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Labour in a Single Shot. Critical Perspectives on Antje Ehmann und Harun Farocki's Global Video Project

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FILM
CULTURE

IN TRANSITION



LABOUR IN
A SINGLE
SHOT

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON
ANTJE EHMANN AND HARUN FAROCKI'S
GLOBAL VIDEO PROJECT

EDITED BY

ROY GRUNDMANN

PETER J. SCHWARTZ

GREGORY H. WILLIAMS

Amsterdam
University
Press

Labour in a Single Shot

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*Critical Perspectives on Antje Ehmann and
Harun Farocki's Global Video Project*

*Edited by
Roy Grundmann,
Peter J. Schwartz,
and Gregory H. Williams*

Amsterdam University Press

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For Harun Farocki and Thomas Elsaesser

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Consistent with the international, interdisciplinary nature of *Labour in a Single Shot*, the Boston conference was envisioned as one of two major events designed to analyze and discuss *Labour in a Single Shot*. The second

1 The variation in the spelling of the project owes to the fact that our Boston conference title followed U.S. spelling (Labor) whereas the workshop project itself was conceived within a European framework and follows British spelling (Labour). The spelling of our book title follows the British spelling of the workshop title.

conference was held at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin, in February of 2015, but both events were conceived in close co-operation with all partners over months of Skype meetings and in an in-person planning meeting in Berlin in June 2014. Our wholehearted thanks go to our friends and partners at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Cordula Hamschmidt, Katrin Klingan, Sonja Oehler, Bernd Scherer, Anselm Franke, and Kirsten Einfeldt. Their enthusiasm for the double conference project and their collegiality and hospitality in Berlin were vital in helping us to develop our vision. Further, we would like to thank them for hosting the 2015 conference at the HKW, which gave us valuable impulses for taking our own project from conference to book publication.

We would also like to acknowledge two galleries that hosted exhibitions and events in conjunction with the Boston conference. Working with Antje Ehmann, the staff at the Mills Gallery of the Boston Center for the Arts (BCA) exhibited a substantial selection of videos from *Labour in a Single Shot* from September to November 2014. We extend our thanks to Randi Hopkins, the Associate Director of the BCA at the time, for her help in mounting the show. In addition, a small display of work related to the workshop ran from November to December 2014 at Boston University's Sherman Gallery; our appreciation goes to Lynne Cooney and James Hull for their support. Also at Boston University, we were fortunate to have the assistance of Chris Spedalieri, Visual Resource Manager in History of Art & Architecture, in producing still images from the *Labour in a Single Shot* videos.

Bringing a conference to publication can be an intricate process. We remain deeply grateful to the late Thomas Elsaesser, a long-time scholar of Harun Farocki's work, who, along with Tom Gunning, graced our Boston conference with a keynote address, and who encouraged us to produce a full-fledged book for his series with Amsterdam University Press, "Film Culture in Transition." We were profoundly saddened by Thomas's untimely death in December 2019, and we feel greatly honoured to have this book appear in the series, now edited by Malte Hagener, Patricia Pisters, and Wanda Strauven. We would also like to thank our editors at Amsterdam University Press, Maryse Elliot and Chantal Nicolaes, for steering us through all phases of the publishing process.

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Finally, we are indebted to Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki. This book project would never have made it to publication without Ehmann's enthusiasm and support. Although Harun's sudden and unexpected death in July 2014 kept him from attending the two conferences on Labour in a Single Shot, we are grateful to have experienced his acute intelligence, warmth, and dry wit. We dedicate this book to him and to Thomas Elsaesser, in fond memory.

1. Foreword: Eine Einstellung zur Arbeit/ Labour in a Single Shot

Detlef Gericke

Translated by Peter J. Schwartz

Abstract

As a long-time director of various Goethe-Institutes and the principal investigator of the internal grant awarded by the Goethe-Institut's Excellence Initiative, Gericke recounts the history of the Labour in a Single Shot project from the first brainstorming sessions in 2010 between Farocki, Ehmann, and himself to the concrete planning stages and execution of the project on a global stage. The essay explains the Labour project's double mission – to train aspiring film-makers through the historically tested model of art and film workshops and to create a visual encyclopaedia of labour in the twenty-first century – in relation to the Goethe-Institut's history and mission as Germany's premier international cultural agency, and with special regard to its agenda of organizing events in the service of international cultural exchange.

Keywords: Goethe-Institut, workshop, Excellence Initiative, international cultural exchange

There is a long prehistory to the collaboration between Harun Farocki, Antje Ehmann, and me, which, however, contains all we needed for our later shared project, Labour in a Single Shot.

Our story began in 2002 in Jakarta, Indonesia with screeners that I had had sent to me by the Head Office of the Goethe-Institut in Munich. The Jakarta International Film Festival had wanted a competent and empathetic documentary film-maker from Germany to run a seven-day workshop

for young Indonesian film-makers. I was enthralled by the first sample of Farocki's work, two minutes long, *The Words of the Chairman*, 1967. Farocki thought politically and could poke fun at himself at the same time – wonderful! It continued with *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992), which showed Harun Farocki's and Andrei Ujică's ability to bundle the complex events comprising a social revolution into a single common thread. Then, there was the calm objectivity with which Harun commented on the images he thematized. The films, and the subtle differences between them, were far beyond what the Indonesian film-makers were capable of. But that's where they wanted to get to.

Harun Farocki was thus the ideal workshop leader, but I didn't dare to invite him. Directors that productive (four film projects per year) generally don't have the time for undertakings like the one we were planning: for a seven-day workshop in Jakarta, one needs two eighteen-hour flights to get there and back, plus two days to get used to the country, and then two days to get over the jet lag upon returning, so at least fourteen to twenty days total. Goethe-Institut honoraria can hardly pay for that. I was casting about for more realistic options when I received an unexpected email from Berlin, the original version of which I have lost, but which I still remember word for word:

Dear Mr. Gericke-Schoenhagen,

This is usually not how I do things and it may seem strange, but since I attended grade school in Jakarta for five years, I would very much like to show my wife where I spent my childhood. If you should happen to have some use for me or something I could do, please don't hesitate to let me know. I would be very happy to come. With best wishes, Harun Farocki

Harun Farocki was ideally suited to our project: he knew Indonesia, was a well-known documentary film-maker, and had a great deal of experience teaching and running workshops at multiple universities throughout the world. We immediately said yes.

The art of film and the practice of film production in Indonesia were in a difficult and laborious phase of reconstruction in 2002. A lot of people had to start from scratch following Indonesia's political turmoil, and this was precisely where the documentary workshop with Harun Farocki would need to begin. He wanted to meet the young professional film-makers where they currently were in their professional development and give them building blocks they could use to fight their way back onto the international market. What I saw in the eyes of the participants was that Harun Farocki

was an amazing teacher of video and documentary film-making. No one could possibly manage the task with more empathy than he did. We met ever more frequently, together with Antje Ehmann, but we didn't know at the time that this was the beginning of a friendship that would become ever deeper in the course of years of collaboration on a common project.

An Idea Is Born

The beginnings of the project can be traced to the year 2010. Harun Farocki and Antje Ehmann had both been invited to Boston. Harun was supposed to give two seminars at Harvard University as a visiting professor, and Antje was to curate the exhibition *The Image in Question: War – Media – Art* at Harvard's Carpenter Center. When they arrived in Boston, they initially moved into my apartment with the intention of using it as a base to search for their own living quarters. We got along so well that they ended up living there – in the room of my son, who had just moved out – until the end of their stay in Boston.

This made it possible for us to have many conversations over shared meals and nocturnal cigarette breaks on the backyard deck of my apartment in Brookline. It quickly became clear that we wanted to develop a major transcontinental film and video art project. We discussed every imaginable aspect of the idea, returning repeatedly to the question of what constitutes a well-conceived and successfully executed event in the service of international cultural exchange. They had both travelled frequently for the Goethe-Institut and were able to provide important input; there had been retrospectives of Harun's films in all formats – some digital, and quite a lot in 16mm and 35mm format – since the early 1990s. It was easy enough to define a successful event on the abstract level, that is in terms of cultural goals agreed upon by the Goethe-Institut and the German Federal Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*), but how would it look from the point of view of everyday work?

I thought it best to begin with the question of audience expectations, in particular those of the public of a South Asian capital such as Jakarta, where I myself had worked for years and where Harun had once attended grade school. There, one needs roughly an hour and a half to get into the city and another hour and a half to get back home, three hours in total of driving by car or by bus, to take part in an evening event at the German cultural institute. The evening has to be worth the effort, or the visitors won't come back. The subject, the film showing, the performance, the concert has to

have something essential to do with people's lives and/or work lives, and it has to be organized and advertised in a clear way. If someone is going to decide to attend, they have to know what and whom they'll be getting, and why. It can be a film with discussion afterwards, preferably with the director and with the possibility of eating and drinking a little something and entering into personal conversation.

What makes an evening rewarding for the visitor? When does the guest say, "Absolutely! I'll be coming back again next week"? Probably when the room was full and the visitor left the event "richer" than before. That can be a matter of additional knowledge, a newly acquired perspective, a personal encounter, a recognition of something forgotten, a view of "what must be done," of having the opportunity to get one's bearings, to become more certain of oneself, but also of putting apparent certainties into question, of preparing oneself a bit to study abroad, and so forth.

What must a programme look like to fulfil these requirements? It has to have quality! It has to have relevance; that is, it has to have something to do with what people are currently talking about, both in the guest country and in Germany. And it must have sustainability; that is, it has to stay relevant beyond what happens in a single evening. Of course, it should be entertaining, but it shouldn't be a flash in the pan of flat gags and jokes, homeland schmaltz, or horror movies. Cultural institutes are, after all, neither agencies for state self-representation nor propaganda channels ("Look how lovely things are in Germany, what a wonderful health system we have and how well we have managed the reunification..."). Nobody is interested in official self-praise on the part of the state. Events like that produce yawningly empty rooms. What people are interested in, when it comes to Germany, is self-critical and socially critical reflection on how problems are solved in our country, and about how they might also be solved, in similar ways and with the same urgency, in other parts of the world. People think of the Germans as good problem-solvers.

Harun Farocki's ideas about quality were informed by his thinking about good films, and this thinking, in turn, was decisively shaped by Bertolt Brecht. Harun viewed film and the visual arts as art forms that were there both to narrate *and* teach, in which things that seem self-evident acquire the character of something strange thanks to techniques of estrangement: a cinema of critique and of reflection that does not permit viewers to check their wits at the door. A cinema in which the viewer says, "I hadn't thought of that. I've never seen it like that." A cinema that didn't feed viewers with illusions and make them forget the world... It was this side of Harun Farocki

that drew the interest of the students and young film-makers with whom I had – and still have – contact.

We found ourselves repeatedly discussing the question of how to develop a project that would include and represent this “Farocki style.” Cultural programming normally designates learning processes that put advanced artists together with younger artists just beginning their careers as “workshops.” This is the most intensive form of exchange and of information flow. There are result-oriented and process-oriented workshops. The result-oriented workshop involves having something to show for it, something to present or exhibit at the end, preferably in front of live TV news cameras. The process-oriented workshop dispenses with results, banking entirely on the exchange between the teacher and the taught. For international cultural exchange, the learning process as such is both most productive for participants and least perceptible to the public at large. The things participants take home with them, and the ways they transmute this into their own advancement, can change life trajectories, influence work styles, and open careers, but normally it's only the participants themselves and the workshop leaders who are aware of how a workshop helped them. Personally, I believe that an aggregation of individual changes is where truly sustained cultural exchange finds expression, and that the changes thus effected in people are what really constitute its sustainability. This can come into conflict with institutional requirements and the necessity of public awareness. Nonetheless, I gave higher priority to the successful teaching and learning process than to snappy headlines – at least so far as I was free to make such decisions.

The Labour in a Single Shot workshops would later succeed in combining process- and result-orientation instead of setting them in tension. The task as assigned involved participants in a *process* of consolidation and reflective self-limiting: to tell something in a single shot no more than two minutes in length, to concentrate entirely on a single sequence of images to grasp the essence of a complex process or condense it into a compact statement. Making a two-minute shot can be compared with writing a haiku. The haiku is the shortest poetic form in the world. It has to deal with nature or with feelings, it must be concrete, and it has to have something to do with the present. The task set in Labour in a Single Shot is similar. The films were to deal with human labour, they were to be concrete, and they should address a present capable of being caught on film.

But how would the *results* of our workshops achieve a public effect? Would they be artistically and technically good enough to support an exhibition?

I wasn't the only one who was sceptical; it took the didactic self-confidence and the visual imagination of Antje Ehmann to be fully certain of this effect and to convince us all. In 2010, on our Boston backyard deck, we were not yet speaking concretely of Labour in a Single Shot. Instead, we got to know each other better and established the framework we wanted to work within if it should come to a common project. After four months of living together, we went our separate ways and kept up with each other through correspondence.

The Institutional and Financial Framework

About half a year after our brainstorming sessions on the deck in Boston, Harun and Antje had arrived at the basic concept. Based on Harun's experiences as a video teacher and film professor, they sketched out the project Labour in a Single Shot. It would take place on five continents, in fifteen countries, and in twelve Goethe-Institut regions. The workshops would be combined with exhibitions of video art developed from them, and would be oriented both to process and to results. A unified theme and consistent task definition would make the project visible, recognizable, and also sustainable. The goal was a visual encyclopaedia of labour in the twenty-first century – paid and unpaid, material and immaterial, traditional as well as totally new. It would make reference to the method of the early films of the late nineteenth century, such as those of the Lumière brothers (*Workers Leaving the Factory*), to locate the project historically, but also so as to regain something of the decisiveness of the early films.

To host workshops in fifteen countries and exhibitions of video art in seven locations is expensive, exceeding the budget of any one Goethe-Institut. Fortunately, the Institut's "Excellence Initiative" had recently been established. The Goethe-Institut operates on the principle of decentralized programme autonomy. This had been its strength for decades, and had in recent years become its weakness. Since the 1990s, the world had become ever more globalized, but the 157 German cultural institutes in ninety countries continued to work locally, with small-format, spatially limited programming restricted by budget concerns and repeating itself all over the world. In these changing times, this programming format tended to reach an increasingly ageing audience and to bore younger people. It was not keeping up with the times.

The creation of the Excellence Initiative between 2006 and 2009 was one of the decisive steps taken to modernize the offerings of the Goethe-Institut, and it was from this initiative that the Labour in a Single Shot project would receive the financing and support that would make it possible. The Excellence Initiative was an idea of the Goethe-Institut general secretary at the time, Hans-Georg Knopp, who with the help of the Federal Foreign Office created a dedicated budget of several million euros to stimulate efforts to work innovatively and in new formats and – transcending the agendas of individual Institutes – to work regionally and, if possible, even transregionally. In short, the idea was to substantially raise the quality of cultural programming at the Goethe-Institut worldwide.

To complete our application for the Excellence Initiative, Antje, Harun, and I took a vacation together in India, where Harun's father was born and where some of my children were living. Harun and Antje would give the first workshop in Bangalore not long after our vacation. There, they would test out the basic features of the project. We used our time together to formulate the basic approach of the application and to identify the countries and the Goethe-Institutes that we wanted to co-operate with. We juggled so much with numbers, dates, and countries that, at some point, my son, walking by and casting a quick glance at the paperwork, asked us if we were doing our tax returns.

We had contacts to our favoured locations through either the Goethe-Institut or the Harun Farocki Film Production Company. Altogether, our network comprised fifteen prospective countries and twelve regions of the Goethe-Institut.

As far as content was concerned, I could assume that my colleagues at all of the relevant Goethe-Institutes would already be familiar with Harun Farocki's most important films. Back in Boston, I phoned everyone on our city wish list, spoke with my colleagues, and everywhere received only enthusiastic endorsement. If our application for an Excellence grant succeeded, all of these Institutes were prepared to contribute additional funding and then to take steps to secure the help of appropriate partners in the guest countries.

As early as that spring, we received the good news that a special fund had been set aside by the Foreign Office to help launch the project and to finance the development of a continually expandable website with the sum of forty thousand euros. Near the end of 2012, a decision was made, and the jury of the Goethe-Institut awarded us a budget of 180,000 euros, funded by the Excellence Initiative. Bingo!

How the Project Was Integrated with the Global Infrastructure of the Goethe-Institut

Many first-rate partners would participate in the project during its first two and a half years (museums, galleries, film academies, cultural institutions, two biennials, and a triennial), and altogether they would contribute a further 680,000 euros to the project. In the end, the total project cost for fifteen workshops and seven exhibitions would reach nearly one million euros. By the middle of 2014, more than four hundred video artists had participated in the fifteen workshops, and later 200,000 people would visit the exhibitions in Tel Aviv, Lisbon, Łódź, Venice, Athens, Montreal, Bangalore, Mexico City, Essen, Boston, and Berlin.

The local Goethe-Institutes were the essential link between us as producers and our many prominent partners. It was also useful that many people knew me, thanks to my twenty-five years of work for the Goethe-Institut, both in Germany and abroad. I had led the film, television, and radio section for six years, and during those years had maintained close contact with the fifty or so colleagues who specialized in film work, who had real professional expertise and whom we informally called “film representatives” (*Filmbeauftragte*). I knew all of them, and in most cases, I even knew when their birthdays were. Film representatives are usually local employees of ours who take the time to keep up with what’s going on in the world of cinema, which means that at least once a year, they take in what there is in the way of new German film production at festivals in Berlin or in Hof, Leipzig, Duisburg, Oberhausen, Osnabrück, or Munich, depending on whether their main focus is on feature films or documentaries, shorts or experimental films, or upon which festival they’re in the process of planning some kind of co-operation with. These people are almost always local, and something like 90 per cent of them are women. Some of them have become known internationally, such as, for example, Ingrid Scheib-Rothbart of the Goethe-Institut in New York, who had worked as a secretary to Hannah Arendt before joining the Goethe House (as the Goethe-Institut New York was then called) to become an ambassador of the New German Cinema in America, and making the movement famous. Ingrid Scheib-Rothbart was a model to us all, and to me as well.

The conceptual aims of the project were as important to us as the resources that we had in our local employees. These had to be formulated in such a way as to fit equally well into the regional concept of the South Asian region as into those of South America, eastern Europe, central Asia, or North America. The format of Labour in a Single Shot covered the



Labour in a Single Shot

A project by Antje Ehmman and Harun Farocki

Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, February 26–April 6, 2015

Exhibition view

© Laura Fiorio / Haus der Kulturen der Welt

most important contexts and objectives of all the participating Institutes, and all of them could identify with it. Among the common objectives of Goethe-Institutes, whether in Europe, Asia, the Americas, or Africa, are the following:

- to expand and deepen international cultural exchange and access to culture in Germany, as well as to promote intercultural dialogue in a globalized world,
- to strengthen civil societies, and
- to develop co-operation and collaboration in the field of education.

With regard to the last point, it is worth mentioning that the Goethe-Institut understands itself as standing not only for culture but also for education. Within the purview of its sphere of action “educational co-operation,” it has contact with tens of thousands of schools and universities, mostly in the service of expanding German language teaching, but also with an eye to conveying other educational content. With our fifteen workshops in total, with the conferences planned in Boston and Berlin by Roy Grundmann and Gregory Williams and in Berlin by Katrin Klingan, Annika Kuhlmann, Cordula Hamschmidt, Anselm Francke, and Bernd Scherer, and with the

co-operation of major universities throughout the world, the educational aspect of the project was integrated into the project concept in a way that also convinced colleagues in other work sectors.

Synergy between the Goethe-Institut and Its Local Partners

Here, I will cite a slightly abridged version of something our long-standing president Klaus-Dieter Lehmann has said in speeches:

At the Goethe-Institut, we work not only rationally but also through personal connection, that is, through human competence, closeness to each other, neighbourhoods, truly concrete projects and familiarity with each other – this is absolutely key. What the Goethe-Institut has is the ability to bring people together – that is to say, to create encounters. We don't work in isolation, but in partnerships, and when possible also as participants. We don't export culture and exhibit it, but act by means of voluntary cooperative partnerships.

Decentralized programme autonomy and the integration of local galleries, film schools, and other institutions as partners are essential for the work of the Goethe-Institut. That is our work philosophy! The question is how that works out in detail, and whether one in fact achieves what one has set out to do. How participatory is the project really?

One of the most convincing achievements of Labour in a Single Shot – for myself and for others – was the way it implemented its aspirations to be participatory. This involved working with local workshop participants to prepare their videos for exhibition, presenting *all* the results of each workshop on the website, and curating a selection of workshop films for exhibitions that would later travel around the world. All of the films were shown equitably side by side, equal in size and length: films from the first and the so-called third world, from industrialized and agrarian countries, from emergent and transitioning countries, from North and South America, from Africa, Asia, and Europe. Antje Ehmann came up with the basic visual concept, first realized in Tel Aviv with screens mounted on stelae with attached headphones. Within a year, she developed the visual concept further. The third exhibition, in Poland, involved large screens hanging from the ceiling with “sound showers” installed in front of them that made it possible for several people at once to watch the films without the sound of multiple films overlapping. The idea of hanging the screens from the

ceiling like a forest of pages made visible the aspiration and goal of the project to become a visual encyclopaedia of human labour in the twenty-first century. I think that even Harun Farocki was surprised at how intense an impression was generated by the fifteen hanging screens, each of them one and a half metres wide.

Of course, partners in guest countries each have their strengths and their weaknesses. There were some galleries for which the technological requirements were too much. There were partner universities whose regulations did not allow them to open the programmes they sponsored to students from other universities or to collaboration with freelance artists. These were, however, axiomatic ground rules of the workshops. Participants from multiple generations and various universities were supposed to be able to be there. In Boston, this was happily enabled by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), thanks to the efforts of Kurt Fendt.

Because the films had been made in various formats (most of them in PAL, but many also in NTSC), at the exhibitions, we needed players, projectors, and displays that would be capable of playing back both sorts of video file. For some exhibition venues, it was no problem to rent compatible equipment, but it was a big problem for others, which led to long exchanges about whether films made in PAL couldn't be converted to NTSC. For us, this was out of the question, because such conversions always reduce image quality. What to do? The solution was the company Eidotech and its expert Jan Imberi, who arranged favourable rental conditions for each exhibition venue and instructed the local technicians by telephone – whether in North America or in India – on how to operate the delivered playback equipment. Jan Imberi had studied Harun Farocki's work so carefully and was so familiar with his scenarios and forms of installation that the technical correspondence required to mount every exhibition that he supplied and oversaw was reduced by 98 per cent. He knew what it was all about and consistently demanded uniform standards worldwide. A real stroke of luck!

What Was There Left for Me to Do?

We were a core team of three people: Antje Ehmman, Harun Farocki, and me. In addition, there were three colleagues from the Goethe-Institut Boston (Annette Klein, Iris Alcorn, and Karin Oehlenschlaeger), as well as two close collaborators from the Harun Farocki Film Production Company, Jan Ralske and Matthias Rajmann. Every workshop and exhibition also required collaboration with local partners, from curators to local media technicians.

The project had two coproduction partners, the Harun Farocki Film Production Company and the Goethe-Institut Boston. The production management tasks were split between us. Because the global subvention came from the Excellence Initiative of the Goethe-Institut, the Goethe-Institut in Boston was responsible for budgetary control and fiscal management. That meant that I spent Saturday mornings planning and initiating expenditures and justifying them in the budget. The project budget had to be monitored, honoraria paid, contributions remitted, flights booked, and initial account assignments issued. There are rules and standards governing the use of public monies (and such are the project funds of the Goethe-Institut). All money must be spent in an economical and accountable way, every bank transfer is checked by local, regional, and central budget controls, and sometimes randomly and without warning by external auditors. Here, as well, I had help from an experienced colleague, Matthias Feldmann, a former pastor from East Germany. He would come by the Goethe-Institut at eight in the morning, play sonatas for an hour on our Bechstein piano, then transfer the funds that I had prepared, while making certain that I hadn't made any errors. I have no training in business management, and in the first years of my professional life, I tortured myself working through such tasks, listlessly and overwhelmed – until I spent several years in a country I loved where a badly paid civil service skimmed its own personal share from the top of nearly every payment transaction as a matter of course. Watching how the quality of life and the development dynamics of an emerging country were time and again set back by years and slowed down by the corruption and nepotism of “civil servants” in public service transformed me into a furious proponent of transparent, rule-bound, continuously monitored budget management processes.¹ Where I was too slow or uncertain, I let myself be coached. Today, I can do in a morning what used to take me four times as long, with half that time spent complaining.

The grant was split into two annual instalments, 100,000 euros for 2013 and 80,000 for 2014. The grant for the second year, 2014, was to be paid out on the condition that the project accomplished as nearly as possible what it had planned for its first year. There was some scepticism that such an ambitious project, spanning multiple regions and continents, would actually succeed. The goal was thus always to demonstrate that we were entitled to receive the funds that were already earmarked for the following year. That was another reason why we kept such careful accounts and paid such attention to making reports and keeping within the budget.

1 A film director once told me how he had once won a state prize of \$20,000 (US). When he finally received the money, there was only \$7,000 left; the rest had gotten “stuck” along the way.

We continued with everything that managing a project involves: there were exhibition deadlines that had to be moved (Mexico), and there were surprising workshop cancellations (Beirut), where we had quickly to find new and equally relevant partners (Goethe-Institut Hanoi).

I tried to carefully keep to deadlines set for the reports on workshops and exhibitions that had already taken place. Better to be a month early than a day late. At the Goethe-Institut, we have a practical software program for project planning into which one enters single planning steps along with the financial information and then completes reports step by step. I executed these reports as precisely and as legibly as possible. I knew from my years of work at the central office in Munich how little effort some colleagues put into their reports, how incredible amounts of coffee were required to compensate for sloppily formulated reports, and how inspiring and action-inducing a concise, readable, and, if possible, amusingly formulated event report can be.

Because according to the logic of our institution I reported only on the events that we ourselves hosted and not on those hosted by other Institutes, I asked Antje Ehmann for descriptions from her perspective as curator and workshop leader. You can see how well she did that in the second chapter of this book.

In the second year, when the German media began to pay attention to the project, we had to write more and more journalistic texts; building blocks for speeches by the Goethe-Institut president Klaus-Dieter Lehmann at the annual press conference; texts for the local, regional, and central websites; and also opening speeches for the crowning exhibition in Berlin in 2015.

To keep the productive tension of such a major project at a consistently high level of energy, one has to know everyone involved and be in a position to answer questions from one's own institution, from funding sources, and from the Foreign Office, at short notice and in real time: queries from directors, department and section heads, participating Institut and regional directors, or the press division. To give myself a sense of the thing overall, I attended the opening exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, the exhibition held at the Museum Sztuki in Łódź, and the exhibition and workshop at the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City. I was in Boston anyway, so together with my colleague Annette Klein, I co-ordinated the workshop at the MIT Media Lab and the exhibition at the Boston Center for the Arts. After Harun Farocki's sudden death, I represented both curators at the Ruhrtriennale in Essen. I was able to travel to the crowning exhibition at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures) in Berlin – splendidly organized by Bernd Scherer and his team – and to answer the surprising invitation to the Venice Biennale in 2015 from my new posting in Vilnius.

I have described the project many times on my own and on other websites, so that the world will understand what we wanted to do and achieve: namely, a visual encyclopaedia of human labour in the twenty-first century. I had hoped that more exhibitions would be mounted than just the seven that we planned and already had financed. This hope has been fulfilled to an extent that I could not have dreamed of. At the moment I write these lines, *Labour in a Single Shot* has been presented in thirty-six exhibitions worldwide. Further exhibitions are being planned, and a second series of workshops has successfully been started, run variously by Antje Ehmann, Eva Stotz, Cathy Lee Crane, León de la Rosa, and Luis Feduchi.

For me, and naturally for Antje and Harun, it was intellectually gratifying to see the project grow and develop as it had been planned in our heads. It was also fun to refute the sceptics who thought it hardly possible to carry out the whole thing, and it was a pleasure for me to follow individual workshop participants as they developed careers, earned institutional appointments, won prizes, or became film professors. The project achieved worldwide recognition, and the results surpassed our expectations.

Meanwhile, I had worried that all that travelling around the world might be physically too exhausting for Harun Farocki, who was approaching seventy. He answered a question of mine to this effect with his own method of calculation. He had deducted the twenty-two trips in total that this project had required of him from the two and a half years in which he had cancelled everything that didn't have to do with *Labour in a Single Shot*. So, on balance and quantitatively, his travel quotient had come out to the same. Only this way he got to travel with his partner Antje. For this reason, the project was for both of them the most beautiful project of their lives.

And what was the point of the whole thing? By way of answer, Harun sent me a poem by Bertolt Brecht about the journey into exile of Lao Tzu, who wanted to rest – but who, stopped by the toll keeper, in the end wrote down what he had discovered, in eighty-one sayings, among which this one was to be found:

[...] that with time, soft water in motion
will conquer the mightiest stone.
You understand: what is hard, succumbs.²

2 Bertolt Brecht, "Legende von der Entstehung des Buches Tao Te King auf dem Weg des Laotse in die Emigration" (Legend of the Origin of the Book Tao Te Ching on Lao Tzu's Journey into Exile), *Die Gedichte von Bertolt Brecht in einem Band* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 660–663.

This was Harun Farocki's favourite poem. And it also describes the philosophy behind the work of the Goethe-Institut.

About the Author

Detlef Gericke directed the Goethe-Institut Lithuania from 2015 to 2019 and the Goethe-Institut Boston from 2009 to 2015. During his tenure in Boston, Gericke collaborated with Harun Farocki and Antje Ehmann in conceptualizing *Labour in a Single Shot* and also oversaw its financing through the "Excellence Initiative" of the Goethe-Institut.

2. Labour in a Single Shot: Critical Perspectives – Editors’ Introduction

Roy Grundmann, Peter J. Schwartz, and Gregory H. Williams

Abstract

The introduction sets the history of the Labour in a Single Shot video workshop in relationship both to Ehmman and Farocki’s artistic trajectories and to the twentieth-century tradition of the politically committed film documentary. Noting the academic and public interest the project has received, the editors introduce the essays that follow.

Keywords: video workshop, gallery exhibition, online archive, curatorship, media pedagogy, Goethe-Institut

Labour in a Single Shot was the last project undertaken by the German film-maker Harun Farocki in collaboration with his partner Antje Ehmman before his untimely death in July 2014. Conceived and executed over the course of four years (2010–2014), the project’s ideological and aesthetic roots extend deep into the soil of Farocki’s decades of development as an artist and as a teacher and into Ehmman’s as a curator. In the form of international exhibitions, additional workshops, lectures by Ehmman, and an online web archive, it continues to bear fruit to the present day. This volume of essays is the product of two inadvertently posthumous scholarly conferences, one held at Boston University in November 2014 alongside an exhibition at the Mills Gallery at the Boston Center for the Arts, the other – again complementing an exhibition of videos from the project – at Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures) in late February 2015. Both sets of events were initially planned in concert with Farocki and Ehmman: the Boston conference by Roy Grundmann and Gregory Williams together with Detlef Gericke, then

director of the Goethe-Institut Boston; the one in Berlin in collaboration with Grundmann and Williams, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Gericke and the Goethe-Institut, and the international research centre Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History (re:work) at Berlin's Humboldt University. Although the tone of the Boston conference was deeply affected by the shock of Farocki's passing, its overall shape remained true to the original plan of assessing the Labour project; in Berlin, a day of talks and events commemorating Farocki and his legacy was added to two days of lectures discussing the project.

Aside from two texts combining talks given in Boston and Berlin (Elsaesser, Schwartz), and three written specially for this volume (Barker, Hudson and Zimmerman, Navarro), the essays that follow are all revisions of papers given at the Boston conference. We have prefaced this critical work with a translation of extended extracts from previously unpublished journals kept by Antje Ehmman during the project workshops held in multiple cities worldwide between December 2011 and April 2014. It is our hope that Ehmman's account will give readers an organic sense of how the hundreds of videos now comprising the project's archive came into existence as the product not only of two-week tutorial workshops on the art and craft of documentary film-making in twenty cities worldwide¹ but also of an exceptional set of human and institutional relationships: between Farocki and Ehmman as a remarkably symbiotic pair of artistic collaborators; between the two of them, workshop participants in fifteen countries, and the local landscapes of the workshop cities; and, not least, between Farocki and Ehmman, the project, and numerous representatives of Germany's premier international cultural agency, the Goethe-Institut, chief among them Detlef Gericke. Our request for a foreword, graciously obliged, is but a small token of the debt owed Gericke's ongoing interest and dedication by both the Labour project as a whole and the grateful editors of this volume.

Planning for the Labour project began in 2010, when Farocki, about to retire from teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, decided with Ehmman to respond to multiple teaching and lecturing invitations with

1 The cities in which Farocki and Ehmman held workshops together were, in chronological order: Lisbon, Bangalore, Geneva, Tel Aviv, Berlin, Cairo, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Łódź, Moscow, Hanoi, Boston, Mexico City, Hangzhou, and Johannesburg. This series was preceded by a limited workshop in Sligo, Ireland in 2011, and has been followed since Farocki's death with workshops led by Cathy Lee Crane and León de la Rosa in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, by Eva Stotz in Vilnius, Lithuania and Marseille, by Antje Ehmman and Eva Stotz in Chicago, and by Antje Ehmman and Luis Feduchi in Warsaw.

a co-ordinated international teaching effort centred on documenting the subject of labour. Yet the various strands of interest informing the project can be traced much farther back, through multiple phases of the film-maker's long career. As Thomas Elsaesser observes, an “interest in work, work routines, and work practices – often associated with the human hand and manual labour” – was one of Farocki's “abiding preoccupations.”² Following more than two decades of films documenting production processes in a direct observational mode, especially of cultural artefacts (light bulbs, a model's make-up, film posters, an artist's painting, a recorded pop song, a Playboy centrefold, a film by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet)³ and of labour accomplished by talking (the work of shoe salesmen, the conduct of classes training executives in self-presentation and salesmen in giving sales talks),⁴ the 1995 film *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik/Workers Leaving the Factory* marks an inflection point in Farocki's approach to the problem of representing labour in film. Its declared task was to reflect on the relative invisibility of labour processes in cinema and of the relations of money and power to which labour is subject, a lacuna marked at the very inception of the medium by one of the first films ever shown, the Lumière brothers' *Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon/Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895).⁵ As Farocki declares in his 1995 film's

2 Thomas Elsaesser, “Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist,” in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 22, 34–35.

3 *Die Teilung aller Tage* (1970); *Make Up* (1973); *Plakatmaler* (1974); *Sarah Schumann malt ein Bild* (1977); *Ein Bild von Sarah Schumann* (1978); *Single. Eine Schallplatte wird produziert* (1979); *Ein Bild* (1983); *Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet bei der Arbeit an einem Film nach Kafkas Romanfragment >Amerika<* (1983).

4 This series continues through Farocki's last film, *Sauerbruch Hutton Architekten* (2013).

5 Films that show actual work processes (rather than depicting related but more general themes such as labour conflicts, the class system, or working-class culture in general) are surprisingly scarce. The body of scholarship on films showing work processes is also small. One of the first books focusing on media's representation of work and working-class culture of the 1960s and 1970s was *WDR and the Arbeiterfilm: Fassbinder, Ziewer, and Others*, ed. Richard Collins and Vincent Porter (London: British Film Institute, 1981). For a recent study of industrial films and other non-theatrical films about labour, see *Films that Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, ed. Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009). This wide-ranging essay collection analyzes films made by and about the auto industry, films about trade unions, corporate management films, and films about affirmative action in the workplace. Among the publications devoted to various aspects of Harun Farocki's work, two books have dealt with his representation of work processes and his filmic analyses of work-training films. Tilman Baumgärtel's monograph, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm: Harun Farocki—Werkmonografie eines Autorenfilmers* (Berlin: b_books, 1998), places its valuable critical analysis of Farocki's films about work in the context of his overall

voice-over, “The factory the workers are streaming out of is unadorned, without any company signboard. Nothing is visible of the power and money of industry. And also nothing of the workers’ power. Still, at the time these images were recorded, the governments of Europe had reason to fear a workers’ rebellion in case of war, like the one that had happened in Paris in 1871.”⁶ The second in a series of found-footage films and installations in which Farocki endeavoured to archive and analyze selected visual tropes in cinema,⁷ *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* deploys visual imagery from a century’s worth of narrative and documentary films to show how at the moment in which moving pictures first seemed to promise to make the world visible in a new way, the Lumières’ first film would initiate a tradition of rendering labour invisible – in this case, precisely the labour that had made cinema possible. Labour in a Single Shot is in effect the counter-archive to this found-footage testament to missing imagery: explicitly setting the Lumières’ film as a formal and substantive cornerstone to the project, it encourages both a filling of this historical lacuna (in the project’s manifold direct representations of labour, especially manual labour) and continued reflection on its persistence to the present day (in the project’s remakes of *Workers Leaving the Factory* and in its thematization – sometimes overt, sometimes by omission – of the policed sequestering of some forms of labour from view).

This genealogy of the Labour project has been declared in several of its gallery exhibitions (Berlin 2015, Barcelona 2016, Marseille 2017, Seoul 2019) with an updated version of a separate work created in 2006, a twelve-channel video installation entitled *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik in elf Jahrzehnten/Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades*, which recycles, without verbal commentary, much of the source material from the 1995 film, while also adding more. Several exhibitions to date of selected videos made in the workshops have also included a separate installation of

trajectory as a film-maker, educator, and media activist. More recently, the art historian and curator Monika Bayer-Wermuth published *Harun Farocki: Arbeit* (Munich: Silke Schreiber, 2016), a book that is entirely focused on Farocki’s career-long engagement with the theme of work, though she does not discuss *Labour in a Single Shot*.

6 Voice-over, Harun Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995), our translation.

7 Films: *Ein Tag im Leben der Endverbraucher* (1993); *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* (1995); *Der Ausdruck der Hände* (1997); *Gefängnisbilder* (2000). Installations: *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik in elf Jahrzehnten/Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* (2006/2014); *Zur Bauweise des Films bei Griffith/On the Construction of Griffith’s Films* (2006); *Fressen oder Fliegen/Feasting or Flying* (2008); *Tropen des Krieges/War Tropes* (2011). Cf. Antje Ehmman and Harun Farocki, “Cinema like never before,” in *Kino wie noch nie/Cinema like never before*, ed. Antje Ehmman and Harun Farocki (Cologne: Generali Foundation, 2006), 20–21.

some subset of workshop videos intended as remakes of the Lumière factory film (thirty-one of the current tally of 568 films by some 300 workshop participants),⁸ and the project website includes “workers leaving [...]” as one of three subset selection criteria (the others are “type of work” and “dominant colour”). A fourth component of all the exhibitions, adorning both gallery walls and publicity material, has been the series of prints by Andreas Siekmann and Alice Creischer representing each workshop city through an iconic image of some signal aspect of its economy; local statistical data assembled by Bernd Heitmann also complement the online videos on each city web page.

In their return to the Lumières' *Urszene* of labour's erasure from cinematic view, Farocki and Ehmann were not content to limit themselves to matters of content: they also tasked their workshop participants with rehearsing some of the formal constraints under which the Lumières made their seminal film. Each video was to be one to two minutes long, taken in a single shot with no cuts, addressing the subject of labour; such post-Lumière features as camera movement, colour, and sound were, however, allowed. This, too, was not entirely new: as Elsaesser has observed, Farocki had already “reinvented” the tableau shot of early cinema as the basic building block of such earlier films as *Zwischen zwei Kriegen/Between Two Wars* (1978), *Etwas wird sichtbar/Before your Eyes – Vietnam* (1982), and *Leben – BRD/How to Live in the FRG* (1990).⁹ Linking static vignettes through montage into paratactical chains of visual metaphor, this last film especially left much of the activity of meaning-making up to the viewer: “precisely because no commentary is offered, and no verbal paraphrase links the one sequence to the other, or compares the animate with the inanimate, the viewers are given ample room for their reflections”¹⁰ – reflections ideally embracing not only the subject matter of the film but also the very conditions of filmic narrative. In a similar manner, one of the Labour project's intentions is both to reveal and evade cinema's ordinary narrative conventions, a function that falls in one way to the formal constraints, and in another to

8 To date, these remake exhibitions have appeared in Tel Aviv (2013), Lisbon (2013), Łódź (2013), Bangalore (2013), Essen (2014), Boston (2014), Berlin (2015), Seoul (2015), Barcelona (2016), Madrid (2016), Marseille (2017), São Paulo (2019), Chicago (2019), and Timișoara (2020). The number of videos (and channels) in these separate installations ranged from six to fifteen; in each case, the installation included the Lumières' film (representing Paris) alongside workshop videos from a range of other cities. In all the other exhibitions, remakes of *Workers Leaving the Factory* were included in the looping sequences on the individual city channels.

9 Elsaesser, “Harun Farocki,” 20.

10 Elsaesser, “Harun Farocki,” 21.

the conditions of exhibition. While the formal directive “one shot, single subject, one-to-two minutes” tethers the project symbolically to 1895, a moment preceding cinema’s fall into what film scholars call narrative integration and its ideological consequences, the selection criteria that organize viewer experience on the project website (and, in a different way, Ehmann’s curatorial practice at the exhibitions) compel the viewer to undertake a kind of aleatory editing across the project as a whole, and to reflect on that undertaking.

The Labour in a Single Shot project may thus be seen as a culmination of Ehmann and Farocki’s shared preoccupation with the technological, aesthetic, and political conditions of making labour visible through filmic documentation. To understand the project as such, we must situate it within the overall history of political film theory and practice. The manner in which the Labour project engages its workshop participants and represents itself to the public signals its place within the twentieth-century tradition of the committed documentary. Its pedagogical structure taps the legacy of early and midcentury left film collectives and their dedication to using film as a tool for social change. As a direct artistic implementation of the revolutionary ideal of mass empowerment, such collectives as the Soviet Kinoks in the 1920s; the Nykino and Frontier Films cadres of 1930s United States; their disciples in the American Newsreel Film Collective, founded in the late 1960s; and the Dziga Vertov Group, also founded in the late 1960s (by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, in France), all embodied the idea that art should not only be made for the masses but also by them. This agenda influenced many subsequent art- and film-making endeavours for decades to come, including the literature initiatives of the early Soviet *Proletkult* and the writers’ workshops launched in West Germany in the 1960s. The desired transformation of participants from art recipients to art makers was widely (and, as it turned out, naïvely) assumed to be unproblematic. Collectives that taught film-making, however, found themselves faced from the outset with the challenge of overcoming the difficulties that inhere in film-making as an art and a craft. Negotiating this challenge turned out to require extensive teaching and mentoring, a fact that explains the historical prominence of elite instructional cadres within revolutionary film collectives.

Labour in a Single Shot shows its debt to this tradition in the care Ehmann and Farocki took in developing their approach to the task of teaching students to make films with an eye to social impact. But the political vision behind Labour in a Single Shot differs significantly from that of the Kinoks, Nykino and Frontier, Newsreel, the Dziga Vertov Group, and other radical

film-making collectives that understood their task as a struggle with a capitalist state engaged in class domination and imperialist warfare. Unlike these collectives, the Labour project, a nonprofit undertaking sponsored by the Goethe-Institut, a cultural association mostly funded by the German government, operates within the realm of state-sanctioned cultural work. This institutional framework shapes the workshops' pedagogical mission not only in its funding structure and organizationally – all the workshops were co-ordinated by regional Goethe-Institut employees – but also in their ideological alignment with the twin goals of *Völkerverständigung* (fostering understanding between different peoples and cultures) and providing alternative structures of education, particularly for adults.

Farocki and Ehmann thus clearly still subscribe to the modernist ideal that art should be an agent of political change, a conception that regained urgency in the 1960s, when Farocki's generation of artists became politicized in response to the decade's sociopolitical upheavals. This process also entailed an intensive theoretical engagement with the relationship between art and politics. The call for art to break down the walls that bourgeois capitalist society had erected around it became a baseline agenda, regardless of the artists or media in question.¹¹

Film was poised to play an important role in the politicization and fraying of the arts (*Verfransung*, to use Adorno's term for the intermixing, or blurring, of media) in the late 1960s.¹² But because of the tainted role film was felt to have assumed as a capitalist mass medium and as a tool for the advancement of totalitarian ideas during the first half of the twentieth century, in the late sixties and early seventies, much of the political left regarded cinema with a certain amount of ambivalence or with outright scepticism. In the wake of the student riots of May 1968, a debate erupted among left-wing film-makers and critics in France, Germany, and other countries (including many developing countries) as to how cinema could be joined with other arts to bring about political change. Following Victor Shklovsky and Bertolt

11 Tilman Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 37. European avant-gardes of the 1960s took inspiration from early Soviet art, but it should be mentioned that the call for breaking down the barrier between the space of art and the space of the audience (and thus between art and life) also owed a significant debt to Dadaism, which had attacked the hubris and ignorance that had led to World War I. Dadaism became a central inspiration for such sixties movements as Situationism and for new art forms including Happenings and performance art, which attacked Western consumer society and its economic and military imperialism. Baumgärtel explicitly links Farocki's approach to political documentary to Situationism, with which Farocki was briefly involved in the 1960s.

12 Theodor W. Adorno, *Über einige Relationen zwischen Musik und Malerei. Die Kunst und die Künste* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1967).

Brecht in espousing the notion of aesthetic estrangement, the two leading French film journals, *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Cinéthique*, proclaimed that for film-makers to take part in this political task, they needed to make visible the devices that film uses to create illusion. Guided by the historical models of the Soviet Futurists and Formalists at the journals *Lef* and *Novy Lef* and by the work of the Soviet film-makers Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, who argued that a transformation of cinema had to include the relationship between film and spectator, *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* also embraced the concept of the alert, active viewer.¹³ Yet neither French journal was able to explain why directors like Godard had so far failed to reach the working-class audiences on whose behalf they purported to make their films.¹⁴

As noted by Silvia Harvey, whose summary of this debate remains the most detailed and comprehensive available, the formalism of *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* required emendation by another line of thought, exemplified by Walter Benjamin and Brecht. Both these writers had warned against neglecting a culture's popular elements and underestimating the public's need for entertainment and its desire to combine learning with pleasure.¹⁵ Benjamin and Brecht helped artists on the left expand their focus from the internal structure of a literary or cinematic text to the question of how the text functions within "a particular apparatus, within a system of consumption, distribution or exchange specific to a particular society and a particular historical moment."¹⁶ This epistemological shift is exemplified in statements by Godard and Brecht that, while overlapping in their concern about the limited truth-bearing capacities of the image, set different emphases. Godard, articulating the thinking that defined the approach of the Dziga Vertov Group as a materialist strategy of art making, declared: "A photograph is not the reflection of reality, but the reality of that reflection."¹⁷ This view elevates formalism to a materialist strategy of

13 Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 69.

14 Ibid., 66. See also D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

15 Harvey, *May '68*, 69-70.

16 Harvey, *May '68*, 70. Harvey here draws specifically on ideas formulated by Benjamin about Brecht's theory of Epic Theater in Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," *New Left Review*, no. 62 (London 1970), 1-9, reprinted in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz and Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 220-238. See also Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theater?," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 147-154.

17 Godard, cited in Harvey, *May '68*, 71. Godard made an almost identical statement with regard to film: "A movie is not reality, it is only a reflection. Bourgeois film-makers focus on the

film-making, whereby the constant defamiliarization of aesthetic codes is the only safeguard against film's tendency to naturalize the things it shows. By contrast, Brecht's scepticism about the relationship of images to truth seems to leave no room for solutions. Already in the 1920s, he laconically observed that "[a] photograph of the Krupp factories doesn't tell you very much about those factories."¹⁸ Brecht's statement has encouraged artists such as Farocki to shift their focus from an exclusive concern with the image (and its formal treatment) to other points of interest, including such questions as why images privilege or omit certain things, from where images issue forth, in what contexts we encounter them, and so on.

In the 1960s and 1970s, West German artists and intellectuals were struggling just as much as their French counterparts to reconcile their political investment in and love of film with their distrust of it – and just as in France, this struggle was stoked by an ideological war between duelling camps of film critics.¹⁹ What made things even more volatile in the German context was that these two sets of critics did not represent two distinct publications: all of them wrote for a single journal, *Filmkritik*. One camp of the *Filmkritik* critics, the so-called "political left," hewed close to an iconophobic Marxist view of film shaped by Frankfurt School critical theory, while another, eventually called the "aesthetic left," proceeded in a quasiheretical manner to advocate for what they called the "productive consumption" of films.²⁰

On a theoretical level, Farocki, who wrote for *Filmkritik*, was deeply engaged with both of these duelling critical camps. As someone who also made films, he avoided choosing sides and tried instead to chart a middle path between these positions. This nonpartisan stance would inform all of Farocki's subsequent works. As a film-maker, Farocki had initially used film as a blunt weapon, for overtly propagandistic purposes. By the early 1970s, however, he had abandoned the stance of the militant provocateur seeking to eliminate the boundary between art and direct action. Instead, he began to see himself as an artistic agent of the Enlightenment engaged in

reflection of reality. We are concerned with the reality of that reflection." See Kent E. Carroll, "Film and Revolution: Interview with the Dziga Vertov Group," *Evergreen Review* 14, no. 83 (October 1970), reprinted in R. S. Brown, ed., *Focus on Godard* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), cited in Harvey, *May '68*, 66.

18 Bertolt Brecht, cited in Harvey, *May '68*, 71.

19 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 51–52. For assessments of Farocki's work as a theorist and his affiliation with *Filmkritik* see Olaf Möller, "Passage along the Shadow-Line: Feeling One's Way Towards the *Filmkritik*-Style," and Rainer Knepperger, "The Green of the Grass: Harun Farocki in *Filmkritik*," in Thomas Elsaesser, ed., *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 69–76 and 77–82.

20 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 51–52.

a political struggle. He accepted that “filmmakers cannot make revolutions but can only provide ‘working tools’ for those who can.”²¹ Within these parameters, however, Farocki would continue to develop his understanding of this complex role in relation to the projects he undertook, which included Brechtian films that formally foregrounded work processes, more widely ranging essay films about the cultural and filmic conventions of representing work, experiments with analogue video that sought to reach spectators in new ways, later experiments with digital video and installations, and finally *Labour in a Single Shot*, which integrates and further develops many of the tendencies and strategies of his earlier works. Farocki’s complete oeuvre reveals that, over the course of his artistic career, he came increasingly to imagine the viewer as an agent of meaning-creation, gradually shifting away from using film as an illustration of his own thought processes and towards turning his films into constructs that offered a loose web of concepts for viewers to use to chart their own connections.²² This arc, too, finds an endpoint in *Labour in a Single Shot*, which allows viewers to meander freely through its array of videos (none made by Farocki himself) to educate themselves and enjoy their discoveries.

Farocki’s artistic trajectory may thus be seen as an evolving response to Brecht’s observation that a photograph of the Krupp factories does not tell us much about the factories. As the title of one of his films suggests – *Etwas wird sichtbar/Before your Eyes – Vietnam* (1982) – Farocki’s work aims to make complex contexts visible and to teach audiences how local processes function within larger systems. His thematic focus all along was not only the operations of labour and industry (as systems unto themselves and in relation to each other and to society) but also how such abstract phenomena as history and culture are the result of human thought processes meriting critical investigation rather than simple acceptance as natural givens. This complex didacticism is already evident in Farocki’s 1969 anti-Vietnam War film, *NICHT löschesbares Feuer/Inextinguishable Fire*. This scripted film features a scientist character who is employed by a chemical plant to produce napalm. The stilted dialogue between the scientist and his team didactically foregrounds the interconnections between napalm’s destructive effects and the complex set of industrial relationships informing its production,

21 Thomas Waugh, “Introduction: Why Documentary Filmmakers Keep Trying to Change the World, or Why People Changing the World Keep Making Documentaries,” in *“Show us Life”: Towards a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*, ed. Thomas Waugh (Metuchen and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1984), xiv.

22 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 125.

including the exploitation of its raw materials and byproducts – a set of relationships that Farocki, ever interested in how the flow of industrial products could be maximized by means of multiple interlocking systems of production and exploitation, termed *Verbund* (a new coinage suggesting “linkage, network, feedback loop, compound structure”).²³

Farocki assessed the public impact of the film *NICHT löschesbares Feuer* with the same sobriety that he used in the film to analyze napalm's manufacture and circulation. Commenting on its positive reception by festival and student audiences, he laconically surmised that its agitational impact owed solely to the fact that there simply were no other films like it at that moment.²⁴ Keenly aware that a film's effect depends on how it manages to insert itself into the public sphere, Farocki began to subject his films to laboratory-like testing of the effectiveness of formal devices with regard to both their didacticism and their dissemination.²⁵ Labour in a Single Shot must be regarded as a logical outcome of this mode of assessment. Farocki's intention of circulating his work as effectively as possible is evident in the workshop's strategic doubling of its exhibition modes, while his pedagogical ambitions register clearly in the workshop's continued commitment to the long take as the primary tool for capturing the intricacies of work processes and of labour's relationship to social life.

In Farocki's early films, long takes had a Brechtian function: films such as *NICHT löschesbares Feuer* featured lengthy, unedited takes of “model situations” (scripted interactions between characters whose didacticism makes them slightly artificial) that Farocki repeated within each film with minimal variation. Gradually, however, Farocki repurposed the long take by freeing the act of filming from preconceived political agendas. This becomes evident in films such as *Erzählen/About Narration* (1975), *Zwischen zwei Kriegen/Between Two Wars* (1978), and *Etwas wird Sichtbar*, which combine scripted scenes with uncommented shots of physical reality (including shots of natural scenery, such as rivers).²⁶ This move away from a Brechtian aesthetic made Farocki's long takes more observational and sensual, an aesthetic that would figure centrally in his essay films of the 1980s and 1990s. His agenda of making captured reality legible through context-based interpretation would continue to depend on the long take's ability to create

23 On *Verbund* as feedback loop, see Thomas Elsaesser, “Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist,” in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, 16.

24 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 94.

25 See, for example, Roy Grundmann's discussion of *Wanderkino für Ingenieure* in “One Shot, Two Mediums, Three Centuries.” Published in this volume, 155–157.

26 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 112–113.

ambiguity, a feature we also see at work in many of the videos of Labour in a Single Shot. The workshop videos are notable for how they celebrate physical reality in its full complexity, using the camera in ways that are reminiscent of the films of the Lumières and other early cinema pioneers to whom Farocki was drawn.²⁷

To understand the logic behind the workshop's exhibition modes, we must consider the impact of the digital revolution of the 1990s. While it made film-making equipment more accessible, the advent of digital technology had an even bigger impact on film exhibition modes, particularly of experimental nonfiction and avant-garde films. Digitization made it easier for galleries and museums to integrate film exhibition into their regular programming and thus to bring experimental nonfiction film into the purview of the art world on a broad scale.²⁸ This process occurred in tandem with the rapid expansion on the art scene of urban galleries, museums, and biennials. The art world had no interest in exhibiting film simply for the sake of contrasting it with fine art. On the contrary, museums and galleries began to openly celebrate film, as part of a much broader cinephilic turn that swept the visual arts in the late 1990s, when large parts of film history were digitally archived and re-exhibited in celebratory fashion in the context of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of cinema.²⁹ Farocki seized on this digital shift by reorienting his mode of production from film to digital video and by making the gallery his favoured site for developing new films and installations, both alone and together with Ehmann. What his work of the 1990s and beyond reveals is that installations became a new way for Farocki and Ehmann to continue the politically charged strategy

27 Baumgärtel reminds us that in the late 1960s, when much of the left was suspicious of film as part of mass culture, the long take gradually came to function as code for aesthetic ambition, and as an antidote to commercialization (48). While Farocki's long takes were initially austere didactic rather than playful (98), from the late 1970s on, he used them in a more "sensibilist" manner, that is, to capitalize on cinema's capacity to record the irreducible flow of life (113).

28 Strictly speaking, this interest in film and moving images on the part of the art world did not originate with the advent of digital technology, but goes back to video art's appropriation of the genre of the essay film in the 1980s, spearheaded by such multimedia artists as Isaac Julien and Trinh T. Minh-ha.

29 See Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013). Much of Balsom's insightful book is concerned with the art world's embracing of cinephilia as part of a broader shift towards large-scale spectacle-oriented exhibitions frequently involving an engagement with certain film genres, directors, and selected aspects of film history. For a specific discussion of the art world's discovery of nonfiction film, see chapter 4. As a key moment and institutional event in this development, Balsom cites Documenta 11 (2002), whose director Okwui Enwezor is credited with being a major proponent of what has come to be known as "the documentary turn" of contemporary art (162).

of Farocki's essay films, which involved defamiliarizing established and naturalized conventions of representation through an innovative formal structure that challenged audiences to engage with moving-image media in analytical ways.

As Christa Blümlinger has observed, Farocki's first multichannel video installation, *Schnittstelle/Interface* (1995), which confronts the spectator with sequences of images shown simultaneously on two monitors, extends the ability of montage to generate meaning. As Farocki explains in voice-over: "In the past, it was words, sometimes pieces of music that commented on the images. Now images comment on images."³⁰ *Schnittstelle*, as Blümlinger argues, reflects critically on that process by invoking "an apparatus that permits one to experience the simultaneity of images which film usually orders as a succession."³¹ Made the same year as *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* and using some of its material, this installation prefigures the Labour project's design as a multichannel archive. In its exploration of a cryptographic randomization of image sequences intended to evade easy narrativization, *Schnittstelle* anticipates the aleatory montage effect produced in the Labour project by the unsynchronized image streams of the exhibitions and the website's randomized ordering of videos both on its home page and in the video subsets selected by its sorting rubrics. Farocki's decision there to construct montages of half-second and three-second shots likewise signals a quasi-Oulipian understanding of a priori formal constraint as a way of resisting traditional narrative form. However, *Schnittstelle* stops short of the degree of randomization achieved in the Labour project through unsynchronized multiple image streams. Whereas the "horizontal" or "soft" montage produced by the interplay of the image sequences on the installation's two screens is precisely timed, as it would also be in such later multichannel installations as *Eye/Machine* (2001–2003), *Serious Games I–IV* (2009–2010), and *Parallel* (2012–2014), the workshop project follows the lead of two installations in which parallel image flows are *not* synchronized: *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik in elf Jahrzehnten/Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* (2006/2014), already mentioned, and *Tropen des Krieges/War Tropes*, a six-channel installation of 2011. In their movement away from editor-controlled to aleatory, viewer-effected montage, both of these works

30 Harun Farocki, cited in Christa Blümlinger, "Incisive Divides and Revolving Images: On the Installation *Schnittstelle*," in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, 63.

31 Farocki, "Incisive Divides and Revolving Images," 62.

adumbrate the notion of the image archive as public toolkit that would later inform the Labour project.

Farocki and Ehmann's installations are possibly best understood as components of a series of co-curated museum projects stretching back to the late 1990s and culminating in three major multi-artist exhibitions: *Kino wie noch nie/Cinema Like Never Before*, held in Vienna and Berlin in 2006–2007, for which *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* was made; *The Image in Question: War – Media – Art*, an exhibition at Harvard's Carpenter Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts that saw the première of *Serious Games I: Watson is Down* (2010); and *Serious Games: War – Media – Art* (Mathildenhöhe, Darmstadt, 2011), at which *War Tropes* and the full four-part *Serious Games* installation were shown.³² Thematically, the latter two projects anticipated the Labour project in the way they attended to the problem of what Elsaesser has called the *military labour of invisibility*, a category that includes not only multiple varieties of military secrecy and disinformation and the invisibility of casualties in armed conflict but also “the invisibility of the psychic wounds that especially the long drawn-out wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have inflicted on thousands of young men [and women] and their families.”³³ (Indeed, the perfect absence of military labour from the Labour project's archive would seem to testify by omission to this sort of invisibility.) Formally, the Labour project fulfils, and exceeds, the pedagogical ambitions of the earlier museum shows, both in the extent to which it delivers the operation of image montage into the eye and intellect of the beholder and in the immensely extended reach of its complex and ongoing workshop and exhibition strategy.³⁴

These operational and semantic shifts, which deliberately transferred agency to the viewer, proceeded in tandem with Farocki's evolution from film-maker/author to contributor/collaborator and finally to mentor/teacher. To note Farocki's centrality, as an individual author, to an inherently collaborative project such as Labour in a Single Shot may appear

32 Ralf Beil and Antje Ehmann, ed., *Serious Games: Krieg – Medien – Kunst/War – Media – Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 199.

33 Thomas Elsaesser, “Simulation and the Labour of Invisibility: Harun Farocki's Life Manuals,” *Animation: an interdisciplinary journal* 12, no. 3 (2017): 223.

34 In 2002, Farocki wrote of *Schnittstelle*: “When *Interface* was shown at the Centre Georges Pompidou for more than three months in a wooden box structure, with a bench for five people in front of two monitors, I worked out that it would reach a greater audience than in any film club or screening venue that relates more to cinema.” Harun Farocki, “Cross Influence/Soft Montage,” in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, ed. Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun (London: Koenig, 2009), 73. By now, the number of visitors to the Labour project's thirty-six exhibitions to date and to the project website must have exceeded that audience many times over.

contradictory, but it isn't. Until his untimely demise, Farocki remained the workshop's public face. His prominent position in the art world was a major incentive for institutions to cosponsor the project, which they often did in return for Farocki giving public lectures or teaching master classes at their venues. Several workshops were held in conjunction with retrospectives and exhibitions of Farocki's films and installations. But it is easy to overlook the change of roles that *Labour in a Single Shot* required him to undergo. He not only went from maker to teacher but also from having sole answerability for a project to sharing its vision, control, and execution with others. The most important "other" is, in this case, Farocki's personal and professional partner Antje Ehmann, whose decision to continue the workshops after his death further complicates the question of authorship, even as the project carries on his legacy.

As the workshop diary Ehmann kept until Farocki's death reveals, their collaboration was based on the principle of equal partnership. Their relationship was one of mutual trust and respect, and their division of labour structured itself according to their diverging fields of expertise. Farocki's career in film-making and his knowledge of nonfiction film history seem to have placed him in the position of "head lecturer," while Ehmann's career as a curator put her in charge of developing a vision for the project's exhibition component. But her diary indicates that she was also involved in all aspects of workshop instruction and critique. Meanwhile, her creative collaboration with Farocki on several earlier video installations suggests that she shared with Farocki a strong cinephilia, a sensibility that clearly underpins the workshop.³⁵ While there is little detail in Ehmann's diary about the minutiae of instruction, this document does yield an impression of the scope of her responsibilities, while also giving the reader a sense of their somewhat different approaches to teaching.

Farocki's lecturing on the craft and history of nonfiction film appears to have focused on imparting established norms, histories, and practices, a task requiring a high degree of personal identification with the material and a certain conception of documentary's purpose and scope.³⁶ Ehmann, by contrast, took a somewhat different approach to teaching. Her diary is filled with perceptive observations about many of the workshop participants,

35 See, for example, their collaborative installations *Fressen oder Fliegen/Feasting or Flying* (2008), *Tropen des Krieges 2: Wozu Kriege/War Tropes 2: Why Wars* (2011), and *Tropen des Krieges 4: Verbindung/War Tropes 4: Connection* (2011), most recently exhibited at n.b.k. in Berlin. For a discussion of these works, see Antje Ehmann and Carles Guerra, "Mit anderen Mitteln: Trennen—Verbinden—Übersetzen," in Harun Farocki, *Retrospektive: Mit anderen Mitteln—By Other Means* (Berlin: n.b.k., 2017), 5–8.

with whom she seems to have had a relatively close rapport. On occasion, she mediates between them and Farocki, who tends to present his ideas, in eloquent English, as fully fleshed-out concepts, sometimes exceeding the linguistic and cultural competence of students. Thus, for example, she observes in her diary entry for the Hanoi workshop:

In discussions with the participants, I can always understand even the ones who speak English badly. Often I have to tell Harun what they've said. This produces an odd accomplice relationship, in the manner of "Antje will understand what we're showing and saying." Sometimes they give me a thumbs-up when I've understood some Vietnamese cultural specificity that Harun's reacted to with a "What was that?"³⁶

With her "translations" of Farocki's ideas, Ehmann appears to try to negotiate the gap between stated rules and practical reality. Shielded from public view, this task is less conspicuous or prestigious than the teaching processes ostensibly at the centre of the workshop's daily routine. As a description of work behind the scenes, Ehmann's diary is a valuable source of information for understanding the overall dynamics of the workshop.

Ehmann's contribution to *Labour in a Single Shot* is thus complex in nature. The more workshops that were added to the project, the more she became its discursive manager, with her efforts directed both inwards (in helping Farocki to select videos from prior workshops for participants to study) and outwards (in her work of organizing the videos into public exhibitions whose scope and structure evolved along with the project). Ehmann has thus done for *Labour in a Single Shot* what *Labour in a Single Shot* set out to do for labour: she has enhanced the visibility of work by facilitating its representation in innovative ways. We thus see a gradual widening of agency away from Farocki's singular authorship towards collaboration, both with Ehmann and with their students. Not only did this project entail a shift in his role from film-maker to teacher, but in it he also shared pedagogical agency and responsibility with Ehmann, while the videos that the workshops have produced are not directly their work, but the work of their students. This widening of agency helps define the position that *Labour in a Single Shot* is poised to claim within the tradition of politically committed cinema. Although the workshop videos differ in mission, format, and tone from the films of the classic film collectives of the heroic revolutionary

36 Antje Ehmann, "Labour in a Single Shot—Antje Ehmann's Workshop and Exhibition Journals, 2011–2014," trans. Peter J. Schwartz. Published in this volume, 77.

period, the workshops in which they were made must still be regarded as taking part in this longer tradition.

The essays in this volume reflect upon the aesthetic, epistemological, and political consequences of the Labour project and situate it within an international history of cinematic representations of labour. Organized into four thematic sections, the essays consider the workshop's structure and explore its historical precedents, its aesthetic and poetic responses to contemporary labour, its affective and embodied engagement with workers, and its embeddedness within networks and digital platforms. These thematic divisions are intended to help guide the reading experience, but they are not strictly determinative of the authors' arguments, which developed independently and with only minimal suggestions in advance from the editors. Although the majority of the texts began as conference papers, all of which have been substantially rewritten and expanded, at this point the collection has only a tenuous connection with the conversations that took place in Boston and Berlin. The writers, all of them working as instructors at universities, approach the project videos from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including film studies, German studies, art history, film-making, and studio art. At the same time, most contributors have explored the videos from positions beyond their customary disciplinary boundaries, resulting in a wide array of critical responses to the Labour workshop and the project's distribution platforms.

The first three essays take the long view by situating the Labour project within three increasingly narrow frames of historical context: the centuries-old European tradition of producing images of labour, the twentieth-century legacy of cinematic representations of work, and Farocki's own committed investigation into these themes since the late 1960s. Peter Schwartz traces a history of picturing labour in the West with the aim of determining the various *Einstellungen* (the primary word in the project's German-language title) or "attitudes" towards work expressed by image-makers since Roman antiquity. He unpacks the multiple modern resonances of the notion of *Einstellung* to measure the project's degree of success in prompting a change in perspective on the subject of labour. Describing the evolution of film as a medium over the course of the "long" twentieth century, Roy Grundmann also considers attitudes towards work, but he does so with the goal of asking what the Labour project gains by employing the relatively new technology of digital video as part of a response to the history of cinema. He identifies ways in which the videos respond to and employ codes and strategies that come from cinema, and he looks to moments in film theory to analyze the viewing experience of the Labour project as well as its political impact.

As one of Farocki's most thorough and attentive interlocutors, Thomas Elsaesser likewise assesses the artist's films about work, but he does so by focusing on Farocki's influential contribution to the discourse on cinema's emancipatory potential. In particular, Elsaesser reads Farocki's evolving treatment of labour with reference to his recording of the human body, the senses, and play. These three historical takes on the Labour project set the stage for the other writers' close readings of specific aspects of the workshop's structure and of its distribution platforms.

The next three essays, grouped under the rubric of poetics, explore the linguistic and aesthetic categories that define the Labour project. Dale Hudson and Patricia R. Zimmermann structure their essay as a series of ten "propositions" that allow them to test the usefulness of different terms (archive, collaboration, gender, or industry, for example) in precisely articulating the impact of the workshop. They concentrate especially on Labour films that highlight women in work situations, noting that the project website does not include the theme of gender among its search categories. A similar interest in identifying overlooked elements in the project motivates the essay by José Gatti, who examines several videos to explore the idea of what he calls "videopoetics." Gatti argues that certain forms of labour resist visualization, which, in his view, raises the political stakes of the matter of representing the working class. David Barker's essay also treats the theme of picturing the working class, but it does so through close observation of the camera's position and movement in specific Labour videos. Having worked as a researcher with Farocki on *Workers Leaving the Factory*, Barker uses his own perspective as a film-maker and editor to assess the Labour workshop model in relation to Farocki's larger body of work.

The following two essays examine the theme of embodiment in the project as part of an effort to bring the reader a step closer to the labouring subjects, the workshop participants, and the inanimate objects recorded by the camera in a number of the project videos. Jeannie Simms, a practising artist and film-maker, compares Labour videos with works by other artists (including herself) who collaborate directly with labourers to help them generate their own opportunities for self-representation. Simms looks specifically to moments of caregiving and child labour in the project videos, asking how much information is conveyed about each given context while acknowledging the distance that separates the viewer from these often intimately filmed scenes. Gregory Williams explores the haptic element in several videos in which the camera is attuned to the physical movements of the workers, though he does so by focusing attention on the role of tools

as visible forms that guide the viewing experience, and finds that physical objects often occupy the frame in a way that mediates the relationship between the camera and the labouring subjects.

The book's final section on networks takes a more expansive view to think broadly about the related issues of access and distribution in the Labour project as a whole. Thomas Stubblefield links the workshop model and the online database to broad questions about the spatial and temporal parameters of global labour today. He thinks critically about the potential of the website to gather and tell stories about the activities of workers in the post-Fordist economy during a period in which it seems impossible to conceive of a totalizing account of labour. Gloria Sutton is similarly interested in comparing the different components of the Labour project, but in her essay she concentrates on the distinction between seeing the videos as works of art encountered in galleries and museums and understanding them as digital artefacts embedded in a web-based network. In thinking about how the Labour project might be situated within the expansive context of present-day digital culture, Sutton discusses several new-media projects by other contemporary artists who represent labour in ways that both intersect with and depart from the Labour videos; together, the artists and video-makers reveal the challenge of reliably documenting work. Finally, Vinicius Navarro evaluates the online catalogue through which the majority of viewers will gain access to the Labour videos, both now and in the future. He describes the database as a "dynamic system" that adopts randomization processes and promotes unique routes into the video collection, ultimately arguing that new information and conceptions of work can emerge when individual viewers are allowed to make choices while navigating through the website. Collectively, the essays in this volume analyze Labour in a Single Shot both in terms of its specific recording of localized scenes of labour around the world and with regard to its continuing relevance as a model for teaching and developing documentary video practices.

NB: All Labour in a Single Shot videos mentioned in the essays receive footnotes containing the relevant web address. The URL links take the reader directly to Vimeo, which hosts the videos from the workshop project. To understand the full context of Labour in a Single Shot, readers should also consult the project's standalone website: <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/films/>. The video frame grabs printed throughout the book are provided courtesy of Antje Ehmann and the Harun Farocki Institute.

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3. Labour in a Single Shot – Antje Ehmann’s Workshop and Exhibition Journals, 2011–2014

Antje Ehmann

Translated by Peter J. Schwartz

Abstract

A translation of extended extracts from previously unpublished journals kept by Antje Ehmann during the project workshops held in multiple cities worldwide between December 2011 and April 2014. Ehmann’s account gives readers a sense of how the hundreds of videos now comprising the project’s archive came into existence as the product not only of two-week tutorial workshops on the art and craft of documentary film-making in fifteen cities worldwide, but also of an exceptional set of human and institutional relationships: between Farocki and Ehmann as a remarkably symbiotic pair of artistic collaborators; between them, workshop participants in fifteen countries, and the local landscapes of the workshop cities; and between Farocki and Ehmann, the project, and numerous representatives of Germany’s premier international cultural agency, the Goethe-Institut.

Keywords: workshop, documentary, video pedagogy, international travel, curatorial practice

We conceived the plan for this project in 2010, and spent the next three or four years putting it into effect. The basic idea was simple: we would teach a series of workshops about documentary video-making in fifteen cities worldwide, with a separate series of exhibitions designed to show selections from the work produced; from the beginning, we also intended to archive all

the videos produced in the workshops in an online web catalogue. The films would all focus on the notion of labour in relation to the cities in which the workshops took place, and they would be governed by a set of constraints modelled on one of the first films ever shown, the Lumière brothers' short film *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895). The task of the workshops, then, would be to produce videos on the subject of labour, one to two minutes in length, each taken in a single shot. The camera could be static, panning, or travelling – cuts were not allowed.

The task led straight to basic questions about the cinematographic form and raised essential questions about the film-making process itself. Almost every form of labour is repetitive. How can one find a beginning and an end when capturing it? Should the camera be still or moving? How to film the choreography of a workflow in one single shot in an effective and interesting way? The workshop results show that a single shot of one or two minutes can create a coherent narrative, with suspense or surprise. The project was generously funded by grants from the Federal Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) in Berlin and the Goethe-Institut; it was a highly collaborative project, achieved in co-operation with art schools, universities, festivals, museums, and outposts of the Goethe-Institut on five continents. Among the many people to whom thanks is due, the former director of the Boston Goethe-Institut, Detlef Gericke, played an exceptionally active role in helping to bring this project to fruition; we couldn't have done it without him. The following is a selection of entries from journals I kept over the course of the project.

I. India: Vacation in Goa and Workshop in Bangalore, December 2011–January 2012

Goa

We looked through the applications for our workshop in Bangalore. The very first one was from a woman artist a few years older than I am, who already has a long list of exhibitions. Several Indian students wrote that Harun's work had opened their eyes. We discussed admitting everyone who had applied. Or, conversely: not excluding anyone. So far there are thirty-six participants. They're to divide themselves up into nine groups, which should be a good way to work. I'm excited to see what "shots of labour" they propose. So far, we've done workshops in Sligo, Ireland and Lisbon, Portugal. Some of the Irish videos are country-specific. A sheep being sheared, a wall being built of fieldstone. Then some unspecific subjects. A tattoo artist,

someone preparing a sandwich at a Subway – either could be anywhere in the world. A student in Lisbon wants to combine a laundry carousel, seen from below, with Fado music. We liked that right away. It will depend on how things are balanced. And we have to remember that repetition can also be interesting. Differences in how the same subject appears when repeated in another country.

So as to have something in reserve in case the students run out of ideas, we make a list of themes that we think could be interesting in the Indian context:

1. Railway and shunting work.
2. Something with dyes or spices. People fill bags with them, or sieve them – and are yellow as saffron or blue as aniline all over their bodies.
3. Temp work at construction sites. Human assembly lines, e.g., with bowls of mixed concrete passing from hand to hand.
4. Are there nuclear power plants in Bangalore? Something about high security.
5. Laboratory work, with Indian doctors sitting before X-rays of European patients.
6. Computer hardware production. (There is hardly any hardware production in wealthy countries.)
7. Repetitions. Market traders constantly calling out the same thing, or repeatedly making the same movements.

We would like to come up with ten fields of research. We sit in cafés during the day, come up with ideas, and discard them. Our experience so far is that students mostly suggest the things nearest to hand. Like work in a shop on the way to their school. They don't even need to make a detour. Or filming an uncle who's a blacksmith, and who often invites them for tea. The first thing we want to do is ask the students in Bangalore to find themes that aren't so obvious in this sense, but which will still be easy to realize. So not subjects that one has to research for months or for which one would need to seek shooting permission. And still they should be good ideas. We begin next Friday. So they should spend the weekend coming up with initial ideas and materials to present on the following Monday. I find this all very exciting, and I'm happy about our project.

Shortly before New Year's, we sat on the porch with our dear friend Detlef (from the Boston Goethe-Institut) and discussed our application to the Foreign Office for funding the internet catalogue. We fine-tuned lists of cities to hold the workshops and exhibitions in. Detlef got more and more enthused and said that there'd never been a Goethe project that had so comprehensively included

so many Goethe-Institutes worldwide. He would apply for an Excellence Grant on our behalf. We're so thankful to him; he'll really do anything for us.

Bangalore

We spent the first evening with Vasanthi Dass, an Indian friend and colleague, in a somewhat more upscale rooftop restaurant with a view onto Bangalore. She was in Berlin for two months, but we first met her here exactly four years ago. She laid much of the groundwork for us here. We're holding the workshop at the college where she is faculty, and half the participants come from her classes. She is in a good mood, and I can tell it's important to her that things go well for us here.

Harun gave a lecture this evening. At first, the room is half empty, but it fills up fast. Harun shows his *Serious Games* series and talks a bit after each part. People laugh at his jokes, which is always a good sign, and they show a lot of interest at the Q & A afterwards. Great people, smart questions. After the event, we visit the villa of Goethe-Institut Director Christoph Bertrams and his wife Dorette for an excellent meal. Before Bangalore, he was stationed in Cuba. Dorette described how alternative medicine has gained a good deal of recognition in interested circles in Cuba. She will be flying back to Cuba in two weeks, because she did not want to leave the people there in the lurch.

The next morning, we leave early by car for the workshop. The college has been in existence for fifteen years, the building we're in for only six months. One can feel it – everything's still very new. The white concrete is still white, the glass walls are clean, the steel isn't corroded yet. The building has a light and airy feel – I like it. We're in the faculty area, which is filling up with more and more people. The mood is cheerful. Many of the lecturers greet us warmly, Vasanthi is beaming. I have the feeling that it's not every day that people like Harun visit here. Many, many students. We already knew that it would be over thirty students. I look about curiously. Coffee, tea, cake, and samosas are on offer. We'd said that we would begin at ten, but it's clear that it will take until eleven. I'm excited, which keeps my slight sleepiness down.

