26

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abstract:

Beginning with a close reading of Harun Farocki's Einfühlung, the author analyzes the formation of this tradition of empathy and the critical attitude towards it, with particular emphasis on the sense of failure and the retrospectiveness of the postulate of regaining the Einfühlung by the critical tradition. The author looks at the role of photographs of suffering bodies in the process of shaping the German public sphere during the Vietnam War. He tries to show the complexity of strategies critical of the mass media by reconstructing Farocki's polemics with terrorist movements. He analyses parodying the use of television aesthetics in Inextinguishable Fire (1969) and includes it into the tradition of fighting the tabloid media. He is interested in the reevaluation of the relation between the body and image, which enables reaching beyond the pattern of empathy by means of identification and the idea of "Einfühlung, which has caused the alienation effect."

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To Reclaim Einfühlung: The Search for a Formula of Radical Empathy in Harun Farocki's Early Work



Their Newspapers ©Harun Farocki, 1968

In the short but very dense article "Einfühlung" – written for an anniversary publication on the centenary of Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer theater in 2008 – Harun Farocki attempted to rethink once again the workings of the cinematic mechanism of empathy. Comprising six concise paragraphs and suspended between the poetics of a manifesto and a master lecture, the text transforms into a retrospective self-reflection on the beginnings of the artist's own work.

Farocki emphasizes that in his consideration of the question of empathy he prefers to use the German word *Einfühlung* over mentioning the mechanism of "identification," as the former contains more brutality and stirs disturbing discomfort in the viewer. That is because its overtone combines the semantic scope of the words "to penetrate" and "to sympathize." It may come as a surprise that Farocki addresses this category, because the viewer's embodied experience had been analyzed in detail in previous decades by phenomenology[1] and sensual film studies.[2]


Their Newspapers ©Harun Farocki, 1968

Engaging in reflection on *Einfühlung* therefore marks the German director's return to fundamental notions that organize his thinking and emphasizes his affiliation with a specific theoretical tradition. The sources of the debate on *Einfühlung* date back to disputes in the field of

German idealism concerning relations of emotions and the body with the aesthetic experience. The first theoretical formulation of the concept was put forward by Robert Vischer in his book *Über das Optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik*[3] in 1873, in which he analyzed the experience of viewing painting and sculpture. What interested him in that process was the mutual impact between the viewer's body and the perceived object. Vischer's thought was founded on the differentiation between passive "seeing" [*sehen*] and active "looking" [*schauen*].[4] Active looking entailed the engagement of the viewer's corporeality, which made it possible for them to "trigger the feeling of empathy" or "penetrate" the viewed object. The psychological mechanism of the projection of the viewer's consciousness onto the object of contemplation was an aesthetic experience, but also a cognitive-ethical one, since it resulted in a union with the most profound essence of the matter of animate and inanimate objects.[5] The pan-psychologism of that perspective was, over time, considered a naive legacy of Romanticism and deemed non-scientific. The rehabilitation of (and resumed interest in) *Einfühlung* occurred with the development of psychology at the beginning of the 20th century. The psychiatrist Theodor Lipps sought to develop a generalized formulation of the concept of *Einfühlung* in his essay "Einfühlung und ästhetischer Genuss."[6] He recognized *Einfühlung* as a mental process, during which the subject gains awareness of the emotional content of the object through perception of its individual attributes.[7] He thus extended the scope of possibilities of developing "the feeling of empathy" by including such properties of objects as color, shape, mood, and space. He also drew attention to the role of *mimesis* in the mechanism of *Einfühlung*. The viewer's empathic reaction is made possible by the instinctive human capability of imitating gestures and inferring feelings from bodily states. Aesthetic emotional projection is therefore accompanied by a somatic reaction

that transforms it into empathic engagement. Lipps described *Einfühlung* as an experience of physiological agitation in which the viewer merges with the object to form a single whole. This brings about a sense of corporeal vitality in the viewer and triggers visual pleasure. We may therefore perceive the debate on *Einfühlung* at the turn of the 20th century as, on the one hand, an attempt to rethink, along with the development of psychological knowledge, the opposition of terms of key importance for traditional aesthetic debate – the mind vs the body, the distance of the intellect vs destabilizing aesthetic experience – and, on the other hand, as a harbinger of new models of reception.

Never again fascism – never again *Einfühlung*

Farocki begins discussing his own approach to *Einfühlung* with an agonistic account of how the concept functions. He states that *Einfühlung* "belonged to the other side,"[8] thus revealing his view of it as a malleable tool that can be used by different social actors to pursue their own goals. The category is therefore unstable in terms of its definition, and thus raises suspicion. Further paragraphs describe Farocki's reckoning with his juvenile illusion – based on illusory determinism – concerning the change of approach to the method of acting and the challenges faced by artists. He admits having wrongly thought that "in my adult life, I would never again have to deal with a kind of acting that required empathy."[9] This stemmed from his assumption that he would be a continuator of Brecht's method, which he believed was correct – not because it was close to his personal ambitions, but rather because he recognized it as a credible theoretical practice which offered indispensable tools to transgress the compromised bourgeois-fascist spectacular regime. Farocki therefore believed that it was no longer possible to return to the previous model of reception, as he explains via an analogy: "just as painting would never again become

representational."[10] In the 1930s, Brecht formulated a critique of the concept of *Einfühlung* in theater, in reaction to the commercialization of acting intended to trigger the emotional reaction of the audience and saturation with the resentful rhetoric of fascist rallies. He no longer associated it with active participation in the object, but quite the opposite – with stupefaction and the lack of viewers' critical reflection.[11] In his opinion, the instrumentalization of empathy by bourgeois theater was oriented toward the powerful emotional identification of the audience with what was happening onstage. This posed the threat of manipulation, as creators pursued the goal of making viewers lose control and engage uncritically in the spectacle. Brecht warned that such a model of reception entailed disturbing political consequences, since it treated the audience as an amorphous mass that could be freely shaped by means of emotion. To oppose those negative tendencies, he developed in his theater the alienation effect [*Verfremdungseffekt*], seeking to negate classic dramaturgy and demanding of actors that they maintain distance to the acted character or even openly criticize it. He saw a chance for the subjectification of viewers in encouraging them to adopt a critical and distanced attitude. Brecht believed that only through intellectual reception was it possible for the viewer to notice their own ideological entanglement and thus activate their political awareness.

