Realism as Protest draws on the »realistic method« developed by Alexander Kluge to counter the limited image of reality generated by the mainstream media. Focusing on innovative productions produced by Kluge, Schlingensief and Haneke, this groundbreaking study explores how the experimental form of their work in film, television and theatre facilitates thinking, discussion and debate about the possibilities for cultural and political change.

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Introduction

[A]rt no longer has the task of representing a reality that is preexisting for everyone in common, but rather of revealing, in its isolation, the very cracks that reality would like to cover over in order to exist in safety; and that, in doing so, it repels reality.

Theodor W. Adorno\(^1\)

The modern form of Fascistisation is much more the mass mobilisation of passivity, of collective inattention.

Alexander Kluge\(^2\)

In the *Poetikvorlesungen* (Poetics Lectures) he delivered in Frankfurt in 2012, Alexander Kluge argues that the Frankfurt School tradition of Critical Theory “works with an antagonistic conception of realism”. For Kluge, who is a contemporary heir to that tradition, reality is not a straightforward concept that accurately reflects the world in which we live. While “[t]his reality”, he states, “is real in the sense […] that an accident kills people, or that wars exist”, it is also a

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“cocoon” we build around ourselves in order to “keep reality out”. As Kluge makes clear, the image of reality represented, for example, in the mainstream news media does not necessarily bear a meaningful relationship to the possibilities inherent in existing circumstances. “It is”, he argues, “characterised by an extreme rigidity, a hardness. It sits in jail and bangs its head against the wall when it notice[s] how objective real relationships are”.

This violent, disaffected image of reality – embodied in the figure of someone locked in a cell banging their head against a wall – is an important one because it evokes a palpable sense of the degree to which it is both removed from the real conditions of the everyday world and mindful of its status as an ideological construction. As Kluge’s description makes clear, this rigid conception of reality is seriously flawed because real conditions cannot be described in relation to an objective state that is removed from the subjective input of people who experience reality first hand. He argues, rather, that it is subjectivity embodied in the form of human experience that serves as a form of resistance to so called “objective” conceptions of reality.

If the productions explored in this book are driven by what Kluge describes as a “realism of protest” then it is because they cultivate a subjective mode of engagement that challenges the status quo. Although disparate in their form and content, each of the works can be described as “realistic”, not because they accurately reflect a particular political or social reality, but because they encourage viewers to become active participants in the meaning-making process; to draw on their own capacity for experience in an attempt to make sense of the material in question. For Kluge “this capacity to make an effort, to strain something in oneself, to strain something in the senses” is part and parcel of what it means to lead a vital and productive existence. When, he writes, someone “sits in front of the television watching Deutschland sucht ein Superstar on Saturday or in January

4 | Ibid.
1939 listens to Radio Leipzig”, then this capacity is not put into practice.\(^5\)

As this statement suggests, there is a certain passivity cultivated by the rigid form of the constructed realities generated by the mainstream media; a rigidity that stymies the capacity to conceive of the extent to which reality could, in fact, be very different. As Christoph Schlingensief makes clear: “One sees an image and thinks that is the world, but forgets that there are actually many images of the world. That one also has within oneself many images, ideas, longings that couldn’t be satisfied on which one continues to depend to the point where one could cry. Because one had to give them up. The human being consists not just of chemistry, but also of so much longing”.\(^6\)

As Kluge’s delineation of reality banging its head against a wall suggests, reality – in the restrictive sense of the term – is deeply alienated from this longing because it is divorced from the subjective needs of the constituency it is supposed to represent. If the productions explored in this book cultivate feeling then it is not because they seek to channel the viewer’s response in a particular direction, but because they cultivate a certain “obstinacy” (Eigensinn) in the face of existing circumstances; circumstances that lock people into accepting an image of reality that neither supports nor sustains their own interests.

Obstinacy, in this context, refers not only to a straightforward refusal of reality but to a mode of engagement that is driven not by the machinations of an external force but which is guided by one’s “own sense” or “meaning” (Eigensinn). The productions explored in this book are significant not because they seek to close down meaning by presenting the viewer with a pre-packaged image of how reality should be, but because they actively cultivate this Eigensinn in the face of a dissatisfying reality; a reality that bangs its head against the

\(^{5}\) Ibid.

wall once it realises that so-called objective conditions are, in reality, not real. “We live”, Kluge states, “in our subjectivity. That is our life. And that is obstinate”.7

CHAPTER 1

Subjunctive Realism:
Kluge on Film, Politics, and Feelings

We are surrounded by subjunctives, by the form of possibility. It could all be very different.

Alexander Kluge's experimental film, television, and literary work is underpinned by a conception of realism that he describes as “subjunctive” and “antagonistic.” As Kluge makes clear, it is “antagonistic” because it is pitted against the pervasive idea that the reality in

which we live – as both experienced by people on an everyday basis and represented by the mainstream media – accurately reflects the myriad possibilities inherent in existing circumstances. Within this schema, the edict commonly espoused by politicians – that when reflecting on politics, policy, and the possibilities of the future one must, in fact, be realistic – is indebted to a conception of realism that is committed to the maintenance of the status quo. “Public opinion”, Kluge argues, “is very strongly determined by people who […] furnish themselves in reality as if in a tank or a knight’s armour”. As this statement makes clear, this hegemonic conception of realism (of what it means to be realistic) is, for Kluge, extremely limiting, not only because it functions to protect the interests of those who employ it as both shield and weapon, but because it disregards the subjunctive realities that “exist side by side with reality” that are borne out of the feelings and wishes of people who actually “want something completely different”. For Kluge, these subjunctive realities are significant because, as alternative visions of what could be, they play an important role in mobilising thought, discussion, and debate about how – and with what effects – the so-called reality in which we live could be transformed into something very different.

It is this capacity for interrogating reality – for actively imagining alternatives to the status quo – that, for Kluge, constitutes a truly realistic approach; an approach that is fueled by a dissatisfaction with, and a desire to protest against the prevailing conditions. “If”, he writes, “I levy a protest against the reality principle, against that which this reality does to me, I am realistic”. It is thus not the real-

5 | Laudenbach, “Wir sind Glückssucher”.
ity principle but “the realism of the human brain with its reshaping reaction to reality” that is “the fundamental condition of realism”.  