Then we begin. Harun shows the Lumières' *Workers Leaving the Factory* – naturally, the best reference point for our project. One shot, labour and labourers as a theme, and there are many details to study within the shot. We are planning to use it to introduce every workshop. Harun talks a lot and also shows results from the single-shot project he ran with his Viennese students. This is all very useful, because it allows us to begin identifying

problems. That even in a single shot, without cuts, there has to be a beginning and an end. When and why a camera should be stationary or not. Harun keeps on talking, I know it's tiring. I take over for a while after the pause.

This first session was seven hours long. Once we begin to converse with the workshop participants, it quickly becomes clear that they're very motivated – the room is crackling with ideas. We are impressed and have a really good feeling right off the bat. The project plans are noted down on a blackboard. We'd thought the participants might produce six or seven usable ideas – and now we have eighteen. Wonderful. It's Friday evening – we arrange to meet again on Monday afternoon, and everyone declares that they should have time over the weekend to do preliminary research and some filming.

The following Monday, the participants present the first film materials, which they've worked up over the weekend. We're enthusiastic. Only a few videos, by completely inexperienced students, are clumsy or otherwise unusable. One participant, a pretty young girl, filmed in a flower market entirely on her own. The material looks correspondingly hapless. I feel bad, so I ask if there's an experienced camera person willing to work with her in a group. Kindly, someone immediately volunteers. (Did it happen so fast because she's so pretty?) The shots by other participants look more skilled; some we already find to be nearly perfect. This brightened the mood considerably. But we were still able to contribute ideas to every single project and make suggestions about how the shots might be improved even further. It was a gratifying exchange, because – this was my impression – it became clear that it's not a question of whether someone is good or bad, but only of doing the *job* right. We're trying hard to keep things from feeling like a contest. I'm already looking forward to our internet catalogue, where all of this will be documented. We ask each of the participants to write a few lines about their projects, and to document the path to the finished product with photos.

Harun and I are also learning a great deal here, such as how to run the workshops better. We also develop ideas that we'd like to see realized everywhere. Very promising: in every city in which we're conducting workshops, some groups should make a remake of the Lumières' *Workers Leaving the Factory*. That's great, because this is the genuine point of reference for the entire project. In the end, we'll have shots of workers streaming out of the doors and gates of their workplaces in India, Brazil, Mexico, Ireland, Portugal, etc. The idea of showing that in a row on fifteen monitors makes my curator's heart beat faster.

This suggestion seems to have been popular. Already, two groups have attempted remakes. A gifted student filmed downwards from a roof deck to show workers leaving a construction site with yellow protective helmets in

hand. First, one sees the long shadows falling in the early evening light, and then the yellow helmets, like points of light. That had a certain something. Two students film seamstresses leaving their factory. They sew the same dress in millions of copies for H&M. Magnificent. Workers leaving the factory in the most colourful, shimmering saris!

The workshop participants had another two days to work on their projects. It's really wonderful. This time, each film draws spontaneous applause. As general praise: yes, that's it! Marvellous. I'm feeling something like a pedagogical Eros: it's so satisfying to witness the learning process. Certain things are encouraged, agreed upon – and then the result is really so beautiful! We have the feeling that we've given the right advice, and the workshop participants show how they've taken it and turned it into something. They also completely rethought some things from their own points of view – and convincingly. We were all sold! The only problem is that, so far, all the projects document the labour of relatively poor people, all with a traditional background. All of them involve processes to which access is easy, mostly on the street. It obviously won't do to represent India solely as a dusty, impoverished country. We encourage participants to make sure to realize projects behind corporate walls, in laboratories, or in IT or other high-tech companies.

Meanwhile, Mexico City and Rio have agreed to participate. It's still the rule: every potential partner we describe our project to is enthusiastic. Often, the positive answer comes only three hours later. If I write a long travel diary like this one each time, it will become a long, long report.

II. Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, March 2012

The workshop begins. With thirty-five people, the room is full to capacity. On average, the participants are older than the ones in India. Many are graduate students. Harun introduces the theme and the project. I add something here and there; mostly, I look at people. I can't judge the people just by looking at them. I'm glad that our friend Avi Mograbi is there, who keeps making funny jokes every now and then, and who set up the contact for us with this institution. Everything's going well. Nearly everybody has already thought of subjects, but nothing really excites us. Some project ideas are actually sort of daft. A few of the participants come across as art-studentish, egotistical, somewhat arrogant, and stubborn. Others are cordial and obviously – as the saying goes – inspired. The first impression this time is thus ambivalent.

After the lunch break, Harun gives an introduction to his work. The event is open to the general public and takes place in the auditorium of

the university. Once again, it's quite full. Now nearly all the instructors are there. Again, Harun does this all brilliantly. He takes as his theme the question "How does one structure a documentary film?" and outlines various possibilities, using clips from his work. I observe how they listen, spellbound, and – nearly breathlessly – watch the film clips. I think: this is the best unintentional self-advertisement anyone could possibly make. How could anyone watch these excerpts and not want to see the films in their entirety?

Today, we saw the first results by the workshop participants. I am so relieved! There are already four perfect shots there. One participant managed to smuggle a camera into a jewellery business. That's forbidden, and dangerous. But she managed to film secretly in her uncle's office as he processed jewels. Great material! There's also already a good *Workers Leaving the Factory* remake. And two participants, Orit and Tamar, who I especially like on account of their warmth and maturity, show real talent. We're really pleased and optimistic.

Continuing the workshop work in Tel Aviv. The number of participants has dwindled mysteriously. Many film students have stayed away; we almost only have art students left. It's not clear to us why this is, but we suspect internal school affairs, and we don't take it personally. I'm noticing anyway that it's more pleasant to work with smaller groups.

The people who've stayed here are all really great and full of passion. What impresses me especially is their perseverance. Many of them are so ambitious that they admit of their own accord that their results aren't perfect yet. They're prepared to revisit a shooting location and try again and again. That makes our work together so exciting – we are all totally psyched when someone comes back from a location and presents the shot. Tamar keeps working at a waste-disposal facility, Hadas in a print shop. Orit keeps returning to a hair salon. I'm not worried at all anymore – it's like it goes by itself.

It occurs to us that we need to establish a research group, because the artists understand nothing about research. Harun sometimes gets impatient with this. His tone in the seminar suddenly gets sharp, and I have to hiss at him quietly in German not to punish these nice people who are still here and are doing their best. Fortunately, he gives me a shocked look and apologizes. We make an appointment to meet six people in the lounge of our hotel to establish such a research group. We don't just want street videos or labour done by poor people! While we're explaining all this later on in the seminar, these six people show up. Now they're sitting in the lounge and making it clear that they haven't understood what the issue is. At this

point, I would understand if Harun were to get annoyed again – but he is nice. And explains the problem for the fourth time. I explain it again in my own words – Harun's English is too eloquent. I'm figuring out that participants sometimes don't understand him simply for language reasons. I'm somewhat proud of the indirect proof that I'm good at understanding people and finding adequate ways to address them.

III. Cairo and Alexandria, October 2012

The workshop participants are a colourful mixture of likeable, capable people. Fairly international: the majority are Egyptians, but there are also two Danish artists-in-residence, one of whom is of Indian extraction. Two people from an activist group, one Polish German, the other Egyptian German. An Iranian German lecturer, and another German who teaches video-making here. I was totally surprised – many of the Egyptians speak our language, because one of the best schools here is a German school.

We introduce the project once again and show workshop results from other cities, so as to make the thing more concrete. In the following discussion, it becomes clear that a very agitated post-revolutionary wind is still blowing here. The question immediately comes up of how much political content one can include in one two-minute shot. The worry is that it could turn into aesthetic formalism. Beautiful shots or folklorism. That went back and forth. The level of discussion was good, but unfortunately there weren't many concrete, productive ideas.

Today, we met with a somewhat diminished group, and immediately sensed a much better group spirit. We recapitulated once more, watched a few excerpts from Harun's films for inspiration, and decided that we should divide ourselves into groups now and go on out: into the field!

It was wonderful. We were a group of eight people. Three people from Cairo who know each other well, plus the Danish women, the German woman, Harun, and me. It worked out so that one would show the others something, and in so doing discover it with new eyes. We walked through the dusty city in the burning heat. Our destination was the television building, in which 40,000 workers are employed! We wanted to see if one could make a *Workers Leaving the Factory* remake here. The building is garish and enormous, it looks like socialist architecture, and the exits are ringed with balls of barbed wire. The paths are so narrow that people have to leave the place one by one, in long lines. Of course, one can make a great remake here! Needless to say, when we took a few photos, a security guard rushed

over instantly. The pretty young Egyptian Nadah opined to the officer: “But it is OUR building, after all, we have to be proud of it, and show it to tourists!” She explained to me afterwards that this is her strategy: whenever a security man tries to make trouble, she opens her eyes wide and plays the naïve, innocent girl. That’s how you get places. I thought it was marvellous.

After the workshop meeting, we set off once again to look for subjects for *Workers Leaving the Factory* remakes, this time with Nadah and Magdalena. Downtown, there’s an enormous building belonging to the national newspaper *Al-Ahram*. We spent a long time hanging around and observing the situation. Nadah negotiated with the paunchy security boss and the chief executive, each of whom kept sending her to the other, until she finally succeeded in arranging a three-way interview – she actually managed to obtain verbal permission to film. A written version would have taken two weeks – respect! I’d never have expected this outcome. So we can film completely openly, with a tripod. The factory gate and the people exiting it cast long shadows. In general, people walk so slowly in this heat – almost absurdly slowly. Whereas in Europe, people can’t leave their place of work (if there still is one) quickly enough, and stream out rapidly, the people here shuffle and slouch through the gate at a leisurely pace. They come by elevator – Nadah figured that out – so always in waves, one after the other. Now that work hours are staggered, there are hardly ever masses of workers moving in streams. Again, it’s the unpredictable details that count, surprise, or disappoint. I’m happy that we’ve made this remake idea into a part of the worldwide project.

Workshop again the next morning. Right off, Nadah had three lovely new clips to show! Kaya, the German Iranian, also has a great project, of which he showed a new version. The mood was good; we’re optimistic. There’d been some artistic-intellectual doubts, of the sort that tend above all to keep the doubters from ever beginning a project: better to doubt and do nothing. There are so many ways that one can obstruct oneself, in our field of work. I know that all too well, which is why I don’t ever joke about it. All the more reason for me to be happy about the people who try out this and that with gusto, and then maybe have doubts afterwards – on the basis of a real attempt.

Alexandria

We’re picked up at the railway station and brought to a wonderful hotel by Daniel Stoevesandt, the Goethe director here. He asks us if we’d like to freshen up or take a rest. But no, we want to go right out and see the city, have

a coffee! It quickly becomes clear that Daniel is absolutely wonderful. We know lots of Goethe-Institut people all over the world. And it's sometimes a bit of a problem that they talk too much about the Goethe, or about their work (whether in the mode of self-praise, or complaining) – really, too much about *themselves*. Mostly that hardly matters, it's charming, but sometimes it's a little annoying, or a lot. Nothing like that with Daniel. Completely relaxed, we sit together and have all sorts of interesting conversations.

And oh, what a relief: Alexandria is also a city of several million people, but it's by the sea, and the air is much, much better. We sit with a view of the water and breathe deeply. The city generally seems to be in much better shape than Cairo. The apartment buildings look like palaces and can hardly be told apart from the grand hotels, like ours. They're up to ten stories high, which one hardly ever sees in Europe. Not even in Nice, on which these hotels are modelled.

In the evening, there's a screening with films by Harun in the absolutely gorgeous building of the Goethe-Institut, which looks like a dream villa. With wrought-iron grilles, windows of coloured glass, ornamental panels of dark wood, and a complicated parquet pattern in the floor. The event is very well attended. To our great pleasure, Wael Shawky, an artist I've worked with twice on curatorial projects and who's become something of a star lately, has managed to make it here – together with a whole lot of very giggly young female students in headscarves. Wael's also founded an art space in Alexandria, which we were sadly unable to visit. One of his young students surprises me the next day with intelligent commentary, bravely expressed through the microphone. *Videograms of a Revolution* is of course viewed with careful attention and discussed with much interest. A few of our workshop participants showed up. They too are in a sort of vacation mood – for them as well, a calm city by the sea and hotels, paid for by the Goethe-Institut. Not bad for young students. Sarah, Jens, and Daniel planned the whole thing really well.

The second film screening also went really well. Harun made a serious effort with a lecture. (He'd prepared notes, which isn't always the case.) Interestingly, he spoke less about the political content of *Serious Games* than about "direct cinema." The young attendees in the cinema may never have heard of the latter – who knows?

Our last day in Alexandria, Sunday, was doubtless a highlight for everyone. Daniel had actually managed in advance to organize an appointment for us in a textile factory, where we were also allowed to film. We drove in two Goethe buses through a somewhat bumpy neighbourhood. Every drive from A to B is interesting and already a little adventure. When we entered the

two-story textile factory, it was clear to me right away that the place had been massively cleaned up. The windows are clean; everything sparkles and shines. Everything smells of chlorine detergent. I went to the toilet – it was as clean as in a grand hotel. I found it touching, because on the one hand it's so obvious that it never looks like this here ordinarily. On the other hand, one can understand that the factory owner must prefer to imagine an attractive image of his plant being shown abroad. Closer observation also revealed some nice surprises. The factory manufactures baby clothes, also for newborns. Computerized synchronized sewing machines embroider little bears onto plush fabric, with sayings like "It's a girl"; over two bear babies, the machine writes "friends" and "love." There are about fifteen machines in a row, working simultaneously. One or two people feed them with piecework and check them. It takes just a few seconds to sew a heart. There is a constant *ratta-ratta-ratta* sound. On the upper floor, gigantic balls of pink plush and other things are laid out and cut. The workshop participants immediately have several ideas for shots and shoot like mad. Harun whispers excitedly in my ear: "Now they can see that it's worth the small amount of effort that it takes to get to a place one didn't know." His hobby horse, the research sermon! The factory manager contacts a few colleagues, and we move on to yet another textile factory, where much more would have been possible if we'd had the time. But we have to get to the train station soon.

Back in Cairo, there's only one more thing on the horizon: our public presentation of the workshop results in the cinematheque. It seems like our workshop has shrunk to the core group of the people who were also in Alexandria. That's significant shrinkage, but it has its advantages, because now we're truly a well-functioning group, in which nearly everyone takes responsibility, with plenty of good will to go around, without any silly hierarchies. We meet and look through all the material. We have twenty clips for the presentation! There's never been so much excellent material at the end of a workshop!

IV. Rio de Janeiro, November 2012

We go to eat in a beachside restaurant with Arndt Roesken, the local Goethe person. I notice immediately that he's very nice, cheerful, and easy to get along with. He laughs when he speaks, and his eyes become friendly slits. He's been here for six years already and of course knows his way around. We ask him what we should take into account with regard to safety. He says

we shouldn't walk around on the beach at night. Later, other people tell us that the best souvenirs are the T-shirts you can get at the beach markets, which only open after dark.

The workshop situation has never been better. One might even say that the affair's been overly organized. Many institutions are involved. The Goethe-Institut, two universities, an art school, and a foundation, Fundação Roberto Marinho, which belongs to a museum. Finally, both of us are receiving appropriate honoraria, and the Goethe is also paying us a per diem. The foundation has employed Adriana, a particularly nice woman, specifically to take care of organizational matters. She has her own assistant, Anna. The university has supplied an assistant, Fred, whose job it is to look after all the technical issues. It's crazy – we have only to go “peep”, and we can rest assured that everything will be set in motion. We say that we'd really like to visit a factory with some participants, with permission to shoot, as in Egypt. Anna immediately comes up with four different possibilities. Amazing. We'll see – Coca-Cola, chemicals, or textiles!

There are nearly twenty participants, and during the introductions it already becomes clear that we've been lucky again. Many experienced, capable people. Everyone is extremely interested and focused. I'm blown away by the fact that two professors return the next day, really participate, and even want to make a video. Usually, the professors just drop by to shake hands.

An ambivalent experience: Tadeu, a university lecturer, visited a red-light district some time ago, during the day. Around lunchtime, there'd been a lot of people sitting in cafés. On the second floor of a housefront, he'd vaguely perceived naked body parts in a window. Wasn't that also an image of “labour”? He wanted to show us. We're always happy to gain access to places through locals that we'd never be able to see otherwise, so we said yes.

Together with a couple of other participants, we seat ourselves in two taxis and drive on over. We reach a neighbourhood with the pretty name “Villa Mimosa” that couldn't have looked more rundown. Like in Pasolini's *Accattone*. Slum-like streets, the houses are ruins – cheap, dirty holes. We get out of the taxis and people are immediately eyeing us. Villa Mimosa is pretty empty of people. The few women on the street are prostitutes. There's a bar with an enormous boombox outside playing loud music.

Tadeu ushers us into a house door and we enter a long grey corridor with room after room. It's dirty and it stinks. The sex workers are sitting around a little table in the hall, smoking and talking. I feel really out of place and think it's nuts how we've just shown up to a red-light district

in taxis, like sex tourists. I want to get out of there. Other people in the group feel the same way, and they immediately turn back. We leave the street with Tadeu and Chris to find a café that isn't a whores' café with pimps in it.

We have an appointment with an artist who works in this neighbourhood and knows her way around. She's interesting, and it's well worth it to make the absurd excursion to meet with her. She tells us that she never makes video recordings, only sound. She's in constant contact with two prostitutes. She shows us a photo of them. They're to the right and the left of their female pimp, who has her arms around them – she's a young lesbian woman, in jeans with short hair and a cap. It's a bit jarring. The artist is very careful and reflective. I talk a good deal about the ethics of making images, mostly in Tadeu's direction, as he seems a little naïve about the whole issue. We think about what one can reasonably film in this milieu, without compounding the exploitation or being sensationalistic or tasteless. I find it extremely difficult. Tadeu and the artist talk about how it's jam-packed here at night, all music and spectacle. With naked women moving about in the middle of it all, when they're not sitting on plastic chairs to be looked at. I really don't want to see this, and I find it a stupid project idea. Harun also shoots me a doubtful glance. It wouldn't be impossible to film something here, just difficult.

We have another workshop day, and unlike with some of the workshops in other cities, nearly all the participants have returned! While we're conducting the preliminary discussion, and everyone is reporting on their research and shooting attempts, I notice that excitement is the prevailing mood. The people here are simply great. Then we watch the results together. We're all totally bowled over! In just six days, we've produced enough excellent videos to integrate into an exhibition. And the people even have a mind to reshoot some things that already came out well, just to make them *better*. Harun and I are really happy.

As in the report on Cairo, I'd rather not write in detail on the public closing event, because that would just make me sad. The sadness of completion. I just want to say that it was really, really good. It was full. Many of the videos were stunning. And the Goethe-Institut director Alfons Hug, who sat next to me, kept twitching with excitement and making notes in the dark. Already after the first three videos, he couldn't keep quiet, and whispered into my ear: "These are better than any of the short films that you see in the cinema!" I couldn't help beaming, and whispered back: "Yes, they really are!"

V. Tel Aviv, February 2013–Lisbon, April–May 2013

Up to now, I've only written reports while we were on workshop trips. Meanwhile, the project is running on parallel tracks – we're still giving workshops, but we're also arranging workshop exhibitions. The premiere, the opening exhibition in the series, was in Tel Aviv.

The project grows with each additional workshop. I work the new results into the internet catalogue, and the exhibitions get commensurately larger. In Tel Aviv, we showed videos from five cities: Bangalore, Berlin, Geneva, Tel Aviv, and Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, we couldn't show Cairo in Israel, because the artists in Cairo didn't want that. From India, I also received worried, doubtful emails, which weren't quite refusals, but asked why the premiere was in Israel. What's our political position with regard to Israel? What sort of intervention did we have in mind?

Harun always becomes outraged that many people act as if Israel were the only problem in the world, as if only this injustice existed. We're also doing workshops in China and Russia! But of course that changes nothing about the problem and ends in nothing but relativism. After careful consideration, I wrote an email to the Indians who were critical of Israel. I emphasized that I don't believe in boycotts, but in critical argument and dialogue; that the people we're working with in Israel are themselves suffering under this perfidious politics, and that for this reason there could be no question for us of excluding an entire people across the board. There was no meaning in the fact that Israel was the first exhibition site – that had happened by chance.

I was very relieved when they responded by telling us we had their trust. So we were allowed to show the films from India in Israel. I have to admit that I'm somewhat proud of having solved this problem on my own. It sometimes seems as if the participants have too much respect for Harun, indeed are a little afraid of him, and thus turn to me with questions or problems. Ironically, this, too, is part of what makes us such a good team.

Meanwhile, in the last ten years, I've curated a really substantial number of exhibitions and can say that I have experience doing this. And I can also say that it's never before been as bad as it is now in Tel Aviv! From the outside, the Tel Aviv Museum of Modern Art looks like a classy institution. They've just completed a modern extension, increasing the floor space roughly by half. They also do about 50 per cent more exhibitions per year than they did before, but their budget and staff haven't doubled! With such stretched resources, they just can't keep up. To be sure, they have an excellent and experienced production manager who was able to rapidly sketch out an

exhibition design that will probably turn out to be perfect – it's just that during construction, he wasn't ever available to deal with the problems that kept arising.

So there was our workshop exhibition and a separate exhibition with works by Harun. In the end, I was very satisfied with the workshop exhibition, but the Harun exhibition couldn't entirely be saved. Altogether, I worked like mad on these two exhibitions. And the opening was also splendid. Deputy ambassadors in black suits were there, Goethe people from Cairo and Ramallah had travelled over, and our dear friend Detlef Gericke had even flown in from Boston. There was an enormous crowd there. Most of all, I enjoyed clinking glasses with the proud workshop participants whose works were on show in the exhibition.

Lisbon

Now I'm in Lisbon. The second exhibition.

The situation here is the exact opposite of the one in Tel Aviv. I was hardly able to work out anything in advance for the Lisbon exhibition. The workshop we gave here at the lovely Maumaus Art School back in October 2011 was only a week long. We've spent two weeks on every one since, and at this point we know that's a minimum. But here, the initial situation was different. Our dear friend Jürgen Bock, who runs the school here, is an excellent curator. When he heard of our project, he absolutely wanted to participate and put his name in the list of possible exhibition cities.

Slowly, the last missing pieces are delivered to the gallery. I can still be of use in putting things together. I look at the clock and I'm shocked. The last pieces are delivered five minutes before the official opening time. Need I mention that, thanks to a sleepless night on the part of James the technician, all the videos are now perfect and are running upstairs in a glitchless loop? People are coming from all directions; it's clear from the look of them that they're all coming to see us. Jürgen can't believe it. He's been running the space, Lumiar Cité, for four years and tells me he's never had such an audience! The rooms are bursting with visitors.

After a while, we bring all the chairs downstairs. Harun, Jürgen, and I sit on the stairs and there's a discussion and question-and-answer session. I say almost nothing, because it's clear that people want to hear Harun. The mood is interested, friendly, and nearly intimate. I just sit there, look out over the many friendly visitors peering at us, and I can't believe the success we've had again with our project. And I am so thankful to Jürgen for this.

VI. Buenos Aires, March 2013

The hotel isn't part of any chain. A modern building – simple, tasteful. We have a suite. We take a two-hour nap, deep and heavy as two stones. Then, to orient ourselves, we open the city map that's been left for us. Magnificent! Inge Stache, from the Goethe-Institut Buenos Aires, has marked our coordinates with a highlighter. We don't have to study the map intensively: here's the hotel, there's the Goethe-Institut, here's the PROA Museum, there's the film school, and there's the cinema. So helpful! The Goethe should publish a tip on their intranet that guests should always be greeted this way. And Inge should get a prize. She is so clear, considerate, and well organized, and also so smart and friendly.

The first workshop day. Agustina, who's been assigned to us as an assistant, picks us up from the hotel, and we walk to the university, which is only a few blocks away. Once again, we're excited. What fantastic buildings. There's no campus, only a simple residential street in which several row houses have been converted into a college. Long white banners are hanging down from the façade with the legend "Universidad del Cine." The houses have several stories and small interior courtyards, where one can sit and drink coffee during the pauses.

Remarkably, Harun is especially popular in Buenos Aires, as quickly becomes apparent. One hundred and thirty people applied for the workshop, of whom twenty-five were chosen. Inge and Agustina were the ones who took care of that; thankfully, we had nothing to do with it. But I did receive several emails from the people who had been turned down, with complaints and bribery attempts, asking whether we'd accept money to bring someone else in ... abject offers of service, as well.

Of course, I can't tell now whether we really have the best of the best in our course. But the first impression is excellent! It's one of the most exciting moments in our project when we've only just arrived in a city, and the participants immediately start telling us about ideas they've had for their film projects. We're now discussing something like sixty film ideas on the subject of labour in Buenos Aires. And even after several hours, there's no trace of tiredness in the participants. They are motivated and interested, some of them even funny on the first day. (I always find it touching, but also a pity, when people are too respectful and student-like.)

The following projects are city-specific: slaughterhouses, maté tea rituals at work, the path garbage takes from collection through recycling (each city has its own system), and cooperatively run companies, of which there are still something like fifty in Buenos Aires. There are other ideas, some of them

good ones, that one could certainly realize anywhere in the world – but who knows? We so often run into surprises.

I notice in the way the participants present their projects that they're thinking cinematographically. They immediately start talking about camera angles, choreographies, dramaturgies. That makes them different from many artists, who tend to begin by orienting themselves around content, and often have no idea of how to go about filming their project. Or they're just not so good at describing it. On the whole, we find this all promising. We're excited.

The next day, there's a workshop meeting and we spend many hours screening films made in other cities from our internet catalogue, as well as bits of things made earlier by the participants on the subject of labour or in a single shot. It's intensive work, and instructive for everybody. I have the feeling that things have never yet worked so well. Maybe partly because this is the first time we've had the internet catalogue available online. And so we can bring things up spontaneously, quickly, and without technical problems. The idea comes up for the first time of making remakes of films made in other cities. I like that a lot.

I have a different sense of time this time. Maybe because Buenos Aires is already the eighth workshop we've done, and certain things have become routine. I have the feeling that time is flying. Earlier, when a workshop was beginning, I would always lull myself into a sense of security with the idea that we would be spending a long time there. Two weeks, half a month! Now, after three days, I'm already thinking: yikes, the time is tight. We've already been here for a week, and I was shocked that we were already discussing the final presentation.

We peek into the exhibition – and encounter masses of people shoving past each other, but also sitting thoughtfully in front of the works. Harun keeps having to sign the white books that many people are carrying under their arms. We hear that the event is again completely sold out, and that people who can't get in are becoming aggressive. The museum spontaneously sets up a second room with a video transmission. This room is also quickly booked – and they're setting up the technology for a third room with video! We've really never experienced anything like this. Adriana greets Harun with the words, "Hello, pop star!"

Our expedition to the gigantic steel mill was simply amazing. It's not the sort of thing one sees every day, people were pleasantly excited – an initiative like that is good for the group dynamics. The participants are super and know exactly what they want. The cameras are set up in a trice, and I can see what makes who tick and what interests them. I already

found it so interesting, on our excursions in Rio, to see who liked to keep a decent distance and thus tended to long shots, and who got up close. It's a luxury – the bus drives us around the factory grounds all day; when we see something interesting, we call "Stop!", jump out, and observe and film everything, till we have the feeling we're "through" with the site.

Eight cameras are also each shooting a remake of *Workers Leaving the Factory*, and I can already tell from watching which will be the best. It's a guy who's unimaginably good. He always gives good advice, also knows all the technology, and has already shown us brilliant examples of his film work. Harun and I can't remember all the names, and make do with nicknames. He's "the Nerd." We mean that lovingly, though, because we both think he's wonderful. Naturally, he's the one who volunteers to help us with editing the final presentation. He can do it with Premiere on a PC or with Avid on a Mac. It's great to have someone like that there, and it's a relief.

Today, the participants show us again what they've done in the last few days. Some of the results are so incredibly good that it's clear that Buenos Aires is giving Rio a run for its money in terms of quality. Ha – from that perspective, our workshop project is like a World Cup. And Latin America is very clearly in the lead. We'll be doing this in Mexico, too. I'm already looking forward to it.

Today, Harun has to give a "master class" at the university. After seven hours of intensive workshop work, I have no desire to come along. Harun called me right before the event to tell me that there wasn't any official meal planned for afterwards. Fine by us. He said the place was full again. I'm feeling I've had enough of all the hype. Unfortunately, he's scheduled to give another presentation tomorrow evening. We should reduce the amount of work we're doing, but it's difficult when all the co-operating partners are doing and giving so much, and then of course they also want something... It's also a little crazy to be taking care of arrangements in Łódź, Lisbon, and Mexico while I'm still in Buenos Aires. But I can't do otherwise.

We're enthusiastic about the final selection. Our nerd Lucas is really worth his weight in gold. He can multitask at an amazing speed – transcode, copy, cut, manipulate sound, insert logos ... perfect! Over the course of the afternoon and evening, one student after another says goodbye and in the end it's just Lucas, Hernan, and Paloma sticking it out. We invite them out for a pizza and are happy we did so. We recapitulate the workshop. And for the first time, we get a chance to hear extensive feedback from participants. It's extremely positive. So much intelligent praise makes me happy.

VII. Łódź, May 2013

Georg Blochmann – the charming, always excited, equally clever and emotional director of the Warsaw Goethe-Institut – appealed to us to do the workshop in Łódź rather than with him in Warsaw. He suggested Łódź, because the museum there is the best and most interesting art space in all of Poland. And doing a workshop in the Łódź Film School would take the cake – no question. The place is mythical. Besides, the recent history of Łódź would really suit our project. Łódź first became a city with the rise of the textile industry in the nineteenth century. It endured a major crisis in the aftermath of the First World War, and under socialism it became a significant centre of production. That brought a rapid increase in wealth, the lustre of which one could still see traces of today. Once capitalism was reintroduced, most local industries found that they couldn't compete, and they shut down.

The film school is very close to our hotel. In the morning, we walk the few metres there. As always, I'm excited and curious. Georg has a Goethe-Institut banner in a black zipper bag under his arm. I find it amusing that wherever we go, the green Goethe banners are hoisted like flags. As if the Goethe were a nation of its own.

We walk onto the campus, which I wouldn't have called a "campus" if I hadn't known that it was one. A colourful mishmash. Old red brick factory buildings, small wooden arbours, modern cafeterias. Lots of green, almost as if it were a park. We admire an arbour entwined in plants whose brickwork makes it seem touchingly private, as if a society of birdwatchers had built it to beautify a commons. What can the planners have had in mind when they built this? Did they make it for students to sit and drink sweet champagne in the evenings? We take a seat there and smoke a cigarette. Later, we figure out that the arbour belongs to the villa where the owner of the grounds used to live.

Harun suddenly looks at me meaningfully, eyes wide, and says: "I can't believe that I'm here. This is where Cybulski used to run around!" I find this incredibly moving. When I see photos of Harun at twenty-four, it's clear that he saw himself as part of a lineage: James Dean – Cybulski – Farocki. Harun also admits that in the sixties and seventies, he used to wear sunglasses – even in nightclubs – in imitation of Cybulski.

Our seminar room fills up with lots of young people and, fortunately, a few older ones, too. We give the introduction, which is now routine. Then all the participants introduce themselves and present their ideas. As usual, that's the most exciting part. It quickly becomes clear that we have nothing

to worry about. There are so many good project proposals. Most of the participants are coming from the photography class. A number of people remark that their shots will have to be static, because they have neither the proper equipment nor adequate experience for pans. Confessions like that testify to a certain professionalism. One participant says that he drove some distance to get here; he's a cameraman, doesn't yet have a project idea, and would like to help out. He'd be happy to do anything. I like that! Insistence on solo authorship tends to be less productive than work in groups.

Łódź- and Poland-specific ideas: cars from the West being sawed into pieces, and large factories in which only small operations are still being conducted. One of the last open mines. Rickshaws of a sort one only finds in Łódź, on the boulevard construction site. A guard in the natural history museum sitting so still that one can hardly distinguish her from the stuffed animals.

A second workshop meeting begins rather lamely. Actually, there are twenty participants, but only seven have shown up. We don't know if we should begin or wait for people coming late. We hear that some students are working on shoots, which we can hardly object to. Still, Harun is a little annoyed. After a while, the participants begin to show up in dribs and drabs – and have things to show. The atmosphere improves.

In the evening, there's a public discussion with works by Harun and a professor whose name we still can't get straight, because it has so few vowels. He's supposed to be a Polish expert on media studies and a great aficionado of Harun's work. I find him extremely likeable; he looks a bit like Georges Didi-Huberman, but he makes more dramatic thinking faces than Georges does.

Renata Prokurat, the program coordinator for the Goethe-Institut Warsaw, has arranged a buffet for the public concluding event in our seminar room. Renata is simply wonderful. So warm, kind, smart, and reliable. I instantly felt taken care of, and I felt happy to be part of such a nice team. In her professional capacity, she is also just as Detlef described her: she is perfectly networked with Poland's cultural and commercial film institutions, she's a brilliant organizer, she's fully versed in German and Polish film history, and she has an excellent sense of her Polish audience – both the general public and the film professionals. For the buffet, the people running the university cafeteria bring tableware, food, and drink. They arrange everything so lovingly and in such an old-fashioned way that we feel like we're back in the former East. The space fills up, and the conversation with the audience after the showing is pleasant and lively. I have a feeling that everyone's satisfied

and in a good mood. We've felt comfortable in Łódź, but we're also happy to be returning home to Berlin.

VIII. Moscow, June–July 2013

After another very long ride, we finally arrive at our apartment in the centre of Moscow. Lisa Welitschko from the Goethe-Institut is standing there on the asphalt with an umbrella to shuttle us the last few metres to our place. How long was she standing there in the rain? I found it embarrassing. She is nice and smart; she has two children and a PhD – and had to wait here and look after us guests.

In an organic café in the nearby pedestrian zone, we meet up with Lisa and Wolf Iro, the director of the Goethe-Institut here. We get along immediately. After a while, it occurs to me that Wolf is probably a good writer, because his spoken German is so witty and precise. Naturally, we talk about Moscow and Russia. About how 70 per cent of the population voted again for Putin, which is really hard to comprehend. About the problems of a country that is about to become fully capitalist: the frightening nationalism, terrible xenophobia, and the difficulty in bringing good books onto the market. Finally, they show us where the metro station is and explain how to get to the school in the morning. We need only count off five stations. We should be able to manage that.

There are lots of extremely nice, smart, tasteful, and experienced artists in our class, and very few beginners. Just now, I really love working with adults. Not because I've just come from a vacation with lots of children, but because it takes pressure off me. Some of the participants need no help from us at all, but are simply happy for the stimulation and the exchange.

The participants' project proposals are interesting, but, as nearly always, hardly based on research, which gets Harun in a huff again. On the second day of instruction, they can already show finished work with some relevance to our project's theme or format. I find a lot of it good; some of it is also moving.

The school is small and nondescript, the atmosphere intimate – which I love. Sometimes, things are repeated in Russian, because some of the participants don't understand English well; others speak and understand excellently. All in all, everything's going well, and there's a lot of laughter in the classroom, which is always the best sign. One participant, who speaks in an extremely deep and quiet voice and also radiates other gender ambiguities, is a founding member of Pussy Riot. She shows us good videos of harsh

police violence against protesters. It's only after we've admired her videos that we learn from Kirill, who's been teaching at the Rodchenko School since it was founded seven years ago, that she's in Pussy Riot. Cool!

The next workshop day is interesting – we watch the first results of the new round of shooting. As usual, there's a lot that could be improved, but some of it is already really good: the work of a sound technician filmed through a potted plant that nearly fills the frame; Indian dances in front of the entrance to a metro station; enormous walls of mirrors being built up for a Dior fashion show in Red Square; cheap Lenin, Stalin, and Putin impersonators charging money to pose with tourists for photographs; a moving scene of begging in the subway, with "Gaudemus Igitur" being sung a cappella by an old woman in a headscarf; an ultrasound test of helicopter parts.

Sitting with Kirill in a café the other day, we told him how excited we'd been about the Russian pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale. We couldn't recall the name of the artists' group, but we described the triptych-shaped video installation we'd been so impressed with. He said, matter-of-factly: "Oh, I know who you mean. Let's give them a call," pulled out his cell phone, and made an appointment for a studio visit. I love such spontaneity! Wonderful.

A few days later, we meet with Alina at our metro station and take a train out of the centre of Moscow. Harun loves riding in subways so much – he's wearing his happy Harun face the entire time. At one point, we even emerge into the sunlight to cross the Moskva River. The residential area on the city's edge is in very good shape. Again, everything's so enormous; the main avenue, Leninsky Prospect, has eight or ten lanes. In a liquor store whose name includes the word "magic," we buy several bottles of wine and a couple of beers for Harun. A taxi takes us the final short distance.

We're visiting the artists' collective AES+F. They've been quite successful internationally, and for that reason (Kirill says) very controversial in Moscow circles. Fortunately, we couldn't care less about such local conflicts. I found the advertising aesthetic, the glamorous melancholy, and the unsettling cynicism of their video installation so amazing that I don't care what anyone else thinks of it.

We exit the taxi in front of an enormous building and wait for Kirill. The house is tiled in white. All the homes here are artists' studios, originally designed for sculptors. There are large elevators for transporting heavy sculptures and sculptures the size of giraffes. The studios all have high ceilings, so one can work in large dimensions. The rent, we hear, is insane. Only artists who have had success can live or work here. The cars parked in front, however, mostly look old and decrepit. One of them has cartoons

on it done with markers. Alina has found a few sour cherries in the weeds around and gives them to us.

AES+F is an acronym made of the surnames of its member artists, of whom we meet Tatiana Arzamasova and Lev Evzovich. Both of Jewish extraction. Like nearly everyone we meet here. In such a Christian place as Russia, we seem mostly to be meeting people with Jewish backgrounds! Tatiana looks wild. Strawlike, red-coloured hair, pale blue eyes. Lev, her husband, attractive, with a Roman profile. Tatiana is emotional and gesticulates a lot. Lev is constantly stopping her a bit, and gets right to the point. It seems like a loving, well-practised routine. They've made delicious hors d'oeuvres with tomato and mozzarella and small round rolls from a delicatessen, everything with great style. Everyone's smoking like crazy, even while eating. Only Harun is heroically holding off, having mostly given up smoking since the vacation with the children. He declares, maybe five times, how nice it is to drink a cool beer at the end of a hot day. His happy Harun face gets happier and happier.

Now, we get to experience a round of drinks Russian style, as promised by the cliché. A continuous clinking of glasses and toasts: "To our guests, who are our friends!" "To Kirill, who brought these nice guests!" "To our hosts and the wonderful food!" So movingly sincere. There's also a certain emphasis placed on the friendship and peace that prevail at this table, as if outside there were still only police, military, and informers.

Sadly, we have to admit to ourselves that the quality of the workshop videos here lags behind what we saw in Rio, Łódź, and Buenos Aires. People keep making beautiful things, but we're not seeing any of the special esprit and the high motivation that we saw at the other sites. Then again, I have to admit that we've been a bit spoiled by the last workshops. And the mood in the classes here is certainly engaged and caring. So let's just wait and not get discouraged.

Meanwhile, people are making some good videos! The participants dribble in gradually to prepare for the final presentation, and we survey what we have. Everyone can select one video to show. With two or three especially good participants, I wink and make an exception, so they can show two things. Things are coming together into a nice composition. We finish up at the last moment and hurry over to the museum for the presentation. The change of scenery is a good thing. The mood is somewhat formal, more official. The room gradually fills up; in the end, it's full to bursting. The film programme is well received, and we are extremely satisfied. There are so many interested questions from the audience; the event appears to be a success. We celebrate afterwards in a comfortable cellar restaurant,

which we seem to have all to ourselves. Georgian food. Kirill is wonderfully drunk. We laugh a great deal – what a lovely end to yet another interesting, marvellous stay.

IX. Hanoi, August–September 2013

I'm woken up very early, before Harun, by loudly barking dogs and constantly honking cars. Not an ideal start to the day. When we arrive at the Goethe-Institut, we're surprised that our classroom, whose setup we'd discussed yesterday, is occupied by a German language class. We have to move with the twenty or so participants to the auditorium. Over the course of an hour, first one, then two, then finally five people work to connect first one laptop, then another, then a third to the projector. We can't teach if we can't access our home page. It's unbelievably embarrassing. I try to stay calm and be a good sport, but at some point I can't help but feel somewhat annoyed. How I hate these eternal technology problems! When we finally get started, the general energy level has sunk a bit. After we've spoken about our project for a while, though, I find myself looking into what seem like two dozen friendly, interested, and open faces. We seem to be back on track. Thi summarizes everything we say in Vietnamese. I love listening to this sing-song, and it's wonderful when suddenly everyone is laughing – then we know that Thi's come to a part where Harun wove in a joke.

The group dynamic is good. The people have things to say, questions to ask, or commentary to give. Later, the nice Goethe staff person Mailan tells us that it's an exceptional thing here to have such a lively mood right on the first day; as a rule, the Vietnamese tend to be shy. These participants are not! Later on, when we all come together to screen some of their test work, they engage in some pretty intense debate among themselves. Naturally, they don't get combative with us. They show the what-do-you-expect-of-me attitude I've become familiar with by now. This seems very Asian and is pretty much the opposite of what we saw for example in Israel, where the artists tended to work on their own and didn't feel ready to talk about their shooting concept until the films were done. Here, I have the feeling that they want to do everything "right," and they would probably be happy if we were to give them tasks to do and rules to follow, as in school. We don't do this, of course. But today I believe we managed to make clear, with concrete examples, how one can capture or create complexities or ambivalences. How, for example, one can tell not just one but two stories elliptically in a single shot. Often, the participants concentrate so much on their subject

while filming that they let it fill the frame, without noticing that it could be more interesting to also capture, for instance, the fact that the killing and skinning of frogs is happening in the street, and right next to a woman selling flowers. In such a case, it's a question of framing or camerawork. Conversely, it's often unnecessary to include the entire person executing a task within the image, if what's interesting about the shot is what the person is doing with his or her hands. If the theme is a surgical operation, the question might be whether one needs to show any blood at all; instead, one could film the surgical implements being readied beforehand, or the room being cleaned up afterwards. We talked about this for an especially long time, as one woman had fearlessly focused her camera on a scalpel.

The curiosity, openness, and even the "dutifulness" of the participants have the result that we can speak in great detail and very precisely with one another. It's never occurred to me before that "autonomy" and "self-consciousness" can also *obstruct* a good mutual exchange – that is, if everyone's thinking: "I should be able to figure out for myself the best way to do this." Here, we're collectively thinking through solutions to problems. On account of this dutifulness, Harun and I always feel compelled to emphasize that we mean our suggestions to be exactly that, *suggestions*: something we'd like them to think about. After eight hours of workshop, we're all exhausted, but I have the feeling that the participants are now really raring to go with their projects. This is the best thing that we can achieve together on a first day!

Today is really a "free" day. But we've made a date for an excursion with eight of the female participants. For the first time, Harun and I take a taxi without local help. We show the driver the address that I have written down in my notebook, and luckily he understands. It's not far to the old city, and I'm pleased when I see that our destination is a busy neighbourhood, with lots of colourful shops. Now the participants zoom in on mopeds from all directions. To begin, we walk through the quarter in a large group, but gradually pairs break off to film in peace. Two of the women speak English well, so we always go with at least one of them. Mostly, people here are selling things, but at every third stand there's someone making or repairing or producing something. Some of the shops are also primarily workshops, with just a few items for sale. There's production of many kinds: work with steel, tin, and wood; stainless steel shelves being welded, tin being cut, and all sorts of baggage racks being made for, and attached to, motorbikes. There are open cookshops on the sidewalks, and the children back home would be amused to see that all Hanoi is equipped with plastic children's chairs, stools, and tables, but with adults sitting at them.

It's not easy to film in this bustle, and we notice that the participants are shooting a bit too spontaneously and without forethought. They're probably afraid to miss a situation, because it won't repeat itself. Which happens often. Announcing itself with loud thunder, a storm puts an end to our enterprise. Luckily, we'd spent enough time at the site. One thing our excursion taught me: one participant, who I thought must be about twenty-five, showed me photos of her children, who are nineteen and seventeen. Our so-called "girls" are maybe ten years older than we thought! Now I look at their hands and notice that many of them are wearing wedding rings.

Again, eight hours of workshop today; there was a lot of material to watch. Some scenes were unfortunately too banal or trivial. It's not easy to explain why something is insignificant when people don't see this themselves. I'm afraid they're thinking: "But surely this is labour in a single shot?" But the fact that there's labour in the shot doesn't make it a film. A lot of things were really good, though! One of the few male participants, who looks like he must be forty years old (and thus is probably fifty), has done some amazing, carefully considered shots. He's interested in the street vendors and films them with great sensitivity and not at all in a folkloristic manner. One scene is already complex by virtue of how the image is constructed. In the foreground, one sees the endless traffic, moped after moped. In the background, there's a moped shop with mopeds shown in large displays. Squeezed in between is an old woman in a bright yellow raincoat sitting in front of piles of herbs that she's bundling for sale. I found this scene instantly moving.

Another participant, who looks like he's thirty and therefore is probably forty, has filmed in a village that specializes in making those conical straw hats. It's pure handiwork, done by families. We see a little girl who has to be about three years old working with needle and thread on a hat that's about half as big as she is. Then the camera pans to the mother, who's cutting raffia while speaking with another, older daughter, who's sewing raffia onto a hat, whereupon the father comes into the picture, edging another hat with sweeping movements. A pan like this across generations is simply fantastic. The participant has filmed four versions of this scene, and we all ponder which one we think is the best. I'm not surprised that Harun prefers the version that starts with the little girl. The pan reveals the next fifty years of this little girl's future!

I'm no less enthusiastic about the man's next video. Canal work in a field. A worker, having just delivered a load of water over a distance of some ten metres, lets his empty wheelbarrow drop with such a bored gesture and trots so incredibly slowly back with it through the mud – as if in slow

motion – that I have to laugh. You couldn't stage such a thing. Only in real life does one find such nonchalance! A woman participant has filmed a situation at a construction site in a somewhat trivial way. It doesn't require feedback for her to realize that it might be better if she were to change the camera angle. Someone who's here for the first time today, because he was sick, brings shots from a circus. Young men getting horses to walk up and down stairs. Artists practising on the trapeze. He films everything once with a moving camera and once with a static camera. With another video, Harun can't understand that what's being shown is an architect approving of building plans spread out on a table, while his daughter paints next to him. Harun asks if it's a school during exam time, and everyone giggles like mad. Each time Harun doesn't understand something, the people laugh themselves silly, whereupon he always looks over to me in this sweet questioning way – "What's up this time?" – and everyone laughs even more, because strangely enough I always know what's going on and can explain things. In discussions with the participants, I can always understand even the ones who speak English badly. Often, I have to tell Harun what they've said. This produces an odd accomplice relationship, in the manner of "Antje will understand what we're showing and saying." Sometimes, they give me a thumbs up when I've understood some Vietnamese cultural specificity that Harun's reacted to with a "What was that?" This happened, for example, with the following scenario: a group of men carrying motorcycle helmets under their arms aggressively besieges the descending passengers of a long-distance bus that has just arrived. It was clear to me that these were moped taxi drivers looking for customers. Later, Harun explains to me that he'd never seen anyone here trying to sell anything by pushing things on people. The idea had simply never occurred to him. He'd never seen moped drivers offering their services. I hadn't either, but still I understood that this was what was happening in the video. Same as how I understand people when they speak broken English. I have no idea why this is.

We're beginning our second week in Hanoi, once again with a long, long workshop day. And again there's a combination of interesting and uninteresting videos. We take great pains to explain what makes something uninteresting. One participant asks if it's interesting that in Hanoi the gas stations are still full-service, whereas in Europe one normally pumps the gas oneself. We say that in and of itself this isn't interesting. We say: "There has to be something specific." She looks at us with wide eyes, a bit frightened. I don't know if she understands what we mean. I also don't know if she understands just what it is we find interesting in the videos we've watched together that we have described as interesting. Our most promising participant – the man

with an interest in street vendors – spent time in an enormous textile factory yesterday, where he made some marvellous shots (not entirely legally). He also shows us some excellent takes of a horticulturist carefully snipping away at his trees like a barber, with scissors. At the end of the day, we start again at the beginning: why *one shot*? Unfortunately, doing a project like this (including the press interviews) also means repeating oneself.

Once again, we sit down at the Goethe-Institut to sketch out plans for the exhibitions in Łódź and Mexico. It's crazy how, with this project, everything goes in series. Still, we are always thinking on local terms and always arrive at different solutions.

Today, we really get down to brass tacks and decide which of the videos people are showing us we would like to “keep” for our home page; we copy these directly onto an external hard drive that I've brought along for the purpose. Fortunately, there was only one case in which we had to refuse anyone's work entirely, that of a girl who kept on being really clumsy with her camera. We just can't fake it and pretend that we're interested – and then not publish the stuff! This probably stressed me out as much as it did the participants. It's like giving out grades, even if we don't want it to be that way. Some people enjoy a great feeling of success, because we are so enthusiastic about their videos and want to have nearly all of them for our home page. Others not so much. I can't help it, and this makes me feel so bad. We won't have these problems with the preparations for the concluding presentation. Everyone can choose a video to show, whichever he or she likes the most; there are so many participants that it will end up being a full evening's programme.

Towards the end of the day, Harun was a bit tired, and – I thought – somewhat unfair to one of the participants, who had filmed seven shots in a printing shop and also one shot of something happening outside the front door. Harun said he thought only the shot in front of the door was good; the indoor shots were all banal. “Just labour.” I found this inappropriate and – with some legitimacy, I believe – defended one of the indoor shots that I thought had turned out well. Hours later, at home, when I read these notes out to Harun, he remembers the situation and says he's happy I contradicted him, because he'd been careless. Overall, he'd been feeling like I was getting so good that I could do these workshops without him. I think that's going too far. And it's also not true! The special thing is how well we complement each other. Harun just wanted to pay me a high compliment, and I'm happy about that, too.

Today, we didn't quite manage to finish preparing the final presentation. It's always the same: choosing, cutting, ordering, and retitling the videos

always takes longer than one thinks. But the mood is quite positive again. Although we are doing the editing on six computers, the participants still have a lot of waiting to do before they can work with their stuff. One woman is massaging the head, neck, and shoulders of another, very professionally. It distracts me, because I always like to watch. Our tech assistant, whom we don't need right now, falls asleep on the sofa and wakes up an hour later. The good masseuse ties my hair up in a nice bun. Harun rolls back and forth in the desk chair and keeps calling out: "What's going on? How can we speed up?" I say: "We can't speed up, everybody is working on something." Then Harun sneaks off for a bit, even though he could certainly give his opinion when Thi and I do the fine edits. Then he shows up again and says: "What's going on?" We spend about eight hours like this, and then we all go to a restaurant, after announcing that we'll continue tomorrow at twelve. A few people heroically stay behind to get their subtitles done.

X. Łódź, September–October 2013: The Third Labour in a Single Shot Exhibition

The technicians are working hard, the museum employees are getting printed materials ready. I have nothing to do, so I hang out in the museum café. It's absurd, but I'm getting more downtime here than at home! I begin to miss Harun. Later, finally, I'm needed. We have to determine the exact position of the eight screens and projectors; the trick is to arrange things so that when visitors move through the space, they won't cast shadows onto the screens. Then I find I don't like how the speakers are visible above the elegant built-in video wall. It would destroy the elegance of the whole thing. We consider the problem from all angles; eventually, we simply hide the speakers behind the wall. We could test the arrangement, but the whole thing is a cacophony anyway. I keep finding errors in the proofs of the printed material and in the captions. All very satisfying.

The exhibition is taking shape. All eight screens are hung. I was very nervous about the fine details of the positioning. It's a wild hanging pattern, suggesting no particular order. There's the possibility of all sorts of errors there. I'm so happy that the Eidotech company sent their best man. He's been with the company since its foundation and is thus very experienced. I've heard that he was the technical director of the last Documenta. If he managed to survive that... He's careful about not offering opinions. I can always tell, though, when he disagrees with something. It's not hard,

because when he likes a decision, his whole face beams and he gives two thumbs up. When I said, "Let's take the white sound shower," he kept a straight face. Then I turned inwards and tried to imagine how it would look in black. That would be much more coherent. Because one can't hide this technology, one should at least be able to see it clearly. After ten minutes, I went to him and said: "I changed my mind. We should take the black showers." Beaming again, he exclaimed: "Ha! I won!" – not that he'd ever made any sort of remark at all.

It took about two hours for three men from the museum to apply an enormous foil print of the amazing Łódź city logo by Andreas Siekmann and Alice Creischer to the glass entry door. It looks great! Andreas and Alice's pictograms are an important component of our exhibitions. I'm glad that we have a graphic element besides the videos themselves. For the eight city posters with statistics, we've chosen a warmer yellow than in Lisbon. I'm happy with that, too. Today's the day I can assure myself: The exhibition will be good!

XI. Boston, October 2013

Detlef Gericke-Schönhagen, the Goethe-Institut director with whom we'll be staying, picks us up at the airport. The airport is only twenty minutes away. We like the apartment immediately. There are multiple rooms coming off a long hallway – so many that I was initially afraid I'd enter the wrong room if I went to get something from ours, or if I wanted to go to bed.

The bed is comfortable; when one of us rolls over, the other doesn't notice. We spend a lot of time sitting on the miniscule veranda outside – the first days, in extraordinary heat. During the day, to smoke and read; in the evening, to smoke, drink, and talk. Detlef, Harun, and I talk a lot, warmly and with excitement. Within two days, we already feel almost like family. Detlef is enchantingly nice and amusing, and I love listening to the stories he tells so cleverly. We're all good listeners, and the stories and debates lead one to another.

We drive to Cambridge in the midday heat to take care of all sorts of formalities, Harun has to fill out the craziest forms. So we go looking for the administration. We walk by the Carpenter Center, the building by Le Corbusier in which we'll be presenting an exhibition that I've been working on for a good year. I'm so nervous and excited to finally see the building that I can't really look at it, and I suggest to Harun that we seek out the administrative office, which I assume is somewhere nearby. We walk

aimlessly up and down the street, and understand much too late that the administrative office is inside the Carpenter Center.

Now, we really have to go inside. It's immediately clear that the spaces will pose extreme difficulties. It's all glass and concrete. And the exhibition hall where we'll be showing most of the works is actually an entry hall, with columns in all the wrong places, with streams of students climbing the stairs around the corner, and if one covers all that glass then one's fought the building and made it unrecognizable. Is this what we want? The things that are hanging there now look reduced in this environment. Somehow not worth taking seriously. Upstairs, the gallery in which we'll also be showing things is a completely closed white cube inserted into the building's glass and concrete. The acoustics aren't good and there are columns here, too, asymmetrical ones. I can't hide a certain displeasure. I decide to stay calm, and tell myself that one always ends up finding solutions.

Harun and I will be giving a lecture in Philadelphia about our exhibition project. I make outlines, write down roughly what I want to say, and leave spaces for Harun to fill in. We go through the thing together, and once again I notice how perfect it is with Harun. We're so much in agreement on everything, it's a pleasure. The topic art-media-war is of course so complex that sometimes I think we're nuts to be doing this. Why not a nice, small field that one can cultivate completely?

At our opening, Detlef introduced the panel in such a charming way. First, he gave some basic biographical facts, and then it got slightly more personal: "Antje works on a MacBook, Harun on a PC. Harun drinks beer, Antje prefers red wine. Antje reads Harun's proposals and Harun reads Antje's proposals. Often they collaborate on projects – and you will realize how great that is when you see their exhibition."

One evening, I freaked out. The most desperate crying jag imaginable, which made it clear to me that I hadn't quite come to terms with the whole complex of having done a show at Harvard and of having been "in the limelight" there.

I suppose it's something exceptional to curate an exhibition in one of the world's best universities and to moderate a large panel there, and all that apparently with success. David Rodowick, the new Director of the Carpenter Center – a real sweetheart, who supported us a great deal in this first project of his tenure as director there – came up to me after the panel to say how happy he was, and how much he liked the exhibition, and that our panel discussion had made some things clear to him for the first time. For me, that was a double confirmation that everything turned out well: he really liked the show and the panel as well. And he thanked me for them!

Harun had flown to Bregenz that evening and so we couldn't share the success and the joy of it. He'd left the panel before the last question, and I had to finish the discussion. Fortunately, that was okay. During the drinks and the dinner afterwards, I also received marvellous feedback, and above all it was lovely to be together with the artists, who were all content and in the best sort of mood.

So this was a collaborative project of Harun's and mine, for which I ended up doing 90 per cent of the work. At Harvard, and with the presentations in Philadelphia and Toronto, we always presented the thing as a common project, with the two of us on an equal footing, even if it was always clear that Harun had the star card in his pocket. But people were always quite nice to me and to us. No Harun cult. We really were treated equally – a point that is sadly worth emphasizing.

Because this is where the break came. Once it was all over, there were of course invitations, meetings, and appearances where it was only about Harun. He said recently – somewhat proudly, but also somewhat annoyed – that lately he sometimes feels like a pop star. For me, that isn't a problem. I've been aware of that for a long time, and I find Harun's earned it – to be celebrated a little, after decades of drudgery. Of course, I've also long been aware of how people and groups can be so fixated on Harun that no one will look at me, ask me anything, or pay me any mind, even though I'm right there next to him. Sometimes that's bad, sometimes it's less bad; often it doesn't happen at all, but sometimes it comes pretty close to impudence.

Strangely enough, I always thought that really it didn't hurt me, because it's so absurd to be neglected as an artist-professor-spouse. Now, though, I have to admit to a growing annoyance, even anger. And this time, it bothers me more than usual, perhaps precisely because of the triumph at Harvard, when I make an appearance somewhere not just on my own account or *with* Harun but *next to* Harun, in his wake, and am treated like an escort or a wife. This time, it's getting to me. And then when somebody we've been quite close to and friendly with subtly does the Harun-cult thing the whole time, possibly even without really noticing it, and then makes some stupid wounding remark (again, perhaps unintentionally), then I'm just fit to explode. The whole thing brought me to tears again, because this bullshit makes me so tired – maybe also out of self-pity. Something along the lines of: haven't I earned myself some respect, damn it?

All this did have one positive effect, though. I talked about it with Detlef, with whom I've had a lot to do professionally, and who's had a chance to perceive precisely how I am both professionally and in private. And he said such wonderful things about me in such a charming and thoughtful way

that I was quite overwhelmed. I'll put up with bitter tears any time to hear such nice things said about me afterwards. Ha.

XII. Mexico City, February–March 2014

Workshop day one. The participants drift in on time. I sit on the terrace in the sun for a few more minutes to dry my just-showered hair. Now representatives show up from all the collaborating institutions. The room's very full. That bothers me a bit, because no matter where I look, I have to greet someone. Once we're all in the room, I find myself worrying that it's a bit too long, and full as it is, this could make it difficult for the people in the back to understand what we're saying up front. That always leads to a lack of intensity, which I much regret. We make a special effort to speak up and also ask the participants to come to the front while presenting their projects, so they won't be murmuring or shouting their ideas from one or another corner. I believe that it halfway works. It quickly becomes clear to me that this is a well-composed group. Not everyone knows everyone else, but many know somebody. That produces an atmosphere of familiarity and curiosity at the same time.

One couple would like to shoot in a call centre, an adult chat centre. They say that it's the oldest one of the type in Mexico. They're familiar with all the details, because – according to the woman – the business belongs to her father. That's great, of course. We can only encourage the two of them to pursue this. Naturally, there are street-cooking projects, research ideas on all sorts of informal labour, which in Mexico makes up 60 per cent of the economy. One woman wants to film biers being washed in a mortuary. Bullfight training with dummies, policewomen on horseback learning to handle demonstrations and uprisings. Street musicians in the metro, which a law passed last week has just made illegal. The themes here are darker in tone and more serious than in Vietnam; also somewhat angry. I listen, entranced. Even with the shallower projects, I know from experience that one shouldn't pass judgement too quickly. All the participants are fairly to highly experienced. That always brings surprises. In any case, it's clear that we won't be bored here.

Detlef reminds me, with pleasure, how when we were trying to organize the funding for the various workshop sites, he had called Alfons Hug in Rio de Janeiro to explain the thing to him. Ehmann and Farocki are doing fifteen workshops worldwide, and showing the results in ten exhibitions. Hug's reaction: "Great idea. If it comes to that, I'm happy to participate. But



Harun Farocki in the exhibition room of *Labour in a Single Shot*
 Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City
 February 2014
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they'll never manage it." Ha, ha! We laugh like children who've completed a treasure hunt. Meanwhile, not only have we done the workshop with Hug in Rio, but thanks to him our project has also made it into the Biennale in Venice.

I believe that nobody in the world besides Detlef really understands what we've accomplished in the last two years. And, conversely, only we know what an enormous amount of work it's been for Detlef. So now here we are sitting together in Mexico City and telling each other background stories – and with such happiness!

Workshop day two. All of the participants show up. Today, they bring materials from their archives to show, as long as it's single-shot stuff. Some are showing things they had already shot in preparation for the workshop. It's ideal to be able to look at such material together and discuss it. Everyone quickly gets up to speed. There are some exciting shots of a bullfighter having his costume put on, a process that takes nearly two hours – which, interestingly, one can somehow sense in the two-minute video. The procedure is shot without countershot (in our case: counterpan); what turns out to be particularly effective is the way close-ups of the face show the tension and concentration involved in the preparations for the bullfight. A young participant shows us some breathtaking material that he's found on YouTube:

policemen learning to defend themselves against demonstrators and to advance against them. They stand in a closed row, riot shields presented, and are pelted with bricks. Then attacked with truncheons. It's so brutal and life-threatening that I can't believe my eyes. I can't imagine exercises like that in Europe or the United States. The participant researches when and where in Mexico City such exercises are happening, so as to be able to film them. We're impressed.

Workshop again. This time, we arrange the chairs in a circle, as wide as the longish room permits. People have asked us for more explanation of our theoretical background and agenda. So we discuss that. It's fun. Using examples from the internet catalogue, we introduce various camera operations and apply the relevant terminology. The response is extremely excited and good. I notice that this really gets Harun going.

The most successful video was filmed in a large fish market. The participant is obviously a very good, experienced cameraman. What an elegant choreography, along a fish stand, past two customers, and around the corner to the fishmongers, who are filleting fish on wooden blocks and laying them onto glittering beds of ice cubes. Finally, the camera travels a bit upwards and to the left and we're looking at colourful tropical fish in an aquarium. Everyone recognizes how well this was done and applauds. The participant beams.

Unfortunately, there was also some entirely awful material by a young girl who has no idea how to use a camera. She'd made the effort of driving out to the countryside to film at a cactus farm, but none of the material she shows us is usable. Later, we find out that she'd actually asked for a cameraman to help her and that the promised help simply hadn't shown up. This is of course vexing.

On the other hand, there were some excellent things by an Iranian filmmaker, Bani Khoshnoudi, who had already shown us work samples from a documentary film she had made in Iran. I thought it so good and interesting that I immediately asked her for a DVD. Here in the city, she'd encountered a man who had interested her. An artist whose income from theatre work isn't enough for him to live on has an additional project with which he is trying to make ends meet. Dressed in traditional garments like Frida Kahlo, he stands in front of an easel with a self-portrait of Frida that he painted himself. He stands without moving, a brush in his right hand and a mirror in his left, only moving for a short time when someone throws a coin into the bowl. Then he puts on some lipstick or makes a few fake brushstrokes on the canvas. Bani has filmed this in several different versions, some of them including the reactions of the somewhat sceptical audience. In Mexico, pictures of Kahlo

have long ago superseded sombreros or cactuses as icons. In one of the many variants that Bani made, a ragged young homeless man walks by, whereupon Kahlo quickly gives him a coin. It's so fantastic, we naturally all agree that this is the version she should finally publish in the internet catalogue.

A young participant has made a real effort at a particular choreography in filming street performers who perform impressive tricks with knives on unicycles and stilts whenever the streetlight turns red. We see his ambition to get the thing right and are able, I think, to make a few suggestions as to how he might do it better.

There's one thing we've experienced here more intensely than elsewhere. Whenever the opportunity presents itself, the participants pepper us with questions about ourselves. What contemporary films do we watch and like, and what books do we read? Harun's asked about his film work. How does he make editing decisions? Does he always work with the same people? And again and again: what was it like to work with people at the other workshops? Similarities? Differences? Because people are asking questions in such detail, we answer in detail. Often, I can answer questions aimed at Harun better than he can, because it's difficult or embarrassing to say things about oneself. They keep us in the crossfire for so long that I'm only now realizing that we should have turned the tables on them. Fortunately, there will still be time at the final presentation to talk together and for us to ask questions of them. In any case, it's clear that of the thirteen workshops we've done so far, this has been one of the best. For this, we also have our excellent collaborating partners and their great organizational talents to thank.

The next day, it takes several hours to collect all the video contributions, discuss the newly shot films, make a selection for the final presentation, and copy everything to a hard drive for ourselves to take back to Berlin. We're looking forward to the presentation tomorrow. People have made such lovely videos!

XIII. Hangzhou – Beijing – Hangzhou, March 2014

We've been notified that instead of the twenty-five participants permitted, we will probably have thirty-eight at the first workshop meeting. We shouldn't worry, because not everyone will stay the entire time. We don't quite understand what this is supposed to mean, but we accept it for the time being.

We meet in a large seminar room, which fills up with ever more shyly entering participants. When we begin showing the first videos from our

other workshops to introduce the project, it turns out that it's impossible to darken the room adequately. The video image is weak. What is more, within ten minutes, we're freezing – the heat isn't working. We make a strenuous effort to explain our project while looking over a Great Wall of expressionless faces. When we ask if there are any questions or comments, there's dead silence. Only our three-person workforce from Beijing does anything to save the situation; the other thirty-five participants say nothing. Xiao and Jingban translate eagerly. It can't be a language problem. We have no idea what else to do, so we flee to have lunch.

During lunch, Harun and I speculate about why nobody's participating. We agree that it must be a combination of shyness, submissiveness, lack of autonomy, and uninformedness. Probably, quite a few of them had heard of us for the first time only yesterday and had shown up without having the faintest idea of what the thing was about.

The whole thing was already a catastrophe in the prep phase. The Chinese curator who was supposed to take care of things, whom Harun had met in Leipzig two years ago and who had enthusiastically professed his willingness to co-operate, hadn't answered a single email of Harun's over the next twenty-four months. When at some point Harun asked our faithful Goethe people in Beijing what was going on, they simply answered that the curator was known for never responding to emails. So it's like it was in Moscow here – nearly nothing's been done in advance, despite massive input from Harun's side.

Fortunately, our workshop coordinator turns out to be competent. During the short lunch break, he was able to organize a new room for us, with a perfectly functioning projector. Of course, this room is overheated and oxygen-deprived. If in the first room, we were all sitting and shivering in coats and scarves, here everyone's stripping off all their clothes. A girl from our Beijing rescue party changed her clothing during the pause, and now she's sitting there in a thick, plushy wool dress with a turtleneck, and sweating.

The people are slowly beginning to speak, and we're noticing that there's a certain rebelliousness mixed in with the submissiveness. They flatly reject an absurd number of our well-meaning and carefully considered suggestions. They find some of it too old-fashioned – “That's already all over the internet” – meanwhile ignoring the intersections of traditional and contemporary ways of going about things (which do certainly exist), as if it were all ridiculous. We ask if, as in Mexico City, there are still “labour markets” where people stand around with signs advertising their special skills or areas of expertise. “Painter,” “plumber,” etc. They say yes, that still exists, but it's so old-fashioned. We find out that the largest automobile

factory in China is located here. Would anyone like to form a group to go look at it? No reaction. Harun's features begin to move dangerously in the direction of his "Harun face" (not the happy one) – a term coined by our friend Kodwo Eshun to describe the face Harun makes when he finds something terrible.

Because the participants are apparently used to "school" more than to working autonomously, I assigned homework at the end of yesterday's seminar. Working alone or in groups, everyone should use their ubiquitous iPhones to research what kinds of labour, industry, service work, etc. are going on in the city – and the next day to have ready a list of at least three project ideas for discussion. Things go awry here, too. In the hopes of inspiring some ideas, we proceed to show further examples from the internet catalogue, and talk far too much. To wrap up, we once again present the "Workers Leaving the Factory" idea, and Harun asks who would like to try out a remake at the big auto factory. Nobody moves. Which makes Harun jump out of his skin. In an aggressive, despairing tone of voice he confesses that he really has no idea how to proceed, if nobody's ready to declare his willingness to act on a perfectly reasonable suggestion. In German, I tell him not to use such a tone of voice, because I'm certain that his threats will only make things worse. At this point, he quickly calls a pause.

We have a heated discussion while standing in a ray of light on the balcony. I argue that Harun should have more patience, that the people are feeling overextended and frightened. And that aggression or cynicism – to which Harun is tending more and more – don't help at all. We agree that for the moment Harun should keep quiet while I continue the discussion. I ask in a friendly fashion who's developed ideas since yesterday. (Now we're good cop and bad cop.) Things begin to move. A group of three presents five ideas. Gradually, the others come out with their ideas. That was the homework, after all!

As I mentioned, it was also part of the homework that they use their iPhones to do the research. Apparently, aside from our team from Beijing, no one's bothered to make the effort. Again, the project ideas come almost entirely from the small piece of the pie supplied by individual experience. Street kitchens and street artists, large markets, construction sites, and so on. A certain amount of all this is original – people selling turtles and fish that the buyers immediately release alive into a lake around the corner; people canvassing for customers (again on the street) for businesses advertising "Wall Street English." Only our crew from Beijing hits the target with Farocki themes, which pleases us, despite its predictability. Tomorrow, we plan to visit an IT city, a city within the city of Hangzhou.

By now, Harun has tempered his aggression and cynicism into irony. A new participant asks us about Harun's film *An Image*, which is about the tedious work that goes into a Playboy centrefold photoshoot. After answering the question, Harun says: "If you keep on doing this well and someone volunteers to shoot at the auto factory, I'll show you all a naked woman for three minutes." Finally, everyone actually giggles. In the end, Harun shows the three minutes, even though nobody's yet agreed to film at the auto factory. The participants are extremely interested and would like to see more examples of Harun's work. Finally, every trace of Harun's "Harun face" has disappeared.

Our Beijing crew has been working hard these days, and takes us along to a shoot at a factory that produces dumplings and ice cream. I'm happy to be visiting a factory that produces such a typical Chinese product as dumplings. The factory's called "You Can" – I joke that it was probably sponsored by Obama. For reasons of hygiene, one can film only through windows, which somewhat limits the possibilities of capturing work processes with the camera. But we can see the production process directly, and follow the workers' fingers. People make a real effort to film the following scenario: there are about forty women sitting at a long table with a conveyor belt set in the centre. Each has a pile of trays in front of her, a bowl with ground meat filling, and piles of round dumpling wrappers. The women smear meat into the wrappers and form them into ribbed half-moons, with which they then fill the trays, which are laid onto the belt as soon as they're full. It's clear that no machine could possibly be so dextrous. Which, no doubt, is why these women still have these jobs. In the People's Republic, the workforce is called the "front line," like in a war.

We also take a look at the packing logistics and ice cream production. I'd be really happy if some of the shots our people produce here turned out to be good! One has to walk through a little supermarket to leave the factory. This reminds me of the IKEA principle. I look to see if the ice cream they make is also sold here. Of course! Both of the girls buy some. We take silly photos. I notice that we are all in a good mood. Our Beijing people are so productive and hands-on. It's a pleasure.

None of the three Beijing participants studied at a Chinese university; they all got their degrees in London. They're almost more horrified at the sheepish mentality of the students here than we are. They're worried about the future of the country, given the way this generation is. Our thoughts on the matter hadn't evolved this far. I notice with pleasure that when they say this, it isn't with any intention to praise or talk about themselves. They're really worried about what's going on with the young people in our course.

The next morning, we're all noticeably relieved that over the last two days our problem children have at least kept themselves busy. There turned out to be so much material that we only just managed to get through with sifting and discussing it before we had to take off for the airport to catch a flight for our weekend in Beijing.

During this break, Harun admits that by now, in our fourteenth workshop, he's really exhausted with having to always discuss scenes of street labour. This cute little theme is getting on his nerves. (It's a running joke with him that we should really be having people film in a nuclear power plant.)

Again, a lot of folklore on view: street dumpling kitchens, confectionery (the skill involved in forming animals out of sugar paste, in this case delicate birds), or merchants making combs out of a special material. I'm certain that if we hadn't already seen variants of all these themes in thirteen other cities, we'd have been much more interested.

There was a really good video about a shadow play in which one first sees the play on the screen, and then the camera pans to behind the screen and we see with what effort a group of young dwarves is pulling it off. It's choreographed with such care – Harun and I are very enthusiastic. I already know that this video will make it into our exhibitions.

Another young female participant with a quiet high voice has made endless efforts to use a car to get a travelling shot of a street in which a row of houses is being demolished. We see an entire block full of building debris consisting mostly of red bricks, with intact houses still standing in the background. The chunking of a pneumatic drill pierces the scenery's otherwise ghostly silence. This is original, and it demonstrates that just as much effort is required to destroy something as to build something up. Again, we're impressed.

So the mood is far better today when we're done than it was before. My impression, also from the participants, is that it was helpful to get past the reasoning and begin with production.

The next day's workshop goes easily. We see some very good videos. The crises have been overcome; we're even laughing together. We're done after three hours – and unexpectedly have another free day in the radiant sun.

XIV. Johannesburg, March–April 2014

The university building is so brutally ugly that I almost like it. It looks like bad Eastern Bloc architecture from the seventies. The security one has to pass to get in is like entering a prison. We get to the film school along

some complicated paths. Everything's fairly dilapidated, and in our section there's renovation, hammering, drilling – clouds of dust. The electricity is partly shut off, we find ourselves walking through darkened corridors. Jyoti Mistry, a South African film professor of Indian origin, heartily greets us. She's been teaching at the Wits University for twelve years. She's managed to reserve us a small, windowless, stuffy room for the next two weeks. She shows us the cubbyhole with pride. Harun and I look at each other with some apprehension. Then she says that the students are waiting for us in a larger room in the basement. Good, things can only get better.

The basement room is in fact nicer. There are maybe fourteen students sitting at a horseshoe-shaped table arrangement, separated from one another as in the days of apartheid. Whites on the left and Blacks on the right, with a student of Indian extraction also on the left. This is one of Jyoti's classes, in their fourth year – so not complete beginners.

François gives an excellent opening address, he's really good at holding people's attention. Then we begin as usual. Once again, it proves worthwhile to introduce the project by showing and discussing selected films from other workshops.

When the students finally begin to present their ideas, we're actually somewhat shocked. The usual problem – that people can only think of the most obvious themes, and particularly of work that takes place in the street – is represented here in force. Nothing but garbage pickers, blind con artists, parking valets. The White students to the left all explain their themes with reference to the categories "class," "race," or "skin colour." The Black students with similar themes – prostitutes at parking lots for truckers, people seeking work with signs describing their qualifications – do this without mentioning "race," "class," or "skin colour."

Jyoti makes a great effort to shake these people up a bit. And keeps apologizing to us for interfering. I tell her that she's totally in sync with what we're doing and that it's great that she's taking the floor. We make a point of showing examples of other worlds of work, which must exist here. Jyoti, Harun, and I excitedly discuss the examples we've shown. After a while, we ask the students if they wouldn't like to say something too. They answer that it's so interesting to listen to our debates – if we couldn't just please continue? That's already more of a response than we got in China!

Finally, a participant named Nhlanhla tells us about all the things he's researched. He has a whole list of possible themes. Agriculture at the city's edge, factory visits, a textile quarter. That's all super. We decide to form working groups at the beginning of the week. We keep putting off the lunch

break until we realize that we're nearly through and can stop. That was an intensive meeting. Now, everyone's happy to get some fresh air.

Jyoti, Harun, Nhlanhla, and I drink another coffee outside on the campus and debrief. The dynamic between us is perfect. Despite the students' general lack of imagination, I'm looking forwards to this workshop with some excitement.

The Johannesburg stories from four years back, about how all the organizers and curators were held up in the dark with pistols at their temples, still have a grip on me. I think it's amazing that Harun and I have been able to move without fear through cities everywhere else in the world. We know that isn't possible here. On a Sunday, within two minutes of our having gone out on foot in broad daylight to visit a museum, I find myself feeling nervous about some characters hanging out on street corners with no apparent purpose. I wouldn't want to take out a tourist map and look lost here. But that's what we're doing. In a tone that allows no opposition, I ask Harun to return immediately to the hotel square. "I can't run around here, I'm afraid." And so we spend the whole free Sunday near our hotel, which in the end is completely okay by me. Next time, we'll have to set ourselves a clear goal and take a taxi.

We drive to the second exhibition opening with Lien Heidenreich, from the Goethe-Institut, and her husband. In the car, Lien tells us that her mother was from East Germany and that her father is Vietnamese. I'm surprised to realize that I've never met anyone with that background before. In East Berlin, especially, where so many Vietnamese came to work, there must have been many such couples.

We drive to an exhibition venue in the centre of town, a satellite of the Goethe-Institut. It's an exhibition space on Main Street; the whole neighbourhood is called "Art on Main," and is pretty impressive. Like everywhere in the world, it consists of former factory complex buildings that now house gentrified art spaces, boutiques, restaurants, bars, and bookstores. I'm perplexed at the thought that we've seen such showpiece neighbourhoods in nearly every larger city we've been to worldwide. Sometimes, the countries are in the early stages of capitalism (Hanoi), sometimes they're just about to be fully commercial (Łódź), and sometimes it's an odd mixture of both situations (Beijing).

