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Rethinking the City Symphony after the Age of Industry : Harun Farocki and the 'City Film'

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[See table of contents](#)

Article abstract

Harun Farocki's films and installation works have often revisited the question—central to the history of experimental filmmaking—of the city and its representability. Focusing on Farocki's recent installation *Gegen-Musik*, this article explores his efforts to reconfigure the genre of the *Stadtsinfonie* (city symphony) for a post-industrial era. To the difference of other recent efforts to renew modernist strategies for representing the city, Farocki interrogates the possibility of such a genre in an era characterized by the marginalization of human labor, industry and the image itself.

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Rethinking the City Symphony after the Age of Industry: Harun Farocki and the ‘City Film’

MICHAEL COWAN

69

“A process of human self-abolition is underway.”¹

If, as Thomas Elsaesser has written, the history of cinema appears in Farocki’s work as a “brief lease” between a prehistory of image-fabrication and a post-history of audio-visual control technologies, perhaps the specificity of Farocki’s treatment of the subject lies in his relentless interrogation of the relations between the marginalization of film today and other forms of historical obsolescence: namely that of the working body and, more specifically, the eye, along with images made by and for human eyes.² As Farocki put it in one interview (also with Thomas Elsaesser) from 1993, the eye, like the hand,

is no longer essential to the production process. Film and television images have a simple function: to keep our eyes alert and moving, similar to having to exercise horses when they’re not out working. If you compare this to the field of manual labour, it is the same: more and more automation, also in the field of vision. This branch of working with images that I am in is about as modern as Muybridge’s experiments with recording a galloping horse’s movement.³

1. Harun Farocki and Thomas Elsaesser, “Making the World Superfluous: An Interview with Harun Farocki,” in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2004, p. 185.

2. Thomas Elsaesser, “Harun Farocki. Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist.” in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 11 sq.

3. Thomas Elsaesser and Harun Farocki, “Making the World Superfluous,” p. 183. Images for human eyes, Farocki goes on to suggest, are like athletics for feet and hands that no longer participate in the production process: an occupation for human bodies rendered obsolete in an epoch in which work can increasingly do without the help of people.

Farocki's comments about the horse point back specifically, I believe, to his 1986 essay film *Wie man sieht* (*As you See*), where the narrator makes the same comparison between the horse and the eye as we are shown a photograph of a dead horse lying next to a tank on a WWI battlefield. [fig. 1] "Images," the narrator states there, "don't want to mean anything. They only offer movement for the eye, like gestures you make at horses who aren't working and aren't free." An outmoded form of labor and transportation in an age of mechanized warfare, the horse forms one of the many objects, bodies and paths discarded by technological development, and whose superfluosity—along with the ascendancy of other forms of technology—finds its historical verification in warfare. At the same time, as suggested by Farocki's own reference above to Eadweard Muybridge's famous chronophotographic shots of the galloping horse from 1878, the dead horse in *Wie man sieht* can also be read as a metaphor for the cinema itself—indeed, as one of the many references, in Farocki's films, writings and installations, to the incompatibility of film's sensuous images with the increasing abstraction of technological operations. Among other things, *Wie man sieht* deals with the impossibility of adequately filming the battles of WWI. But this concern with film's inadequacy also applies to other areas, most notably to the factory, as Farocki has explored in his 1978 film *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* (*Between Two Wars*) and the more recent *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* (*Workers Leaving the Factory*).⁴

For its part, *Wie man sieht* offers an extended reflection on the parallel between the growing obsolescence of human labor and that of sensuous images. Among the film's many threads, it retraces the history of technology as a trajectory involving the gradual exclusion of human organs from the work process. Whereas

4. In a text written to accompany *Workers Leaving the Factory*, Farocki writes that the factory already surpassed cinema's capacities as a visual medium: "Over the last century virtually none of the communications that took place in factories, whether through words, glances, or gestures, was recorded on film. Cameras and projectors are essentially mechanical inventions, and by 1895, the heyday of mechanical inventions had passed. The technical processes which were emerging at the time—chemistry and electricity—were almost inaccessible to visual understanding. The reality that was based on these methods was hardly ever characterized by visible movement. [...] This addiction to motion is increasingly running out of material, a phenomenon that could lead to the self-destruction of cinema." Harun Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory," in *Harun Farocki. Working at the Sight-Lines*, p. 238. On this point, see also Ulrich Kleist, "'Freiheit, die Lohnarbeit heißt': Spuren suchen, Bilder lesen, Filmgeschichte dekonstruieren. Zu *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*." in Rolf Aurich and Ulrich Kriest (eds.), *Der Ärger mit den Bildern. Die Filme von Harun Farocki*. Konstanz, Uvk, 1998, p. 300-301.