This “reshaping” capacity (which Kluge describes as “the species given nature of protest”) has, however, been stifled by the emphasis placed by politicians and the mainstream news media on the importance of being “realistic”; of channeling one’s energies and confining one’s hopes to activities and goals that are recognized by and sit comfortably within the paradigm supporting and maintaining the status quo. Within this schema, Kluge argues that “reality” (in this restrictive sense) is not a “natural state” that exists autonomously outside the subject. On the contrary, he argues that it is manifested in a mode of thinking that has been imposed on the subject via ideology; an ideology so pervasive that it has overridden the instinctive capacity – inherent in our feelings – for distinguishing not only between right and wrong, but between that which works for or against our own interests. Extending the metaphors described above, the reality-principle functions, in this context, as a tank or suit of armour that inhibits feeling because it seals the subject off and anaesthetises him/her from the capacity to make connections and draw distinctions that are grounded in the experiences of the subject.

In what follows, I will analyse the degree to which the realistic method underpinning the experimental form of Kluge’s films is driven by a desire to “motivate feelings”; to break through the ideological straight jacket imposed by the reality-principle in an attempt to facilitate thinking, discussion, and debate about the possibilities for cultural and political change. Focusing on two films – The Patriot (Die Patriotin) (1979) and War and Peace (Krieg und Frieden) (1982) – that were directed and co-directed by Kluge respectively, this chap-

9 | Ibid.
ter will explore how and with what effects Kluge has sought to mobilize debate about what he describes as the “porosity” of the present.\textsuperscript{12}

\section*{The Anti-Realism of Feelings}

The significant role that feelings can play as bellwethers of a desire for change is integrally bound with Kluge’s delineation of the task of a realistic method. For Kluge, feelings are significant because they are endowed with the capacity to “make distinctions”. “It is”, he notes, “constitutive of human beings and our species that we can distinguish between hot and cold, between what attracts me and what repels me, between what we will gladly watch and what we cannot bear to see.”\textsuperscript{13} This natural capacity is instinctive.\textsuperscript{14} It is not borne of logic or the intellect. Rather, it is an ability which is grounded in the senses and which enables us to gain and consolidate experience that, in turn, guides and informs our decisions. Feelings, Kluge claims, are “happiness seekers”\textsuperscript{15} and it is this capacity to both make and act

\begin{itemize}
  \item[14] “Let’s just say”, Kluge notes, “that we have inherited a lot. We’ve even been endowed with instinctive functions that rumble away under the surface, in the so-called reptilian brain”. Hopf, “‘Feelings Can Move Mountains...’”, p. 241.
\end{itemize}
on distinctions that is a constitutive element of what it means to lead a vital and productive existence.\textsuperscript{16}

However, as Kluge makes clear, this vital capacity has – over time – been significantly diminished. “I have the impression”, he states, that, at some stage in the twelfth century, the feelings were massively suppressed in our country, banished with witch trials and terror into an intimate sphere where they’re just not talked about. It may be the case that, historically speaking, this happened at a different time; at any rate, the feelings were disempowered. It’s almost as if a decree went out that, while women and children may have feelings, the important men’s business is to be dealt with realistically, through the intellect, or rather, through the false application of the intellect.\textsuperscript{17}

As Kluge makes clear, the guiding assumption of the reality-principle – that when making plans and forming decisions one must be realistic – is bolstered by a system of reasoning that is completely divorced from the knowledge of the senses. “The whole culture industry”, he states, “is busy persuading people to divide their senses and their consciousness”; to not “interest themselves in the elementary basis of their awareness, in their way of observing, in their sensuality.”\textsuperscript{18} For Kluge, this split has profound implications for how people relate to and participate in the political sphere because – alienated from the capacity to draw distinctions based on their own experiences, feelings, and wishes – the responsibility for determining what is and isn’t possible, what is a desirable reality and what isn’t, is delegated to external authorities that harness feelings in aid of their own interests.

\textsuperscript{17} Florian Hopf, “Feelings Can Move Mountains…”, p. 244.
Within this schema, Kluge argues that feelings become “traitors” because, instead of protecting the best interests of the subject, they are deployed (in aid, for example, of “patriotism” and “industrial discipline”) as a form of “putty that holds everything together”, even when the logic driving and maintaining the status quo works directly against their own interests.\textsuperscript{19} Summarizing this situation, Kluge argues that feelings can be likened to “proletarians who find themselves confronted with the choice between unemployment and accepting nuclear power plants”. “Now”, he adds, “they are even standing up for rationalization and denouncing trouble-makers” because they have resigned themselves to the status quo out of a position of self-defence.\textsuperscript{20}

As this example makes clear, the elemental capacity of feelings to draw distinctions based on both instinct and experience has, in this context, been overridden by a form of logic that complicates and undermines the subject’s ability to make and act on decisions based on their sense of how things should be. “The intellect”, Kluge states, “has concluded a pact with dietetics. How you feed yourself, how you earn a living, how you adapt to power, out of self-defence. The intellect has learned the art of self-defence. No one thinks except out of necessity.”\textsuperscript{21}

This split – between the intellect and a form of experience which is grounded in the knowledge of the senses – is a divide which, for Kluge, must be overcome if feelings are to “exert a practical critique”\textsuperscript{22} of the restrictive and repressive logic underpinning the reality principle. Although “present in all countries”, he argues that this

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Florian Hopf, “‘Feelings Can Move Mountains...’”, pp. 243-4. “Feelings”, in this context, are “used as motives (driving forces), and against our better knowledge at that: ‘I’m feeling uneasy about this, but you just have to keep going, don’t you?’”, p. 245.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp. 245-6.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 245.
\end{itemize}
disjunction (between the intellect and experience, between the “specialized area” of politics and the “intensity of […] everyday feeling”) has, in Germany, functioned as a catalyst for a series of activities, decisions and events that have led to catastrophic outcomes. Extrapolating on these ideas in relation to the Holocaust, Kluge argues that:

it is thoroughly unpractical if the emotional shock of German families, which would have meant something important for the victims of Auschwitz in 1942, is made up for in 1979; for today it is an essentially useless, that is, timeless form of shock. The fact that we in our country are always shocked at the wrong moments and are not shocked at the right ones – and I am now talking about something very bad – is a consequence of our considering politics as a specialised area which others look after for us and not as a degree of intensity of our own feelings.23

