

**new  
german  
critique**



Number 49

Winter 1990

**SPECIAL ISSUE ON  
ALEXANDER KLUGE**

*Alexander Kluge*

The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time

*Eric Rentschler*

Remembering Not to Forget:  
A Retrospective Reading of Kluge's *Brutality in Stone*

*Timothy Corrigan*

The Commerce of Auteurism: a Voice without Authority

*Helke Sander*

"You Can't Always Get What You Want":  
The Films of Alexander Kluge

*Heide Schlüpmann*

Femininity as Productive Force: Kluge and Critical Theory

*Gertrud Koch*

Alexander Kluge's Phantom of the Opera

*Alexander Kluge*

On Opera, Film and Feelings

*Richard Wolin*

On Misunderstanding Habermas: A Response to Rajchman

*John Rajchman*

Rejoinder to Richard Wolin

*Marc Silberman*

Remembering History: The Filmmaker Konrad Wolf



an interdisciplinary journal of german studies

# NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE

*Editors:* David Bathrick (Ithaca), Helen Fehervary (Columbus), Miriam Hansen (Chicago), Andreas Huyssen (New York), Anson Rabinbach (New York), Jack Zipes (Minneapolis).

*Contributing Editors:* Leslie Adelson (Columbus), Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor), Ferenc Feher (New York), Agnes Heller (New York), Peter U. Hohendahl (Ithaca), Douglas Kellner (Austin), Eberhard Knödler-Bunte (Berlin), Sara Lennox (Amherst), Andrei Markovits (Cambridge), Biddy Martin (Ithaca), Rainer Nägele (Baltimore), Eric Rentschler (Irvine), Henry Schmidt (Columbus), James Steakley (Madison).

*Assistant Editors:* Ned Brinkley (Ithaca), and Karen Kenkel (Ithaca).

*Project Assistant:* Cynthia Herrick (Ithaca).

Published three times a year by TELOS PRESS, 431 E. 12th St., New York, NY 10009. *New German Critique* No. 49 corresponds to Vol. 17, No. 1. © New German Critique Inc. 1990. All rights reserved. *New German Critique* is a non-profit, educational organization supported by the Department of German Literature of Cornell University and by a grant from the Department of German and College of Humanities of Ohio State University.

All editorial correspondence should be addressed to: NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE, Department of German Studies, 185 Goldwin Smith Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853.

The annual subscription rate is \$22.00 personal; \$50.00 institutions. All foreign subscribers 15% extra. Back issues are available at \$8.50 copy for individuals and \$17.00 a copy for institutions. For subscriptions and back issues, write to: NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE, Telos Press Ltd., 431 East 12th Street, New York, NY 10009.

Articles appearing in this journal are annotated and indexed in *Historical Abstracts and American History and Life*.

Note to Contributors: Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the Modern Language Association Style Sheet, but should continue to include endnotes and not a list of the bibliography. Manuscripts should also be sent on IBM-compatible disks in WordPerfect, ASCII or WORDSTAR format.

# NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE

Number 49

Winter 1990

## SPECIAL ISSUE ON ALEXANDER KLUGE

### *Table of Contents*

#### ARTICLES:

- Introduction ..... 3  
*Miriam Hansen*
- The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time ..... 11  
*Alexander Kluge*
- Remembering Not to Forget:  
A Retrospective Reading of Kluge's *Brutality in Stone* ..... 23  
*Eric Rentschler*
- The Commerce of Auteurism: a Voice without Authority ..... 43  
*Timothy Corrigan*
- "You Can't Always Get What You Want":  
The Films of Alexander Kluge ..... 59  
*Helke Sander*
- Femininity as Productive Force: Kluge and Critical Theory ..... 69  
*Heide Schlüppmann*
- Alexander Kluge's Phantom of the Opera ..... 79  
*Gertrud Koch*
- On Opera, Film and Feelings ..... 89  
*Alexander Kluge*
- On Misunderstanding Habermas:  
A Response to Rajchman ..... 139  
*Richard Wolin*
- Rejoinder to Richard Wolin ..... 155  
*John Rajchman*
- Remembering History: The Filmmaker Konrad Wolf ..... 163  
*Marc Silberman*

# TELOS

## A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought

Since its first issue in May 1968, *Telos* has introduced into the English-speaking world the best trends in continental radical thought. Committed to the development of an *American* version of Critical Theory unencumbered by conformist communication theory or Freudianism, *Telos* continues to focus on international issues and, increasingly, on a critical analysis of American society.

ISSUE No. 82

WINTER 1989-90

### Articles

**Meuschel:** *The End of "East German Socialism"*

**Adam:** *Israel and South Africa: Conflict Resolution in Ethnic States*

**Elkins:** *The Politics of Mystical Ecology*

**Roth:** *Durkheim and Gender Equality*

**Lichtblau:** *Gender Theory in Simmel, Tönnies and Weber*

### Notes

*Does Critical Theory Have a Future?*

*The Elizabethtown Telos Conference (February 23-25, 1990)*

**Adler:** *Norberto Bobbio at 80*

**Glutz and Kallscheuer:** *An Interview with Norberto Bobbio*

**Barbiero:** *After the Aging of the New Music*

**Hullot-Kentor:** *Barbiero, Eno and New Age Music*

**Luke:** *Xmas Ideology*

**Piccone:** *Xmas Ideology or Reaganism?*

### Reviews

**Roth:** *Divergent Histories of Sexual Science*

**Schuler:** *Adorno's Kierkegaard*

**Asher:** *The Moral Blindness of Paul de Man*

Subscriptions cost \$28 per year (four issues) for individuals; \$70 for institutions. Foreign orders add 15%. Checks must be in US funds. No Canadian checks will be accepted. Back issues are \$8.50 each (institutions pay \$17). Back issues available: 13, 17-51, 53-80. For subscription, back issues or information, write:

*Telos Press Ltd., 431 E. 12th Street, New York NY 10009*



The Johns Hopkins University Press



# diacritics

*a review of contemporary criticism*

Debra Castillo, Editor



*Diacritics* is the preeminent forum for contemporary literature and critical theory. Fostering speculation and debate, each issue examines innovative and seminal modern criticism.

---

## DIACRITICS

March, June, September, December

Please enter my one-year subscription:

Individuals \$19.90       Institutions \$45.00

**Payment:**

Check or money order enclosed       Visa       MasterCard

Account # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send orders to:

The Johns Hopkins University Press, Journals Division, 701 W. 40th Street, Suite 275,  
Baltimore, Maryland 21211

*Make checks payable to The Johns Hopkins University Press. Prepayment is required before shipment. Subscribers in Mexico and Canada add \$3.75 postage; other subscribers outside the U.S., Mexico, and Canada add \$6.50 air freight. Payment must be drawn on a U.S. bank or be by international money order. Maryland residents add 5% sales tax.*

EA9

---

boundary 2  
an international journal of literature and culture  
Paul A. Bové, editor

**New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon**  
17:1 (Spring 1990)  
Donald E. Pease, special issue editor

**Contents**

The *Res Publica* of Letters / Michael Warner

The Rationale for "The American Romance" / John McWilliams

Scarcity, Subjectivity, and Emerson / Wai-chee Dimock

Hearing Narrative Voices in Melville's *Pierre* / Priscilla Wald

The Rhetorical Use and Abuse of Fiction: Eating Books in Late  
Nineteenth-Century America / Steven Mailloux

Maternal Discourse and the Romance of Self-Possession in Kate  
Chopin's *The Awakening* / Ivy Schweitzer

Realism, Ideology, and the Novel in America (1886–1896): Chang-  
ing Perspectives in the Work of Mark Twain, W. D. Howells, and  
Henry James / Robert Weimann

American Literature and the New Historicism: The Example of  
Frederick Douglass / Gregory S. Jay

"Ours by the Law of Nature": Romance and Independents on Mark  
Twain's River / Howard Horwitz

Cataloging the Creatures of the Deep: "Billy Budd, Sailor" and the  
Rise of Sociology / Susan Mizruchi

Violence, Revolution, and the Cost of Freedom: John Brown and  
W. E. B. DuBois / William Cain

**Future contributors include** Jonathan Arac, Joseph Buttigieg,  
Margaret Ferguson, Michael Hays, Daniel O'Hara, Edward W. Said,  
William V. Spanos, and Cornel West

**Subscription prices**

\$30 institutions

\$18 individuals

Single issue price \$10

---

**Duke University Press**

Journals Division

6697 College Station

Durham NC 27708

---

# boundary 2

---

# revue d'Allemagne

---

et des pays de langue allemande

---

1990 /

Die vierteljährlich erscheinende wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift des Centres d'Études germaniques der Universität Robert Schuman, Strasbourg. Sie nimmt in französischen und deutschen Beiträgen Stellung zu den Problemen der B.R.D. und D.D.R. auf politischem, wirtschaftlichem, sozialem und kulturellem Gebiet.

## **Wissenschaftlicher Rat**

J.-P. Bled, F.-G. Dreyfus, A. Grosser, F. Bilger, R. Bauer,  
G.-L. Fink, P. Koenig, R. Poidevin, J. Rován, J.-M. Valentin

## **Direktion**

J.-P. Bled, F.-G. Dreyfus, D. Goedel, A. Losser, R. Poidevin, S. Urban

## **Redaktionskomitee**

J. Bariéty, G. Castellan, C. David,  
J. Droz, L. Dupeux, P. Grappin, F. Hartweg, J. Murat, R. Poidevin,  
R. Rémond, A. Rieg, E. Schulín, F. Siegburg, K. Sontheimer,  
R. von Thadden, J.-M. Valentin

## **Redaktionssekretärin**

U. Mousset

## **Themen der letzten Nummern**

Deutschsprachige Länder nach 1945: kultur-politische Forschung und Lehre  
in der französischen Germanistik  
Frankreichs Einfluß auf Deutschland  
40 Jahre Bundesrepublik Deutschland — Versuch einer Bilanz —  
Französischer und deutscher Protestantismus

## **Themen für 1990**

Österreich und die Neugestaltung Europas  
Industriestrategien in der Bundesrepublik  
Die alternative Versuchung in Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert  
De Gaulle und Deutschland

---

## *Bulletin d'abonnement*

REVUE D'ALLEMAGNE », Centre d'Études germaniques, 8, rue des Écrivains,  
67081 Strasbourg Cedex / Tél. 88.36.45.14 / Fax 88.35.64.42

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Beruf \_\_\_\_\_

Ich bestelle hiermit ein Jahresabonnement (4 Nummern) für 1990 zu senden  
an folgender Adresse \_\_\_\_\_

zum Preis von: Abonnement 1990 : Frankreich: 220 F  - Ausland: 280 F   
Anbei meine Geldüberweisung auf Bankkonto C.C.B. (Sogénal 82536 / 7) oder  
Postscheckkonto C.C.P. (Strasbourg 1299-41 A) an Société d'Études Allemandes,  
8, rue des Écrivains, 67081 Strasbourg Cedex.

## *Introduction*

Miriam Hansen

In the United States, the critical debate on Alexander Kluge's work has only just begun, thanks to a comprehensive retrospective of his films organized by Stuart Liebman and sponsored by the Goethe Institute and Anthology Film Archives. A retrospective, Kluge might say, is a bit like an inventory of boxes left behind in the basement after one has moved to another city — the boxes still contain some useful things, though one's current life is elsewhere. In Kluge's case in particular, the relationship between author and oeuvre is a problematic one. Compared to the main body of the so-called New German Cinema, his films have most persistently refused a status as "works" which could be circulated and canonized or, for that matter, translated and exported.

For one thing, this resistance is an effect of the films' textual strategies — their stylistic heterogeneity, openness, incompleteness, their challenge to the "film in the spectator's head." These strategies undermine the closure typical not only of the classical Hollywood film but also of the masterpieces of art cinema. But beyond formalism, Kluge's films are not as easily assimilated to auteurial consumption as, for instance, the work of directors Herzog, Fassbinder, or Wenders, because Kluge's authorship often takes the form of an intervention in a pragmatic context, in a particular constellation of public life. Thus, his films usually belong to a larger configuration of events and discourses; they respond to specific political conflicts, to historical moments and movements such as the incipient student movement, the *Häuserkampf* (the fight against real-estate speculation in the Frankfurt Westend), or the spiral of terrorism and state surveillance. When I recall the films I saw at the time of their German release, *Artists under the Big Top: Perplexed* (1967),

*Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* (1973), *In Danger and Dire Distress* . . . (1974), and *Strongman Ferdinand* (1976), I am less likely to remember a filmic text than particular situations of reception, discussions, and controversies that the films occasioned and in which they — and Kluge himself — participated. The films' dependency on a performative context is, of course, also due to the fact that the filmmaker in this case is also a writer, theorist, teacher, lawyer, and organizer.

It is a topos of Kluge criticism, using one of his own metaphors, that his work resembles a "construction site." The object of construction, as readers of Kluge know by now, is not just the individual film or the oeuvre, but the "public sphere" (*Öffentlichkeit*) in the emphatic sense of the word: the context, horizon, or relationship (*Zusammenhang*) in which experience can be articulated, compared, and reflected upon. Because of its technical and aesthetic affinity with the discourse of experience (associations, mixed materials, floating temporalities), the cinema assumes a particular significance for the organization of public life, including the conditions of feeling and intimacy. In that sense, film history too, with its boulevards, detours, and dead ends, is a construction site, as open-ended as most of Kluge's films. If few of his films could be said to "succeed" as integral or complete works, most of them will contain some sequence or moments which reveal an alternative vision of cinema, which suggest relations between the film and the viewers' experience that differ from those reproduced in the dominant media. In its emphasis on the ecology of public life, then, Kluge's concept of cinema is useful to any film practice that is committed to the articulation of marginal, suppressed, distorted, co-opted discourses of experience, whether or not one shares Kluge's particular positions.

Kluge's linkage of film practice with a politics of the public sphere is not limited, however, to the institution of cinema. On the contrary, because Kluge has no illusions concerning the "illusion that the cinema [. . .] will have a triumphal entry into the 21st century," he has temporarily shifted the focus of his activities to another scene: independent television. Kluge has not made a feature-length film in more than four years but instead has been producing a series of roughly 30-minute clips for a weekly program broadcast by one of the new, privately owned networks in Germany.<sup>1</sup> This shift in focus, Kluge insists, does

---

1. On a selection of Kluge's television work see Margaret Morse, "Ten to Eleven: Television by Alexander Kluge," *1989 American Film Institute Video Festival* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1989) 50-53; Miriam Hansen, "Reinventing the Nickelodeon:

not mean he has abandoned the cinema as a public form; rather, he views his television work as a hibernating strategy, based on a realistic assessment of the conditions of film production, distribution, and exhibition in the Federal Republic today. At the same time, Kluge's shift to television represents the logical development of one aesthetic perspective in his films: the concern with opera that culminated in *The Power of Emotion* (1983). The parameters of the video clip seem especially well suited to Kluge's revisionist crossing of opera and film. The two translations that appear in this issue — excerpts from his book *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*, and selected writings on opera — among other things provide an explanatory background for the filmmaker's current investment in television.

The articles framed by the two translations originated as contributions to a symposium on Kluge held in conjunction with the retrospective of his films. The symposium took place at the CUNY Graduate Center on 28 October 1988, and brought together scholars and filmmakers from the Federal Republic and the United States. The papers published here document the beginnings of a discussion which reflects both a time lag in the critical reception of Kluge in this country and a certain divergence between German and American discourses on film and cinema. Unfortunately, the two papers dealing with Kluge's more properly literary work — by Andreas Huyssen and Fredric Jameson — could not be included in this issue. Missing as well are the responses to the papers by symposium participants — precisely the public dimension of the event — in particular the interventions of Yvonne Rainer and Annette Michelson.<sup>2</sup>

The symposium discussion centered on two issues: Kluge's status as an *auteur* (the subject of Timothy Corrigan's paper), and the question of Kluge's sexual politics. The critique of representations of femininity in Kluge's films began with the polemics against *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* in the feminist film journal *Frauen und Film* (no. 3, 1974); in

---

Notes on Kluge and Early Cinema," *October* 46 (Fall 1988): 178-198; Andreas Kilb, "Der lange Abschied des Herrn K.," *Die Zeit* 1 July 1988: 15-16; Dieter Jeuck and Guntram Vogt, "Fernsehen ohne Ermässigung: Alexander Kluge und das Kulturmagazin '10 vor 11,'" *Frankfurter Rundschau* 16 December 1989: ZB 3. Also see Yvonne Rainer and Ernest Larsen, "'We Are Demolition Artists': An Interview with Alexander Kluge," *The Independent* (June 1989): 18-25.

2. For a more comprehensive introduction to Kluge's work, including an interview, articles, filmography, and bibliography see the special issue of *October* magazine (no. 46, Fall 1988) edited by Stuart Liebman, which served as a catalogue for the retrospective.

the American context, Ruby Rich took up the issue under the rubric of “patriarchal modernism,” arguing that under the cover of modernist devices such as voice-over the female subject was once again ‘spoken’ by a male narrator/author.<sup>3</sup> At the CUNY symposium, the feminist critique of Kluge’s work was at once reiterated and complicated. Helke Sander, founding editor of *Frauen und Film* and co-author of the first polemical review, both resumed and to some extent revised her earlier critique, speaking from the difficult position of a woman filmmaker competing with an avant-garde ally. Heide Schlüpmann elaborated on the concept of a “female productive force” in Kluge’s theoretical writings (explicitly bracketing the films), which she placed, on the one hand, in the context of the West German women’s movement and debates on a feminist “counter public sphere” and, on the other, in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, especially Max Horkheimer’s “Authority and the Family” (1936). Gertrud Koch opened up the discussion to consider the link between erotics and aesthetics in Kluge’s work, focusing on his revisionist use of opera, in particular the Carmen motif.

The issue of Kluge’s sexual politics clearly dominated the discussion, threatening prematurely to foreclose, as some participants charged, a more comprehensive reception of a body of work largely unknown in the United States. Yet the issue has implications beyond Kluge’s individual case and authorship — implications for film theory and film practice today, especially within a feminist framework. I will use my prerogative as editor of this special section to close my introduction with a few remarks, in large part provoked by the symposium.

A feminist reading risks missing what is interesting in Kluge’s work (or in any film practice as idiosyncratic and prismatic as Kluge’s) if it isolates representations of femininity from, for instance, the peculiar representations of masculinity in Kluge’s films, or from his vision of the precarious relations between the sexes. As Koch argues in her contribution, the discourse on gender, sexuality, and erotics in Kluge’s work is inseparable from the aesthetic theory implicit in this work and therefore cannot simply be reduced to ideological questions, much as they play a part in it. A number of Kluge’s female protagonists seem to

---

3. Ruby Rich, “She Says, He Says: The Power of the Narrator in Modernist Film Politics,” *Discourse* 6 (Fall 1983): 31-47; also see Heide Schlüpmann, “‘What is Different is Good’: Women and Femininity in the Films of Alexander Kluge,” *October* 46 (Fall 1988): 129-150.

confirm clichés of feminine irrationality, intuition, impulsiveness, and inefficiency — that is, if one judges them by a realistic-narrative concept of character. And the relation between authorial voice-over and female character is no doubt problematic, but the voice-over in Kluge's films neither presents a consistent, authoritative commentary nor is it always identified with the filmmaker's voice: the polyphony of male/female voices in *Artists under the Big Top*, and the female protagonists' voice-over in *In Danger and Dire Distress* furnish examples to the contrary.

To the extent that Kluge's representations of femininity merely illustrate his theoretical notion of a specifically "female productive force," they participate in the essentializing discourse criticized by Schlüppmann — a discourse that identifies femaleness with mothering, reduces sexuality to sensuality, and borrows a psychoanalytic theory of repression stripped of sexual difference. The notion of a female productive force functions by and large as a metaphor (related to the trope of "the film in the spectator's head"), which Kluge uses to appropriate a set of socially and historically suppressed bisexual human qualities — spontaneity, curiosity, fantasy, memory, finetuning of the senses, a capability for seeing connections — for his own aesthetics, for his concept of cinema. Thus, this notion seems to supply Kluge with a sociological rationalization for his aesthetic practice, for the montage texture of his films, their episodic rhythm and associational openness.

For centuries, male artists have idealized the female imagination and have mounted their own aesthetic identities on those idealized notions of femininity — a phenomenon we find in different ways in Richardson, Flaubert, Schlegel, Rilke, Breton, to mention only a few. In film history, the female mind has suffered much less gloriously, since mainstream commercial cinema, predicating spectatorial pleasure on voyeurism and fetishism, has tended to revolve around images of the female body. This is slightly different in the genre of the art film and its particular variant of the woman's film, exemplified by directors such as Ophüls, Dreyer, or Bergman. While Kluge's idealization of the female mode of production belongs to that tradition, the material base of this mode of production, the sexual body, is rarely a sight in his films, although the few instances I recall are quite curious (cf. Gertie in *Strongman Ferdinand*).

Even more curious are the representations of the male body in Kluge's work, often linked to his critique of institutional authority and



military hierarchy. Relentless and microscopic descriptions of male bodies and their physical functions — often malfunctioning — can be found throughout Kluge's writings, from the 1962 volume of *Lebensläufe* (*Case Histories* [New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988]) through his most recent stories. The pale porous skin of Anita G.'s lover, the few anxious hairs around his nipples; the imagined pregnancy of Generalfeldmarschall Blücher; the hemorrhoids of Officer Gert P. which jeopardize his unit's march on Luga; the accidental erection of Police Chief Scarpia in Kluge's rewriting of *Tosca* — these bodies are not only extremely unerotic but their malfunctioning usually collides with the respective subjects' positions of power and authority. The films, by comparison, offer less diagnostic detail but instead full views of aging and unshapely bodies: Dr. Busch in the bathtub in *Artists under the Big Top*, played by the self-parodistic Alfred Edel; Strongman Ferdinand, played by popular comedian Heinz Schubert who performs all kinds of unflattering positions and exercises; and, most disturbing, the slippage between male bodies and corpses in *Germany in Autumn* (1978), from Fassbinder's masturbation scene to the terrorists' presentation of the kidnapped industrialist Schleyer in pajamas, intercut with footage of his coffin.

Kluge's male bodies display a masculinity congealed into a phallic façade, ruins of desire. To the extent that these bodies belong to figures of official authority (institutional peons, bureaucrats, "character masks"), their impotence and frailty expose anachronistic social and sexual power structures in the Federal Republic; they are part of the large-scale exorcism that Kluge has been conducting in relation to German history, especially in relation to the catastrophe of the Third Reich and its continuing consequences (see Eric Rentschler's article in this issue).

To the extent that these bodies are deliberately devoid of erotic imagination and attraction, they throw a shadow on the very possibility of relations between the sexes. In an interview following the release of *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*, Jan Dawson observes that Kluge's films "offer a fairly tough and basically unsympathetic treatment of the male characters; and a rather depressing view of the actual, possible relations between men and women. The only instance of tenderness I could find was that between Leni Peickert [the circus director in *Artists*] and her father; and the tenderness between them was made possible largely by the fact that the father was already dead." To which Kluge responds, "tenderness doesn't necessarily have anything to do with actual presence. Presence,

an actual situation, mostly destroys it.”<sup>4</sup> The withdrawal of feeling to the level of caring — tenderness, politeness, devotion to a job — is the result of a profound skepticism toward the sexually grounded emotions that have governed cultural constructions of “love.”

If the notion of a female productive force belongs to the context of the early 1970s, to the beginnings of the West German women’s movement and Kluge’s somewhat inadequate reception of it, his systematic analysis of “the power of emotion” beginning in the 1980s focuses on the general mechanisms of erotic, aesthetic, and political illusions, reflecting upon and to a degree rejecting his former idealizations.<sup>5</sup> These mechanisms are epitomized for Kluge in the paradigm of the 19th-century opera, with its celebration of romantic passion and the dramaturgy of immutable fate. The victim of the concatenation of feelings and fate is invariably female; “In every opera dealing with redemption a woman gets sacrificed in Act V,” reads an intertitle in *The Power of Emotion*. But Kluge now views the suppression and co-optation of female subjectivity as part of the historical de/formation of feelings in both sexes, in particular of heterosexual love and its cultural mystification as an anti-social force.

What has changed too is the constellation of desire and history. In Kluge’s earliest work, the impossibility of erotic relations was a measure of the inhumanity of social and political conditions, culminating in the extreme situation of the story “Ein Liebesversuch” (“An Experiment in Love”) in *Case Histories: Auschwitz* as the absolute negation of desire. The minimalism of Kluge’s prose still harbors a romantic dimension in the gesture of refusal (the story describes, from the point of view of one of the guards, the failed attempt to get two prisoners to mate). In his more recent work, romantic love itself appears complicit with the catastrophes of German history, because it nourishes fictions of fate that prevent any alternative course of action and usually lead to murder, suicide, mass psychosis, and war. “It begins with being in love and ends in a divorce. It begins in 1933 and ends in ruins. The great operas begin with the promise of intensified feeling, and in Act V we count the dead.” The political conclusion Kluge draws from this analogy is a plea for the “disarmament of the fifth acts” and the reconstruction of the

---

4. Jan Dawson, *Alexander Kluge and The Occasional Work of a Female Slave* (New York: New York Zoetrope, 1977) 29f.

5. I elaborate on this point in my article, “The Stubborn Discourse: History and Story-Telling in the Films of Alexander Kluge,” *Persistence of Vision* 2 (Fall 1985): 19-29.

so-called small feelings — discrimination (*Fingerspitzengefühl*), capacities for seeing connections and for cooperation — feelings that partly recall the virtues of the female productive force.

Whether or not decomposing the discourse of passion (as Kluge does in his “imaginary opera guides”) will lift him above the pitfalls of gendered representation remains questionable. What also remains to be seen is the extent to which the program of “small feelings” can sustain the renewal of an aesthetic form, the reinvention of cinema through television. Despite Kluge’s militant mistrust of operatic desire (and libidinally grounded desire in general), his work partly appeals to the same source of fascination, albeit ironically refracted and analyzed into its elements. The success of such recycling very much hinges upon the strength of the underlying ambivalence, the tension between reflection and fascination; without this tension, it risks lapsing into postmodern pastiche and nostalgia.

If, as Koch points out, Kluge sides with Nietzsche against Adorno in his profound mistrust of the redemptive value of eros, he is also more Nietzschean in his pragmatism, in his attitude toward illusion as simultaneously fictitious and necessary (see *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*, translated in this issue). This is how I read the commentary that introduces the character Roswitha in the first shot of *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*: “Roswitha feels within herself an enormous power, but she knows from movies that this power really exists.” The somewhat illogical “but” between the two sentences encapsulates the filmmaker’s own navigation between fascination and critique, between a “pessimism of the intelligence” vis-à-vis the growing devastation of the media landscape and an “optimism of the will” toward strategies of hibernation and change.<sup>6</sup>

---

6. Antonio Gramsci, cited by Stuart Liebman as an epigraph in his essay, “Why Kluge?” *October* 46 (1988): 8.

# *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*<sup>1</sup>

Alexander Kluge

## **CONCERNING THIS FILM PROJECT:**

We speak about the *opera of the 19th century*; it is considered the summit of dramatic art. In the film *Die Macht der Gefühle* (*The Power of Emotion*), opera was likened to a “power plant of emotions.” The film *Carmen* by Carlos Saura has shown that such older forms of dramatic art tap certain currents in spectators; this is something we did not know before.

Bound up with our own century is another “power plant of emotions” — the cinema. Presumably, in the next century, beginning sixteen years from now, we will call it *the cinema of the 20th century*. This art form is ninety years old — a love affair of the century. The cinema consists of screening rooms, movie palaces, theaters on the front-lines, as well as many other gathering places, wherever films are shown for money. It also consists of a series of fascinating technical inventions which, though very elementary compared with the capabilities of electronics, all have to do with with the construction of a time machine. This cinema tells stories and it has produced artistic figures [*Kunstfiguren*] and idols. Obviously, this medium intrigues me. The present film project deals

(1) with elements of cinema;

---

1. The following passages are taken from pages 7-8, 10-11, 12-14, 27-30, 37, 55-56, 66-68, 79, 83-84, and 105-111 of *Der Angriff der Gegenwart auf die übrige Zeit* (Frankfurt/Main: Syndikat Autoren und Verlagsgesellschaft, 1985); this translation appears here with permission of the author. Kluge’s film of the same title, which is only loosely based on the book, was shown in the United States under the title *The Blind Director*. Its first U.S. screening was at the New York Film Festival in October, 1985. The translators wish to thank Miriam Hansen for many helpful suggestions.

(2) with the illusion of the city;

(3) with people acting in the city who have all kinds of things moving through their heads: personal experiences, notions about cinema, the reality of the city.

The stylistic link, and simultaneously the basis for a certain comic dimension corresponding to the seriousness of the situation, is the category of time (see below). Cinematic time, the “condensed dramatic time of cities,” a lifetime — wrestling with time obviously occupies the course of our lives. The title is a provisional working title. The film could also be called: *The Mystery of the Final Hour* (Last-Moment-Details)<sup>2</sup>, or: *Cinema and the Illusion of the City*. Please trust me to develop the definitive title as the work progresses.

### *The Plot*

The film has numerous plots. Five women are the main characters. [ . . . ]

All five stories deal with the often unnoticeable transitions between illusion and experience. This, you will easily observe, has been the subject matter of cinema from the start. The story of the five women is therefore woven together with a series of other plot lines in the city and with film sequences which in each case represent a cinematographic translation of their versions of reality. [ . . . ]

### *The Illusion of the City and the End of All Illusion*

There is a promise which is founded upon enclosed space. This promise, that of the big city, is about 8,000 years old. From the beginning, films dealt with the strength of this illusion: a man comes to the city in search of his fortune and is struck down by fate . . . In recent years our big cities — they are the cities in which the five women of the film live — have been reconstructed: subways, subterranean levels, new city centers and pedestrian malls are being built. For many people this construction is accompanied by the illusion that it leads further and further until cities suited to human taste evolve and the bustling yet livable city becomes an idol. The actual situation reveals no ambition in this respect. The reconstruction of the cities will soon be finalized. We will enter the 21st century with cities that are just like those we see before us. The city as an idol, Renaissance Florence, for example, belongs to the currency of illusion.

With regard to the reserves of illusion on which we live, we have a

---

2. In English in the original — trans.

series of currency reforms ahead of us. One could say: the principle of the present rages against the principle of hope and against all the illusions of the past. We live in a present which for the first time has the potential to become the power ruling over all other times. This is summed up by the phrase: the uncanniness of time.<sup>3</sup> [ . . . ]

These elements — the present, the city, uncanniness, finality, illusion (as a rebellion against finality) — are not connected in linear sequence, but variations on them are the principle of the film. [ . . . ]

### *In Closeup: Our Time*

In this film I would like to show a snapshot of the classical cinema from the perspective of today. The emphasis is on: “the perspective of today.” What do we mean by today? Such events as mass unemployment, the closing of shipyards, demands for the thirty-five hour week, structural change in the industrial areas, the consciousness industry, and so forth, have not been treated in feature films. Each of these themes, however, poses a challenge for cinema, to be sure not only in the sense of how to represent them, but rather in the sense of how to effect their cinematographic *translation*.

The infinite forms of filmic translation and the experiential concerns of our time require some restrictions. As far as the social dimension of present experience is concerned, this project focuses on the theme of temporal conflicts, of a struggle for time. In the filmic translation this corresponds to a critique of the categories of cinematic time.

### *Key Term: Essay Film*

As much as possible, I intend to narrate this film in the style of a fiction film. However, the means cinema uses to express its relation to the present need to be brought up to date. Many thoughtful touches of *mise-en-scène* have become hackneyed. In cases where experience, or, rather, its translation is blocked, we need to resort to the format of the essay film. I know of no other possibility to supply so much material so quickly.

### *The Secret of the Final Hour*

The lead characters, the five women, the two stories from the forties, the sequences in the film which deal with the illusion of the city, the handing over of the child, the threat of finality and the people’s rebellion

---

3. This is the subtitle of Kluge’s volume of stories *Neue Geschichten: Hefte 1-18* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977) — trans.

against it (both of which are uncanny): each of these is a swan song. A parting with an illusion.

Such partings do not happen voluntarily. For example, I myself would not be prepared to part with the illusion that the cinema, to which I devote a large part of my working life, will have a triumphal entry into the 21st century. This idea enables me to deal realistically with the danger that the phenomenon known as the new media poses for film. One thus parts with an older illusion by constructing a new one. The latter becomes a reality when real materials are included. The road does not lead from error to truth, but rather to a more substantive process of illusion. In this regard, the third part of the film tells the following story:

Over the course of the 19th century, oil lamps supersede candle light, gas lamps supersede the oil lamps, and electricity supersedes all previous lighting fixtures. There appears to be a law that several technologies cannot exist side by side. There have been reports, however, that the older technology, in its terminal phase, brings forth once more a burgeoning array of forms. In any case, with this late vitality the older modes of lighting flare up and bloom anew. For an instant it seems that, at the last moment, the beauty of the chandelier and gas candelabra will allow them to outlive the ugly new technology. It was, however, in each case only a swan song. Now the question is: provided that the secret of the final hour brings forth blooms in many places of a society, can we then speak of an **alliance of the threatened** which, once they are united, could force the new technology into coexistence? This can be narrated just like the “Deconstruction of a Crime through Cooperation” in *The Power of Emotion*. But one could also describe it in terms of the elements at work in an industrial development. Such *real* developments also involve people, and are marked by fateful blows, by escapes, affection, death, and so forth. [ . . . ]

[From Sequence I:]

**THE HISTORY OF THE MEGALOPOLIS**

Human beings have lived in cities for only one per cent of their five hundred thousand year old history. And this invention, the city, can disappear as fast as its ghostly apparition began. [ . . . ]

The sequence contains a calm factual account similar to the one about the industrial world’s fair in the film *The Power of Emotion*, but it is more elaborate. Shots that can only be made with the Bavaria Studio’s front projection device are mixed with trick shots and live footage. Something like the following will be recounted: one can imagine a world

consisting of villages, indeed, the world itself as a village. It would be characterized by the absolute predominance of intimacy. Everyone cares for each other; everyone keeps an eye on each other. One can recreate an illusion of this with universal television; its reality, however, cannot be recreated by anything at all. We human beings have come to carry the village principle within us.

It is an illusion insofar as hardly any modern person could really put up with the sense of time associated with the village. In comparison, our villages in the Federal Republic are decentralized urban installations. In other words: in the course of barely a hundred years, perhaps only fifty years, the village principle, that is, intimacy has disintegrated in all of Western Europe from an all-powerful present into two components, the past and the hope for a future.