Fig. 1: Harun Farocki, *Wie man sieht/As you See*, 1986.

industrialization brought about the demise of traditional footwork and handicrafts, computer technology threatens to erase what tasks are left for the sensory organs—and most centrally the eye—as monitors of mechanized production. “The machine,” we hear at one point, “makes the worker’s job easier, but the worker is still needed [...] His eyes, ears and even nose are needed for monitoring.” Later, however, we learn that, with the automation of production through computers, “the eye, ear and nose of the worker [are] no longer necessary.”⁵ Parallel to this exclusion of the human sensory organs from the production process, *Wie man sieht* also includes an extended reflection on the gradual replacement of sensuous images by what Farocki calls “Rechnen”: i.e., calculations, computer processing and digital technology. “Nothing,” the narrator states, “has done more to marginalize the image than computing [*Nichts hat das Bild so sehr an den Rand gedrängt wie das Rechnen*].” Thus where technology still produces sensuous images, these have at best an anachronistic effect, like the giant picture that Joseph Marie Jacquard had woven of himself just after inventing the first mechanized weaving loom. Or worse, images assume a deceptive function, like the centerfold or the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, both designed to make viewers believe that media

5. Elsewhere the narrator states: “The worker who prepares and monitors is now faced with extinction since the machines have been connected to computers.”

communications and war still have something to do with human individuals and their stories.⁶

In what follows, I will consider how this question of the relation between sensuous images and the increasing invisibility of technological processes informs another of Farocki's investigations into the historicity of the cinema: namely his engagement with what he calls the "city film" genre of the 1920s in his 2004 installation *Gegen-Musik* (*Counter-Music*).⁷ Before turning to the installation, however, I want to linger for a moment on *Wie man sieht*, which also includes a reflection on the relation between images and cities. There, Farocki broaches the question of urban representation right at the beginning of the film when he introduces the Egyptian hieroglyph for "city." [fig. 2a] Depicting the emergence of urban space from crossroads in its two intersecting lines, the hieroglyph evokes all sorts of unrealized historical possibilities. It points, first of all, to a different use of public space from that of the dominant instrumental economic and military logic documented in *Wie man sieht*. Although merchants and armies have sought out urban crossroads for their strategic vantage points as centers of control and profit, the traveler, we learn, might have taken a different, less instrumental approach, pausing to contemplate the various possible trajectories of the crossing paths. As a map of Europe appears overlain with migratory routes, the narrator thus imagines another history of European cities: "It is nice to imagine the traveler stopping at the crossroads to envision other possible trajectories and destinations. The city arises from this act of pausing and contemplating."⁸

But if the hieroglyph evokes another possible emergence of cities, it also points back once again to the emergence of the cinema and the aspirations attached to the new medium in its early years. Indeed, few other metaphors were so bound up as the hieroglyph with the dream of early film theorists to find in

6. The centerfold, like the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, is designed to give the semblance of a human face to processes completely given over to abstract calculation: "Man hat den unbekannten Soldaten erfunden, damit der Krieg wie eine Tat erscheinen kann. Eine Tat ohne Namen gibt es nicht. Jeder Soldat kann sagen, ich habe den unbekannten Soldaten getötet. Auch die Mädchen dieser Zeitschrift bekommen einen Namen. Der Benutzer dieser Zeitschrift mag sich vorstellen mit dem Mädchen zu schlafen, und damit das wie eine Tat erscheint, bekomme das Mädchen einen Namen."

7. Harun Farocki, "Contre-chant," *La ville qui fait signes*, Paris, Éditions du Monieur, 2004, p. 106.

8. My translation of the German original: "Eine schöne Vorstellung: Der Reisende hält an der Kreuzung, um sich die möglichen anderen Ziele und Herkünfte zu gegenwärtigen. Aus diesem Innehalten und Vergegenwärtigen entsteht die Stadt."

the cinema a new universal language of picture writing, whose sensuous immediacy would overcome the abstract intellectualism of the Gutenberg age.⁹ While Farocki's work shows no such faith in the evidentiary immediacy of pictures, the hieroglyph in *Wie man sieht* does still function as a metaphor for the cinema: namely as a metaphor for experimental filmmaking, where the filmmaker, like the traveler, pauses and lingers over images in order to try out different contexts, connections and ways of seeing or understanding.¹⁰

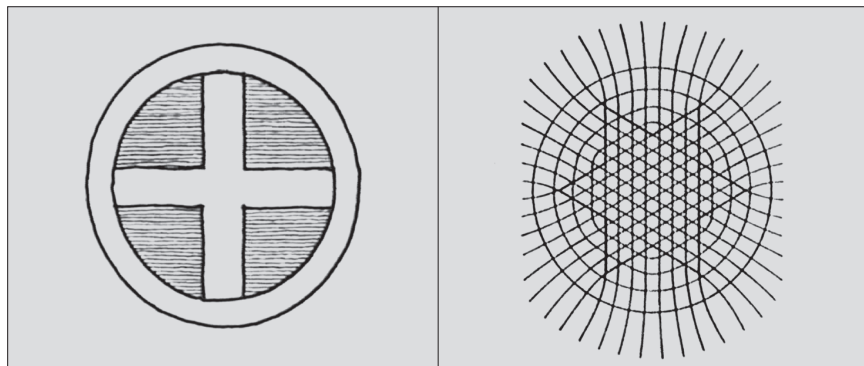


Fig. 2a, 2b: Harun Farocki, *Wie man sieht/As you See*, 1986, détails.