Central to Kluge’s conception of the task of a realistic method is the degree to which an experimental film practice can reactivate the senses, sharpen perception and, in the process, reconnect the viewer with the political sphere. Politics, in this sense, is transformed from a professional, logic governed domain populated by strategists, experts, and politicians into a mode of perception that is characterised by a “particular degree of intensity of everything and everybody, of everyday feeling”.24 For Kluge, this transformation is significant because he argues that “direct perception has a capacity for self-regulation that logic doesn’t have. With logic [which he elsewhere describes as the product of an “anchorless intellect”25] I can just as well be a guard at

24 | Ibid.
a concentration camp as I can be a chief strategist at the Pentagon. But my diaphragm won’t lead me there. My eyes and my ears won’t lead me there.” This is because the instinctive function of feelings – which can distinguish intuitively between something which is fair and unjust, between that which is disturbing and pleasing – has the capacity to protest against a form of reality that generates fear, unhappiness, and suffering. Kluge describes this elementary, albeit undervalued capacity as the “anti-realism of feelings” – a capacity he seeks to reignite via the experimental form of his films.

**The Film in the Spectator’s Head**

The realistic method driving the construction of Kluge’s work is based on a conception of “realism that takes the imagination and wishes of human beings just as seriously as the world of facts.” A “materialist” film practice, he argues, does not seek to impose its ideas on the audience but rather encourages the viewer to draw on their own experience and imagination in order to participate autonomously in the meaning-making process. As Kluge makes clear: “We call this position materialist because it thinks from the bottom up, from the spectator and the cinema in his mind, to the cinema on screen.” Meaning, in this sense, is not conveyed directly by, nor contained autonomously within the film itself. Rather, it is generated by a process of exchange between the audience and the film that is initiated but not foreclosed by the director. Such a film practice seeks neither to explain nor generate understanding. “Understand-

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29 | Jan Dawson, “But Why are the Questions so Abstract?”, pp. 33-4.
ing a film is”, Kluge writes, “conceptual imperialism which colonizes its objects. If I have understood everything then something has been emptied out. We must make films that thoroughly oppose such imperialism of consciousness”.

According to Kluge, both Hollywood cinema and conventional documentary film are incongruous with this materialist model. What troubles him about the former is the “strict separation” that exists between films that are organised around generating entertainment and the experiences of the viewers who are watching them.

“Excite the viewer, but there can’t be any consequences” is, he notes, one of the “guiding principle[s] of the entertainment industry in Hollywood”. Instead of taking the audience seriously as “co-producers”, Kluge argues that Hollywood films encourage “the audience to give up their own experience and follow the more organised experience of the film”. Instead of relying on and/or cultivating the viewer’s own capacity to draw distinctions, the refined form of Hollywood films channels the viewer’s feelings in specific directions, leaving the audience with scant opportunity to reflect on and/or think autonomously about the issues and ideas at hand. “Öffentlichkeit [a public sphere] without Erfahrung [experience]”, Kluge states, “[t]hat is the cinema today”.

31 | Stuart Liebman, “On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere: An Interview with Alexander Kluge”, October, 46 (Fall, 1988), p. 27. “So at night”, Kluge states, “I see films that are different from my experiences during the day. Thus there is a strict separation between experience and the cinema. That is the obstacle for our films. For we are people of the ‘60s, and we do not believe in the opposition between experience and fiction”.
32 | Alexandra Kluge and Bion Steinborn, “Film ist das natürliche Tauschverhältnis der Arbeit...”, Filmfaust 1.6 (December, 1977), p. 96.
33 | Jan Dawson, “‘But Why are the Questions so Abstract?’,” p. 34.
If Kluge is also wary of conventional documentary film, it is because he has little faith in one of its defining tenets: that is, that the camera is able to provide the viewer with a truthful re-presentation of reality. In keeping with Bertolt Brecht’s criticism of photography in *The Threepenny Opera*, Kluge argues that documentary realism is incapable of capturing reality because the camera “can only photograph something that’s present”.

On the subject of realism, Brecht says: Of what use is an exterior view of the AEG if I cannot see what is going on inside the building in terms of relationships, wage labour, capital, international investments – a photograph of the AEG says nothing about the AEG itself. Thus, as Brecht says, most of the real conditions have slipped into the functional. This is the heart of the problem of realism. If I conceive of realism as the knowledge of relationships [eine Kenntnis von Zusammenhängen], then I must provide a trope for what cannot be shown in the film, for what the camera cannot record.

These “relationships” or “Zusammenhänge” (which can also aptly be described as “interconnections”) refer not only, as per Brecht’s example, to the alienated labour conditions and financial affiliations rendered invisible by the camera’s so-called “objective” re-presentation of reality. Rather, they are associated more generally with the viewer’s capacity to draw distinctions and form connections that are grounded in the experiences of the subject. As Kluge makes clear, “[m]ere documentation forecloses Zusammenhang” (that is, the context and/or capacity for interconnection). “[O]bjectivity”, he adds,

35 | “I don’t”, Kluge states, “believe too much in documentary realism: because it doesn’t describe reality. The most ideological illusion of all would be to believe that documentary realism is realism”. Dawson, “‘But Why are the Questions so Abstract?’”, p. 34.
36 | Ibid., p. 35.
37 | Alexander Kluge, “On Film and the Public Sphere”, p. 46.
“does not exist without emotions, actions and desires, that is, without the eyes and the senses of the people involved.”

In Kluge’s films, a number of techniques and devices are employed to generate Zusammenhänge, to stimulate the senses and, in the process, to both complicate and undermine the reality effect generated by the refined, organised and conventional form of much narrative and documentary cinema. In contrast to the harmonious structure that he associates with Hollywood film, the experimental form of Kluge’s work generates contrast, ambiguity and tension that isn’t easily resolved. The key device employed by Kluge in this regard is the “mixed” form according to which his films are constructed; an experimental aesthetic that consists of both documentary and fictional material that was either shot specifically for the film in question or gleaned from various sources including newsreels, books, paintings, photographs, drawings, and early cinema. By dissolving the traditional distinction between documentary and fictional film, by mixing black and white and colour footage, and by editing it together with intertitles, quotes, photographs, diagrams, and pictures, Kluge generates a series of contrasts and connections that disrupt the “unequivocal picture of reality” produced by both documentary and fictional film. For Kluge, this mixed aesthetic generates a more realistic representation of reality because the complex nature of the world it depicts challenges the idea that the reality in which we live is somehow immutable or set in stone. As Kluge makes clear, it is not he, the director, but reality itself which is responsible for generating this complexity.

