and Deane Williams’s excellent The Grierson Effect: Tracing Documentary’s International Movement (2018)
13 Anthropologist Tom Harrison, poet Charles Madge and artist filmmaker Humphrey Jennings founded the Mass-Observation in 1937. Its aim was to study the habits and customs of ordinary British people – to create, in Harrison’s words, ‘an anthropology of ourselves’. (Badger 2010: 78). Humphrey Spender did most of the photography, ‘using an unobtrusive Leica to photograph unobserved where he could.’ (ibid.)
14 For further details, see Darren Newbury (2002).
For example Safe Harvest examines the plight of selected Irish and Indian farmers forced into debt and dependence by multinational GM seed companies (Sweeney 1998). Lasairfhiona Chonaola documents disappearing elements of the world of young sean-nós singer Lasairfhiona Ni Chonaola from Inis Oírr, a small-inhabited island off the west coast of Connemara (Sweeney 1999). Feud integrates the intimate stories of those impacted by drug wars in inner city Dublin (Sweeney 2007).

In Dismantling modernism, reinventing documentary (notes on the politics of representation, Sekula (1978) posits that in a consumerist economy, the photographer, from a position of assumed priviledge, may be merely exploiting their documentary subject. The photograph is therefore in danger of becoming merely an act of liberalism; a pornography of representation of misery.

In her seminal essay ‘Post-Documentary, Post-Photography’, Rosler coined the term ‘careful realism’ to describe Hine’s photographic practice (2000).

For example, the film installation Rhythms of a Port is featured on Dublin Stevedores Limited website: <http://www.dubinstevedores.ie/news-media/rhythm-of-a-port-installation/> Keepers of the Port was premiered with a Q&A session for approximately 250 people in Cinema 1 at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin on 23 September 2017. The audience was made up of different dock constituencies and their families alongside academic and artistic constituencies, as well as my own family and friends and the general public. The key participants in the film from Dublin Stevedores Limited, the Dublin Dockworkers Society and Dublin Port Company were all present. The IFI invited me to contribute a blog for the premiere: <http://ifi.ie/moira-sweeney-on-keepers-of-the-port/> [Accessed 14 April 2018].

Keepers of the Port was subsequently screened on a loop at The Lab Gallery in Dublin between 18 January and 4 March 2018. Full details are available here: <http://www.dublincityartsoffice.ie/the-lab/exhibitions/keepers-of-the-port> [Accessed 14 April 2018].


Quicktime is available here: <https://support.apple.com/downloads/quicktime>

VLC is available here: <https://www.videolan.org/vlc/>
Chapter One: Framing Documentary Practice and Port Perspectives

Figure 1.1: ‘Unloading on the South Coal Quay’, Moira Sweeney, Dublin, 2010

Overview

This filmic investigation into how the experiences and memories of a community of workers in Dublin’s surviving port space shape their urban identity and sense of place, is undertaken with regard to the sensuous, haptic qualities of documentary and ethnographic filmmaking. In order to address these themes, the research identifies and explores how observational and participatory methods of documentary filmmaking can contribute to current understandings of film’s potential to convey and mediate senses of place and lived experience – remembered, imagined and understood. The working docks are necessarily viewed through the unique prism of an imagination situated at the nexus of documentary, ethnography and geography. The breadth of this approach allows me to challenge any reductive neoliberal understanding of the Dublin port space and demonstrate that this is a not friction-free setting but a space in which there exists an interdependent web of constantly transforming social relations.
When I commenced this study, the dock labour of Dublin was almost invisible, underrepresented both on screen and in publishing, while the voices of those engaged in it were largely unheard. The national broadcaster RTÉ had produced a number of news items – and, to a lesser extent, documentaries – in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s responding to labour disputes and the detrimental impact of changing working conditions on the local residential dock communities, traditional suppliers of Dublin’s dock labour. Asides from the reports on dock labour disputes in Dublin Port, nuanced depictions of this multi-layered space were rare in the various news media in the early twenty-first century.

Therefore, whilst the artistic output of Allan Sekula serves as a critical reference point for me, as do the other scholarly and artistic studies identified in this chapter, as a whole they combine to highlight gaps in relation to research on surviving working life in port spaces, specifically Dublin’s docks. There has been no substantial documentary film or photographic study that embraces the contrasting experiences of different dock working constituencies in the transforming early twenty-first century space of Dublin Port.

Figure 1.2: ‘Cleaning the Hold’, Moira Sweeney, South Coal Quay, Dublin, 2010
The distinctive research approach of this thesis is characterised by reflexive audio-visual methods. Ruby proposes that ‘being reflexive means that the producer deliberately, intentionally reveals to the audience the underlying epistemological assumptions which caused him (sic) to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, and finally to present his finding in a particular way’ (1980: 157). Whilst this is an honourable, if not rigid concept of ‘deep reflexivity’, as MacDougall notes, the reality in the field is that researchers tend to work in a more ‘exploratory and intuitive’ way (1998: 89). It is this more dynamic process that guided me in my image making and writing; a reflexivity, which allows for shifts in levels of understanding, empathy and interrelationship between the participants and myself. Therefore, the distinctive methodological approaches (detailed in chapter two), combined with the unique long-term access granted to me by my participants to film their working lives, afforded me the opportunity to create a substantial and original body of work which provides a valuable contemporary insight into and understanding of a Dublin port community (Figures 1.1–1.4).
As outlined in the introduction to the thesis, this work evolved over time by a process of osmosis as opportunities opened up during the fieldwork phase and during the early exhibition of the installations. Guided by a desire to experiment and elasticate my practice, I made myself vulnerable as a practitioner and did not set out with a fixed plan or destination – this was a journey of surprises and the form of the artefacts is reflective of such an organic process. I concur then with Donna Haraway when she writes:

Rather than privileging too narrow a range of texts through standardising the curriculum, might it not be more beneficial for students to have multiple and different tools so that they can converse in the world as coding tricksters, and become actors themselves, agents in the mediation of their own knowledge and subjectivities.

(1991: 201)

Setting out on this journey, I was yet to unravel the multifarious and diverse nature of the ‘everyday’ and was fortunately blissfully naïve in my reaction to cultural and media theorist Ben Highmore’s claim that ‘those who venture into this labyrinth must be honestly forewarned that not all answers will be supplied’ (2002b: 250). And so, although supported by cultural theory, a reflexive journey is at the heart of this inquiry, driving it as I gradually made sense of the working life of a selected constituency on the Dublin docks through experimenting with documentary and ethnographic forms of filmic documentation (elaborated upon in chapter two), textual reflection and critical analysis. As I explore in part one of this chapter, I am inspired by David MacDougall’s urging of documentary filmmakers to counteract their tendency to separate themselves from the reality which they are observing. He advocated a reflexivity that is instead, ‘a record of the meeting between a filmmaker and society’ (2003: 125). As the author of the audio-visual artefacts of this thesis, I therefore assume responsibility for the meanings communicated in the imagery generated. A central part of the deconditioning process that moved me away from my habitual televisual approach was the reflective
textual questioning of both the authenticity of working from a journalistic mode and the privileged assumptions of authorial and editorial control that I carry.

As the study evolved, it became clear to me, that at its core, there was a strong impulse to convey a sense of how working in Dublin Port shaped the thoughts, feelings and relationships of different dock constituencies. In this regard, I understand that place is inextricably linked to identity and memory and that it shapes how stories are recalled and personal narratives constructed. Chapter one therefore travels across temporal, spatial and creative spheres to provide critical insight into some of the tributaries that inspired and drove this reflexive audio-visual enquiry. These tributaries become in turn the axes of the prism through which the Dublin’s port is viewed over the course of the study.

In order to trace the evolution and expansion of the documentary imagination that drove the project, the first tributary in Part I of the chapter frames my practice within specific
documentary film and photography critical theories. As my methodological approach is that of a creative documentary practitioner concerned with illuminating the creative and critical auspices of this research rather than that of a film theorist per se, I draw on the critical writing of both academics and filmmakers.

Following De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell (2013), I understand creative documentary to be a documentary project (regardless of its various methods of dissemination) that originates from an existing situation rather than a series especially constructed for television broadcast. I take the word creativity in this context not to mean some innate individual gift possessed by the few, but to be the capacity to produce novel or original work as defined by psychologist Sternberg (1999). The work is driven less by funding sources or indeed recognition, and more by the desire to create without the restrictions and limitations that accompany my significant experience of constructing works for television audiences. I understand that such a creative work is made with a ‘shared imagination’; in other words, that it is created to be shared with an audience (Baillie and Dewulf 1999: 5). Furthermore, in the documentary outputs of this thesis, a shared space is created through weaving the stories of the Dublin docks participants and my imagination together.

I acknowledge that the term ‘shared imagination’ also extends to the collaborative nature of a creative work, insofar as a number of people may contribute their creativity to the final work: the editor, the audio designer and the music composer (De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell 2013). In the context of this project, I loosely align myself with the concept of the ‘total filmmaker’ – a term they define as:

The filmmaker whose work embraces these new developments in production and distribution, who crosses traditional boundaries of role and ownership, who is likely to be centrally involved in conceiving, researching, producing, editing, and
distributing their film, who may be in that process collaborate with other skilled professionals but whose engagement with all aspects of the production process is perhaps more all-encompassing than that of documentary makers in the broadcast past, working with larger budgets, crews and institutions.

(ibid.: 3)

I concur with Corner’s (2008) view that documentary can be viewed as sitting culturally somewhere between the genres of drama and news, drawing on the quality and aesthetics of drama and the preoccupations of journalism, namely knowledge generation. As I explore, the moral challenges for a documentarist begin, since the ethics of recording lived experience, which is aligned with journalistic practice, can be in sharp conflict with the ethics of narrating everyday life. Journalism implies objectivity, however loosely this is interpreted, while drama implies subjective creative intervention; the former employs observation, whilst the latter carries no particular obligation to tell the truth (Winston 2013).\(^3\) It is this 'crease' (ibid.: 6) wherein documentary exists that interests me: an ethical space between total manipulation and unmediated observation. Following MacDougall (2003), I recognise therefore that observational documentary is neither complete, unmediated nor politically and ideologically neutral.

In the Part II of the chapter, I necessarily place the work in the broader context of projects that explore the representation of lived experience in urban dock settings as well as at sea. As there is a significant contemporary body of scholarship on ports in the fields of cultural geography and urban sociology, it is firstly necessary in Part II to consider academic understandings of place in these disciplines. I provide an overview of some of the thinking that has developed in this area and identify the scholarship relevant to my work. Viewing the Dublin docks through the prism of a ‘geographical imagination’ (Gregory 1994) facilitates me in capturing a sense of the social history and contemporary reality of this multi-layered space, further revealing how the local is in
many ways enmeshed in wider global systems. I take as my starting point the key geographic concept that place is not fixed (Massey 2005; Gieseking, Mangold, Katz and Saegert 2014; Ruddick 2014; Anderson 2015). As the artefacts discussed in chapter three of this thesis contribute to existing artistic and filmic projects, which address port life, Part II necessarily identifies and analyses the most pertinent of these projects.
Part I: Documentary Practice

A Time of Momentous Change

It is clear that a certain level of stability is required for documentary to be an adequate label for identifying films and television programmes as of a ‘similar kind’, but this level is one that can admit more contingency and variation, indeed a measure of contradiction, than scholars in search of an isolable generic system are often able to accept.

(Corner 2008: 19)

Last, and most important, those who watch documentaries as well as those who make them should realise that anything goes. There are traditions of filmmaking, to be sure. But the vitality of the documentary resides in the fact that it thrives at a series of crossroads scarred by accidents. You can arrive at the idea of documentary through tabloid journalism or philosophy, out of a desire to change the world, or merely because there is a story you wish to tell. All you really have to want to do is say what happened.

(Fraser 2012: 21)

As I commenced my research on Dublin’s docks in 2008, documentary film was already in the midst of momentous changes: rapid developments were taking place in the technology of digital production and post-production; television formats were flourishing; and there was a surge of new media platforms (Austin and De Jong 2008; Chapman 2009; Daniels, Pearce and McLoughlin 2013; De Jong, Knudsen and Rothwell 2013 and Chi, Vanstone and Winston 2017). In the current climate, the prevalence of multi-media blurs traditional distinctions between documentary genres, screen-based installations, interactive projects, online dissemination and gallery screenings of films (De Jong, Knudsen and Rothwell 2013). Add to this the fact that television documentary is populated by a range of formats, all competing for prime slots, budgets and audiences. The very idea that the term documentary applies only to a film is no longer valid, as it has become an umbrella term for a broad range of formats, narrative styles and means of dissemination.

By the early years of the twenty-first century, documentary has furthermore been
subject to a barrage of critique, facing serious philosophical challenges from ‘multiple sources, on social, political, and ethical grounds’ (Rosler 2001: 205). Rosler declares that post-structural and postcolonial rhetoric has effectively eroded the accountability of the documentarist and the capacity ‘of any image to convey lived experience, custom, tradition, or history’ (2000: 211). An edition of the New York Times Magazine confirms that ‘documentary film makers have to manipulate reality in order to make their art, even if that means exploiting their subjects’ (cited in Rosler 2000: 1). Photography theorist Ariella Azoulay (2008) further argues that when photographers document the vulnerable (such as refugees or the impoverished) they are merely aggravating their already precarious status. When writing about the process of making photographs in advertising, she concludes that:

The existing common manual reduces photography to the photograph and to the gaze concentrated on it in an attempt to identify the subject. It takes part in the stabilisation of what is seen, in making it distinct, accessible, readily available, easy to capture, and open to ownership and exchange.  
(Azoulay 2008: 14)

The tension between creativity, ethics and commerce particularly underlies the making of documentaries in a contemporary broadcasting setting. Entertainment-oriented broadcasting parameters increasingly determine the nature of the stories selected to tell and the method of their telling, bringing the aforementioned moral challenges more sharply into focus. Individuals and communities are open to exploitation for the sake of another high-rating transmission, another ‘big theme’, or another compelling story. The public service remit, which formerly guided the broadcasting industry in Ireland and the UK, has shifted towards a more commercial, aggressive and consumer-led orientation. In my early years of producing and directing documentaries and magazine series firstly for Channel 4 and then for the national broadcaster RTÉ, a great deal of creative flexibility and experimentation were afforded. This has changed dramatically; on the
morning after a documentary has aired, the corridors of broadcasting stations and independent production houses alike are buzzing with talk of viewing figures – quantity matters at least as much and often more than quality. Factual commissioning editors ask documentary makers to come to them with ‘big themes’ and ‘characters that will draw a large audience and go on a genuine journey or transformation in the course of the series’. Potential documentary participants go through a form of casting and selection to determine those most likely to entertain audiences.

The pre-production period then requires the creation of a script that is largely accountable. Whilst some degree of fluidity and spontaneity is inevitable, it is considered preferable before going into production to have a clear idea about the various components of the documentary, when and where interviews will take place, what questions will be asked and what are the likely outcomes. Budgets often dictate that interviews be conducted in a few concentrated hours, rarely facilitating spontaneous interviews or discussions of real depth. The director, from a position of authorial power, constructs a story from the answers to predetermined questions. Cooper (2011) elaborates here on the constructedness of the documentary process:

We collect interviews, we gather people and record what they say and then put them in a line in the linear sequence of a film. And by doing that we inevitably put a single order and we cut out the chance for exchange.

Advances in technology, a less cohesive audience and neoliberal policies all serve to buttress this commercialism and shift towards consumer choice (Zoellner 2010). For Rosler, documentary practice, (photography in particular) is in crisis, ‘perpetually teetering on the brink of its demise’ (2000: 230) as it loses access to audiences ‘more and more attuned to television and to accounts of the real refracted through the distorting prisms of sensationalism and what might be called a neo-gothic sensibility’.
Sekula warned against such a sensibility where style took precedence over social truth:

A truly critical social documentary will frame the crime, the trial and the system of justice and its official myths. Artists working toward this end may or may not produce images that are theatrical or overtly contrived; they may or may not present texts that read like fiction. Social truth is something other than a convincing style.

Corner proposes that we are in fact in a ‘post-documentary culture’ (2002: 255), while Winston (2008) suggests that 'The Post-Griersonian Documentary' offers an opportunity for a new definition that responds to the current abundance of forms. In photography, Azoulay proposes that the image-maker enter into a civil contract, or a form of mutual consent with the subject, so that the image may become ‘evidence of the social relations which made it possible’ (2008: 127). And Cooper (2011) argues for a practice that can capture something of the spontaneity and aliveness of reality, as opposed to creating a highly structured event.

Corner’s (2002) theorisation of the emergence of a ‘postdocumentary’ film culture does not so much suggest a scenario where documentary is over, but one in which we continue to witness its alteration as a practice. Winston (2008) along with Chi, Vanstone and Winston (2017) remind us that in the midst of all the theoretical and ethical quagmires, more documentaries are being produced and viewed than at any time in the genre’s history. They propose then that documentary’s potential in the digital age ought to be celebrated. Bruzzi (2000) shows that traditional theories of documentary filmmaking can be applied to contemporary genres and explores how recent inventive examples of the genre have a relationship with the recognised canon of documentary. Renov (2004) focuses on how documentary filmmaking has become a vital means for
exploring selfhood and analysing how the subjectivity of the filmmaker can be forefronted in the essay film, the video confession and the personal web page.

It is therefore a timely juncture at which to examine the relevance of some of the key documentary critical theories, assumptions and methods of inquiry to my specific study of a Dublin port community. For despite documentary’s inherent ambiguities and its shifting nature, the form offered a valuable methodological approach in photography and film with which to uncover some of the rhythms, uncertainties and fluctuations in working life on the Dublin docks. And whilst facing contemporary challenges, documentary as a modernist project has always been open to changing technologies, new ideas and influences (Holland 2013). At any given moment in time, perspectives of the world change and there is an eagerness amongst documentary filmmakers to respond with new modes of representing lived experience. In tandem with this, academics and filmmakers have developed a substantial body of scholarship, which explores documentary as a creative and artistic practice, in the last one hundred years. I concur with De Jong and Rothwell when they encourage filmmakers to ‘honour thine ancestors’ (2012: 5) and, in the following sections, I frame my study of a Dublin Port community within the foundational texts and films of the discipline of documentary.

My practice has its roots in traditional definitions of poetic, observational and participatory documentary as defined by Nichols (1993; 2001; 2017). It is therefore impossible to consider the state of the art of documentary without drawing on these classic definitions, and further texts and scholarship, which provide a historical context for current debates and discussions surrounding documentary representation. And whilst these histories shape my aesthetic decisions while filming the workers and space of Dublin’s docks, they do not define my work as I consciously experimented with
different forms when photographing everyday life and also when recording the stories, sounds and activities of this space (Figures 1.5, 1.6, 1.7).
I necessarily write from the perspective of my own time and experiences, drawing in particular on theories of observational documentary developed in texts by filmmakers Grierson (1926), Grimshaw (2005) and McDougall (2003; 2006) and scholars such as Corner (1996; 2008), Marks (2000), Austin and De Jong (2008), Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009), De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell (2013), Winston (2013), Nichols (2017) and Chi, Vanstone and Winston (2017) in the English speaking worlds of North America and Britain. This is not to deny an array of vibrant global film cultures, but to honour the scholarship that has most profoundly impacted my understanding of the form, particularly when considering my experiments in documenting changes in everyday working life on Dublin’s docks.

Figure 1.7: ‘Ships Arrive and Depart in Dublin Port’, Moira Sweeney, Dublin, 2010

**Taxonomies of Documentary Filmmaking**

Two formative but politically opposed notions have informed key debates and practices since the 1930s. On the one hand is the notion of documentary film to educate and inform a mass audience on the duties, responsibilities and occasional pleasures of citizenship. This model was developed by John Grierson and embodied in John Reith’s founding charter for the BBC. On the
other hand is the model, inspired by the political avant-garde in Soviet Russia that sought to use images as a vehicle for social and political change, such as the imagistic factography of a Dziga Vertov or the more traditional humanist challenge of a Joris Ivens.

(Nash 2008)

Although every documentary style or mode has its distinguishing characteristics, most documentaries are not made exclusively in any one mode; instead they combine more than one style. Working within the independent sector, my practice, as a documentarist, draws on notions of hybridity as summarised by film critic Laura Marks:

The term ‘hybrid cinema’ also implies a hybrid form, mixing documentary, fiction, personal, and experimental genres, as well as different media. By pushing the limits of any genre, hybrid cinema forces each genre to explain itself, to forgo any transparent relationship to the reality it represents, and to make evident the knowledge claims on which it is based. Hybrid cinema is in a position to do archaeology, to dig up the traces that the dominant culture, and for that matter any fixed cultural identity, would just as soon forget. One cannot simply contemplate a hybrid (or a work of hybrid cinema): one cannot help but be implicated in the power relations upon which it reflects.

(2000: 8)

Creative documentary practice is therefore intrinsically hybrid, using a toolbox of different, sometimes contrasting genres such as re-enactment, journalism and direct observation. As documentary theorist Bill Nichols expounds: ‘Every documentary has its own distinct voice. Like every speaking voice, every cinematic voice it has a style or “grain” all its own that acts like a signature or footprint’ (2001: 99).

Theorist Renov (1993) establishes four fundamental documentary modalities, which combine to establish a documentary poetics: the preservational, the persuasive, the analytic and the expressive functions. In Theorizing Documentary (Renov 1993) writers rigorously work through these modalities, using specific texts to trace the contours of such a poetics. I lean however towards the pioneering work of Nichols (1993; 2001; 2017) whose definitions of documentary resonate with the approach of my research on
Dublin’s docks in this unstable, constantly changing and hybridised form of definition. Renov (2004) argues that Nichols’s definitions of documentary situate it on the side of conscious rather than unconscious processes, potentially doing it – subjective documentary – a disservice. Bruzzi (2000) finds Nichols taxonomy to be too reductive and questions its value in film analysis. I would argue, however, that they provide a useful taxonomy for filmmakers to examine their documentary film practices. In particular, the modes upon which I now elaborate offer a valuable way of reading my evolving, hybridised photographic and film study of a Dublin port community.

Ultimately, while I draw loosely on Nichol’s taxonomy to contextualise the film outputs of this research, the installations and films are by their very nature complex; they weave together multiple port voices, my own reflections, archival material and contemporary imagery to create distinctive documentaries which convey a sense of Dublin’s docks and its working community in a way that is a clear departure form my traditional televisual way of looking.

Bearing this in mind, I provide an overview of methodological approaches, which I draw on as well as depart from. In an attempt to establish a framework of affiliation for filmmakers to create within, Nichols (2017) identifies six documentary modes of representation: the poetic, the expository, the participatory, observational, the reflexive and the performative. Whilst not necessarily a historical lineage, each mode may be viewed as arising out of dissatisfaction with a previous mode. As Nichols notes:

New modes arise partly in response to perceived deficiencies in previous ones, but the perception of deficiency comes about partly from a sense of what it takes to represent the historical world from a particular perspective at a given moment in time’.

(2017: 101)
Concurring with Marks’s (2000) observations surrounding the prevalence of hybridity in documentary, filmmakers tend to utilise one primary mode to provide an overall structure, and then adopt secondary modes. Whilst not necessarily adhering to Nichols theorising of modalities, the film outputs of this study of working life on Dublin’s docks are informed by observational, participatory and poetic modes of filming, each of which hide the filmmaker’s methods of representation (as opposed to the, performative or reflexive modes of filmmaking which draw attention to the filmic processes and/or the presence of the filmmaker). In the expository mode, the images tend to be subservient to the voiceover, whereas in the outputs of this study there is a strong emphasis on visual aesthetics. For example, in my film *Keepers of the Port* (2017), I adopt personal voiceover not as an expository ‘voice of God’ type of narration, but rather as a character on a journey who narrates an evolving understanding of the Dublin port space, alongside the many voices of those who sustain this working space. This is demonstrated here in the opening clip from the film *Keepers of the Port* in which I narrate the experience of the first time in Dublin Port with a voiceover that is more reflective than expository: (Figure 1.8); [Clip 1.1 ‘Keepers of the Port’ – Narration, 1 min].

![Image](image_url)

Figure 1.8: ‘Keepers of the Port’, Screenshot, Moira Sweeney, 2017
Understanding Observational Documentary

Observational documentary is not easily defined; it has a complex and contested history, with filmmakers differing greatly in their understanding and application of observational methods of filmmaking. Moreover, since the 1970s, filmmakers have been liberated from the constraints of cumbersome equipment and work with cameras in an observational mode that contrasts starkly with their predecessors. In *Sisters in Law* (2005) and *Divorce Iranian Style* (1999) for example, contemporary filmmaker Kim Longinotto is able to bring audiences remarkably close to her subjects in intimate and sometimes unsettling observations of women within the legal systems of Cameroon and Iran respectively. Daisy Asquith uses small digital cameras to get under the skin of her subjects, so much so that ‘often you have the feeling you are part of a personal conversation’ (De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell 2013: 23). Such intimacy would have been inconceivable to earlier generations of documentary filmmakers.

In the received conventional history of documentary, the North American married couple Robert and Frances Flaherty are considered to have made the first English-language observational documentary with the globally successful *Nanook of the North* (1926). Where Robert Flaherty brought his expertise as a wilderness explorer and acclaimed photographer to the project, Frances Flaherty, traditionally under-recognised for her role, acquired finance for the film (McLane 2012). Despite Robert Flaherty’s highly contested methods, he did fashion, in this film, a form of filmmaking in which he tried to document creatively for audiences how the native people of Northern Canada lived. However, when George Stoney, the son of an Aran Islander, and James B. Brown visited the island to uncover how inventive Flaherty had been with reality in his seminal poetic film, *Man of Aran* (1934), the resulting documentary, *How the Myth Was Made: A Study of Robert Flaherty's Man of Aran* (1978), showed through interviews with the
islanders themselves that they were well aware of Flaherty’s contortions, while his biographer reveals that ‘Flaherty wasn’t interested in actuality, he was interested in his own idea of life’.  

Filmmaker, critic and founder of the British Documentary Movement John Grierson was initially highly critical of the Flaherty’s work – his concerns were more with the social, economic and political in urban Britain (Curthoys and Lake 2005; McLane 2012). Grierson was nonetheless prompted to devise the term documentary when reviewing the Flaherty’s second film _Moana_ (1926) for the _New York Sun_: ‘Of course, _Moana_, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value’ (Grierson 1926 cited in Ellis 2000: 28).  

Grierson popularised his ideas on documentary film in writings for the _New York Sun_, the _New York Tribune/Herald Tribune_ and _the Motion Picture News_ in the late 1920s and developed his aesthetic theory and sense of social purpose on return to Great Britain. His subsequent personal definition of documentary has become the standard one: ‘Documentary, or the creative treatment of actuality, is a new art with no such background in the story and the stage as the studio so glibly possesses’ (Grierson 1933:8). Although Grierson’s definition – ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ – is quite open-ended, it remains relevant today and has led to significant debates in documentary studies (Corner 1996; Austin and de Jong 2008; Corner 2008; Nichols 2001; Winston 2013; Nichols 2017). In the midst of this scholarship, Coles offers a notably effective and apt definition of documentary when he writes that it is ‘where imagination encounters and tries to come to terms with reality’ (1992: 267).  

Grierson’s admirable but ideologically flawed vision assumed that the world was a
series of facts, which could be communicated in a transparent manner free of the problematics, ambiguities and codes through which any narrative is constructed (Stott 1986; Wells 2015). However flawed Grierson’s vision may have been, his depictions in films of labour have had a lasting impact on contemporary photographers and filmmakers and remain an inspiration in my own practice.

*Drifters* (1929) in particular, which follows the fishermen of Britain’s North Sea herring industry, produces an evocative yet uncomplicated study of their work in harbour and at sea. Following early 20th century Soviet filmmakers Eisenstein and Vertov, Grierson adopts expressive montaging techniques in the editing to build dramatic tension and drive the film forward. For example, close-ups of the machinery that powers a modern steam ship are intercut with wider exterior shots of the trawler as it cuts through the sea and mid shots of men loading coal into the furnace (Figures 1.9–1.11). This sequence can be viewed here. [Clip 1.2 Extract from ‘Drifters’, 1'45”].

In the film, Grierson reveals his concern with the tension between modernity and tradition in the opening titles:

> The Herring fishing has changed. Its story was once an idyll of brown sails and village harbours – its story now is an epic of steel and steam. Fishermen still have their homes in the old time villages – But they go down for each season to the labour of a modern industry.

(Opening Title, *Drifters*, Grierson, 1929)

These titles indicate that Grierson was concerned with ‘modernity and progress’, not in any revolutionary way, but rather in a ‘moderate and evolutionary’ way, whereby he honoured tradition without having to negate scientific progress (Sexton 2002: 48).
Figures 1.9–1.11: ‘Drifters’, Screenshots, John Grierson, 1929, North Sea, Britain
Like Grierson, Spender and the photographers of the Mass-Observation project of 1930s working-class Britain perhaps exemplified the best and worst of documentary photography. The project was a mixture of the impulse to ‘document social conditions, an obsession with detail, upper class amateurism and an element of voyeurism’ in the north of England town of Bolton (Badger 2010: 79). Class difference results in Spencer maintaining a reserved distance from his subjects whether they are at work, in the streets, or at home. According to Williams (1986), the women documentarists of the project ‘usually set out to record rather than captivate’ (cited by Wells 2015: 110).

The consistent avoidance of the dramatic in the Mass-Observation project has arguably contributed to what are lasting documents of everyday 1930s working-class life in Bolton. Yet even today, the ‘paternalism, patronisation and elitism’ of British social-realist film-making’s vision, along with the ‘intrusive middle-class voyeuristic tourism of Mass Observation’s sociological-anthropological’ survey still haunts photographers and filmmakers like myself, more closely aligned with creative humanist interpretations of the realities that we encounter (Jennings 2002). As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, I am, as a practitioner, informed by the complexities and nuances of a background of historical family activism and bifurcated class traditions. My family history, stretching back to the early part of the last century, is confounded by a blend of agrarian and urban activism and passivism, and the social identities of my family and ancestors are not clear-cut. For example, only two generations separate me – identified as working as a professional television producer and lecturer – from my great-grandmother and great-grandfather who worked along the Hudson in New York, classed as a domestic servant and a longshoreman respectively.

Observing, recording and narrating working life on Dublin’s docks through the lens of
an ancestral imagination deepened my understanding of the participants from a Dublin port community, providing an empathetic layering through identification with some of the complexities of tribal allegiance and precarious labour practices. As I explore further in succeeding chapters, the film outputs of this research demonstrate an empathy with the participants of the research. In this clip from Keepers of the Port, extended screen time is given to observations of everyday work rituals, while dockers and marine operatives express their struggles with the impact of technological change and globalisation on their working lives; in the personal reflective narration there is an understanding that these struggles led to a necessary tribal allegiance amongst the dockers: (Figure 1.12); [Clip 1.3 ‘Keepers of the Port’– Allegiance 1’43”].

In the context of the development of the previously identified humane observational approach to recording labour, the next section addresses the parallel development of documentary photography.
**Documentary Photography: Recording Labour**

It is important to note that while documentary as a recognised visual artistic style has its roots in the moving image, there are antecedents in, for example, Mathew Brady’s *Civil War Photographs* (1860–1865), Jacob Riis’s *New York Portraits* (1890) and the Depression years work of Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn (1935–1944) for the United States Farm Security Administration (McLane 2012). They laid the ground for photographers such as Joe Rosenthal (1945), Fred Lonidier (1975), Chancery Hare (1978), Fern Tiger (1992–2018) and Allan Sekula (1995; 2010; 2014), all of whom integrated documentary photography into their projects as a fundamental component of ‘advocacy documentation’ (Tiger 2012). Documentary photography then shares with documentary film production an inherent tension between the documentary as creative artefact and documentary as carrier of social message.

![Image: 'Ten-Year-Old spinner in North Carolina Cotton Mill', Lewis Hine, Getty Museum, 1908](image-url)
The project at the centre of this thesis, visualising dock labour, compounds this aesthetic/realist dilemma; aestheticising labour for the sake of a powerful or even beautiful composition carries with it the risk of neutralising the hardship visualised (Sontag 1977; Berger 1982). The early 20th century photographs of the American social documentary humanist photographer Lewis Hine carried this risk; exploited children in the turn of the century American mills and mines stare melodramatically into camera; a powerhouse mechanic bares his naked skin blackened with oil and dirt; and construction labourers pose, precariously balanced on the top of the Empire State Building (Figures 1.13 –1.15).

There is much still to learn from Hine; he reminds us that the intention of the photographer has the power to transcend the potential danger of disempowering the subject matter. In his case, revulsion at the abuse of children motivated him to use photographs to draw attention to their plight (Sontag 1977; Hine, Trachtenberg 1997). Hine’s photographs of working-class men were informed not just by his desire to
dignify the labourer but by his personal experiences of exploitation in factories and retail stores, and of being forced to work long days for miserable pay (Rosenblum cited in Hine, Trachtenberg 1997). Hine then did not merely parachute in to photograph his subjects; he spent time informing himself of the names, ages and occupations of those he photographed. When the images were published as photo essays, he used this information to add depth and richness to the imagery. According to Trachtenberg (1989), Lewis Hine dedicated his life to using images for the purposes of social reform. His considered approach exhibits some of the thoughtfulness of enlightened ethnography, although it is unlikely he was aware of this at that time.

Chaucery Hare, recalling Hine, worked with subjects with whom he had identification. His series Interior America (1978), in which he examines the workings of Standard Oil Refinery, was born of personal disillusionment with ‘the hierarchical bureaucratic structures – the autocratic management and associated privileges and the humiliations of the labourers’ (Sekula 1978: 251). In his 2006 series British High Speed Rail, British photographer Brian Griffin portrays the men who built the British channel tunnel rail link as ‘courageous Figures, lending them a valiant status through his trademark lighting, classic use of black and white and formal, reminiscent of Russian Constructivist imagery’ (Bainbridge 2009: 52). Griffin’s approach, although typically maverick, nonetheless conveys the epic task undertaken by the men.

As elaborated upon in the next chapter, during the processes of the photographic visualisation of my Dublin port participants, any unconsciously romantic thoughts I may have had about dock labour were gradually dispelled as each of their stories unravelled. A significant social modality at play was my gendered, classed sense of awe and respect at the nature of the manual labour performed by the crew of this moving
island: the consistent and repetitive loading, unloading and cleaning, from port to port, on a ship, a home without a home. This awe is represented in some of the images generated, such as *Seafarer Cleaning the Hold on The Pacific Future* (Figure 1.16), where the camera is situated below eye level, looking up towards the Lithuanian seafarer as he works, which results in him taking on a powerful, heroic stature at the site of the image. Whilst this was an unconscious positioning of myself, it was informed in part by the personal distance in the relationship and also by the aforementioned empathy.

![Figure 1.16: ‘Seafarer Cleaning the Hold’ by Moira Sweeney, Dublin, 2008](image)

Accordingly, my research with the selected community on Dublin’s docks evolved from being an observational photographic study of everyday working life. Over time, as relationships developed during my encounters with the key participants, it became clear that the best way of representing their voices would be to conduct interviews on camera. This engagement with the port community in a participatory mode of filmmaking greatly enriched the overall content of the material that I recorded, providing necessary
insight into the values and beliefs of the dockworkers and port managers. In the next section, I address how the participatory mode of filmmaking, when combined with an observational approach, greatly enriched my audio-visual research.

**Participatory Mode of Filmmaking**

Participatory filmmaking finds its roots in a renewed interest in the mode of observation within documentary film in the late 1950s when filmmakers separated themselves from the founding fathers of the genre Grierson and Vertov. Building on this in the 1960s, Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité (otherwise known as ‘fly on the wall’) were born of new lightweight cameras, which facilitated filmmakers in engaging directly with main characters. Albert and David Maysles, masters of Direct Cinema in North America, were not afraid to include off-topic interactions between crew and subject in their films, and were clearly operating in participatory as well as in observational mode. Intrusion was kept to a minimum, in contrast with the staged methods of their forerunners; the flow of events was left to run un-interrupted and purity was claimed. Cinéma Vérité, by contrast, deals with the problem of authenticity by actively involving participants in the process.

The questioning of the presumed authority of documentary is central to the work of Cinéma Vérité documentarists Jon Jost, Jean Luc Godard, Chris Marker, Jean Rouch, Trinh T Min Ha and Agnes Varda, all of whom are concerned with de-privileging the screen from its power to distort social reality. Mamber (1974) illuminates the work of these latter filmmakers, suggesting that it lingers somewhere between documentary and fiction as it tries to minimise the barriers between filmmaker and filmed. Barnouw succinctly summarises the differences between these two modes:
The direct cinema documentarist took his (sic) camera to a situation of tension and waited hopefully for a crisis; the Rouch version of Cinéma Vérité tried to precipitate one. The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the Rouch cinéma vérité artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of uninvolved bystander; the cinéma vérité artist espoused that of provocateur. (1993: 254–255)

MacDougall observes that during the 1970s at the height of Cinéma Vérité, ‘audiences have had restored to them the sense of wonder at witnessing the spontaneity of life that they felt in the early days of the cinema, seeing a train rush into the Gare de Ciotat’ (2003: 115). For Nichols, these modes of observational cinema displayed a fascination with the everyday world, which, contrasted starkly with the ideological affinities showcased by filmmakers in previous decades (2017).

Filmmakers differ greatly in their understanding and application of the identified observational and participatory methods of filmmaking. Ethnographic filmmakers such as the MacDougalls have found themselves using the observational approach not so much in the Grierson tradition but in the style of the dramatic fiction film (MacDougall 2003). For MacDougall, the Grierson tradition forefronted the filmmaker’s aesthetic sense and used images to advance a position: ‘Each of the discrete images of such documentaries was the bearer of predetermined meaning. They were often articulated like the images of a poem, juxtaposed against an asynchronous soundtrack of music or commentary’ (ibid.: 118). The MacDougalls align their style instead with fiction film, in which images or fragments of events are linked together for the audience to read or decipher. Nichols suggests that whilst the observational is by nature confined to the present moment, it has in common with the expository mode and the poetic mode a tendency to hide the presence of the filmmaker and their methods of production (2017). What unifies this significant body of scholarship on the subject of observational documentary in film studies, ethnography and visual anthropology is the understanding
that the filmmaker strives for a cinematic realism (Evans 1991; MacDougall and Taylor 1998; MacDougall 2003; Hockings 2003; Winston 2008). As Chapman (2009) notes, however, the convention’s rigidity in adhering to the truth resulted in it falling from grace.

