

Redefining the Image

A Harun Farocki
Retrospective

August 1-3, 2024



Bangalore
Film
Forum



GOETHE
INSTITUT
MAX MUELLER
BHAVAN

INDEX

About	5
Programme Notes	
About Narration	8
Counter-Music	9
Eye Machine 1	10
How to live in the FRG	11
Images of the world and The Inscription of War	12
In Comparision	13
Inextinguishable Fire	14
Interface	15
Prison Images	16
The Expression of Hands	17
The Interview	18
Videograms of a Revolution	19
White Chistmas	20
Workers Leaving the Factory	21
Programme Schedule	23

About Harun Farocki

Srikanth Srinivasan

The protean filmography of Harun Farocki, comprising fictional features, video essays, documentaries and multi-screen installations, must count among the most intellectually piercing and artistically rich bodies of work in the history of cinema.

Born in 1944 to an Indian father and a German mother, Farocki was taken at a very early age by the work of Bertolt Brecht, who, along with Theodor Adorno, had a lasting influence on his thought. As a student at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB), Farocki was actively engaged in the student movement in West Germany against the Vietnam War, resulting in a dismissal from the academy. *Inextinguishable Fire* (1969), made shortly after, contrasts the horrifying effects of Napalm B on the human body with the amoral, scientific detachment with which it was developed in the laboratories of a private chemical company. The phenomenon of the alienation of labour from its products and the removal of individual moral accountability in technological societies would become a recurring theme in Farocki's films.

A lifelong Marxist, Farocki interrogated the ever-changing face of industrial production, examining what labour means in an age in which the boundary between productive and not-productive work becomes ever fuzzier. His last, unfinished installation project, *Labour in a Single Shot* (2011–2014), a collection of single shots showing people at work in 15 different international cities and simultaneously projected on 15 screens, probes into the shape-shifting nature of labour and its increasingly invisible status in modern societies.

Such a desire to get to the heart of modern capitalist practice is also what informs a series of remarkable observational documentaries that Farocki made from the 1990s onward. In these films, we typically see a team of white-collar workers coming together to conceive and realise a project, such as the construction of a mall (*The Creators of Shopping Worlds*, 2001), the forging of a deal between a small firm and an investor (*Nothing Ventured*, 2004), the training of candidates for job interviews (*The Interview*, 1996) or the design of a new corporate office space (*A New Product*, 2012). As these discussions take shape, we come to notice the presence of rational, human decisions underpinning the development of larger, impersonal systems. In these sound-proof rooms of glass and steel, we witness the materialisation of ideology in the realm of the visible.

This osmosis between the domain of ideas and that of real things is a motif that binds all of Farocki's work. His films examine the processes by which intangible notions become concrete objects (and vice versa); *Still Life* (1997), for instance, shows how the idea of happiness and satisfaction for the consumer upon buying a product translates into the advertising image. Such a dialectic between the notional and the material marks Farocki's own professional practice, in which he moved from working with film, then with analogue video, and lastly with digital cameras.

The digitization of shooting, editing, distribution and exhibition of films, for Farocki, rhymes with the increased depersonalisation of manual labour. Data from the real world is stored as electrical charge on computers, then abstract images are generated from these charges and eventually the real world is reshaped with these very images.

The pre-existing filmic material used in Farocki's films — surveillance videos, engineering models, reconnaissance footage and scientific data feeds — attests to the centrality of machine-captured images in military, economic, social and legal processes today: supermarkets are architected according to the walking patterns of consumers (The Creators of Shopping Worlds), defence strategies planned out based on computer simulations (Serious Games I, 2009), psychological traumas treated with virtual-reality programmes (Serious Games III, 2009), and prison facilities controlled and regulated through interactive CCTV setups (Prison Images, 2003).

Images, of course, are the primary objects of study in Farocki's films. These works delve into the history of modern image-making — from the diminishing perspective of Renaissance architecture, which anointed sight as the preeminent sense, to the flattened images of aerial photography that gave birth to both Cubist art and wartime telecast — to explore how the cinematic image has, time and again, unwittingly played its part in the concentration and abuse of power. They demonstrate how, in modern warfare, terrains are mapped out in extensive detail, strategies simulated through software and variables of battle controlled to a degree that the actual war becomes little more than logistical formality. In such an asymmetric war, the side that controls machine-filmed, amoral and objective images of a region is the one that conquers it. To see is to capture.