Lien tells me that the Goethe exhibition space here is in extraordinarily high demand. Once a year, there's a competition that a vast number of artists apply to with exhibition ideas. An independent jury makes the annual selection. I observe that with so much competition our own exhibition probably doesn't stand much of a chance. She says, "No, actually sometimes

we can arrange special exhibitions.” I silently resolve that we’ll only come back to Johannesburg for an exhibition if we can get this particular space. The hall and its environs are really perfect.

Workshop again, and we’re hoping that our sermons on the various worlds of work have had an effect on the students’ thinking over the weekend. Jyoti begins by showing us a sort of omnibus film. A portrait by five film-makers of the lives of five people in Jeppe, an old Johannesburg neighbourhood. She hopes that we’ll find this film interesting in the context of our project. It was good watching and discussing the film with her and the students, but unfortunately it also gave the students fodder for their projects on poor people: they all found the portrait of the garbage collector more interesting than that of the real-estate speculator, with regard to whom the film-maker had problems conveying what exactly his labour consisted of – aside from that he runs through building complexes talking on a cell phone. Still, we were able to use it to talk about a good number of matters of detail, which was good.

The students present a few new project ideas belonging to middle-class contexts. Work in a hospital, a laboratory, ballet lessons. I can see that they’re understanding us and really making an effort. Harun is still finding the state of things pretty bad. He’s more strict than I am; also more obsessive, and less willing to put himself in the students’ place, which I find somewhat remarkable, as on the other hand Harun is always so interested sociologically.

It’s only now becoming clear – especially after another discussion with Nhlanhla about the situation – how extremely limited the radius of these students’ everyday reality actually is. I would never have imagined it. Almost all of them live in this university neighbourhood, in student housing, and pretty much never leave the area. The city centre is also too dangerous for them, so they can’t move freely there. It’s crazy – I’m only now coming to understand that it’s not just mental laziness that’s obstructing them from discovering other themes or even researching them. This is really their only reality!

At the end of the first session, I tried to encourage them by prompting them to think about what jobs their parents, aunts, cousins, friends, or friends of friends have. They can’t all be garbage collectors or con men? With the new suggestions today, I asked: “So – do you have access to the site, permission to shoot there?” Only at this point did they reveal that these were all jobs done by family members or friends. None of it had occurred to them on their own! All this is a lesson for us. We’re doing the project in so many countries – what’s most interesting is what differs in the repetition!

The next day and a half are fairly uneventful. Harun feels somewhat weak and goes to sleep early. I stay in the hotel, of course, because there's nothing I can do here alone. The next day is the same. I'm in the room, and I read and write and go now and then to smoke a cigarette just outside the door. When the sun comes out, between the frequent showers of rain, I can sit on the square out front. But I'm never really relaxed, and I peek constantly out of the corners of my eyes to see who's approaching.

Nhlanhla has organized two excursions for the next day. Early in the morning, a visit to a factory where railway parts are repaired; after that, a textile factory. Harun's experience as a film-maker is much in demand on these excursions, because he can give the students advice and has such a good eye – he always sees immediately what and where one can try something filmically. After fourteen workshops and two years of teaching, I also have the sense that I have something meaningful to contribute. Nonetheless, I decide to come along only for the second excursion.

We drive to the textile factory in the Goethe bus. I'm surprised at the good mood the students are in, what with all of them having been on the road since early in the morning. They crack jokes, giggle, and sing. The factory produces articles such as school uniforms or work clothing, nothing fashionable. As soon as we enter the main hall, in which about fifty people work, I see that it's worth looking carefully at things. I'm fascinated by a Black woman worker who's checking finished products, fixing them, folding them, and finally sealing them in transparent plastic wrap and throwing them to the floor. Her hand movements are so rapid, elegant, and efficient – for me, she's the queen of this factory. When our student Amy shows up – she's come with her own car, and she's one of the few who works with a tripod – I immediately point her in the direction of this amazing woman. I'd also timed the woman's work process: she required about two minutes per piece of clothing. So that's perfect. Now I'm totally surprised and impressed that Amy spends nearly an hour filming her. Normally, the participants are much more impatient; it would never occur to them that filming such a repetitive process for an hour might yield interesting variants. But it's good that she does so. I watch patiently the whole time: students frequently walk through the image (once, even Harun does this), sometimes the operation being filmed takes more than two minutes, sometimes the worker leaves or chats with a neighbour. It's exactly the right idea to keep filming forever, just so that in the end one can select the best two-minute shot.

Meanwhile, several days have gone by, and I haven't been keeping up with this report, because I'm depressed and sad and would rather just take the next flight home. Harun's health is hardly improving. I'm encouraging him

to sleep as much as he possibly can. I know it's the only thing that will help. So I'm alone the whole time. I can't smoke in the hotel room. The chairs in the cafés on the square outside our hotel are remarkably uncomfortable. Besides, I don't feel 100 per cent safe there, although it probably is safe. There's a security guard five metres away, day and night. On the one hand, that's reassuring; on the other, it's clear there's a reason why somebody's posted there the whole time. I feel constrained, trapped. The "free" days that we've so enjoyed with our other workshops have become something of a horror. Up till now, I'd always found some way of finding a situation, condition, or solution that I could be happy with, no matter where we were staying.

The radius in which people move here is apparently extremely tight! I feel like I'm slowly understanding more and more about how things work here, which unfortunately doesn't improve my mood. We had another workshop meeting, primarily with the students who had been along for the excursions. We saw a great many shots. Some were okay. But nothing was good enough to send a jolt through the classroom or even elicit applause. There were also some really awkwardly shaky videos. We'll be presenting the workshop results end of next week in a cool cinema, and I can only hope that we'll get to see some better material by the beginning of the week. It would be such a pity if we were to have to feel ashamed of the final presentation for our very last workshop.

Jyoti had terrible news to relate at the start of today's session. One of our sweet young female students was attacked and beaten up over the weekend. She's lying in the hospital, badly hurt. We're all shocked and can't wrap our minds around it. The attack seems to have happened on the Mandela Bridge around 8 p.m., which isn't late. That's about ten metres away from here, around the corner. I feel that we have to do something for the poor girl – visit her in the hospital, at least, and bring her something nice.

The participants have done a lot of shooting over the last few days, and we watch and discuss one film after another. The mood is pretty good, despite the shock at the beginning; the videos are of variable quality. Only very few are really successful; we're happy if we can accept some of the others with a wink and a nod. Most of it, though, looks like they could do with setting out once again and observing, practising, reflecting, and trying out new things. I'm not upset about this, it's simply the level people are at here – and that's what we have to deal with. Generally, I'm pleased with how people communicate. There have been workshops in which I was never as certain as I am here that the participants were understanding what we were saying. In the end, I have the impression that we will manage a final presentation that may not be captivating by virtue of brilliant results, but

which will show a charming mixture of possibly somewhat awkward, but typical, Joburg videos.

Later, at dinner, I notice that Harun and I are both pretty upset about what happened to the girl. She probably wanted to save the taxi money and that's why she crossed the bridge on foot. It should be a human right that women can move about as freely as men. I find it appalling that this isn't possible here! Even though certain things are beginning to improve, I'd really just like to get home.

About the Author

Antje Ehmman has curated numerous group and solo exhibitions since 1999, together with Carles Guerra, Okwui Enwezor, Marius Babias and others. She has been active as a video artist, most frequently in collaboration with Harun Farocki, and as editor or co-editor of multiple books, including the volume *Weimar Republic 1918-1933* (2005) in the German Research Foundation project *History of Documentary Film in Germany*. She conducted the workshops and exhibitions of *Labour in a Single Shot* with Harun Farocki from 2011 to 2014 and, after 2017, with Eva Stotz und Luis Feduchi, participating in the Venice Biennale in 2013 and 2015.

History

4. Attitudes Towards Work: On the Historical Metamorphoses of Psychotechnology

Peter J. Schwartz

Abstract

This essay evaluates the success of the Labour project in supplying what its German title punningly claims to be – a new *Einstellung* (attitude towards, cinematic shot of) labour – by situating its visual strategies within a longer historical series of ways of imaging labour in the West, in each case assessing how historical conventions of representation have reflected and helped to shape contemporary attitudes towards work. Moving from images of labour on ancient Roman calendars through medieval breviaries and books of hours, early modern and nineteenth-century “books of trades,” the *Encyclopédie* of d’Alembert and Diderot, the protocinematographic investigations of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge, early cinema, the ideas of early twentieth-century labour psychologists, and Soviet and National Socialist propaganda, Schwartz describes how the Labour project’s aesthetic and technical constraints encourage productive departures from traditional ways of representing, imagining, and valuing labour.

Keywords: iconography of labour, media archaeology, film aesthetics, labour psychology, psychotechnology

The English and German titles of Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki’s project *Labour in a Single Shot* (*Eine Einstellung zur Arbeit*) declare the stakes of the enterprise in different ways. Whereas the English phrase “in a single shot” describes the project’s main formal constraint – the stipulation that

workshop participants mimic the technical parameters of the first Lumière film, *Workers Leaving the Factory*, by making videos showing a labour-related subject in a single one- to two-minute camera shot – the German title plays on the ambiguity of the word *Einstellung* (which can connote both a camera shot and “perspective” or “attitude” as a capacity of human subjects) to suggest that the one may inform the other. By signalling the idea, familiar from film theory, that a given choice of camera position or certain ways of constructing or connecting shots can both express and propagate ideologically inflected attitudes towards a subject – in this case, the subject of labour – the title intimates a possibility of changing such attitudes by changing the nature of camerawork. Indeed, by making *Einstellung* rather than “labour” its key noun, the German title construes the project itself as a new way of looking at labour, and hence as an organon for the changing of attitudes.

To judge its success in this regard, I propose to situate the visual strategies characteristic of the Labour in a Single Shot project within a longer historical series of ways of imaging labour in the West. At some risk of anachronism (because the word in its modern acceptance dates to the early twentieth century), I would like to apply the notion of *Einstellung*, loosely, to precinematographic visual representations of labour, while adding a third nuance of meaning to its definition. In its broadest sense, the noun *Einstellung* (a nominalized verb literally meaning “positioning-towards”) describes the position or attitude taken by one object in relation to another. From about 1800, the word has been used to mean the “setting” or “regulation” of a technical (often an optical) device; we find it regularly applied in this sense in nineteenth-century astronomical journals to describe the adjustment of telescopes, and it has retained this technical meaning to the present day. The term enters the field of experimental psychology in a 1889 text by Georg Elias Müller and Friedrich Schumann, where it signifies “a readiness, attained through habit and practice, to direct mental behavior toward an object in a predetermined manner.”¹ Around 1910, it was taken

1 “Eine durch Gewohnheit und Übung erreichte Bereitschaft, seelisches Verhalten in vorbestimmter Weise auf ein Objekt hin einzurichten.” Georg Elias Müller and Friedrich Schumann, “Ueber die psychologischen Grundlagen der Vergleichung gehobener Gewichte,” *Pflügers Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* 45 (1889): 37–112. Cf. Friedrich Neumann, “Einstellung als seelisches Verhalten: Der Weg eines Wortes,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Wortforschung* 17.2 (1961): 62–63, 67. I would like to express my thanks to Silvia Beier, Antje Ehmann, Aaron Garrett, Roy Grundmann, and Gregory Williams for their helpful comments on drafts of this chapter, to Marta Braun for helping me find an image, and to the Haus der Kulturen der Welt for inviting me to speak on this subject in Berlin in February 2015.

up by philosophers belonging to the so-called “phenomenological school,” foremost among them Edmund Husserl; by about 1920, the word *Einstellung* was fairly commonly used to describe mental attitudes towards the world as given to consciousness.² In the 1920s and 1930s, the psychological and technical senses of the term and its foreign equivalents converge in the work of German, American, and Soviet industrial psychologists to describe the *Einstellung* of workers in relation to tools, workplaces, and workflows for the sake of efficiency in production; an effort that made use of cinema, as we shall see. Around 1930, the word began more clearly to designate the cinematographic “shot” as a discrete event, a shift perhaps facilitated by the growing interest of experimental psychologists in film as a tool of research, and possibly also by innovations of 1922–1924 in camera positioning and mobility.³ This application retained, and today still includes, the older technical connotation of the camera’s being set in a certain position in relation to objects filmed. The Weimar film theorist Béla Balázs may have been the first to connect all its three senses (the psychological, the technical, and the ideological). In a chapter of his 1930 treatise *Der Geist des Films* (*The Spirit of Film*) entitled “Die Einstellung,” he observes:

[E]very image implies a camera point of view [*Einstellung*], every point of view [*Einstellung*] implies relationship. And that relationship is more than merely spatial. Every view of the world contains a world view. Similarly, every camera set-up [*Einstellung*] signifies an inner human attitude. For nothing is more subjective than the lens. Once captured in an image, every impression becomes an expression, whether by design or not. And it is the deployment of the camera’s subjective gaze which, whether consciously or intuitively, makes of photography an art.⁴

2 Neumann, “Einstellung,” 63–67.

3 *Aufnahme* (from the verb *aufnehmen*, to record), which is still also used in German to mean “shot,” seems to have been the preferred term before this. See, for example, Franz Paul Liesegang, *Handbuch der praktischen Kinematographie: Die verschiedenen Konstruktions-Formen des Kinematographen, die Darstellung der lebenden Lichtbilder sowie das Kinematographische Aufnahme-Verfahren* (Leipzig: Liesegang, 1908), pp. 271–275, which uses the word *Einstellung* to describe camera *settings* in a chapter section about cinematic *shots* titled “Die Aufnahme.” On changes in camera positioning in cinema around 1922 and their relationship to problems of labour psychology, see Peter J. Schwartz, “The Ideological Antecedents of the First-Series Renminbi Worker-and-Peasant Banknote, or What Mao Tse-tung May Have Owed to Dziga Vertov,” *The Journal of Transcultural Studies* 2014/1: 32–49, <http://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/transcultural/article/view/13129>.

4 Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 112–113, translation modified. Cf. Béla

The historical fact that the German American labour psychologist and “psychotechnician” Hugo Münsterberg, a leading theoretician of worker *Einstellung* from about 1912 on, is also often considered the first film theorist – characteristically, his book of 1916 on the “photoplay” centres on the problem of directing viewer attention – locates the word’s use in industrial psychology at an intersection of its several fields of connotation: the psychological, the technical, and the cinematic.⁵ Although it would be illegitimate to view premodern visual representations of labour as accessory to such deliberate attempts at workplace engineering as we perceive, for example, in the early decades of the USSR, still we may see these images as more or less ideologically charged programmes for human behaviour. By setting labour practices into symbolic relationship with key aspects of society and the cosmos as understood at the time of their making, they will have both reflected and conditioned contemporary attitudes towards labour, endowing its practice with meaning and thus partly shaping its social fate. If the central intention of the Ehmann-Farocki Labour project is, as it seems, to supply us with an archive of images adequate to orient us in a new way within today’s rapidly changing social cosmos and world of labour, then its accomplishment is perhaps best measured against the long tradition of labour imagery that it both continues and aims to disrupt.

Among the earliest images of labour in Europe are the ones on Roman calendars: beginning around the second century before the Common Era, these calendars paired representations, in typical (often agrarian) work situations, of the relationship of humans to nature as it changed cyclically over the course of the year with appropriate signs of the zodiac in so-called “Labours (or Occupations) of the Months” so as to express a conception of calendar time that was just then becoming formalized in the Roman world. In the Middle Ages, the relationship between man, nature, and labour was extended to include the relationship with the Christian God, which had the effect of setting the

Balázs, *Der Geist des Films* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002), 30: “Jedes Bild meint eine Einstellung, jede Einstellung meint Beziehung, und nicht nur eine räumliche. Jede Anschauung der Welt enthält eine Weltanschauung. Darum bedeutet jede Einstellung der Kamera eine innere Einstellung des Menschen. Denn es gibt nichts Subjektiveres als das Objektiv. Jeder Eindruck, im Bilde festgehalten, wird zu einem Ausdruck, ob das beabsichtigt war oder nicht. Das braucht nur, bewußt oder intuitiv, gehandhabt zu werden, und die Photographie wird zur Kunst.”

5 Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York: Appleton, 1916). Cf. Jörg Schweinitz, “The Aesthetic Idealist as Efficiency Engineer: Hugo Münsterberg’s Theories of Perception, Psychotechnics and Cinema,” in Annemone Ligensa and Klaus Kreimeier, ed., *Film 1900: Technology, Perception, Culture* (New Barnet, Herts, England: John Libbey, 2009), 87–98.

passage of time marked by the “Labours of the Months” into analogy with the liturgical year. The images of this sort to be found in medieval breviaries and books of hours were not “realistic” images of labour, but rather typological, allegorical ones: their function was to determine the place of man within a religiously and astrologically conceived cosmos, in relation to God, nature, time, and eternity. For example, the month of March is represented with the pruning of grapevines,⁶ with a ram figuring as the sign of Aries;⁷ in June, we see mowing (with a crab as the sign of Cancer), in July harvesting (with a lion as Leo),⁸ in August threshing (with a young woman as Virgo).⁹ These images are to be found in books of hours or in breviaries, that is, in devotional manuscript books whose main objective was the articulation of liturgical time.¹⁰

The iconographic programme changes with the dissolution of the medieval world view, that is, with the invention of the printing press, mechanical clocks, humanism, and incipient challenges to feudal social relations by the “third estate,” then politically and culturally on the ascendant (and producing books). In the sixteenth century, the tradition of the “Labours of the Months” is accordingly dissolved into the iconography of the “Book of Trades,” a genre whose first acknowledged example is the *Ständebuch* by Jost Ammann and Hans Sachs (1568). One iconographic link between the two genres is *The Dance of Death* by Hans Holbein the Younger, designed in the 1520s but first printed in book form at Lyons in 1538. In this series of woodcuts, we see evidence of the old theological ordering principle: Holbein begins with Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Paradise; labour is understood as a consequence of the expulsion.¹¹ In the work of Ammann, Sachs, and Holbein, the interpretation of images is guided by emblematic super- and subscripts, and the behaviour of characteristic human types is sometimes

6 MS M.170 fol. 2r, Morgan Library, New York: <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/3/77136>.

7 MS M8 fol. 3, Morgan Library, New York: <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/3/76862>.

8 MS M. 8 fol. 7r, Morgan Library, New York: <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/7/76862>.

9 MS M.170 fol. 4v, Morgan Library, New York: <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/8/77136>. Colum Hourihane, ed., *Time in the Medieval World: Occupations of the Months & Signs of the Zodiac in the Index of Christian Art* (Index of Christian Art, Department of Art & Archaeology, Princeton University/Penn State University Press, 2007).

10 Naturally, the “Labours of the Months” were not the only representations of labour produced in the Middle Ages, simply the only genre with a coherent labour-related pictorial program. There were, for instance, also illustrations to stories from the Bible, representations of agricultural labour to accompany the *Georgics* of Virgil, images of monastic scriptoria and other stages of book production, and so on. Cf. Patricia Basing, *Trades and Crafts in Medieval Manuscripts* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1990); Wolfgang Metzger, *Handel und Handwerk des Mittelalters im Spiegel der Buchmalerei* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 2002).

11 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8609551c/f20.image>.



Calendar image for the month of March. Top: four men pruning grapevines; bottom: a ram, signifying the Zodiac sign of Aries; calendar text in between. Breviary, France, ca. 1511. The Morgan Library & Museum. MS M.8, fol. 3r. Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan.

(1837–1913) in Mar. 1901. Photographic credit: The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

moralized – yet the occupations depicted are not agrarian, but mainly bourgeois or urban, and the mode of their representation hovers between a certain realism and an allegorical typologizing that has become detached from astrology and the seasonal cycle. In these early products of the new book medium, the concept of “labour” no longer serves primarily to affirm a divine order, but to articulate an understanding of the German corporate social order (*Ständeordnung*) that – in accordance with the artists’ bourgeois origin – has critical undertones: death swings his scythe in an egalitarian fashion, and the monks and aristocrats are not always paragons of virtue



Jost Amman and Hans Sachs. "The Smith." *Eygentliche Beschreibung aller Stände auff Erden, hoher und nidriger, geistlicher und weltlicher, aller Künsten, Handwercken und Händeln Durch d. weiterümpften Hans Sachsen gantz fleissig beschrieben u. in teutsche Reimen gefasset*, Frankfurt a/M. 1568. <https://digital.slub-dresden.de>.

or of aristocracy of spirit.¹² The culturally accepted interpretive model semantically underpinning the representation of labour – that is to say, the new *Einstellung* or attitude implied by the image – is thus more sociological than cosmological, more worldly than divine; the typologies this generates are typologies of human types, not signs of the bond between man and God.

In the book *Het Menselijk Bedrijf* (*Human Industry*, 1694), a collection of a hundred emblematic images of trades and occupations, the Amsterdam engraver and poet Jan Luyken and his son Caspar take up the themes of the

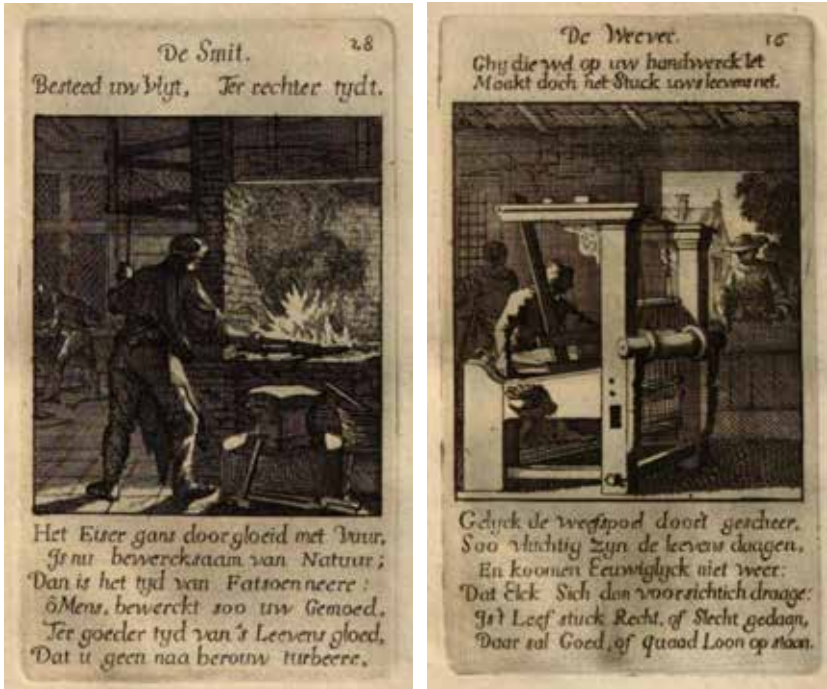
12 Rolf Dieter Jessewitsch, *Das "Ständebuch" des Jost Ammann (1568)* (Munster: Lit, 1987).

older Books of Trades, but with significant changes. A century and some years earlier, Holbein and Ammann organize their depictions of trades and occupations in socially declining sequences: after Adam and Eve, Holbein places Pope, Emperor, and King, then the aristocracy and lesser clergy, Doctor and Merchant, and so on, ending with Peasant and Last Judgement. Ammann omits Adam and Eve and the Last Judgement, beginning first with the Church hierarchy, then moving on to the temporal one, running through a number of bourgeois trades and occupations (without organizing them in any hierarchy of class), and then ending with musicians and fools. Doubtless partly because of the fact that he lived in a Calvinist republic, Luyken omits Pope, Emperor, and King,¹³ and he organizes his hundred trades in an ascending order whose logic is more thematic than social: first food producers (Baker, Miller, Hunter); then artisans (Basketmaker, Cooper, Smith), and Sailor and Peasant; next, cultural workers (Schoolmaster, Musician, Painter); and finally Merchant, Apothecary, Surgeon, and Gravedigger. Let us, however, attend once again to the Blacksmith, because this profession will later recur in a way that will allow us to compare the entire paradigm synoptically. The sequence of the images, along with the emblematic subscripts in verse, lets us know that there is still something left of the Christian *memento mori*. But in a pirated edition of the following year, the verses are rewritten in a distinctly more secular mode and the images are rearranged into alphabetical order, from *Advokaat* (lawyer) to *Zwaardveeger* (sword-maker). These workers are all shown in the context of urban street life or before open doors and windows with a view onto city life. Social hierarchy transforms into encyclopaedia; the corporate cosmos becomes a bourgeois republic.¹⁴

The encyclopaedic *Einstellung* becomes ever stronger after this – as in the plates to the *Encyclopédie* by d'Alembert and Diderot (1751–1772), in which the images illustrating métiers are characterized by a diagrammatic laying-out of the work situations. Here, for example, a plate showing a confectioner: above, we see the confectionery; below, the tools used there, laid out analytically. We see blacksmithing work as well. If we examine

13 There is indeed a Sovereign, but nearly at the book's end, squeezed in between Bookbinder and Astrologer.

14 First edition (1694): Jan Luyken, *Het Menselijk Bedrijf*, with an introduction by Leonard de Vries (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1984); pirated edition, 1695 (originally Antony de Winter, 1695, this edition, Reinier & Ottens, 1725 [?]); Jan Luyken, *Afbeelding der Menschelyke Bezigheden*, with an introduction by Johan Schwenke (Zaltbommel: Europese Bibliotheek, n.d. [1965?]). Cf. Annette de Vries, *Ingelijst Werk. De verbeelding van arbeid en beroep in de vroegmoderne Nederlanden* (Zwolle: Wanders, 2004), 162–171, esp. 164–166.



Jan and Caspar Luyken. "The Smith" and "The Weaver," *Het Menselijk Bedrijf* (Amsterdam, 1694). Google books.

the *Encyclopédie*, we see that the *Einstellung* implied by the image serves the Enlightenment project of a rational utilization of the world; gone is any connection to the divine order or to the corporate social hierarchy; the doors to industrial modernity stand open.

The representation of labour in the nineteenth century is a rather more complicated affair. The media channels become more diverse, the transformations accelerate, the sources are hard to survey. If we compare two broadly disseminated compendia that continue the tradition of the Book of Trades – the *Book of English Trades* (1803),¹⁵ and the nine-volume collection *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, Encyclopédie morale du dix^e siècle* (1840–1842) – we see, despite differences in national idiom, a similar concentration of the image on an isolated individual figure, which in the English book we see framed and centred in workshop scenes, while in the French we most often have figures abstracted from any environment, with only a sketchy indication of the setting. The worker is thus presented

¹⁵ First edition (1803) pub. Richard Phillips, London; many editions to 1839, including versions for children.



"Confectioner," *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751–1772).

<http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/encyclopedie/>.



Forges, 4^e Section, Couler le Renard

"Forges. 4th Section. Rolling muddled iron." *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751–1772).
<http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/encyclopedie/>.



"The Smith." *The Book of English Trades and Library of the Useful Arts* (London: Rivington, 1827), p. 294. Archive.org.

as an autonomous, self-reliant individual, or to put a point on it: the liberal fiction of his social autonomy as a producer¹⁶ is supported by the pictorial composition. The accompanying texts show a similar tendency, although with some national differences: the English rhetoric is mildly heroic, whereas the French compendium indulges in the Daumieresque social typology typical of its era.¹⁷

¹⁶ Karl Marx, "The Grundrisse," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 222–223.

¹⁷ *A Book of English Trades: Being a Library of the Useful Arts* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2006), an abridgement of the 12th edition of 1839. Cf. Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book of Trades:*



Philippe-Auguste Jeanron. "Blacksmiths of Berry." *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du xix^e siècle. Province*. Vol. 2 (Paris: Léon Curmer, 1841), p. 334.

Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The protocinematographic works of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge, towards the end of the nineteenth century, approach the world of work as a set of physical problems to be analyzed, such as, for example, when Muybridge shows his blacksmith without any socially indicative clothing or technical interest – really just as a study of movement. Marey's experiments of the 1870s with muscle fatigue during work processes were continued in the 1880s and 1890s with support from the French army, which marks the beginning of the combination of cinema, labour efficiency research, and military interests that Farocki would address in *Images of*

Iconography (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1976). Compare also *Le Diable à Paris – Paris et les Parisiens: moeurs et coutumes, caractères et portraits des habitants, etc.*, ed. Pierre-Jules Hetzel, Paris, 2 volumes, 1845–1846.



Paul Gavarni, "Grocer" and "Midwife." *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du XIX^e siècle*. Vol. 1 (Paris: Léon Curmer, 1841).

Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

the World and the Inscription of War (1989) and other works.¹⁸ It is perhaps not surprising that Marey's first application of chronophotography to the analysis of labour processes (1894) was directed at blacksmithing, that one of Thomas Edison's first Kinetoscope films, of 1893, stages blacksmithing work,¹⁹ or that the Lumière brothers filmed a blacksmith scene in 1895. We also perceive the continuing strength of the link to the military forged by Marey in the right- and left-wing socialist propaganda of the 1920s, which would lead, in the end, to a thorough militarization not only of labour but of nearly every aspect of life.²⁰

Around this time, blacksmiths take on a privileged position in the socialist imaginary as a metonym for industrial labour: theirs is the hammer in the

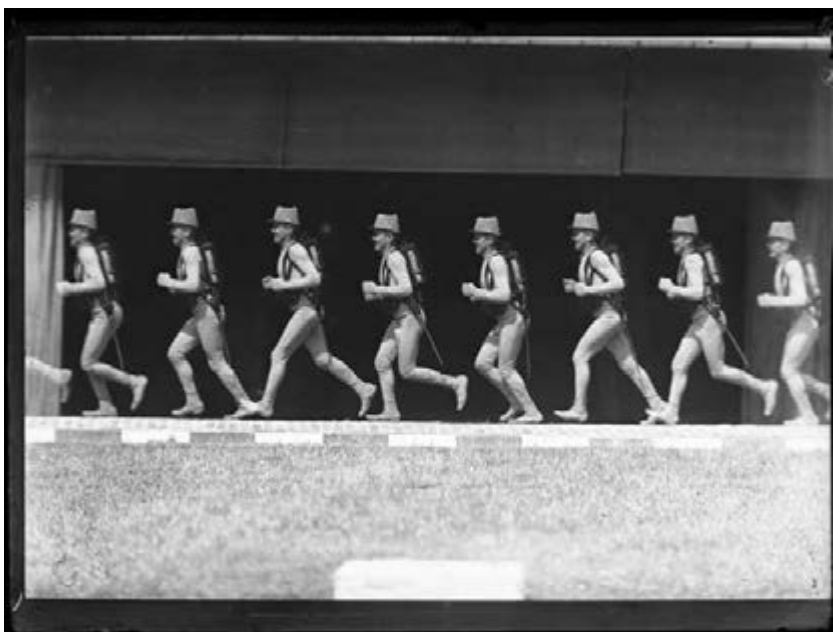
18 Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. 66–71 and 84, and Ch. 8, "Marey and the Organization of Work," 320–348.

19 The actors were also not really blacksmiths, but Edison's laboratory employees. On the Edison "Blacksmith Scene" see Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 32–36.

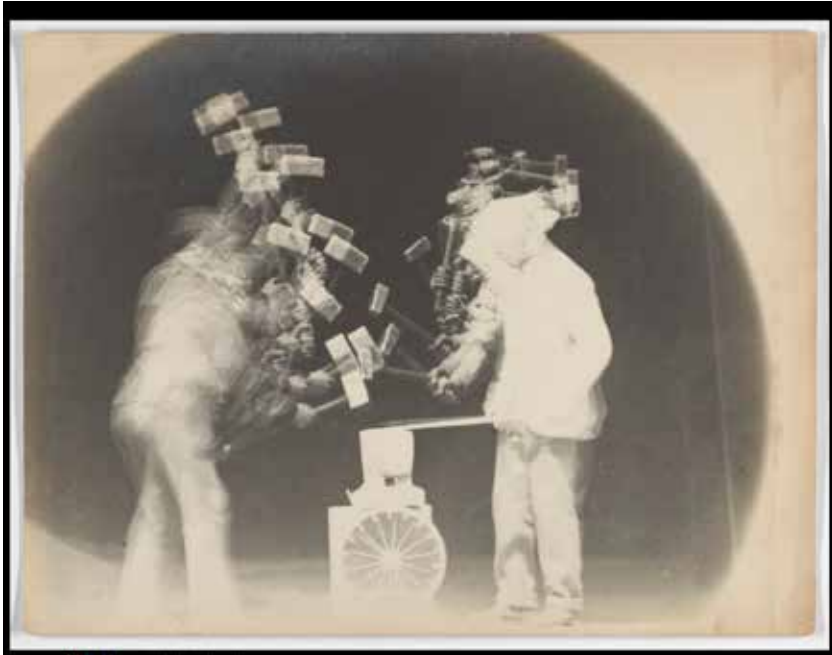
20 Oksana Bulgakowa, with Dietmar Hochmuth and Gregor Hochmuth, *The Factory of Gestures: Body Language in Film* (Berlin: PP Media/Stanford, CA: Stanford Humanities Lab, 2008), videodisc, 160 min.



Eadweard Muybridge. "Blacksmith, hammering on anvil with two hands." *Animal Locomotion* (1887), Plate 378. Reproduced courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



Étienne-Jules Marey. "Soldier running with his kit." Chronophotograph, undated (early 1880s?), 3 PV 916. Fonds Marey, Paris. Reproduced courtesy of the Collège de France.



Étienne-Jules Marey. Chronophotograph. 1894. Gelatin silver print from glass negative, 16.3 x 20.2 cm (6 7/16 x 7 15/16 in.). Purchase, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift through Joyce and Robert Menschel and Rogers Fund, 1987 (1987.1054). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.



Blacksmith Scene. Thomas Edison Company, 1893. Still.



Blacksmiths. Louis and Auguste Lumière, 1895. Still.



Reichsparteitag 1935: Die Arbeitssoldaten

"The Labour Soldiers" (Die Arbeitssoldaten). Nazi Party Rally, Nuremberg, 1935. Collectible photograph, inserted in album *Adolf Hitler: Bilder aus dem Leben des Führers* (Cigaretten-Dienst: Hamburg-Bahrenfeld, 1936), p. 90. Collection of Peter J. Schwartz.



Dziga Vertov, miners in training at Gastev's CIT (Central'nyi institut truda = Central Institute of Labour, Moscow), *Entuziazm* (*Symphony of the Don Basin*), 1931. Still.

Communist hammer and sickle. The majority of propagandistic images of labour were anything but modern;²¹ within this ideological frame, their romantic unreality enabled their activation as symbols. Blacksmiths shatter the chains of the proletarians of all nations, or they forge weapons for the struggle. Technologically up-to-date labour is figured quite differently, especially from the mid-1920s on – by Dziga Vertov, for instance. The new *Einstellung* of the planned economy speaks for itself in such images: labour is still heroic, but now collective and – proudly – technologically cutting-edge.

Vertov's steelworkers show a certain resemblance to the plates from the *Encyclopédie*, presumably on account of their common origins in the social and technological ambitions of the Enlightenment. As also in the sociotechnical ones: here, as in the eighteenth century, the idea of a rational construction of the entire human world does not limit itself to the regulation of social and labour relations but also takes into account the interactions of all this with media systems and intellectual education. The experiences of the last century have shown more than adequately how such utopianism can turn dystopian, how Enlightenment can transform into its opposite. In

21 Mark D. Steinberg, "Modernity and the Poetics of Proletarian Discontent," in *Language and Revolution: Making Modern Political Identities*, ed. Igal Halfin (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 93.



Front cover of issue 9 of the Russian-language version of *The Communist International* (1920). Wikimedia Commons.



Deni (Victor Nikolaevich Denisov). "Every Stroke of the Hammer is a Blow against the Enemy." Bolshevik propaganda poster, 1920. Russian State Library, Moscow. Reproduced courtesy of HIP/ Art Resource, NY.



"You are the front." German propaganda poster, 1941.
https://www.reddit.com/r/PropagandaPosters/comments/l40mtv/du_bist_front_you_are_the_front_194041_poster/.

hindsight, Hugo Münsterberg's 1914 definition of psychotechnology today touches nerves wounded by twentieth-century history:

Psychotechnology is the science of the practical application of psychology in the service of cultural tasks. [...] The teacher [for example] wishes to model the mind of the child and develop it in the service of cultural tasks. [...] The businessman wants to have an effect on the fantasy of his customers, so that the desire to purchase is awakened in them. The manufacturer tries to handle his workers in such a way as to arouse in them the will to the greatest possible exertion of effort. The politician wants to influence the souls of the masses so that they will be prepared to agree with his plans. [...] It is the mission of psychotechnology to explain



Left: "Forges. 4th Section. Rolling muddled iron" (detail). *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751–1772). <http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/encyclopedia/>.

Right: Dziga Vertov, steel workers, *Entuziazm (Symphony of the Don Basin)*, 1931. Still.

what mental processes this is a question of, and what influences are necessary in order to arrive at the desired final result.²²

It is clear enough who is understood to desire such final results and who is to be influenced: Münsterberg's is a technocratic utopia in which the masses are to be formed and controlled by a designated elite.

Münsterberg gained his conception of *Einstellung* partly through optical experiments with attention (which had consequences for his book of film theory, *The Photoplay*, 1916),²³ and he had disciples. His approach was followed up, for example, by his student Karl Marbe (who himself wrote a *Theory of Cinematic Projections* in 1910) in a 1925 essay "On Personality, *Einstellung*, Suggestion and Hypnosis," which two years later became the second chapter of Marbe's book *Psychology of Advertising* (1927).²⁴ Here, more strongly yet than in Münsterberg, the *Einstellung* of the subject to be influenced – the orientating system of values and relationships within which perceived phenomena coalesce as such and then into an interpretation of the world – is understood as the potential construction of a technical media apparatus.²⁵

In the dystopian novel *We* (1921), the Soviet writer Yevgeny Zamyatin showed with prescience how badly all that could go. His terrible vision of the controlling, all-seeing, propaganda-soaked "One State," with its robotic workforce, is a satire on the state-supported work rationalization programme of the Soviet Taylorist Alexei Gastev, whose central concept, "Ustanovka" (установка), is a fairly direct translation of Münsterberg's *Einstellung*.²⁶ In 1919, Roman Jakobson uses the same word, *Ustanovka*, to

22 Hugo Münsterberg, *Grundzüge der Psychotechnik* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1914), 1, 6.

23 Münsterberg's interest in cinema as a means of steering attention (*The Photoplay*, Ch. 4, 1916) was thematically and technically connected with earlier experiments involving the use of quickly shown images that demonstrated, according to Münsterberg, an "influence of preparatory *Einstellung* of attention" upon perception, a process related to "suggestion and suggestibility" (*Grundzüge der Psychotechnik*, 115).

24 Karl Marbe, "Über Persönlichkeit, Einstellung, Suggestion, und Hypnose," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 94/1 (1925): 359–366; Marbe, *Psychologie der Werbung* (Stuttgart: Poeschel, 1927), 9–29.

25 Gordon Allport, to whom we owe the classic English-language formulation of the social-psychological concept of "Attitude," was also Münsterberg's student. G. W. Allport, "Attitudes," in C.A. Murchison, ed., *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Worcester, NY: Clark University Press, 1935), 798–844.

26 In the 1920s Münsterberg's writings were popular (although much debated) not only among Soviet labour psychologists, but also with artists and architects. Cf. Ross Wolfe, "The Ultra-Taylorist Soviet Utopianism of Aleksei Gastev," <http://thecharnelhouse.org/2011/12/07/the-ultra-taylorist-soviet-utopianism-of-aleksei-gastev-including-gastevs-landmark-book-how->

translate Husserl's concept of *Einstellung* (1913), a term normally rendered in English as "set."²⁷ "Like [the] German word, the Russian one can mean at once the orientation of one thing to something else, and the arrangement of all the parts within a system (corresponding to its external orientation)."²⁸ One can see from the "cyclograms" produced at the Photo-Kino-Laboratory of Gastev's Central Institute of Labour in Moscow in the mid-1920s that the institute's photo- and film-assisted biomechanical research owed something to Marey's motion studies. Here, the technocratic attempt to orientate one thing (the worker) towards something else (the labour process), and to arrange all these parts within a unified system, is clearly in evidence.

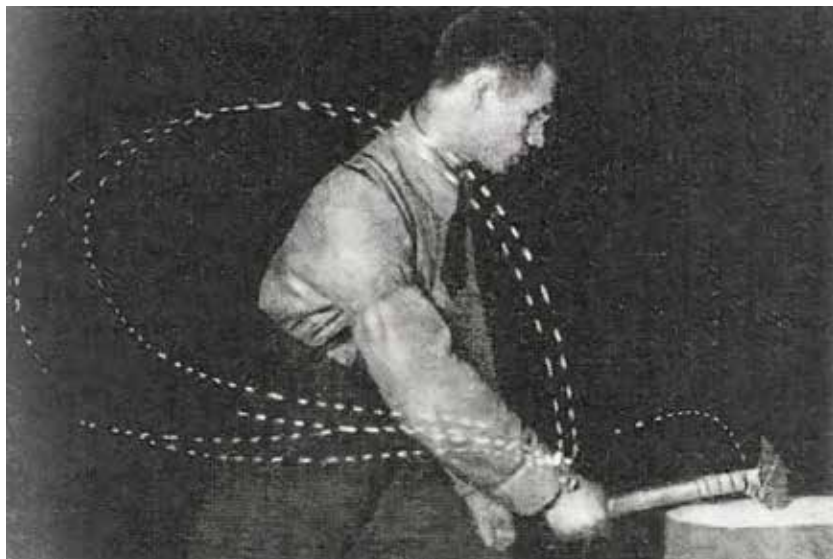
The iconographic tradition that flows from this *Einstellung* is familiar: it is that of the Socialist Realist figure, now cliché, of the heroic worker-peasant-soldier, tool shouldered and viewed from below, gazing proudly into the symbolic dawn of the coming utopia. What Gastev's programme adds is a protocybernetic feedback loop that now not only gives employers the ability to shape planned labour processes more ergonomically but also assigns the workers the task of comparing themselves with images of their own work processes so as to adjust themselves to them – *sich selbst einzustellen* – in a physically and psychologically optimal way.²⁹ In the political sphere, a similar feedback loop is developed by propagandists on both Left and Right so as to integrate the viewer into a web of implied sight

to-workкак-надо-работать/, accessed 3 January 2020. See also Margarete Vöhringer, *Avantgarde und Psychotechnik: Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik der Wahrnehmungsexperimente in der frühen Sowjetunion* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 25–32.

27 Friedrich Neumann observes that the psychological conception of *Einstellung* was, so to speak, "in the air" at the time (Neumann, "Einstellung als seelisches Verhalten," 63–65, esp. 65n16). Perhaps more specifically, an essay of 1910 by W. Betz, "Vorstellung und Einstellung: Über Wiedererkennen" (*Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* 17 [1910]: 266–296) seems to have played a significant role in introducing the concept. Steen F. Larsen and Dorthe Berntsen, "Bartlett's trilogy of memory: Reconstructing the concept of attitude," in Akiko Saito, ed., *Bartlett, Culture & Cognition* (London: Psychology Press, 2000), 94–99.

28 Jurij Striedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 59–60; Richard Bradford, *Roman Jakobson: Life, Language, Art* (London: Routledge, 1994), 15–16. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 1 (1913): 1–324, passim; Roman Jakobson, "Futurism," *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 28–33.

29 Barbara Wurm, "Gastevs Medien: Das 'Foto-Kino-Labor' des CIT," in Matthias Schwartz, Wladimir Velminski, and Torben Philipp, ed., *Laien, Lektüren, Laboratorien: Wissenschaften und Künste in Russland 1850–1960* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), 347–390.



Cyclogram. A.K. Gastev in the pedagogical laboratory of CIT (Central'nyi institut truda = Central Institute of Labour, Moscow). A.K. Gastev, *Trudovye ustanovki* [Labour Installations], Moscow: TsIT, 1924. Wikimedia Commons.



PRC 10-yuan note (1st series), 1949.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d4/Renminbi1ban_10yuan.jpg.

lines that sets into analogy the relationship of the working subjects to their work, the relationship of political subjects to state authority and the utopia it guarantees, and the relationship of media-using subjects to current media technology, all in order to make these subjects maximally disposable for certain political and economic aims. In the visual propaganda of the interwar



Above: Dziga Vertov, *One Sixth of the Earth* (1926); below, Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Stills.

period and after, both utopia and authority tend to be located off-screen or out-of-frame; the gaze of the worker-peasant-soldier-subject anchors the entire sociopolitical order in a signifier that is often only implied, or the order is legitimated with a *chain* of signifiers that consists of a sort of gaze relay from the viewer to the image of the worker, from the worker to the mass, from the mass to the leader, from the leader to the utopian future. The viewer's gaze is thus continually referred to something that is also continually denied. The shot of the desiring subject always lacks the countershot of what is desired; one is adjusted thus – *eingestellt* – to an open-ended purposive rationality that may sanctify unholy means.³⁰

This iconographic tradition is ailing, but it isn't dead yet. The open time horizon off-screen – the invisible source of meaning, implied in the missing countershot – has become less utopian; the visual directives for the proper self-*Einstellung* before new implements is no longer as strictly ideological. But the image type remains idiomatic. Or better: cliché. And this is the point to begin to assess the value of the Ehmann-Farocki labour project. If it is the aim of art to release us from the habitualization that – as Victor Shklovsky put it – “devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war”; if we can say with Shklovsky that “art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony* [...], to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and

30 Schwartz, “The Ideological Antecedents of the First-Series Renminbi Worker-and-Peasant Banknote.”



Stock photo, 2014.

not as they are known,”³¹ then we may properly value the labour project, in its entirety, as art.

The *Einstellungen* of the project’s contributing film-makers – in the sense of “shots” – do not dictate any particular *Einstellung*, in the instrumental Münsterberg-Marbe-Gastev sense, to the viewers; if anything, they orient viewers to an intelligent wonder, to critical openness. That is still an ideologically conditioned template for a pattern of perceptual behaviour, but it is different. The videos break – the project as a whole breaks – with the entire tradition of labour images that I’ve just laid out, and especially with the cinematographic ones, whose ideological baggage is probably more important today than that of the medieval Labours of the Months.

This is not surprising, because in the main, the succession of visual idioms I have described have been ideologically aligned with the dominant culture of their place and time, whereas in its basic approach, the Labour in a Single Shot project is of a piece with Farocki’s multiple critical films on the subject of labour. Yet taken as a whole, the project’s *Einstellung* also diverges significantly not only from any alternative tradition of critical image-making I might have traced through, say, Henry Mayhew’s engravings of London labour and the London poor, the photography of Lewis Hine and

31 Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, trans. and ed., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 12.

Sebastião Salgado, and interwar or post-1968 avant-garde documentary film, but also from that of Farocki's own prior work. Perhaps above all, they mostly avoid overt political pathos, including Farocki's signature pathos of dispassion (e.g., his monotone voice-overs or the cool irony of his montage). This, too, may be partly a consequence of the project's formal constraints. The stipulation "only one shot" excludes every possibility of interpretive editing – aside, I suppose, from what has been called, after Eisenstein, "editing within the shot,"³² and also not counting the choice of when to begin the film and when to end it. The viewer's attention cannot be directed, action interpreted, or comparisons made through cuts; this can be done only through framing, camera motion, and composition in depth (often exploiting the effect, recognized by Georges Sadoul in the Lumières' other seminal film, *Arrival of a Train*, of multiple planes of action within a single shot registering sequentially as long, medium, and close-up shots).³³ Lacking the resource of being able to comment on one image by cutting to another, many videos opt instead for a pathos of slow or delayed revelation, e.g., by using pans or zooms out to reframe the narrative – often to interesting dramatic or ironic effect, but rarely tendentiously.³⁴

It is also remarkable how often the videos leave essential information off-screen, in an off-screen space that is filled rather differently from before. The ban on reverse shots seems to have encouraged participants to leave

32 Sergei Eisenstein, "Montage 1938," *Selected Works, Volume II: Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 304–308. Thanks to John MacKay for helping me locate this reference.

33 E.g., Orit Ishay, *Just Another Day*, Yavne (near Tel Aviv), 2012, <https://vimeo.com/57103001>; Purna Bishop and Rucha Dhayarkar, *Workers Leaving the Textile Factory*, Bangalore, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/57808101>; or, in a different way, Cristián Silva-Avária, *The City, the Runners, and the Fisherman*, Rio de Janeiro, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/59076368>, and Kathrine Dirkinck, *Iron Curtain*, Cairo 2012, <https://vimeo.com/58263577>. Cf. Georges Sadoul, *Histoire du cinéma mondial des origines à nos jours*, 8th ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 1949), 20–21. As Martin Loiperdinger has observed, the Lumières shot several versions of this film. There is no evidence that any of them were shown at any of their public film screenings in 1895; the first known example in the series was apparently shot in January or February of 1896, and the version that has survived was made in the summer of 1897. Loiperdinger, "Lumière's 'Arrival of a Train': Cinema's Founding Myth," *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 4.1 (Spring 2004): 102–103.

34 According to Antje Ehmman (verbally), this technique was expressly taught in the workshops. Some outstanding examples: Gabriel Barbi, *Harvest at a Motorway*, Lisbon, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/79523758>; Neha Shrestha, *Drum*, Bangalore, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/58895351>; Tran Xuang Quang, *Canal*, Hanoi, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/76341647>; Orit Ishay, *Drawer*, Tel Aviv, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/57211269>; Yacov Afuta, *Bread and Water*, Tel Aviv, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/58673227>; *Modern Times?*, Paul Geday, Alexandria, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/58778618>; *Ultra Violet* (Dario Schwarzstein, Buenos Aires, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/66932166>).

both soundtrack and image frame permeable to the outside world: instead of showing what surrounds the object of a single shot, its presence can be signalled through acousmatic sound or by suggesting that what's in the frame is only a segment of some larger whole, either in space (the camera locates a filmed operation within a workshop or street scene) or in time (the shot details a sequence of moves that then begins to repeat). The videos often combine these techniques, with delayed revelation disclosing the source of hitherto unexplained sound or a broader context. Sometimes, however, the context is left unexplained, and it is in such videos (which are frequently shot with a static camera, hence hewing more closely to the Lumières' constraints) that the project's difference from earlier *Einstellungen* is especially marked. Thus, for example, in its sonic and visual openness to all sides the image of blacksmithing work in a video from the Cairo workshop – *Iron Curtain*, by Kathrine Dirckinck (2012)³⁵ – diverges significantly from what we have seen in Luyken, the *Encyclopédie*, Marey, Edison, and the Soviets. A metal fence, laid out on a street, stretches towards the camera from what could be the front of a shop. In the top fifth of the frame, the feet, hands, and blowtorch of a man solder the fence; nearby are the sandalled feet of another man pointing out missed spots; below that, cars and bicycles and pedestrians cross the frame, some clearly treading or rolling over the fence, others perhaps passing through open street space before it, though we cannot be sure, as the frame's bottom edge obscures where the fence ends. Except for the more or less regular buzz of the soldering torch, what we hear is the out-of-frame sound of the city, the street. *Iron Curtain* is a study in permeability: of the ways work and the city interpenetrate, of how labour and sociability and urban rhythms intertwine. No statement, however, is made concerning the *meaning* of blacksmithing work, nor is the viewer invited to occupy any particular evaluative position.

Many of the workshop videos resemble *Iron Curtain* in this respect, whether in their resistance to narrative closure (a trait only partly explained by the short time constraint), or in their tendency to exclude or delay showing context, or – perhaps most especially – in their lack of a clear demarcation of the position from which things are meant to be seen. For nearly all the workshop videos, and even more the multiperspectival project as a whole, leave both the viewpoint of the observer and the meaning of what we have seen fundamentally open. The *Einstellung* (position) the project takes on the subject of labour does not let the *Einstellungen* (shots) of which it consists become a determinate *Einstellung* (positioning) of people with regard to

35 Kathrine Dirckinck, *Iron Curtain*, Cairo, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/58263577>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Kathrine Dirckinck, *Iron Curtain*, Cairo 2012.

All still images from *Labour in a Single Shot* reproduced by kind permission of Antje Ehmann and the Harun Farocki Institut.

labour processes. The second or third shot perform lacking in each of these one-shot films – its missing countershot – is thus *not* filled with tools to be used, utopias to be reached, or leaders to be obeyed, as in the ideologically loaded image montage of the early twentieth century, but with human beings who are permitted to retain the dignity of their being the way they are. With so many close-up shots, with cameras static in complex environments, we are sensitized by the frame to the possibility of our own ignorance; the repetition of this effect orientates us, primarily, to *curiosity*.



Labour in a Single Shot. Huong Mai Nguyen, *Wood Cutter*, Hanoi, 2012.

Watching the videos, I've frequently found myself wondering what's going on, straining for clues to infer unshown setting or sense. Then – whether a pan eventually tells me something, as for example when, in Themba Twala's *The Block*, a pan reveals someone who could be a beggar to be a merchant,³⁶ or when the wise-looking face of Huong Mai Nguyen's Vietnamese woodcutter, slowly revealed, seems somehow in harmony with what he's saying, but in disharmony with what he's doing³⁷ – I suddenly realize that, with some

36 Themba Twala, *The Block*, Johannesburg, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/96892859>.

37 Huong Mai Nguyen, *Wood Cutter*, Hanoi, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/76351589>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Florencia Percia, *Dry Cleaner*, Buenos Aires, 2012.

prejudice, I've been watching someone to whom this mystery *is their daily life*, their field of competence, their labour. The effect is intensified in the films of workers leaving their factories: I have no idea what they have been doing in there with the last eight or so hours of their lives. Just as I have no idea what Florencia Percia's *Dry Cleaner* in Buenos Aires is thinking, or whether and why he is as angry as he looks.³⁸ And I *know* – I become aware – that I have no idea.

It is true that this formal indeterminacy can also leave the viewer unsure of what may actually be going on in a given film. At the Boston conference, I found it remarkable how often the conference participants could not agree on what was *happening* in certain films, never mind what it all meant politically, sociologically, or morally. In the case of Patrick Sonni Cavalier's film *Garbage Choir*, for instance,³⁹ I thought initially that this must be an official event organized by Rio's sanitation department, and I was shocked to see the pride of these workers deployed in the service of municipal propaganda; but in the course of discussion it became clear that the concert had been organized by the singers, with pleasure, and also that the song is historically a protest song. So that was *my* projection – corrected by Antje Ehmann and José Gatti in discussion, not by the film.⁴⁰ If on the one hand André Bazin and the proponents of composition in depth believe that

38 Florencia Percia, *Dry Cleaner*, Buenos Aires, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/67082192>.

39 Patrick Sonni Cavalier, *Garbage Choir*, Rio de Janeiro, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/58672827>.

40 Boston University conference, November 14, 2014.

montage should be forbidden because it directs the attention of the viewer in too controlling a way,⁴¹ on the other we have the possible disadvantage that the attention of the undirected viewer will take off on side-paths of personal projection – or simply make errors. This would seem at least partly a consequence of the reversal of cinema history entailed in the project's ban on montage – a technique developed, alongside others, precisely in order to both counter and exploit what John Berger, following Roland Barthes, has called the “weak intentionality” of the photographic image.⁴² It may be hard to gauge the value (aesthetic, epistemological, ethical, political) of this kind of indeterminacy.

In addition, quite a number of videos use the invisibility of off-screen space to suggest the effective invisibility of certain varieties of labour, and here we indeed sense critique. *Invisible Penal Labour* (Lisbon, 2013) is a case in point.⁴³ The camera is trained in a still shot on a gorgeously dilapidated and vertically cracked concrete wall; we hear birds and wind and ambient street sounds, then a male voice, which may or may not issue from the crack, quietly saying (in Portuguese), “Psst – can you hear me?”

A female voice, presumably that of the video-maker, replies, “What?”

Then a louder male voice – we can't tell if it's the same as the first, only closer, or if it's inside or outside the wall – asks, “Would you mind telling me what you're doing?”

“I am recording a sound.”

“But who are you?”

“I am a visual art student.”

“Visual art? But... what sort of sounds do you want to record?”

“The sounds out here in the street.”

“In the street?”

“Yes.”

“But you're pointing it here inside.”

“Yes, but I am here on the outside.”

41 André Bazin, “The Virtues and Limitations of Montage,” *What is Cinema, Vol. I*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 41–52; David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 158–271.

42 John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 89–90; Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message” and “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 15–31, 32–51. See also Peter J. Schwartz, “Aby Warburg and Cinema, Revisited,” *New German Critique* 139 (February 2020): 131.

43 M. Gonçalves, A. Krabbe, T. van der Maase, *Invisible Penal Labour*, Lisbon, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/79553408>.

The ambiguity of inside and outside is clearly deliberate, and we sense a tension in the situation: the man is suspicious and speaks with a voice of (possibly armed) authority (“Are you recording?” – “Yes.” – “You’re not a journalist, are you?”); the woman sounds as if she is putting him off with feigned innocence and neutral answers. Only at 1:36 do we learn that this is the outside wall of a prison, and suddenly realize that this is an image of an interdiction on images, an inexpressibility topos revealing a blind spot created by armed state power.

The project’s remakes of the Lumière film *Workers Leaving the Factory* express something similar. Except in the case of outdoor construction work, we are never permitted to look inside, and security at the gate is a frequent motif. Most of these films, too, are static. Antje Ehmann’s workshop journals reveal that the relative difficulty of access to industrial workplaces, combined with an inclination on the part of participants to film “folkloristic” subjects and street scenes,⁴⁴ inexperience in researching alternatives,⁴⁵ and sometimes a certain sociocultural blindness⁴⁶ mostly occluded the documentation of themes such as those that she and Farocki proposed early on in Bangalore: work at nuclear power plants, laboratory work, computer

44 Bangalore journal: “The only problem is that, so far, all the projects document the labour of relatively poor people, all with a traditional background. All of them involve processes to which access is easy, mostly on the street. It obviously won’t do to represent India solely as a dusty, impoverished country. We encourage participants to make sure to realize projects behind corporate walls, in laboratories, or in IT or other high-tech companies.” Antje Ehmann, “Labour in a Single Shot—Antje Ehmann’s Workshop and Exhibition Journals, 2011–2014,” trans. Peter J. Schwartz. Published in this volume, 56.

45 Tel Aviv journal: “It occurs to us that we need to establish a research group, because the artists understand nothing about research. Harun sometimes gets impatient with this. His tone in the seminar suddenly gets sharp, and I have to hiss at him quietly in German not to punish these nice people who are still here and are doing their best. Fortunately, he gives me a shocked look and apologizes. We make an appointment to meet six people in the lounge of our hotel to establish such a research group. We don’t just want street videos or labour done by poor people! While we’re explaining all this later on in the seminar, these six people show up. Now they’re sitting in the lounge and making it clear that they haven’t understood what the issue is. At this point, I would understand if Harun were to get annoyed again – but he is nice. And explains the problem for the fourth time.” Ehmann, “Workshop and Exhibition Journals,” 57–58.

46 Johannesburg journal: “It’s only now becoming clear – especially after another discussion with Nhlanhla about the situation – how extremely limited the radius of these students’ everyday reality actually is. I would never have imagined it. Almost all of them live in this university neighbourhood, in student housing, and pretty much never leave the area. The city centre is also too dangerous for them, they can’t move freely there. It’s crazy – I’m only now coming to understand that it’s not just mental laziness that’s obstructing them from discovering other themes or even researching them. This is really their only reality!” Ehmann, “Workshop and Exhibition Journals,” 93.

hardware production.⁴⁷ Ehmann's report on a single group factory visit in Alexandria also tells us that its owner cleaned up beforehand,⁴⁸ a circumstance to which one homegoing miner's comment in Łódź might be seen to reply: "Hey, boss, don't we have a beautiful coal factory? Fuck, you should shoot in the bathroom. What a fuckin' junk!"⁴⁹ This is, of course, another variety of constraint, one that the project negotiates with varying degrees of success. The project has blind spots, which Farocki and Ehmann worked hard to correct, but the image the project makes collectively, and sometimes singly, of those blind spots is in itself a valuable image.

The project's curation and exhibition involve yet another set of constraints. On the project website⁵⁰ is a choice of selection criteria for viewing a daunting number of films: subsets can be selected by project city, type of work, dominant colour, or workers leaving their workplaces; videos can also be viewed in various kinds of order, moving systematically or unsystematically through the array that is randomly generated each time that one opens the page. At the project's gallery exhibitions,⁵¹ the choices are somewhat reduced, and differently steered, by multiple stages of curation. These selection criteria effect a kind of aleatory editing or "soft montage" (Farocki's term)⁵² across the project as a whole, with the overall effect of prohibiting any definitive *Einstellung* (attitude) towards the project as a whole. If the problem with narrative film is that whichever way you cut it, you're going to end up with a story, the project responds by putting the editing into the viewers' hands (or eyes) – but not entirely: the choices we might *think* we want to make are inevitably complicated by the wealth of material, deflected along paths we never intended to take, and altered from point to point by what we are seeing in time. I cannot help but reflect that the path that I take through the project – my personal mental assembly of the composite film of world labour, of this global seed bank of labour images, collective both in its sources and

47 Goa journal. Also Hangzhou: "Harun admits that by now, in our fourteenth workshop, he's really exhausted with having to always discuss scenes of street labour. The cute little theme is getting on his nerves. (It's a running joke with him that we should really be having people film in a nuclear power plant.)" Ehmann, "Workshop and Exhibition Journals," 90.

48 Cairo and Alexandria journal. Ehmann, "Workshop and Exhibition Journals, 60–61.

49 Wojciech Domachowski, *Workers Leaving their Workplace* (Łódź, 2012). Also in Ehmann's Hanoi journal: "Our most promising participant – the man with an interest in street vendors – spent time in an enormous textile factory yesterday, where he made some marvellous shots (not entirely legally)." Ehmann, "Workshop and Exhibition Journals," 77–78.

50 <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/films/>.

51 <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/dates/exhibitions/>.

52 Harun Farocki, "Cross Influence / Soft Montage," *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, ed. Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun (London: Koenig, 2010), 69–74.

in its construction – is necessarily different from anyone else's. My image of world labour is different from yours. Which leads me to the politically important question: how does this world look to you?

What all this demonstrates is the way the Labour project's multiple formal constraints tend nearly automatically to generate estrangement effects that disrupt traditional attitudes towards work, and thus help us meditate on the conditions of its visibility. As in much of Farocki's work, the goal is to find ways to see anew what multiple interests – financial, political, social – have conspired with new technology, dominant media landscapes, and human psychology to blind us to. In the main, the *modus operandi* is Shklovsky's (and Brecht's) *ostranenie*, estrangement, *Verfremdung*: making strange, through art, what has been normalized or naturalized – and thus possibly reified or instrumentalized – in daily life. What was a statement in earlier iconographies has thus now become a more or less open question, as well as an invitation to empathy. The videos challenge us to recognize things formerly unrecognized, without allowing us to file the unknown away as if it were known. The stone is made *stony*... and we understand something of the labour of the person who has to lift it.

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5. One Shot, Two Mediums, Three Centuries

Roy Grundmann

Abstract

Proceeding from a discussion of translations of the German word *Einstellung*, this essay considers how the Labour project uses the technologies of film and video to meditate on attitudes towards work. The essay's first part discusses the cinematic qualities of several workshop videos and examines how viewers experience them aesthetically. Shifting the discussion to the project's exhibition modes as models of participatory (and potentially emancipatory) viewing, part two assesses the workshop's political impact in relation to cinema's legacy of effecting social change. Part three investigates how the workshop's online exhibition mode fares against modernist critiques of progress that have been used to polemicize against postmodern digital media. Inspired by film theorist Siegfried Kracauer's "productive lapsarianism," Grundmann situates the Labour workshop halfway between the emancipatory art of political modernism and the mercantile practices of "prosumer culture."

Keywords: documentary film, Siegfried Kracauer, online exhibition, viewer participation, *dispositif*, critiques of progress

Eine Einstellung zur Arbeit – this is the German title for Harun Farocki and Antje Ehmman's video workshop Labour in a Single Shot.¹ The English word "shot" and the German *Einstellung* both refer to the cinematographic shot, cinema's smallest building block. However, while "shot" connotes a

¹ I would like to thank Peter Schwartz, Gregory Williams, and Fatima Naqvi for their valuable feedback on this essay.

static, mechanical, and irreversible process, the German *Einstellung* implies malleability. It signals the possibility of change, raising questions as to what a shot could look like, what it might capture, and how it might be executed. Once we move beyond a filmic frame of reference, anyone who speaks both languages will notice that “shot” fails to capture the full meaning of the German word *Einstellung*. The latter means several more things, including “setting,” in the sense both of a technical device’s operational mode or speed and of a process of calibration. Most crucially, *Einstellung* also means “attitude.” As such, it is often combined with qualifiers such as “economic,” “political,” or “ideological.”

Eine Einstellung zur Arbeit is an apposite name for Farocki and Ehmann’s workshop. It suggests that film-making is a process that goes beyond the technical details of shooting, and as a motto it prompts workshop participants to ask certain important questions regarding their videos: why should work merit our attention as a cinematic subject? What are interesting ways of putting it on camera? Why not concern ourselves with work’s opposites and correlatives, such as play, leisure, or learning? One’s answers to these questions reveal how one thinks about the subject of work. Because *Einstellung* also refers to the act of controlling the camera’s angle and range, it hints at the circumstances in which the video shoot is embedded, but which lie beyond the frame. It thus makes clear that film-making never takes place in a historical, political, or sociocultural vacuum. Also at issue, then, is the film-maker’s relationship to the film’s subject. Particularly in the case of films addressing social issues or seeking political change, commitment goes beyond heeding received notions of documentary objectivity and accuracy. Film-makers with an activist attitude or *Einstellung* may be motivated to participate in the very process of change that their films document. Indeed, a documentary’s solidarity with the goal of change may be a key measure of its commitment.²

We can thus judge from its German title that Farocki and Ehmann’s video workshop aspires in every regard to help develop a conscious understanding of labour and our relationship to it: it moves us to ask how labour is politically, historically, and culturally embedded in the world and thematizes the ways in which filming labour may reveal these relationships. The workshop videos’ double mode of exhibition – both in an open-access online digital

2 Thomas Waugh, “Introduction: Why Documentary Filmmakers Keep Trying to Change the World, or Why People Changing the World Keep Making Documentaries,” in *Show Us Life: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*, ed. Thomas Waugh (Metuchen and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1984), xi–xvii.

archive and in gallery exhibitions Ehmann curated alongside and after the workshops – also resonates in the project’s German title, because the variegated manner in which we encounter the videos in this double exhibition mode influences how we feel about them and respond to them. Finally, *Einstellung* points us to the diverse ways in which Farocki experimented with representing work processes. His lifelong interest in analyzing labour through images was a foundational factor for the workshop, which may itself be regarded in turn as the culmination of his aspirations as a politically committed film-maker.

Over the course of his four-decade-long career, Farocki continually revised and updated his approach to filming labour. Few film-makers have possessed greater historical, theoretical, and practical knowledge of two of the dominant visual media technologies of the last 125 years: film and video. What began in the late nineteenth century as an imaging technology based on photochemical capture and mechanical projection turned into modernity’s biggest mass medium (a position it held for the first fifty to sixty years of the twentieth century), and has evolved, in our own century, into a multipurpose, multiplatform digital device for the inscription, storage, and circulation of information. Digital technology now pervades all regions of the globe and all parts of life.³ One shot, two mediums, three centuries – and the technological, historical, and artistic frameworks subtending this conceptual trifecta – will be the focus of my discussion of Labour in a Single Shot.

The workshop’s programmatic engagement with early cinema’s legacy makes it a privileged site for exploring what happens when aspiring film-makers retrace the steps of the pioneers of early cinema using digital technology. I mean to address in particular two important aspects of Labour in a Single Shot. One has to do with some of the implications of what has recently come to be called remediation – that is, with the incorporation of one medium by another.⁴ I explore how the project’s operative medium – the “new” medium of digital video – incorporates the “old” medium of film. Can the digital equipment with which the workshop videos are made be used to realize, perhaps even enhance, film’s potentials? In the first part of the essay, I survey a selection of videos with the aim of identifying their cinematic qualities and of exploring how viewers experience them aesthetically. Digital

3 Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 73.

4 On remediation, see J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). See also Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*.

media's coming of age has dislodged ontological questions from the centre of the debate on cinema's medium-specificity. Yet, as I intend to show, these videos remain cinematic in crucial ways, affording us an aesthetic experience that clearly stems from the cinema and which continues to draw on key aspects of the older medium. I shall use key tropes of film theory to ask what exactly constitutes this viewing experience, drawing in particular on André Bazin's understanding of the ontology and language of cinema and on Siegfried Kracauer's theorization of the cinema as "embodied" experience that mobilizes all of the spectator's faculties.⁵

My second concern is with the political impact of Labour in a Single Shot. I explore how the workshop may be viewed as advancing the legacy of cinema's efforts to effect social change, and I will investigate how this potential is technologically, historically, and socioculturally inscribed into the workshop project. The essay's second part thus shifts discussion away from the individual videos to consider the project's two exhibition modes – gallery and online archive – as models of participatory viewing that have at least the potential of turning viewers into agents of political (self-)emancipation. While each mode encourages its own form of active viewership, I make a systematic case for the virtues of online viewing, without ignoring the deleterious aspects of digital media culture.

In the third part of the essay, I will investigate how the workshop's online exhibition mode fares against modernist critiques of progress that have been enlisted in recent polemics against postmodern digital media. Here, my discussion will return to Siegfried Kracauer. While it was not until after World War II that Kracauer theorized film's unique mode of capturing reality, his interest in the photographic medium goes back to the 1920s, when he discussed photography in an essay that developed a pessimistic, but not altogether hopeless, critique of mass cultural decay. It held that photography, while embodying ephemeral and disposable mass culture, may potentially be repurposed. Its capacity to reveal culture *as* debris turns photography into a tool that helps us see how culture may in fact be "reassembled" differently. Therein, so Kracauer believed, lies photography's potential: it helps us see things in their provisional state, which, in turn, may help us change civilization's course. Kracauer's essay concludes that film can make good on this potential in another way. Film is able to "redeem" physical reality by making visible all that may easily be overlooked or forgotten. Because Kracauer considers cinematic experience in all its aspects to be an integral

5 On the concept of embodied experience, see Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), particularly the chapters on Kracauer.

part of the sociocultural and material fabric of society, he may teach us something about the intricate dynamics of digital media consumption that shape our own age. Inspired both by contemporary theorists' revisiting of Kracauer and by the Labour workshop's reanimation of an early version of film by means of a later one, I try to bring what I would call Kracauer's "productive lapsarianism" to a defence of digital video, whose virtues and limitations I discuss with regard to the online exhibition mode of Labour in a Single Shot. I thus situate the workshop halfway between the emancipatory art of political modernism and the mercantile nature of what media studies terms "prosumer culture."

1. Cinema's Immanent Qualities and the Question of Aesthetic Experience

Labour in a Single Shot instructs its students to use digital equipment while hewing close to early cinema's formal patterns and thematic concerns. Many of its videos match early cinema's formal complexity, boasting sophisticated *mise en scène*, intriguing camera placement, resourcefulness, and precision in converting the technology's limitations into aesthetic virtues.⁶ Consider *Canal*, a video made by Tran Xang Quang as part of the 2013 Hanoi workshop.⁷ It opens on a man scooping water into a wheelbarrow before pushing it down a canal's tiled length, past a coworker who is checking the cracks between the tiles. The camera tilts up to follow the wheelbarrow pusher towards a group of workers in the distance. Halfway between our worker and that group, we see another man, younger and better dressed, walking along the canal's right rim, possibly overseeing the construction work. By subtly shifting from medium to long shot, the camera widens our perspective on the nature and scope of the work and on the division of labour. *Cart Avenue*,⁸ made by Gautam Vishwanath, K. Surjan, and S. Marur as part of the 2012 Bangalore workshop, fluidly combines different angles and shot ranges, expanding its scope from an initial focus on the face of a man pulling a cart with a bulky freight to encompass his environment, a busy street lined with store fronts. As the merchant stops his cart for what appears to

6 On early cinema's formal complexity, see Thomas Elsaesser, "Louis Lumière: The Cinema's First Virtualist?," in *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable?*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Kay Hoffmann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 45–62.

7 <https://vimeo.com/76341647>.

8 <https://vimeo.com/59009850>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Tran Xang Quang, *Canal*, Hanoi, 2013.

be a wedding procession, the camera crosses in front of him, taking in the group. One of the young boys in the procession, realizing he is being filmed, starts to dance. Then, the camera returns to the cart puller, as he resumes his journey with an annoyed look on his face.

Canal and *Cart Avenue* exemplify the mainstays of cinematic realism: the cinema's capacity – via its mobilization of a single shot extended to a long take – to capture profilmic reality in a seemingly unhindered manner while at the same time allowing film-makers to control shot selection, framing, camera movement, angles, and focal range. The workshop videos repeatedly rehearse this combination of technological and aesthetic factors, which has preoccupied film theorists and practitioners alike. In *Canal*, for instance, the camera's careful calibration of its shot range so as to produce a mini narrative evinces filmic qualities theorized by André Bazin as the paradox between photographic indexicality and filmic codification. Despite differences of execution, every workshop video rehearses a similar tension between what the camera captures impassively, bypassing human agency, and what Bazin calls "plastics," a term designating such aestheticizing vectors as angles, framing, and lighting.⁹ The relationship between the ontologically inscribed and the creatively coded is further complicated by film's antithetical capacities as a time-based art: it records time objectively only to render subjective what it records. The longer the take, the greater the

9 André Bazin, *What is Cinema*, vol. I, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 13–14.

potential for ambiguity, one of the central rhetorical features of cinematic realism that invades the plainest and seemingly most “authentic” of shots.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Bazin’s understanding of cinema’s capabilities also influenced Farocki.¹¹ He, too, regarded the long take as ultimately interpretative, understanding it as a device through which “the great reality,” as he called it, could be made to signify, and which could act as proof that this reality was “capable of its own self-abstraction.”¹² At various moments, the long take has meant different things to different film-makers – including Farocki, who initially used it in a didactic way before gradually repurposing it.¹³ Film’s capacity for shaping recorded reality into an aesthetic representation – an insight also central to Bazin’s film theory but eclipsed by the canonization of his concept of filmic ontology – prompted some theorists to pay attention to the ways in which film addresses and, indeed, embeds the viewer as a materially and historically contingent subject. For Siegfried Kracauer, for instance, film cannot be thought apart from such vectors as the sensory, the psychological, and the cultural. Film, he argues, does not simply record the world; it reveals it to human experience according to a particular aesthetic principle – a central figure in Kracauer’s thought that, as Gertrud Koch put it, “demands that a specific relationship to the physical world be recognized.”¹⁴

10 Bazin, *What is Cinema*, 36.

11 Tilman Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm: Harun Farocki—Werkmonografie eines Autorenfilmers* (Berlin: b_books, 1998), 50. Together with Hartmut Bitomsky and Ekkehard Kaemmeling, Farocki published the first selection of Bazin’s essays available in German translation.

12 The wording in quotes constitutes my own translation of a statement Farocki made in a publication accompanying his film *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* (Between Two Wars, 1978), quoted in Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 50, in which Farocki expresses hope that the great reality signals that it is capable of a self-abstraction [“daß die große Wirklichkeit einmal ein Zeichen gibt, [f]ähig ist zu einer Selbstabstraktion”]. While this sounds like a Brechtian acolyte’s desire for producing “Gesinnungsästhetik” (party-line aesthetics), in fact it arose out of a radical 1970s scepticism, shared by left-wing media theorists, that reality could ever be accessed outside of language and discourse.

13 According to Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 88, 95–98, Farocki at least initially used the long take not to celebrate the fine ambiguities that come with capturing the profilmic, but to forcefully drive home an abstract idea by repeatedly showing the same scene or sequence with minimal variations, at times adding choreographed elements (and thus fictionalizing it). Brechtian as it may be, this approach is far from dated. Jacques Rancière has recently claimed that “[t]he real must be fictionalized in order to be thought.” See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 38.

14 Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 104.

For Kracauer, film possesses a “marked affinity for the visible world around us.”¹⁵ In fact, he identifies four central affinities for the visible world that photography and film share, affinities that make them uniquely suitable for revealing the world, for presenting it in a way that demands to be read rather than merely observed:¹⁶ the affinity for capturing unstaged reality (“catching reality in its flux,” which brings out its most genuine qualities); the ability to record and reveal what Kracauer terms “the fortuitous” (exemplified, in his view, by photographic representations of the city and its “haphazard contingencies”); the photographic medium’s affinity for suggesting endlessness (representing fragments rather than totality); and its affinity for capturing the indeterminate (“transmitting raw material without defining it”).¹⁷

The aesthetic effects resulting from these ways of capturing reality are widely evidenced in *Labour in a Single Shot*. As we view *Cart Avenue*, for instance, our gaze travels across the image’s richly textured surface, on display particularly in this street scene bustling with people and lined by a dense tapestry of store fronts. We are in discovery mode, experiencing what Kracauer identified as the photographic medium’s double capacity for recording and revealing. Bazin and Kracauer both reject the notion that film is a transparent window onto the world, but their understanding of film aesthetics differs in key respects. For Bazin, the camera is a tool with which to penetrate space – a process through which it charts an ontological link with a real-world referent – and with which to render formal complexity in depth and through duration. Kracauer, by contrast, understands camera reality as surface reality. For him, film is a kind of membrane for spectators to experience the world as a flattened display of real-world objects and formal constructs. While he was intrigued by film’s capacity to record reality, for Kracauer, as Miriam Hansen has explained, the photographic sign could not be reduced to its “resemblance or analogy with a self-identical object,” nor does Kracauer view the image’s photochemical bond with the referent as positivist proof of the veracity of the image. Rather, as Hansen goes on to say, “the same indexicality that allows photographic film to record and figure the world also inscribes the image with moments of temporality and

15 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xlix.

16 See Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke, “Introduction,” in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 4–5.