As a possible founding gesture of cities, the traveler's contemplative pause constitutes one of the many paths *not* taken in *Wie man sieht*, and Farocki's history of technology will suggest how such lingering has been discouraged through the rationalization of junctures in any number of domains, from highway overpasses to the standardized bindings of mechanized weaving. Designed to compel circulation, this rationalization of junctures discourages the kind of lingering that might allow for critical contemplation of images. In terms of media history, this process goes hand in hand with the replacement of images for the eye by invisible calculations. One can see this in another drawing from *Wie man sieht* that functions, I think, as a counterpart to that of the hieroglyph: a sketch of the ideal city by Konrad Zuse. [fig. 2b] Unlike the hieroglyph, Zuse's sketch no longer embodies any desire to produce an image for human eyes, but rather—

9. See for example Lindsay Vachel, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, New York, Liveright, 1970, p. 199-217.

10. See Jörg Becker, "In Bildern denken. Lektüren des Sichtbaren. Überlegungen zum Essayistischen in Filmen Harun Farockis," in *Der Ärger mit den Bildern*, p. 75, p. 92-93.

like the use of clothoid curves to facilitate higher speeds on motorways—results from abstract numerical operations, the lines representing streets calculated to cross at precise 60° angles. Farocki tells us that Zuse's sketch was in fact inspired by film, and specifically by Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), itself an attempt to represent the increasingly unimaginable workings of cities in the medium of picture writing. The connection here is not without irony, given the ardency with which Lang himself had subscribed to the notion of film's humanistic calling as a universal language of images.¹¹ But although inspired by film, Zuse's sketch goes beyond the power of the image in its abstract quality. While Zuse did not become a city planner, neither did he go into film; rather, Farocki reminds us, he is known today as the inventor of the first computer, which, like Jacquard's loom, was operated by the invisible calculations of perforated cards. Thus where the hieroglyph provided an icon of the aspirations for a humanist cinema by early film theorists, Zuse's sketch stands as the harbinger of new media technologies, in which the work of the eye is increasingly marginalized by abstract calculations.

Zuse's sketch also portends the increasing unpicturability of cities today. This question of picturability forms one of the central stakes in Farocki's installation *Gegen-Musik*. Completed in 2004 and focusing on the French city of Lille, *Gegen-Musik* coincided with a large number of updates and "remakes" of the city-symphony or cross-cut city film genre in the wake of European unification, a tendency most evident in Berlin films such as Hubertus Siegert's 2001 *Berlin Babylon* and Thomas Schad's remake of Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: the Symphony of a Great City*) in 2002. Unlike these other projects, however, Farocki's "remake" seeks less to apply the genre of the city-symphony to post-industrial cities, than to pose a *question* about that genre's applicability today.¹² Juxtaposing historical footage from Ruttmann's Berlin film and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (Chelovek s kino-apparatom, 1929) to video and digital images taken from the network of surveillance cameras regulating the city's operations today, *Gegen-Musik* interrogates the relation between

11. As he described it in an article written to coincide with the premiere of *Metropolis*: "Through the mute speech of its moving images, in a language that is equally comprehensible in all hemispheres, film can make an honest contribution to repairing the chaos that has prevented nations from seeing each other as they really are ever since the Tower of Babel." Fritz Lang, "Ausblick auf Morgen. Zum Pariser Kongress", *Lichtbild-Bühne*, trans. Sara Hall, 19, n° 229, September 25, 1926, p. 2 (unpublished manuscript).

12. In a text written to accompany the installation, Farocki himself placed quotations around the term "remake": "I too want to 'remake' the city films, but with different images." Harun Farocki, "Contre-chant," in *La ville qui fait signes*, p. 108.

the two media; in so doing, the installation “depicts,” in the words of Jörg Becker, “the process of reflection, rather than propping the result up on the screen.”¹³ Indeed, by placing viewers physically before two screens, it asks them to become part of this very reflective process and ponder the stakes of any attempt to construct a visual drama of cities whose operations are, in Farocki’s words, “no longer spectacular.”¹⁴

Certainly, films such as Ruttmann’s *Berlin* and Lang’s *Metropolis* were already centrally preoccupied by the growing difficulty of picturing the operations of the city in images for human eyes. One could argue that the primary aesthetic project of these films lay precisely in an effort to translate what Klaus Scherpe has called the *Unwirklichkeit* or “irreality” of modern cities—i.e. their status as abstract functional systems surpassing the visual capacities of the observer—into a tangible representation. The symphony form employed by Ruttmann—constructing the city as a series of coordinated rhythms over five periods of the day—represented one such translational strategy. Another can be seen in the ubiquitous allegory of the city-as-body. Lang’s *Metropolis* pictured an industrial apparatus regulated at its center by a giant pumping “heart machine.”¹⁵ Similarly, Ruttmann’s Berlin film, like Joseph Roth’s famous ode to the “triangular railway juncture,” pictured the city as a vast circulatory system, revolving around the central heart of the railway station.¹⁶

13. Jörg Becker, “In Bildern denken. Lektüren des Sichtbaren. Überlegungen zum Essayistischen in Filmen Harun Farockis,” p. 78. On the representation of thought in Farocki’s films, see in particular Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie. Bildforschung bei Harun Farocki und Jean-Luc Godard*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2006, p. 29-75. On the integration of the spectator into the installation format, see Christa Blümlinger, “Incisive Divides and Revolving Images: On the Installation *Schnittstelle*,” in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 61-66; Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie*, p. 170-172.

