This chapter discusses five important books published in the field of Film Theory in 2015 and is divided into five sections: 1. Film Rhythm After Sound; 2. Closed Circuits; 3. The Feel-Bad Film; 4. Realism as Protest; 5. Farocki/Godard: Film as Theory.

1. Film Rhythm After Sound

Writing in 1945, the influential film theorist Béla Balázs reflected on the ways sound affects the rhythm of a film:

>The sound film brought new laws of rhythm in its train. Words have a real acoustic rhythm which cannot be slowed down or speeded up by any illusion-creating technique without changing the meaning or dramaturgic significance of the words. Sound films also have silent scenes which have their own laws of rhythm. (Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art, trans. Edith Bone (Dobson [1952]), p. 132)

Later on in the same book, Balázs goes on to propose that sound film should not aim to achieve the perfection of the theatre, but the combination of image and sound should be used in creative ways. Reflecting on the first years of the talkies, he admits that for the most part the majority of them destroyed the innovations of silent-film language and ended up reproducing 'photographed theatre'. Then again, Balázs was astute enough to understand that the 'gap' between verbal and pictorial representation was not 'impassable' and could be bridged.

Lea Jacobs’ fascinating book Film Rhythm After Sound: Technology, Music, and Performance explores in detail the ways that the introduction of sound technology affected the rhythm of the film in terms of performance, editing and script. Her project strikes one as a desire to investigate something that Balázs touched on but never really explored in his Theory of the Film, since the subheading titled ‘Rhythm in Sound Film’ in the tenth chapter of his book, is
the smallest one in the book and contains only the above-quoted paragraph. In the introduction of the book, Jacobs skilfully explains the problems posed by the introduction of sound technology to the ‘rhythmic control of the cinema’ (p. 3). The fluidity of the film narrative, which was a key characteristic of early cinema, was now replaced by static scenes of synchronised dialogue. The major consequence of the talkie was that the sequences of images slowed down so as to allow the inclusion of dialogue in the narrative and this posed problems in the pacing of the actors’ performances. This is demonstrated clearly in the introduction where she compares in a shot-by-shot analysis the two versions (one in synchronised sound and one with ‘music-and-effects’) of Song o’ My Heart (Borzage [1930]) only to conclude that the first version looks much more inflexible precisely because of the use of dialogue. For Jacobs, the film clearly demonstrates the ways that the transition to sound initially confused filmmakers when it comes to aspects of rhythm and pacing. The aim of her study is to investigate the ways that filmmakers attempted to address the problem and the ‘aesthetic strategies for gaining rhythmic control over the new medium’ (p. 20). The book thus discusses how performance and film directing departed from previous strategies employed by silent-cinema directors and how dialogue was incorporated with performative movement and editing.

The book is thus written from a film-history perspective rather than from a film-theory one—although many of the questions that Jacobs intends to answer preoccupied film theorists; Balázs is a key example and he is curiously absent from the book, while Arnheim is mentioned in passing. But what makes this study extraordinary is Jacobs’ impeccable formalist analyses of sequences backed up by numerous illustrations and musical transcriptions. Although the introduction states that the book intends to investigate how classical Hollywood filmmakers responded to the challenge of the transition to sound, the first case study examined by Jacobs is Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible (1944). This is one of the most convincing chapters of the book; Eisenstein, Jacobs suggests, had a very clear understanding of the ways rhythm affects the narrative organisation of the film and how it can produce affective responses on the part of the viewers. For him, rhythm was the outcome of the relationships produced by music, speech, camera angles and shot lengths. As Jacobs’ analyses of key sequences reveal, each frame in Ivan the Terrible contributes to the rhythm of the film and Ivan is unique thanks to its ability to combine formalism which is simultaneously in the service of narrative content. It is one of the rare examples in the history of cinema of a film capable of integrating music, editing, figural movement and narrative development.
In her second case study, Jacobs looks at Disney cartoons and proceeds to reconsider ‘mickey-mousing’, that is, the synchronisation of the musical material with the actions on the screen. The shift from Eisenstein to Disney is a logical one given the former’s admiration for the Hollywood cartoons and his passionate writings in defence of Disney’s ability to subordinate the movement of cartoons to music so as to communicate ideas visually rather than literally. The significance of Disney cartoons, as Jacobs astutely observes, was their ability to provide sound and image synchronisation in every frame and beat, something that was not the case in early sound films working with live-performance synchronisation. She shows this by discussing how music played an important part in the represented actions, and despite the fact that Disney films initially integrated sound and image, by 1934 their rhythmic quality became more complicated to the point that in Playful Pluto (1934): ‘Music, sound effects, and animation are not simply tied together on every beat, but rather, each of these elements can be used separately or in tandem to create accents that themselves can be freely placed with respect to the underlying meter’ (p. 99). Jacobs strives hard to show that mickey-mousing is not a crude reproduction of sound and image but a complex production of rhythm and narrative pacing. While this chapter is extremely informative, at times it loses its hold on the reader mainly because of the numerous sequences discussed and the musical transcriptions that do not always do service to the argument. The reader gets a bit lost because the strictly and indeed engaging formalist readings do not always clarify the narrative implications.

