1. Le film qui pense

Image, Theory, Practice

> "Theory has not really been able to arrive at the image—to speak, to hold to, to live by the image; infinitely less has it been able to retain the image in its words. Perhaps this union of theory and image is an impossible marriage. Yet I continue to believe in the surprises that could arise, at this level, from encounters of the word and the image."
>
> Raymond Bellour

Raymond Bellour's statement comes from his text "Analysis in Flames," which returns to the debates around "film as text" and is concerned with the relationship between text and image.[1] Bellour's retrospective diagnosis sounds resigned, but a cautious optimism can also be sensed. On the one hand, he considers the attempt to bring theory and visual practice into closer approximation to have failed, surmising a fundamental irreconcilability between the two spheres: although image and text occasionally come together—in particular film-analytical texts, for example—their relationship remains supplementary and does not bring about a real synthesis that would allow us to characterize film as a theoretical language in its own right. On the other hand, this failure can equally be understood as an appeal: where word and image collide, but also where images enter into mutual relationships, something new might emerge.

Bellour's observation is my point of departure for a more general inquiry. In fact, a clear dividing line is usually drawn between the visual practice of cinema and the field of theory. Theory—even image theory—is per se not image, but needs to be translated into the language of the logos. William J. T. Mitchell summarizes this position in his canonical book *Picture Theory*: "We tend to think of 'theory' as something that is primarily conducted in linear discourse and logic, with pictures playing a passive role of illustrations, or (in the case of a 'theory of pictures') serving as the passive objects of description and explanation."[2] Why this incompatibility? one might naively ask. Couldn't the irreconcilability also be understood as a challenge? From this point, at any rate, questions can be posed that will form a guideline throughout the following text. What is the relationship between theoretical

1 Raymond Bellour, "Analysis in Flames," *Diacritics*, vol. 15, no. 1 (spring 1985), pp. 52-56, 56.

2 William J. T. Mitchell, "Metapictures," ibid., *Picture Theory* (Chicago: Chicago UP 1994), 35–82, 82.

discourse and visual language? How can one put forward an argument not only *with* images but *from* the images themselves?[3] And more basically, could the apparent distance between both areas help to illuminate the general relationship between theory and practice?

Theory and practice are usually understood as opposites, as mutually exclusive poles of thought and action, of abstract reflection and concrete realization. Here the thinking head, there the executive hand: two body parts by which the spectrum of initial conception and subsequent realization of idea and material can be gaged. Theory implies abstraction and distance. In its aim to make general assertions, it needs to abstract from concrete action and individual cultural artifacts, and to adopt a distanced position of observation in regard to its subject matter. Theory—and here is the measure of its validity—is supposed to encompass and explain all the phenomena within its defined territory. Yet in doing so, theory can never be both explanation and object of explanation—the solution as well as the problem. Theory shouldn't be affected by its subject matter; it knows no feelings.

There are good reasons for questioning such juxtapositions. From the perspective of poetics and literary theory, this has been occurring for at least two hundred years. Attempts not only to combine theory and practice—which even within a model of combination continue to be thought of as separate areas—but also to contest the very premise of splitting the field of discourse into theory and practice, can be found in the aesthetic theory (and practice, one would need to add) of early Romanticism. In one of his most well-known programmatic comments, Friedrich Schlegel remarked that transcendental poetry would have to "portray itself within each of its portrayals, being at all times poetry and the poetry of poetry."[4] In this sense, all writing practice should be combined with a self-reflection of the same practice. Schlegel outlines one of the most incisive and far-reaching concepts that early Romantic thought drew on: a distanced, self-confident speaker position is called into question—not for incidental, playful reasons but out of epistemological necessity—in favor of a mingling of discursive

3 See also Gottfried Boehm, who traces the important stages in the marginalization of the image and suggests how a "logic of images"—a non-predicative logic, that is—might look: Gottfried Boehm, "Jenseits der Sprache? Anmerkungen zur Logik der Bilder," lecture in the series "Iconic Turn" at the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, January 16, 2003, printed in *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder*, eds. Hubert Burda, Christa Maar (Cologne: DuMont 2004), 28–43.

4 Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenäums-Fragmente" [1798], *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* vol. II, ed. Ernst Behler (Munich, Paderborn, Vienna: Schöningh 1967), 165–255, 204.

levels. In practice this skepticism leads to a permanent, ambiguous oscillation between meta- and object language, and in the end to a questioning of the differentiation between them. This not only has consequences for the neat separation of linguistic levels but also disrupts the question of genre. As Friedrich Schlegel, the most important "practical" theorist of early Romanticism along with Novalis, puts it: "Such a theory of the novel would itself have to be a novel,"[5] and thus a text that would be understood as both theory and practice.[6] What Schlegel calls for is an attitude that doesn't categorically differentiate between poetic theory and authorial practice but makes the utopian concurrence of both areas the aim of thinking and writing.

Film as a "Concrete Medium"

These thoughts may seem inappropriate to introduce a discussion that is essentially concerned with two filmmakers. But they refer to basic questions that can equally be asked about working with images. How can we think about the relationship between theory and practice? Is it possible to imagine developing (film) theory within film, and if so how might this look? As long as we are involved with language, particularly the poem, whose concentrated form always seeks to be read as both a message and a reflection on it, the connection between theory and practice may be obvious. The poetological program appears to be firmly woven into the practical implementation of rhyme and meter. But how are we to assess the relationship between theory and practice in the medium of film? Can Schlegel's adage be translated to mean that a theory of film could only be imagined *as film*? Can films express themselves "theoretically" at all, or at least be understood as theoretical expressions? It may at first come as a surprise to see film placed in such emphatic proximity to the theoretical. After all, filmic reality—excluding animation and certain forms of abstract film that do without the camera altogether—deals per se with a concrete material, which is merely "doubled" in the film image. Film, to echo Kant, is entirely a matter of intuition; it is separated from the concept by an

5 Friedrich Schlegel, "Brief über den Roman" [1800], ibid., 329–339, 337.

6 In Novalis's *Fichte-Studien* the mingling of theory and practice is conceived even more programmatically: "Theory without practice, practice without theory, is incomplete." (Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, vol. 2, *Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl (Darmstadt: WBG 1999), 57).

apparently unbridgeable divide.[7] Within the dichotomy between empty thought and blind intuition developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, one would undoubtedly have to characterize the reproductive mode of film as "blind," and Jean-Luc Godard's blind assistant editor in JLG/JLG[8] may be an allusion to this specific blindness of film.

The point, however, is that this blindness can also be considered film's decisive accomplishment. It was its exactness of reproduction, which apparently allowed no leeway for interpretation or abstraction, that was revolutionarily new about the medium in the early twentieth century. Only for this reason was film also able to serve as a media utopia for a number of materialistically oriented theories.[9] The technology itself put a stop to unrestrainedly abstract philosophizing. Speculative flights of fancy seemed to have become impossible because of the dictate of documentary reification. However the diagnosis was evaluated, the medium was considered "mindless," and this could either be condemned or welcomed—depending on whether it was felt to indicate anti-intellectual dullness or the fulfillment of anti-idealistic hopes. But there was general agreement that in film a moving train was so alarmingly "real" that the viewers, according to the gladly recounted (although undocumented) anecdote,[10] hastily fled the hall at the first public projection on December 28, 1885—a scene which Jean-Luc Godard took up ironically in 1963 in his film The Carabineers, when the naive protagonist Michel Ange anxiously covers his face with his arms during a similar scene.[11] According to Hartmut Winkler, the success of the medium of film can partially be ascribed to the fact that it formulated a *concrete* answer to the groundlessness of linguistic representational models, which Hugo von Hofmannsthal had explored in his "Lord Chandos Letter"

7 See the famous juxtaposition of reason and the senses in "Transcendental Logic": "Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind's concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition, as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts). Further, these two faculties or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only from their unification can cognition arise. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1787], translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1998), 193–194.

8 JLG/JLG. Autoportrait de décembre, F/CH 1994, director: Jean-Luc Godard.

9 Walter Benjamin's and Bertolt Brecht's canonical media theories greeted the medium as a materialistic release from an idealistic understanding of art.

10 The sense and purpose of propagating such legends needs to be examined separately. What is certain is that at its moment of birth, an effectiveness and power was ascribed to the medium that goes far beyond all other media.

11 The Carabineers, F/I 1963, director: Jean-Luc Godard.

of 1903, taking up Nietzsche's "mobile army of metaphors."[12] While the fin de siècle had learned to mistrust language as a field of permanent dislocations and imponderabilities, film had a stable counterpart in reality. To doubt the formation of significates in the light of floating signifiers seemed inappropriate here.

> Photography and film were enthusiastically welcomed as a release from language; in a very direct way, they realize what is anticipated as an aesthetic experience with Chandos, and they choose the same way out of the crisis: photography and film are in fact the radical form of a language exclusively articulated in *concreta*. They counter the increasingly false generality with the respectively individual, and the unity of the concept with the variety of examples. If the concept "table" can indeed be dissolved into the plurality of concrete, photographable tables, this primarily means that abstraction and subsumption, ultimately in fact the formation of significates, can be avoided.[13]

Winkler radically contrasts language and film, telling us that film functions according to a fundamentally different principle. In the light of the mistrust of language felt by Nietzsche, Hofmannsthal, or Fritz Mauthner, film does in fact appear to be an ideally language-free realm in which reality and representation match one another perfectly. But objections can easily be raised to a description of the fin-de-siècle "language crisis" and the development of the technical media of photography and film as two sides of a coin. Asking about the social groups who can be said to have "enthusiastically welcomed" the film certainly won't lead us to those who were "infected" by the language crisis. Mistrust of language has to be seen as an "intellectual disease" and did not occur in the same social class as the triumph of the cinematograph, which at least until its literary ennoblement around 1910 was closely connected to the funfair, the music hall, and vaudeville. Those who were responsible for the economic success of the cinematograph during its first two decades had a much less complicated relationship to language and neither the leisure nor the refined taste buds to upset their stomachs on Hofmannsthal's famous "moldy mushrooms."[14] However, Winkler seems less

12 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truths and Lies in an Extramoral Sense" [1873] *Nietzsche and the Death of God Selected Writings*, ed. Peter Fritzsche (New York, Boston: Bedford, St. Martin`s 2007), 47–51: 51.

13 Hartmut Winkler, *Docuverse. Zur Medientheorie der Computer* (Munich: Boer 1997), 206f.

14 See, for example, an early analysis of the cinema audience: "Concerning the viewers, they overwhelmingly came from the working classes. Persons from the middle classes were entirely

concerned with a precise socio-historical argument than with a systematic description of film as a "concrete medium." His definition can raise some initial questions pertaining to "film as theory": How does this "adherence to the concrete" relate to the possibilities of theoretical expression in film? Does it merely limit these possibilities, or exclude them altogether? In other words, should film be classified as an "untheoretical" medium because of its technical a priori?

