

Harun Farocki

Vol. VII comparative cinema  
No. 12  
2019

# Harun Farocki: On Display: Peter Weiss A Production Dossier

98-105

June 4 [1979]

Dear Mr. Burgmann,

Written in a hurry, a synopsis + an excerpt. I'd prefer if we talk on the phone.

Best, H.F!

Harun Farocki: Peter Weiss On Display

a book he is still working on—on the third part  
the path of a first-person narrator from berlin in the nazi era  
emigration, spanish civil war, sweden,  
second world war and planned until '45.  
document-rich: the pergamon altar, the comintern line,  
the social democracy-communism controversy,  
spain, the hitler-stalin pact, a play by brecht,  
the life of ossietzky's daughter, the history of  
swedish social democracy, gaudí, delacroix and so forth  
(the history of montmartre) many inherently political biographies.  
one's own life went differently.  
but close acquaintance, a man like hodann, who he  
extensively interviewed and whose journal exists.  
actually knew brecht.  
the writing always conveys first-hand experiences  
onto other lives and time periods.  
as a working principle: each factual word (date) should be correct.  
how far this goes:  
sometimes a demolished house is sought, a photo procured,  
something looked up.  
sometimes very secondary sources:  
where münchenberg was born, somber region, enumeration of  
names of rulers. sometimes very close: a gesture one  
made that finds a use in the book.



June 17 and 18, 1979

**Shooting in Stockholm**

The archive of the Harun Farocki Institut accommodates about sixty minutes of unused 16 mm footage (b/w image and sound) that was shot for *On Display: Peter Weiss*. In October 2016, this material was digitized.

working method:

interviews, sources, literary as well, visiting locations.

no set plan, in writing there always arises

another version, out of one chapter another becomes necessary.

a lot of reworking, every page 4, 5 times. following ideas of form, which one cannot describe as abstract. it is important for him that the book have an even typeface with many

letters on a page. he also uses very large sheets of paper in order to have an idea of the whole already while working.

the first-person narrator does not experience everything that happens in

the book

directly, there are many "levels of commentary." so he goes walking with someone and they discuss something and then comes

a new chapter and there is an essay about something.

however, this commentary also stands in relation to the hero, to his consciousness. the world becomes consciousness, reflection,

not plot.

what's with the magic of the locations?

peter weiss' worldview is opposed to the familiar.

he wants to rescue a disappearing political culture and

therefore works like an archeologist. turns a place

that one otherwise passes by thoughtlessly into an important place.

digs something up, places a small flag.

just like in the title, the subject of aesthetics is thematized in the book.

in spain it is considered that the emblematic and

symbolic in art has to do with a politics of individuals

that is not yet mature. to discover precursors of the proletariat uprisings in greece; the beautiful can only be beautiful if it is rooted in necessity, demanded by struggle.

how it is treated like film: not only the importance

of original locations and location sound, the editing

of the particular chapter is also important. two are walking, one goes

into a tent, then something else, he comes out again, and

the scene with the two walking continues.

the simplicity of the metaphors is also like film. a single

action or posture characterizes an entire demeanor.  
 catalyst for the book was the visit to the altar.  
 the intellectual shape of the book is determined by events and  
 experiences brought about by a trip to vietnam.<sup>2</sup>

because it is something that is crucial to me in every scene—  
 that what is depicted is completely realistic. that i have a  
 basis for the fantasy—so that basically nothing is invented. it  
 enriches me—whenever i am at an authentic place.

for example, rosner who made the comintern newsletter in  
 a sort of cubby-hole clandestinely in sweden, for four years,  
 hidden with swedish comrades. so didn't take one step out. so  
 he lived here illegally and the police hunted him, and didn't find  
 him. and i was unable to find out where this little room was. the  
 communists, who were here in sweden, who helped german  
 communists at the time, and harbored them, continued to live,  
 as long as they were still alive, in the spirit of illegality. so that  
 not a single, tiny detail would become public. even people who  
 dealt directly with rosner had suppressed this so much, where  
 he was, that no one could actually tell me exactly where he had  
 resided.

and the book was already finished and i was so sorry, i had  
 already delivered the text. as i was lying in the hospital and  
 already had the proofs, i suddenly received a call from a swedish  
 acquaintance who was closely affiliated with rosner and wehner  
 in those days and who found out where his room was. i could still  
 go out of the hospital to this house that was still being rebuilt.  
 and could see the apartment and the bedroom, the size of the  
 bedroom and could add it to the proofs. that was significant. it  
 may not be important for a reader where a bedroom in this or  
 that street was found. but for me it was important to see the  
 courtyard, the entrance and the size of the bedroom and the  
 street in front of me.

in spain too, this cueva la potita house where hodann had his  
 original first-aid station, i had to invent this in an earlier draft.  
 and just after we found out where this was, which in itself was  
 an enormous trip, which would be worth a chapter in itself,  
 depending on coincidences, and acquaintances with people  
 who suddenly remember, it is like a journey of discovery. and  
 only after we now stood in spain beyond albacete in front of this  
 house and then attempted to find the key to enter the house,  
 to climb in, everything was still the same. the house still stood  
 there as if it had been uninhabited since the civil war. the red

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flags were still hanging from the roof and the old radio still stood there and the player piano, and the rolls that one put in the piano.

the red flags were still hanging there?

yes, it had been closed, it belonged to one of these big landowners who have six, eight or ten such properties and he hadn't visited it since the civil war. it was completely decayed, old, but one could completely orient oneself.

in this way possibilities arise of describing the course of the river, júcar, which is buried very deep, the sharp coast the poplars and the surrounding foggy atmosphere.

– where did you get the idea for münchenberg always climbing onto scaffolding while speaking?

– that is in fact an idea that is connected to this character.

i never saw münchenberg in person, but it is connected in some way, in his books he always talks about hiking. he was always hiking, and what hodann describes in his journal: this enormously expansive personality, these are things that are connected to one's own imagination. i imagined this man who must always have big views, perspectives before him that are connected to his plan. this is no couch potato. this is someone who is really always traveling, hiking, on the move, active.

i was able to imagine this, after i had been in paris and saw where he lived, and he actually lived directly next to the parc d'expositions, next to the porte de versailles, and he always followed this path. the house he lived in was one of the new constructions in the thirties and he must have always passed it, so it was possible that while speaking he would suddenly go in there, in the park where there is scaffolding. these are pictorial, sometimes filmic ideas.

also in my personal life spaces always affect me. when i'm writing a stage play, it is clear to me from the beginning how the people stand next to each other, rarely can i imagine a chamber play where people sit in trash cans and only talk to each other. there is always the image that there is a world outside. that there is never an entirely self-absorbed person who is sitting there and dealing with a problem, but it is unmistakable that there is always an entire world that is being effected. with endless ramifications that of course often make writing difficult, because i come upon hundreds of thousands and must always cut away more.

Published in: PANTENBURG, Volker; DE SEYNES, Elsa; et al. (2016). *Harun Farocki: On Display: Peter Weiss*. Berlin: Harun Farocki Institut and Motto Books.

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1/ This is a handwritten note attached to a six-page typescript. The typed pages begin without a heading, the words “Harun Farocki: Peter Weiss On Display” have most likely been added by the WDR editors.

2/ The “excerpt” Farocki mentions in the short note he attaches begins here on a new, typed page and probably relates to the minutes taken during the preparatory meeting with Weiss.

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