In order to remain true to the open, variable nature of real conditions, the montage practice favoured by Kluge is driven by a desire

to stimulate the viewer’s capacity to draw distinctions rather than channel or close meaning down. “We do not”, he states, “fashion the associations of the viewers, that is what Hollywood does, we do not channel them at all, but we stimulate them, so that something independent comes into being, something which without these incentives, would not have been actualised”. This independent “third image” (which is manifested not in the film itself but rather in the head of the spectator who is watching it is not an obvious association generated by two images that have been edited together to produce a connection conceived in advance by the director. “We are not”, Kluge states, “god over the materials. We do not provide a red thread to lead them through the film the way straightforward narratives do. [...] It requires another way of being involved. It’s as if you are walking down the street and are looking at the windows.” Viewers, he adds, “are required to think and make distinctions” for themselves.


41 | This idea of the film in the spectator’s head is regularly discussed by Kluge. See, for example, Edgar Reitz, Alexander Kluge and Wilfried Reinke, “Word and Film”, October, 46 (Fall, 1988), p. 87 and Alexander Kluge, “Interview von Ulrich Gregor”, p. 227.

42 | Elaborating on this point, Kluge claims that “[t]his is basically no different from the situation where poets write poems and schoolchildren are forced to memorise them – why on earth should people with a phantasy of their own be forced to learn something by heart which was conceived in an associative fashion by somebody else?”. Kluge, “On Film and the Public Sphere”, p. 48.

Film, in this context, is thus transformed from a medium that captures or fixes reality to a propaedeutic that hones and stimulates the audience’s own capacity to interrogate reality by encouraging them to form connections and draw distinctions that are grounded in their own imagination, reality, and experience. As Kluge makes clear: “either social history narrates its novel of reality without regard for men or men narrate their counter-history. They can only do this, however, on the level of the complexity of reality. This demands in the most literal sense the ‘art object’, an aggregate of art objects. Sensuousness as method is not a natural product of society.”

“A Realist Drills”

It is a book about cooperation, a wish. David and Goliath. How associative do human powers have to be [...] in order to shoot the monster of reality in the eye.

The above quote appears in Kluge’s foreword to *Die Patriotin (The Patriot)*: a book which, like his film of the same title, was released in 1979 and which contains a text list, a series of stills, quotes, and other raw materials (such as photographs, drawings, stories, and newspaper clippings) that relate to and stimulate thinking about the issues and ideas explored in the film. Although the quote summarises what, for Kluge, is the driving force of the collection, it is also an apt description of the experimental impulse motivating both the film and its protagonist Gabi Teichert: a high school history teacher and a realist in the positive sense described by Kluge because she is

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passionate about encouraging her students reflect on how - and with what effects – the reality in which they live could be transformed into something different.

For both Teichert and Kluge the so-called “probable” order of events around which linear accounts of history are constructed has a direct impact on shaping our conception of the possibilities and limitations of the present. As Kluge makes clear, what is problematic about these narratives is not only their carefully crafted, linear structure, but the extent to which both the process of exclusion out of which they are fashioned and the ideology of historical necessity through which they are rendered meaningful prohibit our capacity to conceive of the possibilities of the past, the present and the future in different terms. Why, Kluge asks, do we carry in us such a fixed conception of the probable order of events, which is only the sum of what is impressed upon us by the objective history or the media? Why do we hang onto it so energetically, while the imagination circles elsewhere [... and while] the sum of improbabilities is just as great as the sum of all probabilities?47

For Kluge, central to this idea of historical probability is a conception of historical realism that could more accurately be described as “historical fiction”.48 In a similar vein to his analysis of the limitations generated by the reality principle governing the political sphere, he argues that “[w]hat you notice as realistic [...] is not necessarily or certainly real. The potential and the historical roots, and the detours of possibilities, also belong to reality. The realistic result, the actual result, is only an abstraction that has murdered all other possibilities for the moment.”49

49 | Jan Dawson, “But Why are the Questions so Abstract?”, p. 34.
Teichert too is deeply dissatisfied with the highly abstract, linear narratives that appear in the textbooks assigned to her students, so much so that she heads out of the classroom and into the field in search of forgotten, overlooked, and discarded materials with which she can rejuvenate the history curriculum and, in the process, encourage her students to reflect on the “porosity” of both the past and the present. Armed with various tools (including a shovel, a telescope, a saw, and a drill) she works like an archaeologist unearthing materials; she studies the moon; and she sets up a laboratory replete with test tubes and beakers in which she boils text, saws into books, and drills holes into the tightly organized linear narratives around which the history curriculum is constructed.

Figure 1: The Patriot

50 | “I don’t”, Kluge notes, “believe in the existing circumstances; rather, I believe in the porosity of the existing situation, at least when I can make it out”. Stuart Liebman, “On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere”, p. 38.
As Miriam Hansen has pointed out, “Gabi Teichert’s work [...] is the work of the film itself”\textsuperscript{51} and \textit{The Patriot} is constructed, in part, out of the kind of raw materials that Teichert may have unearthed as a result of her experimental approach. In keeping with Kluge’s realistic method, these materials (which include photographs, poems, maps, interviews, sketches, diagrams, illustrations from fairytales, voiceover statements, intertitles and newsreel footage) are edited together in a manner which stimulates the senses and facilitates an active, creative mode of engagement via which the solidity of reality is called into question.

