Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Documentary Photography and the Fantasy of the Real

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts
at Massey University, Wellington,
New Zealand

John Lake
00020885
2008
Abstract

This thesis explores the epistemological shift in my photographic practice from an ethnographic position to that of surrealist documentary. In charting this shift I have consider the use of documentary photography by the historical Surrealist movement, and, the synthesis of surrealism and ethnography found in the English group Mass-Observation. The photograph’s oscillation between indexical record and mystical emanation forms a key position in understanding these two groups belief in the found images ability to describe a repressed reality located in the mass unconscious.

Drawing on the Lacanian model of the Real used by Slavoj Zizek as a tool of cultural critique I suggest a new framework for a surrealist documentary practice. In bringing the methodology of the early Surrealists into a contemporary context I consider the position of suburbia as a new terrain vague in relationship to the fantasy of the Real.