Certainly, Chapters Four and Five are more ‘user friendly’ but one notes that Jacobs gets carried away by the numerous passages of close analysis to the point that very important conclusions are lost since they are packed amongst abundant sequence analyses from the case studies. Chapter Four focuses on the early musicals by Ernst Lubitsch and Rouben Mamoulian drawing attention to the complex relationship between words and music and the ‘musical treatment of speech’ in the films under discussion (p. 148). Jacobs highlights that these strategies of merging speech and music have their roots in theatrical traditions, such as the cabaret and the operetta. While these traditions were very influential in the early days of the medium what distinguishes Lubitsch’s and Mamoulian’s works was that unlike other films from the early sound period, they integrated musical score with speech so as to highlight rhythmic patterns, a strategy that Lubitsch eventually left behind in his later films.

The book’s final chapter discusses performance and dialogue timing in Howard Hawks, emphasising the shift in the director’s oeuvre, since in his
early films such as *Dawn Patrol* (1930) and *Scarface* (1932) there was a visible distinction between action and dialogue scenes. In *Scarface* there are numerous sequences without dialogue while the film’s form is structured upon a short-scene arrangement. In *Twentieth Century* (1934) Hawks, as Jacobs soundly shows, abandons such a strategy and attempts not to separate action scenes from the dialogue ones, but ‘he figured out how to mobilise scenes that have a lot of talk’ (p. 200). In effect, the characteristic Hawksian employment of performance in a film such as *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) was the outcome of a meticulous planning of gesture and speech that gave his films a dynamic pacing.

Jacobs’ book is impressive both in terms of the research and the numerous references from magazines, film practitioners and people from the industry, but also in the ways it organises its arguments looking at the objects closely. If a charge pressed on many books relying on film theory is that theory at times overshadows the very objects of study, that is, the films, this is certainly not the case here. But still, as mentioned in the beginning of the review, the fact that Jacobs does not spend some time reflecting on the ways film theorists such as Balázs considered problems of rhythm and narrative following the introduction of sound technologies is awkward. Furthermore, while she seems to speak about the Hollywood industry, at times the implications of her arguments look more expansive, and this is also evidenced by the fact that her first case study is a Soviet film from the mid-1940s. The reader would at least expect some justification for this choice in terms of either how Eisenstein was influenced by some of the rhythmic solutions proposed by Hollywood or the other way around. She also spends time referencing key arguments by René Clair, and one wonders whether Robert Bresson—an advocate of rhythmic film language that opposes the ‘photographed theatre’ of dialogue-driven cinema—could probably have been discussed in the book. Furthermore, Georges Sadoul’s *Histoire générale du cinéma* (Denoël [1946–54]) is absent from her discussion of early sound films, and this is indeed a book that has reflected a lot on the problems posed by the transition to sound in film. Last, while Jacobs clearly suggests that ‘narrative progression itself has a pronounced rhythmic component’ (p. 223), the narrative implications are mostly downplayed in her analyses of the case studies. Still, despite these minor reservations, *Film Rhythm After Sound* is an exceptional book that offers valuable insights into the solutions sought out by filmmakers, musicians, actors, scriptwriters and producers to the initial problems posed by the shift from silent to sound cinema. It succinctly demonstrates how formal innovations/changes are the outcome of a complex set of parameters involving technological development and
industrial expertise in various aspects of the filmmaking process, such as directing, editing, performance and music.

2. Closed Circuits

While Lea Jacobs’ approach in her extraordinary book can be described as anti-theoretical, since there is very little theory to it, the exact opposite can be said about Garrett Stewart’s *Closed Circuits: Screening Narrative Surveillance*. Stewart’s book is an audacious project that unapologetically returns to past debates in film theory. The book is an inquiry into cinema’s inclination to produce narratives that do not only thematise the conditions of contemporary surveillance, but simultaneously reflect on the medium itself and the ways its technologies accommodate surveillance practices. The self-reflexivity of the narratives of surveillance does not simply remind us that we are watching a film, but poses questions about mediation and how it has become part and parcel of the historical experience of surveillance.