Since the 1950s, this question has repeatedly been answered with a clear "yes" by realistic film theories. Concreteness was the decisive distinguishing feature that set photography and film apart from all other types of image and art forms, particularly in those writings, such as Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film* or André Bazin's film-theoretical texts, that emphasize the realism of the medium. There seemed to be no reason to doubt the adequacy of filmic representation; film adhered to reality—or reality to film—like a shadow to the object that throws it. This not only prevented the articulation of abstractions, but, in the decades following its invention, also spoke against the consideration of film as an art form at all. For according to common sense, artistic expression and conceptual abstraction were equally reliant on the accentuation of differences from their source material in order to attain an individual style. It thus seemed impossible that art could be created through mere doubling.[15] Or—to rephrase this media specificity in semiotic terms—the "pure" denotation of the film image appeared to surpass all connotation, which in spoken and written language has the greater part in the formation of meaning.[16] It is exactly this point that Siegfried Kracauer wishes to make in the subtitle of his book with his programmatic definition of film as a tool for the "redemption of physical reality." What he describes as a "marked affinity for the visible world around us,"[17] and repeats like a mantra throughout the book, structurally occupies

unrepresented in many cinemas. The better families and the educated appear to ignore the cinema entirely." "Drucksache Nr. 2317 der Nationalversammlung vom Jahre 1920," quoted in Konrad Lange, *Das Kino in Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Stuttgart: Enke 1920), 124.

15 For this reason, numerous nineteenth-century arguments against photography repeat themselves in the early debate on cinema. Wolfgang Ullrich has shown how the photographic blur was primarily used to ennoble the apparently cold, inartistic medium by technically imitating the painterly techniques of Romantic landscape painting. Wolfgang Ullrich, *Die Geschichte der Unschärfe* (Berlin: Wagenbach 2002), 19-29.

16 For a differentiation of the denotation and connotation of cinematic image sequences, see Christian Metz, "Quelques points de sémiologie du cinéma" [1966], ibid., *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, vol. 1 (Paris: Klincksieck 1971), 95-109, 99ff.

17 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford UP 1960), ix.

the same place as Winkler's unavoidable mimetic reification. The flipside of the argument is that film, with this emphatic relationship to reality, is denied any possibility of abstraction. Kracauer's model therefore rigorously subsumes conceptual thinking under the heading of "uncinematic content." The concrete relationship of the medium to reality is diametrically opposed to the formulation of general concepts, which ultimately leads Kracauer to make the categorical judgment that "conceptual thinking is an alien element on the screen."[18] He ontologically isolates the nature of film in its "realism," and sees a departure from the essence of the medium in increasing abstraction. André Bazin, by opening his essay collection *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* with the famous text on the "ontology of the photographic image," follows the same argumentation: "unformed reality," which is understood as a literal *impression* on the film material and only secondarily as an *expression*, is declared the Archimedean point of the cinematic, and artificial intervention into the material through editing and montage is neglected as supplementary. In his detailed study on montage, Rudolf Kersting summarizes the positions of Bazin and Kracauer as follows: "The reality continually invoked by Kracauer and Bazin exists as a *factum* which precisely conceals what it literally is: made. The real for them is per se unconceived. Its substance is metaphysical."[19] However, their reasons for emphasizing film's attachment to concrete reality are quite different. With Bazin—and this is decisive for Jean-Luc Godard, whose thinking was influenced by the *Cahiers du cinéma* milieu of the 1950s—the real and the concrete are a dual opposition to both the illusory world of the studio and the illusionary political agendas prior to 1945. The significance of Italian neo-realism, which brought the real back into film as a morally purifying force, cannot be overestimated here. The much-quoted statement that a film shot also implies a moral attitude should be interpreted to mean that film regains credibility in its connection to unstaged social reality. Reality is thought of as an area that is resistant to ideologization and manipulation.

The emphatic embrace of film as the "art of the concrete" is older than the ideas of Bazin and Kracauer, who hold this to be the crux of film. In the 1920s, which saw the first wave of film theory, the referentiality of the technical medium of film was an important theoretical coordinate. In 1930, Béla Balázs, whose film theory is far from realistic, as it is primarily devoted to the formal and technical possibilities of the cinematic alteration

18 Ibid., 264.

19 Rudolf Kersting, *Wie die Sinne auf Montage gehen. Zur ästhetischen Theorie des Kinos/Films* (Basel, Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld 1989), 261.

of reality, comes to an initially similar conclusion. At the end of his second book, *The Spirit of Film*, whose very title contains a counter position to the realist view, he writes:

> Film is the art of seeing. It is therefore the art of the concrete. In obedience to its inner destiny it resists the murderous abstraction that has succumbed to the spirit of capitalism, turning objects into commodities, values into prices, and human beings into impersonal labor power. Despite everything the photographic technique of the close-up forces film to develop a realism of detail that situates us unflinchingly in present time.[20]

Balázs does not welcome film's enforced reification from an anti-theoretical position—his three books on film should themselves be read as artistically associative film theory—but from a materialist perspective: he finds abstraction "murderous" because it defines one of the key principles of capitalist economization. While goods, prices, and the workforce can only be produced through de-individualization and exchangeability (and themselves, as is intended, produce de-individualization and exchangeability), film relies on the visibility and proximity of every object recorded on camera. For this reason, according to Balázs's utopia, it resists all objectification.[21] Balázs, unlike Bazin and Kracauer, isn't opposed to intervention into the material through montage[22] but to the leveling-down brought about by an indiscriminate abstraction at the cost of the individual.

The constellation developed in the thinking and cinematic practices of Godard and Farocki is a different one. Both filmmakers, particularly Godard, were strongly influenced by André Bazin, whose reflections on films in their combination of concrete observation and abstraction took film discourse to a new level in postwar France. In 1951, he founded the *Cahiers du cinéma*—the world's most influential film journal to this day—which offered Godard and many other protagonists of the later New Wave a platform for their early texts on film. Bazin is therefore, alongside Henri Langlois, the director of the Paris Cinémathèque, the second founding figure of postwar French cinema—someone whom Godard describes as a

20 Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory. Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books 2010), 229.

21 This also applies when the resulting film itself can be sold as a product and is subject to the usual market laws.

22 At the Congress of Independent Filmmakers in La Sarraz (Switzerland) in 1929, Balázs had met Eisenstein, whose films he and many others had followed with interest and enthusiasm in Berlin.

"forefather," and who is the inspiration for Godard's type of filmmaking *through* text production.[23] "Bazin was a filmmaker who didn't make films, but made cinema by talking about it like a colporteur."[24] Godard's early interest in editing and montage can at least indirectly be understood as a reaction to Bazin's preference for the uncut long take, which contained more reality than the edited sequence. "Because of my education, I was always full of a spirit of contradiction. I said to myself, they say 'green,' but couldn't you say the opposite? Bazin said 'sequence shot,' but I asked myself whether ultimately the classical series of shots might not be good too."[25] For Farocki, who published a selection of Bazin's writings in German translation in 1975, the French critic and theoretician was more of a general impulse. "Bazin was above all an inspiration. His literacy and talent enabled him to place film within intellectual history without it becoming philistine."[26]

As far as their relationship to "realism" is concerned, the matter is more complicated with Farocki and Godard. Even if the work of both filmmakers has an affinity to "documentary" techniques, it is also informed by a profound doubt about the direct reproducibility of "reality" by the camera. In their shared belief in the research character of the medium and its ability to contribute decisively to the investigation of reality, they are certainly on Bazin's side. In their skepticism about cinematic methods, however, they are in disagreement with him and belong to a theoretical tradition that has subjected the medium of film to sharp criticism since the 1960s. A group of mainly French theoreticians turned against the essentialization of the cinematographic concept of reality, as primarily found in Siegfried Kracauer, and insistently pointed out the ideological implications of the *dispositif* and the pseudo-objective aspects of the technology (camera, projection), in which a particular, culturally given perspective is maintained.[27] According to this view, "reality" is in no way free of ideology. On the contrary, what is portrayed in film should rather be seen as an

23 For Bazin's importance to French film lovers during the 1950s, see Antoine de Baecque, "Un saint en casquette de velours," ibid., *La cinéphilie. Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture. 1944-1968* (Paris: Fayard 2003), 33-61.

24 Jean-Luc Godard, "L'art à partir de la vie. Entretien avec Jean-Luc Godard par Alain Bergala" [1985], *Godard par Godard I*, 9-24, 10.

25 Ibid.

26 Tilman Baumgärtel, Harun Farocki, "Aus Gesprächen," Tilman Baumgärtel, *Harun Farocki. Vom Guerillakino zum Essayfilm. Werkmonografie eines Autorenfilmers* (Berlin: b_books 1998), 204-228, 208.

27 The canonical texts of "apparatus theory" are the conversation between Marcelin Pleynet and Jean Thibaudeau, "Economical, Ideological, Formal..." trans. Elias Noujaim, *May '68 and Film Culture*, ed. Sylvia Harvey (London: BFI 1978) 149–160, and Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological

effect of the specific parameters of the apparatus. The space recorded by the camera and projected onto the screen should not be understood as a mere doubling of a "naturally" existing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface but as the continuance and petrification of a perspectival code that was bindingly *set* during the Renaissance; that is, with the development of bourgeois society. It is a construction whose ideological presuppositions should be revealed.[28] The cinematic "apparatus" and its implications, criticized from a materialist position, were invoked against the idea of filmic realism: "The cinematographic apparatus is a strictly ideological apparatus; it disseminates bourgeois ideology before anything else. Before a film is produced, the technical construction of the camera already produces bourgeois ideology."[29] While these statements can be taken as a shared basis, the importance and interpretation of what should be understood in detail under "ideology" differs in the debate's various texts. Whereas for Marcelin Pleynet the film camera—via its precursors the camera obscura and the box camera—perpetuates the fixation of a standardizing bourgeois gaze, for Jean-Louis Baudry its constitution of a perceiving subject is decisive and should be questioned and subverted from a psychoanalytical perspective.[30]

No matter how great the differences between the "apparatus" theoreticians are in detail, their criticism and theory are clearly directed *against* the medium of film when they unmask its technical requirements as ideological. Film criticism thus also became an institutional critique focused beyond the individual film on the entire complex of "cinema." In this critique, which mainly appeared in the journal *Cinéthique* (founded in 1968) and in avid debate with Godard's polemical films from the Dziga Vertov Group, it is easy to identify the premises of the (literary) theory then current in Paris: critique of the apparently "natural" code of visual representation, an attack on the metaphysical prerequisites of all cinematographic identification, demystification of the "aura" of cinema, etc. This critique is primarily aimed at the negative effects of the cinematographic *dispositif*; it is essentially

Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia UP 1986), 286–298.