17 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 18–20.

contingency.”¹⁸ These complex visual codes want to be engaged by all faculties, consciously and subconsciously, intellectually and sensorily. Viewing an image is a tentative process in which reality does not present itself all at once, but rather reveals itself as the fragmented, dispersed materiality to which the cinema and its viewer equally belong.¹⁹ This way of making the world visible constitutes what Kracauer calls “the redemption of physical reality”: “We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavoring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmentized.”²⁰

Reading Bazin and Kracauer side by side allows us to explore the full complexity of the Labour videos. *Canal* and *Cart Avenue*, for example, fluidly reframe the image over time, in the process raising more questions than they answer. What, for instance, is the relationship in *Canal* between the worker in the canal and the younger, better dressed man walking along its rim? And what is going through the mind of the cart puller in *Cart Avenue*? He seems annoyed by the intrusive camera, but did he initially feel flattered by its interest in him? Was the filming timed to intersect with the procession crossing the cart puller’s path, or was this encounter pure happenstance? These questions might be posed by followers both of Bazin and of Kracauer – though with different emphases and implications. While I by no means want to dismiss the conceptual potential of Bazin’s theory to address the subject at hand, my discussion will, for two reasons, proceed with a focus on Kracauer. First, Kracauer’s film theory is doubly corporeal. It links the body of the cinema, including its assorted components that later theorists have termed “apparatus,” to the viewer’s body, with all its sensory and intellectual faculties. Kracauer thus understands cinematic experience as integral to the material and sociocultural constellations of our world. This way of thinking about cinema seems promising because we can relate it to the trope of *Einstellung*, whose multiple technical, logistic, psychological, and ideological dimensions are implied in the German title of Labour in a Single Shot.

My second reason for orienting myself towards Kracauer is that his recognition of film’s ability to “picture transient material life, life at its most ephemeral”²¹ reflects a particular kind of materialism. His way of explaining

18 Miriam Hansen, “Introduction,” Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xxv.

19 Gemünden and von Moltke, “Introduction,” 4–5.

20 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 300.

21 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, xlix.

the world tentatively and through its molecular details (from the bottom up, so to speak) has been termed “micrological.”²² This is suggestive with regard to Labour in a Single Shot, because it helps us appreciate how the videos’ intimate scale may help them reveal physical reality at its most minute and fleeting. It may not surprise that Kracauer, in explaining his approach, makes reference to early cinema. “Significantly,” he writes, “the contemporaries of Lumière praised his films – the first ever to be made – for showing ‘the ripple of the leaves stirred by the wind.’”²³ But a “micrological” approach to Labour in a Single Shot may also help us see certain political implications of the workshop’s two digital exhibition modes. In their respective ways, the gallery and the website both shun the impression of an all-inclusive panorama in favour of an open-ended mosaic of fragments. This privileging of the fragment over the whole and of partial over synthesized perception echoes Kracauer’s views on epistemology, specifically his scepticism towards the totalizing ambition of Enlightenment thought.²⁴

Before I return to the mosaic-like nature of the workshop videos in my discussion of its two exhibition modes, I would like to take a closer look at several of the videos with regard to their cinematic qualities. While the high resolution of the Labour videos’ digital image may set them apart from the graininess of early cinema that attracted Kracauer, I aim to show that they still share in film’s capacity to capture physical reality in its complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions. Consider Taisia Krugovyh’s video *Mannequins* (Moscow, 2013)²⁵ and Chaoran Li’s *Welcome to Wall Street* (Hangzhou, 2014).²⁶ *Mannequins* is a static shot of a storefront filled with undressed mannequins that are being organized by three clerks. The clutter of torsos creates a visual excess that is compounded by the foot traffic in front of the store. Several of the Labour videos present this type of small merchant setting in tantalizing detail. Krugovyh’s video stands out for the flatness of its image, whose detailed surface lends the frontal perspective a certain artificiality, and for the way it links the headless mannequins to

22 For a discussion of Kracauer in terms of micrology, see Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 95–96.

23 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, xlix.

24 See also D. N. Rodowick, “Harun Farocki’s Liberated Consciousness,” in *What Philosophy Wants from Images* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 75–76. While Rodowick’s essay centres on the relationship between Farocki’s film-making and Theodor W. Adorno’s theoretical approach to images, the essay opens with a reference to Kracauer’s notion of liberated consciousness, an idea developed in Kracauer’s “Photography” essay, which became one of the leitmotifs of critical theory.

25 <https://vimeo.com/72370700>.

26 <https://vimeo.com/96440272>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Taisia Krugovyh, *Mannequins*, Moscow, 2013.

the passersby who, because of the camera's low position, we see only from the waist down. This visual association becomes ever more apparent over the course of the video's running time. Duration and camera position thus effectively foreground the commodified nature of fashion and of society in general. *Welcome to Wall Street* uses those same tools to similar effect, turning our viewing into a process of reading the image over time. The video focuses on an employee of Hangzou's Welcome to Wall Street language school, who has positioned himself down the corner from his firm at a busy intersection in order to hand out promotional materials to passersby. The video achieves nuance, even poignancy, through the contrast between the air of respectability the clerk attempts to project with his business attire and the menial task he performs. This contrast is only enhanced by his failure to attract customers and by his garish umbrella with "Welcome to Wall Street" printed on it. The locals' indifference to the clerk's emulation of American business iconography makes us gradually realize how globalization reproduces capitalist success myths even as it modifies them.

Three videos from the 2013 Boston workshop exemplify what Kracauer identifies as the photographic medium's affinity for suggesting endlessness. Their respective mises en scène pivot on the concept of the fragment, which conveys not finitude but the opposite. *The Absence of Work*,²⁷ by Joana Pimenta and Philip Cartelli, features an overhead shot of a light table, on which transparencies of parts of a palm tree are being arranged in a

27 <https://vimeo.com/79404921>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Joana Pimenta and Philip Cartelli, *The Absence of Work*, Boston, 2013.

puzzle-like manner. The illuminated puzzle gradually comes together, but the video at least initially keeps viewers in the dark about the exact nature of the work it shows. Its title seems to mock the workshop's mission of filming labour. Eventually, however, we gain a larger, if still ironic, perspective on the theme, both through the completed image of the palm tree – a tropical tree, which, at least for Bostonians, may symbolize vacation, and thus the absence of work – and through the soundtrack, which references another such absence by featuring a radio debate on the government shutdown that was looming in 2013, when the video was made.

Paul Foley's workshop contributions, *Crane Shot*²⁸ and *Handout*,²⁹ mobilize the tension between the fragment and the (imagined) whole in other ways. *Crane Shot* structures its visual field with three elements: the camera's long shot view of a team of zoo workers mending a fence in the background, the presence of a second fence in the foreground, and the cropping of the frame. The scene looks mundane until a large bird, a crane, stalks into the frame and turns towards the camera, then exits. Seconds later, it reappears, only to cross the frame in the other direction. Its back-and-forth movements draw attention to the frame, turning it into a kind of proscenium arch under which an increasingly droll spectacle unfolds. The scenario soon becomes theatrical, as the video invites us to project intention onto the bird – indeed, to invest it with “attitude.” Its stalking and staring may be motivated by

28 <https://vimeo.com/101001495>.

29 <https://vimeo.com/79422705>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Paul Foley, *Crane Shot*, Boston, 2013.

curiosity or territorialism. In the manner of experimental ethnography, the video inverts the conventions of the kind of wildlife observation in which visitors observe animals from a safe distance. In *Crane Shot*, the zoo employees in the background take the place of the animals, while the bird in the foreground assumes the role of game warden or tour guide. This anthropocentric projection fills the vacuum we experience when confronted with enigmatic nature. *Crane Shot* shrewdly capitalizes on two of the medium's affinities, as described by Kracauer: its ability to capture nature in flux, and its ability to turn the indeterminacy of physical reality into meaning.³⁰

Foley's second video, *Handout*, likewise precludes any notion of completeness, but this time, theatricality is already inscribed into the profilmic space captured by the video. It shows a surgery performed on someone's hand, but the patient is shielded from view by a surgical sheet arranged like a curtain. On this side of it, a nurse assists a surgeon, who is operating on the hand sticking out from under the sheet. The video notably departs from the traditional practice of filming surgery in extreme close-up so as to afford scrutiny of the procedure. Instead, it is painterly, evoking depictions of surgery as a kind of theatre as we encounter them, for example, in the work of the nineteenth-century American painter Thomas Eakins. At the

30 With regard to Marcel Proust's notion of photography, on which Kracauer draws in his explication of the medium's affinities, Kracauer notes that "[the photographer's] pictures record nature and at the same time reflect his attempt to assimilate and decipher it" (*Theory of Film*, 20).



Labour in a Single Shot. Andrew Sala, *Musicians*, Buenos Aires, 2013.

same time, the camera's embrace of this highly staged view can also be read as a celebration of the film-maker having been permitted to document the procedure.

The film-maker's self-inscription into what is filmed is likewise palpable in *Musicians* by Andrew Sala (Buenos Aires, 2013),³¹ who capitalizes on his privileged access to an orchestra in the pit of a large musical theatre or opera house. But it is not only by placing himself inside the pit, in proximity to the musicians, that Sala makes good on his opportunity. When the concert is over, he continues to film. His camera is placed at an angle that constructs a line of sight connecting the musicians departing the pit in the foreground with spectators who, as they exit the auditorium's balcony and upper ranks, are visible only as tiny specks. This perspectival compression visually "redeems" the two human elements least visible in any musical theatre space: the musicians who invisibly support the spectacle from below and the less prosperous audience occupying the cheap "nosebleed" seats.

There is no lack of visual sophistication in the videos of *Labour in a Single Shot*. I would like to cite Darío Schwarzstein's *Ultra Violet* (Buenos Aires, 2013)³² as my final example. It neatly combines several of the aesthetic qualities discussed above. His camera is placed inside a media booth overlooking a horse racetrack (the video's title refers to the name of the race). The opening image shows the track, but our view is partially blocked by a

³¹ <https://vimeo.com/66931588>.

³² <https://vimeo.com/66932166>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Darío Schwarzstein, *Ultra Violet*, Buenos Aires, 2013.

monitor hanging from the booth's ceiling, showing a live feed of the horses storming out of the gates. We follow them on the monitor while keeping an eye on the window of the booth, expecting them to come into view on the far side of the track. This never happens. We try to reconcile our view of the empty track with the TV image of the racing horses. The camera tilts down to the commentator in the booth equipped with binoculars. He trains his sight on the empty track in the distance. Why don't we see what he sees? The camera then slowly turns left, as does the commentator, who still uses his binoculars. We now expect the horses to come into view through the booth's left window, but it, too, turns out to be blocked in part by a monitor, on which we see the race going through a turn. Only as the horses enter the final stretch do they come into direct view below the booth, tracked by Schwarzstein's camera, which follows the movement of the commentator's head. He still uses his binoculars even when the horses pass directly in front of him. The camera pans right to follow the horses to the finish line. While the booth's right window is unobstructed, our view is mediated by its protective tinting, which just happens to be violet in colour and in which we see a reflection of the commentator's silhouette. Instead of seeking direct visual access to profilmic reality, Schwarzstein's video is a meditation on what is shielded from direct view.

Farocki and Ehmann have succeeded with their agenda of returning students to the early days of cinema while training them on digital equipment. Not only are the videos cinematic through and through (proving as they do that the digital at this stage is no longer inimical to the filmic), but

they also evince specific similarities to the films of the Lumière brothers, the project's spiritual forefathers. These qualities directly result from a decision to turn constraints of budget and scale into aesthetic virtues. The creative execution of camera placement and angles (in *Musicians*), of framing (in *Crane Shot*) and reframing (in *Canal* and *Cart Avenue*), and of minimal narration (in *Welcome to Wall Street*) demonstrates that by embracing these limitations, film-makers may make their work look more interesting. Or, to reposition their approach within the context of film theory: their adherence to early cinema has helped them develop their own ways of showing "the ripple of the leaves stirred by the wind." It has helped their digital videos "redeem" physical reality, in Kracauer's sense.

In addition – as I have shown with my discussion of *Ultra Violet*, with its self-conscious camera, proliferating frames, and complex interplay of obstruction and revelation – "primitive" cinema's parameters of presentation are far from naïve; indeed, they encourage witty reflections on showmanship. Following *Ultra Violet's* camera in its inch-by-inch exploration of a dense surface of monitors, windows, and reflecting surfaces, the video inscribes the conditions of its own exhibition into its *mise en scène*, whether these are shaped by the installation architecture of galleries or the various kinds of personal screens through which viewers can access the workshop videos online. To chart the connection back to the Lumière brothers: the more "primitive" a film shoot may be – that is, the more pared down it is in approach and scale – the more aware it may become of being part of a larger field of media technologies vying for attention.

Needless to say, the conditions under which early cinema saw the light of day in tents, meeting halls, and cafés located on boulevards and fairgrounds are vastly different from those in which Ehmann and Farocki have chosen to display *Labour in a Single Shot*: that is, from the gallery or museum and the project's online digital archive. There are, however, intriguing analogies between the early cinematic and the contemporary exhibition modes. But before exploring these in detail, I would like to address a basic contradiction underlying discussions of early cinema's artistic "merit." We know that, unlike later figures such as D. W. Griffith, even such towering pioneers as the Lumières or Thomas Edison saw themselves less as artists than as inventors, industrialists, technicians, and tinkerers. The visual sophistication of their films followed so promptly on the heels of their technological discoveries that film historians felt compelled to attribute it in equal parts to artistic ingenuity and to technology. It would seem, then, that when it comes to "primitive" film-making, any distinction between a

given medium's already richly stacked toolbox and a given artist's creative reach into it may be vexingly small.

For *Labour in a Single Shot*, the tension between the amateur and the established artist has its own implications. In a discursive and institutional field wont to privilege individual creators, amateurs tend to be ignored, while established artists enjoy attention. When the 2015 Venice Biennale exhibited a sampling of the workshop videos, it firmly lodged them under the banner of Farocki and Ehmann's names. While such a choice is pragmatic, it is precisely the high quality of the videos – most of them made by relative or complete novices – that troubles received notions of art and artist in an environment firmly intent on upholding such notions. This should motivate us all the more to give special consideration to the political implications that have traditionally underpinned the concept of the amateur or newcomer in contradistinction to the canonized virtuoso. To be able to appreciate how these may affect the workshop's position within the tradition of political cinema, we need to take a longer historical view.

The workshop model is a legacy of political cinema. It is a distant heir to the revolutionary film and art collectives of the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1960s, these were revived in modified form by the governments of liberal Western democracies to serve various reformist agendas. Instead of aiming to overthrow the governments that financed them, such workshops abjured militant agitation in favour of education. *Labour in a Single Shot*, too, is a child of such a state-subsidized initiative, conceived in co-operation with Germany's Goethe-Institut, whose recruitment criteria are based on artistic merit, not political conviction. At the same time, the spirit of May 1968 remains within the workshop's political DNA by virtue of Farocki's own political past. Having come of age as a political film-maker just before May 1968, Farocki shared in the period's fervour. During his time at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB), a newly founded film school, he was part of a student film collective that, like Jean-Luc Godard's Dziga Vertov Group, claimed the Soviet film-maker as ideological father and namesake. But soon thereafter, Farocki would evolve from agitator to documentarian, jettisoning the approach of the militant provocateur seeking to eliminate the boundary between art and direct action.³³ He redefined himself as an agent of enlightenment involved in a political struggle, who has accepted that

33 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 99.

“filmmakers cannot make revolutions but can only provide ‘working tools’ for those who can.”³⁴

This notion also informs the videos made by Farocki and Ehmann’s workshop students. Although their contributions generally lack the classic “Vertovian sense of urgency and fervour,”³⁵ the workshop continues to place film-making in the service of education and political emancipation. Labour in a *Single Shot* aims to intervene against the invisibility of labour in a fully digitized world shaped by globalization and neoliberalism. In addition, when we trace Farocki’s evolution from film-maker to theorist to teacher to workshop co-founder, we see a gradual widening of agency away from singular authorship towards a much larger number of creative agents. This shift rehearses the logic of the collective. It represents political cinema’s aspiration to not only lay bare the means of production but also to share them with those it aims to empower. At the end of this widening of agency stands one more author to be considered: the viewer. No matter how many paths it took, modernist cinema’s agenda of promoting active spectatorship found its overarching expression in its quest to eliminate the divide between makers and viewers. Digital technology has dramatically raised the stakes of this process. It has exponentially increased the number of “users,” but its fully commercialized nature has also triggered a set of caveats, one of which concerns the nature of what is now called the “prosumer.”

Before I explore how digital technology shapes our encounter with Labour in a *Single Shot* in part two of this essay, it is useful to recall that the seeds of this technology – indeed, the very notion of technological innovation – are part and parcel of the modernist teleology of self-renewal. But rather than simply reshaping film, the workshop’s digital technology reshapes the very parameters for film viewing. Whether the videos are viewed in a private, sedentary manner on a PC or in a public, ambulatory mode while strolling through a gallery or using a mobile phone, the two ways in which the workshop videos are exhibited create a range of viewing options that hold the potential for transforming viewers into makers, and passive recipients of knowledge into active learners. To properly locate Labour in a *Single Shot* within this evolution – at whose beginning there stood the singular figure of the artist as creator and mentor, and at whose end there stands the machine as facilitator of group learning – we need to go back to Farocki’s discovery, in the early 1970s, of magnetic analogue video.

34 Waugh, “Introduction,” xiv.

35 Waugh, “Introduction,” xii.

2. Cinema and Social Change: From Viewing to Participation, from Intellectual Montage to “Click Authorship”

Keenly aware of film and media’s instructional potential and intrigued by how modern communications technology might be used against its intended purpose, Farocki took an interest in video the moment it appeared on the European scene. He first encountered it during his visit to the 1967 Knokke Film Festival and began working with it the following year.³⁶ What intrigued him in particular was analogue video’s capacity for instant overwriting and transmission. Until then, video had been available only to industrial and state media or to artistic elites. Realizing that video would soon become accessible in consumer-end versions, Farocki sensed its potential for being retooled into a new device for learning, a machine that could break the top-down instruction mode of conventional teaching. For Farocki, video thus seemed poised to take a place alongside film both as an organ of agitation and as a tool to increase viewers’ analytical abilities.³⁷

Farocki understood that video’s innovative way of making meaning rests partly upon its mobility, which allows it to target the human sensorium in changing places and constellations. His first video, *Wanderkino für Ingenieure* (Travelling Cinema for Engineers), sought to alert science students to the manufacturing of harmful products (potentially used for military purposes) by their future employers. Farocki made it as a contribution to the “technology campaign” of the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (extra-parliamentary opposition), a student-driven political protest group that was formed in response to the disillusionment with parliamentary politics in West Germany in the late 1960s. The video features scripted work descriptions of four engineers foregrounding industry’s enlistment of workers in the manufacture of harmful products. The film was made with the new Ampex system, then a cutting-edge technology using video tape that, while not editable like film, enabled easy retakes as well as replay on multiple monitors.³⁸ Farocki showed *Wanderkino für Ingenieure* at universities by transmitting it on monitors placed across campus. Because video’s minimalist aesthetic, pared-down contents, and physical mobility enabled it to “follow” viewers into diverse reception settings and to insert

36 On Farocki’s first use of video see Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 54 and 82–87.

37 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 87.

38 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 86.

itself into their routines, Farocki hoped that it would make learning more varied and thus more effective. Indeed, his recognition of the virtues of context-specific viewing anticipated a new approach to nonfiction film. Video's "installational" mode seemed to offer new ways for documentaries to lay claim to "real, shared existence" without worrying unduly about the pitfalls of documentary objectivity. Rather than merely learning to doubt images, viewers could use them to develop partial or "situated knowledges" about what they showed.³⁹ While Farocki also remained invested in an anti-illusionist cinema, this new "installational" mode of viewing – demonstrated at that historical juncture by video rather than film – seems to have intrigued him for (among other things) its reparative rather than paranoid potential.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, however, *Wanderkino für Ingenieure* did not resonate with viewers the way Farocki had hoped. This failure showed him that video's pedagogical potential is not necessarily increased merely by diversifying its viewing contexts. To close what he must have perceived as a kind of semantic and experiential gap, one needed to change the film's internal structure along with its exhibition venues: "Had we been able to change the film, we would have ended up making a film about the autonomy of learning."⁴¹ His own learning experience inspired Farocki to write an article on how to use video to construct a computer-supported "audiovisual learning machine" that would have enabled viewers to select different parts of the video on different monitors and would have given them the freedom to play, replay, and stop these videos so as to allow discussion with other learners – in

39 Erika Balsom, "The Reality-Based Community," *E-flux Journal* 83 (June 2017), n.p., <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/>. Balsom borrows the concept of "situated knowledges" from feminist theorist Donna Haraway, whose warning against the detrimental effects of a social constructivism taken too far Balsom reformulates as a call that nonfiction film not relinquish "a needed claim on real, shared existence." While Balsom makes no mention of Waugh or Kracauer, her approach to contemporary documentary is similar to my own assessment of cinema in terms of political commitment and aesthetic experience. Balsom's approach is particularly intriguing with regard to a discussion of Farocki's exploration of multiple media formats in the early 1970s, because the kind of "installational viewing" she proposes is not bound to a particular mode of exhibition, be it the cinema or the gallery.

40 Following Balsom's insight that feminist theory has to teach us certain things about documentary film, my use of "reparative" vs. "paranoid" is borrowed from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's assessment of feminist queer reading practices. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading or Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 123–151.

41 Harun Farocki, "Staubsauger oder Maschinenpistolen – Ein Wanderkino für Technologen," *Film* 12 (1968), 1, 7, quoted in Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 86. (My translation.)

other words, to watch interactively.⁴² This plan never materialized, but critics have noted that Farocki's vision clearly anticipates the use of digital technology for group learning scenarios,⁴³ a development now fully realized by the multiplatform streaming and editing devices available to online communities, and thus also to the online viewers of *Labour in a Single Shot*. But even the workshop's gallery exhibition mode is already present in incipient form in Farocki's idea of distributing monitors across campus.

If magnetic videotape became available to the avant-garde in the mid to late 1960s as a televisual medium to be used, against its intended purpose, to train viewers to think critically in a new way, different from self-reflexive film, *Labour in a Single Shot* continues this project with digital video. This advance is both a step forwards and a means of reconnecting our futuristic present with past media traditions. The workshop's declared affinity with early cinema is evident not only in the mode of production and the style of its videos but also in the architectures it creates for us to encounter these videos. Farocki and Ehmann capitalize on a broad similarity, already noted by Thomas Elsaesser, between early cinema's technological and cultural heterogeneity and the digital era's numerous technologies and user modes that account for its heterogeneous developments.⁴⁴ Tom Gunning's important characterization of early cinema as a "display of attractions" structured by a frontal, presentational mode suggests further affinities to the exhibition-oriented logic of a digital media project such as *Labour in a Single Shot*. As I have indicated in my discussion of the "installational look" of one of the workshop videos, *Ultra Violet*, these qualities make the workshop's indebtedness to the Lumière films even more obvious. If early cinema celebrated illusionism, it did so, as Gunning notes, for illusionism's own sake rather than to tell a story and suture a point of view, as became more and more typical of the narrative techniques that Hollywood introduced in the 1910s and that would heavily shape the studio system's so-called "classical" era, which lasted from the 1930s to the 1960s.⁴⁵ The end of this era allowed

42 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 86–87. Baumgärtel traces Farocki's interest in a "learning machine" catering to several students at once (although in an individuated manner) to his understanding of video as interactive television and to his general interest in pedagogy as an academic field – particularly in the concept of group learning (Gruppenschulung) that emerged in the 1970s.

43 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 86–87.

44 Elsaesser, "Louis Lumière: The Cinema's First Virtualist?," 50.

45 See Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 114–133.

early cinema's presentational mode, which had been displaced by classical Hollywood, to return in a different form. It re-emerged in the multimedia experiments of Expanded Cinema and video art, but also in left-leaning appropriations of television in the United States and Germany. Spotty and liminal as most of these efforts may have been, they succeeded in wresting cinematic and televisual technologies away from their traditional function of shoring up dominant ideologies and confirming the sociopolitical and cultural status quo.⁴⁶

While not all video art of the 1960s and early seventies was political, video's potential for spatial dispersion posed a radical alternative to the conventional cinematic apparatus and to the metapsychological effects attributed to it, which were termed its *dispositif*.⁴⁷ Defined by film theory as a set of looking relations that take part in technology but exceed it, the *dispositif* was believed to turn the cinema into an agent of deception – a machinic heir to Plato's cave – that coerced spectators to submit to its illusionism.⁴⁸ When video and Expanded Cinema set out to retool the components of the apparatus, the notion of the *dispositif*, formulated to describe the looking relations facilitated by these components, was retooled along with them. Its transformed mode and enlarged scope are astutely captured in Michel Foucault's redefinition of the *dispositif* as a heterogeneous ensemble of implicit and explicit laws, assumptions, propositions, and relations.⁴⁹ The comprehensive nature of this definition, which goes far beyond the cinematic, explains why the concept of the *dispositif* has received a new lease on life also, and particularly, in the academic field of moving

46 See Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 54, on the various strategies with which the avant-garde and the left on both sides of the Atlantic "de-authorized" (*entautorisierten*, 54) hegemonic media in the 1960s and 1970s, a process that, according to Baumgärtel, was already set in motion with the emergence of television, and later home video, as consumer-end technologies and mass media. On the use of those technologies specifically by the American avant-garde in the mid 1960s, see Roy Grundmann, "Masters of Ceremony: Media Demonstration as Performance in Three Instances of Expanded Cinema," *The Velvet Light Trap* no. 54 (Fall 2004), 48–64.

47 See Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1974–1975): 39–47.

48 According to apparatus theory, the cinema materially shapes illusion into a viewing position capitalizing on unconscious desires to take the image for proof of one's selfhood, a process that installs spectators in a fixed place while feeding their delusions of transcendence. But how much of this was accomplished purely by technology became subject to revision in apparatus theory. On Jean-Louis Baudry's evolving view of the *dispositif*, see the useful essay by Frank Kessler, "The Cinema of Attractions as Dispositif," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 57–70.

49 Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1971–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194.

image media studies, which has been undergoing its own diversification and expansion. Once transformed into a tool for interdisciplinary theory, the concept of the *dispositif* could be applied to any kind of “new media,” including sprawling video installations and multimedia projects. While such mediascapes do not abjure what Foucault conceptualizes as power’s disciplinary force, that force no longer emanates from the singular point of the projection booth to circulate through the movie theatre. Its reach is more dispersed. It can never be fully escaped, but it can potentially be redirected.

Continually in search of emancipatory modes of media consumption and inspired by the booming gallery, museum, and biennale scene’s avid embrace of digital video, interdisciplinary media theory has thus lavished much attention on the epistemological and experiential potential of gallery-based media art. Its exhibition modes, which encourage contemplation and learning without forgoing the sensual, are widely believed to ensure mentally and physically active viewership. Galleries’ open spaces give visitors the freedom to pursue their individual itineraries and interests while at the same time shielding the art experience from the distracting and banalizing forces of the world outside. However, recent critiques of how galleries and museums now exhibit video and digital media art have demystified the gallery’s image. Erika Balsom, for one, has cautioned against the auratization of the gallery experience, arguing that it rests on a reductive mapping of passive versus active spectating onto architectural differences between the movie theatre and the gallery, “as if to conflate physical stasis with regressive mystification and physical ambulation with criticality – a claim that holds true on neither end.”⁵⁰ Balsom supports her argument with Gilles Deleuze’s understanding of the *dispositif*, which amends Foucault’s by attending to the “flexible and fragmented form of power linked to data flows and an abolition of interior/exterior distinctions.”⁵¹ This take on power, when applied to media exhibition, suggests that the *dispositif*’s very dispersal, often said to constitute gallery spectating’s greater degree of freedom when compared with moviegoing, is in fact a new form of control.

We should note that one reason for film and media theory’s favouring of the gallery is that many of the film-makers who continue to interest film and media theorists adopted galleries and museums long ago as their screening venues of choice, mostly for the sake of exposure. A gallery or

50 Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 51.

51 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7, cited in Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, 51.

museum's institutional setting and cachet ensure that any exhibition there is automatically defined as an "art event." Labour in a Single Shot is no exception. During Farocki's lifetime, galleries would have been ill advised not to capitalize on his name – even if the exhibitions were curated by Ehmann and the Labour videos were made by laypersons. The workshop's other exhibition venue, the online archive, has features and functions that differ starkly from those of the gallery and that diminish it in comparison to the gallery as a place to view art, as will become clear. Displaying the videos for easy browsing, the Labour website has a functional interface with drop-down menus, search functions, and columns listing statistical information about the workshop locations. The emphasis seems to shift from art to data – an impression reinforced by the website's neutral design and the digital archive's "uncurated" look (in contrast to the exhibitions). While both exhibition modes of Labour in a Single Shot require visitors to be proactive in seeking content, the activities performed by online visitors are not automatically associated with experiencing art. Instead, they turn visitors into web "users." The archive's permanence as a storage site and its ease of access compared with that of the site-specific exhibitions further deprive the web archive of the kind of aura that, rightly or wrongly, has been attributed to gallery spectating.

Before I make a case for the virtues of the online exhibition of Labour in a Single Shot, I must acknowledge that my argument is hardly self-evident. Whenever I tried to steer conversation towards a comparison of both exhibition modes during the Boston and Berlin conferences on the project, the responses I received were overwhelmingly in favour of the gallery. Beyond being appreciated as a useful archival tool, the online venue tended to be perceived as just another website at risk of being drowned out by all that's "out there" on the web, especially on YouTube. Geared towards maximizing participation and visibility for profit, YouTube has been charged by media theorists with creating a false sense of transparency. It gives its users a myriad of choices facilitated by sorting algorithms, user-generated links, and tag clouds, to whose internal logic they are not privy.⁵² Because user dynamics are shaped by a set of infinitely expanding vectors that Thomas Elsaesser has grouped under the rubrics of contiguity, combination, and chance,⁵³ YouTube's effect is both "epiphanic" and "entropic," to use Elsaesser's terms. Dragged along from one video to another, viewers may make some marvellous discoveries, but will just as likely be confronted with

52 Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*, 226.

53 Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*, 220.

“the heat-death of meaning” and “the ennui of repetition and of endless distraction.”⁵⁴

Current cultural concerns about internet technology are too manifold to be debated here in full. I shall discuss the online component of Labour in a Single Shot with regard to one key issue – user participation – which exists both as a larger sociocultural phenomenon and as an issue of individual usage. When the internet systematized relations between users and the marketplace, the industry that promoted internet technology quickly co-opted user participation by incorporating it into its business models.⁵⁵ Politicians and business leaders coined colourful metaphors such as “information superhighway” and “cyberspace,” whose utopian and U.S. spin sought to dispel scepticism regarding whether and how internet users might have any say in how the internet was being built technologically, organized economically, and run as a provider of media content.⁵⁶ While utopianism thus became an integral part of the industry’s promotion of technological progress, the language in which it was clad based the utopia on free market principles and the role of entrepreneurs.⁵⁷

Labour in a Single Shot clearly poses an alternative to the commerce-driven logic of YouTube and other online platforms. But its ethos, no matter how indebted it may be to various aspects of socialist thought, is hardly anticapitalist. One might call it “capitalist-reformist” in that it continues to operate, out of necessity, within a capitalist framework, which it however seeks to reshape as much as possible towards principles of equal distribution of knowledge and power. The workshop’s mission is thus not far removed from what historians of social media have described as the pioneering spirit of the internet’s early years, in which a vision of social progress (including responsibly rationalized labour, free access to education, and community network building) within a capitalist framework was not necessarily a contradiction in terms, but rather expressed the genuine if naïve hope that a technological revolution could bring about a new society similar to the one envisioned by the counterculture of the 1960s.⁵⁸ Labour in a Single Shot

54 Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*, 226.

55 See the lucid and comprehensive analysis by Mirko Tobias Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 11–13.

56 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 13, 26–27. See also Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

57 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 26.

58 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 29–30. Drawing on the work of internet historians, Schäfer points out that the 1960s counterculture’s recognition of the socially progressive potential of computer

retains some of these aspirations, while shunning the profit motive. To select participants for the individual workshops, Farocki and Ehmann had the staff of the regional Goethe-Institutes hosting the workshops vet applicants' portfolios. Thus, even the online archive housing the videos represents the result of a selection process. But in contrast to YouTube's commercial logic of maximum exposure and bankability, participation in the workshop promised no fame, nor has it directly led to financial rewards or careers for the video makers. The videos are not ranked in terms of user popularity, and the website remains free of commercials. Its thematic self-enclosure and the absence of certain functions for digital tagging privilege "informed" browsing. These features spare users many of the entropic effects Elsaesser attributes to YouTube. Buffering online visitors from the virtual noise of its internet surroundings, the online archive may thus be said to act as a digital correlative to the gallery. This is not to say that what Elsaesser characterizes as contiguity, combination, and chance lose their relevance – but, as we shall see, they retain a positive connotation.

First, however, I want to make one further point about user participation's sociocultural dimension. At issue is how the website's supplementary data about the project mitigate the internet's commercialism and its false sense of collectivism. A key element of the rhetoric of technological progress accompanying the internet's early years was the mystification of user collaboration by comparing it hyperbolically to the "incomprehensibly well-organized actions of bees, ants or human crowds."⁵⁹ Such metaphors misrepresented user activity as a form of collective agency gushily characterized by one commentator as "the phenomenon of emergence."⁶⁰ The website of Labour in a Single Shot decidedly counters this logic. Its "Concept" column (included in the drop-down menu under "Project") informs users about the workshop's mission and provides the dates and locations of all the workshops. The website thus makes visible its own history and also gives users a sense of the regional and cultural specificity of its components. Further, it openly

technology and information networks was keenly seized on by "advertisements, manifestos, policies, and media coverage in the emerging new market in the 1990s," all of which generated what he terms an "imago" of social progress that drew on the 1960s. See also Schäfer's discussion of CISCO's early years, 30–34.

59 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 35, with reference to James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York: Anchor, reprint edition, 2005), and to Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (London and New York: Penguin Press, 2008). Schäfer surveys a number of sources for additional examples.

60 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 35, with reference to Harold Morowitz, *The Emergence of Everything: How the World Became Complex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

attributes authorship to the individual participants by placing their names underneath their videos and by listing all contributors in a separate column, broken down by workshop cities. In doing so, the website clearly announces Labour in a Single Shot as a workshop – that is, as a media pedagogy project basing itself on principles of small group education and aiming to produce highly individual and diverse films. While the mission and agenda of the actual workshops are clearly defined, the educational benefit and use of the videos (how, in what order and combination, and to what end they may be viewed) are left to viewers to determine. As in a gallery, viewers are free to explore the videos alone or in groups, though solitary use might be more common. In working with the website, there is no incentive for users to network with each other, much less to collaborate on shared projects and work towards prescribed goals as part of an event experience. Thus, the website militates against the “global village” myth that shaped the internet’s early years and that has only been amplified by social media, which heavily rely on “trending” and other vectors of mass popularity that play up rather than dispel the myth of a collective “we.”

Although it uses factual data to counter the rhetoric of transcendence that heavily shaped the image of participatory culture during the internet’s early years, the workshop website does more than merely furnish users with data. It enables interactive viewing – which brings us to the topic of individual usage. Before I discuss the website in this regard, I want to acknowledge that many of the operations I describe below are also common to commercial sites such as YouTube. I would argue, however, that by foregrounding interactivity intellectually, cognitively, and bodily, this particular *dispositif* gives individual usage an explicitly epistemological role instead of making it a consumerist instrument. Browsing the website, we may choose to watch whole videos or only bits and pieces of videos. Rather than being swept along by an endless chain of new videos that, in the manner of YouTube, automatically load one after the other, the onus of selecting videos is on us. We can allow the web catalogue to guide our interests as we deliberately move from video to video. Or we can repeatedly view the same video to study it over and over again, a choice that would honour Farocki’s own intention to use film as a medium to analyze the repetitive nature of work processes. Using several browsers at once, we can create a composite of several videos. We could even go so far as to treat the website somewhat like a kaleidoscope of forms, figures, and movements. This would help us adopt a “micrological” approach that, as it were, forswears a totalizing panoramic view of labour representations. Such viewings might combine a few seconds of a Berlin bicycle messenger with a bit of video following a



Labour in a Single Shot. Screenshot of project website.

Boston trolley conductor and another showing an Amazon River shrimper. But whether we view the videos in such an admittedly rather experimental manner or meander through them successively in a sort of digital *flânerie*, our user mode is shaped by the videos' archival status, which enables us to retrieve and play (with) them. The website of *Labour in a Single Shot* thus also presents a notable similarity to the exhibition mode of early cinema, in allowing a frontal, nonimmersive engagement with what is ultimately not a single image, but a bricolage of images.

The website's partaking in video's replay technology affords another parallel to early cinema: the capacity for contrasting still and moving images. This mode was pioneered by early cinema exhibitors, who sought to maximize the spectacle of, say, viewing a moving train by first showing a single frame as a still photograph before moving the film through the projector and thus animating the image, to startling effect.⁶¹ Eventually, consumer-end video equipment transferred this capability to users through its basic "play" and "stop" functions, which were part of a VCR's remote control before being integrated into home computers.⁶² Digital technology continues to make viewing ever more interactive. Whether operated by a mouse, a trackpad, or a touchscreen, these tools have the potential to turn

61 Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment," 118.

62 Anne Friedberg, "The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Hodder Education Publishers, 2000), 439–452.

viewers into makers in ways we might characterize as “click authorship.” Click authorship has profoundly transformed our engagement with moving images. It has changed how we view a film – any kind of film, provided it exists in digital form and can be viewed on a computer. It affects how viewers process the image flow, while giving them the option to change it.

To be sure, *Labour in a Single Shot* makes only limited use of the highly evolved user technology that exists today. Its possibilities for click authorship are modest. And yet, the digital capabilities of its online archive give users a relatively high degree of control over its videos. We are able to view them successively or repeatedly, fully or partially, singularly or side by side. Of course, these capabilities are not restricted to noncommercial, educational sites. But the *Labour* project’s thematic focus and pedagogic mission aligns them with modernism’s understanding of cinema’s basic properties as tools waiting to be repurposed. On closer inspection, they also align with Farocki’s approach to film-making, which is itself closely tied with his lifelong interest in visual technology’s emancipatory potential. While his Brechtian convictions initially mandated a narrowly antibourgeois focus, his later essay films reflect a deepening aesthetic and historical awareness of the full potential of using images. For instance, in the manner of early cinema, his essay films both animate and halt or freeze images, though in Farocki’s case, the intended purpose is not to create astonishment, but to educate – that is, to teach spectators to analyze how images combine to construct meaning.

This form of media pedagogy, which asks what an image is and which manifests itself programmatically in the titles of such Farocki films as *Ein Bild* (*An Image*, 1983) and *Wie man sieht* (*As You See*, 1986), is expanded in *Schnittstelle* (*Section/Interface*, 1995),⁶³ a digital video installation Farocki made in 1995, at a halfway point between his early 1970s experiments with analogue video and his cofounding of *Labour in a Single Shot* in 2010. Made the same year as his essay film *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* (*Workers Leaving the Factory*), from which it excerpts both the original Lumière film and similarly themed footage he had taken from other films, *Schnittstelle* transposes the question “How are moving pictures formally organized?” from the domain of film (where it was perhaps most famously explored in Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929) to that of digital video. In conceiving this installation, Farocki took another step in shifting the

63 My reading of *Schnittstelle* is indebted to Christa Blümlinger’s lucid essay “Incisive Divides and Revolving Images: On the Installation *Schnittstelle*,” in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), 61–66.

production of meaning away from the film-maker/author and towards the viewer. He had initiated this shift in his early 1970s experiments with video as a learning machine before exploring the possibilities of active viewership in his essay films and finally merging viewer and author in the online *dispositif* of Labour in a Single Shot.

Schnittstelle was installed to operate across several display areas. In one, two monitors simultaneously showed sequences from Farocki films, which were then integrated on a third monitor located elsewhere. The installation thus prompts spectators' mnemonic faculty (as they move between areas) and introduces them to the structuring principles and semantic possibilities of montage. Notably, however, *Schnittstelle* also proposes another way of combining images: through a digital composite, which features two separate images embedded in one and the same frame. One of these image pairs shows Farocki in an editing suite engaged in the process of editing film. One of the two paired images is a medium shot of him sitting at an editing table using his hands to physically cut and paste the filmstrip; the other, slightly smaller image shows those hands in close-up. As Christa Blümlinger points out, Farocki physically cutting the film strip aptly illustrates "how filmic dimensions like time and motion are capable of being translated into haptic or tactile terms."⁶⁴ Furthermore, by virtue of its own genesis, which involved giving manual commands to a computer, the composite that features these two images of Farocki expands the order of the haptic and tactile from the filmic or analogue to the digital.

Schnittstelle is yet another labour-themed piece of media pedagogy in Farocki's canon that anticipates Labour in a Single Shot – and particularly its online *dispositif*. It enables us to glimpse the potential for use harboured by the workshop's online archive beyond its function as a holding place for the videos. In principle, the kind of click authorship inscribed into the digital composite of *Schnittstelle* can also be performed by online users of Labour in a Single Shot. While the website's capabilities may be more restricted than those of Farocki's editing software, its operational principles are similar to those Blümlinger identifies for *Schnittstelle*: the temporal sequencing of images is complemented by their spatial reordering; the combination of images remains unique to the one who perceives them or who does the reordering; the image combinations form an open, not a closed, text; and finally, the cut is freed from its narrowly syntactic function and assigned to the workings of associative montage.⁶⁵ In fact, I would go further than

64 Blümlinger, "Incisive Divides and Revolving Images," 63.

65 Blümlinger, "Incisive Divides and Revolving Images," 63–65.



Harun Farocki, *Schnittstelle* (Section), 2000, video, colour, 23 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the Harun Farocki Institut.

Blümlinger and argue that it exceeds the function traditionally ascribed to montage. As an interval space, it enables viewers to create their own image combinations instead of processing those given to them by the modernist author.

3. Reassessing History's Rubble: From Left Eschatology to Micro Activism

Farocki's engagement with digital media can be understood as a process that, while building upon the principles and ideals of modernist cinema, convincingly updated these for the postmodern age. But how might this update translate to the online exhibition mode of *Labour in a Single Shot*? More specifically, how might an open-source website contribute to the honing of critical consciousness in a world whose saturation with digital images has long eclipsed the anaesthetic effect of earlier mass media? A recurring impulse, when observing the sweeping impact of digital media, has been to look for a philosophical vantage point outside the digitized world, a point from which to reflect from a distance upon the technology-driven

media environment. The *locus classicus* of a critique of progress from within modernity is Walter Benjamin's Angel of History – the angelic figure in Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*, which Benjamin reads as an allegory of our inability to control the catastrophic fallout from the progress of civilization.⁶⁶ Rosalind Krauss and George Baker were among the first to invoke Benjamin's eschatological vision of progress specifically for a critique of digital media. In an introduction to the hundredth issue of *October*, a 2002 special issue devoted to the concept of obsolescence, Krauss and Baker claimed to have found inspiration in Benjamin's liberating outsider view onto "the totalizing ambitions of each new technological order" afforded him by his writing on the new media of his own era.⁶⁷ For *October* to adopt Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* position seemed the only plausible response at a moment, so the introduction reasoned, when the "critical media that this journal ha[d] been dedicated to theorizing and historicizing – once new media like cinema and photography – have been simultaneously declared obsolete by the new 'new media,' through all the burgeoning technological forms of their digital transformation."⁶⁸

October directed its scepticism not only against what its editors called "new 'new media'" but also against the emergence of a whole academic field, which, by declaring these new media forms of interest to the academy, implicitly shifted the question of obsolescence from the object of study to those who study it.⁶⁹ What New Media Studies heralded as a new era of digital mass communication, the editors of *October* perceived as an ominous sociotechnological and intellectual sea change. While their exasperation on one level represents but another instance of modernism's general scepticism towards postmodernism, the explicit connection the editorial drew between digital media and obsolescence indicates that, by the early 2000s, the stakes had been raised: at issue was the idea of progress itself. Modernists had importantly theorized film and photography as inventions carrying key political functions (film as revolutionary tool) and holding considerable

66 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 249. Benjamin reads Klee's figure as having his face turned towards the past, perceiving history as one big catastrophe. His impulse to warn civilization is thwarted by a storm blowing from Paradise that propels the angel backwards into the future: "This storm is what we call progress."

67 Rosalind E. Krauss and George Baker, "Editorial," *October* 100 (Spring 2002): 3–5.

68 Krauss and Baker, "Editorial," 3.

69 Krauss and Baker found one writer worth singling out from this new academic field – Lev Manovich, whose book *The Language of New Media* was published a year before the *October* Special Issue on obsolescence and would become one of the field's foundational texts.

epistemological value (film's instructive ability to both reflect and refract the modern subject's psychology and social relations). But these values and functions were now being upended by the "new 'new media'" of the digital revolution. The perceived effect is not only one of obsolescence, but indeed of invasion and expropriation, whereby digital media (and their theorists) invade the spaces of formerly new media and, or so it would seem, render these (and the theories established around them) antiquated.⁷⁰

In modernists' pessimistic assessment of the digital revolution, discourses of medium-specificity converge with analyses of capitalism's corrosive effects into a broad-based critique of progress. This critique is reminiscent of the rhetoric Hans Blumenberg identifies in his "secularization thesis," which claims that discourses that sought to delegitimize the fledgling modern age projected onto it an eschatological image of progress.⁷¹ In this purely ideologically motivated projection (itself but a symptom of the insecurity of the modern age), progress is blamed for the general waning of society's theological substance and accused of transforming this substance into secular functions. But progress, as Blumenberg argues, is self-generating. Its provenance is the realm of theory and aesthetics, not theology, and while it continues to coexist with the latter, it does not warrant the scapegoat function it is accorded in eschatological conceptions of the course of history.⁷²

The rhetoric Blumenberg identifies also shapes debates about digital technology, such as *October's* discussion of obsolescence. In what may be regarded as a second-order secularization polemic, modernists have cast digital media in eschatological terms by attributing to them the very risks that were initially also linked to formerly new media (which, however, have since acquired their very own aura of authenticity, and thus a quasi-religious or cult status). Digital media are perceived as endangering the subject. They threaten to deceive us (with a world of simulacra) and to rob us of our judgement (by luring us into manic consumption). While the visual

70 This fear is openly articulated by T.J. Clark, who, in *October's* special issue on obsolescence, discusses Tony Oursler's installation *The Influence Machine*, which projects onto a cloud of steam (belonging to the iconography of modernism) a face ranting about the internet: "For some reason the internet has invaded the world of these spirits and taken over their wavelength." See T.J. Clark, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Steam," *October* 100 (Spring 2002): 154.

71 Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983). See especially chapter 3, "Progress Exposed as Fate," 27–36.

72 Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 33–34. See also See Stefanie Baumann, *Im Vorraum der Geschichte: Siegfried Kracauer's "History – The Last Things Before the Last"* (Constance: Konstanz University Press, 2014). Baumann astutely reveals the influence of Blumenberg's argument on how certain modernists, such as Siegfried Kracauer, developed their theories of progress and history.

mass media of modernity are now widely perceived to have operated in a complex dialectic between politically productive and destructive tendencies, in the eyes of modernists, digital media carry no such complexity. They only intensify the anaesthetics of the postmodern age. It thus comes as no surprise that the *October* editors would summon Benjamin's image of the Angel of History in their attack on digital media, because this image clearly positions progress within an eschatological framework.

In the battlefield thus staked out, Farocki is of particular interest, because he defies the entrenched division between modernism and postmodernism – not least because his concept of progress, as we shall see, steers clear of eschatology. The fault lines between the modern and the postmodern age, when mapped onto Farocki's work, do not run between films and digital media works (his installations, all digital, have maintained his legitimacy in the eyes of such journals as *October*), but between these works' diverging modes of consumption. By stretching the concept of the active viewer to include online users of digital media – who some modernists tend to regard as duped subjects, as impassive consumers of cultural detritus – Farocki implicitly puts the modernist ideal of the active spectator to the test, asking if modernism has the courage of its convictions. This inclusion of digital “prosumers” in the modernist legacy forces us to ask how warranted it is for modernists to cast the digital revolution in an eschatological light. While that revolution may well have its own set of “totalizing ambitions,” it is specious to reduce the digital to those qualities. In Farocki's artistic trajectory, technological progress is what links modernism to postmodernism as a quality immanent to both. It includes his Brechtian use of the long take, the deployment of cinematic montage for essayistic structures, experiments with analogue and later digital video, and the migration from the cinema to the gallery. Because Farocki's career so clearly demonstrates the continuum between modernism and postmodernism, however, it may come as a surprise that he, too, has been linked to modernism's cherished image of eschatology – Benjamin's Angel of History.

In 1998, in a discussion of *Zwischen zwei Kriegen*, Tilman Baumgärtel likens Farocki himself to the Angel. Baumgärtel justifies making this comparison because of a scene in which Farocki is positioned with his back to the camera, facing the ruins of a half-raised foundry. His pose evokes Benjamin's reading of the Angel, who beholds the debris of civilization that is piling up before him faster than he can process. The character that Farocki plays in the film, *The Author*, states that the story he had wanted to tell was to feature all the machines of the defunct industrial site, but that his plan faltered on his inability to find any. With every torn-down factory he learned of, it felt less

possible for him to tell the story: "I don't have to blame myself for feeling this way. Things disappear from view before they have been half understood."⁷³ Yet, in a later commentary on the film, Farocki does not sound completely hopeless. He notes that he based *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* on a brief text about capitalism's exploitation of human labour.⁷⁴ He notes further that, when he first read the text, it had a "eureka!" effect on him: "I felt like I had found the only missing piece to complete a picture. That's when the long story of this film began. I was able to piece the image together from its shards, but this took nothing away from its broken state. The restored image was an image of destruction."⁷⁵ For Farocki, the debris of defunct foundries and other heavy industry constitutes part of the larger-scale rubble of history, as do the many images of this rubble. One gleans from Farocki's comments that he wanted to make its pieces visible, so they could be understood not as a seamless whole, but as a broken mosaic. For him, the fissures of this mosaic are the price we pay for progress, the scars we have gained from the struggle against being overlooked and forgotten.

Farocki's sober assessment of progress and his solidarity with its victims pose an evocative analogy to Benjamin's Angel of History, perhaps even an explicit identification with the figure. We do not know if this identification ever took place, but even if it did (consciously or subconsciously), knowledge in hindsight complicates our perception of the meaning Farocki may have accorded to it. Looking ahead to *Labour in a Single Shot*, we are moved to conclude that Farocki, while certainly wary of civilization's rubble, must eventually have decided that he no longer wanted merely to behold it, as his character The Author does in the scene from *Zwischen zwei Kriegen*. Evidently, he seized the opportunity to get closer to the rubble, to pick it up and work with it. What does this repositioning mean for *Labour in a Single Shot*? What kind of eschatology, if any, does the workshop website's digital *dispositif* imply?

Facing the website of *Labour in a Single Shot*, the first thing to note is that we cannot look at it the same way Benjamin's Angel of History beholds the rubble of progress. This is not because there is no rubble. At issue is not what one sees, but the point from which one sees it – that vantage point, which, in the case of Benjamin's Angel, privileges a singular and singularly passive view that, as it faces the world's destruction from a distance, ineluctably assumes a

73 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 114.

74 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 114. The author of the text is Alfred Sohn-Rethel, whose writings on industry, work processes, and the economy had considerable influence on Farocki.

75 Baumgärtel, *Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm*, 114.



Harun Farocki, *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* (Between Two Wars), 1978, 16 mm, b/w, 83 min.
Reproduced by kind permission of the Harun Farocki Institut.

messianic character. For us, there is something else of interest when looking at the Labour website: beholding its videos is but the first step. In contrast to Benjamin's Angel, we can act upon what we see, provided we actually want to use the website for its intended purpose, as an interactive archive. Its features do not altogether obviate the allegorical dimension the website arguably shares with Benjamin's reading of Klee's painting. They modify the allegory in a manner consistent with Farocki's cautiously optimistic vision that civilization can, in fact, be restored, provided it reflects upon its own brokenness. The digital interface exemplifies this vision in that it is structured like a mosaic, whose pieces, the individual videos, can be actively engaged with. A reading comparing Farocki to the Angel figure would thus conclude that Farocki held on to what constitutes the essence of Benjamin's allegory – observing the world's broken state and wishing to repair it. But such a reading would then be compelled to add that, for Farocki to act on his wish, he would have had to ignore the allegory's messianic logic.⁷⁶ I say "ignore"

⁷⁶ On this logic, see Gershom Scholem, "Benjamin's Angel," trans. Werner Dannhauser, in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 84–86.

rather than “abandon,” because Farocki’s comments in *Zwischen Zwei Kriegen* yield no evidence that any identification on his part with Benjamin’s Angel ever extended to the allegory’s messianic aspect. Farocki was no eschatologist. If anything, he can be compared to a Renaissance artist intrigued by the interplay of science, technology, and art. In the end, he decided to share agency by teaming up with Ehmann. Together, they taught others how to treat civilization’s debris like a mosaic, which they began to restore from within.

However “micrological” Farocki and Ehmann’s project may be, assessing its political implications prompts us to resituate its notion of progress within a new critical framework. While lacking bona fide messianic elements, this framework is not strictly secular either. It, too, concerns itself with broad-based and pervasive decline, but its lapsarianism rests on a certain materialism that regards history as a series of discontinuous new beginnings rather than as ineluctably moving towards its final destiny. This framework has likewise been furnished by critical theory, theory closely related to Benjamin’s. It belongs to Siegfried Kracauer, to whom my discussion now returns. At issue is Kracauer’s concept of the fragmented nature of modern society, for which he found a metaphor akin to Benjamin’s description of the debris piled up by civilization’s progress.

For Kracauer, this debris is exemplified by technologically reproduced mass culture, whose broken images he evocatively characterized as a *Scherbenhaufen* – a heap of shards. The image goes back to Kracauer’s 1927 essay “Photography,”⁷⁷ in which he discussed the medium in the context of Germany’s rapid sociocultural and technological transformation. The essay focuses on two qualities that, for Kracauer, exemplify photography: its ubiquity and its degraded visual quality.⁷⁸ Chemically deteriorating and frozen in a time no longer that of the viewer, photographs, so Kracauer argues, constitute an index of alienated, anaesthetic mass media. Yet Kracauer also sees a potential in the decayed materiality of photographs. Presenting “in effigy the last elements of a nature alienated from meaning,” photographs in their disintegrated state no longer support organic memories. Instead, they present the remnants of nature as a “warehouse,” whose provisional order is waiting to be reorganized: “It is therefore incumbent on consciousness to establish the provisional status of all given configurations, and perhaps even to awaken an inkling of the right order of the inventory of nature.”⁷⁹

77 Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1993), 421–436.

78 Kracauer, “Photography,” 432.

79 Kracauer, “Photography,” 436.

Kracauer's image of the heap of shards shares with Benjamin's notion of cultural debris the idea of disintegration. But where Benjamin sees only catastrophe, Kracauer sees both "the fallout of modernity and the possibility of doing it over."⁸⁰ The difference between Benjamin and Kracauer derives from several facts: Benjamin, as is well known, created this particular allegory of Klee's painting in 1940, after the pact between Hitler and Stalin had left him shattered, and shortly before he committed suicide while fleeing the Nazis.⁸¹ Furthermore, while Kracauer was influenced both by Benjamin's concept of history and by his mysticism, his own notion of history was not as negative as Benjamin's. In contrast to Benjamin, Kracauer accorded (limited) benefit to the use of generalizing historical principles and master narratives, provided that these were part of a more complex historicism in which the general and the particular are brought together in a composite view, whose uneven elements increase its hermeneutic potential.⁸² Finally, Kracauer was familiar with and inspired by Blumenberg's concept of progress. Its claim that progress is *sui generis* and fully secular (rather than secularizing) held appeal for him, because its pivoting on new beginnings (rather than on overdetermined fate) seemed compatible with his own notion of history as based on contingency and endlessness⁸³ – a notion that ultimately also informs such tropes as that of the heap of shards, no matter how eschatological they may appear at first glance.

But how feasible is it for us to apply Kracauer's notion of progress to postmodernity? How might his concepts of deteriorated photographs and of "cultural warehousing" be related to digital technology and, specifically, to the digital archive of Labour in a Single Shot? The workshop videos surely lack the patina of old photographs, whose deterioration over time bestows a semi-abstract, thinglike quality to their once glossy surfaces. But more important than any close phenomenological similarities between the two media are certain correlations with regard to how photographs and digital images circulate in culture. We note that the Labour videos, even more

80 Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 36.

81 This particular reading of Klee's painting is the final one in a series of readings Benjamin performed on the painting for nearly two decades. See Gershom Sholem, "Benjamin's Angel."

82 See Baumann, *Im Vorraum der Geschichte*, 296. Supported by substantial archival research, Baumann's study shows that Kracauer's concept of history is directly indebted to Hans Blumenberg, whom he knew personally and also corresponded with. See Kracauer's letter to Blumenberg from January 17, 1965, cited in Baumann, *Im Vorraum der Geschichte*, 296, and Kracauer's concept of history as formulated in *History—The Last Things Before the Last*, completed by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2014 [orig. 1969]), 203–206.

83 Siegfried Kracauer, letter to Hans Blumenberg from April 15, 1965, cited in Baumann, *Im Vorraum der Geschichte*, 294.

than visual mass media before them, have recyclability coded into them. They may look fresh and vivid, but they are subject to their own order of deterioration. But their archival status and availability for interactive viewing lends them a reified quality of their own – a quality that indexes, as it were, the material's own capacity for reuse. Displaying the fruits of a pedagogical project that, after all, is also about film history, the website of Labour in a Single Shot, if nothing else, is a site of extensive cultural recycling, whose originality resides precisely in the creative *rearticulation* of existing visual codes and representational traditions. Many of these codes and traditions were already established by early cinema during modernism's peak period.⁸⁴ Comparable to a photo album or the photo spread of an "illustrated newspaper" (*Illustrierte*) of the kind Kracauer describes in his discussion of photography's alienated mass cultural character, the Labour videos are presented in their own bound form – within the confines of a website that is itself part of a vast mediascape.⁸⁵

The website of Labour in a Single Shot thus relates to Kracauer's "heap of shards" metaphor in that the former, too, treats visual culture with its history and conventions as a warehouse for the storage of reified codes waiting to be recycled. At the same time, the images on the website do not look "lifeless," and they exist both in still and moving form. This suggests a further parallel to Kracauer, specifically regarding the evolution of his thinking from still photography to film. His "Photography" essay concludes by noting that the medium's "warehousing" effect may be enhanced when the images begin to move: "The capacity to stir up the elements of nature is one of the possibilities of film."⁸⁶ While his concern at that point was with cinematic montage, when we get to his postwar *Theory of Film* we see that what had begun to intrigue him about the photographic medium was film's capacity to record and reveal reality. Film retains the function of a "*force démoliteur*," to use Gertrud Koch's words.⁸⁷ But Kracauer no longer regarded it the same way as photography,

84 In a related comment on Farocki's essay films, Thomas Elsaesser notes that cinema's at once referential and allusive potential is guaranteed by its "vast store of images already present before any event occurs, but also always slipping away from any single event." See Elsaesser, "Introduction: Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist," in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, 15.

85 Elsaesser argues that, for Farocki, the photograph already had the function of a picture puzzle. See Elsaesser, "Introduction: Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist," 26.

86 Kracauer, "Photography," 62.

87 Koch, *Kracauer: An Introduction*, 95. For further background on Kracauer's epistemological shift, see Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 256. The lapsarianism of the "Photography" essay initially still guided Kracauer when he first began to gather ideas for systematically

that is, as a lifeless index (or “effigy,” as he termed it) of alienated nature. Instead, the book posits film as a vibrant aesthetic surface, whose vivid phenomenology owes to the medium’s capacity to record transient reality’s multiple layers onto a two-dimensional picture plane. *Theory of Film* reconceives photography’s alienated materiality into film’s ability to record reality without hierarchy or judgement. The result is a notable “indifference to sense and legibility” that in the last instance resists systematizing interpretations.⁸⁸

In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer terms film’s unique predisposition for making visible all that is part of the outside world (but has not been seen) “the redemption of physical reality.” Notwithstanding its materialist logic, however, Kracauer’s view of film remains obliquely informed by Benjamin’s mysticism. The idea of film redeeming physical reality, as Koch points out, is “bound up with Benjamin’s call for anamnestic solidarity – for dedicated commemoration of the dead, together with whom we wait for the day when the Messiah will come, the day when the dead are done justice.”⁸⁹ However, the way redemption functions in Kracauer’s film theory balances eschatology with his characteristically micrological view that film is able to capture physical reality in its smallest particles. Instead of projecting them onto each other, Kracauer lets eschatology and materialist analysis exist side by side.

Kracauer’s materialism also informs Harun Farocki’s artistic approach, and it registers in both the cinematic and post-cinematic aspects of Labour in a Single Shot. The cinematic aspects refer to qualities I have identified in my discussion of the Labour videos: film’s ability to capture and express contingency, indeterminacy, endlessness, and life in its fragmented form and ephemeral flow. These qualities make it impossible for us to mistake the videos’ lack of editing for an experiential and aesthetic break from the digital environment in which they are embedded. They are not windows

theorizing film while in exile in Marseille in the early 1940s. However, by the time Kracauer was able to systematize his ideas for the book, World War II was over. History had “gone for broke,” but the Messiah, central to other philosophers’ eschatological thinking, had not come. Nonetheless, for Kracauer, the realization of having survived the catastrophe prompted at best a cautious optimism that, in *Theory of Film*, registers as an understanding of the filmic medium’s radical openness and indeterminacy. The idea of history having gone for broke refers to Kracauer’s definition of history as a go-for-broke game (*Vabanquespiel*), in which mass culture’s progressive functions stand in dialectical tension with its destructive forces, themselves also an index of the destructive forces of industrial society. If humankind had been able to instrumentalize the progressive tendencies to its advantage, it might have been able to dodge historical catastrophe.

88 Miriam Hansen’s formulation of “an indifference to sense and legibility” here converges with Gertrud Koch’s notion of film’s “micrological” resistance to Enlightenment reasoning.

89 Koch, *Kracauer*, 106.

onto reality whose formal self-enclosure, as it were, might afford us an experiential reprieve from the digital media storm. They are part of that storm, constituting “the aura of history’s vast archive of debris, the snowy air reflecting the perpetual ‘blizzard’ of media images and sounds.”⁹⁰

Not only does the windows-onto-reality view ignore all that makes the Labour videos cinematic, but it also risks relegating the digital to the status of a lower-level facilitator of cinematic experience. As I have argued, the digital is indeed integral not only to how the videos are made, but also to their circulation, retrieval, and consumption – the latter epitomized by web browsing. But while it constitutes a post-cinematic form of spectatorship, web browsing is not nearly as new as is commonly thought. Certain ways in which online viewers engage with images parallel some of the more distracted, visceral, and subconscious ways that are also part of moviegoing. Thus, when we look for theoretical frameworks that might help us understand the supposedly sinister postmodern concept of progress that web browsing implies, we need to look no further than to modernist film theories such as that of Kracauer. While Kracauer never witnessed digital technology becoming accessible through consumer-end products, his concept of cinema spectatorship clearly anticipates some aspects of online viewing – particularly, its haptic dimension.

In an argument that remains of interest for assessing the value of Kracauer’s film theory for digital media studies, Gertrud Koch reminds us that Kracauer’s film theory was partly shaped by his biography, specifically his relationship to physical objects. His theory of the physical redemption of reality is rooted in his childhood obsession with the physical world of objects, to which he had a particularly tactile, intimate relation.⁹¹ For Koch, this relationship points to one of the underlying conditions of spectatorship in the cinema. As we grow up, “the domain of the visual, of showing and presenting things, merely substitutes eye contact for tactile contact with things.”⁹² The cinema, as Koch rightly claims, still enables us to experience this substitution in a sensuous way. In the cinema, the image itself becomes the object. Koch stops short of extending this notion of spectatorship to its

90 Hansen, 271. Hansen’s “blizzard” metaphor alludes to Benjamin’s reading of “Angelus Novus.” While the metaphor thus blurs the image of the storm blowing from Paradise with the debris the Angel perceives, this slippage, it seems, is already implicit in Benjamin’s reading, in which progress ultimately constitutes both the debris and the storm. This is how I read Gershom Scholem’s exegesis of Benjamin’s allegory in “Benjamin’s Angel,” 84–86.

91 Koch, *Kracauer*, 110. Koch references an anecdote by Theodor W. Adorno, a friend from Kracauer’s youth, who traced this intimacy back to Kracauer’s childhood.

92 Koch, *Kracauer*, 110.

post-cinematic iterations. But her emphasis on the tactile aspects of film viewing, which she supports with psychoanalytic film theory, nonetheless lets us take this step. This theory has read the contrast between the physically inactive movie spectator and the hyperactivity on the screen as generating a “somasochistic symbiosis, a ‘fort/da’ game in the sense of Freud’s theory of the transitional object with which the infant playfully learns to overcome its separation anxiety by making itself into the agent of a process of permanent disappearance and reappearance.”⁹³ If the cinema, particularly during its golden age, constituted a viable way of assimilating fragmented, shock-fuelled modernity through somasochistically inflected spectatorial mechanisms such as the *fort/da* game, interactive digital *dispositifs* may be said to hold a similar function within and for the digital age. To be sure, the mouse clicks, track pad commands, and touchscreen operations they require do not bring back actual physical objects either – the image itself remains the object and the spectator’s relationship to it remains mediated. But these operations, for better or worse, do stage the *fort/da* game more literally than film by doing something a projected film could not do (and neither was nor is expected to do), which is to add a haptic dimension to spectators’ engagement with the image.⁹⁴ Digital technology thus finds an additional way to capitalize on the primacy of the visual that is founded on our relation to the physical world of objects – a basic principle that already

93 Koch, *Kracauer*, 111.

94 I do not mean to posit the haptic as something that the cinema was lacking and that now makes it more complete, courtesy of digital technology. In analogy to assessments of the historical impact of sound film technology on film viewing, I argue that digital technology, by furnishing film viewing with a haptic component, has added one more facet – and a nonessential one at that – to the expanding notion of what constitutes cinema. Whereas the coming of sound quickly made us forget that the silent film experience was already complete in itself (its “lack” of sound was a retroactive projection facilitated by the repression of knowledge about its fullness), the ascendancy of digital film with all its operational possibilities has openly inscribed the past into its progress by rehearsing a key phenomenon of the exhibition of early or “primitive” film: the viewer’s keen awareness of the machine that mediates the viewing (see Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment,” 125). For two key assessments of the impact of haptic components of film viewing, see Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), who traces the impact of haptic engagement from VR technologies to the Nintendo “PowerGlove” as a prosthetic digital device (145), and Ute Holl, “Cinema on the Web and Newer Psychology,” in *Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema*, eds. Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg, and Simon Rothöhler (Vienna: Synema, 2012), 150–168, who criticizes the tendency to pathologize digital image consumption because such consumption accords centrality to the haptically performed feedback (162–163) and appears to leave little room for contemplation. Holl’s essay must be placed in dialogue with Deleuze’s expanded notion of the *dispositif* in his essay “Postscript on the Societies of Control.”

subliminally informed Kracauer's concept of film's physical redemption of reality.

Transplanting Kracauer's ideas to postmodernity does not violate them. His modernist views of cinema and visual culture also help us understand postmodernity. They allow us to theorize the Labour workshop's use of digital technology and its implicit concept of progress with the same richness and nuance that informed Kracauer's assessment of visual mass media's place in modernity. As a comprehensive proposition for preserving on film all that is at risk of being forgotten or ignored, the notion of "the redemption of physical reality" also helps us grasp certain political and ethical concepts that underpin the Labour workshop's politics of representation. The project's political import can be measured already by the sheer number of videos about work that it has generated so far. Many of these videos – and particularly those showing work that is unpaid or underpaid, or considered negligible, unworthy, or disreputable – reflect the workshop participants' desire to document, as so many of Farocki's own films have, history's marginal subjects. But the Labour videos also "redeem" reality by explaining the hidden intricacies of work processes. This view "from the bottom up" has an opaque matter-of-factness that is highly intriguing, as it shows *to us* (rather than explaining *for us*) how profoundly our bodies, movements, behaviour, and material existence in this world are shaped by these processes. This, too, is something with which Farocki concerned himself, as is already indicated by the titles of some of his films, such as *Etwas wird sichtbar/Before your Eyes – Vietnam*.

While Kracauer's conception of film teaches us much about the qualities of the individual workshop videos, his notion of "cultural warehousing", while arising from his lapsarian view towards the "new" media of his era, implies a notion of progress that helps us appreciate the political potential of the "new" new media of our own age. Given that Labour in a Single Shot claims interrelated legacies of collective art making and viewer emancipation, the project, it would seem, only stands to benefit from digital video's new way of collapsing the means of production with the conditions that shape video's circulation and consumption. And the Labour website's interactive capabilities make "cultural warehousing" all the more concrete by adding a haptic dimension to it. As it infuses Benjamin's allegory with some measure of agency, however miniscule, Farocki and Ehmann's workshop project suggests that progress does not have to be imagined in eschatological terms. But neither is there any reason for unbridled optimism. We simply have to accept that the workshop's full educational (and thus political) impact

“remains to be seen”⁹⁵ – to use a formulation that paraphrases Kracauer’s own cautious optimism.

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95 Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 261. The apostrophized words are Miriam Hansen’s, paraphrasing the mood in which Kracauer, during the early war years, projected the future in his initial notes for *Theory of Film*. This mood, as Hansen goes on to say, painted the future as bleak, but also as “remarkably open and unpredictable [...]”

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6. The Body and the Senses: Harun Farocki on Work and Play

Thomas Elsaesser

Abstract

The essay discusses Harun Farocki's preoccupations with filming work routines and practices (often associated with manual labour) and his enduring concern with simulation, make-believe, and role-play (often connected with the eye, particularly as an instrument for control and surveillance, but also as an organ easily deceived in its assumption of knowledge, and occasionally deceived for pleasure and play). Elsaesser places Farocki's work in relation to cinema's evolution from novel recording technology to mass medium and from being a tool for political emancipation to being an instrument of surveillance. The essay discusses *Labour in a Single Shot* in relation to – and as a culmination of – Farocki's earlier approaches to filming labour in his 1970s workers' films and in his cinematic meditations on the concept of *Verbund*, a principle of recycling and repurposing apparently unrelated or even mutually antagonistic elements. The essay demonstrates how *Verbund* becomes Farocki's own working method, as he "bends" art in his attempt to negotiate questions of artistic production under a capitalist system that tends to play artists out against each other. This attempt entailed moving away from traditional modes of film production and exhibition towards digital film-making and its new exhibition spaces.

Keywords: workers' films, *Verbund*, film authorship, political cinema, digital cinema, gallery exhibition

Among Harun Farocki's abiding preoccupations across his long career and prolific output are his interest in work, work routines, and work practices – often associated with the human hand and manual labour.

He had an equally enduring concern with simulation, make-believe, and role-play, often connected with the eye – in particular, with its ability to act as a control instance and as an organ of monitoring and surveillance but also as an organ easily deceived in its assumption of knowledge, and occasionally also deceived for pleasure and play. Both preoccupations are in evidence among the Lumière-esque films, made in different parts of the globe, subsequently assembled and put online under the title *Labour in a Single Shot*.

Two brief examples at the outset: for work, think of the Vietnamese iron lady, who in Tra My Pham's video *Metal Lady* (Hanoi, 2013)¹ bends crooked steel rods straight before handing them to another woman, who hands them to a man who bends another kink into them, in acts of repetition and recycling that function like a silent dialogue among three people, synchronizing not just their activities but also their gestures and bodies. For play, and the pleasurable deception first of eye then of ear, consider *Street Artists*, a video by the Mingshen group (Hangzhou, 2014),² which is set in a Chinese subway station. Focusing on a street musician positioned near a subway, the camera soon retreats from the musician and, while keeping him in focus, backs into a hallway that eventually connects to another platform with another musician positioned around the corner. The camera's final angle affords a view of both musicians. While the corner around which they are positioned prevents them from seeing each other, and would thus seem to put the camera at an epistemological advantage over the two musicians, the sound remains unified in this deceptively simple tracking shot. We can identify only one sound source and only one tune being played over its full duration, which raises numerous questions about the relationship between the two musicians and their music – questions that undermine the epistemological certainty granted by the video's visuals.

Hand and eye, work and play are, of course, also connected to film-making, and especially the kind of film-making practised by Farocki himself, with its focus on editing and montage. But the themes of work and play also encompass a particular archaeology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which the emancipatory aspirations and social utopias of the nineteenth century turn into unfounded hopes, false expectations, and cruel deceptions and failures in the twentieth century. To put it somewhat schematically, ever since the monastic rule of *ora et labora* – “pray and work” – there has existed the notion that work is something that not only

1 <https://vimeo.com/76341649>.

2 <https://vimeo.com/96445729>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Tra My Pham, *Metal Lady*, Hanoi, 2013.



Labour in a Single Shot. Mingshen Group, *Street Artist*, Hangzhou, 2014.

has its spiritual counterpart but also furthers our nearness to God and puts us on the path of salvation. *Ora et labora* mitigates the fact that work, as the bodily exertion of sustaining oneself “by the sweat of one’s brow,” is the consequence of original sin and follows the expulsion from paradise.

By the late nineteenth century, due to migration from the land into the cities, with people no longer tilling the fields but toiling in factories, honourable work had become the labour power that the proletariat had to carry to market. Thus, throughout the Marxian tradition, there is a tension:

on the one hand, there is wage labour as slave labour, considered as both evidence and expression of capitalist exploitation; on the other hand, there is work as a means of self-fulfilment and self-realization. The latter is true to the motto: “to each according to his needs, from each according to his abilities” (of which *Jedem das Seine* / “To each his own” has become the cynically perverted echo). Farocki’s films – and quite a few of his writings – are extended self-interrogations of this tension between the dignity of labour and the dehumanizing conditions often imposed on it.³

In the second half of the twentieth century and into the present, this relationship of the body and the senses to machines has changed yet again, as has the image of the worker. The voice-over commentary in Farocki’s essay film *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik/Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995) puts it like this: “Today, you cannot tell whether someone in the street is coming from work, has been doing sports at the gym, or is returning from collecting his welfare check.” In other words, work, leisure, and the loss of work have become – at a certain level of abstraction, which manifests itself in outward appearance as interchangeability – different modalities of each other. If human beings were once economically defined by their labour power and socially defined by class or citizenship, they now tend to present themselves as consumers, their identity defined by brands and leisure activities.

Extrapolating from Farocki’s take on the eponymous subject of workers leaving the factory and turning it into a factual statement, one can retroactively view the Lumière’s 1895 film by that title as emblematic of a whole subsequent part not only of film history but also of democracy and politics. The film identifies the site of a crucial contest throughout the twentieth century: that between the worker/factory system and the

3 Numerous films by Farocki document the changes and transformations in how work has, since the nineteenth century, impacted the body and the senses, as working bodies had to approximate the performativity of the machines and adjust to their rhythm, rather than the machines serving as extensions of the human senses: a perversion for which capitalism, the factory and the assembly line used to stand as living proof. Films such as *Eye/Machine I* (2001) and *Eye/Machine II* (2002), for instance, chart the increasingly asymmetric relationship between human hands, eyes, and machines, as bodies seem to become the weakest link in a chain of automated interaction that promotes the eye at the expense of the hand, and promotes seeing as registering and controlling (*kontrollieren*) over seeing as recognizing and understanding (*erkennen*) – thereby also putting an end to the epistemological equation according to which “to see is to know.” These transformations of the body and the senses in relation to machines and weapons are often cast in Farocki’s work as meditations about distance and proximity, with actions conducted in remote locations having consequences that must be accounted for at home.

cinema/entertainment system. For what the Lumière film says, in effect, is that as these workers are leaving the factory, the cinema (in which they see themselves) is already waiting for them. This would be the cinema's allegorical truth for the first half of the twentieth century. But if motion pictures are envisaged as the necessary compensation for the rigours of the industrial labour process, then they also already carry with them the Facebook lure of the uploaded selfie, especially once one adds that political self-representation through the ballot box or street battles would eventually turn into commercially facilitated self-representation or self-fashioning in the shopping mall or on social media. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, ever more workers indeed left the factory for good, replaced not just by robots and software programs but also by screens and monitors, of which the first screens in Paris and Lyon were the innocent antecedents. Conversely, we note that today's computer terminals are analeptic techno-mutants of chronophotography and the cinematograph that – now firmly installed both at the workplace and inside our homes – gather data to be mined and processed.

In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin made the case for the cinema's emancipatory potential by arguing, among other things, that it puts at the disposal of the masses a privilege hitherto reserved for the aristocracy: namely, *otium*, leisure, which is to say the privilege of ostentatiously “wasting time” and thus expending energy without doing useful work, while not being accountable to anyone. In the context of labour and working-class existence, the need to waste time, however, was itself a function of a specific Western modernity. This modernity, via the factory's assembly line and the railways' fixed timetable (the technologies of industrial production and the technologies of mass transport), was to standardize, regiment, and synchronize time to a point where leisure became synonymous with escaping the constraints of clocked and measured time.

Thanks to chronophotography (literally, the “writing of time with light,” but in practice involving the breaking down of the movements of bodies into segmented and measurable units of time and motion), the social uses of cinema as “a wasting of time” to escape surveillance and control, and its political-economic uses as the very instrument of surveillance and control, therefore inescapably enter into conceptual conflict and irresolvable tension with each other. I have argued elsewhere that the cinema is based on a technology (chronophotography) whose social uses (in the workplace, as time and motion control) function as the causes of a problem (alienation from one's own productive capacities in Marx's sense, fatigue of the body in

the sense of Anson Rabinbach's analysis of the "human motor")⁴ for which the cinema's artistic uses (telling stories, providing a window on the world), at least since the late 1910s, appeared to be the solution.⁵ But at the same time, by being implicated in the dual process of taking away what it gives, the cinema should be called the disease for which it promises to be the cure (to modify Karl Kraus's dictum about psychoanalysis). But perhaps it also works the other way round: might not the cinema be the cure that allows us better to understand the disease? In other words, can we better understand the bodily regimes of energy expenditure, the relation of leisure to work, the obsession with sports, workouts and bodily directed "care of the self," as has become the norm in contemporary Western society, a state of things to which Farocki seems to be alluding? It is this second possibility I want to explore in what follows, with regard to Farocki's analysis of work and its relation to the human body and mind across several of his works, each marking an important way station in his thinking.

