

# FILM

## Harun Farocki: Labour in a Single Shot

Labour in a Single Shot (LSS) is the title of a project by the recently deceased filmmaker and artist Harun Farocki (1944-2014) in collaboration with artist and curator Antje Elmann. From 2011 to 2014 the pair initiated workshops in 15 cities worldwide, where participants were asked to address the topic of labour in 'a single shot' (ie no cuts allowed) lasting a maximum of two minutes. Part of the idea behind LSS was to develop a growing series of exhibitions (as well as an online archive) in order to construct a global cartography of labour in the 21st century, culminating with an exhibition at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin.

At the HKW the work is exhibited alongside two other moving-image installations by Farocki: *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades*, 2006, and a concomitant project with LSS *Workers Leaving their Workplace in 15 Cities*, 2011-14. The latter restages the Lumière Brothers' 1895 film *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* – which is shown on the first of the 11 monitors in the former work – asking the viewer to contemplate what kind of workers do we still see leaving their workplaces and where? (The Lumière's film also provides the formal model for the restriction to a single two-minute shot.) All three installations manifest a constellation of three central motifs, which recur throughout Farocki's practical and theoretical oeuvre: first, the task of critically representing labour, be it material or immaterial (in the German title, the word *Einstellung* has the double meaning of 'shot' and 'attitude'); second, a sustained attempt to explore such subjects globally – mapping labour geographically and historically; and third, a continual reflection on the history of film and cinema (whether documentary or fiction), as well as image production and technologies of perception more generally. It is this conjunction of the history of film with the problem of envisioning labour – sparked by the Lumière's film outside their own factory gates in Lyon – which runs like a red thread through Farocki's inimitable output.

It was this constellation of themes that provided the general background for an accompanying two-day conference held after the opening of LSS commemorating Farocki's life, work and legacy, with the second day focusing

more specifically on the motifs of the show. The opening night featured a keynote by the German film theorist Thomas Elsaesser. After glimpsing the show, a few hundred people shuffled into the HKW auditorium to hear Elsaesser impressively weave a discussion of the recent project and its genealogy in Farocki's previous writings and films. Elsaesser construed the compilation style of LSS and similar works as both archeological and poetological in method: compiling and choreographing cinematic tropes, visual motifs and gestures in order to construct a spatial super-cut or a super-single-shot. This montaging of fragments, for Elsaesser, allows us not only to mediate cinema with labour but also to meditate on the historical and social transformations of both cinema and labour. Today, labour, as in the Lumière's day, predominantly lies hidden behind closed doors, or has been offshored out of view, thus the visual challenge of imaging it. As Hito Steyerl argued in her paper 'Eye Explosion', however, both work and cameras – as well as monitoring and tracking devices – have exploded and embedded themselves in all aspects of our everyday life, hiding in plain sight. Elsaesser described this Farockian dialectic as 'the invisibility of labour and the labour of invisibility'.

The first day of the conference was titled 'Thinking with Farocki', with many of the speakers being students of the filmmaker, teaching colleagues or his collaborators. Artists such as Filipa César took the idea of 'thinking with' in order to develop Farockian gestures within her own practice, whereas theorists such as Nora Alter focused on Farocki's filmic techniques. Alter discussed Farocki's notion of 'soft montage', the building up of image associations and comparisons – where images comment on other images – rather than a strict opposition. As in previous works, Farocki figures this spatially in LSS. The 15 screens are hung in a constellatory manner, so that when viewing a film from Hanoi one also sees peripherally scenes from Boston or Buenos Aires. Yet soft montage is also about retaining the specificity and self-sufficiency of images, and when standing in front of a film of Mexico City one is enveloped by the sound of the speakers above. The editing table (now computer) was continually highlighted as Farocki's primary work place, and presenters contrasted Farocki's often sober editorial method with his capacity for irony, his dry humour and telling of bad jokes. Steyerl spoke of her debt to Farocki's exploration of visual technologies, which he

labelled 'eye machines'. What he taught us, according to Steyerl, is that images are not only records but also projects – they are used as models to project reality. Models and modes of pedagogy ran throughout the conference, with numerous comparisons to another great German pedagogue, Bertolt Brecht (the Otolith Group described Farocki's fly-on-the-wall documentaries of training situations as 'capitalist *Lehrstücke*', parodying Brecht's learning plays).

The second day approached LSS through themed panels, such as 'Hands/Tools/Gestures'. Unfortunately, this had the effect of breaking down the speculative and comparative scope of the project in often unproductive ways. An exception to this was Kodwo Eshun and Ayesha Hameed's panel 'Circle/Rhythm/Ritual'. Eshun began with a film from LSS titled *Ultraviolet*, documenting the virtuosic acceleration of a horse-racing commentator's voice, which he speculatively linked to a Werner Herzog film about auctioneering and the slurred and cut-up style of trap music; all register an industrialised rhythm of the voice, with the latter expressing an emotional deadness. Hameed focused on what she called the 'threshold' or 'knife's edge' constitution of labour, which hovers between a recognition of its dignity and dehumanisation, and explored the dangers of speaking for, rather than to, marginalised groups (a topic also addressed in Elsaesser's keynote).

Farocki and Elmann's authorial voice and gaze in LSS are dispersed by mobilising a series of diverse perspectives, each casting a different light on the singular experiences of work (and its imaging) within the 'single shot' of a transnational capitalist world. Openness is therefore combined with predetermined constraints, obliging participants to think with the tools provided by the very first cinematic auteurs. It is a legacy Farocki gives to filmmakers around the world: to reinvent the cinema their way, but also the Lumière way. ■

The conference 'Labour in a Single Shot' took place at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin 26-28 February. The exhibition continues until 6 April.

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