Stewart returns to some overworked debates in film theory, that is, the theory of the apparatus, but his approach is totally original and refreshing. As he states in the preface to the book, the present technological proliferation of electronic apparatuses and monitors has vindicated the very idea of the apparatus, since millions of users’ activities behind screens are constantly tracked by an invisible system storing online activities in its data banks. The real exists simply to be replayed televisually and electronically and the digital age has radically questioned ideas of privacy and even bourgeois ideas of self-determination. This historical condition, Stewart suggests, has found its cinematic expression, since screen narratives (both from popular and art cinema) have rarely reflected so much on political and social conditions and the cultural anxieties over their own media of communication, namely the expansion of digital technology. The return to theory is therefore for Stewart necessary, because film narratives go beyond the level of plot, addressing in a meta-cinematic way questions of mediation and the medium itself. Film theory can recover what ‘has been lost’ in much of contemporary scholarship obsessed with industrial analyses and cognitive generalisations—and what has been lost for Stewart are discussions of the implications of the medium itself (p. xxii).

Stewart’s unapologetic gesture to return to questions of theory is neatly synopsised in a passage worth-while quoting:

> Few books are less nostalgic for Lacanian abstractions than this one, yet few less inclined to boast of having moved beyond them in the gloating lassitude of the ‘post’. Isn’t there some middle ground between proselytising and anathematising? And what occupies our
attention when we occupy it? Surely something more than cultural
generalisations or cognitive positivisms—meant to cleanse viewing
from the impositions of psychoanalysis and Marxism, in all their
supposed ideological subterfuges. But repression and interpellation
were only the marching cry of high theory—say, its strategy. Its
tactics were more trenchant and flexible. To my eye, the power of
suture theory—to take that quintessential instance of apparatus
study—already resided, to begin with, in its cinematographic ana-
lysis, its precision about montage and about the dialectical relation of
camerawork to image and of image to audience. (p. 9)

In a way, Stewart recalls some of Rodowick’s arguments (mentioned in
passing in the book) with regard to the importance of rethinking film
type. His approach is simultaneously Lacanian and Kittlerian (again a the-
orist mentioned sporadically in the book) pointing to narratives that
thematisi voyeurism, and the ways they make us conscious about the very
agency of the machine; and indeed the questions of structure posed even by
the excessive polemics of the Grand Theory of the 1970s are worth revisiting.

The book looks at a series of case studies starting with Fritz Lang’s classic
\( M \) (1931), which for Stewart epitomises cinema’s early preoccupation with
the dialectics between the act of seeing and the object that is looked at. This
ever film poses for Stewart some of the key questions with respect to
mediation and the very idea of ‘invisible viewing’ (p. 27), which is charac-
teristic of the cinematic oeuvre of the great German émiigré, and it is this
‘invisible viewing’ that is pertinent in the era of digital technology in which
surveillance is depersonalised; it can thus only be attributed to systemic
structures and technologies of vision. In this chapter, Stewart eloquently
revisits Jean-Pierre Oudart’s writings on ‘suture’—the ways that the spec-
tator is woven into the narrative so as to create a sense of narrative coher-
ence that conceals the ideological structures within the narrative and the
medium itself. He relates Oudart’s arguments to Slavoj Žižek’s defence of
the theory of suture, arguing in a polemical way how films like \( M \) manage to
resist suture’s coherence and reveal the very process of ‘seeing’ not only as
an act of ‘seen’ (being a spectator), but also as a systemic process of being
watched (p. 31). But most importantly, \( M \)’s narrative encapsulates many of
the arguments that Stewart goes on to make in the following chapters; by
watching the serial killer Beckert (played brilliantly by Peter Lorre), the film
narrativises the act of surveillance in modernity, but it also draws attention
to the medium and the moving image as an apparatus, or as Stewart suc-
cinctly puts it, as ‘a universal index of potentially being watched’ (p. 58).
Stewart offers fine analyses of his case studies, surveillance and the novelistic in Chapter Two with an emphasis on Orwell’s *1984*. Chapter Three looks at Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Conversation* (1974), Brian de Palma’s *Blow Out* (1981) and Tony Scott’s *Enemy of the State* (1998). Here Stewart makes a distinction between early surveillance films in which photographer and sound engineers (in the first two films) try to act (without success) upon the evidence they have gathered as opposed to more recent films where resistance in the present panoptical reality is rendered impossible. Chapter Four revisits some classical films including Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) and Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (1960), while Chapter Five discusses some contemporary ones including Michael Haneke’s *Caché* (2005) and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck’s *The Lives of Others* (2006). In both films the screening of narrative surveillance gives us an insight into narratives of national past—the problematic colonialist past in Haneke’s case and the contradictions of the DDR in von Donnersmarck’s film. Chapters Seven and Eight make some intriguing arguments on the relationship between image and death with the aid of case studies from contemporary films representing war and—given that war is increasingly turning to visual extravaganza—one needs to recognise the complex reality that war is visualised not only because of the proliferation of images, but also because war tends to rely more and more on ‘computerized picturing’ (p. 189). Stewart’s case studies here pose questions of agency. In a highly mediated reality who conducts the war? Are the humans simply avatars in a warfare that has gone digital?