Both Teichert and Kluge are driven by a desire to “see things in their \textit{Zusammenhang}”\textsuperscript{52}; that is, their context and/or interconnection and, in the process, to rupture the neat facade of consistency generated by historical documents (or “novel[s] of reality”) that seek to bolster and/or naturalise politically motivated agendas, policies, and decisions. As Walter Benjamin makes clear: “The rulers at any time are the heirs of all those who have been victorious throughout history”. Historical documents that emphasise the probability and rigidity of both the past and the present can, in this sense, be seen as a form of “empathy with the victor” because their delineation of politically motivated decisions and events as stepping stones in history’s so-called march of progress to the future creates a climate within which it is difficult to conceive of the possibilities of the past, the present, and the future beyond the “realistic” paradigm established and maintained by the ruling status quo.\textsuperscript{53}

As Kluge’s voiceover states in the opening sequence of the film, Teichert is a “patriot” because “she takes an interest in all the dead of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Kluge, \textit{Die Patriotin}, p. 18.
\end{footnotes}
the Reich” – an interest which (as revealed by her activities throughout the course of the film) is focused on redeeming those materials, memories, feelings, and wishes that give voice to “generations of men who the whole time actually wanted and want something completely different”. When criticized by her colleague for her lack of order and so-called inability to construct a “rational argument”, she responds simply by stating that she isn’t “cold hearted”. In other words: she is neither able to professionally divorce, nor analytically distance herself from the unfulfilled possibilities, hopes, and wishes (what Kluge describes as “subjunctive realities”) that have been excised from the neat, linear histories she is expected to teach in the classroom. As the voiceover states over footage of Teichert marking essays at her desk one Sunday morning, when she is reading her students’ assignments, she is duty-bound to cross out the “errors”, even though the mistakes that give voice to alternative possibilities are, for Teichert, “the best parts”.

Figure 2: The Patriot

Teichert’s energies are, however, not limited to excavating the past in search of untapped possibilities. Rather, she is also committed to participating in and actively contributing to contemporary activities, debates, and events that could have a future impact on transforming both history and the curriculum for the better. For example, in a section of *The Patriot* entitled “Die Parteitag” (Party Conference), we view Teichert at a Convention of the Social Democrats where the delegates are involved, in part, in debating the formation of policy on issues pertaining to nuclear power. “If”, Kluge’s voiceover states, “Gabi Teichert is to teach German history, then she wants to actually participate in decisions made, such as those here at this event. She must try to influence the delegates”.

In the following scenes, we view Teichert in discussions with a number of real politicians who are clearly unaware that she is a fictional character and that their discussions are being shot for Kluge’s film. After introducing herself to the delegates as a teacher who wants to change history and thus the curriculum for the better, she claims that “the material available for advanced history lessons isn’t positive enough because our German history isn’t positive enough either”. As revealed, however, throughout the course of the film, Teichert’s conception of a more “positive” curriculum is based not on the replacement of a negative chain of events with a narrative that is more pleasant in its focus, but on the opening up of the subject to incorporate materials that could challenge her students to question the extent to which the history of their country (and, by extension, the present reality in which they live) could have turned out very differently. “It would be bad”, Teichert states, “if that which is known about the history of my country were ultimately the truth. There is always a way out”.

It is this desire to find a “way out” that is the driving impetus of the realistic method underpinning the construction of Kluge’s films; a method which employs both montage and a mixed aesthetic to re-invigorate the senses, to sharpen perception, and to encourage viewers to become active, imaginative participants in the meaning-making process. For example, in the opening minutes of *The Patriot*, we are presented with a montage of materials that includes a black
and white image of Teichert’s face; intertitles; fictional footage of a battlefield littered with corpses; a poem by Christian Morgenstern recited by Kluge in voiceover; an image of the earth and the sun rotating in unison; and a drawing – reminiscent of a fairytale image – of a man trying in vain to scale the icy landscape that would lead him to a castle. These images are followed by sketches of soldiers walking though a snowy landscape, tanks in battle, bodies blasted helplessly into the air, and men digging trenches in Stalingrad. All the while we hear the voice of “the knee” – a character inspired by the Morgenstern poem in which the uninjured knee of a dead soldier travels alone through the world. “No one”, the knee states in voiceover, “is actually dead when he dies. You can’t just write us off: the wishes, the legs, the many joints, ribs, skin that freezes. And if only I remain, the knee, then I must speak, speak, speak.”

The figure of the knee is an interesting inclusion, not least because it is an embodied example of the hopes and wishes of human beings that are sidelined by approaches to the representation and writing of history that are more conventional in their content and structure. When Kluge speaks via the voice of the knee of the “wishes”, the “ribs”, and the “skin that freezes”, he is invoking “the anti-realism of feelings”55; that is, the desire for happiness and the capacity for protest that, for Kluge, is embodied at a cellular level in generations of human experience and which is manifested in the instinctual capacity to draw distinctions based on our sense of how things should be.56

“The knee”, as Anton Kaes has pointed out (which is “anatomically nothing more than a joint that makes movement possible”) can also be read “as a concrete image for the ‘between’” and as “an alle-

56 | “Our cells”, Kluge notes, “are around four million years old, our eyes have experience that comprises the complete history of the world”. Jürgen Bevers, Klaus Kreimeier und Jutta Müller, “Eine Baustelle ist vorteilhafter als ganze Häuser: Ein Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge,” Spuren: Zeitschrift für Kunst und Gesellschaft 1 (Februar/März, 1980), p. 18.
gory for montage and Zusammenhang”. Quoting Kluge, Kaes adds: “I developed the knee [...] from this Morgenstern poem. You never see it except in the gap between the shots [...] and that is the point: the main things in the film are between the shots”. While Kluge’s montage practice functions to open up gaps within which the viewer can “fly into the break”, as demonstrated by Teichert’s visit to the SPD conference, contrast, space and tension are also generated by the manner in which Kluge shoots footage of fictional characters interacting with real people, events, and situations. In The Patriot what is made immediately apparent from the uncomfortable reactions of the participants with whom Teichert converses is the “inappropriateness” of voicing one’s wishes and desires in a political context that functions according to its own rules, regulations, and logic. As Teichert sits despondently on the steps outside the auditorium where the SPD delegates are discussing issues pertaining to energy policy that will have a serious impact on the future of Germany, Kluge’s voiceover states: “For one thousand years, governments have been structured so I can only vote for what I want, by accepting what I don’t want.”