14. Harun Farocki, “Counterpoint,” p. 107.

15. On this point, see my article “The Heart Machine: Rhythm and Body in Weimar Film and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*,” *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 14, No. 2: April 2007, p. 225-248.

16. “So sieht das Herz einer Welt aus, deren Leben Radriemenschwung und Uhrenschlag, grausamer Hebeltakt und Schrei der Sirene ist.” Joesph Roth, *Bekenntnis zum Gleisdreieck* (1924) http://www.berlin-gleisdreieck.de/Seiten/projekte/projekte_Frameset.htm?JoephRoth.htm~pinhalthttp://www.berlin-gleisdreieck.de/Seiten/projekte/projekte_Frameset.htm?JoephRoth.htm~pinhalt. Roth grappled explicitly with the problem of how to provide a visible representation of a system that surpassed visual comprehension: “So gewaltig sind die Ausmaße des neuen Lebens. Daß die neue Kunst, die es formen soll, den Ausdruck nicht finden kann, ist selbstverständlich. Diese Realität ist noch zu groß für eine ihr gemäße Wiedergabe.”

Since at least as far back as *Zwischen zwei Kriegen*, Farocki's work has continued to grapple with technology's resistance to visual representation; and it is hardly by chance, I would argue, if this question has taken him back often to the period of the 1920s. Where *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* took up the Brechtian problem of how to represent the workings of a modern factory in a photograph, *Gegen-Musik* engages with the efforts of 1920s filmmakers to picture the abstract operations of the city.¹⁷ Indeed, Farocki almost seems to pick up where Lang and Ruttmann left off when he repeatedly returns to the image of the city as a circulatory system revolving around a beating heart. [fig. 3] But with its cartoon aesthetic, the visual metaphor of the post-industrial city-body would fall, I think, into the category of what Farocki has elsewhere called "pseudo-visualizations" ("Scheinveranschaulichungen") the need for which increases in proportion precisely to the increasing abstraction of socially determinate forces. As Farocki has commented elsewhere: "On the one hand, things are becoming more and more resistant to visual depiction, but on the other hand, institutions attempt more and more to offer what one might call pseudo-visualizations.

76

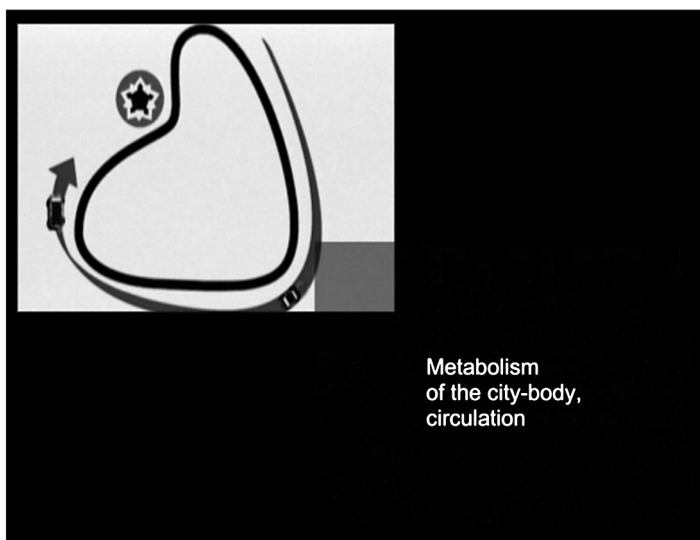


Fig. 3: Harun Farocki, *Wie man sieht/As you See*, 1986.

17. Brecht's argued that the reality of a Krupp factory or the AEG resisted visual representation "because reality has slipped into the realm of functions and cannot be grasped as appearance." Cited in Thomas Elsaesser, "Political Filmmaking after Brecht: Harun Farocki, for Example," in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 143. See also Ulrich Kleist, "Freiheit, die Lohnarbeit heißt," in *Der Ärger mit den Bildern*, p. 301.

One sees this also in computer technology. Where things are invisible, they are constantly being brought into this pseudo-visualization. Hence the flood of charts, graphs and diagrams.”¹⁸ But if the image of the heart offers an example of such pseudo-visualizations, this is also, I think, because it covers over the very function of “circulation” in post-industrial cities, which serves a different purpose from the one visualized in modernist city films. Where Lang’s and Ruttmann’s heart machines regulated a productive industrial apparatus, the heart of post-industrial circulation is a resolutely consumerist center: namely the Euralille complex of shopping malls, supermarkets, businesses, banks, concert halls and office buildings. Designed by Rem Koolhaas, Euralille has been heralded as a model of economic renewal for one of Europe’s declining industrial regions. But its central claim to fame lies in its status as a hub of circulation within the New Europe. If, as one intertitle in Farocki’s installation states, every post-industrial city now claims to be a city of “connecting links,” this is especially true for Euralille, which links high-speed rail service arriving from the Channel with the rest of Europe via Brussels and Paris.