Figure 1.17–1.18: ‘Keepers of the Port Trailer’ Screenshots, Moira Sweeney, Dublin 2017

Like observational documentary, the participatory mode of documentary filmmaking has undergone rigorous debate in relation to the presumed reliability of the interviews as
credible truth. In my study on Dublin Docks, however, an adoption of this mode allowed for a broad range of port voices to co-exist in the final film outputs, thus allowing audiences an opportunity to witness their different stories, testimonies, memories and emotions. The trailer from the film *Keepers of the Port* featuring crane driver Dave Quinn, VTS Fergal and CEO Eamonn O’Reilly demonstrates the coexistence of this multi-vocality: (Figures 1.17, 1.18); [Clip 1.4 ‘Keepers of the Port’ – Trailer 2'30”]

Nichols argues that, with the participatory mode of filmmaking, we are witnessing ‘a form of dialogue between filmmaker and subject that stresses situated engagement, negotiated interaction and emotion-laden encounter’ (2017: 123). The active engagement on the part of the filmmaker with her participants (even when the filmmaker is absent on screen) evokes a sense of a unique perspective in a given moment. When this mode is used to represent conversations between participants and the filmmaker in the field, there is an expectation that, as viewers, we are witnessing some genuine aspect of the social or historical world. Qualities such as these make the participatory mode appealing to the documentary maker as a wide range of subject matter – from personal to social history – can be woven together. As the preceding clip demonstrates, unique perspectives, contingent on personal experiences, are meshed with broader histories of the Dublin docks.

The clip intertwines distinct perspectives of dock work and dock life: stevedore John Nolan expresses his deeply felt respect for the world of a working port; crane driver Dave Quinn remembers the experiences of coal workers on the docks; VTS Fergal warns of the dangers for the economy of the port closing; and port manager Eamonn O’Reilly humourously encapsulates dockworker’s view of management. The
participants are purposefully situated in their respective port locations to provide a context to their experiences and memories. Depth, tactility and sensuousness are brought to each story through weaving contrasting forms of visualisation through the interviews: black and white archive material of coal workers evokes a sense of the 1950s; while Eamonn O’Reilly reviews his managerial position, the camera tracks around the quay, as if from the point of view of a ship or boat; and a choreography of crane movements underscores John Nolan’s expressed affection for dock life.

The observational and participatory modes of filmmaking adopted in the artefacts of this thesis are complemented by a poetic and essayistic sensibility. In the following section, I explore how the historical falling from the grace of observational and participatory cinema’s ‘rigid adherence to truth’ opened up the space for subjective expression in the more essayistic or poetic films of the 1980s and onwards to the present day.

**Poetic and Essayistic Approaches to Filming**

‘Expressivity’ runs like a glowing thread through the history of documentary – sometimes dominating the mood of the age, but always latent in the visuals, the rhythm, the impact of the film (it was Joris Ivens, whose *Rain* [1929] is a classic of poetic cinema, who complained that his camera recorded ‘beauty’ even ‘when we did not want it’.

(Holland 2013: xiii)

While filmmakers such as Chris Marker, Trinh T. Min Ha or Agnes Varda are associated with Cinéma Vérité – an observational mode of filmmaking in Nichols’s definitions of documentary – their documentaries are equally identified as essay films. The essay film is perhaps the most extensively written about documentary form, from the foundational essays of Hans Richter (1940) and Andre Bazin (1967) to contemporary theorisations by Alter (2002), Alter and Corrigan (2002), Stella Bruzzi (2000), Phillip Lopate (1992), Michael Renov (2004) and Alisa Lebow (2012).
Nichols’s series of definitions, the essay film is closely aligned with what he terms the poetic mode of documentary – a mode in which the filmmaker tends to sacrifice conventional, linear, continuity editing, and instead creates a structure which stresses the lyrical, rhythmical and emotional aspects of the historical world (2017).

Early examples of the poetic mode of filmmaking share traits with the modernist avant-garde, in particular the tendency to explore patterns, spatial juxtapositions and temporal rhythms. For example, Lasso Moholy-Nagy’s *Play of Light: Black, White and Grey* (1930) is an experimental study of the nuances of shifting light on one of the artist’s kinetic sculptures. Rather than attempt to depict the sculpture realistically, Moholy-Nagy creates an abstract impression of it, one that is radically removed from its source. In his intensely lyrical *Rain* (1929) Joris Iven evokes a sense of a fleeting summer shower in Amsterdam by merging numerous rainstorms from over several months into one time space. For Renov, this cine-poem\(^2\) allows the audience an ‘imaginary engagement’ with the physical world, one which is only possible through the medium of film (2004: 102).

By contrast, there are films in the poetic mode, which display a more obvious fragmentation and ambiguity. Luis Buñuel’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) and *L’Age D’Or* (1930) appear to be documenting reality only to unexpectedly disrupt any sense of real time or space. In Chris Marker’s *San Soleil* (1982) – a complex, meditation on filmmaking, post-colonialism and memory – the rules of the classic ‘voice of God’ voice-over are subverted with a reflexive, experimental, ironical, narration. The various themes in the dis-embodied female narration are linked by ‘random association rather than causality’ (Bruzzi 2000:63).

Alter and Corrigan (2002) argue that since the 1980s the essay film has become one of
the most important and dynamic practices in the world. Filmmakers continue to explore the potential for this poetic form to reach audiences in cinemas and galleries without the need to compromise on the aesthetic concerns. In the iconic *Looking for Langston* (1989), Isaac Julien claims the voice of the restricted homoerotic desire of men in a poetic meditation that ‘subverts a linear conception of time, space and light, not simply as a conceptual gesture but as a visceral protest’ (Singh Soin 2017). In Sarah Polley’s tender and audacious portrait of her troubled parents, *The Stories We Tell* (2012), she blends pastiche Super 8mm footage with real archive material to highlight the unreliability of memory.

These latter essayistic films created in the poetic mode clearly indicate that ‘the observational tradition of direct cinema has been augmented by compelling works exploring mentalités, seeking new modes of documentary expression’ (Chi, Vanstone and Winston 2017: 2). With many other independent and artist films, these works have opened up the space for subjective expression in documentary. Whether termed essayistic or poetic, they fluidly marry or blur genres and refuse to neatly conform to definition. As already outlined earlier in this section, they straddle some of the contradictory classifications that persist in film scholarship, such as fiction versus non-fiction, documentary versus avant-garde, cinema versus video, subjective versus objective (Alter and Corrigan 2002; Renov 2004). In the early twenty-first century they stand as bold artistic statements in the face of an avalanche of commercial demands on the documentary form.

Although my documentary approach cannot strictly be defined as poetic or essayistic, as I explore further in chapter three in relation to the installations and film critically analysed in this thesis, I experimented with an aspect of the poetic perspective, wherein
time and space are fragmented into multiple points of view, including the subjective. This proved to be a valuable approach to the challenge of depicting the multi-faceted nature of the Dublin port space without resorting to a continuous stream of expository voice-over – an approach frequently utilised in television newsrooms and documentaries. As I reveal, this approach allowed for a more nuanced representation of the layers of concerns for different dock constituencies – such as their memory being preserved or their vital roles being recognised – and at the same time gave me the opportunity to introduce a subjective and reflective narration.

As the next section explores, the essayistic or poetic documentary film form is widely prevalent in exhibitions in galleries and museums, partially in response to these demands.

The Blurring between Art and Documentary Practice

![Figure 1.19: ‘Stevedoring Stories’ Installation, Moira Sweeney, CHQ, Dublin 2012](image)
At the heart of this study, there has been a quest to challenge the boundaries of a traditional broadcast documentary practice by employing avenues of exploration of my research subjects in order to achieve, via my camera, a somatic and tactile documentation of a port community. Chapter two provides examples of this research approach, while chapter three explores the ways in which this haptic sensibility was carried over into the dissemination of the project as I sought forms of exhibition outside those I was used to as a broadcaster. The two site-specific multiscreen installations *Stevedoring Stories* (2012) and *Rhythms of a Port* (2014) were in keeping with the embodied approach adopted in the filming and responsive to the specificities of the field site of my research and to my participants (Figures 1.19–1.20). Producing two installations in the early stages of the research necessitated approaching the exhibitions as methods of ‘testing out’ the research material in settings that resonated with the filming approach.

Figure 1.20: ‘Rhythms of a Port’ Installation, Moira Sweeney, Dublin, 2014

While documentary film is undergoing seismic changes as a consequence of the
proliferation of television genres, practitioners like myself who work with the moving image are adopting documentary as a means of exploring contemporary reality in moving image works (Nash 2005; 2008). As I have already proposed, this is partially due to the narrowing of more experimental opportunities on television, with gallery spaces subsequently opening up more and more to digital technologies. Raczynski suggests that ‘it is possible to trace the stages of media art – such as performance art, video art and installation – in line with the advances of technology, beginning as early as the invention of photography’ (2013: 129). Therefore, although artist filmmakers have screened in galleries since the 1960s, over the last two decades there has been a growth in single and expanded cinema within these settings, with artists taking on material traditionally the territory of documentary makers (Holland 2013). Artist filmmakers are interrogating the complex relationships between reality and representation in ways that extend, expand and contest cinema’s long documentary tradition. For example, in Ten Thousand Waves (2010), Isaac Julien combines fact, fiction and the film essay genre in a nine screen film installation that meditates on unfinished journeys, poetically weaving together stories that connect China’s past and present.23 In his three-channel video installation Unfinished Conversation (2012), John Akomfrah blends archival material with text and music to challenge received historic narratives of the African diasporic experience.24 In common with most artist filmmakers, Julien and Akomfrah were trained in art schools.

Renov argues that the innovative instances of documentary practice that have been developing outside the documentary mainstream have helped reinvent the tradition (2008). Traditional documentary therefore is being re-invented and revitalised by a blurring of the traditions of art and documentary. So much so, that Holland (2013) proposes that the formerly parallel movements of Art and Documentary have moved so
close together that distinctions are almost erased. This documentary impulse or ‘documentary turn’ in art has prompted an emerging body of contemporary scholarship and debate – (Enwezor 2004) Daniels, Pearce, McLoughlin (2013), Lind and Steyerl (2008); Nash (2007; 2008); McLoughlin (2008; 2013); Balsam (2015); Caillet and Pouillaude (2017) – alongside conferences such as LUX’s *Art Theory: Artists Moving Image and the Documentary Turn* (2015). As the next section demonstrates, this revitalisation of documentary by artist filmmakers is occurring at a time when documentary is increasingly viewed as a product rather than a creative artefact within mainstream television.

**Documentary as Product**

Returning full circle to the opening section, the most serious shift in documentary occurred in the late twentieth century, when it became a generic category within international television, attracting audiences far exceeding those of the independent cinema or art-house settings in which documentaries were traditionally disseminated (Corner 1996). Documentary today enjoys unprecedented levels of attention on the cinema screen and on television screen, where multiple channels are on offer. Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) was amongst the top ten grossing theatrical documentaries in the United States between 2000 and 2015 (Chi, Vanstone and Winston 2017). Meanwhile, Ken Burns’s *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History* (2015) attracted 33 million American viewers and at least 12 per cent of the audience in Britain tuned-in to documentary programmes in 2014 (ibid.) However, the increased commercialisation and digitisation of documentary has come at a price. As De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell argue, ‘whereas documentary filmmaking once expected to make a contribution to a widely informed citizenship and provoke debate in the public sphere, it has become a “product”’ (2012: 4). Corner further postulates that the cinematic essay is
viewed as ‘impressionism put to promotional ends; an exploration of the modern and the changing through the evocative, metonymic use of images and sounds’ (1996: 2).

In the face of these contemporary transformations and ethical predicaments, Grierson’s foundational definition of the documentary as the ‘creative treatment of reality’ is quite clearly no longer sufficient. As described at the beginning of this chapter, with the advancement of digital technologies in the twenty-first century, the image’s claim to truthfulness has been undermined and a proliferation of forms claim documentary status, including, as Winston notes, agitprop and advocacy, animated documentary and CGI, satire, poetry and pictorialism, docusoaps, dramadocs and documusicals, excluded feminist, minority and other marginalised voices and first person documentaries, mockumentaries and rockumentaries and ‘reality’ television (2008). Moreover, there is now an abundance of socially mediated, short-form and long-form documentaries uploaded via YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, Instagram and other platforms. Whether self-funded or group-funded, they no longer rely on the traditional screening outlets of television or cinema to reach mass audiences.

At a time, therefore, when documentary is in a state of ongoing ‘social, imaginative and discursive reconstruction’ (Corner 1996: 10), the film *Keepers of the Port* (Sweeney 2017), the installations *Stevedoring Stories* (Sweeney 2012) and *Rhythms of a Port* (Sweeney 2014), when combined with the written component of this thesis, offer a necessary and innovative depiction and analysis of how a contemporary community of dockworkers, recently retired dockworkers and port managers are finding ways to continue to shape their urban identity while coming to terms with transformations in working life on Dublin’s docks.
Part II: Port Perspectives

Representing and Disrupting Ports

If the reflex of contemporary consumer society in the global North is to foster a romanticised vision of industrial labour consigned to an imaginary past, this may be as refuge from the urgent pressures of the present.

(Roberts 2012)²⁵

One underlying objective of this thesis was to represent the largely invisible labour that sustains the flow of cargo into Dublin’s docks (Figure 1.21). When I commenced this study, there were very few contemporary portrayals of this port space in the mediums of print, television or film.

I am not alone in finding my imagination seized by the geography and lived experience of those inhabiting a dockland space. As this second part of chapter one demonstrates, ports and port cities, as well as the concept of maritime space, have long occupied the imaginations of artists and filmmakers. When Walker Evans arrived into Havana to

Figure 1.21: ‘The Mouth of Dublin Port’, Moira Sweeney, 2014
document city life on the cusp of historical change from dictatorship, he was drawn to
the docks to produce the series *Coal Dock Workers* (1933).\(^{26}\) In *Fish Story* (1995), Allan
Sekula eloquently uncovered his concern with the invisible role commerce plays in the
world’s seafaring networks. Sekula urges us to turn our imaginations back to a once
specific space: the sea, the forgotten space in a world of instantaneous digital
connection (1995). In urging us to turn our consciousness back to the sea, the forgotten
space, Sekula recognises the importance of maritime space as opposed to the persistent
focusing on cyberspace and the illusion of an instantaneous connection between far-
flung lands (ibid). Sekula’s imagination moreover extends to the sensuous nature of a
globalised port:

> In the past, harbour residents were deluded by their senses into thinking that a
global economy could be seen and heard and smelled. The wealth of nations
would slide by in the channel. One learned a biased national physiognomy of
vessels; Norwegian ships are neat and Greek ships are grimy. Things are more
confused now.  
> (Sekula 1995:12)

As my documentary practice-based enquiry is situated in the geographical space of
Dublin’s docks, it contributes to existing sociological knowledge on ports through
honning in on the specificity of this space and exploring the unique stories, memories and
identities of its different working constituencies in the early twenty-first century. The
filmic material uncovers an alive and vibrant community who are eager to preserve their
memory and the valuable nature of their labour in keeping Ireland’s economy flowing.

As identified in the introduction to this chapter, the artefacts of this practice-based thesis
contribute to a body of film and photographic projects, which address maritime space,
port life and globalisation. This body of work concurrently enriches a series of
contemporary artistic projects, which respond to Dublin Port and Dublin Bay. Part II
therefore further provides an extensive review, relating to my research, of some of the
diverse contemporary artistic and filmic approaches that are being taken in representing and disrupting port spaces both locally and internationally. I firstly consider some of the discourses within the fields of cultural geography and urban sociology, which engage with ports on a local and global level.

The Macro and the Global: Dublin Port and the Geographic Imagination

When David Harvey (1973) coined the term the ‘geographical imagination’ (building upon Mill’s (1961) concept of a ‘sociological imagination’) he recognised the role that space and place could play in helping people relate to the social structures around them. He argued for a creative use of space and an appreciation of the bearing of spatial structures created by others. Derek Gregory (1994) further developed this concept of the geographic imagination, finding it beneficial also to work from the starting point that space is socially produced. Cultural geographer Massey subsequently argued for a rejuvenation of the geographical imagination, one wherein space is viewed as being composed of numerous and often overlooked ‘distinct trajectories’ (2005: 9). John Agnew (1987) contends that for a space to become a place it needs to have three dimensions: a specific location, a locale (a social and material setting) and a sense of place such as a personal and emotional attachment, a sensory quality, or a memory.

Viewed through the lens of a geographical imagination, Dublin’s docks are therefore more than a geographical space; this is a multi-dimensional space – a product of many forces including historical and economic necessity, business elitism, globalisation, contemporaneous regeneration and cultural affiliation (Sweeney 2012). This place is made by culture and context, making it necessary ‘to swim in’ (Anderson 2015: 5) and investigate the wider context for the subject of this study and those living and working in the Dublin dock space.
The audio-visual artefacts and thesis combine to convey a sense of how working in Dublin Port has shaped the thoughts, feelings and relationships of different dock constituencies. In this regard, I understand that place is inextricably linked to identity and memory and that it shapes how stories are recalled and personal narratives constructed. As a filmmaker, I am interested in the way that the layering of aural and visual traces, both material and non-material, allows for the creation of a sense of place (Anderson 2015). This intersects with an ongoing conversation on place within cultural geography. In this sub-discipline of human geography, context is vital to understanding place: ‘Things, ideas, practices and emotions all occur in a context, in a broader world that influences, values, celebrates, regulates, criminalises, sneers or tuts at particular activities and objects’ (Anderson 2015: 1). Gieseking, Mangold, Katz and Saegert elaborate on this, claiming that human beings are ‘inextricably connected to places, people, and their material and cultural histories and geographies’ (2014: ix). They argue therefore that place is not fixed, but rather ‘created and co-created through the actions and meanings of people’ (ibid.: 3). For Geographer Susan Ruddick (2014), places instead are produced as raced, sexualised, classed, nationalised, ethnicised and gendered.

Guided by these key understandings of space there is a significant body of discourse addressing port life. Outstanding amongst the range of local geographic perspectives that explore the nature of the Dublin dock space is Niamh Moore's *Dublin Dockland’s Revisited* (2007) and *Rejuvenating Docklands: The Irish Context* (2010). Both are examinations of how global urban influences have interacted with local processes to transform a formerly marginal part of Dublin city into an economically successful and vibrant urban quarter. Crucially, the research builds on urban and cultural geographer

Further existing knowledge to which the research contributes to and builds upon includes sociologist Aileen O’Carroll’s *Every Ship is a Different Factory* (2006) – a study of the changes in work organisation that occurred on Dublin’s docks in the twentieth century – and her extensive co-authored *The Dublin Docker: Working Lives of Dublin’s Deep-Sea Port* (O’Carroll and Bennett 2017). Mary Benson’s *Changing Cityscapes and the Process of Contemporary Gentrification: An Examination of Ringsend within the Context of Post-Industrial Growth in Dublin* (2006) explores the displacement of an inner city residential Dublin dockland community. The impact of urban regeneration on the docks is further explored in *Challenge, Renegotiation and Change in the Current Phase of Spencer Dock* (Hogan 2005) and *The Politics of Urban Regeneration* (Hogan 2006).

These local studies are enriched by sociologist Alice Mah’s *Port Cities and Global Legacies: Urban Identity, Waterfront Work, and Radicalism* (2014) – an exploration of the concept of global legacies in three post-industrial former port cities, Liverpool, New Orleans and Marseille. Unlike, Dublin, the ports of these three cities have not survived the introduction of neoliberal policies and the use of new technologies such as containers. Using historical, sociological and ethnographic approaches, Mah focuses on how the contradictory nature of memories amongst dockworkers shapes urban identities.

Mah’s study of the shaping of waterfront identity finds precedents in a number of detailed social studies of longshoremen. Charles B. Barnes’ classic investigation *The
Longshoremen (1915), based on personal interviews, strikers’ circulars and publications, notes that in the 1880s, ‘95 per cent of the longshoremen of New York, both foreign and coastwise, were Irish and Irish-Americans’ (1915: 6). The Irish asserted dominance on the Irish Manhattan Waterfront similar to a ‘hereditary birthright’; communities from rural Ireland replicated the close-knit nature of their indigenous townlands, developing a ‘proprietary attitude’ towards their new neighbourhoods and work and viewing outsiders ‘with suspicion’ (ibid.: 2–6). James T. Fisher’s social history On the Irish Waterfront (2009) also recounts how the Irish traditionally coalesced close to the maritime industries in waterfront districts along both shores of New York’s Lower Manhattan (2007). The study explores how an insular community was forced to adapt its economic, political and religious lives to both local and global forces. More recently, essayist Philip Lopate eloquently explores the neglected shoreline of New York in Waterfront: A Walk Around Manhattan (2005).

Gerald Mars’s (1972) anthropological study examines social relationships in the Port of St John’s where he worked in the early 1960s. Although concentrating on activities within the port, the study is placed these within Newfoundland’s geographic, economic, political and legal contexts. Mars confirms that the physical inheritance, wider social environment and history all influence both the form of social relationships and the organisation of longshoremen and their families, with consequent implications for industrial relations. Winslow’s (1998) Waterfront Workers: New Perspectives on Race and Class contributes to the aforementioned understandings of longshoreman.

Economists Zouheir El-Sahli and Richard Upward (2015) turn their gaze on to the docks in Off the Waterfront: The Long-run Impact of Technological Change on Dock Workers, as they follow dockworkers over a forty year period between 1971 and 2011 to examine how individual workers and labour markets adjusted to the introduction of
containerisation in the UK port industry. This longitudinal study suggests that job guarantees significantly reduce the cost to workers of sudden technological change. The study is related to detailed literature on the development of container technology (Hoare 1986; Vigarié 1999; Levinson 2006; and El-Sahli 2012) as well as literature on the effects of deregularisation on dockworkers in the United States (Talley 2002; Hall 2009). Moving beyond the docks, Iris Acejo’s study *Seafarers and Transnationalism* (2012) explores the myriad ways that Filipino seafarers sustain relationships that allow them to achieve a sense of belongingness at sea.

This aforementioned scholarship views the docks through the prism of a geographical, sociological or economic imagination capturing a sense of the social history or the historic and contemporary reality of the multilayered nature of docks and ports. It also reveals how the local is in many ways enmeshed in wider global systems. As my research hones in on the specificity of Dublin’s docks, it adds a valuable, nuanced layer to this scholarship. In the following sections I explore visualisations of port and maritime spaces on a local and global level, revealing how turning the lens onto Dublin Port facilitated the production of distinctive installations and films, which add to this body of visual and audio-visual knowledge of dock spaces.

**Artistic Visualisations of Dublin Port**

The research of this thesis accords with a local impulse to connect the port with the city – a conversation which in turn is part of a global drive to revitalise ports and consider their potential as culturally inspiring spaces. Cultural bodies in Ireland are responding to an interest in ports as sites of artistic exploration and funding a small but significant body of artworks and films: Dublin City Council, the Dublin Docklands Development Authority and Dublin Port Company have all initiated funding strands for artistic
projects which explore the Dublin docklands area and Dublin port itself.²⁷ (The installations *Stevedoring Stories* (Sweeney 2012) and *Rhythms of a Port* (Sweeney 2014) – created for this thesis and explored in detail in chapter three – have benefitted from this support). Commissioned by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, Turtle Bunberry’s (2009) *An Urban Voyage* charts the evolution of an area of 1,300 acres bordered by Clontarf to the north, the Irish Sea on the east, Ballsbridge and Pearse Street to the south and Amiens Street to the west. Inspired by the emerging, local artistic interest in harbour and port spaces, in 2017, Dublin Port Company announced an open call for artworks, which responded specifically to the built environment, local areas, history and context of Dublin Port. Under the umbrella of *Port Perspectives*, the resulting projects were realised throughout 2017 in sites across Dublin and included artworks by a range of artists, including Cliona Harmey, Silvia Loeffler and myself as detailed below. *Keepers of the Port* (Sweeney 2017) was exhibited as part of *port | river | city* – a programme of screenings and site-specific moving image installations curated specifically for *Port Perspectives.*²⁸
The various works in *port | river | city* were often very personal reflections on ports and their immediate environs. Harmey developed her aesthetic of systems with *Endpoint* (2017), in which live footage from the interior of the Poolbeg Lighthouse on the Great South Wall in Dublin Bay was transmitted to a publically positioned iPad on two occasions, once in situ on the wall in daylight hours over a weekend and again for an evening on the north quays close to Dublin Port (Fig 1.22). Audiences were thus afforded a rare opportunity to view the normally hidden complex technology of this very visible lighthouse that guides the journey in and out of Dublin Port.

![Figure 1.23: ‘Dublin Ships’, Cliona Harmey, Scherzer Bridges, Dublin, 2015](image)

Harmey’s earlier *Dublin Ships* was a temporary public artwork which responded to the maritime space of Dublin Port through tracking the movement of ships arriving into and departing from port via an electronic information system (Figure 1.23).\textsuperscript{29} The names of the ships are outputted on to two large LED screens at the Scherzer Bridges beside Samuel Beckett Bridge on the north side of the river Liffey, approximately halfway between the city centre and Dublin Port. Harmey engages with the monumental nature
of the contemporary global system of shipping, whilst at the same time, on a more intimate level, drawing attention to the meanings and poetic qualities of ship-names. These names allude to maritime trade, cargoes and distant places, or heroic and literary figures: Atlantic Comet, Arklow Bay, Seatruck Progress, Jonathon Swift and Ulysses. The artist describes the work as attempting to ‘interrupt the speed of instantaneous data and return it to the speed of movement of real entities in space’ (Harmey 2015).\textsuperscript{30}

Shipping, the ubiquitous system of contemporary life, is thus ‘intercepted, interrupted and irritated’ (Halsall 2015).\textsuperscript{31}

Where Harmey draws attention to the ship as it operates in a virtual network of global communication and control, artist Sylvia Loeffler creates narratives of public intimacy through deep mapping\textsuperscript{32} of harbour and port spaces. Her collaborative arts project – \textit{Glas Journal, A Deep Mapping of Dún Laoghaire Harbour} (2016)\textsuperscript{33} – explored the emotional responses of a community to its locality, evoking a sense of the harbour space as sanctuary. The work consisted of twenty-eight books of drawings and words that represent the artist’s intensive and careful exploration of the shoreline buildings and maritime activity of Dún Laoghaire harbour.

In \textit{Transit Gateway – A Deep Mapping of Dublin Port} (2017), Loeffler’s artistic cartography for \textit{Port Perspectives}, the transitional changes of the shape of Dublin Port, from its medieval shoreline to its current infrastructure, are documented. Each month over a period of nine months the artist completed one large-scale painting based loosely on the maps used by H.A. Gilligan in his \textit{History of the Port of Dublin} (1988). The nine paintings were layered vertically and made open to the public once a month (Figure 1.24). Each painted layer is concerned with a specific historical period of transition in the port when viewed as a gateway to the city.
Here Loeffler (2017) identifies some of the historical periods which are mapped in her paintings:

The void of communication of the 18th century on the ships before Marconi, the forced emigrations of the 19th century, the modern context of maritime holiday migration that shaped the 20th century, and which now extends itself to the cruise business the 21st century, and how cargo volumes changed over the centuries in terms of goods, locations and quantity.\(^{34}\)

In a socio-economic and urban context, as well as in psychological terms, Loeffler explores in her installation how the port as a gateway creates a vital connection between the city with the wider world.

Sheila Broderick expands this concept of a connection between the city and the wider world in *Port Walks* (2017) – an online art project that explores contemporary seafaring through the medium of podcasts.\(^{35}\) Dublin Port recreational walkers, while visiting the
Great South Wall or from further afield, can listen to the podcasts of the ‘invisible community’ of seafaring crews that enter the Port each day. The podcasts draw attention to the tensions that exist beyond the horizon between globalised and national interests, evident for instance in the operation of flags of convenience, port state control measures and oversight of seafarer training. As with Harmey, The Great South Wall is a particular focus of interest for Broderick because of its proximity to the great volumes of ship traffic that arrive and depart from the Port daily. Broderick’s works find resonance in Stephen Willat’s much earlier exploration of the contained reality of the London Docks, *Working Within a Defined Context* (1978), in which tape recordings of individuals at the Dock reveal their part in the working process.36

**Preserving Dublin Dockland Heritage: Community Initiatives**

The above local artistic research runs parallel with the work of the Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society – a group of former dockworkers dedicated to preserving their history through an online archive of photographs, an ongoing series of exhibitions and various speaker events, such as presentations by former dockworkers and historians (Figures 1.25, 1.26).37 The society is almost exclusively drawn from dockland communities – the Ringsend, Pearse Street and City Quay residential areas on the Southside and the East Wall, North Wall and North Inner City areas of the Northside. Since 2011, they have amassed several thousand photographs38 and generated a high public profile for themselves, voluntarily organising dockworker oral storytelling and music evenings in conjunction with a significant group of bodies such as Dublin Port Company, the Five Lamps Arts Festival, St. Patrick’s Rowing Club, SIPTU, the Irish Labour History Society, UCD, the East Wall History Group and the Cabra Development Project.
In 2017, after the Society almost lost heart about their efforts to achieve recognition, Dublin City Council stepped in to involve the former dockworkers in the Dublin Culture Connects project, an initiative which, according to co-founding member Declan Byrne (2017), has allowed them ‘to connect with our own culture – to remember the solidarity, the generosity and the acts of bravery and generosity. In the good times we may have fought among ourselves, but in the bad times we all stuck together’.\textsuperscript{39} As Chapters two and three reveal, I worked closely with the Dockworkers Preservation Society, recognising that their voices and collection of photographs would have a central place in the film and installations of this research.

**Evoking a Sense of Place: Documentary Films in Maritime Spaces**

The concerns of the artists in the preceding sections on local works, whilst specific to Dublin Port, resonate with the concerns of international artists and filmmakers...
producing work about how global ports and maritime communities have survived or declined in an era of globalisation. In her deep mapping of Dublin Port, artist Silvia Loeffler offers contrasting visual senses of Dublin’s shifting shoreline over several centuries. This desire to evoke a sense of place is also central to many documentary filmmakers exploring transformations, challenges and losses in diverse port and maritime settings.

Among contemporary film works evoking a sense of place in maritime settings are the exploratory projects of the Harvard Sensory Ethnographic Lab, in particular Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor’s film *Leviathan* (2012), an experimental evocation of the collaborative clash of man, nature and machine at sea. Through positioning multiple GoPro cameras on board a ship, the filmmakers create an immersive and elemental study of the contemporary fishing industry, where the perspective of both the fishermen and the catch are offered. A disorienting and visceral sense of the conditions
that the fishermen endure on the ship co-exists with disturbing imagery of the disemboweled fish. A sense of the dangers at sea for these men is underscored by the haunting soundscape of the creaking ship’s motors and winches.

Where *Leviathan* is a sensory ethnographic film that could easily be classified in the horror category, Anna Grimshaw’s film *At Low Tide* (2016) presents as a gentler and valuable ethnographic study of changes in clam digging practices in Eastern Maine. In the film Grimshaw creates a sensory composition of unexpected quiet beauty through allowing the repetitive, everyday rituals of the diggers to take prominence.

Pat Collins has brought his singular experimental lens to two films, which explore aspects of marine life in Ireland. *Na Duganna* (*The Dock, 2007*) hones in on the docklands area of Cork City, allowing the harsh experiences of the men and the women who work there to take centre-place. *Fathom* (2013), co-produced with Sharon Whooley, is by contrast a non-narrative, meditative film, which evokes a sense of the solitariness and isolation in the Fastnet Lighthouse of the west coast of Cork. In this sensorial exploration of the physical reality of life on a lighthouse, depictions of the shifting light and swelling sea – as seen through the windows – are interwoven with archival and contemporary imagery of workers. The filmmakers claim that they wanted to ‘evoke in the viewer a contemplation on solitude and silence and our place in the world’ (Collins, Whooley 2013).

Whilst the aforementioned films create very different sensory experiences, they share a commitment to evoking a unique sense of place, sonically and visually, of their contrasting maritime environments. Filmmakers, Peter Hutton (2000; 2007), William Raban (1986), Hulda Ros Gudnadottir (2015) and Allan Sekula (2010) also adopt
subjective, poetic forms of documentary in their respective responses to dock spaces. Since the work of these latter four filmmakers most strongly resonates with the film outputs of this thesis, I now elaborate in more detail on their work.

**Peter Hutton’s *Time and Tide***

Over thirty years and up until his death in 2016, American Peter Hutton built a singular body of work consisting of over twenty silent cinematic poetic portraits of cities and landscapes filmed in an array of different global geographical sites. The works are deeply inspired by his time working in the merchant marine while at art school; this is particularly evident in his only films to use colour, *Time and Tide* (2000) and *At Sea* (2007), both of which are layered studies of the relationship between man and sea, and nature and industry. In *Time and Tide*, Hutton meshes archival material with his own observational footage, shot on board various vessels moving slowly through rivers and ports along the Hudson in different seasons and years (Figure 1.27). Hutton films from the perspective of the ship, using a circular window as a framing device to look out on to the contrasting gritty industrial and scenic landscapes of the Hudson and New York City. The result is a meditation on the Hudson in which both the mesmerising imagery
and the silence encourage the imagination to roam. Hutton considered his work to be ‘diaristic without being autobiographical’ and there is indeed a contemplative, sketchbook quality to his visual montages.

Although *Tide and Time* may be viewed as an intimate evocation of maritime and river spaces, the work is also concerned with the political. The continually evolving skyscapes were shot when the Environmental Protection Agency was recommending a dredging of the heavily polluted river, a time when Hutton had a sign in his own window: ‘Clean the Hudson’.

Hutton’s political and humanist concerns are also subtly evident in *At Sea* (2007), which focuses on the construction, voyage and deconstruction of a container ship. Shot over three years, the construction takes place in a sleek modern Korean shipyard and contrasts with the demolition of freighters by workers in an archaic Bangladesh scrapyard. In between these two acts, the camera’s perspective is from a moving ship, gazing from the freight to the bow at the waves of the sea and the subtle hues and tones of sea and sky, as the weather and time of day change. Film scholar Scott MacDonald suggests that Hutton’s sensibility resembles the ‘still small voice’ of the nineteenth century landscape painting technique, Luminism (2001: 67). Stylistically, in Luminist paintings, ‘a resonant, light-suffused atmosphere melded topographic divisions into a visually seamless whole’ (Miller 1996: 243). When applied to Peter Hutton’s film, the more meditative style contrasts with the epic or dynamic depictions of landscape in classic independent films such as Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1921) or Godfrey Reggio’s *Koyaanisqatsi* (1984). The temporally slow editing in Hutton’s films contrasts starkly also with the fast paced, intense editing of commercial cinema. As McDonald writes, the resulting apparent stillness allows ‘a revelation of the motion of
the world to speak directly to the viewer’s senses, mind and spirit’ (2001:80). Hutton’s ‘deep-hued and expertly composed’ films can be viewed then as finespun observations on labour and globalisation (Schwendener 2015)47

William Raban’ Thames Film

Figure 1.28: ‘Thames Film’ by William Raban, Screenshot, London, 1984

British artist filmmaker William Raban shares with Hutton an interest in landscape as well as expanded cinema, the latter born of his formative years in the 1970s at the experimental London Filmmakers Co-op.48 Raban acknowledges that since the 1990s his work has been more consciously framed towards historical and sociopolitical concerns in the context of the global economy and the effects of urban change.49 London and the river Thames in particular have become steady themes in his work since the essay documentary Thames Film (1986), which John Hurt narrates (Figure 1.28). Raban (2005) elaborates on the methods he employed in creating the film:

By filming from the low freeboard of a small boat, the film attempts to capture the point of view of the river itself, tracing the fifty-mile journey from the heart of London to the open sea. This contemporary view is set in an historical context
through use of archive images and the words of the travel writer Thomas Pennant, who followed exactly the same route in 1787.50

Where Pennant’s text connects British imperialism and technological advances with the Thames, Raban, as Buckell (2005) observes, juxtaposes this pre-modernist ideology with images of ‘derelict British imperialism, technological advances and pompous voiceovers from post-war newsreels anticipating the collapse not just of the Empire but also the ideals which supported it’. The Thames is gradually exposed as a dark, primeval, fearful place, ‘drunk with blood’, the blood of the many people who have died or been killed on her over the centuries.51 The dark past of the river is mirrored at moments in the film with slow moving pans over Brueghal the Elder’s grim painting of a chaotic future, *The Triumph of Death*. Despite such morbidity, Raban, like Hutton, is inspired throughout the film by the luminosity in the landscape art of Turner or Whistler, and depicts the river also as a place of beauty, its painterly glow appearing out of the darkness.52 In employing narration, archival material, poetic and observational footage to evoke his vision of the Thames, the film is perhaps the closest that Raban comes to conventional documentary (Buckell 2005). It remains nonetheless a subjective, reflective filmic meditation, which exemplifies Nichols’s definition of the poetic mode of documentary.

**Ros Gudnadóttir’s *Keep Frozen***

Hulda Ros Gudnadottir’s anthropological multi-media art-as-research project *Keep Frozen* (2010–2016) was prompted by childhood memories of travelling between Icelandic harbour villages with her parents, who were small industrialists producing plastic fish tubs.53 Over time her project expanded to cover not only rural Iceland, but also the Moroccan coast as well as capital cities such as Reykjavik and New York. For Gudnadottir, her concern is ‘a harbour aesthetic’ – the labour of the dockworker and the
movement and materiality of harbours (2016: 16). Drawing on autobiographical and personal material, the research outputs – photographs, a book, film installations and a film – embody the experience of being a labourer in the contemporary fishing industry in the context of the larger global picture (Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson 2015).

In the documentary film – also named *Keep Frozen* (2015)\(^{54}\) – Gudnadottir creates an audio-visual choreography of labour and movement; as workers in an Icelandic port unload cargo aboard a deep sea fishing trawler, the rhythmical editing of unpacking lulls the viewer into a cinematic trance (Figure 1.29). This sense of beauty is re-enforced by a disembodied voiceover: ‘Dock work is like dance, you are lifting something and moving it somewhere else’. The dance is disrupted abruptly when a crane accidently drops the cargo in transit and boxes of fish tumble down. Mirroring the danger, the screen fades to black as another worker in voiceover observes that, ‘The work is so dangerous that you have to keep your eyes and ears open’. The workers are the heroes in this documentary, and it is evident in Gudnadottir’s close relationship with them that she is in solidarity with them and the precarity of their lives. As Robert (2015) concludes:

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**Figure 1.29**: 'Keep Frozen', Ros Gudnadottir, Screenshot (Dennis Helm), Iceland, 2016
The guys doing this work are tough. The slightest error, the slightest wrong move, could be an accident that costs them their lives. In Keep Frozen they become virtuosos. At the same time, it is this treatment that transforms this group of men into a real team, which is united, and which gives the strength of achievement.\textsuperscript{55}

Noël Burch and Allan Sekula’s \textit{The Forgotten Space}

![Figure 1.30: The Forgotten Space, Screenshot, Burch and Sekula, 2010](image)

Gudnadottir’s project addressing port life finds a significant precedent in Allan Sekula. His seminal photographic essay \textit{Fish Story} (1995), photographic installation \textit{Ship of Fools} (2014) and filmic collaboration with Noel Burch, \textit{The Forgotten Space} (2010) are all meditations on the sea as a neglected site of an ever-shifting crosscurrent of global exchange of goods, money, knowledge, and power. \textit{The Forgotten Space} most effectively uncovers these concerns in a hybrid blend of investigative, observational, poetic and expository modes of documentary filmmaking (Fig 1.30).