Farocki's cool, composed essay films remind us of the treachery of images, but they also point to their liberating power. These works move beyond simply analysing our extremely visual, late-capitalist culture through its images and reveal the epochal changes that machine sight has brought about in every sphere of existence. One of the greatest strengths of these films is their genuine curiosity and interest in understanding the rapid transformations that mark our post-ideological, technological age. Critical yet never pessimistic, instructive yet never condescending, Farocki's enduring body of work continues to inspire and illuminate.

-Srikanth Srinivasan is a film critic and programmer. He is the author of "Modernism by Other Means: The Films of Amit Dutta" (2021, Lightcube) and "Nainsukh, the Film" (2023, Museum Rietberg Zürich)



**P
R
O
G
R
A
M
M
E
N
O
T
E
S**

Programme Notes by
Cathy Lee Crane and Srikanth Srinivasan

About Narration



Erzählen

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki,
Ingemo
Engström

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

DURATION

58 min.

YEAR

1975

This collaboration between Ingemo Engstrom & Harun Farocki is an exploration of what a story is and by implication, what makes history. The telling, the pattern and rhythm of the telling of chosen events. A film story has its own formal rules governed by framing and sequencing but the generative principles of a story (fairytales are used to illustrate them: Cinderella and King Kong) align with the necessity of crossing boundaries, not through the oppositional nature of borders alone, but ultimately through a dialectical and ongoing set of transformations of structural tension. The knowing what but not yet how, leaving the why to remain “unknown”.



Counter-Music

Counter-Music

How do you film a city today? This question haunts Counter Music, set in the deindustrialised city of Lille in northern France. Referencing two classic city symphonies of the 1920s — Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) — Farocki's two-screen installation contemplates on the meaning of producing images of a city at a time when urban spaces are continuously filmed by machines and interpreted by software for human supervisors. These surveillance images, devoid of the drama and surprise of the 1920s films, bear witness to a public sphere where all uncertainty and mystery have been eliminated, where a stray plastic bag blowing in the wind becomes the container of both anomalous beauty and quiet resistance.

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE

German with English subtitles

DURATION

25 min.

YEAR

2004

Eye / Machine 1



Auge / Maschine 1

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

DURATION

23 min.

YEAR

2000

The basis for Eye/Machine 1, a two-channel installation turned into a single-channel video work, is aerial footage recorded by autonomous weapon systems during the Gulf War of 1991. These images, produced by computers recognising their targets in order to strategically eradicate them, raise a pressing question: when machine vision goes from being operational to being intentional and intelligent, what is the role of human judgment? Eye/Machine 1 fleshes out one of the prime motifs of Farocki's work: the increasing elimination of chance and human fallibility in both military operations and civilian life through simulations and machine reasoning. Farocki's film, on the other hand, demands the opposite from the viewer. Using a method of intra-frame montage, it compels us to actively create meaning out of seemingly disparate images.



How to live in the FRG

Leben - BRD

Farocki assembles a genre picture of the contemporary Federal Republic of Germany with shots of scenes where life is rehearsed, ability/durability is tested. Wherever one looks, people appear as actors playing themselves; they take on roles. A play in the theatre of life made up of training courses, fitness tests for things and people. Be it in birth preparation classes for expectant parents or in practice runs for sales talks, on the military training ground or during roleplays for educational purposes.

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

DURATION

83 min.

YEAR

1990

Images of the World and the Inscription of War



Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

DURATION

75 min.

YEAR

1988

The quintessential Farocki film, *Images of the World and Inscription of War* is a wide-ranging meditation on the faculty of sight and its progressive replacement by technologies of sight. “The history of battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception”, wrote Paul Virilio. From systems of geometric projection during the European Renaissance to modern aerial war photography, the film reveals how image-making technologies have increasingly eliminated physical danger for the observer by predetermining the world from a distance. Where painters once obtained numbers and rules from the study of nature, says the narrator, “the calculating machines of today make pictures out of numbers and rules.” Farocki’s film proves prescient in our self-cannibalising era of large language models and generative AI, where the world is represented in images derived from representations themselves.



In Comparison

Zum Vergleich

In Comparison elaborates on a theme vital to Farocki's late-career work: the diminishing visibility of human labour in spaces of production. An intimate observational documentary without explicit commentary, it documents the process of brick production in six countries across three continents. In India and Burkina Faso, labourers make bricks on site by hand, their repetitive, closely observed gestures taking on the power of a ritual. In Europe, in contrast, conveyor belts rapidly churn out flawless, factory-made building units, their speed limited only by the human elements on the production chain. In Comparison illuminates classic differences between the West and the Global South, but also raises questions about the hidden ecological costs of automation and vanishing labour.