77

Behind this claim to increased international mobility within the new Europe, however, Farocki shows us another kind of circulation, an enforced circulation of bodies within the post-industrial city itself. Here, one could invoke the Deleuzian concept of control society, often brought into relation with Farocki’s recent work, in which “free-floating” forms of social control replace the old discipline of enclosed spaces.¹⁹ But it is essential, I think, to underscore how Farocki relates this development to the fate of working bodies in a post-industrial age. Where the circulation of bodies in the industrial era marked their participation or exploitation in a productive industrial project, the post-industrial variant serves rather to *occupy bodies that, like horses, have become redundant*. As we read at one point in an intertitle accompanying surveillance images of a group of youths on a bench in front of the Euralille center: “In societies without industry [...] one sees men sitting about in the streets and open spaces.” In post-industrial societies of control, such loitering has become a paramount danger, as another intertitle explains: “Whoever does not budge makes themselves suspicious.” Thus, where *Gegen-Musik* invokes the topos of the city-as-circulating-body, that circulation has taken on a decidedly negative character; no longer the driving

18. Cited in Stefan Reinike, “Das Leben, ein Test. Postindustrielle Arbeit in Filmen von Harun Farocki,” in *Der Ärger mit den Bildern*, p. 263.

19. Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October*, n° 59, Winter 1992, p. 3-7.

force behind a productive system, it functions rather as a means of regulating bodies no longer needed for production.

Certainly a reflection on the fate of the human body in the age of automation already formed part of Ruttmann's and Vertov's films, where working bodies are constantly compared to automatons and shown, in the words of Farocki's installation, as "appendages to the apparatus." Indeed, the motif of the organic body's inadequacy is ubiquitous in efforts to come to terms with the city in the film and literature of the 1920s. One thinks here of those figures in Ruttmann, such as the woman who jumps to her death from the bridge, who fail to adapt to the mechanized environment of Berlin, or of Vertov's notion of the "Kino-Eye," emancipated from the weaknesses of human perception and bodily inertia.²⁰ To cite Joseph Roth once again, next to the mechanical city-body, "everything human appears tiny, weak and lost."²¹

Nonetheless, the modernist city film does still centrally tell the story of the human body's insertion into the industrial process, as we can gather from the many images, in Ruttmann and Vertov, of factory workers, cigarette rollers, typists, telephone operators, chauffeurs or traffic police. And this relation between bodies and production also informs these films' reflection on the cinema itself. For alongside its function as an aesthetic visualization of the city, the city-symphony genre also sought to place film in the service of an adaptation to the conditions of mechanized work and life. One thinks here of Benjamin's understanding of montage as a tactile training ground for the shock-laden environment of the city, or of the interpretation of movie-going as a form of conditioning to the mechanical rhythms of urban life by Weimar labor theorists such as Fritz Giese.²² With its accelerated montage and jarring cuts, one might say,

20. See *Kino-Eye. The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984: "We take as the point of departure the use of the camera as a kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space" (p. 14-15). "Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility" (p. 17). Vertov's Kino-Eye was also specifically related to what Benjamin called the "optical unconscious." "Kino-eye is understood 'that which the eye does not see,' as the microscope and telescope of time, as the negative of time, as the possibility of seeing without limits and distances, as the remote control of movie cameras, as tele-eye, as X-ray eye, as 'life caught unawares,' etc., [...] Kino-eye as the possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt" (p. 41).

21. Joesph Roth, *Bekanntnis zum Gleisdreieck*, (1924).

22. In this respect, Giese saw film as a parallel to the rhythmical spectacles of jazz dance and girl groups: "Der Film vermittelt, wie jene Jazzbandtänze, den "Strom der

the city-symphony sought to adapt spectators' imperfect body to the mechanical body of the industrial city.²³

There is little of this sense of project left in Farocki's "remake." Indeed, *Gegen-Musik* never shows a single factory floor or working body in the present; rather, the images of Lille pass immediately from morning to nightfall, skipping altogether the time of production on which the classical city symphonies focused. The few images of Lille's industry that Farocki does include in the installation are—like those of Ruttmann's and Vertov's films themselves—relegated to the medium of black and white film, now transformed (as we read in an intertitle) into an archive for collective memories of an industrial past. Within this archival configuration, it is perhaps not by chance if the images of Lille's former weaving industry remind us of the central images of textiles in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, where weaving offered a kind of master-metaphor for filmmaking as the art of the industrial epoch.²⁴

If Farocki's reworking of the city-symphony is distinguished from the industrial variant by the lack of productive bodies, one body in particular is conspicuous here precisely for its absence: that of the cameraman himself. In Vertov, the cameraman functioned as an acrobatic hero of modern life, his body having overcome the inertia of organic existence and able to move anywhere within the mechanized environment of the city. Vertov constantly includes the cameraman's body in the frame, heroically floating over a canal in a crane, descending into the mines with the workers, making his way through the smoldering metal of a foundry, or climbing atop plates of food in trick shots. Through

Zeit" sehr unmittelbar, [...] das dauernde Wechseln im Rhythmus des Zeitstroms: das erlebt der naivste Mensch hier, daran gewöhnt er sich durch Kinobesuch. [...] Konzentration, Rhythmik, schnelle Auffassung: das sind Erziehungswirkungen der Filmkultur." Fritz Giese, *Girlikultur. Vergleiche zwischen amerikanischem und europäischem Rhythmus und Lebensgefühl*, Munich, Delphin-Verlag, 1925, p. 53.