Sekula's sociologically informed photography in \textit{Fish Story} echoes Massey’s (2005) concern with the mapping of space within the flows of global trade and the exercise of corporate power. In particular, Sekula eloquently uncovers his concern with the
invisible role that commerce plays in the world’s seafaring networks. His plea that we turn our imaginations back to the forgotten space of the sea and its place in contemporary capitalism is developed in *The Forgotten Space*. Sekula relies on extensive critical voiceover to allow him to make explicit links between otherwise latent connections in the observational interviews in the film. Building on his *Fish Story*, *The Forgotten Space* seeks to ‘understand and describe the contemporary maritime world in relation to the complex symbolic legacy of the sea’ (Burch and Sekula 2010).

Where the sea is the forgotten space of the title, the film sets out to depict some of the many other ‘forgotten’ spaces in the movement of global capital, the ports that have been relocated to the peripheries of cities, the fenced off warehouses that characterise relocated ports, the trucks transporting cargo inland from the ports and even the invisible goods inside the cargo containers.

The film consistently returns to a point-of-view shot of a cargo ship, stacked high with containers, as it moves through the sea. The containers on the ship are used as a vehicle with which to tie the constituent parts of the film together as it follows the movement of cargo across different spaces: on ships in megaports such as Rotterdam, Los Angeles and Hong Kong; on a truck in urban Los Angeles; on a barge on a canal; on a Betuwe railway connecting Rotterdam with Germany. These spaces represent the ‘unseen matrix of globalisation’ (Young 2010) where local dockworkers, crane drivers, barge captains, train engineers and town planners can tell us about the demands of their work in straightforward documentary interviews. Reinforcing the sense that the workers are all part of a larger matrix, they tend to be ‘paired with machines to which they sometimes become appendages, now all part of a global, mobile factory’ (ibid).

The people in the ‘forgotten’ domestic spaces in between the transportation networks
are also featured: a homeless woman living in a tent city by a railway line on the edge of a Californian suburb; a working-class family picnicking on a slither of parkland butting into Long Beach Harbour; a seafarer’s hostel in Hong Kong; displaced farmers and villagers in Holland and Belgium; two young Chinese female factory workers as they excitedly go from their tiny dorm out into the city to shop. Sekula and Burch consider the ‘low wages’, which these two Chinese women earn to be ‘the fragile key to the whole puzzle’ (2010). The focus then, is on those who physically move cargo/capital rather than the people who are in charge of ‘time-space compression’ and who use their positions of power for their own business interests (Harvey 1989).

Each of the narratives of observed everyday working life have their own internal rhythm and are discrete in themselves; it is only when they are collaged with Sekula’s observational narration that the film takes on a critical edge. The cumulative effect of Sekula’s voiceover, as it links stories of maritime work and domestic life, is to evoke a sense of the costs of increasingly expanding global trade, ‘from pollution to standardization to the automation that increases productivity but keeps wages low and eliminates jobs’ (Young 2012).

With the voiceover’s focus on ‘how the processes and technologies of capitalism are reconstructing spaces of connection while destroying spaces of everyday life’ the film is clearly geographical in imagination (Steinberg 2010). In Massey’s conceptualisation of space (1993), the sea has become a complex constantly changing product of practices, trajectories and interrelations from the local to the global. This is a nihilistic vision of the sea as a space that has been completely tamed by the processes of capitalism (Steinberg 2013; Harvey 2011). As Sekula’s vision is relentless, there is little room for the surviving patterns of labour and the rhythms of everyday human life in port spaces.
Whilst globalisation and mechanisation since the mid-twentieth century have no doubt negatively impacted upon residential communities along Dublin’s docks, such transformations co-exist with more nuanced and sensuous contours of working life for a port community. As the next chapter uncovers, workers and managers do not see themselves as mere minor players in an invisible global grid; they are proud of their histories and their contributions to Ireland’s economy.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has critically situated my study in the broader context of projects that explore the representation of lived experience in urban dock settings, as well as at sea. Whilst I am neither a geographer nor a sociologist, identifying some of the relevant scholarship on ports in the fields of cultural geography and urban sociology has allowed me to capture a sense of the social history and contemporary reality of how ports are enmeshed in wider global systems. These historical, geographical, sociological and ethnographic studies of port cities and post-industrial former port cities have furthermore provided me with an invaluable insight into something of the contradictory nature of how identity is shaped amongst dockworkers and those who work at sea.

The socioeconomic scholarship established in this chapter is augmented by a body of international and local artistic and filmic studies, which focus on different dock and marine localities and the working communities in these settings. As a result, it has become clear that there has been no previous visual or audio-visual study which focuses on the surviving, interdependent, nature of the working lives of the dockworkers, boatmen and port managers on Dublin’s port, or on how these different dock constituencies have survived technological transformations, continuing to ensure that their memory is preserved. I have thus been able to establish a gap where my research
can make a valuable contribution to existing film and photographic projects, as well as to socio-economic and geographical studies, which explore contemporary transformations in working life in global ports. Furthermore, the audio-visual artefacts of this thesis enhance an existing body of artistic and filmic research projects, which respond to the specificity of Dublin’s docks. In so doing they illuminate the nature of how the memory and experiences of a community of dockworkers has shaped their urban identity.

In order to trace the evolution and expansion of the documentary imagination that drove this study, chapter one has further framed my practice within specific documentary film and photographic theories, drawing on the critical writing of both academics and filmmakers. Guided by Bill Nichol’s observation that every documentary has its own ‘distinct voice’, ‘signature’ or ‘footprint’ (2001: 99), I have situated my work methodologically within a lineage of observational and participatory modes of filmmaking and photography alongside poetic approaches, thus facilitating an interrogation of my practice. In the following chapter, I unravel how utilising these documentary methods, alongside fieldnotes, facilitated the gathering of local understandings and perceptions of the transforming Dublin dock space, further providing material for the audio-visual artefacts of the thesis. In the third chapter, I reconstruct and critically analyse the processes of disseminating the research material beyond traditional broadcast models.

Having established the scholarship and artistic and filmic research within which this study is situated, I now turn the lens onto Dublin’s docks, invoking Haraway’s appeal to the documentarist to hone in on the ‘elaborate specificity and difference’ of the local (1988: 583). Specifically, how do the memories and experiences of the dockworkers of
Dublin’s surviving port space shape their urban identity and how, despite the technological working transformations that this community face, do they continue to find ways to shape their identity? And how might documentary film and photography facilitate and enrich such an experimental quest to challenge notions of friction-free trade?
Notes

1 An extensive list of these news items and documentaries can be found in the filmography.
2 In The Investment Theory of Creativity and The Propulsion Theory of Creative Contributions, Robert J. Sternberg developed two theories of creativity as a result of thirty years of research in psychology. He concludes that ‘creativity is the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning constraints)’ (1999: 3).
3 This dilemma stretches back to the earliest days of cinema when the Lumière’s filmed ‘La Sortie de l’Usine Lumière à Lyon’ (‘Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon’). In the third, celebrated take, a well-placed dog meanders amongst the conspicuously well-dressed workers. This is this 'crease' wherein a space exists between manipulation and observation (Winston 2013: 6).
4 The request for ‘big themes’ is in an RTÉ Factual Commissioning Brief: <www.rte.ie/commissioning/rtefactual.html> [Accessed 15 December 2017].
5 ibid.
6 This quote is taken from Robert Cooper’s From Vérité to Virtual: Conversations On The Frontier Of Film And Anthropology (2007). The essay is available online at: <http://www.der.org/films/from-verite-to-virtual.html> [Accessed 7 November 2015].
7 Neo-Gothic refers to primarily American Gothic art forms from the mid 20th Century onwards. David Punter writes that the ‘New American Gothic’ deals in ‘landscapes of the mind, settings which are distorted by the pressure of the principal characters’ psychological obsessions’ (1996: 3). He elaborates that violence, including rape and mental breakdown are key motifs.
9 Nichols first identifies four documentary modes of representation in his seminal text Representing Reality (1991) and upgrades them to six in the book Introduction to Documentary (2017).
10 Flaherty’s biographer Arthur Calder-Marshall was interviewed in the film How the Myth was Made: A Study of Robert Flaherty’s Man of Aran (1978, 56 minutes), produced by George Stoney and James B. Brown. [Available for rental from Films, Inc.].
11 Grierson’s review of Moana appeared in the New York Sun on February 8th 1926 and can be found in Jack Ellis’s John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence (2000: 28).
12 The New York Sun was published daily between 1833 and 1950 and considered to be groundbreaking in its content at the time. It merged with the New York Herald in 1920. Archives are available at <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=nysun> [Accessed 15 January 2018].
15 According to Jackson (2007), Drifters, commissioned by the Empire Marketing Board, was a low budget film costing £2,948. For further reading on the Grierson’s film Drifters see <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/sep/01/film> [Accessed 7 August 2018].
16 For further reading on Soviet Montage techniques, see Jeremy Hicks, Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film (2007) and James Goodwin’s Eisenstein, Cinema, and History (1993).
17 Anthropologist Tom Harrison, poet Charles Madge and artist filmmaker Humphrey Jennings began the Mass-Observation in 1937. Its aim was to study the habits and customs of ordinary British people – to create ‘an anthropology of ourselves’ (Badger 2010: 78). Humphrey Spender did most of the photography using an unobtrusive Leica to photograph unobserved where he could.
18 Moreover, Leni Reifenstahl’s films, early examples of observational cinema in Europe, raise persistently challenging questions about the creative treatment of reality and the crossing of the line between observing and staging/ visual aesthetics and realism (Deutschmann 1991; Nichols 2017; Winston 2008). In her film Triumph of the Will, (1935) a series of seemingly neutrally
In our complex society, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood and community groups, service clubs, and committed individuals play a significant, though often unnoticed, role in revitalizing our cities and towns. And while corporations have the capacity to tout their efforts, it is often the strength, vitality, hard work, and perseverance of people engaged and rooted in their communities — and those who advocate on their behalf — who spur the private sector and government bureaucracies to bring about change. These activities should be documented and integrated into the social and political memory of each community and organization — not as ends in themselves, but as means to further the purpose of organizations and the issues they promote.

(Tiger 2012)

For further reading on Tiger’s ‘advocacy documentation’ see


21 Renov (2004) uses the term ‘cine-poem’ to describe Iven’s deeply atmospheric documentary.


23 Ten Thousand Waves was exhibited at the Victor Miro Gallery in London in 2010. Further details can be found at: <https://www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/410/> [Accessed 20 February 2018]

24 The Unfinished Conversation is in the British Council and Tate Collection. For full details, see

25 This quote is taken from Bill Robert’s Production in View: Allan Sekula’s Fish Story and the Thawing of Postmodernism (2012). For further reading see:

26 The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art catalogue descriptor for the Coal Dock Workers Series (1933) notes that:

Walker Evans arrived in Havana in spring 1933, just months before the collapse of the bloody eight-year reign of dictator Gerardo Machado. He had been commissioned by the Philadelphia publisher J.B. Lippincott to make pictures for Carleton Beals's Crime of Cuba, a history of the country and an indictment of American support for Machado's regime. Evans claimed never to have read the book, however, and would routinely distance himself from the ideological agendas of his employers.


27 Dublin Port Company has initiated a Masterplan within which they have a soft-values component that allows cultural projects relevant to the port to be supported. Projects which have received recent support include Sean O Laoire’s reconstruction of The Diving Bell (2015) and the other projects mentioned in this chapter. The following describes the Objective on Societal Integration and Soft Values of Dublin Port:
In the context of integrating Dublin Port with Dublin City and the people of Dublin, there is a key policy objective that DPC intends adopting and applying in the context of the operation, management and development of the Port during the period of the Masterplan. In particular, it is a policy objective of DPC to ensure that the Port will not operate in isolation from Dublin City and the people that it services. This will involve ensuring that the people of Dublin benefit not just from the Port operating as an efficient facilitator of trade, but also that the City and the people of Dublin gain in many wider senses from the successful operation and growth of the port. This policy objective will underpin both how the Port operates its current business and any development proposals envisaged under the Masterplan. To support the achievement of this objective, a programme will be devised and implemented, in consultation with the local authority, statutory stakeholders and local communities, to identify and implement initiatives to support societal integration between the Port and the City and the achievement of soft values associated with the Port.


Port | river | city took the form of a unique programme of screenings and site-specific moving image installations curated by Alice Butler & Daniel Fitzpatrick of aemi (artists experimental moving image) and artist Cliona Harmey for Port Perspectives 2017. For further reading see http://www.portrivercity.ie [Accessed 15 January 2018].


Dublin Ships was commissioned by Dublin City Council as part of the Dublin City Council Public Art programme (Strand 2 – Interaction with the City), under the Per Cent for Art Scheme with funding from the Department of the Environment and in partnership with Dublin Port Company and the Dublin Docklands Authority. For further reading on Cliona Harmey’s artwork see http://www.dublinships.ie [Accessed 15 January 2018].

ibid.


Deep-mapping as a term has its origins in William Least Heat-Moon’s Prairie Erth: A Deep Map (1991). The methodology has resonance across the spatial humanities and speaks to a diverse range of perspectives that engage with the mapping or tapping of a layered and multifaceted sense of place, narrative, history and memory (Roberts 2016).

Silvia’s Glas Journal project was funded by an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship. For further reading on her approach to Glas Journal see https://silvialoeffler.wordpress.com/glas-journal-2/ [Accessed 15 January 2018].

For further reading on her approach to mapping see Loeffler (2013; 2015).

Loeffler organized a series of seminars to accompany the development of Transit Gateway. For further reading on these artistic mappings, see http://www.dublincultureconnects.ie/tag/dockworkers-preservation-society/ [Accessed 1 March 2018].

Sheila Broderick’s Port Walks can be listened to on her web page http://portwalks.ie [Accessed 1 March 2018].

Further details of Stephen Willat’s Collection can be found at: http://stephenwillats.com/work/working-within-defined-context/ [Accessed 1 March 2018].

The complete Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society photographic archive is available to view at http://www.bluemelon.com/alanmartin/ [Accessed 1 March 2018].

Further details on the Dublin Culture Connects initiative can be found here: http://www.dublincultureconnects.ie/tag/dockworkers-preservation-society/ [Accessed 1 March 2018].

ibid.

In the Harvard Sensory Ethnographic Lab, researchers use ethnographic media to produce a variety of original digital video, still photographic, hypermedia, and sound works. For further


44 For further reading on Hutton’s work see Scott MacDonald, Peter Hutton: The Filmmaker as Luminist (2001).


46 Luminism is a technique of painting of light and the term is applied specifically to the nineteenth century American landscape painters of the Hudson River school who depicted scenes of natural beauty in areas that included the Hudson River Valley and the Catskill Mountains. For further reading, see American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School (Avery, Bolger Burke, Howat, Hoover Voorsanger and Roque 1987). MacDonald borrows the term the ‘still small voice’ from Barbara Novak’s famous distinction between two approaches to American Landscape painting – ‘grand opera’ and the ‘still small voice’. See Nature and Culture: American Landscape Painting, 1825–1875 (Novak 1984).


48 The London Film-makers Co-operative (LFMC) was formed on the 13 October 1966 and was initially centered around the Better Books bookshop on Charing Cross Road. The founding members included figures such as Bob Cobbing, Jeff Keen, Simon Hartog and Stephen Dwoskin, who had recently emigrated from New York where had made his early works. Based on a model inspired by the New York and other international film co-ops, the LFMC sought to provide exhibition, distribution facilities and a published journal to be called Cinem. An open submission policy was agreed that filmmakers could loan copies of their films to the Co-op and rental fees would be split 50/50 between the filmmaker and the Co-op. For further reading, see: <http://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1960-1969/london_film-makers_co-op.html> [Accessed 15 January 2018].

49 This summary is taken from conversation notes with Raban during a public interview which I led with him at the port | river | city seminar in Dublin in 2017.

50 Raban contributed this summary of Thames Film for the catalogue of the film’s UK distributor LUX: <http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/william_raban/thames_film.html> [Accessed 15 January 2018].

51 From the narration in Thames Film. The line ‘Thames is drunk with blood’ is borrowed from chapter three in William Blake's epic, The Prophetic Books (1804)

52 In a short essay to accompany the BFI DVD Release of William Raban’s film, Peter Ackroyd writes about Thames Film:

This is a vision of the dark Thames, of “Old Father Thames” as an awful god of power akin to William Blake's Nobodaddy, and, in Blake's poem, Jerusalem, ‘Thames is drunk with blood’. In this film there is something fearful about the river, something monstrous, recalling Conrad's line in Heart of Darkness that “…this also has been one of the dark places of the earth.” Raban has learned something from the great artists of the river, such as Turner and Whistler, and portrayed the Thames as clothed in wonder (2004).

Hulda Rós Gudnadóttir produced a book on the project in which the project concept is explored by herself and other artists. The book is available to read here: [Accessed 1 March 2018].

A trailer and further details of the documentary can be found here: [Accessed 1 March 2018].

This quote is taken from Robert Cooper’s *From Vérité to Virtual: Conversations On The Frontier Of Film And Anthropology* (2007). The essay is available online at: [Accessed 7 November 2015].


For further reading on Sekula’s work, see Steinberg (2013) and [Accessed 15th May 2018].
Chapter Two: Documenting Working Life on Dublin Port

Overview

Life is random and messy and the primary task the photographer faces is ordering it, giving it meaningful form within the image.

(Badger 2010: 8)

Photography, including urban photography, is essentially concerned with a transparent interpretation of the world. Success in this endeavour depends upon conveying semiotic meaning through the photographic product. To do this effectively aesthetic considerations have to be applied. The aesthetic contains and reflects notions of beauty and the photographic process itself tends to beautify its subject. Successful urban photography therefore contains beauty. However, both the photographer and the viewer subjectively interpret this beauty.

(Purcell 2012: 1)

As identified, the primary medium for research in this study was film, supplemented with photography. Where researchers traditionally tend to use photographs to confirm visually rich textual narratives (Edwards 1992, Harper 2003), my intention on the South Coal Quay was to allow the photographs to be the starting point of a documentary investigation into how a community of dock workers shape their urban identity amidst the technological working transformations that they face. My instinct then in reflecting on the visual methodologies adopted in the field was to draw on some of the key critical texts that informed my documentary photographic practice, in particular those of Berger (1982) and Sontag (1997). In the analysis of selected photographs generated in this study I revisit these texts with fresh eyes and complicate the readings by drawing on contemporary critical thinking within documentary and visual culture from Harper (2000), Rubenstein and Sluis (2008), Stallingrass (2009), Rose (2012) and Wells (2015), amongst others. This approach serves to enrich the reflective reading of the production of the imagery as well as enhance an evolving reflexivity.

In an era characterised by ubiquitous photography where snapshot, throwaway digital
images proliferate online, it is challenging yet enriching to adopt a thoughtful, critical approach to the imagery generated. Rubinstein and Sluis conclude that the networked image lacks any significance or reference point: ‘Put another way, transmitted over networks, the snapshot image signifies an absence of meaning; it is the ambient visual background against which visual narratives are told, distributed and consumed’ (2008: 23). A maturing reflexivity and critical awareness regarding the production of these images can hopefully therefore serve as a valuable tool with which to dispel the dangers of assuming a ‘patriarchal visuality’ in the richly textured field site of the docks (Haraway 1991). As Haraway expands, ‘there is a premium on establishing the capacity to see from the peripheries and the depths. But here lies a serious danger of romanticizing and /or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions’ (2002: 679).

Although I started out using a digital stills camera, the omnipresent sounds of the Dublin docks, the stories freely told by dockworkers and a distinctly cinematic mode of looking all prompted the use of a digital moving image camera. I adopted observational methods of documentary filmmaking and photography alongside participatory interviews and fieldnotes to gather local understandings and perceptions of the Dublin dock space. As demonstrated in this chapter, these forms of observational and participatory research served to enrich my understanding of the broader social context for the dock constituency with which I was working, while providing me with material for the various audio-visual artefacts of the research.

There is both crossover and contrast between observational documentary research methods and those used in ethnography.¹ For example, one observational approach in ethnography, that of the purely responsive camera, leaves the camera rolling on a single
wide shot, objectively observing and interpreting it’s subject without provocation or
disturbance (MacDougall 2006). Such an approach emerged out of scepticism within
visual anthropology about the habit of accumulating a variety of shots through different
takes when filming (Robertson 2007). It is believed that the intent is to manipulate the
filmed action or interview in the edit suit for an ulterior narrative purpose. Documentary
for television, by contrast, typically employs cinematic language and accumulates
‘actuality’ material through asking the subject to repeat tasks, look a certain direction to
suit the camera, adopt a more expressive pose and even perform a ‘walk in’ shot to
introduce the space. (Winston 2013). For MacDougall, this interpretation of the subject,
through breaking down and reassembling the action according to some external logic, is

Accordingly, approaching the docks through an ethnographic lens enriched my practice,
whilst also providing me with a means with which to shake off some of the shackles of
my broadcasting conditioning. I therefore necessarily draw on literature from both
ethnography and documentary, deriving inspiration from filmmakers and scholars such
as Jean Rouch (1975), John Corner (1996; 2008), Bill Nichols (2002), Anna Grimshaw
and Amanda Ravetz (2005), David MacDougall (2003; 2006), Anna Grimshaw (2005;
2009), Willem De Jong, Erik Knudson and Jerry Rothwell (2013), Brian Winston

The ethnographic scholarship of Les Back (1993; 2007) and Paul Atkinson and Martyn
Hammersley (2007) guided me in critically reflecting on the methods involved in
negotiating trust with the participants in the field site. As introduced earlier, Paul
Stoller’s (1997) insights into ‘sensuous description’ guided me in the textual
representation of these encounters. I am guided by his idea that ‘sensuous scholarship is
ultimately a mixing of the head and the heart. It is an opening of one’s being to the
world’ (Stoller 1997: xviii). I acknowledge the seminal work of ethnographer Clifford
Geertz (1973; 1988) who developed the idea of ‘thick description’ in ethnographic
writing, as well as the scholars who expanded the discussion on this method of
observational and interpretive writing (Clifford 1986; 1997; Marcus 1986; 1997; Banks
2007). Geertz held that, when writing through thick description, the many details of
culture could be acknowledged, allowing the study to consist not only of facts but also
of commentary and interpretation. Writing like this is ‘accordingly exploratory, self-
questioning and shaped more by the occasions of its production than its post-hoc
organization into chaptered books and thematic monographs might suggest’ (Geertz
1973: xii).

During the research phase in the field site, whether photographing between 2008 and
2010 or filming between 2012 and 2013, I maintained a research diary to record and
reflect upon observations, conversations and interactions. Whilst there was no deliberate
attempt at the time to delineate the form of the notes, they do fall loosely into three
categories: the ‘substantive’ account which offers a chronology of a particular day; the
‘methodological’ account which outlines the nature of the methods involved in image-
making; and the ‘analytical’ account which queries and probes the nature of the
encounters with participants (Burgess 1981: 76). The fieldnotes therefore capture and
demonstrate a number of aspects of the research: a working methodology whilst in the
field, a rethinking that traces the move from photography to film work, and reflections
on my interactions with participants.

The fieldnotes are very distinct in style from the academic writing or the material
generated in the interviews with the participants. They were not intended to be the
primary means of conveying my research to others, serving more as observations and reflections that might later act as triggers or sparks to enrich the ethnographic writing process. Newbury (2001) notes that:

> The research diary can be seen as a melting pot for all of the different ingredients of a research project – prior experience, observations, readings, ideas – and a means of capturing the resulting interplay of elements.  

(Newbury 2001: 3)

Accordingly, to facilitate the development and expansion of fieldsite encounters the fieldnotes have been woven through the thesis, alongside extracts from interviews and scholarly material. This has ultimately contributed to thicker descriptions of situations and interactions with the research participants. As detailed in the next chapter, the notes provided me with material to use in the voiceover narration of the artefacts of this thesis.

When ethnographer Les Back (1993) prompted the researcher to provide an honest account of the process of selecting participants, he also warned of the temptation of inventing credentials. Back (2007) further identifies the importance of finding balance on the research journey between the need for self-reflexivity and the desire to tell the stories of our social actors. As he writes:

> The role of autobiographical or experiential knowledge is in my view an interpretative device. In this sense, subjectivity becomes a means to try to shuttle across the boundary between the writer and those about whom s/he is writing. It is not about narcissism and self-absorption but common likeness and, by extension, contrasts.  

(Back 2007b: 208)

Accordingly, part one of this chapter recounts my soft landing onto the docks with the key social actors, in particular gatekeeper John Nolan (Figure 2.1).
Over the course of reconstructing the research journey, my participants came to function as critical friends or counterparts who provided me with productive ‘instances’ to interrogate. These instances are drawn from a constellation of experiences: the negotiation involved in generating a photographic image or film sequence; a conversation; fieldnotes and diaries. Through the process of critically engaging with these selected instances I begin to unravel local experiences and performances of identity, which permeate the dock space. In consonance with chapter one, this necessitates drawing on sociological scholarship which explores the changing face of working life on Dublin’s docks (Kearnes 1996; O’Carroll 2006, Bennett and O’Carroll 2017) as well as geographical perspectives on the impact of fluctuations in the Irish economy on dockland spaces (Moore 2007, 2010; O Callaghan 2012, 2014, 2016 and Ó Riain 2014). I additionally consider studies of masculinities within manual working class settings (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995; Barret 2001; Beynon 2002 and Roberts and Walker 2018). It is opportune to detail this social scientific scholarship, as it informed the writing of content for the narration in the installations and film of my research.
Having established a sense of the Dublin docks field-site in Part I of this chapter, Part II and Part III narrate the processes of the evolving, informed visual methodologies which facilitated me in conveying the rhythms of Dublin dock life; the geography, the people, the nature of the work and the transformations. As noted in the previous chapter, this work evolved over five years between 2008 and 2013 through a process of assimilation as connections and chances opened up during the fieldwork phase. I was guided by a desire to experiment and challenge my practice and therefore made myself vulnerable as a filmmaker. Rather than set out with a fixed plan or destination, this was a flexible process of slow revelation and the evolving methodologies are reflective of the corporeal nature of the journey.

In terms of the visual documentation, two levels of analysis appear as I reflect on the fieldwork phase on Dublin’s docks: that of the wider content depicted in the imagery generated, and subsequently, that of the overall formal compositional logic that shapes them (Van Gelder 2009). In this chapter, then, there is a nuanced dialogue between observation and critical analysis, interweaving field-site conditions and characters with theoretical and methodological considerations. The register of the writing fluidly shifts from ethnographic descriptions of working life for my participants on the docks to photographic and filmic analysis. Furthermore, photographs and links to audio-visual clips are embedded within the text and designed to be an essential and integrated part of the study. A personal leaning towards documentary means that I see the bringing together of text and imagery as facilitating the production of both social and visual knowledge (Stallabrass 2007).
Part I: Coming to Know the Docks

John Nolan, Dublin Stevedores Limited and the South Coal Quay

You need to have that feeling that you’re part of a port. I’ve always had this feeling when I’m in the port for the people who went before me: my great grandfather, his brothers and all the siblings after that. I’ve always imagined that their voices are still around the port and when I walk around the port I get this great sense, this great feeling that I actually belong here. It’s that sense of voices of past that has that feeling. I love this port, I just love this port.

(John Nolan, Extract from *Stevedoring Stories* (2012), recorded 12 June 2012)

Figure 2.2: ‘Grand Canal’, Moira Sweeney, Dublin, 2008

I could feel the warmth of the early autumn sun on my back as I cycled east along the four-kilometre Grand Canal towpath in September 2008 (Figure 2.2). The tree-lined track links my home, in inner city Dublin 8, to the Grand Canal Basin in Dublin 2, which in turn is linked to the tidal River Liffey by sea locks. Between 1804 and 1960 the Grand Canal was a key trade route for cargo, such as Guinness, travelling from Dublin’s docks to the rural towns of Ireland, as well as other goods, such as turf, arriving into Dublin.\(^3\) It was a path well-suited for the occasion since I was on my way to meet up with stevedore John Nolan, excited about the prospect of becoming acquainted with the docks and photographing working life on the quays.
As I cycled off the leafy track along Lower Canal Street to John’s company Dublin Stevedores Limited (Figure 2.3), my initial reaction was one of disappointment. How could a dock company’s office be set in a dull, urban street away from the vibrant, working port?

John suggested that I lock the bike up so that we could take a detour to the South Coal Quay where his company unloaded ships. The detour brought us through the Southside residential area of City Quay where John grew up – a locality that traditionally supplied labour to Dublin’s docks. We continued down Pearse Street, the noisy and in places unattractive three-lane arterial route that leads into central Dublin. John grew up in Countess Markievicz House in the 1950s and 1960s, while his mother hailed from the neighbouring Lombard Street and his father from City Quay. ‘We were fourth generation in and around Townsend Street’, John said, with clear affection for the area. Although he no longer lived in the locality – having bought a house as a newly-wed in 1975 in Artane in North Dublin – John still considered himself a local: ‘I never left the
area, I’m part of the City Quay Church Choir and I still work on the docks. I never remember anyone who didn't work – everyone worked’.  

From the outset of our conversations, John tended towards a view of the past in which community and working-class belonging championed over the harsher realities of inner-city tenement living, mass movement and dock working life. This ‘resolute’ spirit is echoed, particularly amongst the women, in the stories recounted in Kearne’s *Dublin Tenement Life, An Oral History*, a documentation of the 1950s tenements of Dublin (2000). The tenements were widely judged to be the worst slums in Europe; some districts housed up to one hundred people in one building with twenty family members lived in one small room (ibid.). Despite the physical deterioration, overcrowding, profiteering and social stigma, Gaughan and Kearns observed that tenement dwellers often recalled the security and contentment that a close-knit community provided (1995; 2000). Whilst John, an articulate and humorous orator, evoked a sense of the rhythms and patterns of this culture, a similar nostalgia for lost communal tradition in unquestionably harsh living standards prevailed in his accounts. I was to discover over time that this nostalgising of the past also permeated the stories and memories of my other participants who performed manual labour on the docks.

In *Modern Dublin*, Hanna suggests that the nostalgising of the destruction of city communities is born of ‘an unquantifiable sense of identity bound up in urban space’ (2013: 212). She further observes that it was not only former residents, but also middle-class commentators of the 1960s, who eulogised the loss of these communities. For John, the inner-city Dublin and docks of his childhood had become a repository for memory and identity in which communal values were valorised. I surmised that John’s memorialising his past was a way of having the best of two worlds: he could experience
a sense of belonging to a formerly close knit, inner-city, Dublin working-class community whilst also valuing the middle-class privileges and freedoms associated with owning a successful self-created business.

John blended an unlikely combination of a romantic view of dock life and labour with a shrewd business mind. Guided by traits of generosity and helpfulness, he adopted dual roles as a gatekeeper affording me privileged access to a dock community and an ‘encultured informant’, freely sharing his extensive knowledge and experience of residential and working port life (Spradley 1979; O Reilly 2009). As noted, he tended to reminisce about dock life and his docking ancestry, stretching back to the early part of the twentieth century, in an inherently nostalgic manner. Atkinson and Hammersley note that:

There are, of course, aspects of personal front that are not open to ‘management’ and that may limit the negotiation of identities in the field, and these include so-called ‘ascribed’ characteristics. Although it would be wrong to think of the effects of these as absolutely determined or fixed, such characteristics as gender, age, ‘race’, and ethnic identification may shape relationships with gatekeepers, sponsors, and people under study in important ways.

(Atkinson and Hammersley 2007: 73)

John’s perspective was that of a former resident of a strong, working-class, dock community that had been ruptured by larger, political forces. His experiences of former contentment permeated his perceptions and memories of the past. My presence furthermore affected John’s recollections: my identity was, in part, defined by my status as a documentary filmmaker with the potential to broadcast previously undocumented stories. Whilst John did not ultimately select what material I chose to bring into visual representation, he did consider certain stories and activities from the docks to be deserving of an audience. His narration, then, was at times, as much a ‘telling to the world at large’ as it was to me (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007: 178). This telling
became a feature not only in John’s conversations with me, but also in the conversations with other dockworkers. As I elaborate upon later in Part II of this chapter, it eventually prompted the use of a digital film camera with which to adequately record these ‘tellings’.

Throughout this research, the onus was on me to build trust between the participants and myself so that they would feel safe in telling me their stories. In order to build such trust, De Jong, Knudsen and Rothwell (2013) propose that negotiating skills are vital for the total filmmaker. As they write: ‘Somehow you must be able to convince people to co-operate, to trust that their ideas, feelings and experiences will reach the screen in a “truthful” and recognisable way’ (ibid.: 176). Many years of researching for documentaries in the television industry fortuitously provided me with some of these necessary negotiating skills.

The Dublin Docks: ‘A Man’s World’

There are dangers everywhere you walk in this port. People are driving machines, they may be loading lorries all day and with a forklift truck and they don't really keep looking around every time you know, they expect you not to be there, you know. Danger in the docks is when you haven’t got the knowledge, they say knowledge is danger but knowledge down on the docks can save your life. This is a man’s world, whether you like it or not, tough and dangerous.

(John Nolan, Extract from Stevedoring Stories, 2012, recorded 12 June 2012)

For John, the dangers and risks of the dock space contribute to making it ‘a man’s world’. Such a view of the docks defines the dockers or stevedores as an embodiment of traditional, male-role behaviours, such as toughness, risk-taking and tenacity. Whilst these behaviours could all be considered ‘strands of hegemonic masculinity which men can draw upon to secure masculine identity’ (Barret 2001: 95), I do not surmise that
John was suggesting that other strands of masculinity or indeed femininity are inferior. As there is a multiplicity of performances of masculinity, John’s experiences and expression of masculinity must be viewed within the larger context of the docks. Tillner (1997) expounds on this, suggesting that:

The whole diversity of lived masculinities can be understood as specific realizations of a vague set of ideals and demands, images and stories that are defined as masculine, adapted to the concrete situation an individual or group has to cope with.

(cited in Beynon 2002: 12)

John’s gendering of the docks arises firstly from the fact that this is a space where dock labour is traditionally performed by men and secondly, from his upholding of an ideal of masculinity. His construction of the docks as ‘a man’s world’ relies on his particular notions of what constitutes successful ways of ‘being a man’ (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995). As Butler contends, ‘gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of act.’ (ibid.: 39). Just as one aspect of John’s identity was bound up in nostalgising the urban space of his childhood, his framing of the dock space as ‘a man’s world’ was tied up with a personalised notion of what constituted a successful performance of masculinity. Television depictions of working-class men on the docks and in other manual blue collar working environments tend to reinforce these ideas of masculine heroism, where overcoming danger and male camaraderie operate side by side. Working class valorisation of ‘certain types of embodied hard and heavy manual labour and highly skilled trade and craft occupations’ is of course not a cliché; it has been embedded in ‘intergenerational transfers of knowledge from father to son and through the trades apprenticeships schemes’ (Roberts and Walker 2018: 10–11).

Beynon suggests that the different ways in which men experience and perform their identity at different times and in different settings be recognised as ‘hybridised
masculinity’ (2002: 6). John performed and validated one aspect of his masculinity through speaking with a sense of personal pride and ‘heroism’ about how he had carved out operational territory for his company on the South Coal Quay. Taking my cue from Cornwall and Lindisfarne, I view the idea of masculinity, like gender, as ‘fluid and situational’ (1995: 3). As they expound, ‘Being masculine need not be an exclusive identity. It can involve self-presentations which include behavior conventionally associated with both masculinity and femininity’ (ibid.: 15). Moreover, I concur with the notion that masculinity has the potential to change and develop towards more positive ends than those with which it has been traditionally associated viz-à-viz power relations (Edwards 104). In advanced Western industrial capitalism, working-class jobs were stereotypically viewed as requiring physical skills such as strength for men and dexterity for women (McElhinny 1994). Middle-class jobs were viewed as offering workers more opportunities to utilise mental skills, with men being viewed as strong analytic rationalisers and women the stronger social communicators (ibid.). However in the 21st century, such unilinear gendering and classing of the workplace is undermined by the decline of manufacturing, increased participation of women in the workforce and the increase of market-driven policies which have created a precarity for many workers (Edwards 2006; Beynon 2002). As Edwards expounds, these developments are likely to be linked to ‘wider developments in flexible working, globalisation and post Fordism’ which affect all sexes and classes (2006: 9).

‘Stevedore, dockworker, docker, dock labourer, wharfie and longshoreman’ – as we drove into the docks John explained that, depending on the country, these were the various maritime industry titles given to men involved in the loading and unloading of ships. He added that in Ireland the stevedore is the name given to the person charged with the loading and unloading of cargo, while the docker or dockworker is an
employee of a stevedoring company and carries out the labour.  

Up until the early twentieth century, specialised crews of dockers called ‘hobblers’ would race out in boats to the incoming ship and the first man on board boat would win the right to negotiate a rate with the captain for discharging the ship (O’Carroll and Bennet 2017). The hobblers evolved into master stevedores, or middlemen, who leased the dock labour to the ship owner. Over time, the importers took over responsibility for arranging the discharging of the ship in advance, thus losing the need for hobblers to race out to the incoming ships.

Stevedores tended to hail from influential local families, although John was an exception to this tradition – he joined forces in 1992 with a man from a well-known local stevedoring family to establish Dublin Stevedores Limited.  

Along with Portroe Stevedores, John’s company is the only remaining independent deep-sea, freelance, stevedoring service in Ireland, which provides bulk cargo and container services for any global company. Marine Terminals Limited is, by contrast, a multi-national company providing a container service exclusively for its own shipping lines. Dublin Stevedores Limited, like the other operational stevedoring companies on the docks, lease various berths from Dublin Port Company (the berths are in two bulk terminals and three container terminals). John informed me that: ‘We are all in competition for the same services and the same cargoes, which is healthy’. When I first travelled to the docks with John in autumn 2008, his company was operating from the South Coal Quay where all his cranes were based. Geographically, this quay sits on the Southside of the docks, across the Liffey from the main activity of the Port Operations Centre and the ferry terminals (Figure 2.4).
John laid claim to the title of stevedore with territorial pride, telling me that his company was also the only indigenous stevedoring community left on the quays of Dublin Port. Like many of his employees, he was a fourth-generation Dublin dockworker: his grandfather had been a dock labour supervisor; and his brother, son in law, nephew and three daughters were all employed in his company. This level of family involvement was now unusual as mechanisation and transnational shipping had contributed to a sharp decline in dock working numbers from local communities since the 1950s.\textsuperscript{12} The sense of importance which John attached to running a family business which employed local labour was in keeping with an era when docking was a family profession, passed from generation to generation, with stevedores recruiting (usually men) from within their own families (O’Carroll 2006; Bennet and O’Carroll 2017).
John’s bifurcated class identity may arguably contribute to the sense of importance he attaches to his family-run company on the docks. As a stevedore he is now in a position of power; nonetheless, the docks are a direct link to the working-class neighbourhood of his formative childhood, a time when daily competition for dock work was fierce. For John the contemporary docks remain competitive and he views drawing on traditional notions of local identity, such as ‘family run business’, as a means of empowering his company in the marketplace. What could be perceived as John’s maintenance of an insular community actually has its roots globally in the need for dockers and stevedores to defend their local labour markets (Morgan 1993; O’Carroll 2006; Bennett and O’Carroll 2017). Definitions of local identity therefore remain significant in lived culture and, moreover, play a vital role ‘in shaping the political views of those who live in traditional working-class neighbourhoods’ (Morgan 2003: 523).

