great care to not place the partisan in opposition to the regular armies which are needed to topple the forces of the state or the occupier.

Spain — The coincidence is significant that Mao wrote his most important works in the years 1936–38, that is to say, during the same years in which the Spanish [Franco] government was engaged in combating international communism by means of a war of national liberation. It is also a significant coincidence that this book arose from two lectures given by Schmitt in 1962 at the invitation of the Universities of Pamplona and Zaragoza. (Like this earlier Prussian edict concerning the militia, the constitutions of Switzerland and Norway, and more recently, [Tito’s] Yugoslavia, contain a provision calling on citizens to armed resistance in the event of a foreign occupation. In this way the irregular resistance struggle is made legal. Conversely, the otherwise legal step of capitulation is made illegal in Yugoslavia’s case: ‘[...] and nobody has the right to recognise or accept the occupation of the country or any part thereof or its armed forces.’)

11. Ibid., p. 29.

Translated by Laurent Faasch-Ibrahim.

Political Filmmaking after Brecht: Harun Farocki, for Example

Thomas Elsaesser

Brecht and Brechtian Cinema

Filmmakers, especially in Europe, who profess they owe something to Brecht are numerous, but his legacy has been appropriated in very different ways. For Italian post-war directors such as Luchino Visconti, Francesco Rosi, Bernardo Bertolucci, Ermanno Olmi, and the Taviani Brothers, Brecht’s influence was most apparent in novel, often anti-heroic ways of dramatising (national) history. In films like Senso (1954), Salvatore Giuliano (1962), 1900 (1976), The Tree of Wooden Clogs (1978), and Kaos (1984), the historical process is depicted not only in the Marxist sense as the movement of conflicting class interests. Directors delight in that sensuous apprehension of lived contradiction one finds in Galileo, a play that more than any other of Brecht’s theatre pieces has appealed to film professionals. Charles Laughton gave it its American premiere, produced by John Houseman and directed by Joseph Losey. Galileo may in turn even have been inspired by Hollywood biopics, judging from Brecht’s praise for one of their chief directors, the German émigré William Dieterle.

French directors such as Jean Luc Godard and Jean-Marie Straub have transposed more specific Brechtian ideas into filmic terms: rethinking the question of pleasure and spectacle, developing filmic modes of spectatorial distanciation, and exploring the politics of representation in and through the cinema — in much the same spirit as Brecht reflected on the ideological implications of the traditions of bourgeois theatre. Straub, for instance, explicitly fashioned the acting style and verbal delivery of his protagonists after Brechtian precepts, but he also prefaced his first feature film Not Reconciled (1965) with a quotation from Brecht: ‘only violence serves where violence reigns.’ He even adapted a prose work of Brecht, Die Geschichte des Herrn Cäsar for his film, History Lessons (1972). Godard’s work from 1967 onwards shows an intense preoccupation with the theories of Brecht, which in La Chinoise (1967) surfaces in the form of extended quotations. It culminates in such explicitly Brechtian films as One Plus One, British Sounds (1970), Vent d’Est (1970) and Tout Va Bien (1972).
In West Germany, virtually every director of the so-called New German Cinema makes reference to Brecht, either as a source to be acknowledged or a cultural presence to come to terms with. Of these, Alexander Kluge is the most readily identifiable Brechtian. Films like *Yesteray Girl* (1966), *Artists at the Top of the Big Top: Disoriented* (1969), *Occasional Work of a Female Slave* (1974), *The Patriot* (1979), and *The Power of Feelings* (1984) are typified by episodic narratives, frequent interruptions by voice-over or inserts, non-naturalistic acting, separation of sound from image, self-conscious staging of scenes, quotations from diverse sources, and, finally, a didactic-interventionist stance *vis-à-vis* contemporary social and political issues. Volker Schlöndorff directed Brecht’s play *Baal* (1969) for television with Rainer Werner Fassbinder in the title role, and his Poor People of Kombach (1970) is a didactic parable in a setting not unlike that of *Mother Courage*. Fassbinder’s theatre work bears the mark of Brecht, as does the dead-pan diction, the ‘primitive epic forms’ of films like *Katzenmacher* (1969), *Gods of the Plague* (1969), and *The Trip to Niklashausen* (1970) with their division of the action into individual scenes. Likewise, the deliberate artifice of the situation and the didacticism of the denouement in *Fear Eats the Soul* (1973), *Fox and His Friends* (1974) or *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972) is reminiscent of Brecht’s learning-plays (*Lehrstücke*) and his Parables for the Theatre. Hans Jürgen Syberberg’s first film was a Super-8 production of Brecht rehearsing Goethe’s *Urfaust* with the Berlin Ensemble, filmed semi-clandestinely from the stalls. His German trilogy *Ludwig, Requiem for a Virgin King* (1972), *Karl May* (1974), and *Hitler* – *A Film from Germany* (1977) is, according to the director himself, ‘a marriage of Richard Wagner and Bert Brecht’. Finally, the Bavarian aspects of Brecht’s humour are shared by Herbert Achternbusch and Werner Herzog, two names not normally associated with Brecht. Their sense of the contradictory and grotesque elements in human behaviour, their predilection for ‘blunt thinking’ and satirical materialism, however, stem from the same source as Brecht’s: the Munich comedian Karl Valentin and his music hall mock-profundity.