23. Vertov pursued a similar project with a slightly different aim: namely that of permitting workers to see with the machinic vision of the Kino-eye, whose central function was to decode the "chaos" of modern life and connect disparate elements of the whole: "The textile worker ought to see the worker in a factory making a machine essential to the textile worker. The worker at the machine tool plant ought to see the miner who gives his factory its essential fuel, coal. The coal miner ought to see the peasant who produces the bread essential to him" (Vertov, p. 52). Vertov called this the "battle for the communist decoding of the world" (p. 42). In what is perhaps another reference to Vertov, Farocki's installation includes one intertitle that reads: "Decoding the secrets of the night!"

24. On this point, see Annette Michelson's introduction to Vertov's writings in English in *Kino-Eye*, xxxviii-xl.

this dramatization, the cameraman's body stands metonymically for a broader set of working bodies contributing to the production of urban images, including most prominently the cutters and projectionists featured in Vertov's film. All of these bodies are distinguished by the presence of the hands, from the cranking hand of the cameraman to the hands of the female cutters splicing together new scenes of city life.²⁵

The lack of such productive hands and bodies in *Gegen-Musik* can be read in both a general and a specific sense. On the broader level, it corresponds to Farocki's practice of working with found footage and derivative images, of citing, recombining and interrogating existing images rather than producing new ones. As many of Farocki's critics have pointed out, the installation format—with its spatialization of montage on multiple screens—tends to underscore this concept of the author as “receiver” rather than creator.²⁶ In *Gegen-Musik*, Farocki thematizes this model of authorship at the beginning of the installation; as we watch parallel images of Vertov's cameraman riding into the city on the back of a car, intertitles state: “For Dziga Vertov, the day starts [...] with an entrance: Man with the Movie Camera. The day begins with the production of images. [...] For us the day begins with their reproduction.”

But this insistence on the derivative quality of the images in *Gegen-Musik* also has a more specific sense, one related to the question of the city-symphony's applicability today. For just as production increasingly occurs without the need for human labor, so the *city-symphony itself*, Farocki suggests, *has already been made automatically*, without the need for a productive cameraman. If Farocki's installation can be said to put forth any “arguments,” one of them is certainly that Ruttman's and Vertov's project of total visibility has, in fact, already been realized in the age of video surveillance. As we watch scenes from the control room of the Lille metro network, where images from 1200 surveillance cameras come together on the wall, an intertitle reads: “Images without a cameraman/camerawoman [...] Many images shot at the same time [...] as in Ruttman's

25. Precisely this tactility associated with the filmic medium becomes lost in the digital medium. In his installation *Schnittstelle* from 1995, Farocki commented on the difference between the tactility of the filmic medium and the increasing obsolescence of the hand with the arrival of video technology. “Bei der Arbeit mit Video fasse ich das Band nicht an. Ich drücke lediglich auf Knöpfe.”

26. See Christa Blümlinger, “Incisive Divides and Revolving Images: On the Installation *Schnittstelle*”, p. 61; Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie*, p. 49-50, 170-172. The concept of the author as “receiver” comes from Kaja Silverman. See her essay “The Author as Receiver,” *October*, n° 96, Spring 2001, p. 17-34.

and Vertov's dream—[...] to tell the story of a day in the life of the city." Like Ruttmann and Vertov, who sought to bring all of the normally unseen mechanisms of city life onto the screen, the new surveillance images leave no corner of urban space unrecorded, from the sewer canals to the tops of skyscrapers, from residential streets to the tracks of the TGV. In a further realization of a modernist cinematic dream, even the inner workings of the body have now been rendered visible through endoscopy and electric encephalography.

The notion that Ruttmann's and Vertov's dream of complete simultaneous visibility has been realized might seem to contradict my own reading of *Gegen-Musik* as a work about the impossibility of visualizing the city's increasingly unspectacular operations. But while surveillance cameras might have rendered everything visible, the images thus produced are increasingly meant not for human eyes, but rather for processing by digital software. In one such image, Farocki shows us a program meant to count the passengers in a metro station; as we watch the bodies reduced to abstract shapes on the screen, an intertitle reads: "This software counts the people passing by. [...] Both Vertov and Ruttmann envisaged something different—[...] For them the crowd was not a lump to be dissected—[...] and rendered as numbers." [fig. 4] This "dissecting" operation of surveillance technology defines a paradigmatic transformation in the function of urban images from the industrial city-symphony and its post-industrial variant. Like this image, nearly all of the surveillance images shown in *Gegen-Musik* are, as another title states, "images processed by a program"—i.e., images recorded not for human eyes, but rather for software designed to count, identify and regulate circulating bodies. Like the digital images tracking the trajectories of supermarket customers in Farocki's installation *Ich glaubte Gafangene zu sehen* (*I thought I was Seeing Convicts*, 2000) such operational images function to transform the city into a space of control where, in Deleuze's words, "the position of any element within an open environment [can be given] in any instant."²⁷ Indeed, the "dissecting" operations of such

