Dialectic must then be understood as repeated collision between words and images: images jostle together making words suddenly appear, words jostle making images suddenly appear, images and words collide making thought take place visually.¹

Created seven years before his death in 2014, and 10 years before Renée Green’s filmic homage to her friend, Harun Farocki’s *Comparison via a Third* (2007) is a two-channel 16mm film installation which shows the work processes at play in traditional, recently industrialized, and highly industrialized societies. Images shot in Indian factories are projected alone or side by side, alternately or confronted with scenes shot in European ones. The seemingly linear progression to more and more automated production processes is called into question by the montage of images that complexifies such a one-sided reading. By focusing on the comparison of similarities and contrasts between different times and temporalities, and between different geographies by means of the montage of two simultaneous projections, Harun Farocki’s installation does much more than create a dichotomy, or contrasting juxtaposition, between two realities. Rather, as the title of the work indicates, what he tries to do is precisely to open up a third space through the dialectical encounter of two images—to create the very space where meaning can occur. As he states in a 2004 interview, “In a double projection, there is succession and simultaneity, links from one image to the following image and to the image alongside. Links to what has been seen and to what is being seen at the same time. Imagine the three double bonds between the six carbon atoms in a benzene ring jumping back and forth—that is how ambiguous I imagine the links to be between one element in an image sequence and the one after or beside it.”²

Double projection in its relation to rhythm and duration, hence to time. And consequently in its relation to space, both as a place, in the sense of what is shown in the images themselves, and as the space of the projection. But also, crucially, as a mental possibility—a “projection”—opened up by the montage itself. Time, space, ambiguity. And movement. What is set in motion by this oscillation of atoms. How to capture, be it only in fragments a life, a life’s work, a location; the spatiality they are constrained within or opened up by, over time. I was reminded of this installation,
as well as many other of Harun Farocki’s films and installations, as I watched Renée Green’s ED/HF for the first time on the Walker’s Moving Image Commission website in 2017. But I was also, profoundly, flooded by memories of Renée Green’s other works/words, and all they have set in motion— their multifold oscillations, some immediately perceptible, others slow, undercurrent, elusive ones. What happens when the oscillations of two lives’ endeavor—Harun Farocki’s stopped by death, Renée Green’s in full flow—are made to resonate with each other? What happens when a conversation takes place through a work made by one with the memory of the words and images of another, informed by this other who is no longer there except through his work, the shared times, the shared spaces, the resonating histories? Is it a question of recalling someone’s life, or is it, more profoundly, to work with what this life, this work, has set in motion? And what spaces would there be to accommodate such an experiment? “When a person is dead, you can imagine what you like. You can also imagine respecting them as well. You can also review what they left, if you can find it” (ED/HF).

In fact, many more voices than Harun Farocki’s and Renée Green’s are in conversation in ED/HF—their words are interwoven with excerpts from poems by Robert Creeley (The Finger), Paul Celan (“Cello Entry”), Rainer Maria Rilke (Sonnets to Orpheus), words by playwright Heiner Müller and literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, those of art historian George Kubler (The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things) and philosopher Michel Foucault (What Is an Author). What brings them together is a voice—the calm, soft-spoken, warm voice of South African artist Nolan Oswald Dennis, who embodies all their texts, performing as the narrator of the film in one, fluid, continuity. “Sometimes, words are difficult, insistent, hard to find, as well as stubborn, insufficient. Beyond. Sometimes it’s beyond words. Too many words. Not the right ones. What changes. Seeing words? Hearing words?” (ED/HF, opening sentences).

In ED/HF, there is almost no written text, a usual cinematic device in Renée Green’s films, via intertitles; this aurality confers an almost tactile quality to the images the voice neither comments upon nor illustrates but accompanies and stands in dialogue with. Montage of words and images—via a third. The only written words, in white on black background, are the recurring “ED/HF” which structure the film in what could be seen as five chapters and a prelude, as well as Harun Farocki’s original name, “Harun El Usman Faroqhi,” which he simplified in 1969 to the name he has been known under ever since. At the end of the film, as the credits stop rolling, the last words read, “In Memoriam Harun Farocki.” It is thus Harun Farocki’s name, in three different spellings—HF, Harun El Usman Faroqhi, Harun Farocki—which hover on in the retina.