**From Boom to Bust on the Dublin Docks**

John Nolan traced a working lineage on the docks to the early 1800s and claimed that, ‘back then there were a far greater number of Dubliners living within the dock wards of the North Wall, Trinity and the South Docks’. Oral history played an important part in John’s recounting of dock lore, and other oral accounts concur with his stories. For example, Kearnes (1996) writes of ‘a world of masts, funnels, towering cranes, barges, carts, horses . . . a hundred sounds becoming a symphony of dockland’.13

John vividly recalled the pig farms that were located in the middle of the residential communities of his childhood in the 1960s. He could also remember from that time thousands of dockers at the deep-sea end of the port and lamented that only forty dockers remained on the docks today, a dozen of whom were working for his company. From the late 1990s until 2008 when I arrived onto the South Coal Quay, Dublin
Stevedores Limited was primarily unloading dry cargo such as eco-cement and pet coke (a fuel used in the production of cement). Both of these cargos were in heavy demand in Ireland during this period, the so called ‘Celtic Tiger’. With the deepening of the global financial crisis in 2008, the Irish property bubble burst and the resulting collapse of the banking and property sectors led to a contraction in the wider economy and an accompanying virtual standstill in the construction industry. As the majority of construction materials are imported through Dublin Port, the rise and fall of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ had a tangible impact on John’s business. A handful of large cargo ship deliveries were arriving from abroad annually, compared to the weekly shipments at the height of the building boom.

For Kitchin et al (2012), ‘the follies, excess, gluttony, greed, defaults, bankruptcies, repossessions, and bail-outs which have marked Irish life in the past two decades reflect simply the cultural flotsam and jetsam of a classic crisis of over accumulation’ (2012: 1320). The neoliberal policies, which resulted in the property boom and its subsequent implosion, had the effect of balancing out an over-accumulation and excess. For John, in practical terms, this meant that stevedoring activity had dramatically slowed down. ‘We have lost 80 per cent of our trade and we’re trying to keep the crew, many of whom have been with us for over thirty years’, he told me. Keeping the crew involved a creative strategy of everything from shorter working weeks to creating maintenance work on the South Coal Quay that could be done during ‘downtime’ between cargo arrivals. In addition, John was hiring his employees out to other stevedoring companies, ‘the opposition,’ on contract.

The frequency of cargo arrivals was, then, poignantly emblematic of the changing fortunes of the Irish economy in recent years, and the South Coal Quay was,
serendipitously, a rich site for exploration. I had met John at a vulnerable and challenging time in his professional life. Whilst he comfortably inhabited the position of power entailed in being Director of Operations of his own company on the docks, it is conceivable that I may not have had such easy access to him or his company during the height of the much busier ‘Celtic Tiger’ era.

Solidarity Amongst Dublin’s Dockworkers

A year later, in September 2009, John phone me to say that his company was unloading a ship on the south coal quay and that it would be a rare opportunity in the current environment to photograph a busy ship. As I made my way, while turning off the roundabout onto Pigeon House Road, I glimpsed a small group of men picketing outside Marine Terminals Limited entrance gates. Placards hinted at their grievances: ‘The Right to Work is the Right to Dignity’; ‘Support Dublin Port Workers’. A truck driver honked and the picketing men cheered. Marine Terminals Limited, the largest and most lucrative of the three stevedoring companies in Dublin Port, had been taken over by the multi-billion pound UK company Peel Ports. MTL dockers, crane drivers and port operatives were in the middle of what would end up being an eight-month strike disputing the new management’s compulsory redundancies, reduced pay and less favourable conditions. Peel Ports responded by bringing over their UK employees. Employees who chose not to strike were subjected to a bitter ‘name and shame’ campaign by a minority of the strikers and supporters.

Dublin’s dockers, renowned for their trade union militancy, had adopted a ‘one out, all out’ approach which was born of historical duress and a need to protect conditions ‘in an industry subject to the vagaries of casual engagement and the fluctuation of trade’ (Turnbull cited in O’Carroll 2006: 52). The strike, led by members of the trade union
SIPTU, had been largely overshadowed in the media due to a concurrent strike by electricians, and despite my on-going research on the quays, I kept my camera out of sight. Blithely snapping at the picketing men would have been an exploitation of their situation and a replication of what Back (2007) identifies as the ‘intrusive empiricism’ of media discourse. Back instead appeals to researchers to place individual life stories within a larger social and historical context. Although Dublin Stevedores Ltd had not been directly affected by Peel Ports’ attempts to row back the hard-earned improvements in conditions and pay for dockers, it was easy to empathise with John Nolan’s position when he later lamented to me about what was occurring with MTL:

> The stevedores are the people working the quays. They are the ones that know the Port. The very people who built the port and worked it all their lives have been let down. We say that Dublin Port is a site of heritage. Well, this would be like throwing farmers off their land and bringing in outsiders to do everything. That’s what has happened in Dublin Port. So there’s a lot of anger.

(John Nolan, from fieldnotes, 17 June 2014)

In *Port Cities and Global Legacies*, Alice Mah interviewed Seaforth dockers in Liverpool in 2013 after Peel Ports had been recently named ‘International Port Authority of the Year’ by the global industry journal *Containerisation International*. They echoed the sentiments expressed by John:

> Peel are ruthless and they are meant to be the Port Authority setting the standard across the whole of this complex. They were awarded the world port of the year 2012. It just beggars belief. How much money did they pay for that? You can’t even get a hard hat off them. It just beggars belief that they got that . . . you look at the conditions of the plants, the infrastructure, the conditions of the way they treat the labour force. The remuneration, the pay, pensions, sickness, and all of this, it’s far, far worse — you compare it in the world.

(Seaforth docker interviewed 8 February 2013 in Mah 2017: 68)

Like the Seaforth dockers, John’s anger was born of a personal and historical solidarity with the striking men and it was shared by many of the dockers and stevedores in
Dublin Port, alongside the local residents who had been the traditional suppliers of labour for MTL. A collective memory of the volatility of dock labour drove this solidarity. Turnbull has argued that ‘dockers’ work and social environments’ were traditionally ‘complementary’, something which created ‘a high degree of solidarity and a pattern of norms and obligations which gave psychological comfort and support to dockers during periods of unemployment and distress’ (1992: 308).

The tendency towards valorising a former way of life on Dublin’s docks has already been identified in this chapter. The formerly strong, working culture on the docks emerged at a time when local labour markets needed to defend themselves in the face of globalisation (Morgan 1993; O’Carroll 2006; O’Carroll and Bennet 2017). Despite the transformations in working life, definitions of local identity continued to have personal significance to John and the other dockers working in this traditionally working-class community. A multi-national UK company, with no former attachment to the docks or locality, had swiftly moved in and dismantled the conditions that had been negotiated by the dockworker unions over the previous three decades. Turnbull’s signalling of the fragile nature of dock-work translated pertinently into this contemporary situation. As he warned:

Dock work is once more insecure, yet now it is without the positive attributes of work, family and community that once made dock work attractive and provided a measure of support and solidarity. The likelihood is that today’s dockers will be as vulnerable, if not more so, than those in the past, particularly if dockland employers are successful in employing non-unionised labour. 

(1992: 52)

As chapter three explores, one of the unsettling consequences of non-unionised labour has been the continued, rapid global expansion of an insecure, poorly paid ‘industrial labour pool’ (Roberts 2012).
In contrast to the insecurities of the current, fluctuating, economic environment, John viewed the past as a repository of nostalgic memory and secure identity: a safe sanctuary in fluctuating times. As a newcomer to a captivating, complex and potentially dangerous fieldsite space, it was initially practical to rely on John’s self-assured knowledge of the docks. I was happy to trust his guidance on the quays, not only because he clearly knew what he was about, but also because the confidence with which he claimed his territory engendered a reciprocal confidence in me. This was the beginning of a process of negotiating permission and trust within our relationship. A reciprocal friendship was predicated on a practitioner’s curiosity in documenting working dock life alongside a gatekeeper’s pride in sharing an ordinarily inaccessible world.

Whilst there was no deliberate connivance or even clarity as to where the exploration might lead, the process of building trust, even at that stage, was vital in order to establish a position from which to communicate within the project (Grimshaw 2005). In those early days I allowed John to ‘take me under his wing’ because of a need to feel safe. In the longer term, this would prove to be a secure position from which to take off and develop the project. I was given access, not only to the field site and to the other social actors, but also to John’s knowledge. Through critical reflection on the encounters with John, and subsequently the other social actors, I have been able to claim a subjective authorial voice within the thesis, as well as in the documentary installation and films. This process has been made possible by time and absence from the field site. My friendship with gatekeeper John Nolan opened the window onto the world of the port and allowed me to begin to understand aspects of historical and contemporary working life on the South Coal Quay and the wider space of Dublin’s docks. As the next sections details, John Nolan was not my only gatekeeper. A true reflection of the
diversity on the docks required expanding the field site to incorporate more of the many constituencies on Dublin’s port.

The Port Operations Centre

On a blustery, February morning in 2010, I turned onto Alexander Road, the long, gaping, container and tank-lined corridor that slices through the centre of Dublin Port. The headlights of a stream of bulky trucks and compact, container lorries perforate the darkness. A tarpaulin, stretched over an unnamed truck of goods in transit, flapped in the wind, as small fragments of loose dry cement flew from the bucket underneath. I always drive with extra mindfulness along this road – the echoing concrete surface, the industrial anonymity and the briskness of the trucks shuttling goods in and out of Ireland, combine to turn it into an unsettling no man’s land.

I was on my way to the Port Operations Centre, which stands prominently in the heart of Dublin Port, directly opposite the South Coal Quay on the North side of the river where the early stages of the project were located. These two spaces on either side of the Liffey perform different functions, and yet they are part of a ‘functional ensemble’ (Sekula 1995) within which the ship is embedded; she arrives into port with goods, the container units from her are lifted onto lorries or the cargo is unloaded into trucks, and the commodities are then shuttled around Ireland.

At the entrance to the Port Operations centre, I was faced with a steel security gate and an intercom system, which does not respond when I pressed it. Eventually, the gate opened for a Harbour Police jeep behind me, and the guard inside the jeep signalled me to go on in. In front of us sat the clearly signed, compact, rectangular three-story Port Operations Centre, occupying a key vantage point on the edge of the Liffey from where
marine traffic in and out of the port is managed. The entrance to the building consisted of a second layer of security, which involved waiting in a claustrophobic reception cabin while a security camera scans my face. I shuffled, a little exposed, my heavy tripod and camera bag over my shoulder. When an unfamiliar security guard behind glass asked what my business was, I responded that I was meeting with Fergus Britten, the assistant Harbour Master, to film the Vehicle Traffic Management. By this stage, Paddy Rooney, a Harbour Policeman who had previously guided me around the port in his jeep, came into the reception and happily broke the officialdom of the experience with his usual cheeky, warm smile: ‘the security has become very tight in the last couple of years; there are all these gates’. Standing in the reception of the Port Operations Centre, which monitors the movement of capital and people through Dublin Port, security is clearly crucial but sometimes alienating. The face-to-face contact with Paddy transformed the situation, creating a sense of possibility rather than defensiveness or fear. Atkinson and Hammersley remind the practitioner that marginality can engender a sense of insecurity due to the stress of occupying two worlds: that of research and that of participation (2007:89). Paddy’s humour and my reciprocation of the warmth softened the edges around the scrutiny. ‘They have a kind of a nickname for me down round here: the sniffer. I am always there when things happen’, he told me, not for the first time.

Fergus Britten was based on the top floor of the Port Operations Centre along with David Dignam, the Harbour Master. They were both accustomed to assisting television documentary and news crews, which, along with a recommendation from John Nolan, expedited the initial process of gaining access. In addition, Fergus’s completion of a Master’s Degree as a mature student made him amenable to and appreciative of the project. Like John Nolan, Fergus adopted dual roles: a gatekeeper giving me privileged
access to a marine community, and an ‘encultured informant’ freely sharing his extensive knowledge and experience of life in port operations (Spradley 1979; O Reilly 2009). These two gatekeepers managed relatively discrete domains that are nonetheless linked and interdependent: John oversees the loading and unloading of ships and Fergus (along with the Harbour Master) oversees the safe arrival and departure of these same ships. As a gatekeeper, Fergus’s on-going encouragement opened up the project and facilitated access to a second, relatively self-contained community within the larger port space. This community, based in the Port Operations Centre, included the Marine Operatives Service operators, and the Harbour Masters themselves. Without the promise of access, I may not have followed this path on the research journey.

The security guard in reception sent me up to the top floor to meet Fergus in Vehicle Traffic Management, a space which resembles the control centre of an airport; wall to wall glazing affords a spectacular view out to Dublin Bay and radio messages intermittently break the otherwise low-key atmosphere. There was an ordered and reassuring calm in the communication between the men here at base and the pilots and captains out at sea – it was a sanctuary that belied the loud, busy activity of the rest of the port. All vessel movements are controlled by the Port’s Radio Operation in here – it co-ordinates the timing of each vessel’s entry to and exit from the port utilising Vehicle Traffic Service (VTS) radar and Vessel Management Information systems. Accordingly, the dress code fell into the stereotypical hierarchical categorisation of white collar and blue-collar workers: management in their white shirts or suits; and manual labourers in overalls. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) observe that ‘Clothes and uniforms become important devices not only to codify hierarchies but also as styles of masculinities’ (2003: 36). In contrast to the dusty docks, the formal attire had the effect
of turning the top floor of Port Operations Centre into a ‘serious’ space where the business of managing port traffic takes precedence over individuality.

Over the course of the research, the camera came to define my identity for seafarers on the visiting ships and dockworkers on land. I was clearly visible to all the crew members, such as Tomo, John or Dick, as they guided me around the ship. Dressed in fluorescent work gear, I was always introduced as a photographer. The vital early phase of gleaning knowledge in the field and coming to know John Nolan and Fergus Britten and their contrasting worlds afforded me an initial confidence. I was excited at the prospect of returning over time to explore these interdependent yet unique spaces and their people. Part II therefore now unravels the processes, productive failures and successes of visualising different constituencies on Dublin’s Docks, a critical journey which serves to disrupt the notion of friction-free capitalism.
Part II: Documentary Photography Methods

Negotiating Trust with my Participants on the South Coal Quay

But the term ‘negotiation’ also refers to the much more wide-ranging and subtle process of manoeuvring oneself into a position from which the necessary data can be collected. Patience and diplomacy are often at a premium here, though sometimes boldness is also required.

(Atkinson and Hammersley 2007: 62)

On a bright autumn morning in 2010, I made my way towards the South Coal Quay along the Pigeon House Road. A scape of smokestacks, gantry cranes, metal scrapyards and banks of ship containers lined the route (Figure 2.5). As I turned off the rough urban road, an industrial no man’s land, and into the restricted South Coal Quay, an industrious and sooty mise-en-scène revealed itself; roaring trucks rumbled by, a whizzing crane unloaded cargo from a substantial ship docked on the quay wall (Figure 2.6), and men with apparel of fluorescent gear and hard hats imbued the space with a sense of purpose (Figure 2.7). The noisy activities were set against a backdrop of ships slowly manoeuvring their way in and out of the port. This view differed greatly from
my first glimpse of the Dublin Docks from the deck of an Irish ferry ship twelve years previously.

Figure 2.6: ‘Unloading on The South Coal Quay’, Moira Sweeney, Dublin 2010

Figure 2.7: ‘Ship Maintenance on The South Coal Quay’, Moira Sweeney, Dublin 2010
Up to our left, sat a Portacabin on stilts, accessible via steep, metal steps. Inside, several dockworkers, in their mid-thirties to mid-sixties, were sitting around a table, drinking tea, eating homemade sandwiches out of aluminium foil wrapping and reading newspapers. Although they were all dressed in outdoor work-attire and high-viz jackets this private communal space seemed to provide a clean refuge away from the grimy work a stone’s throw away. John, whose presence lessened my initial sense of vulnerability in the unfamiliar environment, introduced me as a researcher and photographer and asked his brother Tomo Nolan and the foreman Willie O Leary to help me out with my project on the South Coal Quay.

The roles John and I were playing in this enterprise had something in common, but I was now presented with a new group of potential informants, with whom trust and acceptance would have to be negotiated. Although there was no stills or film camera on that early encounter, Grimshaw and Ravetz assert that: ‘from the outset, filmmakers who work observationally are forced to confront issues about participation and power’ (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005: 6). As the men were at home in this cabin on the docks, I considered it my job to fit into their routines, on their territory. I hoped that through the process of building relationships, I could find a way to position myself so that I would be able to communicate visually what I was experiencing.

Grimshaw and Ravetz observe that the balance between participant and researcher is ‘embedded in the very fabric of any observational piece, providing its emotional undertow’ (2005: 8). In John’s presence, I did not have the full freedom to develop relationships or to observe the men. The imbalance was redressed when he left and my vulnerable status as an outsider became apparent; now I was able to earn the men’s trust.
on my own merits. Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that everyday sociability is one of the key ingredients in building trust with participants. As they write:

> The value of pure sociability should not be underestimated as a means of building trust. Indeed, the researcher must often try to find ways in which “normal” social intercourse can be established. This requires finding some neutral ground with participants where mundane small talk can take place. (2007: 70)

The dockworkers welcomed me into a traditionally male environment John vouched for me, while my gender and age made me appear non-threatening. I was younger than all but one of the men, but not so young that I could be treated lightly, and I had a professional aura that elicited a certain degree of respect, so my endeavours as a researcher were usually treated seriously. I was viewed as, on the whole, ‘harmless’: John’s ‘protectiveness’ and my status as a newcomer were probably as important as my gender in leading the dockworkers to that conclusion.

A constant theme running through the early methodological writings of anthropologists was that of women finding themselves barred from certain locales and confined to the ‘domestic world of fellow women, children or elderly people, and so on’ (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007:73). Fortunately, anthropological studies by women in predominantly male settings now range from Bonnie McElhinny’s (1994) *An economy of affect: Objectivity, masculinity and the gendering of police work* (1994) to Lori Kendall’s (2002) *Hanging Out in the Virtual: Masculinities and Relationships online*.

In my case, many years of producing and directing sports documentaries that focused on male GAA footballers have accustomed me to the complexities of negotiating one particular masculine culture and considerations of gender were not foremost in my mind during the early encounters on the docks. I experienced the insecurities arising from
being in an unfamiliar setting without the reassuring back up of a television crew complete with a detailed researcher, cameraman and soundman. A broadcasting sense of belonging, identity and security was replaced by playing it ‘by ear’ – a process which Atkinson and Hammersley identify as drawing on ‘native wit’ (2007: 41). The process of negotiating access to the dock site was then a pragmatic one requiring the adoption of ‘intra- and inter-personal resources and strategies that we all tend to develop dealing with everyday life’ (ibid.). Ultimately, I was at ease with, rather than threatened by, the men’s Dubliner banter, humour and camaraderie.

Between 2008 and 2013, I returned to the port some thirty times to spend full days recording working life and interviews with different constituents. In addition, on eight different occasions, I interviewed and filmed gatherings of the members of the Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society. I found that field relations improved as I became more physically immersed in the activities of the docks while seeking to gain photographic or filmic access to the different work environments, climbing up high rise cranes with crane drivers to gain a vantage point or travelling out to sea with pilots to understand their work more fully. The willingness to go to any lengths to understand the nature and conditions of my informants’ work may have gained me respect for ‘showing bottle’ (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007; Westmarland 2002). This was not, however, an attempt to show off, but a desire to ‘be there’, a gesture of empathy with my informants.

**Visualising Dockworker Tomo Nolan**

The East Toll Bridge crosses the River Liffey on the periphery of Dublin’s working docks. As the river spreads eastwards out to sea, the hum of activity only hints at the vital role Dublin Port plays in transporting commodities to and from Ireland. In late
2008, a few months after my first venture into the grime and dust of the South Coal Quay, Dublin Stevedores Limited crane operators were unloading the bulk commodity pep-coke from the hull of the ship the ‘Pacific Future’ with cranes and diggers (Figure 2.8).

![Figure 2.8: ‘Pacific Future’ by Moira Sweeney, South Coal Quay, Dublin, 2010](image)

Although the huge cargo ship was flying the Belize flag, she had been built in China, was being managed from London and was travelling the seas with a multi-national crew hailing from Russia, Lithuania and the Ukraine.\(^2^2\) Her sailing trail took in the ports of Gibraltar, St Paul in Malta, Virginia in the USA, Vera Cruz in Mexico, Hobart in Tasmania, Brisbane and Port Kembla in Australia, Sevastopol and Thisvi Port in Greece.\(^2^3\)

Tomo Nolan (John’s brother) met me at the Portacabin and we hung out there for a while, drinking tea, chatting and warming up. Tom still lived locally on Townsend Street where he and John had grown up. His children and grandchildren also lived on the same street, making his family seventh generation inner-city residents. We
eventually braved it down onto the quay and up onto the ship, where Tomo confidently guided me around the narrow perimeter of the ship’s huge metal hulk. Mindfully negotiating the space, I could see down into the ship’s deep hull from where the cranes were unloading the soot-black pep-coke into a conveyer system of trucks on the quay wall. Although it was noisy, dirty, potentially dangerous work, it was exhilarating to be so close to the heart of the activity.

Tomo spoke of the dangers of the unloading system and of the changes in the regularity of incoming cargo during his years working on the docks. He did not display any of the romanticism, which characterised John’s accounts of the docks. Tomo considered the docks to be dirty and the working hours to be ‘brutal’. He was not sure if he could take another bitterly cold winter outdoors. Despite John’s efforts to secure part-time work for his employees, the reality was that Tomo did not earn enough to make a living. The domains in which John and Tomo functioned on a day-to-day basis differed greatly and so, therefore, did their dock experiences: John was the employer, Tomo the dock working employee; John worked from an office, Tomo performed the physical labour of unloading pep-coke, cement and cars. Traces of weariness were visible on Tomo's face as he talked.

I was acutely aware that the docker, like the miner, ‘occupies a special place in western popular culture rising almost to the status of an icon’ (Lahiri-Dutt, MacIntyre 2001: 30). When analysing the culture of mining, Allen (1981) suggests that

Mining evokes popular images of hard unrefined men, distinct and separate from other workers, hewing in mysterious dungeons of coal: dirty, strange men, in some ways frightening and for this reason repellent, yet attractive because they are masculine and sensuous.

(cited in Lahiri-Dutt, MacIntyre 2001: 4)
Likewise, visually valorising masculinity on the docks was a danger from the outset. Shore notes that photographers often take pictures, with ‘mental models’ in their minds; these are built often ‘insight, conditioning, and comprehension of the world’ (2007: 117). The ongoing reflexive textual critique of my practice has helped to expose and redress any tendency to romanticise the participants.

Berger argued that the photographer ‘chooses the event’ she photographs and that this choice, a cultural construction, is an immediate ‘reading of the event’ before her eyes (Berger and Mohr 82: 92–93). Standing on a narrow walkway between ship and sea, two creative impulses merged; the desire to construct a portrait that reflected something of the nature of Tomo’s everyday work and the instinctive reliance on the habit of taking a photograph to create a sense of security in an unfamiliar space (Figure 2.9). In this sense, composing a photograph allowed me the chance to ‘take possession of a space’ in which I was ‘insecure’; the camera literally steadied me (Sontag 1977).
I recognise that there were additional technological, compositional and social modalities in operation at the site of production of the image (Rose 2012). Hovering on the narrow walkways of that enormous ship, I was firstly technologically aided by a professional digital SLR Fuji S5 camera with its pragmatic and flexible 24–70mm lens. This was the first time I used a digital SLR camera rather than my usual lightweight traditional rangefinder 35mm Leica M6 film camera and there were positive aesthetic and technical consequences to this choice. There is always a waiting period before developing colour slide film and the risk that something may not have worked out. Working with a DSLR camera liberates the photographer from this technological concern and allows for the immediate viewing and checking of imagery.

The second modality exercised in the photograph is compositional. Tomo is framed in the foreground of the crane grab unloading peep-coke, his arm leaning on the edge of the blackened metal wall of the ship hold. In the background, soot rises in a dust cloud as a result of the crane’s movement. This was an aesthetic and formal negotiation, which resulted in Tomo being situated and foregrounded in his working environment. The photographic shown here was selected from a dozen shots taken over a few minutes, each image depicting a different moment in the background activity (Figure 2.10–2.19).

This photographic series was choreographed rather than being purely spontaneous (Stallabrass 2007). As the frame by its very nature excludes more than it discloses, the camera could not fully render Tomo’s reality. I could have chosen to take close up shots of Tomo’s dirty fingernails or the heavy work boots he wears for protection. This image is therefore an interpretation of Tomo’s world, which was made possible by utilising selected aesthetic constructs (Purcell 2012). The aesthetic qualities of this photograph, such as the processes of composition, the use of light and colour and the selection of the
best frame are all personal choices, which together create a latent tension between personal taste and truth (Rose 2012; Sontag 1977; Wells 2015).

Figures 2.10–2.19: ‘Tomo Nolan Series’ by Moira Sweeney, South Coal Quay, Dublin 2008
The compositional and technological modes employed at the site of production of the image are further complicated by its social modality, in particular the two identities mobilised in its making. Tomo and I inhabited distinct and contrasting social identities. Tomo identified himself as a seventh generation docker from a local tight-knit working-class community; my identity was that of a photographer on a research journey (rather than a photo journalist looking for a ‘compelling newsworthy’ image).

Roberts argues that:

There can be no representation of class subjectivities without the photographer intervening in the process of the production of meaning. Whether you are studio-based or working with conventional documentary images then, work on the representation of class cannot proceed without a recognition of those symbolic processes that shape and determine the construction of class identity. (2012)

In this regard, the image is a co-construction of Tomo’s classed and gendered identity. Tomo was on familiar territory on the docks and had made it clear that he did not enjoy the day-to-day work and hoped to retire. The image consequently attempted to reflect something of this tension: Tomo’s clothes, sooty face and confident placing of his arm on the hull of the ship all indicate a sense of his belonging to the labour site, while a discordance is created by his gazing off into the distance, away from it. Tomo adopted a pose, which I now interpret as a display of defiance and sombre resignation.

Barthes (1984) observed that the ‘portraitee adopts a pose which anticipates the representational image, and takes account of the fact that this piece of paper will outlast the actual person who is the subject of the portrait’ (cited in Wells 2015: 37). Tomo took partial ownership of the image and how he was represented. I reinforced his heroic stance through the use of a visual trick which allowed Tomo to look larger than life; he is positioned to take up almost half of the photographic frame size whilst the enormous industrial grab appears perspectively minuscule in the background. This is not the
deadpan portraiture of contemporary photography, where individuals are portrayed in a homogeneous series, centrally located as they stare straight into the lens (Stallabrass 2007). The image of Tomo is aligned instead with a trend in portraiture wherein the subject is situated at the heart of their work place. As detailed in chapter one, this tradition of unsentimental documentation of workers in their everyday lives can be traced back to the humanitarian photography of Lewis Hine in the early twentieth century.

Ironically, considering Tomo’s dislike of dock work, on his retirement he asked for a print of an image, which valorises and memorialises his time on the docks. Joanna Lowry observes that the specificity of the social context in which an image is created is crucial. As she writes, ‘the act of taking the photograph is a communicative act in itself which exposes the social dynamic through which identities (both of the photographer and the subject) are formed’ (2000: 13). It is possible that Tomo invested time with me that day in the trust that I would return the favour and provide him with a print. The knowledge of impending retirement may have actually informed his decision to adopt his defiant pose as a final reminder of his time at the docks. In this regard, we both reconciled ourselves to creating a lasting documentary image; there was a ‘clear dialogical constitution’ to this portrait (ibid.).

One of the photographs from the series of Tomo was selected for publication in an edition of The Irish Times newspaper as part of a review of Stevedoring Stories – an installation curated with the visual material of the research project. It was an unexpected although satisfying outcome, considering that the newspaper has a weekend readership of half a million people. The image remains accessible in the digital archive version of the paper and reaches many more millions with the simple utilisation of
search words Dublin, docks and photograph. For all the radical questioning of the truth-value of this documentary photograph, once the image left Tomo and me, it was used and appropriated in countless ways. Rosler confirms this contemporary reality when she writes that:

> Despite the radical questioning of the truth value of documentary, every day, countless times a day, documentary images, in the form of news photos and documentation, are produced and received in a great variety of forms and at a growing host of sites of reception.

(2000: 28)

Rubenstein and Sluis (2008) argue that ‘by taking on the appearance of a snapshot, the networked image is camouflaged as a non-political, non-significant and non-ideological site that does not merit textual analysis’ (2008: 23). Therefore, since global dissemination is a contemporary reality for any photographer, there is an ethical responsibility at the moment of constructing an image with curatorial intent. Harper (2003) offers insight into the ethical process of creating a documentary photograph in an ethnographic context when he recognises that, ‘visual information is selected and constructed in distinct ways’, and that this does not necessarily ‘destroy or diminish’ its value (ibid.: 241). Instead, he suggests that the process of careful construction and selection allows ‘the alert ethnographer’ to use imagery with ‘more caution and subtlety’ (ibid.). The positive consequence then of Tomo’s and my co-constructed ‘miniature of reality’ (Sontag 1977) has been its multiple uses; it has been embedded in the text of the project, curated for exhibition and disseminated through print and digital media.

It was a stark reminder however of how much everyone’s work life had changed when Tomo remarked that, ‘in the boom days, there would be three ship loads of import cars a day, compared to a shipload every ten days now’. I could only imagine how tedious and laborious it must have been to unload many hundreds of cars every day, going in
and out of the mouth of the ship three times a day, a workload thirty times greater than what they were now being called on to do. The current work was minimal compared to those heady Celtic Tiger days, and the dockworkers took whatever work there was.

Although the ports of many great maritime cities suffered ruination in the era of globalisation, Dublin’s port survived due to it being the key sea route for importing and exporting into and out of Ireland. Nonetheless, even this hub port was not immune to temporary decline for as Mah observes ‘shipping is intimately tied to the vicissitudes of global capitalism’ (2014: 2). Since the beginning of the global recession in 2008, maritime industries worldwide experienced their steepest downturn in trade of commodities in many decades (ibid.). The piecemeal work available to Tomo proved, to be inadequate to sustain him and his family; and he was to retire five years later in 2013 when I filmed him for the last time, telling me that he ‘couldn't support a family regardless of my brother John’s best efforts to spread the work around’.29 In my conversations with dockworkers it was rarely that anyone spoke of the harsh reality of labouring. It came then as something of a revelation when Tomo said that his decision to leave was made easier by the ‘cold weather looming large and the prospect of another bitter winter out on the docks’. Global forces, the macro-economic fluctuations that impacted on DSL, compounded the heavy burden of work on the quays.

Unlike his brother John, Tomo did not derive identity or long-term security from the docks, although he was much involved with the local youth club and requested the photographic print of his portrait for its walls.

**Visualising Solidarity with Dockworkers Willie O Leary and Dick Elliot**

In other photographs, I wanted to visualise a sense of my solidarity with the dockers and their demanding work conditions. For example, in *Ronnie, Willie and Dick*, Willie and
Dick are embedded within a larger frame which depicts the workplace – the work itself, the mechanical equipment and Ronnie Drew, a crane named affectionately after that late, celebrated local musician from the traditional folk group the Dubliners (Figure 2.20). As with the image of Tomo, there was a deliberate attempt to humanise the participants (Sekula 1977; Grimshaw 2005) by embedding them within the larger frame.

Willie and Dick, good friends who were both nearing retirement, had worked on the docks since they were young men and wore their joint total of eighty years of labour unpretentiously. As I stepped back to fill the frame with the crane, Dick, unprompted, placed his hand on Willie’s shoulder – an act of solidarity and friendship that
demonstrated shared experience. Willie and Dick adopted a powerful physical stance as they looked confrontationally into the lens, – a stance I now interpret as a form of taking ownership of their space and time on the docks (Figure 2.20). A palpable spirit of pride has allowed the men to create their own narrative of urban identity. Although the dockworker may have become an iconic symbol of urban identity in port cities (Mah 2014), it is memory that is central to how that identity is constructed (Olick and Robbins 1998). This photograph therefore can be read as one expression of urban identity, an identity forged from a shared sense of belonging on the docks born of a distinctive way of life and common struggles over many years.

The Ronnie Drew crane is included as a third ‘character’ in the background, towering over the two men and wearing what John had described as ‘his dirty grin’. The crane is representative of one of the most dramatic changes in labour practice on the docks in the last fifty years – the shift from manual labour to time saving mechanisation. Despite the conflict surrounding that process from the 1950s onwards, this and other items of modern machinery had allowed Willie and Dick many extra years of active labour. The crane was a ‘friend’ that had saved them from ‘broken backs’, but although there was a clear fondness for the ‘Ronnie Drew’ amongst the dockworkers, John associated it with a sense of power on the docks: ‘at €2 million this is the Ferrari of Liebherr cranes’. It dominates the port skyline and is capable of shifting nine thousand tonnes of cargo in a twelve-hour shift, something that would have taken a couple of weeks in the old days.

Whilst there was no interference Willie and Dick’s work, I did nonetheless have to contend with what Sontag identifies as the discomfort of the camera interfering with personal space (1977). With the interpersonal distance between us, only a limited and partial perspective could have been achieved in this photograph (Haraway 1991; Back
Barthes (1980) contended that the photograph has the power to think or be ‘pensive’: the photograph comes alive through the combined acts of the photographer thinking, the portraitee posing and the spectator responding reflectively. As a photographer, I captured the texture and feel of the site and provided a sense of the nature of the work, while the portraitees added to this, bringing an obvious familiarity of each other and the site to the photograph. In advance of the spectator’s response within a curated environment, I, the photographer, had already become the reflective spectator, bringing further layers of meaning through textual analysis. Lamentably, the photograph cannot describe the moving conversations I had that day and over the forthcoming years with Tomo, Dick and the other dockers. As filmmaker Kluge observes, he too is ‘always confronted with the problem that whatever I see does not actually contain these relationships’ (2012:46).

The portraits of Dick, Willie and Tomo were curated as part of the film installation *Stevedoring Stories* (Sweeney, 2012) reflected on in chapter three. When Dick came to see the installation, he was ‘chuffed’ with the photograph and curious about the overall exhibition: ‘You did all that yourself?’ This warm-hearted acknowledgment and understanding of the effort required in any creative venture resonates poignantly as a highlight of the research journey, principally because the sentiment was reciprocal. When Dick retired, he used the resulting freedom to begin attending adult literacy classes. We continued to meet for coffee, and he once described the immense fear, as well as joy and self-confidence, that came with finally learning to write. Like many dockworkers of his generation, Dick had left school at a very early stage. He has now begun to write down the story of his time on the docks.
Rouch (1975) and Stoller (1992) interpret lived experience as one’s implication in the life of others. The very act of making this image and disseminating it ethically, affirmed for me the tenderness of this involvement in the lives of others. McGrath further identifies the crucial value system required at the heart of our involvement with social actors when she writes that: ‘It is we ourselves who must be responsible and accountable, in the present, here and now’ (2007: 19). The image, an outcome of an encounter, displays what Adams (1989) termed ‘an affection for life’. He further identifies the bringing together of the three verities of representation – geography, autobiography and metaphor – as a means of strengthening the image and reinforcing this affection for life.

The reflexive unpacking of the complexity of the representational modalities at play, as well as the critical analysis of the precarity of dockers’ lives, incline towards including the images of Tomo, Willie and Dick here. An epistemological desire for self-reflexivity combined with a wish to tell what I know of Dick’s story guides this decision. As MacDougall notes: ‘reflexivity in fact involves putting representation into perspective as we practice it.’ (1998: 87). The reflective processes of making the photograph have therefore become equally about the ‘gathering’ and the ‘transformation into experience’ of a moment (Berger and Mohr 1982: 287). The photographs are not only a trace of the dockers in Dublin Port; they have become an expression of a fragile ‘mutual guarantee’ and ‘evidence of the social relations which made it possible’ (Azoulay 2008:127). Significantly, the critical recognition of the partial way in which I visually organised the world of the dockworkers prompted a more heightened awareness of my situatedness. I come away from the experience embracing Haraway’s humane appeal to the photographer:
All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability, but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view, even when the other is our own machinery.

(2002: 670)

There are clear limitations to how faithfully I was able see from a docker’s point of view. In part, this prompted my move to audio visually record the dockworkers, boatmen and port managers in their working lives, and eventually to allow their voices take centre-place in this documentation in the form of participatory interviews – a mode explored in Part III of this chapter. Significantly, the time spent coming to know the dockworkers and photographically record their work informed the methods adopted in the film documentation and which is now elaborated upon in Part III of this chapter.
Part III: Filmic Documentation

The Fluctuating Economic Environment on the Quays

Figure 2.21: ‘View onto Alexander Quay’, Moira Sweeney, 2012, Dublin Port

The vibrant hum and bustle of the Alexander Basin in Dublin Port was clearly audible and visible from where John Nolan and I sat in his impressive brand-new, second-floor office in June 2012 (Figure 2.21). Between 2010 and 2012, we had maintained regular contact, sometimes by phone, at other times over coffee. Dublin Stevedores Limited had undergone a number of changes in this time, the most apparent of which was the move to this smart, recently constructed two-story office building, strategically positioned in the heart of Dublin Port on the industrialised north bank of the river Liffey, across from the South Coal Quay. When I first encountered John in late 2008, DSL had experienced a steep slump directly linked to the Celtic Tiger’s sudden and catastrophic crash. According to John, the company had experienced a ‘significant improvement’, going from being ‘in chronic debt in 2009 . . . almost full circle back to 2001/2002 volumes’.31
This development reflected a nationally perceivable, albeit minimal, economic shift; the real sequential growth which had occurred in 2011 and 2012 and was being predicted to continue was viewed by some economists as an indication that Ireland was out of the recession (Davy 2010; Johns 2014; Barry 2014). Ó Riain however, has a more sobering view of the situation in Ireland at the time. He suggests that, despite five years of recession and austerity, the strain resulting from the banking and government debts had created a sluggish economy, with few hopeful signs of real growth:

The Irish public deficit came down in 2011 and 2012 even as the economy stagnated and the social costs and political tensions grew. Despite some indicators of stabilisation and perhaps even growth in the economy, it was clear that many years of high unemployment lay ahead. (2014: 2)

Despite the fluctuating economic environment, John was cautiously optimistic: ‘We are back to 40 per cent of the volumes that we were dealing with at the height of the boom’ and if ‘we could improve that further, we would be back to 2004 volumes’.32 He believed that DSL were not typical amongst businesses within the port because they imported goods such as construction materials and cars, which were more precariously linked to the rise and fall of the Irish economy. When I first met John in 2008 in the early days of a national economic struggle, he was desperately trying to retain his workers. He was proud of having achieved this, only losing Willie O Leary and Dick Elliot to retirement.