First Attempt and Fatal Temptation: The *Arbeiterfilme*

The beginnings of Farocki's films about work date back to a time when film-makers made determined attempts to document and give a voice to the situation of what was then called "the working class," using the cinema as medium and film-making as means. This was a characteristic move among directors especially in West Germany and Berlin, and it led to the brief period of the so-called *Arbeiterfilme*, or "workers' films."⁶ However tempting and well-intentioned this gesture of solidarity with the victims of capitalist oppression may have seemed in the wake of May 1968, when student protesters, along with leftist intellectuals, tried to mobilize the workers on behalf of liberation struggles, there were those – and Farocki was among them – who saw grave dangers in the means, the methods, and the strategies deployed. It is instructive to revisit the ferocity with which Farocki and the writers around the journal *Filmkritik* attacked what they saw

4 Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

5 See chapter 10, "Cinema, Motion, Energy, Entropy," in Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 301–329.

6 Richard Collins and Vincent Porter, *WDR and the Arbeiterfilm – Fassbinder, Ziewer and others* (London: British Film Institute, 1981). For a reassessment, see Thomas Elsaesser, "West Germany's 'Workers' Films': A Cinema in the Service of Television?" in Christina Gerhardt and Marco Abel, eds., *Celluloid Revolt: German 1968 and German Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 122–133.

as the facile self-identification of students with workers, and of film-making with factory labour.

As Johannes Beringer, for instance, a fellow student with Farocki at the dffb (Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin) and a fellow contributor to *Filmkritik*, put it in 1975 in a sharp (and sharp-eyed) polemic about the genre of the workers' film:

To commit oneself to serving the cause of the working class would have required first of all the realization that as a director one cannot have a free pass to the reality of the proletariat as easily as to a left-wing film festival. The interests of the working class are by no means automatically identical with those of the filmmaker. [...] Placed between the emancipatory needs of the workers and the capitalist media's needs to package these needs and sell them as social issues, the filmmaker is in a difficult and dubious position.⁷

What this "difficult and dubious position" might mean in filmic terms is made clear in a devastating review by Farocki himself about one of these workers' films, Christian Ziewer's *Schneeglöckchen blühen im September* (*Snowdrops Bloom in September*, 1974):

We know as much about the work these workers do at the beginning of the film as we do at the end. The men always bang the obligatory hammer three times before they have another round of dialogue. They lower the hammer and start: "you remember what I told you the other day ...". [N]ot once does somebody bang his finger. Nikolaus Dutsch, an actor by now notorious in Berlin for his roles as the working man, defiantly raises his chin even when someone asks him what time it is. [...] [The director] neither possesses a (film) language nor is he without one. It is as if he had sent someone off, telling him to go and shoot some footage of the workers at their benches. In fact, it is [the director] who sends himself [...]. The same gesture that in the film allocates meaning to images and to sentences is used by others to allocate housing, assign jobs or select children at schools. It is the gesture of bureaucratic terror.⁸

7 Johannes Beringer, "Ranklotzen – Arbeitsweltfilme und Verwandtes," *Filmkritik* 219 (March 1975): 125–127.

8 Harun Farocki, "Schneeglöckchen blühen im September," *Filmkritik* 219 (March 1975): 138–139.

Farocki goes on to describe in detail what he perceives as the film-maker's contradictory use of the zoom lens, of actors, of music, and concludes: "What a pity that there are so few who understand the politics of cinematic language." Someone who did understand the politics of cinematic language at this point was Jean-Luc Godard, and *Filmkritik's* polemic strongly suggests Farocki's debt to Godard, who in 1972 had made his own workers' film *Tout va bien*, with Yves Montand and Jane Fonda, partly in response to a film by Marin Karmitz (*Coup pour coup*, 1972). While Karmitz used the narrative strategies of melodrama and the social conflict film, much as did Ziewer two years later, Godard's factory was clearly marked as a set, made up of a cross-sectioned building, with the camera dollying back and forth from room to room. The director reinvented for the cinema what Brecht had done with the revolving stage in the theatre, dissolving the action into a series of staged tableaux. In other words, what Farocki wanted was not so much greater realism ("not once does someone bang his finger"), but greater artifice.

Alfred Sohn-Rethel and the *Verbund*

Farocki also conceived his first full-length feature *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* (*Between Two Wars*, 1978) in this sense as a filmic response to the workers' film, but in doing so, he took on a more formidable challenge than that of filmically representing local strikes during a briefly volatile period in the early 1970s, when West German workers fought for – and won – major additions to the so-called *Mitbestimmungsrecht* (workers' right of codetermination).⁹ Opening a much wider historical horizon, he tried to answer one of the most puzzling questions of the postwar labour movement: namely, why the German working class could have been so easily seduced by Nazism into deserting the Communist alternative. Key to these questions seems to have been an essay by Alfred Sohn-Rethel, whose 1932 analyses of the political economy of emergent Nazism were republished in the journal *Kursbuch* in 1970 under the title "Zur politischen Ökonomie Deutschlands (1932) – Ein Kommentar nach 38 Jahren" (On the Political Economy of Germany [1932] – A Commentary After 38 Years).¹⁰

9 See the entry "Mitbestimmungsgesetz": <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitbestimmungsgesetz>.

10 Alfred Sohn-Rethel, "Zur politischen Ökonomie Deutschlands (1932) – Ein Kommentar nach 38 Jahren," *Kursbuch* 21 (September 1970): 17–36.

What I want to retain from this encounter is how reading Sohn-Rethel's text also enabled Farocki to better understand the kind of labour relations he was involved or trapped in as a film-maker. While working on *Zwischen zwei Kriegen*, for which he failed to get funding, Farocki had to make a living, which he did with all sorts of jobs, as he explains in the film: "Because I couldn't get any money to make this film, I had to earn money with other work. I worked in the culture business, I earned money by writing copy text. I took on every job which required the writer to cover over sensuality with words."¹¹

Amid a pile of nude photos from a Playboy-type magazine, we notice the words *Kunst – nicht knicken* ("Art – don't bend"), but that is – to risk a pun – what Farocki does: he "bends" art, and makes of it a *Verbund*, a form of connectivity and synergy, but under special conditions, whereby, in Sohn-Rethel's argument, the waste products of the steel industry were used to good effect in the coal industry. It is this principle of recycling and repurposing, of combining apparently unrelated or even antagonistic elements and bringing them into a productive relationship, that becomes Farocki's working method. Providing the key also to a different self-understanding of the film-maker as a distinct kind of worker in the culture industries, positioned between the worker in the factory and the autonomous artist, *Verbund* is the principle that Farocki applies to his own working conditions. He explains in an essay written around the same time:

Following the example of the steel industry [...], I try to create a *Verbund* with my work. The basic research for a project I finance with a radio broadcast, some of the books I use I then review for the book programmes, and many of the things I notice during this kind of work end up in my television features.¹²

In Farocki's subsequent feature film, *Etwas wird sichtbar/Before your Eyes – Vietnam* (1982) – a filmic self-examination of political militancy and of the difficulties of speaking on behalf of others (the presumption of the workers' films) that shows its protagonists trapped in the ubiquity of press photographs, which paralyze their will to act – a voice-over passage directly addresses Farocki's own dilemma as a political film-maker.

11 In a similar fashion, Godard had opened *Tout va bien* with shots of a hand writing cheques and tearing them out of a chequebook for the different items of the film's budget.

12 Harun Farocki, "Notwendige Abwechslung und Vielfalt," *Filmkritik* 224 (August 1975): 368–369.



Harun Farocki, *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* (Between Two Wars), 1978, 16 mm, b/w, 83 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the Harun Farocki Institut.

Discussing the relationship of manual labour and creative labour – again a topic dear to Alfred Sohn-Rethel – Farocki comes to the following conclusion:

It is not a question of doing either one or the other, but of joining the two. When you clear out your room by moving everything to one side, that's easy. Or when in your workshop every time you use a tool you put it back where it belongs, that's easy, too. It's easy to produce something systematically, like a machine. And it is easy to produce something new, and once only, like an artist.¹³

The passage echoes images from the scene in *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* where we see Farocki trying to make tabula rasa, half in anger and frustration, half impatient to try and make a new start. This, then, was the challenge at a point when Farocki realized that a so-called independent film-maker in the Federal Republic during the 1970s and 1980s was anything but independent.

¹³ Harun Farocki, *Etwas wird sichtbar*, typed transcript, kindly supplied by Harun Farocki in 1981, 21.

Now that the financing of films had become a matter of state subsidies or of commissions (*Aufträge*) handed out by (state-funded) television broadcasters such as WDR or ZDF, independent film-making embodied and exemplified the biblical dilemma of “serving two masters.”

Serving Two Masters

As autonomous artist, the film-maker auteur was expected to uphold the ideals of bourgeois individualism and personal freedom, which bourgeois liberalism, having cast its lot entirely with capitalism, could not live up to or would not implement. Carrying the burden of someone else's ideals was the price the artist paid for his creative autonomy, his creativity the outsourced labour of the dominant class. This was master number one: bourgeois idealism. But the independent film-maker was also the servant of capital, where his freelance labour was used to fill the media slots that were deemed too unpromising or too unprofitable to invest major resources in and to stake reputations on. In the essay already quoted, “Notwendige Abwechslung und Vielfalt” (Necessary Variety and Diversity [of opinion]),¹⁴ Farocki argued that it suited state-controlled television (which had to demonstrate *Ausgewogenheit* (“political balance” in its programming) to nurture the subjectivity of *Autoren* (“auteurs”) as *eigenwillige Künstler* (“independent spirits”), because that allowed television to win both ways: producers could boast of being “experimental” and bask in the prestige of being patrons to the arts by giving *Autoren* a late-night programme slot at relatively little cost, but should these *Autoren* turn out to be too experimental or innovative and cause commotion or a scandal, they simply would not receive any further commissions.

In retrospect, it is remarkable how clearly, in his analysis of the independent film-maker working for television, Farocki analyzed and indeed anticipated the dilemmas that were to reproduce themselves beginning in the 1990s, when politically motivated film-makers moved out of television and into art spaces, after German public service (*öffentlich rechtliche*) television had internalized all the criteria of its commercial rivals and given over those late-night film slots to interminable talk shows. Whether exchanging their television producers for museum curators and public service television

14 Harun Farocki, “Notwendige Abwechslung und Vielfalt,” *Filmkritik* 224 (August 1975): 360–369.

for publicly funded contemporary art museums made them any less servants of two masters is a moot question.¹⁵ This may well have been one of the reasons why Farocki was and remains the most successful and productive artist of this crossover generation: that is, of film-makers who made the transition from cinema and television to installation art, from black box to grey tube and from tube to white cube, all the while retaining their political convictions and keeping intact their artistic integrity. Having lived through it all with television in the seventies, Farocki was well equipped to take on a new set of cultural industries in the nineties, and to work out for himself what creative constraints were required to navigate and to survive in this art space environment.

For this if for no other reason, it is worth returning to Farocki's writings and essays from the seventies. They yield precious insights into the situation of the new precariat in the art world today, of all those who, as interns or backup crew, as helpers and aspirants, work for modest pay and even more modest prospects.

Verbund and Schnittstelle

Schnittstelle/Section/Interface, from 1995, is the result of this process of reorientation, at once a manifesto for the new *dispositif* of multichannel composition and presentation and a reflection on what it was that had hitherto motivated Farocki as a film-maker and a writer. Re-staging and at the same time breaking down the traditional division of labour within film-making between, for example, scripting and filming, Farocki shows fragments from his previous films while explaining the difference between editing film and editing video, primarily by reference to hands and fingers: in the case of film, touching the film strip to feel the cut, even prior to seeing or hearing it, and with video, pushing buttons and turning a dial as if adjusting the frequency on a radio set in order to fine-tune and sharpen reception. Underpinning both operations, however, is the subtle alternation between *Schreibtisch* (writing desk) and *Schneidetisch* (editing table), their homophonic proximity in German lending credibility to Farocki's main point: namely, that the work of writing and the work of editing mutually condition each other, while each can take on the functions of the other

15 The art critic and philosopher Boris Groys emphatically thinks that artists are now more than ever the captives of the art world system, where power is with the curator. See the essays collected in his *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

(writing/editing; leaving out/combining with) in a constant back-and-forth process – rather than succeeding each other, as in mainstream industrial film-making.

Workers Leaving the Factory and The Expression of Hands

In many ways, *Schnittstelle* is the most directly autobiographical account of Farocki's own working methods, a kind of self-reflexive, retrospective rumination on his occupation, as if metaphorically performing a split and making a cut to announce a new beginning, almost "taking back" the tabula rasa gesture of fifteen years earlier. At about the same time, Farocki was also returning to the problems of the *Arbeiterfilme* with a parallel project, not from a militant, interventionist perspective, but more as an archivist and archaeologist. I am referring to *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik/Workers Leaving the Factory*, also made in 1995, and formally inaugurating a series of compilation films which also included *Der Ausdruck der Hände/The Expression of Hands* (1997). Both of these films start from an "archive" of cinematic tropes or visual motifs. Among examples of this increasingly popular form of collecting recurring cinematic objects¹⁶ or scenes and combining them into so-called "super-cuts" or video essays,¹⁷ *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* sticks out not only because it was one of the first. It is also a carefully folded and layered meditation on changes in modern labour conditions, in factory work, and on people's relationships on the factory floor, one conducted mainly by means of a wide-ranging interrogation of the single filmic motif of workers leaving the factory – a motif as old as the medium itself.

Whereas *Der Ausdruck der Hände* gives us a kind of poetological-existential reading of hands, including directors as different as Sam Fuller and Robert Bresson and suggesting the possibility of a choreography of gestures that might serve as a grammar of film, *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* examines its thesaurus of images (*Bilderschatz*)¹⁸ not in search of a grammar,

16 See, for instance, Volker Pantenburg, ed. *Cinematographic Objects. Things and Operations* (Berlin: August Verlag, 2015).

17 Among the best-known practitioners and theoreticians of the video essay are Kevin B. Lee, kogonada, Matt Soller Zeitz, and Catherine Grant, cofounder of the video essay journal *[In] Transition*. For a requiem for the supercut, see Brian Raftery, "I'm Not Here to Make Friends: The Rise and Fall of the Supercut Video", *Wired*, August 30, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/supercut-video-rise-and-fall/>.

18 See Harun Farocki and Wolfgang Ernst, "Towards an Archive of Visual Concepts," in *Harun Farocki – Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University

but setting each image into relation with its respective historical moment. More important than their fictive or documentary status are the recurring features and intersecting contexts across time and from one to another political system, which chart a remarkable history: through the different ways that the end of the working day has been filmed over one hundred years, the fragments speak of the cinema and the working class, but also of the end of both cinema and the working class. This trope of the “end of the working class” revolves around the issue of invisibility, the difference between work and leisure now camouflaged by a similarity of appearance that Farocki, in the voice-over commentary from *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* noted at the beginning of this essay, astutely characterized thus: “you cannot tell whether someone in the street is coming from work, has been doing sports at the gym, or is returning from collecting his welfare check.”

Representing Labour

In asking why directors film the exit of workers and not their entry, why there are so few scenes inside the factory, and why workers tend to rush and run when they leave the factory at the end of a day or a shift, Farocki's compilation film essay *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* revisits the failed, flawed, or misguided attempts from the 1970s to make the cinema a tool for representing the site of industrial work and for making visible the situation of the workers. In particular, Farocki echoes the questions that Jean-Luc Godard tried to answer in the interview he gave in 1972 after completing *Tout va bien*,¹⁹ in which he points out that almost all the spaces where our lives are decided or where most of the productivity of a nation takes place are off limits to the camera: besides factories, this is true of ministries and other public buildings, just as it is true of the metro, museums, or the airport. Godard here anticipates some of Farocki and Ehmann's remarks on what motivated the Labour in a Single Shot project:

In each city [...] most of the work activities happen behind closed doors. Often labour is not only invisible but also unimaginable. Therefore it is vital to undertake detailed research, to open one's eyes and to set oneself into motion: where can we see which kinds of labour? What is hidden? What happens in the centre of a city, what occurs at the periphery?

Press, 2004), 261–287.

19 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKrtDKfiv8k>.

[...] What kinds of labour processes set interesting cinematographic challenges?²⁰

Today, it is as much the CCTV camera that remains invisible, as it is the owner or supervisor who makes the workplace unfilmable. And yet precisely here lies the paradox that Farocki is only too aware of: one of the major reasons why workplaces now seem to be more open to the human eye and the camera gaze is that these places are now co-opting such representations into their own self-presentation, making them part of their self-promotion. This is especially true of one of the places that Godard mentions, the museum: much has changed since Godard clandestinely filmed his three protagonists in *Bande à part* trying to break the record for the fastest visit to the Louvre. Now, we have prestigious names fronting well-funded productions of films and videos about the most famous museums in the world.²¹ While these promotional moves to attract more tourists fit in with the general trend of making museums the destination of a mass audience and art exhibitions the new mass medium, and while this possibly benefits even film-makers and installation artists such as Farocki, an additional consequence of this sudden openness of hitherto camera-shy spaces is that it detracts from all the other once public spaces that are being privatized and thereby rendered invisible. Overexposure can also render invisible, as the phrase “hiding in plain sight” has always recognized.²²

But it is not only the spaces of labour that have changed by becoming seemingly more visible, which means subject to surveillance and control: the very concept of labour has expanded and mutated. At issue is not just the distinction between manual and mental labour, as more and more assembly line workers monitor machines and robots rather than use their hands to make things, but also the designation of activities as labour that did not qualify for this label just a few decades ago. Women have successfully lobbied to have housework recognized as labour so as to be properly remunerated, and the service industries have in some countries become part of organized labour, while in others the service sector is where the undocumented subsist on pay below the minimum wage. And then there is “affective labour”: provided by caregivers, receptionists, therapists, and

20 <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/project/concept/>.

21 See for instance Beyoncé and Jay-Z's 2018 Video “Apushit,” shot at the Louvre, Paris: <https://hyperallergic.com/449108/beyonce-jay-z-louvre-apeshit-museums/>.

22 I expand on this topic in Thomas Elsaesser, “Simulation and the Labour of Invisibility: Harun Farocki's Life Manuals,” in *animation* 12, no. 3 (2017): 214–229.

anyone else, whose (paid) job it is to produce positive emotions in another human being.

To the extent that factory labour is increasingly replaced by work in the service industries, in administration or supervision, or by no work at all, the primary labour we humans, especially in the West, give to society as well as to the dominant economic system is our *attention and its duration*. Much of this attentive time comes in the form of “perceptual labour,” done in front of screens, rather than physical labour, expended in making things. In this configuration, however, moving images play an ambiguous role, because they now stand for an extension of the workplace, rather than as its opposite. This means that the worker/factory system and the spectator/cinema system no longer form a relationship of contrast and compensation, but are once more modalities of the selfsame process, within which images are either “coded” images (i.e., images whose meaning lies in the hermeneutic message we decipher while trying to pry open the secret we imagine they preserve) or “operational images” (images that contain instructions and require actions on our part, or images made by machines for machines). Just as monitors dominate the workplace, before which we process both words and images, scanning them for the clues they contain and the commands they address to us, so Farocki’s archaeological model of reading images engages a similar attention economy, where image labour is the dominant currency that both “art” and “work” extract from us. Cinema, too, having left the space of contemplation and comprehension, has entered the space of monitoring and control. In this space, we, as spectators, are always already in a self-referential feedback system: while we watch, we are being watched.

But operational images also refer us to the transition between labour and the ludic, between a world of work and a world of play. Throughout his career, Farocki was a dispassionate observer of all those situations, locations, and people who make use of moving images or photographs for purposes other than display, narrative, or spectacle. At first, he was fascinated by the function of role-play, test drives, drills, and the rehearsals of emergency situations – in short, by how performative approaches to social life have taken hold of society, and have begun to define “the social” itself: the film *Leben – BRD (How to Live in the FRG, 1990)* is a great – sad, funny, and deeply ironic – inquiry into this obsession with rehearsing (for) living. Subsequently, Farocki became interested in the function that images have in this permanent performative staging of situations and scenarios, when social life acquires a layer of what one might call spontaneous virtuality. What was once the preserve of the fire

brigade, the classroom, or the military, that is, training for a mission, for an emergency or for life itself, has bled into everyday life. We test, train, or rehearse either in the name of self-improvement, self-enhancement, and self-optimization, or for the sake of risk aversion and security. In *Die Schulung* (*Indoctrination*, 1987), *Nicht ohne Risiko* (*Nothing Ventured*, 2004), or *Serious Games I–IV* (2009–2010) (about PTSD-therapy simulations), or in most of his works on gaming and virtual worlds, such as *Parallel I–IV*, Farocki had begun to document the pragmatic, persuasive, and ludic uses that such image worlds initiate, as well as the feedback loops that result. In other words, these are extensions or further explorations of Farocki's strategic understanding of operational images, and of how they begin to define for us not only what an image is, but *who we are*, in our relations and interactions with the world.

These developments are widely considered one of the hallmarks of the transition from the industrial and manufacturing societies to postindustrial information and service societies. But the question is perhaps not whether physical labour has indeed been replaced by mental labour; even in our Western societies, it has not. The films brought together by Labour in a Single Shot are a moving proof not only of the diversity of work situations and conditions but also of the kinds of self-presence and self-representations that humans still derive from the body in rhythmic or repetitive, in dominating or actually demeaning motion, and how each can look uncannily like the other.

To cite an example that also illustrates how bodily exertion in the form of leisure and bodily exertion in the form of physical labour can share the same space, interact with each other, and yet sharply contradict each other: one of the videos from the Tel Aviv Workshop is Erga Yaari's *Gym* (2012), set in a gym, where a Black maintenance cleaner and White fitness fans "exercise" together, as it were, while the camera observes them, registering the minimality of their differences, as they present themselves in revealing similarity and involuntary bodily synchronicity. Yet the strategic placement of the camera and the presence of a mirror also invite a different kind of reflection: we observe the finally rather pitiful attempt to compensate for the lack of manual labour, as well as its meaninglessness as a means of self-fulfilment: the gym becomes a parody of this attempt, when grown men behave like hamsters in a treadmill, flanked by someone who services them in a physically demanding yet socially demeaning role, so that what the maintenance worker and the exercising men have in common is that their activities cancel each other out rather than complement each other, because they illustrate two sides of the lack of self-fulfilment in the act of physical labour today.



Labour in a Single Shot. Erga Yaari, *Gym*, Tel Aviv, 2012.

As the philosophical text that names and explains these changes in bodily regimes, we tend to cite Gilles Deleuze's essay on the "control societies," in which Deleuze updates and extends Michel Foucault's conception of the disciplinary regime.²³ But the particular mixture of indefiniteness and urgency that accompanies the intensified extraction of value from our bodies by the attention economy at both ends of the collapsed divide between work and play was already put into pithy words by Theodor Adorno in 1951, in his *Minima Moralia*:

The haste, nervousness, and restlessness observed since the rise of the big cities is now spreading in the manner of an epidemic, as did once the plague and cholera. In the process, forces are being unleashed that were undreamed of by the passers-by and flâneurs of the nineteenth century. Everybody must have projects all the time. The maximum must be extracted from leisure. Free time is preplanned, used for special tasks, is crammed with visits to every conceivable site or spectacle, or just filled with the fastest possible locomotion. The shadow of all this falls on intellectual work. It is done with a bad conscience, as if it had been poached from some urgent, even if only imaginary occupation. To justify itself in its own eyes it puts on a show of hectic activity performed under great pressure and shortage of time, which excludes all reflection and therefore annihilates itself. [...] The whole of life must look like a job, and

23 Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.

by this resemblance [to work] it conceals what is not yet directly devoted to pecuniary gain.²⁴

In all these configurations, moving images play an ambiguous role, because they, too, now function as an extension of the workplace, rather than as its opposite. Farocki has taken due notice of this fact, focusing in his films on what he called “operational images”: images that contain instructions or that require actions. Just as the waiting operators in front of their monitors at the places of work attentively scan video images for clues to changes and the signs of danger that they hold, so Farocki’s particular method of forensic image archaeology reads images through other images, while reconstructing the sedimented layers of reference that their comparison might illuminate and their juxtaposition might disclose. What this seems to indicate is that the moving image has left the space of contemplation that it had successfully claimed for the best part of the last century, making instead the realm of monitoring and control its new epistemic home and default value. Symptomatic are the many videos in the *Labour in a Single Shot* collection in which people are surrounded by different types of screens, interact with control panels or sit in front of multiple image banks, supervising traffic junctions, giving running commentary on a horse race, or rendering two-dimensional images of a poor neighbourhood in 3-D for architects to redevelop the site.

The new kinds of labour, in other words, require us to rethink our strategies for making labour visible, and *Labour in a Single Shot* is a heroic attempt to do just that. Let me, by way of conclusion, briefly outline what I see as some of the project’s salient strategies. One might begin by saying that *Labour in a Single Shot* is conceived as a way of reversing, or at least countering, the dominant logic of the practice of outsourcing labour, while nonetheless clearly recognizing that not only multinationals such as Apple, Mercedes, or IKEA practice outsourcing. Museum curators, short of fresh material, will travel the globe in search of new talent, and film festivals are equally anxious to tap new creative potential in developing and emerging countries, by organizing talent campuses or offering seed money and development money to tie such potential talent to their institution or brand.

Labour in a Single Shot counters outsourcing by re-sourcing, but not as the workers’ films had considered doing – by handing cameras to striking workers – nor by imitating the way anthropologists give camcorders to

24 Theodor W. Adorno, “91. Vandals,” in *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 138.

Amazon tribes to help them speak out against the iniquities of logging and the destruction of the Brazilian rainforests. Labour in a Single Shot avoids both these traps of missionary empowerment, by reflexively doubling the task. Remember what Farocki said about the workers' films and about Christian Ziewer – that the director had made him- or herself the servant of an assignment; *er hat sich selbst geschickt* (he sent himself). Farocki is careful *not* to send himself, and so the assignment is multiply filtered and mediated, refocused and made self-reflexive by empowering the eyes and hands, the skill level and temperament of the aspiring film-makers, most of them indigenous to the cities visited.

But the project is also reflexively doubled by its judicious mixture of freedom and constraint. The freedom was in the permission to shoot anything the film-makers found interesting; the constraint was that it had to be in one take, that it could not be longer than one or two minutes, and – as a semi-optional extra – that it should show some awareness of the peculiar genius of the Lumière films.

I think the mix worked wonderfully well, and one could easily explore more fully than I am able to do here in what ways the third constraint, especially, bore remarkable fruit. But broadly speaking, the reference back to the Lumières can be observed in the following features:

- Many, if not all the films are process-oriented, often in a typically Lumière way.
- Some, such as *Metal Lady*, discussed earlier, actually manage to record an entire process and end by hinting at how it will start all over again.
- There is a knowing and effective use of off-screen space as an element of surprise or in the service of conceptual reframing, as for example in *Street Artists*.
- Finally, some videos, such as *Gym*, deploy another Lumière-like stylistic device: the division of the frame into distinct action spaces that either comment on each other or offer two complementary perspectives on the same idea or concept.

There is a particular reason why the project can be situated within the broader horizon of labour made visible. Once, when I was discussing with him what could be the possible alternatives to his dictum, “It’s easy to produce something systematically, like a machine. And it is easy to produce something new, and once only, like an artist,” Farocki replied: “*Alle Arbeit ist Wiederholung*” – all work is repetition.²⁵

25 Personal conversation, Berlin Pfarrstrasse, April 2004.

And repetition, as routine and iteration, is itself a form of invisibility, so that the objective of Labour in a Single Shot, its critical as well as its emancipatory mission, as it were, is to make us see again, to use the concentrated attention of the Lumière set of constraints to discover or rediscover the details, the gestures, the process of labour – in other words, to conduct just such an image forensics on work and play among today's everyday practices, and to use the tools provided by the Lumières, cinema's first auteurs, to look at the present as if it were a delicate and fragile archaeological site. The salient point was to discover the visible *within* the invisibility of repetition, and not *against* the many kinds of invisibility.

This is the legacy that Farocki has given to all these young film-makers in Rio de Janeiro, Tel Aviv, Berlin, Boston, Hangzhou, Hanoi, and elsewhere, so that they might reinvent the cinema *their way* and at the same time in *the Lumière way*. It is also the legacy Farocki has given us – to cherish, to continue, and to remember him by.

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About the Author

Before his death in 2019, **Thomas Elsaesser** taught film studies at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where he became Professor Emeritus in 2008. His books include *New German Cinema: A History* (1989), *Fassbinder's Germany: History Identity Subject* (1996), *Weimar Cinema and After* (2000), *Filmgeschichte und Frühes Kino* (2002), *German Cinema – Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory since 1945* (2013), and *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (2016). He also edited volumes on early cinema, digital cinema, and Harun Farocki.

Poetics

7. Ten Propositions

Dale Hudson and Patricia R. Zimmermann

Abstract

In this essay, Hudson and Zimmermann emulate the multiple exhibitions of Labour in a Single Shot through two design and argumentation moves. First, they invent an algorithm to devise pathways through this project, connecting it with other projects or works that make comparable interventions and provocations. Whereas computational algorithms require well-defined instructions to perform logical calculations operating according to rules, the authors propose a more loosely defined set of propositions within whose gaps new ideas can be generated. Second, Hudson and Zimmermann extend these ideas of modularity to build a set of propositions that can function as a mosaic of ideas, politics, and theories. Propositions are less fixed than arguments: they put forth ideas, suggest relations between concepts; they offer the possibilities of open encounters rather than represent closed analyses.

Keywords: collaboration, database, horizontal processes, micro practices, nonhuman, transnational capital

oo: Preamble

An ongoing project involving short films produced at workshops in twenty cities on five continents and exhibited on a website and in exhibitions, *Eine Einstellung zur Arbeit/Labour in a Single Shot* explicitly rejects the totalizing enterprise of a fixed-object, feature-length, single-authored, theatrically screened, celluloid film. It provides a matrix for multiple short-length films that suggest fragments of a larger, incomplete inquiry into what labour looks like. The project asks where labour is performed, whether in a formal or informal setting. It unwinds what kinds of labour are exchanged for money

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and what kinds are unremunerated. It questions what aspects of labour can be captured by a digital camera, who has the right to perform certain types of labour, and who has the right to film this labour. A subsidiary set of inquiries also surfaces in this project, foregrounding questions as to who is supervising the workshops within which the films were conceived, and how gender, race, and species intersect with class, still the traditional vector of Marxist analysis of labour.

Labour in a Single Shot works the liminal zones between the macro of the transnational economy and the micro of individual repetitive work. The project concentrates on work in major urban centres. Produced with many collaborators in workshops around the globe, the one-to-two-minute films are collected in an online catalogue. Subsequent public exhibitions of the work at art venues, museums, universities, and other gatherings reorganize the relationships between these short films in a project that imagines the enormity of labour as a concept and the finiteness of the single shot as a format. Multiscreen installations create different kinds of resonances between the films, with different selections, organization, and architecture.

La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon (*Workers Leaving the Factory*, Louis and Auguste Lumière, 1895) is, of course, a prominent point of reference for Labour in a Single Shot. But rather than functioning as historical antecedent, inspiration, model, or prompt, it instead functions as an algorithm from the nineteenth century transported into the twenty-first century. An algorithm is a sequence of instructions for dealing with data. Latinized from Persian, Arabic, and Greek words, the term recalls the intercultural exchanges that have helped shape computer science. What we might call “the Lumière algorithm” is comprised of these instructions: workers, factory, single take, no editing, brevity. Many films in Labour in a Single Shot emanate from an algorithmic design. Beyond evincing an algorithmic structure in many of its videos, Labour in a Single Shot evokes ways in which short films in early cinema used to be exhibited in programmes that curators would today describe as remix projects for particular audiences based upon assumptions about what content will maximize audiences in the exhibition spaces.

Labour in a Single Shot, however, does not simply remix standalone films. Like most digital art practices, it is conceived as adaptable and fluid, its segments designed to be rearranged, reconfigured, reimagined in physical space on multiple screens to reject theatrical singularity.¹ The online

1 For a discussion and analysis of the constituents of digital media that are distinct from analogue media, see Dale Hudson and Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Thinking Through Digital Media: Transnational Environments and Locative Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

interface also offers multiple category options, such as place and subject. Users can select films from the toolbar, then further sort by subject and colour. The project's algorithm pulls the videos from the database according to instructions initiated by the human user and randomly generates other videos on the project's opening home page. The films can also be accessed via the workshop pages, which are divided by city. There is no beginning or ending. Neither screening the films online nor on-site is preferred. The project is modular and iterative in response to a world that resists totalization.

In this essay, we emulate these multiple embodied exhibitions of Labour in a Single Shot through two design and argumentation moves. First, we invent our own algorithm to devise pathways through this project, connecting it with other projects or works that make comparable interventions and provocations. Whereas computational algorithms require well-defined instructions to perform logical calculations operating according to rules, we propose a more loosely defined set of propositions within whose gaps new ideas can be generated. Second, we extend these ideas of modularity to build a set of propositions that opens multiple points of entry into different ideas, politics, and theories. Propositions are less fixed than arguments: they put forth ideas, suggest relations between concepts; they offer the possibility of open encounters rather than represent closed analyses.

We propose an algorithm to work through films that focuses mostly on women, either as makers or as subjects. The search categories on the Labour in a Single Shot website do not include categories of gender, race, or species, all key to the smooth functioning of transnational capitalist production, from manufacturing to the service industries to the immateriality of commercial digital data surveillance.² The modularity of this essay shuttles between micro, macro, and meta, creating a topography of multiple theoretical approaches that, like this project, also refuses causality, closure, fixity, linearity, logocentrism, nationalism, totalization.

² For an analysis of the racialized and gendered strategies of transnational capitalism, see Zillah Eisenstein, *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and "The" West* (London: Zed Books, 2004) and Zillah Eisenstein, *Abolitionist Socialist Feminism: Radicalizing the New Revolutions* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019). For a transnational analysis of the role of data in a new form of data capitalism that promotes the immaterial while exploiting the materiality of data, see Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias, *The Costs of Connection: How Data is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019). For an analysis of capitalism and the underexamined category of species, see Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).



Labour in a Single Shot. Claire Juge, *Tapestry Maker*, Marseille, 2018.

01: Archive

Projects that assemble a variety of material in one spot provoke the spectre of the archive as a concept of congregations and a place of aggregations.³ *Tapestry Maker* (Claire Juge, Marseille, 2018) materializes the archival as it pans over a woman who unpacks the material inside an old chair. As her hands work to pull out batting from the bottom of the chair, she says: “With this number of marks, it has probably been remade four times already. But it is 200 years old. Almost. 170 years old.” Online archival projects unpack old material, pull images out, and remake their relations, much like the tapestry maker and the interior of the chair from which she pulls out matting.

Visual and conceptual artists engage with archives differently from historians. Hal Foster describes “an archival impulse” within arts practices that make “historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present.”⁴ These practices open questions about historiography and archive construction. Christian Boltanski’s *The Store House* (1988), Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* (1992–1993), Emily Jacir’s *ex libris* (2010–2012), and Ali Cherri’s *A Taxonomy of Fallacies: The Life of Dead Objects* (2016) question the

3 For a discussion of the formulation of the archive as a repository, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). See also Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), for an analysis of the ideologies of the past, collecting, and historiographic writing.

4 Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (2004), 4.

very assumptions upon which the archive is erected – along with its alleged ability to provide answers to historical questions. Such installations and exhibitions invite audiences to think relationally and spatially.

Many new media art and digital arts practices reject the use of archival objects in the linear arguments of conventional documentary by creating alternative archives that propose different ways of searching and thinking through how the world is organized. They develop new architectures to organize data for open-ended analysis. Projects exhibiting this archival impulse to infiltrate spatial politics with new structures of congregation and aggregation are found around the globe, and resonate with Labour in a Single Shot in their method and design. *EngageMedia* (www.engagemedia.org, Indonesia/Australia, 2005–present) aggregates short community-based videos to provide a localized point of view exploring environmental and labour challenges specific to the Asia-Pacific region. *La Buena Vida/The Good Life* (<http://la-buena-vida.info/>, Carlos Motta, Colombia/United States, 2005–2010) probes neoliberalism across Latin America in a homage to the film *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Argentina, 1968). The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (<https://www.anti-evictionmap.com/>, United States, 2013–present) exposes layers of the history of gentrification and class in Silicon Valley. *The Black Gold: A Web Documentary* (<http://theblackgoldwebdoc.weebly.com/home.html>, Nicole Defranc and Katrine Skipper, Ecuador/Denmark/Norway, 2017) dives into Norway's environmental issues and the wealth derived from the national oil industry. The Folk Memory Project, a combination of videos, performance pieces, and photographs, chronicles elders' memories and experiences of the Great Famine in China with short films shot by young Chinese of the post-Tiananmen generation.⁵

The concentrated digitalization of capital and of everyday life that characterizes the post-Fordist era suggests the endless archivalization of life as data, ephemera, phantom, representation, surveillance. Labour in a Single Shot lives online, with more than 550 films assembled in a grid with thumbnails four across, requiring scrolling down. The website describes itself variously as a catalogue, a database, and a project, stating that it “is

5 For an explanation of new media projects that function as open archives for repressed histories such as EngageMedia and the Folk Memory Project, see Patricia R. Zimmermann and Helen De Michiel, *Open Space New Media Documentary: A Toolkit for Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2018). For analysis of how the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and *Black Gold: A Web Documentary* operate as aggregators of data and explanation, see Dale Hudson and Patricia R. Zimmermann, “States of Environmentalist Media,” *Media+Environment* 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1525/001c.10786>.

not a selection of our favourite videos, but a documentation of everything that was produced.” Rather than functioning as a form of curation, the project reverses into aggregation. It has two search engines to guide users through the material. One of these sorts the films by type or content of work, including advertisement, animals, cleaning, construction, food, garbage, security, teamwork, transport, water – a category that emphasizes what the subjects do. The other organizes films by dominant colour, a more formalist sorting strategy. The list is thus not based on subject and place but on the image itself, asserting difference from the black and white of the early Lumière films and mapping the colour palettes embedded in the transnational labour sphere.

More significantly, *Labour in a Single Shot* challenges the archive as a repository for found and reclaimed works that elaborate regional or national histories as acts of an enunciation of difference. Instead, it dialectically inverts the processes of archival acquisition: rather than recovering films, the project instead generates its own films. Production of new content operates differently, and thus offers a counter position to the reclamation of cinematic objects. The project figures the archival impulse as a productive process of construction of new encounters, abandoning earlier notions of the archive as regionally or nationally comprehensive. It recalibrates the archive as transnational, emphasizing ways that capitalism exploits the most vulnerable, notably migrants, minorities, nonhumans, and women, in informal markets – and how these people respond with acts of resilience and ingenuity.

This building of new spaces through micro gestures that large global flows of capital, data, and goods obscure or erase replaces the reclamation strategies of the archive. The site inverts archival dialectics. Rather than reclaiming temporalities, it asserts spatiality with different locations and types of work. Against the view of the archive as a domain of fixed objects monumentalized in honour of the closed past, the site continually opens up to new works, which are mobilized in an ongoing analysis of the unfolding present. The structure rejects a more typical historiographic periodization based on turning points and change. Date and author identify each video, and a dropdown menu on the site supplies the overall chronology of the project. However, chronology is not historiography, as it lacks periodization based on change and recalibration. Instead, the project employs a mosaic of fragments and gaps that suggest disunity and polyphony rather than unity and totality. Here, the archive facilitates investigation into the less visible domains of transnational capital as a productive process of architecture, addition,

aggregation, curation, and navigation that materializes the polyphonic.⁶ Labour in a Single Shot proposes that the archive can be reconsidered as a transnational assemblage generated from a concept, rather than as a fixed place located in a nation-state or region.

02: Authenticity

The Lumière *actualités* (actuality films) are sometimes considered proto-documentaries. However, scholars have noted that the events they staged were carefully composed and choreographed. They were not life caught unawares, as Dziga Vertov's *kino-pravda* (cinema truth) would demand for social analysis achieved via new technology. The Lumière films nonetheless reveal truths about nineteenth-century France, its colonies, and other foreign places – truths, however, that are not always markers of authenticity.

Like other films in Labour in a Single Shot, *Workers Leaving Al Hamra* (Magdalena Kallenberger, Cairo, 2012) restages actions from *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon*, with its fixed exterior shot of a procession of humans and horses outside a factory. Here, a mixed group of women in hijab and men in short-sleeved shirts exit a factory. Some look at their mobile phones; others stare ahead. A weathered iron street lamp occupies the centre of the frame, with ambient sounds of passing cars and tweeting birds. The film is shot in Al-Zawiya al-Hamra, an industrial suburb to the north of central Cairo created in the 1960s as part of the noble intentions of the 1952 revolution.

If the Lumières erased modern Cairo by shooting Giza's pyramids and the Great Sphinx, then *Workers Leaving Al Hamra* rejects the orientalism that locks Egypt into an ancient past to examine what might appear an unremarkable street. The film upsets French assumptions about an authentic (that is, a premodern) Egypt, reinforced by the "rendering things up to be viewed" characteristic of the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, where French people constructed a model of what they considered to be an accurate image of Egypt, with a colourful bazaar, ancient ruins, and a mosque inside of which a café was installed.⁷ Reality effects were produced through details. Models, Timothy Mitchell explains, were here made to

6 For an elaboration of the concept of polyphony as a major operating system of new media practices that collect, aggregate, and organize, see Patricia R. Zimmermann, "Thirty Speculations Toward a Polyphonic Model for New Media Documentary," *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 15 (2018), 9–15.

7 Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 2.

correspond to visual and ideological realities. Where French audiences were supposed to encounter authenticity, Egyptians saw illusion, noting that “on the buildings representing a Cairo street even paint was made to look dirty.”⁸

Workers Leaving Al Hamra becomes a site for two imaginaries: first, the imperialist legacy of the Lumières, who dispatched male camerapeople from France to create exotic images of the world, and second, the ways that Egyptian state planners adapted ideas of modernity in public housing and other projects. Farha Ghannam argues that “Al-Zawiya is not attractive to tourists, and you rarely see it on Cairo’s maps for it lacks the ‘authenticity’ of Old Cairo and the luxury of upperclass quarters. It is not attractive to researchers either.”⁹ “While *baladi* [roughly, village-like] neighborhoods [...] have attracted the attention of researchers,” she explains, “newer neighborhoods like al-Zawiya are often considered by researchers to be ‘less authentic’ and thus outside the scope of academic interest.”¹⁰ The orderly procession of workers hides another history. Forty-five civilians and a police officer were killed in Al-Zawiya during the Arab Spring of January 2011. As in Tahrir Square, Al-Zawiya’s residents came to the streets to protest Hosni Mubarak’s rule, which had made the district increasingly poor.

In another film, *Metal* (Magdalena Kallenberger, Cairo, 2012), a man cuts metal outside a shop, as another man smokes a cigarette and others walk past them. The film shows informal labour performed by hand. Manual labour appears in many films shot in Cairo and Alexandria. In *Modern Times?* (Paul Geday, Alexandria, 2012), the camera follows an Egyptian man as he meticulously silkscreens another layer of colour onto fabric that will later be sewn into clothing. Like small shops and factories throughout Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, this one may have subsequently closed due to mass-produced textiles from China. *Multiple Machines* (Anu Ramdas, Alexandria, 2012) documents the operation of machines that perform comparable labour at a much faster rate under the silent supervision of a few men. In *Asma* (Anu Ramdas, Alexandria, 2012), women converse over the sound of loud sewing machines in another factory. All the factories appear authentic in that they exist and operate in their own ways, but none of the representations conform to the tightly choreographed model of workers leaving the Lumière factory. Nor do they evoke the faith in industrialization characteristic of

8 Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, 7.

9 Farha Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern: Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 5.

10 Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern*, 5.

the nineteenth century, or the faith in the potential organization of labour then harboured by some. Instead, the Labour in a Single Shot videos reveal capitalism's extraction at a micro level.

03: Collaboration

The algorithmic structure of each film and the architecture of Labour in a Single Shot problematize the idea of cinematic single authorship and, further, that of cinema as a fixed object occupying a theatrical or festival screen. These are small works for small screens, drilling down into micro practices, some of which evidence collaboration whereas others merely show coordination.

The search engine acknowledges work beyond the individual with a category entitled "teamwork." In *Rolling Cake* (Nguyen Huong Na, Hanoi, 2013), three women sit on stools in a small shop making food. One woman takes dough and spreads it over three steamers, then passes the thin pancake, slung around a wooden rolling pin, to two other women, who stuff the flattened dough with a mixture from a large bowl, then fold in the sides. In one long take, the film shows the women working together to make the packets of food, but not talking to each other. As the film documents, teamwork is not the same as collective or collaborative work, which entail dialogue and joint purpose. Instead, artisanal food production in Viet Nam in a small shop or hawker stall embodies the principles of Taylorization, of breaking a task into small parts for efficiency. At the same time, the women's labour represents sustainable incomes, both against the mass-produced food projects of transnational corporations and within their own artisanal alternative networks.

Labour in a Single Shot proposes a dialectic of dispersal and multiplication that counters the unities and single authorship of the long-form documentary. It emphasizes a collaborative, horizontal workshop model that has a long history in participatory communities as a way not only to democratize the means of production and tools by providing more access but also to move away from individual expression towards collaborative action.¹¹ Labour in a Single Shot was produced by mobilizing the traditions of the

11 For an overview of many different community media projects around the globe and their use of training workshops to democratize the production process in a horizontal system that empowers technological skill building and community identities, see Chris Atton, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media* (New York: Routledge: 2019).

community media workshop model, which utilizes a practice of horizontal structure (rejecting the role of the auteur and of vertical production methods depending on hierarchies of skill and decision-making) and conceptual distribution (where ideas are shared rather than proprietary). Embodying intergenerational collaborations and skill sharing, Ehmann and Farocki worked with students from universities and art schools such as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania), Art Academy Hangzhou, the Alexander Rodchenko School of Photography (Moscow), and the Polish National Film, Television, and Theatre School in Łódź. These groups were not small tutorials: in Chicago, 15 students; Marseille, 19; Vilnius, 13; Johannesburg, 15; Hangzhou, 23; Mexico City, 28; Boston, 28; Moscow, 18.

Of course, the focus on labour that is simultaneously repressed by capital and oppresses the body aligns this project with long histories of collective political cinema, including the Workers Film and Photo League in the 1930s, the oeuvre of the committed film-maker Joris Ivens, work of the Newsreel Collective and the Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1960s and 1970s, and ACT UP in the 1980s and 1990s.¹² However, these resonances with the histories of leftist collective film-making do not provide a full mapping of Labour in a Single Shot within the larger international documentary media ecologies. Unlike the examples listed above, this project does not document workers directly confronting power in their workplaces through collective organizing or acts of resistance. Instead, it operates as a series of micro practices and infiltrations into the spaces of work. More akin to indigenous media, notably the *Vídeo nas Aldeias/Video in the Villages* films produced in the Brazilian Amazon, the films in *Labour in a Single Shot* carve out visual spaces within the seams of transnational capital.

Beyond these explicit interventionist documentary practices that directly confront power, it is important also to locate this work within the histories of participatory collaborative community media, a body of work not usually curated in festivals or art expositions. Such works engage a horizontal process of production, rejecting the vertical modes of commercial media production and the romanticized authorship of art cinemas. They function as a cinema of utility for people to tell their own stories and to insist on the power of the micro local. Community

12 Ana Carvalho, Fabiana Moraes, and Vincent Carelli, "The Struggle of the Indigenous Film," *Revista Zum* 12, June 30, 2017, <https://revistazum.com.br/en/revista-zum-12/entrevista-carelli/>.

media engages in small-scale technologies dependent on access and participation.¹³

Participatory community media also engages in cartographic projects to remap territories beyond elites and power, deploying distributive authorship models. Two projects from Scribe Video Center in Philadelphia exemplify this dispersal of authorship and multiplication of voices. The Muslim Voices of Philadelphia project provides a cartography of the voices and places of Muslims in Philadelphia across nearly fifty years. The Precious Places Project works with communities in Philadelphia to recapture the histories of specific places in the face of massive gentrification, a remapping of Philadelphia as multiple microhistories over more than ten years.¹⁴ Although *Labour in a Single Shot* is decidedly transnational, whereas the Scribe Video Center projects are micro local, both illustrate the significance of collaborative practices, a place-based distributed production strategy, multiple contributors, and aggregation.

04: Data

The films in *Labour in a Single Shot* resemble data in a database. They can be filtered by colour, location, or subject. The latter two terms are uncontroversial for analysis of labour, but colour is typically considered subjective and cultural rather than objective and universal, and thus unsuitable as a category for analyzing labour. The website thus produces different kinds of scientific knowledge by sorting according to colour (aesthetic, emotional, perceptual) in addition to subject or location (demographic, political, social). It is designed to make automated suggestions after each film is played, which points to the role of metadata (the data that instruct how and when data is made visible or audible) in performing digital labour that passes unnoticed by most of us. When a subset of films is selected by means of one of the filters, the films appear in randomized order.

Another section of the project provides demographic and other statistical data – employment rates, costs of living, pollution rates, traffic fatalities,

13 For an explanation of the decentralized nonhierarchical practices of community media, see Ellie Rennie, *Community Media: A Global Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), and Kevin Howley, ed., *Understanding Community Media* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2010).

14 For an analysis of Scribe Video Center's Precious Places project, see Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Documentary Across Platforms: Reverse Engineering Media, Place, and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 37–41. For discussion of the Muslim Voices project, see Hudson and Zimmermann, *Thinking Through Digital Media*, 73.

rates of suicide and femicide – about the various cities where workshops have been held. Most of the data is attributed to newspapers or Wikipedia. The categories for these statistics provide critical context for the films. Population density, hourly wages for cleaning women, the price of eggs, and average monthly rent for an eighty-five-square-metre flat, for example, situate acts of labour within the vast inequities obtaining between the various locations of the project's workshops. The data opens sets of questions across the larger project. How do wage and price differentials within and between Hangzhou and Geneva, for example, affect quality of life? Are wages disproportionately higher in Boston than in Buenos Aires or Hanoi due to ongoing effects of U.S. imperialism in Latin America and Southeast Asia?

The data for Bangalore (Bengaluru) includes the role of English as a “new caste system,” so that below poverty line is replaced with below English line. English's augmentation of income inequality destabilizes the city's accelerated growth as an IT capital. Many castes and classes are excluded.¹⁵ Statistical data helps users of Labour in a Single Shot contextualize the content of the films to make sense of what might be invisible or inaudible. *Maintenance* (Christoph Pohl, Bangalore, 2012), for example, shows a man vacuuming a swimming pool as the film-maker asks questions in English about his “job,” his “labour.” The labouring subject lists reasons why he feels lucky to have had the job for the past ten years, working from “10 PM to 7.” The statistical data shows that 93 per cent of the workforce is located in informal sectors of the economy, with nonexistent protections from illness and accident. Statistical data, however, cannot help us understand everything the man tells the film-maker about his job.

In *Watercan Delivery* (Nikhil Patil and Arav Narang, Bangalore, 2012), a camera is mounted on the back of a motorbike with a large bottle of water filling the centre of the screen. To the side, the camera captures the uneven transformation of the city. The only sounds are the engine and the noises made by others on the street. On one side, pylons for flyovers under construction to relieve traffic congestion appear before the driver turns into a side street. The camera then begins to shake as the motorbike rolls over bumps in a road partly excavated for new plumbing systems. When it becomes stuck, a man smoking outside his house offers a push. As the data on the web page makes clear, 66.6 per cent of Bangalore's 2,377,000 households consume treated tap water, another 12.5 per cent untreated tap water, and 17.7 per cent water from wells; 3.2 per cent of the water consumed comes from other

15 Anant Kamath, “‘Untouchable’ Cellphones?: Old Caste Exclusions and New Digital Divides in Peri-Urban Bangalore,” *Critical Asian Studies* 50, no. 3 (2018), 375–394.

sources, including bottled water. Statistical data for so-called emerging cities within global capital's networks thus expose the inequities and injustices that capitalism attempts to camouflage, for instance, through municipal advertising campaigns that seek to embellish and refurbish a city's image.

Comparably, the Israeli capital Tel Aviv's status as "best gay city in the world" is offset by statistics on increasing rents and deteriorating health and education systems. Homeless protestors pitch tents on picturesque boulevards. In *Gym* (Erga Yaari, Tel Aviv, 2012), a young instructor leads an older Ashkenazi man to padded mats where he demonstrates abdominal stretches, while a non-Jewish African "migrant" man bends over to scrub the mats. Hierarchies become clear in the context of social fear of "African infiltrators." Asylum seekers from Eritrea, escaping ethnic and religious cleansing, and from Sudan, escaping authoritarianism, are stigmatized in Israel. In May 2012, the state fomented anti-immigrant protests for public support of expatriation and incarceration of African asylum seekers in Tel Aviv, ignoring the "moral obligation of Jews towards persecuted Others" in light of the historical persecution of European Jews in Europe.¹⁶ Israel's economy and high standard of living for its citizens is dependent on migrant workers. The short film makes the invisible labour of the cleaning staff visible – and, moreover, refracts it in the mirrors that cover the gym's walls. The reflections appear at the edge of the frame. They are not the central focus, suggesting ways we often do not notice the role of metadata, as we have learned not to notice people whose invisible labour makes our lives more efficient and enjoyable.

Metadata allows computers to perform a vast series of minor operations that make things happen, whether locating and opening files on laptops or identifying data files through voice-recognition software on mobile phones. Comparably, consumers have been acculturated to ignore the labour that makes goods and services possible and inexpensive. While many consumers in urban areas such as New York and San Francisco now enjoy access to lettuce and strawberries during winter, they do not always want to consider the labour performed in other countries under possibly harsh conditions or by undocumented workers in the United States – labour that is required to make these resource- and labour-intensive products available.

16 Yoav H. Duman, "Infiltrators Go Home!: Explaining Xenophobic Mobilization Against Asylum Seekers in Israel," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 16 (2015), 1231–1254; Barak Kalir, "The Jewish State of Anxiety: Between Moral Obligation and Fearism in the Treatment of African Asylum Seekers in Israel," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 4 (2015), 580–598.

05: Extraction

Some imperial documentaries in the classic canon have highlighted the manual and mechanical extraction of resources from the earth, often on a monumental scale, such as hydraulic power via dams in *The River* (Pare Lorentz, United States, 1937) and oil in *Louisiana Story* (Robert J. Flaherty, United States, 1948). Both of these films document the ecological destruction of waterways. By contrast, videos in *Labour in a Single Shot* often pull into focus extraction on a smaller and more environmentally sustainable scale. *Mussels* (Le Viet Ha, Hanoi, 2013) consists of a high-angle shot onto a body of water. A floating basket appears with mussels and mud. Eventually, a straw hat enters the frame. Underneath it is a human who extracts mussels from the mud below the water. The labour is slow. Extraction is performed by hand and foot rather than by large nets dragged across the seabeds, which are destructive to ecosystems.

The videos in *Labour in the Single Shot* are extractions. Each film-maker selects a beginning and an ending to a short narrative that suggests an endless cycle of repetitive labour. Some labour involves extraction. Labour is often considered in terms of the manual and mechanical, that is, in terms of humans and machines. *Labour in a Single Shot* also allows us to see extractive labour performed by nonhuman animals – labour that humans extract from nonhumans. In *Work in a Fishtank* (Eva Stotz, Marseille, 2018), a white woman places her foot into a tank of water. Inside, small fish perform the labour of exfoliating the skin on her feet. Most of the footage is shot through the glass. The water appears light blue under the light; the sound of air bubbles is captured by the microphone. The film adopts the perspective of a voyeur. Nonhuman labour is transformed into a curious entertaining spectacle for humans. The fish are held captive in a tank that makes no effort to replicate a natural environment. The fish extract dead skin cells to survive.

In a static shot, *Dogs* (Khong Viet Bach, Hanoi, 2013) shows a large room where three shirtless Vietnamese men train a group of dogs to perform for the pleasure of humans. The dogs are on a rotating carousel. Four dogs are forced to perch over images of Mickey Mouse, as though enjoying the ride. The heaviest and oldest man hits the dogs to keep the carousel spinning. Two other dogs are directed to balance each other while standing on a plate at the centre of the carousel. When they make mistakes, the man smacks them with a stick. While the film shows labour by humans and nonhumans, the grotesque interspecies inequities become the central focus. The dogs are reduced to entertainment as humans extract their labour.



Labour in a Single Shot. Eva Stotz, *Labour in a Fishtank*, Marseille, 2018.

Nonhuman animals are extracted from their habitats and framed as entertainment for humans in zoos. *Zoo* (Monika Maison, Łódź, 2013) shows the human labour of a white man bringing food to a group of ring-tailed lemurs held in a room equipped with two fake trees and a ledge behind a glass wall. As John Berger pointed out in his seminal essay “Why Look at Animals?” (1977), zoos are for animals what “ghettos, shanty towns, prisons, madhouses, [and] concentration camps” are for humans.¹⁷ These primates are native to southern Madagascar, not northern Poland. Habitat loss and poaching make lemurs an endangered species. As with other endangered species, the short-term needs of humans prevent thinking about what might be learned from lemurs and their contribution to an ecosystem. Within neoliberal economic systems, humans kill lemurs and other endangered animals for sale to restaurants as food. They do so in desperation after trade and war destroy their traditional livelihoods.

o6: Gender

Gender is latent, problematic, and unresolved in *Labour in a Single Shot*. Categories of gender – women and men, girls and boys, cisgender and transgender, feminism, racialized gender, nationalized gender, or other categories of gender identities – are not listed in the search engine focusing

17 John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?” (1977), in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 26.

on tasks, cities, and colours. Most significantly, the project defines work for the most part as wage labour in the public sphere, marginalizing unpaid domestic labour in the private sphere. In a feminist analysis, both spheres constitute work. Domestic work is typically gendered and therefore even more invisible and uncompensated. Amid the myriad forms of wage labour represented in the project, there are few films on food preparation in the home, cleaning, and caregiving for children or elders. Labour is predominantly defined through exchange value in a marketplace in a multiplicity of different kinds of enterprises. These absences highlight the project's epistemological and political orientation towards locating labour outside the home in commodity production, exchange relations, and extraction.

Cucumber Animation (Mikka Waltari, Vilnius, 2017) shows a male artist photographing a cucumber. He makes new slices to reveal different configurations of seeds. Computer software runs the still photographs into an animated video. The labour is creative and meant for public consumption. The video was created in a workshop conducted by Antje Ehmann and a female collaborator, Eva Stotz, after Farocki's death. By contrast, *Mama Peeling* (Thenjiwe Mazibuko, Johannesburg, 2014) raises questions about what kind of labour the woman is actually doing as she prepares fruits and vegetables while sitting on a brown couch in one long tableau shot taken from the position of the food. The woman wears a beige dress. In front of her, on screen left, cut greens overflow a colander; on screen right, peeled mangoes fill a green pot. Behind these piles, she grates a tomato, looking off-screen. Television advertisements overwhelm the sounds of her labour. Is her work to cut vegetables for a family meal? Or, given the large quantities, is this piecework for sales and consumption outside the home? This film suggests that dialectics between public and private expose contradictions of gendered capitalism.

Labour in a Single Shot mines the dialectical interstitial zones between different forms of work, refusing to render distinctions between artisanal, industrial, postindustrial, service, and digital economies. These spheres of work exceed a simple binary between public and private; instead, work is composed of layers of different kinds of labour and institutional relations. The project insists that the body be considered as a central foundation of transnational dematerialized digital capital. Different kinds of labour are not periodized as a progression (modernization, industrialization, automation, dematerialization) but instead figured as pieces of the complex ecologies of work in the transnational era where residual forms of labour by hand coexist with machine and digital labour. An aggregation, these videos contest the dematerialization of capital, commodity, labour, and work. They situate



Labour in a Single Shot. Thenjiwe Mazibuko, *Mama Peeling*, Johannesburg, 2014.

labour in individual bodies and hands as micro practices. What they do not do, however, is expose or interrogate the gendering of transnational capital.

As the project design builds via iteration and adaptation with exhibitions and other projects emerging from it, one might imagine a new offshoot entitled *Women's Labour in a Single Shot*, with an algorithm of single-take, one-to-two-minutes in duration, domestic space or free-trade zone, unpaid or underpaid labour, and women.

07: History

While it is on the one hand a contemporary, ongoing collaborative production project of documentation of the dispersal of work in the transnational era, *Labour in Single Shot* also engages a historiographic imaginary that invokes a double helix of the histories of cinematic form and the micro practices of hidden labour. *Pico Pocata* (Rui Silveira, Lisbon, 2011) takes place in a toy store. An area is roped off, with spectators immobilized beyond the lines. Two young women in short white flowing dresses dance with a person costumed as Popota, Portugal's beloved pink hippopotamus, wearing a blue sleeveless dress and silver sandals. The women jerk their torsos in unison, moving their arms up and down, their legs pumping to a Lady Gaga song, as Popota deejays and hugs children. Amid the toys stacked in boxes on shelves, the actions of the women's bodies and their forced smiles contrast with the passivity of the spectators. The images



Labour in a Single Shot. Rui Silveira, *Pico Pocata*, Lisbon, 2011.

suggest that the action of women's bodies as spectacles for consumption can reanimate commodities.

The film resonates with examples of early cinema that chronicle women dancers performing the serpentine dance with flowing material attached to wooden wands held by the hands, turning the body and moving the arms to swirl material around the body in a tornado of cloth. These films include *Annabelle Serpentine Dance* (William K.L. Dickson for Thomas Edison, United States, 1895), *Danse serpentine* (Auguste and Louis Lumière, France, 1897), and *Danse serpentine* (Gaumont, France, 1900). These early films delineate woman as spectacle and the female body as a thing of wonder and awe. They obscure the work of performing. They evoke stop-motion photographic practices of dividing movement into small fragments, so that it could be analyzed in ways that conventionally universalize the labour of men and trivialize and delegitimize the labour of woman. As Linda Williams notes, Eadward Muybridge's somewhat earlier stop-motion photographs exhibit "gratuitous fantasization and iconization of the bodies of women," whose movements are choreographed with extraneous props such as baskets and jugs in dubiously functional poses. These representations have "no parallel in the representation of men," whose movements are represented as empirical documentation, despite their allegedly shared impulse towards "scientific truth."¹⁸ As paid models, women are trapped in

18 Linda Williams, "Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions," *Ciné-Tracts* vol. 3, no. 4 (1981), 19–35.

economies of voyeurism and exhibitionism. *Pico Pocata*, also a single-take tableau, suggests the persistence of these early forms, documenting how awe, performance, spectacle, and wonder are rerouted into consumer capitalism and commodities.

Labour in a Single Shot operates as cinematic historiography, suggesting that the single-shot film invokes the stratified layers of many different histories of cinematic modes beyond the feature-length film. It not only takes *La Sortie de l'usine à Lyon* as an algorithm that links labour and capital to the beginnings of cinema but also evokes multiple cinematic forms, modes, and histories, in a complex ecology of the short form. These single-shot short films parallel the history of scientific films that reduce formal manipulation of the image to underscore empirical documentation of phenomena.

These films also evoke the histories of structuralist experimental film, which reduces the manipulation of form to a focus on one element in order to investigate vision and seeing. For example, *Lemon* (Hollis Frampton, United States, 1967) looks like a one-shot film (it is actually several shots seamlessly spliced together) of a lemon with light moving around it, changing its shadows, colours, and metaphorical meaning. This film, like the works in *Labour in a Single Shot*, asks the spectator to engage in the act of observation of the micro by jettisoning argument, character, manipulation of form, and narrative. The single long-take tableau shot evokes amateur media-making, where the long to medium tableau shot documents people, place, and space without formal manipulations. Because established artists are conducting workshops with young students who are yet to be professionalized as media workers, the project embeds amateurism. Finally, these films resonate with newer practices of mobile-phone media-making, where long takes of short duration documenting leisure time are made to be posted on social media and circulated, and images of workplaces are often produced surreptitiously. All of these allusions to other cinematic forms implicitly reference cinema history as a *mise en abyme* of different modes, aesthetics, and use values.

o8: Industry

Both the Lumière *actualités* and early Technicolor films were designed to promote modern science and industry: the Lumière films promoted the company's technologies, and *The Toll of the Sea* (Chester M. Franklin, United States, 1922) was primarily made to sell Technicolor's new two-beam colour process. Both the Lumière *cinématographe* and the Technicolor camera were

proprietary. Only licensed technicians could operate them. Tom Gunning has challenged myths about the Lumières, especially assumptions about early cinema's credulous audiences. Despite the publicity of film impresarios who "made careers out of underestimating the basic intelligence and reality-testing abilities of the average film viewer," audiences did not hide under café tables to avoid being crushed to death by a black-and-white image of a train arriving at a station.¹⁹ These audiences had regularly attended exhibitions of projected slides. The shock of the cinématographe was that the images appeared to move. Audiences were not beguiled by the reality of projected images but instead demonstrated "undisguised awareness [of] (and delight in) [the medium's] illusionistic capabilities." Later audiences would also marvel at the inventiveness of Technicolor's various colour palettes in augmenting – not imitating – reality. The labour of scientists was perhaps the larger attraction.

Nonetheless, childlike belief might have conditioned audience reception of actuality films when the Lumières deployed their camera operators to the colonies to capture exotic images. Audience abilities to distinguish between fact and fiction may have encountered more challenges. Film historians have warned us against succumbing to our own childlike belief that the films documented a world caught unawares. *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon* required multiple takes. In a choreographed departure from true factory practice, factory workers were directed to play themselves.²⁰ Thus, the short films in *Labour in a Single Shot* call forth Tom Gunning's "(in)credulous spectator."

09: Nonhuman

Jonathan Burt argues that "film locates questions of the place of the animal in modernity at the junction where technology and issues of treatment of animals meet."²¹ "Animals" appears as a search term in *Labour in a Single Shot*, but animals are more objects than subjects of the films. For example, *Dog* (Ewa Ciechanowska, Łódź, 2013) features a white female dog groomer who shaves a dog's thick white fur. Restrained by a leash on a table, the

19 Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Art and Text* 34 (1989), 31–45.

20 David Robinson, *From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 63.

21 Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film* (London: Reaktion, 2002), 87.



Labour in a Single Shot. Ewa Ciechanowska, *Dog*, Łódź, 2013.

dog looks plaintively towards the camera, occasionally showing her teeth and growling in silence as the groomer pulls her by the leg. The groomer makes soothing sounds, and the dog later yawns. The film leaves certain questions about labour unresolved. Is the dog performing the role of obedient pet for the human woman? Is the human woman performing the role of dog caregiver? *Vet* (Pietr Kotlicki, Łódź, 2013) attempts to consider the nonhuman perspective. The camera is mounted at around dog eye level. In the background, a woman prepares an injection for the large white dog. His mouth is muzzled. The dog's nervous panting dominates the soundtrack. When the woman moves to administer the injection, the dog growls, leaps, and attempts to bite in self-defence. The film ending echoes early trick films, which often featured animals. The ostensibly comedic ending exposes the limits to the emotional labour that humans can demand of nonhumans confined as pets.

More disturbingly, *Pulpo* (Gladys Lizarazu, Marseille, 2018) shows the savage practice of selling live octopuses as food for humans. The film captures the nonhuman labour of octopuses as they struggle to free themselves. It is painful to watch as the octopuses' tentacles grip the sides of a bright red bucket, while an older white man attempts to weigh them before placing them in a white plastic bag without water. The voices of a woman and her child, presumably the humans who will kill the octopuses and eat their corpses, comprise the soundtrack. The film captures how human violence against other species is naturalized for humans at an early age. It evokes Georges Franju's *Le Sang des bêtes* (*Blood of the Beasts*, France



Labour in a Single Shot. Gladys Lizarazu, *Pulpo*, Marseille, 2018.

1949), with its horrific images of the slaughter of a young horse that pierce the commodity fetishism of postwar industrial prosperity. Sheep witness the slaughter of other sheep. At the end of the day, they are locked in a pen where other sheep were slaughtered. The smell of death is inescapable. As the gates to the slaughterhouse close, the sheep seem aware of impending death, creating parallels with the Nazi death camps. Although postwar France was quick to emphasize the historical role of the Resistance, French republican systems often operated according to a logic of violence that discriminated in particular against Arabs and Africans.²² Achille Mbembe calls these logics the “necropolitics” of the colonial plantation, which could be extended to the metropolitan slaughterhouse as well as its bidonvilles and banlieues.²³

Pulpo opens with several octopuses in a shallow water tank—a death tank. The bottom is painted light blue, making it impossible for the octopuses’ chromatophores to provide camouflage and protection. Octopuses are notorious for their keen ability to escape from aquariums and zoos. They can solve problems and navigate mazes. Their intelligence is on par with the intelligence of dogs. Their incarceration and consumption as food by

22 See, for example, Max Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1992); Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Dominic Thomas, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

23 Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, vol. 1 (2003), 11–40.

humans reveals not only the cruelty of humans to nonhuman animals, but also the depths of human ignorance of and indifference to the intelligence of nonhuman species. Scientists have long recognized the ability of octopuses to recognize individual humans. *Pulpo* evokes the Edison Company's *Electrocuting an Elephant* (Edwin S. Porter and James Blair Smith for Thomas Edison, United States, 1903), in which a female elephant named Topsy is electrocuted to death in a savage display of Edison's business savvy. The film was a publicity stunt for his direct current (DC) system for electric power. Topsy was condemned to death after responding violently to a keeper who burnt her with a lighted cigar. *Pulpo* and *Electrocuting an Elephant* mark a different ethics from that guiding Jean Painlevé's *Les Amours de la pieuvre* (*The Love Life of the Octopus*, France 1965). Painlevé's anthropocentrism in his own documentaries is dangerous since these suggest that nonhuman life can be understood by humans only when cast in human terms, but an inability to imagine other species as sentient is far worse. *Pulpo* resonates with the viral video of the Chinese vlogger "seaside girl Little Seven," who was bitten by an octopus as she attempted to eat it alive during a livestream of her vlog.²⁴ The carnivorous vlogger threatened to eat the octopus in her next video.

In *Butcher Lady* (Jean Doroszczuk, Marseille, 2018), a white woman wears sunglasses and holds a microphone as she promotes the sale of chicken corpses as human food. Her black clothes distinguish her from her underlings, the Arab men, Ali and Miloud, who wear red overalls and obey her orders with smiles. For some audiences, the smiles might convey fantasies of female empowerment in unexpected trades, postcolonial forgiveness, and multiracial harmony. For others, they might appear resistant, invoking the "colonial mimicry" that Homi Bhabha described as occurring under official colonialism and imperialism.²⁵ Given France's culture of racism, the smiles of the Arab male workers and customers seem a kind of affective labour demanded by the white butcher lady. The meat stall is decorated with cut flowers. Corpses of dead animals hang in the back room. Like the Chinese vlogger, the butcher lady provokes similar questions to those posed in Carol J. Adams's landmark analysis of the relationships between patriarchy and

24 The video was covered widely in the media, including Chelsea Ritschel, "Vlogger Attacked by Octopus as She Tries to Eat It During Live-Stream," *The Independent*, May 8, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/octopus-eat-alive-attack-face-girl-vlogger-live-stream-video-a8904911.html>.

25 Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 82–92.

eating meat.²⁶ Patriarchy mistreats women; humanity mistreats animals. Feminism cannot succeed when human violence against nonhuman animals is unacknowledged. Does *Butcher Lady* pull into focus the ways that French women participate in their own patriarchal oppression? Or does it offer some potential for solidarity across gender and race, if not species?

10: Realism

Taking the nineteenth-century Lumière film as an algorithmic model for twenty-first century production, *Labour in a Single Shot* references more than one hundred years of cinema and capitalism through a system of portraiture of workers spread across five continents. However, the project can also be framed within a much longer history of realism dating from the early nineteenth century. The more than 550 films in the project present a portrait gallery mostly of individual workers. They represent a contemporary iteration of paintings such as Gustav Courbet's *Les Casseurs de pierres/The Stonebreakers* (1849), which shows a tableau of two peasants, young man and an older man, breaking rocks, or of the novels of Honoré de Balzac, which centre around human behaviours as they adapt to modern institutions no longer premised entirely on inherited status and accumulated wealth. Realism challenged aristocratic tastes and heralded the dignity in the labour of peasants and an emerging working class.

Picking Mushrooms (Eva Stotz, Vilnius, 2017) is visually reminiscent of *The Stonebreakers*. In a medium shot, we see an older woman with grey hair in a forest, back to the camera, holding a basket with mushrooms. Wearing mismatched pants, skirt, sweater, and a scarf around her head, she bends over, picking through the twigs on the ground, constantly moving. The full-body shot resembles the composition in the Courbet painting. The camera pans with her constant movement and peering down at the ground. The video shows body, eyes, and hands foraging, with a momentary shot of wild mushrooms nestled in the bottom of the brown basket.

Realism shifts the subject matter of art away from history, idealized forms, literature, and religion to modernity and class.²⁷ It rejects the timeless and

26 Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, twenty-fifth anniversary edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

27 Richard R. Brettell, *Modern Art 1851–1929: Capitalism and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12–14. For an elaboration of the relationship between nineteenth-century realism and film theory, see Ian Aitken, *Realist Film Theory and Cinema: The Nineteenth-Century Lukácsian and Intuitionist Realist Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

the transcendental, positing the “real as sensed and lived.”²⁸ For Brendan Prendeville, realism emerges along with other representational strategies of modernity and class such as journalism and photography.²⁹ As Peter Brooks argues, realism rejected the idealization of Greek art and the romantic heroicized body by “demythologizing and deromanticizing the image of work.”³⁰ He contends that the development of photography coincides with realism in the visual arts and in literature, paralleling the way Ehmann and Farocki’s project suggests that cinema aligns with the rise of industrial capitalism.³¹ Brooks argues that realist strategies concentrate on the urban, emphasizing the detail, the everyday, the ordinary. Realism relies on rich descriptions, which “points to the primacy of the visual.”³² With its intense description and attention to details, realism eschews expressionism and subjectivity; it is directed instead to what Brooks calls “taking the side of things.”³³ Realism resides in the empirical and in seeing. Brooks identifies this as “the visual logic of the realist tradition,” where details, gestures, postures, and a working class focus jettison expressivity, idealized forms, and subjectivity.³⁴

In two hundred years of realism, *Labour in a Single Shot* can be situated as both a reclamation and evocation of the realist traditions emerging in the early nineteenth century, extending the artistic exposition of the resilience of the working class and the ordinary. Just as nineteenth-century realism moved away from the expressive, the idealized, and the subjective, the Ehmann and Farocki project moves away from the idealizations of virtual reality and 360-degree (immersive) video, and from other interfaces whose digital utopias smooth out the horrific contradictions of neoliberal transnationalism. The videos in this project do not indulge in the narcissistic expressionism and flagrant subjectivity of the digital selfie, which incessantly documents and circulates affect. Rather, they turn the camera in the opposite direction. With participatory interaction located in the observational empiricism of micro practices, the videos in *Labour in a Single Shot* turn outwards to the worlds of the everyday.

28 Brendan Prendeville, *Realism in 20th-Century Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 9.

29 Prendeville, *Realism in 20th-Century Painting*, 8–12.

30 Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 81.

31 Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 86

32 Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 17.

33 Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 210.

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8. Videopoetics of Labour in a Single Shot

José Gatti

Abstract

Focusing on videos produced in the workshops of the Labour project, this essay analyzes representations of the working class in audiovisual media. The aim is to evaluate the (in)visibility of workers on the screen and the political contexts stemming from those representations. To accomplish that, the essay starts out with an analysis of *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895), the pioneer film shot by the Lumière brothers, who framed the workers of their own factory. Some of the videos analyzed here place the workers under the spotlight; some, oddly enough, dare to erase the workers, suggesting present-day politics that negate class struggle and the working force as a category in itself. In this work, the author uses some of the concepts defined by Maya Deren concerning the poetics of cinema.

Keywords: poetics of cinema, politics of cinema, video art, working class, Lumière brothers, Maya Deren

In their description of Labour in a Single Shot, Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki explain that the project involved “the production, in each workshop city, of contemporary remakes of the Lumières’ film *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*. One of the pivotal acts on display, then, is workers leaving their workplace. And one of the central questions is what kinds of workers do we still see leaving their workplaces today, and where?”¹ But the videos produced within the workshops feature more than exit scenes. The filmmakers – many of them nonprofessionals – were free to produce single shots that showed scenes of labour, of workers immersed in their activities, getting prepared to work, talking about their work, or, as in the Lumières’

1 www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net.

film, leaving their workplace – which could be a factory, a mine, a ploughed field, a concert hall, or the kerb of a sidewalk.

The home page of Labour in a Single Shot features a panel that displays all the workshop videos in a grid, offering multiple avenues of entry to particular cultures, ethnicities, languages, and activities. The viewer can enter the single shots directly from the panel. The videos are grouped under four main categories: 1) city, 2) type of activity, 3) the colour prevailing in the cinematography, and 4) videos that specifically show workers leaving their workplace. These categories help the viewer select which of the project's 550 or so available videos to watch. The project includes a vast array of people and activities: factory workers in Hanoi, miners in Łódź, a projectionist of a movie theatre in Mexico, fishermen in Rio, a hairdresser in Tel Aviv, metal workers in Cairo, subway musicians in Hangzhou, and Stalin, Lenin, and Putin impersonators in a Moscow street. As Ehmann and Farocki explain in their project description, the project's subject of investigation is labour in its myriad forms: "paid and unpaid, material and immaterial, rich in tradition or altogether new."