DIRECTOR
Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE
German with
English subtitles

DURATION
61 min.

YEAR
2009

Inextinguishable Fire



Nicht löschbares Feuer

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

DURATION

25 min.

YEAR

1969

A shining example of Harun Farocki's early work, *Inextinguishable Fire* combines confrontational agitprop, Brechtian theatre and dry humour to critique the use of Napalm during the Vietnam War. In the opening segment, Farocki puts out a burning cigarette on this hand to demonstrate the effect of Napalm on human skin, at once minimising the horror of the brutal war and making it starkly real. We then see scientists at Dow Chemical Company developing Napalm, tweaking their formula and workflow based on media coverage of the war. With wit and didactic directness, *Inextinguishable Fire* illustrates how capitalist division of labour alienates individuals from the consequences of their work and, in doing so, shields them from the guilt of being complicit in inhuman violence.



Schnittstelle

Originally a two-channel gallery installation, *Interface* constitutes a reflexive tour into Farocki's highly tactile working method. In two, slightly overlapping sub-frames, we see the filmmaker at a video editing suite, viewing his earlier work and commenting on the difference between film and video. The overarching impression is that of a progressive dematerialisation: of the image, of the filmmaking process and of labour itself. "I can hardly write a word these days if there isn't an image on the screen at the same time," go the first words of the voiceover. *Interface* offers a bridge between the two dominant tendencies of Farocki's oeuvre — observation and instruction — and makes concrete the dialectic between thought and material in the process of artmaking.

DIRECTOR
Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE
German with
English subtitles

DURATION
25 min.

YEAR
1995

Interface

Prison Images



Gefängnisbilder

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

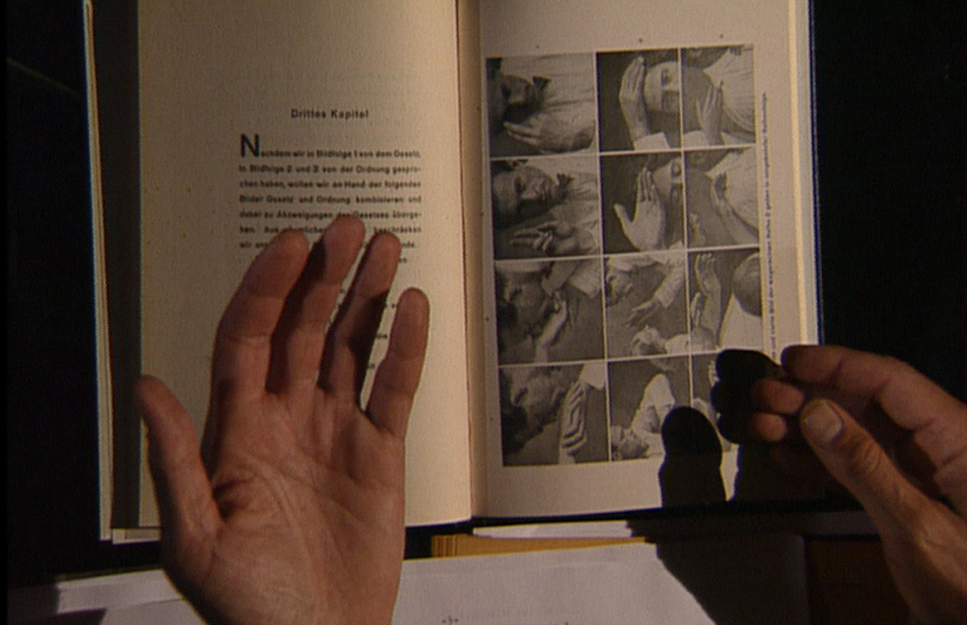
DURATION

60 min.

YEAR

2000

Like factories and shopping malls, prisons occupy a crucial space in Farocki's work, embodying as they do fundamental tensions of capitalistic societies. Interweaving news clips, CCTV footage from American incarceration facilities and excerpts from across film history, *Prison Images* examines the use of 24x7 surveillance of inmates in correctional centres and the resultant gamification of the prison system. The film suggests that this confluence between sight, technology and police power is the foundation of all institutional control in a mass society. But *Prison Images* also foregrounds gestures that defy this regime of control. As much as total subjugation remains a cornerstone of fascist fantasy, Farocki's film demonstrates, the desire for escape remains just as indomitable.