It would be easy to go on. But for a picture of the role of Brecht as a source for concepts of avant-garde cinema and as a model for political filmmaking in the 1970s and 1980s, one has to look further than the direct echoes. Not all the Brechtianisms in post-war cinema are true to the spirit of Brecht. Among those who have claimed him for their work, fewer have inherited his questions than copied his answers, which, of course, were by then no longer answers. Brecht came to stand for a confusing proliferation of practices among filmmakers and a complex set of assumptions for film theory in the 1970s. Yet his teachings also played a crucial role in the much wider cultural shift which marked the avant-garde’s final break with high modernism. To understand this break, a flash-
Modernism in Retreat: The Artist as Producer

Avant-garde filmmakers in the 1970s felt they had to take a stance on the cinema’s relation to politics in general. But they also had to locate their politics of form between modernist aesthetics on the one hand, and popular culture on the other. As to politics in both senses, the watchword was Godard’s ‘the problem is not to make political films but to make films politically’,” a Brechtian sentence down to the very formulation. To make films politically meant to challenge the strategies which contemporary popular culture, especially the cinema, had inherited from the bourgeois novel and theatre, as well as to distance itself from the increasingly commercialised leisure culture, T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s ‘culture industry’. This meant an intense engagement with the means and modes of production, such as the ‘independent’ sector, state subsidy, television broadcasters. For if the Hollywood-Mosfilm-Cinecitta Empire was for most of the avant-garde a relatively distant enemy, the different national television networks provided a more immediate target.

Modernism thus came under attack from two fronts: firstly, with television accelerating the breakdown of the traditional distinctions between high art, popular culture and mass entertainment, theories of unpleasure threatened not only to remain frozen in a reflex of negativity, but to appear elitist and antidemocratic. Secondly, modernism’s fetishism of the text implied neglecting the way formal means function ideologically in a given reception context. In both respects, the legacy of Brecht proved particularly instructive and also controversial. It will be remembered that Brecht himself had in the early 1930s practised a strategy of interventionism (eingreifendes Denken) in just about every debate and through every existing medium of technological mass culture. These interventions, tragically, were robbed of their full impact, even for theory, by his exile, first in Denmark, later in Hollywood. Brecht sought in every case ‘not to supply the production apparatus without [...] changing that apparatus’.

He worked in the theatre, wrote radio plays, and participated in musical life via his association with Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith and Hanns Eisler. He was active in proletarian associations such as the Rote Fahne, and wrote his learning plays for factories and workers’ clubs. He involved himself in filmmaking via Prometheus Film, and together with Slatan Dudow and Hanns Eisler made KÜHLE WMPE. In the theatre he wrote for various publics or non-publics, plays as different as The Mother and St Joan of the Stockyards, making the years between 1928 and 1933 among the most productive of his life.

West German filmmakers, on the side of the avant-garde and among the so-called author’s cinema, seemed much more drawn to this interventionist side of Brecht (being directly involved in institutional battles and strategic decisions) than to Brecht as a possible theorist of cinema. Notwithstanding the international acclaim some of them received in the 1970s, most directors stayed, with the very notable exception of feminist filmmakers, outside the debates that at the time dominated Anglo-American avant-garde circles and those interested in film theory. Because of the governmental sources of finance that directors and producers depended on, but also because of an increasing access to television, German filmmakers adopted strictly tactical strategies, confronting the question of the spectator in more practical terms. For instance, they travelled with their films and introduced them to live audiences, they took up social issues as their subject matter, and they targeted sections of the public who could be addressed as special interest or pressure groups.

Intervening in the apparatus and not merely supplying it with a product thus became one of the most Brechtian aspects of the New German cinema, crystallising around the representation of the working class, of working-class subjects (Arbeiterfilme), and the strategies and compromises these entailed.

On the other hand, television further marginalised filmmakers who wanted to develop new discursive or non-narrative forms. Lack of access to funds caused a sort of withering away of Brechtian counter-cinema as envisaged by Godard (or Wollen). Even state-run broadcasting corporations had a commissioning policy, which, while quite broad-minded in terms of issues and the expression of minority views, tolerates only a limited amount of formal experiment.

In the case of the (short-lived) workers’ films, for instance, it meant adopting a Brechtian spirit, rather than following him to the letter. It meant showing conditions not merely as they were (naturalism) but from the perspective of their susceptibility to change, optimistically assuming that the dialectic of change operated in favour of greater redistribution of wealth and political power. Such old chestnuts of the realism debate as a work’s utopian tendency, and the notion of the positive hero were widely argued in media seminars, but also in the house journals of television stations such as Cologne’s powerful WDR. Significantly, it was Ernst Bloch as much as Brecht who provided the key words (Der aufruhrige Gang [Walking Upright], Das Prinzip Hoffnung [The Principle of Hope]), not least because filmmakers working in television inherited a typically Blochian problem, namely how to revitalize or redeem the progressive potential of apparently retrograde but emotionally still powerful ‘popular’ narrative forms, such as melodrama, the sentimental novellette, boys’ own adventure stories: disciples of Bloch (such as Christian Ziewer) seemed to carry the day over the more hard-line Brechtians (such as Straub and Huillet). Bloch’s writings also represented a more conciliatory stance towards mass entertainment and popular culture than the teachings of Adorno at one end of the radical spectrum, and Brecht’s at the other. Brecht’s own view
of the debate between popular versus proletarian culture was varied. He wrote, for instance: 'The manifestations of the proletariat in the domain of culture, its apprenticeship, its intellectual productivity do not happen on some ground exterior to bourgeois culture. Certain elements are common to both classes.'

The Imaginary and Symbolic as Political Categories?

From a European vantage point, however, the relation between mainstream cinema and the avant-garde in the late 1960s and early 1970s was radically and absolutely antagonistic in both theory and practice. Debates borrowed their metaphors from the vocabulary of the class struggle, and from Third World liberation struggles. After the mid-1970s, it was this very assumption of pure antagonism which came to be questioned. For while Brecht offered a more genuinely political strategy in one kind of battle (that against high modernism aesthetically, and high capitalism economically), his precepts were scrutinised on another front (psychoanalytically inspired film theory). So much so that by the early 1980s Brecht seemed to be a figure who had closed an epoch, even more than he had opened up new perspectives.

