

Aïd el-Fitr fêté à Larnaca, Chypre

Photo: CRUCIBLE Océan

Une femme musulmane chypriote turque dans la mosquée d'Umm Haram, située dans la partie sud de l'île, durant un service religieux organisé pour les pèlerins qui résident dans la partie nord de l'île. Ce site antique est révéralé par les musulmans parce qu'il est réputé contenir les cendres de la tante paternelle du prophète Mahomet, Umm Haram (Hala Sultan de son nom turc). La pèlerinage est organisé à l'occasion de la fête de l'Aïd el-Fitr qui marque la fin du mois saint du Ramadan.



Everything Now is Measured by After

Emmanuel Van der Auwera

January 12 – March 4, 2017

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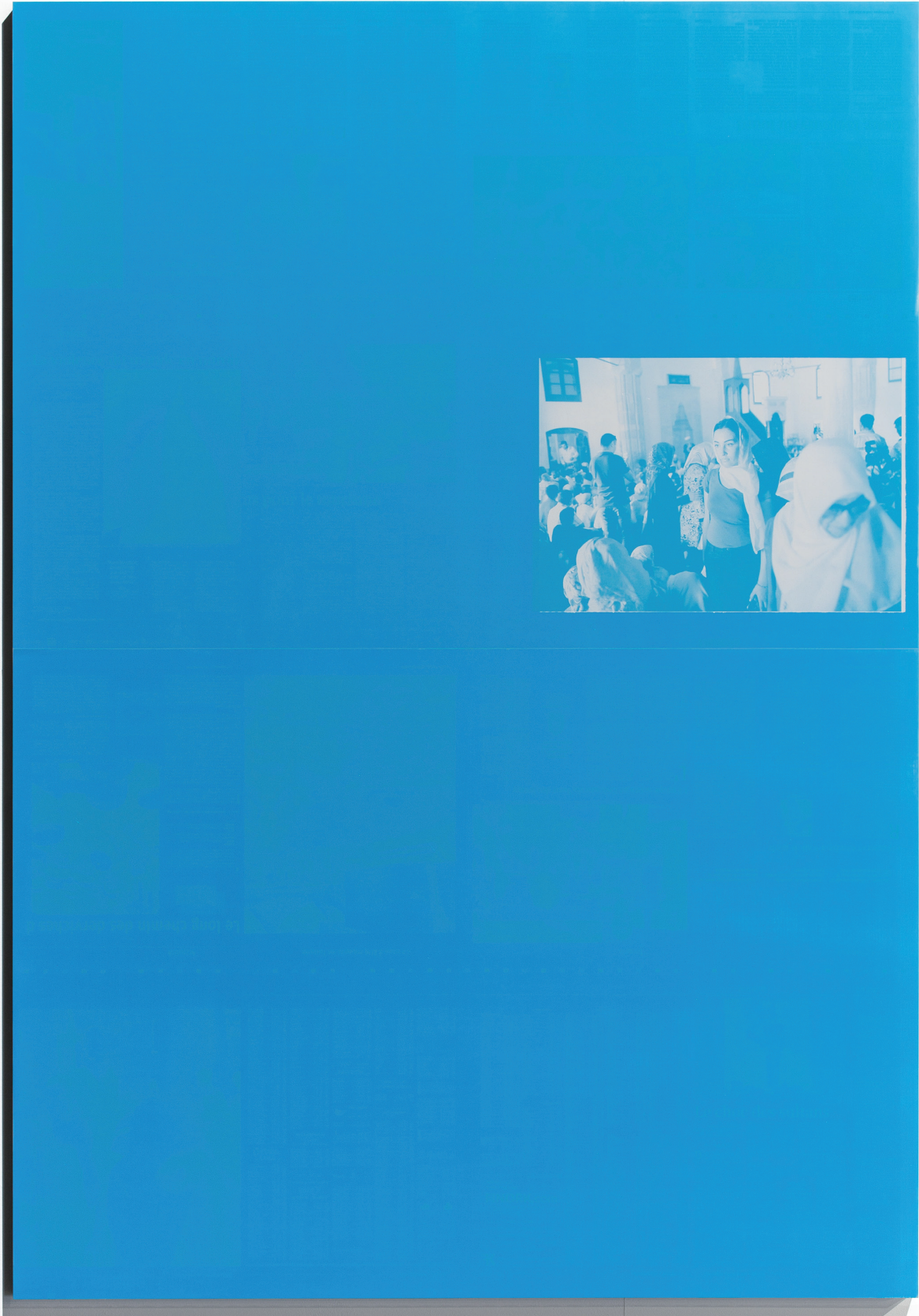
Emmanuel Van der Auwera, *VideoSculptureXII*, Installation view at Harlan Levey Projects



