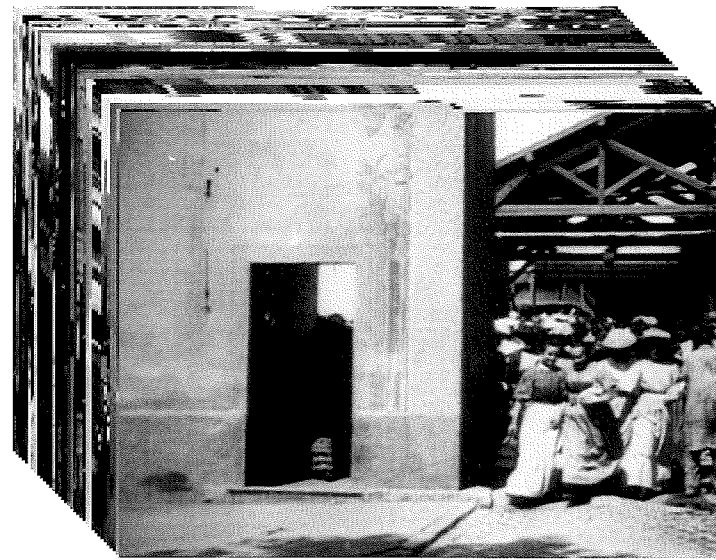


WORKERS LEAVING THE FACTORY (ARBEITER VERLASSEN DIE FABRIK) In 1995, Harun Farocki recalls a scene from 1895 and traces out its repetition over the course of film history: 'Workers Leaving the Factory'. What Farocki retrieves proves this shot to be a primal scene of cinema, as a spectacular effort of looking away, of ignoring, of overseeing. In 'La Sortie Des Usines Lumières à Lyon', as the original title goes, female workers wearing summer dresses, male workers, office employees, a bicycle, and a dog emerge from the darkness of the factory into the bright sunlight and disperse, some quickly, some hesitantly, into the open of the hors-champs, off screen. Referring to repetitions of this constellation in fiction and documentary films, Farocki efficiently lists the elements that make the motif a historical topos: the supposed transition from the sphere of production into public space, while a camera is obviously located opposite the factory gate.

A deployment of surveillance is integrated into the scene. Movement is recorded, but no worker's movement. The particular swallows the political in filmic fiction. While the transformation of people into individuals is shown, the damage they endure through procedures of production is not. The political in the films is either ignited by affect or not at all. Again and again, cinema focuses on the location in front of the factory, but refuses to shoot work itself. The space facing the factory becomes something of a secondary stage of history, the commentary remarks. Yet its insistent presence in cinema's stories hints at the fact that something must have happened there once. Violence is insistent throughout the images. The violence that is expected at the factory gate evokes the idea of resistance, strike, and struggle, while none of this is actually visible. The missing counter-shot, invisible cuts, gaps between shots and ellipses of commentary reveal the fact of an alternative, a missed possibility in history: the workers could have chosen to stay at the factory, appropriate technologies and redistribute production in a reasonable way.

In his film 'Workers Leaving the Factory', Harun Farocki examines the politics of memory and remembering in the age of the cinema. Which archival order can organize images which gain their meaning from gaps and lacks? What kind of historiography is made of processes that simultaneously hide and reveal? History in cinema appears at the margins of the field of vision. At least the workers have not left the cinema, and even the off-screen space is related to the production process. Today, we know that they are off to a park.

*Ute Holl*



In: Benedikt Reichenbach (Hg.): Harun Farocki. Diagrams. Images from Ten Films, Köln 2014, S. 118.

Workers Leaving the Factory [1995]