The company’s move from the dusty old office on Lower Grand Canal Road, where John and I had met four years earlier, contributed to a corresponding shift in the fieldsite of this thesis. Over 2012 and 2013, my focus moved from the people and activities of DSL on the South Coal Quay, across the Liffey, to the new base on Alexander Quay. Venturing out from the safe bastion of John’s company, I began to explore some of the
interconnected hubs of dock work on the North Quay, where DSL was now housed. Hence, the research was constructed from following one constituency and then allowing its connections to lead to other constituencies on the docks. The following sections unravel this filmic journey.

**Filmmaking as a Process of Discovery**

Observational cinema is based on the fundamental premise that films should arise out of the filmmaker’s intimate, sensitive and sympathetic relationship with his/her subjects – with the film-maker watching “as much as possible from the inside” (Young 1975: 76), rather operating in an aloof and detached manner. This sensitivity is reflected in the fact that the mandate for the film comes from the subjects. The film-maker does not impose direction, but instead allows the space for the film to be heavily shaped by its protagonists the film around preconceptions and what is already known, the film-maker approaches film-making as a process of discovery.

(Goggan 2005: 31)

Grimshaw and Ravetz’s (2009) critical appraisal of observational cinema offers a re-evaluation of its role as a methodological resource within research. This approach is defined by the adoption of a phenomenologically shaped viewpoint, one where the body (of the researcher as well as his/her participants) and the senses are embedded in the ethnographic process (ibid.). This re-evaluation of visual anthropology can be read against moves within film studies to acknowledge the role of the 'haptic' within cinema (Marks, 2000). Such a critical approach reflected my own desire to return to a more embodied form of filmmaking. The fact that I was divested of a full production crew and travelling light in terms of camera equipment (compared to the normal television film crew) facilitated an embodied engagement with the participants in the field. Grimshaw (2007), Rouch (1975) and the MacDougalls (2006) all share a commitment to embodied technology, including the use of minimal handheld equipment.
For a media practitioner and broadcaster, everyday research involves exploring novel, attention-grabbing techniques and templates with which to present narratives to large audiences. There would typically be a fast turnaround of ideas and stories in the form of a treatment and a scripted themed series. Moggan describes this process as one in which the film is constructed around ‘preconceptions’ (2005:31). Corner suggests that this is a process having purpose. As he writes:

> If we interpret ‘purposes’ broadly, they can be seen as a factor in production method (particularly the time spent on research and the working protocols for relating to, and ‘using’, participants) and also in mode of address and tone. ‘Purposes’ become an over-determining influence on ‘treatment’, producing potentially very different kinds of programme using the same broad formal repertoire and perhaps engaging with similar subject matter.

(2008 ibid.: 20)

The sense of purpose prevalent in broadcasting production contrasts strongly with the impulse at the core of an artistic practice; there is not the same demand to appeal to a wide audience in an ‘accessible’ format in the latter. Rather than write a conventional treatment I was keen to experiment, through adopting a less ‘purposeful’ approach, with how lived experience could be recorded in this dock location. Under such circumstances, an attempt at conventional treatment would have proved fruitless.

I was bolstered by a desire to render the rhythms of dock work and life visible and audible from a documentary perspective and a corresponding need to examine long-held broadcasting patterns of observation more closely. An uncertain and conflicted situation arose in my practice as I tried to straddle some of the tensions between the attention seeking methods of broadcast documentary and the poetics of observational cinema. According to Schon, practitioners can use rigorous reflection to ‘cope with the unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice’ (Schon, 1983: ix). Forewarned by MacDougall’s writings on the dangers of audio-visual conventions constantly weighing on us (2006), I consciously attempted to de-habituate myself from some of the accepted
norms and interpretations of broadcasting by developing a more authentic mode of looking.

**Amy Nolan: Adopting an Authentic Mode of Looking**

Figure 2.22: ‘Amy Unloading’, Screen shot from *Rhythms of a Port*, Dublin, 2014

Anatomy is not really destiny; destiny comes from what people make of anatomy.

(Stoller 1976: 37)

Sociological listening is needed today in order to admit the excluded, the looked past, to allow the “out of place” a sense of belonging … a form of active listening that challenges the listener’s preconceptions and position while at the same time it engages critically with the content of what is being said and heard.

(Back 2013: 23)

Amy Nolan, in her early twenties, was standing with her back to me in the corner of the Portacabin making tea, sheltered from a bitter wintery morning in early February 2012.

Her still-wet, long, jet-black hair stood out against her fluorescent jacket and protective white overall; she wore unlaced, heavy, black industrial work boots. An enthusiastic
photographer, Amy was the assistant forewoman on the site for the day. She offered me a cup of tea, which I accepted gratefully, not just because it was cold, even inside the cabin, but because it meant that we could sit down at the table and chat to break the ice. I was happy that we had some mutual territory to facilitate conversation; I chatted about how the research was going, she spoke about studying photography while at college in Limerick. She seemed to be reassured by the nature of my own project, as well as appreciative of the challenges in producing visual material for college. She was, fortunately, able to locate me within the ‘social landscape’ defined by her own experiences (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007: 63).

Despite her tough exterior in this all-male environment, there was a fragility to Amy, which prompted a protective feeling within me towards her. When studying sex segregation in the workplace in America, McElhinney (1994) observed that work spaces were ‘gendered not only by the numerical predominance of one sex within them, but also by the cultural interpretations of given types of work’. He suggests that:

> Men’s work is stereotypically associated with the outdoors, with strength and with highly technical skills (whether they be mechanical or scientific knowledge). It is perceived as heavy, dirty, dangerous and requiring creativity, intelligence, responsibility, authority and power.

(1994: 159)

McElhinney elaborates that by contrast women’s work tends to be viewed as ‘being indoors, lighter, cleaner, safer, repetitive, requiring dexterity rather than skill, having domestic associations’ (ibid.). The advantages of coming from a stevedoring family meant that Amy broke the mould of the ‘man’s world’ of the South Coal Quay: the invisible button that she had inherited from her father provided her with an opportunity on the docks.
Amy was not only the first woman I had encountered on the South Coal Quay, she was also the first person who was considerably younger than myself. The process of building a relationship with her therefore contrasted strongly with the earlier encounters with the dockworkers and crane drivers Dick Elliot, Willie O’Leary and Tomo Nolan, all of whom were older than me. There was a delicate balancing act involved in positioning myself as a filmmaker within this developing relationship. As had been the case with the other participants, a desire to work observationally enforced the need to deal sensitively and encouragingly with Amy (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2005). The strength of the observation process hinged on achieving a balance of power between myself as filmmaker and Amy as participant. This balance would carry though the whole process to the point where it would be ‘embedded in the very fabric’ of the piece (ibid.: 9). My identity in Amy’s eyes was, in part at least, that of a woman filmmaker, something that she understood; this may have engendered a degree of trust in her towards me and made her willing to let me film her. It was the ‘crease’ (Winston 2013:6) in which documentary exists that interested me here, the ethical space between total manipulation and unmediated observation. De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell (2013) suggest that the burden of responsibility for this ethical approach lies firmly with the ‘total filmmaker’. As they write: ‘An ethically sound approach is of high value in contemporary documentary filmmaking as interviewees or the general audience have become more aware of possible “manipulations” by the media’ (ibid.: 176).

A fine mist of black slag already coated the quay as Amy focused on unloading the cargo from a ship on the South Coal Quay (Figure 2.22). She was operating from within a small cabin on the quay wall, confidently communicating to a lorry driver through a signal system of beeps: one beep signalled to the driver to move in under a funnel full of slag; two beeps signalled him to stop so that she could lever open the funnel to unload a
portion of the cement into his lorry. Further beeps signalled the closing of the funnel and directed the lorry back out safely. Once full, each lorry transported the slag away from the quay to a French company further along the docks, where it was then chemically alchemised into cement. The whole process unfolded into a mesmerising and precise performance of repetitious and rhythmic sounds and movements. I instinctively relied on the deeply engrained documentary habit of capturing the activity in a variety of shots (long, mid and close-up) that later in the cutting room would be constructed into a visual micro-narrative which this clip demonstrates: [Film Clip 2:1 Amy Unloading 2’33”]

Like Amy, I was dressed in white overalls, hard-hat and a fluorescent safety jacket and if it were not for the camera, I looked like just any other dockworker. Not wishing to stand out, this engendered a level of comfort in me. Amy allowed me into the tiny cabin to see the world of the docks and activity from her point of view, a generous gesture that offered me a distinctive sensorial experience of ‘being there’ in the middle of an industrial process. When I struggled to capture an image of the lever Amy was using to control the unloading of the slag from the funnel, she voluntarily leaned away to allow me to move into her space and thus facilitate the shot.

Grimshaw and Ravetz posit that: ‘Observational cinema assumes the possibility that filmmaker and subject exist in a shared physical and imaginative space, one that encompasses but is not necessarily synonymous with the events that are filmed’ (2007: 7). There was an ongoing and unspoken negotiation between Amy and myself, a two way process whereby permission to film was subtly provided or withheld. An intersubjective space emerged between us – a silent temporal space that was akin to being in what Rouch termed a ‘ciné-trance’. 34 Rouch candidly elaborates on an intuitive
and ecstatic experience of capturing material that is synchronous with an event: ‘Filmmaking is for me to write with one’s eyes, one’s ears, with one’s body; it’s to enter into something . . . I am a ciné-Rouche in ciné-trance in the act of ciné-filming . . . It’s the joy of filming, the ‘ciné-plaisir’.\(^{35}\) Compared with the notion, dominant within broadcasting, that documentary involves neutral observation, I entered into a 'ciné-trance' and fully engaged with Amy while filming her work rituals. Filmmakers are often privy to moments like this that they wish to capture and then reconstruct for an audience. MacDougall understands this longing for haptic engagement when he observes that: ‘It seems an unattainable dream, and yet with a camera it is almost possible’ (2006: 27).

Following Benjamin’s appraisal of the mimetic, Taussig (1993) argued for a ‘renewed engagement with forms of knowledge that draw on the body and the senses’ (Grimshaw 2005: 26). Taussig suggested that mimetic practices be viewed as not only a means of knowledge production but as ‘highly charged, indeed magical, social practices’ (ibid.). Along with Taussig, Marks recognises that visuality is tactile – a way of knowing and seeing that moves beyond the literal senses of touch, smell, taste or hearing to a more haptic visuality (2000; 2002). The observational filming of Amy at work therefore became structured around four axes: the temporal, the spatial, the visual and the experiential. There was a desire to capture Amy’s concentration and focus, to depict the small cabin from within which she controlled things with such precision, and to reflect the rhythms, sounds and processes of her labour. This was an internal mimicry of Amy’s actions through the mimetic property of the filmic image.

It would have been impossible to gain such close access to Amy with a crew. Apart from the spatial considerations, there were the temporal factors; a crew is not generally
directed to spent time filming an individual who is not going to provide an interview and a compelling story. Precariously balanced between two forms of documentation – broadcast and ethnographic – a series of different shots were accumulated without interfering with Amy’s work. Rotha (1997) suggests that, being observant during the process of generating raw material is vital for the latter film processes of editing. As he writes:

Not until you come to cut do you realise the importance of correct analysis during camerawork and the essential need for preliminary observation. For unless your material has been understood from the inside, you cannot hope to bring it alive.

(cited in Barbash and Taylor 1997:123)

Experience has taught me that no amount of cutting can create movement or poetry where it has not been captured in the first instance. Being conscious at every stage of the filmmaking of the latter processes of cutting the material was therefore vital.

**Further Synchronous Filming Experiences**

After an hour I need to go back to the Portacabin and download the video files onto a drive. As it happens an hour is the maximum period of time I can sustain the level of concentration required in ‘being there’ with or ‘getting close to’ Amy. It is also freezing cold and not only is my body stiff from the position I took up when filming, but my fingers are numb. Amy and Shane join me in the Portacabin as everyone is rotating jobs to alleviate the monotony of any one job. We chat and Shane offers me a banana for lunch. Norman and Dave join us offer me one of their sandwiches. Amy hated seeing herself on film. She didn’t mind being filmed or if others viewed images of her but she couldn’t watch herself, telling me that ‘my favourite shot is the wide angle from behind’.

The Portacabin is a hub, a meeting place, a way of not just taking a break and warming up on a cold day but of socialising out here on this sooty quay. It has a humanising effect on everyone. Out on the quay, the dockers are preoccupied within their own worlds, focused on the task at hand. I stay and chat as the material downloads and realise that I would rather just hang out as well rather than do any more filming. I have a momentary sense of operating on a parallel plane, going with the flow of the activity, becoming in a sense one of the workers with my own task at hand. We agree that I will come back next week when a new ship comes in and spend another day hanging out with them and filming.

Extract from field diary, April 12 2012
I returned to hang out with and film Amy and the other dockworkers several times in February and March 2012. On one occasion, signing an indemnity form for Arklow Shipping, who owned the boats, highlighted the dangers and left me a little nervous; a fall into the hold of the ship a drop of about 60 feet, would have resulted in serious injury or fatality. Despite such a daunting prospect, I lay down along the black oily slipway, one arm firmly wrapped around the railings for security, and began filming the tiny Figures of Amy, Norman and Shane down below in the hold. Their sweeping activity was slow and repetitious, moving back and forth and across the ship’s floor, the huge grab ever present in the background lifting and unloading, occasionally banging on the side of the hold walls with a thunderous echo. I wanted to convey a sense of a tiny community of focused dockworkers working within the enormity of the ship, the mountain of eco cement behind them, the thirty-tonne grab lifting cargo close by and an open sky above them. The intimacy of the local contrasts with the immensity of the global transnational ship, as demonstrated in this clip. (Figure 2.23); [Clip 2.2: ‘Unloading the Hold’ 2’45”]

Figure 2.23: ‘Unloading the Hold’. Screen shot from Rhythms of a Port, Dublin, 2014
After about forty minutes, frozen and stiff, I unravelled myself and made my way, along with the second mate, to the narrow, dark cylinder, which descends into the bowels of the ship, where Amy, Norman and Shane were sweeping. We negotiated our way down the metal ladder, the engine throbbing deafeningly around us, my ears buzzing and my eyes stinging with the fine layers of cement in the air. There was a lot of hanging about and ‘bantering’, while waiting for the grab to lift more cement, before the sweeping of the ship floor could continue. Nonetheless, it was disciplined work, and whilst everyone seemed at ease with the thirty-tonne grab powering up and down close by, they were clearly attentive to its potential dangers.

The humdrum conversations, in between the performance of manual or mechanical work, were so normal that they functioned as a constant in the fluctuating economic environment. Basso (1990) observes that, ‘the discourse of any speech community will exhibit a fundamental characteristic – a genius, a spirit, an underlying personality – which is very much its own’ (cited in Desjarlais 1997: 41). The exchanges, which emerged during the hanging about were then both the ‘cornerstone of my research method and part and parcel of everyday life’ on the quay (Desjarlais 1997: 41). Listening to the conversations allowed for an understanding of the rhythms of the lives of the dockworkers. The listening was founded on an ethical sensitivity, and an ‘attention to the everyday’ which allowed for a more ‘intimate knowledge’ of this face-to-face community (Marcus 1998: 83).

Like the ongoing repetitious nature of loading and unloading, building up a collage of imagery and accompanying mechanised harmonies was a slow gradual process. This approach extended me beyond the routine boundaries of broadcasting; it involved patient perseverance as people opened up, listening to stories without being obtrusive or
directional, allowing each little insight to weave its way into a larger tapestry rather than forcing it. MacDougall offers an understanding of this process of responding to the ‘fleeting expressions’ of the animated world:

The filmmaker ‘makes’ nothing in the obvious sense but conducts an activity in conjunction with the living world. The pleasure of filming erodes the boundaries between filmmaker and subject, between the bodies of the filmmakers see and the images they make.

(2006: 27)

The reflexivity inherent in the act of such intimate filming allowed the footage to become a vital reference, to be drawn on for thick description in conjunction with log notes.

Over the course of generating filmic material, I attempted to position myself as a ‘novice’ (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007), a ‘respectful listener’ (Back 2007a) and a passionate observer. I began to unearth some of the hidden geographic spaces and sounds of the docks and the mechanised labour of my social actors from both land and sea. A slow familiarisation was taking place through the lens of a camera in this audio-visual mapping of the port. Stoller argues that the body has been an important ‘locus in the discourse of human sciences’ (Stoller 1997: xi–xvii). In this vein, I was employing observational ethnographic filmmaking methodologies, which privileged a somatic and intuitive approach. In being acutely aware of the ‘filming-body’ throughout the ethnographic process, I accumulated over this time ‘a series of perceptual clues’ (MacDougall 2006: 25) that allowed me to construct a filmic space analogous to that experienced in the everyday working life of the stevedores. MacDougall argues for a mode of looking which is fully attentive and which overcomes the fear of our own responses to what we see, hear and experience (2006).
I was only able to achieve such synchronous filming experiences as a consequence of the longer-term observational approach adopted on the docks. Long-term immersion facilitated the nurturing of mutual trust between some of the participants and myself. This in turn allowed an intimate access to the dockers’ working scenarios, which I was then able to use in the documentary installations and film, explored in the next chapter.

The desire to create a sense of ‘being there’ became my guiding concern in my filming. I gradually built up a collage of imagery and accompanying mechanised sonic harmonies to capture the mechanical rhythms associated with the loading and unloading of the ships. I ended up uncomfortably stiff from sitting tensely in one position, often dizzy from the manoeuvres with my ears throbbing from the cacophony of the dockside activity. I would return home from days spent on the docks covered in black soot or with eco cement in my ears and hair, exhausted from the concentrated effort of filming and of exercising the mindfulness required when faced with the ever present dangers of open dock machinery. Operating my camera whilst situated so physically close to my participant’s activity seemed to afford a level of transcendence. This was a highly pleasurable experience in which I sought to respond to the ‘fleeting expressions’ of this animated dockside world, achieving a degree of somatic intimacy with my subject through what MacDougall refers to as the ‘experiencing body of the filmmaker’ (2006: 27).

Furthermore, the way in which we frame our participants reveals our own sensibilities as filmmakers or authors; our focus communicates our own distinct way of seeing. MacDougall elaborates upon this distinctive mode of looking: ‘Framing people, object, and events with a camera is always “about” something. It is a way of pointing out, of describing, of judging. It domesticates and organizes vision. It both enlarges and diminishes’ (2006: 3–4). In the case of Amy, the footage reveals the incongruity of her
youth and femininity as a young woman working within a physically demanding, and predominantly male, work environment. Framing Amy in this way reveals a personal sensibility and distinctive mode of looking, one informed by my gender, class and positionality in this male dominated urban environment. Amy’s physical beauty seemed magnified by the filmic lens and had a powerful effect on me as I filmed, producing ‘a sensation of power and expectancy, a willing of others to be precisely what they are, and do precisely what they’re doing, as they appear in the viewfinder’ (ibid.: 28). Echoing Hoffman and Rouch (2013), McDougall suggests that this offers a form of ‘spiritual synchrony’ (ibid.). As explored in the next chapter, this poetic imagery provided me with many rich opportunities to bring my film sequences to life in the edit suite.

During my time with Amy, the camera was always visible and always significant. As Banks anticipates, this may become uncomfortable for both the researcher and the participant (2001). Nonetheless, when Amy decided to withdraw from the filmmaking process a few weeks later, stating that she didn’t want to do an interview, it came as a ‘rude surprise’ (Feldman et al. 2003: vii). I had not been attentive to any warning signs that Amy did not want to be interviewed and was reminded that participants may be ‘complex, frail, ethically ambiguous, contradictory and damaged’ (Back 2007: 209).

Moving from the tentative social relationship into a state of rejection, I discovered that the ethnographic journey is not just one of examining habits but one of needing to bridge hope and disappointment. Fortunately, the film material and fieldnotes are a lasting visual and textual record of those fragile moments when I had privileged access to Amy on the South Coal Quay. And although her subsequent shunning of me on a couple of occasions was temporarily distressing, it contributed to the decision to widen
the research site to other constituencies on the docks, a move that ultimately enriched the project.

**Participatory Interviews**

A further technological advantage of filming with a lightweight camera was that it offered the chance to record interviews on location between 2012 and 2013, as well as interacting freely with the participants rather than merely observing them. Over time, as I adjusted to the work of the dockworkers and gathered material of their daily rituals *in situ*, they allowed me to conduct informal and semi-structured interviews in different settings, usually in the familiarity of their own working environments where they were comfortable. A total of fifteen semi-structured interviews were organised around a series of loosely prearranged, open-ended questions that were unique to the experiences of each participant (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree 2006; Merriam 2009). Some of these interviews were recorded on camera, others were recorded on a Zoom audio recorder, and at times I took notes during or after spending a day filming actuality material and/or spending time with participants. The primary interview with each of my key participants – stevedore John Nolan, crane driver Dave Quinn, marine operatives Brian Latimore and John Murphy, retired dockworkers Declan Byrne, Alan Martin and Miley Walsh and port manager Eamonn O Reilly – lasted up to ninety minutes. Additional shorter, informal interviews in different locations of between fifteen and thirty minutes were also conducted with some of these key participants as well as with other retired dockworkers and their family members.

I employed the ‘participatory method’ of documentary filmmaking, whereby material on the lived experience of participants was augmented by interviews that added meaning to that material (Nichols 2001).³⁷ (I use the term participatory cautiously,
bearing in mind that being knowingly filmed does not equate to participating in a film (Chi, Vanstone and Winston 2017). In common with observational cinema, the participatory mode has antecedents in the discipline of anthropology, where researchers have traditionally been dependent on participant-observation. As already mentioned, the approach is exemplified in the work of ethnographic filmmakers such as Grimshaw (2007), Rouch (1975) and the MacDougalls (2006). As Nichols notes ‘being there’ involves participating and ‘being here’ calls for observation (2001: 266). The participant-observation mode created opportunities for creative engagement and collaboration between the participants of the documentary and myself. In a range of audio-visual outputs, this approach would allow the viewer to experience what being in these situations was like for me.

When selecting interviewees and subsequently interviewing them, Rothwell stresses the importance of seeking an approach which ‘compliments and supports the other directing choices’ (2013: 240). In keeping with the overall approach of this research, I viewed the selection and interviewing process as an exploratory adventure. I choose to interview dockworkers, stevedores, port managers and boatmen as I became acquainted with them while gathering actuality material.38 By contrast, in advance of the filming of a television programme, there is an onus on the production team to cast interviewees who are ‘good on camera’, implying that they perform well for an audience. As a filmmaker attempting to break this mould, I did not select participants for their potential as providers of useful ‘dramatic performances’, choosing instead to follow a more intuitive path. As I became acquainted with the men while filming their working lives, I proposed recording them telling me about their experiences on the docks. The men were already key presences in my filming and I had come to experience them as ‘active
participants’ and reliable witnesses, passionate about their everyday roles on the docks (Rothwell 2013: 240).

The interviews were staged insofar as they were framed within port settings, guided initially by the curiosity of my questions and dependent on a participant’s own personal motivation and willingness to tell their story (Figures 2.24–2.26). The question of
authenticity was less important than the opportunity afforded to the participants to express their own social experiences in a distinct way (Ouellette 2016).

Chi, Vanstone and Winston argue that,

All ‘stagings’ authentically, one way or another, reflect the person. Inauthentic behavior authentically reveals him or her as effectively as sincere behavior does. To lie or misrepresent one’s self, to fake or distort one’s identity is still performatively valid.

(2017: 106)

Consequently, what happened in front of the camera became ‘an index of the interaction’ between participants and myself (ibid.: 264). This interaction enabled me ‘challenge or catalyse whatever may be invisible or withheld’ (Rabiger 2009: 89).

As explored in further depth in chapter three, in parallel with filming the work rituals on the docks, over two years I further documented the activities and meetings of the members of the Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society – a group of former dockworkers dedicated to preserving their history through an online archive of photographs, on-going series of exhibitions and various speaker events. I tended to
interview them while they were doing things; hanging photographs for an exhibition, or recreating an old photograph of dockers by using the younger generations of the same families. I also arranged to record the key interviews in an unused room overlooking the docks in Dublin Port Centre. Although the retired dockworkers were slightly removed from the grime and dust of dock activity, the port nonetheless acted as a backdrop to their tellings (Figure 2.27). Interviewing participants in the various port or port-related settings provided visual and thematic consistency as well as continuity with the actuality material (Rothwell 2013).

Figure 2.27: Miley Walsh, Screenshot, ‘Keepers of the Port’, Moira Sweeney, 2017

Drawing on Dorothy Heathcote’s (1990) work, Rothwell concludes that the interviewee can be a participant, a guide, a demonstrator, an authority or a witness (2013). The interviewees were thus multi-functioning, easily slipping in and out of any one of these roles as they built up a picture of changes in working life on the docks. In order that the participants felt free enough to elaborate on experiences and stories that mattered to them, I adopted a combination of a semi-structured approach with a more open-ended one. Over time, I returned to particular participants (for example John Nolan, with
whom I had developed a close relationship) and they provided me with more in-depth information about the conflicts of working life on the docks. Incrementally, I was able to build a narrative from the socio-economic knowledge of their experiences working on Dublin’s docks that the interviewees provided.

Documentary filmmakers tend to use interviews to bring different accounts of events together into one carefully arranged and nuanced narrative. As Nichols notes: ‘The voice of the filmmaker emerges from the weave of contributing voices and the material brought into support what they say’ (2001: 122). I later transcribed all of the interviews to draw out key themes and it was this that allowed for the structuring of the documentary installations and film, as detailed in the next chapter. Winston (2013) suggests that Grierson’s ‘creative treatment of reality’ occurs in the creases between production and editing. Therefore, as a means of familiarising myself with the material, between 2012 and 2013, I edited a series of vignettes. In each of the vignettes, a distinct yet interconnected aspect of dock labour and experience is depicted and narrated by a participant of the study. The dock experiences are therefore depicted in a multitude of geographic port spaces. For example, as ships arrive into port from Dublin Bay, stevedore John Nolan reflects on his relationship with the port and the loss of a local community; as marine operatives meet an incoming ship and guide it into port, boatmen Tommy O Reilly, Brian Latimore, John Murphy explore issues of trust within their roles; and as port manager Charlie Murphy guides a busload of students around the port, CEO Eamonn O Reilly offers his personal reasoning for the expansion of the port in the Masterplan.

Giving voice to the participants in this manner is a classic documentary cinema trope; it allows the film to ‘speak’ through a combination of sounds and images to present a
coherent point of view or argument’ (Ouellette 2016: 107). The next section unravels the processes of depicting one of these constituencies: the marine operatives.

**Visualising Camaraderie at Sea**

We're the bread and butter of the port; we're the people that get the ships and bring them in. We're the core, it’s up to us to get the ships in and get the pilots aboard safely. It’s the core. Others within the port might dispute that, there'd be a bit of banter about that with the tugboat workers and the riverbank workers. We'll say that we are the core. That’s correct!

John Murphy, 15 March 2013

You have to have some experience to be here at sea. Navigation, ships moving, you can relate to what they are doing. You can relate to the master on the ship. They appreciate what you are saying, that you have knowledge of what they are talking about. You could never be in a position to tell a master of a ship what to do. He is the master of the ship, how he gets there is his problem, our job is to keep him clear of where we want to keep him clear of. He's on the bridge of the ship he knows best how his ship works. We'll only advise him.

Tommy O Reilly, Boatman, 10 March 2013

Looking out across Dublin Bay, from Sandymount strand on the south side or Howth head on the north side, ships stealthily glide in and out of the docks night and day, barely drawing attention to themselves in urban Dublin. I find the majestic elegance of the ship alluring. There is much more to her than immediately meets the eye, she fires the imagination to chart her journeys.

Extract from Field diary, 18 June 2017

In the spring of 2013, I met up with Brian Latimore and John Murphy, the Marine Operatives who were taking me out on the pilot boat *Cayman* to film with them for the day. Brian and John were charged with transporting the pilots out to Dublin Bay from where they safely guided cargo ships, unfamiliar with local waters, in and out of Port. Brian was operating as a boatman and John was the cox, and their daily schedule was coordinated through the Vehicle Traffic Management systems in the Port Operations Centre.
Despite the involvement of significant numbers of women in skilled marine activities like yachting, as with other outdoor work in Dublin Port the jobs of boatman or cox have traditionally been performed by men. Until recently, all exterior dock work was performed by men, while women tended to be involved in indoor administrative jobs. This is slowly changing; women are now visible outdoors, directing the traffic on and off cruise ships and operating as foremen or Health Officers.

I was first entrusted to Brian and John three years previously at sea in 2010, while they were on conservancy duties that included checking and cleaning the buoys at either side of the Burford Bank, a sandbank right at the entrance to Dublin Bay. Sea traffic must travel in the lanes, two on either side of the extensive bank, for incoming and outgoing vessels. The first experience of speeding out on a tiny pilot boat into Dublin Bay was exhilarating; the movement of this small vessel seemed to magnify the enormity of the slow bulks of incoming ships.

My love affair with the water and boats stretches back to a childhood spent swimming in and boating on Lough Erne and includes considerable experience as a captain’s first mate, a lifeguard and a sailor, on an array of boats. And so, although I am predisposed to some of the vagaries of the sea, that first time on the pilot boat was the closest I had ever come to the daunting steel walls of tankers, container ships and cargo vessels. On that first occasion, Brian and John assisted me in taking photographs of ships arriving into port, provided unfettered views as we circled the incoming Seashark from bow to stern and round again to bow, covering the full 360-degree sweep of the ship (Figures 2.28 –2.30).
The images of the *Seashark* had a filmic quality when viewed together; they tracked the movement of the ship through the water in a series of moments that build into a photographic sequence. The intention was to capture that sense of an unbounded horizon that has so occupied the imaginations of artists from Turner to Sekula. A natural progression was to document filmically the network of transnational shipping in the bay and deep into the Port. As my relationship with John and Brian developed, and as the following sections demonstrate, an aesthetic, filmic preoccupation with the ship was replaced by more immersed, ethnographic encounters with both Marine Operatives.

This later rendezvous, on a winter’s morning in 2013, was in the functional but warm kitchen, which was situated on the ground floor of the Port Operation Centre and doubled up as a communal lounge for the boatmen between trips out to sea. There was a very easy-going and relaxed atmosphere, which, in common with the VTS room on the top floor, belied the serious nature of the work. Brian and John were drinking tea and reading the paper and other boatmen drift in and out; they discarded their heavy outdoor coats and high viz jackets, made tea, spread their foil-wrapped homemade sandwiches out on the table to eat, washed dishes and engaged in light banter (Figure 2.31).

Figure 2.31: Marine Operatives Brian Latimer & John Murphy, Screenshot ‘Keepers of the Port’, 2013
The first ship of the day for Brian and John was sitting at anchorage, awaiting pilot guidance into port. There were mooring areas in the bay where ships parked, sometimes for days, waiting to be guided in or, after they had discharged their load, waiting to take on new cargo. I was extremely grateful for the men’s helpfulness on the trip out to sea in the five-seater Cayman; despite my normally steady sea legs, it proved to be a fairly rough experience. Strong north easterlies whip up the waves, causing them to pound the bow relentlessly. As my fieldnotes remind me, the boat hopped out of port:

I am sick as a dog on the first trip out on the boat this morning. Discomfort doesn’t sit easily with me when observing participants, particularly with a camera close by. I need to have a sense of the space and order of the activity and where I can fit into it. So I leave the camera alone under the seats on the pilot boat and just observe what they are doing. It gives me breathing space to adjust to the activity and let the nausea settle down.

Fieldnote 28 February 2013

There was no option but to embrace this embodied ‘experience in the field’ (Stoller 1997), my face drained of colour, the fluorescent glare of the compulsory high viz jacket heightening the nausea. ‘Abandoning ship’ and asking to be returned to base was not an option; the men were working to a port schedule, which I had to fit into it. So I sat tight all the way out on the first job of the day, trying to appreciate the sun rising towards us and tune out the very noisy engine. Past the Bailey Lighthouse at the tip of Howth Head, the Poolbeg Lighthouse, the North bull Lighthouse and the Kish right out into the Irish Sea – these ordinarily enchanting and salient points sped by in a blur.

Like the communal space back at base, on the boat there is calm and order in the face of the potential dangers. The boatmen travel out in twos; the first operates as a bayman, which literally means someone who works in a bay and helps the pilot embark and disembark from the ship, while the second operates as a cox, controlling the boat. The pilot makes it a team of three. The incoming ships wait at anchorage or are met en route; only qualified Dublin pilots familiar with the channels can guide them in and out. There
are captains on regular cross-channel ships, such as those of the Irish Ferries Company, whose familiarity with Dublin Port means that they have no difficulty negotiating the channel and can come and go without guidance. As the port has a very narrow traffic channel that presents hidden dangers to those unfamiliar with these waters, the pilots perform a vital role in guiding the captains of international ships into dock. Radio operator Kevin Byrne in VTS has described how communication issues arising with the captains of incoming ships could increase the danger to the boatmen and the pilot:

The captains can question you a couple of times. If you get someone that’s not receiving what you are telling them, you can check the radio vessel to see if they are not transmitting to you. It could be a language thing. It could be tiredness; he’s worn out and had a longer few days getting here; his brain is not functioning well and he’s not picking up things that are being transmitted to him.

Kevin Byrne, VTS Operator, 12 February 2013

Under such critical circumstances, mutual trust between the boatmen is paramount. For Brian and John, who had worked together for the greater part of their respective twenty and thirty years as employees of Dublin Port, mutual trust is a matter of life and death.
The following clip depicts the contrasting settings in which Brian and John men operate on a daily basis: the calm orderly interior kitchen setting, its dining table strewn with newspapers, biscuit packets and cups of tea; and the compact, noisier interior space of the boat taking them out to an incoming ship, on a slightly choppy sea. (Figure 2.32) [Clip 2.3: ‘Marine Operatives’: 1’11”]

Interviewing Brian and John in their familiar environments, surrounded by everyday noise and activity, provided a visual and acoustic sense of place. It allowed for a relaxed free-flowing conversation, which elicited insights into how the participants experience and remember their work. Through interweaving the rhythms of lived experience with interview, personal experience and bodily knowledge is translated to screen. Shared living experiences of danger at sea served to foster camaraderie and a sense of community between the two marine operatives. This is once again, a mimetic cinematic experience, where the knowledge and memory that these men hold in their bodies find an audio-visual means of expression. Marks suggests that when ‘verbal and visual representation is saturated, meanings seep into bodily and other dense, seemingly silent registers’ (2000: 5). In other words, whilst these images and sounds represent a sense of working life and place, as well as daily danger and the trust required and valued amongst the men, the unspoken and the invisible are also apparent. Viewing this construction of my experience of the participants’ experiences, there is also space for the viewer to reconstruct imaginatively their own sense of the mutual trust that exists between Brian and John in their daily working lives. I examine this idea of evoking the viewers’ experiences further in the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have selected instances from the observational film and photographic
documentation over a five-year period and recounted the processes of these chosen methods of visualisation. Merging fieldnotes, visual documentation and memory, I have crafted a reconstruction of experiences, observations and instances. As the site was not a ‘pre-given entity, not naturally bounded in time and space’, I have produced and understood it through ‘the interpretive frameworks of memory and reminiscence’ (Coffey 1999: 110). This temporal reconstruction relies then on intertextuality to conjure up the past in the present. This is a richer, thicker, more creative process, which combines observational techniques that find a home in both ethnography and documentary and allows for a greater depth to the research for both the written and film outputs. It is an approach that has facilitated the visualisation of different interdependent Dublin Port constituencies and how they each shape their urban identity in this transforming technological space.

I have drawn on the notes and diaries to develop the critical reflections and analysis for the film narration. This process allowed me to make links between otherwise latent connections in the participatory interviews and the observational material. This mindful and considered personal narrativising of the material generated contrasts with the more open-ended approach to the actual filmmaking. Chapman argues that introducing a personal understanding of the material in the form of narration – something which has become prevalent in documentary – creates greater definitional fluidity, as the traditional boundaries of objective/subjective become blurred (2009). Accordingly, the concept that the participants were ‘custodians’ or ‘keepers’ of the port only materialised during the editing and writing processes. The form and shape of the outputs of the research therefore revealed themselves to me over time, rather than fitting into a predetermined format. As detailed in chapter one, this process is greatly discouraged in broadcasting culture, which is limited financial and time-related considerations.
The encounters between 2008 and 2013 with the dockworkers of Dublin Stevedores Limited on the South Coal Quay and the Port Operations Centre were privileged, insofar that I was able to direct my gaze without obstruction. The men went out of their way to assist in the making of the images and in the interviews, allowing me onto the ships and also up into the cranes, all of which allowed for unimpeded views of their work with the cargo. The relationships with the participants formed slowly, for as McGrath reminds the researcher: ‘Relationships like histories and identities, are not there to be discovered; they have to be made’ (2007). Duneier however, in conversation with Back, forewarns researchers however that we will not form perfect relationships. In his words:

I am a firm believer that there is no right answer to the question of the ideal relationship between the subject and the informant or the collaborator or whatever you call the individual, the partner. I think there is no ideal relationship. I’ve seen fantastic ethnographic work come from people who do it in all different kinds of ways.

(2006: 6)

As the research developed, relationships ebbed, flowed and transformed, and on occasion tensions arose with participants, thus complicating the initial easy experience of dock life.

Alongside the developing relationships, I established a presence on the ships and on the quays. Between 2008 and 2013, I returned to the docks about forty times, on each occasion spending a full day along the Liffey attempting to capture a sense of the magnitude of the docks and their activity. I recorded the geography of this space in photographs and film sequences, which together depict an imposing industrial landscape and the workers therein: rubber-tyre gantry cranes in constant motion; heavy, dirty lorries transporting waste and cargo away from the South Coal Quay; and the anonymous stacks of coloured metal containers safe guarded with CCTV cameras and
reinforced wire fences. Whilst imagery has been consciously selected for critical reflection and inclusion in this text, the same imagery functions as a visual trail of the exploration of the South Coal Quay dock space. The process of generating photographs and film sequences in this site served then to sharpen my visual aesthetic whilst pausing ‘the flow of social action’ (Back 2009: 480).