In the province of theory, a sign of an impending change was the way writers came to think about the politics of representation. They began to use Lacanian psychoanalysis to displace the Brechtian concepts of 'distanciation' / identification with a different kind of opposition. Lacan's triple system of the subject (the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real) stipulates a necessary connection between these terms, rather than opposition. In fact, attempted to compare the Freudian concept of fetishism to Brecht's notion of 'distanciation', pointing out that distance is not the same as separation, the necessary condition of voyeuristic pleasure: 'identity in separation, the very geometry of [cinematic] representation'.

Following Christian Metz and Jean Louis Baudry, Heath argued that Hollywood exemplifies a cinema ruled by the Imaginary (identification, mirroring, control of and through the image), where pleasure derived from the spectator's illusory discursive mastery over such narrative processes as point of view, camera perspective, and the relative positions of knowledge within the fiction. By analysing the function of narrative in 'centring' the spectator and by investigating how filmic images are encoded according to several kinds of binary logic, these theorists sought to demonstrate the workings of the structures underpinning the effects of the filmic Imaginary, depending as it also seemed on a sexually differentiated opposition between seeing/seen, subject and object of the look. Narrative cin-
ema came under attack, not only because it was identified with the dominant form of (Hollywood) filmmaking, but because it also stood for the master discourse by which meaning was encoded in the 'social text' generally, across a wide field of visual representations, of language, of symbolic action and the spaces of (gendered) intersubjectivity.

The core of the Lacanian-Althusserian critique of traditional Marxist models of false consciousness and the 'revolutionary subject' was to posit a necessary relation between recognition, misrecognition and disavowal, as key to the subject-effects of identity (not: cogito ergo sum, but 'I think where I am not, I am where I do not think'), from which even the class struggle could not escape. Lacan's impact not only on film theory was to lead to a revaluation of the Imaginary as a dimension of political action. In a society of the spectacle, the tactics typical of the Imaginary (deploying the look, the mirror, masquerade and performance) could have a potentially progressive political function, in the form of play, mimicry and 'style', challenging the 'enemy' on his own terrain, by not seeming to challenge him at all, and merely citing and miming his 'style'. Such were the tactics of pop, punk or glitter, in the wake of Andy Warhol or David Bowie. Conversely, Brecht's own critical rationality, and perhaps the entire project of an avant-garde cinema, especially one opposing itself to the 'reactionary' ideology of illusionism, came under scrutiny, in the name of deconstructing or exposing the (hidden) imaginary identifications underpinning certain positions, whether they presented themselves as conservative or as progressive. Furthermore, by questioning the subject positions, which a particular body of knowledge such as Marxism implied, the cultural critique derived from psychoanalysis (often identified with the feminist project) cast doubt on any objectivist position. The Brechtian avant-garde became vulnerable to the charge of implying in its critical practice not only an imaginary subject of enunciation — be it the artist, the filmmaker, or theorist as owner of normative or prescriptive discourses — but also of speaking to an imaginary addressee: the yet to be constituted revolutionary subject. In this respect, Brecht's own strategy had been ambiguous: because the implied spectator of the Brechtian text is invariably the spectator-in-the-know. He (Brecht's spectator is mostly conceived as male) is the ironic spectator, for whom the text provides a complex matrix of comprehensibility based on allusion and intertextuality. The theatre becomes a stage for spectacles of knowledge-effects. But it was this arena of knowledge effects as pleasure effects which the contemporary ('postmodern'), technologically very sophisticated media, such as advertising and television, began increasingly to exploit. A devaluation of once radical techniques and stances, such as Brechtian 'distanciation' was the inevitable consequence. Not only did the media become self-reflexive in recycling their own images and histories. Their self-parodies and inter-textual play made
reflexivity the very sign of a closed, self-referential system, the opposite of Brecht’s ‘open form’ or his concept of realism as contradiction.

**Before your Eyes – Farocki**

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, an oblique dialogue was taking place among German directors around these paradoxes. Oblique because of the indirect (or even suppressed) struggle with the awkward legacy of Brecht’s anti-illusionism and the Frankfurt School’s distrust of images, but also because few filmmakers seemed aware of being in a dialogue at all. Most saw themselves as politically isolated and aesthetically too embattled to engage in a ‘theoretical practice’. The major exception was Harun Farocki, who more explicitly than almost any other filmmaker began to examine the complex reality of images and the subject positions they implied. With his films, a new (sexual) politics of the image and a new critique of political economy entered avant-garde filmmaking in Germany, emphasising the tensions between history and subjectivity. The politics of representation were now defined also as problems of temporality and enunciation (‘here’, ‘now’, ‘you’, ‘me’), around the traumatising but also captivating power of media images and still photographs. An outstanding example of his (self-)interrogation of such images, at once liberating in its radicalism and troubling in the way it makes itself vulnerable to the conflicting tensions between the positions of Brecht and Barthes, between the desire to make political cinema and the knowledge that this takes place in the ‘empire of the sign’, is his film Etwas Wird Sichtbar/Before Your Eyes – Vietnam (1980-1982).