28 Apparatus theory would in fact be unthinkable without the concept of ideology propounded by Louis Althusser, as one of its primary aims was to attack the ideological premises of the cinema *dispositif*.

29 Pleynet, Thibaudeau, "Economical, Ideological, Formal ...", 158–159.

30 See *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, 219–298. Parts 2 ("Subject, Narrative, Cinema") and 3 ("Apparatus") introduce the positions of Baudry and others (Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier").

inimical to the cinema. The Parisian "apparatus debate," which was more widely echoed in America than in Germany, may have been a theoretically versed examination of the cinema and the ideological aspects of its technical a priori, yet in its repudiation of cinema as a whole it is hardly compatible with a re-evaluation of film as a theoretical instrument.

A positive "utopia of film,"[31] on the other hand, which attempts to use the capacities of film as an instrument of research, was formulated in Germany in Alexander Kluge's films and texts of the 1960s. Unlike the objections raised in France, Kluge's critique is not directed against the technical apparatus but attempts to use it differently in order to reveal a reality that is always more than the merely visible. Where Pleynet and other writers involved in the "apparatus debate" attack the hidden manipulative aspects of camera and projection, Kluge discovers the constructive elements on the level of reality itself. For Kluge, who is as much a cinematically operating theoretician as Godard and Farocki, reality is always composed of various levels and "shots," containing as much so-called fiction as "plain" reality.[32] In both his film montages and his texts, Kluge repeatedly counters the simplifying view of reality with a sense of possibility inspired by Robert Musil.[33] A sense of possibility that, as I will show, can particularly be developed through the principles of *montage*.

The relationship between concrete material and abstract thought is also central to Kluge's reflections on the utopia of conceptual thinking in film. His premise, which he developed in his 1964 essay on the fundamentals of cultural and film politics, would be shared by Farocki and Godard, particularly as Kluge often refers to the latter: "The cinematic movement has great similarities to the brain's stream of thoughts and images; the main thing is to entrust oneself to this stream."[34] For Kluge, too, the equivalence of thought and image promotes the idea of film as an instrument of research; films are not—or at least not exclusively—after entertainment but "aimed

31 In 1964, Kluge published a text entitled "Die Utopie Film" in the journal *Merkur*, no. 201, reprinted in Alexander Kluge, *In Gefahr und größter Not bringt der Mittelweg den Tod. Texte zu Kino, Film, Politik*, ed. Christian Schulte (Berlin: Vorwerk 8 1999), 42–56.

32 See Alexander Kluge, "Die realistische Methode und das sog. 'Filmische'" and "Die schärfste Ideologie: daß die Realität sich auf ihren realistischen Charakter beruft," ibid., *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin. Zur realistischen Methode* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1975), 201–211 and 215–222. In the second essay, Kluge brings fiction and reality together in the first sentence: "It must be possible to portray reality as the historical fiction that it is."

33 For Robert Musil's example, see Alexander Kluge's acceptance speech on receiving the Heinrich von Kleist Prize in 1985: Alexander Kluge, "Wächter der Differenz. Rede zur Verleihung des Kleist-Preises," *Kleist-Jahrbuch* 1986, ed. Hans Joachim Kreutzer (Berlin: Schmidt 1986), 25-37.

34 Kluge, "Die Utopie Film," 44.

at knowledge."[35] Kluge explained these ideas in more detail a year later, when he extended the principle of montage from the image alone to the relationship between image, sound, and language. "The coincidence of linguistic, acoustic, and visual forms and their integration into the montage enables films to make more complex statements than would be possible with one of these forms alone."[36] So from the very beginning, film has been less of a "medium" than a "multi-" or "inter-medium." From Kluge's perspective, what arises at the interface of the different levels in an equilibrium between the concrete aspects of the mise en scène and the abstract aspects of the montage should be described as a cinematic argument. Film theory in this sense occupies a middle position between intuition and concept:

> In film, radical intuition in the visual part and conceptual possibilities in the montage combine into an expressive form which, like language, enables a dialectical relationship between concept and intuition without the stability this has in language. This gives particular possibilities to the literary language adopted by film.[37]

With Kluge, this involves a clear deferral. The theoretical potential of film isn't something that directly expresses itself in the filmic material but rather something that needs to be synthesized and transformed by the viewer: "The expression is not materially concentrated in the film itself, but arises in the mind of the viewer in the cracks between the cinematic elements. This kind of film does not envisage a passive viewer who 'only wants to sit and watch'."[38] In Kluge's argument, this displacement of the utopian from the film itself to the challenged and active viewer becomes a social force through the accumulation of individual utopian moments. Potential for social change arises from supposedly individual audience responses, from "sensuousness," "imagination," "willful obstinacy," to name a few of Kluge's key terms.

Harun Farocki and Jean-Luc Godard are also coordinates on this map of theoretically oriented critique of a naive understanding of cinematic realism. For the films and texts of both directors formulate alternatives to Kracauer's dichotomy of reality and abstraction. In one of his early texts,

35 Ibid., 53.

36 Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz, Wilfried Reinke, "Wort und Film" [1965], Klaus Eder, Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien. Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser 1980) [*Arbeitshefte Film* 2/3], 9-27, 16.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 15.

"Defence and Illustration of Classical Construction,"[39] whose argumentation seems to be rooted in the classical poetics of the "invisible cut," Godard suggests that the apparent realism of film can only be thought of in terms of the tension between concrete elements and abstraction. Every depiction in a good film both transcends mimesis and indicates something more general: "[...] there is a look, posed so afresh on things at each instant that it pierces rather than solicits them, that it seizes in them what abstraction lies in wait for."[40] The cinematic perspective should accordingly be understood as a twofold gaze, directed to concrete reality (this is the mise en scène, the level of duplication) but identifying in it what points toward abstraction and "depicting" this through the montage.

> Two forms of gaze always coexist within them [cinematic images; author's note]: the technical camera eye and the human eye; an optical record, on the one hand the fact of never quite being able to ignore the concrete object in front of the camera, on the other an appropriation of this record, its integration into a history of images, and into stories told in (visible and invisible) images. The images are pictures ("object images": photographic records of camera realities on celluloid, polyester, or acetate) and they are "metapictures," images not of "things in themselves," but of society.[41]

Because they are part of a series of prior or future—potentially other—images, they point beyond the concrete depiction and carry the potential for abstraction within them. The work of Godard and Farocki shows a particular kind of emphasis on the connection between reification and abstraction. Rather than a fixed border, the relation between "concrete" and "abstract" in the medium of film should be seen as a smooth transition. What can be observed in both filmmakers is a reversal of the initial question: talking about reality in the medium of film doesn't necessarily mean asking about the degree of reality of the depicted world but above all about the reality effect of media images themselves. Film has equally to do with a reality of images and a secondary realism induced by the

39 Godard's title quotes Joachim du Bellay's "Défense et illustration de la langue française," from 1549, one of the programmatic documents that reevaluated the French language. Immodestly and ironically, Godard places himself within the tradition of advocacy for a new language—here, of the cinema.

40 Jean-Luc Godard, "Defence and Illustration of Classical Construction" [1952], *Godard on Godard*, ed. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo 1986) 26-30, 27.

41 Kersting, *Wie die Sinne auf Montage gehen*, 268.

depiction itself. The realism of the medium should not be seen as its essence but as the *function* of a particular technically and culturally determined principle of representation. The films of Farocki or Godard should by no means be described as less "realistic"; rather, they attempt to devise a realism that doesn't play reification off against a possible theorization but discovers the one within the other. Even in the 1960s Richard Roud pointed out that the apparent opposition of realism and abstraction misses something in the case of Godard. As much as Godard's early films seek a direct access to reality in their abandonment of artificial lighting and preference for live sound, they are characterized by "the tensions created between the demands of reality and the demands of abstraction."[42]

This is why the films and texts of both authors have always been deeply rooted in their respective contemporary societies. The student movement, the Vietnam War, the Algerian War, but particularly the images these political events generated, were an important background to the production of images and texts during the 1960s. "Theory" was not something that ignored concrete reality but incorporated it into wider considerations. When Harun Farocki and other DFFB students forced the abandonment of the Knokke Experimental Film Festival in 1967 with a deliberate intervention in protest against the Vietnam War,[43] it was not without reason that this was accompanied by the slogan "Réalité! Réalité!" directed against the aloofness of the cinematic avant-garde. One had to take a stand on Vietnam, according to the protesters, and therefore purely aestheticizing formal experiments, as represented by some of the films shown, should be rejected. "Reality" was anything other than a neutral depiction of the status quo but a counter-reality of other, more reflected and theoretically informed images aimed against the inflationary television representations of war. Images that criticize other images, and in this critique delineate an alternative visual space. Godard's and Farocki's position is thus that of a specific realism in which filmmaking becomes a political act.

42 Richard Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Secker & Warburg 1967), 82. In the same chapter, Roud gives a series of examples of the "double pull towards both reality and abstraction" (93) from Vivre sa vie, Contempt, and Masculin féminin. However, "abstraction" is very generally taken to mean any clearly recognizable *shaping* of the material.

43 See Baumgärtel, *Harun Farocki*, 13-17.

Film Theories / Film as Theory

A look back at more than a century of intellectual involvement with film shows that the problem of reification was interpreted very early on as an indication of the medium's unsuitability for theory. This naturally didn't limit the possibility of talking *about* film theoretically: the gradual recognition of film as an art form resulted in the necessity of setting it apart from the established arts and assigning it to a discursive field of its own. A lively debate, which attempted to define film in terms of its media similarities to and differences from the established narrative forms of literature and the theater, began in 1909 at the latest.[44] What has gone down in film history as the "Kino-Debatte" primarily refers to the growing visibility of film in contemporary aesthetic discussion. The attempts to emancipate film from the funfair and establish it as an art form in its own right were largely aimed at upgrading the *content* of the medium. It was hoped that the adaptation of traditional literary material and collaboration with well-known writers[45] would attract a bourgeois audience.[46] This development had two major consequences: film came to be largely identified with narration, while its medium-specific innovations were considered less important.