While the sheer variety of videos on display quickly reveals how variegated labour is in the early twenty-first century, deeper immersion into the collection affords a second, perhaps even more astounding insight: how labour is commonly perceived is contingent not only on the degree of its visibility but also on how it is visualized. For instance, it is common knowledge by now that the day of a homemaker is just as labour-intensive as that of a factory worker. But because housework takes place behind closed doors (thus belonging to a private sphere not associated with gainful employment), it is largely taken for granted and belittled as "mere" domestic activity. Thus, it has paradoxically remained largely invisible *as* work. Something similar is now the case with digital work. Once belonging almost exclusively to the domain of large offices and electronic labs, work with computers has migrated to the private home, where it has become ubiquitous (in its shaping of numerous freelance occupations), yet just as invisible as classic housework, such as cooking and cleaning, in its erosion of the distinction between work and leisure.

Other forms of work, such as agricultural work, are more widely acknowledged to be labour, because they are widely visible. Yet here, too, visualization varies according to numerous factors, some of which, again, have to do with the importance accorded such work. "In some African countries," Ehmann and Farocki point out on the project website, "an entire family lives from cultivating a tiny strip of land next to the highway." The livelihood of individual African families – their daily toil, their division

of labour – is generally inconspicuous. The project website contrasts such small-scale scenarios with their extreme opposite in the downright bizarre exigencies and mandates of large-scale first-world agriculture, which may well involve people being rewarded for *not* working – that is, for staying home and leaving resources lying fallow. “In many European countries,” the website explains, “farmers survive by leaving their soil uncultivated and being paid for it.” Interestingly, as Ehmann and Farocki go on to describe, this form of resource management, too, depends in its own way on visualizations, because such arrangements, to be managed effectively, are often monitored by satellites.

This essay concerns itself with ways of visualizing labour. I have selected seven videos to highlight the issue of the visibility of workers and the work they do. In some cases, these are new forms of work; other examples show forms of labour performed by what we might still call the working class. How do the workers appear in these films? Or how do they *not* appear? If this agenda already implies that some forms of labour are more visible than others, the aim is to find out how such visibility is produced and what techniques are used to visualize work. By “technique,” I do not merely mean modern technologies of vision, driven, as they are, by advanced optics and surveillance technologies. I am more concerned with artistic and rhetorical ways of visualization – ways that are decidedly low-tech rather than high-tech, and for which I would like to use the term “videopoetics.” In doing so, I will draw on the thinking of a film-maker who was herself also a poet: Maya Deren.

The Original Single Shot

First, however, I would like to revisit the film that in a sense started it all by giving rise to the tradition of visualizing work in moving images, a film made by Auguste and Louis Lumière in a single shot in 1895 and acknowledged by Ehmann and Farocki as the inspiration for their project. When the Lumière brothers set their camera to shoot the legendary *Workers Leaving the Factory*, also known as *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, that short film launched a cluster of technological, aesthetic, and rhetorical developments that continue to play themselves out to the present day. Its premiere, on December 28, 1895, is generally held to have marked the beginning of the history of cinema proper. Already, in cinema’s *Urszene*, in what might seem a clear-cut case of plain or even crude realist documentation, the relationship between what is visible and what is invisible, between what is seen and

what is implied, is revealed in all its vexing imbalance. The impression of reality created by this scene of exiting labourers demonstrated, among other things, the effect of the cinema on questions of verisimilitude. The visceral effect of the “actuality” that nineteenth-century spectators saw on the screen may have seemed as shocking as the image they saw in another seminal film made by the Lumières, *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, which showed a train that appeared to invade the premises, seemingly springing from another dimension. Not unlike the train, those workers leaving the Lumière factory seemed to move audaciously towards the audience, perhaps triggering in some viewers memories of the Paris Commune, which had happened a mere twenty-four years before.

But if photographic visibility had now acquired another dimension, the question became: visibility exactly of what and exactly for whom? Historically, the advent of the cinema coincided with an increased visibility of the working class. But what impact did it have on the working class itself? Whether seen as a pioneer experiment or as a tour de force of French technology, the Lumières’ film in fact recorded a kind of scene that, unless witnessed in person, could until then only be envisaged in the novels of Zola or Dickens – in other words, by the literate and educated. At first glance, the Lumières’ film would seem to belong to this same tradition. During its first public screening on a wintry Saturday evening at the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines, the room was filled mostly with respectable, proper gentry. But universal accessibility would soon enough become the cinema’s most important quality, and it would quickly make obsolete certain traditional class barriers to knowledge. Before the advent of proper movie theatres in the 1910s, the cinema’s presence at fairgrounds and during the nickelodeon boom made it a prime new medium for working-class audiences. In fact, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, like many other films made by the Lumières, had already been shown, prior to its official premiere, at closed sessions, to their family, to business associates, and, significantly, to the workers themselves. Thus, the scene that inaugurated the representation of the working class on the screen had the working class among its first viewers. Yet there is evidence in this film that suggests that the visibility of work and of workers to other classes and to themselves would remain subject to an unstable relationship of various factors relating to authorial conception, modes and circumstances of production, and aesthetics.

The Lumières’ film of their workers has historically been presented under a variety of titles. I have mentioned its English-language titles, both of which put the workers in the position of a grammatical subject; the usual French title, however, *La sortie des usines Lumière à Lyon*, focuses not on

the workers but on the Lumière factory itself: on a specific location within it (its exit doors), on the city where it was located (the thriving industrial centre of Lyon), and on an activity at its gate (the moment of exit). Thus, in a certain sense, the workers were erased from the French title. Even though this film will forever remain a precious record of working-class life in 1895 France, it will also always retain the characteristic marks of its origin as a portrayal of the proletariat from the point of view of the bosses. We see what *they* saw, through an ideological operation that, at the same time, established the vocation of cinema (not unlike still photography before it) as a medium with the power of recording a representation that we may take for an unequivocal reality. In this sense, the point of view of the workers themselves can only be imagined, for it was not registered on film by the Lumières.

La sortie des usines Lumière à Lyon survives in three versions, all of them similar to each other. All three versions keep approximately the same framing, which more or less splits the screen in two: on the left, a small door opens onto a sidewalk; on the right, huge gates open to a paved driveway, and again, not unlike the train at La Ciotat, the workers come towards the camera, towards us. This last characteristic is most prominent in what I will call the third version (the version mostly used by film historians, that is, the only one that does not feature a horse cart coming through the gate), which neatly divides the screen into two halves, or two exits. We can take the identical choice of framing in all three versions as an indication that the Lumières were pretty sure what they wanted to show. But one of the things that make the photographic arts unique, and film unique among the photographic arts, is the cinematic image's combined capacity to bypass human agency and intention, and be shaped by it. Add to this the fact that an image is, ultimately, produced in the mind of the beholder, and the interplay of factors involved in the problem of cinematic invisibility or visibility becomes even more complex.

In my classes in film history, students often make a distinction between the small door on the left and the gate on the right, and believe they see more white-collar workers leaving from the smaller door, which they imagine to be the door of an office. A closer inspection of the film reveals that this perception is inaccurate; in none of the three versions is there any regular difference in dress code that differentiates the workers coming through the door from those coming through the gate. This reading may thus tell more about the students and how they organize their ideas about labour and industrial architecture than about the film itself. Women wearing fancy fin-de-siècle hats emerge from both door and gate, and we see workers



Lumière Brothers, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon*, 1895, b/w film, silent, 46 sec.

leaving both exits on bicycles. Moreover, the space behind the smaller exit is not indoors: the workers are coming not from an office but from a sunlit, open patio, which opens directly onto the sidewalk.

However, it would be ill-advised to label the way these films represent the workers as limited or reductive based solely on the fact (or objection) that they were not the authors of their own portrait. There is a wealth of information to be found in those three short single shots. From all three of them, we can gather information about the workers' gender (there are many women and at least one of them carries a baby), age (children also worked there), outfits (and the hierarchies they betoken), and means of transportation (most workers walk, and some ride bicycles); in all three versions, we also see a dog happily trotting out of the factory.

We witness some festive gestures: a man who seems to be playing with one of the dogs, two workers touching one another in an affectionate manner, one woman jokingly pulling another's dress. And in many of the workers' faces, we may perceive the liberating sensation of their having finished their shift: many of them are smiling, while some of them look at the camera, thus acknowledging the presence of their film-making employers. This is not surprising, because the Lumières had been experimenting with film cameras for a while, often using their employees as subject matter. We can

imagine that many or all of these workers will have been aware of what was happening.

The three versions of this film are also suggestive in what they do not show, in what remains outside the frame. Once we begin to imagine what remains invisible beyond the frame, we can begin to imagine how these workers lived and interacted. That which remains invisible may prompt us to query the invisible dimension of what remains behind the gates that close at the end of the film (is there anyone left inside the factory?) and of where the workers are going (invisible spaces to left and right). There seems to be a general atmosphere of relief at the moment of exit, as workers, after twelve (or perhaps fourteen or more) hours of work in a shop filled with photographic chemicals and perhaps little in the way of safety precautions, leave their (perhaps gruelling) workshop to walk to their homes, pubs, or union halls. Or is this just my imagination? Is it something one can see or is it simply the product of the film's dialogue with my own repertoire of images from books by Zola or Dickens or Marx, the plays of Brecht, or films by Eisenstein, Lang, Chaplin, and Nelson Pereira dos Santos?

This, then, is the question I mean to address with regard to the videos from *Labour in a Single Shot*: what is visible within the frame, and what remains invisible outside it, while nonetheless being suggested by the frame itself? I will not engage, here, the categories of fiction or documentary. Some of the workshop videos, in documentary fashion, are obviously recordings of working activities; others are clearly recordings of deliberate performances. Instead, I would like to explore them as poetic constructs that mobilize registers – specifically, audiovisual registers – of what is said and what is merely implied. Literary and film theory have given us numerous ways to negotiate the relationship between these two vectors of enunciation. On the one hand, there is film's denotative power, constituted by the exactitude of its recording capacity and the wealth of realist surface detail. But how to account for what goes beyond the explicitly stated? Among the wealth of critical approaches that one could take, I have chosen to apply the ideas of Maya Deren. Not only did Deren concern herself with questions of what is said versus what is implied; she did so in a decidedly unscientific vein, drawing on the traditions and practices of written poetry instead. And, just as importantly, as a practising film-maker, Deren had no qualms about bringing the vocabulary of poetics to a technological medium. It is through Deren's thinking that I would like to approach the videos of *Labour in a Single Shot* as poetic constructs – that is, to trace their practice of videopoetics.

Deren expatiated on her ideas during the symposium *Poetry and the Film*, co-ordinated by Amos Vogel in October of 1953 in New York City, at a

debate that also featured Dylan Thomas, Parker Tyler, Arthur Miller, and Willard Maas. On that occasion, Deren had the opportunity to explain what she called “poetic constructs,” in which the logic of actions, in other words, narrative form, gives way to a condensed, poetic statement.² Deren saw (art) film and poetry as forms of expression distinct from drama and narrative. Because classical narratives usually possess linear trajectories, they are, by way of association, called horizontal. Here, the purposiveness of syntagmatic action (the one-thing-builds-on-another quality) tends to work in synergy with the clarity of expression, or, if you will, the denotative character of what is told. This vector of storytelling, whose functionality is what determines its horizontality, then becomes enriched in meaning by elements that rupture or “attack” the story’s flow, in a way she defines as “vertical.”

To explain this, Deren does not initially draw on an example from film, but from classical drama. She characterizes Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as “moving forward on a ‘horizontal’ plane of development” until it arrives “at a point of action when (Shakespeare) wants to illuminate the meaning of this moment of drama [...] so that you have a ‘horizontal’ development with periodic ‘vertical’ investigations, which are the poems, which are the monologues.”³ According to Deren, such moments of illumination shed new light and unfold new levels of meaning for the entire play – as they do also in film.⁴ She goes on to explain:

The distinction of poetry is its construction (what I mean by “a poetic structure”), and the poetic construct arises from the fact, if you will, that it is a “vertical” investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications

2 Her specific ideas on verticality and horizontality were never published in writing, which turns their use into a risky though tempting enterprise. In her study of Deren’s work, Sarah Keller relates these ideas to Deren’s familiarity with Gaston Bachelard’s philosophy, especially *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*. See Sarah Keller, *Maya Deren: Incomplete Control* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 215.

3 At the debate, she met with strong opposition from Dylan Thomas (who, according to Willard Maas, was drunk and tried to dismiss her argumentation by making jokes about vertical and horizontal positions) and Arthur Miller, who, at some point, emphatically said, “To hell with that ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal.’ It doesn’t mean anything.” Deren managed to calm Miller somewhat when she brought up an example from his own *Death of a Salesman*, which nevertheless he tried to rebut. In Sitney, *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 184–185, and Maas, “Memories of My Maya,” quoted in Keller, *Maya Deren*, 266.

4 It would be interesting to relate Deren’s notions of verticality and illumination to her actual experience as a practitioner of Haitian religion, in which possession defines moments of stasis and transfiguration. See Deren’s own account in her ethnographic essay *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston, NY: MacPherson, 1985).

of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned, in a sense, not with what is occurring but with what it feels like or what it means. A poem, to my mind, creates visible or auditory forms for something that is invisible which is the feeling, or the emotion, or the metaphysical content of the movement.⁵

The relationship between the visible and the implied is thus unstable; their ratio in any given artwork is constantly in flux. At times, the poetic qualities of a scene completely take over. From this perspective, we may regard some of the videos I have selected from *Labour in a Single Shot* as vertical, condensed, poetic recordings of experiences that encapsulate micro narratives, which can be perceived in one coup, so to speak, like a sort of single-shot poetry.⁶

But not all videos I have selected for analysis function this way. Despite their concise quality, some also function as “horizontal” narratives that seem to rest calmly in the mundane mode of their seemingly unpoetic descriptiveness. They unfold as a result of, say, gradually evolving camera movements and sound recording, thus privileging a syntagmatic development in time. But such horizontality can also be enhanced by what is *not* shown – that is, by what remains invisible and yet remains to be imagined. At these points, then, such shots once again combine horizontally unfolding denotative detail with illuminating, vertical moments to be discovered and pondered by the viewer.

Split Screen

One of the videos from *Labour in a Single Shot*, Adam Sekuler’s *The Docking Ferry* (Boston, 2013),⁷ disconcertingly shows two frames within one camera frame. We soon realize that each of these two frames corresponds to a window in one of the doors to the deck of a ferry approaching the wharf. The two doors are separated by a wide partition, which stands as a black stripe in the middle of the image frame. Each window frame has its own view of the water, the dock, and the city behind it. The two windows can be seen as two separate screens, which present us with two different cityscapes.

5 Deren in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 174.

6 Deren elsewhere refers to “haiku film,” an idea that follows the same line of thought and which might be directly related to Eisenstein’s theories about vertical montage. Keller, *Maya Deren*, 189.

7 <https://vimeo.com/79385635>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Adam Sekuler, *The Docking Ferry*, Boston, 2013.

One after the other, two members of the ferry crew (as we can tell from their uniforms: one wears khaki shorts, the other khaki slacks, and both wear the same dark polo shirt), both young, White, and male, casually open the right-hand door and walk out onto the deck. Once on the deck, they open the small gate that will let passengers out onto the dock. The two crew members stand, walk around a bit and talk, each of them visible through a different window. As the ferry docks, one of them opens the windowed doors, thus enlarging each of the two separate frames. A woman can be heard talking, perhaps on a phone, and we can barely hear her conversation: “I got to get serious this year...” Through the right-hand door, a sign on the dock, “Ferry Center,” is slowly uncovered by the boat’s movement. We can hear the same woman, now laughing out loud. People start to leave the ferry. One man, to the right, carrying a knapsack, picks up a bicycle waiting for him on the deck. The crew seem to count the passengers with a clicker. The single shot thus unfolds a short sequence of actions that can be understood as a narrative, developed (as Deren put it) horizontally.

Even though the split screen may recall the two doors of the Lumière factory, the setting here could not be more different. The camera is positioned behind the doors; thus, our point of view coincides with that of the passengers, who see the approaching shore. Moreover, in *The Docking Ferry*, both spaces – indoor and outdoor – make up a continuum in which tourists, workers, CEOs, self-employed professionals, and owners of the means of production may be blended, making class differences virtually invisible. The only clearly visible members of the working class are the

crew in uniform, even though their clothing seems as discreetly casual as that of the passengers. They seem relaxed and perfunctory as they perform their duties. One can even detect a smile on their faces: are they posing for the camera? Indeed, crew and passengers could pass for each other. Here, class distinctions may have other markers than just physical appearance – these may show up in accent, in vocabulary, or in the model of smartphone one carries. Class distinctions will probably become visible as soon as the passengers reach their destination after leaving the ferry. We are not sure whether its passengers are leaving or going to their workplace; in fact, we are not sure whether their transit is related to any type of work at all. The only workers visible in the frame are the crew members, who will remain on board for the time being. Nevertheless, the video raises more questions: are these young ferry workers happy with their salaries? Does their workplace comply with safety regulations? Are the workers entitled to a health plan? Are their jobs temporary or seasonal, or is theirs a chosen career?

One Face

Class (and ethnic) markers are much more obvious in *Simon*, by Hadas Tapouchi (Tel Aviv, 2012).⁸ Most of what we see is the watchful face of a Black man, who is shot from a low angle in such a way as initially to make it unclear where he is or what he is doing. His face practically fills the frame, while behind him, we see the ceiling of a building, and in the background we hear the continuous sound of some sort of machine. His face continues to dominate the frame as the environment gradually becomes more visible. We realize he must be riding some sort of vehicle, for the changing background reveals that he is on the move. The Hebrew signs we see behind him are not surprising, because we already know that this video was shot as part of the Tel Aviv workshop. But a Black face is not what a normal viewer would expect to see in an Israeli setting. Moreover, the man's face does not recall the face of a Falasha, a person of Ethiopian origin and Jewish faith, nor does he wear a kippah. Ethnically, he could pass for African, Latin, or African American.

We soon realize that he is driving a vehicle inside a shopping mall or airport, and that whoever is holding the camera is staying very close to him to maintain a proper close-up shot from a low angle. He sometimes glances at the camera (or is it at the cameraperson, who remains invisible?). We

8 <https://vimeo.com/57093700>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Hadas Tapouchi, *Simon*, Tel Aviv, 2012.

finally understand that he has been giving the film-maker a ride atop the front end of a small vehicle, and the viewer realizes that the cameraperson was perched right below him all along. The man discreetly smiles, as the film-maker seems to step down from the vehicle. Then the film-maker suddenly uses her voice to make herself present on the scene, as she asks him in English: “What’s your name?” He says, “Simon.” She asks, “Where are you from?” He replies, “From Ghana.” Now the camera leaves the vehicle, which, we now see, is a motorized sweeper. Simon resumes his work cleaning the floor, as a young man passes by, and then he drives the sweeper away.

The video is constructed like a short road movie, in which the unrolling action ends when it comes to a point of arrival. However, the video opens up possibilities of reference that exceed its frame when Simon says “Ghana,” thus clarifying his identity. This is when the issue of migration arrives at the thematic centre of this video. We know that Ghana is very far from Tel Aviv, ethnically, culturally, and politically. We now realize that Simon is a foreigner, someone who has probably arrived without knowing the local language or the local cultural traditions, let alone the acute political problems of Israel, which entail a permanent state of military alert that permeates social relations at every level. His role as part of the lower ranks of the working class within that context is unaddressed in the video, but certain things can be inferred. Simon’s presence on the scene evokes the quandary of a country that needs a foreign workforce but currently has qualms about granting citizenship to non-Jewish workers, because that would mean redefining the Jewish character of the nation. Palestinians are

generally refused work permits in Israel, which forces the country to import workers, mostly from Asia and Africa. This is a system that has also been adopted by many oil-rich Arab countries, with varying results. Is Simon treated better than, say, an enslaved labourer working on the construction of a university campus or of a soccer stadium in the Arab Emirates?

This apparently simple video is thus filled with visible and invisible information. Leaving aside assumptions regarding his ethnicity, we can see how the video makes Simon an allegory of the cheap labour Israel imports in order to have people working in low-paid positions usually shunned by Israelis. Moreover, the video does not expose the possible precariousness of his position. Is he fairly paid? How secure is his contract? Is he forced to compete for and within his job with workers from other countries? Nevertheless, the strength of Tapouchi's video lies in the visibility of this man, who otherwise might pass unnoticed. Furthermore, it is his face we see most of the time; it is his gaze that fills the screen and reaches the spectator. The verticality is directly inscribed in the polyvalence of Simon's brief gaze at the camera.

Another Face

Like *Simon*, many of the videos of *Labour in a Single Shot* feature body parts in action, such as hands, legs, or faces. Several works frame the lower half of the workers' bodies, and a few of them don't show their faces at all. Another eloquent face can be seen in *Dry Cleaner*, by Florencia Percia (Buenos Aires, 2013).⁹ This is perhaps one of the most minimalist – and vertical – works included in the series. Not unlike in Tapouchi's video, most of what we see here is a face, which occupies the screen and dominates the narrative. But this is a very different face, the statically framed face of a dishevelled middle-aged White man, who sternly stares on and off at the camera as he keeps working with no interruption whatsoever. His gaze leaves no room for any humour: it is as if the seriousness of his face contaminated our own faces. We barely see his hands, which make regular, repetitive movements, while in the background we can see clothes, out of focus, hanging from a rack. The diegetic soundtrack, however, hints to what he is doing: repetitious, hissing steam sounds signal the presence of a pressing machine and suggest a boring, mechanical activity. What centrally occupies the screen,

9 <https://vimeo.com/67082192>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Florencia Percia, *Dry Cleaner*, Buenos Aires, 2013.

however, is the cleaner's sad, defiant gaze. His face opens up possibilities of a silent dialogue with the viewer that the activity of his arms and hands might not yield.

What can we learn from this worker? We already knew from the title that we could expect to see a scene shot at a dry cleaner's shop. But the title suggests different possibilities: the man we see is apparently working as a dry cleaner, but we do not know whether he is owner or employee; that information remains invisible to us. We sense, however, that the activity in which he is engaged does not produce much joy. Moreover, we also know that he lives and works in a country that has been plagued, in recent years, by economic recession. His gaze, however, reveals a complex combination of a call for compassion and of a certain defiant challenge. The silent dialogue it initiates thus gives spectators the opportunity to construct more than one imagined biography of the dry cleaner.

Two Faces

Frida Kallejera 1, shot in 2014 by Bani Khoshnoudi,¹⁰ an Iranian film-maker based in Mexico, seems to do the opposite of what *Dry Cleaner* does. Instead of focusing on one face, or on no face at all, this work multiplies faces,

¹⁰ <https://vimeo.com/96476874>.

constructing a palimpsest of biographies, genders, and sexualities rooted in the art and life of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, whose work was mainly focused on her own face and body. Her paintings are sufficiently well known not to require any examples – in fact, the mere mentioning of her name fills our minds with their imagery.

However, this video does not start by showing a face. As if in a prologue, the camera follows a horizontal narrative as it travels over colourful objects scattered on a sidewalk: a box filled with coins, fake fruits, a painted cactus, a page with tarot cards with a phrase scribbled on it: “Viva la Vida.” The camera then pans to the right to disclose a small sign:

I don't want a happy end, I want a life filled with happy moments. Because the end ... the end is very sad. Viva la vida. [signed] Frida Kallejera.

We hear a Mexican folk song coming from a boom box outside of the frame. The song is “Ojitos de engaña a veinte,” by Salvador Velazquez, which became a hit with a 1999 recording by the duo Las Palomas. In a gender-twisting performance, their female voices sing a male monologue:

Do not look elsewhere
You know I am a jealous man
I take care of what the heavens gave me.

At last, the camera moves upwards to show an easel with a portrait of a tearful Frida Kahlo, and we see a hand, armed with brush and palette, apparently giving the painting its final touches. The camera moves to the left, and we realize that this Frida is being painted by another, queer Frida – the Frida Kallejera or Street Frida of the title – a heavily made-up drag queen, who also uses the same brush to retouch her own makeup. We soon realize the brush is just a prop and that the palette has no real paint. The retouching, both of painting and makeup, was all theatrics, all make-believe. Among the few things we can believe in are the queer artist's faux eyelashes, so long and curved that, every time she blinks, they touch her legendary Frida eyebrows.

Frida Kallejera's performance foregrounds the fact that all these Fridas – the performer, her performance, perhaps even the original Frida – are crafted images, which helps give Khoshnoudi's video the quality of a *mise en abyme*. All these coexisting Fridas spring from the life of the artist and are now infinitely repeated by the mimed brushstrokes of this street performer. Here, as so often, Frida Kahlo is used as an image (an



Labour in a Single Shot. Bani Khoshnoudi, *Frida Kallejera 1*, Mexico City, 2014.

operation that Kahlo's own production of self-portraits already suggested), this time being appropriated by a drag queen, who performs in the *calles* of Mexico.

Kallejera poses, briefly smiles, giggles and pouts; she chats in a deep, grave voice with passers-by whom we don't see; she applies the brush to the painting and to her own face, in alternation; she stops, gazes into the distance and, in the last ten seconds of the video, which coincide with the end of the song we have been hearing all along, expresses a deep, silent sadness.

It is worth noting that in Mexico, Frida Kahlo is often impersonated by drag queens in the gay clubs of the Zona Rosa, the bohemian quarter of Mexico City. This might seem paradoxical to spectators who are not familiar with Mexico's gay subculture; after all, the tragic figure of Frida Kahlo would not seem a natural source of inspiration for drag shows, which are often associated with comedy and fun – in the vein, for example, of Carmen Miranda. But the explanation lies in the invisible world outside of the frame, and this tells us much about the ethos – as well as the pathos – of Mexican humour and the ways Mexicans deal with death and suffering, as the carnivalesque celebrations of the Día de Muertos attest. Moreover, the Mexican LGBTQ community might very well claim Kahlo as one of their own, for she had female lovers (as the intriguing 1983 biopic *Frida, Still Life*, by Paul Leduc, clearly shows). One could thus say that Khoshnoudi's and Kallejera's rendition of Kahlo's persona expresses solemn reverence and compassion for the artist's trajectory.

The Celebration

Another video in which workers produce a representation of themselves is *Garbage Choir* (Rio de Janeiro, 2012), by Patrick Sonni Cavalier.¹¹ It shows workers who don't appear to be working but are rather describing their own labour through singing, in a self-reflexive performance imbued with poise and dignity. They are the garbage collectors and street sweepers of Rio de Janeiro, whose presence within the urban landscape possibly ranks among the most invisible, and this despite their bright orange uniforms. That invisibility is attributable to a myriad of reasons, most of them embedded in the surviving master–slave relations that still permeate Brazilian society. Brazil was the last American nation to abolish slavery, in 1888, and its elite often displays contempt for people of the lower ranks of the working class, a racist sentiment also cultivated by the White middle class, because most domestic workers are of African origin. Hence the invisibility imposed on people who work in sanitary facilities; until as recently as 1996, residential buildings featured separate entrances and elevators for the use of domestic workers.

Among the city's workers, garbage collectors are probably the ones who earn the lowest salaries. In many ways, the work of a garbage collector is a belittled position, indeed one charged with self-deprecation. But there they are, wearing their glaring uniforms, unmistakably identified as the garbage collectors that car drivers are supposed to spot and avoid running over in the everyday rush of the city.

However, despite their evident professional role, they are here to sing, not to sweep. They form the garbage choir advertised by the video's title. Their performance, which takes place in one of the city's public parks, is in fact a pep session to the sound of samba, in which they proudly present themselves and reiterate the importance of their work for the environment and for public health. The camera shows them from a low angle; it is positioned almost at ground level, thus foregrounding the intricate *petit-pavé* or Portuguese cobblestone pavement of Rio's sidewalks, a kind of sidewalk also characteristic of cities such as Lisbon and Oporto, the same kind to be found along Copacabana and Ipanema beaches, sidewalks swept daily by the garbage collectors.

The handheld camera remains fixed for most of the video, moving slightly to the left when a small child steps into the frame and happily dances to the rhythm of the choir's percussion, only to leave the frame a few seconds later.

11 <https://vimeo.com/58672827>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Patrick Sonni Cavalier, *Garbage Choir*, Rio de Janeiro, 2012.

The child's appearance exemplifies what Maya Deren defines as controlled accident:

By “controlled accident” I mean the maintenance of a delicate balance between what is there spontaneously and naturally as evidence of the independent life of actuality, and the persons and activities which are deliberately introduced into the scene.¹²

According to Deren, it is the role of the film-maker to incorporate such spontaneous events into the scene. We are not in an auditorium or before the stage of a theatre; the stage, here, is the street itself, the privileged public space for the performance of samba, open for anyone to join. Thus, different elements – singers, child, samba, and mosaic floor – produce a complete, vertical, poetic construct.

But which song have the garbage collectors chosen for this performance? It is the now classic “A voz do morro,” or “The voice of the favela,” composed by Zé Kéti, which hit the charts in 1955 and is still widely played. However, few people will remember that the song was especially composed for the soundtrack of *Rio 100 Degrees*, the feature film directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos that inaugurated Cinema Novo in 1955, to considerable controversy.

12 Maya Deren, “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality,” in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1978), 66.

The film was celebrated by many critics who saw in it a refreshing example of neorealism and social engagement, badly needed at a time when Brazilian films mostly shunned the portrayal of social and class struggles; at the same time, it suffered harsh censorship, on account of these very qualities.

Rio 100 Degrees also unveils (in)visible workers: its protagonists are a group of Black boys who make a living for their families selling peanuts on the streets. Zé Kéti's theme song, indeed, underlines the change brought by Nelson Pereira dos Santos's film in the landscape of Brazilian cinema: in verses written in the first person – "I am the samba," runs one verse – it gives voice to the favela, to those poor Black children who are protagonists in a story of struggle and survival. In the film, the boys pass mostly unnoticed by adults, except when they are seen by the upper class as a menace to law and order. This happens in one of the most touching scenes of *Rio 100 Degrees*, which shows one of the peanut vendors being chased off the sands of Copacabana beach by White sunbathers. This was one of the scenes that, in the 1950s, embarrassed many White Brazilians who wanted to believe that their country was a "racial democracy."

Thus, it is moving that, nearly sixty years later, this song was appropriated by the choir of garbage collectors to stress their pride in their work. It would not be surprising if none of those workers had ever seen Pereira dos Santos's film, because *Rio 100 Degrees* has no presence on television or in movie theatres, except in film history classes or special shows attended by students or intellectuals. But in this video the stars are evidently the collectors, who assert their profession as well as their ethnicity. Mostly Black, they add their own verses to the original lyrics, singing "I am a friend you can trust," and "I am the one who brings health to the city," lines likely addressed to those who perceive poor Black people (like the boy ejected from the beach in *Rio 100 Degrees*) as a threat to their security. And they close their performance by touching their hearts, as if they were singing an anthem and proudly presenting themselves: "I am the garbage collector of the city!"

Instead of showing the workers collecting garbage or sweeping the streets, *Garbage Choir* thus echoes Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Zé Kéti by giving voice to the workers themselves. The authors of song, film, and video can be seen as what Antonio Gramsci called organic intellectuals: as people who align their work and endeavours with the political agenda of working-class struggles.¹³ As they rewrite the lyrics of the song, the collectors become intellectual partners of the original authors.

13 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1989), 3–33.

Invisible Labour

Another Gramscian figure can be seen in Aleksandra Hirszfeld's video *Philosopher* (Łódź, 2013).¹⁴ This is perhaps one of the most enigmatic videos in the Labour In a Single Shot catalogue. Its title already implies the invisibility of the activity of the worker portrayed – for how can we render visible a lonely, concentrated mental activity such as philosophy? Nevertheless, this video is fraught with visibilities.

Philosopher shows a White, bespectacled young man comfortably seated in an armchair, reading a book. Whatever action is occurring seems to be happening in the philosopher's mind, so the spectator's gaze can roam freely around the room shown on the screen. The philosopher is probably at home, because he is wearing a T-shirt and flip-flops. Behind him, we see a wall covered in bookshelves, and next to him, a conspicuous globe that doubles as a lamp. The globe, which radiates a yellow light, is turned so as to reveal South America in the foreground, a continent visibly crossed by a thick line marking the Tordesillas Meridian, 24°W of Greenwich, which was defined by Portugal and Spain in 1494 as the line dividing the portions of the American continent to which they laid claim. This globe thus hints at a specific point in history, that of European mercantilist expansion and the ensuing geopolitical reorganization of the world.

The philosopher reads, occasionally touching his forehead (a gesture standardized by Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker*), frowning and scribbling in his book – an indication that this is not a library book, but his own private property. After one minute and thirty seconds of reading, the young man's concentration is disturbed by a bizarre, rhythmic sound that suggests some sort of rap music, which we soon realize must be coming from a cell phone nearby. Possibly annoyed by the call, he interrupts his reading, rests the book on the arm of the chair, stands up, and leaves towards the left of the frame. We now see the book's cover and realize that he has been reading Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*.

Hirszfeld's video manages to make a variety of statements: the activity of a philosopher may be invisible, but his book gives us a sense of what he may be thinking about, that is, the material world as described and analyzed by a Marxist philosophy whose status in post-communist Poland is probably open to question. We cannot know whether the phone call was staged or an accident. Above all, this scene, most likely a *mise-en-scène*, is indicative of the video-maker's subtle humour and playfulness. When the

14 <https://vimeo.com/74945090>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Aleksandra Hirszfeld, *Philosopher*, Łódź, 2013.

phone rings, *Philosopher* reaches a turning point in which the role of its protagonist is defined and contextualized. The sudden intrusion of the cell phone and its hip-hop ringtone undermines the initial apparent dignity of the scene, while the revelation it provokes of the book's title casts a new light on the meaning of Marxism in the present, and, in retrospect, on that of the scene overall.

The Invisible Worker

If the playful *Philosopher* is all about the history of the working class and the status of the intellectual as a worker, Ana Rebordão's video *Untitled* (Lisbon, 2012),¹⁵ by contrast, suggests a disturbing elimination of workers. Like Florencia Percia in *Dry Cleaner*, Rebordão chose a dry cleaner's shop as her subject matter. However, her work can be seen as the exact opposite of *Dry Cleaner*: it does not feature any person, any face, hands, or any other hint of manual or mental labour. As a matter of fact, this video can also be set in contrast with the Lumières' *Workers Leaving the Factory*; here, the workers are rendered utterly invisible.

A steady, low-angle shot – directly vertical, from below – of an object whose nature is initially obscured by the odd camera angle lets us understand that what we are seeing is a circular, mechanical rack of hangers,

¹⁵ <https://vimeo.com/79504154>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Ana Rebordão, *Untitled*, Lisbon, 2011.

each of them with garments enveloped in plastic covers, as if they had already been cleaned. We then realize that the camera is placed right underneath the circular rack. As soon as the soundtrack is heard – an apparently extradiegetic fado song sung by a female voice – the rack starts to move in circles and the garments sway to the music, in a bizarre choreography.

In *Dry Cleaner*, the diegetic soundtrack gave us an indication of the manual activity of the man who stared at us; here, it is an extradiegetic soundtrack that fills the images with meaning. The voice we hear is that of Amália Rodrigues (1920–1999), who was the most celebrated interpreter of the fado, the traditional musical genre of Portugal. Fados (a word that means destiny, or fate) are mostly tragic love songs. Fados are usually not to be danced to: one is supposed to listen to them in a grave manner. Rodrigues sings here one of her most famous creations, *Povo que lavas no rio*, in a recording of 1973 in which she is accompanied by the US jazz saxophonist Don Byas.

Amália Rodrigues was revered as the queen of the fado and was regarded for many years as one of the most important Portuguese musical artists. She was claimed both by supporters of the fascist dictatorship that lasted from 1926 to 1974, which sent her on official excursions throughout the world, and by the revolutionaries who overthrew that regime in 1974, who argued that she had helped many communists during the harsh times. *Povo que lavas no rio* is one of the rare songs in her repertoire that deals with the struggles of the working class. It was composed by Pedro Homem

de Mello and Joaquim Campos, and the Portuguese lyrics we hear can be translated as follows:

People who wash at the river
 You who carve with your axe the wood for my coffin ...
 Some may defend you, and some may buy your holy ground
 But your life will never, never be bought.

The words refer directly to the activity of washing and thus establish a connection with the cleaning shop and the image of the moving mechanical hangers. In this rendering of the song, authors and singer mark their social positions, using the word *povo* and the informal pronoun *tu*, which sounds in Portuguese as if the artists were not included among the people (or *povo*), as if the working class were the Other. A general feeling of compassion – or pity, who knows? – permeates the lyrics, which stress the political duty of the artists as defenders of the people.¹⁶

The lyrics also suggest a temporal discrepancy, which contrasts the modernity of the mechanized shop with the outdated image of workers as people who wash their clothes in river waters. The people with whom the poet is nostalgically in dialogue are implicitly linked to a rural origin, one in which river, axe, and ground stand out as prominent elements.

Yet another suggestion is invisibly embedded in the image of the dancing clothes, because at the time when the video was shot, Portugal featured one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe.¹⁷ The absence of human beings in the visual track thus produces an uncanny space void of people, suggesting a working class become expendable in a world inhabited by machines, which seem joyfully to be dancing to old, melancholy songs about death. In this scenario, the people can only be perceived in a voice stemming from a distant, bygone past.

If at first glance, Ana Rebordão's video appears humorous or droll because it seems to be showing dancing clothes, for those who understand the Portuguese lyrics of the dirge that provides its soundtrack, it looks more like a horror film with touches of sci-fi. Its accomplishment is to depict an

16 New interpretations that suggest a queer reading of the verses have arisen in the past few years, because of the posthumous outing of composer Pedro Homem de Mello, who lived as a closeted gay man during the years of the fascist dictatorship. See São José Almeida, "O Estado Novo dizia que não havia homossexuais, mas perseguia-os," *O Público*, July 17, 2009, <https://www.publico.pt/2009/07/17/sociedade/noticia/o-estado-novo-dizia-que-nao-havia-homossexuais-mas-perseguiu-os-1392257>.

17 That situation has radically changed since 2012, when *Untitled* was shot. Portugal has successfully shunned neoliberal economic policies in the past few years.

eerie world in which workers have become utterly invisible. One could argue that machines were invented to spare humans labour; however, as we know for a fact, that is not the case in many parts of the world. The machine is no longer the one defined by V. E. Meyerhold nearly one hundred years ago in the following terms: “The body is a machine, the worker is a machinist.”¹⁸ In Rebordão’s video, the machines have literally replaced human beings, and they even dance, as if celebrating the deed.

Thus, the soundtrack supplies the video with its illuminating, poetic quality, re-signifying what seemed, at first, just a play with the images of bodiless, hanging garments. The fado is sung by a voice that seems remote, stemming from a past in which people worked, lived and died. Now, the fado lets us know that it is too late: people are but a figment of memory, human bodies have disappeared, and machines, it seems, are automatic and have a will of their own.

Not unlike the other videos selected for this analysis, Rebordão’s work accounts, in a direct, vertical fashion (in this case, both in Deren’s sense and literally) for the necessarily political nature of representations of the working class, whether visible or invisible. At the same time, *Untitled*, in a disturbing way, seems to mark the end of a trajectory that has *Workers Leaving the Factory* as its starting point, a trajectory that moves from visibility to invisibility. What seemed to be an assertion of the workers’ presence in the Lumières’ film of 1895 has become, in Rebordão’s, an image of absence, which suggests their expendability. It also opens up a series of new questions, which may begin with the obvious: “Where do we go from here?”

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9. Knowing When to Be Wary of Images*

David Barker

One must be as wary of images as of words. Images and words are woven into discourses, networks of meanings. My path is to go in search of a buried meaning, to clear the debris that clogs the images.

– Harun Farocki¹

Abstract

This essay draws on both film-making practice and the work of Bertolt Brecht and Jean-Luc Godard to develop a critical cinematographic term, “distance.” This term encompasses both the physical distance between the camera and its subject and the constructed relationship of the viewer to the subject of a film, as well as the film-maker’s (sometimes unconscious) relationship to the subject as expressed through both. It then uses this term to analyze Harun Farocki and Antje Ehmman’s Labour in a Single Shot workshops and to trace their relationship to Farocki’s 1995 film *Workers Leaving the Factory*, from which the workshop originates. Paying particular attention to the definition of cinema behind the workshops’ command to “use video as though it were film,” Barker examines which aspects of the critique in Farocki’s film are developed in the workshops, as well as whether some of Farocki’s critiques of image production are left behind or even contradicted.

Keywords: labour, Bertolt Brecht, distance, dramaturgy, film-maker

* I worked as a researcher on Harun Farocki’s film *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* (1995); I was responsible for finding the U.S. footage (with the exception of *Clash By Night*, which was envisioned from the beginning). I would like to thank the editors of this book, Peter Schwartz, Roy Grundmann, and Gregory Williams, for the opportunity to revisit this project as it developed into the Labour in a Single Shot project, as well as for their helpful and generous notes and their patience, Aaron Garrett for making the connection and for his comments, Rocío Lorca for her comments, and Bani Khoshnoudi for discussing her experience in the Mexico City workshop.

¹ Quoted in David Cox, “Images of the World: Notes on Harun Farocki,” *Otherzine* 33, San Francisco, 2018, <http://www.othercinema.com/otherzine/images-of-the-world-notes-on-harun-farocki/>.

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The gap between looking at films critically as a film-maker and looking as a critic or someone who studies films or writes about films is sometimes quite small, and sometimes large. There is a famous example of an interview with Claudia Weill about her film *Girlfriends* (1978). The interviewer asks about the significance of the blonde/brunette symbolism in the two leads, and Weill's reply is one of a director: "Well, you do have to be able to tell them apart." Practical considerations aside, for a film-maker working in a critical (rather than a purely entertainment-based) tradition of film-making, there are two broad domains of questions. The first has to do with the cinematographic relationship to what is being filmed and includes questions such as: what does it mean if I put the camera here versus there; a little closer, or a little further back; at a lower angle that allows us to glimpse the actors' "thoughts" through the eyes, versus at a higher angle that withholds that access; what does it mean if I cut from the edge versus from the centre of the frame, and how do I build a sequence through what I show and what I withhold; what do I make visible and what do I create in the imagination of the viewer? The second consideration is the domain of the scenario, of the choices that are made in terms of dramaturgy on the story level, as well as of the broader movements of the film's narrative or experiential structure in relation to the society and moment in which it is made, and in relation to the history of arts and communication that came before it.

This second domain is more commonly seen as the "meaning" of a film, and it aligns more closely with much critical thinking about cinema done by thinkers who are not film-makers. The first domain is more elusive and less commonly examined outside of a film-making context. An exception is Serge Daney's work, which relates closely to the concerns of a strain of critical film-making in France between the late 1960s and early 1980s. In his review of Jean-Jacques Annaud's 1992 film *L'Amant/The Lover*, Daney analyzes shots in the same way that a film-maker might. Whereas several essays about the film refer to its visual style as "glossy," Daney is more precise in his analysis of the film's visual qualities, describing in detail a shot of a shoe and the way that shot cuts to the following shot, and in doing so begins to formulate a distinction between a "shot" (a visual dramatic construction that derives meaning from its relationship to something else) and an "image" (in which meaning comes not from a dramatic construction but from the self-sufficient portrayal of the thing filmed itself). By getting into the weeds of these specific choices, he articulates a critical approach that closely mirrors the thinking process of a strain of critical film-making for which these are primary questions. That this type of thinking is not always visible to the observer is clear in one scene in Pedro Costa's film *Où*

gît votre sourire enfoui? / *Where does your hidden smile lie?* (2001), in which Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet argue passionately over what seems to be a nearly imperceptible one-frame difference in a cut during the editing of their film *Sicilia!* (1999).

Looked at together, these two sets of “film-maker” questions can be seen as ways of articulating a film’s distance to a subject, in both the broader sense of the perspective from which a story is told or a phenomenon is investigated, and in the cinematographic real-time, moment-to-moment positioning of the audience as they watch a film. Later in this chapter, it will become clear why and to what extent these questions work as an interesting lens to look at the workshop aspect of the *Labour in a Single Shot* project.

The *Labour in a Single Shot* project is not only a series of workshops in film-making focusing on images of labour that originated out of a film critiquing cinematic depictions of labour, but it was co-led by Harun Farocki, whose large body of work is marked by his use of the frame and editing to articulate a critical perspective on the subjects of the films. For this reason, it is interesting to look at this project and its workshops from the point of view of the question of distance. In the following pages, I will investigate to what extent the workshop develops or fulfils the concerns and possibilities raised in Farocki’s film *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik/Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995), as well as in his previous work. I will also ask in what ways the workshop may even contradict or leave behind aspects of the 1995 film or of Farocki’s earlier critiques of images.

Farocki’s film-making is frequently referred to as observational. In *Ein Bild/An Image* (1983), he documents the four-day process of shooting a Playboy centrefold, from building the set and designing the lighting to numerous test shots and extensive critique to determine the details of the poses and camera positions.² By taking an image that might appear “intimate” or “sexy” and pulling the camera back a few metres and making it immobile, Farocki puts the audience in the place of an observer watching a process. We see that it is in fact neither an intimate nor a sexy moment, and that these attributes are a product produced through a decidedly unsexy and unintimate process.

But the ways in which he controls the audience’s engagement with the film are more specific than can be described by merely saying that the audience is in the position of an observer, because Farocki controls the engagement in a much more precise way. For example, while preparing

2 *An Image* [DVD], Harun Farocki, 1983. Chicago: Facets Video, 2010.



Harun Farocki, *Ein Bild (An Image)*, 1983, 16 mm, colour, 25 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the Harun Farocki Institut.

the first test shot, the photographer gives the model instructions to arch her back, then decides that they need to put a cushion under her. We then see the team make adjustments to the lighting and to the camera position. The photographer then tells the model to close her mouth and takes a photo, saying “let’s look at it.” The group then discusses the image. Their comments include “the hair is pretty good” and “it’s a bit too much with the pink cushion” as well as “it’s getting closer.” One member repeats twice that “one breast is enough.” Throughout this scene, the photograph is held at an angle that lets us observe the team as they examine and discuss it, but we cannot see the photo itself – and in fact we never see it. These framing and editing choices mean that the audience has a very particular relationship to the process. They are not given access to the image or to other details that would allow them to track what the team is specifically trying to achieve and to measure the extent to which these aims are achieved. Instead, they can track only that the team has specific goals they are trying to achieve in the photograph, and that they are making adjustments to achieve them. Another film-maker might have shot the scene differently, creating for the audience some of the specific compositional goals that the team is trying to produce, such that the audience would be tracking the achievement of these aims over the course of a scene or sequence. Though this would also



Harun Farocki, *Leben – BRD* (How to Live in the German Federal Republic), 1990, 16 mm, colour, 83 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the Harun Farocki Institut.

be an observational perspective on the scene, the two films would be very different in terms of how they have positioned the audience to observe.

Likewise, in *Leben – BRD/How to Live in the German Federal Republic* (1990), Farocki creates a specific observational distance.³ In this film, which is composed of thirty-two scenes of instructional courses and sessions in private and state institutions in West Germany addressing a wide variety of aspects of life, from crossing the street to stripping, childbirth, and police work, Farocki does not create for the audience the distance of a participant looking to learn one of the skills taught in the classes filmed. Instead, he focuses our attention on the phenomenon of instruction through courses and private sessions, making sure that we do not become too engaged in any one lesson. In the opening of the film, he cuts from a roughly twenty-second shot of a pornographic video game to a twenty-second shot of a wooden roller rolling over a bed, seemingly flattening the bedcover. Each of these shots is framed to show the content from a removed observational perspective: the first shot of the video game is partial, leaving us unsure what we are looking at, and the second shot shows the roller on what seems to be a bed, but again it shows only enough to let us guess what is happening.

The third shot, of almost equal length, returns to the video game, this time showing a hand working a console in the foreground, while the game plays in the background. This is followed by a shot that is twice as long as any previous, and which is filmed in a more engaging manner. A girl who is perhaps eight years old is surveying several objects on the table in front of her. She seems to be making a decision. Suddenly, she grabs a small human figure and begins to bend it. We realize that she is under the watchful eye of a woman, who looks on supportively. Then, we understand that the girl is trying to bend the figure into shape to sit in a miniature wooden chair that is on the table. She has trouble bending it enough to make it stay on its own. The woman encourages her in a soft voice, and then tries to help her by bending the figure herself, but the figure falls out of the chair anyway.

3 *How to Live in the German Federal Republic* [DVD], Harun Farocki, 1990. Chicago: Facets Video, 2010.

At this point, we are becoming engaged for the first time in the film, in the relationship between the girl and the woman, and in their task. Farocki cuts to a shot of a woman demonstrating with a doll a technique for bathing an infant, which seems filmed from the perspective of a student sitting in the class. As in *Ein Bild*, Farocki makes sure that the audience does not engage in the specifics of any particular lesson or class, this time by intercutting moments from the classes together and by cutting away abruptly any time the audience begins to get engaged. Instead of becoming involved in any particular process, the audience is kept at a distance from which they are able to notice the patterns and the phenomena of the classes. In this case, the distance created both by the framing and the length of the shots allows something specific to be seen: the way that West German citizens take part in and interact with the numerous opportunities to be trained in life.

This distance in Farocki's work could stem from ideas of Bertolt Brecht, or perhaps from Brecht via Jean-Luc Godard, through the latter's experimentation with Brechtian ideas in cinema.⁴ Brecht argued that it is impossible for an involved person to have the same degree of objective judgement as a casual bystander, and developed the idea of the "estrangement effect" in drama to put up barriers to the audience's empathy. Rather than stimulating emotional involvement, or identification, with the action on the screen, as in much fiction cinema, this distanciation stimulates intellectual judgement. Godard made no secret of his interest in Brecht's thinking, and his translation of the "estrangement effect" into cinematic terms in his films of the 1960s and 1970s was hugely influential.⁵ The techniques around the use of the frame, extended duration of shots, and abrupt cuts away from scenes that Farocki uses in *Leben – BRD* could all be understood to stem from Godard's development of these techniques as a cinematic equivalent to Brecht's ideas on theatre. Farocki uses other methods of distancing not found in Godard, for example in his use of editing to move from a fragment of a lesson to another fragment of a lesson, provoking the spectator to think about the similarities and differences between the activities shown.

4 Godard's influence on Farocki is well documented. See for example: "For me, Godard has been way out in front for the past thirty years, he always encouraged me to do things, and I always found out that I do what he did fifteen years earlier," in Thomas Elsaesser, "Making the World Superfluous: An Interview with Harun Farocki," in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 178.

5 For a clear explanation of Godard's translation of Brecht's ideas into cinema, see Jan Uhde, "The Influence of Bertolt Brecht's Theory of Distanciation on the Contemporary Cinema, Particularly on Jean-Luc Godard," *Journal of the University Film Association* 26, no. 3 (1974): 28–30.

Although the Labour in a Single Shot exercises do not allow for all of the techniques used in Farocki's own films, such as montage, the question of what distance to look from seems to be at the heart of the workshops. The two exercises assigned to participants are of a type that in its general form isn't uncommon in film production classes taught in schools that teach film in a critical rather than an industry environment. The choice of a single subject matter and the restrictions of formal rules shift attention away from expression through choice of content to expression through the more critical question of the relationship to a subject. The rules stipulated in the Labour in a Single Shot workshops are therefore of great interest, because these define the "work" of the workshop: that is, the field of choices, and therefore of critique. The primary exercise is to produce videos of one to two minutes in length on the subject of labour, "each taken in a single shot. The camera can be static, panning or travelling – only cuts are not allowed."⁶ The participant must choose what activity to represent as labour, and then must decide "where to put the camera," in other words, how to film the activity within the constraint that this must be done in a single shot of one to two minutes.

This exercise, carried out in workshops around the world, is directly related to one of Farocki's critiques. "Factories – and the whole subject of labour – are at the fringes of film history," he states.⁷ This is a problem because although much of our lives are spent at work, films reflect our lives only after we leave work, leaving a huge part of life unrepresented (as well as many mechanical and technological processes visually undocumented). Teaching young film-makers to regard labour as a cinematic subject and to film it through exercises increases the possibility that labour will find its way into their films in the future, making visible something that has been nearly invisible in cinema. Likewise, an audience that views an exhibition of the workshop films may leave the screening more sensitive to the depiction, or lack of depiction, of labour in cinema.

Given that the cinematic depiction of labour is hardly a neutral subject (as Farocki's 1995 film, screened for participants as part of the workshop, makes clear) and that the single shot forces a rigorous contemplation or exploration of how to depict labour, the workshop and the resulting films

6 "Concept," Labour in a Single Shot, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/project/concept/>.

7 Harun Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades," accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.harunfarocki.de/installations/2000s/2006/workers-leaving-the-factory-in-eleven-decades.html>.

provide a rich ground for exploring the basic issues of film-making within a critical context.

The question of how to film the subject becomes interesting with the restriction of making the films in one shot, as this forces the participants to strategize prior to and during shooting about how to film their subjects. There is a wealth of material here. It's possible to isolate a technique and look at how various participants used it, for instance pans. *Coffee Brewing* by Katulo Hadebe (2014), *Weaving* by Nguyen Trinh Thi (2013), and *Hat* by Tran Xuan Quang (2013) all use pans, but with different results and for different purposes.⁸ *Coffee Brewing* begins with a close-up of a part of a machine that is turning. Off-screen sounds of the machine and room motivate the camera to move up to better see what is happening, landing on a man's hand resting on a lever, which he is adjusting. The camera then slowly pans to the right along the man's hand to reveal his head, face turned away and partly obscured. At first, the focus is soft, then his face comes into clear focus. The camera moves in sync with his body as we glance at a computer screen and then at the top of the hopper, in which we see coffee beans funnelling into the machine. At this point, halfway through the nearly two-minute film, we have learned as much as we are going to about what exactly this machine is doing. The camera continues to give us a few details, but more than anything else, it creates interest in the man who is working the machine, by circling around him and viewing him from different vantage points, though never satisfactorily: his face is always partly looking away. We are introduced to his figure by a close-up of his hand adjusting a lever. The camera then travels along his arm to his shoulder revealing his face, which is out of focus and facing away, so we see a little less than a full profile. The camera refocuses on his face, but just as it comes into focus the man turns away, leaving the audience looking at the back of his head. This drama of trying to see the man continues through the film. The camera pans to him again and even seems to move around the machine for a better vantage point, but it never quite gets a satisfactory look at him.

Weaving seems at first to use the moving camera in a similar way to *Coffee Brewing*. After beginning with a medium-wide shot of the machine and a woman visible behind it, the camera moves through a series of essentially still shots of details of the machine. We hear a rhythmic mechanical noise and see elements of the machinery, but not enough to know what the

8 Katulo Hadebe, *Coffee Brewing*, Johannesburg, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/100998612>; Nguyen Trinh Thi, *Weaving*, Hanoi, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/76351590>; Tran Xuan Quang, *Hat*, Hanoi, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/76341648>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Katulo Hadebe, *Coffee Brewing*, Johannesburg, 2014.



Labour in a Single Shot. Nguyen Trinh Thi, *Weaving*, Hanoi, 2013.

machine or the woman are doing. In this case, though, the moving camera reveals details that gradually allow us to understand what is happening. First, we understand more about the rhythmic movement, then we realize that this is a weaving machine, but it is only at the end of the film that we learn what the woman is doing, and finally what the machine is making (a woven ribbon). This is a more finely structured use of information, building to an answered question at the end of the film, than in *Coffee Brewing*, which seems only to ask a vague question about the man working the machine. The woman's clothing and her attitude, revealed in details as the film progresses, also tell us more about her relationship to the machine and her work than we learned in *Coffee Brewing*.

Hat takes such use of camera movement to isolate and reveal successive details through essentially still shots to another level. Beginning with a shot of a young, perhaps five-year-old, girl sewing the final trim onto a bamboo hat, the camera pans to see an older girl, perhaps her older sister, sewing a hat in an earlier stage of the process. The camera then pans for the last time, revealing a middle-aged woman (probably the girls' mother) sewing a hat at an even earlier stage of manufacture than the second girl's hat. Behind her, a man of a similar age sews a hat that seems nearly finished. The three frames thus created through pans each add information, elegantly



Labour in a Single Shot. Tran Xuan Quang, *Hat*, Hanoi, 2013.

developing a complex story about the labour that we see in the film. Each frame reveals something new about the process of hat production, of which we see the various stages, and about the reproduction of the labour that produces the hats, as we seem to see parents who are training their children to follow in this practice.

Beyond the question of how to film the subject, the other large area of concern is the choice of what to film, which in this case is labour. The workshop films encompass a multitude of approaches. Traditional forms of labour are represented, but what is more striking are the many attempts to identify as labour activities that which might not automatically be thought of as such: a Santa Claus in Rio de Janeiro posing with children, three men in military uniforms in Moscow singing a song about the Chechnyan conflict to an audience of two, a man, again in Rio, building an elaborate sand castle and accepting donations. Becoming aware of the varieties of labour in each location, which are often “not only invisible but also unimaginable,” is stated as an essential part of the research aspect of the workshops: “it is vital to undertake research, to open one’s eyes and to set oneself into motion.”⁹ The originality and variety of the responses is one of the pleasures of looking at a broad selection of the films produced.

But this choice is more complicated than it looks at first, in part because of the focus on labour as a subject. Despite the overall variety, the videos largely depict street labour. Ehmman’s journals make clear that getting students to do research, and not to repeatedly film easily accessible street labour, was a struggle. Discussions about what to film were as much a part of the material of the workshops as formal considerations about how to film it once the subject was chosen.¹⁰

This problem of students repeatedly filming street labour is more interesting than that of participants having trouble accessing more established

9 “Concept,” *Labour in a Single Shot*, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/project/concept/>.

10 Antje Ehmman, “Labour in a Single Shot—Antje Ehmman’s Workshop and Exhibition Journals, 2011–2014,” trans. Peter J. Schwartz. Published in this volume, 51–96.

venues of work, being lazy in researching what to film, or having little relationship to the world outside their school environment, all of which are discussed in Ehmann's journal of the workshops. One of the biggest decisions of film-making regards the relationship the film-maker will construct to their subject. A workshop participant must choose how to define labour and then how to film it, but behind both questions lies a third: from what distance are the film-makers looking? Are they looking as labourers themselves, as sociologists looking at society, as observers stopping and watching, as consultants, as business owners? The choice of labour as the subject for the workshop brings a special charge to any choice by dragging it into a complex history of representations of labour and relationships of class, economics, and power. These sticky issues related to the depiction of labour then overlap with the cinematic questions of "distance to the subject" and "where to put the camera," making it even clearer than usual that no choice can be neutral.

These issues that participants wrestle with as they do the exercise are interesting for the ways in which they relate to Farocki's previous critique of images. His output of something in the neighbourhood of one hundred audiovisual works covers a lot of ground, but a group of key films deals specifically with looking critically at images, excavating what he calls their "buried meanings" in the quote above. In films such as *An Image/Ein Bild* (1983) and *Images of the World and the Inscription of War/Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (1988), Farocki interrogates images, laying bare the hidden meanings in their creation and reception, thus making visible unseen aspects of the society that both produces and is moulded by them. This is an act of resistance against a world in which images are presented as though they were self-evident – as though they were their content and nothing more.

"It is not a matter of what is in a picture, but of what lies behind." Thomas Elsaesser quotes this dialogue passage from *Etwas wird sichtbar/Before your Eyes – Vietnam* (1982) in the opening essay of the valuable collection on Farocki *Working on the Sight-Lines*. Elsaesser goes on to argue that Farocki paid special attention to the notion that the film-maker "knows he has been implicated by the very process he is documenting."¹¹ Himself using images to critique images, Farocki does not fantasize that he somehow stands outside the web of discourses in which those images are produced and received.

11 Thomas Elsaesser, "Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist," in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 12.

Farocki's film *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*, from which the workshops derive, continues this project of demystifying images. Making the film for the centenary of cinema, Farocki collected all the images he could find in cinema history of workers leaving factories after the one presented by the first film, *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon/Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon* (1895). Placing them side by side allows him to look at the use of this space in front of the factory in cinema over time, and to analyze the image as a rhetorical figure given different meanings in different films, but also performing clear cultural functions while avoiding others. These are not just images of workers in front of factories, but signposts to hidden agendas, power relations, and undercurrents in society.

It is not surprising, then, that Farocki's patience was tested by participants' reliance on filming street labour in many of the workshops. One concern stated in Ehmann's journals is the way the workshop represents its cities: "It obviously won't do to represent India solely as a dusty, impoverished country."¹² There may be another concern. Looking through the prism of this analysis of images at the heart of Farocki's work, we could wonder whether these films are not only images of labour but also images in which some students likely unconsciously reproduced their own structural relationship to labour. Few film or art students come from economic backgrounds based in street labour, so the fact that they focus on this type of activity as "labour" is worthy of inquiry.

To what extent is this struggle around the choice of what to film a function of the ground rules of the workshop? The ground rules are drawn from the Lumière film, the film that begins both the film *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* and the Labour in a Single Shot workshops. "To use video as though it were film" is a central rule of the workshop, as the Labour in a Single Shot website states. "We draw on the method of the earliest films," the text continues. In contrast to the "indecisive cascades of shots" of current documentary films, "the single-shot film [...] combines predetermination and openness, concept and contingency."¹³ *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* is the point of reference here, but the interpretation of that film in its use of the frame and duration to combine "predetermination and openness, concept and contingency" could relate as well to Farocki's use of the frame in his own previous work.

12 Ehmann, "Workshop and Exhibition Journals," 56.

13 "Concept," Labour in a Single Shot, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/project/concept/>.

In fact, the exercise seems to imply that a participant has the ability to step back and consciously construct a point of view from which to look at labour, in the way that Farocki has done in his own work, and some of the workshop work does in fact end up fulfilling this mandate, in working with participants who do not yet have this ability to develop it. Maybe they are also too young; in some cases, their worlds are simply too limited. And so this work of developing the critical distance falls to the work of the workshop, whose conversations (noted briefly in Ehmann's journal of the workshop) must have been fascinating.¹⁴

But any definition of cinema, like any shot in cinema, is not neutral. Farocki has not been the only film-maker to cite *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* as a reference point for what is essential to film-making, and other film-makers have drawn different lessons from it for their own film-making. How would these issues in the workshop have shown up differently if a different lesson had been taken from this "first film"?

Pedro Costa and Jean-Luc Godard, for example, have both pointed to the Lumières' film as problematizing, from cinema's very beginning, the fuzzy line between fiction and documentary. As Costa put it: "It is here that things deteriorate, go awry, become complicated, because the Lumières were not very happy with the appearance of the workers coming out of their factory (it was their own factory), they said to the workers: 'Try to be a bit more natural [...]. So they managed the workers, they said: 'You, go left, don't go to the right... you, you can smile a bit, and you too... you, go with your wife over there...' And so there was *mise en scène*. Thus, fiction was born, because the boss gave orders to an employee, to a worker."¹⁵ Costa and Godard both explore the boundary between fiction and documentary in their own work, and film-making workshops could be designed based on this principle as the central element. This boundary between fiction and nonfiction is not investigated in the Labour in a Single Shot workshops, but I believe that it is an issue that was never very central to Farocki's work.

Another take on *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* as the origin of cinema that is much closer in spirit to Farocki's own critiques of images comes from the film-maker and critic Jean-Pierre Gorin, best known for his partnership with Godard between 1968 and 1972, sometimes under the name Dziga Vertov Group. In many ways, Gorin and Godard's work together, especially

14 Ehmann, "Workshop and Exhibition Journals," 51-96.

15 Pedro Costa, "A Closed Door That Keeps Us Guessing," in *Rouge*, Australia, 2005, page 2, accessed November 10, 2019, http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa_seminar.html; Michael Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard: Cinema Historian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 24.

Letter to Jane (1972), can be seen as paving the way for some of Farocki's later analyses of images, particularly the practice of analyzing images *with* images. In a 1995 lecture, Gorin spoke of the Lumière factory film as significant because it already contained the three orders he sees at the centre of the project of cinema, which he names the technological, the sociological, and the private: "those orders constantly, in all films, are collapsed upon each other [...]. The enterprise of cinema is not only to rethink time and space, but it's also to rethink those three orders."¹⁶

If we develop Gorin's categories a bit, we could indeed see their intersection as what cinema – or at least art cinema – is still about. The "private" (the space of domestic drama, personal challenges and growth, love stories); the "sociological" (in part, the organization of society that allows the private sphere and the specificity of the problems explored in the film to exist); and what I would call the "invisible" (the animating principle in the film that can't be directly spoken or filmed, but around which the film revolves). Gorin called the animating principle of the early Lumière films the "technological," because central to those films, beyond any content on the screen, was the technological miracle of the possibility of moving images. In a contemporary fiction film, the animating principle might more often be "love," "freedom," or "justice."¹⁷

In the case of *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon*, the private is the lives of the workers, and the sociological is the organization of society that enables this shot, or perhaps cinema itself, to exist, in other words, the socioeconomic structure that allows the Lumière brothers to own a factory and employ workers, conditions that in turn allow them to develop the cinematograph. It is a shot of workers leaving the factory where their labour has created the possibility of the invention of the cinematograph apparatus by the factory's owners, who are in turn filming them with the very apparatus that their labour and the capitalist structure of France made possible.¹⁸

The relationship, in this shot, of the filmer to the filmed could be more precisely articulated with the concept of distance to the subject. In the

16 Jean-Pierre Gorin, lecture at the University of California, San Diego, March 8, 1995. (Author's transcript of a recording.)

17 For example, the invisible in the 2019 documentary *American Factory* could be said to be "love," because it is animated by looking with a spirit of love at both the U.S. and Chinese workers, as well as the factory owner, such that the audience sees all parties with empathy over the course of the story. On the other hand, the invisible in the 2015 fiction film *Sicario* could be "justice," as the animating question for the audience throughout is whether this is just.

18 The story of the brothers saving their father's business from bankruptcy by inventing a process of mechanization makes this potentially even more interesting to explore.

Brechtian formulation mentioned earlier, the distance is that of an observer, someone not identifying with the action or emotionally drawn into the scene, who is able to watch dispassionately and think critically about what he or she sees. Gorin's analysis of *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* asks a more precise question about what this distance is and finds that it is the distance of the beneficiary of the workers' labour. According to this interpretation, this shot of the workers leaving the factory is seen from the distance of the factory owner who benefits from their labour – the labour which, in fact, made the shot possible.

The relationship between the private, the social, and the invisible is not part of the definition of the “methods of the earliest films” drawn from *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* for the purpose of the Labour in a Single Shot workshops, but it is an equally valid description of what could be considered central to it. It might be interesting to ask how these exercises would have been different if they had drawn on this interpretation of the method of the earliest films.

Practically speaking, what would a contemporary remake of *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* look like according to this interpretation of the method of the earliest films? It might be to film the exit from the workplace of the worker whose labour made possible the participant's unpaid artistic work in the workshop – whether that is the labour of a workshop participant's parent or parents, of the participant, or perhaps of more distant relatives whose wealth was inherited. This approach is not the only one possible; it is just an example of how one might approach the exercise through this lens.

Given the choice of labour as a subject for students in film and art programmes, the issue of students filming primarily street labour seems likely to be the type of discussion that would be provoked in the workshop. But it also relates to the definition of cinema used in the workshop, in which the content of a shot is seen as something separable from the shot itself. If the definition of cinema at its origin had been Gorin's, the issue of hidden meanings in relationship to the subject would have been at the forefront of the exercise, and this type of problem (filming street labour) would have occurred much differently, because the film-maker's relationship to that subject would have been at the forefront of the problem of how to film. At any rate, it would have been impossible to separate the choice of a subject from the way of looking.

This is not to call that a solution to the problem or a better solution for the workshop. This approach would have highlighted some forms of creativity at the expense of others. For example, participants might have had trouble justifying filming the labour of people they are not economically

connected to, without constructing a larger vision or economic theory of the relationship of labour in the city to the work of film school students. And what would have been lost through this narrower definition of film-making would have been tremendous. The workshop films to date as they appear on the project website display a multitude of perspectives and attempts to define and film labour in diverse communities around the world. Both in their attempts to define labour and in their experimentation with formal mechanisms (such as pans) to control and focus attention during the single shot, the films reflect a diverse group of participants taking a multitude of approaches, building on what others in their own and previous workshops have done.

I've looked at the Labour in a Single Shot project from the perspective of a film-maker, through the lens of the concerns of film-making, and have found it to be a rich ground for the exploration of all the basic elements of film-making. The comparison with the *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* film from which the workshops originated, as well as with Farocki's previous critical look at image-making, suggests that the exercise may possibly take as its aesthetic basis a concept of what constitutes the method of the earliest films that fits uncomfortably with Farocki's admonition to "be wary of images."

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Embodiment

10. Punching In/Punching Out: Labour, Care, and Leisure at Work and at Play

Jeannie Simms

Abstract

The representation of labour and workers is considered in relation to the Labour project by Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki and their workshop participants in several countries, and in the work of contemporary visual moving-image artists. Different methods of production and aesthetic choices are analyzed, particularly in relation to ideas of objectivity and observation versus creative invention when artists collaborate with workers and mix observation with extensive workshopping and theatrical staging for the camera. Simms focuses on various significant geopolitical sites and situations, including the Chinese-Laotian border, undocumented Guatemalan day labourers in San Francisco, a maid-training agency in Indonesia, and textile workers in the garment district in Manhattan.

Keywords: labour, collaboration, performance, migration, artwork, imagination

In Harun Farocki's films, the bottom line always seems to be bodies and souls – a concern for human subjects, whose lives are shadowed by the subsuming drives of corporations, the military, and state and corporate media. Farocki traces how ideology and policy meet the skin and minds of people. He exposes institutions' infringements on democracy and how the moving images used by them often calcify into power through the top-down dissemination of histories. His rigorously researched essay films on subjects such as labour, the military, surveillance, consumerism, and the law provide methods for long-form visual correctives. The films are truth-seeking and analytical, and they draw from real situations and show people at work. By

shedding light on the lives, emotions, and conditions of ordinary workers and people, as well as on the conditions that shape their experiences and emotions, the films offer artists and independent moving-image makers tools for our time, as we careen further into the era of “fake news” and “alternative facts.” Writing from the perspective of a fellow artist, I will reflect on forms of social imagination and on the ways the Labour in a Single Shot project, as well as the work of other independent artists and moving-image makers, challenges the ideologies and strategies of institutions of power while also raising questions about the interior lives of workers.

The subject of labour’s invisibility is part of Farocki’s life’s work. His 1995 essay film *Workers Leaving the Factory* asserts that, while work was one of the earliest subjects of film, there was a general disinterest in imaging the factory during the first hundred years of cinema. Through voice-over and archival footage from newsreels, a Soviet film, and occasional narrative films depicting work conflicts (strikes, as well as industrial film imagery of gates and barriers that protect the factory), the film makes a strong case that the history of narrative cinema has largely excluded stories that come from within the factory walls. This void serves as a summons for more films to be made – and Farocki takes up the subject of labour in many of his works. The Labour in a Single Shot videos further answer the call while also actively training a new generation of moving-image makers to focus on the subject of labour through the workshops.

The Labour videos show us aspects of human life that we do not often see: people just doing their jobs. Because work is often performed in the service of employers and is not entirely driven by choice, it is hard not to wonder what people think about their work and how they relate to what they are doing, to other workers, and to their companies or employers. To what degree do workers imagine and enact the values, interests, and desires of their employers? Farocki’s own films likewise focus on the social, cultural, and economic values embedded in work and the workplace. They seem to suggest that the workplace is as good a site as any for revealing the core beliefs of our societies, beliefs that are both imagined and embodied.

Farocki’s films have shown how companies and workers negotiate deals with one another or learn to sell products or themselves, and how they manage other workers or manage themselves. He focuses on the logic of the workplace in such films as *The Interview* (1997), *Retraining* (1994), or *Nothing Ventured* (2004). Farocki’s selections suggest that the worker’s imagination is borrowed in the service and interests of the employer. Footage of verbal exchanges explores professional language and the specialized terminology workers have learned to use with fluency. The terminology further reveals

the values that are important to employers and which must be performed through speech acts by employees.

The acts of observation and witnessing in Labour in a Single Shot function as tools to emphasize real time, time that passes at the pace of thinking, breathing, moving, and feeling, as in our own lived social relations and experiences. The psychology and value of productivity in my selection of Labour videos materializes through the bodies and mouths of the workers, through attitude and emotion, raising questions about care and concern. Who cares for whom? Whose cares are addressed? In this essay, I explore the motivations and imagination of the labourers, and I discuss contemporary moving-image artists who produce artworks with workers. These contemporary artists utilize tools of real-time observation, voice-over or intertitles, and work experimentally, workshoping and creating artworks with workers. Some of the non-Labour art-makers I discuss rely on the emotional bonds of trust and affection that already exist between coworkers as useful assets for creative collaboration. These bonds pose deeper questions about how work and the rest of life connect and challenge structures of profit. The artists' visual aesthetic choices resist neat categories of value. At the same time, complex dynamics between work, care, and camaraderie undoubtedly do emerge.

In her book *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay makes a case against “political” versus “aesthetic” categorizations of photographs and exposes the fallacy of these concepts when positioned in opposition to one another. In her discussion, Azoulay describes imagination as “‘perverse’ or ‘pathological’ when the range of possibilities that it generates appears to us to be threatening, strange or depressing. Most of the time, however, the points of friction created by the imagination are subsumed within existing economies of exchange without our even being aware of their imagined status.”¹ For example, Farocki’s film *In Comparison* (2009) observes different forms of brick production in various cultures, some by hand, some highly industrialized, revealing different values concerning time, efficiency, and the social structures and values that bricks quite literally hold in the built structures and worlds they form. Another example, Farocki’s *War at a Distance* (2003), shows the ways computer-generated images were increasingly used in the reporting on the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991, inaugurating a movement towards expanded simulation and away from human observation and handheld cameras. Showing how constructed

1 Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012), 4.

simulations stand in for reality or reflecting on how something as simple as a brick structure can suggest cultural priorities “without our even being aware of their imagined status,” as Azoulay describes, Farocki’s films point out various subtextual ideologies at play in society.

The Labour in a Single Shot videos show what might be hidden in work environments and how different kinds of labour situations might challenge the very possibility of filming in such contexts. It seems noteworthy that the project emerged in the era of the “crisis in journalism,” in other words, between the decline of broadcast news and television, the proliferation of cable TV, and the rise of the internet. It also developed during a period of decline in foreign news coverage in the United States, a rise in web-based, user-generated content, and the expansion of mobile journalism and bystander eyewitness video. It seems to address another absence as well: unscripted real-time documentation of everyday life from parts of the world not generally imaged by corporate media in the United States and much of the West.

The workers in the Labour in a Single Shot videos I discuss perform low-wage, expendable labour, alone or in loose networks that appear to have little organizing ability or established bargaining power. They may work at home, or they might operate in transitional or temporary situations not united under one roof. The videos barely scratch the surface of the vast field of human activity falling under the label of “work.” Yet they afford viewers rare glimpses into rooms and situations that show how people spend large swaths of time. The videos open our eyes to the lives of people one might never otherwise see, showing how they connect to global economic powers. They allow us to wonder how these workers’ jobs are integrated with their private lives, emotions, and psychic states. How does an artist make visible the invisible, or the unimagined? The hands that create, make beds, care for bodies, pour foundations, and harvest or butcher our food remain hidden. Lives and labour remain mysterious, by design. As Farocki’s final project, produced together with Ehmann, Labour in a Single Shot incorporates the philosophy and methodology of the late film-maker, curator, author, and educator to recast work, workers, workshops, and the world.

In what follows, I will discuss a handful of moving-image artists who create videos that move beyond Farocki’s observational and essayistic methods to expose the inner lives of workers. I will consider his impact on another generation of artists and discuss how they have developed his tools into new forms of moving-image art that build upon his example. The Labour project uses strategies connected to early cinema as well as what Jennifer Peterson, writing about contemporary film-makers and

moving-image artists who utilize historic tools in the digital age, calls “conceptual realism.”² Peterson argues: “By challenging the commercially saturated, fast-paced style of the moment, these films enable us to witness labour and media reflecting on and even shaping each other. At stake in this work is a rigorous, digitally informed observational aesthetic that adheres to a principle of witnessing.”³ Aesthetically, these works connect to realist and neorealist films in which nonprofessional actors perform in stories about difficult economic conditions and social struggles, in which the “stars” on the screen perform the struggles of their own real lives. In the case of the artists she cites, they insert constructed or staged situations into ordinary environments, and most of them use the actual people in the films to create poetic and metaphorical gestures in real time, avoiding contemporary tools of illusion or heavy digital manipulations.

Often shot with a handheld and moving camera that underscores the human presence of the cameraperson/observer, the Labour videos suggest the potentially tenuous position of the observer whose own frail circumstances are pointed to by the instability of the situations depicted. It is hard not to wonder how the film-maker obtained access to what often appear to be precarious situations. I have selected videos that, in my viewing experience, create a productive anxiety. They transmit the stress of workers dealing with high-stakes and unpredictable work environments: nannies and day labourers who, with limited language skills, interpret tasks and expectations across vast cultural differences. As an artist, I am struck by the observational nature of Ehmann and Farocki’s project and the wide range of content and approaches within their relatively simple rules for the project, as well as by the range of participant shooters from diverse backgrounds. The drive to bring the background to the fore in the workshop videos materializes in a similar way to the artists’ videos I will discuss. As we move towards the increasingly obfuscating imagery and language that currently surrounds the consequences of globalization, forced migration, and the very nature of work, artists such as Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson, Patty Chang and David Kelley, and myself pursue and orchestrate projects that, like many videos in the Labour project, allow us to observe the processes behind the global economy writ large. There is a simple elegance in the Labour in a

2 See Jennifer Peterson, “Workers Leaving the Factory: Witnessing Industry in the Digital Age,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, ed. Carol Vernallis, Amy Herzog, and John Richardson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 600.