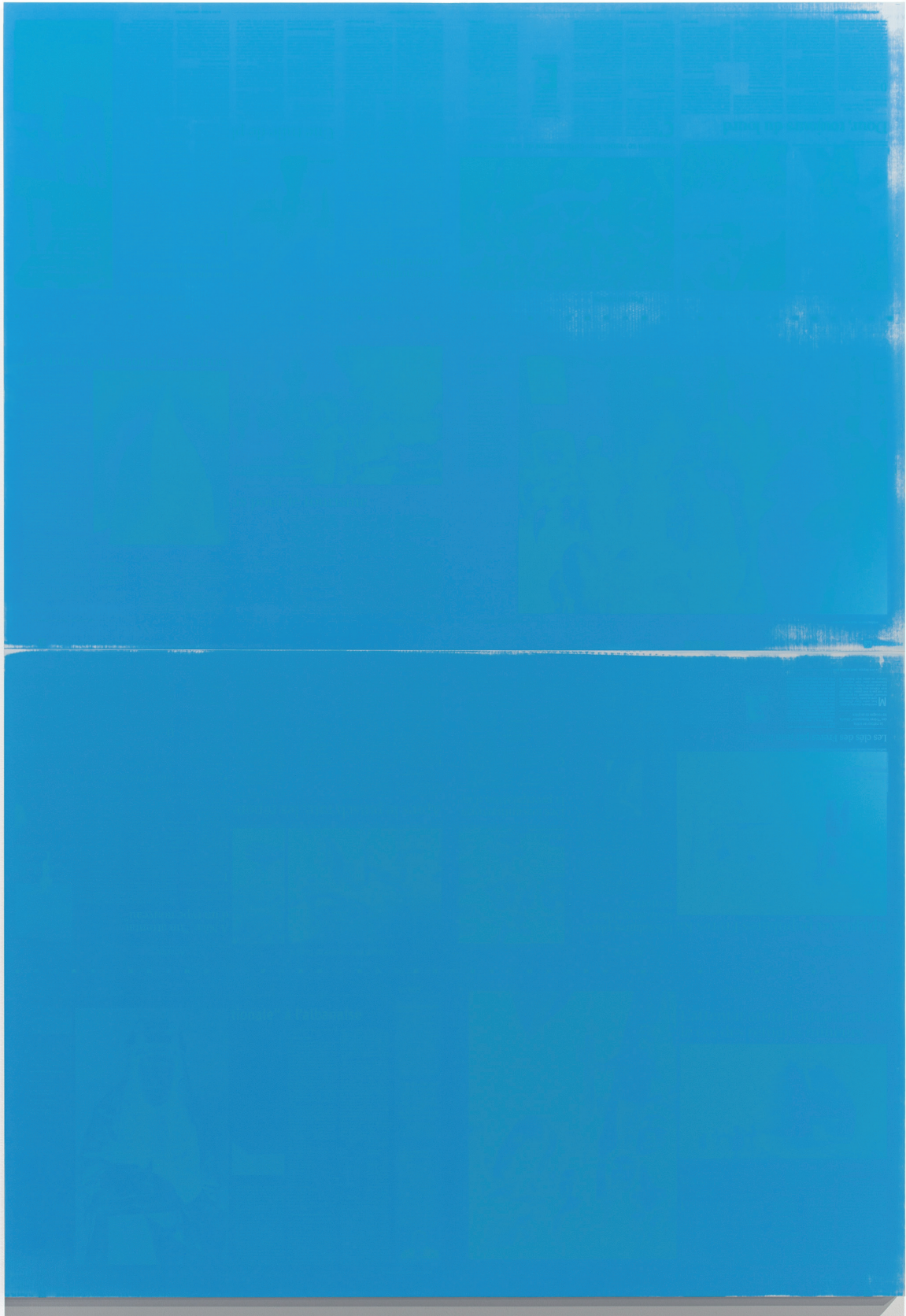
Emmanuel Van der Auwera, *VideoSculptureXII*, Installation view at Harlan Levey Projects



Emmanuel Van der Auwera, *Memento series*, Installation view at Harlan Levey Projects