In defense of lost causes

Further in his text, Farocki questions the validity of defining one's position via a simple negation of the mechanisms of *Einfühlung*. Adopting a sententious tone, he reveals his polemical intentions: "Empathy is too good a word to leave to the other side."[12] He remarks that although Brecht and his followers – himself included – did not condemn emotions altogether, but merely criticized their all-too-simple evocation, they got caught in the trap of agonistic thinking, thus becoming stuck in

a seeming contradiction. Therefore, one should challenge the simplified opposition between empathic identification, implemented through the viewer's complete immersion, and the aseptic distance of the critical intellect. According to Farocki, emotional reaction should not exclude the possibility of access to other levels of film reception; it does not have to veil the images themselves – their embedment in social memory, the context of their creation, their functioning in the public sphere, and finally, the events to which they refer. Following the principle of the dialectical movement of thought that abolishes contradictions and thus salvages their most valuable components in order to synthesize them on a new level, he proposes conceiving empathy "in such a way that it produces the effect of alienation."[13]

Farocki's "Einfühlung" was written in 2008, with considerable temporal distance to the topics discussed, which compels the question: to whom are his proposals addressed? Although his attempt to reconcile the contradictions between empathy and alienation sounds as if it was taken from the polemic pursued in the film milieu toward the end of the 1960s, it is preceded by an admission of defeat in the dispute concerning *Einfühlung* – "this word belonged to the other side."[14] A key to understanding this approach is offered by Enzo Traverso in his book *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory*, in which he seeks to show that the history of the left-wing project is formed from a series of failures, which are an ethical obligation and a moral debt, while also carrying the promise of future redemption. Defining leftism as a culture of the defeated, Traverso confronts the phenomenon of melancholia that accompanies ensuing defeats. He proposes the abandonment of the Freudian model that recognizes melancholia merely as a temporary stage in the work of mourning, believing that such an approach paralyzes the subject's ability to act, thereby leading to passiveness and cynicism.[15] Traverso follows Walter Benjamin, distinguishing a different type of melancholia,

"consisting in a kind of epistemological posture: a historical and allegorical insight into both society and history that tries to grasp the origins of their sorrow and collects the objects and images of a past waiting for redemption."[16]

Reading Farocki's text devoted to *Einfühlung* through the prism of left-wing melancholia opens up the possibility of a different way of thinking about the gesture of returning to the beginnings of creative practice. It offers protection from seeing there nothing but nostalgia for youth (from the perspective of the last stage of your career). However, in this case, the loss of *Einfühlung* , in opposition to Traverso's approach, would not directly result from the historical defeat suffered in social struggle, but would rather come as a consequence of the dispute concerning the role of emotions within the left-wing movement itself. Farocki's attempt to reclaim *Einfühlung* would therefore not so much mark his longing for the unfulfilled potential of social change, but rather be an appeal to the memory of leftist cinema – a return to the forgotten utopian moment of the student film movement of the late 1960s, obscured in the course of constructing the history of German cinema via "New German Cinema."[17] This was an intensive period of searching for new collective forms of production, of dispute with media moguls, and above all of the interpenetration of film practice and political activism. Read more than a decade after its publication – when debate about the return of fascism has been revived – Farocki's text may strike us with the aptness of intuition and offer an important voice in the discussion concerning the exhaustion of critical strategies, as well as the search for a language capable of engaging the audience.

To stop the dialectic

In his text "How to Open Your Eyes,"[18] Georges Didi-Huberman analyzes the ethical dimension of Farocki's work with images. According to Didi-Huberman, the director follows a method known from philosophy in employing an aporetic way of thinking about mechanisms of empathy. This happens when, at first, he suggests that he wishes to respect the viewer's feelings, but then brutally questions their sense of responsibility in the next moment. Oscillation, or even reaching liminal points between conflicted modalities of consciousness, allows Farocki to lend visibility to the ongoing conflict of epistemic levels between "knowledge [*connaissance*], misknowledge [*méconnaissance*], and acknowledgement [*reconnaissance*]."[19] On this basis, Didi-Huberman elaborates on the eponymous question about the range of resulting issues concerning the epistemology of the witness: "how to invest someone with knowledge who refuses to know? *How to open your eyes?* How to disarm their defences, their protections, their stereotypes, their ill will, their ostrich politics?"[20] The French philosopher elaborates on this list in order to emphasize that it is nothing but a detailed iteration of another fundamental question posed by Farocki: "why, in which way, and how does the *production of images* take part in the *destruction of human beings?*"[21] The creative act therefore appears here primarily as an ethical gesture, which – according to Didi-Huberman – can be extrapolated directly from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno.[22] In other words, he recognizes Farocki's way of working with images as a counterpart of the philosophical tradition of critical thought transposed into the visual sphere. Farocki shared with Adorno