From the very beginning, however, attempts were made to see film less in its capacity to remediate content but to analyze it in terms of its *form* and the possibilities this offered, and to emphasize its differences from literature and theater. Early on, for example, Georg Lukács developed his

44 See Anton Kaes, ed. *Kino-Debatte. Literatur und Film 1909-1929* (Munich, Tübingen: dtv, Niemeyer 1978). I am aware of the unclarity of the subsumption of the theater under *narrative* forms, but I am less concerned here with a comparison between the dramatic and the epic than with the narrative element common to both. This should be seen in contrast to other forms of expression, such as music.

45 In 1913, the first "film d'auteur" movement culminated when the film industry tried to interest numerous authors in writing film texts. See Joachim Paech, "Autorenfilm," *Deutsche Literatur zwischen 1945 und 1995. Eine Sozialgeschichte*. ed. Horst Albert Glaser, (Stuttgart: UTB 1997), 693–712. See also Kaes, "Einführung," *Kino-Debatte. Literatur und Film* 1909-1929, 1–36. The year 1913 also saw the publication of Kurt Pinthus's *Kinobuch,* for which authors such as Else Lasker-Schüler, Max Brod, or Albert Ehrenstein wrote "film pieces": *Das Kinobuch,* ed. Kurt Pinthus [1913/14] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1983).

46 "In the realm of cinema, all the non-narrative 'genres'—the documentary, the technical film, etc.—have become marginal provinces, steps, so to speak, while the *full-length novel-like feature film* (which is usually called a 'film' in a kind of succinct convention) is increasingly outlining the royal road to cinematic expression." Christian Metz, "Quelques points de sémiologie du cinéma," ibid., *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, vol. 1 (Paris: Klincksieck 1971), 96.

"Thoughts toward an aesthetic of cinema,"[47] which attempted to distinguish the medium from bourgeois theatre through the concept of "the present." In the following years, until the introduction of the sound film, numerous literary figures from Thomas Mann to Bertolt Brecht participated in the sometimes polemic discussion in Germany on the contentious new art form. In the phase of early film theory, apart from the basic recognition of the artistic value of film, a distinction can be made between theories of acting, camera, and montage, which analyze film in terms of respectively individual elements.[48] Film was established at least as an *object* of theoretical reflection relatively soon after its invention, but there was also a restriction: film was now allocated an exactly delimited functional space, which can be described by the words "entertainment" and "distraction," and in exceptional cases by "aesthetic edification." Rudolf Arnheim's essay title *Film as Art*[49] can therefore be taken as a summing-up of the majority critical position. The title of this book, *Film as Theory*, is intended to set a different focus, attributing a cognitive potential to film alongside its function as art or entertainment[50] and identifying a space in which art, entertainment, and knowledge coincide.

The discipline of art history, which sought to gain a new competence as a general science of images during the 1990s, has particularly raised the question of a possible "self-awareness" of the image. In this context the various self-reflexive mechanisms of artworks have (once again) come under scrutiny.[51] William J. T. Mitchell's concept of the "metapicture" was particularly helpful for the present study. The metapicture is the central element of what Mitchell, who became interested in the relationship between text and image through his involvement with William Blake, calls "picture

47 Georg Lukács, "Thoughts toward an aesthetic of the cinema," *Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture and Politics*, no.13 (2001), 13–18.

48 See Helmut M. Diederichs, "Zur Entwicklung der formästhetischen Theorie des Films," *Geschichte der Filmtheorie*. ed. ibid., (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2004), 9-27, particularly 12ff.

49 Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* [1932] (Berkeley: Universtiy of California Press 2006).

50 A similar proposition, though weighted otherwise in relation to different material, is put forward by Thorsten Lorenz in his reading of the "cinema debate" literature: "The philosophy of the cinema needs be read as the switch from genitivus objectivus to genitivus subjektivus for this reason. [...] Philosophy is cinematographic. It sustains itself, zombie-like, on discursive life because it cunningly conceals the moment of its technical realization." Thorsten Lorenz, *Wissen ist Medium. Die Philosophie des Kinos* (Munich: Fink 1988), 19.

51 See Valeska von Rosen, *Mimesis und Selbstbezüglichkeit in Werken Tizians. Studien zum venezianischen Malereidiskurs* (Emsdetten, Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag 2001) and Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997).

theory."[52] Terminologically referring to the logical-philosophical relationship between meta-language and object language, and to the critical concept of "metafiction,"[53] Mitchell sees the metapicture as an image that is capable of reflecting "itself." Metapictures are by no means restricted to art—on the contrary, taking a "picture" in a broad sense to mean any conceivable image is essential to Mitchell's "iconology". This is why he finds many of his examples in cartoons, magazine illustrations, or caricatures. Although he sees Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, which Foucault declared an iconic "representation [...] of Classical representation,"[54] as an image that almost encyclopedically integrates self-reflective mechanisms—through motivic scaling, different viewing standpoints, reflections, and framings—the famous "duck rabbit"[55] picture puzzle, which works with the viewer's perceptive instability, is just as central to Mitchell's argument. In the context of such images, which he calls "dialectical pictures," he suggests a definition that can be applied to the films of Farocki and Godard: "Metapictures are pictures that show themselves in order to *know* themselves: they stage the 'self-knowledge' of pictures."[56] This definition implies two things: first, a trust in images that implicitly anthropomorphizes them. The metapicture is thought of as a "self-aware image," to which both autonomy and agency are attributed. Second, that the theoretical is not something that needs to be added to the image from the outside but exists in the references, ambivalences, and discontinuities within its surface. Mitchell develops his ideas in relation to still images—primarily drawings and paintings—but they can be productively applied to films.[57] Furthermore, it can be suggested that particularly

52 In the title, *Picture Theory*, the word "picture" can be read as both a noun and an imperative.

53 See Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (London u.a.: Routledge 1993).

54 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] (New York: Vintage Books 1994), 15.

55 The "duck rabbit," whose epistemological implications also occupied Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, is an illustration that originated in the nineteenth-century humorous weekly *Fliegende Blätter*. The viewer sees either a duck with a long beak or a rabbit with long ears, depending on which of the picture's two images is seized upon by his or her cognitive apparatus. For a discussion of this image, see Mitchell, "Metapictures," ibid., *Picture Theory* (Chicago: Chicago UP 1994), 35– 82: 45–57.

56 Ibid., 48. See also the in-depth interview with William J. T. Mitchell in the journal *Mosaic*: "Essays into the Imagetext. An Interview with William J. T. Mitchell," *Mosaic* 33/22 (June 2000), 1-24.

57 Particularly since Mitchell, although in a different chapter, discusses Billy Wilder's Sunset Boulevard as a classic metafilm, being at once a reflection on the dying silent film and the love of the classic movie. See William J. T. Mitchell: "Beyond Comparison. Picture, Text, and Method," ibid., *Picture Theory* (Chicago: Chicago UP 1994), 83–107, 100ff.

in Godard's late works the puzzle picture's challenge to jump between two possible images is shifted from the cognitive apparatus of the viewer to the visual level whenever two images are not only cross-faded but merged in a flickering, pulsating alternation between two individual frames. This can occasionally be seen in his works from the 1970s—for example Comment ça va—but it becomes a major principle in his film-historical studies, such as Les enfants jouent à la Russie or Histoire(s) du cinéma.[58]

The identification of the theoretical in the image itself could be said to be an *autonomization* of the image. But this only describes one side of the model. For neither in Mitchell's theoretical deliberations nor in the practical work of Farocki or Godard does the constitution of a "self-aware image universe" lead to an abolition of the viewer but on the contrary to an activation. If every heterogeneous image, and all the more every combination of several images, is the place of a decision, then the projective space of this decision is predetermined by the material—although the decision itself as to the nature of the link between the images is always taken by the viewer. And even if the "theoretical" lies in the images themselves, it still needs to be translated in order to make this content explicit. Both Harun Farocki and Jean-Luc Godard have been carrying out such translations for several decades, and one of the tasks of this book its to translate and elucidate this work in turn. The point here is not so much that the active viewer completes an "open artwork" by filling in the gaps with his or her conceptual repertoire—this would be the idea that the viewer becomes co-author of the film to a certain extent. With Godard and Farocki, there is rather the opposing tendency that the author himself becomes the viewer. It is not only coquetry when Godard, in conversation with Woody Allen, claims to his interlocutor's amazement that he is glad to have an idea of the film *at the end of a film*, thus radically contradicting the idea of a set screenplay that just needs filming.[59] It is also an acknowledgement of being reader and viewer—in the first instance of his own films and in the work at the editing table— who imparts an interpretation to the film through the montage.

Kaja Silverman has detected in Godard's late works the "author as receiver": someone who, despite his productive presence in his films,[60] increasingly becomes their receiver through techniques of citation and

58 Comment ça va, F 1975, Les enfants jouent à la Russie, CH 1993, Histoire(s) du cinéma, F/CH 1988-1998, director: Jean-Luc Godard.

59 Meeting Woody Allen, F 1986, director: Jean-Luc Godard.

60 This particularly applies to Histoire(s) du cinéma and JLG/JLG.

dissociation. In order to distinguish this from Roland Barthes's much-quoted dictum of the death of the author, Silverman writes: "The Godard who lives on after his authorial death is not a scriptor but rather a receiver. What he receives is language itself, which now emerges as the veritable agent both of speech and writing."[61] And the numerous scenes in which Godard and Farocki appear as authors in their films do in fact show them as hinge and relay between production and reception. The editing table at which Farocki sits to view and comment on his films in the installation INTERFACE marks the same point of intersection between (seeing, intuitive) "theory" and (writing, filming) practice as Godard's place in HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: the sounds of the editing table winding back and forth and the rattle of the electronic typewriter dominate the soundtrack and identify Godard's film-historical project as the superimposition of seeing and writing, reception and production, practice and theory.

The formulation "film as theory" implies the question of what should be understood by "theory." One of the difficulties—although also a possibility—lies in the fact that the concept of theory underwent a redefinition in the 1960s. The classical model, which in empiricism and theory defines two different approaches to a problem, has—particularly in America—given way to a notion of theory as a specific form of writing and thus to a certain extent as a practice.[62] A form of writing that, as propagated by the early Romantics, thematizes "writing" and thus locates its own practice as much on the level of the described as that of describing. Theory in this sense takes part in what Richard Rorty has described as the "linguistic turn," in the course of which writing (*écriture*) became a broad term that establishes theory at the very moment in which it opens it up to the literary. The concept of "theory" is therefore in itself determined by the contradictory duality of terminological demarcation and dissolution.

Talking about theory today, however, one also needs to acknowledge the historical dimension of the term. In the early twenty-first century a look to the US, the country where French philosophy was transformed into "theory" in the 1970s, can convey the impression that the short era of theory is over. "The Latest Theory Is That Theory Doesn't Matter" was the heading of an article in *The New York Times* in April 2003. In it, Emily

61 Kaja Silverman, "The Author as Receiver," *October 96*, spring 2001, 17–34.

62 See, for example, Richard Rorty's suggestion of characterizing Derrida's project of deconstruction as a specific form of writing: Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida," *New Literary History*, vol. 10, fall 1978, 141–160.