Stewart’s book is impressive both in its scope and its thorough analysis and demonstrates an impressive understanding of theories—from theories of the apparatus, to Deleuze and Kittler—and applies them to films convincingly. As he states in the conclusion, we increasingly see films that thematise the act of watching. Stewart introduces the neologism of ‘surveillancinema’, ‘whose electronically marked camerawork in a pivot beyond suture, can often turn on you, the spectator, in a twofold move, adjusting the point of view to insinuate a further point about unreturned viewing’ (p. 254). As he suggests, cinema has returned to its roots making the act of looking and being looked at one of its central concerns. For all its impressive points, one at times feels that the argument of the book has been earned very early and what follows are numerous repetitions. To this, I should add that Stewart’s prose can be disconcerting, since he tends to pack much material in his chapters, often making it hard to understand where we are and where the argument goes. In a way, it would be fair to suggest that the book combines both the positive aspects of apparatus theory—that is, the polemics and the rigorous theoretical reasoning; but also the negative ones, namely the
excessive use of jargon, the reduction of films to objects that simply illustrate theory, and a prose style that at times looks like a collection of statements rather than apodictic arguments. Surprisingly, the book does not include a bibliography and this somehow speaks volumes about the writing style, which does not rely much on secondary research but on a predetermined argument. Then again, some of Stewart’s points on some of the much-discussed films in film theory, such as *Rear Window* or *Cache*, are well rehearsed and some inclusion of secondary literature on the films would have at least enriched some of the book’s points. Still, the book contains some of the most remarkable reflections on the relationship between cinema and surveillance, the shift from analogue to digital and how this shift does not necessarily make us forget the questions posed by the film medium; by contrast it urges us to return to the very origins of the medium’s concerns.

3. The Feel-Bad Film

Nikolaj Lübecker’s *The Feel-Bad Film* contributes to topical debates on films that produce uncomfortable effects in the audience. Some of the key works in the field are Tanya Horeck’s and Tina Kendall’s collection of essays *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe* (EdinburghUP [2011]), and Asbjørn Grønstad’s *Screening the Unwatchable: Spaces of Negation in Post-Millennial Art Cinema* (Palgrave [2012]). Yet Lübecker’s book differs in scope because as he also states in the Introduction, he does not simply intend to ‘explain’ the provocations behind these films, but also to ‘challenge’ them (p. 5). Lübecker defines the feel-bad film early in the Introduction with reference to Alain Resnais’ *Muriel* (1963) and Todd Haynes’ *Safe* (1995). As he explains, the key aspect of the feel-bad film is that it generates desires in the viewing audience, which are not satisfied but frustrated, ‘*it creates, and then deadlocks, our desire for catharsis*’ (italics in the original, p. 2). The book does not simply intend to show the different approaches of feel-bad narratives, but its aim is to identify their ethical and political implications. The author’s intellectual rigour is demonstrated early in the book, where he makes a distinction between ‘humanistic spectatorship’ and an ‘anti-humanist one’. In his discussion of the former, Lübecker resorts to Sartre’s famous article *What is Literature?*, where the renowned philosopher describes the work of art as a harmonious collaborative act between author and reader. Sartre suggests that literature makes the reader ‘experience freedom’ (cited in Lübecker, p. 8), but the more this experience is stabilised, the more the audience recognises the other in itself.
For Lübecker, this is a standardised paradigm of the ‘art as model’ thesis. For Sartre, art in this way serves simultaneously a political and an ethical role. Art is not about individual experience, but about understanding ourselves by getting to know the other. Anti-humanist spectatorship is at the antipodes of this paradigm and Lübecker affirms that it can make us understand that spectatorship here is not structured upon mutual recognition. The films of Lars von Trier, Michael Haneke, Harmony Korine and Bruno Dumont amongst many others, cannot be seen as a model for a better society, nor are they structured around a process of reciprocal collaboration—I shall return to this later on. These films are unpleasant and at times ‘aggressively didactic’ (p. 11) and produce strong emotional responses (at times even somatic reactions and the Cannes screening of Gaspar Noé’s Iréversible is a good example) that deny the closure we associate not only with films from the Hollywood industry, but also with all artistic objects that in a Sartrean way sustain the ‘art as model’ standpoint. But as he also clarifies, feel-bad films are not necessarily associated with the New Extremism in cinema, since they do not rely so much on images of graphic violence or sex. In actual fact, many of these films have less explicit scenes of sex and violence even compared to objects from the mainstream cinema canon.