and Horkheimer the belief in the self-destructive internal tendencies of the Enlightenment, which became most fully expressed in the destructive power of technology. In his reflection, Didi-Huberman does not develop the details of the project of stopping the mechanism of positive dialectic, and it is precisely at this point that a particular proximity between Farocki's and Adorno's work comes to the fore. Both shared the ambition of suspending the tension – typical of dialectic, particularly in its homogenizing version – between the part and the whole, which results in the total annihilation of what is singular, different, and peculiar. Adorno, constructing the concept of "negative dialectics," sought to reformulate dialectic in a way that would allow for a successful dismissal of the fundamental role of the modern instrumental mind: sacrificing singularity for the sake of historical progress.[23] It was also for this reason that Adorno found unquestionable evidence of the importance of individual existence in the bodily experience of pain.[24] Michał Pospiszyl comments: "It was there that all absolutizing positive dialectic was to stop, and from there that all properly understood negative dialectic was to begin."[25]

In front of our very eyes

Formulated by Adorno, the irreducible ethical admonition concerning disagreement with the suffering of others was considered a polemic against Stalinist and social-democratic Marxism,[26] and an attempt to reformulate the Kantian categorical imperative after World War II. However, Adorno referred only to the awareness of suffering, and did not extend his remarks to embrace reflection on the media. Viewing photographs of suffering bodies exposed to public view – their publication spearheaded by the Axel Springer company tabloids – was a formative experience for the generation of German film directors training and debuting in the 1960s. It also explains, to a considerable degree, why many representatives of radical

leftist movements in Germany had an episode of studies at a faculty of film directing in their biographies. Farocki's colleagues in the same year of studies at Berlin's dffb film school – renamed the Dziga Vertov school during protests against the declaration of the state of emergency in 1968 – included Holger Meins, later a member of the Red Army Faction (RAF), who died of starvation under arrest, and Philip Sauber, activist of the "2 June Movement." Classes at the dffb were even attended by the global icon of the entire movement, Ulrike Meinhof.

The particular interest in images at the time stemmed from two major and closely related developments: the war waged by the United States against Viet Cong communist guerrillas in Vietnam, and anarchistic attempts to mount direct resistance against the military hegemony of the US, culminating under the banner of the RAF. Both phenomena were reported on in detail by the developing mass media, which makes it worthwhile to pay attention to their far less exposed visual aspects. The increasing significance of images in mass communication resulted from the use of better-quality equipment, enabling quicker reproduction of images, and consequently their constant presence in media reports. Viewers were left with the impression of what Philip Auslander called "liveness"[27] – that the spectacle of a war unfolding thousands of miles away was happening "in front of our very eyes."

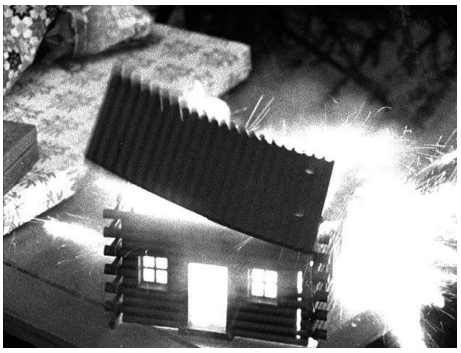
Viewers' empathy for the wrongs suffered by helpless victims entailed hope for the establishment of a new type of moral community that could express its opposition to the perpetrated violence in real time. However, the belief that images of war were capable of completely transforming viewers' convictions soon proved to be futile.



White Christmas ©Harun Farocki, 1968

Further protests against the Vietnam War failed to attract considerable crowds.[28] Hence, the transgression of audience indifference to such images became a key challenge for artists, and a reason behind their frustration at the same time. As a sign of solidarity with the victims, artists resolved to conduct a series of agitational actions during Christmas services at churches in 1968.

An attempt to thematize social ignorance can also be found in Farocki's first film, *White Christmas* (1968). This three-minute-long production is a montage of images of German society indulging in mass consumption at Christmas, edited together with images of civilian suffering during the Vietnam War. Scenes show toy rifles being thrown to children from Santa's sleigh, which then transform into images of American bombs falling on Vietnamese villages.



White Christmas ©Harun Farocki, 1968

This juxtaposition is accompanied by an ironic voiceover: "The Americans also think about the Vietnamese at Christmas, so they throw them 'explosive toys' from the sky." The film makes provocative use of the Christian phraseology of "redemption" and "resurrection" while also revolving around the motif of Christ's birth in order to reproach Germans celebrating Christmas for their religious hypocrisy. Farocki's polemical strategy reveals the problem of moralism represented by the anti-war activists: instead of following Brecht's proposed

lightness of phrasing, they became wrathful mentors – the only ones to take ethical obligations "seriously." They were "like the rear view mirror – belated, heavily moralised and fiercely protestant."[29]