Emmanuel Van der Auwera, *Memento 1*, 2016, Newspaper .3mm aluminum offset plates mounted on aluminum frame, 143 x 99 cm



Emmanuel Van der Auwera, *Memento 2*, 2016, Newspaper .3mm aluminum offset plates mounted on aluminum frame, 143 x 99 cm



Emmanuel Van der Auwera, *Memento 3*, 2016, Newspaper .3mm aluminum offset plates mounted on aluminum frame, 143 x 99 cm



Emmanuel Van der Auwera, *Memento 4*, 2016, Newspaper .3mm aluminum offset plates mounted on aluminum frame, 143 x 99 cm



Emmanuel Van der Auwera, *Memento 5*, 2016, Newspaper .3mm aluminum offset plates mounted on aluminum frame, 143 x 99 cm

Shortly after the catastrophe

“Get around town, get around town
 Where the people look good
 Where the music is loud
 Get around town
 No need to stand proud
 Add your voice to the sound of the crowd”
 The Human League, *The Sound of the Crowd*, 1981.

“Remember you! Yes, I’ll wipe my mind clean of all trivial facts and
 memories and preserve only
 your commandment there.”
 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1:5, ca 1600

“These are the days after. Everything now is measured by after.”
 – Don DeLillo *Falling Man*, 2007

Blue is the color of the unreal, of the memory, of the open mind, of the royal, the precious and the rare. Blue is the color of the absolute, the higher, the divine, of cold and of clarity. It is the color of Yves Klein, Derek Jarman, Picasso and Gerard David. Blue – cyan, to be precise – is also the color of Emmanuel Van der Auwera’s *Memento* (2016), an ongoing, growing series of offset newspaper panels mounted on aluminium. In commercial offset printing (used for brochures, magazines and newspapers), information that is invisible to the human eye is transmitted to an aluminium panel with a computer controlled laser beam. The CMYK colors are then printed in four stages. Van der Auwera visited local newspaper production plants during the 24 hours after a collective catastrophe. He removed the exposed panels from the machines, positioned pieces of cardboard on the sequences he thought to contain images and added white light. The unprotected areas of the panel turned cyan, the white neon light of the space burned itself into the panel in only a few seconds, leaving bright white marks. Afterwards, after development, what remains are semi-accidentally ‘framed’ and cropped photographic prints. It is important to note that there are different layers filtering through the blue, remnants of the layout. These are barely visible marks of what once was – or then again, was not?

Memento builds on the artist’s fascination for the mediated representation of the crowd. Shortly after the catastrophe the masses shroud themselves in mourning – demure postures, pained expressions, eyes locked on the ground or directed upwards, fixing to some imaginary point. Suffering culminates into a position of elevation. How do catastrophic events like these write themselves into collective memory? And in what lies the common imagination for the future?

Memento creates an allegorical double Droste effect: Søren Kierkegaard’s conception of the ‘untruth of the crowd’ becomes in the media - newspapers in this case - (1) a construction that Van der Auwera interferes with. After all, publications and press arise from a process of storytelling that is co-driven by marketing; events are supposed to produce meaning, which can be turned into the subject of press publications. Not only are they a *mise-en-scène* (figuratively), they are part of a *mise-en-page* (literally). The artist’s intervention doesn’t merely create a *mise en abyme*, it deconstructs the situations pictured (chance plays an important part in this). Van der Auwera’s deceitfully simple intervention thus inherently reveals a sharp analysis of the automatized system of newsgathering, its processing and the inscription of all this in the cultural memento.

In this work the blue-out, like the blackout in cinematography, isn't only a means to speak about the unspeakable (2). It is also a technique to appeal to the imagination. Hence, Van der Auwera opens the way to a reading that puts the tragic and the sublime on the same plane. His images don't leave us uncertain, but on the contrary, they gnaw away at us with the lingering reminder of a simple yet often unstated abominable truth: .The fact that we do not see something does not mean it is not there.