It is the gap illustrated in this sequence – between the hopes, feelings, and desires of individuals and a status quo both produced and sustained by politicians, institutions, and the media – that highlights “the contrast between the wishes of people and a reality which does not answer these wishes”. By inserting fictional characters into so-called real contexts, Kluge seeks to generate a scenario within which the “realism of the senses” (in the form of “the eyes, the ears, the head of a real person”) can exert a “practical critique” of

57 | Kaes, “In Search of Germany”, pp. 120-121.
the reality principle governing the political sphere. What is powerful and, at times, also comical about Teichert’s presence at the SPD conference is the degree to which her comments, hopes, suggestions, and ideas ruffle the veil of realism in which the legitimacy of the status quo is cloaked.

**FEELINGS, POLITICS, WAR AND PEACE**

The bombers remind us of what Leonardo da Vinci expected of man in flight: that he was to ascend to the skies ‘in order to seek snow on the mountaintops and bring it back to the city to spread on the sweltering streets in summer.’62

If, Kluge argues, “politics had all the feelings at its disposal” then it “would be strong enough to prevent wars, to nip Fascism in the bud rather than defeating it after it had done its worst”.63 The problem lies, however, in the gap that separates the senses from the political and historical spheres: “The big decisions in history”, he writes, “are not made in the realm of what we can experience close at hand. The big disasters take place in the distance which we cannot experience, for which we don’t have the appropriate telescopes (or microscopes) in our senses”. The two worlds “don’t come together. In this sense man is not a social, not a political being”.64

Kluge’s analysis of this experience of sensory alienation builds on and develops ideas explored by Walter Benjamin in his epilogue to ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in which he draws a distinction between the aestheticisation of politics undertaken by fascism and the significant role that art can play in

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both revitalising the senses and rejuvenating the viewer’s capacity for imagination, experience, and autonomous thought. The aestheticisation of war enacted by fascism has, Benjamin writes, “reached the point where [humankind] can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure” – a point illustrated via a quote from the ‘Futurist Manifesto’ in which war is described as “beautiful because it combines gunfire, barrages, cease-fires, scents, and the fragrance of putrefaction into a symphony.”

The aestheticisation of politics that Benjamin is referring to here is not, of course, specific to Fascism but is a practice which is alive and well in the contemporary media and which functions – as per the armoury that Kluge associates with the reality principle – to aesthetise and thereby seal the subject off from the events and ideas it is depicting. As Kluge and Oskar Negt argue in *Public Sphere and Experience*, the “abstract character” and entertainment-driven focus of news and current affairs programs prohibits the viewer from relating – in an engaged, sensual, and intuitive manner – with the issues and ideas in question.

*War and Peace* is one of three collaborative films co-directed by Kluge that was produced in direct response to political events that were taking place in West Germany at the time. Co-produced by Kluge, Volker Schlöndorff, Stefan Aust, and Heinrich Böll, the film explores the relationship between war and peace, freedom and

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68 | The film also contains a contribution by Axel Engstfeld.
subjugation, and the dangers faced by the FRG (and Europe more generally) as a direct result of the American installation of nuclear weapons on West German soil. As Aust has made clear, his participation in the venture was driven by a desire “to do what you cannot do (or cannot do any longer) in television, to try new forms, to sharpen the content, to become involved in the pressing political problems of the day, take a position and demonstrate connections [Zusammenhänge darstellen].”69 “[W]e believe”, Schlöndorff states,

that our gaze is different from the gaze of the television camera, and different than, earlier, the gaze of the Wochenschau; if later someone wants to produce a chronicle of our time, then we prefabricate, so to speak, material that has a different kind of sensuousness [Sinnlichkeit], a different gaze and a perhaps also a different personality.70

As the directors make clear, the experimental form of the film is driven by a desire to rob the status quo of what Kluge describes as its “reality character”71 and, in doing so, to reinvest the audience with the capacity to determine what is and isn’t possible, desirable, and/or real. Instead of presenting the audience with a one-sided, pre-processed analysis in which the case for or against the stockpiling of nuclear weapons is laid out in a clear and didactic fashion, the mixed form

of the film (which consists of new, old, fictional and documentary footage, images, quotes, and diagrams, clips from video games, political speeches and instructional videos, interviews with missile testers, military strategists and “the father of the neutron bomb”) seeks to facilitate Zusammenhänge and, in the process, to undo the experience of sensorial alienation that Kluge associates with the reality principle.

*Figure 3: War and Peace*

The aestheticisation of politics described by Benjamin, and the an-aesthetisation of the senses with which he associates it, is explored by the film on a number of different levels, most notably through the contrast it establishes (as early as the pre-title opening sequence) between the different modes of perception and experience facilitated by distant and proximate relationships. In one scene, for example, we are presented with stuttering black and white footage of two enemy soldiers who unexpectedly find themselves sharing a trench. “Initially”, Kluge’s voiceover informs us, “one enemy wanted to stab the other enemy to death”. After realising, however, that one of them
is seriously wounded, the other places a cigarette in his enemy’s mouth, but he dies before he has the opportunity to smoke it. “They only knew each other for ten minutes”, the voiceover states, and the scene cuts first to an image of Gabi Teichert’s eye and then to colour-tinted footage of a battleship in motion with sailors scrambling across the deck. “Fourteen seconds”, Kluge states over an image of a star-spangled sky, “was how long the battleship had before the rocket hit. One doesn’t get to know each other at all.”

This distinction – between modes of violence that are, on the one hand, mediated by and, on the other hand, completely devoid of human contact – is explored in detail throughout the film in a manner that speaks directly to Kluge’s delineation of the degree to which our relationship to the political sphere, and warfare in particular, is mediated by an experience of sensorial galvanisation that prohibits us from feeling the pain of others and acting according to our own best interests. While the scenario in the trench certainly isn’t devoid of irony (the soldier initially decides to kill his enemy but refrains from doing so once he realises he is hurt) the shift from face to face combat to long distance warfare illustrated by this sequence forms part of a historical trajectory traced by the film, albeit in a discontinuous way: a trajectory which is buttressed by technological “progress” and which enables us, in the words of Benjamin, to “experience our own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure.”