The television industry of consciousness

During this period, film critic Helmut Färber noted that the repeated use of images of victims as evidence of violence led, against activists' intentions, to indifference. Instead of sparking and sustaining moral outrage, it generated the effect of familiarization and soon transformed into boring routine. Färber therefore argued that images of violence intensified affective impotence; they achieved a paradoxical effect: they paralyzed and caused powerful agitation at the same time, and thereby that which is "intended to escalate our disgust turns instead into blasé routine."[30] Filmmakers and political activists attributed the sources of social indifference with which they clashed during the Vietnam War to the exponential growth of the tabloid press and, above all, the ever-broader reach of television – the ratio of households with television sets in the FRG tripled between 1960 and 1974. Following the critique that unmasks ideologies, they defined the individual first and foremost as a television viewer, and recognized their consciousness as a product of TV news broadcasts. The heated debate around mass television reveals the particular kind of iconophilia and iconoclasm that accompanies the initial developmental stages of new media forms. Overlapping fascination and ruthless criticism conveyed the unexpressed conviction that, thenceforth, people would maintain particularly close relations with images. Due to the mass reach, the viewer came to be considered as a consumer who could absorb an unprecedented amount of images on a daily basis. At the same time, the images themselves, embraced in the new format of their televisual life, revealed an extraordinary power of engagement and became

suspiciously expansive to the point of potentially devouring the viewer. "A public sphere without experience (*Erfahrung*). That is the cinema today"[31] – as Alexander Kluge argued in his summary of the influence of Hollywood cinema on viewers' reception of film. Links between these two orders – the media and the public sphere – provide the topic of Kluge's book (co-written with Oskar Negt), *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung – Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*.[32] Intended as a polemical response to Jürgen Habermas's famous book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*,[33] it also marked a return to the reflection pursued prior to World War II concerning the influence of media based on reproduction technology on the way reality is experienced by mass audiences. Aside from challenging Habermas's concept over its exclusivity and the omission of self-organized proletarian forms, Kluge and Negt believed that, in order to understand the workings of the public sphere, it was necessary to embrace its mediatization. This meant rethinking the functioning of television, which was gaining nationwide reach at the time and becoming the principal source of information about reality. In the chapter "Das öffentlich-rechtliche Fernsehen – in konkrete Technik umgesetze bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit" the authors analyze the influence of television on the shape of the public sphere, and attempt to find an alternative use for the potential offered by TV documentaries and news broadcasts.[34]. In reference to Adorno's concept of the "culture industry," Kluge and Negt recognize television as a "consciousness industry."[35] They ask about the political consciousness of viewers watching the polyphony of television broadcasts, and seek to investigate the interests and ideological principles that informed the increasingly frequent interpenetration of informational content and pure entertainment. References to the Vietnam War recur, especially at the beginning of the chapter; for the authors, the manner of its reporting offered a model example of the limitations of the media

industry. The coverage of the war activities fully revealed for the first time how the informational function overlapped with the entertainment profile – a phenomenon called "open form." German mediology generally gave considerable attention to the ties between war, the media, and the entertainment industry. In his famous quote from the 1980s, Friedrich Kittler went so far as to perversely state that: "The entertainment industry is, in any conceivable sense of the word, an abuse of army equipment."[36] German scholars worked under the assumption that every medium had been developed for the needs of the military industry before it became a mass medium; however, this was not equivalent to society's constant militarization with the advent of mass radio and television. Paradoxically, Kittler argued that when subsequent "new media" achieve mass reach, they completely repress their military genesis and even lead to the negation of the very concept of war.[37] Their manner of informing about hostilities makes war mutate from a state of emergency to a natural state, as it becomes an integral part of news broadcasts.

Holger Meins's posthumous photograph

Opposition to official television broadcasting, and the perception of it as something at the service of the authorities, confronted filmmakers and activists with the political challenge of shaping a counter-public sphere [*Gegenöffentlichkeit*], which would provide a credible counterbalance to the "dictatorship of manipulators."[38] As a result, the initial activities of dffb film school students largely involved documenting demonstrations and political actions. The fluid overlap between political activity and filmmaking during the era offers grounds to ask about ties between social movements and visuality, as well as about the later link between the increased significance of terrorism and the development of mass news media; it also offers the possibility of examining the role and functioning of images in that process. In

the book *Ulrike Meinhof and the Red Army Faction: Performing Terrorism*, Leith Passmore defines the relation between the mass media and terrorism in the 1960s as strictly symbiotic. She works under the commonly shared conviction that "terrorists provide the mass media with the spectacular images and stories it needs, and in return the media supplies terrorist organizations with the coverage they crave."[39] Her argument about the symbiotic relations of post-war German terrorism and the development of mass communication media is founded on the association of terrorism and media with harnessing the rhetorical power of images – they are the source of success of both, a visual record of planned acts of violence whose spectacular appeal attracts viewers. Passmore notes that later researchers of the RAF's terrorist activity were critical of placing images at the center of their analyses.[40] In her view, such methodological skepticism toward visual forms was a reaction to the exceptional saturation of the RAF's media history with images. The author quotes the arguments of Petra Terhoeven, who followed W. J. T. Mitchell in suggesting that a "pictorial turn" was indispensable in research on the activity of the RAF.[41] However, restoring images to the debate around German terrorism would not mean "a return to naive mimesis"[42] – the perception of images merely as passive records – but rather recognizing them as factors that actively create events. Such a perspective allows us to avoid the temptation of simple criticism of the media for the sensationalism which contributes to the visibility of fame-seeking terrorists; instead, it offers encouragement to concentrate on the characteristics of the new type of images and on the way in which the use of new recording tools – especially the development of reportage photography – influenced the shape of the public sphere. A concept of the image different to the purely mimetic one enables the "rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality."[43] In consequence, this allows us

to notice the ambiguity of the RAF's visual strategies, in which pictures formed part of image-building and the disinformation game played with the police and the press. At the same time, it offers an understanding of the way in which the RAF's terrorist activities, targeted against the media spectacle, became mired in self-mythological clichés in the 1970s and transmogrified into political sectarianism brimming with a narcissistic cult of personality.