As the words “What changes. Seeing words? Hearing words?” are spoken, the camera moves in on Renée Green’s hands, one holding a pencil, the other resting on a stack of printed pages as she underlines a sentence we cannot read. The move from the film’s initial close-up shot of a speaker (aurality) to the written word, via an image of a computer and editing table, sets the parameters for the montages which occur throughout the film—between words, sounds, images, and what is sparked, or negotiated, in these “contact zones,” to quote a symposium and book project by Renée Green.3 But the shot of Renée Green’s hands on paper in itself triggers myriads of associations—with the way she thinks, researches, compiles, remembers, maps, and gives shape to her work. “The Berlin wall came down in 1989. I went to Germany in 1991. Cologne. I find a journal to help me remember … It doesn’t,” the voice-over states as the camera zooms in on one of Renée Green’s innumerable little black notebooks filled with her small, wonderfully clear and dense handwriting, recognizable from other of her films. Further into the film, the notebooks again, their pages overlapping as the artist’s hands leaf through them. “Thousands of words, I’ve written, for years, all piling up in black books. Some uniform, some of various sizes, some of varying colors. Yet all part of my system.” The notebooks stand for a space where thoughts occur and histories are written, but even to the writer of their words, they sometimes fail to trigger the memory they were meant to have captured. And as for us, as we watch ED/HF, we will read neither Renée Green’s words nor Harun Farocki’s—but listen to them while seeing the images, their flow, their rhythm, their combinations, what they do or don’t trigger for us in relation to the narrative we are witnesses to.
“1944 : I should have been born in Berlin, in the Virchow Hospital, but we left the city because of the bombing. I was born in Neutitschein, today Nový Jičín, at that time Sudentengau, today the Czech Republic.” As the narrator reads excerpts from a short autobiographical text written by Harun Farocki five years before his death, it is the images which tell us that we are hearing Harun Farocki’s own words, two thirds into the film. Indeed, the nature and montage of the images change; from a full screen flow of images of the sea, of landscapes both natural and urban—some of which recognizable as coming from Renée Green’s previous films—we move to the mise-en-scène of Harun Farocki’s own working method, the montage of two images, the double projection, here juxtaposed as two images of identical size set on a black background. Images of Berlin after the war, of Indonesia where Harun Farocki moved with his parents when he was five, of the films he saw, the places where he lived, etc., accompany in a similarly syncopated mode the life story being told.

“1959 : I am born. 1962 to 1966 : I ran away once and for all, moved to West Berlin…” Here again, it is the images that suggest who the “I” is, more than just the dates—“I am born” is heard while an image of light patterns fills the screen, and then moves back to the double image on black background as we hear “I ran away…” This alternation of voices and images punctuated by dates draws attention both to the interweaving and crossings between the two artists’ trajectories and to the specific and unique experience of each one, as they inhabit particular places at specific historical points in time.

In her 1999 film Some Chance Operations, Renée Green explored, through the figure of Italian filmmaker Elvira Notari (1875–1946), how the processes of memory are related to place, as well as the ways in which one experiences events directly or with a delay. Some Chance Operations can also be read as a meditation on cinema as an unstable form of archive, a receptacle of memory that can disappear at any moment. It is one of the films and videos, together with Partially Buried (1996), Super 8 Footage (1996), Partially Buried Continued (1997), Berlin Stories (2001), Here Until October 2004 (2004), Excess (2009), and Begin Again, Begin Again (2015), whose images are interwoven in the fabric of ED/HF. A woman’s face from one of Notari’s films appears and flickers on the screen as the words “film, cinema, photography, medium, specificity” complete a list started a couple of frames earlier, juxtaposed to a split screen featuring a young man’s gaze and an editing table seen from two different angles: “Montage, edit, combine, place next to, collage, confluence, conflate, Schnittstelle, interface.” The whole list could apply both to Renée Green’s and to Harun Farocki’s working tools and preferred mediums of expression—Schnittstelle/Interface also being the title of Harun Farocki’s seminal 1996 video, which can be read as a kind of self-portrait via the montage of all his previous films. And thus the conversation between the two artists—which, as noted earlier with regards to the textual sources, we already hear to be a conversation between more than two—becomes a conversation between the two artist’s works and, hence, between the many voices they each sought to bring forward, always paying attention to the specificity of each one of them. “What is so important about being German? What is so important about HF?,” the narrator asks, as the image moves from a view of Berlin to a shot of Harun Farocki’s 1995 film Workers Leaving the Factory being screened in one of Renée Green’s Media Bichos at MoMA.