The triptych *Videosculpture XII* (2016) starts from the same principle, but in this case the artist reverses the formal procedure and the works are more interactive in nature. One that wants to read the message of these hellishly white monolithic screens, has to gaze through the polarising filters mounted on tripods. Found footage of predator drones and targets make the viewer painfully aware of the impact of technological developments in warfare today. The images show a dehumanized hygienism that contrasts sharply with the so-called secure, (but never effective!) surgically precise assassination operations carried out by mechanisms with particular anthropomorphic characteristics. The physical installation of *Videosculpture XII* itself, echoes the very principle of registered action: One who would want to see the work, has to position themselves in front of a filter - the imaginary viewfinder— allowing the view to correspond with that of the lethal machine. *Memento* and *Videosculpture XII* perfectly complement each other, embedding themselves into the developing vocabulary of the artist, in which power terms such as image manipulation, horror, politics, the media crisis, identity and transformation leapfrog each other in constant play. Even though the almost 'invisible' war of *Videosculpture XII* is set in a desert that somewhat reminds us of a moonscape (far far away for most Western perspectives) this choreography of death depicts our obsession to register every detail; the daily choice for suspension of disbelief over the intrinsically perverted nature of what is called reality.

Ive Stevenheydens, december 2016

(1) "There is another view of life; which holds that wherever the crowd is, there is untruth, so that, for a moment to carry the matter out to its farthest conclusion, even if every individual possessed the truth in private, yet if they came together into a crowd (so that "the crowd" received any decisive, voting, noisy, audible importance), untruth would at once be let in".
Søren Kierkegaard, *The Crowd Is "Untruth"*, From "*That Individual*": *Two "Notes" Concerning My Work as an Author*, published posthumously in 1859.

(2) This technique is used for a variety of different reasons, such as: the impossibility of representing something, the delicate constellation of the collective memory, the risk of offending a singularity, "too cruel for words" and so on.

« EVERYTHING IS MEASURED AFTER » OR THE POSSIBILITY OF HISTORY

At the core of certain works by Emmanuel van der Auwera are interventions to an existing corpus. His earlier intercessions based in *found footage* are, according to me, akin to a reading. In other words, an operation that employs perception and cognition, the decoding of signs, with the aim of assigning them a meaning. What meaning, I will elaborate on, later. Reading, as it is presumed here, cannot be confused with interpretation, which operates on a secondary plane and builds on a primary decryption of a series of options of various significations, explanations or hypotheses. It appears that Emmanuel van der Auwera does not interpret, but rather, shares a « simple » reading with the spectator; specifically, a reading of anonymously produced media artifacts destined for a mass consumption (newspaper offset printing plates), or artifacts of military use (images recorded by US army drones). His other recent works also share as a point of departure, the collection of predominantly visual signals which have no true author and whose uses may be those of surveillance or control (a scanned X ray in *Lastwagen*), information (television programs featured in his first *Videosculptures*), « sharing » on social networks and via virtual communities (Youtube videos grouped in *A Certain Amount of Clarity* or the internet forums used in the variations in *Central Alberta*) or still, propaganda (a video produced by ISIS present in his most recent work, *Missing Eyes*).

In reflecting on van der Auwera's intentions, we can borrow what critics have said in regard to Harun Farocki, with whom the artist shares an objective of decrypting the contemporary visual environment.

« Harun Farocki frees the images from the conceptual stereotypes and narratives with which they have been covered in the course of their development and distribution, as well as from the cognitive patterns and habits which support these stereotypes. He brings out that which is essential, naked, and direct within the image and which does not conform to the norms and conventions of those systems which produced it. (...) Farocki's [works] (...) express a position and provoke the viewer to position himself. »¹

However, where Farocki takes a position of critique or militancy in order to unveil the image's political core, Emmanuel van der Auwera does not seek to attain the ideological reversal of the images he employs, but their *pathos*, the sensitivity that emanates from them, the affect and emotions embedded beyond the code, technical matrices, infrastructures, economies and the powers that make their production and dissemination possible. There is no demonstration, no anamneses, but rather a spontaneous presentation *hic et nunc*, a very elaborate exhibition intended to present the viewer the sheer face of the image and not its flip side, the immediate, inaugural, and often forgotten dimension rooted in the mechanical recording of the moment it belongs to (forever and again) despite the equipment and prosthetics of reading, a connection with the physical and emotional reality of events.

To continue with this diametric comparison to Farocki, it is not gratuitous that van der Auwera employs very little editing in his work. The methods used by the artist are not those of putting into relation, bringing together or collage. In contrast, they favor an uncombined, linear, global or serial reading. These attributes of his work drive me to defend the idea of reading as neutral, less subject to forms of judgment even when supported by arguments, than of reading as interpretation. This aspect gives his pieces the capacity of reaching the viewer without detour: the unity and strict coherence integral to his work accentuate the frontality of the viewer's experience. We can bring to mind the frank and immediate interpellations that are triggered within us when standing before the *Memento Series* or that are at the heart of *VideoSculpture XII*.