Drawing attention to the change in the functioning of the image becomes crucial for understanding the claim that the visual sphere was the main space of the RAF's struggle.
A political activist of particular importance to Farocki was Holger Meins. The acquaintance between them became the topic of the German director's text "Staking One's Life: Images of Holger Meins"[44] and he also appeared in the memorial film *Starbuck – Holger Meins* (2002). Meins was only occasionally involved in cinema; his most well-known film was *Molotov Cocktail* (1968), and he worked as a camera assistant on Farocki's *Die Worte des Vorsitzenden* (1967). Farocki frequently underlined the significance of meeting Meins for the early days of his own film practice; Meins may indeed be recognized as one of his first teachers. He appreciated Meins's editing style, in which the manner of combining frames was strictly related to their political message. In his memoirs, Farocki admires the deftness of Meins's physical gestures, watching him at the editing table "while he was working on his film *Oskar Langenfeld*. He commanded it like a musical instrument."[45] The ethical dimension of Meins's editing gestures resulted from the separate treatment of each image, which offered Farocki a model example of work as an editor. Meins quickly abandoned his profession as a director and became involved in collaboration with the RAF. Soon afterward, in June 1972, he was arrested and then charged with and sentenced for terrorism along with other members of the organization, Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Rasp. In protest

against the treatment of his fellow inmates, he went on a 58-day hunger strike, which ultimately led to his death from starvation.

The first part of Farocki's text concentrates on a newspaper photograph of Holger Meins's dead body, published on tabloid front pages on November 9, 1974. The photograph was taken in collaboration with the German police and was supposed to be a media triumph for the authorities in their struggle to combat left-wing terrorism. Farocki came across the image by chance. As he recalls: "When I read in a newspaper that he was one of the wanted terrorists, his name had been printed as 'Möns,' and this led me to hope both that it might not be him and at the same time that he might not be caught, simply because of this misspelling."[46] Farocki understood the publication of the photograph of Meins's corpse as a message from the authorities that they had nothing to hide. The image was intended to say: we didn't kill him, he did it himself, and it was not within our power to prevent it. However – Farocki continues – the overtone, the social reception of the photograph, differed from the intent of its makers. In this case, a much more intuitive reading of Meins's photograph was as follows:

> The exhibition of the dead man was to prove power, and by doing so, the distance from the prisoner was eliminated. He was exhibited like a trophy. This evoked memories of the magical and ritualized prehistory of punishment, of lingering tortures that led to death staged for an audience of the curious.[47]

In other words, the dissemination of the image by the media allowed the disciplining power of the police evidence photograph to regain its spectacular dimension of public corporeal punishment. However, the ideal of complete transparency behind the authorities' gesture of public display of the dead body and the approach to the photograph as a war trophy collided, in a way unforeseen by those in power, with the iconic density of the photograph itself, which opened it up to alternative readings.

In Didi-Huberman's interpretation, the photograph of Meins's emaciated body is considered as part of the iconography of the Passion, and described as "an image filled with time."[48] The author of *Images in Spite of All* refers to Walter Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image, according to which the legibility (and therefore the "visibility") of history revealed itself "merely in flashes, explosions, double blasts, those montages of time."[49] In a later text,Didi-Huberman elaborates on this thought and puts forward the following claim:

> there is never just one catastrophe: at every catastrophic moment there would therefore exist a combination, a hidden conflict or a superposition of at least two catastrophes. Similarly, in every danger there exists a combination of at least two threats, in every political intervention – of at least two stakes, in every rhythm – of at least two kinds of tempo, in every symptom – of at least two misfortunes, in every sentence – of at least two words, in every image – of at least two visibilities.[50]

The "two visibilities" of the history of Meins's posthumous photograph is a trope followed by Habbo Knoch in his book devoted to the functioning of the body in post-war West Germany.[51] Knoch notes that the image of the RAF member's emaciated body drew on the similarity to images of Nazi crimes from World War II. This is not a matter of simple association with wartime atrocities that were still fresh in the memory, but of calling attention to the dynamic of such images in the collective consciousness, which developed following the rhythm of repression and regular returns over the next decades. He points at their cultural "coding": first, they formed part of the Nazi

wartime propaganda; later they played a didactic role in the re-education efforts pursued by the Allies; and later still they faded from public consciousness – a period Knoch describes as a time of "visual amnesia"[52] – until they entered the iconography of the political resistance of anti-fascist activists at the end of the 1960s.

This was how photographs of burned bodies, following napalm attacks during the Vietnam War, functioned when published in the press. Farocki mentions one such newspaper image – the "Vietnamese anti-Madonna"[53] – in his account of his meeting with Meins:

> At the beginning of 1968, I went to see him at his apartment on Hauptstrasse in Berlin-Schöneberg. I had with me a newspaper-sized photograph that I had pasted on cardboard. It showed a Vietnamese woman holding an injured or perhaps dead child in her arms. [...] Holger Meins took a stick of charcoal and heightened the contrast between the woman and the background. He then began to shade her face, saying something along the lines of: if you're going to do it at all, then you must exaggerate a little, her suffering has to be really visible. That's the kind of thing they probably said in Hollywood when they were trying to have an effect against the Nazis.[54]

Meins's advice to follow the strategy of American anti-Nazi propaganda and "exaggerate a little" was based on the conviction that shock was necessary to trigger an affective emotional response. The strategy of "exaggeration" not only presupposed that the image had agency, but also assumed by default that it would only impact viewers effectively when its content was exaggerated. The conclusions of political activists concerning the rhetorical properties of images and associating agency only with the spectacular appeal of media coverage was a simple path to the instrumentalization and aestheticization of violence. This presumed a model of reception based on