One can see this in a simple example. As long as most lives were spent in villages, no act of war or the burning of a city (such as the burning of Magdeburg) could wipe out a country or continent. The evenly settled countryside acted as a buffer against massive annihilation. Now, for about the last five thousand years, the city has entered the picture. In it, human beings are crowded together. This expresses itself above all in the sense of time: time becomes dramatic. Cities, says Richard Sennett, open up the possibility of channeling human aggressiveness into parallel paths and thereby of liberating it. The citadel, ambition, sacrifice, the public sphere, condensed time, the various arts of remembering, specialization, the separation of actors and spectators, the principle of drama, and finally electrification, cables everywhere, war as a principle (rather than simply as something opportune) — these are derived from the invention of the city. In this artefact, the city, which corresponds to everything Sigmund Freud discusses in his essay *The Future of an Illusion* (*Standard Edition XXI*: 5-56), destructive forces have been struggling with constructive combinations of forces issuing from the same illusion about the city since its inception. Realities such as enclosed space, condensed time, and a sense of drama allow passions and spontaneity to develop. Nothing else we know can produce and organize more intense concentrations of mental energies. In this way, a Babylon, a Florence, a Nuremberg, a Berlin, a Paris, and so forth, come into being. Then, too, cities in the Ruhr, or a transit city like Ulm arise when longings drive generations out of small towns into district towns, state capitals or cosmopolitan cities. While people continue to amass illusions allowing the city to grow into a metropolis, decay necessarily also sets in so that cities, because so much is under construction, never really come into being —



at least never in the form of the city as an idol. Throughout, the unconstrained conflict of destructive and constructive forces in the cities (or on the planet as a city) has an objective limit: in a situation in which public life and the realm of intimacy collapse simultaneously, in which villages disintegrate as cities become more sprawling, people can no longer escape from one sphere to another. They cannot live this way. They would either implode or explode. In this respect cities are never finalized (*endgültig*). [ . . . ]

We are looking at ninety years of cinema. In terms of human life spans, this corresponds to three generations. In sixteen years the question will arise: cinema in the 21st century?

Our time shatters all temporal measures just as it obliterates spatial categories. Either we wait around or things go too fast. Therefore we must reinterpret the concept of drama.

[From Sequence II:]

Filming the theme: **What is a minute?** At issue is one minute among the 1440 minutes in a day. A minute on its own, extracted from this day, for example a minute before death, would be something different. We have, in turn, about 36,000 such *days* between our birth and death. You treat a minute carefully if you are as forgetful as Rita Merker. It's so easy to forget. She makes no progress with her diary.

Short sequence of clocks, cameras, film projectors of various sizes, the Maltese cross. These are all clocks. Clocks do not reproduce the present; a more useful measure of time is the pulse. In music: *tempo ordinario*. In the image: a conductor takes his pulse. The orchestra waits. The conductor raises his baton. The music begins.

Film speed is another way to measure time. Half the time in a movie theater is spent in the dark. The film is illuminated for 1/48th of a second; the film's passage through the camera or projector takes up another 1/48th of a second during which darkness prevails. That is, at the movies, our eyes look at something outside for 1/48th of a second, and for 1/48th of a second they look inward. That is something very beautiful. [ . . . ]

NEW YEAR'S EVE 1900-1901. The 20th century commences. Several things will happen that nobody can quite imagine:

- (1) the destructive weapons of the 20th century;
- (2) "the myth of the 20th century";
- (3) the city in the 20th century;
- (4) the cinema of the 20th century.

Apart from the delight derived from flashing lights and the pleasure in

moving images (even meaningless ones), there is the overwhelming need for a simple story: boy meets girl, or girl meets boy, or *cousin* meets *cousine*, etc. That's my idea, says the producer in 1901, now make a film out of it. At any rate, that's how simple the basic urge to watch a film is, says Anna Eilers as she is talking with the experienced box office cashier at the Olympia theater. Yet, she adds, the story was never filmed according to our wishes. There are always these ingredients: cancer, separations, mistakes, happy endings, a host of obstacles derived from the arsenal of drama, but never a story like this: a boy meets a girl, everything goes well, they are compatible, and when they are 71 years old, they look back and think it quite nice that they met. For once, says Anna Eilers, this would be a **clearly defined position**.

In accordance with the montage of the entire film, the short history of the cinema alluded to here (seen from the vantage point of the question: when will the story *boy meets girl*<sup>4</sup> finally be filmed without further ado?) is divided among different scenes of the second and third sequences. It partly involves self-contained scenes (dramatized), partly film clips (edited, optically transformed).

NEW YEAR'S EVE 1918-1919. A party convention in the Prussian House of Lords. How one participant of this convention in 1918 imagines World War II: Ludendorff bought UFA; now it is taken over by Privy Councillor Hugenberg who already owns the Scherl conglomerate; the German cinema at its high point in 1942; films are shown in an area reaching from Bordeaux to Kharkov; the head of German cinema is Associate Judge Dr. Pfennig whom we see in a JU 52 as he flies over his flickering empire; one day he is suddenly dethroned because he received a package of black market meat from the Prague studio; the film studios in Warsaw have not been used since the German occupation. Among mannequins, props and costumes, in the wide spaces of illusion, sheltered from the rain, the caretaker and his wife have set up their nest, guarding these studios which the world has forgotten; with a small group of friends they have little parties; using some costumes, they have fun and make up little games, just as in the early days of the movies. At night, in the capital of Austria [*Ostmark*], film workers re-cut the montage they produced during the day in order to destroy a piece of the "present" — they want to remain in their privileged positions. Film history began with Lumière's documentaries. Since then, documentation has been progressively suppressed. Throughout the war, Fred Wittlich of PK-Company tries to capture authentic

---

4. In English in the original — trans.

images of battle scenes on celluloid. But whenever he rushed to the front, even at top speed, the battle was over, and he found the troops playing cards. Now, finally, at the end of April, 1945, he was able to produce documentary shots of the battle for the newsreel scheduled to appear after April 8, 1945. In Tunisia, feature films belonging to the U.S. army were captured in a German tank offensive. Scenes in the Propaganda Ministry while one of these films is screened. The Americans' greater skill as far as entertainment value, *i.e.*, the political in film, is concerned. Can we do it too? First attempts during the production of the German color film *Münchhausen*. [ . . . ]

[From Sequence III:]

**THE CINEMA ANIMAL**

Portrait of a person addicted to the cinema. The atmosphere is the same as in Sequence II, that is, still within Monday night. The animal is looking for a cinema it finds congenial. It is characterized by a tendency to view the real streets as a movie while in the theater it views things objectively. This species of animal is supposedly threatened with extinction. [ . . . ]

A montage sequence, in part with imaginary images: "In principle, when we perform a rapid or accelerated action, we experience a contraction of time, but when we remember the action we expand its duration" (Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of Time*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1971: 276). Clocks, a chronometer at work, a time clock. "A diagram of homogeneous time. Succession and duration as the culture in which concepts breed." "Grasping time is tantamount to freeing oneself from the present: not only to anticipate the future on the basis of regularities unconsciously established in the past, but to unfold a series of conditions which do not resemble each other and are only linked . . . by movement. To comprehend time, therefore, is to transcend space through intellectual agility. This means, above all, reversibility. To know it, on the other hand, is to retrace it in either direction and thereby to proceed beyond the actual course of events" (Piaget 283 ff.). "The state of 'innocence' which precedes the phase of critical construction." "Realism is egocentric."

"Let us imagine a creature who, from birth to death, does the same work uninterruptedly, always at the same speed — for instance, building the Great Wall of China. In his case psychological time would coincide with physical time . . ." The durations could be measured in terms of the dimensions of what is constructed. There is a certain moral Utopia in the idea that I could measure my life's capacities, even if it were

only a question of moving along a straight stretch of road. Without detours I would have control over my abilities to do good deeds.

It will turn out that this reflection on the grammar of time in the friendly, simple time machines of the cinema can be pursued clearly only in documentaries. That film is used to nourish illusion is really a mistake. At the moment just before death, mistakes in the form of silhouettes enter the picture. Sequence of back-lit shots, so-called silhouettes. Music. Strongly imaginary. [ . . . ]

## APPENDIX

### *Notes on Details in the Script*

#### Note 1: "POCKETS OF FATE"

The best way to measure the gaps in a tragic, irrevocable system, the pocket of fate within it, is through the comic. For this purpose, the cinema has developed artistic figures [*Kunstfiguren*] who also form the basis of the star system: perfection, in each case with one flaw. Because of their scale as well as their imperfections, these people are fascinating. These qualities not only make them lovable, they also serve as the spectator's point of entry, the necessary discount. The five women, supplemented by countless other persons as well as the six men whose actions populate this film, imitate a typical trait of classical movie characters. My ambition is to show that there are ways out of the irrevocability and the sheer "distended present" that the high point of the best years of our lives seem to be. This is the significance of the heading of the third sequence — the secret of the final hour. It corresponds to the historical experience that something beautiful, useful, older, something that is vitally threatened by new developments, engenders sympathy and mourning at the moment of its demise.

#### Note 2: THE PRESENT

Developing programs involves, above all, a decision about the flow of time: its acceleration, retardation, the time of experiencing it, response time, time to be gained, time to be lost, and so forth. The production of the ability to remember, of a horizon, a perspective, of precision, certainty, movement (in two senses, as motion and emotion) — all this is realized through ever so fine manipulations of time. Evidently time possesses a grammar.

In this respect the category of the present is a convention. Between "just now" and "already" there is a boundary (in terms of the Arriflex camera this boundary has a duration of 1/48th of a second and a surface

of 35mm) which represents the present. It is something imagined rather than something real. In the modern world, this next-to-nothing has, increasingly, passed itself off as something, indeed, as potentially everything. The consensus among people about what belongs to our time, what is important enough for an announcement or a play, is decided through categories such as topicality or “our present.” Every earlier present had the tendency to do away with the past and to put limits on the future. In our day, for the first time, the forces of the present have the objective power to close the horizons of the future irrevocably and to cut off the past. At any rate, the present **thinks** it could do so. “The past, however, is not dead; it is not even past.” And without a future horizon, that is, without hope, people would not even have the strength to agree with each other about what the present is. In this respect, each quantum of time says: “I was, I am, I will be.” And if one looks closely, it will add: “I sense, I could, I may not, I wish,” and so forth. At least this is the way film time works.

**Note 3: “DISTENDED PRESENT”**

The present could not effect its seizure of power over other times if it were not for something in human beings in complicity with it. The latest research calls this the “distended present” (Brose). Professional qualifications, expectations about life are being devalued on a large scale; people become unemployed, lose parts of their lives for which they have worked. They cannot come to terms with this new situation simply in an objective way. Facts are one thing and the wishes that find these facts unbearable are something else. Frequently, these people opt for temporary solutions after the defeat they have suffered. For example, they get a new job, or (in relationships) a new partner because this does not involve a final decision. Something remains suspended between past and future — and we call this the present. It is something different from waiting and something other than life: a new way for fate to strike. In order to describe it, one must record the gentler tones of time. Scenes emerge whose characteristics are neither tragic nor genuinely comic, but oscillating. Something emerges that is neither dream nor reality. This happens voluntarily, indeed, because people freely will it. And what I find most important is that these new kinds of behavior are the opposite of ambivalence and irresoluteness.

I would really prefer to recount all this exclusively in the form of dramatized stories. Because it occurs in a single place and on a single day, the second sequence gives me the opportunity to narrate in the manner of the fiction film. On the other hand, the explosive force of the

theme demands free (non-dramatized) modes of representation. I will try to concentrate these at the beginning and end of the film.

**Note 4: FINALITY**

As a category of the future it is rather unbearable. Imagination exhausts itself in denying this finality which is ultimately death. In all cases in which finality is intuited, imagination (or desire) prefers the indefinite. In all cases in which something is not yet definitively final, we demand certainty and precision. In this respect, happiness, for example, should be something precise — a source of the comic.

**Note 5: THE FINALITY OF OUR CITIES**

One of the clearest expressions of finality is enclosed space. Anyone looking at a tomb can see this.

In December of 1983, Karl-Heinz Bohrer, the new editor of the monthly *Merkur*, called me. He asked whether I could write an essay with the title: "The Finality of Cities." I was taken aback. Up till then I had assumed as a matter of course that the renewal of our cities, the installation of pedestrian zones, underground malls, subways, the establishment of satellite cities, and so forth, would continue until once again we would live in cities as I used to know them. I did some research, asked around. This illusion was not mine alone. In reality, however, there is much to support the view that the cities, as they are now constructed, will be our dwellings as we proceed into the 21st century. An essential result of my research is that a chronicle of the modern city — no more than its prehistory — cannot be represented in the form of essays or dramatic scenes. Rather, it is a cinematic theme. What is especially fascinating to me is the so-called "invisible city": the urban structure which is lodged in our nerves, feelings and knowledge. The urban principle and the dramatic principle (of condensed time, of suspense) are like cousins. Corresponding to this urban principle are unmistakable characters and destinies.

**Note 6: PERSPECTIVE ON THE CENTURY: NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1918**

I intend to produce this sequence in collaboration with Margarethe von Trotta. New Year's Eve, 1918 (including New Year's Day) is a turning point in our century that will never come again. World War I is still fresh in people's minds. It laid bare something of the character of reality in the 20th century. By comparison, the perspective of New Year's Eve, 1900 (that is, 1899-1900) is almost naively illusionistic — as if the 19th century were extending into the 20th. Now, however, on New Year's Eve, 1918,

illusions are scattered to the winds only to be replaced, however, by countless new ones. But the decisions of January, 1919 have not yet been made. For a moment it seems as if Germany could develop in many different directions. On this day, nobody governs anywhere. The leaders restrain themselves. In the former Prussian House of Lords (the *Landtag*), the founding convention of the Communist Party takes place. Rosa Luxemburg delivers her speech, "Proletarians in Uniform." The leadership of this newly founded party is voted down that very same night.

This material can be seen in the context of Margarethe von Trotta's Luxemburg-film; collaboration about this historic juncture makes sense.

#### **Note 7: CHANGES OF TIME AND STYLE**

Just as the film *The Power of Emotion* dealt with elements of the opera, and *Artists under the Big Top: Perplexed* with aspects of the circus, the film *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* is about the cinema because it presents an abundance of things in fragmented form. A series of actions, set in the contemporary city or shown as historical superimposition, is paralleled by the narration of well-defined short movie scenes using doctored film clips or a front projection device. In this way, the pictorial narration moves across time. Because there are clear changes of time and style, the spectator can easily notice the narrative process; furthermore, this process is conveyed musically. These image changes, which create a bridge from one story to another, are not individually accounted for in the script. Until such cinematographic renderings are produced from the materials themselves, they can be described only with great difficulty. Part of the pictorial and stylistic changes can be echoed in live-action takes. Therefore, as in the three previous films, I plan to have three independent camera teams working in succession. Cutting sessions will be interrupted by additional shooting sessions.

*Translated by Tamara Evans and Stuart Liebman*

# *Remembering Not to Forget: A Retrospective Reading of Kluge's Brutality in Stone*

Eric Rentschler

## I

In Nuremberg, an international convention of circus producers takes place. Later, Leni Peickert and a co-worker go through the convention proceedings, reading the protocol aloud: "I would like to see the person who after Auschwitz wants to try to prevent us from saying something we think needs to be said. A majority vote: the number with the rats won't be cancelled. Applause! A break for refreshments." Leni Peickert continues alone: "Nothing at all can stop us, I would like to see the person who after Auschwitz wants to stop us from doing and saying what we think is right. Refreshments are passed around."<sup>1</sup>

## II

*Brutality in Stone* [*Brutalität in Stein*], a short documentary film directed by Alexander Kluge and Peter Schamoni in 1960, represents Young German Film's earliest sign of life.<sup>2</sup> Made two years before the

---

1. A scene from Kluge's *Artists under the Big Top: Perplexed* [*Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos*, 1967], quoted from the script (Munich: Piper, 1968) 45.

2. *Brutality in Stone* (1960), 320 meters (12 minutes), 35mm, black and white. Scripted, edited, and produced by Kluge and Schamoni; cinematography by Wolf Wirth; music by Hans Posegga; speaking voices include Christian Marschall, Hans Clarin, and Karyn Kluge. The film premiered at the Oberhausen Film Festival on 8 February 1961 and received various prizes. In 1963 a slightly revised version with the title *The*



outspoken, indeed histrionic Oberhausen Manifesto, it begins with a solemn declaration:

Every edifice left to us by history emanates the spirit of its creator and its age, even when it no longer stands in the service of its original function. The forsaken edifices of the National Socialist Party, as testaments in stone, allow memories to come alive of that epoch which led to the most terrible catastrophe in German history.

I would like to scrutinize this statement from a double perspective. First, I wish to ponder the pre-Oberhausen setting and Young German Film's initial efforts, concentrating on a generation's evocation of the past and its confrontation with the cultural legacy of the Third Reich, with the systematic denigration of fantasy wares to tools of domination. Using *Brutality in Stone* as a point of reference, I want to rehearse the theoretical impulse and historical impetus behind Young German Film's desire to renew West German film in the early sixties, as well as to identify some of Kluge's chief discursive predilections.

Second, I wish to see what *Brutality in Stone* tells us today about the historical project that constituted Young German Film and, in subsequent years, determined the New German Cinema. In other words, I want to discern how this critical documentary on Nazi architecture, made in 1960, appears in light of several contemporary discussions: the recent debates about historical revisionism and the place of the Third Reich within the larger course of German history;<sup>3</sup> the heated controversy about the status of Nazi art and architecture within the

---

Eternity of Yesterday [*Die Ewigkeit von gestern*] gained the designation "valuable" ("wertvoll") from the Film Rating Board in Wiesbaden. A subtitled copy of the film is available from the Anthology Film Archives in New York. For initial responses to the film, see Walther Schmieding's notice in *Weg zum Nachbarn: Protokoll der VII. Westdeutschen Kurzfilmtage* (Oberhausen: Oberhausen Film Festival, 1961); and Enno Patalas, "Der Kurzfilm sucht die Wirklichkeit," *Filmkritik* 5 (March 1961): 138. Patalas stresses the subjective emphasis of this documentary film: "The creator confronts reality as an interpreter. He no longer remains content with recounting 'dramas of everyday events,' he himself confronts reality." For subsequent discussions of the film, see Ulrich Gregor's account in *Herzog/Kluge/Straub*, eds. Peter W. Jansen and Wolfram Schütte (Munich/Vienna: Hanser, 1976) 132; and Rainer Lewandowski, *Die Filme von Alexander Kluge* (Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1980) 288-291. In general, Kluge's shorts remain all but unexplored.

3. For initial orientations, see Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge/London: Harvard UP, 1988); and "Special Issue on the *Historikerstreit*," *New German Critique* 44 (Spring/Summer 1988).

cultural institution;<sup>4</sup> and discussions of the role New German filmmakers, including Alexander Kluge, have played in revisionist tendencies in the Federal Republic since the seventies. What does *Brutality in Stone* tell us about the past? More importantly, what does it tell us about the present that examines the past? And most crucially, what does this film, as a political intervention from the recent past that addresses a problematic cultural heritage, reveal about present-day issues and interests?

### III

1963, Nuremberg: a public screening of Leni Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light* [*Das blaue Licht*] in the Meistersingerhallen is a huge success. Carl Müller, prominent owner of the Studio für Filmkunst in Bremen, describes the event: "During late October in 1963 I had an overpowering experience in Nuremberg. Hundreds couldn't get in. . . . Rarely have I seen such an enthused audience. . . . How often I heard people say, 'What a film!' — Why don't they make films like this anymore?"<sup>5</sup>

### IV

On three separate occasions in the postwar period, German filmmakers declared their intention to create a new German film. As early as 1946, Hans Abich and Rolf Thiele issued a "Memorandum Regarding a New German Film" and established a studio in the English sector of Germany, the Filmaufbau Göttingen. They spoke of their desire to make "films against the film of National Socialism," to make anti-Ufa productions that were not entertainment, but problem films with a constructive resolve. Abich and Thiele soon found themselves

---

4. See *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?*, ed. Klaus Staeck (Göttingen: Steidl, 1988); and the special issue of *tendenzen* (Munich) devoted to "Nazikunst ins Museum?," No. 157 (January-March 1987). Cf. the catalogue, *Inszenierung der Macht: Ästhetische Faszination im Faschismus*, eds. Klaus Behnken and Frank Wagner (West Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, 1987). This extensive collection of essays accompanied an exhibition of fascist art in the Kunstquartier Ackerstrasse in Berlin-Wedding during the spring of 1987.

5. Quoted in Dietrich Kuhlbrodt, "Leni Riefenstahl wieder offiziell," *Die Zeit* 24 July 1964.

surrounded by members of the old group. Indeed, their first project, *Love 47* [*Liebe 47*] (an adaptation of Wolfgang Borchert's drama *The Man Outside* [*Draussen vor der Tür*]), touted as its director the former production head at Ufa, Wolfgang Liebeneiner.<sup>6</sup> There would be no decisive break and no novel impetus during the Adenauer era; even as late as 1957 about 70 percent of all West German feature films employed either a director or a scriptwriter who had been active under Goebbels.<sup>7</sup> A second, less compromising initiative came more than a decade later with the group "DOC 59," a gathering of documentary filmmakers, cameramen, composers, and the film critic Enno Patalas, who sought closer connections with the international art film scene. They wished to merge documentation and fiction, to commingle authenticity and scripted narrative.<sup>8</sup> Still, for all its awareness of the dead-end state of German film culture, DOC 59 did not succeed in reviving an arid and all-but-monolithic production landscape dominated by wornout genre fare, mindless escapism, and paint-by-number production schemes, a national cinema without a distinct stylistic and critical will, devoid of experimentation, alternative strategies, and younger voices.<sup>9</sup> The dire situation, recognized almost universally, reached its acme when the government awarded no state prize for the best film of 1961, and Ufa suffered financial collapse.<sup>10</sup> In this setting, a third attempt at renewing German film took shape,

---

6. See Christian Bauer's documentary film *Phönix aus der Asche: Hans Abich und der Filmaufbau Göttingen*, screened on West German television on the first channel (ARD), 4 August 1988. For a lengthy interview with Abich reflecting his long career in German film and television, see Rainer Ganser, "Hans Abich - Begegnungen, Erinnerungen und Ausblick," *epd Film* 5 (September 1988): 20-29.

7. For statistics regarding the participation of filmmakers from the Third Reich in postwar West German productions, see Hans-Peter Kochenrath, "Kontinuität im deutschen Film, 1966," *Film und Gesellschaft in Deutschland: Dokumente und Materialien*, eds. Wilfried von Bredow and Rolf Zurek (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1975) 289-290.

8. Leonhard H. Gmür, "Zur Chronik," *Der junge deutsche Film: Dokumentation zu einer Ausstellung der Constantin-Film* (Munich: Constantin-Film, 1967) 22.

9. For critical assessments of the postwar film malaise in West Germany, see Joe Hembus, *Der deutsche Film kann gar nicht besser sein* (Bremen: Schünemann, 1961); and Walther Schmieding, *Kunst oder Kasse: Der Ärger mit dem deutschen Film* (Hamburg: Rütten & Loening, 1961). Recent accounts are less critical. See, for instance, Manfred Barthel, *So war es wirklich: Der deutsche Nachkriegsfilm* (West Berlin: Herbig, 1986); Gerhard Bliersbach, *So grün war die Heide: Der deutsche Nachkriegsfilm in neuer Sicht* (Weinheim/Basel: Beltz, 1985); and Claudius Seidl, *Der deutsche Film der fünfziger Jahre* (Munich: Heyne, 1987). For a summary of film during the Adenauer era, see Eric Rentschler, "Germany: The Past That Would Not Go Away," *World Cinema since 1945*, ed. William Luhr (New York: Ungar/Continuum, 1987) 213-219.

10. Cf. Georg Ramseger, "1961: Ist der deutsche Film am Ende? Rede zur

resulting in the oft-quoted “Oberhausen Manifesto” of February 1962 — a document lamenting the bankrupt state of German film as an art and an industry, and promising, brashly and arrogantly, a collective’s desire to “create the new German feature film.”<sup>11</sup>

The 26 angry young men who signed the Oberhausen Manifesto claimed to have “concrete intellectual, formal, and economic conceptions about the production of the new German film.” By and large, however, this was not the case, for the manifesto provided a promise, but did not articulate a program.<sup>12</sup> None of the signatories (many of whom had won festival prizes for their shorts) had yet made a feature film; the vast majority had backgrounds in documentaries and experimental industrial films. The group gained its identity above all from a common sense of displeasure and critique, from a shared desire to combat the powers that controlled image production in Germany, from a wish to militate against an abuse of the medium that had continued unabated since the Third Reich. Alexander Kluge, in an essay of 1962 entitled “What Do the ‘Oberhausener’ Want?,” reflected on the group’s central motivations, which were to:

1. free film from its intellectual isolation in the Federal Republic,
2. militate against the dictates of a strictly commercial orientation operative in the film industry today,
3. allow for conditions which make film aware of its public responsibility and, consequently, in keeping with this responsibility, to seek appropriate themes: film should embrace social documentation, political questions, educational concerns, and filmic innovations, matters all but impossible under the conditions that have governed film production.<sup>13</sup>

---

Verleihung des Deutschen Filmpreises am 25. Juni 1961 in Berlin,” *Deutscher Filmpreis 1951-80*, eds. Manfred Hohnstock and Alfons Bettermann (Bonn: Bundesminister des Innern, 1980) 52-58. Klaus Kreimeier analyzes the dynamics of the West German film economy at length in *Kino und Filmindustrie in der BRD: Ideologieproduktion und Klassenwirklichkeit nach 1945* (Kronberg: Scriptor, 1973). For a paraphrase in English, see Thomas Elsaesser, “The Postwar German Cinema,” *Fassbinder*, ed. Tony Rayns, 2nd rev. ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1979) 1-16. Cf. Michael Dost, Florian Hopf, and Alexander Kluge, *Filmwirtschaft in der BRD und in Europa: Götterdämmerung in Raten* (Munich: Hanser, 1973).

11. Cited from *West German Filmmakers on Film: Visions and Voices*, ed. Eric Rentschler (New York/London: Holmes & Meier, 1988) 2.

12. Kluge acknowledges this in an interview. See Rainer Lewandowski, *Die Oberhausener: Rekonstruktion einer Gruppe 1961-1982* (Dieckholzen: Regie, 1982) 86.

13. The essay originally appeared as “Was wollen die ‘Oberhausener?’ ” in the

Shortly after the Oberhausen festival, the group convened to discuss the ways in which it could effect the desired intellectual transformation of German film and establish appropriate institutional support systems.<sup>14</sup> A first goal involved founding a public subsidy mechanism that would allow young filmmakers to fund their first productions without commercial constraints. This came to fruition in 1964 with the establishment of the Curatorium for Young German Film. Second, the Oberhausener stressed the role of independent short films as a “natural experimental field” and sought to keep them alive despite exhibition practices and state legislation that endangered the genre. Finally, the group called for an “intellectual center for film,” where theory and practice might work hand-in-hand. A laboratory for the new German cinema, the Institute for Film Design in Ulm, was established already in October 1962, conceived of as “a place of higher learning directed against fascism.”<sup>15</sup>

## V

October 1965, Oberhausen: journalists, public officials, and educators gather to watch 20 previously banned films from the Third Reich and to discuss their possible public screening.<sup>16</sup> Later, Atlas-Film releases Veit Harlan’s *Kolberg* in a newly edited version designed to defuse any sympathetic reading by means of critical voice-overs and contrastive montages from wartime Germany. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* calls the refurbished *Kolberg* “a convincing example of how film can be used to unmask and critically analyze film.”<sup>17</sup> The distributor Hans Eckelkamp comes under fire nonetheless for what some perceive to be his opportunistic revival of the “brown screen.” He responds to an interviewer from *Der Spiegel*: “I want to bring anti-Nazi

---

November 1962 issue of *epd Kirche und Film*. Cited from Rentschler, *West German Filmmakers* 10.

14. Lewandowski, *Die Oberhausener* 86-87.

15. This was the impulse behind the founding of the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, a postwar extension of the Bauhaus (which offered a project to be continued as well in film). See Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich/Vienna: Hanser, 1980) 35.

16. The discussion was documented in *Der Spielfilm im Dritten Reich*, ed. Manfred Dammeyer (Oberhausen: Westdeutsche Kurzfilmtage, 1966).

17. Peter W. Jansen, “Die Wunderwaffe des Joseph Goebbels: *Kolberg*, ein Film und seine Geschichte zwanzig Jahre danach,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 27 September 1965.

films into the cinemas, not Nazi films. . . . It would be undemocratic to suppress these films. It is democratic when we put them in a new context and show them there.”<sup>18</sup>

## VI

Structures from the past as fragments, memories, testimonies; texts from another epoch which speak to the present and disclose the innermost workings of an age: in this regard, the project of *Brutality in Stone* recalls that of Siegfried Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler*. In this work, Kracauer provides symptomatic readings of Weimar films as a secret history of collective inner dispositions, closely analyzing, above all, prominent pictorial motifs as “visible hieroglyphs,” forms allowing access to the “unseen dynamics of human relations” characteristic of the period.<sup>19</sup> (Kracauer, we dare not forget, started out as an architect and remained throughout his endeavors remarkably sensitive to structures and streets as crucial signifiers of modernity.) Similar to Kracauer, Kluge and Schamoni refunctionalize historical motifs and forms so that, many years later, we might grasp their true function in a larger *Zusammenhang*.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, we find a ragpicker’s zeal in sifting through the garbage pile of history, sorting out and recovering discarded chunks of reality lest they be forgotten and disavowed by the present. *Brutality in Stone* does not reconstruct the past, it deconstructs it, attempting to wrest away memories of National Socialism from a public conformism that would deny their reality and materiality. It uses architecture, both actual buildings and planned structures, as artifacts of a collective dream of nightmarish proportions<sup>21</sup>, combatting the forces

---

18. Quoted in the unsigned article, “NS-Filme in bundesdeutschen Kinos?,” *epd Kirche und Film* 18 (November 1965): 17.

19. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1947) 7; quoting Horace M. Kallen, *Art and Freedom*, vol. 2 (New York, 1942) 809.

20. Cf. David L. Vierling’s discussion of the term *Zusammenhang* and the challenges it poses to the subtitle of Kluge’s films in “Quinzaine: *Die Patriotin*, Alexander Kluge: ‘A Question of *Zusammenhang* . . .,’” *Kino: German Film* 2 (West Berlin, Spring 1980): “For within this single German word lie the major thematic and formal concerns of *The Patriot*. In short, the term *Zusammenhang* is a mystery worth exploring. What, then, does it mean? *Zusammen*: together. *Hängen*: to adhere, to cling; to stick. *Zusammenhang*: the state of fitting together; context, association; continuity” (22).

21. Cf. the formulation from Walter Benjamin’s *Das Passagenwerk*, quoted in

that seek to suppress or, even more problematically, to mythologize recollection of the Third Reich. In this way, the film's resolve recalls Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," especially in its disdain for those who would treat fascism as an inevitable destiny vanquished by time rather than as a state of emergency still affecting the present.<sup>22</sup>

In a lecture of 1959 titled "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?," Theodor W. Adorno confronts predispositions in the Adenauer era which seek to forget rather than to rethink the past, to deny collective responsibility for World War II and the Holocaust, to relativize the significance (indeed even the existence) of the death camps, to bicker over exact statistics (five, not six million Jewish dead in the concentration camps), and to efface memory in a manner more conscious than unconscious. The result of these predispositions, Adorno claims, is a mode of mass repression, which at best pays lip service to a national project of coming to grips with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) through public demonstrations of philo-Semitism, screenings of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and half-hearted reeducation programs — none of which ask difficult questions and pursue equally probing answers. For Adorno, the past needs to be worked through (*aufgearbeitet*), to be reshaped into something new. The term "Aufarbeitung" blends psychoanalytic relentlessness and enlightened resolve; only in this way could the German subject ever regain its lost maturity and reconstitute national identity.<sup>23</sup>

West German films of the 1950s present few examples of critical sentiment, of a desire to comprehend the experience of the Third Reich. Paradigmatic instances on celluloid of such coming to grips with the past are Helmut Käutner's *The Devil's General* [*Des Teufels General*, 1954], Kurt Hoffman's *Aren't We Wonderful?* [*Wir Wunderkinder*, 1958], and Bernhard Wicki's *The Bridge* [*Die Brücke*, 1959]. With their humanistic rhetoric, the films console rather than interrogate, focusing on victims of circumstance (a jovial *Luftwaffe* general, a well-meaning *Bildungsbürger*,

---

*Bestandsaufnahme: Utopie Film*, ed. Alexander Kluge (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausend-eins, 1983): "Even technology, and not only architecture, is in certain manifestations the embodiment of a collective dream" (426).

22. Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969) 257.

23. Theodor W. Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?," trans. Timothy Bahti and Geoffrey Hartman, *Bilburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 115.

a group of young boys drafted into the army at the war's end), innocent sufferers held captive by situations they neither control nor fathom. These narratives display finished worlds and inexorable destinies; National Socialism is equated with unceasing fear and misery (especially for the average German citizen), the war recast either as a primal scene that wreaks violence on the unwitting, or as a negative family romance that renders everyone an orphan of history. Film thus serves to repress the past and displace guilt, to obfuscate the undeniable; in the process, the real victims are cheated out of their remembrance.<sup>24</sup> A number of difficult questions faced the Young German filmmakers: how to combat repression of the past with a medium so vehemently implicated in fostering public pacification? How to change the status quo with an apparatus largely controlled by forces that liked things as they were, a world of reconstruction, economic miracle, and no experiments?<sup>25</sup> How to counter images of a past whose own images and imaginary dominated attempts to imagine and image that past?

## VII

A key point of consensus among the Oberhausen group remained its preference for a mode of production in which the author maintains a high degree of control over the creative endeavor, circumventing outside pressures. Through effective lobbying, Kluge and his colleagues managed to set in motion public subsidy systems that would fund debut films and pose only minimal resistance, as long as filmmakers limited themselves to modest formats.<sup>26</sup> Clearly, though, there was a marked difference between the German *Autorenfilm* and the French *politique des auteurs*. As Kluge would later point out, the fact that certain filmmakers craft personal works is one thing; that certain circles of

---

24. What is at issue is the destruction of memory: "The murdered are to be cheated out of the one thing that our powerlessness can grant them: remembrance" (Adorno 117).

25. Cf. Wolfgang Staudte's observations, cited in Katrin Seybold's essay ". . . Die Welt verbessern mit dem Geld von Leuten, die die Welt in Ordnung finden," *Wolfgang Staudte*, ed. Eva Orbanz, 3rd rev. ed. (West Berlin: Spiess, 1977) 30-57.

26. See *Die ersten drei Jahre*, ed. Norbert Kückelmann (Munich: Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film, 1968). Cf. Sheila Johnston's account, "The Author as Public Institution: The 'New' Cinema in the Federal Republic of Germany," *Screen Education* 32/33 (Autumn-Winter 1979/80): 67-78.



filmmakers join together and embrace common goals regarding film politics is quite another. Film innovators protest for different reasons at different times, and even among peers the reasons will vary. Godard's initial protest, according to Kluge, was directed against culture in general and against the power of language in culture. Truffaut at best protested the misuse of language and education, and eschewed the perverting potential of culture. The members of the *nouvelle vague*, nonetheless, joined in a protest against a "cinema of quality" and in the desire to combat a moribund cultural atmosphere.<sup>27</sup> The Oberhausen group consciously shaped itself according to this impulse; for all its diverse personalities and factions, it commonly protested — at least initially — against film in the service of the state and the status quo, against a cinema that meant a cult of distraction, an institutionalization of amnesia, valium for the masses, an official stranglehold over fantasy life.