The narrative of *Before Your Eyes – Vietnam* centres on the couple, Anna and Robert. The film chronicles their different phases of living together, their decision to separate and their final brief reunion at the port of Wilhelmshaven, against the background of a common past in the student movement of West Berlin during the late 1960s and early ’70s. At the end, the desire for co-operation which their love initially promised gives way to the melancholy realisation that men and women cannot work together politically: they once more agree to go their separate ways. The couple’s difficulties are, however, present in the film only in a very muted form, insofar as their own central preoccupation is to understand the relation between the personal and the political, dramatised in their anti-Vietnam war protests and their encounter with this war through its media representations. As in some of the films of Marguerite Duras, the love story acts as the fictional support for setting up a dialogical situation which echoes throughout the film and is not confined to the couple. Besides Robert and Anna’s self-questioning, an American psychoanalyst interrogates a Vietcong prisoner about his family background, a North Vietnamese man is talking to a South Vietnamese woman, and the story as a whole is framed by a confrontation in a hotel room between Claire, alias Judy, alias Francesca; and a Mr Jackson, alias Rosenblum, alias Frankson. She is a ‘terrorist’, fighting the US in France, Idaho and Mexico, he is a former SAS member in Algeria, a CIA liaison officer in Vietnam and now a scientist employed by the Pentagon to supervise research programmes at American universities. Their ‘dialogue’ ends with him being killed by her revolver and her being blasted by his razor (see ill. 28). In Duras, the dialogical situation often works towards a stark opposition between a placeless space of feeling (‘love’, ‘desire’, ‘loss’) and a geographical location (‘Empire’, the French colonies), allowing the filmic image to occupy a floating space in-between the ‘timeless’ space of the narrative and the historically specific referent.”

In Farocki, the dialogical structure of *Before Your Eyes – Vietnam* seeks to fix a referent, politically so colonised by discourse that the subjective space always resides being ‘out of place’. Made in 1980, but covering the period between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, the film looks back and shows why ‘Vietnam’ especially in West Germany was such an over-determined political referent, and why the personal could only inscribe itself into this powerful political presence through acts of exchange and substitution, transfers and transformations – in short, through metaphor. Hence the choice of the dialogue form, the aim of which is to disengage from ‘Vietnam’ neither a position of knowledge, such as a politically correct analysis of the war and its aftermath, nor a personal truth, which would allow the protagonists to put their own experience retrospectively ‘into perspective’. Instead, the love story connotes (as the plot synopsis has already indicated) a perpetual movement of joining and separating (until the final ‘severing’ of ties on a drawbridge that is slowly opening), governed by a dynamic of couple-dom to which Lacan’s ‘you never speak from where I listen’ might apply. The Vietnam war becomes a ‘model’, a master-trope of how to represent any number of conflicts and encounters between two radically non-aligned, asynchronous, asymmetrical entities. Starting from the imbalance of forces between the US and Vietnam as countries and military powers, the film investigates similar non-equivalences among temporalities (now/then), productive relations (mental work/manual work), types of warfare (army/guerrilla), subjectivities (men/women), and cinematic signifiers (sounds/images).

Telling its tale as a story-within-a-story-within-a-story, of different couples, of different partners in dialogue, of different pairs of antagonists and enemies, *Before Your Eyes – Vietnam* is constructed like a hall of mirrors, but also
shifts laterally, along a series of metaphoric-metonymic substitutions. At a certain point, during the visit to a gallery showing war correspondents’ pictures from Vietnam, one of the images literally becomes a mirror and the mirror, appropriately placed, becomes an image (see ill. 23). Ostensibly, Farocki makes the central characters confront a biographical as well as a political past, interrogating images supposedly referring to a reality ‘out there’ that reveal themselves to have a reality ‘in here’. At another level (the mirror-phase of radical politics, so to speak), he takes the still photographs in the exhibition as emblems for an investigation of the new role of the imaginary in politics. ‘It started with these images’, Anna comments, after leaving the exhibition. What this ‘it’ is becomes clearer as the story unfolds: she attributes her commitment to the anti-war cause to the images, which made her a militant and an urban guerrilla:

When I worked as a typist in an office in 1966, I first saw them [in the papers] and it was for their sake that I wanted to change my life. I wanted to be a partisan. At the office I tried to work conscientiously and listen attentively so that when the time came no one would remember my face.”

The photographs remind her of her own place in several distinct social realities and roles, hinting at their incompatibility. What follows is a narrative entirely given to uncovering the splits and divisions between conflicting and coexisting identities: of office girl and militant, of Western Marxism and Third World liberation movements, of socialism and feminism, of 1960s utopian optimism and 1980s pragmatic disillusionment. However, unlike mainstream films where similarly disparate sets of oppositions would be lined up in a single story-space, and moved forward by the logic of repetition and resolution towards some form of closure, BEFORE YOUR EYES – VIETNAM takes as its central theme the fundamental irreconcilability of story-space, subject-position and the political referents that are in play. So disturbing, enigmatic and yet familiar are the images seen on television, in the newspapers, or in the gallery to Anna that instead of confirming her identity as spectator, and giving her mastery over her role as activist and ‘partisan’, they make the very idea of identity and action problematic: not only to herself, but to others, too, notably to her lover and to the political commune that has become her surrogate family. The images made her a militant, but the images also make her question the meaning of militancy.

For Farocki, to make a film about the war in Vietnam is to make a film about the images of Vietnam. And to make it about Vietnam images in Berlin and West Germany: Thus the characters in BEFORE YOUR EYES – VIETNAM look at the photos not only for what they show; their significance is the place and time in which they were encountered:

I used to distribute handbills with this picture on them. Underneath we had written a text, which demanded the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam. In the street people swore at me and made threatening gestures [...] On the underground train going home they read the evening papers. And maybe they saw this other picture, with the caption ‘In South Vietnam, Communists are committing atrocities’. The images were so close together. We pointed at one and said ‘Americans out!’; they pointed at the other saying ‘Vietcong out!’ It was like advertising, competing as to who could show the more appalling atrocities. I felt ashamed.