Eakin reviews a conference of the journal *Critical Inquiry*, one of the most important publications on theory during the 1970s and 80s, and sums up:

> The era of big theory is over. The grand paradigms that swept through humanities departments in the 20th century—psychoanalysis, structuralism, Marxism, deconstruction, post-colonialism—have lost favor or been abandoned. Money is tight. And the leftist politics with which literary theorists have traditionally been associated have taken a beating.[63]

One reason for the symposium, entitled *The Futures of Criticism*, was a re-evaluation of the concept of theory after its zenith in the 1960s to the 1990s, described by William J. T. Mitchell as the "theory revolution of the late twentieth century." A second reason, however, was also the rebound of the "real," as the attacks of September 11, 2001 were perceived in the US. The short contributions from numerous participants, including Homi K. Bhabba, J. Hillis Miller, Fredric Jameson, and Teresa de Lauretis are helpful in determining—in this case often retrospectively and melancholically—what the concept of theory in the 1970s and 1980s entailed. Frederic Jameson outlines the origins of theory as follows: "I believe that theory begins to supplant philosophy (and other disciplines as well) at the moment it is realized that thought is linguistic or material and that concepts cannot exist independently of their linguistic expression."[64] According to Jameson, theory comes about at the moment in which the inseparability of thought and speech is acknowledged, and the insight into the linguistic character of knowledge is integrated into one's own writing practice. But the step Jameson goes on to describe seems to be even more important to this concept of theory:

> In a second moment—sometimes called poststructuralism—this discovery mutates as it were into a philosophical problem, namely that of representation, and its dilemmas, its dialectic, its failures, and its impossibility. Maybe this is the moment in which the problem shifts from words to sentences, from concepts to propositions. At any rate, it is a problem that has slowly come to subsume all other philosophical issues, revealing itself as an enormous structure that no one has ever

63 Emily Eakin, "The Latest Theory Is That Theory Doesn't Matter," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2003, p. A17.

64 Fredric Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, no. 30. vol. 2 (winter 2004), 403–408, 405.

> visited in its entirety, but from whose towers some have momentarily gazed and whose underground bunkers others have partially mapped out. Thus, the general issue of representation is still very much with us today and organizes so to speak the normal science of theory and its day-to-day practices and guides the writing of its innumerable reports, which we call articles.[65]

"Representation" can be said to have been the central concern of the work of both Jean-Luc Godard and Harun Farocki during the past forty years. Representation is an ambivalent term, and the interconnection of ambivalences has led both filmmakers to a political understanding of working with images. On the one hand, the medium of film is inevitably based on the principle of pictorial representation: the depiction seems to stand unequivocally for the depicted, which it substitutes. But this kind of claim to representation, whose validity was increasingly called into question in the 1960s, can also be found in the area of political processes: every act of speaking for someone else, any kind of advocacy, adheres to a model of representation that was also subject to redefinition and extension from the mid-1960s onwards. Against the background of the Vietnam War and the growing opposition to it, the question of political action was closely linked to the question of siding with America or North Vietnam. Vietnam and the problem of oppression and resistance represent central points of reference for both Farocki and Godard. Almost all the films that Farocki made during his time at the DFFB deal with the American war[66] and attempt to develop visual models that take the distance between Berlin and Vietnam seriously and do not rashly equate student protest with Vietnamese resistance. Godard's works since 1965 contain explicit references to the war in Southeast Asia. It seems crucial that with each filmmaker, both aspects of the concept of representation are linked: speaking for someone should not be separated from the *image* one has of him; that is, from his previously conveyed media image. The question of representation becomes decisive to a (visual) politics and the point at which the works of Farocki and Godard intersect with the field called "theory."

However, bringing film and theory as closely together as in the title of this book also draws attention to the discipline of film studies and its relationship to theory. Under the heading of "post-theory," David Bordwell

65 Ibid.

66 This particularly applies to White Christmas (1968), in which Farocki sets Bing Crosby's hit against the bombing of Vietnam.

and Noël Carroll have called for a reconstruction of film studies that would dispense with the "Theory with a capital T" that they believe has especially defined American film studies since the 1970s and 80s. What they mean by theory is primarily an amalgam of structuralism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and Marxism:

> What we call Theory is an abstract body of thought which came into prominence in Anglo-American film studies during the 1970s. The most famous avatar of Theory was that aggregate of doctrines derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Structuralist semiotics, Post-Structuralist literary theory, and variants of Althusserian Marxism. Here, unabashedly, was Grand Theory—perhaps the first that cinema studies ever had. The Theory was put forth as the indispensable frame of reference for understanding all filmic phenomena: the activities of the film spectator, the construction of the film text, the social and political functions of cinema, and the development of film technology and the industry.[67]

What Bordwell and Carroll polemically wish to replace "Theory" with is in no way a new positivism limited to the production of shot lists, filmographies, and a naive, theory-free description of films. They are more concerned with maintaining close contact to the films themselves, from which the theoretical should be derived. In this respect, their strategic concept of "post-theory" is certainly in line with my own argumentation. However, the project of "post-theory" leaves the boundary between film and theory largely untouched: writing against the film theories of the 1970s continues to assume a clear distinction between the films on the one side and their analysis and theorization on the other.

To summarize how humanities and film studies "look back" at the age of theory, both positions agree that theory refers to a discursive space that consists entirely of texts. Images come into consideration as objects of investigation but do not themselves count as theoretical commentary. This limitation continues a long tradition of privileging the word, which as Logos appears to coincide with reason itself. "Logical" abstract thinking is by definition a thinking in language, which keeps images at bay in favor of sober and conceptual argumentation. It is not by chance that the critique of what Jacques Derrida describes as "logocentric" thinking is articulated at the same time and in the same place as Godard's re-evaluation

67 David Bordwell, Noël Carroll, "Introduction," *Post-Theory. Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. ibid., (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1996), xiii.

of the image, and that the two projects overlap in both content and their protagonists.[68] However, it is noticeable that Derrida's numerous texts on the problem of logocentrism articulate this critique *intralinguistically* and simply counteract the dominance of a particular style of thinking and writing with different uses of language (association, repetition, deferral, etc.). The image only comes in figuratively here, when Derrida undermines discursive strategies through an elaborate use of metaphor and invokes the pictoriality of language against language itself. In 1993, the American historian Martin Jay presented a detailed study, entitled *Downcast Eyes*, that diagnosed a persistent denigration of the visual in twentieth-century French thought—including Derrida.[69] In his account of the status of the eye and visual perception in intellectual history, Jay comes to the conclusion that the equation of seeing and knowing, which fundamentally structures European thought, with numerous differentiations and nuances from ancient Greece to the French Enlightenment, went into a crisis during the nineteenth century. Partially responsible for this was the invention of photography, which delegated exact optical perception and reproduction to a machine for the first time. This technical fulfillment of the dream of exact optical representation can initially be judged a victory of the visual. However, photography also represents the disempowerment of the eye. Although liberated, the eye ironically no longer needs to look so closely, as photography is not responsible for the exact registration of reality.[70] In the words of Jean-Louis Comolli: "The photograph stands as at once the triumph and the grave of the eye."[71] Following this break, according to Jay, the eye (and by extension the image) was subject to a mistrust shared by all manner of twentieth-century philosophers, and particularly so in the French-speaking world.

This is not the place to retrace in detail Jay's reconstruction of the shifts and modifications of what he calls "anti-ocularcentric" discourse. What is primarily important in this context is his observation that since the 1960s

68 Godard tried to hire Roland Barthes as an actor in his film Une femme mariée (1964); Jean-Louis Comolli, one of the protagonists of the "apparatus debate," was an editor on the politicized *Cahiers du cinéma* and also appeared in Godard's The Carabineers and Alphaville (1965).

69 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: California UP 1994).

70 This dialectic not only influences the relationship between photographs and the eye but can also be observed in the use of any external storage medium: if you save a telephone number in your cell phone, you don't need to remember it; if you copy a text, you increase the likelihood of not reading it.

71 Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," *The Cinematic Apparatus*, eds. Teresa de Lauretis, Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin's Press 1980), 121–142, 123.

there has been an intensification and radicalization of this discourse, which for many different reasons encounters the former "noblest of senses"[72] with reservations. In texts as different as those of Lacan, Althusser, Debord, Foucault, Barthes, and Metz, but also Derrida or Luce Irigary, a wariness about visual perception can be detected that Jay summarizes as a "denigration of vision": "Although definitions of visuality differ from thinker to thinker, it is clear that ocularcentrism aroused (and continues in many quarters to arouse) a widely shared distrust."[73] Jay's observation falls into line with a wide general interest in the image and the phenomena of visual representation since the 1990s. Particularly in the Anglo-American world, but also, with a delay, in Germany, the "image" has evolved into a central point of reference—a development for which J. T. Mitchell coined the term "pictorial turn," which has been widely taken up.

> Whatever the pictorial turn is, then, it should be clear that it is not a naïve return to mimetical theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial "presence": it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, discourse, bodies, and figurality.[74]

Independent of whether Mitchell's diagnosis is held to be correct or incorrect, two things should be said here: The aspects of the revived interest in the image that Mitchell lists coincide exactly with the points from which Harun Farocki and Jean-Luc Godard attempt to analyze images. In order to be able to effectively describe and criticize how images are dealt with, the two directors subject both the filmic apparatus and film discourse to scrutiny but also their own bodies—the seeing subject—and the metaphoricity of discourse. Farocki's and Godard's texts and films participate in what Mitchell calls the "pictorial turn," but they are also skeptical about the ubiquitous distribution of images. This especially applies to the use of media images in military contexts and the coverage of such contexts. For Mitchell, the First Gulf War forms the background before which the

72 See Hans Jonas's influential text "The Nobility of Sight. A Study in the Phenomenology of Senses," *Philosophy and Phenomenologic Research* 54 /1953, 507–552). In conversation with Thomas Elsaesser, Harun Farocki expressly refers to Jonas's examination of the metaphoric descriptions of perception. See Thomas Elsaesser, "Making the World Superfluous: An Interview with Harun Farocki," *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP 2004), 177–189, 181.

73 Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 588.

74 William J. T. Mitchell "The Pictorial Turn," *Artforum*, March 1992, 89–94, 90.

question of (technical) images and their functionality can be sharpened and posed anew.[75] Abstraction and cool distancing seem to have cut the direct connection between image and war reality.