*Brutality in Stone* stages a rebellion on celluloid; its very form subverts a genre that flourished in the Third Reich: the *Kulturfilm* (the short "without a plot" that accompanied every feature film). One cannot, in fact, understand Nazi cinema in terms of single films. Newsreels, shorts, and features shared the labor. As Hartmut Bitomsky notes: "The main features might have shown revues and romances, the culture films took over responsibility for matters of *Weltanschauung*."<sup>28</sup> From the beginning of Young German Film, the short film functioned as an experimental site. Edgar Reitz's first effort, for instance, explored the war ruins of an opera house in Munich (*Fate of an Opera House* [*Schicksal einer Oper*, 1957]).<sup>29</sup> The short film format would continue in the individual contributions of directors to omnibus films like *Germany in Autumn* [*Deutschland im Herbst*, 1978], *The Candidate* [*Der Kandidat*, 1980], and *War and Peace* [*Krieg und Frieden*, 1983], finding a latter-day extension in Kluge's television spots for *The Hour of the Filmmakers* [*Die Stunde der Filmemacher*]. Kluge's first film would be a short, an anti-*Kulturfilm* as a sort of anti-culture, an act of subversion, analysis, and revenge.

---

27. "Autorenfilm/Politik der Autoren," in Kluge, *Bestandsaufnahme* 576-581.

28. Hartmut Bitomsky, "Der Kotflügel eines Mercedes-Benz: Nazikulturfilme," *Filmkritik* 27 (October 1983): 445.

29. Cf. Edgar Reitz's comment: "We were particularly interested in a sort of anti-architecture which had arisen. We were inspired by the operatic beauty of the ruins" (Lewandowski, *Die Oberhausener* 136).

## VIII

“All documentary films that are authentic,” Kluge said in 1983, “document reality; all radical film experiments work at heart in a documentary fashion.”<sup>30</sup> *Brutality in Stone* combines the important and inextricably bound impetuses in Kluge’s theory and praxis of film: documentation, authenticity, and experimentation. As *documentation*, it confronts voices and artifacts from the past with a retrospective revolt, seeking to represent historical reality as the fiction that it indeed is, pressing into service Hitler’s claim that every great period “finds the final expression of its values in its buildings.”<sup>31</sup> In a manner redolent of Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog* [*Nuit et Brouillard*, 1955]<sup>32</sup>, the film revisits an infamous site of past barbarism: the Nuremberg Party Congress grounds. This set for Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* [*Triumph des Willens*, 1935] is in its present countenance no longer the scene of frenzied spectacle, with massed ornamental groups of euphoric bystanders, but rather a forsaken, vacant, seemingly lost space. The camera, in short fragments (the 12-minute film contains over 200 single shots), provides stills of modernized neoclassicist structures, registering severe angles, sharp planes, and an abiding penchant for the monumental and gigantic — edifices cast, in Barbara Miller Lane’s words, as “symbols of the ‘heroic scale of life’ . . . intended to reflect the power of the dictator and his modern state over his subjects in the mass.”<sup>33</sup> Architecture, Walter Benjamin once observed, “has never been idle.”<sup>34</sup> Nor is the camera idle here in its attention to aesthetic designs with a geometry of inhuman proportions. We see the space and structure of the massive *Zeppelinfeld*; stills of Hitler at work on the empire’s future capital, Germania, as well as simulations of that metropolis; sketches of other future edifices; models of utopian expanses; and the skeleton remnants of an unfinished building, the construction site of Albert

---

30. Kluge, *Bestandsaufnahme* 536.

31. Quoted in Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945* (Cambridge/London: Harvard UP, 1968) 188. For a recent study of Nazi architecture, see Dieter Bartzko, *Illusionen in Stein* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985).

32. For an extended analysis of *Night and Fog*, see Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema’s Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1988) 6-18.

33. Lane 215.

34. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations* 240.

Speer's Convention Hall. Documentation, in Kluge's understanding, always takes sides and never allows itself to be objective or balanced.<sup>35</sup> It displays a heterogeneity of materials, multiple temporalities, and shifting fields of discourse. As a document, *Brutality in Stone* scrutinizes historical artifacts that created imaginary effects, facts based on fictions. The film thus reflects how the imaginary became real and seeks at the same time to fathom the construction of meaning by a state apparatus.

The quest for *authenticity*, claims Kluge, aims to activate those forces that enliven the spectator, that engage, challenge and, on occasion, irritate audiences. The authentic text is a communicative one, at once sober, concrete, and precise, but also nomadic, willful, and extreme.<sup>36</sup> *Brutality in Stone* constitutes an eccentric work of archaeology — an exhumation in the vein of Gabi Teichert, the radical pedagogue in *The Patriot* [*Die Patriotin*, 1979]. The guiding energy here ferrets out *Zusammenhang*, analyzing the relationship of parts to wholes, of building blocks to entire structures, of shapes/forms/surfaces to overall *Gestalten*, of spectators to historical spectacles.

No doubt, the voice we hear in *Brutality in Stone* lacks the subtlety and nuance of the capricious enunciators in other Kluge films, be they the inexorable elephants in *Artists under the Big Top: Perplexed* or the talking knee in *The Patriot*. The sober declarations possess no ludic elan; rather, they are terse, stark, straightforward. An unreconciled intelligence guides this tour through a visual and aural museum of memories. We hear authentic voices: Hitler on various occasions, exultant Hitler Youth choirs, radio announcers, and cheering crowds from *Triumph of the Will*. We also partake of quotations: a gruesome verse from a *Bund deutscher Mädel* songbook, for instance; and a horrific passage from Rudolf Höss's memoirs, in which the commander of Auschwitz describes the processing of human material in the camps, the factory-line extermination of deported Jews. The authentic concern of *Brutality in Stone* is with the past, with the images and self-images of that past and their unacknowledged place in present discourse. A similar concern informs Straub and Huillet's contemporaneous short, *Machorka-Muff* (1962).

---

35. Kluge, "Thesen II," *Bestandsaufnahme* 535-36. Cf. the discussion "Probleme des Dokumentarfilms," in Eder and Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien* 51-56.

36. Kluge, *Bestandsaufnahme* 213-16, especially 214. Authenticity means attentiveness in the midst of distraction, a relaxed, yet critical relationship between spectator and film, which is mirrored in the authentic text's open mode of address. A film that seeks to destroy the autonomy of the spectator, argues Kluge, "also destroys itself." In Kluge's language, the authentic text is both objective ("sachlich") and biased ("unsachlich").

At the center of this film we find a general dedicating an Academy for Military Memories in Bonn of the Adenauer era, a place where war veterans find government support for their revisionist enterprises. We witness the cornerstone being laid for the edifice and the accompanying ceremony, which strikingly dramatizes state investment in the stylization and reconstruction of memory.<sup>37</sup> *Brutality in Stone* provides something similar, but it is more like a deconstructed museum of memories, gathering fragments and shards, collecting, evoking, and refunctionalizing so that we might better grasp the workings of the historically real, whose operations continue in the present and are, in that way too, authentic.

In an age of “no experiments,” *Brutality in Stone* merges *experimentation*, intervention, and reinterpretation in an undertaking driven by an inexorable will not to forget. It contrasts, at times rather brazenly, aural and visual signifiers, juxtaposing the cities of the future with the resounding bombs of allied air raids, confronting barren parade grounds with the jubilant sounds of Nuremberg in 1934. The film’s dominant strategies involve contrast, counterpoint, and parody. Its schematic and patterned editing rhythms underline and overstate the object of investigation, forming again the already hyperformed, exaggerating the regularity of spaces, shapes, and surfaces. The structures of the past are recycled and worked over (*umfunktioniert* and *aufgearbeitet*), ceasing to serve their original function in two ways: they are at once no longer in use, but indeed are put to use in this film in another context — in the historical project of Young German Film and its attempts to renew German film history.

If realism has a motive, asserts Kluge, it “is never a confirmation of reality, but rather a protest.”<sup>38</sup> The protest fueling this experiment blends radical imitation with a frontal attack, employing an aggressive montage that establishes relationships between the seemingly unrelated. The camera moves solemnly in forward processions down expansive corridors as Höss describes the calmness of prisoners entering gas chambers, a combination that associates neoclassicistic promenades with Prussian thoroughness and thus links the shapes of edifices and the substance of political actions as emanations of the same ideological instrumentation. The opening shot literalizes the dialectic of enlightenment and the

---

37. See Eric Rentschler, “The Use and Abuse of Memory: New German Film and the Discourse of Bitburg,” *New German Critique* 36 (Fall 1985): 73-76.

38. Alexander Kluge, *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin: Zur realistischen Methode* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975) 216.

antagonistic construction of National Socialism: we see a lake and a natural landscape behind it, over which then the vast facade of a building is superimposed, covering the trees and fields. Nature succumbs to monumental madness, to the same instrumental will that shrouds itself in premodern garb, propagating blood and soil fustian while transforming the world with the tools of modernity.<sup>39</sup> Kluge's first experiment offers an exercise in critical art history and outspoken archaeology, insisting that certain structures still bear on the present. The subtitle of *Brutality in Stone*, "The Eternity of Yesterday" ["Die Ewigkeit von gestern"], later replaces the original title and finds an ironic echo in Kluge's debut feature of 1966, *Abschied von gestern*.

## IX

Kluge will endure as the most prominent public defender of West German film, an individual whose stress on the power of cinema to redeem historical reality and to give voice to alternative energies continues to guide his work today — a cinema of *Eigensinn* indeed.<sup>40</sup> And Peter Schamoni? He gained some attention for his feature debut, *Closed Season on Fox Hunting* [*Schonzeit für Füchse*, 1966], a study of a young generation's passive aggression towards smug and unrepentant elders.<sup>41</sup> Two decades later, after commercial ventures in various generic veins, he now makes feature-length *Kulturfilme* like *Spring Symphony* [*Frühlingssinfonie*, 1982] and *Caspar David Friedrich* (1986), bio-pictures about romantic artists that are all but indistinguishable from the former confections of *Opas Kino*.<sup>42</sup>

---

39. Cf. Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984).

40. For useful and dynamic appreciations of Kluge's project in its multiple directions, see Miriam Hansen's various essays, including: "Collaborative Auteur Cinema and Oppositional Public Sphere: *Germany in Autumn*," *New German Critique* 24-25 (Fall/Winter 1981-82): 35-56; "Alexander Kluge, Cinema and the Public Sphere: The Construction Site of Counter-History," *Discourse* 6 (Fall 1985): 53-74; "Alexander Kluge: Crossings between Film, Literature, Critical Theory," *Film und Literatur: Literarische Texte und der neue deutsche Film*, eds. Sigrid Bauschinger et al. (Berne/Munich: Francke, 1984) 169-196; and "The Stubborn Discourse: History and Story-Telling in the Films of Alexander Kluge," *Persistence of Vision* 2 (1985): 19-29. See also the special issue of *October* devoted to Kluge, ed. Stuart Liebman, No. 46 (Fall 1988).

41. The script was published in the journal *Film* 4 (Velber, June 1966): 45-56. The film is available in a subtitled version through West Glen Films in New York.

42. Cf. the summary account of *Spring Symphony* from the program of "New German Films" presented at the 1984 Berlin Film Festival: "The love story of Clara Wieck and

## X

1986, Cologne: the wealthy industrialist and influential patron of the arts, Peter Ludwig, complains in a series of public pronouncements about the narrow perspective (*Blickverengung*) that refuses to grant German art and sculpture from 1933 to 1945 a place in public institutions.<sup>43</sup> (He does not use the phrase “Nazi art.”) People have a right, he claims, to judge for themselves whether these works are barbaric. In any case, the operative tabus should be lifted and audiences granted a chance to see whether a distance of 40 years might allow new approaches to the previously censured. The same person who purchased Pop Art two decades ago and had his portrait done by Andy Warhol now commissions the once-prominent Nazi artist Arno Breker to make busts of himself and his wife. It is a sign of the times, submits Ludwig: “Postmodern — what does that mean other than being traditional?”<sup>44</sup>

## XI

The initial impetus behind Young German Film was a negative project, a critical enterprise, a taking of revenge. The anti-*Kulturfilm* and the subsequent new German feature film meant explicitly to recycle images from the past; to confront the facts, structures, and discourse of National Socialism; and to militate against collective forgetting. If we jump ahead to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when New German Film had gained stature, self-assurance, and wide recognition, we glimpse a cinema invested in recreating national identity — a mission essentialized in Gabi Teichert’s quest for a positive German history. As the artist Christo put it: “In the seventies, the Germans suddenly began to reinvent National Socialism. The Hitler period became an extraordinary creative resource

---

Robert Schumann, but also the love-hate story of Schumann and Friedrich Wieck, Clara’s father, whose bond with his daughter lies beyond mere paternal love: in managing her career he seeks his own artistic self-fulfillment.” The film starred Nastassja Kinski, Rolf Hoppe, and Herbert Grönemeyer. Cf. Gertrud Koch’s devastating review of *Caspar David Friedrich* in *epd Film* 3 (December 1986): “Schamoni makes a political connection between the artist’s biography and the resistance against Napoleonic occupation troops: in the confused context of the film this amounts ultimately to a more pernicious form of German chauvinism” (37).

43. From an interview with *Der Spiegel*, reprinted in Staeck 14.

44. Staeck 15.

for a whole generation of filmmakers and writers.”<sup>45</sup> When we look today, from the perspective of the current historians’ debate, at the most celebrated New German Cinema revisitations of the Third Reich, we find more than passing traces of revisionist discourse in representative films like Hans Jürgen Syberberg’s *Our Hitler* [*Hitler — ein Film aus Deutschland*, 1977], Helma Sanders-Brahms’s *Germany, Pale Mother* [*Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*, 1979], Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Lili Marleen* (1980), and Edgar Reitz’s *Heimat* (1984). These films rewrite history from the perspective of the present; one might speak of them as retro-scenarios, transforming history into myth, or as restaged versions of the past that exorcize the shock of that experience and thus soothe the present.<sup>46</sup> Three characteristics stand out: (1) the fixation on Germany as a nation of victims and martyrs, and an attendant identification with innocent and impotent bystanders that undercuts the Holocaust and Jewish suffering; (2) the figuration of German history as woman: as an allegory of mourning (*Our Hitler*), as the central presence and source of continuity (*Heimat*), as a voice pressed into public service (*Lili Marleen*), or as a victim of rape (*Germany, Pale Mother*) — a strategy that represents the nation as a violated or vulnerable female body, a stand-in and medium for a hapless Germany; and (3) the reflection on the Nazi past as an unwitting reflection of that past, a function of what Saul Friedländer has called a “New Discourse” about National Socialism, which replaces guilt with fascination, shame with shamelessness, awareness of wrongdoing with a (however unintentional) complicity with criminals.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike Edgar Reitz, Kluge clearly does not wish to rewrite German history in a master narrative that integrates the Third Reich into a wider course in time, relativizing its singularity, denying its special status, and resenting those who insist on its exceptional significance.<sup>48</sup> Kluge’s first short uncompromisingly confronts incontrovertible facts and places them within larger structures. Höss speaks candidly of the death camps and their operations, leaving no doubt about questions of

---

45. Christo, “Wrapping Up Germany,” *semiotexte* 11 (1982): 20.

46. Cf. Bruno Fischli, “Rekonstruktion, Retro-Scenario, Trauerarbeit, Aufarbeitung — oder was? Neue Filme über den alten Faschismus,” *Jahrbuch Film* 79/80, ed. Hans Günther Pflaum (Munich/Vienna: Hanser, 1979) 63-75.

47. Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (New York: Harper, 1984) 11-12.

48. Cf. Reitz’s essay “The Camera Is Not a Clock,” in Rentschler, *West German Filmmakers* 139f.

agency in the Holocaust. *Brutality in Stone* intervenes, activating crucial memories. To be sure, these desires inhere in *The Patriot*; at times, however, a curious shift of emphasis demonstrates how even Kluge, the most vigorous agent of historical memory, cannot fully free himself from a revisionist climate. *The Patriot* mourns and recollects “all of the Reich’s dead,”<sup>49</sup> giving them a voice, stressing that they are not simply dead, but indeed full of protest and energy. The film’s most persuasive spokesman is the talking knee of Corporal Wieland, a soldier “who wanted to live, but found himself in the wrong history,” perishing in the battle of Stalingrad. At one point the viewer is explicitly reminded that the Royal Air Force burned 60,000 people in the bombings of Hamburg during World War II.<sup>50</sup> We also glimpse American aviators taking a cigarette break after “dismantling Germany systematically for eighteen hours.” If we remember the dead and recall the monstrous, we stand before a German history conspicuously unburdened of certain victims and certain remembrances. This is clear from the start of *The Patriot*, in its opening quotation from Curtis Bernhardt’s *The Last Company* [*Die letzte Kompanie*, 1930]. We see a drawn-out traveling shot over dead German soldiers, accompanied by the music Hanns Eisler composed for *Night and Fog*. The script describes the scene: “This takes place either in the Seven Years’ War or the Wars of Liberation, but now we see an anti-aircraft gun from 1943.”<sup>51</sup> The strategy is a troubling one; like Reagan’s visit to Bitburg, it collapses Jewish concentration camp victims and German war dead into one, implying their common status. This is all the more disturbing in a film that makes no further mention of the Holocaust, that withholds even a single image of Jewish suffering in a prolonged work of mourning, suggesting that we can talk of World War II without mentioning Auschwitz. In an odd way, *The Patriot* conforms to an approach described by Friedländer, wherein an “endless stream of words and images becomes an ever more effective screen hiding the past. . . .”<sup>52</sup>

---

49. Kluge, in voice-over, introduces his heroine with these words: “Gabi Teichert, history teacher in Hesse, a patriot, i.e., she is interested in all of the Reich’s dead.”

50. Kluge uses the abbreviation “RAF,” more likely to connote the Red Army Faction (i.e., the Baader-Meinhof group) in contemporary minds. In this way, he plays with the notion that the attacks on Hamburg during World War II were acts of terrorism.

51. *The Last Company*, in fact, takes place during the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon.

52. Alexander Kluge, *Die Patriotin: Texte/Bilder 1-6* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979) 51.



## XII

In his *Bestandsaufnahme* [*Taking Stock*, 1983], Kluge quotes without citing a source the following phrase: “The real becomes imaginary, and for that reason the imaginary is real.”<sup>53</sup> This characterizes life in the age of electronic reproduction as well as recent appropriations of the past in German discourse, retro-scenarios that transform history into the spectacle of myth, into fictions that take on the character of pseudo-fact.<sup>54</sup> To this day, Kluge remains inordinately sensitive to those elements in contemporary society which undermine historical memory and seek to perpetuate a constant state of diversion, a voracious present that engulfs and nullifies the past. These forces control fantasy production, determine the shape of cities, and dominate postmodernity in general, creating a situation in which the present forecloses future horizons and cuts off the past — or at least tries to. For all of this, Kluge maintains (playing on a phrase by Christa Wolf that he reworks in *The Patriot*) that “[t]he past isn’t dead, it isn’t even past.”<sup>55</sup> We dare not misunderstand certain of Kluge’s insights as Baudrillardian revelations. Kluge does not share the latter’s vehement pessimism nor his loss of faith in the resilient powers of the subject.<sup>56</sup> (Kluge’s and Baudrillard’s quite different responses to Mogadishu and Stammheim provide, I would suggest in passing, a telling contrast: compare *Germany in Autumn* to “Our Theater of Cruelty.”<sup>57</sup>) Kluge still believes in the project of modernity, even in the face of postmodern realities. He both mourns and protests the vitiation of certain forms of experience: the shattering of memory, the denigration of the past, the destruction of living spaces and public spheres, the decline of the cinema, the stifling of human imagination

---

53. Kluge, *Bestandsaufnahme* 473.

54. Cf. Anton Kaes, *Deutschlandbilder: Die Wiederkehr der Geschichte als Film* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1987).

55. Alexander Kluge, *Der Angriff der Gegenwart auf die übrige Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1985) 107.

56. Cf. Baudrillard’s characterization of a naive mode of “technological optimism” regarding the media and their progressive potential in “The Mass: The Implosion of the Social in the Media,” *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988) 207. For dialectical optimists, claims Baudrillard, “the media constitute a new, gigantic productive force and obey the dialectic of productive forces. Momentarily alienated and submitted to the law of capitalism, their intensive development can only eventually explode this monopoly.”

57. See Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities . . . or the End of the Social*, trans. Paul Foss et al. (New York: semiotexte, 1983) 111-23.

by the new media.<sup>58</sup> Kluge, for all his keen awareness of “fatal strategies,” refuses to succumb to fatalism and instead continues to articulate and practice strategies of resistance.

### XIII

Cinema as a time machine: images out of time vs. moments lost in time, films from the past against the power of the ever-present.<sup>59</sup> A quote from the script *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*:

*PEOPLE ON MONDAY.* Reference to the film *People on Sunday*. A Sunday scene from the film *Kuhle Wampe*. Now it is fall 1984, 5 a.m. The time nears when the first waves of people will rush off to work. It is the day on which we go off daylight-savings time and reset our watches (that actually happened already in the night from Saturday to Sunday, but most people didn't notice it until Monday morning). The main thing is to forget what happened yesterday.<sup>60</sup>

For Kluge, it is clear: the main thing is to combat blithe takings of leave from yesterday, to remember not to forget.

---

58. See Alexander Kluge, “Theses about the New Media,” in Rentschler, *West German Filmmakers* 30-32.

59. See Gary Indiana's interview with Kluge, “The Demolition Artist,” *Village Voice* 33 (25 October 1988), in which Kluge speaks of treating cinema “as a time-producing animal. I think this is the meaning of film history. Commercial cinema absorbs time — like in Hitchcock. Suspense takes time away: if a bomb is ticking under this table, it's not interesting what we say, or how we feel. It's killing time. I think to produce time is a very high ideal of all the arts” (67).

60. Kluge, *Angriff der Gegenwart* 41-42.

*The Commerce of Auteurism:  
a Voice without Authority*

Timothy Corrigan

Subjectivity is greater than someone's intentions.

—Alexander Kluge

Alexander Kluge is a grudging auteur, a reluctant personality who seems to engage any and all historical issues more than the history of himself: since Oberhausen, he has been one of film's most famous international signatures yet has accepted that label only with great hesitation and careful qualification.

To locate Kluge within this troubled category of auteur has always required revision, but as Kluge has evolved through the contemporary international film industry, placing Kluge the auteur has meant increasingly complicating that position to fit the shifting grounds of postmodern culture. Commentators within modern German cinema have noted his original trouble with and redefinitions of auteurism. As Miriam Hansen and Eric Rentschler have argued, one of the most important collective gestures of contemporary German cinema may have been to resituate the very notion of the auteur. Rentschler has shown that Kluge has been part of an effort to enact a variety of cultural subjectivities in which different enunciatory relations with history have decentered the conventions of auteurism. Hansen notes that for the New German Cinema "the emphasis was necessarily more on a 'politique des auteurs,' the political struggle for independent film-making in a country which did not have a film culture comparable to that of France," this new direction calling for a "revision of Autorenkino through a collective politics of production."<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Eric Rentschler, *West German Film in the Course of Time* (Bedford Hills, NY:

Accurate as these assessments are, they should be supplemented by suggesting another way in which Kluge has mobilized auteurism as a critical category: namely, with Kluge one finds less a critical subversion of auteurism as a production strategy than a critical exploitation of auteurism as a category for reception. Indeed, the marked shift within auteurism as a way of viewing and receiving movies, rather than as a mode of production, has been the central change in the meaning of auteurism from the sixties to the eighties. It is along these lines that Kluge has begun to make specific use of the commerce of his own singularity and subjectivity.

Many of the relevant terms in this revised stance — fragmentation, diversification, multiplication — are not new to studies of Kluge. But I will enlist them here as part of a specific commercial strategy which I find in Kluge, one in which a politics of agency takes its place as much in an extra-textual as in a textual business, more exactly as a “semi-textual” practice where Kluge admits to performing himself as an image of the writer/producer/filmmaker but primarily as a strategy for eliciting certain relations with his audience. In a crucial sense, Kluge’s writing of a self in today’s national/international film industry situates itself between the more social and political work surrounding the films (his involvements with government policies or television networks) and the reception of his film practice (whose material textuality refuses to be the authority for its reading). As an extension of his early attempts to dismantle the aura of auteurism as expression, Kluge’s more recent engagements with the practice of auteurism have been to use it as a textual material in its own right, a textual material through which he can act out and disperse the specific problematic of an authoritative agency.

### *The Multiple Children of Truffaut*

As a heuristic category, theories and practices of auteurism have never really been untroubled. Its spread from France in the fifties through America and elsewhere in the sixties and seventies was tightly bound to changes in production and distribution strategies, such as the rise of an international art cinema and the introduction of an Arriflex camera. While these changes in production technique frequently presented

---

Redgrave, 1984) 89-101 and 158-61; Miriam Hansen, “Cooperative Auteur Cinema and Oppositional Public Sphere: Alexander Kluge’s Contribution to *Germany in Autumn*,” *New German Critique* 24-25 (Fall/Winter 1981-2). See also Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U. Press, 1989).

auteurism as a more accurate way to cut through the complications of mass entertainment and to locate the expressive core of the film art, they also offered, less visibly, a more historically appropriate method for negotiating the reception of films. The historical adaptability of auteurism, back through the works of early filmmakers like Von Stroheim and Eisenstein and through to the present generation of Spielberg and Cimino, identifies mainly the desire and demand of an industry to generate an artistic (and specifically Romantic) aura during a period when the industry as such needed to distinguish itself from other, less elevated, forms of mass media (most notably, television). Auteurism offered not just new audiences, retrieved from the modernist art communities, but new cultural sanctions to old audiences, alienated and awash in an indistinguishable spate of media images. Despite its often overstated counter-cultural pretensions, auteurism became a deft move in establishing a model that would dominate and stabilize critical reception for at least thirty years. The subsequent auteurist marketing of movies, such as Bernardo Bertolucci's *1900*, David Lean's *Ryan's Daughter*, or Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* guaranteed, through the reverberations of directorial names across titles, a relationship between audience and movie whereby an intentional and authorial agency governs, as a kind of brand-name vision whose contextual meanings are already determined, the way a movie is seen and received.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, one of the chief mystifications within early theories and practices of auteurism has been a valorization of one or another idea of expression, mostly disconnected from its marketing and commercial implications. Despite their large differences, theories and practices of auteurism from Astruc and Peter Wollen to Foucault and Stephen Heath, from John Ford to Jean Luc Godard, share basic assumptions about the auteur as the structuring principle of enunciation, an organizing expression of one sort or another.<sup>3</sup> Whether one locates that auteurial presence as a source for stylistic or other textual consistencies and variations or as a figurative authority supplanting a lost or "dead"

---

2. A collection of the major documents and debates about auteurism can be found in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). See also Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage, 1975) 292-4.

3. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1972); Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1977) 113-138; Stephen Heath, "Comment on 'The Idea of Authorship,'" *Screen* 14.3 (Autumn 1973): 86-91.

source (as Barthes would say) in the form of a textual enunciation, the place of the auteur within a textual causality describes a way of organizing spectatorial positions in a transcendent or trans-subjective fashion.<sup>4</sup> To view a film as the product of an auteur means to read or to respond to it as an expressive organization that precedes and supersedes the historical fragmentations and subjective distortions that can take over the reception of even the most classically coded movie. The often strained attempts to make consistent or evolutionary the British and American movies of Hitchcock or the German and Hollywood films of Fritz Lang are governed by some sense of a historically trans-subjective and transcendent category which authorizes certain readings or understandings of those movies. In David Bordwell's analysis of auteurism as an interpretative cue,

the overt self-consciousness of the narration is often paralleled by an extratextual emphasis on the filmmaker as source. Within the art cinema's mode of production and reception, the concept of the *author* has a formal function it did not possess in the Hollywood studio system. Film journalism and criticism promote authors, as do film festivals, retrospectives, and academic film study. Directors' statements of intent guide comprehension of the film, while a body of work linked by an authorial signature encourages viewers to read each film as a chapter of an oeuvre. [ . . . ] More broadly, the author becomes the real-world parallel to the narrational presence 'who' communicates (what is the filmmaker saying?) and 'who' expresses (what is the author's personal vision?).<sup>5</sup>

Formalist and cognitive critiques of auteurism, such as Bordwell's, can vanquish most of the myths of expressivity in the cinema in favor of more formal and heuristic uses for the auteur. Yet these too do not fully attend to the survival — and, in fact, increasing importance — of the auteur as a commercial strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims. Today, even these modernist corrections, discussions, or deconstructions of the romantic roots of auteurism need to be taken another step towards recontextualizing them within industrial and commercial trajectories.

---

4. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-48.

5. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 211.

Illustrating this need to investigate how “the author is constructed by and for commerce,” John Caughie has noted that this question has been overlooked since Brecht’s 1931 account of *The Threepenny Opera* trial in which Brecht “brilliantly exposes the contradiction in cinema between the commercial need to maintain the ideology of the creative artist and the simultaneous need to redefine ownership in terms of capital, rather than creative investment.”<sup>6</sup>

This attention to a commerce of auteurism is especially critical in keeping pace with the auteur as a practice and interpretative category during the last fifteen years, the period when the play of commerce has increasingly assimilated the action of enunciation and expression. Certainly such a reevaluation of auteurism as more than enunciatory expression or a heuristic category could and should take place across any of its historical variations and to a certain extent has already been implicit in the social and historical emphasis of a “politique des auteurs.” Yet the international imperatives of postmodern culture have made it clear that commerce is now much more than just a contending discourse: if, in conjunction with the so-called international art cinema of the sixties and seventies, the auteur had been absorbed as a phantom presence within a text, he or she has rematerialized in the eighties as a commercial performance of *the business of being an auteur*. To follow this move in a postmodern culture, the practices of auteurism now must be re-theorized in terms of the wider material strategies of social agency. Here the auteur can be described according to the conditions of a cultural and commercial intersubjectivity, a social interaction distinct from an intentional causality or textual transcendence.

Models of agency are useful here precisely because they are models of intersubjectivity which aim to undermine the metaphysics and the authority of expression and intention. They delineate a model of action in which both expression and reception are conditioned and monitored by reflective postures towards their material conditions. Charles Taylor, for instance, has argued a model of human agency which foregrounds “second order desires” where the “reflective self-evaluation” of “the self-interpreting subject” has as its object “the having of certain

---

6. *Theories of Authorship: A Reader 2*; Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967) 18: 139-209; in French, *Le Procès de quat'sous: expérience sociologique*, trans. J.-L. Lebrave and J.-P. Lefèbvre (Paris: Editions de l'Arche, 1970) 148-221. See also Ben Brewster, “Brecht and the Film Industry,” *Screen* 16.4 (Winter 1975-76): 16--33. See also Robert Self, “Robert Altman and the Theory of Authorship,” *Cinema Journal* 25.1 (Fall 1985): 3-11.

first-order desires.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Anthony Giddens suggests a materialist model of expression as self-reflective action: the motivation of expressive action, the rationalization of that action, and the reflective monitoring of action concomitantly interact to map the structure of expression as a reflective social discourse which necessarily calls attention to the material terms of its communication.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, agency becomes a mode of enunciation which describes an active and monitored engagement with its own conditions as the subjective expresses itself through the socially symbolic. In the cinema, the auteur-as-agency thus becomes a place for encountering not so much a transcending meaning (of first-order desires) but the different conditions through which expressive meaning is made by an auteur and reconstructed by an audience, conditions which involve historical and cultural motivations and rationalizations. Here, even reluctant auteurs like Kluge may strategically embrace the more promising possibilities of the auteur as a commercial presence, since the commercial status of that presence now necessarily become part of an agency which culturally and socially monitors spectatorial identification and critical reception.

### *The Auteur as Star*

Where the practice of the auteur as a particular brand of social agency initiates a revision of its relation with film audiences — and where Kluge finds his opening for addressing those audiences — is, paradoxically, in the contemporary status of the auteur as a star. This idea of the auteur-star may appear merely to hark back to the earlier avatars of auteurism who were placed in certain aesthetic and intellectual pantheons: from Orson Welles to Robert Bresson, the celebrity of auteurism was a product of a certain textual distinction. Despite the general consistency of the tradition of the textual auteur, more recent versions of auteurist positions have deviated from its textual center. In line with the marketing transformation of the auteur of the international art cinema into the cult of personality that defined the film artist of the seventies, auteurs have increasingly become situated along an extra-textual path, in which their commercial status as auteurs is their chief function as auteurs: the auteur-star is meaningful primarily as a

---

7. Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1985) 43, 28, and 15.

8. Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contrast in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1983).



promotion or recovery of a movie or group of movies, frequently regardless of the filmic text itself.<sup>9</sup> Like Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*, auteurist movies are often made before they are made; and, like Coppola's *Tucker*, a director's promoted biography can preempt most textual receptions of a movie.<sup>10</sup> In a twist on the tradition of certain movies being vehicles for certain stars, the auteur-star can potentially carry and redeem any sort of textual material, often to the extent of making us forget that material through the marvel of its agency. In this sense, promotional technology and production feats become the new "camera-stylo," serving a new auteurism in which the making of a movie (like *Fitzcarraldo*) or its unmaking (as with *Twilight Zone*) foreground an agency that forecloses the text itself. As Godard has parodied it so incisively in recent films like *King Lear*, in today's commerce we want to know what our authors and auteurs look like or how they act; it is the text that may now be dead.<sup>11</sup>

Placed before and after a film text and in effect usurping the work of that text and its reception, today's auteurs are agents who, whether they wish it or not, are always on the verge of being consumed by their status as stars. By this I am not suggesting some brand of egotism but that the binary distinctions that once formulated most models of auteurist expression or formal organization have collapsed into what Dana Polan has called the postmodern "evacuation of sense" within mass culture.<sup>12</sup> The oppositional calculus of expression to text, psychology to meaning, or authority to interpretation no longer sustains

---

9. An example of this position, one which responds to the special status of the auteur yet fails to reflect on its larger cultural and critical implications, is Joseph Gelmis's *The Film Director as Superstar* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1970): "Over half the movie tickets sold today are bought by moviegoers between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. They know what a director is, what he does and what he's done" (xvii). More recently and specifically, see Jeffery Chown, *Hollywood Auteur: Francis Coppola* (New York: UMI, 1988).

10. One particularly significant account of the contemporary auteur as self-promoting superstar is Steven Bach, *Final Cut: Dreams and Disaster in the Making of "Heaven's Gate"* (New York: New American Library, 1986). A more theoretical and pertinent discussion is Sheila Johnston, "A Star is Born: Fassbinder and the New German Cinema," *New German Critique* 24-25 (Fall/Winter 1981-82): 57-72.

11. One of the most sensational examples of how the production process of a auteur can usurp the film in several senses is Les Blank's *Burden of Dreams* (1981/2), which documents Herzog's making of *Fitzcarraldo* (1982).