27. Farocki himself mentions Deleuze's late essay in the text written to accompany *Gefängnisbilder*: "More than anything else, electronic control technology has a *deteritorializing* effect. (Companies no longer have to be concentrated in one location; and production at these locations can be quickly switched to making different products.) Locations become less specific. An airport contains a shopping centre, a shopping centre has a school, a school offers recreational facilities, and so on. [...] Deregulation does not by any means imply a reduction of control. In one of his last writings, Gilles Deleuze outlined the vision of a society of controls which he said would replace disciplinary society." "Controlling Observation," in Harun Farocki. *Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 293 sq.

control images becomes apparent right from the opening shot of the film, where Farocki shows us two parallel images of the main entrance to the Euralille shopping mall. While the left image remains static, we see the right image reduced by computer software into a group of abstract shapes, stripped of sensuous detail and transformed into manipulable units. Such visual dissecting—which will be repeated on various images throughout the installation—opens up the suspicion right from the beginning that surface images of the city might not show us all there is to see, and that the operational images Farocki does show us in *Gegen-Musik* might not be intended for human eyes.

82

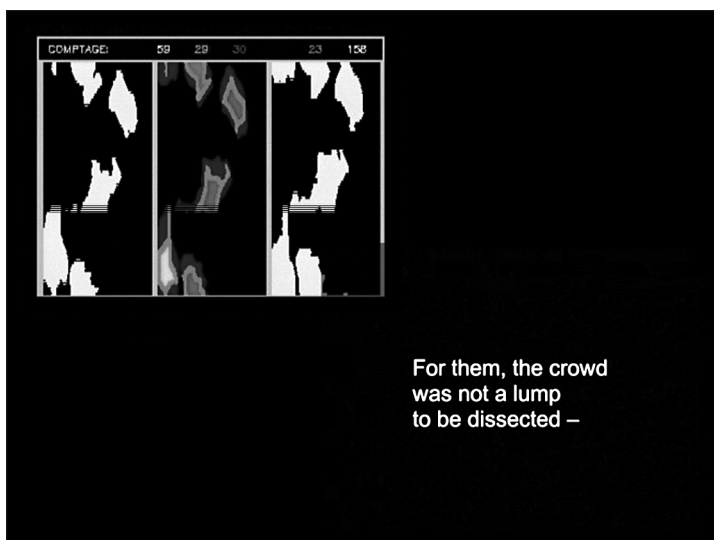


Fig. 4: Harun Farocki, *Wie man sieht/As you See*, 1986.

In matter of fact, the installation does still show human eyes playing a role in the work process, even if the eye has been reduced to a mere “appendage to the apparatus.” The work of the eye is paradigmatically represented in the installation by the workers in the Lille metro control station who monitor the 1200 surveillance images on the wall. (fig.5) But even this vestige of human participation in the production process, Farocki suggests, is also being marginalized by operational software. Elsewhere, the installation describes such software as “Programs reducing the amount of work for the viewer—[...] or abolishing it.” Accompanied by black-and-white images of a factory floor from Lille’s former textile industry, these words ask viewers to consider whether the work of the eye might not be going the same way as that of the hand.



Fig. 5: Harun Farocki, *Gegen-Musik/Counter-Music*, 2004.

Indeed, Farocki's installation ends on an even more ominous question about whether the eye's looming obsolescence might not find its verification in another war. "We know rooms like these from the movies," an intertitle states, referring to the same metro control room. "In rooms like these rocket launches are supervised, or the Third World War is started or prevented." In a work structured around a comparison between the post-industrial era and the 1920s, this closing commentary suggests that the present, like the Weimar of *Zwischen zwei Kriegen*, might again fail to learn from the past, because—as one of Farocki's characters states there—"events [remain] a jump ahead of our knowledge." Just as the modernist city-symphony showed an industrial society on the brink of war and the working hand on the brink of obsolescence, so the symphony of post-industrial cities will perhaps have shown a society between two wars, one about to verify the eye's obsolescence in another world war. At the same time, it is crucial to underscore Farocki's open formulation ("the Third World War is started or prevented"), which also leaves room for the *prevention* of war. Farocki's work, so concerned to excavate other possible trajectories in the past, would, I think, never foreclose such possibilities in the present through any unidirectional historical narrative.