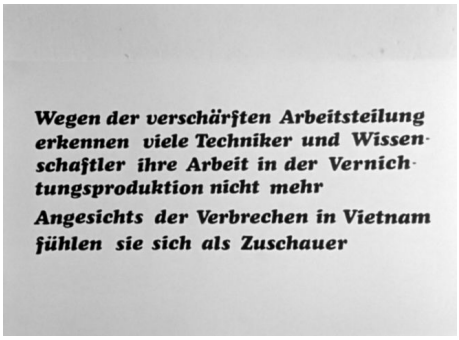
consecutive shocks, as confirmed by the historical testimonies of viewers, in which the experience of scenes of violence is likened to a musical experience: "He felt their political violence as a percussion cutting into the monotone of his everyday, a form of bodily 'sensation'."[55] It is precisely such paralyzing abuse of emotion that Brecht warned against in his criticism of *Einfühlung*. The experience of *Einfühlung* in turn provides the context in which to understand Elsaesser's remark that although the RAF's activity was strongly founded on textual messages – pamphlets, statements, and press releases – it was remembered as non-verbal. In his view – just as theorists of *Einfühlung* formulated it at the beginning of the 20th century – that shift of events in the memory of witnesses potentially leads to the conclusion that"the verbal was not perceived as words, but as material signs, and the signs not as messages, but as shapes, sounds and colours."[56]

Beyond capitalist realism

Polemic with the strategy of "exaggeration" in the use of victims' photographs would become a major part of Farocki's reflection on attempts to portray war crimes in Vietnam. A photograph of a body burned after a napalm attack – similar to the one taken to the meeting with Meins – became one of the main features of his film *The Inextinguishable Fire* (1969). The history of its shooting abounds in coincidences. The film was created somewhat by chance – produced hastily at the end of 1968 because the WDR television station, seen as much more left-wing than other public channels and mockingly dubbed "Rotfunk," had an available budget to be used.[57] During that period, Farocki made agitational films as part of the so-called "technological campaign" whose goal was to boost the political engagement of students of technical universities and engineering schools.[58] Therefore, when he received an offer of collaboration with WDR, he chose to shoot yet another film following that convention, this time devoted to the involvement of the Dow

Chemical factory in Michigan in the production of napalm used by the American army in Vietnam. Farocki arranged a series of staged conversations – fictitious but based on official press coverage – with workers, factory directors, scientists, engineers, and officials at the US Department of State. They form the second part of *The Inextinguishable Fire* – conversations revolving around the ethical, military, and economic consequences of the use of napalm by the US army. The film ends with a statement of moral simplicity: "What we produce is the product of the workers, students, and engineers." Farocki emphasizes universal entanglement in the military-industrial complex, and that shirking responsibility for war crimes by perceiving oneself as a mere cog in the complex machinery of production is nothing but a convenient ethical dodge.

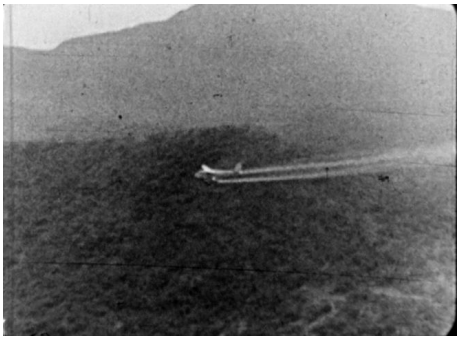
The Inextinguishable Fire would therefore probably have become just another agitational film, had it not been for the fact that its production granted Farocki brief access to the television studio where its first part was shot. The piece is usually seen as a pioneering example of a film essay, which somewhat obscures the fact that it balances on the border between documentary and fiction; the use of television aesthetics in the work is thereby overlooked. Meanwhile, the first part of the production largely resembles a parody of a news broadcast. Such a style emanates from the opening scene, in which Farocki, dressed in a suit, reads from a sheet of paper, in the manner of a TV presenter, fragments of the shocking account of the Vietnamese citizen *Thái* Binh Danh, who suffered serious burns during an American napalm-dropping raid: "The flames and unbearable heat engulfed me and I lost consciousness. Napalm burned my face, both arms, and both legs. I was



Inextinguishable Fire ©Harun Farocki, 1969

unconscious for thirteen days."

Many years later, Farocki explained that he had not used documentary footage at the beginning of his work, preferring to create fictitious worlds instead:



Inextinguishable Fire ©Harun Farocki, 1969

> The point was the utopian moment that suddenly came. You could not see it in the outside world, or at least it could not be recorded on camera. And in this case – I still believe so – I managed to create an entirely artificial world resembling a 3D animation.[59]

Although these words refer directly to his student film *The Words of the Chairman* 1965), they may be considered emblematic of the whole of Farocki's early work. The television studio from *The Inextinguishable Fire* is another such completely artificial world. Here, Farocki dealt with the challenge of covering American crimes by using a credible aesthetic: the format of news broadcast, associated with professionalism and presenting a commonsensical perspective. In order to better understand the difficulties involved, it might be helpful to refer to the category of "capitalist realism"[60] evoked by Mark Fisher, which concerns the portrayal of the capitalist order as a naturalized model of the representation of the world, which turns it into an insurmountable horizon of thinking and renders it impossible to imagine a logical alternative. However, the concept is not new – Fisher notes its first historical use in Germany in the 1960s by a group of pop artists[61] who created parodic representations of capitalist prosperity by emulating the aesthetics of socialist realism. So if "Germany's political youth culture was almost solely university-based, theory-driven, [and it proved more earnest, more systematic, more bloody-minded,"[62] its other currents should therefore be sought in the tradition of satirical struggle

with the media. This tendency also includes Farocki's early films – including ;*The Inextinguishable Fire* – in which he employed satirical mockery targeted at the seeming transparency of news broadcasts. At the time, he spoke in a very straightforward way about the manner of the portrayal of reality in the mass media:

