

"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"

Panel 1: Research, Media Art and Documentary Filmmaking

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"Archival Practice by Harun Farocki: Effects and Affects"

Abstract:

Harun Farocki's documentaries are most often constituted by found footage and fragments from archives: they are perhaps forgotten, discarded or obscure remains of other works or archives. Therefore his films are citations edited and compiled into an archive and my paper will examine his archival practice in order to illustrate the effects and affects produced by them. In sum they are counter narratives to media doctored politics and he uses the very same material to take them to less known destination. Farocki's archives are relentlessly and carefully re-documenting and retelling narratives that do not always reach main stream politics. However, he uses those well known politics and hence they comes across as obvious and didactic. I argue that they are his tactics, because he supplements them with other footages which are contingent with his meticulous formal economy in order to tell other narratives: they are repressions that he excavates to counter dominant discourses/narratives. My primary question here will be: What is the relationship between the narrative practice and the archive impinging and embedded in them?

For most part my paper is influenced by Derrida's Archive Fever (1995) which examines the presuppositions of archival practice and the infomatics culture we live in. While Judith Butler's Frames of War (2010) confirmed the possibilities of found footage redirected to form counter narratives. She unpacks the presuppositions of media managed politics of "interventionist" war in the recent times while citing Farocki's film War at a Distance (2003) and Eye Machine I, II, III (2001-3). My interest in formal analysis via poststructural and postcolonial theories provides the necessary framework for my analysis of Farocki's work. Through them I discern the formal and the political intertwine to discover narratives countering main stream/ media politics.

His work is at once constituted by meta cinematic/ meta documentary practice, formal aspects that engages with New Wave experimental cinema. Furthermore, he extends the Brechtian theoretical prescriptions which were otherwise limited by the New Wave cinema and modernist work in general. By re-representing the obvious or known formal, political or theoretical concerns he not only interrogates but sustains them to produce and speculate on perspectives that are not easily perceptible. Perceptibility is retarded because subjectivity and normalizing discourse engendered by desire and politics dominate and eclipse cognition—a very challenging task indeed for counter narratives.

His narratives like most modernist work emphasize a distancing, alienating, calculative and objective stance and hence they encourage critical cognitive effect. However, I argue that he extends the modernist practice to suture the affective with the critical response to rethink and reframe. I demonstrate the affective functions with varying levels of haunting, nostalgia, pensive speculations, poignancies, pathos along with a search for the unknown/repressed. In other words they include both the cognitive and affective charge that involuntarily haunts the viewers. My analysis of Farocki's formal expressions will demonstrate how they recharge the visual with the affective and speculative concerns that are quietly and sometimes fleetingly manifested as a flicker on the screen.