Photographic and cinematic techniques allowed me to convert the experience of coming to know dockworkers and dock-work into images (Sontag 1977; Chapman 2008). The images use the language of appearances ‘not only to illustrate, but also to articulate a lived experience’ and the everyday (Berger and Mohr 82: 134). As a documentarist, adopting elements of ethnographic filmmaking, I had effectively constructed a space which I could traverse (Marcus 1986). From the outset, the imagery generated was not merely illustrative, but an integral part of researching this site. The depictions presented in this chapter were consciously generated ‘records of material reality’ (Collier and Collier 1986: 10) of a selected stevedore and dock-working constituency, which would be eventually curated in the form of installations and a film. Whilst unsure at that point of how the project would evolve, the original intention in generating the imagery was to allow audiences to ‘bear witness’ (Holliday 2004) to the lived experience of this constituency through eventual curation and dissemination, giving the images the potential to immortalise the dockworkers (McGrath 2007, Sontag 1997). Providentially this approach, albeit intuitive at the time, also enhanced the imagery’s potential not just for curation and dissemination, but, as Rose (2012) argues, for critical reading of pictorial representation in the thesis.

The imagery cannot claim to be a comprehensive documentation of the lives of selected dockworkers and stevedores; they are moments, instances, scenes. It cannot claim to
present empirical proof of a community, or even to be objective, as the images are informed by the modalities brought to bear at the site of their production (Rose 2012; Wells 2015). Rather they are mere traces of reality (Sontag 1977), remnants with multiple possibilities for interpretation; they are ‘fragments, uprooted and disembedded from time and place and they belong to no one’ (McGrath 2007: 2). Arguably, the imagery is an inherently reflexive reminder of this place, referring back to the moment of its creation, at the moment of encounter (MacDougall 2003). The making of the images established the importance of a series of encounters, ensuring that they were more than passing memories.

The photographic and cinematic methodologies discussed in this chapter were born of the search and productive tension of uncovering over time both what worked and what did not. The hybrid compositions and moving images generated were intended to sit not alone, as portraits or documents, but rather within the overall body of visual depictions of dock life. Blending observational methods from both ethnography and documentary proved to be a liberating approach. Fortunate enough to have been granted unprecedented access, these initial encounters allowed me to build up a valuable bank of knowledge, which contributed to the narrative of the evolving object of study. The imagery sits firmly within the tradition of observational documentary photography and film and I have reflected on this process within the historical and personal context of this discipline, whilst introducing a reflective ethnographic analysis.

This chapter has demonstrated therefore how photographic and filmic methods situated at the nexus of ethnography and documentary can facilitate a rich visualisation of some of the contours of working life in Dublin’s port. The immersive, longitudinal nature of the enquiry has helped me begin to undermine any notion that the port is a friction-free
setting. Such an approach has instead uncovered an interdependent web of transforming social relations wherein multiple contrasting voices and perceptions of work life and identity coexist in one space.

In the following chapter, I discuss how the observational material gathered is edited together with the participatory interview material for the purposes of the documentary installations and film. Furthermore, I will elaborate on how the narrativising of the audio-visual research material in the film outputs helps me to re-enforce the humanity and interdependent nature of working life in the Dublin port space.
Notes

1 Both ethnographers and documentary filmmakers tend to adopt the observational mode discussed in chapter one. Documentary filmmakers may differ from ethnographers when it comes to the output of the material; they ordinarily record material with a view to making a film, whereas ethnographers may record documentary material for research purposes only.

2 In ‘Cross-Cultural Filmmaking – A Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Videos’ Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor argue that:

The people you feature in your films are usually called ‘subjects’, but this can get a bit cumbersome after a while, so we also talk about “actors” and ‘characters’. These terms typically refer to fiction film actors, but they're pertinent for documentary too. ‘Actors’ points to the performative quality of documentary, in which social actors are for a time, for better or worse, also film actors: they act out their lives, more or less self-consciously, in front of your camera. ‘Characters’ hints at how you, the filmmaker, have to construct and develop your characters on the screen, and at how documentary conventions of character development over the course of a film are uncannily close to fictional ones.

(1997: 7)

3 According to the Grand Canal Working Group, the Grand Canal is the southernmost of a pair of canals that connect Dublin in the east of Ireland with the River Shannon in the west, via Tullamore and a number of other villages and towns. The main line of the Grand Canal is 131 km long with 43 locks, 5 of which are doubles. There are in addition three sea-locks linking the Grand Canal Basin in Ringsend with the tidal River Liffey. For further reading, see Ruth Delaney’s comprehensive The Grand Canal (1995).

4 According to O’Carroll (2006), Dublin had three dockland communities performing the work: Ringsend and City Quay on the Southside; and on the Northside, the inner-city area surrounding Sheriff Street.

5 John Nolan, from fieldnotes, 17 June 2014

6 ibid. I gleaned from John that this was once a locality of dockers and skilled labourers for port companies such as Hammond Lane, Tonge and Taggart Foundry and Paul and Vincent’s Fertiliser. The women tended to work for Fox’s Sweet Company and the many local Printers. John recalled that as a teenager he was involved in Save the Quay, a campaign formed in resistance to the demolition of tenements on City Quay where his father had grown up. Residents were sent out to Kimmage in South Dublin, resulting in a disruption of community: ‘We then became isolated with big office buildings instead of homes’. Lynsey Hanley affirms John’s view of the consequences of similar governmental policies in post-war England when she writes that: ‘the movement of working-class people from terraced streets or tenements to large scale estates will one day be accepted by historians as having been as traumatic and dispossessing as the Highland clearances’ (cited in Rogaly and Taylor 2009: ix).

7 Fleras and Dixon (2011) point out that US television shows such as Deadliest Catch, Ax Men and Ice Road Truckers praise masculine heroism and risk-taking while conveniently overlooking messier aspects such as job insecurity or safety.

8 See Charlie Walker and Steven Roberts’s excellent Masculinities, Labour and Neoliberalism (2018), for a comprehensive overview of the complexities of contemporary masculinities.

9 John Nolan, from fieldnotes, 17 June 2014

10 Aileen O’Carroll describes the early days of Dublin Port:

In the early days of Dublin Port sailors themselves did the job of unloading ships. In 1823 the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company was inaugurated. From that point onwards the replacement of sailing ships by steamships led to an increased need to reduce turnover time, and so specialised crews of dockers took over the task. The early history of docking is not documented, however docker lore has it that local crews (known as hobblera) would row out to the ships from the port. The first man onboard would be entitled to negotiate a rate for unloading the ship with the captain. With this practice, the hobblera became Master Stevedores, the middle men who leased the dockers’ labour to the ships’ owners (in other countries the word stevedore is synonymous with docker. In Ireland,
The Irish economic model, which prevailed between 1993 and 2007, was widely heralded as a beacon of what the deep liberalisation of a small open economy might deliver. Indeed, the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ years saw a dramatic transformation in the social and economic life of a country that had, until the start of the 1990s, been a relatively poor and peripheral state, perched on the edge of Europe, with a weak indigenous economy and a foreign direct investment (FDI) sector characterised by low-skilled, branch-plant manufacturing.

The effects of the international financial crisis, while practically ubiquitous, have been felt more strongly and deeply in Ireland than in many developed countries. As a small open economy, Ireland was always going to be exposed to fluctuations in the international markets (O’Hearn 1998; Jacobson et al 2006), but the extent of this exposure was significantly exacerbated by the homegrown inflation of a property bubble (O’Toole 2009). For further reading, see Moore (2008) and Kitchin et al (2012).

Neoliberal property policies during the Celtic Tiger benefited private interests and promoted the free market. There was minimal regulation and public goods were privatised while public housing disappeared. For Gleeson, Kitchen and O Callaghan ‘localism, clientelism and cronyism existed to varying degrees across the modes and scales of governance’ (2014: 1070).

John Nolan, from fieldnotes, 17 June 2014

Marine Terminals Limited (MTL) have changed owners on a number of occasions, before being taken over by the UK based Peel Ports group. Peel Ports are part of the much larger Peel Group. They are the second largest Port owners in the UK, but their main business interests are in property ownership and land speculation. For further details see: [http://www.cieranperry.ie/DublinPortWorkers%20.htm] [Accessed 15/7/2015].

The following is an extract from a report during the strike in the Irish Times on 3 September 2009:

SIPTU, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions officials and employees at a company involved in a strike at Dublin port have denied that they have harassed or intimidated staff who are continuing to work. Earlier this week Marine Terminals Limited secured an interim injunction preventing the unions, several of their officials and a number of former and current employees, from harassing staff after there had been an "unlawful escalation" of the strike. Today at the High Court the defendants, while accepting that there has been ‘an escalated progression of the dispute’, and that other workers have been described as ‘scabs’ denied that they have engaged in unlawful industrial action. They also denied that the term scab has been used in a threatening or intimidating manner. Since early July, about 50 port operatives at Marine Terminals, who are members of SIPTU, have been involved in a dispute with the company over redundancies and changes to workers’ terms
and conditions. On Tuesday Mr Justice Kevin Feeney granted Marine Terminals an interim injunction against SIPTU, ICTU and 10 named individuals. In its action the company claims the defendants tried to ‘coerce and intimidate’ employees who were not on strike to cease working, by calling them scabs, and engaging in a 'name and shame' campaign. Marcus Dowling BL for the company said that the actions against workers, who are also SIPTU members, were a breach of their constitutional right to earn a living. Under the terms of the order granted on Tuesday, the defendants and their agents cannot intimidate, harass or threaten any persons employed by the company who have continued to work during the strike. The company are further seeking orders to bring proceedings aimed at restraining the defendants from referring to any person at the firm who continued to work as being a scab, or from interfering with their constitutional rights to work. The company is also seeking orders prohibiting the defendants from distributing fliers or publishing personal details of, and from continuing a campaign of naming and shaming, those employees who continue to work.


21 The GAA is The Gaelic Athletic Association/Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, a 32-county sporting and cultural organisation that has a presence on all five continents. It is Ireland's largest sporting organisation and is celebrated as one of the great amateur sporting associations in the world today. The GAA is a volunteer led, community based organisation that promotes Gaelic games such as Hurling, Football, Handball and Rounders and works with sister organisations to promote Ladies Football and Camogie. It is part of the Irish consciousness and plays an influential role in Irish society that extends far beyond the basic aim of promoting Gaelic games. For further details, see http://www.gaa.ie/about-the-gaa/ [Accessed in April 2014].


23 ibid. The ‘Flags of Convenience’ system is addressed further in chapter three.

24 This quote is taken from Robert Cooper’s From Vérité to Virtual: Conversations On The Frontier Of Film And Anthropology (2007). The essay is available online at: <http://www.der.org/films/from-verite-to-virtual.html> [Accessed November 7th 2015].

25 In this noticeable trend, text or short captions occasionally accompany the images for clarification or contextualisation. Stallabrass (2007) wonders why this impassive trend is so popular when one considers its links to the much-maligned objectifying practices of colonial visual ethnography and the on going heavily criticised use of photography in surveillance, cataloguing and regulation.

26 The installation Stevedoring Stories was curated in a former cargo warehouse along the docks for key Dublin city cultural events such as Tall Ships 2012, PhotoIreland 2012 and Dublin Port Riverfest 2013.


28 Tomo Nolan, fieldnotes, 12 November 2008

29 Tomo Nolan, fieldnotes, 4 June 2013

30 Liebherr Container Cranes Ltd. is a County Kerry based company which makes professional equipment for container handling. At the Killarney plant in the south-west of Ireland, the company produces ship to shore container cranes, rubber-tyred and rail-mounted stacker cranes, and accessories. Liebherr container cranes are in use in over 100 ports and nearly 50 countries worldwide.

31 John Nolan, from fieldnotes, 12 June 2012

32 ibid.

33 I had adopted this approach throughout my early years as an experimental filmmaker.

34 Rouch elaborates here on the term ciné-trance:
For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it . . . it is a matter of training, mastering reflexes as would a gymnast. Thus instead of using the zoom, the cameraman-director can really get into the subject. Leading or following a dancer, priest, or craftsman, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, ‘ciné-trance’.

(1975: 39)

Rouch elaborated on the ciné-trance in an interview in French with Fulchignoni in 1981. Translated extracts can be found in MacDougall (2006).


The participatory mode of filmmaking is not to be confused with ‘participatory video’ or PV – a separate methodological paradigm where a community group use a range of video production and screening activities to drive an evolving process of exploration and dialogue on shared issues (Mitchell 2012). Moreover, I acknowledge a broad body of research in arts and socially engaged practice where the term participatory practice is used extensively. Participatory practice is a community-based method where the researcher engages in a collaborative manner with participants (Henderson, 2004; Finley 2008, Buckingham 2009 Couldry 2010; O’Neill, 2011; Shortt 2018). The participatory method of conducting interviews in documentary film has no specific link to this form of research, although there obviously is crossover in approach, such as the guiding desire to ethically give voice to a participant.

Grierson (1932-32) first used the term ‘actuality’ to describe authentic documentary material.

According to the UK body Port Skills and Safety there are more males than females currently employed within the Marine industry, but this is changing. <See http://www.portskillsandsafety.co.uk/skills/careers/industry_roles/marine_operative> [Accessed 15 April 2017].
Chapter 3: Meditating the Research through Site and Screen

Overview

Installations made with media screens are especially evocative in that as environmental, experiential sculptures, they stage temporal and spatialized encounters between subjects and technological objects, between bodies and screens.

(Mundloch 2010: xiii)

This chapter charts the ways in which the haptic sensibility of the documentary filmmaking and photography was carried over into the dissemination of the film and photographic content, and how I explored forms of exhibition other than those that I was used to as a broadcaster. I also examine the degree to which I was successful in depicting the rich tapestry of this transforming port scape, its various social actors – dockworkers, stevedores, marine operatives, port managers – and the ways in which these different constituencies shape and perform their urban identity. As with the fieldwork phase of the research, the installations and film evolved over time as opportunities for their circulation, on the docks and beyond, opened up. Guided by a desire to experiment with my film practice, the form and content of the artefacts is reflective of an organic process; each artefact builds upon the preceding work, evolving and expanding into more empathetic, richer screen representations of the participants, their concerns and their locale.

Chapter one has already framed the curatorial and representational strategies of artists whose work on ports informed the structuring of their installations. Practitioners like myself, who work with the moving image, are adopting documentary as a means of exploring contemporary reality in moving image works (Nash 2005; 2008). The last two decades in particular have witnessed a growth in single and expanded cinema within the gallery setting, with artists taking on material traditionally the territory of documentary
makers (Holland 2013). This is partially due to the narrowing of more experimental opportunities on television, with gallery spaces increasingly opening up to digital technologies. Site-specific installation, as a practice with a public intent, has the capacity to intervene in sites such as the Dublin docks and construct interactive spaces (in relation to audiences) through employing sensory means that break the mould of the white cube gallery. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, this mode of exhibition is in keeping with the embodied approach adopted in the documentary filming on the docks, whilst being responsive to the specifics of the site of my research and to my port participants.

Installation has numerous parallel histories, ‘each enacting a particular repertoire of concerns’, and there is a multitude of artworks using the term installation (Bishop 2007: 8). Within this multitude, a further diversity of influences – sometimes running concurrently – is discernable (ibid.). Similarly, there are many ways in which site-specific studies can function; they can draw attention to an overlooked aspect of a locale; dramatise historical or existing conditions; or ‘suggest expressive possibilities that are latent in interactions between artists and environments’ (Rugg 2010: xiii). I wanted, in the public dissemination of the research objects, to create a space or an occasion where different mediums interacted with each other so that something new altogether was generated. I hoped, as Campbell and Cramerotti propose, that viewers could make ‘connections from various juxtapositions’ (2013: 13).

The idea of exhibiting the filmic material from Dublin’s docks across more than one screen, in installation form and outside the traditional gallery space or cinema, was prompted by earlier experiments in the 1990s whilst I was a member of the avant-garde London Filmmakers Co-op. Housed in an ‘off the beaten track’ British Rail warehouse,
the Co-op brought together a workshop-based laboratory, cinema and distribution network. The coexistence under one roof of production and dissemination facilities meant that practice and theory constantly informed each other in a way that shaped radical and experimental ways of producing and presenting film. Making a disused warehouse the home of our artistic experiments reflected a larger paradigm shift, stretching back to the 1960s, in the types of spaces used for exhibiting art. This shift was characterised by a move away from ‘domestic-like structures to buildings associated with commerce and industry’ (Greenberg 1996: 350). Traces of the former railway occupants lingered both inside and outside the building and producing and exhibiting art film in this abandoned industrial space contributed to what Greenberg identifies as a powerful ‘visual and geographic claim for being different’ (ibid.: 352). Artist May Stevens (1980) suggests that the colonisation by artists of alternative spaces came to have an almost iconic status at that time. As she writes:

The alternate space is the equivalent of ‘dressing down’, wearing jeans and knowing what's in, intellectually, aesthetically, politically – in the sense of artworld politics. Money is nowhere to be seen . . . The dinginess or long climb on creaking stairs to the clean white space, the unexpected content: government office building, broken down loft, business district, etc., proves sincerity.

(cited in Nairne 1996: 271)

Despite the ‘energetic independence’ that drove this artists’ initiative, an eventual ‘institutionalization of dissent’ was unavoidable (Nairne 1996: 388); at the turn of the new millennium, the Co-op joined forces with a sister video collective and they were both rehoused in smarter, more habitable premises. The formative experiences in the London Filmmakers Co-op shaped my position as a practice led researcher, now working at the nexus of documentary and ethnography, and encouraged me to ‘think outside of the box’ for the dissemination of the research of this project.
As a practitioner, screen-mediated installations in particular offered a lively alternative way of amplifying the audio-visual experience I wanted to offer when compared with the two dimensional nature of the television or cinema screen (Bishop 2007). Informed by discourses of documentary, screen mediated installations and site-specific art, Part I of this chapter therefore provides a critical contextualisation of the curation of my documentary research material for the two installations *Stevedoring Stories* (Sweeney 2012) and *Rhythms of a Port* (Sweeney 2014). Both installations sit at the nexus between narrative cinema, which privileges time, and media installation, which tends to privilege space (Mundloch 2010). The discussion gives an account of the two installations, theoretically framing the rationale behind their creation. As installation art is viewed as a mode of production and display rather than a movement or style, it tends to be more concerned with the methods by which the work is installed (Kelly 2007). Methods are therefore core to a ‘work’s reflexive identity’, making it necessary to critically unravel the processes underpinning the structuring of the two documentary filmic and sensory environments in the first two parts of this chapter (ibid.).³

Part III identifies sequences from the film output of this research, *Keepers of the Port* (Sweeney 2017), with which to demonstrate how sociological knowledge of Dublin’s docks and global ports, alongside my field diaries, informed, illuminated and enriched the narrative of the film. In keeping with the ethnographic and sensuous description employed when discussing the methods in the field in chapter two, this chapter further employs ‘thick description’.⁴

As explained in chapter one, I take as my starting point in the research, the key geographic concept that place is not fixed (Massey 2005; Gieseking, Mangold, Katz, Saegert 2014; Ruddick 2014; Anderson 2015). Site-specific installation offered the
potential to draw attention to the different layers and meanings of this contemporary place, Dublin’s docks, whilst providing a way of being grounded in place. Echoing installation artist Miwon Kwon, I worked from the premise that ‘all stories are rooted in place’ (Gieseking, Mangold, Katz, Saegert, 2014: 4).
24 August 2012: ‘Stevedoring Stories’, CHQ, Dublin Tall Ships 2012: It’s open, the installation is open! Older men – seafarers and stevedores – come up to tell me their memories, as do daughters and granddaughters of dockers. They love to tell you that there was a docker or a stevedore in the family or that they have a story of their own. It’s as if they are part of the installation. The whole piece has become interactive, with people feeling compelled to tell their stories. I love that connection.

25 August 2012: Miley from the Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society came in to the installation and heard himself talking on one of the screens. ‘Yeah, that’s me’ he said, and started agreeing with what he was actually saying on the screen, adding to and elaborating on the stories. He pointed out, with childlike glee, who was driving the diggers and what types of cargo they were shifting. He asked me if I was happy and if I wanted to do any more filming and I responded that this was just a beginning. He echoed this sentiment: ‘It’s just the beginning for us too. As far as the dockworkers are concerned, our dream is to have support for a Docker Museum to honour the work before it fades out of memory.’ As we chatted about our different parallel paths I had the feeling of having gone from outsider on the docks to momentarily walking inside alongside a former dockworker.

Extracts from Field Diary, 24–25 August 2012
It was a sweltering August afternoon. Tens of thousands of people were wandering up and down the docks, vying to get close to the majestic Tall Ships, which had charted a course to Dublin from Chile, Mexico, Argentina, USA, Southern Europe and the Baltic countries (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.2; 3.3: CHQ Building Exterior and Interior, Tall Ships, Moira Sweeney, Dublin, 2012
In the heart of this buzzing throng, the Customs House Quay (CHQ) building took prominence with its spectacular glass walls (Figure 3.2). A steady flow of locals and visitors casually wandered in and out of the maritime-themed, visual art exhibitions, each housed inside in its own discrete space (Figure 3.3). A voice, in the distinct vernacular of inner-city Dublin, drifted out of the darkened room of the *Stevedoring Stories* installation (Sweeney 2012). An old wooden wine barrel stood upright by the glass entrance door to the artwork. Hanging on the left wall inside, one of three blackened walls, were four large photographic portraits of dockworkers and seafarers (Figure 3.4).

![Figure 3.4–3.6: The Installation *Stevedoring Stories*, Moira Sweeney, CHQ, Dublin 2012](image)

Eco-cement was scattered in a mound on the patchy, torn, black mat that is stuck to the dirty floor. Old wooden crates sat slanted against the wall as orange, apples and onions spill out from them (Figure 3.5). A young child ran around the open space while another
child ate one of the apples. A row of seats lined the ceiling-to-floor glass window and faced two large film screens, which touched each other at an angle, bringing to mind the bow of a ship (Figures 3.6–3.7). This was the installation Stevedoring Stories in full flow during the Tall Ships Dublin 2012 Festival: [Clip 3.1: Stevedoring Stories – Extract 1’23”]

Figure 3.7: The Installation Stevedoring Stories, Moira Sweeney, CHQ, Dublin 2012

Figure 3.8: ‘Tall Ships’, Moira Sweeney, Dublin 1998
My fascination with the Tall Ships extended back to their previous visit to Dublin in the late summer of 1998. At the time, I lived in Sandymount village overlooking Dublin Bay and the concept of maritime space had already seized my imagination. As part of a larger photographic project about the locality – *Dumhach Trá* (1998) – I documented the berthed tall ships, as their skeletal masts emerged from the uninviting darkness of the night-time dock walls close to Dublin Port (Figure 3.8).\(^6\)

The opportunity to exhibit the research for this project in public arose in 2012 when Dublin City Council, through the Office of Government Procurement, awarded funding to produce and present a screen-mediated installation as part of the Visual Arts strand of Dublin Tall Ships 2012 (See Appendix II).\(^7\) The audio-visual research of this project was in its infancy when I received the award. Simultaneously, the installation was accepted for the Open Programme of PhotoIreland 2012.\(^8\) Producing an installation was both a daunting and exciting prospect and necessitated approaching the exhibition as a means of ‘testing out’ the research material in a setting that resonated with its filming approach. The next section unravels the processes and critical thinking involved in this filmic re-presentation of the audio-visual research, a re-representation which views space through a sensory lens.

**Stevedoring Stories: Montaging Form and Content**

Like the filmmaking process, editing is a pro-filmic process of perception, selectivity, assimilation and even manipulation.\(^9\) Just as a multitude of events occur while filming – some of which can be documented, while others can be ignored or hidden – in editing there are a multitude of choices in cutting that can re-present the reality of the participants (Barbash and Taylor 1997). The personal joy in editing comes at this stage; it is only possible after a painstaking process of meticulously logging all of the material;
interviews, events and the actuality footage from the field site. The rewards of mindful logging of the footage are a thorough understanding of the material, ease in locating it, and the freedom to treat it creatively (Grierson 1933; Winston 2013).

During the early stages of editing, and as a means of becoming closer to the audio-visual research material, short vignettes were constructed to offer different aspects of working life on the docks, such as unloading cement, delivering import cars, or travelling out to sea on a tanker. As already demonstrated in chapter two, one such vignette, the unloading of eco cement, is constructed from a multitude of shots from different angles such as the crane driver’s point of view from on high or the assistant foreman’s point of view from the quay wall [Clip 3.2: ‘Unloading the Hold’ 2’45”]. The re-presented processes of labour in the vignettes have a choreographed aesthetic; the cuts occurring between wide shots, close shots and panning shots maintain a rhythmic flow.

Contrasting with the vignettes, are long, continuous moving shots that map the geography of the port, from the bow of a ship as it arrives into the industrious port, or from the side of a boat as it glides alongside the activity on the quay wall. The long, continuous one-take moving shots, which map the quay wall or the water to the bow of the ship, are left uninterrupted as stand-alone sequences: [Clip 3.3: ‘Stevedoring Stories – Extract’ 3’29”]. The combined effect of the edited footage of activities and single-take mappings of the port space is to create an aesthetic illusion of constant movement that entices the viewer into a trance-like engagement. The editing process of this particular material therefore delivers a re-presentation, which is synchronous with the original ‘ciné trance’ experienced in the filming as described in chapter two.
In chapter two, consistent themes which arose out of the recorded conversations and interviews with John Nolan, Miley Walsh, Alan Martin, Declan Byrne and Norman Byrne included changes in dock life with the arrival of containers, nostalgia for a former way of working life and the loss of a former port community. John Nolan’s nostalgic narrative had a romantic resonance, which contrasted with Miley’s humorous stories of stealing oranges from the ships, or Alan Byrne’s factual recounting of how globalising forces such as containerisation had destroyed working life. This material, when distilled, suggested a narrative of memory, transformation, loss, nostalgia and hope from which I was able to construct a micro universe, a ‘diegesis’ of the recollections and hopes of Miley, John and Alan (Barbash and Taylor 1997).11

The out of vision interviews were woven across two separate timelines over actuality vignettes of dock activity and port. Although this practice of weaving interview through actuality footage is drawn from a long history of voice-over in documentary, the content was more lyrical and meditative than that of ‘mainstream’ broadcast documentary. Whilst this meant that there was continuous interview content across the two screens, the mnemonic cultural memories and counter-memories of Miley, John and Alan took the place of a precise linear narrative. Marks suggests that the final edited screens rely on words to reveal what cannot be said in image (2000: xv). As she writes:

Voices, not only informative witnessing or testimony, but also casual conversation, the texture of talk, and the simple presence of a clear or incoherent voice in counterpoint to the image, activate cultural memories. In some cases the words become more poetic, less an explanation of what cannot be imaged than an evocative layer of their own.

(ibid.)

The decision to keep the interview conversations out of vision as voice-over narration was underscored by a desire not to break the spell and rhythm of movement in the edited vignettes. The on-camera interviews had been filmed through direct address to
me rather than through the more observational style of the actuality material, and consequently created a very different viewing experience. Keeping the men in vision, there was a risk of ‘subordinating the actualities to the interviews, which then seem to comment on and explain the action’ (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 413). And so, using the interviews as voice-over narration had the dual outcome of providing an easy way to edit the material without appearing to be unduly directorial, while also weaving an evocative layer through the imagery.

The overall narrative on the screens of *Stevedoring Stories* is composed of a number of these discrete yet interconnected micro audio-visual narratives. The following fragment demonstrates how narrative and image are montaged in the two continuously looping sixteen-minute screens of *Stevedoring Stories*: (Figure 3.9); [Clip 3.4: ‘Miley’s Monologue’: 0’38’’]

![Figure 3.9: Stevedoring Stories, Screenshot, Dublin, 2012](image)

On the first screen, recently retired docker Miley Walsh laments the loss of a communal atmosphere on the docks:
If you go in looking for a container you go to an automated system you talk to a voice and you receive your docket and you go through what could only be described as a tunnel maybe and on the way you discover there’s a container on the back of your truck and now you're on your way out and you probably haven’t seen anyone. With regard to working there, it’s much the same. Eh, on the dot of seven o’clock you get into a crane and you don’t get out till nine, you've ten minutes for a cup of tea. These things that have changed they may be more profitable but they’re certainly but I do think people have to be allowed to do the work they do. And they seem to be looking to employ robots rather than people. We had loads of time for people for each other. They don't have time for each other now. So you don't even know the face you’re working for whereas before you knew who your boss was.

(Extract from Stevedoring Stories, original recording 12 February 2012)

Miley’s voice is audible on the right screen over one long continuous shot from the front of a car as it drives dramatically through the mouth of a ship. The car travels at speed up three levels and arrives among dozens of gleaming new import cars, each ready to be driven onto the quays. As the car in which the camera is placed speeds up onto the rattling metal ramps and through the gaping mouth into the belly of the enormous multistorey ship, Miley bemoans the anonymity brought about by automation on the docks. The impersonal, dark, steel interior of the ship and the near absence of human beings reinforce his narration. Meanwhile on the left screen, there is a second, long continuous exterior shot from the front of a vehicle as it makes its way through docks security and onto the quays. Again the absence of human beings echoes Miley’s narration and the starkness of the left screen.

Editing stories that recount dock events from the past further affords the narrative a temporal quality. While this temporality imparted a sense of a continuous linear narrative, the incomplete nature of each story allowed for an open-endedness or non-closure, a non-conclusiveness, which mirrored the messiness of life. At any given time, the images on one timeline offer a contrasting view of an activity or dock view to the images of the other timeline. For example, in the following clip, while screen one tracks the railway line of the docks from the front of a moving train, screen two depicts the
actual train moving across frame left to frame: (Figure 3.10); [Clip 3.5: ‘Miley and Alan Reflect’ 2’48”].

There is an entrancing dance between imagery and familiar theme in the narration. The narrative across the two screens is underscored by a dock soundscape of sync sound; lorries beeping, cranes whirring, forklifts beeping and trains clattering along the tracks. As John’s and Miley’s narration is off-screen, the danger of their and Alan’s voices becoming disembodied is offset by the close audiovisual engagement with the activities on the docks. In addition, unlike some conventional televisual documentary narratives where the story is prefigured by the so-called ‘voice of God’, the three men speak in the first person. Pauses, moments of reflections and local vernacular are not tampered with in the editing. The interviews allow the participants to ‘reflect on their lives, tell their stories, and offer their perspective on the world with an immediacy and clarity’ which might not have been possible in mere observational filming (Barbash and Taylor 1997). For the installation Stevedoring Stories, these two concurrent screens offered the viewer a micro ‘structural complexity’ which mirrored ‘the social complexity of real life’ on the transforming docks (ibid.).
The mosaic of research material generated on the South Coal Quay included numerous observational photographs of dockers and seafarers. Four of these digital portraits – printed up to 80cm x 120cm and mounted onto plexi-glass – hung on the black wall to the left of the film screens. While the images made visible the face of dockworkers, crane drivers and seafarers, their disembodiment from the main screens denied the viewer any sense of specific identification with the voices on the screen. However, through the montaging of seemingly separate layers – the dockworkers in the photographs, their voices on the cinema screens, the audio-visual rhythms of labour, the soundscape of the port sounds, the sculptural crates of oranges, apples, onions and eco cement sculpturally arranged on the tattered floor – an interconnectedness was forged.

In the context of this reflexive critical practice, such montaging – a key component of installation – formally reflects the fragmented nature of the research (Pink 2001; Curran 2012). As Pink observes, ‘reality is, in fact, continuous and subjectively experienced, at best, ethnographers can only reconstruct fragments of a subjective experience of reality, representations of knowledge are never complete’ (2001: 167).

The extracts in the installation have a structural intricacy. Moreover, they are open to being interpreted and articulated differently by each viewer. Experienced in the context of a major maritime event in a dock locale, the installation opens up ‘subjective spaces’ (Edwards 2001: 194), ‘enabling the agency of the viewer to enter into and witness’ (Curran 2012: 194) an experimental and multi-layered representation of local history and change. The full installation is available here [The Installation ‘Stevedoring Stories’ 16 mins].
In the following sections I redirect the lens away from the narrative structure of the screens and focus on the installation as experienced by the viewer in this particular geographic space.

**Stevedoring Stories: The Viewer’s Experience**

I felt like I was in the trucks, on the water like I was being guided through the docks in and out, up and down, like I was operating the machinery.

(Janet McKenna, granddaughter local dockworker, from fieldnotes, 26 August 2012)

You see there that man on the screen was talking about dockers stealing oranges. Well let me tell you, they wouldn't steal from Woolworths but Arnotts and Switzers they would. They stacked up their jumpers. They’d go in thin and come out fat. They'd run and sweep! The checkers were part of this system.

(Richard McDermott, retired dockworker, from fieldnotes, 24 August 2012)

You see there, they are unloading the cement into lorries, well the beeping sound is the foreman telling the truck driver that the lorry is full and that he can move on.

(John Murphy, Dock HGV Driver, from fieldnotes, 24 August 2012)

It’s like one continuous shot in which a voice unfolds so you don't have an overall narrative or narrator, you have different dockers from the community who speak about this experience and that gives you the immediacy of their experience. And the film is like one continuous shot, which explores the space in one moment of movement that is the docks. It also, not overtly but covertly charts a movement from community to the collapse of community to the mechanisation of relationships where they don't know the face they are working for. It makes me think of Marx’s commodification of relationships, but it doesn't end on that, there is an ending of a message of hope, a vision of a renewed community. There is a beautiful sensuousness of the objects as if you are caressing them. The film signals an aesthetic of love. The camera loves the port, it loves the water, and it loves the object. It doesn't just snap them, it caresses them and equally caresses the voices of the dockers who are talking about a community love of a place and people; it gives the names of families; it’s about loving the space and a community that was based on friendship and how it collapsed. But it is about renewal also and so therefore about love.

(Ronan Sheehan, Writer and Poet, from fieldnotes, 26 August 2012)
The installation *Stevedoring Stories* marked the end of the first phase of my filmic immersion on Dublin’s docks. Coming midway through the audio-visual documentation of participants on the South Coal Quay (as described in chapter two), it was an attempt to draw together a critical selection of the material – photographs, observational film extracts, audio interviews – and test it out publicly. This was the beginning of depicting the multidimensional nature of contemporary maritime space; the ship, the dockland, the local working community, the visiting crews, the globally linked technology, the containerisation of cargo, the hinterland and the developed shorelines.

Of the one million people who attended the Dublin Tall Ships 2012 Festival, hundreds of thousands passed through the CHQ on their way to the docks where the tall ships were docked. Bearing in mind that I was testing out the research material, it was opportune that over the course of the four days tens of thousands of these visitors wandered in and out of the installation *Stevedoring Stories*. Some viewers stayed for the full seventeen-minute duration, whilst others stopped to view the photographs and experience whichever sequence of the looped screens was visible when they walked in.

The ‘ephemeral, site responsive agenda’ (Bishop 2007: 10) involved in making, dismantling and even destroying an installation prompts a theorising through the lens of the viewer’s experience. A viewer may participate in the form of a broad spectrum of actions or experiences and indeed the term experience is much contested. Therefore, following Bishop, I recognise that it is the ‘human being who constitutes the subject of that experience’ (2007: 8).

In the first instance, the exhibition site impacted on the viewing experience. Nairne posits that the notion of place ‘implies both physical and political geography’ (1996: 399). The CHQ, in the heart of the docklands on George’s Dock, is within a short
walking distance of former dock residential communities. While these communities have been ruptured by local economic and wider global forces, as discussed in chapter one, significant numbers of families in Ringsend, North Wall and Sheriff Street retain a connection to the docks through a father, grandfather or uncle who laboured there, or a mother, grandmother or aunt who worked in the canteens. Moore and Whelan draw attention to the way in which the narratives of such local communities are often overlooked in the very spaces they have historically inhabited:

> Usually the potential of a place to tell us something about the lives of ordinary individuals in the past is given less credence than those places that represent the extraordinary . . . where do we hear or see the stories of ordinary Dubliners, who witnessed the most dramatic events in Irish History from their tenement homes?

(2007: 105-106)

Amongst the cohort of visitors to Stevedoring Stories were a significant number of local people with contemporary and historical dock links as was evident in the many conversations I had with them over the four days. This was not on a typical art gallery audience; a by-product of curating the installation in a dock site during a major maritime event was the attendance of the very communities that were the focus of this research. When discussing the work of German artist Thomas Hirsch, Kelly notes that situating exhibitions in venues away from the main galleries allows artworks to become spaces of social interaction with local communities (2010).

The CHQ space, whilst appropriate, nonetheless retained the vestiges of a place of privilege. This place had been marketed for a ‘small, wealthy elite and disenfranchised those for whom memory of a place is often strongest’ (Moore and Wheelan 2007: 98). The extensive restoration of a commercial site had failed to retain any of the original ‘feel’ of a dock warehouse, despite preserving the beautiful iron structure; the interior and exterior were shiny, clean, new and devoid of atmosphere. The original building,
known as Stack A, would have been messy, while the iron structure of this old warehouse is a misleading ‘tangible marker of an alignment with its downtown neighbours’, the residential and labouring dock community; there are no such links (Greenberg 1997: 362). The marketing campaign of the CHQ developers deliberately aimed to attract an upmarket audience rather than a socially inclusive one that might benefit from and value a dock heritage museum. In fact, apart from of the Dublin Tall Ships 2012 Festival, the building is merely ‘a symbol of segregation and exclusivity in an already divided district’ (Moore and Whelan 2012: 106).

In addition to offering valuable encounters with members of a former dock community, the installation prompted interactions with the participants of the study. Tomo Nolan asked if I would take a picture of him beside the portrait of him displayed on the wall (Figure 3.11), Declan Quinn returned twice with different grandchildren to show them how he operated a crane to unload cement (Figure 3.12) and Norman Byrne remarked on how affirming it was for him to have been filmed doing the jobs he had performed all through his working life, and to now see himself up on the screen.
Whilst it could be argued, when considering this exhibition site, that the ‘alterity is more rhetorical than actual’ (Nairne 1996: 406), the artwork sparked a dialogue between me and audiences from communities who might not have attended a more mainstream gallery or exhibition space further away from the docks. Reiss (2000) argues that the spectator is key to the completion of an installation artwork. While she may be referring specifically to a spectator’s participation in the work through the viewing or experiencing of it, I would suggest that the conversations were also integral to the completion of the installation. Over the four days of its life, numerous other dialogues, prompted by viewers’ experiences, completed not only the artwork itself but also my experience of it, highlighting gaps in the research material and propelling the study to the next phase.