This shift – from close to long distance warfare, from personal contact to no contact at all – is also explored later in the film via a segment that opens with the following quote: “In former times people were closer. Firearms didn’t reach that far”. This on-screen statement is succeeded by black and white footage of bomber planes during the Second World War. We watch the planes swoop and dive as they drop bombs high above their patchwork targets, and then the film cuts to reveal the shocking reality of the attacks for those located on the ground. We see exploding bombs, burning buildings, and people frantically trying to escape the area by foot, via tank, and on horseback. The air is thick with panic, fire and smoke, cars roll off the road, and horses buckle under pressure only to be tram-
pled on by other horses, soldiers, vehicles, and carts. This scene of
destruction is intercut with images of a bomber pilot’s perspective
shot from a camera located in the cockpit. As the plane dives, the
abstract target looms before our gaze before it is clouded in a haze
of smoke generated by the bomb as it is released from the plane.
From the pilot’s bird’s eye perspective, there is little sense of con-
nection between his/her aerial manoeuvres and the invisible horror
taking place on the ground, the only trace of which is manifested in
a smoky haze which is barely perceptible from on high.72

As *War and Peace* makes clear, the gap explored in this sequence
– between the anaesthetised gaze of the pilot and the sensations of
fear, terror, and panic experienced first hand from below – is exac-
terbated by nuclear warfare and the development of atomic weapons
designed to generate destruction from afar. As the voiceover makes
clear in the early stages of the film, a number of these weapons have
been stockpiled on both sides of the East/West German border by
Soviet and US military forces. “We are a sovereign state”, the voice-
over claims over footage of trucks transporting nuclear weapons.
“Our security is ensured by the Americans. For this they’ve brought
some equipment into our country”.

This “equipment” is displayed throughout the course of the film
via different types of footage: We view ads produced by arms manu-
facturers, images of nuclear tests conducted in the Nevada desert, and
a remote military site in West Germany surrounded by barbed wire

72 | This lack of connection is also demonstrated in *The Patriot* via a
series of clips of American bomber pilots shot during the Second World
War. For example, in one sequence, we view footage of bomber planes
flying high above their targets which is intercut with images shot from a
pilot’s perspective of bombs reminiscent of fireflys being released onto
the houses below. This is followed by footage of bomber pilots back at
their base standing in front of their plane and talking and laughing among
themselves, while Kluge states in voiceover: “These bomber pilots are back
from their mission. They haven’t experienced Germany. They’ve simply been
razing the country for eighteen hours”.

and electric fences which is used for the storage of nuclear warheads. Outside the storage facility a group of protesters gathers in the cold bearing signs that state: “No nuclear missiles in the BRD” and “Peace only exists without weapons.” What is clear, however, is that this conception of peace stands in stark contrast to the image of a peaceful existence propagated by the US president, Ronald Reagan, whom we view via public appearances and press conferences with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Over footage of a German family wearing protective suits in a barren, windswept landscape, the voiceover states: “Our freedom, so we learned, was based on nuclear deterrence”.

This and other dystopian images of a post-nuclear European landscape are contrasted with footage of what might have been because “once upon a time”, the voiceover states, “we had different ideas”. In a sequence that evokes the utopian promise of the epigraph that opens this section (in which flying machines would gather snow from the mountains to be sprinkled over hot city streets) we see how German weapons were repurposed in the postwar period for humanitarian (rather than military) ends. We learn, for example, that submarine hulls were transformed into silos for the storage of grain while artillery shells metamorphosised into ovens, cups and pots for domestic use. The sense of promise contained in these objects is, however, counteracted by footage depicting the remilitarisation of West Germany in the form of nuclear canons and submarines brought into the country by the US government in order to defend their interests on West German soil. “No one asked us”, the voiceover claims. “Our security and our lives are dictated by military experts and other people of questionable competence”.

One such figure is Sam Cohen who appears in an interview conducted in the private spaces of his car and his Californian home and whose “competence” is bound with his status as the inventor of the neutron bomb. In between drinking coffee and preparing cocktails in the kitchen while his wife cooks dinner on the stove, Cohen explains – in a proud, matter-of-fact tone – how the neutron bomb is highly effective at killing people without, ironically, destroying the infrastructure upon which they rely. The bomb, he explains, is de-
signed to explode 2000 or 3000 feet above the ground. “The explosion releases all these neutrons, this radiation. Just like a giant X-ray machine” so that the people below are completely irradiated. “It’s by far”, he states proudly while drawing on a cigarette, “the most effective weapon ever invented. That sounds boastful but it’s true. There has never been anything like it.”

What is disturbing about this sequence is the extreme, almost pathological indifference displayed by Cohen in regard to the effects that his invention would, once detonated, have on real people located on the ground; an indifference also exhibited by his wife (who focuses her energies on “tennis” and “the house”) and his children who actually echo the phrase “tremendous indifference” to characterise their relationship to their father’s work. When the German interviewer notes that he is not indifferent because the nuclear battlefield Cohen is describing is situated in Europe, ie. his home, Cohen responds coolly by stating: “Of course. Unfortunately the Europeans live adjacent to the Soviet Bloc. The threat is against Europe, not America.”

This sense of detachment and indifference is also communicated in a scene located in a munitions firm responsible for the production and testing of the Pershing II: “the first missile to be able to reach Moscow from German soil”. When asked about his work, a company employee notes that missile testing is “just a business. It is just like testing cars. [...] I personally don’t feel any connection to war or anything like that.”

It is precisely this lack of connection – between arms producers and the targets of such weaponry, between bomber pilots and the horror of death, between nuclear “deterrence” and the human effects wreaked by a nuclear strike – that the film seeks to break down by cutting through the sense of abstraction via which such distance and indifference are maintained. The kind of cool detachment exhibited, for example, in the missile tester’s comments is complicated by a radio report in which a doctor reflects on the type of injuries that would be sustained as a result of a nuclear attack. “Anyone”, he states, who looks at a fireball from thirty miles away, his retina will burn and he will go blind. There would be tens of thousands of third degree burns [...]
There would be skull fractures, ruptured lungs, spinal injuries, lacerations and hemorrhages. Even at eleven or twelve miles, ordinary windows would become deadly weapons. Glass shards flying at ninety miles an hour will kill everyone in the room.

Later in the film, an image of a mushroom cloud rising in the sky is followed by a German instructional video detailing how to react in the case of a nuclear explosion. “When caught outdoors”, the adviser states, “carry out the following procedures: Shield eyes from the bright light and drop to the ground.” In another segment, we view footage of people gathering together in protective masks followed by the on-screen instruction: “Stay at home”. An animated diagram of weaponry appears and is followed by a map indicating how long it would take for nuclear missiles to reach several West German cities after crossing the East German border: Four minutes to Munich, seven to Stuttgart, and one to Hamburg, i.e. not a lot of time for people below to prepare.