To summarize, then, the paradox of Farocki's city film is that while the modernist dream of rendering the city visible has been realized, that visibility

occurs in images not meant for human eyes. Such a non-human vision, I would add here, could be read as the very opposite from that theorized by Gilles Deleuze for the modernist city film. In his discussion of the perception image in *Cinema I: The Movement Image*, Deleuze praised the avant-garde genre—and Vertov in particular—for returning perception to a richer “gaseous” state before the separation of a perceiving subject from a material universe. “The materialist Vertov,” Deleuze wrote, “realizes the materialist programme of the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* through the cinema, the in-itself of the image. [...] For Vertov, the most important thing was to restore the intervals to matter.”²⁸ As Jacques Rancière has explored more thoroughly, at stake, in Deleuze’s Bergsonian reading of avant-garde film as an attempt to restore perception to its pre-human state, is a thoroughly redemptive narrative of cinema technology itself – one in which, by undoing the sensory-motor schemata of human perception, filmic images would restore a non-instrumental relation to the world.²⁹ But where Deleuze reads the city film as a restoration of pre-human perception, *Gegen-Musik* shows us a form of perception rarified into its *post*-human, thoroughly instrumentalized, state. Transformed into numerical calculations, that perception increasingly exists only for digital technologies.

Farocki’s point in showing such non-human visions, it seems to me, is not to translate them, or the operations they support, into a human drama. At several points in the installation, he comments explicitly on Ruttman’s and

28. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 82.

29. See Jacques Rancière, *La fable cinématographique*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. “Librairie du XXI^e siècle”, 2001, p. 150: “S’il faut donner aux choses une puissance perceptive qu’elles ‘avaient’ déjà, c’est parce qu’elles l’ont perdue. Et si elles l’ont perdue, c’est pour une raison bien précise: c’est parce que la phosphorescence des images du monde et leurs mouvements en tous sens ont été interrompus par cette image opaque qui s’appelle le cerveau humain. Celui-ci [...] a constitué un monde d’images à son usage: un monde d’informations à sa disposition à partir desquels il construit ses schèmes moteurs, oriente ses mouvements et fait du monde physique une immense machinerie de causes et d’effets qui doivent devenir des moyens pour ses fins. Si le montage [de Vertov] doit mettre la perception dans les choses, c’est que cette opération est une opération de restitution. [...] Il y a alors quelque chose d’emblématique à ce que Dziga Vertov, le représentant de la grande volonté soviétique et constructiviste de réagencement total de l’univers matériel au service des fins de l’homme, soit symboliquement affecté par Deleuze à la tâche inverse: remettre la perception dans les choses, constituer un ‘ordre’ de l’art qui rende le monde à son désordre essentiel. [...] Cette histoire de l’art cinématographique est tout autant l’histoire d’une rédemption.”

Vertov's tendency to "dramatize"—in one of Farocki's key words—city traffic. Such dramatization is represented paradigmatically by the accelerated train montage with which Ruttmann transports his viewers into the thrilling world of Berlin. In *Gegen-Musik*, Farocki experiments with similar forms of montage, editing together computer images of the TGV with images from Ruttmann's speeding train, as if to explore the compatibility of the two media. But Farocki's train montage remains strangely non-binding, devoid of music, the images from video surveillance cameras failing to draw the spectator into their rhythms. If anything, such sequences demonstrate the impossibility of using surveillance images to interpellate human viewers or represent the city's circulation apparatus as if it were a question of human stories. "City traffic today," we read in a title accompanying another shot of the Lille control center, "is hardly dramatic."

85

The impossibility of "drama" in the post-industrial city-symphony is indicative of a broader impossibility of "humanizing" images intended less and less for a human audience. Rather than translating the city's inner workings into images for a human eye, *Gegen-Musik* makes viewers aware of an automated city-symphony unfolding with a diminishing need for the human. But while the installation doesn't try to humanize such operative images, it does recontextualize those images for a less instrumental mode of looking. Not unlike Farocki's practice of slowing down moving images through the use of drawings, photographs and stills in his essay films, *Gegen-Musik* takes the surveillance images it borrows out of their enforced circulation, introducing them into the space of the museum for critical contemplation by spectators now placed physically before a crossroads of intersecting video projections or monitors.³⁰ In this sense, Farocki's own work, in distinction to the automated city-symphony he documents, is indeed addressed to human eyes—and, we might add, to the human body. Where technological development has tended to exclude the body from the informational process, the installation format, by insisting on the physical act of viewing, makes spectators aware of their bodily presence, their circulation within the museum, or their refusal to budge.

This address to the body goes hand in hand with a particular attention to all of the objects discarded by urban modernity, not unlike the attention, in *Wie*

30. Often invoked in relation to Farocki's work, Serge Daney's opposition between the "visual" (instrumental images, operative images, mass media clichés, etc.) and the "image" (images that make us see the world anew or place other images in question) would seem appropriate here. See Christa Blümlinger, "Harun Farocki. Critical Strategies," in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 315; Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie*, p. 57.

man sieht, to the rejected paths of technological development. In *Gegen-Musik*, one might see a visual metaphor for this concern with history's superfluous bodies and objects in the repeated images of pieces of trash – a plastic bag or a fast-food carton—discarded and floating aimlessly. (fig. 6) In their pirouette-like movement, these bits of rubbish might be read as evoking an almost surrealist resistance to instrumental manipulation, an image of chance in a regulated system. More specifically, they evoke a resistance to the enforced circulation of the post-industrial city. As such, they also represent the potential of another city film, one functioning not to construct a space of control, but rather opening up a space for critical contemplation.



Fig. 6: Harun Farocki, *Gegen-Musik/Counter-Music*, 2004.