Lübecker’s prose is characterised by enviable clarity and his analyses of the case studies show tremendous respect for the objects, in the sense that the films do not simply operate as illustrations of a predetermined thesis—and I felt that this was at times the case in Stewart’s book. But most importantly, Lübecker keeps on offering clear descriptions of the problems posed by the films engaging in close readings of the objects, being also willing to ask questions about their provocations. The book consists of an Introduction, three chapters and a conclusion and this shape gives it a nice and concise structure that helps guide the reader to the key points and questions. The first chapter is dedicated to formal strategies of assault focusing on prominent films such as von Trier’s Dogville (2003), Haneke’s Funny Games (1997), Simon Staho’s—an important Danish filmmaker whose work is strangely overlooked in the Anglophone scholarship—Daisy Diamond (2007), and Brian de Palma’s Redacted (2007). Chapter Two focuses on spectatorial feelings of unease, looking at Gus Van Sant’s Elephant (2003), Claire Denis’ I Can’t Sleep (1994), Lucile Hadzihalilović’s Innocence (2004), Stan Brakhage’s Kindering (1987) and Ruben Östlund’s Play (2011). Finally, the last chapter discusses Bruno Dumont’s Twentynine Palms (2003), Urszula Antoniak’s Code Blue (2011), Marina de Van’s In My Skin (2002), Claire Denis’ Les Salauds (2013) and Harmony Korine’s Trash Humpers (2009).
In all chapters, Lübeker weaves his arguments judiciously, but I would like to focus on two important points made in Chapter One and Chapter Three. In his discussion of von Trier’s *Dogville* and Haneke’s *Funny Games*, Lübeker addresses an overused argument about these filmmakers being ‘masters’, who intend to manipulate the audience. He elaborates on Jacques Rancière’s famous critique of the Brechtian and Artaudian paradigms of representation that aim to force the audience out of their passivity. Rancière notably suggests that these paradigms are based upon an understanding of a separation between ‘masters’ and students, and the latter are only supposed to resort to the formers’ intelligence to learn what they do not understand. But Lübeker’s point challenges this assumption explaining that these filmmakers (and indeed both Haneke and von Trier draw a lot on the Artaudian and Brechtian paradigm as he acknowledges) do not necessarily intend to force a message, but to expose the audience to an experience that can make them reflect on a series of ethical and political contradictions (and indeed this is the case in the films of Pedro Costa and Straub/Huillet heavily influenced by the Brechtian paradigm of representation, but as Rancière admits, they go beyond it). The author argues persuasively that:

> Although Rancière has a very good point when he polemicises against certain dogmas about the emancipatory virtues of active spectatorship, this does not mean that the direct—and manipulative—address that we find in these films should necessarily be associated with stultification and reactionary politics. The shrewdness or aggressiveness with which these directors address the spectators (very often playing with the Hegelian master-slave dialectic) can stimulate wildly disparate responses in the spectators. So even if the films lie far from Rancière’s ideal of moving beyond the active/passive dichotomy, some of these feel-bad films can be seen as ambiguous carnivalisations of master-slave relations, parodies of stultification. (p. 43)

What is implicit here in Lübeker’s argument is that these filmmakers and others such as Ruben Östlund—whose work is shrewdly examined in Chapter Two—do not necessarily assault to preach, but to search for answers along with the audience. The director does not occupy the seat of the ‘teacher’, but of the ‘searcher’. And here towards the end of the chapter, the author makes some of the most important points in the book, that contradict even his own idea—mentioned above—that these filmmakers do not anticipate a collaborative spectatorship on the part of the audience.

A key point is made by the author in the last chapter of the book, in which he showcases his deep knowledge of broader cultural debates. Here
Lübeckecker returns to Peter Bürger’s influential writings on the avant-garde and his distinction between the historical avant-garde, which aimed to bridge the gap between art and life, and the neo-avant-garde which neutralised the polemical effects of the former leading to the co-optation of the avant-gardist aesthetic by the culture industry (p. 111). Lübeckecker’s original thesis rests on the assumption that feel-bad films are part of a third-generation avant-garde dedicated to an exploration of a series of ethical, social and political impasses without sharing the optimistic standpoint of the historical avant-garde. This offers Lübeckecker the chance to respond to James Quandt’s critique of contemporary French cinema as a cinema concerned with provocation for the sake of it, without having any political implications. Lübeckecker does not see this as a negative trait, since for him ‘politically, the strategy of going into the dead-end is problematic and counter-productive; aesthetically, perhaps not’ (p. 161).