12. Dana Polan, "Brief Encounters: Mass Culture and the Evacuation of Sense," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: U. of Indiana Press, 1986) 167-187.

the contemporary auteur film. Instead, institutional and commercial agency defines auteurism almost exclusively as publicity and advertisement, that is, as both a provocative and empty display of material surface that intercepts those more traditional dynamics. Although filmmakers may write manifestos and preside over movements, Meaghan Morris has noted (in language similar to Richard Dyer's description of stars) that today "the primary modes of film and auteur packaging are advertising, review snipping, trailers, magazine profiles — always already in appropriation as the precondition, and not the postproduction of meaning."<sup>13</sup> To respond to a movie as primarily or merely a Spielberg film is, after all, the pleasure of refusing an evaluative relation to it — a pleasure that might be equally true of the standard reception of Herzog movies — and much of that pleasure lies in being able to know already, not read, the meaning of the film in a totalizing image that precedes the movie in the public images of its creator.<sup>14</sup> An auteur film today seems to aspire more and more to a critical tautology, capable of being understood and consumed without being seen. Like an Andy Warhol movie, it can communicate a great deal for a large number of audiences who know the maker's reputation but have never seen the films themselves.

For Kluge, it seems that the evolution of auteurism into a kind of postmodern stardom has now, following an irony that runs through many of his projects, come to serve his aims for relocating a spectator's relation to a film as a more material engagement with the cultural agencies of history.

### *An Agent of Agency: A Prismatic Effect*

Of the several tacks within the commerce of the auteur-star, two are most pertinent here: the commercial auteur and the auteur of commerce. Although the first category could theoretically include a vast range of stars as directors and directors as stars (Sylvester Stallone, Madonna, Clint Eastwood, and so forth), more purportedly respectable names in this group would include Spielberg, George Lucas, Brian De

---

13. Meaghan Morris, "Tooth and Claw: Tales of Survival and Crocodile Dundee," in *Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1988) 122-123; Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979).

14. Cf. Timothy Corrigan, "Producing Herzog: From a Body of Images," in *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History*, ed. Timothy Corrigan (New York and London: Methuen, 1986) 3-19.

Palma, David Lean and, with different agendas, John Sayles, Woody Allen, Truffaut of the later years, Lina Wertmuller, and the Bertolucci of the latest Academy Awards. My argument so far would assimilate most of these names, since what defines this group is a recognition, either foisted upon them or chosen by them, that the celebrity of their agency produces and promotes texts that invariably exceed the movie itself, both before and after its release.

The second category is, I believe, the more intriguing variation on the first, for there a filmmaker attempts to monitor or rework the institutional manipulations of the auteurist position within the commerce of the contemporary movie industry. If normally the auteurist text promotes and recuperates a movie, these filmmakers now run the commerce of the auteurist and autonomous self up against its textual expression in a way that shatters the coherency of both authorial expression and stardom. Motivations, desires, and historical developments — which are frequently dramatized in critical readings of films as at least semi-autobiographical — now become destabilized and usually with a purpose: did the same Fassbinder who made *Maria Braun* give us *Querelle*? is it the same self-exiled and stridently independent Coppola who says “I need to be a solo guy” and then for *Tucker* humbly surrendered the film to George Lucas’s “marketing sense of what people want”?<sup>15</sup> While a more traditional auteurist position could describe these changes in perspective and expression according to some coherent notion of evolution, an evaluation of many contemporary filmmakers must admit fissures and discrepancies which consciously employ the public image of the auteur in order to confront and fragment its expressive coherence.<sup>16</sup>

I believe Kluge has positioned himself more and more within such a commerce of auteurism, admitting and reworking the institutional impostures and excesses of an auteurist position today in a way that aligns him somewhat peculiarly on this front with filmmakers like Raoul

---

15. Robert Lindsey, “Francis Ford Coppola: Promises to Keep,” *New York Times Magazine*, section 6 (24 July 1988): 23-27.

16. In *Narration and the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell recognizes this fragmentation of the auteur but sees it as a mere variation on the traditional auteur-narrator: “The popularity of R.W. Fassbinder in recent years may owe something to his ability to change narrational personae from film to film so that there is a ‘realist’ Fassbinder, a ‘literary’ Fassbinder, a ‘pastiche’ Fassbinder, a ‘frenzied’ Fassbinder, and so on” (210). Obviously I believe that mobilizing these different agencies within an auteurist category has larger implications.

Ruiz, Nagisa Oshima, R. W. Fassbinder, the Godard of the eighties, and Coppola. Walking a tightrope between the image as a romantic auteur and his recognition of its commercial conditions, Kluge has recently described himself as a “demolition artist” whose position under the Big Top today alternates between a highwire artist and a performing clown: “I’m Robinson Crusoe. If I’m an artist, I am alone, and individually I can work only this way. I’m esoteric like Adorno is, like every artist is. But I would like to have camouflage, mimicry. I think it’s important not to show one is an artist nowadays, because it’s a very dangerous status.”<sup>17</sup> Again, this claim both to be an artist and to mimic the image of the artist does not contradict Kluge’s earlier aesthetic programs in revising the needs of “Autorenfilm” as a cooperative cinema nor his other efforts to generate the multiple perspectives of a public sphere. Yet, if in the sixties and early seventies those efforts emphasized political and formal strategies that leaned towards a counter-cultural utopia, this particular engagement with the commerce of auteurism indicates a more conscious confrontation with his own evolution into the mainstream of film culture. If, comparing Kluge to Wenders, Schlöndorff, Fassbinder, and Herzog, one could previously make, more reliably, the claim that Kluge stood outside the international auteurist circle, that is less true today as Kluge carefully promotes his politics through the promotion of his name: his recent premier appearance in New York, for example, has featured radio interviews, university symposia, negotiations with *Paper Tiger*, a special issue of *October*, and the overseeing of an American collection of his films and television programs at the Anthology Film Archives. A growing television presence in West Germany, Kluge has become a reluctant star within the international auteurist circle, and the question has now become for him, I believe, the inverse of the American political scene today: not how can a star absorb the political but how does a star reactivate a materialist politics within his or her commercial agency.

The answer for Kluge and others is that there is a business and politics of agency that permits auteurism to remain a useful tactic in engaging commercial or semi-commercial patterns of identification. Although auteurism today has effectively vacated agency or a metaphysics of expressive causality and textual authority, the shell of auteurism

---

17. Yvonne Rainer and Ernest Larsen, “‘We Are Demolition Artists’: An Interview with Alexander Kluge,” *The Independent* (June 1989): 21.

— that remains in the form of a material publicity — opens a space for the dramatization of subjectivity refusing its own expressive authority, for a dramatization of subjectivity as, in fact, a material intersubjectivity responsive to the action of self-interpretation and self-critique. To put this in linguistic terms, the mechanisms for identifying with a speaking subject, usually a director, have become as important to communication in film culture today as the so-called textual statement of a movie itself or the different ways it is received by different audiences: the commercial drama of a movie's source can say as much today as the drama of the movie and the dispositions of its viewers. As important as the text of a Kluge film becomes the work of critical reception that Kluge initiates across his name, his auteurist status and his public's knowledge of it.

Kluge thus finds in the contemporary agency of auteurism one of several postmodern grounds on which to initiate a modernist critique of contemporary cynicism and vacancy, a way of reorganizing a devalued and emptied auteurism as a critical subjectivity.<sup>18</sup> As early as 1979, he claims, "I have always believed in auteur cinema." But "auteur cinema," he continues, "is not a minority phenomenon: all people relate to their experiences like authors — rather than managers of department stores."<sup>19</sup> Implicit even in these remarks is an understanding of auteurism as a process of identification which can reflect itself as an agency for critical "self-interpretation" in its audience; such a reception of auteurism is possible largely because a putative creative presence has been commercially dislocated from textual authority and re-focused as the mechanisms of agency. Indeed, one sees an especially concrete and anticipatory version of this critical use of the agency of auteurism in Kluge's release and re-release of perhaps his most commercial undertaking, *Strongman Ferdinand*: he followed the film from theater to theater, the authorial source repositioned as a critical interlocutor defined by the diversity of his audience. The auteur becomes literally realized as an agency constructed across the diverse response

---

18. Kluge remarks: "We are not postmodernists. I believe in the avant-garde. But that is not where the distinction lies. There are two different approaches: dominating the materials and respecting the materials. The first would take materials to realize intentions. The opposed attitude would be to accept the autonomy of these materials, which are living." Stuart Liebman, "On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere: An Interview with Alexander Kluge," *October* 46 (Fall 1988): 57.

19. Alexander Kluge, "On Film and the Public Sphere," trans. Thomas Levin and Miriam Hansen, *New German Critique* 24-25(Fall/Winter 1981-82): 206-207.

of a genuinely public sphere — not unlike one of Charles Moore's postmodern buildings, constructed through the interaction of community planning.

Kluge's aesthetic and ideological play with agency within the commerce of auteurism may be seen acted out across a spectrum of other artistic and social texts: from public appearances and social and political commitments to literary and non-literary writings, from rumored histories of one's past to one's penchant for a certain camera person or a particular star.<sup>20</sup> A recent television program which he has produced, for instance, features a collage of different "auteurs" from the New German Cinema (Helke Sanders, Margarethe von Trotta, Herzog, Volker Schlöndorff), yet the show refuses to identify the specific product of any particular director. Indeed, for Kluge, the very multiplicity of his own personae, as a university professor, novelist, aesthetician, politician, lawyer, disciple of Adorno, and businessman becomes a fortuitous instability within the auteurist perspective on his filmmaking career. Other, more textual dimensions, would include his early use of his sister as a familial counterpart in films like *Yesterday Girl*, his place as adaptor of his own stories, such as *The Patriot*, and the books that reassemble movies like *The Patriot* and *The Power of Emotion* around Kluge's own voice and promulgations.<sup>21</sup> Like the wry voice-over whose "useless remarks" introduce *The Patriot*, his expressive agency through most of these tactics achieves a "prismatic effect" which tends to assert and then disperse its own authority.<sup>22</sup>

As a much more specific case, however, I want to look briefly at one "semi-textual" strategy which is often taken for granted in Kluge's and other auteurs' work: the interview — one of the few, documentable extra-textual spaces where Kluge engages and disperses his own organizing agency as auteur. The standard directorial interview might be described according to the action of promotion and explanation: it is the writing and explaining of a film through the promotion of a certain intentional self; it is frequently the commercial dramatization of self as the motivating agent of textuality. With Kluge, though, it becomes a dialogue about complications and deferral in which in his words he,

---

20. For additional examples of these moves within Kluge's artistic practice and biography, see Thomas Böhm-Christl, ed., *Alexander Kluge* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983).

21. Alexander Kluge, *Die Patriotin: Texte/Bilder 1-6* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979); *Die Macht der Gefühle* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1984).

22. Rainer and Larsen 23-24.

“like a catalyst, [. . .] disappears from the process.” Indeed much of attraction of the interview format for Kluge may be precisely that dialogic or polylogic structure which is ignored in most auteurist encounters but which for him is enacted as something between a conflictual debate and the relational experience of “chatting” (which Kluge oddly associates with women). This kind of encounter obviously parallels Kluge’s work with textual montage and his other efforts to replace creative authority with a more cooperative and conflictual exchange. Yet here it has the specific advantage of reformulating the coherence of intention and the opacity of celebrity that attaches independently to the agency of auteurism, the path which in the contemporary film industry has become increasingly important in forming modes of identification as expressive action.

For Kluge, the interview regularly accentuates that presentation of agency according to a series of rhetorical and structural strategies. As early as 1974 Jan Dawson recorded this tendency when she introduced a long interview as “a fragmented, three-day conversation.” After reading the transcript of that interview, Kluge distanced himself further from it by complaining about its abstractions and asking Dawson “to cut down the generalisations and explicate his meaning with more concrete illustrations from the films.” Confronted with all these dislocations of her speaking subject, Dawson took proper refuge in Kluge’s film aesthetics, asking the reader to “create their own interview from the text that follows.”<sup>23</sup>

More specifically (and more recently), one finds in Kluge’s interviews a tendency not only to alternate the abstract with the concrete but to embed that concrete in a disconnected montage of seemingly digressive stories, placing himself as an empty agent at the center of “not one story but many stories.”<sup>24</sup> These anecdotes can range from accounts of the filming of an eviction in Frankfurt to stories about the “history of the plow, which in 8 A.D. already looked like it does today” to pseudo-confessional fantasies of love-making in the deserts of Africa.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes, these episodic digressions can serve as illustrations of certain points, but just as often they stand out as Brechtian gesticulations which seem intentionally to trouble the historical and cultural place of Kluge

---

23. *Alexander Kluge and the Occasional Work of a Female Slave*, ed. Jan Dawson (Perth: A Perth Film Festival Publication, 1975) 27.

24. Kluge, “On Film and the Public Sphere” 206.

25. Kluge, “On Film and the Public Sphere” 216-17

himself as speaking subject: the apparent failure to maintain a consistency in subject matter or historical episode monitors a speaker whose agency is regularly being fractured by that matter. This is the presentation of Kluge as historical raconteur who, unlike the Reagan paradigm, does not use the historical anecdote to fabricate himself as a transcendent or opaque agent of discourse (“anything I say is important and true simply because I say it”) but to disperse or dislocate his agency through the material variety of history’s “histoires” (“because anything could be said it surpasses any coherence I can give it”).

A second characteristic of the Kluge voice is its ability to absorb or deflect a centered, critical position. As has been common from the beginning, an interview with Kluge is an interview with a complex plurality manifested in his third- or first-person plural voice and the deflection of most questions about his specific work towards larger financial, artistic and political issues. In an interview with Stuart Liebman, for instance, Kluge consistently redefines his own alliances, relocating himself as a filmmaker with a variety of odd bedfellows. He accepts Herzog as an ally, as “an amateur like me.” “Even films like *The Boat*, *The Never-Ending Story*, *The Name of the Rose*,” he allows, “are made the Oberhausen way.” Yet he finds Straub and Huillet’s *Moses and Aaron*, a film that would seem close to Kluge’s own materialist aesthetics, too visual in its recreation of the opera.<sup>26</sup> At one point, cinemas are declared dead and television hailed as the future; but then he acknowledges, “we will come through television to cinema again.” With typical mobility and contrariety, he refuses full identification with either the modernist or postmodernist school, and instead declares his work “classical” in its faith in a counter-public sphere.<sup>27</sup> His objections and agreements always appear as only qualifiers, making waffling appear a strict political program: “we have no objections,” he says of his and Negt’s disagreements with the historical focus of Habermas’s work, “but we have a different field of employment.”<sup>28</sup> In a 1989 interview with Yvonne Rainer and Ernest Larsen, Rainer pursues the elusive “we” that Kluge becomes, and the response only diffuses the agency further before it paradoxically joins ranks with *Der Spiegel*:

---

26. Liebman 31, 49, 25.

27. Liebman 43.

28. Liebman 42.



We have organized ourselves. We have organized all opera houses and theaters in Germany, book publishers and independent filmmakers. In other words, the traditional media — not newspapers or broadcast artists — the books, cinemas, theaters, and the circus. They belong together. And on television they look very different. This is understandable because originally they had nothing to do with television. We also have a partner, the news magazine *Der Spiegel*.<sup>29</sup>

To paraphrase his own words, this auteurial voice — mobile, critical, and generous in the sense he applies it to Adorno — is a voice of continual differentiation in which it becomes more a predicate and a “porous” agent than an authorizing expression.

Interview tactics such as these are not, obviously, radical political gestures. As a part of the diversified confrontation that is Kluge’s project, however, they can mark a significant move within the critical reception of agency. Indeed, the questionable possibility of a “radical gesture” itself may be exactly what is implicit in a perspective on auteurism as critical agency. As Charles Taylor notes about the subject/agent of Sartre’s “radical choice” (who might equally be the classical auteur or the textual auteur of the sixties):

He would be utterly without identity. [. . .] The subject of radical choice is another avatar of that recurrent figure, which our civilization aspires to realize, the disembodied ego, the subject who can objectify all being, including his own, and choose in radical freedom. But the promised total self-possession would in fact be the most total self-loss.<sup>30</sup>

Instead, as I believe Kluge recognizes on all fronts, the preliminary question to all other questions of symbolic form within today’s international culture must concern the material conditions and agencies of inter-subjectivity. This is a politics of agency that moves beyond radical choice towards that of the radical evaluation and openness of a public sphere, towards, in Charles Taylor’s words, the “deepest unstructured sense of what is important.”

Kluge has said of the style of his films, “one doesn’t see the cut, but my signature resides in it.” Likewise, one might say of his agency as an auteur, one hardly sees the expression because the speaker resides so rigorously in the material politics of its predication.

---

29. Rainer and Larsen 19.

30. Taylor 35.

*“You Can’t Always Get What You Want”:  
The Films of Alexander Kluge\**

Helke Sander

Looking at the films of Alexander Kluge, two themes continue to replay themselves, taking shape and adding to the richness of his work. The first theme is the multiplicity in the seemingly definite. The second, the unwanted within the wanted. While both themes contribute to the complexity of the content and structure of Kluge’s films, they also cause problems for the serious and engaged viewer. It becomes increasingly clear that one of the major problems is the way in which both themes are integral to Kluge’s portrayal of women — in itself a thorny and volatile issue.

In shaping the first theme, the multiplicity in the seemingly definite, Kluge emphasizes that the emotional life of each and every individual is not only manifold and inconsistent, but that various strands of emotions, instincts, desires, and needs have come to a halt at different levels of development. In effect, as human beings our emotional organization is out of harmony with our social organization, creating a source of unending conflict. To illustrate this point, take a simple conversation between two people, in which, for instance, values of the 19th century are mixed up and confused with those of the 15th and 20th centuries. This explains why, in addition to the difficulty we have understanding ourselves, communication with others becomes complicated — if not a matter of sheer luck.

Somewhere Kluge uses the example of dinosaurs who, according to

---

\* I wish to thank Regina Cornwell for her help in reworking the English version of this paper for publication.

one theory, became extinct because their nervous systems transmitted impulses so slowly that coordination between brain and limbs gradually became impossible. When, for instance, a dinosaur had a leg injury and bled, the message took about twenty minutes to travel from the wound to the brain. Once realization had hit the dinosaur's brain, it was too late for adequate reaction — the animal was already bleeding to death.

Kluge's second theme is difficult even to describe: one always gets something in addition to what one wants, and possibly even gets. And when one gets this something one doesn't at all want but gets all the same, it unfolds its own dynamic.

I would like to contribute an experience that strongly impressed me as a child and has stayed with me. It now serves as a parable for Kluge's point about the unwanted. It was Christmas time in postwar Germany. Word got around that Christmas candles were available at the new Woolworth. However, you could only buy 10 thin candles if, at the same time, you bought two kilograms of foot powder. 20 Christmas candles, the minimum for a proper Christmas tree, meant four kilograms of foot powder — a product unknown to us all. In my mind I still see families struggling with huge bags of foot powder since, in light of the many power cuts, they wanted to provide themselves with candles beyond Christmas. One was not to be had without the other.

The multiplicity in the seemingly definite, the unwanted within the wanted mark for me the intellectual threads running through Kluge's films. They form the backbone for the interpolations, the chains of association, and the many fragmented and implied stories in his films.

In contrast to a Kluge film, we have the conventional feature film that thrives on a lack of ambiguity. For the benefit of this lack, a simple *mise-en-scène* is created and actors are typecast. One standard statement in traditional narrative film, that mommy loves daddy, and daddy loves his wife, that the children love their parents and the parents their children, is in fact the condition of murder and homicide. Here one lack of ambiguity clashes with another incompatible one. To me, Kluge's films are quite the opposite. He not only makes intellectually anti-dramatic works, but is himself a passionate anti-dramatist. *He* would expose the sentence "I love you" as a compromise among the various strands within one person. The intertitle "Reduction of a Crime by Way of Cooperation" (from *The Power of Emotion* [*Die Macht der Gefühle*, 1983]) seems to me typical of this. In the film *The Assault of the*

*Present on the Rest of Time* [*Der Angriff der Gegenwart auf die übrige Zeit*, 1985]<sup>1</sup>, one man confesses to another that he has married his wife out of politeness. The word “politeness” means more here than the word “love.” On screen, a man who says he is marrying out of politeness may be projecting more of his real feelings to the audience than a man who claims to marry for love. This statement is pleasantly unsentimental and highlights the “gooeyness” normally associated with the word “love.” However, politeness is a word and an idea that eludes drama and thus almost any adaptability to screen. The truth in marrying out of politeness does not easily translate into action. This is why in this, as well as in other of Kluge’s films, explanations and differentiations slip into the voice-over commentary, making them increasingly more important. These commentaries are always spoken by Kluge himself, who always has the last word.

Kluge jumps from point to point. If one thinks that he is setting out to confuse his audience, this is partly true; however, his path to clarity leads through confusion. This creates a dilemma for the viewer. While one can understand why Kluge delivers monologues on communication (one of his major themes), this doesn’t make listening to them any easier. After all, we as viewers are just as complicated as the author. We are slow and need time when confronted with new subjects. We don’t simply want to be overwhelmed by an unfamiliar chaos, but want instead to organize our own. We must protect ourselves from being overwhelmed by a chaos constructed by another even as we are pleased by its presence in the work. We require time to take up unfamiliar trains of thought and more time still to dwell on and to assimilate them. However, we find that Kluge is already on the next train of thought when we have hardly managed to reach the last one. This is, of course, stimulating, intellectually refreshing, and of genuine entertainment value, but it quickly becomes tiring. These mental jumps cause symptoms in the viewer similar to those described in Kluge’s *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*, when a man, in conversation with another man about his wife, says: “I have my way and she gets ill.” Kluge does not give us enough time to distinguish between what he refers to as a “real quarrel” and a “fundamental disagreement” in explaining why the woman becomes ill. In a Kluge film only Kluge speaks to us, controlling both commentary and visual structure. We as

---

1. The American release title of the film is *The Blind Director*.

viewers are allowed neither space nor distance nor time to address the contradictions and objections arising within us in response to his control. The protest against the “too much” in Kluge’s films is the equivalent of the above-mentioned foot powder. In this case the Christmas candles represent the liberating thought combinations which we get only when we give ourselves over without mercy to his chains of associations. Despite the openness of Kluge’s form we are almost hermetically caught up in it. This in itself is significant. Ensnared as we are in his thinking, problems arise when we find ourselves disagreeing or at odds with Kluge’s constructions. We must then find a way to intervene.

Alexander Kluge and I met over a “real quarrel.” In 1974-75, I wrote a scathing critique of his film *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* [*Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin*, 1973] for the journal *Frauen und Film*. I reproached him with the fact that his protagonist, contrary to his intentions, was once again nothing but a patriarchal projection. Today, with more information, I am better able to express this feeling that has never left me, not even in watching his later films. After this quarrel, we became friends and my criticism became less free — pushed, as it were, somewhat into the background. I was taken in by Kluge’s charm, his intelligence, as well as his wit (which to me is irresistible); by his ability to correlate unusual facts, one with the other; and by his generosity. His films give me so much that I am well able to push aside for quite some time whatever I do not want from them. Nonetheless, I discovered that his anti-drama is a form — his form of kindness. Relinquishing drama and opening up his films to ambiguity and multiplicity, Kluge’s form of kindness is something like advice designed to wipe out definite occasions for destruction and even the desire for destruction.

Kluge’s patriarchal viewpoint, as I interpret it, is the object of the dispute between us. However, what actually takes place is more like a continuous “non-dispute.” It is something that I can best describe using the words that Kluge employs in the above-mentioned conversation between two men in *The Assault of the Present*:

GERLACH: Something’s wrong with your argument.

BEHREND: That was no argument, but a process. Step by step.

GERLACH: Due to disagreement?

BEHREND: Due to fundamental disagreement.

GERLACH: Who loses the quarrel?

BEHREND: The two of us, always. *I* have my way and *she* gets ill.

GERLACH: And it can't go on like that?

BEHREND: Sure, why not.

Social conditions aren't such that *she* could get her way and *he* would get ill. Nor would it improve matters; it would however, change the pattern. Despite his ability to associate, Kluge simply doesn't think of asking himself why it is always only she who gets ill.

Quarreling is difficult in any case, particularly with people one likes a lot. In this connection I would like to tell a story that continually repeats itself everywhere, causing fatigue and querulousness in those who tell it because they are aware that nothing much will change.

A few weeks ago on German television there was a roundtable discussion on the possible pardon of two former terrorists by the President of the Federal Republic. Six men and one woman participated; three of the men were strongly against the pardon, three were for it. The woman and one of the men, former members of the RAF terrorist group, had spent 15 years in prison. Five of the men were known to the public. Since his release the sixth man had often been interviewed and dealt with the media relatively well. The men were self-assured, calm, and confident. The woman was speaking in public for the first time after 15 years of silence, and she wanted to say something different from the others. She wanted to say that she considered inhuman a system in which thousands of people die of hunger every day and millions are without a roof over their heads. She spoke in a shrill voice with a justified fear of being interrupted. Needless to say, she did not make a favorable impression. Sitting all hunched up in her chair, the woman got on everyone's nerves. Her eyes were filled with tears, for which she tried to compensate by occasional hysterical giggling. She did not have the charm of youth. For the others, particularly for those who wanted to help her, she was an embarrassment. The three who wanted to "help" did not give her the space in which she could quietly express herself, but instead interpreted her statements. They smoothed over her hard words. They soothingly intervened and explained to the other three men that the woman actually was not as bad as the impression she was projecting would suggest. Paralyzed and silent, the woman sat there, one meter removed from the others who interpreted or maliciously attacked her. It was a lesson in discussion-terrorism.

In Kluge's films, women are treated in a similar, although somewhat more moderate way. While Kluge's landscape is filled with women, the question always arises: what are they allowed to do? Examples from

*The Patriot* [*Die Patriotin*, 1979] and *The Assault of the Present* illustrate this point.

*The Patriot* begins with a title which tells us that Hannelore Hoger plays the role of history teacher Gabi Teichert. We see her in a close-up. Her part is not defined by her, but for her by the voice-over commentary: "Gabi Teichert, history teacher in Hesse, is a patriot, that is, she sympathizes with all the dead of the nation." A sequence dealing with those dead follows: we see a battlefield of the distant past, and war materials of the last world war. Then a two-word intertitle appears in capital letters: THE KNEE. This title is accompanied by Kluge's voice reciting Christian Morgenstern's poem about the lonely knee running around the world. A montage section follows, recalling war through repeated images of soldiers, male choirs, graves, and buildings. Then comes a long monologue. The knee is given a voice lent by Kluge, the narrator. All doubts are removed; after all, the knee does talk.

The knee frequently expresses itself during the film in extraordinarily long, uninterrupted passages. The protagonist Gabi Teichert, however, is pieced together through commentaries and only rarely gets a chance to speak herself. When she does open her mouth, she either reads texts by others or attempts to reconstruct the writings of others, such as *Ode To Joy* (Schiller's poem which Beethoven set to music). Or, she refuses to speak because she is tired. The only real initiative she displays is to urge delegates during a political party convention to change their policies so that she will have better teaching material. After all, who doesn't want political change and "better materials"? Women and small children can make these demands in all naiveté and innocence. Yet men can laugh and calmly return to their normal business after a speech such as Gabi Teichert's, for the demands of this woman patriot are so vague and out of place as not to be taken seriously.

Gabi Teichert, in search of another German history, may roam about the woods with a shovel and dig in the earth, bore a hole into books and saw them up, but she is never allowed to formulate her own questions. She bores, digs, and saws "blindly," as it were. The commentary explains to the audience what she is doing and what she means by her actions. It also defines the meaning of patriot: a person who sympathizes with all the country's dead.

For the past 20 years feminist linguistics, philosophy, history, and analysis have filled volumes telling us that a term like "woman patriot" (*Patriotin*) is not innocent. In a manner of speaking, the very term

“woman patriot” is already a joke. Realistically, a woman patriot doesn’t even exist, because a patriot is really a male who does something for his country. A patriot is a part of the patriarchal. There is an African language in which you cannot say “I’m sleeping” simply because one cannot say this while sleeping. “I’m sleeping” is thus a lie, and there is no grammatical form in this language for the expression. After 20 years of the feminist movement, “woman patriot” is similar to this grammatical impossibility. Whoever uses it, whether male or female, should at least be aware of the extreme irony of the term.

But obviously this is not the case here, where the term is employed in dead earnest. Kluge says that Gabi Teichert sympathizes with all the nation’s dead. If we were to go along with Kluge and accept, for the time being, that she does, then we should actually expect something else from her as a woman. We should expect her to see public battlefields hand-in-hand with other kinds of battlefields. In this way she would retain her perception as a woman. But as the film’s patriot, Gabi Teichert sees only what she is allowed to see by her creator. And that is only what a man sees. Even within Kluge’s logic it is astonishing that she doesn’t attempt to bring together the victims of domestic battles with the pictures of war. Within this logic it is conceivable that her eye might travel across graves where not only men and the carcasses of horses lie, but also, now and then, women who have died in childbirth, of beatings or rape, who were burnt as witches. It might be conceivable that the props Gabi Teichert is handed to bore and saw for the secrets in the books could prompt her to such questions. But this is not the case. The fact is that the lack of such questions is in most cases not perceived as a lack by critics, due to their implicit agreement that it is male perception that is decisive; the absence of a feminine perspective is not even noticed as a lack. Furthermore, Kluge is a master at always choosing women of great cinematographic presence, excellent actresses who can feign an independence they are not really allowed to possess, let alone to act upon, within the context of his films.

Kluge interprets silence, and the actions of his characters that result from silence, as positive. He praises women’s ability to continue to bring together emotional worlds that have been separated, and contends that women have not yet been subdued by the bureaucracy of the world of men. They are made to appear superior to men. Their irrationality is almost a sign of their strength. Furthermore, they should not nag. A woman who nags about the irrationality of Kluge’s female figures is already



half a man, suffering from what has ruined men. For Kluge cannot stand men. Underlying his attitude is a romantic conception of the world, in which women have characteristics men have either lost or never possessed. The idea evolves that women are intact, better suited to clearing away the wreckage caused by men. No doubt there is a wreckage caused by men and no doubt they have lost control of it. As Kluge's thought implies, only women are considered capable of delivering the world. Women are not supposed to reject this benevolence and trust. They are supposed to accept this role gladly, for it increases their worth. In the meantime, never once are they asked whether they want to take on responsibility for the wreckage that has already occurred.

Kluge's *Assault of the Present* offers a second example for examining his particular treatment of women. In the film, a social worker takes an orphaned child with her because she does not want to leave it with a family that she believes incapable of giving it the warmth and attention it needs. The woman, with her "rich emotional life," recognizes what is good for the child. In the past, women were assigned the role of caring for children because men had worthier things to do. Here she takes the child not because she is capable of nothing but childcare. This time she does so because she is the better person, superior to men. Women who laugh at this irony are often rebuked by men who are deeply moved. After all, men now see in films modern versions of skipping out. Since women are better people, children are to stay with them — while men, whose presence is an imposition anyway, can "get lost." Wim Wenders taught this very same lesson in *Paris, Texas*: after the tramp who left his wife and son is fed up again, he takes his child from the foster parents who have reared and learned to love him, and returns him to his natural mother without so much as asking her if she wants the child. Then, once again, he leaves to roam the world, a lonely hero.

At the same time as Kluge attributes value to feminine characteristics that for so long have meant nothing, he also muzzles women. Woman's worth is increased and men continue to wreck the world. The multiplicity and contradictoriness that in theory is granted to men is basically not granted to women. But Kluge slightly conceals this in his films. He tackles subjects from which other filmmakers shrink. The film *The Power of Emotion* contains a strange story about a rape. A woman sits in a car, preparing to commit suicide because her love has left her. She takes pills, and is found by a travelling salesman who makes

her do a couple of exercises to vomit up the toxins. While still unconscious, she is raped by the salesman. A third man watches and informs on the rapist. The ambulance arrives, the woman is saved, and the salesman arrested. During the trial she says to the woman judge: “my lover’s obstinacy and his cunning hurt me more than the action of the accused, which I did not even notice.” The commentator tells us that the judge is out to get rapists, which makes the situation more difficult for the accused, who did, in fact, save the woman’s life.

Kluge here raises a problem very much neglected in the contemporary discussions of rape: many women are better able to take physical rape than psychological hurt from a person close to them. (I also take up this subject in my film *The Trouble With Love* [*Der Beginn aller Schrecken ist Liebe*, 1983]). In the film the woman has the opportunity to describe her non-feeling towards her rapist. It is, however, strange that the feelings of the rapist are not investigated. After all, the question is: what makes this man take possession of an unconscious, temporarily dead woman? One should enquire whether the well-known saying “only a dead Indian is a good Indian” applies here, in a more subtle form, to women. Although one cannot yet really do without women (as test-tube babies are not yet the rule), one can still kill them symbolically. A lot of hidden emotion must lie behind the man’s action; otherwise he would not have sexual feelings without communication. The salesman makes the woman vomit. He walks her up and down, gets her back on her feet so that she is fit enough to be used by him. He does not protect her, but only himself so that he cannot be called a murderer. Had he not been observed and informed on by a third person, he probably wouldn’t have taken the woman to the hospital.

From the commentator we hear the fear that the man may get an unsympathetic trial judge, while from the woman during the trial we hear an emotional statement that the pain of being rejected by her lover is greater than that of a rape of which she was unaware — a statement that serves to excuse the accused. From the man we never learn why women in an unconscious state are attractive to him, and obviously to other men as well — think of the many rape victims of war and torture.

Along the lines of “silent woman, unconscious woman,” I would like to end by turning to a seemingly harmless concept. At first glance, the meaning of the title *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* is understandable, making clear that we live in times in which it is possible to erase the future and thus the past as well. The title contains the

knowledge of possible destruction and shuns the optimism most films are, or have to be, devoted to. However, at a closer look the title is not all that precise. Or differently put: it is less precise than I would expect Kluge to be. For who is assaulting whom? Is it really the present? The title acts as if it were a dispute on grammar. The possibility of a future is really questioned. But not by "the present." The products capable of destroying life (poisons, armaments, gene manipulation, etc.) are in the hands of people who can be named: the ruling white minority. They are in the hands of the ruling white men in the world's industrial nations, who have the power to blow up the world around us. These men do not ask whether this is also in the interest of their black, yellow, red, or other-colored "fellow" humans. Nor do they ask white women whether it is in their interests. The white woman need only ask herself whether she is prepared to continue to contribute to the success of destruction. The woman patriot could have asked that also, and she would have had *her* question, which would have given meaning to the sawing of the book.

Correctly put, the title should be *The Assault by White Man on the Rest of Time*. That would be just as concrete and naive as, interpreted in the best sense, the women in Kluge's films are naive. But since Kluge's title is not this but what it is, it perhaps best proves his thesis that our emotions are locked in various stages of development. The title *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*, as well as Kluge's general attitude towards women, have just arrived in the era of pre-Copernican thought, in the year 1529. Before Copernicus's discovery, the sun still revolved around the earth and the male was in God's image, the focus of creation; women, trees, whales, and seals were subject to man, to whom every perspective led. A terrible notion rears its head: if Kluge, the male avant-garde artist, has only arrived at the year 1529 in his attitude towards women, in what century have other males arrived?