If we observe the manner in which Emmanuel van der Auwera operates this process of reading we can take support from the powerful and rigorous formal methods he employs. It is by and through them only, that the reading of the image becomes manifest. Despite the obvious differences in their final form, both *VideoSculpture XII* and the *Memento Series*, employ a process of tightening, of applying tension and focus to a key aspect in order to put the mechanisms

of phenomenological contact between the spectator and image into evidence. The relation of these two elements brings attention to perception and emotion. We are compelled, in front of the work, to look and to feel before all else. Our bodies Nothing additional is placed before our bodies to carry us anywhere but to percept and affect in the first degree: no narrative, no external references, no quotations, no context, no history.

Notwithstanding, it is not difficult to identify sources of the material: in part images taken by drones, in part press images. In both cases these charged sources, current and heated even, have ambiguous functions since both serve to mask reality, to keep it at a distance and to substitute it with information, with the pretense that they are presenting reality with utmost transparency, fidelity and maximum control.

In this contradiction we find elements that echo the myth Barthes defines for our current time :

« Ce que le monde fournit au mythe, c'est un réel historique, défini, si loin qu'il faille remonter, par la façon dont les hommes l'ont produit ou utilisé ; et ce que le mythe restitue, c'est une image naturelle de ce réel. (...) Le mythe est constitué par la déperdition de la qualité historique des choses : les choses perdent en lui le souvenir de leur fabrication. (...) Une prestidigitacion s'est opérée, qui a retourné le réel, l'a vidé d'histoire et l'a rempli de nature, qui a retiré aux choses leur sens humain de façon à leur faire signifier une insignifiance humaine. La fonction du mythe, c'est d'évacuer le réel : il est, à la lettre, un écoulement incessant, une hémorragie, ou, si l'on préfère, une évaporation, bref une absence sensible. »²

Emmanuel van der Auweia's interventions, it seems to me, fill this falsely naturalized visual material with the loss of the real as described by Barthes, and bring affect to front stage, via formal operations that re-read, backwards, the manner in which the images « here » have come to their state. In other words, each time the viewer's — particularly our — gaze upon these artifacts is stripped bare, it visually reveals the way this gaze has been constructed and elaborated, just as van der Auwera scrapes the surface of the form to give it meaning.³

For the *Memento Series*, Emmanuel van der Auwera, strips the printing plates straight from the newspaper's production line and burns the majority of their surface before the final development; he saves but a single emotionally loaded image, one that can inscribe itself in the history of representation. In *VideoSculpture XII*, he positions polarized visors in front of monumental white screens and hence enlists viewers in the space as responsible for their perspective on distanced images of destruction. In both cases, a visual reading and a formal decryption deconstruct our habitual modes of consumption and dismantle the notion of information, the judgment of values or beliefs, and the mythical dimension of these visual artifacts to reinstate, at their core, a *presence*, a certain density and visual consistency which, all of a sudden, distances the standard instrumentalisation of affect in these media products, removing their generality and making them reappear again directly implicating the viewer : individually, personally, and subjectively.

Anne-Françoise Lesuisse, decembre 2016

¹ Susanne Gaensheimer, Nicolaus Schafhausen, « Foreword », in *Harun Farocki, Imprints/Writings – Nachdruck/Texte*, 2001 Lukas & Sternberg, New York, Verlag Vorwerk 8, Berlin, p. 8.

² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Editions du Seuil, 2010 (1957), Paris, p. 240.

³ Barthes établit que le mythe est une parole c'est-à-dire qu'il se définit, quel que soit son support (langage, photo, objet,...), selon les trois termes bien connus de la sémiologie : signifiant (face sensible) et signifié (concept) qui se combinent pour donner le signe. Mais le mythe pour Barthes « s'édifie à partir d'une chaîne sémiologique qui existe avant lui : c'est un système sémiologique second. (...) Tout se passe comme si le mythe décalait d'un cran le système formel des premières significations. » (*Id.*, p. 227). Dans sa démonstration, Barthes construit ainsi cette idée que le sens premier d'une image, sa valeur de signe, composé d'un signifiant et d'un signifié dans le système sémiologique initial, est décalé par le système du mythe et utilisé par celui-ci comme signifiant uniquement, comme *forme*, dans le système sémiologique second qui le caractérise (voir *id.*, pp. 226-233).