*Figure 4: War and Peace*
STRATEGIES FROM ABOVE AND BELOW

Kluge’s preoccupation with the imbalance of power exhibited in this and other sequences – between the “strategies from above” enacted by those in positions of power and the scant opportunities available for “strategies from below”\footnote{For Kluge’s analysis of the differences between these two strategies, see “The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feeling”, p. 289.} - stems, in part, from his own experience of surviving the bombing of his hometown Halberstadt at the end of the Second World War; an event documented in his literary montage piece ‘The Air Raid on Halberstadt, 8 April 1945’.\footnote{Alexander Kluge, “Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945” in: Alexander Kluge, Neue Geschichten. Hefte 1-18: ‘Unheimlichkeit der Zeit’, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978, pp. 33-106. For Kluge’s comments in this regard, see Bion Steinborn, “‘Unser Herrgott ist der erste Kernaggressor’: Ein Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge und Volker Schlöndorff über (den Film) ‘Krieg und Frieden’”, Filmfaust, 32 (Februar-März, 1983), p. 20. For a comprehensive analysis of these “strategies” in relation to the Halberstadt piece, see David Roberts, “Alexander Kluge and German History: ‘The Air Raid on Halberstadt on 8.4.1945’”, in Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials For the Imagination, pp. 127-154.} One of the characters who features in this fragmentary text is Gerda Baethe whose story is discussed in class by Teichert’s history students in The Patriot and who finds herself in an air raid shelter with little means available to protect her children. “The problem”, Kluge notes in a different context in which he extrapolates on this story,

is that the woman in the bomb-cellar in 1944, for example, has no means at all to defend herself in that moment. She might perhaps have had means in 1928 if she had organised with others before the development which then moves towards Papen, Schleicher and Hitler. So the question of organization is located in 1928, and the requisite consciousness is located in 1944.\footnote{Kluge, “The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feeling,” pp. 289-290.}
As noted previously, Kluge reads this experience of delayed consciousness as a symptom of the pervasive conception of “politics as a specialised area that others look after for us and not as a degree of intensity of our own feelings”. By deferring important decision-making responsibilities to politicians and the mainstream media, the public – in this context – occupies a position of both distance and indifference from the very real effects generated by “strategies from above”. While Gerda Baethe’s story is a very concrete example of the kind of helplessness that Kluge and his family must have felt living in Halberstadt during the war, it also functions as an allegory for the imbalance of power and the experience of alienation that, for Kluge, characterises the disjunction between politics and the public in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As he makes clear:

if this relationship of person/bomb in the emergency is the model of how our modern world intends to deal with people and if we don’t want to deceive ourselves in times of peace or apparent peace about the fact that this is precisely the point of the emergency, then we must ask ourselves whether there are any reasons which make us satisfied with the meagre means of a strategy from below in the emergency.

Kluge’s approach (as prefigured in the comparison with David and Goliath cited above) is to undo, complicate, and undermine the veracity of the behemoth of reality generated by those who develop “strategies from above” to support and maintain their own interests. “Politicians”, Heinrich Böll states in footage in War and Peace shot at a political rally in Bonn, have the capacity to “turn us into complacent cynics. It’s easily done. They can have a paralysed population around the globe, paralysed by weapons, this plague of weapons”.

In scenes that follow we view the public staging of political reality in the form of footage capturing the media’s documentation of

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76 | Ibid., p. 289.
77 | Ibid.
the arrival by helicopter of senior political figures at an international economic summit in France. At the moment each helicopter lands, a band pipes up with military music, fountains that were previously dormant majestically ascend in the background, and two men roll out a red carpet that will lead the dignitaries – who are engaged in heavily staged “casual” conversation – from the helicopter to the cavalcade awaiting them. Later we are presented with footage of politicians seated at a table in “Le Salon de la Paix” at the Palace of Versailles surrounded by the international media while a news bulletin announces: “3.09pm: More than 20,000 Israeli soldiers backed up by tanks are attacking Lebanon”.

As the following voiceover statement makes clear, the staging of political reality enacted by politicians and the media plays a significant role in both generating and augmenting the sense of paralysis described by Kluge and Böll. “Our curiosity”, the voiceover states,

must constantly be fed by fresh news from the media. New suffering as well. In this sense, we are cannibals. But our feelings can not easily adjust to the suffering of others. Feeling takes time. The war machine, however, apparently functions timelessly. On the one hand, it doggedly carries out the same war. On the other hand, it changes scenes so abruptly, that the feelings can’t follow. One moment it’s Pershing, then it’s Poland, then the Falklands, now it’s Lebanon.

In the following sequence, we view a montage of clips of the destruction wrought on the ground in Lebanon as a direct result of strategies conceived from above. We see demolished buildings, hills of rubble, a burnt-out hotel devoid of windows, a female beggar, abandoned cars, and a young man who stares pensively at the camera. The scene then cuts back to the Palace of Versailles where political leaders are dining in the sumptuous surroundings of the Hall of Mirrors encircled by the international media who are there to capture the “refined”, “civilised” manner in which politicians participate in such activities.
What is significant about *War and Peace* is the manner in which it ruptures the veneer of refinement generated by these and other images, not by producing a coherent counter-narrative, but by collating an experimental assemblage of materials that prompts the audience to generate questions and draw connections but which resists the impulse towards didacticism, lucidity and closure characteristic of Hollywood cinema and the mainstream news media. In the final minutes of the film, we are presented with a fast-paced panorama of a landscape shot from a train, the green fields of which are punctuated by nuclear power plants that flash up and disappear just as rapidly. “The nearly unsolvable problem”, the directors state via the intertitle which follows, is “to avoid being struck dumb, whether through the power of others, or through one’s own paralysis”. If, as Kluge suggests, a realist film practice can shed light on this problem, then it is because he has faith in its capacity to motivate feelings, to rupture the sensorial and ideological armour generated by the reality principle and, in the process, to foster a form of embodied consciousness through which meaningful political engagement is enabled.