*Translated by Regina Cornwell*

## *Femininity as Productive Force: Kluge and Critical Theory*

Heide Schlüpmann

When Alexander Kluge introduced the concept of a “female productive force” into the debates of the women’s movement in the mid-1970s, it was as part of a longstanding discourse on the “public sphere” (*Öffentlichkeit*). The topos of the public sphere had been a central concern to the left in the Federal Republic — from the anti-nuclear protests (*Ostermarschierer*) of the 1950s and 1960s to the student movement. Whatever their particular causes might be, these movements invoked the Enlightenment tradition of Western democracies which the Federal Republic purported to have joined. As an “extraparliamentary opposition,” the left claimed to promote the democratic process — the “coming-of-age” of the German people — in contrast to the continuing hold of the National Socialist past over political, legal, social, and cultural institutions. Jürgen Habermas’s influential study, *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere*, epitomized this critical interest in the liberal tradition of the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> First published in 1962, the book went through three reprints before the end of the 1960s.

The fact that factions of the left went underground as the 1960s came to an end had a lot to do with a disillusionment, a loss of confidence vis-à-vis the emancipatory substance of the bourgeois public sphere. At the same time, this loss of confidence defined the fragmentation of the protest movement into the so-called “new social movements.” Despairing of the promise of universality inherent in the formal principles of classical

---

1. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied/Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1962).

democracy, the protest movements turned to the politics of causes — and paid the cost of mere particularity. In contrast, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge made one more attempt in the early 1970s to resurrect the project of the public sphere on Marxist premises. In their *Public Sphere and Experience* [*Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*, 1972], Negt and Kluge maintain an emphatic notion of the public sphere by surrendering its bourgeois form. With their concept of an oppositional or “counter public sphere” (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*), they try to extricate the public sphere from formalism and the dichotomy of public and private. Instead, they attempt to ground the public sphere in material relations, defined by economic production on the one hand, and by human experience on the other. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Negt and Kluge’s book could figure in the 1970s as a theoretical umbrella under which a left disintegrating into individuals, into ecological, peace, and women’s movements, could once more imagine itself unified.

For the women’s movement in particular, *Public Sphere and Experience* presented a theoretical framework within which a continuing and fundamental alliance of political struggle could be reflected upon — despite the political exodus of women from a left that had once been united in protest. The considerable impact of the book when it first appeared can be explained by looking at the problem that confronted the women’s movement at the time: how to reconcile fundamentalist tendencies such as “new motherhood” and the cult of matriarchy with the leftist notion of politics to which the movement had previously been committed. Today, this notion of a unified politics has long since disintegrated.

The attempt to contextualize feminist politics under the umbrella of a counter public sphere, however, fell short of the specific impulse of that politics. The women’s movement cannot be subsumed under the “new social movements,” as Habermas would have it, nor does it have its political foundation in any kind of “femininity.”<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is founded in opposition to the gender hierarchy inscribed in the bourgeois public sphere. Re-reading *Public Sphere and Experience* today, it is amazing how its critique of the bourgeois concept of the public sphere aptly analyzes the separation of public and private, but misses the central question of

---

2. Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns: Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981) 178. On Habermas’s discussion of the women’s movement within the framework of new social movements, see also Silvia Kontos, “Modernisierung der Subsumtionspolitik? Die Frauenbewegung in den Theorien neuer sozialer Bewegungen,” *Feministische Studien* 2 (1986): 34-49.

gender difference. Negt and Kluge's book played into the need for unity in the women's movement when it ascertained a sense of coherence within the spectrum of the "post-60s" movements. But it also contributed to a tendency to minimalize the all-round latent conflicts, and thus to evade a political discourse on sexual politics which would have presented a challenge not only to the old left and the new movements, but to the proponents of matriarchy as well.

Kluge subsequently elaborated the concept of femininity, which plays only a minor role in *Public Sphere and Experience*, in his 1975 book *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave: Toward A Realistic Method* [*Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin: Zur realistischen Methode*]. This discussion is not only indebted to Marxian social theory, but also documents Kluge's relationship to Critical Theory, and to Max Horkheimer in particular. My intention in the following discussion will be to throw light on Kluge's relationship to Critical Theory by examining his emancipatory concept of femininity as productive force. In doing so, I will refer only to Kluge's theoretical writings and not to his stories or films, in which he presents this thematic more complexly. While Kluge foregrounds the female protagonists in his films, women play a much more peripheral role in his theoretical writings, with the exception of *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*.

By Kluge's own admission, this book developed as a reaction to criticism from the women's movement which the film of the same name provoked upon its release. Here as well, however, his theoretical coming-to-terms with the situation of women and the problem of emancipation occupies a comparatively narrow space: along with reprints of a list of texts and script outlines, the book includes an elucidation of "Roswitha's agenda" (Roswitha is the film's protagonist) as a response to the criticism leveled against the film. In this section, Kluge comments on, among other things, the film's abortion scene. Among the "Comments on the Oppositional Concept of Realism" that comprise the addenda to the film section, one text addresses the topic of the "Interest in the Woman's Film: Context of the Social Mode of Production." Nonetheless, the effect of this work on the women's movement at the time — at least insofar as this effect was mirrored in the cultural and academic women's scene — was great: it became a canonical text for reading and discussion groups.

A passage from *Public Sphere and Experience* forms the point of departure for the discussion of femininity as "productive force" in *Part-Time*

*Work of a Domestic Slave*. This passage consists of excerpts from the section on “Primary Socialization as the Formation of the Experiential Capacity.” It is here in a footnote that the concept of a female productive force first appears in Kluge’s work. This concept is taken up again in the early 1980s in *History and Obstinacy/Autonomy* [*Geschichte und Eigensinn*, 1981], also co-authored by Kluge and Negt, in a section entitled “The part played by female labor in human production.” This section primarily documents the fact that the authors have incorporated the work of Claude Meillassoux and with him are expanding the Marxist horizon of historical observation. I will not pursue this point in any greater detail here.

In examining the positions Kluge outlines on the “women’s question” in these pieces, the following points stand out:

1. Kluge never differentiates between femininity and “motherliness” (*Mütterlichkeit*); he considers the entire problematic of feminine productive force and social existence only from the perspective of the mother/child relationship.
2. Kluge subordinates the question of women’s emancipation to the Marxist categories of productive force, relations of production, and class.
3. Femininity and sexual difference are never mentioned in discussions of the public sphere, the productive force of fantasy, or the productive force of the spectator in cinema.
4. Kluge often emphasizes that the categories “feminine” and “masculine” do not ultimately classify persons, but rather contribute, in accordance with a natural bisexuality, to an analysis of qualities that are present in varying degrees in every human being.

I would like to quote the footnote from *Public Sphere and Experience* on femininity as productive force in its entirety, because it delineates the scope of Kluge’s theorizing on the “women’s question”:

In the forms of interaction that define the successful mother/child relationship, a mode of production is maintained which can be viewed as the residue of a matriarchal means of production. It is incorrect to attribute it solely to hormonal processes, to a “maternal instinct” in merely biological terms. It is much more the case here that a female means of production which is aimed at the satisfaction of needs (“handling the child in accordance with its capacities, satisfying its needs at any cost”) is vindicated in opposition to the patriarchal and capitalistic world surrounding it. This mode of production is absolutely superior to the mechanisms of that world, but is isolated from the degree of socialization of

overall social communication. *The superiority of this mode of production legitimates women's claim to emancipation*: it makes use, however oppressed and deformed, of experiences within a superior mode of production if only it is able to grasp society in its entirety.<sup>3</sup>

Kluge appropriates here the fundamental ideas of Max Horkheimer's 1936 essay "Authority and Family" — an essay which Kluge also cites in his text vis-à-vis the question of the "double character" of the family.<sup>4</sup> According to Horkheimer, the bourgeois family is not only the agent of submission to social domination, but it is also the site of humanity, even containing the potential for resistance. It owes this emancipatory potential to the work of women, for it still contains a residue of matriarchy. Where Horkheimer — along with Hegel — speaks of the "principle of love for the whole human being," Kluge speaks of the mode of production that is aimed at the satisfaction of needs by means of concrete, actual use values.

Both Horkheimer and Kluge see the feminine potential in the family as always already restricted, above all because the woman is exclusively fixated on the welfare of the family members, which is politically conservative in its effect. In addition, Horkheimer refers to the "chains" of monogamy, and to the fact that even in the — to quote Kluge — "successful mother/child relationship," the child never learns to see the mother (i.e., the woman) in her concrete existence as a social and sexual being. Kluge does not extrapolate a reality for women other than that of the mother/child relationship. He only points out the "double oppression" that the woman experiences within this relationship: her general social oppression, and the oppression specific to her existence for the child.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of these limitations, however, Horkheimer and Kluge maintain that the feminine potential of the family allows it to transcend its status quo, which Horkheimer designates as the "inadequacy of love in its bourgeois form" — a topos of bourgeois literature.<sup>6</sup> Kluge, on

---

3. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971) 50; emphasis added.

4. Max Horkheimer, "Autorität und Familie," *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Paris, 1936); also in Horkheimer, *Kritische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968) 277-360.

5. Cf. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 1981) 312.

6. Horkheimer 357.



the contrary, perceives a discrepancy between the superiority of the feminine mode of production and the relations of production which separate this production from the public sphere as something “private” and prevent it from becoming socially valid.

It is apparent, however, that Horkheimer’s concept of the feminine potential within the family is at base affirmative, not critical; he derives the utopian element from a projection. The fact that woman must maintain a different, retarded, earlier level of socialization within capitalism, in that she produces and reproduces the requisite humanity, can be read in the philosophy of the bourgeois revolution (Rousseau). Horkheimer celebrates, in its disintegration, nothing more than the function imposed on woman in the establishment of the bourgeois family.

In the writings of Rousseau we see in beautiful clarity how little matriarchy and how much patriarchal violence determine this role. Rousseau’s philosophy allows us to look further into the organizational structure of the family and capitalist society (the private and public sphere) than does Horkheimer’s piece on authority and the family. Rousseau’s writings make clear that the discussion of the emancipatory potential of femininity cannot begin with the woman’s role in the family, for the actual problematic is located prior to this, in the appropriation of the sexual relationship and female sexuality by society. The separated spheres of the private and the public, without which bourgeois society would not be able to function, are constituted by means of the functionalization of the sexual relationship, which is thus alienated from its own reality. Specifically, female sexuality, bound by its obligation to reproduce the species and to the male capacity for love, is withheld from woman’s experience.

Horkheimer’s emphasis on the “erotic rebellion” intimates that what is really at stake is the emancipation of relations between the sexes and the emancipation of woman as a subject and a sexual being. But only a perspective transcending the family — a perspective Horkheimer never reaches — could differentiate this from a romanticizing of the capacity for love attributed to women. Kluge apparently avoids this romanticization by eliding the erotic altogether, speaking instead in a sobering tone of a female productive force that stands in opposition to relations of production. In so doing, he on the one hand comes closer to the problem of the separation of the private and public, but on the other overlays this separation with Marxist categories. In the entire *Public Sphere and Experience*, Kluge fails to mention sexual difference,

femininity, or the emancipation of woman except in the footnote cited above, which belongs to the chapter on socialization within the bourgeois family. Yet he manages to devote one section of comments in the addenda to the public sphere of children.

What Kluge (along with Negt) neglects in *Public Sphere and Experience*, namely, any reflection on the question of woman's emancipation, he intends to address in *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*. Within the framework of this emancipatory interest, he attempts to interpret the contradiction between the private and public in the lives of women as one between female productive force and patriarchal/capitalistic relations of production. Women possess the most important object of production in society: the commodity of labor power. Their laboring to produce human beings, not things, thus always retains a "human response": "The productive force of women so determined would have to be emancipatory in and of itself."<sup>7</sup> Why does it not, then, have an emancipatory effect? Kluge provides the answer: "The reason for this is the relation of production, within which the productive forces of woman are expressed. Her productive force is defeated by its privateness."<sup>8</sup> What this means is that women develop strengths which are considered weaknesses by the dominant reality principle. While the critics, and women especially, called Kluge to task for the simple-mindedness of the political actions represented by Roswitha Bronski, the protagonist of the film *The Occasional Work of a Domestic Slave*, he firmly maintained that he had been concerned with representing specifically female capacities.

According to Kluge, the contradiction between woman's productive force and the relations of production has assumed in current society the form of a contradiction between actual strengths and the public recognition of these strengths as weaknesses. Thus Kluge elevates the theme of emancipation from the narrower Marxist model of revolutionary change and ultimately marks it as a question of the modification of the public sphere. In other words, women will break free of their conservatism when they develop an altered consciousness of themselves which refuses to validate the dominant reality principle.

Kluge has described this problem elsewhere in *Public Sphere and Experience* as one of the productive force of fantasy.<sup>9</sup> Fantasy — "in reality

---

7. Alexander Kluge, *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin: Zur realistischen Methode* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975) 185.

8. Kluge, *Gelegenheitsarbeit* 184.

9. Negt and Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit* 66-74; this section has been translated by Peter Labanyi; in *October* 46 (Fall 1988): 76-80.

the most important form of human labor”<sup>10</sup> — exists in current society only in split parts. One part is functionalized as a bonding medium to fixate human beings on the status quo as “the best of all possible worlds”; the other part is excluded as unrealistic, discredited as “mere fantasy,” and permitted only within the reserves of “art, beautiful feelings [*schöne Gefühle*], the family, leisure time.”<sup>11</sup> Fantasy is not available for use as a mediating force between the drive structure, consciousness, and the external world. Kluge draws a connection between the problem of a “confined” (*kaserniert*) fantasy and the emancipation of the worker, but fails to draw a similar connection between confined fantasy and the emancipation of women. Indeed, considering that his concept of fantasy is grounded in psychoanalysis, it is noteworthy that the reality of sex and sexual difference has eluded him.

The thematic of the “interest in women’s films” that Kluge finally promises to address in one of his comments on the “antagonistic concept of realism” (in *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*) circumscribes precisely this problem of how to liberate the force of fantasy of women and about women. However, our expectations are disappointed: Kluge again returns to on the total “context of social modes of production.” He hopes for a “transformation of social relations” based on the interaction between the maternal mode of production and that of workers, farmers, etc. This hope also results in the demand, expressed in a footnote, for cooperation between filmmakers, political film organizations, and women’s groups. There is nothing else in this section directly related to the “interest in women’s films.” Kluge rightly speculates that “any one of these modes of production, any class in itself, does not possess the key for its emancipation,” but nonetheless, he again bypasses the question of the emancipation of woman’s (self-) consciousness and the role played by cinema in this process.

In what follows, he analyzes the “blockages” of the emancipatory forces of women who “don’t work for wages.” Women who are active in the work force are never specifically discussed in this context since, as posited in *History and Obstinacy/Autonomy*, job training is not “class-specific to the female class.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the representation of these

---

10. Alexander Kluge, “Marktstruktur und Bedürfnis,” in Michael Dost, Florian Hopf, and Alexander Kluge, *Filmwirtschaft in der BRD und in Europa: Götterdämmerung in Raten* (Munich: Hanser, 1973) 75.

11. Kluge, “Marktstruktur” 75.

12. Negt and Kluge, *Geschichte* 320.

blockages does sound plausible if one proceeds from the assumption that woman represents a productive social force only as a mother. Only then does it seem reasonable that she must maintain her “sub-dominant context of production and meaning,” even if this “maintenance in turn is the condition of possibility for the oppression of women.”<sup>13</sup> And the list of oppressions that Kluge draws up — in the first place, her oppression by man — is a long one. Kluge analyses these point by point, focusing on possible counterforces which form within them, in order to return in the end to his point of departure: the oppositional potential of women is blocked in such a way that it can be organized only in interaction with other modes of production:

the degree of complexity of the oppositional formation against oppression is also there in all other modes of production; that of the intelligence, that of the small businessman, those of the workers, the farmers. But because of the multiple program of the productive force of women and their oppression, this is the most pointed provocation for a realist methodology. And, therefore, for the thesis that all of the various oppressed social modes of production alternately learn from each other.<sup>14</sup>

Thus it becomes increasingly obvious that what matters for Kluge in women’s films is not women’s cinema in general, but what the vision of femininity can contribute to his own work.

Moreover, the ability to represent femininity in Kluge’s films seems to be blocked primarily by the fact that he reduces the question of the emancipation of women to the figure of woman herself, to the figure of the multiply oppressed woman, in order to subsequently bring her into his discussion of the problem of the emancipation of the other “classes.” In other words, he separates the theme of femininity as a productive force from that of the relationship between the sexes, and that of sexuality within society, and never reunites them. However, in this connection lies the element common to a critique of femininity and to a critique of the bourgeois public sphere (in its separation of the private and public), as well as to a critique of a confined fantasy and mainstream cinema.

The fact that the problem of femininity also pertains to men is at once acknowledged and closed off by Kluge with his reference to bisexuality.

---

13. Kluge, *Gelegenheitsarbeit* 229.

14. Kluge, *Gelegenheitsarbeit* 241.

Although socially determined, femininity and masculinity have become second nature to such an extent that the discussion of interchangeable attributes only veils the social violence that forces individuals to identify with gender positions. It is not Horkheimer's essay on authority and the family, but the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that contains the most advanced insights of Critical Theory into the fusion of gender and power, displaying the oppression of woman in its truly abysmal dimension.<sup>15</sup> *Dialectic of Enlightenment* maps out how the bourgeois project of emancipation from nature, realized as the domination of nature, necessarily fails. Thus the idea of the emancipation from nature was not resolved and, under the sign of enlightenment, was also taken up by the radical women's movement — together with the insight, however, that it can only succeed if it is simultaneously the emancipation of nature. But, for women, emancipation from nature means not allowing themselves to be defined in terms of motherhood, even in the form of "social motherhood."

In conclusion, Kluge's reception of Critical Theory (at least as it pertains to the concept of femininity as productive force) is one-sided; it is based on those passages in Horkheimer's "Authority and the Family" which look back nostalgically to the early bourgeoisie. This corresponds to Kluge's concept, expressed in relation to other areas such as television, of releasing productive forces through the reactivation of qualities existing during the manufactory stage of capitalism. Kluge completely disregards the dimension of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Critical Theory, and instead once again affirms Marxist categories at the expense of the Nietzschean influence in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer. Perhaps it is precisely this relationship with Critical Theory that allows Kluge the filmmaker to remain immune to the rigorous tendencies in Adorno's critique of the "culture industry." Instead, Kluge contrasts these tendencies with the memory of an early, precapitalist cinema, under the cover of which he is able, with feigned naiveté, to move productively within the media of film and television.

*Translated by Jamie Owen Daniel*

---

15. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1969).

# *Alexander Kluge's Phantom of the Opera*

Gertrud Koch

Alexander Kluge attaches much greater importance to music as an autonomous aesthetic element in the overall montage construction than do other directors who work predominantly with the possibilities afforded by montage. Operatic motifs played through many of Kluge's films well before opera itself became a motif. Verdi, Bizet and Wagner, dismantled into minimalized parts, run like a thread of sound fragments through his films, as do popular hits, male choirs, humming, warbling, tangos, marches and other musical material. The musical motifs suffer the same fate at Kluge's hands as do the images and the script: they are a collector's spoils, often stripped down so as to bear the burden of the visual and verbal material. In his printed work, musical motifs tend to crop up in the form of sheet music, scraps of larger scores. Thus, the stories in the *Learning Processes with a Deadly Ending* finish with a Schubert lied printed white on black.<sup>1</sup> It contains the message that researchers have burned into the forests of a distant planet with chemical weapons and can now decipher with a telescope: l'Aurore, the first flush of dawn, the hymn of the planet of the same name. For Kluge, musical motifs are not illustrative conveyors of atmosphere; rather, like words and images, they are signs of a social experience that has congealed in the subject.

## *Spitzname: Carmen*

This is the title of a short story in Kluge's book, *The Power of Emotion*. The story concerns Friedrich Karmecke, chief editor of the politics

---

1. Alexander Kluge, *Lernprozesse mit tödlichem Ausgang* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), last page (n.p.).

desk of a West German radio station, who finds that he is to be subjected to a security check that will include his private life:

On various separate occasions, Karmecke had in his younger years repeatedly and in different locations engaged in extramarital sexual congress, which this morning he could remember only sleepily. All these experiences together amount to his *Carmen*. It is his experience of *venturing beyond the limits*; the rest is office.<sup>2</sup>

*Carmen* as shorthand for exogamy. In his famous essay on Bizet's *Carmen*, Adorno offers an interpretation of what in Kluge's work functions to condense the concrete experience of a definite, if ideal-typical case. Adorno views it as the universal lapse of sexuality into a natural state, in the course of which sexuality gains its freedom by refusing to conform to societal norms: "The fate that holds sway there and that holds up nothing human is sexuality itself, in its ante-diluvian and pre-intellectual form."<sup>3</sup> Where Adorno follows in Nietzsche's tracks, Kluge clearly injects practical meaning. The opera, above all its music, which for Adorno still contained something of the history of human beings as natural beings (as he sees being performed in *Carmen*) is translated back in Kluge's short prose piece into the opposition between "venturing beyond the limits" [*Grenzüberschreitung*] and "office" [*Amt*]. Sexuality becomes "extramarital intercourse," and the exogamy of the 19th century opera world is transformed into an imperial transgression, a "venturing beyond the limits."

"*Carmen* is also one of those operas about exogamy, a series which extends from *The Jewess* and *L'Africaine* via *Aida*, *Lamké* and *Butterfly* to Berg's *Lulu* — eulogies to an escape from civilization."<sup>4</sup> Kluge refers to this passage by Adorno in one of his television broadcasts which focuses on presenting the history of opera as a sort of social history of human emotions. In these brief thirty-minute montage films produced for the private networks, Kluge proposes a different way of reading opera history and the stories that operas tell. While "Spitzname: *Carmen*" summarizes the referential presence of opera mythology in the everyday interpretations of its recipients, his opera clips move along a variety of paths

2. Kluge, *Die Macht der Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 1984) 346.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, "Fantasia sopra *Carmen*," *Gesammelte Schriften* 16 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 305.

4. Adorno 299.

to approach the main goal: the disarming of the fifth act, in which the dramaturgy of traditional opera was wont to have the heroine die.

One of these television experiments bears the title *L'Africaine; or, Love with a Fatal Ending*. In it Kluge has Sabine Trooger, the announcer, say the following:

A famous film director, returning from work on location abroad, and at a moment when his life's work seemed threatened, decided to father 110 children in the Third World in order to, as it were, have a life after death. At the low cost levels of those nations. The attempt failed.

This corresponds to a key notion underlying numerous operas of the 19th century. Western men become infatuated with exotic foreign women, as the analyst Theodor W. Adorno puts it, seduce them and then return home. The exotic women die of such love. The operas insist on this fatal conclusion. Adorno mentions Halévy's *The Jewess*, Giacomo Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, Giacomo Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, Richard Wagner's Kundry [from *Parsifal*], the exotic *Carmen*, the Inca son in *The Power of Fate*, the earth spirit *Lulu*. We would add: the slave Helen in *Quo vadis*, *Gone with the Wind*, *The Ice-cold Angel*, etc., etc.<sup>5</sup>

This sequence, which follows on the heels of the passage from Adorno already cited, moves smoothly from the 19th-century opera into 20th-century film history, specifically from mammoth spectacles via the melodrama to the French film noir of the sixties. One of the well-known theses in Adorno and Horkheimer's chapter on the "Culture Industry" in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that Wagner's notion of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* was at once consummated and destroyed by film — and it is this thesis that Kluge invokes here.

Apart from this trajectory, however, Kluge believes that opera and film correspond to different needs: whereas opera invokes the Feeling for irreparable tragedy, the majority of films imagine themselves obliged to offer a happy ending. In both cases, love gets left somewhere on the way-side. Kluge by no means accepts the compulsion to closure which links opera with narrative film in dramaturgical terms. As in his stories and films, Kluge approaches opera by means of a consistent policy of minimalization and atomization. He selects details from the plot or the

---

5. Kluge, "Ein imaginärer Opernführer," *Jahrbuch der Hamburgischen Staatsoper 1984-88* (Hamburg: Intendanz der Hamburgischen Staatsoper, 1988) 15.



music and attempts to radicalize their intrinsic logic to such a point that they ultimately explode the overall architecture of the closed artwork.

He thus takes stock of *Madame Butterfly*, a colonialist drama, by means of images of waiting, images that culminate for Madame Butterfly in her death. Using black-and-white footage — with details from Japanese gardens which he projects onto a stage in an empty theatre — he stresses precisely the mythologized signs of an essentialized, Western “Japan”: the bamboo cane, the graphic lines of twigs, Mount Fuji, etc. Yet at the same time, this limited quality of the signs implies the death of the person: exoticism as a fantasy which is carefully sheltered from real life — a life of appearances.

Kluge sums up the items in his “imaginary guide to the opera” in a manner reminiscent of ideology critique, though he gives them a different direction: rather than unmasking mythologies as delusions, he assumes the attitude of a quasi-naïve observer. The latter poses tough questions as to the probability of that which opera’s illusionary space evokes. Thus Kluge allows his imagination free rein with respect to the protagonists’ motivations: why does all action at a particular juncture in an opera appear to be connected to a powerfully effective destiny? or what are the blindspots in the actors’ minds and motives which result in their becoming unpredictable sexual offenders at the height of enlightened civil society?

A ten-page text in *The Power of Emotion* entitled “The Police Chief is Dead . . .” is undoubtedly the most bizarre of Kluge’s supplemented opera plots. In this text, he narrates Scarpia’s murder by Tosca from a wide variety of perspectives which, on the one hand, trace the inevitability of his death with painstaking attention to detail and, on the other, create an altogether unusual picture of Police Chief Scarpia. Kluge’s interpretation takes as its leitmotif the musical motif that Puccini had assigned to the police chief’s appearance:

Three thunderous harmonies from the orchestra (in B-major, A-major and E-major, loud, almost brutal) form the leitmotif for the blackguard Scarpia, somewhat preempting the violent action to follow. (The conductor Ferenc Fricsay believed he could recognize in them the “blinding glare of the midday sun in Rome.”)<sup>6</sup>

Kluge’s passage on “Scarpia as male body” seems to me significant with

---

6. Kluge, *Die Macht der Gefühle* 446; trans. in this issue.

respect to the qualities and idiosyncracies of Kluge's oeuvre. He may admittedly share the opinion that opera concerns itself with emotive states and worlds that have been suppressed by civilization and which simultaneously create and express "discontent in culture"; yet in the strictest sense he would reject the antipodal division of nature and history, of drives and culture. Allow me to quote at somewhat greater length from this passage, on which I shall later elaborate. The text begins with a description of Scarpia's physical condition before getting up in the morning, namely that he sullenly and unwillingly finds himself faced by the fact that on this particular morning his erect penis confronts him as if it were something foreign and troublesome, "but he cannot cut it off in the same way that he can close one of his security departments or give or forget orders to subordinates."<sup>7</sup> In order to extricate himself from the predicament he thinks of blackmailing Tosca, clearly not with any pornographic intent but so as to reestablish the harmony between himself and his own social context by thinking of the social degradation of this divine singer. "The next day," Kluge's text returns to the passage in the opera:

The next day, however, what he with good reason had denied himself gets in his way once he has Tosca locked in his official chambers and talks to her insistently, which brings him in physical proximity to her. She kneels before him so that he, circling around her in this divine posture, ends up behind her back [. . .]. He shoves her slightly so that she falls forward into a position the spies had occasionally embroidered upon in their reports and which he, had his trousers been unbuttoned in the meanwhile and had she remained still, could have exploited in a primordial manner as if he were a goat or a hare, or a French soldier during a lull in the fighting and so forth. Instead, the penis stuck in his trousers becomes smeared at the tip with a fluid — not sperm and not urine, rather a lubricant; but it fails to make anything glide through the silk trousers, which are difficult to open, so that Scarpia, annoyed with this brazen autonomy, no longer feels the diva's magic and loses his desire as if it miscarried. As a consequence, he proceeds with the blackmail, this deceitful seduction — not because he hopes to gain some erotic advantage over the diva, but rather in order to get his mind to prevail, which, since the early morning, had been at odds with his penis.<sup>8</sup>

What is remarkable in this fantasy which supplements the established

---

7. *Macht* 450.

8. *Macht* 451.

lished plot of the opera is the way the description is almost scientific, drawing its comic effect from the familiar device of the failure of mechanical processes. With an eye trained in experimentation in the natural sciences, the painstaking method of the empirical description of physical-material processes in the case of this "male body" corresponds to a certain deictic tendency in Kluge's writings, an inclination to use exemplary demonstration which is depicted and/or surfaces in his films as the commentator's voice, as intertitles, as statements by experts and other devices. The assertion implicit in the opera, that it is concerned with passions and all its various forms, that Scarpia desires Tosca, the divine singer, and that the opera in turn claims that she is desirable — it is this precondition which allows opera dramaturgy to switch on "a power station of emotions" that Kluge subjects to a dialectical critique. He takes the assertion that opera has to do with passions seriously in order to then, in a second step, define that passion in terms of its sexual core, quite in keeping with Adorno's intentions. Where he does so, however, he also shows — not without a mocking undertone — that the passion opera demands is always one that has been deprived of precisely this sexual core. Scarpia's desire for Tosca is the sheer will to power: the chief of police blackmails the divine diva; sexuality only disturbed him in the act. At the moment, however, when the passion is robbed of its sexual core, it collapses by itself. Hence Kluge summarizes:

This is how he died, without having the original reason at his disposal that outside observers would have ascribed to his actions. Even without Tosca's knife, he would not have reached his objective in the affair. In fact, it was never actually *his* objective, rather there were *objectives* in the *affair* that disintegrated into different situations as soon as they neared practical realization. He had already felt the catastrophe coming that morning. If he hadn't died in this adventure, he would have disgraced himself with impotence.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Kluge does not limit himself to reconstructing and supplementing the internal mechanisms of external, theatrical events from the perspective of an omniscient observer and demiurge: he also invents unrealized possibilities for the characters involved in the action. Opera thus becomes for him a pile of ruins left by the fatalistic course of the story, which he sets out to rearrange. Once exploded into atomized

---

9. *Macht* 451f.

details — ruins — the power of fate dissipates, as does the efficacy of any narrative closure. He can now hunt for ways-out and give recommendations. Like the *deus ex machina*, whose function in Baroque opera was to ensure with pleasing regularity that the prescribed good and harmonic end was after all achieved, so Kluge too descends upon the smashed remnants of the opera in order to expose as misdirected determinism the now openly visible mechanism as it runs on empty.

It is above all the short form of the television operas that is best suited to such atomized portrayal, and Kluge groups these miniatures ironically under the heading of an “imaginary guide to the opera”:

According to [this guide], a modern opera now, at the end of the 20th century, would not consist of an imitation of the great opera repertoires. The search for the needle in *The Marriage of Figaro* — and the desperation at not finding it — suffices as a sketch for opera material. The sum of such material could fill many evenings: yet each single sketch could be as short as the “*moments musicaux*.” It is enough for such a moment to “flare up.” There is no need for a temporal build-up.<sup>10</sup>

The explosive elements which Kluge extricates from the operas are clearly not those of an unbound sexus, of natural images of a utopia of reconciliation: the cover of *The Power of Emotion* shows a single photograph of an air force squadron flying in combat formation, and it is no coincidence that the volume not only contains the script of an opera film of the same title but a wealth of critical military writings as well. In his brief preface, the writer and filmmaker sketches his project:

The power of fate: the name of an opera which would fit almost all operas. But it remains doubtful whether there really is such a thing as fate. Perhaps there are only a hundred thousand different causes which are *called* fate after the event [ . . . ] My last film was entitled *The Power of Emotion*. There *really* is such a power, and there are also *real* emotions. *War* poses the greatest challenge to emotions. And incidentally it comprises the greatest challenge facing all power-based projects for such a time as it can prove that no power can hold it in check; and historically hitherto no power has been able to arrest it. I *wish* to tell stories of why emotions are not powerless.<sup>11</sup>

---

10. Kluge, “Ein imaginärer Opernführer” 20.

11. Kluge, *Macht*, preface (n.p.)

Kluge thus posits emotions as diametrically opposed to war, yet at the same time, this initial comment on the power of emotion is so clearly embedded in the political discourse of West Germany that the abstract opposition is mediated through particular associations. "Fate": the name used in the public or semi-public consciousness above all to describe war — instead of investigating the *causes* for war, one preferred to invoke the power of fate that manifested itself in war. When Kluge deploys the formula of the necessary "disarmament of the fifth act," this only makes sense against the background of such a covert cross-connection which forges a link between the poles of emotion and war, despite their abstract juxtaposition. Opera is highly suspect in Kluge's eyes because it touches on the fact that the greatest passions — which can become that fate which decides life and death — can, in the form of a mass psychosis, also become the basis for crusades of annihilation, just as in the shape of an individual psychosis they can link sexual murder with death out of love. The clinical descriptions Kluge gives of the sexual processes that comprise the explosive core of emotions are not just a means of ironic distantiation, a travesty of language, but also the expression of a deep-seated fear, an overwhelming distrust of the power of seduction, a power that must be disarmed.

Construing fate as ineluctable, as metaphysically preordained, denies the possibility of freely determined action. Interestingly enough, at this juncture Kluge swerves away from Adorno toward Nietzsche. To return once more to the name of Carmen: with regard to Bizet's opera, Adorno saw the very degeneration to a natural state as the redemption of sexuality, and Carmen is compelled to follow that sexuality as if it were a categorical imperative, thus passing into the realm of freedom: "Her song," Adorno writes, "is no song of fate, but the subject's answer to fate . . ." <sup>12</sup>

Kluge by no means shares the figure of redemptive critique which Adorno develops in his analysis of Bizet's *Carmen*. Rather, he seems to be indebted to that remark of Nietzsche's which Adorno cites critically when averring that its author remained "entrenched" in "fatalism": "Love, whose methods are those of war and which is founded upon the deadly hatred between the sexes!" <sup>13</sup> For Kluge, this is what opera is about; and it is at this that he levels his critique. The intertwining of emotions and war becomes the decisive metaphor on whose wings a whole spectrum of associations is borne into battle. Kluge's critique of opera is

---

12. Adorno 303.

13. Adorno 305.

at heart a critique of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, including his mystification of death dressed up as metaphysics.

For Kluge, combatting the power of fate means above all exposing the causes that hide behind its mighty, flowing flag. Of what did Scarpia really die? Fate for Kluge is nothing but the jamming together of motives that remain opaque, that mutually paralyze each other and hence explode in a fatal ending. Thus, in opera the deaths are both utterly determined and well-founded and yet completely unfounded, for the characters do not see through their own paradoxes. What they lack is a practical sense, a shot of pragmatism with which they could find a way out. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Kluge's opera performances could be summed up in the simplistic terms of ideology critique. The drafts, with their multiperspectival solutions, their theatrical-scenic rehearsal of action (which sometimes takes the form of court proceedings) implicitly contain a stubborn, idiosyncratic utopian core: the wish to reverse the course of action, to give in to the child's impulse to save Punch from being arrested by shouting out a warning to him. Kluge's film aesthetics reveal with exceptional clarity a certain compulsion to repeat; there is hardly a motif that does not crop up again in some other situation, that is not tried out, rehearsed once more, rearranged, and illuminated anew by different contexts. If one takes this aesthetic, formal moment seriously, one can interpret it as the exact counter-program to *opera seria* — the serial opera which disperses its motifs in a wealth of situational possibilities.