Time and place not only create the context. They constitute the images’ main indexical relation to the ‘reality’ they depict, the temporal relations implying an enunciative position for the speaking subject (me/you, now/then). Perhaps the imaginary dimension of public affect (‘I felt ashamed’) is a sign that the power of the images is not of the order of truth, but that it exceeds the ability of language – the symbolic – to assign to them a fixed place in discourse. The new political battlefield, as Godard had already shown, was in the relationship between image and word, or as Farocki’s characters put it: a caption to a photo may be correct but what it says is nonetheless not true, for ‘what matters is not what is on the picture, rather what lies behind it. And yet we are showing pictures to prove something that cannot be proven.’

The terms of this exchange return us once more to Brecht. They recall his well-known remarks, also quoted by Walter Benjamin, to the effect that a photograph of a Siemens, Krupp or AEG factory does not tell us anything about capitalism and its sites of industrial production, because ‘reality has slipped into the realm of functions and cannot be grasped as appearance’, Brecht’s opposition between function and appearance still assumes the belief in a position of knowledge ‘outside’ the image from which its truth can be judged. Several of Farocki’s earlier films were also a form of practical engagement with Brecht’s assertion, notably BETWEEN TWO WARS, which probes the political reality behind certain ‘images’ that have come down to us from the history of the German working class and its industrial struggles. Another one was a television documentary, called INDUSTRY AND PHOTOGRAPHY, made in the same year that Farocki completed BETWEEN TWO WARS (1978). It was compiled from material he collected during location research for the full-length film and acknowledges the photographs made by Bernd and Hilla Becher of the Ruhr Industrial Area in the 1960s and 70s (see ill. 16). Reversing Brecht’s dictum, while still staying within the same political perspective of what exactly it is that images can tell us about the power relations in society, INDUSTRY AND PHOTOGRAPHY is a form of archaeology that investigates the different meanings contained in photographs taken at factory sites and industrial installations:
Most of the images [...] are private photos, images from advertising, images that look like painted still-lifes. The film 'reads' these images in order to talk about labour and photography [...] how for instance collieries are both useful constructions and works of architecture, sites of work and signs that want to be looked at."

In his rejection of photography as a means of understanding social relations, Brecht took for granted the convergence of a class position with a position of knowledge. It is precisely at this point that Farocki's commentary intervenes. The viewer becomes aware of the non-convergence of class and gender, of knowledge and subjectivity, of discursive mastery and personal emancipation. Posing the question of history in the subject and of the subject in history, Farocki chooses an archaeological — along with a semiological — approach to images, making a distinction between the 'sign' and the 'site', the latter always present in the photograph as a surplus or an excess. Brecht notwithstanding, the film gives the images a 'history' — even if this history is a history only of the looks the images have been able to attract. Of these looks, Farocki's documentary wants to be the story, no less than his feature film about the images of Vietnam is the documentary of the looks cast on them by two people who seek in them a mirror-image of themselves.

In this sense, INDUSTRY AND PHOTOGRAPHY and BEFORE YOUR EYES — VIETNAM are reminiscent of Godard in their dialogical interplay of image and voice, but they also go beyond, say, LETTER TO JANE (1972), where the director's voice-off addresses, interrogates and even harasses Jane Fonda, his star from TOUT VA BIEN (1972), shown in the famous press photograph taken of her in Hanoi. Farocki, who has also at times chosen the single news photo as pre-text, makes sure that when 'reading the image' the filmmaker, too, suspends his illusion of mastery. In INDUSTRY AND PHOTOGRAPHY, through his commentary, he retraces the very division between the iconic-indexical and the discursive-constructed in photography, pointing to the divisions in the (speaking and viewing) subject itself. These insights, though, are not presented in a psychoanalytic vocabulary. Instead, Farocki confronts the viewer with his/her bodily limits when entering the technological space of post-industrial society, demanding a different kind of visuality:

Cameras are built to accommodate the gaze of a human eye. But heavy industry accomplishes work, which cannot be surveyed by a human eye. Industry extends the labour process over vast distances and at the same time concentrates and joins the work of many different sites of production. A gigantic organism, at once beyond vision and of somnambulist precision. How can one grasp this with images? Ought there not to be images that do not fit into households, nor on walls, into pockets, or illustrated books? And on no retina?"

Farocki's provocative final question leads directly to a speculation about what gaze might be inscribed in an image, and to whom it is addressed, once neither the retina nor the image are conceived as stand-ins for a subject-object duality governing the relations between spectator and image. One might even go so far as to suggest that the specific epistemological change that the cinema poses for the Cartesian subject is precisely this: that consciousness can no longer be defined within any form of a traditional subject-object division, any more than within the mind-body-eye split of the camera obscura.

Body, Image, and Voice

Many of the issues of political cinema after Brecht thus turned on the relation of 'who looks' and 'who speaks', and on the traces which these marks of enunciation leave on the filmic discourse. Nowhere is this more acutely evident than in the question of the voice-over, or the voice-off, a frequent feature of many German auteur, avant-garde and documentary films in general, with Farocki's films being no exception. Non-fiction films and especially documentaries made for television rarely exist without a voice-over, which often presumes a hierarchy of knowledge in favour of the spoken word, indicated by the generic term 'voice of God' documentary.

