

Davor Konjikušić

Operational Images of Audio Personalities

Film and media artist Harun Farocki insisted on proving that there is an aesthetic basis to the negative dialectics of the contemporary, technologically conditioned and mediated world of repression, and that this aesthetic basis is the path towards a new rationality of abandoned humaneness. He claimed that the true power of violence is cunningly veiled by the popular belief that the materials used by the global repressive systems for the surveillance of the unstructured movement of people are “boring” and technically incomprehensible. Farocki used “operational images” to demonstrate the gap between the infatuation with technological progress and the abandoned quality of humaneness. The “operational images” are photographs that testify to the power/dominance of the surveillance elites, but when interpreted by a competent observer (film or video artist, photographer) they establish themselves as the source of an optimistic, liberating and humane perspective.

Davor Konjikušić exploits this clear place of Farocki’s perspective, but he approaches it from a different angle. Contrary to Farocki, who stresses the need of becoming mindful of the power of “machines”, Davor articulates the “operational images” from below i.e. from the materiality of human movements/fates towards the stringent character of the repressive surveillance/punishment. In his award-winning work “Holly People” (2014) Davor applies the formal method of police biometrics on the photographs of immigrants’ faces thus transforming them into halos that were “offered” to the citizens of Zagreb and Belgrade on large posters months before the start of the current waves of migrations in Europe.

The faces with gently stylized biometric halos have no name, but the clarity of their objectification stretches beyond the presentation rhetoric and becomes a permanent responsibility of the observer.

In his new work, Davor questions the strength of such responsibility. He does it because the dynamics of the current historical events dictate it and because this dynamic is impossible to hide from the eyes of the public. It is possible, of course, to change the perspective, but that would only deepen our responsibility, Davor believes.

Unfortunately, the relevance of the Davor’s work is so strong that author’s “operational images” strike us with the brutality of their

documentary character; there are no rhetorical breaks or dilemmas. It is clear what is shown. The immigrants cross the border (the Schengen, we find), and what we have before us is the footage of the movement of their bodies taken by a police infra-red camera. How Davor managed to “snatch the view” of the surveillance officers, how the photographer succeeded in “using” the police camera and adopting the powerful “police genre”, that we do not know.

The exhibited photographs or Davor’s “operational images” taken at night we see first and foremost as fictionalized evidence of mesmerizing beauty. Fragile auras with dynamic energy in clouds of movement resemble classical aesthetics, a futurist sfumato. Why are we almost ashamed when such a resemblance is evoked? Why shame? Because here we have photographic evidence produced by expensive police equipment that measures the temperature of human bodies so that they can be monitored? Konjikušić shows different perspectives to this difficult question, but he clearly and decisively avoids adding an aesthetic component to this collectively relevant political moment. Davor widens the frame of the photographs, so to speak, by adding the recorded voice of an unknown man who informs us in fluent English that he is the actual traveller in this location. Davor talked to this man on several locations, and he edited the recording leaving out the parts with his own voice.

This audio intervention brought back the photograph of “dynamic aura” back into the documentary genre of “operational images”. The man, i.e. the recorded voice of the traveller on his way towards a European destination, greets the author (and/or us) as a “friend to whom he is grateful, and he hopes for another encounter taking place in better circumstances when all these events will be laughed about”. The observer becomes momentarily aware of all the powerful and powerless ones, of all the inadequacies of this regime of roles. Davor’s “operational images” photographs are actually “audio personalities”. The dynamic of a body that is actually the voice of a traveller (who successfully crossed the Schengen border) goes beyond “power play” with surveillance elites and reaches towards a higher form of your responsibility, into a permanent form of your attention.

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