At first sight, such an antipathetic agenda would appear to be completely contrary to the nature of opera. For it is no coincidence that opera — which, if it is robbed of its pathos by irony, immediately flips over into the comical — has become the favorite object of all travesties and impersonators. What is the reason for Kluge's vehement attack on opera's blind belief, its alliance with death? I have already briefly outlined that Kluge's rejection of the pathos of fate and passion stems from social experiences that cannot be seen in isolation from German history. Kluge is the representative of an interim generation who had their childhood under National Socialism and their intellectual socialization in the Federal Republic. For this generation, the experience of chains of events — in which culpable action was both lived through and whitewashed — as fateful involvement would seem to be a crucial issue. The wish to redress acts of injustice must have been as overpowering as the diffuse experiences of omnipotence and impotence in the war. The endless chain of attempts to bring the dead of opera dramatics back to life (the film, *The Power of*

*Emotion*, also devotes its last section to the effort to resuscitate a murder victim) contains a factual utopian core: namely, the non-acceptance of death.

Kluge's compulsion to represent the really major emotions as precisely those which border on deceit takes on a burlesque form in his television opera *The First 140 Bars of the "Valkyrie"*. In an interview, Kluge doggedly questions conductor Michael Gielen on the above 140 bars of the "Valkyrie." In the course of his musicological analysis, and at Kluge's request, Gielen also goes into the practice of Wagner performances and the enormous technical difficulties the musicians have playing this part of the score. By dint of his intransigent questioning, Kluge finally finds out that some parts are so difficult that the musicians resort to a practical aid — they simply and quite systematically leave some of the passages out, reducing the Wagnerian opulence to a humanly manageable measure. While already in the 1950s Wieland Wagner's productions in Bayreuth undertook an immanent deconstruction of Wagner's mythology by concentrating the material and reducing it to the transparency of the musical structures, Kluge in his minimalistic Wagner critique goes one step further: he attempts to show places in the score itself that oppose human practice.

Kluge's small encyclopedia of opera, his imaginary guide to the opera, offers a critique of the consequences the 19th century has for the 20th, undertaken in the spirit of the 18th century: Enlightenment as the utopian conception of forms of life and relationships in which emotions do not have a fatal ending but are rather acted out and commented on in playful scenarios. This *éducation sentimentale*, however, is conceivable in the Federal Republic only as a kind of re-education. The question as to how life will continue cannot be contemplated without at the same time asking how life could be organized differently: life as interconnected action itself becomes a utopia. This form of thought incorporates an affirmative trait inherent in any affirmation of life as a program. Yet Kluge's pragmatic utopianism is relativized vis-à-vis such apologetic trends by the historical foil against which it is written — the mass murder of millions in the 20th century. Against this backdrop, the yearning for death in great opera appears hardly less apologetic than the yearning for a livable life. In view of the paradoxes of reality, Kluge becomes a utopian gambler with the irreversibility of time: from "once upon a time" to "if only I had . . . !"

*Translated by Jeremy Gaines*

# *Kluge On Opera, Film, and Feelings*

Edited by Miriam Hansen

## *Answer to Two Opera Quotations*<sup>1</sup>

### I

*“Vedi? di morte l’angelo. . . .”*  
 (“Do you see? The angel of death. . . .”)  
Giuseppe Verdi, *Aida*, Act IV

1. The unlikely pair, the Ethiopian princess and the Egyptian general (removed from office), are buried alive because of their love. They are considered traitors. Radames, though still accompanied by deputies, is now alone (or so he thinks) in that dungeon under the Temple of Vulcan. Aida, in contrast, snuck in by herself; she is here of her own free will. She had always known that a love like this would end with being walled in.

This scene is preceded by the dramatic underground trial of the reluctant traitor. Radames had stubbornly remained silent. Change of scenes. The orchestra evokes a particular melancholic mood, set in D minor, which Verdi uses for departure scenes — for those moments immediately preceding acts of finality. Radames wonders where his lover is. Her presence was never so familiar to him as it is now that she is absent. . . . The music breaks off . . . a sigh. . . . *Qual gemito?* (What cry is that?). The former general searches in the darkness for the living creature that had sighed. Nervous movement in the orchestral score. Radames has just touched a strange body. Even in the darkness of the tomb, he knows

---

1. “Antwort auf zwei Opernzitate,” *Jahrbuch XI der Hamburgischen Staatsoper für die Spielzeit 1983/84* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1984): 117-130. This and all subsequent translations are printed here with permission of the author.



immediately who it is. He calls out in extreme despair (*nella massima disperazione*): “*Tu, in questa tomba?*” (“You, in this tomb?”).

He thought Aida had been saved. This thought, his interest in her objective well-being, is a sign that he really loves her. He loves her reality. That is why he is so extremely desperate when he finds her buried alive.

Aida answers:

“My heart forewarned me  
Of your condemnation;  
Into this tomb  
Which was being opened for you  
I made my way by stealth,  
And here, far  
From every human eye  
In your arms I wish to die.”

As a princess, she is aware of the following: it is written that she *sacrifice herself before everyone’s eyes* for her lover; this act would benefit the caste of all princesses and widows, the kingdom, the priests, the memory of the victim, and whatever can be redeemed from the latter. Sharing the destiny of her lover, however, she dies for him alone, “far from every human eye,” without producing any benefit for herself or her class: *she expresses that she really loves him*. Throughout the entire opera, the lovers appear amazed, surprised that they love each other. Again and again they declare to each other that they (against all the laws of reality, the powers of war, class boundaries, etc.) are on fire for each other.

Even now Radames is amazed: “To die! . . . to die for love?” Two currents of history collide in the “emotional economy” of this scene. The old tale goes: *sacrifice* and *the wish for happiness* are coupled strictly together — it goes without saying that the woman can only express her loyalty, the very fact that she is a living being, in such a way as will cost her her life. Colliding with this, on the other hand, is a certain bourgeois level-headedness in Radames: one doesn’t exaggerate the bond to the point where someone has to die purely as a result of falling in love. That is why he is surprised, but also happy: Aida’s particular form of devotion is expressed especially *clearly* in the midst of this collision between values and times. “*Sogno di gaudio che in dolor svani. . .*” (“dream of joy which in sorrow faded. . .”). But in this version, the sky opens up: “*A noi si schiude il ciel. . .*” (“Heaven opens for us. . .” — the word “to close” has the same root as “to open” in Italian).

At the climax of the lovers' dialogue, or rather at the climax of the two alternating monologues (for the lovers misunderstand each other in distinct ways), Aida says: "*Vedi? di morte l'angelo. . .*"

2. "Do you see? The angel of death. . .," says Aida. Is there an angel of death which Radames, too, sees at this moment? Are there any angels of death whatsoever in Egypt? We know that there were some in the mists of Germania because Brunhilde pronounces Siegmund's death and later fetches him in *The Valkyrie*. Does the Ethiopian princess cite a myth of her own country which the Egyptian general cannot immediately understand? Does she see anything? Or does Aida only want to comfort the despairing man by claiming to see this angel? Is she describing herself as one? It is pitch black in this tomb. The executioners have not set up any lights because the priests must prevent the condemned from burning himself to death — for if he did so, his soul would not be starved to death along with his body, indeed it would not even step over into the realm of the dead; rather it would haunt *them* — in which case, they might as well have burned themselves. At any rate, that's why it is dark; the lovers can touch each other, but nothing is visible. Hence, Aida can claim with impunity that she sees something. Radames, willing to believe her, looks for a time, spellbound, in the direction he assumes Aida is pointing. He does not want to spoil the mood with a contradiction. Neither does she insist. Nor does she repeat the question. The dead in Egypt enter the realm of the dead via the *preparations made by the living*: the dead in Egypt are the debt to be discharged at the home of the creditor, not that of the debtor (*Bringschuld, nicht Holschuld*).

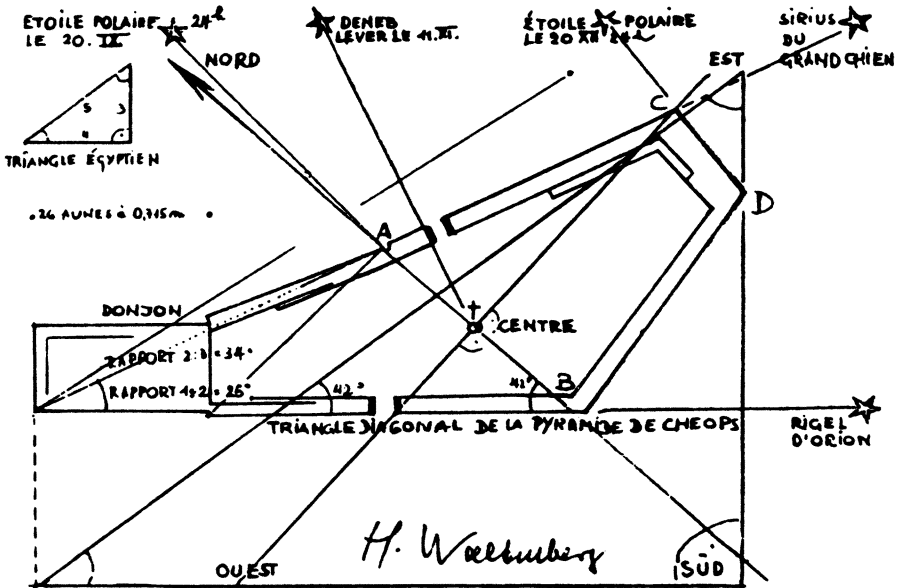
### 3. The Unpredictability of the Angel of Death

Why, however, if there are angels of death, do they not help, for example, in the case of a mistaken verdict? One has to distinguish the live burial of two live lovers from the sentence that condemned only *one* of them.

Doubtless there are cases more unjust than the punishment of lovers who, after all, were pursuing an egocentric, consumerist dream of happiness, "*sogno di gaudio*"; and behaving rather imprudently with regard to state secrets — for which they now pay. In Smolensk 1942, that would have led to a rash ending as well. It's another story when Antigone, Oedipus's daughter, is walled in. *She* fought for the burial of her brother and was herself buried alive as a result; she fought for the *validity of the old laws* against the new despotism. No angel of death helped her. It cannot

be, however, that angels of death remain completely insensitive to the injustice suffered by the dying who wait to be fetched. Thus, Brunhilde is quickly prepared to decide the duel against Hunding; Hercules enters the underworld in *Alceste*, responding to the unjust sacrifice by robbing the dead; and thus Charlemagne intervenes in the nick of time to save the Infante in *Don Carlos*, etc. Angels of death, if they do exist, have in certain cases no other choice but to mutiny, refuse commands, employ cunning. In fact, these are actually the signs by which we recognize them. How else could we discern whether or not we are dealing with an angel of death? After all, we don't follow him merely to be his witness.

By the way, the angels originate from the same substance *from which the old laws arise*. The text reports nothing more specific about the “*di morte l'angelo*.” Here lies the starting point for another opera — it lies in the *gap of the text*. The secret that is waiting to be revealed is, from the perspective of the angel, the text.



Instructions for the transferral of a dead person under the supervision of the stars; according to Egyptian rite.

The dead are not equal. On the contrary, their different forms of accomodation (some are put into holes, others into pyramids) rather consolidate the earthly hierarchy which in turn represents the only secure connection with the cosmos. An angel of death in the Germanic tradition would be likely to confuse this hierarchy, especially if he were to display a sense of justice or a personal capacity for discrimination. In Ethiopia, such a thing might have existed, but never in Egypt. It could be the case, therefore, that Aida saw an angel of death which Radamas, hard as he may have tried, could never have seen.

4. The mission of the 20th century, of which we still have 16 years ahead of us, is to tell *counter-stories* to the collected stories of the 19th century — in the manner of the story of Odysseus, which is of course either fairly old, or set in Ireland (James Joyce). To the classical dramaturgies of plot, intensification, progress, suspense, climax, and catharsis, we oppose *gravitational* forms of expression; that is, forms that develop from the laws of narrative and musical material. This is no contradiction to the 18th century, no contradiction to Lessing or Arno Schmidt, yet clearly one to the 19th century as it nests in the minds of the 20th.

#### 5. Radio Broadcast from Afar; Air Raid

On 7 April 1945, at 11 p.m., there is a broadcast of *Aida*, I think on Radio Rome. We are sitting in my father's bedroom in front of a brown wooden set, with an illuminated glass panel showing the foreign stations, and we listen to the distorted mystery music; from far off and a little garbled, it conveys something serious which our father summarizes in brief German sentences. At one o'clock the lovers are suffocating. My father, a country doctor who knows something of the technical tasks of prop-masters since he is also on call for the Halberstadt Theater, speculates on what the cause of death might be on the third or fifth day, on whether Radames survives Aida or vice versa (according to medical probability — a doctor can never be sure). They were found in this vault, my father said, after thousands of years. Did Caesar dig them out? One doesn't know. How were they lying? One can imagine this from other pictures, namely those of Herculaneum and Pompeii. It's hard to embrace for five days straight; they will not have had the strength in their last moments to change their position in any major way. Nothing in the world is as serious as (1) a dramatic opera, which (2)

comes to us from a great distance. With our big super-radio in the dining room, we would not have been able to receive the distant music that this tiny foreign product managed to dispense into our provincial town, albeit with distortions.

Because it got so late, we didn't go to the Rübäländer Höhlen the next day, 8 April 1945, although we children were supposed to be evacuated there because of the danger of the air raids, which everyone was talking about on 7 April 1945, a Saturday. Instead we have been sitting in the shelter from 11:20 a.m. on. After the first attack, when the lights went out, we are lying on the cellar floor. This action has nothing of the seriousness that the operatic action of *Aida* has. The magic of opera implies: we believe in the absurd because it contains a serious mystery; because what is spoken and what remains unspoken (for example, the angel of death) is guarded as a secret, camouflaged by the work of the orchestra. Of the bombers, however, we only believe what *really* happens. If they hit me, I'm dead; otherwise, I'm not. They can bury us in the cellar, but without doing so, they cannot move us to consider what it might feel like to be buried in the cellar, what we feel like when we think of the entombed lovers in the opera *Aida*. We see them as they depart, fleeing from the city: in squad formation, a school of minnows in the sky. Living in the 20th century, we do not know why it says in the opera guide: "Amneris above the tomb sends a prayer for peace to the sky." We find this prayer for peace, the invocation "*ciel*" in many operas.

This sky, however, is occupied with bomber formations; the invocation, the prayer must find another direction. Thinking of the injustice of their action, the scattering of bombs over rich and poor seems insensitive to us. We know that angels of death would never behave this way. The attack was unnecessary. I would never have said to my sister, while running through the burning town: "*Vedi? di morte l'angelo. . .*"

## 6. Practical Uses of a Love Token

Sitting in the dark, above her the footsteps of the priests and the desperate calls of Amneris (who in such a condition makes mistakes, for which the Priests will send her to follow the lovers into death), *Aida* has, unknown to those above, a ring on her little finger. She had stolen this ring from Amneris, who has delicate Egyptian fingers, so that the ring, which Radames had given Amneris when they were still engaged, does not fit on the paws of the muscular *Aida*. Now, in the face of the angel of death — perhaps she could survive three or five days in this vault,

through long drawn-out hours that are too short for living and too long for dying, but she couldn't think of anything more to do — she took the metal ring from her finger, handled it, scratched signs on the cellar wall and eventually put the ring back on her little finger. She lacked the conviction necessary for a definite action.

In Halberstadt, my home town, the story is told of a young woman whom the count of Regenstein unlawfully incarcerated in the dungeon of Regenstein castle in order to win her love (compare to Count di Luna in *Il Trovatore*). The grotto or castle that bears the name Regenstein is situated at the northern border of the Harz, dating from a time before there were cities. The imprisoned young woman, however, owned a ring given to her by her lover, to whom she remained faithful and for this sat in the cellar. With this ring — her fingers would not have worked — she scratched an oblong hole in the sandstone on which the prison rested. In the spring, she did not know the date, she beheld the *shimmering light of the valley*, and hurried away. Thus, the token of her love had a practical use. The ring is the savior when the angel of death fails.

## II

“Here I am, true to you till death!”

Richard Wagner, Senta in *The Flying Dutchman*, Act III

1. The Dutchman has overheard the conversation between the hunter Erik and Senta. Erik reminds Senta “that she once pledged him eternal faith.” Senta rejects him. The Dutchman has overheard and misunderstood everything. He renounces Senta, rushes to the ship, orders the anchor to be weighed. “Senta frees herself from those who are trying to hold her back, reaches a cliff and throws herself into the waves.” Her last words: “Here I am, true to you till death!”

### 2. A Putsch of Emotions

For 2,000 years, he cruised the sea and now he decides, from one moment to the next: I will marry this woman (whom he has never seen). Senta, the well-protected daughter, jewel of her father's stock of commodities, throws herself without further ado at this stranger of whom she has only seen pictures and heard stories. We know, however, that such pictures or mythical stories do not at all resemble the actual person who suddenly appears before us. Feelings take time to develop. It

therefore seems unlikely that love at first sight is mutual. An emotion erupts that has been building up for a long time, enriched by fantasy, by stories one has heard; yes, love at first sight, but only for one; the other feels magically attracted to the prey that is just lying there. He acts like one in love. Thus, in appearance at least: love at first sight. Yet, one of them is investing the whole weight of his or her life, whereas the other, happy-go-lucky, merely seized an opportunity. The suddenness of the Dutchman's and Senta's fatal and mutual falling in love has something of an act of force. One could call it a putsch in the domain of emotion.

### 3. Older Versions: Sacrifice and Self-Realization; The Dutchman as Vampire

Wagner tries to mystify this situation. But there are older traces. The complete phrase preceding Senta's fatal leap reads: "Praise your angel and his words. Here I am, true to you till death!" Thus, a more ancient prophecy comes into play; it relates to the promise of God's messenger to lift the curse from the Dutchman's life, provided a woman dies for him. The angel's words then mean the reverse, as in the case of Abraham: there is no substitute for the human sacrifice; on the contrary, it is required by command — though, in this case, the victim of the human sacrifice is not the sacrificer's own child but the daughter of a stranger, robbed from her father. For it is through an act of robbery that the Dutchman manages to get possession of the daughter from Senta's father: he begins by displaying his treasures, behaving no differently than a wealthy army would in occupying a poor or defeated country.

Just as Arteju in *The Never-Ending Story* discovers the battle already occurring in the form of paintings on the walls of a ruin, Wagner's ballad assumes the endless repetition of that which has already happened but has never been redeemed: the picture of the pale man above the door; in this regard, Senta has been ready long before the pale man actually enters through the door. She ends her recital of the ballad of *The Flying Dutchman* with "the ecstatic pledge to bring redemption to the damned." The reasons for this pledge lie, as it were, in prehistory, in the *command* of an angel or in Senta's *interest*.



The pale man.

He says: "Ah, bereft of hope as I am, in this hope I still indulge."

"After his and the helmsman's calls remained unanswered, Daland discovered the Dutchman sitting motionless on the shore. He approaches the latter who, in the course of the conversation that develops, asks the Norwegian to grant him lodging for one night. When Daland sings the praises of his daughter Senta, the stranger, in a *sudden fit of passion*, desires her to be his wife. . . . Only the selfless devotion of a woman willing to sacrifice herself could free the Dutchman from the curse of eternal damnation. In search of this savior, he once again today — this is his last chance — has set foot on solid ground."



#### 4. Senta's Attempt to Escape Her Father

It is a terrible fate when the days that rush us toward death become predictable: nothing new will happen. What would life be like on the side of Erik the hunter who, as Senta will have quickly learnt, has only limited interests as far as her person is concerned? By contrast: the never-ending neediness of the Dutchman. He requires fundamental redemption. This is the loophole through which Senta can escape the paternal prison. She has to realize her interests before the father sells her to the wrong man, for instance Erik. What makes the father unreliable is that he would prefer to sell her more than once. He is not a good businessman. The commodity, as it were, understands more about the business than the merchant. For she is *interested* to meet someone who needs her fatally. Only this would be serious.

#### 5. Two Different Versions of a Curse

A curse dates far back into prehistory. The wretch has committed blasphemy. A curse like that always affects the individual. Collectives which tempt or blaspheme God are usually not punished in *this way*. They incur the flipside of the curse: the everyday confinement to the habits of life, civilization and its discontents, the prospect of marriage with Erik, the “extended presence that leads to death.” All this is already described in the fairytale of Sleeping Beauty: she is pricked by the 13th fairy only so she can fall into a deep sleep — a routine of fate. And, accordingly, one sees only princes lurking around the hedge. Rarely has Senta been awakened to try to make her way through the thicket from the inside; rarely, too, would the young woman and the prince meet midway. The invincible fascination of romantic opera — compared to merely dramatic opera — is this antiphony between the curse and the act of liberation. Yet while the curse varies from victim to victim, the act of liberation is usually described in rather schematic terms. It is based on a particular type of male actionism, a prior misunderstanding, and the abrupt decision of the woman to kill herself.

What do I fight for, when my life is at stake? “If the history of all dead generations resting like a nightmare on the minds of the living is resolved just for one moment, my life is not too high a price to pay,” says the opera.

#### 6. This Collides with My Mother's Sense of Practicality

My grandmother on my father's side lived by virtue of her sharp tongue, in constant battle with her physically superior husband until he

died. Half a year after his death, she died as well. She was faithful to him, especially to her war with him, till death. My maternal grandmother, born in 1872, lived in relative harmony with her husband until he died in 1937. She, however, survived him by another 36 years and died, physically and mentally quite alert, three weeks after her 100th birthday in February 1973; she remained faithful by surviving.

For my mother, i.e., her daughter, coming to grief for reasons of love was in no way part of the program. That was reserved for *us*. She herself had come to grief, and had died of it. She was well aware of this, as a kind of *trap of fate*, and had talked about it. She didn't think of it as tragic, merely as consistent. A feeling is not proven wrong just because it has run off the tracks.

The ecstatic pledges we make are prepared for by the program of our parents' generation. This is the core of truth in the angel's words, in the compulsion to repeat, in the principle of the ballad, in the closed form in which drama is submerged and rises again to be transfigured, freely adapted from the poets' words. At issue are the balance sheets by which our forefathers and foremothers lived, sought their happiness, missed their happiness, tried to stockpile it, were robbed, etc.



Senta, to the left.

## III

*The Unfulfilled Program of the Bourgeois Tragic Drama*

## 1. Misunderstandings from the Opera Guide

*Reclam Opera Guide*, 16th edition, 1953: “*Aida* is considered one of the *summit achievements* of Italian opera. The *nobility of musical language*, whose melodic power of expression in the most immediate sense of the word manifests the soul, is joined by a will to form which is in full control of its means and uses them with greatest clarity. . . . Fascinating as well are the musical landscapes (the scene at the river Nile) and the *Egyptian local color* which may have nothing to do with ancient Egyptian music but, thanks to Verdi’s musical idiom, is raised above the merely historical into the realm of a *higher artistic truth*.”

## 2. Keyword: “Higher Artistic Truth”

There is no such thing. Artistic truth does not have any special status vis-à-vis truth. Nor can truth be “higher.” There are truths for which there is no time, truth that is jammed up because it does not get expressed, truths in passage, in the diaspora, truths torn to shreds, etc. However, one cannot claim that the concept of truth allows for comparisons of any kind. I can accumulate lies . . . but the opposite of these lies cannot be more beautiful, more timely, more elevated, more local, more true, etc., than true. Thus truth eludes a basic dramatic principle: intensification, heightening, the *stretta*, the bottleneck. What is true, in a manner of speaking, regulates itself.

In Act IV of *Aida* “higher” could mean: the sad Amneris, *above* her the priests, though all of them still on the ground floor of the temple. *Higher* yet, Verdi’s misunderstanding that the temple is a “*tempio di volcano*.” *Above*, the Egyptian heavens, a figment of poetic imagination. Above that still, the *soffits* of the theater building. **One cannot accomplish through mere height what can only be gained by means of a context, relationality (*Zusammenhang*).** The dramaturgy of experience is gravitational, hardly ever linear.

We would reach the same conclusion with regard to a “more profound truth.” It would be under the feet of Radames and Aida — i.e. the desert. It would be interesting to think of “truth in a non-artistic sense.” For instance, by the standards of Egyptian custom, the behavior of Alceste and Aida is barbaric, certainly not “artistic.” The vehemence of feelings is at odds with art.

### 3. "A Summit Achievement of Italian Opera"

As in the case of "higher truth," a similarly mistaken notion of the 19th century. At issue is the *image* of a creative career's gradually ascending trajectory. After a crisis (usually the death of the wife or lover), steep ascent to the summit, followed by decline, deterioration, committal to a mental asylum or tuberculosis clinic in old age. It is appropriate for operas to use principles like *accelerando*, *crescendo*, momentary discontinuation of the music, drumbeat, as well as marvelous plateau passages (like the one on peace in *Simone Boccanegra*). For the concrete working processes of authors and composers, however, such mountaineering images are inapplicable.

### 4. "Nobility of Musical Language" — "The Bourgeoisie of Musical Language"

Certainly there are musical materials which display the qualities of bourgeois acquisitiveness; there are workers or Napoleons of music, slavish or domineering musical idioms. The human senses themselves seem riddled with class barriers: the eyes struggle with the ears, the "higher" interests with the physical ones — all senses fight for their respective rights. In the grandiose project of opera, the events of which operas give an indirect account — the primal scenes, the carnage between nations, the failure of great political causes — are ennobled and raised to the level of a unified idiom of sound, communication, and meaning. This heightened idiom provides the common denominator for extras and heroes alike, for the Egyptian slave, the upstart Radames, the Pharaoh et al. This resembles German politics in the 19th century: aristocrats (von Stein, von Hardenberg, von Bismarck, von Caprivi, Prince Hohenlohe, and many more) run the affairs of state as deputies for the bourgeois forces who cannot agree among themselves.

### 5. "Egyptian Local Color"

Similar to *Turandot*, *Land of Smiles*, or the American feature film, Verdi's *Aida* invents an Egyptian local color for the sake of a "higher artistic truth." The sluggishly flowing Nile, the exotic, the "savageness" of this country which does not know that it is older and wiser than the Italian barbarians who built Rome — these are marks of distinction like the rings pierced through the noses of prisoners. The invention of so-called local color occurs around the same time as the flourishing of the slave trade in the Sudan.

## 6. “Le vaisseau fantôme”

The French title of the opera *The Flying Dutchman* epitomizes the principle of the 19th-century opera: a phantom ship. In this century, music, social relations were for the first time set into a dynamic motion (beginning with a small advance in the 18th century and extending through the outbreak of the war in 1914 as part of the 19th century). . . .

Like a chaotic ark, this phantom ship carries in its hold the symbolic associations of all past centuries, setting up relations among them freely and arbitrarily — a confused way of establishing firm ground. This attitude, however, is ambivalent: one would like to tell the truth — that everything is in flux, that in this social sea there cannot be any fixed positions — yet, at the same time, a landing is attempted every seven years. One of these two goals could be accomplished, but not both. The people of the opera are not in love with civilization: “*La mer est plus belle / que les cathédrales. . .*” (“The ocean is more beautiful / than the cathedrals. . .”).

## 7. The Approach to Symbolic Sequences

In the opera *Le vaisseau fantôme*, several myths intersect which are more hostile in relation to each other than class antagonisms might be: the wandering of Ahasver, the wanderings of Odysseus, pirate tales, the story of Kundry’s laughter about God which leads to her 2,000 year persecution, etc. This multiplicity (the antagonism that the diverse mythical fragments foster among themselves) makes any redemption inevitably schematic. The origins of the events appear multiplied — far too many reasons for one Norwegian fjord or for a single historical year in the Egyptian-Ethiopian War. In the end: a leap into the waves or a walled-in tomb — far too few answers.

The ways in which our two centuries, the 19th and the 20th, approach such symbolic sequences are fundamentally superficial. The two centuries act (presumably in the manner of an administrative aristocracy) as if these sequences of the mind, these symbolic sequences and authentic narratives, could be manipulated entrepreneurially, at will. As if one could plan whether to use the images, sounds, or narratives in a documentary or fictional vein. This attitude corresponds to an incomplete form of materialism in these two centuries, to their “occasional materialism” (*Gelegenheitsmaterialismus*).

## 8. The Wanderings and Attempted Landings of Ulysses

Via detours, the sufferer Ulysses approaches his home, the island of

Ithaca. In one instance, he insults the god of the sea by putting out the eye of one of his relatives, a one-eyed giant. Storm and shipwreck ensue, Ulysses is saved, falls into the hands of princesses, a sorceress, and spirits who try to seduce him from the shore (but he has cotton balls in his ears or else is tied to the mast); at any rate, he seems to manage the separations with almost greater perfection than the rapprochements. Now he has reached the piece of land from which he originally came (*terra, solum*). He does not enter a pale, bearded man. Rather, he takes a bath, disguises himself. He kills the suitors who besiege his wife; he decimates the staff for having been disloyal during his vagaries. Gradually, he is getting used to the happy outcome of his fate; it surprised him.

This is a totally different plot from that of the Dutch captain who, “in raging wind and violent storm / . . . once sought to round a cape; / he cursed, and in a fit of madness swore, / ‘In all eternity, I’ll not give up!’ / . . . And Satan heard. . . .” As far as blasphemy goes, this is a rather minor offense, committed in the heat of passion. Hard to believe that, as a result, the Dutchman was subjected to 2,000 years of punishment. There must be something in him complicit with the curse, an indecisiveness. This means, “that Satan took him at his word”; probably there was a contract between them.

#### 9. Kundry, Ahasver, Lucifer, Nora Leaves the Doll’s House . . .

There are others who are cursed, fallen angels: a woman who laughed when Jesus made his way to Golgotha; a woman in Norway who dared to leave husband and child — now she leads a solitary life. In one case, a cosmic *coup d’etat* provokes the curse, in another an almost trivial violation. The excessive disparity in these narratives suggests that they originate from entirely different stories, which were accumulated, superimposed upon each other; stories in which the ability to discriminate got lost.

10. In the logic of such predetermination, of such incorrigible powers, there is no trace of free will, not even an involuntary one of the human species.

#### 11. *Terra, Solum*

Both terms mean “land”; they could also mean “area,” “a surface on which to stand.” *Terra* can also refer to “fatherland” or even to the whole planet — these are large areas of abstraction for the powers of

fate. The Latin word *solum* cannot compete. It always refers to the actual place where one puts down one's feet. A part of the ground to which every human being has a right. In the opera *Aida*, both terms for land, country, home, surface are used.

## 12. Turning Drama Inside Out

In antiquity, drama reported on events that eluded the will of the persons concerned. A trace thereof can be found in later dramatic works; these later works, however, delight in the demonstration of *free will*. From the tortures incurred in the name of free will, drama, like a vampire, takes its nightly nourishment. To the extent that they are more than just effects, these systems of logic, these intensifications **tear human beings to pieces.**

The accumulation of causalities and family relations, the masquerades of choice, produce the tragic ending. Chance, luck, detail — whatever was not subject to my choice (as little as I chose to have *this* mother and *this* father) thus offers, contrary to the rules according to which experience is traditionally organized, *a free surface for associations*, a starting point for our sense of intimacy. **This is where the new stories lie.**

\* \* \*

### *“Response to Jutta Brückner”*<sup>2</sup>

**“That which bears us, as the surface of the water bears the ship, is only the most recent layer, the 19th century. . . .”**

---

2. “Anmerkungen zu Jutta Brückner,” *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 53/54 (December 1983): 233-35, written in response to Brückner's article, “Carmen and the Power of Emotion,” in the same issue. Quotations in Kluge's reply, unless otherwise noted, are from Brückner's article. When Carlos Saura's film *Carmen* (1983) was released in West Germany, it scored an overwhelming success with female audiences. In Brückner's article, the feminist filmmaker and film theorist distinguishes this reception from a merely regressive cult, based on a simple identification with the heroine. She attributes the fascination of Saura's film to the emancipatory pathos in Carmen's dance: her body learns to speak a narcissistic passion that is not compensatory but an expression of freedom, a source of energy. Hence, Brückner argues, the film offers less an erotic fantasy than a fantasy of liberation. In this context, she criticizes Kluge's plea for an “emancipation of feelings,” claiming that it both remains within a maternal model of the satisfaction of needs and, at the same time, denies sexual difference in favor of a mutuality derived from the liberalist concept of the market. On the female reception of Saura's film, also see the discussion “Carmen on the Couch,” *Frauen und Film* 36 (February 1984): 73-77. [Translators' note.]

If that is so, we must become submarines. Without metaphor: “. . . for the emancipation will not be one, or the old one will be false, if it has no body.” If it has the old false body, however, it will be no emancipation whatsoever.

Regarding Saura’s *Carmen*, Jutta Brückner opens a vast horizon and then closes it off again towards the end of her text — with a classifying mechanism; that is, with old glue.

**A few key phrases: “In defense of emancipated emotions”**

This expression reveals a misunderstanding. Don José stabs Carmen and, as he himself says (in the opera), he kills what is dearest to him in the world, thus killing something in himself. A little later, he too will be seized and condemned to death. Nietzsche celebrates this in his essay “The Case of Wagner” (1888): “love as destiny . . . cynical, guiltless, cruel — and for that very reason, nature! Love, whose methods are those of war, and which is founded upon the deadly hate between the sexes!” Through this “African gaiety,” he claims to have become “so Indian, so sedentary” and “a better philosopher.” This kind of ideological vogue, so 19th century through and through, enrages me. All I can see in Don José’s short circuit is *logic*, no feeling whatsoever. Carmen looking over into the arena, all frazzled and madly in love (or the more subtle parallel in Saura’s film: the scene in the textile factory), might be described as *nervous*, momentarily *not in possession of any particular feeling*. We know of Don José that the pent-up force of his love initially keeps him from even perceiving Carmen’s will (or her state); then he forgets all his feelings and stabs away.

I will not in any way, shape, or form speak of an *emancipation* in relation to such catastrophes. There can be no such thing. We must break through this kind of melodramatic collision by relying on our feeling, intuitively. If at the moment Don José draws his dagger the prompter were to call to the protagonists, “I request an immediate discussion” — then, I assert, their feelings would not permit them to proceed mechanically towards their mutual date with the executioner. After the to-and-fro of this three-way conversation with the prompter, perhaps on this particular day Carmen would simply refuse to have anything more to do with *this* type of man. After all, the only thing that Don José fails to understand is why the matador is preferred over him. This same situation informs Saura’s reinterpretation. The macho man is fatally wounded by the comparison with another man, rather than by the woman’s refusal of tenderness.



The prompter's intervention (or any other intervention, for instance: the police siren is heard and things get serious) creates *surprises*; they function like comedy, although nothing about the situation is funny. This form of defense brings the emotions that govern the rest of life *into contact* with those that control the moment — with deadly consequences for tragedy.

I contend that, under real-life conditions and for the sake of the modernity of our novels, the productive move is to upset the strategy of the willed isolation of feeling promoted by the 19th century. This move would ensure that a momentary *general assembly of feelings* would be continually in session. This *general assembly of feelings* is a grass-roots democracy. The narcissistic "I" by contrast is merely "parliamentarian." This differs from the concept of emancipation (for the assembled emotions themselves would not have to change if they were inserted into an emancipatory context). There is also no deferment of drives. Several drives, exactly as they are in everyday life, would come into contact with each other, instead of entering into melodramatic struggles for precedence. I would begin by exploring these *dramaturgies of experience*, before opposing them with the *foundations of feminist thought*.