This symbolic order of The Word needed to be deconstructed. Separation of sound and image became one of the key features of avant-garde practice in the 1970s, challenging in the first instance the normative practices of Hollywood's carefully matched synchronicities of body, voice, and image. But this counter-strategy, foregrounding the constructed nature of the sound-image alignment, became more problematic for directors working in television. There, such a split assumed a different political significance, if only because television itself has largely deconstructed and reworked the relation of sound and image of classical film. Sound motivates, focalises and cues the images on television in a way that both emphasises the material difference of the respective source, and precludes this heterogeneity from playing an oppositional role. The voice of God rules. As a result, television can tolerate the coexistence of several quite distinct diegetic spaces. Whether present through voice only, or through the image joined to sound-off, as in a reportage or news bulletin that combines studio presentation with on-location footage, such a multiple diegesis does not challenge the impression of coherence of the discourse. On the contrary, the heterogeneity of the sources actually consolidates an illusion of control and authority that the referent ('the live broadcast') has over the image — com-
parable to and yet distinct from the power of the voice-over in observational documentary or instructional films.

The German avant-garde cinema of the 1980s differed from French filmmakers like Godard, Duras, and Marker, not least because of a closer proximity to this documentary tradition, to which television (and its funding) had given a new lease of life. The question of separation of voice and image, so central to these French directors, was in Germany discussed in the context of the political-didactic function of voice-over commentary, or the strategies of the filmed interview when structuring a political cinema around long-term observation and an aesthetic of realism. Berlin filmmakers like Farocki or his erstwhile collaborator, Hartmut Bitomsky, had to define themselves against these documentary tendencies, taught and practised at the Berlin Film Academy, and represented by figures like Peter Nestler, Klaus Wilkenhahn and Gisela Tuchtenhagen, who made documentaries in the style of Fred Wiseman, without any commentary whatsoever. But they also had to differentiate themselves from Alexander Kluge, whose sometimes didactic, sometimes ironic but always insistent editorialising of his images was regarded by many as schoolmasterly and patronising.

This debate over documentary was in Germany one of the liveliest and theoretically most astute anywhere. For instance, it was not unusual during the 1970s to find in Filmkritik, the journal then co-edited by Farocki, discussions of Joris Ivens’ and Alain Resnais’ or Georges Franju’s documentaries, articles on Kracauer’s theories of realism, or on Jean Rouch, next to very full dossiers on the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. The question of which filmmaker to support was a matter of substance for Filmkritik, but the journal’s deceptive eclecticism might have made it easy for the casual reader to overlook the significance of a passing comment on Jean Rouch which appeared in an essay ranging quite generally over film aesthetics that appeared in the early 1980s. Citing PETIT A PETIT (1969), the film Rouch made of a young Senegalese coming to Paris, in order to conduct ethnographic studies on the French, the author finds that:

[T]he illuminating wit of the reversal of roles vanished completely the moment I became aware with a sudden shock that the young black has no other function in the film than to beat out of the bush and drive into the open the game that hunter Rouch is ready to shoot with his camera.

This attack on the unexamined power relations in the enunciative strategies of one of the pioneers of ethnographic films was indicative of quite a dramatic shift away from the prevailing practices of political documentary (which favoured the ethnographic approach) in Germany in the 1970s. But it also took its distance from those filmmakers whose economic and artistic survival at the margins of television largely depended on the didactic or sometimes ‘poetic’ use of off-screen narration. It meant that those holding such uncompromising views as expressed in Filmkritik about Rouch would find it hard to get work from the commissioning editors. The same article, for instance, mentions a television documentary about the monitoring of the ecological balance in a bird sanctuary. As the author notes, with the sound turned off, however well-intended by the makers, the images only register the creatures’ fear, the gestures of aggression of the ornithologists, and the mechanical handling of the birds as they are captured, ringed, and measured. The question was which to trust: the voice-over commentary or the image? If one believes the image one may become victim of the naive anthropomorphism characteristic of wildlife documentaries. If one privileges the soundtrack, what exactly is the function of the images?

The positions of Filmkritik and of other participants in the debate about documentary would thus furnish one important context for Farocki’s own practice of the ‘essay film’, of which the interplay of commentary and image forms such a key characteristic. What Farocki & Cie achieved by their subtle and complex strategies of allowing sound, voice, and image their autonomy was to emphasise the power relations normally hidden in television as well as in ‘independent’ documentaries. Giving shape to several worlds within the film simultaneously, they opened up spaces of reflection and critical engagement, without creating the illusion of spatio-temporal unity, or of ‘voice of God’ omniscience – and this despite the impression that Farocki’s films give, thanks to the quality of the writing in the commentary, of favouring the soundtrack as the locus of narrative authority. The political aspect of this avant-garde practice was that it maintains a material coherence at the level of production (such as Straub-Huillet’s rule of filming only with synch-sound for instance). The conceptual and semantic coherence then becomes the viewers’ task: joining sound and image, staying alert to the inherent ironies and mismatches, finding for themselves the connection between the movement of the ideas of the commentary and the movement of the images.

**Guerrilla versus Terrorist, Margins and Centres of the Visible**

With this debate about ‘seeing with one’s ears, listening with one’s eyes’ in mind, we can now approach another theme prominent in Before Your Eyes – Vietnam. Farocki’s film is literally called ‘Something is Becoming Visible’ and in this respect is crucially concerned with the tension between ‘visibility’ and
'representability'. At first, it may seem that the narrative is mainly treating the relations between representation and visibility as antagonistic. But by adding to the voice-image dialectic the question of the body and the subject implicit in the cinema's technological and discursive apparatus, Farocki makes it clear that in the sphere of photographs and media images a more complex relation holds between the viewing subject and representation. Interpellated by public images, individuals respond in very different ways. As Anna notes, pictures from Vietnam make militants, but pictures from Vietnam also 'de-politicise' militants (see ill. 31). How to understand this paradox? Caught in the Imaginary of the image, and thus confronted with their own reveries or fantasies, subjects try to 'represent' themselves to themselves across discourses that secure them once more a place in the Symbolic. It is as if Marxism and feminism played a double role in the formation of these political subjects. Whatever their emancipatory intent, the discourses do not so much help us 'read' these images and assign them a meaning; rather, they allow us to repossess as 'representation' what escapes or overwhelms as/ in the 'image'. But therein also lies the danger: the excessiveness of the image invites fetishistic fascination, or gets instrumentalised through propaganda.