In the introduction to her collected writings published in 2014, Renée Green writes: “I find this in my notebook: “Letters—sending messages in writing between two people over distances and through time—are often necessary for survival, yet most have forgotten this need. … Quoting, naming, listing in hope of a resonance beyond oneself, a power stronger than itself, reaching beyond the quotes, the names, the lists, the things, through time. That’s a wish. A dream. Enacted in made things. Not deferred.” The vital necessity of the epistolary mode—“over distances and through time”—not only to establish a dialogue but to reach further than the one, further than the two. A dream. Materialized in one of Renée Green’s profoundly moving and far reaching installation, Endless Dreams and Water Between (2009), in which visitors move in a space punctuated by written words on colored fabric, by sounds of the sea, by maps and drawings, and by several films, some on monitors, others projected on the walls. In the film which bears the title of the
installation, four fictional characters (all female, all living on a different island) write letters to each other, and dream of meeting up at an imaginary place called the September Institute. They are distinguished by their accents: Lebanese, South African, Canadian and North American. All write in addition to their other activities: Lyn is a designer living in Manhattan who is interested in communication systems, Mar is a herbalist and botanist based in Majorca, Raya does marine biology in San Francisco, and Aria edits and writes books, dividing her time between Manhattan, California, and Majorca. *Winter in Majorca (1855)* by George Sand is the text all four voices comment upon. The literary stories are therefore interwoven with the stories created by Renée Green, who draws on a very personal archive to create webs of meaning, “correspondences” between places and between her fictional characters who at times bear a strange resemblance to her: “She has an encyclopedic relation to life. It is important to her that she participate in the relay between what has passed and what is present” (Aria’s voice).

Although *ED/HF* is a work concentrated in the space of one video, while *Endless Dreams and Water Between* unravels over the space of a large installation, and although Harun Farocki is not an imaginary character while Lyn, Mar, Ray and Aria are, while watching *ED/HF* I kept recalling *Endless Dreams and Water Between*. How to make voices and realities present, without the representation of bodies or any bodily presence. The dialogues between the female voices speak of dreams and possibilities to be created, knowledge to be shared, connections to be made, ideal places, expanded time. They raise the fundamental question of what relationship we have with other people’s words, other people’s worlds, the history of places and the inhabitants and travelers who have created stories about them, the different movements and migrations that have shaped them and of which language bears the traces. As the narrator in *ED/HF* says of Harun Farocki, “He exemplified mixture. Combination. Yet didn’t speak about it. Made the work to encounter. Again. Begin again.” And later, referring to Renée Green, but resonating with both artists’ lives: “Travels shifted. Cities altered. People vanished. What I wanted to say, What I can say now.” What she can say now is both so vast, ever unfurling and ever searching, and so precise in its poetic concentration, that one is both humbled, and grateful, to be allowed to be a viewer, a witness, and a participant in the ongoing conversation which constitutes Renée Green’s work as a whole, and the “film as a conversation” which is *ED/HF* in particular. “Is it about decoding a secret? Or keeping it?” Maybe it is about watching, and listening, seeing and hearing, again and again, in order for memories to be shaped, and lives to be remembered, in the spaces in between.

Notes