The problematic aspect of a general concept that indiscriminately encompasses linguistic images, paintings, television, video, the cinema, and even mental images is obvious: "Asking about the image means asking about images, an inestimable variety that makes it almost impossible to point scientific curiosity in the right direction. What images do we mean: painted, thought, dreamt? Paintings, metaphors, gestures?"[76] One differentiation has been suggested by the French film critic and theoretician Serge Daney—like Mitchell against the background of the new kinds of television images from the Gulf War of 1991. Daney juxtaposes the emphatic concept of the "image," which prominently refers to the cinematic images also produced by Godard and Farocki, with the concept of the "visual," whose increasing power can primarily be observed in television and advertising. Both categories of images differ in their degree of self-containment and purported integrity:

> The visual would be the optical verification of a purely technical operation. The visual is without reverse shot, it lacks nothing, it is closed, looped, a little like the image of pornographic spectacle, which is only the ecstatic verification of the working of organs (and nothing more). As for the image – this image we loved in cinema to the point of obscenity – the situation would be rather the contrary. The image always takes place at the border of two force fields, it is meant to bear witness to a certain *otherness*; and although it always has a hard core, it always lacks something. The image is always *more and less than itself*.[77]

While the visual refers to the ubiquitous pictorial cosmos from advertising to television news coverage to the optically functioning targeting mechanics of rockets, the "image" in Daney's sense is a utopian place that resists the hegemony of the visual. Further on in the same text, Daney does in fact bring "image" and resistance into proximity: "So not only is the image becoming rare; it is also becoming a from of stubborn resistance, or a touching

75 Mitchell often refers to the technical images supplied to the American media by the army during the Gulf War of 1991.

76 Gottfried Boehm, "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder," *Was ist ein Bild?* ed. ibid. (Munich: Fink 1995), 11–38, 11.

77 Serge Daney, "Montage Obligatory. The War, the Gulf and the Small Screen," *Rouge* no. 8, 2006, accessed at www.rouge.com.au/8/montage.html, June 15, 2014.

Ill. 1

memory, within a universe of pure 'signalization'."[78] The works of Farocki and Godard should be understood as attempts to rescue the "image" in Daney's sense; as acts of confidence in the resistance of images to their cooption. However, this resistance is not articulated through an escapist retreat into the "ideal world" of the cinematic image but indeed in head-on critical debate with the "visual"—Farocki, in his analysis of images from the First Gulf War, for example. The three installations Eye/Machine and their television version War at a Distance are dedicated to precisely those non-images filmed by the intelligent cameras of the Gulf War that provoked Daney's differentiation.[79]

In the work of Farocki and Godard, the image is also confronted by a series of doubts that provoke thought about representation in the first place; in this respect, both positions can readily be included in the spectrum of "anti-ocularcentric discourse" identified by Martin Jay. The apparent evidence of the visible should be mistrusted; both Farocki and Godard encounter the equation of seeing and understanding with a skepticism whose roots will be more exactly described later, and which expresses itself in a broad sense as a critique of apparently unproblematic representational phenomena. In a text on Histoire(s) du cinéma, Michael Witt writes: "Godard's entire theory and practice constitutes a sustained reflection on vision, a relentless critique of the homogeneities inscribed in visual imagery and subjectivity complemented by a constant search for fresh expressive forms."[80] Farocki's work since the 1960s can also be understood as such a "sustained reflection on vision." However, unlike what Jay observes in French thought, this critique of images is not fundamentally directed at all images. The main impulse of both filmmakers is much more the search for other types of images that can incorporate a criticism and theorization of the image. This is why, differently from the

78 Ibid.

79 More on Farocki's analysis of the "visual" and of "operational images" in "Surveyed: Images of the World and the Inscription of War" in chapter five.

80 Michael Witt, "Montage, My Beautiful Care, or Histories of the Cinematograph," *The Cinema Alone. Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard 1985–2000*, eds. Michael Temple, James S. Williams (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP 2001), 33–50, 45.

authors mustered by Jay, Godard's and Farocki's mistrust of images is expressed in images and visual sequences. Their skepticism is balanced by a trust in being able to criticize existing images and gazes by countering them with others. If their criticism of the visual is itself expressed visually, it is the complementary opposite of "anti-ocularcentric discourse."

Ill. 2

Inextinguishable Fire, from 1969, Farocki's first work after leaving film school, shows what such a critique can look like. Above and beyond a direct criticism of war and its horrors, the inextinguishable fire of the title, the flame produced through the use of napalm in Vietnam, provokes the question of whether such phenomena can be depicted at all. The assumption, always taken for granted by television, that it is a meaningful and educational act to show, for example, a body burnt in an attack, is called into question here.

We see Farocki sitting at a table wearing a suit and reading out a Vietnamese civilian's testimony of a napalm attack on his village. Then the director looks up from the text in front of him and, looking directly into the camera, continues with a thought about the impact of images (ill. 1):[81]

> If we show you pictures of napalm burns, you'll close your eyes. First you'll close your eyes to the pictures. Then you'll close your eyes to the memory. Then you'll close your eyes to the facts. Then you'll close your eyes to the entire context.[82]

So an act of representation linked to the simple depiction of napalm victims would come to nothing. Showing napalm wounds would assign this image to the realm of the "visual." It would, according to the commentary, lead to a negation of the image within the image itself, and beyond this would

81 A word about the illustrations: in most cases, it is immediately clear from the text which film they come from; captions are given where this is not so or a further explanation seems necessary.

82 Inextinguishable Fire, FRG 1969, director: Harun Farocki. The dialogue is included in Harun Farocki, *Diagrams*, ed. Benedikt Reichenbach (Cologne: Walther König 2014), 243-249, 244.

overlay memory and, finally, the perception of the facts themselves. The exposition and obliteration of the image would become one and the same.

Farocki takes a different course: instead of exposing napalm victims to the camera, he exposes the act of exposure—and not least himself, when he extinguishes a cigarette on his forearm and an off-screen voice states the comparatively low temperature of a burning cigarette (ill. 2). This too is a "metapicture," which speaks about the problem of representation by replacing the expected image with a different one. Through talking about napalm wounds, Farocki creates a linguistic image of them and at the same time disappoints the voyeuristic curiosity of the viewer. The scene should be read as a representation of the act of representation, which brings one's own body into play instead of the expected image. It is a shock to see an "authentic" wound, which, although minimal, has a far greater impact than the images of the Vietnam conflict and its wounded, to which we have become inured: a highly artificial, constructed injection of the "real" that activates thought about images of reality.

Difference and Theory

Theory, in the sense understood here, is an effect of difference. A cinematic discourse that can be described as theoretical only arises in the oscillation between single frame and moving image, between the visual media of painting, photography, film, and television, between filming subject and filmed objective world. In the potential nexus of different media—both as filmed material and as the accompanying discourse of various paratexts (reviews, analyses, interviews, etc.)—film is a central component of what Siegfried Zielinski calls the "audiovisual discourse."[83] The medium of film should be seen as one of the most important elements of this discourse because it most clearly extends the reservoir of media expression: it is easier to represent painting in film than to "portray" a film in a painting. But the difficulties that confront every intermedia transformation process also expose the boundaries and characteristics of every individual medium. Accordingly, the boundary is the point at which the individual medium itself becomes visible, which is why it is the preferred site of theoretical reflection and the setting for the films discussed here.

83 See Siegfried Zielinski, *Audiovisions. Cinema and Television as Entr'actes in History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP 1999).

Films that are a theoretical part of this discourse can be defined in various ways. On the one hand, they move between fact and fiction.[84] More exactly, they take up the two apparently fixed coordinates of "fact" and "fiction" in order to turn them into the subject of cinematic representation through translation and conversion. What happens when an image replaces the "real"? When the "real" no longer seems to shine through the image but needs to be grasped as an image? How should images be decoded? How do films and texts create the effect of "objective" narration, and what conventions of cinematic argumentation evolve here? As long as film studies continue to make a clear-cut distinction between documentary and feature film—albeit with a certain skepticism—this is difficult to account for. Jean-Luc Godard agrees with François Reichenbach's credo, expressed in an interview in 1958: "All the great films, I believe, tend at heart to the documentary."[85] Godard is therefore not concerned with an opposition of reality and invention but with an interrelationship implicitly dealt with in each of his films. This is a feature common to the projects of Farocki and Godard, and it applies despite or indeed because of their different points of departure: while Godard began in 1959 with the "feature film" Breathless, Harun Farocki approached the "theoretical" more from the direction of the documentary. However, the shared interest of both filmmakers seems to me to be more important than identifying their respective starting points. It is an interest in the mechanisms of image production and reception, in how images function, and in the possibilities of gleaning an (oppositional) visual theory from the images themselves.[86]

It is obvious that film-theoretical thought developed in the medium of film itself tends to the formation of self-referential structures. And as with every examination of self-referential phenomena, here too the question arises as to what should be understood by the prefix "self." For reflection, as the term implies, is only possible from a place that is not identical with

84 It is not by chance that Alexander Kluge gave the transcripts of his television magazines the title *Facts und Fakes* in a programmatic reference to an aesthetic understanding of documentation and fiction as equal parts of a complex concept of reality.

85 Jean-Luc Godard, "Jean-Luc Godard fait parler François Reichenbach" [1958], *Godard par Godard I*, 144–146, 144.

86 "The life that he wanted to save with cinema is what reveals itself in the moments between the images. Whereby the old distinction between 'fictive' and 'documentary' dissolve of their own accord. First and foremost, images are images. And for Godard, imaginings are prolonged 'images,' not inventions that first take place in the mind." Frieda Grafe, "Jean-Luc Godard: Die Rückseite der Berge filmen" [1981], ibid., "Beschriebener Film 1974-1985," *Die Republik* nos. 72–75, January 25, 1985, 179–184, 180.

oneself, in a dialectical movement which abandons the self in order to return again as a reflection—in other media, for example. What Hans-Jost Frey writes in general about the movement of reflection, in the context of idealistic and Romantic thought about the concept of the subject, also applies to media self-reflection:

> Reflection initially has no opposite number. It does not occur in that thinking confronts itself and makes itself the object of its thought. Self-reflective thinking does not stop thinking about something else in order to replace this with itself, but instead becomes aware of itself through thinking differently. [...] At the moment of reflection, thinking is simultaneously involved with something else and with itself. It gains self-assurance in its focusing on something else. But does it really do so? Doesn't the idea of accompanying oneself have something alarming about it? Isn't it confusing to be accompanied by oneself? Is the thinking that accompanies itself still in fact the thinking that is accompanied?[87]

Frey's condensed description of reflection as a paradoxical splitting process, in which convergence with the self is achieved through divergence from it, offers a useful model for thinking about the possibilities of reflexivity in film. Disregarding the anthropomorphization in talking about the "self-reflexivity of film," the mechanism of this reflection should be thought of as follows: as a movement away from the medium—perhaps through taking a different medium into account (photography, painting, literature)—which simultaneously leads towards it, as mirroring and reflection.