In our culture, images are given too little significance. Images are appropriated and put into service. One investigates images to obtain information, and then only the information that can be expressed in words or numbers. Incidentally, I think that noises are even less studied than images. In Vietnam, I learnt to listen to noises; though one has to be careful that somebody doesn't come along and turn them into music.

Before Your Eyes – Vietnam is haunted by images as representations, and is in constant search for images that exceed their instrumentalisation. It shows the public images from Vietnam, which Robert and Anna investigate, analyse, interpret, remember, place, discuss and generalise from, just to keep meaning at bay: a G.I. lying flat on the ground listening with a stethoscope for underground tunnels (see ill. 24); the execution by the chief of police of a Vietcong prisoner in a Saigon street; an overturned bicycle used by a Vietcong soldier as a power generator for a light bulb. As if to exorcise them, the film even enacts them, has them staged by actors (see ill. 26). As the couple looks at the all too familiar pictures and sees themselves in the mirror, Robert says: 'It's like a trailer for a war film: An exciting love story against the background of war and genocide', to which Anna replies: 'It looks so obscene, because we are unharmed'. In these pictures the victims are all bloody but the aggressors are all unharmed'. Thus, visibility produced by the media exceeds representation only at the price of generating that fantastic interplication of the subject, which Robert associates with Hollywood, and Anna calls 'obscene'. On the other hand, visibility must exceed representation, in order to make political action possible. The former CIA agent puts it most succinctly:

Ten years ago (i.e., in 1960) nobody knew where Vietnam was. Vietnam only became visible through the war [...]. How good it sounds to be against war. War is above all an experiment. An experiment with research objectives which cannot be formulated in advance. Where did you get your knowledge about Vietnam? Most likely from a book like Strategy for Survival, financed by the CIA and with a preface by Henry Kissinger. In this war, Vietnam represented itself most splendidly. And it is American science that brought this out. Why plough a field? So that the surface gets larger. American bombs have ploughed Vietnam and it became larger and more visible.

The two opposing factions of the armed conflict are thus paradoxically united by their common effort towards mobilising, not only their soldiers and weaponry, but also their respective means of representation. Located between the clandestine underground of its local resistance fighters and the hyper-visibility of (mostly) American television and photo-journalism, the Vietnam War proved to be a watershed. As a media war, as well as a liberation struggle, it challenged the meaning of territory, by creating the 'terrorist' alongside the 'guerrilla': where the latter hides in the bush, vanishes in the undergrowth, camouflage himself into invisibility, the former has to make a pact with visibility and spectacle. In order to be effective, the terrorist has to be visible, but in order to be 'visible' among so many images, his actions have to exceed the order of representations, while nonetheless engaging 'the enemy' on the territory of representation. Political actions attain credibility and the 'truth of the image', it seems, by passing through the processes of intense specularisation, with the contradictory effect that in order to become recognisable as political, events have to be staged as spectacle, which seems to depoliticise them, as noted by Anna. Any terrain outside visual discourses and narrative 'emplacements' becomes unseen and unthinkable, and therefore non-existent.

Anna's paradox, then, hints at one of the double binds of terrorist action, as Jean Baudrillard was also to point out. Visibility for him signals terrorism's collusion with the Imaginary: the politics of the Red Brigades in Italy in the 1970s or those of the German Red Army Fraction both now almost exclusively associated with the kidnapping and subsequently the killing of Aldo Moro and Hans Martin Schleyer) were as 'obscene' in their violence and as exhibitionism in their relation to the regimes of the visible, as the counter-moves on the part of the authorities risked being politically reprehensible and legally indefensible. The war in Vietnam from this perspective was fought on both sides as a battle for the control of enemy territory only in order to produce for the world at large images of such horror and fascination as might transgress the limits of the imaginable itself. With some of these images, international politics
had succumbed not only to a movie scenario, but to one where superpowers and ‘terrorists’ alike used violence in order to create images, and used these images in order to send ‘messages’.

A reversal could thus be noted in the relation of event to filmic scene such as had already been predicted by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1910, in his short story *Un Beau Film* where a crime is committed solely in order to film it. What in Apollinaire is the gesture of an aristocratic dandy may, in the politics of marginality — whether Palestinian, Vietnamese, or in Northern Ireland — be perceived as the last resort (regardless of how suicidal it may prove to be), in a situation where the state, politics, and the symbolic order are manifest only through their own Imaginary, i.e., in the discourses of power and knowledge conveyed by the media and television.

**Images beyond the Imaginary: Separating and Joining**

Such are the slippages that Farocki, too, probes with his dialogical form, with a lovers’ discourse no less, to paraphrase Barthes. But dialogue not only joins; it separates even where it seems to join, for instance, when men and women experience their dialogue as irremediably asymmetrical (see ill. 30). Illustrating a fundamental principle of cinematic signification — separating and joining, in short: montage — Farocki in *Before Your Eyes — Vietnam* tests its viability for locating the point at which the private and public, the personal, and the political might intersect:

Robert: Why, when lovers embrace do they fall silent and when they start to think or speak, they disengage from the embrace? Or worse still: two lovers talk. When they run out of ideas they embrace. But to join love with politics that would mean doing both simultaneously.