3 Peterson, “Workers Leaving the Factory,” 600. Peterson discusses artists such as Sharon Lockhart, Ben Russell, Véréna Paravel and J. Sniadecki, Harun Farocki, and Daniel Eisenberg.

Single Shot strategy, which allows the participants to reveal the workers' viewpoints through their own hands and eyes.

The labourers in the Labour videos are often shot from close by, and we do not usually see a reaction to the film-maker but assume that the subject knows they are there. It is certainly worth asking what the various workers in the videos might have known or felt about the person behind the camera observing them, including their sense of the camera operator's level of interest or sympathy. At any rate, it is difficult to grasp much about the relationship between those filming and those being filmed. Yet, culturally, we understand being filmed as a matter of being subjected to attention and scrutiny, suggestive of heightened importance. It affords an opportunity to observe oneself being observed and to provide the distance required to understand oneself through the attention of another.

What, if anything, can be gleaned from these videos of the underlying emotional situations and stakes for the workers in the work they are doing and in the locations where they are doing it? That the films allow us to ask this question is an important opportunity, given the relatively invisible nature of some forms of work. Viewers can observe people performing paid tasks that they might otherwise never see: hat-making, massage, and phone sex, for example. Information is palpably present in the looks, gestures, and body language of the people in the videos. The diversity in the collection of works from numerous geographic locations allows for comparative relationships or differences to be found. What are the many ways people relate to their work – whether physical or intellectual labour? Does work create social continuity and connections across generations, family, regions, or other groups? Or might the work be primarily a means to an end, in which money earned represents larger goals, opportunities, cures, spiritual connection, or means of survival – or any combination of these things? What forms of global capital or other forces flow through the bodies of workers? To what degree are bodies disciplined by economic hierarchies? The films I discuss below show the specificity of place and the transient nature of mostly low-paying or low-skilled work. We see bodies performing physical work, yet, as viewers, we also summon what is not easily known and likely project our own relationships to work or what we might know about the various contexts depicted.

In what way do our attitudes about our own work – or opinions and judgements about other forms of labour – affect our reading of these films and what we see as we watch? One might look for vestiges of satisfaction, pleasure, or effectiveness, or for signs of boredom, struggle, frustration, and subversion in the gestures of the workers. The Labour in a Single Shot

films raise some of these questions, and I will compare them with works by contemporary artists who go further to reveal more personal aspects of the workers' lives or the larger circumstances surrounding the workplace. All of the films discussed will help paint a fuller picture of what people spend their days doing and of how this might impact their quality of life, cares, and concerns.

Labour in a Single Shot Videos

In the Labour video *Nanny*, produced by Do Tuong Linh in the 2013 Hanoi workshop,⁴ a woman takes care of two babies and a young child. As with other videos in the project, the camerawork is simple and shaky, but the feeling is one of transparency, of being able to see the physical labour, the facial expressions of the worker, and the strain she experiences. This, in turn, raises questions about her inner experience – as if we were close enough to know her, because we know what she does. Yet there is a wide gulf between subjects and viewers in terms of all that cannot be immediately seen or understood.

Paola Baretto's *Baba*, made in 2012 during the Rio de Janeiro workshop,⁵ records a nanny comforting a child in a playground. A woman who takes care of the child is employed by the parent of the child, who thus become the woman's manager. She may or may not also be managed by an agency that pays her, if she is not paid directly by the employer. This film depicts a complex labour situation and raises a number of questions. The nanny watches as the child glides down a playground slide and then reacts hurriedly when the child suddenly breaks out into loud tears (off-screen) due to an apparent accident. As a society, are we to consider as equal the concerns of the upset child and their parents on the one hand, and the nanny's concerns about her own standing as an employee, particularly if she is held responsible for the apparent accident, on the other? How might these possible feelings of fear and concern compete with one another? One might feel both a desire to comfort the child and resent that the child causes a workplace "hazard" and a challenge. Is the nanny concerned about what observers might think of her work performance – or of her darker skin colour in relation to the child's pale skin? The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated in 2010 that there were 43,628,000 domestic workers worldwide – a substantial

4 <https://vimeo.com/76333132>.

5 <https://vimeo.com/57094668>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Tran Xuan Quang, *Hat*, Hanoi, 2013.

proportion of the global economy, with the majority in Latin America and Asia. This work by large numbers of people caring for young, sick, and ageing populations is increasingly performed by unprotected noncitizens or by people with residency rights that are not as robust as citizen rights. This often creates power dynamics between the caregiver and “client” (as evidenced in various abuse stories in the news), but we must also ask: how does this precarity impact the lives of the workers, their own care network, and their own access to healthcare resources?

In the case of Tran Xuang Quang’s *Hat*, also shot in Vietnam in 2013,⁶ three generations of people stitch hats together while sitting on the floor. When we see that a child is present, we realize that there is a convergence of labour forms, meaning that childcare or care labour is also part of the hat-making production process in this home. We see a woman glance up from her work and over to the child sitting next to her, in what we might imagine as a look from one form of work to another – from the work of stitching a hat to that of caring for the young child. Is she checking the well-being of the needle-wielding child, to make sure that she is safe, attentive, and not growing restless? To what degree is the woman’s care for the child impacted by her concerns for productivity, given that she may be the child’s supervisor? Perhaps the adults are keeping the child busy, so that they themselves can remain productive.

6 <https://vimeo.com/76341648>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Tran Xuan Quang, *Hat*, Hanoi, 2013.

While it is a purely subjective projection, at this moment in the film, I imagined a special kind of trauma born from the banal aspects of work, a sense of pointless repetition or an anxious sensation that the work will never end, a feeling that one must try to continue, against the feeling of grief for lost time. An alternate reality might be to see the child and adults playing together instead of working, yet there is no indication that this is what is going on. Although there appears to be a playful environment amongst the workers, there is pain in seeing the child labouring, wasting precious youth on work, though I know my opinion is influenced by living in the United States, where young children are protected by labour laws. We cannot tell from the image alone if the child is also developing fine-motor manipulative skills for physical dexterity or gaining a sense of curiosity and kinship from the shared activity, in what is likely a family situation. In *Mary*, shot by Sandra Calvo and Pedro Antoranz during the Mexico City workshop in 2014,⁷ a phone-sex worker in Mexico City instructs another worker on how to speak to a customer. In Chu Kim Duc's *Massage*, from Hanoi in 2013,⁸ we see images of three people giving a massage. And in *Streape*, shot by Karin Idelson during the Buenos Aires workshop in 2013,⁹ strippers perform in a setting tightly framed by the film-maker. All three of these Labour videos raise questions about the direct collision of emotional

7 <https://vimeo.com/96486166>.

8 <https://vimeo.com/76336524>.

9 <https://vimeo.com/67086491>.

labour and leisure time. In these videos, workers expend efforts to channel physical pleasures associated with recreation and relaxation directly to their temporary employers or clients. We understand this work to be as repetitive as the work in *Hat*, with possibly similar or greater forms of physical fatigue and mental tedium for the labourers.

Both the repetitive nature of the labour in some of the videos and the use of the long, single take settle viewers into real time, provoking us to wonder what the subjects might be thinking and feeling. *Mary* begins with a woman explaining to someone off-screen how to simulate, using a lollipop, the sounds of oral sex for clients, and what lines should be delivered. "Remember, the client is always delicious, always tasty, always huge" is the last line of the video, suggesting the routine and mechanical responses required for the job. She carefully outlines the importance of maintaining an illusion for the client and the exact skills required to do so. In this gesture she demonstrates command over her own performance and a brief glimpse into her own relationship to her work. *Mary*, and the other Labour videos mentioned above, were filmed with little camera movement and, of course, no cuts, allowing viewers to observe one person or a small group of people. The Labour in a Single Shot website lists statistics for Mexico: service and commercial work comprised 78.3 per cent of employment (by sectors) in 2012, and almost 60 per cent of the population performed informal work in a cash economy.¹⁰ The project website includes economic and labour statistics for each city where workshops and filming took place; and instead of voice-over or essayistic writing, particular data sets are presented on each city's page. There is no information provided on the website's Concept page about the data or how it relates to the films, but visitors can glean a sense of economic context for the people encountered in the videos.¹¹ Moving images are used in tandem with facts to teach viewers more broadly about the cities and the workers who inhabit them.

Other Moving-Image Works

Prior to developing Labour in a Single Shot, Farocki often built a case in his films with written and visual evidence that moved towards a thesis, such as in *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1988) or *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995). This pedagogical premise also took form in

10 <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/workshops-until-2014/mexico-city/>.

11 Website accessed January 20, 2020.

his years as an educator at UC Berkeley and at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The Labour project united film-making and teaching methods in the instructional workshops that Farocki and Ehmann led for the artists, film-makers, and authors who created the short videos. Keeping Ehmann and Farocki's project of observation and education in mind, I want to turn to contemporary artists who work in film and on topics of workers and physical labour. The artists discussed below answer the call of *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995) to fill a representational void by making videos about work, particularly physical forms of work. Directly and indirectly influenced by Farocki's oeuvre, they take up labour as their subject matter and make work or workers visible. The six artists utilize filmic observation, but also, importantly, engage in direct intervention to tease out social, economic, and political relations surrounding the labourers depicted, thereby exploring the shifting shape of work and the emotional lives of workers in a globalized economy.

The fact that, like Farocki, each of these artists has an art-teaching practice informs how we can read their work. Particularly with the two collaborative teams Strom and Carlson and Chang and Kelly, the aesthetic choices can be read, and should be understood, as related to a pedagogical ethos, where the process of art-making is one in which subjects learn about each other in new ways and share that with a wider audience, thus producing new forms of knowledge together. The artist Emma Hedditch, also discussed, uses a different approach by making connections between archival footage and video she shot herself of garment workers in 2014. The artists work without the prescriptive codes of traditional narrative fiction and the expectations those codes vest in viewers. Their films combine a range of aesthetic tools that come from varied disciplines including documentary, journalism, anthropology, video art, essay films, and performance art. Most of the subjects are directly connected to well-publicized political situations or large labour trends, such as migrant labour. These artists use related techniques, yet they go further in stimulating the imagination and inner life of the worker by adding creative collaboration that often shows workers "off duty." They also call attention to the workers' broader geopolitical and economic circumstances, raising questions about how those conditions shape not just the workers' lives, but also their beliefs, attitudes, and emotions.

Strom and Carlson work with the pre-existing familiarity and trust workers have with one another to build a different form of collaboration. In these video artworks, workers are not shown labouring at their jobs as in the Labour in a Single Shot films, but instead collaborating in various performances that connect with their work or workplace. They are shown



Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson, *Four Parallel Lines*, 2007, video, colour, 5 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the artists.

both at work and away from their jobs; sometimes, the artworks showcase their personal memories and fantasies. For instance, *Four Parallel Lines* (2007), a video installation by Strom and Carlson, was made with Guatemalan migrant day labourers in the Bay Area. The men walk in sync, dragging planks of wood in the sand of a beach, making four parallel lines along the shore. As the tides flow, the lines are washed away.

Cuenta (2007) is another short video made by Strom and Carlson with the same Guatemalan day labourers. The performers move through different forms of speech and song in the piece. The video does not depict the men actually working. Rather, the familiarity they have with one another as workers is put to use to create a synchronized chorus of songs and sounds that they perform for the camera. One man starts by saying:

Yesterday I went to look for work and thank God I was able to find work.
 Today I also went to look and here we are with our friends. The day before
 yesterday I also went and I stopped to drink some coffee ...¹²

The day labourers in *Cuenta* have worked together as well as killed time looking for work together. Coming from Guatemala, they likely shared forms

12 Translation and notes by Danica Arimany, email message to author, October 2014.



Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson, *Cuenta*, 2007, single-channel video, colour, 2 min. 30 sec.
Reproduced by kind permission of the artists.

of communal struggle and ways of coping in their past lives with violent surroundings as well as in their current experiences of looking for work in tenuous and vulnerable locations and conditions as undocumented workers.

Strom and Carlson worked with the men over a few weeks and got to know them. The men's experiences of working together on jobs and the emotional bonds forged in struggle, camaraderie, support, and interdependency were redirected by Strom and Carlson into the making of *Cuenta*. In the video, the men are depicted sitting close together and harmoniously speaking, singing, and creating sound, fully in sync and musically punctuating each other. Rapid calls and shouts are made when they are picked up at the start of a work day by employers driving by in trucks. Working with the artists, they transformed those sounds into a score and an experimental vocalization. These activities are a different kind of work – they are a type of creative production, for which Strom and Carlson paid them. The collaborative creative process allows Strom, Carlson, and the men to delicately interconnect the violent history of Guatemala, day-to-day survival activities, personal memories, and their emotional longing across politically contested borders. The compensation the men received from the film-makers satisfied their need for survival while the final artwork they produced evokes the imaginative internal manoeuvring required to navigate their daily lives.



Patty Chang and David Kelley, *Route 3*, 2011, 3-channel video installation, 25 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the artists.

The movement of a large object and the care work of washing hair form the basis of Patty Chang and David Kelley's video art installation *Route 3*, whose title refers to a new international road in Laos, built in part by the Chinese government. The installation is comprised of a three-channel video made by Chang and Kelley in Laos in 2011. It is a non-narrative piece combining aspects of essay films and experimental documentary with poetic visual metaphors, and shows several different sites and activities. One striking scene in the video depicts Laotian workers (hired by Chang and Kelly) from the town of New Boten moving an invented sculptural object created by the artists around the old town of Boten (from where the workers had been displaced).¹³ The piece depicts the ambiguous and possibly pointless labour of moving around a rectangular, body-height rail structure with curtains that keep viewers from seeing what is inside. It also shows people eating a meal on work break, women having their hair washed at a beauty salon, and a young man dancing on roller skates at high speed through the streets – all images in which the pressures of labour are momentarily absent.

Route 3 is set within the context of the construction and geopolitics of the new international road in Laos, and it follows the various people affected by its construction. According to the artists, the road is divided into three parts: the Thai government paid for the part closest to Thailand, the middle part was funded by the Asian Development Bank, and China paid for the part closest to China. Brand-new Chinese casinos were built

13 Patty Chang, email message to author, November 2014.

in the northern Lao border town Boten, and Chinese workers inside those casinos have introduced a new, enhanced service economy on the new road. The town of New Boten was created for the Lao people displaced by the casino industry. *Route 3* also shows a cafeteria for the Chinese workers from the casinos, which were built for Chinese tourists (because gambling is illegal across the border in China), a scene that demonstrates the ethnic changes and divisions of these new economic sites. *Route 3* cuts back and forth between the two towns and includes scenes from a hair salon, editing together the faces of the people doing the washing and of those getting their hair washed. This footage provides a deeper look into the larger social and economic dynamics at play. Communal hair washing, often in a river, is a common social activity in Laos, whereas the hair salons represent the introduction of modern equipment for people with more disposable income who can afford those services. Substantial changes have already begun in Laos with increased tourism, multinational entertainment, and a service-based economy, as *Route 3* expands trade throughout Asia. Given the rapid change and movement of entire communities – and the segregated economic communities of the Laotian and Chinese people – how might these politics play into the feelings of the people whose bodies touch one another in the hair salon on the new road? Do the salons become places of support, information-sharing, and comfort, or places of resentment and anxiety about changing ethnic and class structures?

There is one final image in *Route 3* of a Fujianese migrant worker freely and vigorously moving through space on wheels. The skater is unencumbered by geography, the routines of work, or the limited wages and confines of the dormitory living quarters the new service economy provides him. His movement looks joyful and thrilling, as he is fully ensconced in the pleasures of his own graceful athleticism. We observe this casino worker momentarily freed from the tensions of work or local politics. The smooth expanse of the new road is here a skating surface, metaphorically ripe with potential for a limitless future.

We have seen how film and video make visible the invisible, the way documentary is never without a perspective, and the way artists, both “professional” and “amateur,” are interested in showing bodies at work. In *A Pattern* (2014), Emma Hedditch shows bodies at work by mixing imagery shot in the 1970s by a film-maker named Irving Schneider, sourced from the internet, specifically YouTube, combined with footage Hedditch shot in the chaotic streets of Manhattan’s Garment District in 2014. In this neighbourhood, which is also known as the Fashion District of New York, there is a specific timetable during the day when workers roll clothing or



Patty Chang and David Kelley, *Route 3*, 2011, 3-channel video installation, 25 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the artists.

bolts of fabric through the streets. They roll the fabric to the production shops where clothes are made, to show samples – and then roll the racks back again full of finished garments. There is a large storage space near the intersection of 38th Street and 8th Avenue where these samples come from. By 4:00 pm, things wind down, and on the weekend this garment traffic does not exist at all. Hedditch spent the summer of 2014 looking around the Garment District and shooting. In *A Pattern*, she presents a continuum of work extending across four decades. We see the same sort of labour performed in the 1970s and again nearly forty years later. The city itself becomes part of the factory floor, as materials are taken through the streets and sidewalks. It is surprising to see both the difference in the built environment in New York City between the 1970s and 2014, and the similarities in the form of manual labour taking place. If anything, the work has likely become harder, with greater time pressures driven by globalization and technology. The visibility of Schneider's footage on YouTube afforded Hedditch the opportunity to create a relationship between past and present, and we can say that the internet affords Labour in a *Single Shot* similar possibilities.

As an artist, I myself have worked with issues of labour, care, and migration, including in several projects in collaboration with communities that often go unnoticed by wealthy, globe-trotting Westerners and those from the Global North. While on a fellowship at the Chinese University in Hong Kong, I observed the highly visible queer and trans community among the large number of domestic workers in Hong Kong who were from the



Emma Hedditch, *A Pattern*, 2014, SD video, colour, 33 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

Philippines and Indonesia. As debates about same-sex marriage raged in the United States (a goal that U.S. progressives thought would strengthen the nation's social fabric), I was struck by this alternative phenomenon at the intersection of homosocial migrant labour, homosexuality, and the matrices of work, sexuality, and community. The second part of the project was made in Indonesia, where I observed the training process for migrant domestic workers moving from Java, Indonesia to Taiwan. I produced several short videos in the series *Readymaids: Indonesia*, created collaboratively in 2009 with women inside a maid-training agency in Java before they were placed with families in Taiwan. We created videos in extended voluntary workshops over a few weeks based on the fantasies or memories of the women who wrote them. With my background as a college professor, I employed many of the pedagogical methods I use in my classroom, and showed the women artworks to help generate ideas and facilitate discussion about how to collaboratively brainstorm and invent creative works. As in the Labour workshops, the women inside the agency reflected on the nature of work and created videos containing long or single takes, but they sometimes also chose personal memories or fantasies they wished to share, planning and directing how these would be



Jeannie Simms, *I'm the only one that hasn't flown yet*, 2009, digital video, colour, 5 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

staged for the camera. Perhaps *Readymaids: Indonesia* is another example of a form of art video that reinscribes subaltern imagination with social agency. Foley sound added in postproduction augments the videos in an attempt to visualize and make audible the interior wishes of these maids-in-training.

At the maid-training agency, women constantly go to and from training as they get placed in homes in Taiwan and their migration paperwork is finalized. One of the eldest maids-in-training at the agency, Supriatin, chose to participate in the workshops and made a video called *I'm the only one that hasn't flown yet*, based on her fantasy of becoming invisible, so that she could leave the agency and go visit her family. (Leaving for leisure is only sparingly allowed, for fear that the agency's investment in workers will be lost if the trainees do not return.) Supriatin's quest for the power of invisibility points to her life under constant surveillance, where anonymity and escaping the bosses' view are desirable luxuries. In this instance, visibility is *not* desired, because it would expose personal desires and activities *outside of* the world that directly benefits the employer. Younger women are in higher demand and are the first to be placed abroad. Supriatin had been waiting almost a full year in the agency to be situated with a family and was growing bored and frustrated, and she missed her own family. She had said goodbye to many of her friends who had left for Taiwan. In the video, she visits her husband (played by a female dormitory staff member) and her daughter (played by a much younger fellow trainee) after concocting a scheme with her fellow trainees to help cover for her in



Jeannie Simms, *I'm the only one that hasn't flown yet*, 2009, digital video, colour, 5 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

her absence. At the end of the video, Supriatin successfully returns to the agency after seeing her loved ones and re-enters unscathed and without reprisal, because she is assisted by her fellow trainees, who keep a look-out as she passes a sleeping guard: the fellow trainees have got her back. The trust and camaraderie of the women, built through their life and work in the training centre, re-emerges in the fantasy as they act out protecting one another. Although I was not able to observe evidence of the effects that the work produced after I left the country, it seems worth mentioning the possibility that this form of fantasy and performance might nurture the women's friendships, trust, and solidarity, thus strengthening the fabric of their labour network.

Chris Kraus's book *Video Green* informs my approach to these nonethnographic, nondocumentary film/video projects. Kraus raises questions about the aesthetics of events that depict political suffering. Referencing Chantal Akerman's *D'Est* (1993) in a discussion of a video by Dan Asher, she writes:

Unlike Chantal Akerman's rigorously interstitial movie *D'Est* (1993), Dan's videos are selectively interstitial. Documenting personal rituals and small significant events within the flow of detritus in changing urban centers, he's more like an anthropologist than an artist. Even as I write this, I'm wondering to what extent *D'Est's* formal rigor shields us from the implications of its content. The endless tracking shots of huddled crowds in terminals in *D'Est*, punctuated with the off-screen

strain of violins, makes the decenteredness of these newly “liberated” countries into something existential and not circumstantial, and this (I think) is the dilemma surrounding everything our culture deems great art.¹⁴

Kraus’s critique stands in support of the straightforward, modest camerawork that we encounter in the Labour in a Single Shot videos. Ehmann and Farocki’s project might also, through the use of real-time observation, resist those “formal rigors” and the “existential” readings Kraus describes, in the interest of a fidelity to the immediacy of the human hand – often in both the work shown and the camerawork itself. Kraus’s comparison between “anthropological” and “existential” renderings in art is helpful and poses a profound moral question about the hypnotic power of beauty to undermine representation of the deep troubles of our times in works of art. It also raises questions about which aesthetic choices and tools of communication might make viewers more receptive to the process of bearing witness. The non-Labour artists mentioned do not fall into either category – the “anthropological” or the “existential” – but rather blend the two, taking advantage of the aesthetic powers of both.

The works I have discussed use nonprofessional actors and varying shades of realism and abstraction to invent new encounters with compelling subjects in moving images. These artist-made videos do not feign objectivity: the workers collaborate in the theatricalization of their own work. This might afford a place for fantasy for both artists and workers to reimagine the role of labour or one’s relationship to it. Perhaps getting to play oneself in a movie provides some of the grandeur and distancing that gave mid-twentieth-century social realism its charge, and infuses reality with the potential for rewriting it in the journey towards a different kind of authentic memory. These artworks afford the possibility of a collective re-remembrance of a past event. In the process of making a new version of the story, an expanded community (workers, artists, audience) invests care in the lives depicted on-screen. This attention can be felt and shared by all, including the workers, as a new circuit of care that moves beyond the usual set of demands in the relationship between worker and employer.

While Kraus’s point reveals the dangerous potential for the trivialization of suffering and real political circumstances through art, there can also be ways artists work with metaphor, abstraction, and existential questioning

14 Chris Kraus, *Video Green* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 53.

that fracture and re-route emotional arrangements and commitments. The artists I have discussed all have relationships to pedagogical practices and have taught for large parts of their careers, much like Ehmann and Farocki, and are seasoned facilitators of processes of collective invention in which the group is greater than its individual parts, and thus share values concerning group process and dialogism. In many of these artists' pieces, the bonds of trust, solidarity, camaraderie, and physical closeness and intimacy created between workers who already know one another are redirected into moments of reflection, play, and theatrical communication of the *idea* of the work of the worker, rather than towards the actual work itself. Instead of labouring at their actual work, workers perform other forms of work, or work-related gestures, for the camera and for an imagined audience, such as the men in *Four Parallel Lines* who drag planks of wood along the beach or Supriatin pretending she is leaving the maid-training agency to visit her daughter in *I'm the only one that hasn't flown yet*.

In the videos *Cuenta*, *Route 3*, *I'm the only one that hasn't flown yet*, or *A Pattern*, the sensations and impulses of building and collaboration between workers swerve in other directions: towards a fantasy of eating cake with a grandmother; towards showing the displaced inhabitants of Botan marking their movement through the old town, from which they became estranged, with the procession of an otherwise pointless object that only takes on meaning through their collective effort of carrying it around the city; towards connecting imagery of workers moving clothing racks through the city in the 1970s with those moving racks in 2014; or towards enacting a scenario of escape to experience the emotional flow of support from a worker's family to her new friends at the maid-training agency. In these processes, which are facilitated by artists, new connections or friendships are nurtured and new memories of togetherness are created. In the making of the videos, previous sensations of work transform into new forms of fantasy that can be realized with fellow workers.

These artists show the connection between the real people and real politics that Kraus stresses, while the viewer witnesses a different kind of activity: watching workers *voluntarily* make metaphors or stories out of their own lives. In the process, workers might conjure an imagined audience – and perform for the film-making crew with whom they have created real relationships and shared concerns – both in and beyond the framework of their own labour. These works address Farocki's declaration of an absence of images of labour. They generate new images of workers, using observation while adding new techniques of dialogue, collaboration, and creative intervention.

Coda

Thinking of Farocki's interest in all facets of labour, I can add my own reflections on writing, and on the interior life of one worker. It is worthwhile to mention that writing this essay was a process of escalating grief: at first, I was energized and happy to revisit Farocki's work, but slowly this turned to a deeper, wider, and eventually infinite sadness about his loss as a highly unique producer who defied categories, and whose production had finally ended. My work was not "hard labour" for a wage but rather immaterial and unpaid, nothing at all like the repetitive work in the *Hat* video that inspired my projective fantasy of worker tedium. Nonetheless, in the process of writing, I struggled with my own boredom or alienated feelings as I faced the tenebrous, painful sensation that the writing might never end, as well as with simply not wanting to write – nor to face the loss of Farocki's continued production and potential future works. The fear of the death of Farocki's brand of twenty- and twenty-first-century intellectualism – or of the limits (or death) of my own intellectualism as I worked to connect and rearrange existing and new ideas – proved to be part of the toil. I worked in cafés and libraries filled with other living, breathing bodies who worked beside me.¹⁵

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15 Special thanks to my mother, Peggy Simms, for her editing suggestions, and for pointing out that the women leaving the Lumière brothers' factory were not necessarily ecstatically leaving the factory but were headed to their other jobs: housework, cooking, and caretaking; to Amy Sadao for her rewrites; to Gregory Williams, Roy Grundmann, and Peter Schwartz for their edits; and to all the artists for sharing their work with me.

About the Author

Jeannie Simms is an artist who produces photographs, videos, and objects often focused on precarious geopolitical situations, conjuring desires and fantasies from real people in settings of labour and migration. Through an interplay of intercultural collaboration, conversation, and staging, her works incorporate performances, interviews, and observational filming to create media works that defy categorization. She is a professor of the practice in photography at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Tufts University.

11. Labour's Mediating Objects: Tools, Tactility, and Embodiment

Gregory H. Williams

Abstract

The many handheld tools that appear in the Labour videos function frequently as mediating devices between the workers, the workshop participants, and the project's viewers. This essay explores how such common objects help to negotiate the tension between what is being shown and what is not shown but can be deduced from the image. In doing so, they take on an unexpected role in shaping the diegetic impact of myriad scenes of work. The mediating tools glimpsed in a significant number of videos also point to the importance of tactility and embodiment in the workshop model. Like the workers' tools, the cameras wielded by Labour participants operate like material probes that connect labourers with their environments, and eventually with the viewing public.

Keywords: tactility, embodiment, mediation, cinematographic objects, handheld tools, pedagogy

At an initial meeting to plan the interlinked Boston and Berlin conferences dedicated to the Labour in a Single Shot video workshops, Harun Farocki described the importance of drawing a distinction between showing and telling, one of the issues that he and Antje Ehmann had routinely discussed with the workshop participants.¹ Though documentary film has traditionally

¹ The meeting took place at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin on June 7, 2014. The conferences in Boston and Berlin were held in November 2014 and February 2015, respectively.

combined these two approaches by supporting images with voiceovers or intertitles – as Farocki himself did in his essay films – the Labour videos almost exclusively privilege the mode of showing or demonstrating. The workshop rules stipulated that no overt explanation of the subject at hand was to be delivered via spoken narration or inserted text. While they show a great deal, the multitude of videos from the Labour project generally stop short of delivering a didactic message, leaving much room for viewer interpretation. If the first and most obvious point of entry into the videos are the people performing the acts of labour, there are many other elements that guide the viewing process, including the movement of the camera, the range and nature of profilmic space (indoor or outdoor, private or public, etc.), and, perhaps most important given their tactile connection with the labourers, the great variety of utilitarian objects, both static and in motion, that frequently occupy the visual field.

Farocki located the absence of overt modes of telling stories about labour at the very beginning of cinematic history, with the Lumière brothers' 1895 *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*. In the essay accompanying his film *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995), Farocki discusses depictions of labour in early cinema: "It is as though the world itself wanted to tell us something."² The implication is that the first film-makers were not yet capable of telling a narrative tale of labour, preferring instead to let images speak for themselves by showing reality through the movement and circulation of bodies. Farocki points out that when they made the three versions of their factory film, the Lumière brothers used a camera without a viewfinder, which limited their ability to frame, and thereby shape, the diegetic impact of the scene.³ This leads Farocki to point out that the primary objective for the Lumières was "to represent motion and thus to illustrate the possibility of representing movement."⁴ In spite of the massive advances in photographic technology that have taken place in the meantime, the Labour videos omit additional layers of representation that would address spectators in a didactic manner. This approach leaves viewers to decide where to focus their attention as they orient themselves within these highly varied scenes of contemporary global labour. Farocki argues that a primary lesson delivered by the Lumière brothers is that "the visible movement of people is standing in for the absent

I am grateful to Roy Grundmann and Peter Schwartz for their productive comments on drafts of this essay.

2 Harun Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory," in *Harun Farocki: Imprint—Writings*, ed. Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2001), 246.

3 Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory," 234.

4 Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory," 246.

and invisible movement of goods, money, and ideas circulating in industry.”⁵ Given the workshop's emphasis on work and workers, Farocki's observation may also hold true for the participants' videos.

The focus in many Labour videos on singular activities draws the eye to familiar objects, which frequently take the form of handheld tools. Cinematic vectors (framing, angle, shot range) can lend these tools a surprising degree of presence. Occasionally, they even seem to eclipse the workers themselves in their evident importance to the process of labour captured. In what follows, I want to explore the idea that the tools and related quotidian objects in the Labour videos take on the role of mediating devices between the workers, the workshop participants, and the viewers of the project. In other words, they not only mediate between the work and the worker, which together form the recorded scene of labour, but also help the Labour video-makers construct such scenes in a manner that helps viewers negotiate the tension between what is being shown and what is not shown but can be deduced from the image. The tools guide the eye, pointing to the most important aspects of visible work activities and serving as heuristic devices that draw awareness to the larger network of unseen “movement of goods, money, and ideas.” In addition, these circulating objects suggest an analogy with the work being performed by the cameras themselves. By offering the viewer a place to direct the gaze when human motion does not occupy the centre of the visual field or when human activity is dictated by inanimate things, they call to mind the embodied experience of the video-makers' own immersion into work environments. In my analysis of four workshop videos, I want to suggest that the particular operational parameters of the project – the single shot, the short duration, the frequent use of the handheld camera, and the relatively close-range recording of labour – compel viewers to draw an analogy between the artisanal tools seen on the screen and the unseen camera.

Though the individual videos may not aim for a transparently didactic approach, they help to build an awareness of humble, localized work as it is performed in multiple countries. In general, the workshop participants do so through a close-range filming process that places the camera, and thereby the viewer, in tangible proximity to the labouring subject. In their third major cowritten book, *Maßverhältnisse des Politischen* (Commensurabilities of the Political), published in 1992, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge cite Bertolt Brecht in describing “concepts as grips, with which things and relations are set in motion—corresponding closely to the behavior of a worker

5 Farocki, “Workers Leaving the Factory,” 246.

who uses tools in order to treat the material and to give it the functionally appropriate form. If these grips are lost, the concepts and words also forfeit their reliable effectiveness.⁶ Negt and Kluge here take advantage of the relationship, in German, between *Begriffe* (concepts) and *Griffe* (grips). As the root word of *begreifen* (to understand or to grasp), *greifen* (to grasp or to grip) implies that concepts are formed and maintained through touch. In the individual Labour videos, knowledge is produced through tactile associations generated by the visual representation of tools, which help viewers “get a handle” on the work performed. At the same time, the cameras reveal typically unseen aspects of labour and motivate a degree of reflexivity about the filming of work that is, as part of the workshop, heavily informed by Farocki’s own films. The camera is an invisible but functioning tool that supports Ehmann and Farocki’s pedagogical impulse and aligns the workshop model with Negt and Kluge’s call for using concepts as grips or handles to shape reality.

It is worth noting that the Labour project became available to the public around the same time that film studies scholars were beginning to focus renewed attention on the place of things, or “cinematographic objects,” within the history of film. In his introduction to *Cinematographic Objects*, an essay collection on the topic, Volker Pantenburg bemoans the lack of attention devoted in film and media studies to the importance of inanimate things in cinema, especially considering how central they had been to early film theory. Pantenburg makes the case for an overdue reassessment of the status of objects, including the camera itself, in cinema studies: “Nowhere else do things act the way they do on the screen; nowhere else do they move in the same manner, continuously changing their shapes, monumentally big in one shot and minuscule in the next.”⁷ After prolonged viewing of the

6 I want to thank Richard Langston for suggesting “commensurabilities” as an apt translation of *Maßverhältnisse*. Negt and Kluge’s book has not yet been translated into English. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Maßverhältnisse des Politischen. 15 Vorschläge zum Unterscheidungsvermögen* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1992), 57. Author’s translation [Original German: “Brecht hat von Begriffen wie Griffen gesprochen, mit denen Dinge und Verhältnisse in Bewegung gesetzt werden—ganz entsprechend dem Verhalten eines Handwerkers, der Werkzeuge benutzt, um das Material zu bearbeiten und ihm eine den Zwecken angemessene Gestalt zu geben. Gehen diese Griffe verloren, büßen auch die Begriffe und Worte ihre verlässliche Wirkungsweise ein.”]. Brecht discussed the relationship between concepts and “handles” (another word for *Griffe*) in his satire *Refugee Conversations*, which he started writing while living in exile in the early 1940s in Finland. See Bertolt Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, ed. Tom Kuhn, trans. Romy Fursland (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 63.

7 Volker Pantenburg, “The Cinematographic State of Things,” in *Cinematographic Objects: Things and Operations*, ed. Volker Pantenburg (Berlin: August Verlag, 2015), 14.

scenes of work in *Labour in a Single Shot*, one becomes conscious not only of the sheer number of labour hours performed by the workshop participants, whose unseen cameras function in their own way as crucial mediating objects, but also of the “labouring” objects that circulate within the scenes of work. The recorded activities of workers, whether in the factory or at home, can receive a fuller accounting when considered in relation to the full spectrum of material culture visible in the frame. As Francesco Casetti writes in the same essay volume as Pantenburg, an analysis of objects circulating on the screen enhances the viewing experience so that “the spectator can once more grasp and interact with the fabric of the world.”⁸ It is in this cognitive shift from the invisible to the visible, highly present tool that the political dimensions of *Labour in a Single Shot* become especially evident. When the tools operate as visual pointers that help the viewer explore the space of work, as “grips” that concretize physical activity, labour moves from abstraction to visibility.

The Labour videos not only show performances of labour, they also present these scenes as constructed representations. They do so through their pared-down format (brief time span, single shot, focus on a specific activity), which foregrounds the cinematic aspects of the videos, resulting in a type of mediation that is both diegetic (revealing the relation between tool, labourer, and work context) and nondiegetic (evoking the rhetoric that builds a relationship between the scene of labour, the camera that constructs it, and the viewer). To gain a more precise understanding of mediation in the videos, we can turn to Bruno Latour's work on the power of tools and technologies in negotiating social relations. In his analysis of the “Berlin key,” a rare device that functioned for Prussian concierges as a master key to the main door of Berlin apartment buildings, Latour notes the power wielded by its holders. The standard version of a building's key would have been used by inhabitants, the mail carrier, the landlord, and others to enter the shared interior courtyard. However, only the concierge held the master key, which offered small but crucial variations on the one used by the building's residents and regular visitors, giving this gatekeeper the ability to adjust the lock and enable only certain options for locking or leaving open the main door during the day or night. Latour describes the tool as a regulator of movement through time and urban space that illuminates a distinction between two forms of mediation: “One person will

8 Francesco Casetti, “Objects on the Screen: Tools, Things, Events,” in *Cinematographic Objects*, ed. Volker Pantenburg, 26.

take mediation to mean *intermediary*, another to mean *mediator*.⁹ The first notion suggests a relatively passive role for tools, understood as physical things that merely aid in the performance of basic tasks. A more complex conception of the tool sees it take on a degree of agency as a moving and adaptive fulcrum around which the action takes place. Latour ascribes a social role to the Berlin key, claiming that it “assumes all the dignity of a mediator, a social actor, an agent, an active being.”¹⁰

Latour’s description of this more active position for a tool-as-mediator resonates with a number of Labour videos. The workshop participants use their cameras to insert themselves proactively into spaces occupied by labourers and their handheld tools. There is, however, an important difference: as opposed to functioning as mediators that delimit access, as in the case of the Berlin key, the tools in the Labour in a Single Shot videos tend to occupy a central position and thereby open up visual routes into the scene of labour. In the process, they take on an exploratory role, even if the spectator also becomes aware of how much is left unseen. This is where it becomes fruitful to combine Latour’s notion of the “mediator” with Negt and Kluge’s call for a tactile understanding of concepts. Negt and Kluge, pace Brecht, draw a firm connection between physical labour and learning processes, allowing us to see the tools as productive instructional agents in the videos. For the purposes of this essay, I have selected Labour videos that prominently foreground tools belonging to this knowledge-producing category of mediation, because they enable a reading of the workshop that highlights its pedagogical effects. The tools function as intermediaries that determine the hand and arm movements of labourers as well as the spatial relations among individual workers. These mute mediators are always pictured as extensions of labourers’ bodies, which explains why the instruments, tools, and devices occupy such a central position and ultimately reinforce viewer awareness, however limited, of the socioeconomic context of the events captured. Though they do so primarily through the act of showing rather than by outright telling, the tools play a substantial role in drawing our attention to how labourers’ bodies occupy space and transform materials.

I am considering only handheld, analogue tools, that is, tools attached to and circulating between bodies, rather than the much wider array of machines, devices, and instruments on view. In the Labour videos, the

9 Bruno Latour, “The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things,” in *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, ed. M. Graves-Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 18.

10 Latour, “Berlin Key,” 19.

latter often make up a substantial part of the general spatial environment (computer banks, factory machines, surgical theatres, etc.), such that they appear to fade into the background and lose their concrete qualities. In the first volume of *Capital*, Karl Marx described the capacity of machines to recede from conscious human control, with the worker taking on a supplementary rather than a central role: "Large-scale industry [...] possesses in the machine system an entirely objective organization of production, which confronts the worker as a pre-existing material condition of production."¹¹ The videographers in the Labour workshops approach their subjects with digital cameras, but the haptic engagement with labour prompts a longing for the pre-digital era that seems almost inevitable for the many videos that give a prominent visual role to handheld tools. Indeed, I am aware that, in prioritizing these small objects over industrial machinery, I run the risk of fetishizing the tools or viewing them primarily through the lens of nostalgia. However, given their status as visual guides that aid the viewer in following the movements of the camera, they make the representation of labour physically palpable. Writing about the means of production, Marx referred to the tool as a *Leiter*, or "conductor," a term that emphasizes the direct physical connection between the worker and "the object of his labour."¹² In several Labour videos, the tightly framed triangulations between the camera operator, the labourers' bodies, and the visible tools bring a human dimension to the workshop project that is both instructive on a basic informational level and political on a larger social level.

The traditional tools, such as knives and hammers, that take up a prominent place in the visual field of many of the videos occupy the realm of what the philosopher and technology theorist Gilbert Simondon has called the "artisanal modality." He describes this premodern category as distinct from industrial forms of work, given the "weak distance" that existed between such simple objects and their materials (a chisel and stone, for example).¹³ In addition to the necessary proximity between tools and the matter they transform, artisanal objects must stay close to the bodies of their users in order to function as extensions of hands and arms. Simondon

11 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 508.

12 Marx, *Capital*, 285. For the German original, see Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23 (Berlin: Dietz, 1989), 194. The full sentence reads as follows: "Das Arbeitsmittel ist ein Ding oder ein Komplex von Dingen, die der Arbeiter zwischen sich und den Arbeitsgegenstand schiebt und die ihm als Leiter seiner Tätigkeit auf diesen Gegenstand dienen."

13 Gilbert Simondon, "The Technical Mentality," trans. Arne De Boever, *Parrhesia* 7 (2009): 20.

is quick to point out that “trying to return to directly artisanal modes of production is an illusion,” because society’s needs have long outstripped the productive capacity of individual workers and tools.¹⁴ In the Labour videos discussed below, the bodies of workers are brought into a relationship with the workshop participants, such that simple tools function as mediating elements that reveal the sociopolitical stakes of these moments of video documentation. To be clear, I am not suggesting that a return in any direct or lasting way to these earlier “artisanal modalities” is possible, but rather I consider the tools as active agents instead of focusing on their passive positions within a larger network of the means of production. The tools are foregrounded even when workshop participants record what appear to be unremunerative forms of productivity.

A compelling example of such seemingly unproductive labour is Alexei Taruts’s *Knife Fight Training*, produced in the 2013 Moscow workshop.¹⁵ In this scene, the camera remains relatively stationary as two men practise defensive moves for a hypothetical knife attack. Over and over, they repeat a series of cut-and-thrust gestures, with one man playing the attacker and the other the defender. The viewer is struck by the intimacy of the choreographed violence as well as by the attacker’s willingness to endure the arm twists and falls that, however scripted, would seem to involve physical discomfort. As the two men grapple and tumble, the eye is gradually drawn to the plastic training knife as it continually changes hands and sometimes moves out of the camera frame, even landing briefly on the floor. When the knife leaves their hands, it suddenly becomes clear that this prop is a constant, if fleeting, physical link between the two figures, the point around which they pivot. In each rapid round, the knife begins in the hand of the attacker, only to be taken possession of by the defender, who then uses it to launch an immediate counterattack. One also takes note of the clash of limbs, the men’s grimaces, and the minor but significant differences between the methods of attack and defence. Here the knife is, in a sense, more important than either individual human actor, since the form of their physical exertion is so heavily determined by its presence.

The Labour films encourage an active perception of how such objects as this knife are usually only fleetingly and incompletely registered, a form of limited awareness that is analogous with the compromised understanding we have of the lives of the individuals being filmed. Indeed, I want to

14 Simondon, “Technical Mentality,” 21.

15 <https://vimeo.com/72369318>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Alexei Taruts, *Knife Fight Training*, Moscow, 2013.

suggest that the knife in Taruts's film prompts a critical consideration of empathy in that it points directly to the fragility of interhuman relations. In *The Tactile Eye*, Jennifer M. Barker argues that, as far back as the Lumière brothers' 1896 *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, spectators have responded empathetically to film "to such a degree that we can experience and 'grasp' [...] the exhilaration of a 'close call' or the intimacy of a close-up."¹⁶ And yet this grasping for connection, not unlike the search for "grips," has its limits. Barker acknowledges that the tactile relationship to the cinematic image results at best in a "muscular empathy that is an oscillation between difference and similarity, proximity and distance."¹⁷ The shallow space and nondescript background of the knife-fight training, with the participants positioned close to the camera as the lateral movements of their bodies produce a frenetic pattern of repetition across the screen, prompts a visceral reaction from the viewer. And yet the artificiality of the scene, its predictable and rehearsed format, prevents any sense of identification from developing between viewers and "labourers." Empathy is felt but not fully registered. As the men practise their moves, the spectator gradually becomes aware that the knife is plastic, a prop meant to prepare them for defensive manoeuvres on the street. Here, the ability of viewers to visually "grasp" the tool in question parallels the participants' own tenuous grip on

16 Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 73.

17 Barker, *Tactile Eye*, 75.



Labour in a Single Shot. Huong Mai Nguyen, *Wood Cutter*, Hanoi, 2013.

the knife. In her analysis of common tactile tropes in cinema history, Barker points to the handshake as a “gesture of mimicry,” with two individuals growing closer while mirroring each other’s movements.¹⁸ To the extent that the ersatz knife in Taruts’s video shifts between the participants’ hands as it governs the movements of their bodies, it takes on an active role as mediator. And yet the distance that is repeatedly established between the men turns the object into a hinge that enforces separation. This continuous exchange generates no material product of lasting value; rather, the intimate entanglement of two bodies gestures toward a possible future moment of violence and self-defence. As a nontraditional account of labour, *Knife Fight Training* allows the tool to become a third protagonist in the video.

A video from the 2013 workshop in Hanoi also de-emphasizes labour’s inherent connection to profit-driven material production. Huong Mai Nguyen’s *Wood Cutter* presents a close-up view of an urban scavenger as he uses a hammer to drive metal spikes into a piece of scrap wood.¹⁹ The camera focuses initially on his feet, which are partially covered in rubber sandals, and on the piece of what appears to be a refashioned length of metal rebar he is employing to split the wood. Along with the worn nails that reveal that the wood is recycled, the spikes guide our first encounter with this isolated act of labour. Before we see the face or even much of the body of the worker, we hear his voice speaking in a calm, philosophical tone

¹⁸ Barker, *Tactile Eye*, 94.

¹⁹ <https://vimeo.com/76351589>.

not traditionally associated with such humble manual labour. His words are conveyed with the aid of English-language subtitles: "Humankind is like that. There is a certain percentage of talented and skilled people. Out of 100, if everyone is talented then who would serve them? Who would be the slaves? Distribution ... there is distribution among mankind. There are both talented and stupid people. Otherwise, who would serve whom?" The clanging of the hammer hitting the spikes accentuates the force of this observation, which surprises not only because of the ostensibly impoverished context. One is left unsure as to whether this man sees himself as belonging to the "slaves" or to the "masters," and yet his words obviously do not belong to the vocabulary of a naive person, nor does he seem insecure or apologetic about the simple work he is performing. The relationship between discourse and labour here is a topic that Farocki explored in his own films. In a 2013 interview with Monika Bayer-Wermuth, Farocki speaks about Georg K. Glaser, the German-French writer and metalsmith who lamented in his books the erosion of artisanal forms of labour in favour of the modern assembly line. In Farocki's 1988 film *Georg K. Glaser – Schriftsteller und Schmied* (Writer and Smith), Farocki edits the sound of Glaser reading from one of his texts on manual labour over footage of him repeatedly striking a flat disc of copper with a hammer. In this segment of the film, the camera focuses on the hands, the tool, and the object Glaser manipulates, a close view that produces a delicate balance between mental and manual forms of labour. In the 2013 interview, Farocki downplays the importance of manual labour for his films, yet he also acknowledges that "everything is not merely intellectual."²⁰

In Nguyen's *Wood Cutter*, as in Farocki's *Georg K. Glaser*, the focused view of the hands and tools, accompanied by the voice of the film's subject, lends dignity to the labour and draws attention to the ethical implications of this project and of numerous other Labour films. The initial emphasis on the tools of the Vietnamese street labourer, in combination with his monologue, stresses that social class is not the sole barometer of influence in the world. When the camera slowly pans up the man's body at close range, we finally see his calm face as he concentrates on the task at hand. As the sound of metal striking metal resonates in the background, the soft contours of his torso belie his evident strength. Keeping his eyes focused on his work and not on the camera, he is evidently in tune with his materials. The scene ends with

20 Monika Bayer-Wermuth, "Dass man aus den ausgepressten Weintrauben nochmal Schnapps machen kann...: Ein Gespräch mit Harun Farocki über Arbeit," in *Harun Farocki: Arbeit*, ed. Bayer-Wermuth (Munich: Silke Schreiber, 2016), 254.



Harun Farocki, *Georg K. Glaser—Schriftsteller und Schmied* (Georg K. Glaser – Writer and Smith), 1988, 16 mm, colour, 44 min. Reproduced by kind permission of the Harun Farocki Institut.

a glimpse of the product of his efforts: a pile of splintered chunks of wood that will possibly feed a fire. This final image brings up basic questions of survival, thus echoing the man's observations about who exerts control in the world. The self-sufficiency of this labourer, made apparent in both his focused command of the tools and in his expansive world view, is conveyed by means of a close-up, which Béla Balázs, in his classic *Theory of the Film*, describes as being uniquely capable of disclosing the power of normally overlooked things. Referring to the “hidden things” that the camera captures, he writes, “Good close-ups are lyrical; it is the heart, not the eye, that has perceived them.”²¹ In this case, the rudimentary tools of the spikes and the hammer, though they fill the frame for much of the film, vie for the viewer's attention with the close shots of the labourer's body to turn Balázs's lyricism into empathy. Here, the metal objects function as fully formed mediators that merge seamlessly with the labourer's body and the sonic environment of voice and physical action. In addition, the balanced relationship between the woodcutter's words and his labour – the close link between mental and

21 Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover, 1970), 56.

menial activities – suggests that the alienation at the heart of capitalist labour can, however fleetingly, be overcome in a moment that highlights the dignity of the individual worker.

A more distant, objective approach to the labouring subject marks Filip Gabriel Pudło's *Surgical Instruments*, shot during the 2013 workshop in Łódź, Poland.²² We watch a man in surgical scrubs preparing instruments for the operating room. The camera is static, though it appears to be held by hand rather than mounted on a tripod. From a discreet remove, we observe the highly precise, almost mechanical gestures of the hospital worker from an angle that opens up visual access to the stainless-steel countertop on which he sorts the materials. He first enters the scene with a confident, direct approach that grows in precision of movement as the video progresses. The tools are checked against a written list on a piece of paper, which the man consults repeatedly as he groups the objects and gently places them in a glass tray. His motions are intriguing: although his task only involves preparing the tools for use in a subsequent surgical procedure, he is highly efficient and brisk, wasting no gesture as he shifts between instruments, tray, and paper. Although we cannot read the list, it is clear that each tool has a specific function designated by its name. In this video, the instruments exist in a state of potentiality rather than actuality, though one surmises that they are about to be deployed by a surgeon; they are static, waiting to be picked up. At the same time, the quiet atmosphere of the room, with no audible speech to contextualize the labour soon to be performed, adds to a sense of dormancy, of work deferred rather than prepared. The tools appear in this way to be the actual subjects of the video; they thus acquire agency in spite of their stillness. With his own measured bodily movements, the surgical assistant seems to possess the same type of mediator status as the instruments themselves.

Given the extensive cinematic history of the activities that take place in hospitals and surgical theatres, the instruments inevitably call to mind images of the people and objects they will encounter when deployed: doctors, nurses, machines, gurneys, and blood. With no words to help the viewer comprehend the utility of the surgical instruments, and with the checklist visible only to the worker, the formation of "grips" (both concepts and tools) in the hospital comes across as a highly specialized endeavour. The care with which the Łódź surgical assistant arranges his materials while consulting the list of terms is tied to this preservation of the grip. Because his command of the instruments is institutionally determined rather than

22 <https://vimeo.com/74946135>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Filip Gabriel Pudło, *Surgical Instruments*, Łódź, 2013.

linked to individual invention, it holds a secure place in a chain of events that require strict oversight. Here Negt and Kluge's link between the grip and conceptual grasping, as an expression of comprehension, is made explicit: in the hospital, lives depend quite literally on a reliable relationship between the tool and its name.

The camera reveals a behind-the-scenes moment of preparedness, the accuracy of which has major consequences. Though the necessary skill required to deploy these tools is not demonstrated on camera, the instruments, even in their state of rest, evoke reliable and consistent functionality. They are presented as intermediaries that will soon take on a more active role as mediators; again, mediation is registered as potentiality. This scene captures a moment before the start of the surgeon's work, when the tools take on a vivid, yet passive, presence as their shiny surfaces glint against the backdrop of a metal counter. They have not yet touched a body in an operation, but it takes little imagination to picture them in use. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin compares the work of the surgeon with that of the magician, claiming that the former physically penetrates the body of the patient whereas the latter merely "heals a sick person by the laying on of hands."²³ For Benjamin, this analogy can be extended to the relationship between the camera operator and the painter. He prioritizes the labour of the cameraperson, whose

23 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 233.

probing activity stands in contrast to the painter's remove from a given subject: "The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web."²⁴ By focusing on the surgery preparations, Pudło uses his camera to enable the instruments to stand in for, even to prompt the viewer to envision, the probing activity of the surgeon who will soon use the tools.

The larger network of the relations of production between tools, concepts, and labour to which the Łódź worker belongs remains unseen, even if it is implied. A more overt representation of social co-operation in the handling of tools is found in the Mingshen Group's *Shadow Play* from the 2014 workshop in Hangzhou, China.²⁵ The video begins with a close-up of a translucent shadow-play screen, behind which a tiger moves toward a smaller human figure as jungle sounds and shouting are heard in the background. The story is based on the fourteenth-century Chinese novel *Water Margin*, in which the character Wu Song slays a tiger. In the puppet show, parts of the two figures' bodies occasionally blur when the puppeteer behind the screen allows the stick holding the forms to separate briefly from the surface. For just over half of the film, the camera is positioned on the audience side of the screen, watching the human character fend off the aggressive tiger with a stick. The point of view shifts when a well-co-ordinated, collective effort becomes visible as the camera moves around the side of the screen to capture what at first appears to be children working to produce the images. For this particular production, two stick-wielding players operate the puppets and are in turn coached and corrected by their peers. In the tight space behind the screen, the puppeteers dance and sway in order to make the figures on the other side come to life. In a visual rhyming of tool forms, the shadow-puppet sticks behind the screen produce the image of a person beating a tiger with a stick on the front. The labour of the group requires its own kind of self-regulation as the individual participants constantly adjust their relationship to the tools, calling for precise control of the puppet sticks in the midst of flowing movements.

By shifting the camera from one side of the screen to the other, the Mingshen Group captures the way collective labour calls for a subtle negotiation between bodies and tools. The title *Shadow Play* also acquires a deeper metaphorical significance once a closer look at the puppeteers' agile movements and sturdy physicality reveals that they are not, in fact, children. Around the time that the video was made at the Labour workshop

24 Benjamin, "Work of Art," 233.

25 <https://vimeo.com/96445379>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Mingshen Group, *Shadow Play*, Hangzhou, 2014.

in Hangzhou, articles appeared in *Reuters* and the *Shanghai Daily* documenting the work of this group of adults with dwarfism.²⁶ Employed by an organization known as Dragon in the Sky, founded in 2008, the members of the group had previously experienced social ostracism and limited work options. The shadow-puppet theatre presented an opportunity for this marginalized group to develop marketable skills while building a sense of collective identity. The performers' height also proves to be an advantage when they operate behind the low screen in the small theatres that typically host these events. As they trace centuries-old Chinese tales across the screen, the indexical nature of the shadow image situates the performers' work in relation to a deep cultural tradition and thus brings them closer to social acceptance. As the puppeteers manipulate their tools behind the "skin" of the shadow-play screen, this device that separates the performers from the audience also allows them to play a societal role that leads to greater visibility. This process of cultural adaptation is enacted through hand gestures and bodily movements that have been made for centuries in the telling of a classic tale, and yet *Shadow Play* sheds light on difference instead of denying it.

As a collective that knows firsthand the social pressures associated with alternating between public disclosure and concealment, the Mingshen Group

²⁶ See Sabrina Mao and Jonathan Standing, "Chinese Dwarfs Shine with Shadow Puppets," *Reuters* online, January 15, 2013, and Wu Huixin, "Troupe of Dwarfs Finds Niche in Shadow Puppetry," *Shanghai Daily* online, June 20, 2014.

takes the camera behind the scenes to demonstrate the potential political impact of the Labour workshops. Both the screen and the puppet sticks assertively mediate our access to the dynamic of the play's production and the social context of the puppeteers' group effort. The group's framing of *Shadow Play* around the liminal space of the screen speaks forcefully to the idea that social barriers can be temporarily bypassed, even if during the play the screen maintains a degree of distance between performers and audience. This separation is overcome in the moment that the puppeteers emerge from behind the barrier to receive applause. That such a transformation – from isolation to inclusion – takes place in the context of paid employment lends an additional degree of social recognition to the activity, though the video itself ends before the play comes to its conclusion. This act of making visible the bodies of a typically unseen group of labourers is one example of the Labour project helping to shift the perception of work in general from abstraction to concreteness.

Writing about technology and skill, Bernard Stiegler claims that “[a] technique is a particular type of skill that is not indispensable to the humanity of a particular human.”²⁷ According to Stiegler, each labourer must acquire mastery of a specific implement, but this acquired expertise is not what defines a labourer's humanity. Like many other Labour videos, the four works that I have discussed in this essay present an opportunity to search for a visual language that might provide a firmer handle on how individual labouring subjects orient themselves in relation to tools, the work environment, and the camera as a recording device. And yet the videos give the audience only brief glimpses into these diverse scenes of work, leaving us unsure about the long-term condition of the workers. Our realization that this is the case, which grows during an extended viewing of the workshop projects, leads to questions about what the Labour project has accomplished beyond a hit-and-run documentation of multiple sites of global contemporary labour. What is ultimately achieved by, and who benefits from, the hundreds of videos that the project has made available to the public? I would argue that the visibility granted to the labouring body provides its own justification for the time, effort, and expense required to realize an endeavour of this scale. The immersive nature of these short dives into disparate and dispersed scenes of remunerated and unremunerated activity draws attention to tactile and materialized work in a way that challenges reductive conceptions of “immaterial labour” as having supplanted embodied forms of work. In addition, the focus on mediating tools

27 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 94.

in a significant number of videos points to the crucial place of the haptic in the workshop model. Like the labourers' tools, the cameras wielded by Labour participants serve as material probes that connect labourers with their environments, and eventually with the viewing public.

Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener have highlighted the prevalence of recent cinematic theories that engage with phenomenology and tactility. While analyses of visuality dominated film theory of the 1960s and 1970s, the return of embodiment to the cinematic discourse of the 1990s and 2000s signalled a renewed interest in "a complex yet indivisible surface of communication and perception."²⁸ In the context of an extensive video workshop that can be experienced via a range of surfaces and interfaces (a hanging screen in a biennial, a monitor in a gallery, a laptop at home, a cell phone in a café), the pedagogical impact of the Labour project depends heavily on viewers' own willingness to immerse themselves in a multitude of work situations. If, while watching the videos, we recognize that the cameras recording these scenes of labour are themselves tools – even if they generally remain invisible to the viewer – the same realization must be extended to include the laptops or monitors that display the works of the workshop participants. Like the workers I have just discussed, we experience moments of both friction and synchronicity with the equipment that enables the process of engaging with labour. Writing about phenomenology and film, Vivian Sobchack argued that the camera and projector in traditional cinema play an active, if ambiguous, role in our comprehension of the moving image: "Instrument-mediated perception is an extension and transformation of direct perception but is enigmatic in that extension and transformation. That is, the 'transparency' of this embodiment relation is always only partial."²⁹ The degree to which the spectator is cognizant of the technology mediating access to the sites of labour visited by the workshop participants at any given moment in the viewing process depends in part on how the videographers manipulate, and move with, the cameras. The videos capture the guiding presence of simple tools, which in turn enhance and solidify our awareness of the camera and even of the viewing device.

The broad parameters of the workshop videos, as well as the website and travelling exhibitions, together form a structure that resists a singular viewing platform, making perceptual agility a primary feature in any encounter

28 Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 110.

29 Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 186.

with Labour in a Single Shot. This brings up a question regarding the amount of contextual information that the website and installations should be expected to provide to the viewer, who initially knows little more than the name of the videographer, the city in which the scene was shot, and the video's title. I wonder whether the several hundred works that resulted from this international project will, in the long run, be treated as found online footage partially detached from their local place of recording, from the workers pictured, and from the video-makers who documented each particular scene of work. Perhaps it is inevitable that these images will always withdraw from our awareness even as we engage with them, not unlike the tools that hover in the videos between foreground and background, between conscious recognition and passive inattention. In other words, the project as a whole is pedagogical in both its mode of production and its effect on viewers, but in the end it is not overtly didactic. In thinking about the need for a dictionary of cinema, or what we might think of as an archive of conceptual "grips," Farocki states, "What is essential for me is that the texts in such an archive are independent of each other and do not acquire their individual legitimacy through the system in which they are embedded."³⁰ The same might be said of the Labour videos, which we encounter as distinct, immersive recordings of work rather than as components of a totalizing representation of international labour. The project compels its viewers to consider broad questions regarding both the history of documenting work and the future of capturing the many scenes of contemporary labour that still remain out of view. Ideally, the project would be only the start of a longer conversation in which the labourers seen in the videos join their historical predecessors from the Lumière factory films in prompting curiosity, empathy, and, perhaps, moments of understanding in relation to an embodied vision of work around the world.

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Networks

12. Database Labour: Supply Chains, Logistics, and Flow

Thomas Stubblefield

Abstract

Acknowledging a central tension of the Labour in a Single Shot project, Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki ask: “[because] almost every form of labour is repetitive [...] how can one find a beginning and an end while capturing it?” The question is rhetorical, as the nature of the project explicitly undermines the linear, sequential temporality that has historically been associated with the cinema. Exemplifying the contradictions of the “post-media condition,” video is reimaged by participants as early film and then integrated into an online database or “web catalogue.” Stubblefield considers the ways in which this anachronism allows the project to engage with new configurations of labour and global networks, manifesting a shared logic of flow and discontinuity.

Keywords: relational databases, immaterial labour, post-Fordism, logistics, supply chains

In the Lumière brothers’ 1895 film *Workers Leaving the Factory*, the synchronized dismissal of labourers visualizes a temporal and spatial regime of fixed schedules, sequential units, and disciplinary spaces that were crucial to the nineteenth-century industrial mode of production. Curiously, the film accomplishes this by presenting workers *leaving* the factory. The familiar refrain of modernism’s forward march, which would soon come to preoccupy this new medium, is halted in its first iteration. The factory empties, production goes offline, work ends. In the final seconds of the film, just as the oversized doors are about to close, the viewer catches a brief glimpse into the barren factory left behind. The postindustrial age

has conditioned us to equate such images with the collapse of economies. Conjuring equal parts nostalgia and failure, the empty factory has become our ruin. Yet here the same image carries with it a sense of accomplishment. It signifies the completion of a day's work, the bookend to a cycle of production built upon unforgiving, but nonetheless discrete, windows of time. This temporal distinction between production and nonproduction is reinforced by the gates of the factory, which distinguish the spaces of labour from those of everyday life. As the labourers pass this threshold, they smile and their bodies take on relaxed postures, confirming that work has ceased and leisure has begun.

Seen from the contemporary vantage point, the three extant versions of *Workers Leaving the Factory* succinctly present those assumptions regarding work and workers that are today being thrown into contention in the Global North, most notably, that there is a singular space dedicated to labour and that one can actually leave it. The dispersal of the spaces of work, a phenomenon represented by autonomist concepts such as Maurizio Lazzarato's "diffuse factory" or what Antonio Negri refers to as the "factory without walls," combined with the "always on" modality of production, has rendered the spatial and temporal boundaries of labour ambiguous.¹ Even the notion of "the workers," the distinct collective that structures the Lumière film, is no longer straightforward. With the systematic dismantling of unions over the last half century, the normalization of precarity, and the rise of the independent producer, the coherent identity (much less the solidarity) that the film ascribes to this group no longer appears viable. *Workers Leaving the Factory*: watching this film in the twenty-first century drives home the way in which each component of this action, each term in this most basic set of relations, seems to have broken down.²

Why then choose *this* film as the basis for a project to document contemporary labour and its global relations under late capitalism? While I cannot speak for the creators, my own view is that an answer can partly be

1 Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 89, and Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 135–136.

2 The contentiousness with which this boundary operates in contemporary labour is epitomized by the 2014 Supreme Court case (*Integrity Staffing Solutions, Inc. v. Busk*) which centred on whether Amazon warehouse workers should be paid for the time they spend going through the company's extensive security checks each day. While the court ruled that the company did not have to pay temporary workers for this time, the sheer fact that this case went to the Supreme Court confirms the ambiguity not only of what constitutes work but of where and when it happens.

found in the unique form of the online component of the Labour in a Single Shot project. Filtering these relations of the *actualité* (actuality film), the Lumière brothers' term for their short films of everyday life captured in a single take, through the logic of the database, the project is able to reproduce the perpetual present of a pervasive logic of flow and discontinuity that undergirds late capitalism. In the process, the work dramatizes the way in which the circulation of goods and information within a post-Fordist economy nullifies the boundaries of time and space that figure so prominently in the Lumière brothers' film. In this essay, I would like to consider the duality between narrative and database that structures this project, asking how these media frames come together to communicate and engage with the transformations of labour that occur vis-à-vis contemporary global networks, and what specific modes of spatiality and temporality support these new relations.

In *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, Katherine Hayles reconsiders the enduring opposition between narrative and database that has characterized scholarship on digital media. Taking issue with both Ed Folsom's description of a kind of inevitable acquiescence of narrative to the database and Lev Manovich's famous metaphor of the viral infection of the former by the latter, she argues that the specific conditions of contemporary culture allow the two phenomena to act in concert with one another, forming what she refers to as "natural symbionts."³ In this relationship, databases are not simply productive complements to, but necessary components of, contemporary narratives. In addition to providing the ability to process the enormity of available information, they also preserve the cultural authority of narratives by testing their claims of authenticity. Unlike in the classical world, Hayles argues, where narrative was adequate to explain large-scale events, contemporary issues such as global warming or economic recovery require that narratives be inflected by data analysis. Conversely, the database relies upon narrative in order to create meaning and interpretation within an otherwise undifferentiated or overly systematized field. One could argue that the database still needs narrative much more than the reverse, and for this reason, their relationship might best be described as parasitic rather than symbiotic. Nonetheless, it is Hayles's broader notions of interpenetration and mutual reliance that are most relevant to the current discussion.

3 Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012), 176.

The interrelationship that Hayles establishes between these two forms is essentially one in which the introduction of resistance or noise in one area initiates a deferral to another, allowing the system to successfully reroute content around blockages so as to produce more efficient and meaningful realizations. Presented in these terms, the movement of content within this hybrid form reiterates a recurring logic of the global supply chains of late capitalism. Routers, satellites, towers, and servers do not simply distribute data, but configure fleeting networks that maximize connectivity and minimize bandwidth usage. Mesh formations, loop systems, and fanning networks reroute electricity around outages and breaks within the power grid by shifting to redundant lines or “laterals” between nodes. Even the circulation of material goods via something as seemingly analogue as maritime shipping is sustained by the distributed network’s powers of redefinition and receptivity. Bolstered by containerization, GPS navigation, and satellite communication networks, these routes are formulated in real time according to changes in weather, political upheaval, and, most immediately, the ebb and flow of demand. In fact, as Timothy Mitchell points out in his extraordinary book *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, it is not unusual for ships to depart from major ports without knowing their destination.⁴ Only after checking in at certain nodal points are they given short-term routes, which are formulated in response to a complex set of conditions.

Uniting these phenomena is a shared logic by which hyperefficient, “smoothed out” pathways are produced via an underlying layer of flux that renders information and goods eternally “ready to hand.” Describing the shift from a coal- to a petroleum-based economy after World War II, Mitchell argues that the ability of such systems to reconfigure the flow of goods around pockets of resistance effectively nullified conventional modes of worker opposition and protest. Unlike coal, which was primarily shipped via railroad and thus demanded a labour force of stokers and heavers and tended to route resources along predictable paths, oil could be transported by gravity or pressure engine and then circulated via the fluid and flexible networks of the sea. Beyond enabling the pursuit of efficiency and surplus value, these shifting networks also served to safeguard consumer prices, ensure adequate supply, and ultimately insulate the carbon economy against outside obstruction. Summarizing the larger consequences of these conditions, Alberto Toscano describes a migration of “political and class conflict,

4 Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011), 37–39.

in the overdeveloped de-industrializing countries of the 'global North,' from the point of production to the chokepoints of circulation."⁵

It is this transformation that structures the online form of the Labour in a Single Shot project. Exemplifying the contradictions of the "post-media condition," video is reimagined as early film by participants in the project and then integrated into an online "web catalogue."⁶ As a result of these productive anachronisms, the irreversibility of the filmstrip, which echoed that of the assembly line and the industrial nineteenth century, is absorbed by a more contemporary modality of random access in which all artefacts are equally accessible from any given interface at any given moment in time.⁷ As isolated events connect and resonate with other moments of other films in this environment, individual films lose their autonomy, circumscribing a realm of possibility as much as or more than a diegetic present. As the interface invites viewers to sort works by subject, colour, and location, not only is the experience of individual films nested within other entries, but the field from which these connections emerge is also open to revision. The boundlessness of this experience and the ephemeral connections that it forges evoke what Fredric Jameson so aptly described decades ago as a "new international division of labor, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges (including the enormous Second and Third World debt), [and] new forms of media interrelationship (very much including transportation systems such as containerization), computers and automation."⁸

As this movement is internalized by the objects in the frame, everyday items take on an instability of form that reflects the network's unlimited tolerance for flux and variation. A water jug vibrates with anticipation on the back of a moped as it moves through the winding streets of Bangalore in Nikhil Patil and Arav Narang's film *Water Can Delivery* (2012).⁹ An unidentified parcel travels across the city of Berlin via bike messenger in Katja

5 Albert Toscano, "Lineaments of the Logistical State," *Viewpoint*, September 28, 2014, <https://viewpointmag.com/2014/09/28/lineaments-of-the-logistical-state/>.

6 Peter Weibel, "The Post-Media Condition" *Mute*, March 19, 2012, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/lab/post-media-condition>.

7 While early film was occasionally run through the projector backwards and even held on a still image for dramatic effect, the conventional form of the medium articulated a strictly defined beginning, middle, and end that were to relate to one another in linear fashion. Even in those instances where this logic was not strictly embedded within the practice of film exhibition, it nonetheless manifested within the overall narrative experience.

8 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), xix.

9 <https://vimeo.com/59011064>.

Henssler's piece *Messenger* (2012), while tortillas speed through the spaces of Mexico City in Yamil Mojica's *Of Poetry and Tortillas Delivery* (2014).¹⁰ This peculiar animism represents the triumph of logistics, a field whose goal is to minimize, if not eliminate, stillness so as to ensure that goods and materials arrive on an "as needed" basis. A case in point is the car manufacturer Jaguar, which has recently tasked UCI International with reconfiguring supply lines so that no shipment of parts will exceed a two-hour maximum of offline storage.¹¹ As processes of automation have streamlined production to an extraordinary degree over the last century, there is a significantly higher payoff in reconfiguring extended chains of distribution and storage. As a result, the production process has effectively backed up into the supply chain, with manufacturers demanding synchronization and standardization, two and three steps removed from the point of production. It is on this basis that Toscano insists that logistics and transport no longer be thought of purely in terms of circulation. Following Marx, he argues that as "locational change [becomes] a commodity in its own right" one witnesses the advent of a "directly productive circulation" in which the boundaries between "making and moving" are blurred.¹²

Introducing immaterial forms of labour into this discussion suggests that this tendency of production to overtake circulation in the supply lines of global capitalism is mirrored by a reverse trajectory whereby circulation not only comes to yield surplus value in itself, but precedes and, in some instances, overtakes production. As companies strive toward zero inventory to instantly answer the demands of the market with a customized product, an inversion of the relation between industrial production and processes of informationalization takes place such that communication between the marketplace and producers is now anterior to material production. Interestingly, similar relationships between circulation and the extraction of surplus value are reproduced by social media platforms. Shifting from what Steven Shaviro describes as extrinsic to intrinsic exploitation, the expenditures of immaterial labour in this context are directly incorporated

10 <https://vimeo.com/96487681>.

11 This ascendancy of circulation is succinctly illustrated by a recent study conducted at the Cardiff Business School, which followed the process by which a can of soda was produced, shipped, stored, and then purchased. Beginning with a Bauxite mine in Australia and concluding with the retail venue where the item was purchased, the entire process lasted 319 days. "Of that time, only three hours were spent on manufacturing, the rest was spent on transport and storage." Brian Ashton, "The Factory without Walls," *Mute*, September 14, 2006, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/factory-without-walls>.

12 Albert Toscano, "Lineaments of the Logistical State."



Labour in a Single Shot. Nikhil Patil and Arav Narang, *Water Can Delivery*, Bangalore, 2012.

as commodities via algorithms and the modulated surveillance of big data.¹³ As a result of these relations, the act of communication can serve as its own content; sharing becomes a form of producing. In such work, the directive to communicate and express oneself is, to Lazzarato's mind, even more rigid and inflexible than the order to labour physically was under Taylorization ("one *has* to express oneself, one *has* to speak, communicate, cooperate and so on").¹⁴

This convergence by which production slides into circulation and circulation into production fuels the pursuit of global capitalism's ideal of timelessness and spacelessness. These relations suggest not simply that the just-in-time post-Fordist economy is virtually unimaginable without the database, but also that its logic of random access is the ideal to which globalized supply chains aspire. However, the *Labour in a Single Shot* project asks us to take this idea one step further. It poses the question of whether the interchangeability, simultaneity, and endless circulation of images

13 Shaviro claims that "production and circulation [have become] indistinguishable" as the mode of communication serves as its own content. Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (London: Zero Books, 2010), 48. See also Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

14 This communicative imperative, which is wrapped up with interfaces of work and includes surveillance and information, inscribes post-Fordist workers within processes of production. As workers are "expected to become 'active subjects' in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subject to it as a simple command," they become subjects of communication. Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 135.

through the database might become intertwined with the movement of goods through supply chains at some basic, fundamental level. From this perspective, the database functions not simply as the necessary precondition for the seamless flow of material and ideas through space, but also as a point of convergence between immaterial and material, actual, and virtual.

The ability of databases to constantly integrate new information “without disrupting their order” is critical to this prospect.¹⁵ Contrary to narrative, where the addition of new elements prompts the work to tell a different story, databases are structured so that new additions can be made without interrupting the continuity or experience of information. Put succinctly, databases work through inclusivity while narratives rely on exclusivity. Yet this inclusivity is contingent upon a kind of absolute conformity to the self-describing nature of the database. Not only is the structure of the database contained within the database itself, but so does the logic of retrieval operate within, and indeed require, a closed system within which queries can take place. As a result, while narrative “always contains more than [is] indicated by the table of contents,” databases cannot process “indeterminate value,” which materializes as a null value or not at all.¹⁶ The result is a paradox, in that the apparent inclusivity and interchangeability of assets the database makes possible relies upon an aggressive standardization.

This interrelationship of standardization and flow manifests at the level of material goods as a global system of production, storage, and transport known as containerization. This system utilizes the stackability and uniformity of the container to allow for quick turnover and the reduction of inert storage (essentially, the container is the warehouse). Additionally, since containers are able to accommodate a wide variety of goods (refrigerated, nonrefrigerated, liquid, or manufactured), they drastically reduce minimum load requirements. As a result, shipments can take place in a more piecemeal fashion than before, with multiple vessels carrying cargo from multiple suppliers. Thus, the container not only increases efficiency but also serves as the precondition for a certain mode of connectivity, circulation, and flow of goods. Just as the database is both self-describing and self-replicating, so, too, does the shipping container reproduce the conditions of production through the reduplication of containerized ports and protocols. Both systems perpetuate the “standardization and modularization that characterizes planetary logistics which, in order to maintain the smoothness and flexibility

¹⁵ Hayles, *How We Think*, 182.

¹⁶ Hayles, *How We Think*, 177.

of flows, must abstract out any differences that would lead to excessive friction and inertia."¹⁷

In the videos of Ehmann and Farocki's project, the material world shows all the signs of being interpenetrated by this logic. In Pooja Gupta and Sindhu Thirumalaisamy's *Shoe Shop* (Bangalore, 2012), stacks of seemingly identical shoe boxes extend from floor to ceiling.¹⁸ They surround a lone labourer, who slides effortlessly down narrow pathways to somehow find the correct place for each one. Throughout this activity, the camera maintains a certain distance from the inventory, such that individual boxes appear virtually interchangeable to the audience. In Ignacio Masllorens's *Water Boys* (Buenos Aires, 2013), water jugs are filled and return empty, accumulating in the background as a wall of transparent glass before being refilled and sent out again.¹⁹ Such interchangeability, circulation, and return destabilize the linearity and specificity of narrative. The notion of a singular vantage point, a single protagonist, the specificity of place seems to be almost untenable in this incessant flow of goods, labour, and resources. Yet, at the same time, it is these micro dramas that ground the viewer within this disruptive movement. The tension between the immediacy of globalized networks and their standardized flow and individual actors is taken on by the camera such that the material situatedness of the object is always at odds with the necessity of flow. Even in their stillness, objects are shadowed by what Erin Manning has called "preacceleration," the momentum of a movement that has not yet taken place but which manifests as instability of form in the present.²⁰

A similar instability manifests in relation to time in Darío Schwarzstein's film *Ultra Violet* (Buenos Aires, 2013), which aggregates multiple streams of information to build not a fixed temporal sequence, but an expanded moment of possibility.²¹ As the camera pans from video monitor to computer screen to "actual" images of a horse race, it outlines a nonlinear logic of accumulation. Multiple flows of visual information coalesce into an unstable frame. The slow pan of the camera chronicles a movement by which these frames are always in the process of giving way to another mode of enclosure. Although the announcer's voice attempts to weave

17 Alberto Toscano, "Logistics and Opposition," *Mute*, August 9, 2011, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/logistics-and-opposition>.

