

Serious Games

Harun Farocki
Film Director, Screenwriter, and Media Artist

Serious Games I: Watson is Down

Photo: "Serious Games 1, Watson is Down" © Harun Farocki 2010

Image Courtesy www.farocki-film.de



In the autumn of 2009, we filmed a drill at the Marine Corps Base 29 Palms in California. Four Marines sitting in a class represented the crew of a tank. They had laptops in front of them on which they steered their own vehicle and watched others in the unit being driven through a Computer-Animation-Landscape. The simulated Afghan is based on geographical data out of Afghanistan. A street in the computer landscape runs exactly as it would in the real Afghanistan; the same holds for every tree, the vegetation on the ground or the mountain ranges. The instructor places explosive devices and sets insurgents out in the area. A sniper shot the tank gunner, which we documented with the camera. When the tank drives over the fallow, it kicks up a dust tail. The more vegetation there is, the less dust. On the asphalt street, no dust. Even with all this attention to detail, death in the computer game is still something different than the real one.

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Serious Games II: Three Dead

Photo: "Serious Games 2, Three Dead" © Harun Farocki 2010

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Again, in *29 Palms*, we embarked on an exercise with around 300 extras who represented both the Afghan and Iraqi population. A few dozen Marines were on guard and went out on patrol. The town where the maneuver was carried out was on a slight rising in the desert and its buildings were made from containers. It looked as though we had modeled reality on a computer animation.

Harun Farocki

(Translation by Judith Hayward)

Serious Games III: Immersion

Photo: “Serious Games 3, Immersion” © Harun Farocki 2010

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This installation puts the viewer squarely in the midst of current affairs, the war in Iraq. Eighteen years after the first Gulf War (1990/91), computer-generated game technology is not only employed on the battlefield, but also used for recruiting, training, and therapy for battle-scarred soldiers. It is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the violence of war. Never has war been so transparent, so tangible, so efficient or so virtual. Filming for *Immersion* took place at Fort Lewis, near Seattle, during a demonstration for therapists treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) sufferers. The event was organized by the designers of the technology now being used in Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy (VRET). The therapy consists of subjecting traumatized soldiers to the conditions of war once again, in a virtual reality. It is a kind of going back to the beginning – not only literally to the beginning of the military experience, starting with the recruiting game, but also back to the beginnings of a technology that was initially developed by the military, was subsequently taken over by game designers, and is now being sold back to the same military apparatus from which it originated. What we step into is an economic game, at the stage where the therapists seek a niche for themselves in a growing market. At the same time, *Immersion* is also a return to the role-play with which, for Farocki, it had all begun – the role play that has never been absent from his work.

Pieter van Bogaert, How to Live in a Game. *Harun Farocki's War Games*, in *Metropolis M*, <http://www.metropolism.com/magazine/2009-no5/harun-farocki-s-war-games/>.

Serious Games IV: A Sun without Shadow

Photo: "Serious Games 4, A Sun with no Shadow" © Harun Farocki 2010

Image Courtesy www.farocki-film.de



This chapter considers the fact that the pictures with which preparations were made for war are so very similar to the pictures with which war was evaluated afterward. But there is a difference: The program for commemorating traumatic experiences is somewhat cheaper. Nothing and no-one casts a shadow here.

Harun Farocki

(Translation by Judith Hayward)

Harun Farocki (1944-2014)

January 9, 1944 born in Nový Jicin (Neutitschein), at that time Sudetengau, today Czech Republic. 1966 – 1968 Admission to the just opened Berlin Film Academy, DFFB. 1966 Marriage with Ursula Lefkes. 1968 Birth of the daughters Annabel Lee and Larissa Lu. 1974 – 1984 Author and editor of the magazine *Filmkritik*, Munich. 1998 – 1999 *Speaking about Godard / Von Godard sprechen*, New York / Berlin (Together with Kaja Silverman). 1993 – 1999 Visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley. 2001 Marriage with Antje Ehmman. Since 1966 more than 100 productions for Television or Cinema: Children's TV, Documentary Films, Essay Films, Story Films. Since 1996 various solo – and group exhibitions in Museums and Galleries. 2007 with *Deep Play* participation at documenta 12. Since 2004 Visiting Professor, 2006 – 2011 full Professorship at the Academy of Art, Vienna. 2011 – 2014 longterm project *Labour in a Single Shot*, together with Antje Ehmman. July 30, 2014 died near Berlin.

www.farocki-film.de

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