### **"The market model lacks history"**

The market *model* is a shorthand term for a certain kind of thinking. Markets themselves (unlike the theories about them) definitely do not lack history. In fact, I am certain that as yet we hardly comprehend the extent of that which belongs to the past of markets. There is only the logic of *sacrifice* and that of *the market*. Otherwise there is no exchange, only isolation. In every sphere of intimacy, the market is disavowed but nonetheless there. And it is not necessarily the capitalist market.

"You ask the impossible. Carmen never lied. Her soul remains firm. It's over between her and you" (Carmen). This is erotic Gaullism. Not in 300 years has our culture produced human beings who come equipped with the constitution for such emotional harshness.

I understand that "free-floating misery" means a splitting of consciousness for the processes of fantasy. Instead of religious illusion, a new pantheism of the imagination. Millions of women in the 1920s viewed the vamp films in this way, but did not act as vamps in everyday life. The distortion is even more extreme in the identification with Carmen. "Power of the dance, which is liberation without cause. The search for the physical. . . ." Now, that dance is performed by experts of a culture

that is relatively remote for West Germans. On the screen, at that. The monstrous refinement of the reactionary social model that is being danced shakes up the bodies of the viewers — perhaps in a more differentiated way, but in principle just like the *goose step* on urban streets, quickened by male fantasies. A rhythmic dramaturgy that stands in complete contradiction to everything we do, actually feel, or experience in context. *I cannot believe that the bodies of the viewers jammed into seats in the movie theater are liberated by means of a dramaturgy of the 19th (or 16th) century being danced before their eyes.* It rather seems to me a case of a “thought construct” accompanied by an emotional overtone.

**“The weariness resulting from the persistent small steps that transform all courage into mere tenacity. . . .”**

Holding on to this bitter experience. It was courage, but only tenacity has remained. The film promises to change all that. The cinematic dramaturgies transform the weariness, small steps, and tenacity by lifting them above the misery they suffer under real conditions. However, inherent in real conditions there already rests a wealth of “thought constructs” that can console by playfully alternating self-deception with impressions of reality. None of this has any tendency towards murder, war, great deeds. The majority of women do not walk around wearing the body-dress of a sex-object for macho eyes. They have to conceal their erotic bodies under clothes for their entire lives. No Don José will stab them. Nor are they asked if they still love someone. At the same time, this majority of women is involved in a private economy of its own sort, in which great amounts of the warmth, learning, and intuition (even tenderness) necessary for life are generated. These are the products that are necessary for the manufacturing of human beings. If these products could ever be coherently organized — that is, by human abilities and needs, not by the principles of the 19th century, particularly those of isolation — then we would not have to be “androgynous out of fear.”

**“The maternal method of production”**

For those who do not understand this concept, the matriarchal method of production exists among us not as something complete, but rather as a residue, a ruin, a component.

One can be certain, however, that these traces are “not warlike in their methods.” In a relation of production that is “cynical, guiltless, cruel and inexorable,” monsters thrive, not humans.

The point of the film *The Power of Emotion* is this: in the traditional

alliances of feelings — that is, neither with passionate submission, nor entirely without it — human relationships do not thrive at all. War, as a sensual-practical critic of emotion, defeats our feelings on all levels. Whoever is content with this defeat, let him make himself at home in this world. . . .

It is no coincidence that the individual positive contributions in *The Power of Emotion*, the only examples of happy endings, have to do either with the absence of emotions (accident, luck, rescue by a criminal), or with labor + miracle.

I have seen the opera *Carmen* 48 times, my sister has seen it 17 times, my father 108, and my grandmother 14. I can thus rule out the possibility that this beautiful opera suggests any ways out of its dilemma, or that it depicts any actual experience.

\* \* \*

### *The Power of Emotion* (Excerpts)<sup>3</sup>

#### *Tunnel War in the Media Jungle: Preliminary Remarks*

This film deals with the problem of the *public sphere* (*Öffentlichkeit*). Both the classical forms of public life, and the modern, public law channels are threatened today by the *new media*. Yet, even without these new, privately owned media, the public sphere is disintegrating — before the abundance of immediate experience produced by people can find any adequate, wider form of public expression. What one has lived through (*Erlebnisse*) can become experience (*Erfahrung*) only if it can be related to the experiences of others. Experience is predicated on public comparison. The accomplishments of the public sphere thus belong to the most valuable treasures of the free West. For the Roman *res publica*, this is encapsulated in the four letters S.P.Q.R. Above the formerly Roman city of Mainz [the seat of ZDF, the second German TV network], these letters are still tacitly written in the sky. But one needs a long-term memory to be aware of this. In the 19th century, images with the power of reality provided a framework for public orientation. They are metaphors of far-reaching significance, referring, as the phrase goes, to: “State, Opera, and the Industrial World Fair.”

---

3. *Die Macht der Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 1984); script and materials relating to Kluge's film, *The Power of Emotion* (1983). The excerpts are from pages 234-235, 50-53, 202-205, 187-189, 239-240, 272-273, 346-348, 424-425, 447-456.

In a similar metaphoric vein, the cinema adapts from the opera the classical economy of emotion as it corresponds to a public sphere rendered obsolete by actual developments.

The following forces, each acting independently, are juxtaposed:

(1) An immense urban landscape, rendered in an imaginary mood, composed of impressions of the Rhein-Main area, which is undergoing reconstruction. Less visible from the outside, though just as powerful: the concurrent reconstruction of emotions.

(2) The classical project of a factory for intensified emotions. This is the classical opera and its abode. Not seen frontally, from the perspective of the audience, but from backstage where the work is being done.

(3) In clear contrast to the latter, a modern project (founded after the gigantic opera of the Third Reich), sorting pluralistically dispersed emotions into the categories of information and entertainment — the moderate public law media.

(4) The superimposition of all the forms of traditional public life (items 1-3) by a project taking shape today, the privately owned, new media. This project alters the environmental conditions of human consciousness. It is a question of ecology which can be more important than the question of nuclear power plants or other threats to the environment.

(5) In the course of the film, a series of characters (fictional figures: Rosemarie Eilers, Betty Waldstabe, the lighting specialist Hinrichs, a time-motion analyst, an accountant, the architect of an opera house, the editor Dresen et al.) traverse these four highly diverse contexts. Throughout the plot, these figures will engage in lively contact with actual characters from the world of film, radio, television, opera, daily life, and politics.

....

### *The Moment of Truth*

“Give in to your father’s wishes and you’ll be married by tomorrow. . . .” On her behalf, however, the matchmaking father says this: “Believe me, she’s as faithful as she is beautiful. . . .” The woman is sold, and yet she is recognized — this is more than just a sale. Does Wagner have a sense of humor?

- Would you jump after me to save me?
- Where?

- Into the cold water of a Northern bay.
- To save you?
- Yes.
- No other option?
- Be honest. It won't affect our relationship if you wouldn't.
- I would jump in after you.
- You're lying!

It occurred to her that he habitually lied when he saw no other way to shut her up. They took a few hurried steps.

- You don't have to jump, I'm only asking. Not that I am the Flying Dutchman, she said, but assuming I were?
- Then I would jump in after you, to save you.
- I don't believe you.
- Nor are you the Flying Dutchman, answered Emil Mölders.

Because she is a woman, his fiancée (with whom he had stepped out of the opera house into the Munich night) could never be the Flying Dutchman — who, misinterpreting the conversation between the hunter and Senta, thought his bride was being unfaithful and jumped into the harbor. Senta jumped after him, though, and they both headed off to heaven.

"This story, which I found moving," said Hilde, "had nothing in it to look forward to. Why should I, hoping to be saved, go off to heaven with you by way of the dirty water of Munkmarsh harbor — to use an example we both know — where we couldn't drown anyway at low tide because it's so flat? When we both know that up there past the stratosphere comes the Van Allen Belt, then empty outer-space air and nothing in the way of a place to live?"

"You can't say 'outer-space air,' " replied Emil.

"Why do I get so worked up," Hilde persisted, "when great and absurd emotions are involved, but stay cool when there are realistic issues at hand, like whether I should pick up some sausage on the way home so you'll be relieved of hunger in the evening? Is that supposed to mean that the places and occasions for great emotions do not exist?"

"Apparently, that is what art is trying to tell us," answered Emil, who was anxious to stop in at the *Leopold* before it closed. To do that he needed to hail a cab, but the dispute was impeding him. "Just a minute!" said Hilde, "You can't just put me off like that." In her mind she

lingered with Senta's gaze, which she had held for so long — the gaze directed at the apparition of the ghostly man in the entrance to the shipyard. But now she was supposed to rush to the taxi stand with her fiancé if they had any intention of making it to the *Leopold*, where they could run into people Hilde had no desire to see — people who in no way could be related to anything in the atmosphere of the opera, neither to the ghostly sailors, nor the Norse merchant depot. Yet, they were not the only operagoers hurriedly in need of cabs, and so there were objective reasons why the two of them had to show a little hustle if they wanted to get a cab for themselves. This seemed absurd to Hilde.

"Why," she asked, "must we go to the opera if we have to hurry so much when it's over?" The opera seemed to her to be an exercise in the longer breaths required by the rhythms of emotion. "I think," she said, "that art does want to tell us something. But it can't be merely that we must constantly believe in spirits. As far as this opera is concerned, it seems to me God's vengeance has lasted too long. That this Dutchman in AD 30 (or zero, around Christ's death) laughed at the wrong moment shouldn't necessarily have condemned him to a journey into the 20th century. God is tough, but not that petty."

"The action," answered Emil, "takes place in 1810, not in the 20th century."

"Still too long," Hilde replied. She found Emil's answer superficial. "Concentrate on my question," she said. "I am asking: what does art want to tell us, if I still feel that for a few hours, watching this piece, I was able to accommodate or mobilize large feelings, but that now I can't? God's vengeance, in contrast, has lasted too long." They had arrived at the taxi stand. There were none left.

"Which ones?" asked Emil.

"What do you mean?" said Hilde.

"Which large feelings, in which direction did yours go?" Even though Emil had not remained wholly unmoved by the opera, he asked out of politeness. She could not answer right away.

She was disappointed in the conversation. It hadn't really been a conversation because they were simultaneously rushing for a cab. She had to make up her mind, the moment she could finally open the door of a cab, whether she should find him superficial (not paying attention to her and at the same time too hectic to pay attention to his own feelings) or whether there was still some "common ground" on

which she could continue living with him. Then she jumped after him into the back of the car. We must not be treated this way, she thought. It was going to cost her days to become clear about what following him had meant. Since she really did want to talk about what art had to tell both her and him. She had figured out (had checked her watch) that it took 17 minutes before Senta and the Dutchman reached an understanding about their first eye contact. Hilde, uneducated in the higher arts, imagined she would need 30 minutes to interpret correctly only one of Emil's exasperated looks or the movement of his paw towards the car door. She found this lack of time quite unfair with regard to any one of her daily movements.



“Why, she asked, must we go to the opera if we have to hurry so much when it’s over?”

Thus, she began to doubt whether art had anything to tell them, vacillating in her judgment only because Emil wanted to get to the *Leopold* so single-mindedly and only because he had promised to **make an appearance**. When they entered, nobody looked at her for more than a second. Their friends took it as a matter of course that they would appear as promised. Have a seat, Emil, one of them said. Hilde felt like crying.

. . . .

### *Performance and Amnesia*

The opera singer W. was a big star in Italy, Austria, and France; in the Federal Republic, however, she had to fight against the inertia of the apparatus. She fought for her art, against the sloth of the apparatus. She usually arrived at the theater before noon to warm up. It is not humanly possible simply to arrive and sing without preparation. Nothing big happens instantaneously. Covering Frankfurt for the Berlin daily *TAZ*, the reporter questioned the artist in her dressing room.

REPORTER: Miss W., are you going to perform Tosca as well?

PRIMA DONNA: That's what I'm famous for.

R: What are your favorite roles from that period?

P: Today, Tosca. Otherwise, Aida, Gilda. . . .

R: All of them tonight?

P: Unfortunately, no. Tomorrow, Aida.

R: Why "unfortunately"?

P: It would be interesting to compare the different experiences. From her temporal distance, I think that Aida, an Egyptian slave, could probably help Tosca figure out how to travel safely to la Spezia with her cavalier. Conversely, the prima donna living around 1804 could certainly pass on a few words of advice to Aida, who lived around 4000 BC. It is impossible, however, for these two women to know each other.

R: Are you saying this with the women's movement in mind?

P: What do you mean?





Aida, 4000 B.C.

“Rejected Lover” (Beate Holle)



R: United we are strong.  
P: Yes, we are.  
R: But you know all three women: Aida, Tosca, and Gilda. . . .  
P: . . . and I'm moving into dramatic genre now, I'm preparing Kundry, Brunhilde, Asuzena. . .  
R: Yes, and then you could unite all six women and their various words of advice, no?  
P: That would be difficult.  
R: How so? You embody all these women.  
P: But still only one a night.  
R: But if you made an effort. . . .  
P: All the same, I am never more than one of them per evening.  
R: Why?  
P: Because I make an effort. I concentrate.  
R: And if you didn't?  
P: I would not even be one of them.  
R: But you aren't Aida anyway.  
P: How do you know?  
R: In my eyes, you are Miss Wallstabe, the opera singer. You are sitting right in front of me.  
P: You can't know who's sitting in front of you just like that. When I concentrate, I *am* Aida.  
R: Or the *impression* of Aida.  
P: Then you are the impression of a reporter.  
R: I *am* a journalist.  
P: And who lives inside you? A dead writer?  
R: What do you mean?  
P: If no one lives inside you, you might as well *not be here*.  
R: I am here.  
P: (rising) I don't believe you.  
(Bell signal: it sounds three times at length, per order of the stage manager).

More than ever, I am convinced that there is a relationship between reality and poetry which can be captured on film. What a monstrous and beautiful thing! Eleonora Duse.

Andante moderato  $\text{♩} = 58$

Str. *ff* *espr.* *Bia. Ve.* *tutta forza* ↑ *Red. \** *Red. \**

*ff* *Red. \** *Red. \**

*dim.* *p* *meno p* *Red. \**

*cresc. molto* *ff* *lunga* *Red. \** *Red. \** *Red. \** *Red. \** *\**

The “fate” motif from the opera *Carmen* by Georges Bizet (see arrow, above). From the overture: “Everything is inevitable; everything predetermined.” To which Frasquita, in the final act: “Carmen, some good advice? Go away, don’t stay here!” To which Carmen: “I am not the woman to tremble before him.” Had she left as suggested, however, the hangmen of Seville would not have had to kill Don José.



Carmen. The only existing photograph of this young woman, taken by L. Perez, Seville.

In a cigarette factory in Seville, the women workers are quarreling. The young Carmen has injured another worker. She is arrested and promises the sergeant on duty, Don José, “innumerable delights.” The sergeant “desperately struggles with himself.” He “succumbs to the seduction” and releases the young woman. The promise of the *innumerable delights* refers to a restaurant owned by a certain Lillas Pastia. Full of expectations, Don José goes there.

With her promise Carmen meant to say, as her confidante, Mercédès, explains, that she would be available to him for the duration of *one night*. She meant to say that she was going to be generous, that she was not going to keep count during this night. Don José, who had released her, should feel like a lieutenant colonel of the dragoon regiment; she, Carmen, would be available hour after hour, would be attentive to him. The kind officer on duty who let her escape “should be able to take his time, like a gentleman.” She had promised to come up with something. This is what she meant by the word “delight.” The word “innumerable” referred to the duration of the *entire* night.



“What you started, you have to finish . . . what matter death?”

At the time when the promise was to be fulfilled, Carmen’s problem was to recreate in herself a mood which *roughly* corresponded to her mood when she made the promise. Otherwise she would have broken her word. However, that which she had promised, *l’amour*, is something stubborn, something not available every day. Hence Carmen’s song: “L’amour est un oiseau rebel.”

*Allegretto quasi Andantino (Tempo de Habanero)*

*p* L'amour est un oiseau re - bel.le que nul ne peut ap - pri - voi - ser...

**CARMEN**

*pp*

“Love is a rebellious bird . . . it is all in vain to call it  
if it chooses to refuse.”

If Zacke looked like Laura del Sol, if she had put her middle-European legs through the basic training of flamenco, then she might also be prepared to accept an aging gallant like the dance master Antonio, even if he could not make her into a top-notch dancer, since Zacke, after all, has a regular job and does not have the time required for show performance. He might desire her as a moderately competent expert in dance (although she doubts he would be interested in her unless she provoked envy on the basis of her achievement), yet in no case would she want to displace, oust or kill the companion of this nervous master. Therefore, she resents the fact that the director Saura first sets up Antonio's aging companion as Carmen's rival and then leaves her in the lurch. “A connoisseur of flamenco tells me that her (i.e., Carmen's) style of dancing is a lot more ‘masculine’ than that of her rival. . . .”<sup>4</sup> That tops it, says Zacke.

4. Brückner, “Carmen” 229. [Translators' note.]



Hilde Lehmann, prompter.

Hildegard Lehmann gave a breakthrough performance in the opera *Carmen*. When Don José raises the knife to kill Carmen, whom he worships with all his life, she asks for a delay: she suggests that he think it over again, she asks to discuss his action. After the discussion, Don José is no longer *ready to act*, although, as he points out, the reasons for such action had not changed. Likewise, the actress playing Carmen concedes that now, after the discussion, she is no longer willing to sacrifice her life for love. A week from now she would probably even cease to be infatuated with the matador Escamillo. For this one week, however, it was not worth dying. Besides, she had no interest in killing Don José. She says she is not vindictive, but rather grateful to him for

what has happened. If she were to throw the ring to the floor, she would in effect be killing Don José, because then he would stab her; this at least is what it says in the score. As a result, Don José would be hunted, seized, and sentenced to death in accordance with Spanish law. **One should really try to prevent this outcome together.** The spectators (a) have followed, spellbound, the whispering and hissing **trialogue** between the prompter—who cranes her neck out of the prompt-box as far as she can—and the singers squatting in front of the prompt-box. The spectators (b) feel cheated out of an evening, are becoming restless, hurry to the box-office to get their money back. Here again we have two possibilities: (a) the cashier has already gone home, since she assumed the opera would proceed as usual; what is she doing at home, when and how does the news reach her that, at the end of the opera, her presence was required, as it were, in lieu of the dramatic climax? (b) the cashier was still to be found in the canteen, is called back and on her part engages in a discussion, trying to placate this evening's paying patrons. She is not allowed to reimburse patrons without permission of the manager. The discussion is now devoted to practical questions (**polylogue**).

. . . .





Kitchen with stove, Halberstadt, during the broadcast of the opera  
*Carmen* of 21 December 1946, Radio Leipzig.





**Nickname: Carmen**

The office space at the radio station is situated off hallways in the same way that rooms adjoined the hallways of the Third Reich's War Department on Bendlerstrasse in Berlin — although those halls were roomier and more old-fashioned. The doors to the offices at this radio station are smaller than those in the War Department.

Friedrich Karmecke is a high-level political functionary — a supervisor for the “steam radio”; that is, chief editor and head of the political section of a West German radio station. Karmecke is despondent. He gazes out the window towards the lots of the car depot, a provisional space which neither claims — nor could be permitted to claim — the term “parking-lot.” A new technical palace is planned here that will expand the dominion of the complex northward. Karmecke would rather not think about the fortuitous borders of the complex of 1937, which had surrounded a villa-like structure. The sunny autumn landscape outside, he muses, probably feels cool.

In years past, in several isolated incidents that he recalls sleepily this morning, Karmecke had engaged in extramarital sexual encounters. Added up, all of these incidents constitute *his* Carmen. It is his experience with **venturing beyond the limits**; the rest is **office**.

At a board meeting, the higher functionaries of the station discuss possible radio action in cases of emergency: civil or international war. TV transmissions will be cut off first, but radio broadcasts will continue. They must be transmitted to the individual transistor owners sitting in their cellars. What should be broadcast? How should it be broadcast — moderated, unmoderated? With music, without music? Should the news be editorially approved or should it remain unapproved but subject to “general guidelines”? Or should the sources be censored? What protection against deviating versions? Karmecke goes to the phone. He tries to convince Mrs. Scherer, who runs the canteen, to hook him up to a cup of coffee. Such a service must be available to the highest functionaries in the complex; Mrs. Scherer points out, however, that the canteen does not serve before 11:30 a.m. An exception to this rule would cause bad blood in-house, she says. Karmecke is, however, very sleepy.

He used to be considered dangerous when he was sleepy. His sleepiness was perceived as a disguise for dangerous situations. It wasn't actually a mask, but rather, whenever this sensitive man detected mortal danger in his vicinity, he got sleepy.

In general, federal representatives had no reason whatsoever to investigate a state-run public radio institution. But not having a security agent of its own, there was no doubt that the radio station presented an area of security risk in an emergency situation, and so the self-governed organization now felt obligated to come up with a remedy. Instead of doing so, however, managers, program directors, the editor-in-chief, and a few other higher-ups sat at a round table with federal officers and haphazardly tried to work up some kind of security plan. This conspiracy was directed against Karmecke's need for security. If he took part in it, he himself would have to submit to a security check (a three-month long process of questioning and investigation concerned above all else with facts that could be exploited by blackmailers: extramarital relations, friendships, acquaintances, encounters in railroad cars, etc.) If he did not agree to the security check, he would still be allowed because of his rank to advise the station in an emergency situation, but he would not be apprised of the decisions made — he would have to wait outside the door. In other words, he would not be tolerated in this office any longer, since, after all, the interested parties assembled in this conference room did believe in the probability of a case of emergency. If, on the other hand, he agreed to the security check, his collective Carmen would be put on record. How could he explain that there was nothing he could be blackmailed with — by saying he had an agreement with his wife? For a moment, he had the crazy impulse to desert to Carmen — who, as mentioned before, was not *one* — and flee with her to the smugglers. But what, after 1968, would that be? The orderly GDR that would subject him to a security check?



F. Karmecke

“That which bears us, like the surface of the water bears the ship, is only the most recent layer, the 19th century. . . .”

On 14 November 1983, the day the first snow fell over greater Berlin, Rosemarie Zacke, suddenly having had two hours to kill, sat in a movie theater watching Carlos Saura’s film *Carmen*. It was a successful film — that she knew. “It is about the power of the dance, which is liberation without cause. . . .,” so read the text of her favorite film critic, on whose reviews Rosemarie usually relied. Now the female lead of *Carmen* (Laura del Sol) was cutting the throat of the aging woman — dance master of that studio in Spain. The women working in the factory dispersed into hostile dance groups; they made the floor tremble rhythmically while they cut through the rows of their antagonists and circled around one another (as in a cock fight), until suddenly the murder, like a rhythmic cut, put an end to the dance. As for Zacke, it was *not liberating* for her physically to watch the dance and murder while sitting in a narrow seat. She was bothered by the foul air and was thinking enviously of Elfriede Eilers, who, at that very moment (it being Advent), was probably scurrying through the streets of Berlin. The first snow! Zacke had the feeling she was missing something.



Elfriede Eilers, Rosemarie Zacke

“The Police Chief is Dead”

The police chief of Rome, Scarpia, was *either* at first sight a conservative of the old school, a gentleman, whose clothed body one forgot in favor of his face; an untouchable man, who becomes embroiled in an intrigue just this once by the overwhelming diva, Tosca. He wants to steal Tosca away from that horrible farmer boy, that immature mama’s boy Mario, whom she had taken for her lover merely because he had a few crude gestures at his command; this spoiled child will drop her, however, as soon as she, growing older, will be displaced by the rising diva, Ermolli, and only then will Tosca have reached a state of full bloom to which Scarpia can relate. For Scarpia, each course of action is contingent upon the need for the Vatican state somehow to prevail, and that in turn depends exclusively on that bastard Mellas leading the Austrian troops in northern Italy.



Tosca: In the foreground, police chief Scarpia, whom she has stabbed.

Or the police chief Scarpia, feared throughout Rome (“*Trema tutta Roma*”), was a primitive climber, a wild boar, a bureaucrat who thought he could afford the diva on top of an oyster breakfast without neglecting his oppressive duties; a dutiful man, who, on this particular day, felt ambitious enough to want to add “man of pleasure” to his list of personal qualities — that is, to augment the trappings of abstract pleasure-seeking as long as the state apparatus somehow holds together. If this were indeed the case, however, it would be impossible to explain how the Queen of Naples could ever have exchanged a single word with this Scarpia, while such an exchange would have had to precede his installment as police chief.

The guest performer who is to portray Scarpia this evening inherits a long line of productions that characterize Scarpia as a stout perpetrator of violence — probably a mistake. In this crude rendition, Rome would not obey him. He would be whispered about among his spies and counterspies. The Queen would be informed that this violent man is seeking personal gain. He may prove competent in the execution of state enemies, but he would threaten the court itself and, with his lack of control, could not be distinguished from the usurper approaching from across the Alps. For a police chief in the Palazzo Farnese is himself subject to surveillance — unless he is a gentleman. The performance should at least suggest how the social climber tries to *imitate* the countenance of a gentleman. Trimmed like a Christmas tree with self-made qualities, he has to acquire this mask before allowing himself the luxury of pleasures like Tosca.

In the bustling opera house, there is no place quiet enough — neither on any of the various floors, nor in the deserted areas backstage — to allow for an observant attitude. What looks like a hall-size dungeon or abyss next to the Flying Dutchman’s ship — set up in preparation for the next evening — will actually be the back wall of the Palazzo Farnese in the second act.

The only places of attentive reflection are the areas behind the police chief’s eyes, but the singer does not seem to care. He carries these areas around the stage with him. These retinas of *both Sicilies* scrutinize, from the perspective of a restless Rome, an era of which Scarpia has stored in the back of his mind only the 20 years of his active service as foremost spy. His enemies call him “the memory,” a living dossier that does not have to read the reports of his spies in order to divine what goes on in his Roman domain.



What we have here is a living machine, constructed for an age other than the one that is being destroyed. Sadly, this retinal quality of the role is drowned out by the routine Scarpia moving about in the foreground of the stage.

“Give me,” he says to the stage manager (and while he speaks, the retina remains inactive), “a little seltzer for this juice they call wine. The acidity is constricting my vocal chords. I still need them tonight.”

The prop masters bring on the soda water, but the curtain is already rising. The soda never makes it to the table and glass. The performing singer concentrates on nothing other than rehearsed movements and his voice. Through the eyes of a powerfully voiced farmer’s boy, the historical Scarpia looks out of inactive retinas like a visitor into an alien physical world.

### *Scarpia as Male Body*

Anticipating the heat of the day, the police chief in the Palazzo Farnese is awake early — around five o’clock. A film of sweat covers his body although it is still cool outside. The thin sheet thrown aside, he considers his sexual tools alongside the surge of a digestive tract hidden by his vaulting stomach; he cannot coordinate these instruments. Above the stomach pit, the bellows — air from the Albanian mountains — indicate that Scarpia is alive; unassisted, this part of his body rises and falls as the police chief watches. Scarpia gets up and washes, cooling the film of sweat away. His eyes are clear, without excessive interest. He considers the state as a coordinating or unifying essence, its outer boundaries “assailed” by Bonaparte — a metaphor for the rash to-and-fro marching of the bodies comprising French troops; these troops, however, marching as an entire body, presumably already underway now at five o’clock in the morning. As Scarpia envisions these bodies — the snouts of armed columns, legs, digestive systems, heads upon necks, necks linked to spines, and these extended by knapsacks and weapons — he draws from this image supplied by the enemy a unifying framework to integrate the centrifugal make-up of his body this morning. He looks for the red dawn spread over the Roman city (“*l’aube*”) and finds it beyond the silk-draped walls of the Farnese Hotel, where it takes shape for the waking mind and contributes to Scarpia’s unification even if he is unaware of it. Meanwhile, the French soldiers carry single-mindedly their sexual tools — superfluous in times of war — like knapsacks; that is, as ballast dating from the

millenia, field-packs needed for the occupation of Rome. They do not experience the doubts of the police chief, who wonders whether this piss-pipe is in fact meant for pleasure as well, though he himself wouldn't require such a thing in order to achieve those unifying overviews. All the same, he cannot just cut it off the same way he can close one of his security departments, or delegate or forget orders to his subordinates. On the contrary, the pressure of his colon from the left causes his penis to swell so that Scarpia cannot piss without an accompanying feeling of desire — his penis large and swollen due to a mechanical misunderstanding among the organs. The dissociation of the ruler corresponds to the association of the ruled.

If he now thought it more important than something else — just as one sends spies out on patrol hoping that the suspected prey will be roused and somehow betray itself — Scarpia could make use of the mechanical expansion of the organ by forcing himself, for example, to think of the divine Tosca. He would have to imagine that the singer was looking at him or thinking about him. This would be a misunderstanding, though suitable for eliciting a feeling of desire so that the aroused member, plagued by its dissociation from the body, could recall its ancient or medieval ability and venture an eruption. The cunning Scarpia can do without this kind of solution — this is not the path to unification. Rather, unity could be achieved by blackmailing the actual Tosca, a proud woman who would certainly not be thinking of the police chief, a woman who derives her power from the divinity of her voice, and who is not there to awaken sexual desire.

The next day, however, what he with good reason had denied himself gets in his way once he has Tosca locked in his official chambers and talks to her insistently, which brings him in physical proximity to her. She kneels before him so that he, circling around her in this divine posture, ends up behind her back (and this would appear indecent, if he cared to look, so she would then scoot around on her knees to face him frontally again). He shoves her slightly so that she falls forward into a position the spies had occasionally embroidered upon in their reports and which he, had his trousers been unbuttoned in the meanwhile and had she remained still, could have exploited in a primordial manner as if he were a goat or a hare, or a French soldier during a lull in the fighting and so forth. Instead, the penis stuck in his trousers becomes smeared at the tip with a fluid — not sperm and not urine, rather a lubricant; but it fails to make anything glide through the silk trousers,

which are difficult to open, so that Scarpia, annoyed with this brazen autonomy, no longer feels the diva's magic and loses his desire as if it miscarried. As a consequence, he proceeds with the blackmail, this deceitful seduction — not because he hopes to gain some erotic advantage over the diva, but rather in order to get his mind to prevail, which, since the early morning, had been at odds with his penis. This is how he died, without having the original reason at his disposal that outside observers would have ascribed to his actions. Even without Tosca's knife, he would not have reached his objective in the affair. In fact, it was never actually *his* objective, rather there were *objectives* in the *affair* that disintegrated into different situations as soon as they neared practical realization. He had already felt the catastrophe coming that morning. If he hadn't died in this adventure, he would have disgraced himself with impotence. In his last hour he was *completely unable to desire*: death was only another annoyance in the face of this failure. He carried no "marshal's baton in his knapsack." Precisely this is what he died of: a confusion, so to speak.



Cavaradossi's arrest.

It is well known that the divine Tosca was very easily carried away by **jealousy**, probably because she had learned to express this emotion so well via her many operatic roles, and no one had ever bothered to teach her another; roused merely by the conductor's baton, she could emit this expression on cue. It is possible that, anticipating her aging, she feared her death so much that she could not tolerate even a momentary infringement on her dominion and therefore hastened to attack the disloyal Mario with the authority of the police; the police, with regard to Rome's state enemies, would not have done otherwise. Scarpia took advantage of this weakness of Tosca's when he displayed the fan of Angelotti's sister, knowing full well that the diva would not give up until the miserable Mario — who would have left her soon anyway — was sitting in the torture chamber, until Angelotti's hide-out was revealed, and the fates of all involved were sealed, that is, until she had an explanation of the fan's origin. **Now, a highly talented prima donna can be trained not only in the automatic outpouring of so-called emotion, but also in the art of imperturbability. Therefore, at this point, she cannot be unmasked.** Nobody, not even Scarpia, has the power to lift the mask off her actions in advance of the catastrophe. Thus, Scarpia's death was predetermined, as was Mario's death, and Tosca's end, too.

And Tosca, as a police chief of her emotions, also had counterstrategies at hand. Thus, worried that in the excitement of the moment a wrong breath might tear open her tight-fitting Empire gown, she could have held back her confession while Mario was tortured for three quarters of a minute longer — for at the end of this period her hero would have fainted, and the Roman judge, having eye contact with the diva of whose power outside the court he was well aware, would break off the torture in such a moment, following the secret protocol — then Angelotti's hide-out would not have been revealed to the Roman police. Only days later the French cuirassiers would move into the city: the drama would have been cancelled. Nevertheless, Tosca and Mario cannot avoid the tragic ending, since any other course of action would have led to the singer's aging, to an insoluble intimate dispute, or to a phase of mutual indifference. The plot of the opera cannot go forward if the dress is torn.

Besides, the judge running the torture session had made his own calculations. Arriving in the small torture chamber — where one of the make-up artists dribbled red paint over the forehead and cheeks of the tenor, where the stage-manager was directing the score of the cries of

pain from the wings, where deputy Roberti was busy trying to open a stage door that only opened from the outside — the judge thought of his future, in which Tosca, very highly thought of in Naples, might whisper a few words to the Queen about his conduct in the torture chamber, which could decide the course of his career. He was not interested in the ignominious task he had to perform. Hence, the look he exchanged with the Goddess as he left Scarpia's chambers was appeasing: "I will do no more than carry out the letter of the order. No additional pain shall be inflicted by the knaves." He promised, as it were, the correct execution of the order. The Goddess, however, had reasons that prevented her from trusting her calculating, secret partisan. She did not recognize his long-term interests. That is why she and Scarpia had to die.

*Scarpia/Tosca: Exchange of Characters*

Like an intelligent monkey, a prima donna becomes familiar with the characters she performs. All the same, these characters are minor next to the actual movement of the music. Tosca, who does not see herself onstage but rather has Scarpia in view, is thus able to get to know Scarpia's internal systems of negotiation better than he. For the characteristics of Rome's chief of police have a historical origin; they carry the heavy weight of these real conditions within themselves — a weight that produces a counter-character on its underside so that Scarpia is actually not at all Scarpia when he tries to play himself. Tosca, however, would be in the position to play her antagonist unburdened by the earthly weight of the character. For once in his life, Scarpia would like to be able to relax his vigil, to lose his head and his body completely (out of happiness about the reunion, like a discoverer), but in the long run, he would like to stick to the treaties. Therefore, he must defend the basic treaty of the old regime with force — something the *ancien regime* is not able to sustain. In contrast, as an unreal mask acquired by learning, Tosca is able to present these character traits purely, with a de-dramatizing effect. Nobody will die before their time if *she* plays Scarpia. And she brings a slice of eternal life into the vicinity of the police office.

Yet Tosca is an ice-cold bitch: in other words, she is diva, a goddess. She sees Scarpia's genital confusion almost as if he were wearing no clothes; she supplies a cause for his daily travails. This bachelor, whose emotional life proceeds sometimes in fast-motion, sometimes in slow, would have really enjoyed taking a slice of eternal life for himself, and the impatience of such unaccustomed desire (what does the overworked

man know of desire?) makes him feel like tearing his hair out. Here the clever Tosca might help; having already appeared as a musical instructor, she knows how to ply her unifying or day-breaking magic not only on a spoiled boy, but also on this real man lying fallow. All the more so since she knows that her dominion of art must not be a republic of pleasure, but can only be established as a monarchy, lest she be robbed by the younger and quite capable Tazzi.