> In this sad genre almost all manners of representation are means of deceit. How material is edited, how information is selected, how images relate to sound – all of this is meant to deceive. Like someone who has nothing to say and tries to hide it through grandiloquence.[63]

The years 1966–1967 witnessed the escalation of conflict between the SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund) and Axel Springer's press company. For the activists, the dispute was an attack on the foundations of the capitalist system: "Our struggle against Springer is a struggle against the late-capitalist system of rule itself."[64] In turn, Springer's press regularly published articles depicting students in an aggressive way. Farocki was an active participant of that conflict: together with Helke Sander and Skip Norman, he managed to sneak into the yearly press ball and left a card at Springer's table that read: "Axel, this is your final ball."[65] Other actions of theirs were documented in the film *Brecht die Macht der Manipulateure* (1969), directed by Helke Sander and Ulrich Knaudt.
This concludes with a recording of the filmmakers being kicked out of a press club meeting, which they had sneaked into in order to start a polemical argument with Axel Springer. Farocki himself shot the short film *Ihre Zeitungen* (1968) as an encouragement to campaign against Springer's press. It consists of a situational dialogue between two people concerning new information about the Vietnam War in Springer's newspapers *B.Z.* and *Bildzeitung*. Toward the end, activists wrap paving stones in newspaper as the commentary states: "The stones weigh down the paper, the paper dictates the direction to take," after which the sound of shattered glass can be heard offscreen.

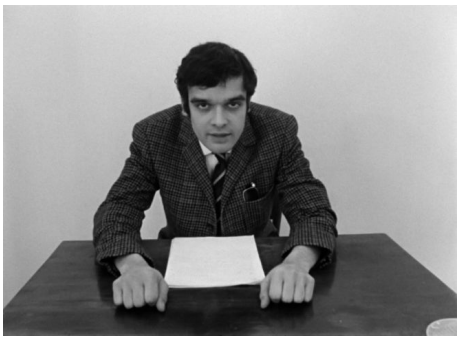
As with another of Farocki's film from the period, *Anleitung, Polizisten den Helm abzureißen* (1968), the ending was accused of openly glorifying anarchistic violence. Tilman Baumgärtel claims that by fantasizing about the use of violence in film form, directors "were dreaming the secret dream of the German student movement."[66] This was an attempt to broaden the horizons of radical imagination, but such representations also had an ersatz function, compensating as they did for the deadlock in real change. This also reveals the politically engaged artists' perception of film as a form of the collective organization of community affects. If, at the declarative level, cinema was to function primarily as a tool in the fight for truth, the narrative strategies of these instructional films feature elements – the idealization of one's own image, the exaggerated portrayal of the enemy – that serve the construction of a coherent group identity, which would offer the capacity of undertaking political action

Satirists, cannibals, and their bodies

Farocki's open hostility toward dominant media content can be seen as part of the left-wing tradition of struggle with the tabloid media. A particularly valuable extension of the understanding of the media satire convention is offered by Walter Benjamin's text devoted to the pre-war independent press publisher Karl Kraus. For Benjamin, the editor of *Die Fackel* was a model example of an author who "brought together all his energies in the struggle against empty phrase."[67] The satirical dimension of Kraus's writing derived from the fact that he lived amid "a mankind that has run out of tears but not of laughter,"[68] a commentary on the ethical indifference of society at the time. As in the case of capitalist realism, the language of satire is tapped into when it becomes impossible to break through the lies disseminated by the media. Benjamin offers a more precise definition of the satirist as "the figure in whom the cannibal was received into civilization."[69] This enigmatic mention of the cannibal is an

interesting way to conceive of satire using the language of corporeality, and an attempt to employ a somatic metaphor in describing Kraus's practice of mockingly quoting his adversaries. It is a diagnosis of the relation between the brutalization of the language of public debate and the brutalization of authors' critical strategies, while demonstrating at the same time that at its final stage, satire must resort to the method of provocation, whose major tool is the body. An example of such a strategy is the suggestion from Kraus's text "that landlords of insolvent lodgers be conceded a right to the sale of their flesh,"[70] which was supposed take "the measure of the humanity of their fellow men."[71]

Reflection on relations between demanding the truth and making use of the body is further pursued by Peter Sloterdijk in *Critique of Cynical Reason*, with reference to the protests in May 1968, which started in Paris and later reached global scale. He quotes the example of half-naked female students interrupting one of Adorno's lectures. Sloterdijk draws attention to the fact that "Wherever deceptions are constitutive for a culture"[72] and "life in society succumbs to a compulsion for lying,"[73] there "really speaking the truth has an element of aggression, an unwelcome exposure."[74] The aggression that accompanies speaking the truth compels protesters to make use of radical means, one of which involves using their own bodies as tools, as it allows for tearing through "the veil of conventions, lies, abstractions, and discretions in order to get *to the bottom* of things."[75]



Inextinguishable Fire ©Harun Farocki, 1969

Farocki uses his own body, or even flesh, in the latter part of the scene in the TV news studio from *The Inextinguishable Fire*, when he looks up from the paper, into the camera, and asks:

> And how can we show you the injuries caused by napalm? If we show you pictures of napalm burns, you'll close your eyes. First you'll close your eyes to the pictures. Then you'll close your eyes to the memory. Then you'll close your eyes to the facts. Then you'll close your eyes to the entire context.