18 <https://vimeo.com/55868348>.

19 <https://vimeo.com/67083224>.

20 Erin Manning, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 19–20.

21 <https://vimeo.com/66932166>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Pooja Gupta and Sindhu Thirumalaisamy, *Shoe Shop*, Bangalore, 2012.



Labour in a Single Shot. Ignacio Masllorens, *Water Boys*, Buenos Aires, 2013.

together these multiple layers of mediation, ultimately the linearity of the event is undercut by the proliferation of screens. The viewer does not know where to look, cannot tell where the race actually is. The event both escapes the images and is contained within them. As every action is infinitely reproducible, undoable, and multiple within the media ecology the film outlines, the notion of a “finish” is ambiguous, even ironic. The anticlimactic nature of this victory is indicative not only of the excessive mediation through which it is presented but also of the ability of this



Labour in a Single Shot. Darío Schwarzstein, *Ultra Violet*, Buenos Aires, 2013.

media ecology to react to information in real time, to reconfigure itself in response to new perspectives.

In her analysis of the work of the photographer Andreas Gursky, Alix Ohlin inadvertently provides a larger framework for understanding the affective dimension of the Labour in a Single Shot project. She explains:

These days, at least in the Western world, [...] fear and trembling in the face of God are no longer generalized. In the place of God, we have a sprawling network of technology, government, business, and communications. These forces of globalization have become our religion. This is not to say that we necessarily subscribe wholeheartedly to a belief in the goodness of the network, yet the network works mysteriously, transecting the world, even as it impinges on our daily lives in specific ways [...]. These factors are like the Divine in that they are beyond the understanding of the vast majority of people whose lives they affect. Such globalization is the hallmark of our time [...].²²

The passage conveys the awe and wonder we experience in the face of global networks as well as the danger that lies in these powers of fascination. However, Ohlin's diagnosis of a collective displacement of God with global networks carries its own dangers, the most immediate of which concerns

²² Alix Ohlin, "Andreas Gursky and the Contemporary Sublime," *Art Journal* 61, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 24.

the specific form that the critical operation might take in the face of these relations. The persistence of familiar tropes of unrepresentability and their concomitant associations of transcendence and fascination can often lead to knee-jerk assumptions that the critique of these structures should proceed by demythologizing this enigmatic lure. As I have suggested in this essay, the slippery rootlessness of contemporary relations of globalized capital strategically sidesteps such interventions in order to seamlessly assimilate what might otherwise serve as acts of resistance. Undercutting the sublime relations of capital would seem doubly ineffective in the context of the larger cultural currents of ideological cynicism, where, as Slavoj Žižek has argued, power appears to work best when we in fact do not believe in it.²³

As the notion of an outside to capitalism becomes increasingly difficult to imagine, an often cited tactic of last resort involves leveraging asymmetries and power differentials from within this field so as to co-opt the apparatus itself. From this perspective, the power of the Labour in a Single Shot project lies not simply in its ability to chart the shifting powers of fascination that Ohlin describes, but also in its capacity to bring to light a new type of moving image from within the networked apparatus, one which might serve as the basis for alternative relationships of raw materials, consumer goods, and modes of production. Drawing out this possibility requires that the experience of the user be considered alongside the content of the individual “actualities” and their mode of distribution. This vantage point reveals a paradoxical relation whereby in reproducing the relations of global supply chains the user is granted the possibility of accelerating these underlying conditions to the point of instability.²⁴

This relationship centres on the interface, a mediating agency that Alexander Galloway aptly describes as an “autonomous zone of aesthetic activity [used to] bring about effects in material states.”²⁵ Unlike the screen, which prompts spectators to passively absorb content in order to internalize an illusion of reality, the interface elicits a set of actions that are closely connected to the physical world. For this reason, it is central to Lazzarato’s understanding of immaterial labour:

In today’s large restructured company, a worker’s work increasingly involves, at various levels, an ability to choose among different alternatives

23 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989).

24 For more on the ideas of accelerationism, see *The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. Armen Avanessian and Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014).

25 Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (London: Polity, 2012), vii.

and thus a degree of responsibility regarding decision making. The concept of “interface” used by communications sociologists provides a fair definition of the activities of this kind of worker—as an interface between different functions, between different work teams, between different levels of the hierarchy, and so forth.²⁶

In overseeing the operations of multitasking, interfaces also serve as a critical component of the communicative aspect of postindustrial labour. As the functional correlate to the always-on, just-in-time modality of the “exploded factory,” they instigate continuous exchange between the organic and inorganic agencies that occupy a given network. Ironically, the abbreviated length and narrative autonomy of the actuality make it ideally suited for this kind of labour. With the integration of this form into digital networks, the film reel is effectively morphed into “the clip.” As a result of this transformation, the networked actuality comes to necessitate and incentivize continual input.

Through the incessant reordering, recontextualizing, and replaying of content that the interface (and the online sphere more generally) elicits, the user is able to introduce cracks, fissures, and discontinuities that might not necessarily function in the service of the flexibility of the on-demand modality. This potentiality is not simply the product of activated users who are prompted to “create” the work by way of their interaction with the interface, but also the project’s articulation of this immaterial labour in terms of the historical anachronisms and tensions that are internal to the digital platform itself. Recirculating the nineteenth-century form of the actuality film via the random-access database, the labour of the user correlates the inner workings of global capital with an inner conflict of digital media, which from McLuhan to Manovich has been understood as inherently heterochronic and even atavistic.²⁷ The result is a symbolic engagement with logistics via the image, a shipping of content across distances and times according to fleeting whims and desires rather than production schedules.

In this relationship, the user of the interface is charged with the creation and maintenance of shifting totalities whose significance is defined not so much in terms of content as by the preservation of flow. The lack of closure

26 Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateri-allabour3.htm>.

27 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), and Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2003).



Labour in a Single Shot. Markus Bauer, Susanne Dzeik, Rene Paulokat, *Data Centre II*, Berlin, 2012.

that pervades this experience is reinforced on a symbolic level by the evasive status of the server in these films. While one might expect these nodal points in the network to disclose the inner logic behind these networks, the actualities collected by the project present a very different picture. For example, in Eric Esser's *Data Centre* (Berlin, 2012), the self-enclosed world of the server farm is literally brought to light as the door to a darkened room is opened at the beginning of the film.²⁸ As the enigmatic machine emerges from the darkness in almost Baroque fashion, the piece clearly engages historical conventions of divine light. Then, an operator inserts a CD and abruptly leaves, returning the room to darkness. A similar sequence is presented by Markus Bauer, Susanne Dzeik, and Rene Paulokat's *Data Centre II* (Berlin, 2012) as servers enter the light and then return to darkness, leaving only the abstract flashes of control boards. These films disclose the centre of the digital economy as opaque and inaccessible. In fact, it is not a centre at all, but rather a zone of indeterminacy that marks an undetermined set of actions.

The extended single take of early films introduced contingency into the frame. The unplanned and accidental occurrences these films captured are typically understood as dramatizing both the complexity and depth of a singular moment and the displacement of totalizing narratives by the shock of modernity.²⁹ However, in the Lumière film *Workers Leaving the*

²⁸ <https://vimeo.com/57744517>.

²⁹ See, for example, chapter 3 of Ben Singer's *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 59–100.

Factory, Farocki sees these qualities as superseded by an early grammar of globalization. He writes:

the workers were assembled behind the gates and surged out at the camera operator's command. Before the film direction stepped in to condense the subject, it was the industrial order which synchronized the lives of the many individuals. They were released from this regulation at a particular point in time, contained in the process by the factory gates as in a frame. The Lumières' camera did not have a viewfinder, so they could not be certain of the view depicted; the gates provide a perception of framing which leaves no room for doubt.³⁰

The actuality, by virtue of being an uninterrupted single take framed in uncertain fashion, allows the production schedules of the factory to take precedence over the narrative presentation of the event. According to Farocki, this temporal order is partially the product of the spatial contingency of early film, the ambiguity with which it establishes what would be included and what would be left out. Given this uncertainty, the cinematic image had to rely on internal framings and compositional techniques to standardize both the image and its system of production. Through these techniques, the factory is able to restore sequentiality, taking on the status of a "container," which is "full at the beginning and emptied at the end."³¹

Farocki's reading of the Lumières' film helps to explain why it is that his (and Ehmann's) project needs the database. As the agent that flattens out such serial temporalities into a perpetual present, it prompts the viewer/labourer to intersperse two forms of movement. The first is associated with the actuality and is defined in relation to the frame, which here demarcates a zone of contingency and capture. The second reflects the relations of immanence that inhabit the database and is represented by movement between and within frames. In the context of logistics, the appearance of resistance in one location prompts the construction of an alternate route, allowing the system to reroute content around obstructions in dynamic fashion. However, as the Labour in a Single Shot interface allows these forms of movement to interpenetrate one another, the project articulates a movement of goods that is liberated from this functionalist paradigm, revealing the raw forces of discontinuity and contingency behind the relations of global capital.

30 Harun Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory," *Senses of Cinema* 21, July 2002, http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/harun-farocki/farocki_workers/.

31 Ibid.

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13. Artwork and Artefact: The Networked Conditions of Labour in a Single Shot

Gloria Sutton

Abstract

Sutton argues that Labour in a Single Shot is defined by the online structure of the project itself. The essay outlines how Labour's ability to oscillate between operating as a digital artwork and a digital artefact is indicative of the ways visual culture is often directed towards the more fragmented, provisional, and particularized audiences reached via the internet rather than the mass audience of broadcast or televisual media (television, radio, film) that shaped earlier models of spectatorship. Outlining how Labour is undergirded by a digital logic of computational aggregation as well as by acts of storage and retrieval that are foundational to working across digital networks, this essay offers a close reading of contemporaneous yet divergent moving-image artworks that, like Labour, attempt to give shape, form, and duration to the experience of labour in the networked age.

Keywords: networked aesthetics, time-based media art, digital art, contemporary art history, Renée Green

In *Textile Printing*, Cristián Silva-Avária's 2012 video for Labour in a Single Shot in Rio de Janeiro,¹ a static camera is trained on a middle-aged man as he methodically presses bright yellow ink through a wood-framed mesh screen onto white T-shirts arranged in neat rows. A wall-mounted oscillating fan hums in the background of this innocuous silk-screening factory as the subject maintains a steady pace. Moving around the worktable, he expertly pulls a squeegee in a quick decisive stroke across an image that precisely

¹ <https://vimeo.com/56925231>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Cristián Silva-Avária, *Textile Printing*, Rio de Janeiro, 2012.

registers the graphic outline of a filigreed butterfly on each shirt. Because each colour requires a separate emulsion to be exposed on the screen, it takes several applications using multiple screens to fill in the image. Over the span of the video's fifty-five-second running time, we see this figure deftly repeat the same manoeuvre with machine-like precision, seeming to rely more on muscle memory than on any technical guidelines. In effect, Silva-Avária's video conveys the protracted process by which a detailed line sketch of a butterfly – ostensibly drawn by hand – was transferred through filmic emulsion onto a mesh screen and then through repetitive hand-printing became converted into a uniform mass image that circulates in the form of a souvenir. Even after the video stops playing, we can picture the repetition of the production: the circular flow of a figure moving around the table replicating the image pattern over and over in a seemingly endless cycle – an image that parallels the way that, as a digital video, the sequence can be endlessly replayed and repeated.

Produced in the 2012 Rio de Janeiro workshop, Silva-Avária's video exemplifies some of Antje Ehmman and Harun Farocki's methodological aims for *Labour in a Single Shot*. Bringing together a multitude of single-shot videos from disparate locations, the project eschews the kind of single overarching narrative structure that often drives documentary modes of image-making. In this particular case, by delimiting the camera's movement, Silva-Avária allowed for a more aleatory "combination of predetermination and openness, concept and contingency" to supersede any sense of

structured narrative within the resulting video.² Moreover, I would posit that Silva-Avária's video can be read through several different registers of meaning. In addition to expressing the titular specificity of its subject and location, the video transmits a wider portrait of how the artisanal converges with the industrial to serve the fluctuating tastes of the tourism trade. At the same time, Silva-Avária conveys silk-screening as a labour-intensive process unchanged since its widespread use – started in the 1960s and continuing into the present – as a specialized technique deployed by artists (from Andy Warhol to Seth Price) interested in mining the parallels between the serial fabrication of products and the production of artworks. Notably, the technique remains relatively undiminished by the rise of digital print processes that have replaced other forms of photographic image transfer within contemporary art production.

Because the video resides in the online digital video archive of Labour in a Single Shot, Silva-Avária's work, like all of the workshop videos produced between 2011 and 2014, is accessible by the click of a thumbnail still image or a keyword.³ Effectively, Silva-Avária's video exists both as a digital artwork – in galleries and museums when Labour is curated into exhibitions – and as a networked digital artefact accessible 24/7 through the internet, Wi-Fi, and other components of ubiquitous computing that have allowed the videos to be untethered from the desktop and viewed on various mobile devices. Therefore, Labour in a Single Shot remains profoundly iterative, formatted to fit various viewing platforms and scenarios as well as locations and languages. Importantly, the project's inherent adaptability denies the established exhibitionary hierarchies in which the gallery or museum is considered the primary viewing experience and the online sphere serves as a secondary mode, functioning more in the role of documentation.

In this manner, I would argue, Labour underscores the networked conditions of contemporary digital culture writ large. Reflecting what can be thought of as an ontology of networks, the project's fundamental capacity to be the mechanism of production (interconnected workshops) means that its modes of circulation, distribution, and public dissemination are enfolded

2 These are the terms used in the exhibition catalogue entry for Labour in a Single Shot when the project was included in the exhibition *Harun Farocki. Empathy* at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies from June 2 to October 16, 2016. See *Harun Farocki: Another Kind of Empathy*, ed. Antje Ehmman and Carles Guerra (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2016), 138.

3 Ehmman and Guerra, *Another Kind of Empathy*, 139. The catalogue entry details how "the web catalogue is an archive that includes all the completed videos from all the workshops. It is not a selection of the favourite videos, but a documentation of everything that was produced."

into the online structure of the project itself.⁴ Additionally, Labour's iterative quality (its ability to oscillate between operating as a digital artwork and as a digital artefact) is indicative of the ways visual culture is often directed towards the more fragmented, provisional, and particularized audiences reached via the internet rather than the mass audience of broadcast or televisual media (television, radio, film) that shaped spectatorship throughout the twentieth century. The project is undergirded by a digital logic of computational aggregation as well as by acts of storage and retrieval that are foundational to working across digital networks.

I see these characteristics as a complement to Ehmann and Farocki's stated aims for Labour in a Single Shot to investigate the various forms that labour manifests: "paid and unpaid, material and immaterial, rich in tradition or altogether new."⁵ Additionally, Labour in a Single Shot foregrounds the way that time-based media are now often conditioned by acts of digital formatting – the capacity to store image data and adapt the data to fit to various displays. The notion of file formats becomes a more useful term than "medium" to think about the ways that the concept of a "video," for example, is now often disassociated from its electromagnetic material substrate and operates on various platforms and viewing devices both online (e.g., on Vimeo) and on single-channel presentations of stored digital files in galleries and museums. Moreover, video's structural mechanisms (e.g., the loop, playback) are supplanted by digital capacities such as streaming and downloading. Overall, these inherently digital conditions (aggregation, formatting, and on-demand storage/retrieval) reflect the ways that media operate under the pressures of "digitality." Like the unevenly deployed term "post-internet," the term digitality emerged in the 2010s, historically marking digital-image technology's complete integration into contemporary culture as ubiquitous and ordinary while also considering the deeper effects it has on the ways we picture and relate to one another.⁶ This includes new social

4 An "ontology of networks" is a term advanced by Eugene Thacker and Alexander Galloway in their signal analysis of the technological and political dimensions of digital networks. See Thacker and Galloway, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007), 12 and 58–62. In particular, they highlight the productive tensions between the ways that networks rely on physical layers (e.g., fiber optics), biological concepts (dissemination, infection), and theoretical traits such as individuation (the relationship between the specific and generic or the particular and the universal).

5 This quote is from the Labour in a Single Shot project description in the exhibition catalogue *Harun Farocki: Another Kind of Empathy*, 139.

6 In *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), Seb Franklin outlines the rise of the concept of digitality, which, like the term post-internet, emerges around 2013 as a descriptor of digital computing's cultural impact. However, the most compelling

phenomena that the psychologist Sherry Turkle has collectively described as “alone together,” in other words, to be constantly connected yet lacking actual human connection, conversation, or eye contact.⁷ The endlessly looped movement of both the silk-screener pictured in Silva-Avária’s video and the format of the endlessly repeatable fifty-five-second clip are expressions of the way that “individual and social identities conform to the uninterrupted, continuous operations of markets, information networks, and other systems of late capital,” as art historian Jonathan Crary suggests in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*.⁸ Moreover, I want to suggest that the hours of digital videos, related research documentation, and exhibitionary frameworks that comprise the Labour in a Single Shot web platform do the very work of digital networks: making the invisible representational, recognizable, and therefore comprehensible.

Networked Conditions

In particular, it is the organizational function of the web platform that links diverse geographic regions through shared thematic video content. The search tag “workers leaving” connects the otherwise disparate experience of workers in Chicago exiting the security checkpoint of a Ford manufacturing plant and heading to a parking lot, filmed by Julian Flavin (*Workers Leaving Ford*, 2019), for example, with Patrick Sonni Cavalier’s film that shows workers flashing their identification cards to a bus driver before boarding in *Maids Leaving the Gated Community* (Rio de Janeiro, 2012). By establishing links between people and places that may not typically be connected, Labour actively models the networked conditions of contemporary life, advancing Ehmann and Farocki’s aims for the project to set up comparative representations of the flow – the exchange of people and information – that undergirds late capitalism. The term “network” is used here to visualize the global spread of people and information. The pervasiveness of networks, according to media scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, has become “a defining concept of our epoch” due to the way networks allow us “to trace and spatialize unvisualizable interactions as flows: from

analysis of the term digitality comes in the form of its critique, including Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) and Homay King, *Time-Based Art and the Dream of Digitality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

7 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 11.

8 Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), 9.

global capital to environmental risks, from predation to affect.”⁹ In this manner, *Labour in a Single Shot* gives form and shape to the uneven and often incompatible conditions under which humans toil, pointing to the impossibility of picturing an inclusive, individual experience within a global economic system predicated on governmentality and profitability.

This essay offers a close reading of contemporaneous yet divergent moving-image artworks that, like *Labour in a Single Shot*, take up the storage, transmission, and public display of images that attempt to give shape, form, and duration to the experience of labour in the networked age. Each art project discussed here offers what media scholar Alexander Galloway would call an “interface effect,” isolating and visualizing transformations in material states that “tell the story of the larger forces that engender them” for an unknown public audience that accesses the works through various networks – digital and social, in real time and online.¹⁰ Like many of the *Labour* videos found under the subheadings of “transport,” “factory work,” and “muscle work,” Sharon Lockhart’s film *Lunch Break* (2008) is a cinematic portrait of naval shipyard workers during their meal break. Exhibited in galleries and contemporary art museums, the film is often accompanied by a suite of large-scale digital photographs of metal lunchboxes, which are essentially ersatz portraits of the welders, fabricators, mechanics, and other labourers like Silva-Avária’s silk-screen printer whose industrial fabrication skills are always under the pressure of redundancy and obsolescence due to digital automation. Together with film-maker and composer Phill Niblock’s *The Movement of People Working* (1973–1993), a series of silent documentary films of repetitive manual labour (weaving, cutting, washing) projected in combination with hours-long live percussive harmonic performance events, the artworks discussed here are representative of the way that time-based media can be spatialized as both cinematic experiences with coordinated screening run times (Lockhart) and durational live events (Niblock) that “reconstitute experiences of the aural,” because, media scholar Frances Dyson reminds us, “sound is the immersive medium par excellence.”¹¹ The

9 Chun makes this case in her book *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 3.

10 Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), vii. See also Kris Paulsen’s keen analysis of how interfaces intersect with concepts of the liminal and haptic within visual art in her study, *Here/There: Telepresence, Touch, and Art at the Interface* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

11 Frances Dyson, *Sounding New Media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 3. For a first-person account of the microtones and percussive sounds enacted in Niblock’s legendary concerts, see “Phill Niblock Reflects on

imagery that comprises *The Movement of People Working* was shot between 1973 and 1993, but the work is still regularly screened and performed.

In the case of Niblock, his multiscreen projections of hands, shown in close-up and in repetitive motion, are scored by hours-long sonic drones – microtones generated by both conventional instruments (cello, bagpipe, saxophone) and found percussive instruments. Lockhart's and Niblock's filmic subjects mirror the dense visual terrain mapped by the Labour in a Single Shot videos, specifically those that reside under the categories of "Finishing Work," "Food," "Animals," and "Factory Work." In addition to their shared subject matter with Labour, *Lunch Break* and *The Movement of People Working* also give shape to the ways that digital images are defined less by fixed categories (i.e., specific formats such as 16mm film or digital video) and more by how these forms operate and behave within their exhibitionary, or public, contexts – moving between projection installations within museums and residing on DVDs and external drives, as well as within online databases as aggregated videos, for example.¹²

This essay also offers a meditation on what can be thought of as transnational networks – the affective ties of shared history. American artist Renée Green's essay film *ED/HF* (2017), a coded abbreviation of "Extraterritorial Durations/Harun Farocki," is presented as a poetic echo to Labour in a Single Shot, offering a diffuse rumination on overlapping experiences of migration, displacement, and alienation – of the complex ways that Green's and Farocki's identities have registered as both resident and foreign in the countries where they have lived, worked, and exhibited. Additionally, *ED/HF* makes reference to their more direct connections as artists, writers, and film-makers, such as when Farocki took up Green's teaching position at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna when Green returned to the United States in 2004. Also, Green's *ED/HF* anchored an exhibition entitled "Shared Cultures," featuring works by Farocki at Walker Art Center in the summer of 2017. This decidedly oblique comparison in both content and context accents what art historian Kobena Mercer has poignantly articulated as the connections between networks of lived experience and notions of diaspora. In particular, I want to suggest that *ED/HF* reflects Mercer's assessment that the "volatile dynamics of structure and agency that have given rise to the visibility of

Experimental Intermedia and His Loft Performances," <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/phill-niblock-81687>.

¹² This reading of Phill Niblock's *The Movement of People Working* (1973–1993) is based on its performance at the New England Conservatory in Boston on April 4, 2012, with performances by Eli Keszler, Ashley Paul, Neil Leonard, and John Mallia, and compositions by Katarina Miljkovic and Benjamin Nelson.

race and ethnicity in the recent history of contemporary art” has not only become one of contemporary art’s most distinctive attributes, but remains especially urgent within the discourse on digitality.¹³ Specifically, I consider how *ED/HF*, like Silva-Avária’s video, frames moments of expropriation and colonialism in a manner that points to what Mercer describes as “the ideological conditions of artistic production under globalization.”¹⁴ *ED/HF* was supported by a 2017 moving-image commission by the Walker Art Center, which hosted *ED/HF* on its Moving Image Commission web portal in addition to screening the work in the museum.¹⁵ And like Labour in a Single Shot, Green’s *ED/HF* is presented in the space of the gallery or museum, while also remaining accessible online.

Moments of Mediation

Labour in a Single Shot brings attention to the ways that labour itself is a mechanism that regulates the circulation of bodies and images. The project presents the mundane realities of repetitive, task-oriented labour, often shot with existing lighting and little editing. The project’s formal rules productively counter the ways digital media’s commercial application is designed to always optimize image quality and thus fidelity to its subject (i.e., enhancing an image’s reality quotient). More importantly, the project’s rules resist the seductive aesthetics of digital media itself (which is predicated on offering an ever-expanding range of colour, higher levels of saturation, and greater degrees of detail capture), which often obscures the long history of racial bias built into imaging technologies – from analogue photography to machine learning.¹⁶ Instead, workshop participants often

13 Kobena Mercer, *Travel & See: Black Diaspora Art Practices Since the 1980s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 3.

14 Mercer, *Travel & See*, 3.

15 *ED/HF* was viewable on the Walker Art Center’s online portal for its Moving Image Commissions series from June 15 to September 10, 2017 at <https://walkerart.org/magazine/series/moving-image-commissions>. *ED/HF* was also screened in the museum in conjunction with the Walker’s *Platforms: Collections and Commission* exhibition, which presented Farocki’s works from the Walker’s Ruben/Bentson Moving Image Collection alongside the commissions it inspired. See also commissioning curator Mason Leaver-Yap’s nuanced reading of Green’s *ED/HF* at <https://walkerart.org/magazine/renee-greens-edhf>.

16 On the connection between technical apparatuses of representation (including standards for photography and training modules for machine learning) and institutionalized racial and gender bias, see Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). For a detailed technical and social history of how race and

eschew digital features that enhance image quality or refinement and focus, instead drawing the viewer's attention towards the often unacknowledged work experiences of their families, communities, neighbourhoods, and social networks.

Labour in a Single Shot's multiple access points form a diffuse network of institutions and locations. One could have seen the videos in person as curated single-channel works in 2014 at the Mills Gallery in the Boston Center for the Arts, and then again in a completely different scale and configuration in the 2016 exhibition *Harun Farocki. Empathy*, organized by the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona, to give only two examples. However, the vast majority of viewers will only encounter the videos online. In this way, Labour functions as a variable data set, and each exhibition is an iteration of the project, with the number of videos, themes, and configurations being formatted to fit the existing exhibition spaces of the museums or galleries. In the 2014 Boston exhibition, custom-built wood cases positioned video monitors at eye level throughout the space of the gallery, and smaller LCD monitors were mounted side by side along the wall of a smaller gallery, creating a single line of monitors that wrapped around the dimensions of the space, with headphones connected to each monitor. However, even when curators select individual videos to include on monitors or to project within the spaces, the viewers themselves – like their online counterparts – make their own decisions about how much time and attention they will afford each video. In this way, Labour in a Single Shot highlights the temporal qualities ascribed to these different processes of exhibition and public mediation.

First, by making the same videos available online as well as in an exhibition context, the project draws a set of equivalences around these distinct modes of address, treating them less as stable media and more as flexible interfaces that are adapted to particular viewing conditions. For example, through the diverse languages and localities that were pictured at the Mills Gallery in Boston, the various cities were rendered geographically and culturally distinct by the wall labels, project descriptions, and other curatorial guideposts. When the same clips are accessed online, however, their specificity becomes subject to a typology of alphanumeric ordering,

racism factor into the conventions of photography, broadcast, and digital imaging technologies, including the ways that the technical baseline for these image technologies was calibrated for White skin, leading to the notion of having to compensate or correct for darker tonalities, see Lorna Roth, "Looking at Shirley, the Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies, and Cognitive Equity," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34 (1): 111–136.

and here difference and distinction give way to patterns of similarity and overlap produced by the database software that filters the videos by predominant colour patterns (black, blue, grey, light brown) as well as thematic designations (“Hot,” “Waiting,” “Working at Height”), which remain an inherently more subjective sorting tool compared to the additional option of sorting by city.

Like other online video repositories, such as the maintenance by Alexander Kluge’s television production company of a web archive for a large number of clips and excerpts from his television projects and films, the turn to the web to host digital content follows the use of DVDs and earlier moving-image storage formats. According to media scholar Philipp Ekardt, this approach comprises an overall strategy for mediating the distribution of time-based visual work that attempts to bypass the channels of the film industry and commercial television – a potential that also remains potentially viable when using web channels such as YouTube.¹⁷ And I would add that using web-based video sharing platforms (including Vimeo, which is the default player for *Labour in a Single Shot*) becomes part of an artistic strategy of distribution. However, like the apparatuses of television and commercial film, these digital applications and platforms are never neutral or benign.¹⁸ The individual videos that comprise Labour’s online archive show us how the project can be read collectively as a type of “operational image,” Farocki’s term for images that are “made neither to entertain nor inform,” reflecting the artist and film-maker’s longstanding investment in using emerging forms of communications media to convey “the complicity of visual representation with certain forms of modern exploitation.”¹⁹ Thus, *Labour in a Single Shot* points to the ways that digital networks continue to pressure representational paradigms of contemporary visual art to move

17 For a close reading of the organizational structure of Alexander Kluge’s website and its correlation to the film-maker’s own working methods, see Philipp Ekardt, “Starry Skies and Frozen Lakes: Digital Constellation,” in *Toward Fewer Images: The Work of Alexander Kluge* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), esp. 118.

18 For an explication of how seemingly user-friendly video interfaces such as Vimeo belie the complex computational materiality of contemporary visual media and their ensuing impact on human–machine interaction, see Lukasz Mirocha, “Communication Models, Aesthetics and Ontology of the Computational Age Revealed,” in *Postdigital Aesthetics: Art, Computation, and Design*, ed. David M. Berry and Michael Dieter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 58–71. See also Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

19 Carles Guerra and José Miguel Cortés, “We Refer to Harun Farocki,” in *Harun Farocki: Another Kind of Empathy*, eds. Antje Ehmann and Carles Guerra (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2016), 11 and 14.

away from defining them by their source or mechanisms of capture – that is to say, by cameras or lenses (photographic, filmic, video) or even humanless cameras (satellites, drones, scanners). Instead, as a web-based digital video platform, Labour models the ways that digital images have become fundamentally conditioned by the processes of aggregation, formatting, storage, and retrieval.

In doing so, the project complicates a tendency in art history to employ the often empty rhetoric surrounding the term “post-internet” as an overarching descriptor to refer to the ways experiential, multisensory installations treat images as inherently variable and reproducible, and in the most benign cases, as equally at home in the space of the museum or on a webpage.²⁰ This term has problematically come to qualify much of contemporary art produced since 1989, a period when the descriptors “participatory” and “interactive,” initially associated with video, installation, and performance, became the regulative norm attributed to almost all forms of contemporary visual art practice from sculpture to software.²¹ Labour in a Single Shot offers a salient reminder that the development of the internet as a locus of production and reception for contemporary art coincides historically with the turn toward dialogism in art of the early 1990s. This mode was advanced by both Farocki and Green, who problematized the totalizing effect of the documentary function across film, art, broadcast, and digital platforms to self-reflexively address what it means to work with found images sourced

20 The historical context and theoretical application of the terms “digitality,” “post-internet,” and “post-digital” are taken up by what media scholar David M. Berry has termed the “New Aesthetic.” See his explication of how the “New Aesthetic” maps onto the discourses of film and media studies in “The Post-Digital: The New Aesthetic and Infrastructural Aesthetics,” *No Internet, No Art*, ed. Melanie Bühler (Amsterdam: Onomatopoe Press, 2015), 287–298. For a broader overview of how these terms have proliferated in contemporary media art, see also David M. Berry and Michael Dieter’s introduction to their edited volume *Postdigital Aesthetics: Art, Computation, and Design* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–11. For a more nuanced art-historical consideration of cultural production in the age of the internet and how its related online communication models have influenced contemporary artistic practice over the past thirty years, including the introduction of the term “post-internet,” see *Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today*, ed. Eva Respini (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). For a consideration of the reception of the term “post-internet” and how the turn toward digital mediation has impacted the curatorial field in particular, see *More than Real: Art in the Digital Age*, eds. Daniel Birnbaum and Michelle Kuo (London: Koenig Books, 2018).

21 For a comprehensive overview of the critical literature on post-internet discourse and post-internet art in particular, which does not mark a time after the advent of the internet, but instead refers to visual art production in the wake of networked communication technology writ large, see the anthology *Mass Effect Art: The Internet in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

from archives, databases, and other image repositories, both offline and online. It is imperative to note that viewers encounter the workshop videos in clusters or nodes that make thematic or geographic connections from the formal elements in the footage rather than following a linear sequence or adhering to an overarching narrative structure.

As an iterative project that invites a direct communal experience in the form of public exhibitions drawing on a database of videos that remain accessible online, Labour critically blurs the divide between the social space of the gallery or museum and the private consumption of artistic production on the web by insisting on a type of collective viewing experience – on what can be considered a type of connectivity that links the built environment with a web-based one. In this regard, the viewing conditions of Labour in a Single Shot are in sync with its cultural moment (2011–2014), when the media specificity of time-based media formats (video, film) became subsumed by digital platforms and applications which often addressed viewers as networked users. This shift from viewer to user does not eradicate or supplant collective bodies such as the public or the audience, but as media scholar Ina Blom suggests, it does engender new group boundaries and definitions of collectivity that are vital to the way that concepts such as social memory are formed, aggregated, accessed, and stored.²²

Circular Movement

In addition to *Textile Printing*, Christian Silva-Avária produced another video, *Circular Movement*, in the 2012 Rio de Janeiro workshop.²³ The video is a distillation of the complex segmentation of cotton fabric manufacturing into a two-minute recording. Training the camera's lens on a room-sized automatic loom, Silva-Avária focuses on a single figure surrounded by the architecturally scaled armatures that hold metal racks of uniformly spun white cotton threads. Hundreds of single strands are fed into a central mechanized loom, which weaves the filaments together into a continuous roll of cloth that collects on a cylindrical bolt at the bottom of the apparatus. The number ninety-two, stamped on the machine's metal exterior grating above

22 See Ina Blom's compelling account of the relationship between human memory and apparatuses of storage media and their ensuing political, technical, and cultural entanglements in "Rethinking Social Memory: Archives, Technology, and the Social," in *Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology, and the Social*, ed. Ina Blom, Trond Lundemo, and Eivind Røssaak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 11–40.

23 <https://vimeo.com/57807866>.



Labour in a Single Shot. Cristián Silva-Avária, *Circular Movement*, Rio de Janeiro, 2012.

an emergency switch mechanism, implies the massive scale of production in this particular factory. The person tending the machine – standing adjacent to it and monitoring the action – is almost completely obscured by the overall apparatus, his red tank top and green shorts blending into the colour palette of the colour-coded labels that adorn the machinery.

This is less a portrait of the particular person than a picture of the human–machine interface that is key to both contemporary manufacturing processes and digital computing. The iterative technology used to transform cotton into fabric, one of the world’s first global commodities, may cycle through various mechanical innovations, yet the labour of its production is still tied to its long history of slavery, expropriation, and colonialism. While this connection to systemic exploitation is not specified by Silva-Avária, cotton, like all cash crops, remains intrinsically linked to issues of trade and export in the same way that screen-printing souvenir T-shirts is connected to tourism – another by-product of colonialism. In fact, the pristine white T-shirts that appear in Silva-Avária’s screen-printing video were probably produced in a factory similar to the one that appears in *Circular Movement*. Like *Textile Printing*, Silva-Avária’s *Circular Movement* pictures a type of endless machinic performance that relies on what Crary describes as characteristic of a 24/7 environment and as a “type of suspension of living that does not disclose the human cost required to sustain its effectiveness.”²⁴

24 Crary, 24/7, 9.

To further contextualize how Silva-Avária's *Circular Movement* figures against some of the processes that dominate digital culture – in particular the propensity to scale-up in size and reach – it is helpful to compare the work to a non-Labour project that was also done the same year. American artist Doug Aitken's moving-image artwork *Song 1* (2012) projects labour's human-machine interface onto an architectural scale. Marshalling extraordinary production resources, *Song 1* took on the circular shape of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden's 1966 Gordon Bunshaft-designed building in Washington, D.C. Aitken projected a series of video loops, flips, and abstract images of people singing while working in factories, offering a purely representational expression and romanticized picture of labour on the building's distinctive exterior. If in Silva-Avária's *Circular Movement*, the worker is caught in the machinery, literally overshadowed by the equipment as well as being emmeshed in the economic and political machinery of class, race, and identity, Aitken shows the worker operating in a frictionless world where the discrepancies between working around the clock because your position affords flexibility and the necessity to do so becomes eroded. Aitken's site-specific installation was on view from sunset to midnight for the month of May 2012. Because it was projected on the outside, *Song 1* was visible to those who traverse the National Mall as tourists and residents, and also to those experiencing homelessness. However, Aitken's primary audience is comprised of another type of mobilized 24/7 viewer, those who traverse the globe as contemporary art collectors, advisers, and curators who increasingly locate artworks for their collections using the internet and social media.

In fact, the website for this project presents a perspective that is impossible to take in from the ground. Aitken's studio seamlessly blended documentation of the in-situ performance of *Song 1* complete with colour-corrected evening skies, light-balanced ambience, and highly edited segments that captured the curvature of the museum's distinctive façade from multiple vantage points which would have only been visible from a drone or an aerial camera, not to a viewer on the street. The pace of the imagery follows a tightly sequenced audio track that, like in most of Aitken's moving-image works, relies on the dramatic blocking of sound, especially nonsounds such as aural static, white noise, snow, and the electronic hiss of the gaps between tracks on vinyl LP records. The mix of audio and visual elements also includes an extended reading by the project's commissioning curator, Kerry Brougher, which are all accessible 24/7 on the artist's own custom web platform for the project (www.dougaitkensong1.com). The website, in effect, presents the most perfect rendition of the work. In Washington,

D.C., Aitken used eleven high-definition Christie video projectors working in tandem to blanket the building's entire surface with a high-definition video remake of the classic 1934 pop song "I Only Have Eyes for You." Beck and other popular musical artists perform ragtime, gospel, doo-wop, and high-speed percussion riffs on this track. The tenor of the music shifts with each iteration, taking on the languid flow of a torch song, or the feel of a country standard, as the sound becomes more syncopated and electronic. Aitken's highly choreographed visuals resemble those from a blockbuster Hollywood feature – individual profiles set against a colour-saturated backdrop are seamlessly interspersed with images of people in cars and buses moving through the night to take up their shifts on the factory floor. In its scale of production and the stylized treatment of its human subjects – individuals appear polished and serene riding in pristine public transportation, moving effortlessly through glistening spaces – *Song 1* does not critique the image flows of capital but presents the "illuminated 24/7 world" described by Crary as a "time of indifference, against which the fragility of human life is increasingly inadequate and within which sleep has no necessity or inevitability."²⁵ In contrast to Silva-Avária's videos of a screen-printing factory and of a mechanized cotton loom, in Aitken's video, labour is magnified, amplified, doubled, and mirrored into a hyperabstraction that effaces the political economy that undergirds the work's production.

The amorphousness of Aitken's *Song 1* stands in sharp contrast to the formal and cultural specificity of Sharon Lockhart's *Lunch Break* (2008), a 35mm film transferred to HD that, over the course of eighty-three minutes, shows forty-two iron workers taking a midday meal break along a corridor stretching nearly the entire length of the General Dynamics Marine Systems shipyard in Bath, Maine, a complex that manufactures military combat vessels for the U.S. Navy. *Lunch Break* generates an arrestingly tactile portrait of the economic decline of manufacturing in the northeastern United States, as Lockhart's film shows the physical wear and tear on the bodies of the Bath iron workers whose skill sets are being slowly outmoded and outsourced. Even the instruments of war are going digital – hacking and the proliferation of fake news have become weaponized. Unlike in Lockhart's previous film works, the camera is untethered and, as it slowly moves through the narrow expanse of the building's airless corridor, museum viewers sitting quietly in an intimate, self-contained space within the openness of the galleries are also subject to a comparable sense of restraint and waiting.

25 Crary, 24/7, 9.

In the 2010 installation at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis, *Lunch Break* was screened in a custom-designed architectural container installed to isolate the viewer from the rest of the museum. According to the curator, its “scale and proportion recall the monumentality of the factory’s long corridor where the workers take their lunch breaks. Entering this dark, corridor-like structure, open at one end with the film showing at the other end, draws one into the space similar to how the camera draws one down the corridor in the film, intensifying our connection to the workers taking their breaks.”²⁶ Within the diegetic space of the screen, the factory’s long hallway is lined with dented and beat-up metal lockers. In this way, the hallway seems to be not only an industrial nexus but also a social one. The generically beige industrial surfaces, having been softened and mottled through repetitive use, seem to sag and stand askance like workers after a long shift. The lockers also gain the patina of personality as each worker’s imprint is registered through tokens such as bumper stickers and other notations in an attempt to claim space that is always temporary, a point reinforced by the layers of peeling stickers and crossed-out name tags. Over the course of the lunch break, workers engage in quotidian activities – reading, sleeping, talking – in addition to actually eating their midday meal. Designed in collaboration with composer Becky Allen and film-maker James Benning, the soundtrack blends industrial metallic sounds, innocuous music, and the low murmur of voices. Unlike the polished hooks of Aitken’s *Song I*, *Lunch Break*’s soundtrack generates a sense of anxious foreboding that directs attention toward the activity unfolding on screen. Like many films in the Labour website’s thematic category of “Waiting,” *Lunch Break*’s images and sounds – the buzz of fluorescent lights, for example – extend into a long, uninterrupted drone that may not be loud or jarring, but that over time becomes grating, like the exhausting experience of waiting – in traffic jams, on long commutes, and sitting through meetings – that is endemic to working.

While the drone effect within Lockhart’s soundtrack – itself a type of compression strategy reducing the amount of noise and detail in order to focus attention – served to advance her film’s visual narrative, Niblock’s *The Movement of People Working* (1973–1993) merges both visual and aural drones to create an all-encompassing durational event. Accumulated over

26 Sabine Eckmann, “Lunch Break,” Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum exhibition brochure. Exhibition dates: February 5–April 19, 2010.

the course of two decades, Niblock's archive of images isolates details of people working in agricultural and industrial settings in Peru, Mexico, China, and Japan, among other locations. In particular, physical, bodily techniques of gesturing, rhythmic motions and muscle memory (as in *Textile Printing* by Cristián Silva-Avária) are compared with mechanical techniques within these multichannel studies. Like the majority of videos in *Labour in a Single Shot*, Niblock focused his shots on the attenuated actions of hands: weaving fishing nets or chiselling wood used to build furniture, for example. By tightly framing the repetitive movements, the geographical specificity of each subject is made abstract. A key component of *The Movement of People Working* is Niblock's expertise in sonic percussive drones in which vibrating metal discs and cymbals are used to generate sound baths of extended tones rather than singular notes, or short bursts of discrete, staccato sounds.

Like *Labour's* videos in a gallery, Niblock's filmic images are projected in a continuous and even manner, offering a visual drone of isolated actions and repetitive movements. However, in Niblock's case, the extended pacing of the images parallels the microtonal intervals that are produced using metal percussive and tuning instruments played live in some cases and prerecorded in others. These durational events extend over hours, as in the 2012 presentation of *The Movement of People Working* at the New England Conservatory, which included performances by musicians Eli Keszler, Ashley Paul, and Neil Leonard. Instead of a full-tilt visual spectacle, many of these decidedly low-tech and low-fi intermedia events are exercises in patience contrasting starkly with the way ubiquitous computing promotes shorter (resulting in smaller image files) and more customizable viewing options. Reflecting Niblock's compositional strategies, the films that comprise *The Movement of People Working* were edited in-camera and eschewed narrative structures. The extemporaneous sounds generated live by the musicians on site are never synchronized with the projected films – the combinations of the films and music pieces are always indeterminate. While there are usually no discernible parallels between a piece's pitch and the human motion featured in the film, there are sometimes unintended correspondences between certain resonances of intensity or dampenings of sound. Here, like in *Labour in a Single Shot*, the everyday movement of people working points to the continuities of quotidian actions, and a slow, repetitive, and sustained presentation of images over a longer duration becomes a counter to the rapid refresh rate of digital images when they reside online.

Extraterritorial Durations

I want to conclude with a consideration of Renée Green's essay film *ED/HF* to think through the ways that personal and cultural memory are bound up with image-recording and dissemination technologies that remain central to *Labour in a Single Shot*. Green has rigorously framed her writings, essay films, videos, and sound installations as spaces for reimagining what we think we already know about history, place, and identity – treating the scopic energies of the camera not as a set of scanning eyes but rather as a pair of hands, closing in to get a better feel for her object of study. She has advanced this methodology over the past thirty years with her well-documented artistic practice, which has been at the forefront of engagements with the critical discourse and history of film and moving images within contemporary visual art.²⁷ In *ED/HF*, Green eschews a plot-driven narrative structure in favour of a networked meditation presenting a portrait of Farocki that connects his writings to her images. It is a poignant consideration of the possibilities for digital images not only to record and capture but also to poetically retrace and reveal shared histories, narratives, and experiences. It is also a visual meditation on empathy and the palimpsestic qualities of film that allows for the registration of loss through remembrance and mourning, *ED/HF* ruminates on the passing of family, of friends, and of her peer Farocki by recounting their overlapping geographic locales, mutual points of interest, and shared affinities as artists who also write and make films. Among the work's many perceptive offerings is a consideration of the stakes for critical art projects such as *Labour in a Single Shot* to contend with the mutability of media in the networked age, understood not as a loss or distance from an original or analogue past, but rather as an opportunity that may reveal new connections and links.

27 Green's film-making methodologies are outlined in her collected writings: Renée Green, *Other Planes of There: Selected Writings* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014) and in Renée Green, "Certain Obliquenesses," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 323–332. Within art history, Green's multivalent moving-image work has also been foundational to the discourses on Institutional Critique and Kontext Kunst. In particular, see Huey Copeland, "Renée Green's Diasporic Imagination," in *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 153–196, and Alexander Alberro, "The Fragment and the Flow: Sampling the Work of Renée Green," in *Sombras Y Señales/Shadows and Signals: Renée Green* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2000), 20–43.



Renée Green. *ED/HF*, 2017. Film still. Digital film, colour, sound, 33 min. Courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media.



Renée Green. *ED/HF*, 2017. Installation detail in the exhibition *Within Living Memory*, 2018. Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University. Image credit: Tony Luong. Courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media.

Presenting a visual exegesis, what Green calls an “extraterritorial duration,” or a political and linguistic marker of displacement, *ED/HF*, like *Labour in a Single Shot*, points to the ways that place, work, and identity often operate outside the designated categories or stable classifications of geography,

class, race, and time. More specifically, as Green explains, Farocki, “who grew up in Germany, India, and Indonesia, was never autobiographical or confessional in his work. His films are never about a direct relationship to his experience of travel or displacement. I’m interested in how there’s more of an ambience or a feeling of tense complexity that comes through than a one-to-one statement about identity.”²⁸ Drawing on Farocki’s own memoir-like essay “Written Trailers,” published in 2009, Green engages with the various characters that Farocki has embodied, reading him as a “combination person” whose own cultural identity (Indian, German) has been edited and amended, just as his own name was subject to various revisions when his family returned to Germany from Indonesia. *ED/HF* is suggestive of the ways that identity, like digital media itself, morphs and shifts in relationship to its context. During the process of conceiving the film, Green empathically articulated what the visual flow of *Labour in a Single Shot* pictures: “Friendships, economics, and forms of labor, production, distribution, and geopolitical shifts, wars, affiliations, affection, specific times, as well as changes throughout lives, also play their roles, albeit obliquely—yet indexed/inscribed and composed with recorded media.”²⁹ Like the way *Labour* juxtaposes fragments of language, images, colours, sounds, and spatial arrangements, *ED/HF* connects us to figures such as Farocki and to others like and unlike ourselves, operating as a salient reminder that the work of cultural history must constantly be reframed and reimagined from our ever-evolving vantage point of now.

Human Behaviours

By drawing formal and thematic comparisons between *Labour in a Single Shot* and other types of publicly exhibited moving-image artworks, my aim has been to establish a series of generative comparisons in order to offer critical specificity about the ways that moving images share material processes conditioned by their fundamental roles as iterative storage

28 Renée Green quoted in William S. Smith, “In the Studio: Renée Green,” *Art in America* 196, no. 2 (February 2018): 78–85. According to curator Mason Leaver-Yap’s reading, Green takes up the vernacular of displacement through the specific term “extraterritorial durations” introduced in George Steiner’s 1970 book, *Extraterritorial Durations*, as a figure who is “at home in several languages but earthbound by none.” See Leaver-Yap, “Renée Green’s *ED/HF*,” in the Walker Art Center online journal, *Crosscuts*, <https://walkerart.org/magazine/renee-greens-edhf>.

29 Renée Green quoted from *ED/HF*, cited in Mason Leaver-Yap, “Renée Green’s *ED/HF*.”

media rather than by the mechanisms of their capture (cameras or lenses). Collectively examined alongside Labour, these other works underscore the recombinant nature of digital mediation. Each project makes prodigious use of the material and conceptual differences between viewing digital artworks through publicly accessible exhibitionary frameworks – in the built environment and online – thereby setting up compelling comparisons between the *representation of experience* and the notion of *representation as experience*. Doing so foregrounds the mutual embeddedness of digital media and identity, reminding us that images – like data itself – are never neutral, benign, or objective, but remain deeply conditioned by their institutional frameworks and protocols. As a networked digital archive, Labour in a Single Shot offers more than an online video repository. It can be seen as a complex mechanism that transposes Ehmann and Farocki’s long-standing commitment to visualizing the political economy of late capitalism – the complex ways that labour, capital, and exchange operate – into a digital context that highlights the political economy of social memory. Specifically, the project productively foregrounds the tensions that arise between treating museums and galleries as sites for the curated display and long-term storage of digital artworks and online platforms as seemingly passive (or unedited, unfiltered) databases for the preservation of digital artefacts. Shifting between artwork and artefact and moving across various public platforms, Labour in a Single Shot models the ways that knowledge and culture can manifest as both public consciousness and personal memory. And, despite increasing bandwidths, faster refresh rates, and an unprecedented capacity for storage, Labour reminds us of the ways that cultural memory remains vulnerable to the same mechanisms of erasure, loss, and omission that undergird all public collections, archives, and repositories of shared lived experience.

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14. Reading the Web Catalogue: Labour in a Single Shot as Online Environment

Vinicius Navarro

Abstract

This chapter examines the role of the web catalogue in *Labour in a Single Shot*. Drawing on scholarship on interactive nonfiction media, it treats the catalogue as a dynamic system, open to user activity and susceptible to change. Rather than focus on the individual documentaries housed in the catalogue, Navarro takes a relational approach to the web project, thus echoing the collaborative, transnational history of *Labour in a Single Shot*. The chapter also finds parallels between the catalogue and other works by Harun Farocki. It describes the user's interaction with the web project as a form of reading that is qualitatively different from a casual viewing of the documentary materials.

Keywords: archive, documentary media, relationality, interactivity, media circulation

Most of us have come to know *Labour in a Single Shot* through the website that houses a collection of short documentaries made by student filmmakers since 2011, the year the project started. The web catalogue, as the project curators call it, functions both as archive and as exhibition space, containing material shot on five continents. Visitors to the site may sort the documentaries by subject matter (type of labour) or by visual pattern (colour). They may also choose to look at several tributes to the Lumière brothers' 1895 *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, which was revisited by the students and recreated in various contemporary settings. For those unfamiliar with *Labour in a Single Shot*, the site offers a series of explanatory notes on its genesis, goals, and methodology. It also includes a brief

reference to the history of the project. From 2011 to 2014, Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki organized fifteen workshops in major international cities, the purpose of which was to have local student film-makers make documentaries – one to two minutes long – on the subject of labour. The workshops were discontinued after Farocki's death in 2014 but resumed three years later, with new ones still being announced on the website.¹ Starting in 2013, selected works created by the students were exhibited in international art venues. The catalogue became available online around that same time. While it provided an additional space to showcase the documentaries, it also contributed to Labour in a Single Shot in other ways, creating a sort of synergy between production and circulation and, more importantly, opening the project to a different media environment.

This chapter explores the role of the web catalogue in the life of Labour in a Single Shot. It sees the web project neither simply as a place to house the short documentaries nor just as a means to access them. Besides the convenience of accessibility, the online environment invites us to think of the catalogue as a dynamic system, defined partly by user activity and susceptible to change. Like the overall project, the catalogue is perhaps best described as a work in progress. As new workshops take place, new materials are added to the site. The use of online media also helps us understand the internal dynamics of the catalogue: the short documentaries figure less as discrete texts than as interrelated pieces, less as self-sufficient objects than as items open to multiple (re)combinations. Although the website already offers specific navigation “paths” and precise ways to sort the documentaries, each visit to the site is likely to produce different clusters of information – and a different experience overall. Elsewhere, this tension between the archival materials and the ephemeral nature of user activity might have seemed undesirable. (The transient allegedly has no place in the archive.) Here, it helps define the life of the catalogue and its place in the history of Labour in a Single Shot.

The question to tackle is what to make of these transient formations, of provisional configurations that do not quite amount to a stable artefact, yet without which the web project would not properly materialize. The archive – the collection of documentaries, more than five hundred at the time of writing – shows an impressive array of materials: different forms of labour documented in a variety of contexts. The provisional formations that arise from user navigation enlarge this perspective, asking that we

1 Since 2017, Eva Stotz, Cathy Lee Crane, León de la Rosa, and Luis Feduchi have also been credited as curators.

consider not just diversity of content but also the relations between the short documentaries. Because user activity is relatively unpredictable, it ends up producing an experience that goes beyond the parameters suggested by the design of the website – an excess that inheres in each specific actualization of catalogue material. This chapter draws attention to the constitutive force of this gesture. It does not dispute the significance of structure and design (all user activity is constrained by design and procedural rules), just as it does not ignore the importance of each individual image (the single shot was, of course, the focus of the work developed by the students). But it maintains that the relations brought about by the user's engagement with the web catalogue – the montage, so to speak – can generate something new out of the short documentaries and the structure already built into the archive.

The *Labour in a Single Shot* online catalogue is certainly not an isolated example of how the contingent nature of user activity impacts the way we think about nonfiction media. For over two decades now, online environments have been home to a variety of experiments in independent nonfiction – the best-known examples of which are probably the so-called i-docs, or interactive documentaries – that place a similar emphasis on user activity and allow information to be viewed and arranged in multiple ways. Insofar as it remains connected to the workshops, the web catalogue also evokes the hybrid character of contemporary media activism, which often conjoins actions on- and offline. For example, community-building and activist workshops are now often co-ordinated with online projects that do not simply represent the work of the activists but also expand the scope of their efforts. These developments do more than provide a technocultural context for *Labour in a Single Shot*. They endorse the argument that sees the catalogue as a vital part of the overall project, rather than simply as an inventory of events that took place elsewhere.

That these features also resonate with Farocki's oeuvre further reinforces the significance of the online archive in the history of *Labour in a Single Shot*. Farocki's career-long attention to archival images was motivated by an interest in reconfiguring existing media materials that foreshadows the mechanics of recycling and repurposing now afforded by digital media environments. As D. N. Rodowick writes, Farocki "was a master of building arguments from appropriated images and situations – often from surveillance cameras, amateur video, automated drones, aerial photography, computer displays, and so forth."² (One might add film and television

2 D. N. Rodowick, "Harun Farocki's Liberated Consciousness," in *What Philosophy Wants from Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 77.

footage to the list.) The archive interested Farocki insofar as it offered itself to appropriation, that is, insofar as it allowed for the emergence of new configurations. Rodowick takes this argument further, claiming that the desire to build and rebuild did not simply inspire the use of archival images; it served as a general principle in Farocki's work. "From a very early point in his career, Farocki considered his own artistic configurations to be open and provisional. [...] Nothing that was done couldn't be undone and reconfigured."³ *Labour in a Single Shot* evokes this general attitude but takes a more specific interest in the archive. It also changes the terms according to which the source materials are used. The task of combining and recombining existing images – the actualization of the archive – now falls in the hands of the user, the visitor to the website.

How does labour emerge from and within these provisional configurations? What do we find out from using the catalogue? And how is that experience different from watching the documentaries individually? Volker Pantenburg, in an essay otherwise unrelated to *Labour in a Single Shot*, briefly notes that the project distils what he describes as two chief concerns in Farocki's long and prolific career: Farocki's commitment to "questions of the *image*," and his interest in "the subject of *labor* or *work*" (emphasis in the original).⁴ Indeed, the project's stated goal – to explore both the "openness" and "predetermination" of the single shot in order to document different forms of labour – already combines these two issues.⁵ The catalogue adds something else to the "picture." It does not so much depart from that initial objective as open it to the encounter between the internet user and the documentary materials, that is, to the process of circulation, from which we derive multiple perspectives on the subject of labour.

From Storage to Circulation

In the journal Antje Ehmann kept during the first years of *Labour in a Single Shot*, there is an early reference to the online project that predates its inception: "I'm already looking forward to our internet catalogue, where all of this will be documented," she comments while writing about the results

3 Rodowick, "Farocki's Liberated Consciousness," 77.

4 Volker Pantenburg, "Now that's Brecht at last!": Harun Farocki's Observational Films," in *Documentary Across Disciplines*, ed. Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 143.

5 *Labour in a Single Shot*, "Concept," accessed October 23, 2019, <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/project/concept/>.

of the workshop in Bangalore (January 2012).⁶ In the subsequent months and years, the archive is mentioned infrequently, the emphasis falling on the workshops and the exhibitions, seemingly more eventful occasions that Ehmann describes in detail. When she does mention the catalogue, though, her references end up suggesting a more vital role for the website, one that in fact connects the catalogue to the other components in *Labour in a Single Shot*. For example, once the first videos were uploaded to the website, the internet catalogue began to serve as a pedagogical tool in the workshops. “I have the feeling that things have never yet worked so well,” Ehmann writes about the Buenos Aires workshop in 2013. “Maybe partly because this is the first time we’ve had the internet catalogue available online. And so we can bring things up spontaneously, quickly, and without technical problems.”⁷ Ehmann’s comment seems initially to focus on the Buenos Aires workshop, yet it ends up offering a broader statement about the use of online media in *Labour in a Single Shot*. The web catalogue appears here not as the place “where all [...] will be documented” but as a development that converges with other developments in the project. The narrative that marks the different phases of *Labour in a Single Shot* changes as well. In lieu of a linear chronology – a trajectory that starts with the workshops and concludes with the archive – we have overlapping components and intersecting events.

Still, a quick look at the website might have suggested otherwise. What the project curators call a catalogue appears like a relatively self-contained database where one can access and view the materials produced in the workshops. Unlike similar projects, the website offers no links to other databases, no direct call for action. *Labour in a Single Shot* does not make room for user-generated content either. The impression that we are looking at a self-contained project is, furthermore, reinforced by the aesthetics of the website. As we enter the catalogue, we see a sort of grid in which the videos are arranged horizontally as well as atop one another: four vertical columns, one next to the other, and 142 horizontal bars. This co-ordination between the display and the structure of the catalogue recalls Lev Manovich’s two-decade-old characterization of new media objects as interfaces connected to a database, where the latter provides a formal logic to the former. “[A]n image database,” he writes, “can be represented as a page of miniature

6 Antje Ehmann, “Labour in a Single Shot—Antje Ehmann’s Workshop and Exhibition Journals, 2011–2014,” trans. Peter J. Schwartz. Published in this volume, 55.

7 Ehmann, “Workshop and Exhibition Journals,” 67.

images; clicking on a miniature will retrieve the corresponding record.”⁸ The web catalogue, too, could in theory be described as a collection of records linked to small images, a seemingly neatly designed and formally coherent object, as Manovich might claim.

The static picture suggested by this description starts looking different, of course, when we begin attending to the contingencies of user navigation. Take, for instance, the 4x142 array. Every time the page is loaded, the array looks different: the placement of each miniature image in the grid seems to change randomly. More importantly, the clusters of information through which we make sense of the subject in *Labour in a Single Shot* are not given beforehand but emerge *as* we act on the materials in the database. The web catalogue, in this respect, evokes not just “the logic of the database” but also the attributes of time-based media that are not linearly structured, media that incorporate the user’s experience, as is the case with video installations, for example.

The analogy should come as no surprise, in fact, because web projects such as *Labour in a Single Shot* sometimes double as video installations: the same material appears in different environments, on- and offline. Farocki’s own history as an installation artist brings additional support to this analogy. Comparing online media environments with video installations may reveal something else, though: the general features of an aesthetics based on contingency. Video installations are not self-contained artefacts; they are variable experiences that involve audience engagement, as Margaret Morse explains:

As a spatial form, installation art might appear to have escaped the ghetto of time-based arts into the museum proper [...]. Video installation, however, remains a form that unfolds in time—the time a visitor requires to complete a trajectory inspecting objects and monitors, the time a video track or a poetic juxtaposition of tracks requires to play out [...] and, one might add, the time for reflection in the subject her- or himself.⁹

The passage is from an article published in 1990 (shortly before the web became publicly available). Morse’s characterization of installation art as a form that “unfolds in time,” however, could very well describe a project

8 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 226.

9 Margaret Morse, “Video Installation Art: The Body, the Image, and the Space-in-Between,” in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, ed. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture, 1990), 166.

such as *Labour in a Single Shot*. Despite offering a phenomenologically different experience, the online catalogue, too, presumes a temporally variable situation that involves a user's engagement with recorded materials. The actuality of the project – its configuration at any given moment – comes to depend on this encounter.

We can now turn to the catalogue and ask what this process might look like. Consider, for example, the section in which the short documentaries are grouped under the names of the cities that hosted the workshops. More specifically, think about the page devoted to Rio de Janeiro. On the right side of the screen, there are thirty-nine videos, arranged vertically in a single column, one atop the other. To the left, in a parallel column, the page displays a vast amount of statistical data: information about Rio's area and climate, demographics and religions, traffic and transportation, economic output and cost of living (see Figure 1). The data help contextualize the videos, thus making up for information that is missing from the short documentaries themselves. Beyond this initial observation, though, there is little that can be said about how the data help us “read” the videos, just as there is no prescribed order in which the videos are meant to be looked at. It is up to the user to find relationships between one column and another, as well as among the documentaries. The visit to the catalogue produces not one but several “narratives” as it connects record and action, the past and the present.

One wonders, then, whether a term such as “archive” still offers a precise designation for the project. The website itself, with its unconventional taxonomy, provides what looks like a critique of the archive as a means of ordering and classifying information.¹⁰ Colour, one of the main tools used for sorting the documentaries, is not exactly an orthodox category to choose from in the context of a project like *Labour in a Single Shot*. The desire to look beyond the allegedly stable form of the archive is, in this sense, already written into the website.

Labour in a Single Shot also calls to mind a growing body of interactive documentary media that, by favouring the fluidity of process over the alleged stability of product, challenges established formats and categories. The aforementioned i-docs, for example, were once referred to as database documentaries.¹¹ The

10 Hollyamber Kennedy, “Labor, in the Visible Recursive: Antje Ehmman and Harun Farocki's *Eine Einstellung zur Arbeit*,” *The Avery Review* no. 8 (May 2015): 3, n6. Kennedy notes that “[t]he categories by which a user is allowed to sort the Web archive's content [...] introduce instabilities that unsettle the archive's field of visibility.”

11 For an early use of the term, see, for example, Dale Hudson, “Undisclosed Recipients: Database Documentaries and the Internet,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 2, no. 1 (2008).

Rio de Janeiro | Brazil

Statistical Data

Google entries for Rio de Janeiro 182,000,000
 Google entries per inhabitant 60,43

City Founding 1565
 Surface area
 City area 1,282 km²
 Metropolitan area 6,567 km²
http://city.wikidata.org/wiki/Rio_de_Janeiro

CLIMATE DATA

Max. temperature @ 27.2
 Min. temperature @ 21
 Rainfall / year (mm) 1,172.9
 Days of rain 129
http://climate.wikidata.org/wiki/Rio_de_Janeiro

POPULATION

Inhabitants / city 6,320,446 (2013) ^[1]
 Inhabitants / metropolitan area 12,043,000 (2012) ^[1]
 Population density / city 5,347.2 inh. / km² (2013) ^[1]
 Population density / metropolitan area 1,851.6 inh. / km² (2012)
^[1] http://city.wikidata.org/wiki/Rio_de_Janeiro
^[2] <http://www.demographia.com/db-world14.pdf>

Age groups in %, 2009

0-14 18.2
 15-24 14.6
 25-59 49.9
 60 17.1
<http://city-regions.com/en/regions/00104/Rio-de-Janeiro-City-Rio-de-Janeiro.pdf>

Population History (metropolitan area)

1950 2,864,000
 1970 7,040,000
 1990 9,682,000
 2010 11,496,000
<http://cidades.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/municipais/populacao/Popup.php?munic=3500000>

Population composition in Rio (metropolitan area)

White 53%
 Black 17%
 Mixed 30%

The image also features a vertical strip of five photographs on the right side, depicting various scenes of labor and daily life in Rio de Janeiro.

Labour in a Single Shot. Detail from the Rio de Janeiro page in the web catalogue.

current designation – interactive documentary – draws attention not to the object but to its modus operandi. Sandra Gaudenzi has described i-docs as “living documentaries,” likening them to open-ended processes that defy rigidly defined boundaries – a statement that resonates clearly with the Labour in a Single Shot web catalogue.¹² Similarly, Helen De Michiel and Patricia Zimmermann have spoken of interactive documentary environments as open spaces where “producers and subjects and audiences work together through dialogue [...] moving across many versions and iterations of a work that are endlessly adapting.”¹³ An open space hardly lends itself to simple categorization. The emphasis is on the process of circulation, on the concrete instances in which the source material is accessed and actualized, rather than on any specific object.

Attention to the process of circulation enlarges our perspective on Labour in a Single Shot in yet another way. It redirects the reflexive ambitions of the project, shifting the focus from the recording process to the extended life of the record. The making of the short documentaries admittedly involved

12 Sandra Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary: From Representing Reality to Co-creating Reality in Digital Interactive Documentary” (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2013).

13 Helen De Michiel and Patricia R. Zimmermann, “Documentary as an Open Space,” in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. Brian Winston (London: British Film Institute, 2013), 358.

a reflection on the capabilities of the moving image: “The task as set leads straight to basic questions of cinematographic form and raises essential questions about the filmmaking process itself,” says an introductory note on the website. Further down, the curators add: “We draw on the method of the earliest films, made at the end of the 19th century [...]. These early films, made in a single continuous shot, declared that every detail of the moving world is worth considering and capturing.”¹⁴ This reflexive attitude is familiar, of course, from much of Farocki’s work.¹⁵ The irony here is that the emphasis on the image ends up producing more than a study of “cinematographic form.” It anticipates the place of the documentary record in the online catalogue. If the parameters set by the project – the one-to-two-minute single-shot piece – create opportunity to think about the filming process, the brevity of the documentaries calls to mind the portability of the image in contemporary circuits of information, where every piece is potentially a building block in an open assemblage. Labour in a Single Shot is, in this sense, a project that “speaks about” a new type of image, an image whose life is directly related to its mobility – an image that has no fixed place in a predetermined sequence.

Labour in Multiple Shots

What arises from this architecture of “movable” pieces is an experience in which labour itself never coheres as a monolithic concept. Rather, it is the multifaceted view afforded by the project, as well as the diversity of the experiences documented, that stand out. One critic reviewing Labour in a Single Shot’s Berlin exhibition complained about the documentaries’ alleged lack of perspective on the subject of labour, faulting the short pieces for failing to produce a clear point of view.¹⁶ The videos, however, were not meant to be seen on their own, as self-sufficient statements on labour,

14 Labour in a Single Shot, “Concept,” accessed September 15, 2019, <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/project/concept/>.

15 See Thomas Elsaesser, “Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist,” in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 32. Elsaesser has described Farocki’s work as “a meta-cinema without a meta-language,” a cinema that speaks about cinema but does so “in cinema’s own terms.”

16 “Lacking an understanding or interest in the social forces behind and historical roots of the conditions they observe, the filmmakers find themselves adrift.” Hiram Lee, “Harun Farocki’s *Labour in a Single Shot* in Berlin: An Exhibition of Films About Working People,” *World Socialist Website*, April 9, 2015, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2015/04/09/faro-a09.html>.

a point confirmed by yet another note from the website: “The subject of investigation is ‘labour’: paid and unpaid, material and immaterial, rich in tradition or altogether new.”¹⁷ Pairing different forms of labour affirms at once the heterogeneity of the subject and the possibility of thinking of it relationally. The catalogue amplifies the nature of the relations by suggesting parallels and differences that exceed the duality embodied in each pair. Consider one more time the short documentaries shot in Rio de Janeiro. We look at factories and construction sites, at a playground and a beauty salon, as well as a number of public places, sequencing the videos as we move along. Gradually, we become aware of recurrent subjects – informal labour, for example – or we may notice the multiplicity of workers for whom the street serves as workplace – cops, performers, and street vendors. The excursion produces no overarching perspective or definitive statement; instead, it renders apparent the inconclusiveness of this process and the numerous ways we may view the subject of labour.

A relational approach that values multiplicity and difference also resonates with the global aspirations of the project. With workshops on five continents, *Labour in a Single Shot* documented not only various forms of labour but also the local contexts they are associated with. The catalogue revisits that original impulse, creating new geographies based on connectivity. Although the videos are still arranged under specific locations, the website allows for a kind of virtual border-crossing that renders palpable – or enacts – the transnational character of the project. Relationships now emerge both within specific cities and across national borders. Street vendors and performers, for instance, are featured not only in Rio but also in Mexico City, two of the three Latin American cities included in *Labour in a Single Shot*. The parallel implies that precarity of labour is a condition known throughout the region. It also reveals locally inflected differences in what might otherwise be perceived simply as recurrent patterns. Other relationships may suggest a new way of sorting the catalogue materials, not fully anticipated by the design of the website. Gender, for example, can help us think about working conditions from both a local and a transnational perspective, even though the term is never mentioned in the catalogue. There are also instances in which the existing categories leave room for entirely unexpected juxtapositions. One of those categories is identified simply as “waiting.” It includes both highly structured, strictly regimented occupations – security-related jobs – and ones existing outside the formal labour market – street vendors

17 *Labour in a Single Shot*, “Concept,” accessed September 15, 2019, <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/project/concept/>.

and beggars. Making connections between them suggests a disconcerting parallel that travels across borders and produces a perspective on labour not fully available within any individual documentary.

Much like the notion of labour itself, the workers do not constitute a homogeneous category. There is no working class that lends itself to generalization, no unified identity to speak of. In fact, the catalogue – and the overall project, for that matter – seems to imply the opposite, asking that we devise other ways to think about the subject. The closest we ever get to a more traditional, or self-contained, representation of the workers is probably when we look at the tributes to the Lumière film, *Workers Leaving the Factory*, which stand as a category of their own. As Ehmann records in her journal, the Lumière film was screened during the workshops and presented as a “reference point” for the overall project.¹⁸ Later, it also served as a sort of template for documentaries that specifically depicted scenes of workers leaving their workplaces. Every workshop produced at least one tribute to the Lumière film. Yet, more than simply update the 1895 film, the short documentaries function as relatively open variations on the original theme. *Workers Leaving the Factory* becomes *Workers Leaving Their Workplaces* – a loose adaptation rather than a faithful remake. In addition to factories, we now see workers leaving construction sites, a shopping mall, and a museum, for example.

To be sure, this was not the first time Farocki had turned to the Lumière short. In 1995, more than a decade before *Labour in a Single Shot*, the same piece inspired another project, a thirty-six-minute compilation of scenes from fiction and nonfiction films that offers its own perspective on the representation of labour. Borrowing its title from the Lumière film, the new *Workers Leaving the Factory* uses the original piece as its opening shot, then follows it with images from other films of workers rushing out of factories: “1975 in Emden, the Volkswagen factory, the workers are running as if something were drawing them away; 1926 in Detroit, the workers are running as if they had already lost too much time; again in Lyon, in 1957, they are running as if they knew somewhere better to be.” With each new excerpt, Farocki evokes the memory of the early Lumière film, as if to recall the beginning of cinema and its association with industrial technology. He also draws attention to the uneasy relationship between the screen and the factory, between cinema and the subject of labour. At some point, towards the end of the film, we hear the narrator explain that the factory is a place both the workers and the camera must leave – or rather, leave *behind*.

18 Ehmann, “Workshop and Exhibition Journals,” 54.

“Whenever possible, film has moved hastily away from factories. Factories have not attracted film. Rather, they have repelled it.” Even though some of the footage excerpted by Farocki suggests an interest in organized labour, it is this apparent absence of the workers *as* workers that stands out – and becomes the focus of his critique. “Most narrative films begin after work is over,” says the narrator. The factory gate is the threshold that is crossed before the narrative begins, the point at which community gives way to individual experience.¹⁹

Farocki returned to the Lumière film on at least one other occasion, a video installation from 2006 called *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades*, created for an exhibition he co-curated with Antje Ehmann in Vienna. Here, too, Farocki uses footage from films that in one way or another represent – or circumvent – the subject of labour. Like his 1995 *Workers Leaving the Factory*, the installation revisits, recontextualizes, and repurposes existing media. Predictably, it also anticipates some of the features later developed in *Labour in a Single Shot*’s website: a design that involves different screens, for example, as well as a spatiotemporal configuration that invites “contact” with the user. The parallels with the online catalogue, however, go only so far. If the earlier works reflect on existing representations of labour, the catalogue offers an opportunity to envision new ones. The film – and to some degree the installation – assumes a certain distance from the original material, so that a critical perspective on cinema’s uneven relationship with the subject of labour may arise. The multiple vantage points afforded by the web project, by contrast, produce no such distance. Whereas it was once possible to claim labour as a fairly contained category, here the concept of labour itself calls for scrutiny. What we learn from the web project is that labour has changed. (Does it surprise us that the workers in *Labour in a Single Shot* leave not just factories but also an office building and a shopping mall?) While evoking the memory of Farocki’s earlier works, *Labour in a Single Shot* thus ends up highlighting the transformations of labour in the postindustrial era and, not coincidentally, of the media we use to represent it as well.

19 The same year the film was completed, Farocki published an article – a sort of companion piece to the film – in which he further elaborates on the subject: “The appearance of community does not last long. Immediately after the workers hurry past the gate, they disperse to become individual people, and it is this aspect of their existence which is addressed by most narrative films.” Harun Farocki, “Workers Leaving the Factory,” trans. Laurent Faasch-Ibrahim, in Elsaesser, *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, 239. Originally published in *Meteor* no. 1 (December 1995): 49–55.

Reading the Web Catalogue

The challenge presented by the web catalogue is in some ways apparent in this comparison between *Labour in a Single Shot* and the earlier projects that bear the name of the Lumière film. The website harbours an ambiguity that Farocki's 1995 film, for example, can easily dispel. Reading the film as a coherent, fully realized text presents no particular difficulty. Nor is it hard to distinguish the text from the source materials. The same does not go for the online project. On the one hand, the catalogue is not simply a collection of items. On the other, it does not amount to a fully developed text either. The question it poses is thus a question of legibility. How do we make sense of what is provisional in the project, of that which does not cohere into a definite, clearly delimited text?

The actions that breathe life into the web project are, of course, what substitute for a more conventional approach to reading. Here, reading remains closely associated with doing. We get to know the catalogue as we work on it, that is, as we produce the clusters of materials that come to represent the subject at the centre of *Labour in a Single Shot*. Reading, in this sense, already functions as a form of writing – a writing whose meanderings suit the diversity and complexity of labour in the twenty-first century. This gesture does more than underline the processual nature of the web project: it produces a qualitative distinction that helps to differentiate the web experience from an experience that is merely fluid or indeterminate. Elsewhere, I have described *Labour in a Single Shot* as a project involving a series of occasions – a series of qualitatively distinct experiences – in which various participants engage in specific tasks or activities.²⁰ Each workshop constituted one such occasion; each produced a gathering of interested parties that shared a common goal. The exhibitions, while different in nature, also provided opportunity to engage with the subject of labour, producing new gatherings and new possibilities of exchange. The web catalogue adds yet another component to this history. Every visit to the website constitutes a particular occasion, a moment that is qualitatively different from other moments. In the absence of clearly defined boundaries, it is this qualitative distinction that grants a formal quality to the fluidity of process.

In the end, what turns the actualization of the catalogue into a form of reading – what distinguishes it from simply browsing the documentaries – is an interpretive gesture, a making sense of the relationships that emerge *as*

20 Vinicius Navarro, "Time, Digital Environments, and the Documentary Experience," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 60, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 106.

we work on the catalogue materials. D. N. Rodowick, in the aforementioned essay on Farocki's "liberated consciousness," draws attention to the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, between the merely visible and what is actually understood.²¹ It is the latter term in each pair that concerned Farocki, and it is also the latter term in each that Rodowick examines as he writes about Farocki's work. The web catalogue, too, calls for a distinction between what is given beforehand and what we make of it, what is visualized and what is performed – between the readable and the act of reading. Seen this way, the catalogue can become an extension, or yet another manifestation, of the pedagogical impulse that inspired Labour in a Single Shot. While no actual teaching takes place – no synchronous exchange of the type produced during the workshops – this process does suggest a form of learning. Rather than being merely presented to us, the subject of Labour in a Single Shot comes about gradually; laboriously, so to speak. Learning is paired with creativity, this time exemplified not by the creation of short documentaries but by the act of montage.

Still, for all the significance of the web catalogue, nothing in the project suggests that the affordances of online media necessarily translate into meaningful achievement. In fact, the web project does not even mention the interactive capacities built into the catalogue. In the modest note that describes the online project, the curators simply say that "[t]he web catalogue is an archive that includes all the completed videos from all the workshops. It is not a selection of our favourite videos, but a documentation of everything that was produced."²² The catalogue is more than that, to be sure. But the apparent modesty of the note seems relevant in another way. It gives the user responsibility for the selection and arrangement of the catalogue materials – and an opportunity to think about labour, in ever so many shots.

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21 Rodowick, "Farocki's Liberated Consciousness," 84.

22 *Labour in a Single Shot*, "Concept," accessed December 29, 2019, <https://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/project/concept/>.

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This collection of essays offers a critical assessment of Labour in a Single Shot, a groundbreaking documentary video workshop. From 2011 to 2014, curator Antje Ehmann and film- and video-maker Harun Farocki produced an art project of truly global proportions. They travelled to fifteen cities around the world to conduct workshops inspired by cinema history's first film, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, shot in 1895 by the Lumière brothers in France.

While the workshop videos are in colour and the camera was not required to remain static, Ehmann and Farocki's students were tasked with honouring the original Lumière film's basic parameters of theme and style. The fascinating result is a collection of more than 550 short videos that have appeared in international exhibitions and on an open-access website, offering the widest possible audience the opportunity to ponder contemporary labour in multiple contexts around the world.

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