The expansion of the geographical field site – from the dockworkers and stevedores of the South Coal Quay and Alexander Basin to the marine operatives, port managers and pilots on the North Quay – formed the basis for discussion in chapter two. The material
from this expanded site went into forming *Rhythms of a Port*. In Part II, I critically reconstruct the creative journey leading to this second installation, expanding on the theme of structuring embodied multilayered experiences for viewers. I also expand on how the processes of testing out the material in these two installations facilitated a critical evolution of my practice, resulting in the creation of the most significant output of this research project, the film *Keepers of the Port* (2017)
I peeked through the cracks of the boarded up exterior of the red brick shed, commonly known as the BJ Marine Warehouse (Figure 3.13). Red brick is an inadequate description; every brick was an individual hue of brown, red or ochre, each marked with the telltale signs of years of absorbing city fumes and dirt. Armed with the keys and a code to disable the alarm, my first time entering the shed was a little unnerving. The heavy steel entrance door was double locked and the interior was dank and dimly lit by late afternoon light, which seeped through the small high windows in the eaves. I fumbled around to find the alarm box. The original cobblestone floor had a fine layer of dust and was lightly strewn with workmens’ empty lunch bags and plastic soft drink bottles. Traces of the warehouse’s former days as a dock cargo store lingered; the smell of oil, the old wooden containers and the goods doockets. The sound of the river Liffey and seagulls merged with the hum of city traffic as gusts of wind wafted through the rafters.
An initial proposal for a multi-screen artwork *Rhythms of a Port*, which expanded on *Stevedoring Stories*, had been accepted as part of the PhotoIreland 2014 Open Programme.\(^1\) At about one hundred metres in length, eight metres wide and ten metres high, the warehouse was an impressive space, which could easily accommodate several hanging screens and projectors. I visualised the installation inside the building, the state of which would remain unaltered; wooden crates could house the amplifiers, the dusty floor suggested a space once in use and hand-made canvas screens could hang from the iron rods stretching across the eaves.

The former warehouse was identified locally by its last residents, the sailboat retailers BJ Marine, who had been evicted by the Dublin Docklands Authority so that the campshire could be developed into an amenity area.\(^2\) The shed, previously unavailable under NAMA\(^3\) in 2012 for *Stevedoring Stories*, was at the time under the ownership of investment management company *Island Capital Services*.\(^4\) The restoration of the warehouse, one of two buildings, would eventually see it becoming a cultural hub with an art gallery, a digital exhibition space and a café. Having waited two years to gain access while the site lay derelict, I was delighted that the company’s investment manager Richard Strappe had given me the keys and permission to use the space for a multi-screen installation. His response was very heartening:

> Moira
> I think we can accommodate that and would love to support the docklands heritage and the dockers.
> Richard Strappe

(14 March 2014)

While the building was in the early stages of its restoration, Richard felt that it would be safe enough for the installation, providing that I had my own insurance. He also made it
clear that the basis for being granted permission was the nature of the content; the company was keen to support local communities with projects relating to the docks.  

Standing on the dusty floor of this old cargo warehouse, the space held appeal to me as a site within which to install the filmic research of the project for a number of reasons. Firstly, as an original protected dock warehouse from the 1880s, it was one of the few reminders still on the quays of how close Dublin Port once was to the city. Up until the mid-twentieth Century it stored incoming cargo such as sugar, grain and wheat for the Guinness factory in Dublin 8. The goods were transported by trams, the tracks of which are still visible running along the quays from the warehouse. Secondly, like the CHQ, it was in the heart of the docklands and therefore close to residential communities traditionally connected both to the docks and to Grand Canal Square, the heart of the new cultural hub that housed a theatre and numerous headquarters of digital and technical companies. Thirdly, the warehouse was beside Samuel Beckett Bridge, which in itself attracted visitors to Dublin. This combination of heritage and public meant that once again local audiences could mingle with the gallery-oriented PhotoIreland attendees.

Viewing the old warehouse space on Sir John Rogerson’s Quay through a sensory lens was in keeping with the filming methodology adopted over the course of the research. By this, I mean that senses other than sight, such as touch, sound and smell, could be engaged with (Byrne and Moran 2010). This reading of an urban place understands the space to be alive, changeable and dynamic. As explained in chapter two, one of the lenses through which I accessed and came to understand the dock space was a geographic imagination; the filming was a visual mining of an ordered urban space, an attempt to unearth hidden, layered narratives, working with whatever I encountered
(Borden 1999; Reid 2011a). Cultural geographers Gibson-Graham encourage this mode of negotiating the everydayness of place, arguing that ‘it is the unmapped and unmoored that allows for new moorings and mappings’ (in Reid 2011b). Just as the reflexive process of filming had been one of ‘becoming and unbecoming’ (Daly 2012: 90), this place’s potentiality allowed it to be viewed as a ‘site of becoming’ (Reid 2011b). In its pre-installation state, this former dock cargo warehouse on the banks of the Liffey close to Dublin Port activated my imagination as a practitioner. The aim now was to allow this sensory activation to drive the structuring of an installation, which could also activate the viewer’s imagination.

The Creative Treatment of Reality

In chapter one I introduced Grierson’s idea of the ‘crease’ between production and editing where ‘the creative treatment of reality’ occurs (Winston 2013: 16). In chapter two, I opened up the discussion as to how to creatively treat the film documentation in post-production; as a means of familiarising myself with the material, I edited a series of film vignettes. In each of the vignettes, a distinct yet interconnected aspect of dock labour and experience is depicted and narrated by a participant of the study in a multitude of geographic port spaces. To create the vignettes, I was initially reliant on the narratives, interpretations, reflections and memories of the participants of the research. As introduced in chapter two, the vignettes allowed me to depict dock experiences in a multitude of geographic port spaces:

- As ships arrive into port from Dublin Bay, stevedore John Nolan reflects on his relationship with the port and the loss of a local community.
- As marine operatives meet an incoming ship and guide it into port, boatmen Tommy O Reilly, Brian Latimore, John Murphy explore issues of trust within their roles.
- As containers are unloaded from a cargo ship, John Nolan ponders on dangers in the port.
• As eco cement is unloaded from a ship onto land, a crane driver reflects on a life of changing labour practices
• As port manager Charlie Murphy guides a busload of students around the port, CEO Eamonn O Reilly offers his personal reasoning for the expansion of the port in the Masterplan.
• VTS Operator Kevin Byrne contrasts his former work as a merchant seaman and the relative calm of life in the Dublin Port Operation Centre guiding ships in and out of Port.

Audio-visual sequences from the film *Keepers of the Port* (Sweeney 2017)

The process of editing was an extremely solitary experience – something with which I had become unfamiliar over twenty years of collaborating in teams with presenters, researchers, editors and producers for television programmes.24 Within this solitude however, I found an unexpected solace in the company of my participants and their stories, as well as in the rhythms of the port. The editing became a form of reacquaintance with the participants in the study.

In time, a deep refamiliarisation with the voices of my participants facilitated a gradual awareness of subjective experiential and critical responses to the dock space and the working lives. Grimshaw (2005) stresses that the filmmaker can eventually establish a position for herself within a project from which to communicate her own responses. My responses to the encounters on the docks, both critical and experiential, were initially communicated textually in the body of the on-going research thesis.25 Over time, a familiarity and confidence with these textual responses led to the decision to finesse them into a narrative voiceover, audio-record them and weave them through the vignettes.

Where initially, John Nolan drove the narrative of some of the vignettes, I now shared the stage with him so to speak. This reorientation from participant-led narrative to shared narrative was a further part of the ‘becoming and an unbecoming’ in the research
process (Daly 2012: 90). I, along with the participants, became vulnerable, or ‘deeply implicated’ in the research (Reid 2011b). Within the lonely creases of the editing process, an authorial voice emerged, through which I was able to translate into words the embodied experiences of the filming, as well as subjective memory of the docks. I attempted to capture something of the sensuous and embodied experience of the filming in the personal voiceover, a challenge that Marks identifies as trying to make ‘dry words retain something of the wetness of the encounter’ (2002: X).

As a subjective authorial voice emerged, I no longer felt the compulsion to work alone as a practitioner and, for the remaining part of the creative research journey, the installation *Rhythms of a Port* and the film *Keepers of the Port* were structured with the collaborative support of friends – an editor, a screen technician, a colourist and an audio-visual technician. This collaboration extended to responding to the feedback of participants. For example, during the exhibition of *Stevedoring Stories* (which focused primarily on the experiences of dockworkers) Dublin Port CEO Eamonn O Reilly observed that there were other sides to the story. My focus correspondingly shifted to include these other stories.

**The Old Cargo Warehouse: Constructing an Interactive Space**

An enormous, five-metre-square, dense oak sliding door has replaced the old rotten door. When opened, it lit up the interior of the warehouse and allowed the audio from the screens to seep out on to the street. Along with those on a deliberate journey to view the installation, local workers, families and tourists were invited into this normally inaccessible space (Figure 3.14).
One of the key elements in the performativity of *Rhythms of a Port* was the reliance on local communities and workers entering the space and interacting with the work and the space in whatever way they choose, whether that was standing around chatting in groups, viewing the screens and listening to the narrative and multiple soundtracks, or wandering through space and returning with friends. Some of the viewers who come to *Rhythms of a Port* happened upon the installation, while others planned their visit. The invigilators and myself made ourselves available for interaction with everyone who entered.

In constructing a space within an intriguing local warehouse, I hoped that a refocusing of both a subjective and communal sense of location could occur amongst viewers (Kelly 2012). The ‘viewer’s activated present-ness, being there’ become central to this spectacle, which was ‘fashioned by blurred delineations between concepts of document and simulation’ (ibid.: 13–14). Earlier in this chapter, Bishop’s idea of the activated subject was introduced in relation to *Stevedoring Stories*. Bishop (2007) suggests that in
addition to activating the subject, installation art also ‘decentres’ it by fragmenting the traditional hierarchical relationship between artwork and viewer. I hoped that *Rhythms of a Port* would deny viewers any one perspective from which to view the work, offering instead multiple perspectives. The five screens were hung in a herringbone pattern, angled slightly away from the viewer like the bow of a ship. The viewer could walk through the space and stop to watch and experience the content of each individual screen [Clip 3.6: ‘Rhythms of a Port’ Extract, 1’13’']. Though the screens each depicted relatively discrete domains and acts of labour, the contrasting visual and audio juxtapositions of external and internal geographic spaces and activities were nonetheless linked and interdependent: a ship arrives into port along the Great South Wall on screen one, while on screen two, a pilot meets a ship and guides the captain on the bridge into port; a view of containers being loaded onto a ship on screen three contrasts with a crane driver’s view down into the bowels of a ship as he unloads the same cargo from the ship. The idea was to create a decentring experience, which mirrored the manner in which different activities coexist within the port in order that it can operate.

Across the screens there was no hierarchy of dock labour; the seeming division of labour was at once confounded by the sheer interconnectedness of the different activities on each screen. Implicit in this visual decentring was the idea that there was no one correct way of looking at the world for the viewer, ‘nor any privileged place from which judgements should be made’ (Bishop 2007: 13). Typically, a television or cinema documentary weaves various geographical locations and participants’ stories around each other to create a convincing singular, linear narrative. Across the five contrasting installation screens, discrete narratives co-existed, only becoming apparent as the viewer walked into the audio range of each individual screen. This technical feat is only possible in broadcasting by the partitioning of the television screen. Where a
screen ordinarily divides a viewer from the form, in *Rhythms of a Port* he/she was on location, walking through the space and engaging with the work. The viewer could potentially be activated into a subjective experience which, Kelly argues, is ‘the experiential outcome of physically being in the work’, something which ‘fosters a sense of dislocation from both everyday life and art, disavowing segregated concepts of reality and systems of representation’ (2010: 14). The premise of cinema or indeed television in a darkened room is that the viewer SUSPENDS real space and time whilst viewing the film or programme. In common with screen-mediated installations, *Rhythms of a Port* deliberately invited the viewer to be aware of the warehouse space as well as of his/her relationship to the screens whilst moving through them. As discussed in the next section, the spatial dynamics of this form of spectatorship are complicated by the work’s temporality.

**Spatialised Time in Screen-Mediated Installation**

The intention in *Rhythms of a Port* was to offer a screen-mediated experience in a space through which the viewer could walk. Ideally, viewers could experience the piece in its entirety, stopping and watching the full five-minute duration of each of the five screens. However, if they so wished, they could wander from screen to screen without any particular time constraints. Mundloch suggests that this open-ended mode of presentation and engagement contributes to a form of ‘spectatorial empowerment’ (2010: 42). She wonders if there is ‘something structural to the work itself that incites or compels the spectator’s perceived temporal self-sufficiency’ (2010: 41). In *Rhythms of a Port*, each screen had an open-ended yet discrete narrative and the five screens, if viewed one after another, formed a loose narrative. For example, if a viewer wandered in from the street, screen one starts out at sea with a ship arriving; screen two follows
the marine operatives guiding the ship in; and screen three depicts the unloading of the
ship.

Without being aware of this, the viewer could walk through and still have different
experiences or indeed an overall experience, wandering from screen to screen. There
was always activity and/or narration regardless of whether or not the viewer was
intimately involved in an overall narrative of specific duration. In this regard the piece
sits more closely with the art-viewing habits of ‘self directed nomadic visitors who take
umbrage with inflexible viewing times’ (ibid.: 56). As the installation was situated in
the interstice between an urban digital/technological labour hub and city transport
including the Luas, buses, trains, cycle routes and pedestrian walkways, a significant
portion of the viewers were on their way to or from somewhere. This meant that they
could essentially self-direct their time and indeed chose to return, as many did.

The more ‘conventional’ gallery-goers had travelled specifically from the city (half an
hour’s summer’s walk or ten minutes by bus) and either I or one of the invigilators
would offer them a hand-out with details of duration, giving them a choice as to how
they would direct their experience (Appendix III). Either way, the piece catered for a
spectatorship characterised by both short and longer attention spans. Mundloch wonders
if this is actually an over privileging of the viewer’s role, implying that all meaning
‘resides in the individual spectator’ (ibid.: 57). I would suggest this was a danger in the
piece, something that became apparent to me when I found myself encouraging viewers
– particularly friends or people who had deliberately made the journey – to view the
piece from start to finish in order to have a fuller experience. The desired outcome in
film and television – whether utilising experimental or more ‘mainstream’ forms of
narrative – is for an interested viewer to experience the piece in its complete state. It
was then a personal frustration that the model of viewing offered in *Rhythms of a Port* was in danger of becoming a ‘temporal flânerie’ (ibid.), a form of window-shopping for the contemporary peripatetic viewer accustomed to phones, tablets and remote control television.

**Assessing the Success of the Installations**

Employing technologies such as video and film in site-specific installation art on Dublin’s docks afforded me the chance to play with ‘the conventions of the cinematic experience in terms of its use of space, narrative and engagement with the audience’ (Byrne and Moran 2010: 7). In contrast to the passive engagement associated with television viewing, installation art relies on the participation of the spectator (Reiss 2000). Indeed the viewer can encounter the artwork from multiple positions, rather than from one single perspective. Similarly, an audience’s response to the cinematic elements in installation art can be embodied ‘in terms of touch, smell, rhythm, and other bodily perceptions’ (Marks 2000: xvii). Following Marks, I understand experiences of cinema to be ‘mimetic or an experience of bodily similarity to the audio-visual images we take in’ (Marks 2000: xvii).

In the structuring of both *Stevedoring Stories* and the second installation *Rhythms of a Port*, there was a desire to remain consistent and follow through on the embodied and sensory ways of knowing explored in the filmmaking processes and discussed in chapter two. Taking as its imaginative lead, the experiential and mimetic approach adopted in the filmmaking, the editing and the dissemination in the form of site specific, multi-screen the installations, evolved in an experimental, organic manner, over time, as opportunities for dissemination opened up. As Part I of this chapter demonstrated,
structuring such experiences for viewers pushed me beyond the boundaries of my broadcast comfort zone, where narratives are highly constructed for once off, high impact televisual transmissions. For installation artworks in off-the-beaten-track spaces, some of the stabilities and illusions enabled by film or television were complicated by the spacialising of time and spectatorship (Mundloch 2010). Despite the personal frustration of witnessing peripatetic viewers, these screen-mediated installations offered valid and alternative windows onto an overlooked world on Dublin’s docks.

While the artworks signaled their resistance to more dominant forms of televisual narration, the visual and aural narratives in both Stevedoring Stories and Rhythms of a Port are nonetheless comprehensible. This allowed the works to be accessible to the participants, local dock constituencies, as well as audiences from beyond the art gallery. The narratives did not uncover contestations and antagonisms between the various social actors in the port, nor where tensions between management and workers over issues such as deregulated work practices rendered visible at this early stage of my research. As Part III of this chapter demonstrates, these concerns found expression through time and distance away from the docks in the final film output of the thesis, the film Keepers of the Port (2017).
Part III: The Film *Keepers of the Port*

A Documentary Representation of a Transforming Port Community

Whilst the screen installations *Stevedoring Stories* and *Rhythms of a Port* represented selected slices of sociological knowledge of particular Dublin port constituencies, they did not include all of the audio-visual research generated or the vignettes edited from this material. Nonetheless, their dissemination facilitated a textual reflection on the ways in which I had employed documentary avenues in exploring my research subject and deployed my camera to achieve, valuable, somatic and tactile documentations of a community experiencing far-reaching transformations in their working lives. In time, this textual framing was enriched with critical socio-economic insights into Dublin port and other global ports, as well with autobiographical reflections, that allied me with my port participants.

In late 2016, the Dublin-based initiative aemi (artists experimental moving image) and Cliona Harmey invited me to participate in *port | river | city*, a project which would take the form of a unique programme of curated screenings and site-specific moving image installations over the course of three weeks in September 2017. The project would trace a journey along the River Liffey from Dublin Port’s most eastern point at Poolbeg Lighthouse on the Great South Wall into its inner city and now invisible waterways, offering new possibilities for engagement with Dublin’s port and its history.

This fortuitous invitation provided me with the opportunity to create a lasting, valuable documentary, single-screen film-work, which would weave excerpts from my written research material through the expanded body of audio-visual research. The impetus to create the film *Keepers of the Port* was thus twofold; the film would enrich and complete this thesis by marrying insightful audio-visual material with critical and
personal reflection and, in keeping with the desire to find lively alternatives for dissemination of the research, the subsequent screening of this cinematic merging would take place in the thematically resonant setting of *port | river | city*.

The following sections build on the explorations of narrative structures deployed in the screen installations *Stevedoring Stories* and *Rhythms of a Port*, unraveling some of the structural devices employed in the film *Keepers of the Port*; for example, how certain narrative and editing techniques of single screen documentary lent themselves to the representation of seemingly disparate, yet nonetheless interdependent port constituencies, and how the use of voiceover narration helped to illuminate, complicate, enrich and marry the audio visual vignettes of these contrasting port constituencies. The full film is available here [The Film ‘Keepers of the Port’ 70 mins].

**Narration: Illuminating and Complicating the Research Film Material**

Far too many contemporary film-makers appear to have lost their voice. Politically, they forfeit their own voice for that of others (usually characters recruited to the film and interviewed). Formally, they disavow the complexities of voice, and discourse, for the apparent simplicities of faithful observation or respectful representation, the treacherous simplicities of an unquestioned empiricism (the world and its truths exist; they need only be dusted off and reported). Very few seem prepared to admit through the very tissue and texture of their work that all film-making is a form of discourse fabricating its effects, impressions, and point of view.

(Nichols 1983: 249)

I have argued that at every stage of the filmmaking, I adopted documentary strategies to achieve a somatic documentaion of a port community. As described, I introduced a voiceover narrative in the installation *Rhythms of a Port* to help contextualise my relationship to, and understanding of, the Dublin docks and the participants of the research. The more critically reflective narrative for the film *Keepers of the Port* evolved over time during 2015 and 2016, when I had completely stepped back from the
fieldwork phase and the initial exhibition of the research material in the form of site specific artworks on the docks. As I began to write the body of the thesis and reflect on the research, I allowed my field diaries and sociological knowledge of Dublin’s port and other world ports to illuminate, complicate and enrich the text. In turn extracts from this writing formed the basis of the narration for the film.

As noted, film vignettes were created on a timeline from the research material, each of which depicted one of the interconnected hubs of dockwork and five of which were originally chosen for the installation *Rhythms of a Port*. A seventy-minute rough cut of the film was structured using these vignettes and a voiceover narrative from the written material was shaped around them. This narration does not so much drive the film vignettes as fill in the gaps between the interconnected hubs of dockwork and experience. Watching the vignettes on the timeline over and over again created space for a tactile relationship with the material and for a more embodied understanding of the participants in the film and the rhythms of working life. The voiceover therefore draws on a number of autobiographical experiences of the docks, some of which come from my family, as well as the sociological knowledge garnered in the field with my participants and in the writing of the textual body of this thesis.

Filmmaker Maya Deren supported an approach where the narration’s function is not to merely describe the visual material; the visual narrative should be complete in itself (Deren and Maas 1962). She suggests that the voiceover should bring a whole new dimension and depth to the material, writing that it should operate ‘on two axes, a horizontal narrative axis of character and action and a poetic axis of mood, tone, and rhythm’ (ibid.: 8). The voiceover narrative in *Keeper of the Port* therefore introduces fieldnotes, autobiographical material and critical context in a way that allows me firstly
to own the material and secondly, to create a tension between the observational visual material and the reflective, critical tone of the spoken text. Blending observational sequences with epistemological conjectures reinforces my position as a ‘participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning’ (Nichol 1983: 247); the narration is neither neutral nor the impersonal ‘voice of God’. Nichols suggests that by doing this, ‘The filmmaker steps out from behind the cloak of voice-over commentary, steps away from poetic meditation, steps down from a fly-on-the-wall perch, and becomes a social actor (almost) like any other’ (2017: 139–140). The next section details how this approach operates in one particular sequence of the film.

**Narration as a Form of Interpreting the Geography of Global Marine Labour**

The process of reflecting on the content of the filmic material generated in the Dublin port space brought to light a trajectory that Sekula (1996) identifies as the forgotten space of the sea. Consequently, some of the edited vignettes which were woven through *Keepers of the Port* extended to explore the sensuous nature of a globalised port: the constant movement of ships; the activity at sea; the sounds and in particular, the geography of global marine labour.

Sekula’s *Fish Story* draws attention to the dangers of globalised commodity production and distribution and to the ocean as a key space of globalisation. I was interested in exploring how the globally connected industry on Dublin’s docks could be expressed through the prism of an embodied, sensuous, geographic imagination in voiceover integrated with imagery. To do this, I placed myself in the vulnerable position of a reflexive practitioner and adopted a strategy of embarking on a journey with the participants. The ‘magical space’ (Rouch 1975) of cinema evolves from some of these
encounters, whilst other encounters trigger explorations into geographies of marine labour and the intricacies of social identity in a port environment.

Figure 3.15: ‘The Lyulin’, Screenshot from ‘Keepers of the Port’, 2017

The following clip demonstrates the effect of intertwining these two different filmic encounters: Figure 3.15; [Clip 3.7: The Lyulin in Dublin Bay, 2’45” ]. It opens with a series of slow dissolves as the camera moves towards a cargo ship at berth in Dublin Bay. As the ship looms larger in the frame, the voiceover narration reflects on why the Lyulin, which once spent most of its time in port, is now most often at sea, operating within a complex global structure. The sounds of waves and a single bass clarinet build to a crescendo as we reach the ship, suggesting perhaps danger. This reflection on the life of an anonymous behemoth contrasts with the next sequence, a more intimate encounter with boatman Tommy, in which he imparts his knowledge as well as his reflections on life at sea. The Lyulin is a two-year old bulk cargo ship flying the Maltese flag and carrying a gross tonnage of about of about 20,000 tonnes and a deadweight of 30,500. Tommy provides us with sufficient information in his interview to have a sense of this enormity. Through the use of rhythm, pacing, music, sound-effects, dialogue and
the choice of shots, the anonymity of the global digitalised structure in which ships operate contrasts with the more intimate lived experience and knowledge of a local worker. A logic is created by the linking of these different moments.

As already discussed at length with regard to the structuring of the internal narratives in the screen installations of this thesis, storytelling is in essence driven by linear links of this nature (Cooper 2011; De Jong 2013; Chi, Vanstone and Winston 2017; Nichols 2017). According to Marks ‘words suture the work together in the absence of a stable, informative image or a linear storyline’ (2000: xv). The words are not so much an exposition of what is happening on screen as another stratum – an evocation of place, memory or personal or social history. They allow me to interpret and add to the observational material by highlighting disturbing aspects of the global marine industry. For example, in the film’s next sequence, the narration introduces the injustices of the ‘flags of convenience’ system.  

Figure 3.16: The Bridge of the Ship, Screenshot from ‘Keepers of the Port’, 2017

In the subsequent clip, set on the bridge of the ship, words are employed to introduce an
empathetic layer in which the plight of the on-screen Filipino mariners is addressed: Figure 3.16; [Clip 3.8: Communication on the Ship, 2’09”]. In the clip, the relationship between the harbour pilot and ship’s captain is evidently reliant on a shared understanding of potential dangers at sea and the communication is characterised by an ‘economy of effect’ McElhinney (1994). The imposing transnational ship is in the charge of a Filipino captain. Because of the strong easterly winds, a tug is helping pull the ship in. On the bridge there is an entirely Filipino crew. The master (captain) of the ship and Colin (the pilot) are wearing almost identical uniforms: white shirts covered with regulation navy blue jumpers. In shipping, the term ‘master’ includes every person (except the pilot) having charge or command of a ship. The uniformity of dress has the effect of creating a sense of solidarity and directing the focus towards the common goal of bringing the ship to shore. Morgan (1992: 6) notes that: ‘The uniform absorbs individualities into a generalized and timeless masculinity while also connoting a control of emotion and subordination to a higher rationality’ (cited in Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003). There is one distinguishing difference in the men’s attire: the master signified his status with gold stripes on the shoulder of his jumper. He also wears a gold wedding band and chats intermittently with the second mate in a Filipino dialect. As the ship moves slowly through Dublin Bay all the crew look ahead to port as the pilot guides the captain in while the Vehicle Traffic Radio back at the Port Operations Centre occasionally intervene. The communication is sparse and functional.

The power relations between the men on the bridge are subtle but apparent: Colin embodies his role as the pilot, well aware of the ‘symbolic significance’ of the opportunity to steer a ship through his home territory; the second mate respectfully follows instructions (Barrett 2001:89). The master, who ordinarily is in charge of steering, observes patiently. The roles assumed on the bridge can be viewed as an
embodiment of the ‘totalizing power of technology’, where anything can go wrong (ibid.). Barrett elaborates that the ‘experience of power and total control, the cool rationality engaged in the physical operation of levers, balances, dials and switches are occasions for the display of mastery’ (ibid.). Whilst these are all experiences traditionally withheld from women, there also exists a hierarchy within the ship; not all crew members are trusted to perform such responsibilities (Hacker 1989; Barrett 2001).

The weighty significance attached to the steering of the ship is compounded by the calm, rational language, which minimises the possibility of miscommunication or misinterpretation in a potentially hazardous environment. McElhinney (1994), when exploring the gendering of the police workplace in Pittsburgh, observed that potential danger can produce an ‘economy of effect’, with officers performing their work in a manner characterised as cold, heartless or offhand. They economise on any expression of emotion, often only investing in it when there is a pay-off. On screen, this bureaucratic human interaction is only broken when the ship has been safely steered up alongside its berth and lightheartedness enters the conversation.

Because of the language barriers, time constraints and the priority of passage into port, I was unable to obtain interviews with the Filipino crew on this occasion. Narration therefore provided me with a means of introducing a layer that revealed concern with aspects of contemporary seafaring for Filipino crews such as the ones aboard this ship:

Unlike their counterparts based in the port, mariners may be at sea for as long as eight or nine months, working long hours in cramped conditions. Shipping is safer than it ever was and the International Transport Workers Federation campaigns for the human rights of seafarers. The contemporary global reality however is that the commercial pressure of moving commodities can take precedence over human lives. Maritime labour routinely involves undermanned long journeys with sleepless nights, which lead to potentially disastrous fatigue.

Voiceover Narration, *Keepers of the Port*, 2017
Within the narrative of a commercially competitive business, there is not space to draw attention to the machinations and the fragility of the working lives of mariners. For example, Dublin Port Company’s website summarises its operations in a neat covering statement, free of complexity:

Dublin Port Company is a self-financing, private limited company wholly-owned by the State, whose business is to manage Dublin Port, Ireland’s premier port. Established as a corporate entity in 1997, Dublin Port Company is responsible for the management, control, operation and development of the port. Dublin Port Company provides world-class facilities, services, accommodation and lands in the harbour for ships, goods and passengers. The company currently employs 144 staff. Located in the heart of Dublin City, at the hub of the national road and rail network Dublin Port is a key strategic access point for Ireland and in particular the Dublin area.

DPC, 2017

Unlike the highly visible, tens of thousands of tourists who arrive annually on the cruise ships which now dominate the port skyline, the men working on these ships rarely leave the ships to visit Dublin city.31 Narration woven through the observational material therefore allowed me to chart the inequalities and distress experienced by the seafarers who make possible the flow of goods and capital that constitutes international trade. As the next section details, this structural device of linking different observational sequences of dock constancies with wider global forces through the use of voiceover narration is supported by a very different structural device in Keepers of the Port.

The Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society: A Recurring Narrative Thread

Between 2012 and 2014, I followed the Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society as they gathered momentum and began to create a lasting archive of their memories and experiences on the docks. The resulting body of observational material, semi-structured and structured interviews provided me with an evolving, temporal storyline, which could form a strong narrative strand in the documentary: the dockworkers first meeting in Saint Patrick’s Rowing Club to discuss exhibiting their archive of photographs; the
hanging of the images; the opening night of the exhibition; the reconstruction of an archival photo with descendants of the original subjects; and a memorial service honouring deceased dockworkers. Through the selection and arrangement of material from these events, I created a series of micro stories that were interspersed throughout the film, ‘making palpable what is impalpable’ (De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell 2013: 91). Over the seventy-minute duration of *Keepers of the Port*, the film, in effect gave ‘material embodiment’ to the world of these former dockworkers, remembered, imagined and real (Nichols 2017: 216). Hence, collectively, they became one of the key voices of the film.

In the following clip, two former dockworkers, Miley and Michael, reflect on the aims of the Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society while hanging their photographs for the exhibition in Dublin Port. A third dockworker provides an historical context of dock work through the lens of personal memory and experience: (Figure 3.17); [Clip 3.9: Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society, 2’28’’].
De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell (2013) argue that one of the ways in which the documentary filmmaker can engage with the viewers is to reconstruct the lived experience of the characters that the viewer can live that story over the course of the film. The observational material in this clip depicts a lived story of communal atmosphere, while the interviews reinforce this mood with emotional statements of solidarity, pride, fear that the valuable work of the dockworkers will be forgotten and nostalgia for a past that was destroyed by modernisation in the form of containerisation. Viewers may find identification or empathy with some aspect of the emotions and struggles expressed. An internal conflict in the film has therefore been established, a structuring device which pits the minority dockworkers and their disappearing world against the mainstream power of globalisation. As already stated in chapter one, and noted by De Jong, Knudson and Rothwell (2013), this device has been in use in documentary film since the days of Flaherty, Vertov, Grierson and Ivens; the values of key participants in their films are presented within the context of a socially unjust world.

Whilst I did not set out as a filmmaker to document the plight of one particular community over another, by following the journey of the Dublin Dockworker’s Society an empathy and solidarity was evoked in me. In the context of the overall structure and narrative of the film, this was not a classic struggle between good and bad, aimed at grabbing the attention of an audience and recreated in a series of micro stories; it was a nuanced, quieter conflict that was being played out by this port constituency against the backdrop of transformations and modernisation in the port.

In common with many documentaries that adopt participatory and observational modes of filmmaking, *Keepers of the Port* did not rely on the filmed, open-ended experiences between me as filmmaker and the participants from the Dublin Dockworker
Preservation Society. In order to illuminate the historical aspects of their stories, I opted to use the archive material from the 1950s to the 70s.\textsuperscript{32} Previously shot footage has become a staple of television documentary and therefore there was an initial reluctance to deploying it. As Marks surmises, ‘Attempts to reconstruct experience by digging in archives of public and private memory are full of pitfalls, since often these experiences are normalized upon interpretation into film language, rather than remaining destabilizing and radioactive’ (2000: 199).

However Nichols, when reviewing \textit{Film Begets Film}, Jay Leyda’s (1964) seminal study on the use of archival film, argues that: ‘Old documentary footage, already associated with reality in one way, becomes associated with reality in a new way. New meanings and insights become possible. New tonalities and emotional states arise’ (2016: 133). In this regard, the adoption of archive material in \textit{Keepers of the Port} functioned as a visual trace of a dockworker’s memory, whilst also providing the opportunity to add a more nuanced layer of meaning to my narration and observational material. This is demonstrated in the [Clip 3.10 Nostalgising a Way of Life, 2’50].

In the clip, Miley laments the loss of community on the docks. The audio-visual television archive from 1973, however, depicts large numbers of dockworkers standing around on the quays, some of whom are sparring, and is accompanied by a somewhat patronising voiceover commentary: ‘there is no doubt that in the port of Dublin there is inefficiency, featherbedding and a waste of human resources’. My narration below unravels some of the tension between Miley’s nostalgia for a way of life and the reality that there were hundreds of dockworkers with secure unionised jobs who, as a consequence of containerisation, had very little to do:
Thousands of imported cars reflecting economic recovery and only a handful of men and women to unload them today.

The nostalgising of a way of life is in part a longing for community and the immeasurable sense of identity tied up with the docks.

While the nostalgia may soothe some of the uncertainties and fragilities of a changing and disappearing world, it is the collective memory of the volatility of dock labour that drives solidarity amongst dockworkers. This solidarity has its roots in a need to defend local labour markets, not only in the face of globalisation in the last fifty years, but right back to the turn of the 20th Century.

Voiceover Narration, *Keepers of the Port*, 2017

A personal sense of solidarity with the dockworkers is thus complicated and elucidated by the layering of observational material, participant interview, voiceover narration and archive. The archive has the effect of destabilising Miley’s nostalgia rather than normalising it. Throughout the film, there are instances where a personal solidarity with the dockworkers of Dublin is complicated with layers of nuance, created not only by the archive, but also by the voiceover narration and inclusion of constituents such as port managers.

The urban identity of the Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society was founded on a collective sense of belonging and attachment to the docks over many years. One of the key aims of the Society was to connect with their culture and remember the solidarity that had helped them through shared work experiences. Nora identifies this process as the making of a ‘site of memory’; a process of deliberately creating archives and celebrating anniversaries which might otherwise be forgotten (1989). As the dockworkers create ‘a site of memory’, the film *Keepers of the Port* is now one constituent in their archive.
Screening the Film to the Participants

The personal solidarity and empathy evolved with the dockworkers, stevedores and marine operatives of Dublin Port over the course of the research. Concurrently, port managers provided access to the port, together with unconditional practical and financial support for the research. The film *Keepers of the Port* afforded an opportunity to identify these different constituencies and give each of them coverage. Consequently, the premiere of the film in the Irish Film Institute for *port | river | city* functioned as more than just a screening; in addition to the general cinema audiences, it brought together all of the film’s divergent participants in what was a profound and moving experience for myself and the different constituents. The soundtrack was deliberately constructed to provide an experiential environment, traveling around the cinema’s numerous speakers in 5.1 Dolby sound. Dockworkers and family members identified themselves with cheers when they appeared onscreen and in the discussion afterwards they spoke of how seeing themselves provided them with new hope, reaffirming their goal of creating a lasting legacy of their work.

This and the subsequent screenings in the Lab Gallery in 2018 were therefore consistent with the embodied and sensory ways of knowing explored in the filmmaking processes. The experiential and mimetic approach adopted in the filmmaking and carried through in the installations and film screenings furthered the notion of active engagement with communities in ways that are of more value to these participants than a newsworthy story. The closing narration in the film reflects this organic interweaving in the relationship between participants and filmmaker:

Dublin Port’s Masterplan aspires to once again connect the city with the waterfront. Perhaps a collective memory of the port can be drawn on to remind us that ours is a port city.
In the collective memory of my family my great grandfather James McCallan suffered an accident while working as a longshoreman on the antiquated wooden piers of the Hudson in the early 20th century. He was left wheelchair-bound in later years. James’s membership of a particular longshoremen’s union may have compounded his difficulties. Having spoken out about unacceptable conditions, something that was discouraged by the dominant union, he had to return with to the family homestead in rural Ireland with my great grandmother Jinnie.

As I create a site of memory for my ancestors, drawn from inherited stories and archives, a community of dockworkers in Dublin ensure that their legacy survives.

And all the while, docks are expanding, berths are deepening, ship sizes are growing, their volumes increasing. And hovering on the horizon are automated ships, navigated from land.

Closing Narration of the film *Keepers of the Port* (2017)

Over the course of the six years between 2012 and 2018, I experimented with different ways of both representing and disseminating the research material. The search was to find sensuous, filmic ways to represent the voices of divergent dock constituencies whilst relatedly finding my own voice within all of this knowledge. Ultimately, this allowed the film to have a voice in the sense that Nichols encourages: ‘Voice is perhaps akin to that intangible, moiré-like pattern formed by the unique interaction of all a film's codes, and it applies to all modes of documentary times’ (1983: 249).
Notes

1 Claire Bishop suggests that installation art can be organised around ‘four modalities of experience that installation art structures for the viewer – each of which implies a different model of the subject, and each of which results in a distinctive type of work’ (2007: 8). The first of the models views the subject as psychological. The second is a phenomenological model of the viewing subject. The third revolves around Freud’s idea of the libidinal withdrawal and subjective disintegration. The fourth is art that posits the activated viewer of the work as a political subject (ibid: 10). In the first model, the psychological, she bases her model on the three characteristics of a dream as identified by Freud: its ‘sensory immediacy of perception’ means that it is primarily a visual experience; its ‘composite structure’ implies that when taken on its own is meaningless; and the ‘elucidation of meaning through free association’ (2007:18).
2 The London Film-makers Co-operative (LFMC) was formed in 1966 and was initially centered around the Better Books bookshop on Charing Cross Road. The founding members included figures such as Bob Cobbing, Jeff Keen, Simon Hartog and Stephen Dwoskin, who had recently emigrated from New York where had made his early works. Based on a model inspired by the New York and other international film co-ops, the LFMC sought to provide exhibition, distribution facilities and a published journal to be called Cinim. An open submission policy was agreed so that filmmakers could loan copies of their films to the Co-op and rental fees would be split 50/50 between the filmmaker and the Co-op. See [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1960-1969/london_film-makers_co-op.html> [Accessed 11 June 2018].
3 Niamh Anne Kelly (2010) elaborates in Here and Now: Art, Trickery, Installation:

Sometimes permanent in structure, usually ephemeral, installation art prioritises, as the term suggests, the mode by which art is installed as a crucial facet in a work’s reflexive identity. This emphasis is typically achieved by ensuring, first and foremost, that the viewer is not a passive spectator but an active agent in how the work (re)defines place.