The Expression of Hands

Der Ausdruck der Hände

Historically, the cinema close-up was initially employed to convey emotions through facial expressions. But soon filmmakers also began focusing their attention on hands. Using film extracts, Farocki explores this visual language, its symbolism, Freudian slips, automatisms and its music. Often, hands betray an emotion which the face tries to dissimulate. They can also function as a conduit (exchanging money) or witness to a form of competence (work).

DIRECTOR
Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE
German with
English subtitles

DURATION
30 min.

YEAR
1997

The Interview



Die Bewerbung

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

DURATION

58 min.

YEAR

1997

First impressions, training the presentation of self for non-actors opens the theatre of gesture to include a subject's objective: most often in these observations, to find a job. Of course, in the flow of this process is the distinction of power (also performed) that defines directors of Human Resources and is meant to separate them from the applicant/supplicant. To portray the character of a colleague, one must not appear rehearsed but rather "natural". Here we find the vagaries of authenticity which the 20th century in reciprocal decline destroyed as more of the world performance would become mediated by and ultimately defined by recording devices.



Videograms of a Revolution

Videogramme einer Revolution

Co-directed with Andrei Ujica, this feature-length reflection on the Romanian revolution of December 1989 performs a brilliant synthesis of political and formal analyses. In videos shot across Bucharest during the unrest preceding Nicolae Ceaușescu's execution, we see history as it is being made, in all its tragicomic faces. Protestors take over the television station, announcing the revolution and conducting kangaroo courts to sentence rivals. The film's narrator periodically comments on these dramatic televised sequences, turning our attention away from the revolution itself towards how it was perceived. In doing so, the film probes into the capacity of photographic images to authenticate an event and legitimise history. Videograms offers a potent investigation into the relationship between technological progress, political power and collective memory.

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki,
Andrei Ujica

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

DURATION

106 min.

YEAR

1992

White Christmas



White Christmas

DIRECTOR

Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE

German with
English subtitles

DURATION

4 min.

YEAR

1968

A classic instance of pop art at the service of political critique. Santa Claus delivers presents to American children as Bing Crosby's chartbuster *White Christmas* plays on the soundtrack. Shortly after, we see other kinds of gifts being delivered from the sky, as American jets drop bombs on North Vietnamese villages. Pithy intertitles provide ironic punctuation, turning the message of Christmas into a rallying cry for the Vietnamese resistance. Like *Inextinguishable Fire*, this cheeky short invades the warm domesticity of American homes with bloody images of a lopsided war. Christmas will never be the same again.



Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik

Made for the centenary of the invention of cinema, this marvellous, dense video essay traces the lineage of Auguste and Louis Lumière's *Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895), symbolically considered here as the first film ever shot. Chaining together clips of workers leaving factories from across cinema history, the essay analyses the historically shifting meanings of this malleable image. The factory gate is presented as a dialectical space: a site of confrontation between Labour and Capital, but also between ideas of work and leisure, between private and public property, and between different strands of film history. "Where the first camera once first stood, there are now hundreds of thousands of surveillance cameras," notes the narrator, pointing out how cinema unwittingly became the instrument to safeguard those in power.

DIRECTOR
Harun Farocki

LANGUAGE
German with
English
subtitles

DURATION
36 min.

YEAR
1995

Programme Schedule

August 1

- 4.00 p.m. **Introduction + The Expression of Hands**
- 4.45 p.m. **About Narration**
- 5.45 p.m. BREAK
- 6.00 p.m. **Eye Machine 1**
- 6.30 p.m. **Counter Music**
- 7.00 p.m. **Images of the World and the Inscription of War**

August 2

- 4.00 p.m. **Introduction + How to live in the FRG.**
- 5.35 p.m. BREAK
- 5.45 p.m. **The Interview**
- 6.45 p.m. BREAK
- 7.00 p.m. **Videograms of a Revolution**

August 3

- 3.00 p.m. **Introduction + White Christmas**
- 3.15 p.m. **Inextinguishable Fire**
- 3.45 p.m. **Workers Leaving the Factory**
- 4.20 p.m. BREAK
- 4.30 p.m. **Prison Images**
- 5.30 p.m. **Conversation : Deciphering Farocki with Basav Biradar
and Srikanth Srinivasan**
- 6.30 p.m. BREAK
- 6.45 p.m. **Interface**
- 7.15 p.m. **In Comparison**



Bangalore
Film
Forum

goethe.de/bangalore



GOETHE
INSTITUT

MAX MUELLER
BHAVAN