There is one further thing to note in Lübeckecker’s arguments. In the Introduction he clearly states that his approach to the films he analyses is close to the writings of Steven Shaviro and his writings on affect. The contradiction is that Shaviro’s key argument is that previous modernist forms of self-reflexivity have been de-radicalised and scholarship should emphasise moments of affective sensuality rather than form; yet this book strives hard—especially in the first chapter—to recuperate reflexivity particularly a non-redemptive one. In this respect, I think that it would have been beneficial for *The Feel-Bad Film* if Lübeckecker had engaged more with Eugenie Brinkema’s book *The Forms of the Affects* (only referenced in passing), which unlike much work on affect—either cognitivist or Deleuzian—does not understand affect simply as a communication of fixed sensations, but as something directly interrelated to ‘reading for form’ and the contradictions posed by such a reading (*The Forms of the Affects* (DukeUP [2014]), p. 37). Nevertheless, Lübeckecker’s book is one of the most interesting studies of films that provoke feelings of discomfort; the clear, apodictic and jargon-free writing style makes it a pleasure to read while his close readings of the films demonstrate a passion for the objects. The films are not mere illustrators of theory, but dynamic objects, whose ambiguity and provocations force us to theorise.

**4. Realism as Protest**

It would probably be easier to get politicians from Israel and Palestine to find a solution to the Middle-East problem than get a bunch of film scholars to collectively agree on a definition of realism. The question of realism has
preoccupied film scholarship from the early days of the medium and recent technological developments have rendered the definition of realism even more problematic. While in the 1970s film theory film realism was an anathema and stigmatised as the naïve reproduction of ideology, recent work by esteemed scholars such as Ian Aitken, Ivone Margulies, Philip Rosen and many more have challenged this and have produced works that force us to take realism seriously. Tara Forrest’s book *Realism as Protest: Kluge, Schlingensief, Haneke* participates in these debates on the reconsideration of realism and makes her case using case studies by practitioners who have produced work for cinema, television and theatre. Cinema, as Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj rightly point out, is an exceptional medium because of its ‘interdisciplinary nature’ (*Critical Visions in Film Theory*) (Bedford Books [2012]), p. vii) and Forrest’s interdisciplinary approach offers insightful perspectives on the very issue of realism.

Forrest’s understanding of realism that runs through her analysis of case studies by Kluge, Schlingensief and Haneke is shaped by Alexander Kluge’s argument that realism is not a form of reconfirming the existing reality, the social relations and the status quo, but a way of opposing it. For Kluge the reality offered by mainstream media, most of mainstream cinema and the political establishment is far from being realistic, because it fails to show that the way things are is not necessarily a naturalised and unchangeable state of affairs, but the product of certain historical and social conditions. According to Kluge, a realistic attitude is, therefore, one that has the potential to show that things can be different. Realism in this school of thought is directly associated with art’s capacity to mobilise a public sphere.

Forrest’s book is extremely timely since in 2014 the Anglophone world had the potential to have access to a long-overdue translation of Kluge’s and Oscar Negt’s *History and Obstinacy* (Zone Books [2014]), an ambitious project looking at the archaeology of labour and addressing questions of realism, history and art. For Kluge, the spectator should be given centre stage, in the sense that she/he should be invited to actively intervene in the meaning-making process. But this does not involve repeating predetermined meanings that she/he simply consumes as a good student (to invoke Rancière’s aforementioned critique). By contrast, Kluge even invites misunderstandings on the part of the audience, since as Forrest perceptively explains, he considers total understanding to be blocking the audience’s capacity to respond to the material. As Kluge says: ‘If I have understood everything then something has been emptied out. We must make films that thoroughly oppose such imperialism of consciousness’ (cited in Forrest, p. 19). The first two chapters of the book are dedicated to readings of Kluge’s work on film and television and
they illustrate clearly the philosopher’s/filmmaker’s thesis of realism as protest. Forrest spends some time explaining the importance of Kluge’s ‘mixed aesthetic’ that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction through an aesthetic that brings together photographs, historical materials, intertitles and fictional situations. Kluge’s aesthetic is motivated by his firm belief that the very notion of reality does not refer solely to the present state of affairs but also to alternative possibilities. Kluge refers to the well-known Benjaminian argument regarding fascism’s aestheticisation of politics, arguing that this is not simply something to be relegated to the past, but it is part and parcel of the ‘reality character’ of the media’s aestheticised portrayals of reality that (again Benjamin here) anaesthetise the spectators. Forrest draws on sequences from The Patriot (1979) and the collaborative film War and Peace (1982) to clarify the ways that Kluge’s experiments are based upon representational practices that collate different materials aiming to provoke questions, without answering them.

What is particularly distinctive in Kluge’s case is, as Thomas Elsaesser observes in his book German Cinema Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory Since 1945 (Routledge [2014]), that unlike his mentor Theodor Adorno he was not dismissive of the mass media, but he wanted ‘to intervene from within’ (Elsaesser, p. 175). This is evidenced by the fact that he has been involved in numerous television experiments aiming to foster an active public sphere. As Forrest explains, Kluge understands the active public sphere to be ‘an inclusive, dynamic, and collaborative space where people participate in the meaning-making process surrounding issues, policies, events, and ideas which impact directly on their concerns and interests’ (p. 48). But Kluge is not simply satisfied with theorising and this is the reason why he has been involved in numerous television programmes in which he returns to the roots of the medium merging again reality and fiction, Meliès and Lumière. Commenting on his television experiments he says: ‘With the true Lumière I am with Meliès, that is reality is fiction and fiction is reality’ (p. 56). As Forrest insightfully explains, this play between fact and fiction is not a formalist trick but demonstrates a desire to activate an alternative public sphere and open out ‘the realism of the senses’ (p. 30).