4 As detailed in the previous chapter, ethnographer Geertz (1973; 1988) developed the idea of ‘thick description’ in ethnographic writing.
5 Miley Walsh is a member of the Dublin Dockworkers Preservation Society. I filmed and interviewed him as he prepared for the Society’s exhibition in Dublin Port Company’s headquarters.
6 Dumhach Trá is the Irish for Sandymount. The series was exhibited in coastal venues including Brownes in Sandymount, Dublin 4 and Escape in Bray, County Wicklow in 1998.
7 The following extract from the proposal, which was submitted in response to DCC’s initial open tender, outlines the intention for the artwork:

**STEVEDORE STORIES FROM DUBLIN’S DOCKS** will use photography, digital storytelling and sculptural media, in an artistic intervention on Dublins’ docklands, and bring to life the experience of the South Coal Quay stevedore community. This audio-visual intervention will take place over the 4 nights of the Dublin Tall Ships Event 2012 in a selected industrial dockland space close to the city and will involve the exhibition of digital narratives, slideshows and soundscapes that depict and reflect the immense transformation of maritime life for stevedores and their families along the docks over recent years. These local stories will be brought into visual representation for Dubliners and visitors in a way that highlights the identity and culture of an ‘invisible’ community. The stories will contrast with lyrical filmic documents and soundscapes of working maritime and dock life such as the arrival of transnational ships, containerised cargo movement and dry cargo loading and unloading.

12 August 2011

For details of the full proposal, see Appendix II
8 PhotoIreland is a volunteer-led organisation dedicated to stimulating a critical dialogue around photography in Ireland and to promoting internationally the work of artists in and from Ireland. See <http://photoireland.org/festival/year-2012/>

9 As discussed in chapter two, the term ‘pro-filmic’ or ‘pro-filmic event’ is used in documentary to describe whatever takes place in front of and around the camera. For Barbish and Taylor, the term is important because ‘documentary is not just a presentation of reality (i.e., it's not reality itself), but also a representation of it’, a ‘process of selectivity and interpretation’ (1997: 8).

10 Barbash and Taylor elaborate on the term ‘actualities’:

‘Actualities’ implies action footage: people going about their lives. Interviews are often conducted as a mode apart, functioning as a slightly distanced reflection or commentary on actualities or historical footage. Archival materials, including film footage, photographs, and sound recordings, connote history, or at least memory – actualities or interviews from the past. But these divisions are continually fractured by filmmakers (and sometimes film subjects). As you’re filming, say, two bakers taking the morning bread out of the oven, they might all of a sudden begin talking about various doughs and the temperatures at which they rise. And if the dialogue was in any way (wittingly or unwittingly) provoked by the camera, then it is in fact as close to being an interview as it is to unadulterated ‘actuality’.

(ibid.: 326)

11 The diegesis is the story constructed in shooting and editing (whether real or fictional), and the pro-filmic is what was really going on during shooting (ibid.).

12 Barbash and Taylor (1997) write that the disembodied off-screen narration or voiceover often used in documentary has been termed the omniscient ‘Voice of God’ and that it prefigures and explains imagery which is often redundant.

13 During the exhibition of the installation Stevedoring Stories in August 2012, I maintained a field diary of conversations that I had with visitors. Janet McKenna from Dublin introduced herself to me as the granddaughter of a local docker.

14 Richard McDermott is a retired Dublin dockworker

15 John Murphy, a dock HGV driver from Longford is talking to his cousin’s son here.

16 Ronan Sheehan from Dublin is a noted author. His book The Heart of the City (2016) reflects on the people of the city of Dublin and features the former dock working communities surrounding the port.

17 For further reading on the history of the CHQ, see <https://chq.ie/history/> [Accessed 10 June 2018].

18 PhotoIreland Festival is Ireland’s first international festival of Photography and Image Culture, and the only festival dedicated to Photography in Ireland. It celebrates Ireland’s photographic talents – oftentimes only recognised abroad – as well as bringing international practitioners and artists to Ireland. The festival highlights, promotes and elevates Photography in Ireland – confering on it the importance it duly deserves. For further details see: <http://2014.photoireland.org/program/moira-sweeney/> [Accessed 10 June 2018]

19 Irish Times, May 31, 2004

20 The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) was established in 2009 as one of a number of initiatives taken by the Government to address the serious crisis in Irish banking, which had become increasingly evident over the course of 2008 and early 2009.

21 Island Capital Services is an investment management company, owned by Denis O Brien, the Irish businessman. Lawrence and Long Architects are overseeing the reconstruction of the building as a restaurant and digital hub.

22 The timing was fortuitous. The building is now close to architectural completion as a restaurant and digital hub and has not been made available for any further cultural projects since Rhythms of a Port.

23 Taking Ian Borden’s The City of Psychogeography as a starting point, cultural geographer Bryonie Reid considers that the dérive central to psychogeography is a ‘a kind of alert, constructive and transgressive “drift”’ (Reid 2011a). For further reading see: <http://www.walkingsilvermines.net/essay> [Accessed 10 June 2018].

24 I was once accustomed to the solitary journey of the artist filmmaker: prior to my time in broadcast television, I shot and edited all of my films.
For the purposes of the written thesis, further critical reflection and analysis was made possible by time and absence from the field site. *Port | River | City* came under the umbrella of Dublin Port Company’s commission *Port Perspectives*, in which artworks were asked to respond specifically to the built environment, local areas, history and context of the port.

For further reading see: <http://www.portrivercity.ie> [Accessed 15 January 2018].


In his autobiographical *Yardbirds Blues* (2010) Arthur J Miller criticises the flag of convenience system which assigns nominal sovereignty to new maritime ‘powers’ such as Panama, Honduras and Liberia and allows owners in the developed world to circumvent national labour legislation and safety regulations. The system affords the ship owners legal anonymity and makes it difficult to prosecute in civil and criminal actions. Flag of convenience ships – with crews primarily drawn from the Philippines, Indonesia, India, China, Honduras and Poland – have been found engaging in arms smuggling, people trafficking, are frequently found offering substandard working conditions, and are now damaging the environment through illegal and unregulated fishing, not to mention some of the most infamous oil spills in history. In 2009, more than half of the world’s merchant ships were registered under flags of convenience, indicating how closely aligned the system is with globalisation.

This definition is from Michael Bundock’s *Shipping Law Handbook* (2018).


They leave instead visual traces of having passed through the port: private messages inscribed onto the public space of the quay wall, visible only to those who also journey in and out of the port by sea. These marks could be viewed as a seafarer’s attempt at claiming an identity as he passed through, almost invisible, on his home without a home, the ship. The marks could also be viewed as graffiti, acts of protest against authority in a regulated urban space (Loeffler 2016)

Archival material was drawn from the RTÉ library and the Irish Film Institute.
Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated some of the compelling and innovative possibilities that emerge from a practice investigating, through observational, participatory and ethnographic documentary approaches to film, how a Dublin Port Community is surviving transformations and shaping its identity in times of change. The study was focused on how to evoke a sense of place for Dublin Port and how a dockworking community shapes its identity within this setting. My goal was to explore the following questions. How could some of the many layerings of a transforming geographic space such as Dublin’s docks be visualised other than through broadcast habituation? How could the everyday on a contemporary working dock be visually recorded and disseminated in ways that reflected its sensuous nature? In a surviving port space how do dockworkers shape their urban identity and how, despite the technological working transformations that this community face, does it find ways to continue to shape its urban identity? How might documentary film and photography facilitate and enrich such an experimental quest? These concerns ultimately guided me to my key research question: how might a filmic investigation of identity, memory, experience and social relations in a Dublin port community challenge notions of friction-free trade?

The strategy of viewing the transformed space of Dublin’s docks through the prism of a documentary imagination allowed me to weave local dockworkers’ narratives and histories into the broader tapestry of a complex web of port operations. Moreover, the strategy of depicting a sense of locale through observational, participatory methods of documentary filmmaking facilitated the processes of filmically representing this selected port community. The combined forces of a sensuous documentary imagination facilitated an empathetic, exploratory examination of the dock field site. My central aim was therefore twofold; to convey the sense of place and identity of a dock community
while also experimenting and elasticating my film practice. The methods employed in interventions and representations have been foregrounded through focusing on observation and participatory and ethnographic research techniques. And so the thesis conveys a sense of the lived experience and shaping of urban identity in a Dublin Dock community whilst also experimenting with filmic ways of doing this, including the narrating of personal experiences and understandings as well as critical contextual observations. I uncovered multiple contrasting voices and perceptions of work life and identity coexisting in this space. The richness of this filmic documentation contradicts the idea that this is a friction-free zone in a friction-free capitalist setting. Instead, former dockworkers profess a fear that they will be overlooked or forgotten and strive to preserve their memory, whilst contemporary dockworkers, marine operatives, VTS operators and port managers stress the vital nature of their work in keeping the port open and the country’s economy flourishing. I have identified the significance, in these circumstances, of memory being preserved, through interviews, informal conversations as well as my embedded, immersive experiences and encounters within the field.

By scrutinising my relationships with the participants through film and the ciné-trance, I explored how a bodily experience can create a sense of place. Immersion and the experiencing filmic body allowed me, through complex editing, to capture and represent the rich textures of this place and this community. As Laura Marks observes: ‘Commercial film and television share some interest in the sensuous qualities that experimental works evoke. However, given their constraints (to put it kindly), commercial media are less likely to dedicate themselves to such exploration’ (2000: xi). Thus, the sensory exploration and embodied film techniques allowed me to foreground mood, rhythms and texture that a standard televisual approach would not have permitted. All of these tactile forms and techniques elicit a sensuous understanding of
the working rituals of interdependent constituencies in the Dublin dock space. Moreover, I have demonstrated the representational process with my own narration despite the fact that the view is through a subjective lens. This has deepened an understanding of reflexive and reflective documentary processes.

The ethnographic and longitudinal approach of this study on Dublin’s docks is unique in its scope; with some exceptions on a local level, seafaring, dock work and marine labour tend to be overlooked by academics and journalists (whose class status may bias them towards white-collar or mental labour). This is the first immersed audio-visual study of this Dublin constituency, building on a small but significant body of research conducted by local scholars identified in the first chapter, such as Aileen O’Carroll (2006), Niamh Moore (2007; 2010), Cian O’Callaghan (2012, 2014, 2016, 2007). The specificity of this study within Dublin Port contributes to the broader global research of scholars like artist and scholar Alan Sekula and sociologist Alice Mah (2014). The thesis, through following the contours of a largely invisible port community, therefore provides a timely and nuanced account of transforming working patterns on Dublin’s docks, importantly filling a gap in knowledge that existed when I set out.

Stoller’s textual strategy of depicting the sensuous nature of locale was one of the guiding forces behind the writing in this thesis, as it followed ethnographic encounters with a constituency of dockworkers, stevedores, boatmen, mariners and port managers in Dublin Port. Stoller’s Sensuous Scholarship provided stimulation over the years of researching, filming, editing and writing this project. As he writes

> And so sensuous scholarship is ultimately a mixing of head and heart. It is an opening of one’s being to the world – a welcoming. Such embodied hospitality is the secret of the great scholars, painters, poets and filmmakers whose images resensualize us.

(1997: xviii)

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Through merging field notes, audio visual recordings and memory, I have crafted a reconstruction of experiences, observations and instances with a selected constituency based in the port: stevedore John Nolan, dockworkers Amy and Tomo Nolan, Dick Elliot, Willie O’Leary and Dave Quinn; boatmen Tommy O’Reilly, Brian Latimore, and John Murphy; Harbour Policeman Paddy Rooney; radio operator of the Vehicle Traffic Systems Kevin Byrne; Harbour Master Fergus Britten; and port managers Charlie Murphy and Eamonn O Reilly. As the field site was not a ‘pre-given entity, not naturally bounded in time and space’, I produced and understood it through ‘the interpretive frameworks of memory and reminiscence’ (Coffey 1999: 110). This temporal re(construction) relies on intertextuality to conjure up the past in the present. This is a richer, thicker, more creative ethnographic process, one that has allowed for a depth otherwise impossible. Through adopting this approach, the thesis succeeds in demonstrating that these docks are not a space with one collective urban identity.

Nor, as demonstrated in this thesis, is the dock site a fixed geographical space. Dublin Port’s Masterplan presents a vision for future operations at the Port and critically examines how the existing land use there can be optimised for trade purposes. The Masterplan outlines Dublin Port Company’s intention to better integrate the port with the city and its people and to ensure that there is harmony and synergy between the plans for the Port and those for the Dublin Docklands area, Dublin city and neighbouring counties within the Dublin region. Future growth to facilitate seaborne trade in goods and passenger movements to and from Ireland and the Dublin Region in particular will involve the widening and deepening of the old Alexander Basin. The physical make-up and boundaries of the port, its work force and its relationship with local communities are all constantly shifting. Viewed through a geographical lens, this
dock space remains ‘under construction . . . always in the process of being made’ (Massey 2009: 127).

Where viewing the site of this study through the lens of a geographic imagination has facilitated a better macro understanding of the docklands space and its history, the research of this study has conversely illuminated and complicated my own past, deepening my understanding of social identity and positionality, a thematic which in turn has informed and enriched the map of complexities in this study. When Clifford (1983) identified the shift within ethnography from the representation of cultures to interpretation of them, he urged that it be viewed not merely as the study of some ‘other’ reality, but as a ‘constructed reality’ composed of the multiple voices of social actors, cultural texts and the ethnographer. Denzin (2006) elaborates on the inclusion of the reflexive subjective voice in a study, suggesting that in order to document, examine and comprehend a selected environment and constituency, ethnographers need also to examine and understand their own lives. The research therefore narrates the emergence of a subjective intellectual and social conscience while undertaking an ethnographic exploration of a dock community. It addresses the enactments of certain masculinities on the docks and shows how cultural experiences and reflections challenge the ‘uncomplicated notion of class as simply socioeconomic status’ demonstrating instead how social identity at any particular moment is contingent on the nuances and complexities of historical, political and material realities (Willard-Traub 2007: 202–203). This contingency is not only synchronic but also diachronic: social identity emerges from the divergence of multiple layers of identity over time and ‘masculinities are not fixed; they change over time, over space, and, not least during the lives of men themselves’ (Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 8).
At the turn of the new Millennium, global social transformations have profoundly impacted men and women, in particular working-class men, and ‘notions of class, having long sustained divisions in masculinity, are now subsumed under often obscure symbolic patterns of consumption and not confined to any specific ethnic or social belonging’ (ibid.: 9). In the light of such nuances, an ethnographic exploration of enactments of certain masculinities on the Dublin docks is well timed. Using the richness of a visual and scholarly ethnographic approach, the thesis succeeds in presenting a meaningful exploration of an enactment of masculinity which ranges from stevedore to dockworker to port manager. I expose how any easy correlation between masculinity and men ignores the many complexities of gender and identity (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995; Clatterbaugh 1998; Beynon 2002).

The research has found expression not only in thesis form but also in the construction of two exhibitions of my filmic work on the dock site itself. I employed distinctive screening spaces located in warehouses on the wharfs for artworks that sought to resonate with the everyday working life of the stevedores. The installations Stevedoring Stories and Rhythms of a Port and the film Keepers of the Port represented the culmination of the practice element of my doctoral study. They took as their imaginative lead the experiential approach adopted in the filmmaking. Having begun to challenge some of the conventions of television documentary production in my image making in this project, it seemed natural to explore new modes of exhibition for my work. The decision to employ a site-specific installation approach as my chosen mode of exhibition took me into challenging territory, often beyond my comfort zone as a broadcaster and outside the codes of mass communication where narratives are constructed to immediately engage an audience as is required in high impact televisual transmission. Whilst Stevedoring Stories and Rhythms of a Port drew on my experience
as a broadcaster in their narrative structure, nonetheless the design of the pieces signalled a certain resistance to the more dominant forms of televised narration and messaging. These were site-specific artworks located in off-the-beaten-track spaces, offering an audience experience and modes of spectatorship significantly different from television viewing. The working method was to make accessible the material to my participants and the local community, as well as to the audiences at a photography festival. The prolonged interaction with these audiences allowed me to overcome some of the ‘traditional aloofness of the merely contemplative sociological observer or journalistic photographer.’ (Sekula 1978: 349). Moreover, it is my hope that these screen-mediated installations offered a valuable, alternative window onto an overlooked world. The responses at screenings of Keepers of the Port have been overwhelmingly positive. Participants felt that their experiences and understandings were represented in ways that honoured and indeed reinforced the case of the Dublin Dockworkers Society at a time when its members were losing hope of being able to preserve their memory.

The aforementioned art works represent the substantive research outcomes of my doctoral project. As site-specific art installations have a finite life, set by their exhibition dates, the work has been archived in film form and is available online Dublin Stevedores Limited website. Keepers of the Port is available in the Dublin Port Archives as well as in the Maynooth University and UCD libraries, where it is part of the Geography Department and English Department syllabuses respectively. The filmic documentation of Rhythms of a Port, Stevedoring Stories and Keepers of the Port has been presented at a number of key Geography and Media conferences in Ireland, England and Italy. Notable amongst these was the Royal Geographic Society’s Annual International Conference, Nexus Thinking, which explored symbiotic relationships towards different ways of knowing and producing knowledge within Arts and
Geography collaborations. Selections from the research have been broadcast on television, including on the arts programme Imeall⁴ and in the digital The Irish Times.⁵ Most recently, the management of Dublin Port Company, inspired by this project, invited me to co-contract a feature documentary film Starboard Home (2019) as a companion piece to their Visual Arts initiative, Port Perspectives.⁶ The stories and memories of the participants of my audio-visual research – the dockworkers, crane drivers and stevedores of Dublin Port – are woven through the film which was broadcast to 100,000 viewers in Ireland in May 2019.⁷

The work has been included in chapter form in two book publications, Media and the City, Urbanism, Technology and Communication (Giaccardi, Tarantino, Tosoni 2013) and Mind the Gap: Working Papers on Practice-based Research in the Creative Arts (Bell 2016). I was furthermore invited to contribute aspects of the research to The Geographical Turn (Kearns 2015), a forum in which geographers and artists are brought together to learn from their separate explorations of the common themes of space, place and environment. A welcome and insightful case study of my lens-based ethnographic research on Dublin’s port can be found in Research in the Creative and Media Arts: Challenging Practice (Bell 2019) (Appendix IV).

The installation, and in particular the film, an archival record, are on one hand reminders of my times in the field and resemble some of my experiences; on the other hand, the processes of editing and narrating these experiences has necessarily produced something completely different. Clifford speaks of the process of creating ‘serious, true fictions’ and film offered me the chance to transmit lived experience whilst intervening with my own narrative which, by its very nature, is subjective, displaying solidarity with the different participants (1983: 7). I have transformed the filmed experience and
encounters in the field into installations and most significantly a lastingly valuable documentary film. This transformation has happened through the combined nuances of creative editing, atmospheric beds of sound, evocative, experimental and resonant instrumental music, rituals of daily work and narration, all of which combine to create a textured and alive dock scape – a sensory experience.

Together with my written thesis, all of this provides a valuable lens-based contribution to our knowledge of a working port community in Dublin and how global forces are transforming it. This thesis in the form of is a lasting contemporary document will continue to be used in colleges and screened at festivals and conferences. This research can now be built upon, for areas of enquiry for future ethnographic research include the expanding role of women in the port and the changing face of the dockworker constituency – once drawn from local communities and now reliant on a contracted new Irish workforce of Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian men and women. The ways in which women embed themselves and shape their working identity on Dublin’s docks – whether engaged in manual labour or administrative work – can also be built upon. Moreover, there is scope to further explore meaningful ways of representing female rituals in urban spaces such as ports, whether through observational, participatory or ethnographic methods of filming.
Notes

1 The film installation *Rhythms of a Port* is featured on Dublin Stevedores Limited website: <http://www.dublinstevedores.ie/news-media/rhythm-of-a-port-installation/>
2 The film can be accessed at https://dublinportarchive.com
3 For further details, see <http://conference.rgs.org/AC2016/327> [Accessed 15 May 2016].
4 *Imeall* is TG4’s flagship arts programme. The programme was aired in November 2016.
6 For *Port Perspectives* artists were invited by Dublin Port to respond specifically to the built environment, local areas, history and context of the port. For further details see https://www.dublinport.ie/artists-bring-new-perspective-port-city/ [Accessed 15 May 2019].
7 *Starboard Home* was premiered at Tradfest: <https://tradfest.ie/event/starboard-home/> [Accessed 15 December 2018]. It was broadcast on RTÉ on May 30 2019 reaching an audience of 100,000 viewers. For further details see: https://www.rte.ie/culture/2019/0520/1050629-starboard-home-a-musical-journey-to-the-heart-of-dublins-docks/ [Accessed 15 May 2019].
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Filmography

At Low Tide (2016) [Film] Directed by Anna Grimshaw. USA: Berkeley Media

At Sea, (2007) [Film] Directed by Peter Hutton. USA: Canyon Cinema

Coming Home (1994) [Film] Directed by Moira Sweeney. Ireland: Spirit Level

Drifters (1929) [Film] Directed by John Grierson. UK: BFI

Fathom (2013) [Film] Directed by Pat Collins and Sharon Whooley. Ireland: Harvest Films

How the Myth was Made: A Study of Robert Flaherty’s Man of Aran (1978) [Film] Produced by George Stoney and James B. Brown. USA: Films, Inc.

Keepers of the Port (2017) [Film] Directed by Moira Sweeney. Ireland: Spirit Level Productions

Keep Frozen (2016) [Film] Directed by Hilda Ros Gudnadottir, Iceland: Ros Gudnadottir


Man of Aran (1934) [Film] Directed by Robert Flaherty. Ireland: Gaumont British Distributors

Moana 1926 [Film] Directed by Robert Flaherty. USA: MOMA

Na Duganna (2005) [Film] Directed by Pat Collins. Ireland: Harvest Films

Nanook of the North 1926 [Film] Directed by Robert Flaherty. USA: MOMA

Play of Light: Black, White and Grey (1930) Directed by Lasso Moholy-Nagy. USA: MOMA

Rain (1929) [Film] Directed by Joris Iven: BFI

Rhythms of a Port (2014) [Film Installation] Directed by Moira Sweeney. Ireland: Spirit Level Productions


*Thames Film* (1986) [Film] Directed by William Raban. UK: LUX

*The Forgotten Space* 2010 [Film] Directed by Allan Sekula and Noël Burch. USA: Doc.Eye Film

*The Stories We Tell* (2012) [Film] Directed by Sarah Polley. UK: BFI

*Time and Tide* (2000) [Film] Directed by Peter Hutton. USA: Canyon Cinema

Appendix I

LIFE ON THE WATER
A REVIEW OF MOIRA SWEENEY’S STEVEDORING STORIES

GEMMA TIPTON
THE IRISH TIMES - THURSDAY, AUGUST 23, 2012

WATER IS AN inescapable part of life in Ireland, and not just the water that falls, with dismaying regularity, from the sky. Crisscrossed by rivers and never more than two hours or so from the sea, it is a strange fact of life in this country that those who make their living by water appear to be such a breed apart.

Although at the very heart of what makes an island nation tick, dockers, sailors and fishermen may seem to have their own culture, customs and communities. As the arrival of the Tall Ships draws Dublin’s attention back to the sea, a programme of art exhibitions and special events, invites us to look again at the lives of those who live by water.

Artist and filmmaker Moira Sweeney has spent four years at Dublin Port, in the company of the men and one woman of Dublin Stevedores Ltd – a 200-year-old family shipping business in Dublin Port. As my own knowledge of industrial docks has – up until now – been gleaned primarily from watching season two of The Wire, Sweeney’s film installation Stevedoring Stories is a gentle revelation. It is a poem to a way of life that has changed utterly in a generation, but which hasn’t entirely disappeared. “The tradition of father-to-son has gone,” says Sweeney, “although John is a fourth generation stevedore, and his daughter Amy, an assistant foreman, is the only female docker in Dublin Port.”

Stevedoring Stories doesn’t attempt to challenge the sometimes conflicted histories of the Docklands, instead it presents a view into the world of a changing community, where globalisation and mechanisation are having a huge impact.

Sweeney describes it as a world away from the TV documentaries where she has made
her name as director (including Feud – The Midlands Traveller Feud, and Teens in the Wild). “It’s very organic, different to broadcasting, because broadcasting is so constructed. This is sitting down and allowing the imagery to speak to me rather than the other way round.”

In the film, the voices of dockers are heard over footage of ships moving through the port’s waters, machinery humming, the hissing sound of brakes, the whirr of engines. They describe a history of what was essentially a closed shop, the “button system” meaning that work stayed within families; they hint at a history of acrimony, and speak of “hard men” who would nevertheless do anything for you. “I don’t want to take a position on that,” says Sweeney. “I want to observe it, I want their nostalgia, and even the romanticisation at times, to exist. I want to make a film that resonates with their memories.”

As the ships arrive and depart, lorries being loaded, cargoes shifted, there’s an unexpected sense of harmony and of beauty in this highly industrial space. Despite ships putting in from around the world, the film’s view of the docks suggests a placeless, rather than a multi-cultural zone. Dockers and international crews haven’t traditionally mixed, and the increasing speed with which ships are turned around means crews only briefly come ashore, if at all. “There’s a little mariners hut,” says Sweeney. “It used to be packed with seafarers, but now there’s half a dozen there over a week – coming in to do emails, and then going back on board. “What surprised me most,” she continues, “is how much I enjoyed the rhythmic quality of the work. And I really enjoy the dockers, I didn’t expect to form friendships and enjoy chatting with them. I wanted to bring to life what I love down there: the sound, the movement, the activity. It’s a world I thought was completely gone, and it has gone from thousands to handfuls; and the work practices are more stringent, but I love the constant sound of cranes lifting, engines, the beep beep beep of lorries.”

Sweeney isn’t alone among artists in turning her eyes to the sea.
Appendix II

PROPOSAL FOR DUBLIN TALL SHIPS EVENT 2012

STEVEDORE STORIES FROM DUBLIN’S DOCKS will use photography, digital storytelling and interactive media in an artistic intervention on Dublin’s docklands that will bring to life the experience of the South Coal Quay stevedore community. This audiovisual intervention will take place over the 4 nights of the Dublin Tall Ships Event 2012 in a selected industrial dockland space close to the city and will involve the exhibition of digital narratives, slideshows and interactive soundscapes that depict and reflect the immense transformation of maritime life for stevedores and their families along the docks over recent years. These local stories will be brought into visual representation for Dubliners and visitors in a way that highlights the identity and culture of an ‘invisible’ community. These stories will contrast with lyrical filmic documents and soundscapes of working maritime and dock life such as the arrival of transnational ships, containerised cargo movement and dry cargo loading and unloading.

The working docks as an integral part of the city’s landscape are more than a geographical space; they form a multi dimensional space, a product of many forces including historical and economic necessity, globalisation and contemporaneous regeneration and cultural affiliation. In the immensity of the globalised space of the docklands, the stevedores exist as a small and intimate community, which has witnessed and can recall through oral history the rich tapestry of an area and life that remains relatively unknown territory for Dubliners.

Oral history recalls the Dublin docks as ‘a world of masts, funnels, towering cranes, barges, carts, horses . . . a hundred sounds becoming a symphony of dockland’. I wish to construct an artistic space, which evokes a symphony of dockland interweaving contemporaneous sound and imagery with the stories and memories of those who have lived and or worked close to the docklands over many years.

This interdisciplinary project will involve a time-based intervention over the 4 nights on a selected appropriate site along the docks. One identified site is the old BJ Marine red brick sheds on Sir John Rogerson’s Quay now part of the Dublin Docklands. These were originally transit sheds for sugar and reflect the nature of stevedore work on the
docks. Stevedores would have loaded and unloaded this dry cargo into the sheds in years gone by. The final decision on a site will however be made in conjunction with Dublin Tall Ships Event 2012 Limited, Dublin City Council and the Dublin Port Authority.

Three walls will be utilised for the intervention. On the first wall, there will be a projection of a photographic slideshow of stevedore portraits, cargo ships and maritime life in Dublin Bay. On the second wall there will be a series of different audio visual narratives projected; each narrative will depict a unique memory or aspect of stevedore history and life told through the eyes of third generation Dublin stevedores who have worked or are still working on the docks. The third wall will allow the audience to use an interactive switch-mixer to select from a series of short stylised audio-visual essays, which draw attention to the sounds, and movements of maritime space and dockland life. These essays will include: cargo ships entering and leaving Dublin Bay; cranes moving containerised cargo along the docks, the movement of dry cargo in and out of the hulls of ships.

When the audience selects an audio-visual essay on the third wall, this will impact on the experience of those viewing the photographic slideshow or digital narratives on the first and second walls; different soundscapes will be audible in the background. In this way the project will reflect the multifaceted layering of sounds and imagery to be heard and seen along the working docks.

INTENDED PROCESS AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS
I am in contact with and have begun to photograph a number of stevedores from the Dublin Stevedore Company who wish to participate in an artistic venture that brings into visual representation their undocumented narratives. The next stage of the project is to gather digital stories from the stevedores and their families. These stories will be edited on Final Cut Pro into distinct individual narratives. In addition a series of interactive audiovisual essays and soundscapes as detailed in the above section will be produced. I will perform all the filming and editing but will need a soundperson for the interview components of the filming. The final part of the process will be the construction of platforms from which to operate the three projectors. I will employ technical assistance for this stage in the form of a projectionist and a carpenter.
Set in a imposing redbrick warehouse beside the Samuel Beckett Bridge on Sir John Rogerson’s Quay, Moira Sweeney’s film installation Rhythms of a Port intertwines the stories and memories of dockworkers, boatmen and port managers with personal reflections and insights on dock life from the artist. Multiple screens hang from the rafters, bringing a former dry cargo store to life and reminding us that the vibrant hub of Dublin’s working docks was once close to the heart of the city. Descriptions of contemporary reality on Dublins’ docks contrast with its history and illustrate an evolving way of life. Arresting industry visuals are amplified by the rugged harmonies of forklift warnings, creaking wood and metal, squeaking ropes and pulleys, and seagulls.

‘The voices and surrounding sounds are the poetry of the everyday, the poetry of life. No drama here, but great beauty, a gentle pace allows you to soak it up….These custodians of the docks and surrounding sea are given the central voice, the “story” is told at a steady pace, steered by the camera and a keen listening ear. The rhythm of the piece, juxtaposed with the steel and industry of the port are beautifully realized.’

Dr. Sally McDee, Researcher and Writer

PARTICIPANTS

Dublin Stevedores Ltd.  John Nolan, Dave + Declan Quinn, Amy Nolan, Norman Byrne, Glen Fleming
Dublin Port Company  Eamonn O Reilly, Charlie Murphy,
Harbour Master’s Dept.  Brian Latimore, John Murphy and Tommy O Reilly, Colm Newport

Art Department  Dermot Ronaldson
Editing Consultant  Alan Devitt
Audio Visual System  Conference Services
Architecture  Lawrence & Long Architects, M J Duncan & Sons Building & Maintenance

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Appendix IV

‘Lens-based ethnography: documenting Dublin’s docklands (case study)’ in Research in the Creative and Media Arts: Challenging Practice (Bell 2019)

9.4 Lens-based ethnography: documenting Dublin’s docklands (case study)

A number of contemporary creative arts researchers have taken inspiration from Rouch’s work. For example, Moira Sweeney in her Dublin Institute of Technology PhD project (2016) sought to explore the shifting occupational and communal identities in Dublin’s docklands. Sweeney employed her still and video cameras to document her interactions with her subjects — dockland workers who have witnessed the transformation of their working lives wrought by the containerization of the port, casualization of dock employment and decline of the north inner-city dockside as a vibrant neighbourhood. She describes (2016:54) her interdisciplinary research approach as involving “the convergence of at least three distinct methodological and professional tributaries: the imagination and production skills of a television documentary maker (she has previously worked in broadcasting), an inquisitive geographical imagination, and an emerging interest in modes of self-reflective enquiry” (which she reports finding in visual anthropology).

A significant influence on her research was the work of photographer, filmmaker and critical theorist Allan Sekula. His 1995 photographic essay Fish Story revisits documentary traditions of photographic representation in order to explore the subject matter of the sea and shipping and the circulation of commodities within maritime space. He addresses complex economic forces which are by their very nature difficult to visually represent. One of the key issues explored in Sekula’s photo-essay (and subsequent in the 2010 film The Forgotten Space, made together with veteran film scholar Noel Burch; Figure 9.9) is the connection between containerized cargo movement and the growing internationalization of the world
industrial economy. He seeks to trace how these systems of circulation impact on the restructuring of the occupational life of ports.

Sweeney found in Fish Story an example of a creative and critical practice she could follow. Like Sekula, she seeks a visual storytelling strategy that might best address this marine political economy. She worked with a number of Dublin dock workers over a two-year period, observing, interviewing and photographing them at work, adopting what she describes as a “visual ethnography approach” in her investigation. Among other things, this meant acknowledging that she as a filmmaker and her subjects existed in a shared and imaginative space constructed in part through the actions of her camera. She invokes the notion of the ciné-trance employed by Jean Rouch. For Rouch, as we have seen, the film-maker, far from adopting a distanced and objective stance when recording the activities of their subjects, enters into an intuitive and ecstatic experience of sensory immersion as they film. “For me”, Rouch admits, “the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it, trying to make it as alive as the people it is filming” (2003:38).

Rouch’s camera does not seek to provide an objective record of the cultural practice filmed. Rather, through its provocative entry into the social world studied, camera and film-maker play a part in the reconstruction of that world. As Jean-Paul Colleyn (op. cit.) reminds us, Rouch never sought to be the unnoticed observer, the “invisible witness”, favoured in US observational documentaries of the 1960s. He hated the metaphor of a filmmaker as “a fly on the wall”: His camera drove straight into the centre of the action, changing it, and provoking reaction.
This *ciné-provocation* seeks to be illuminating for both researcher and their subjects, producing a range of insights into cultural relations which could be shared by researcher and subject alike. In Rouch's hands, the ethnographic film process underscores the fabricated nature of the ethnographic encounter and the collaborative character of all anthropological research. Perhaps for this reason, his approach has found such favour with a generation of young artist-researchers seeking a critical model to guide their practice.

The rituals of working life that Moira Sweeney filmed in Ireland were those of manual workers on a Dublin dockside rather than the trance activities of the Songhay-Zarma in equatorial Niger that Rouch was concerned with capturing. However, the common feature is the involvement of each film-maker in a form of cultural exchange that is seen as collaborative in character. Sweeney adopts the highly mobile use of the camera by the researcher-film-maker in relation to the subjects filmed that Rouch has described as a "strange kind of choreography". This handheld use of the camera a visual prosthetic facilitates the entry of the researcher into the events they encounter in the field. As the use of the term "choreography" suggests, the subjects often actively collaborate with the film-maker to facilitate the portrayal of a scene. This means that realities are co-constructed and that meanings always change as context of interpretation change, continually revealed and modified in numerous ways. Provoking, catalysing, questioning, and filming are simply strategies for unleashing that revealing process. (…) people respond by revealing themselves, and meanings emerge in that revelation.

(Feld 2005:16)

After closely observing the work rituals of the stevedores, dockers and labourers over several months, Sweeney's filming begins to focus on a study of Amy, one of the few women working on the docks (Figure 9.10 left). The film-maker seeks to produce a moving image portrait of Amy, seen at work loading and unloading the docked cargo ships. In a sequence shot in the tiny cabin of the crane she operates, Amy senses the difficulty that Moira is having steadying and focusing the camera in the enclosed space. In an accommodating gesture, Amy instinctively shifts her position to facilitate a film-maker struggling to capture a key shot – a small gesture but one that signals the collaborative and performative character of such documentary work. Her work finally culminated in the exhibition of two multiscreen installations sited within a large dockside warehouse (Figure 9.10 right).

Her completed films were projected in this space and her participants invited to be her first audience. Like many documentary film-makers who have moved out of broadcast and film exhibition, she chose to experiment with an installation approach, believing that this “has the capacity to intervene in sites and construct interactive spaces in relation to audiences that employ sensory means that break the mould of the white cube gallery” (Sweeney 2016:63).
FIGURE 9.10 (left) Moira Sweeney, *Rhythms of a Port* (2014), screen shot: “Amy cleaning the hold”; (right) installation view, 5 Digital HD screens in a dockland warehouse

*Source*: courtesy of the artist
Schneider and Wright have identified a generation of lens-based practitioners, like Sweeney, who work like anthropologists but exhibit as artists. These researchers employ what they refer to (2013:19) as an “observational aesthetic”, producing film and photographic works “exhibited in gallery or site-specific settings which facilitate the use of multiple screens allowing for different kinds of physical encounter with the work”.

This method of presenting ethnographic research moves beyond social scientific reportage, a discourse which often employs objectivist language and scientific tropes that distance the research from the subjects whose collaboration facilitated its outcomes. Sweeney felt that her chosen mode of exhibition “was both in keeping with the embodied approach adopted in the filming and responsive to the specifics of the site of my research and to my participants” (Sweeney op. cit.: 63). As a researcher, she was picking up on a well-established tradition of artists seeking to explore the challenge of site-specific work and of developing new modes of display conducive to the collaborative and dialogical character of their practices.9

Anthropologist, curator and historian of photography Elizabeth Edwards has sought to more broadly engage with this recharged photo-documentary dynamic. She urges anthropologists to acknowledge the art of photography and not simply to see the camera as a field tool for documentation but also to acknowledge and learn from the expressive, formal and conceptual dimensions of recent photographic practice. Her concern is to encourage the imaginative and dialogical, rather than strictly scientific, character of anthropology. As she admits (1992:56), her approach draws mainly

from discourses outside the accepted canons of visual anthropology: from contemporary photographic criticism, the dilemmas of photographic practice and the ambiguous spaces of postmodern documentary practice. (. . .) these discourses constitute precisely that set of “counter rules” which might enable still photography to constitute an active and individual voice within the discipline, premised on the expressive rather than the realist.

This notion of counter rules, derived from Feyerabend’s suggestion that science needs challenges from outside its normal paradigm to renew itself as an empirical domain, is a useful one. Art practice provides such counter rules, disturbing the “imperial” authority of anthropology. Conversely, anthropology also can serve as a set of counter rules which might inform contemporary art practice. As Schneider and Wright suggest (2013:12), “anthropology has much to teach artists about the kinds of negotiations and culturally relative inflections of terms such as participation and collaboration, particularly in colonial and postcolonial contexts”. For example, those who celebrate the relational character of art activity have been slow to elaborate the methodological auspices of such “socially engaged” work and might usefully attend to how over the last twenty years anthropology has sought to elaborate an appropriate methodological and ethical response to the challenge of conducting collaborative fieldwork and adequately representing its subjects.
List of Publications


List of Films and Installations Exhibited

Stevedoring Stories (Exhibited in CHQ, Dublin Docks, 2012) [Film Installation] Directed by Moira Sweeney. Ireland: Spirit Level Productions

Rhythms of a Port (Exhibited on Sir John’s Rogerson’s Quay, Dublin Docks, 2014) [Film Installation] Directed by Moira Sweeney. Ireland: Spirit Level Productions

Keepers of the Port (Premiered Irish Film Institute, Dublin and Exhibited at The Lab Gallery, 2017) [Film] Directed by Moira Sweeney. Ireland: Spirit Level Productions

Starboard Home (Premiered at TradFest and Broadcast on RTÉ, 2019) [Film] Directed by Moira Sweeney with Rob Davis and Elton Mullally. Ireland: Spirit Level Productions / South Paw Pictures.

Reviews