Godard's resistance to the cinema's conventions of production and exploitation are mirrored on the part of the viewers who find his films difficult to get into. Their resistance to Godard's films can only be partially explained by their confusing plethora of images and sounds. If the films are understood as part of a theoretical field, resistance to them can also be seen as what Paul de Man has called "resistance to theory." According to de Man, the reservations and defensive reactions to the field that have developed since the 1960s as literary theory, and have gradually come to be associated with the concept of "theory" in general, should primarily

87 Hans-Jost Frey, "Reflexion," ibid., *Lesen und Schreiben* (Basel/Weil am Rhein/Vienna: Urs Engeler 1998), 117–120, 117f.

be understood as "resistance to the use of language about language";[88] as a fear of the confusion of the meta and object levels. The resistance that the work of both Farocki and Godard is still met with may be similar in both cases:[89] the use of the cinematic medium backbends on the medium itself to generate numerous effects of reflection and multiplication. But de Man's formulation is also useful in sharpening the contours of the concept of theory and in describing its present coloration. According to de Man, theory arises "when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non-linguistic, that is to say historical and aesthetic considerations or, to put it somewhat less crudely, when the object of discussion is no longer the meaning or the value but the modalities of production and of reception of meaning and of value prior to their establishment."[90] So the step from analytical description to theory should be seen—once again in the sense of Romanticism, which is a central reference for de Man—as a step in the direction of a transcendentalization of the production of meaning. Theoretical discourse in text or image would then be a form of expression that took account of the conditions of the production of meaning and turned them into the subject of this very production. Harun Farocki related this level of reflection, which in the course of the 1960s increasingly superimposed the narrative elements in Godard's films, to a general social climate in his deliberations on Le Gai Savoir, from 1968, and characterized the student movement as a politically motivated wave of self-reflection:

> In 1968 university students began asking: "What does my work mean politically? What purpose does it serve?" Once in the air, such questions sowed seeds of doubt everywhere; even bureaucrats began to ask questions about the companies for which they were working. Godard was ten years older than the student generation, but he participated in this reflexive turn. "What is cinema?" he asks in [*Le Gai Savoir*]. He poses this question not only with the discourse of his film, but also with its form.[91]

88 Paul de Man, "Resistance to Theory," ibid., *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1986), 3–20, 12.

89 Since Nouvelle vague (1990), the films of Jean-Luc have no longer found a distributor in Germany.

90 Paul de Man, "Resistance to Theory," 7.

91 Harun Farocki, Kaja Silverman, "I Speak, Therefore I'm Not", ibid., *Speaking about Godard* (New York/London: New York UP 1998), 113

On the one hand, Le Gai Savoir represents a continuation and radicalization of the self-referential motifs that could already be found in Godard's short films of the late 1950s. On the other hand, it can illustrate how the issues of politics and education gain the upper hand and become the work's key question. There is almost no other film in which the three discursive fields of film, research, and politics are so emphatically mingled and linked to current events, and the resulting confusion so willingly accepted. The television studio in which Émile Rousseau (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and Patricia Lumumba (Juliet Berto) meet for seven nights in order to carry out their analyses of image and sound is declared a research lab for the collection, dissection, and reorganization of quotidian images. The insistence that a political revolution must be complemented by a revolution in representation has rarely been articulated so vehemently. For this reason, too, the work is difficult to gage against film-historical criteria and should be discussed in its implicit and explicit references to the contemporary theories of Foucault, Derrida, or Althusser. What can be read in these ideas as a critique of the mode of academic, linguistic, and economic representation, Godard transfers to the politics of images.

Theoretical, reflexive aspects have defined the cinema of Jean-Luc Godard since its beginnings; even in his first feature film, Breathless, in which Jean-Paul Belmondo as Michel Poiccard blatantly models himself on Humphrey Bogart, the film-historical references are very clear. Breathless, with its dedication to the American B-movie studio Monogram, almost parodies the desire to set itself apart from highbrow French cinema and hook up with American forms and genres. Its reflective aspect, which extends Godard's activity as a critic into film production, was recognized at the time. From the mid-1960s onwards—in Germany for the most part in the journal *Filmkritik*—commentators began to point out Godard's tendency towards using cinema as a research tool and his merging of aesthetic and epistemological questions. With Pierrot le fou[92] at the latest, it was realized that Godard was obviously concerned with something other than narration. His films, critics claimed, should be seen, to modify Kant's well-known phrase, as an examination of the conditions of the possibility of narration. Moreover, Godard's conscious or unconscious application of early Romantic theory was also noticed at the time. It is not by chance that Herbert Linder's extended essay on Godard appeared in the section "Theory and Practice"; the "and" should indeed be understood as one of simultaneity. What Linder describes is a direct translation of Novalis's and Friedrich

92 Pierrot le fou, F/I 1965, director: Jean-Luc Godard.

Schlegel's deliberations on transcendent poetics: "Godard's films contain their own analysis. They contain, as acting, the reflection of acting, portrayal, and seeing; the position of the viewer is no longer that of subject versus object."[93] Rephrasing early Romantic positions, a permeability of object language and meta-language, of artistic practice and aesthetic theory, is identified as Godard's method here. And if further proof were needed of his recourse to early Romantic theory, Godard delivered it in 1967 in La Chinoise.

Ill. 3 and ill. 4

Along with revolutionary slogans, the famous portrait of Novalis can be spotted on one of the walls of the apartment where the young Maoists work through the basics of Marxism-Leninism; in one scene, it is briefly shown in close-up (ill. 3 and 4).[94] We may not infer a strict updating of early Romantic ideas from this; Godard is notoriously eclectic,[95] and La Chinoise in particular can stand as an example of the excessive mixing of contemporary politics and historical references that even the names of the leading figures suggest. One of the young Maoists (played by Jean-Pierre Léaud), who are holding this conclave in a "comrade's" apartment in Nanterre in order to educate themselves politically, is called Guillaume Meister in a reference to Goethe's several-volumed novel, which played a central role for Friedrich

93 Herbert Linder, "Godard. Instinkt und Reflexion," *Filmkritik* 3/1966, 125–138, 125.

94 This scene should be analyzed more exactly, particularly as the portrait of Novalis hangs in immediate proximity to Descartes, a man in a Nazi uniform given the name of Kant, and newspaper cuttings about contemporary French politics. Novalis is not part of an altar of heroes but placed among a decidedly ambivalent set of figures.

95 "I love books tremendously, particularly paperbacks, because you can put them in your pocket (actually they put you in their pocket). But I don't read seriously. I rarely read a book, even a novel, from beginning to end." Jean-Luc Godard, "Quand j'ai commencé à faire des films, j'avais zéro an, Rencontre avec Jean-Luc Godard," *Libération*, May 14, 2004.

Schlegel and the theories of early Romanticism.[96] While the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman* is evoked here, a historical assertion is also being made. Together with the reference to Novalis, the choice of name can be interpreted as a superimposition of two time levels—albeit historically inexact and intentionally so. The student politicization of the mid-1960s, which Godard seismographically linked to violence and terror even in 1967, a year before the outbreak of open protest, is related back to the time "around 1800" and the epoch-making events of the French Revolution.[97] Here, too, there is a convergence of the two poles of reflection and politics that Harun Farocki has underlined in relation to Le Gai Savoir.

This force field, which can be outlined by the terms "revolution," "infinite reflection," and "shattering of illusion," not only results from particular relationships between images but can also be found on the level of the individual frame. For Godard's concept of the image is allied to the dialectic of finiteness and infinity that was central to early Romanticism:[98]

> [The image] shows something unlimited and at the same time limits a lot. Images and sounds are not quite enough. If our bodies were made only of our eyes and our ears, that wouldn't be enough. So it's very limited. At the same time, this 'very limited' gives the impression of being unlimited. It goes from zero to infinity without stopping.[99]

Here the image seems to be a paradoxical entity that is both incomplete and congested, limited and infinite. Similar to Eisenstein, Godard identifies these Romantic figures of thought primarily with the cinematic principle of montage. Exaggerating slightly, it could be argued that montage, which by

96 See Friedrich Schlegel, "On Goethe's Meister" [1798], *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2003). Schlegel emphasizes the incommensurability of the novel: "For this book is absolutely new and unique. We can learn to understand it only on its own terms. To judge it according to an idea of genre drawn from custom and belief, accidental experiences, and arbitrary demands, is as if a child tried to clutch the stars and the moon in his hand and pack them in his satchel." (275)

97 This kind of "historicizing" montage will become more pronounced in some of the following films, particularly in Week End and Le Gai Savoir. For instance, when Jean-Pierre Léaud declaims Jacobin slogans in historical costume as St. Just (Week End), or when the media analyst experimenting "chemically" in Novalis's sense is named Émile Rousseau.

98 For the "paradox of interminability and the claim to universality," see Detlef Kremer, *Romantik*, 2nd edition (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler 2002), 92f.

99 Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*, ed., trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose 2014), 77.

definition relates two different images to one another, offers a convincing translation of the idea of difference into the medium of film. For every edit combines similarity and continuity with alterity and discontinuity: even in contrastive montage, the temporal continuum of the act of seeing remains intact. Furthermore, numerous concepts central to early Romantic thought—irony, criticism, transcendental poetics, fragment—lead back to the figure of thought of infinite reflection. The oscillation between two poles that can't be brought to a halt by a dialectical closure—the permanently reflexive element—directs the attention away from the product to the process of depiction.[100]

What characterizes both Godard's and Farocki's concepts was widely perceived in the 1920s: film provides a repertoire of forms whose intermedia condition engenders a complex structure that should be explored systematically from its form side. In such an exploration, the cinematic hardware (camera, editing table) is as important as its concrete operations (montage, shot combination) and effects on the viewer (psychophysics, impact).[101] A further criterion can be gained from the first flowering of theoretical thought in the 1920s, which wanted to revise the early reduction of film to narration and entertainment: apart from the theoretical orientation of the Russian filmmakers, a close connection could be seen to the other literary and art-theoretical developments in the Soviet Union. Parallel to Eisenstein's pre-semiotic attempts to understand the constructive forms of cinematic "language" and make them didactically useful within his theory of montage, Russian Formalism not only examined the construction of literary texts but also emphatically declared film worthy of examination as the most advanced artistic movement of the time. Some of the demands the Formalist school placed on the analysis of artworks—exposure of the procedure, indications of the artificiality of the text/image, even if this complicates the work's perception—can be applied as equally to the works of Godard and Farocki[102] as to Dziga Vertov's MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA.[103] One of the founding texts of Formalism, Viktor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" from 1916, begins with sentences that not only point out

100 See Winfried Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung. Die frühromantische Grundlegung der Kunsttheorie im Begriff absoluter Selbstreflexion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987), 132ff.