Anna: No, you cannot put it this way. Two lovers embrace silently and it is like a conversation. Or they stand far apart and speak to each other, and it is like an embrace.

The various forms of discontinuity in the articulation of space and time, the doublings and displacements with regard to character and place, the asynchronicity of sound and image are in *Before Your Eyes — Vietnam* directly related to a master dialectic. The dialectic is that of joining and separating and it forms the hinge on which the political strategies of the film and its theoretical reflections turn. The beginning of an investigation is when one joins two ideas, but at the end one has to isolate an idea, take it out of its context’, Judy/Claire says to Jackson/Rosenblum. Later on, Robert remarks: ‘In 1972 we wanted to connect everything with everything else. To which Anna’s new man Michael later replies: ‘You have to keep things separate. Two things can lie closely together, and each can be regarded separately. Or they are kept far apart and nonetheless closely refer to each other’. But Anna protests:

Keep things separate, but how? First the Vietnamese children, torn to shreds by American bombs. Then the mountains of bodies in Cambodia all with their skulls smashed. Then the stinking boats with Vietnamese refugees [—]. You call this keeping things separate, but I would rather draw a line. In 1977, I wanted to draw a line and sever all connections.

If the political problem of the film is how to learn from the experience of Vietnam, how to extract from its images a model for action also for one’s personal life, then the theoretical problem Farocki keeps returning to is montage and metaphor. As Robert notes at one point: ‘One has to replace the images of Vietnam with images from here; express Vietnam through us’. The narrative endorses this as a necessary move, yet such a joining of two distinct referents via images, such a move to express one entity through another, assumes as equivalent what is in fact incommensurate. Politically, metaphorical thinking is criticised in the film because the Vietnam experience teaches that concepts such as struggle and resistance, in order to be effective, have to be thought differently, as a relational dynamic of non-equivalent entities, such as strong and weak, machine and tool, centre and margin, the visible and the representable. Joining these terms (montage) also marks the limits of their substitution (metaphor). This is why the film ultimately argues for the local, the irreducible *thereeness* and separateness of its discrete elements. Every move anticipates its counter-move, and *Before Your Eyes — Vietnam* is careful not to cede too much territory to rhetoric and metaphor. Seemingly taking Godard’s dictum of the ‘two or three Vietnamese’ literally, Farocki nonetheless treads lightly among the analogies he has set up between his filmmaking practice and the liberation struggles of the third world. Aware of its marginality, the film tries to conceptualise its relation to ‘dominance’ as a mobile field of differently calibrated forces. It is a film of the 1980s because it carefully disentangles itself from the 1970s counter-strategies of struggle and resistance, while sensing its way towards another kind of (still Brechtian/Brethian again?) tactical interventionism. The guerrilla soldier, we learn, is superior to the professional soldier because of his different relation to both time and space; he withdraws from place, to make himself invisible; he withdraws from time, to tire out the enemy. But how to deal with the politics of spectacle, the ‘terrorist’ side of tactical guerrilla warfare? Farocki gives no straightforward answer, but in *Before Your Eyes — Vietnam*, at least, he shows himself more courageous than most filmmakers who began by rejecting all forms of seduction through the image.
So thoroughly does he investigate the imaginary cinema, so deeply does he enter into the contradictions of representation and visibility, that in Before Your Eyes—Vietnam he practices, to borrow a term from Paul Virilio, an 'aesthetics of disappearance'. It gives to his sounds and images, so apparently minimalist and restrained, a sensuousness of thought and clarity of voice to which one is tempted to apply the words of Stéphane Mallarmé who, speaking of flowers made of words, found in them a scent that was 'absent from all bouquets'.

Notes

1. Parts of this essay were first published in Discourse no. 7, Autumn 1985, pp. 95-120. In its present form, it appeared in German in Rolf Aurich, Ulrich Kriest (eds.), Der Ärger mit den Bildern: Die Filme von Harun Farocki: (Konstanz: UVK-Close Up, 1998), pp. 111-144.


5. For a more extended discussion of Brecht's influence on modern cinema, see Martin Walsh, The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema (London: British Film Institute, 1979), and James Roy MacBean, Film and Revolution (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1975).


8. More detailed examples can be found in Hans Bernhard Moeller, 'Brecht and "Epic" Film Medium' (Wide Angle, vol. 5 no. 4, 1979), pp. 4-11.


10. The terms are used in Peter Wollen, 'Godard and Counter Cinema - Vent d'Est' Afterimage 4 (Autumn 1972), Laura Mulvey (see note 19), and Colin McCabe, 'Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure', Screen vol. 17 no. 3 (Autumn 1976).


19. To paraphrase Laura Mulvey's famous formula from 'Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure', Screen vol. 15 no. 3, 1975/6, pp. 6-18.


21. One could cite Marguerite Duras' India Song, where the images neither enact nor represent nor even seek to contain the play of historical and geographical referents that the text evokes.

22. All quotations from ETWAS WIRD SICHTBAR are taken from a dialogue transcript in German, supplied by the filmmaker.


25. Brecht: 'The dominant ideas of the age are usually the ideas of those who dominate'. But as a Marxist he was also convinced that the proletariat alone had access to ideas that were 'true'.

26. Godard, in Letter to Jane, uses his voice-over to 'master' the photograph. His commentary works over the image, analyses its visual composition, contrasts this with the caption, which practices a reversal of active and passive in the verbal coding of the picture for Western consumption and locates the function of the star-image in politics of which Jane Fonda had become the icon.

27. Industrie und Fotographie, programme note.


29. But see Farocki's defence of Kluge's voice and voice-over in the interview 'Making the World Superfluous', in this volume.

30. For a discussion of the various positions, see my New German Cinema, A History, pp. 162-206.