He then puts out a lit cigarette on his forearm and adds: "A cigarette burns at 400 °C. Napalm burns at 3,000 °C."



Inextinguishable Fire ©Harun Farocki, 1969

We see Farocki performing this gesture with great passion, to deliberately extend the sensation of pain for a moment. The director thus confronts the contradictions encountered in the search for the representation of suffering that compels ethical identification. His answer seeks to reconcile contradictory stances: on the one hand, his skepticism toward the use of images of suffering adopts the form of Brechtian didactics; on the other hand, he represents the approach of an idealist, as called for by Kluge, since his discord is not restricted to a mere discursive intervention, but also engages his own somaticity and viewers' corporeality.



Inextinguishable Fire ©Harun Farocki, 1969

Yet, Farocki's behavior should not be reduced to the conciliatory pedagogy of moderation; its insightfulness does not entail finding a golden mean or the perfect balance of proportions. Taking the radical gesture in parentheses marks an attempt to develop a different way of thinking about the ideological role of distance in viewers' experience. In his commentary on viewers "closing their eyes," Farocki goes beyond the moralistic preaching known from *White Christmas*. He thus notes that the viewer's distance is not merely a form of denial, which preserves indifference, but recognizes in it the way in which the subject subjectivizes their obligations to external social obligations. Farocki's proposed strategy of employing images therefore does not resign from shaking the viewer out of their comfort zone or disturbing their sense of safety. However, the ambition of a non-reductive combination of the emotional and critical components prevents the use of shocking and painful imagery, as it might trigger a counter-effective reaction. Activities meant to yield somatic and affective results must not only bear in mind the viewer's engagement with the represented content, but also demonstrate sensitivity to their relations with the image. Only then is it possible to achieve the effect of encouraging the analysis of what hides behind a given picture, and thus go beyond operations on a purely emotional level, toward an engaged, ethical viewer, in order to eventually activate their ability to question the validity of the social order.

Empathy that produces alienation

How then to understand the violent use of one's own body juxtaposed with distanced commentary? Can we say that through his gesture Farocki practices "cannibalism" in the manner of Kraus? The artist seems to follow Meins's advice to "exaggerate a little." He transgresses the standard repertoire of means used by filmmakers, turning the camera on himself and hurting his own body. Following Kraus, this gesture may also be seen as part of the "cannibalistic" satirical convention that aims to take "the measure of the humanity" of fellow men.[76] Adopting the convention of an instructional film (and satirically abusing the genre), the scene shows what to do in order to feel pain. However, a self-injurious act against one's own body is not, as Sloterdijk would have it, a reference to the only instance that appears to have the status of reality in a society dominated by lies. Akin to Benjamin's "satirist," Farocki realizes that it is already too late to fight for autonomy, because reification has become a fact of civilization. As he stated in an interview, "it seems to me that 1968 was more than anything the end of Humanism – in the sense that what was at stake one last time was the end of alienation."[77] He elaborates on this thought by pointing out the change that occurred at the same time in the understanding of the concept of "power" in political theory. He argues that political activists were still attached to the early Marxian scheme of disalienation, and understood power as an instance of repression concentrated in the hands of individuals, interest groups, or the state. Around the same time, perspectives on power had already emerged – he mentions texts by Foucault, among others[78] – which resigned from the concepts of "ideology" or "subjugation," and situated the problem of social control in the individual's body, gestures, habits, and everyday life.

Abandoning the dream of overcoming alienation also enables thinking differently about the relation between corporeality and image. When, instead of using a documentary photograph, Farocki chooses to demonstrate the effect of napalm on his own body, his gesture is one of weakness, as it resigns from the power offered by pictorial evidence. At the same time, it has the shocking force of the bodily experience of *Einfühlung*, because it takes viewers by surprise and therefore compels them to engage in the work of recognition, thereby offering the chance for renewed vision. According to Volker Pantenburg, this becomes a kind of meta-picture, as the problem of representation is addressed here by means of a different image. It is therefore a picture "which speaks about the problem of representation."[79] Pantenburg believes that the scene in question:

> should be read as a representation of the act of representation, which brings one's own body into play instead of the expected image. It is a shock to see an "authentic" wound, which, although minimal, has a far greater impact than the images of the Vietnam conflict and its wounded, to which we have become inured: a highly artificial, constructed injection of the "real" that activates thought about images of reality.[80]

Aside from the fact that Farocki's gesture retains a meta-relation with the image, it also problematizes representation through the reconstruction of photography, which openly admits its imperfections. It is an attempt to cause suffering not through identification with the image, but by means of partial participation in it. The interpretation of Farocki's use of corporeality therefore needs to be complemented with the ethical consequences stemming from a revaluation of the difference between the real and the pictorial. Participation in the image would not mean participation in its matter, but rather in its desires and forces, while recognizing at the same time that it is

merely an image, and empathy can therefore never be complete. Farocki thus seeks to deactivate the mechanisms of identification used by society to create for itself the emotionally accessible version – adjusted to the habits of reception – of the object of compassion. His goal is to go beyond the narrative model of inspiring empathy, in which the "Other" becomes the victim, or the reverse – the victim becomes the "Other." This is also how we can understand "the end of Humanism" as diagnosed by Farocki, which would open up a space that could be reclaimed under the new rules of the experience of *Einfühlung* – conceiving an internally contradictory formula of empathy "in such a way that it produces the effect of alienation."[81]

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