***Real to Reel: A New Approach to Undertanding Realism in Film and TV Fiction* by Martin Sohn-Rethel (2015) Leighton-Buzzard: Auteur ISBN 978-0-99307175-1**

This is a review partly in the form of a tribute. Martin Sohn-Rethel taught Media (and Film) at the same institution, Varndean College in Brighton, for over twenty years. He was known to me as a colleague working on A Level teaching resources and examining and as a practitioner keen to share his good practice, particularly around the topic of this book, at the annual British Film Institute conference and other events.

We disagreed on several things, most notably during a keynote by David Gauntlett at the BFI, for which I was 'discussant' and endorsed some of the presenter's provocations about the cherished 'key concepts' for the subject, which outraged Martin. At other times, we clashed (politely) over awarding body positions which I represented at public events. But this was far more than a clash of the 'old school' with new ideas, rather Martin always offered an astute and experienced critical voice 'from the patch' but was more fundamentally an enthusiastic advocate of challenging students with theory and looking always to charge media education with academic rigour.

In *Real to Reel* he offers a rich overview of the concept of realism and offers a 'seven code' model for students to apply in their analyses. These codes build on the vast body of work in this area but add layers and re-workings: surface realism (with regard to Ellis); social realism; the genre code; narrative; psychology; the code of discourse and ideology and counter-realism. A chapter on each applies the framework to a range of texts, mainly either 'classic' or well-worn by reviewers and academics (*Erin Brokovich, District 9, The Lives of Others, This is England, La Haine, Coronation Street*, Andrea Arnold's *Wuthering Heights* – but it's a REALLY long list). The author is not attempting to cover new textual ground, or skew the work to awarding body criteria for currency, but instead working across and between a set of examples that allow him to exemplify the model with rigour and depth.

But equally this is no detached, 'objective' appraisal of texts as static. As Jenny Grahame says on the back cover, the approach here is to *review and re-evaluate existing perspectives*. And the author's own meaning-making, sometimes highly personal, is at work, albeit in glimpses, most notably in the reflective interpretation of Haneke's *Hidden*. He offers a 'mind searching' of his visit to Krakow and Aushwitz, describing a personal experience of outrage woven in with his response to the director's moral injunction, conveyed in an interview, about how we stand today to mistakes of the past. For this reader this, and other such moments of personal reflection which he (mistakenly in my view) disclaims as 'controversial' offer a refreshing break with the tendency to fetishise directors and received academic analyses, as opposed to using the seven codes more to liberate textual meaning-making to more fluid or inter / para-textual ways of 'doing realism'. That said, all the chapters offer an accessible but challenging structure in which the key concepts at stake in each code are set up but also problematized and indeed the central project is to show how the seven codes cannot be nearly aligned with one another – so understanding realism here is to see multiple realisms.

Students of realism but also, as the codes weave together all of the major key concepts, of media more broadly, will also be very well served by the meticulous bibliography which

brings together the vast body of work on the various *realisms* in question thematically and offers a plethora of rich leads for further study arranged by chapter topics.

Giroux wrote of teachers as public intellectuals, encouraging us to think in this way of teaching as *a form of intellectual labor, as opposed to defining it in purely instrumental or technical terms*. I will remember Martin Sohn-Rethel in this way and this book is a fitting parting gift.

Julian McDougall