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Harun Farocki, Ein Bild

« My films are making against cinema and against television ». Harun Farocki

Born in 1944 to Novy Jicín in Czechoslovakia, annexed then by Germany, Harun Farocki studies at the Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie in Berlin where he works currently. Filmmaker and publisher of the magazine *Filmkritik* between 1974 and 1984, he is also a theorist of the image. Since the 60s, he has never ceased to investigate the form of movie-essay as cinematographic genre and theoretical program. He deploys in his work a visual rhetoric to denounce the deviant's uses of the image in the social space. Here cinema is a sociopolitical practice, a tool of tactical demonstration, militant and subversive, for public use, to clean the visual of its instrumentation.

Thus *Respite* (2007) is the reconstruction of a film shot in 1944 to Westerbork by Rudolph Breslauer. In 1939 Westerbork was a Dutch refugee camp; In 1942 after the occupation of the Holland by the Nazis, it became a "transit" camp towards concentration camps. Here Farocki comments visually and criticizes ideologically the original images by means of white crossheads on a black backgrounds, he proceeds to an interventionist reading of the film and the History of the deportation. In *Immersion* (2009) he shoots at the Institute for Creative Technology, the therapy sessions of veterans traumatized by the war. The experimental center develops and uses - virtual image and - video games to recruit and train the soldiers, but they also use them to treat them. During an exemplary session, one of the soldiers wears a helmet; he is immersed in a virtual 3D war during which a psychotherapist urges him to remember his moments of trauma. The role of the technology is studied movie after movie from a utilitarian and ideological viewpoint; and if images have reality as starting point, Farocki endeavors to find their origin and their initial destination.

Harun Farocki shot *Ein Bild* (An image) in July '83 in *Playboy's* studios magazine in Munich. For four days he records the production process of a photography in which a young woman had to appear naked, laying down on a carpet in a bourgeois interior. Once the decorators plasterboard set is ready, the playmate appears. Farocki's camera is handled with mathematical precision, attentive to the show and to the demonstration of an erotic savoir-faire; he centers and documents the construction of the painting. But *An Image* is above all a movie about work: the work of the photographer, the work of the model, the working relationship between the photographer and his model, the work of the technicians, lighting engineers and decorators, and the entire auxiliary staff necessary for the production of one image.

The magazine that placed the order for this image was established in 1953 in Chicago by Hugh Hefner. *Playboy* promotes a certain male lifestyle, a culture, a certain consumerism and photos of naked girls, (of which the first one, named Sweetheart of the Month, was Marilyn Monroe). « The naked woman in the middle, writes Farocki, is a sun around which a system revolves: of culture, of business, of living! (It's impossible to either look or film into the sun.) One can well imagine that the people creating such a picture, the gravity of which is supposed to hold all that, perform their task with as much care, seriousness, a responsibility as if they were splitting uranium.»

The same year, Farocki shoots Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet « at work » during the filming of *Klassenverhältnisse* (Class Relations), film based on the unfinished Kafka novel *Amerika*, in which Farocki himself plays the role of Delamarche. Farocki's film is both a tribute to the work of the two filmmakers who defined themselves as "craftsmen" in reaction against the cinematographic industry and, as he says, a self-portrait: at work, under the couple's direction, he repeats shortly as a worker and until the exhaustion gestures and text. In the center of the cinematic process he also bears, as the naked girl, what Walter Benjamin qualified as test: playing for an "expert's committee", the actor, like the worker to the factory, undergoes a test of control. His performance is subdued to the mechanic and the most important is not so much the quality of his performance than his nature properly human in strike against the machine. In *Ein Bild*, contrary to his more didactic movies, Farocki saved the comment and let the image open by itself, let the process of its construction enter on stage. It is a question of making a film; it is a question of making an image, a film about an image.

To make an image it need light, it is even the sine qua non condition of the photo-impression. The photographer in the studio tightens the spotlights on the body of the naked playmate flew of light which hides, paradoxically, the whiteness of her skin. In the manner of the readers of the magazine, he caresses without touching her rounded forms. And if the girl is tired, if the pose of erotic convention benumbs her, if she is a sun, it is because, in the center of the stage she became the target of a technician horizon.

M.C.

Ein Bild

1983 / 16mm transferred on dvd / 25' / coul. / sound.

ChinaGirl thanks Harun Farocki, Antje Ehmann and Alice Motard

<http://chinese-girl-film.blogspot.com>