There is no better answer to the sceptics, who might easily dismiss all these ideas as elitist formalist experiments, empty of practical effects, than the work of Christoph Schlingensief explored by Forrest in the third and fourth chapters of the book. Kluge’s idea of realism as protest is brilliantly pushed further by the late filmmaker, performance artist and television practitioner, who shared the idea that art should not be simply focused on communicating fixed ideas, but on mobilising the public sphere too, by...
introducing debates, arguments and questions. Forrest draws attention to Schlingensief’s performance experiment—modelled on the renowned TV series *Big Brother*—*Bitte Liebt Österreich* staged in 2000. In a temporary dwelling which was monitored on a 24-hour basis, Schlingensief screened the activities of asylum seekers from numerous countries and following the *Big Brother* format every day one of the asylum seekers was evicted. The public could observe the asylum seekers’ activities live through peepholes or via cameras online. The controversial project instigated numerous responses precisely because of its sensible subject-matter and the inability to distinguish between fact and fiction. As Forrest says, the project ‘proved to be highly effective in mobilising spectators to actively participate in a very public debate about both the status of the performance itself, and more significantly, the xenophobic, anti-immigration policies of Haider and the FPÖ’ [Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, the extreme right-wing party which formed a government of coalition with the Conservative Party between 2000–2002] (p. 85).

Forrest’s prose is also very clear and dedicated to explaining and clarifying things for the reader. Her analyses of Schlingensief’s work clearly demonstrate political art’s potential not simply to challenge the viewer on the intellectual level, but on practical issues related to everyday life. She brilliantly shows how these Brechtian-rooted experiments can effectively draw on pop-culture forms, and change them from within. This is evidently the case in Forrest’s discussion of Schlingensief’s reality *TV Freakstars 3000*—modelled on programmes aiming to train future pop stars. Schlingensief’s innovation was his casting of disabled people, a choice that brought attention to Germany’s unfinished business with some of the not so flattering moments of its history, for example, its Nazi past. Similarly, in her discussion of *Quiz 3000*, a game show modelled on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, she explains how Schlingensief used the format of the famous show only to ask the contestants and the audience disturbing questions, such as which minority group faces more rapes in Germany, or how many anti-Semitic attacks take place in Germany every year etc. The aim of *Quiz 3000* was to use the popular format of the game show so as to re-establish communication and reflection on the part of the audience on pressing everyday issues, rather than to ‘pin meaning down’ (p. 135). In a way, Schlingensief’s engagement with popular cultural forms resonates with Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s arguments that the Left should go beyond the New Left’s critique of the media as manipulative platforms, and aim to change them from within. There is a utopian element in these works, something that Forrest elaborates in her discussion of Haneke’s *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994) in the last
chapter of the book. To be fair, this is not the strongest part of the study, but Forrest makes some intriguing points about Haneke’s ability to foster an active engagement with the materials he elaborates. For Forrest, Haneke’s film is indicative of a negative utopia and her argument makes bridges with Kluge’s understanding of the potential of the medium to negate the reality principle. What Forrest, however, does not do in her book is to position her work in relation to the recent developments in theory and the strong reanimated interest in realist film theory. It would be useful for her arguments and the reader, if the Introduction or the epilogue of the book (unfortunately there is no epilogue or conclusion) would summarise the reasons why it is important to historically re-evaluate some of these radical arguments, which are more intricate than the 1970s perception of anti-realist counter-cinema as the only route to politics and representation. Overall, Forrest’s book is an invaluable study that clarifies some really complex terms without resorting to jargon. It is an important contribution to debates on realism and art that can be of interest to scholars in film and critical theory.

5. Farocki/Godard: Film as Theory

Jean-Luc Godard and the late Harun Farocki are two filmmakers whose work continues provoking, inspiring, and puzzling cinéphiles across the globe. Volker Pantenburg’s Farocki/Godard: Film as Theory examines the work of the two filmmakers arguing that their works pose some important question apropos cinema’s ability to theorise. The original book was published in German in 2006, and translated into English in 2015. Pantenburg’s central thesis is that Godard’s and Farocki’s films are concrete examples of cinema’s ability to theorise. For Pantenburg both auteurs make films that are not passive illustrations of theory, but it is predominantly the objects that do the theorising. Early in the book, the author explains that this distinguishes his approach from previous grand theoretical methods of analyses, which saw films as reflections of predetermined theories. In a passage worth quoting Pantenburg explains that:

Methodologically, this book tries to follow the examples of Godard and Farocki, who don’t apply theory to their films from the outside but develop it from the image sequences themselves. Instead of mobilising the conceptual apparatus of film semiotics, psychoanalysis, or other disciplines, the films are understood as contributions to a theoretical discourse whose potential is developed in readings of individual works or thematic complexes. (p. 26)
Pantenburg does not deny that even narrative mainstream cinema can theorise, and he does not simply reduce Godard’s and Farocki’s films to a counter-cinematic aesthetic. By contrast, what distinguishes the work of both auteurs is the fact that their films provoke ‘questions about “cinematic thinking”’ (p. 22). Their films are dedicated not just to presenting, but also to making things visible by engaging in thought processes about cinema and the image as a whole.

Pantenburg sees both filmmakers as inheritors of a Romantic aesthetic that refuses the distinction ‘between object-language and meta-language’ (p. 24). This is also indicated by the fact that both started as film critics and have always made connections between the act of writing as filming, and the other way around. Pantenburg’s innovative perspective rests on his thesis that Godard and Farocki engage in a critique of the image not to participate in what Martin Jay names as ‘anti-ocularcentric discourse’, but to identify ways in which images can actively form concepts and bring ideas to the fore. Pantenburg places Godard’s and Farocki’s work in the context of what W.J. Mitchell describes as ‘the pictorial turn’, an image critique that does not understand images as rigid reflections, but as dynamic processes, as ‘a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, discourse, bodies, and figurality’ (Mitchell cited in Pantenburg, p. 57). In light of this, Godard’s and Farocki’s persistent engagement with questions of the image cannot be simply seen as a mistrust of visual culture. Certainly, this aspect cannot be overlooked, but an important element stressed by the author is Godard’s and Farocki’s belief in the capacity of the image to resist, and ‘the search for other types of images that can incorporate a criticism and theorisation of the image’ (pp. 58–9). How do they do that? A key component of their work, according to the author, is the practice of placing different images together trying to reflect on the medium, the very act of representation and the medium’s connections with history. In many respects, their approach is not unlike Eisenstein’s, who also drew on Romantic concepts of bringing images together so as to form concepts and ideas. In Pantenburg’s reading, there is no room for the reproduction of the standardised truism in film studies scholarship that montage has been de-radicalised. By contrast, montage is an active process which involves reflecting on the relationships created by the act of bringing images together. This is a dialectical and dynamic process and, as Pantenburg convincingly suggests, such a dialectic is simultaneously complete and resistant to closure. The process is valorised at the expense of a finite conclusion. This is a very important point in the book very much in line with the author’s argument that despite the shifts in the filmmakers’ oeuvre, there is a
remaining ‘didactic undercurrent’ even though direct political militancy has been replaced by a more ‘detached attitude’ indicative of an enduring politicised aesthetic (p. 11). To this we should add—and here we return to some of Kluge’s arguments elaborated also in Forrest’s book—that both filmmakers refuse the established dichotomy between realist and fictional images. As much as a real image can lie a fictional one can be ‘real’, but also the other way around.

Chapter One lays out Pantenburg’s understanding of film as theory and in the remaining five chapters he places emphasis on a key feature of both filmmaker’s aesthetic, that is, intermediality. Chapter Two focuses on films in the filmmakers’ oeuvre, which incorporate images of paintings. Chapter Three challenges the predominant criticism that understands these filmmakers’ works under the rubric of the essay film, Chapter Four conjectures that theory is also the product of labour in the editing table and explains how the labour taking place at the editing table has also theoretical implications, Chapter Five offers some reflections on incorporating photography on film and the final one on the motif of the hand as an expressive element in Godard’s and Farocki’s cinematic narrative. One of the most significant insights offered by the book is the author’s refreshing take on the essay film—a term he finds problematic particularly because of criticism’s tendency to equate the essay film with fixed generic patterns and ideas of narcissistic authorial autonomy. Pantenburg considers the term’s use in film theory problematic and he clearly demonstrates how Godard’s and Farocki’s films cannot be considered expressions of an authorial vision. The director does not occupy a privileged ‘master’ position, but he occupies the position of the ‘searcher’, a position that the audience needs to share too. Rather than essayistic film, he prefers the term film as theory, which understands theory not as a replication of statements through the use of sound, but as something visual. Theory is produced when linking different types of images and it is something independent of language. It is a process of labour that takes place during the shooting, the editing and the reception of a film. With the exception of some dated approaches to terms such as realism, self-reflexivity, illusionism that are even at the antipodes of the book’s key arguments, this is a remarkable and strongly argued book that debunks many misconceptions regarding the reception of two significant auteurs. Credit also to the translator, who has managed to work on a very difficult German text and translate it elegantly without diminishing the complexity of Pantenburg’s strong arguments.
Books Reviewed