101 See Ute Holl, *Kino, Trance und Kybernetik* (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose 2002).

102 How close the personal and political overlap between theory and practice was in the USSR of the 1920s can be seen in someone like Viktor Shklovsky. Not only was he one of the most prominent representatives of Russian Formalism, he also worked on the screenplay for Lev Kuleshov's film BY THE LAW in 1926 and wrote a biographic novel about Eisenstein.

103 MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA, USSR 1929, director: Dziga Vertov.

the visual and metaphoric nature of thinking but also, and almost causally, shake the boundary between aesthetics and epistemology, and thus indirectly between theory and practice: "'Art is thinking in images.' This maxim, which even high-school students parrot, is nevertheless the starting point for the erudite philologist who is beginning to put together some kind of systematic literary theory."[104] This book suggests seeing Godard's and Farocki's films as "thinking in images," as contributions to a theory intrinsic to film.

Montage and Cinematic Thinking

"It's the film that thinks," said Jean-Luc Godard in conversation with Marguerite Duras in 1987, hyperbolizing the idea of an actually "thinking film" and provoking a mixture of dissent and concession in his interlocutor.[105] Though Duras may be right in her view that the thinking of film can't be separated entirely from the thinking of its maker—nor from the thinking of its viewer, whose additions occupy the gaps of the montage—Godard's statement should be taken seriously as a poetological maxim which can stand for his works since the late 1950s.

In Histoire(s) du cinéma, particularly in chapter 3A (La monnaie de l'absolu), which includes a crucial examination of the relationship between painting and cinema, Godard describes this through a contraposition of two forms of thinking. "Une pensée qui forme" is the compositional approach that idealistically proceeds from the *imagination* and visualizes a previously developed idea retrospectively. It is a method of illustration in which the image additionally conjoins with a preconceived thought. The other model, "une forme qui pense," for which Godard finds examples in the paintings of Edouard Manet but which equally determines the aims of his own work, operates in the opposite direction. Here, thought is delegated to the form and is seen as a possibility of creating ideas from tension—whether internal or between the images. The sociologist Dirk Baecker took up Godard's formula in a conversation with Alexander Kluge in an attempt to define more precisely what could be understood by such image-internal thinking:

104 Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" [1916], *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1965), 5–24, 5.

105 "Don't talk nonsense. The film doesn't think on its own. Without you, there wouldn't be a film," replied Duras. Marguerite Duras, Jean-Luc Godard, "Entretien télévisé" [1987], *Godard par Godard II*, 140–147, 143.

> What do the images know about the next image? What does every individual shot know about the next shot, which is only possible if this or that has been shown before it? Godard is a sharp thinker, in the most precise sense of the word, who asks with every image he shoots which images will be expected next and how he can produce an image sequence that thwarts this expectation and replace it with another, for which the same perhaps applies. "The form thinks" means here that the form, which only ensues across the images, establishes a context that comes about from the separation of the images, from their contextual liberation.[106]

This definition is helpful because it relates the term *form*, which Baecker identifies as a "tight coupling" as opposed to the "loose coupling" of the *medium*, to a cross-image structure and thus once again to the concept of combining images and montage. At this point, it should indeed be asked whether Daney's ideas about the image's simultaneous deficiency and surplus can be applied to this "thinking form" called cinema. For deficiency and surplus establish structures of reference that go beyond the image and inherently require a further image onto which they then transfer these qualities. The visual flow demands reference, montage, difference. An image, even a single frame, is never alone.

How this kind of "film thinking," to take up the term Klaus Theweleit coined in relation to Godard,[107] might be adequately described is one main concern of this book. For if I have already described the boundary of a medium as the preferred site of theoretical reflection, this also means that talking about film as theory must go back and forth between description and interpretation, image and language. Jean-Luc Godard in particular has described the cinematic procedure of montage as a relational jumping, as the construction and reconstruction of relationships. Between "Montage my Fine Care," from 1956, and Histoire(s) du cinéma, from the 1990s, which quotes this phrase repeatedly, it was a core element of his poetics. The theoretical and creative act of combining two images to create an invisible third one has a striking appearance in the figure of the blind cutter Godard employs as an assistant editor in JLG/JLG. Godard has extended the concept of montage from his first theoretical deliberations to his description of it as a central intellectual act, a development that should be outlined here.

106 Alexander Kluge, Dirk Baecker, "Was wissen die Bilder?" ibid., *Vom Nutzen ungelöster Probleme* (Berlin: Merve 2003), 135–143, 141.

107 See Klaus Theweleit, *Deutschlandfilme. Filmdenken und Gewalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld 2003), 25–34.

"Montage my Fine Care" doesn't strictly contrast mise en scène and montage, as associated with the names of André Bazin and Sergei Eisenstein, but is interested in a dialectical conjunction of both concepts. Montage, as in one of his well-known phrases, is "an integral part of the mise en scène,"[108] a result of the way in which each shot is staged. For Godard, playing montage and mise en scène off against one another or separating them conceptually is nonsensical from the outset. One might just as well attempt—another of his comparisons—to separate the rhythm from a melody. Godard explains this notion with a simple example. In order to film how someone notices a girl and wonders whether to say something to her, the filmmaker needs to find a cinematic answer to two dramaturgical questions. The first, "How shall I approach her?" is answered by camera distance, focal length, and so on. The second is more general and strictly speaking cannot be answered from within the concrete situation: "Am I going to love her?" It is this jump into a hypothetical future that Godard assigns to montage. Despite the inseparability of montage and mise en scène, the step from a concrete situation onto a speculative, more abstract level is reserved here for montage. In "Montage my Fine Care," this step has primarily to do with giving the scene rhythm rather than the confrontation of shots—a principle that was to become important in Godard's own film work. If the montage needs to be kept in mind in the individual image and its staging, this also suggests that the opposition of concrete image and abstract concept is only an apparent one.

The contrast between the concept of montage that was still oriented to film and its later extension to a general intellectual principle can be illustrated by a jump to the late 1970s. In 1978, on the invitation of the director of the Cinémathèque in Montreal, Godard gave a series of film-historical lectures at the Conservatoire d'art cinématographique. They were an important preliminary to the later HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA and according to the original plan should themselves have become a film project.[109] Godard took the place of Henri Langlois, who had died shortly before, and conceived the series as screenings with extensive commentary. His films were the springboard for a kind of retrospective and were combined with other, sometimes influential works in a communication about common themes or other connections. Even if the combination of individual images

108 Jean-Luc Godard, "Montage my Fine Care" [1956], *Godard on Godard*, ed. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo 1986), 39–41, 39.

109 See Michael Witt's thorough account of the project: Michael Witt, "Archaeology of 'Histoire(s) du Cinéma'", Godard, *Introduction to a True History*, xv-lxix.

or sequences was not in the foreground here, Godard's procedure was a form of montage, with the difference that now entire films were brought into contact with one another. Henri Langlois's program for the Cinémathèque française was the model for this cinematic juxtaposition. In the long talks and discussions in Montreal, Godard developed the proposition to which he still adheres and that clearly goes back to the Russian cinema of the 1920s:

> The basic idea is that when it was invented cinema fostered, or impressed, as you have been able to see, a different way of seeing called editing, which is to put something in relation to someone in a different way than novels or paintings.[110]

What is innovative about montage, according to Godard, who like Pudovkin equates it with cinema as its genuine creative tool,[111] should not only be located on the production side but above all on the side of the viewer. The collision of different segments of the world leads to a new kind of seeing that could be described as relational or comparative: "Montage is relationship, and the relationship is there before the image occurs to which another is joined. It is the comparison not equation of things,"[112] as Frieda Grafe summarizes Godard's concept of montage. Only the combination of two images, of two perspectives on something, develops a relationship that can be seen as a flexible triangle in which the viewer defines the third point alongside the two images. "[W]hen people saw a film there was something that was at least double – and when someone watched it became triple. There was something different which in its technical form gradually came to be called editing, meaning there was a connection. It was something that filmed not things, but the connection between things, as I said about Pierrot le fou—the form of filming them. Meaning that people saw connections in them."[113] A political and moral aspect associated with the power of montage derives from this idea of it as relationship to self and other. Montage is not only the precondition of a cinematic grammar; it also establishes a specific visual rhetoric, and in this respect has often been rejected as tendentious, manipulative, and ideological by followers

110 Godard, *Introduction to a True History*, 217.

111 Pudovkin summarized this as follows: "Montage is the essence of cinema." Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Selected Essays*, trans. Richard Taylor and Evgeni Filippov (London/New York/Calcutta: Seagul 2006), 14.

112 Frieda Grafe, "Die tatsächliche Kinogeschichte. Godards Geschichtsbild" [2000], ibid., *Film/Geschichte. Wie Film Geschichte anders schreibt* (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose 2004), 213–222, 219.

113 Godard: *Introduction to a True History*, 217/218.

of "realistic" theories. Godard is on the side of those who see a power in combination that should be explored and described, as it indeed establishes a new kind of thinking. In this respect, Godard's understanding of montage has remained surprisingly consistent over the years, even though since the 1980s he has developed an increased interest in sound and music, which again broadens his concept of montage, taking it beyond the immediate visual level. In 1995, on receiving the Adorno Prize, Godard once more referred to montage as a decisive tool for the analysis of history. In the "big struggle between the eyes and language," he ascribes the greater analytical power to the eyes and understands montage as a healing force:

> There is a big struggle between the eyes and language. The eyes are the people. Language is the government. When the government talks of what it sees and acts accordingly, it's good, because it's the language of medicine. It says, "This is sinusitis," and performs an act of montage, of convergence. [...] Cinema in particular was a new way—one that had never been seen before—of calling things by their own name. A way of seeing the large and small events that immediately became popular and was taken up by the entire world. In short, cinema was made for thinking, and therefore for curing illness.[114]

In order to apply this diagnostic instrument, there needs to be, as Godard says, a convergence, a *rapprochement*. In the films of Godard and Farocki this convergence repeatedly occurs between different types of images, from whose differences and similarities theoretical potential can be gained. An initial point at which the convergence of film and theory becomes practical with both directors is the confrontation of film with painting, to which the following chapter is devoted.

114 Jean-Luc Godard, "À propos de cinéma et d'histoire" [1996], *Godard par Godard II*, 401–407, 404.