This is why she sacrifices Angelotti, already as good as lost, and the dumb dog Mario as well, who — without any regard for her and with minimal desire, since he would rather be painting oils — got himself entangled in political activities. Through timely betrayals and caresses (only both together create magic) she obtains the trust of the aging man, even though she will trade him later for a Napoleonic general — but he cannot know this in advance.

All of this could have been clever and in line with the Goddess's contractual relations, but turned out to be impossible because it would have used up all the diva's energy in real relationships. Yet, her devotion is primarily to her art, as in the cantata from earlier that evening. She is therefore unable to conjure up in this inappropriate official room the *real* affair for which she yearns with the *real* Scarpia. Rather, she must hang onto the child Mario, onto a relationship that demands less reality and serves as a kind of leftover cuisine for what remains after the diva is done singing. Thus, it is not Nature that prevents her from bringing the dramatic action to a happy ending and avoiding the opera, but rather, she fails because she had already expended her divinity in Art.

\* \* \*

### *An Imaginary Guide to the Opera: Commentary on Opera and Television*<sup>5</sup>

#### I

#### *"Distance," "Vision," 140 Bars of The Valkyrie*

Adorno talks about the disintegration of materials.<sup>6</sup> What does this mean? It refers to a newly awakened interest in precision, concentration,

5. From "Ein imaginärer Opernführer," *Jahrbuch der Hamburgischen Staatsoper 1984-1988* (Hamburg: Intendanz der Hamburgischen Staatsoper, 1988).

6. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973) 31.

correlation, details, metamorphosis — in effect, classical virtues that works of art have had for a long time. Take, for instance, the final scene from the libretto of *Carmen*, which the impresario Robert Schulz has heard 218 times, and which I may have heard about 40 times. But it never occurred to me that Carmen speaks of herself as an independent observer, a perceptive, objective witness to her own deadly fate: “Carmen never lied. Her soul remains firm. It’s over between her and you.” Children speak this way, too, as if they were standing beside themselves; and yet, for Carmen, the speech — which begins with “I” — plays a decisive role in the final confrontation. Due to the musical agitation of this sequence, I do not notice the verbal nuances. Having searched Mérimée’s tale for the origin of the fascination with the Carmen topic, I turned to the libretto. For my ear the words finally became clear only when the prompters, in this case two women, spoke the lines of José and the bright voice of the actress Sabine Wegener responded offstage. Carmen’s text is enhanced if I don’t see an image with it. José’s text demands attention if it is spoken by someone of the other sex (who is playing a part that doesn’t belong to the drama). In both cases, information and images are reduced or neutralized to a certain extent.

A similar effect can be achieved for the musical parameters by creating sound perspectives: just as the individual musician seated in the midst of his or her colleagues does not hear the total sound of the orchestra but only those parts of the score played by the musicians in his or her vicinity, I can place microphones in such a manner that in a Wagner-orchestra, for instance, only the cello, contrabass, and bass drum, or, for that matter, any other group are extremely foregrounded. Such procedures seem to suggest an *artiste démoliseur*. However, by pushing the material to the verge of disintegration, one also opens up new qualities within it. Wagner’s score now sounds like chamber music. It would be possible thus to create fragments and use them to adapt raw material of a second nature — such as the libretto Wagner wrote but never set to music on the subject of Wieland the Blacksmith.

There are about 85,000 operas. As we know, roughly 180 of these can be heard on the opera stages and only a small portion thereof make up the repertory. One could cultivate a curiosity for the forgotten scores. But one could also do something else: one could focus on the very elements of the repertory, on what Adorno calls the subcutaneous structure, in such a way that a novel type of work emerges. In that sense, the 140 bars of the overture in Act I of *The Valkyrie* may constitute an

autonomous work. This work “serves” to describe a situation, a wooded area, a thunderstorm, someone on the run, the pursuers, until the curtain is raised on page five of the piano score. “The stage remains empty for a while, the storm outside about to abate.” But if one ignores this serving function — since the materials are disintegrating anyway — the music assumes the formal attributes of a sonata; no doubt, it is absolute music which was never reducible to a descriptive function anyway.

## II

The genre of the opera guide harbors a literary form that has so far been insufficiently utilized. Nobody would confuse the text of the opera with the guide itself. The opera guide thus permits a perspectival foreshortening which — if one were to group diverse operas, as it were, in a long shot — could elucidate affinities among opera motifs. This is hardly possible in dramatic works that move the audience, especially not during the nights on which they exert maximum effect.<sup>7</sup>

Adorno therefore suggested in a private circle in 1964 that one should write *imaginary guides to the opera*; that is, short versions of operas that don't exist. These abstracts could then be offered to composers who would set them to music. To support his argument — and to overwhelm his hesitant interlocutors — Adorno put forward the following example. As an opera machine, a social event, a musical form burdened with prescriptions, the *opera seria* of the 18th century was no longer capable of development. A dinosaur. The fact that — according to the canon of this genre — only gods, Romans, and aristocrats qualified as dramatic characters explains this situation only superficially; rather, it was the importance of these *soirees*, the “realism of the social estates,” that rested on the genre like a nightmare. The intermissions, however, were filled by “*entr'acte*” pieces (such as Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*) of eight to twelve minutes that featured servants, cooks, *figaros*. These “unrealistic” pieces or echoes then served as the core from which at least Italian opera was revived via composers such as Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and again produced monumental works.

---

7. By contrast, this is possible with performances that fail. Thus, I once had the opportunity of “seeing” the affinities implied in *Il Trovatore* during a performance of the opera at the Municipal Theater of Mainz in the 1950s, because all three protagonists had a bad cold and the announcements to that effect disrupted the dramatic tension before every act.



Considering this development, modern opera, now at the end of the 20th century, would not consist of an imitation of the great repertory operas. The search for the needle in *The Marriage of Figaro*, for instance, the desperation at not finding it, would suffice as a sketch for an opera plot. A series of such plots could fill an entire evening, though the individual sketch can be as brief as one of the “*moments musicaux*.” It is enough if such a moment “flares up.” There is no time limit either way. This emancipation from the “time of a rewarding evening for the educated, propertied classes of the 19th century” creates the condition for serial procedures, and as well for categories of authenticity, thoroughness, stringency, etc.

### III

Television (like broadcasting in general) achieves its greatest effects in a naturalistic key. A television program (*Fernsehprogramm*) which shows nothing at a distance (*Ferne*) but represents everything as if in close immediacy — a window which neither affords a look outside nor reflects anything inside but instead is crammed full of program — obeys the reality principle; even the children’s films are grown-up. This is the crucial distinction between television and musical theater or cinema. Opera in particular has learned to break through the barriers of the realistic gaze by means of emotions.

As far as I know, no operas have as yet been composed for television. This confirms my hypothesis that operas import into television chunks of anti-realism. They neither look like the normal television diet, nor do they share the gravitations of opera performances. I wonder how the first notes of such messages in a bottle will sound in a strange medium, or from the perspective of the opera house, “from a distance.”

“Hope is my desire: what I love, has to be as far away as heaven - - -”

*Translated by Sara S. Poor and Miriam Hansen*

## *On Misunderstanding Habermas: A Response to Rajchman*

Richard Wolin

One does not need a Ph.D. in contemporary American fiction to decipher the allusion contained in the title of John Rajchman's review of Jürgen Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, "Habermas's Complaint."<sup>1</sup> The reference is clearly to the masturbation-obsessed protagonist of Philip Roth's 1968 novel, Alexander Portnoy, who also had a "complaint." The theoretical implications of Rajchman's witty literary analogy, moreover, are spelled out clearly on virtually every page of his review: *viz.*, that Habermas, like his fictional alter ego, suffered some childhood trauma that explains his "phobic" revulsion of so-called "irrationalist" philosophical paradigms. "Where does this phobia of irrationality come from?" Rajchman asks plaintively at the beginning of his review (164). And a few pages later we are told that, "In his phobia, Habermas conflates the irrational with philosophical irrationalism" (171).

The ironies of this polemical tack are almost too prodigious for words. Rajchman, the Foucault-advocate (and author of a commendable short book on the latter<sup>2</sup>), adopts the rhetorical strategy of suggesting that

---

1. *New German Critique* 45 (Fall 1988) 163-191. All subsequent page references will appear in parenthesis in the text.

For four reviews which share many of Rajchman's objections to Habermas's reading of the poststructuralists, see the "Symposium on Jürgen Habermas's 'The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity'" (with contributions by F. Dallmayr, J.M. Bernstein, C. Norris, and D.C. Hoy) in *Praxis International* 8 (1989): 377-464.

For a review that is much more sympathetic to Habermas's project, see Martin Jay in *History and Theory* 1 (1989): 94-112.

2. *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

Habermas's critical perspective on poststructuralist thought is pathological in origin; and that such depth-psychological explanations — rather than the inner logic of the intellectual matters at issue — offer privileged insight into the basis of Habermas's "complaint" against his French contemporaries.

Of course, all of this essentially boils down to a shallow instance of *tu quoque* reasoning. If Habermas's differences with Foucault *et al.* are "phobic" (Rajchman's term), they have an "irrational" basis in unconscious or repressed mental processes. And thus, according to Rajchman, it is not Foucault, as Habermas purportedly tells us, who stands guilty of "irrationalism," but Habermas himself, since his criticisms are driven by an uncontrollable psychological compulsion. Or as Rajchman's amateurish efforts at lay analysis suggest: it was Habermas's youthful experiences with National Socialism that left him with an exaggerated fear of "irrationalism" in all its forms; and it is this early trauma that explains his misplaced anxieties vis-à-vis contemporary French thought. Yet, after all that Foucault has taught us, from *Madness and Civilization* on, about the prejudicial nature of clinical categorizations, the argument that if someone takes issue with your position, this can best be explained primarily in terms of certain *ontogenetic disturbances* would seem a monumental act of bad faith.

At the same time, one of the essential claims of my rejoinder will be that the rationalism/irrationalism dichotomy on which Rajchman primarily relies to explicate Habermas's argument in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* is both unproductive and misleading. It is unproductive insofar as it results in an ever-escalating exchange of sterile charges and countercharges: thus Rajchman responds to the (perceived) claims of poststructuralist irrationalism by characterizing Habermas's theory of communicative action as merely another variant of dogmatic rationalism — an allegation that is equally false. It is misleading insofar as it misrepresents the philosophical argument and intentions of Habermas's text, which is neither a chronicle of "self-defeating philosophies," nor an account of "a vast intellectual failure" (169), nor a "war" (declared or undeclared) against "philosophical irrationalism." In fact, Habermas himself is exceedingly sparing in his use of the term "irrationalism." The word itself is never, to my knowledge, applied directly to the work of either Foucault or Derrida. It would of course be misleading to underestimate the profound and fundamental differences that separate Habermas from his French and German interlocutors. Yet to read Rajchman's review, one

would think that *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* represents a veritable and sustained *jihād* against irrationalist thought.

Moreover, although Rajchman would like to read *The Philosophical Discourse* as “an intellectual history of postwar French philosophy” — *i.e.*, exclusively as “a book on neostructuralism” (166) — in truth, the “neostructuralists” do not make an appearance in the book until the *seventh* chapter (on Bataille); and among the twelve lectures that comprise the book, only four (in addition to a lengthy Derrida-excursus) are devoted directly to their work. Thus, although the contemporary vogue of the poststructuralist critique of reason may well have served as the main stimulus behind Habermas’s labor of theoretical reconstruction, at the same time, the “discourse of modernity” under consideration — which begins with Hegel and ends with Niklas Luhmann — is decidedly more complex.

Before I address several of the legitimate substantive criticisms Rajchman brings to bear against Habermas’s study, I wish to return momentarily to the pervasive and prejudicial “rhetorical” dimension of his review. I view this dimension as unfortunate, since it tends to displace what might have instead been a fruitful illumination of specific limitations of Habermas’s theoretical standpoint and thus short-circuit a potentially interesting debate. Rajchman makes promising overtures in this direction: for example, when he points out that in Habermas’s narrative, “there is nothing about the questions of sexuality, the body, language, and gender” (166) that have been central concerns in the work of the poststructuralists. Here it would have been fruitful to show — in terms that would transcend the simplistic accusation that Habermas is an incorrigible “rationalist” — the concrete, internal-theoretical reasons as to why such themes have found so little attention in Habermas’s own critique of power and domination. But such points are rarely followed through, and instead, the substantive matters at issue tend to be obscured by polemical/rhetorical overkill.<sup>3</sup>

---

3. In addition, it might have been fruitful to point out that Foucault seemed to lay the basis for a truly productive rapprochement with the tradition of Critical Theory in later essays such as “What is Enlightenment?”, where he seeks to insert his own philosophical concerns in a theoretical tradition that reaches “from Hegel through Nietzsche or Max Weber to Horkheimer or Habermas.” Cf. *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 32.

Moreover, in one of his essays on Foucault, “Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present,” Habermas explicitly recognizes the common ground that seemed to emerge between the two as a result of Foucault’s later writings. For Foucault, in attempting to

Thus, according to Rajchman's reading of Habermas, "the French have become the bad Romantic Germans" (163-64). His theoretical grievances against his French contemporaries are explicable insofar as, "The evil of German fascism has shown us, if we needed to be shown, that all irrationalist or relativist forms of thought are dangerous errors" (163). For Habermas, according to Rajchman, "'irrationalism' always leads in modern societies to fascism" (179). And further: it is Habermas's "fervent conviction that the only way to secure ourselves against a recurrence of fascism is by an unconditional commitment to a universalist rationalist philosophy" (171). I cannot but regard claims of this nature as bizarre, as strangely out of touch with the theoretical debates at issue. Is the true ground of Habermas's position really the experience of National Socialism, as Rajchman implies? Can the basis of his critique of contemporary French thought really be reduced to such fatuous "guilt-by-association" arguments? (Moreover, in what way can German fascism be considered "relativist"?). In point of fact, whereas Rajchman's claims concerning the fascism/irrationalism nexus might hold in the case of Lukács's *The Destruction of Reason*<sup>4</sup> — where it is argued in the case of a *specifically German* historical context that "irrationalist" forms of thought abetted the triumph of a fascist political structure — they seem to possess very little explanatory value with reference to the Habermas text under consideration. And though Rajchman would like to interpolate a "fear of fascism" as the hidden, foundational subtext of Habermas's entire discussion of contemporary French philosophy, one is at a loss to identify the least bit of textual evidence to support this claim. When Habermas does allow himself to speculate briefly about poststructuralist political sentiments, he makes reference not to fascism, but to a "*primordial anarchism*" (PDM 4). Moreover, it could well be that poststructuralism is philosophically significant, but — as Richard Rorty or Stanley Fish might put it — "politically without consequences." All too often, though, it seems like Rajchman is reviewing Lukács's 1952 "demonology" (Agnes Heller) instead of the Habermas book itself. And while this approach might make for

---

raise once more the question about the meaning of Enlightenment that Kant had posed two centuries earlier, thematizes Habermas's central concern in *Philosophical Discourse* and other works: *viz.*, the unique quality of the modern age, which, unlike any other, must provide its own normative self-justification (*Selbstvergewisserung*). The Habermas essay is reprinted in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David C. Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 103-108.

4. Atlantic Heights, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1981.

provocative and gratifying polemics, it is of little help in identifying the legitimate intellectual differences that are at stake in the debate — my chief objection to Rajchman's method and mode of presentation.

The specious charge that *Philosophical Discourse* represents a global struggle against philosophical irrationalism sets up the equally illusory characterization of Habermas's own theory as a type of superficial rationalism. The problem here is that the theoretical specificity of Habermas's philosophical project never comes into view. Instead, all we supposedly need to know is that Habermas is a "rationalist"; the intellectual intolerance of his position seems a self-evident consequence of this label. Thus, we are told that Habermas embraces "a rationalist conception of reason: judgment by *unassailable standards*, or according to criteria laid down *prior and independably [sic] of discussion*" (171). He is the advocate of "a line to be unanimously repeated by all 'rational' agents" (171). Finally, Habermas falls victim to the illusion that "there are historical models and assumptions which cannot be contested or 'falsified' . . ." (179).

Suffice it to say that anyone who is the least bit acquainted with Habermas's discourse ethic would find the foregoing descriptions implausible and misleading. They yield a woefully reductionist image of Habermas as an inflexible rationalist — as though the Hegel-critique of *Philosophical Discourse* (in a manner that parallels the argument of *Knowledge and Human Interests*) did not make his differences with traditional philosophical rationalism abundantly clear. Contrary to Rajchman's argument ("[Habermas] thinks there are historical models and assumptions which cannot be contested or 'falsified'"), the conception of communicative ethics set forth by Habermas is eminently "fallibilistic." The counterfactual ideal this conception recommends for the creation of just political norms is that no norm would be valid that could not be agreed upon in practical discourse by all those who would be affected by the norm. In this model, there are no norms that are privileged, none that would be exempt from the process of discursive redemption. Nor are there norms that would be *a priori* ruled out as unacceptable — except possibly those that would systematically interfere with the right of all arguments or points of view to be heard. Rather it is the communication community of those affected that is charged with the responsibility of determining the norms and forms of life in accordance with which they would live. In truth, it would be difficult to imagine an ethical theory or an ideal of justice that would be more

open, tolerant, and democratic. And thus, the claim that there is a covert appeal to “unassailable standards” or “criteria laid down prior and independably of discussion” is entirely delusive. Instead, the discourse ethic is designed precisely to *surmount* an appeal to standards and criteria that would be treated as *valid prior to discussion*; e.g., those advocated by the Hegelian conception of *Sittlichkeit* and which have come into vogue again recently among the so-called neo-Aristotelians or “communitarians” (MacIntyre, Sandel, etc.). If one honestly examines its presuppositions rather than relying upon prejudicial clichés, it seems inarguably clear that the discourse ethic, instead of being a dogmatic rationalism, represents an impassioned and principled justification of political pluralism. This is true precisely by virtue of its “formalism” or “proceduralism,” which in principle remains compatible with an infinite variety of practical norms or “forms of life.” Moreover, only a “formalistic” approach to ethics such as Habermas’s can be truly pluralistic, since it in no way attempts to prejudge the *content* of the decisions that are ultimately reached. He is aware that the latter will always be in large measure contingent upon the context and traditions of the specific discursive community in question.<sup>5</sup>

Rajchman tells us (171) that one can be opposed to “rationalism” without being an “irrationalist” — and who would disagree? But Rajchman fails to recognize (at least in Habermas’s case) that one can be a defender of “rational agreement” *and* be a thoroughgoing pluralist — and that in fact, the discourse ethic might well be the surest philosophical vindication of pluralism we have.

The essentially non-dogmatic character of Habermasian reason is made eminently clear in his discussion of the “praxis philosophy” held in common by the young Marx as well as 20th-century advocates of Marxist humanism (*PDM*, 75ff.). Both parties remain tied to the model of self-positing subjectivity advocated by the early Hegel, which in the work of Marx becomes the “production paradigm.” But Habermas is mistrustful of neo-Marxist attempts to posit a macro-subject that would be capable of transcending the divisions of contemporary society — the separation between man and nature, subject and object, etc. — for such attempts present the risk of a “de-differentiation” of the value spheres of the modern world. In Habermas’s work, like that

---

5. For an extremely lucid account of the discourse ethic, see Stephen K. White, *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 48ff.

of his poststructuralist adversaries, we find, upon careful examination, a healthy suspicion of “totalization.” His respect for the independent validity claims of the various “value spheres” of modern life is thus another important example of his persistent skepticism vis-à-vis the claims of totalizing approaches to reason. To confuse his theories with the latter, therefore, would only serve to distort and misrepresent them.

Habermas’s fundamental argument in *Philosophical Discourse*, which receives a thorough sociological grounding in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1984, 1987),<sup>6</sup> is that the paradigm of Western modernity contains certain aporias as well as certain strengths. The central problem with the post-Hegelian philosophical discourse of modernity in his view is that instead of pursuing an immanent confrontation with the diremptions of modernity, this discourse, beginning with Nietzsche, has sought redemption via a wholesale leap beyond the modern age and its aporias. This is suggested by the discussions of “postmodernism” that in recent years have been associated with the names of these (predominantly French) thinkers. In this sense, his object is less an “acrimonious” “declaration of war on his Parisian contemporaries” (165) than an intellectually honest attempt to define the theoretical limitations and risks of the poststructuralist critique of modernity.

Like others before him, Rajchman perpetuates the misconception that Habermas views the neostructuralists as essentially “neoconservatives.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, in “Modernity versus Postmodernity,”<sup>8</sup> Habermas refers to the French intellectual lineage that “leads from Bataille via Foucault to Derrida” not as neo-conservative, but as a variant of “young

6. In my opinion, one of Rajchman’s major interpretive failings is his refusal to understand the work under review in relation to the sociological theory of modernity elaborated in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. And thus, for example, one encounters the erroneous claim that “His [Habermas’s] is a purely intellectual, even Idealist history; one learns little of the developments in society that might have been linked to the various philosophical errors” (169). Surely the most cursory familiarity with *The Theory of Communicative Action* — in which the theory of modernity discussed in *Philosophical Discourse* receives a thoroughgoing socio-historical grounding — would have prevented such an elementary misstatement. That Rajchman’s entire review fails to contain a single reference to Habermas’s 1981 work would seem a glaring omission.

7. “He [Habermas] says that the neostructuralists are structural neoconservatives (*i.e.*, neo- two things which don’t have much in common)” (166-67).

8. *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981) 3-14. The term “young conservative” is intended as an allusion to like-minded German thinkers of the 1920s — the best example would be Ernst Jünger — who “on the basis of modernistic attitudes . . . justify an irreconcilable anti-modernism.” *Ibid* 13.



*conservatism.*” By this term he means something quite specific: the embrace of an intractable “anti-modernist” (or anti-enlightenment) stance whose origins may be found in the critique of modernity propounded by the leading exponents of aesthetic modernism — Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Joyce, the surrealists — a critique that concentrates on the insufferable reifying effects of the logic of modernization. Habermas himself has on several occasions emphatically endorsed the defetishizing ideal of “profane illuminations,” the conception of a de-centered subjectivity, advanced by this modern, post-auratic conception of aesthetic experience.<sup>9</sup> He becomes critical, however, when this experience of *aesthetic modernism* is transformed into the ground and basis for *theoretical discourse in general*, the essential philosophical precedent for this theoretical move being Nietzsche’s appeal in *The Birth of Tragedy* for a “poetic Socrates.” This neo-Nietzschean attempt to generalize the aesthetic moment becomes the focal point of his dispute with Derrida, above all, with reference to the latter’s attempt to invalidate the genre-distinction between philosophy and literature.<sup>10</sup> It also makes itself felt at several key junctures in Foucault’s development: his celebration of the four “mad poets” (Hölderlin, Novalis, Nietzsche, and Artaud) at the conclusion of *Madness and Civilization*, as well as his option for an “aesthetics of existence” in the last two volumes of *La volonté de savoir*.<sup>11</sup>

In Habermas’s view, therefore, the poststructuralist critique of modernity is definitely distinct from that of the neo-conservatives, yet it unexpectedly complements the latter in an important regard. What the two perspectives share is a rejection — albeit, proceeding from entirely different theoretical premises and temperaments — of the (universalistic) normative foundations of modern political life. Thus, for example, in their critique of modern forms of rationality, the poststructuralists seem unwilling to differentiate between practical and instrumental reason.

---

9. See for example his reply to Martin Jay in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard J. Bernstein (Cambridge: Polity, 1984) 199-203.

10. I find Rajchman’s efforts to save Derrida from this charge unconvincing (180ff.), and I think the most cursory review of the Derrida-Searle debate will confirm Habermas’s characterization of Derrida’s intentions regarding the aforementioned genre-distinction. See Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982); Searle, “Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida,” *Glyph* 1 (1977) 198ff; and Derrida, “Limited Inc.,” in *Glyph* 12 (1977) 202ff.

11. A good summation of Foucault’s theory of an “aesthetics of existence” may be found in “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *The Foucault Reader*, 340-372.

Instead, both types of rationality tend to be subsumed under the instrumental variant, leading to a superficial identification of reason with domination *tout court*.<sup>12</sup> Foucault's cynical equation of modern political norms with a repressive process of disciplinary "normalization" (e.g., in *Discipline and Punish*) serves as a good case in point, as does Derrida's critique of "logocentrism." But as a result of this collapse of levels, the specific logic of modern moral-political rationality falls out of account — a logic that may not be equated with technical rationality *simpliciter*.

The neo-conservatives, on the other hand, who advocate government by a technocratic elite, fear the authentically democratic implications of political modernity. In stark contrast to the poststructuralists and as advocates of "technological modernization," they both endorse the global spread of instrumental rationality and tend to be staunch critics of the de-reifying, expressive-emancipatory qualities of aesthetic modernity, which is blamed for a dissolution of the traditional protestant-entrepreneurial work ethic.<sup>13</sup> In *Philosophical Discourse*, Habermas very clearly distinguishes between these two positions, poststructuralism and neoconservatism, that are at once very different but complementary. Thus, as we have already seen, whereas he characterizes the political attitudes of the French theorists as based on a "primordial anarchism," neoconservatives tend to be advocates of political technocracy. Instead of a conflation of these two prominent "postmodern" intellectual currents (not merely Lyotard, but many neoconservative thinkers tend to be enthusiasts of a "*posthistoire*," in which many of the normative presuppositions of modernity have been rendered obsolete), we see that Habermas carefully differentiates them.

But despite these important differences, he simultaneously inquires as to whether or not, on one very important point, they share something essential: *viz.*, a desire to *outflank* the problems of modernity by emphasizing one of its components at the expense of the other two: the poststructuralists, in their one-sided celebration of the virtues of aesthetic modernity, the neoconservatives in their exclusive endorsement of the economic-bureaucratic features of the modern age. Or as Habermas himself characterizes this parallel dialectic:

---

12. This is also the charge Habermas levels against the argument of Horkheimer and Adorno in the chapter he devotes to *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment" (*PDM* 106-130).

13. See the argument of Daniel Bell in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

Both theories of postmodernity pretend to have gone beyond this horizon [of European modernity], to have left it behind as the horizon of a past epoch. . . . We cannot exclude from the outset the possibility that neoconservatism and aesthetically inspired anarchism, in the name of a farewell to modernity, are merely trying to revolt against it once again. It could be that they are merely cloaking their complicity with the venerable tradition of counter-Enlightenment in the garb of post-Enlightenment (*PDM* 4-5).

Part of the problem in attempting to assess the relative merits of Habermas and the poststructuralists is that they proceed from such entirely different theoretical traditions. Even in those relatively few moments when their philosophical concerns temporarily intersect, one feels as though they inhabit two entirely different intellectual universes. To take only one example: whereas in *The Order of Things*, Kant is viewed as the initiator of those pernicious “*sciences de l’homme*” that become the ultimate basis for modern, carceral societies, the Kant of *Knowledge and Human Interests* is the last philosopher to reflect in an authentic way on imperatives of a theory of knowledge — a tradition of philosophical inquiry that Habermas seeks to revive.

It is clear, however, that for those who are interested in comparisons, it is to the work of Foucault that one must turn. For at least since the so-called genealogical turn in his work, his theoretical concerns have overlapped with those of Habermas in no small measure. In essence, both have been centrally preoccupied with a *critique of domination*. As Tom McCarthy has observed, “Habermas devotes two lectures to Foucault, and readers might justifiably conclude that in his dialogue with French poststructuralism, Foucault is the preferred partner. More than any other of the radical critics of reason, Foucault opens up a field of investigation for social research; there is in his work no ‘mystification’ of social pathologies into the ‘destinings’ of this or that primordial force” (*PDM* xiv). Here, too, it seems that Rajchman has missed a good opportunity. Though he remarks at one point that “there is common ground; these philosophers [Habermas and the poststructuralists] may have more important enemies than each other” (165), this insight, too, remains undeveloped, scuttled amid effusive polemics. However, the work of Habermas and Foucault may well prove mutually complementary in several crucial respects.

It seems that Foucault’s own analysis of “power” falls victim to a series of debilitating aporias. Habermas has accused him of a

“cryptonormativism” (*PDM* 276ff — perhaps not the most felicitous choice of words). By this he means that during his genealogical period, Foucault is unable, in terms of the conceptual framework established by his own theory, to account for the normative direction in which that theory itself pushes — *viz.*, an overturning of the omnipresent disciplinary mechanisms of the carceral society. This proves to be the case insofar as Foucault essentially accepts Nietzsche’s cynical equation of “knowledge” and “power.” There is no such thing as “truth itself,” but only various regimes of truth that are recognizable among the various social effects of power. Or as Foucault remarks at one point: “every point in the exercise of power is at the same time a site where knowledge is formed. And conversely every established piece of knowledge permits and assures the exercise of power.”<sup>14</sup> This insight is vigorously reaffirmed in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” where Foucault describes the intentions of the genealogical method as follows: “The historical analysis of this rancorous will to knowledge reveals that all knowledge rests upon injustice (that there is no right, even in the act of knowing, to truth or foundation for truth).”<sup>15</sup> And thus, any critique of domination runs the risk of immediately falling victim to the same sinister, Nietzschean cycle of eternally self-supplanting power formations. Any potential counter-power has only those methods at its disposal that are already the characteristic means of the reigning empire of domination. If this theory of the inner workings of power is correct, then, Habermas argues, “it must destroy the foundations of the research inspired by it as well.” Conversely, “if the truth claims that Foucault himself raises for his genealogy of knowledge were in fact illusory and amounted to no more than the effects that this theory is capable of releasing within the circle of its adherents, then the entire undertaking of a critical unmasking of the human sciences would lose its point” (*PDM* 279).

Habermas thus emphasizes the normative deficiencies of Foucault’s genealogical method. However, there is an additional methodological failing that is perhaps even more debilitating for the critical and “emancipatory” intentions of his framework, a failing that leaves us with a critique of domination that is in many respects self-cancelling. For want of a better term, we may refer to this dimension as Foucault’s

---

14. Foucault, “Power and Norm: Notes,” *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. M. Morris and P. Patton (Sydney: Federal Publications, 1979) 62.

15. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1977) 163.

“methodological objectivism,” which parallels his self-professed “felicitous positivism” (and here, I happily accept Rajchman’s corrective that by this term Foucault is not referring to an “objectivizing method,” but to the “positivity of a domain of knowledge”). In the main, the problem may be described as follows. Foucault undercuts potentials for resistance to the reign of “bio-power” both on the side of the “object” — the analysis of the mechanisms of power themselves — and on that of the “subject” — the potential “addressees” of his theory.

Let us consider first the “subjective” side of the equation. Summarily put, Foucault’s distrust of anthropocentrically oriented approaches in the human sciences is so extreme that in his method he effaces the potential addressees of his admittedly brilliant, material “unmaskings.” He concentrates to such a degree on extirpating the last traces of epistemological subjectivism from his analyses that, by definition, *there are no social actors left* who might take up the very real, constructive potentials of his critique. Or as Foucault proclaims at one point: “The human being no longer has any history . . . since he speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the function of an “author” may best be understood according to Foucault in terms of “the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society.”<sup>17</sup> But once the capacity for action on the part of social actors is understood exclusively in objectivistic terms (or, to use Foucault’s preferred expression, “positively”) — *i.e.*, once they are understood as purely passive repositories of various prior social effects which thoroughly structure, constitute, and shape the modern “self” — the explanatory framework essentially denies in advance any and every possibility of historical otherness and contestation. And thus the potential “other” of power is in Foucault’s framework epistemologically degraded to one of its *a priori* manifestations.

In methodological terms, therefore, Foucault essentially views society through the lens of Bentham’s panopticon. His one-sided preference for “positive science” — as opposed to the anthropologically contaminated, “interpretive” models — leads him to ignore an entire sociological tradition which alone could provide him with the theory of social action his analysis of power so sorely lacks. Foucault thereby creates, as it were, his own “methodological prison.”

---

16. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock, 1970) 369.

17. “What is an Author?,” *The Foucault Reader* 108.

This methodological deficiency is then predictably complemented and reinforced by his own material analyses — the aforementioned “objective” side of the dilemma. It is at this point that his own thesis concerning the omnipresence of power in modern carceral society returns to meet his epistemological anti-subjectivism half-way. Although Rajchman points to certain of Foucault’s later utterances that tend to minimize the monolithicity of disciplinary power (above all, 177, note 16), such observations are the exceptions that prove the rule. There is no avoiding the fact that Foucault’s genealogical studies point in the direction of an all-encompassing and virtually seamless network of bio-power. Or as Foucault himself remarks at one point:

Thus the apparatus of sequestration fixes individuals to the production apparatus by producing habits by means of a play of compulsions, teachings and punishments. This apparatus must manufacture a behaviour that characterises individuals, it must create a nexus of habits through which the social “belongingness” of individuals to a society is defined, that is, it manufactures something like norms. . . . While [the classical] apparatus brought forth monsters, the modern sequestration manufactures norms. Constitution of labour-power, apparatus of sequestration: disciplinary society, permanent function of normalisation. That is the series that characterises our type of society.<sup>18</sup>

It would be difficult to deny that vis-à-vis bourgeois society, Foucault adopts the Nietzschean standpoint of “total critique”: since bourgeois norms are reduced to the function of providing a veneer of pseudo-humanistic legitimation for the various disciplinary technologies, these societies are devoid of a potential for “immanent critique”: there are no ideals of freedom, equality, and solidarity left to redeem. Since for Foucault, like Adorno, “the whole is the untrue,” a “solution” can be found only *deus ex machina*, i.e., non-immanently.<sup>19</sup> The only hints Foucault can give in this respect are vitalistic: e.g., the paean to “the body

---

18. “Power and Norm: Notes” 65.

19. It is ironic that Rajchman considers Habermas’s theory of communicative competence as a *deus ex machina* postulate. But even if one denies the theory of universal pragmatics in terms of which this theory is grounded (and one must doubt from Rajchman’s superficial treatment of these issues how thoroughly familiar he is with them), one can certainly point to a wealth of legal, constitutional, and normative structures characteristic of modern societies that would suggest the content of the theory has a distinct basis in reality.

and its pleasures,” with which volume one of *The History of Sexuality* concludes. Or the following response taken from a 1977 interview with Bernhard-Henri Lévy: “we should be able to rediscover the things themselves in their primordial vitality: behind asylum walls, the spontaneity of madness; in and through the penal system, the fertile unrest of delinquency; beneath sexual prohibitions, the purity of desire.”<sup>20</sup> But I think it is clear that despite whatever new vistas of social criticism have emerged as a result of Foucault’s thematization of “bio-power,” any theory of social contestation that tries to base itself on “the body and its pleasures,” “the purity of desire,” or a “primordial vitality” is essentially self-cancelling.<sup>21</sup> The “aesthetic sphere” (in the Kierkegaardian sense) cannot be treated as a self-evident and reliable basis for social contestation.

But isn’t this precisely the area where the theory of communicative action developed by Habermas could provide an important remedy given the aporias of Foucault’s theory of power — in order to furnish the *theory of social action* that is so sorely lacking in Foucault’s own analytical framework? Would it not be fruitful to understand the capacity of social actors to resist the instrumentalization and colonization of the various spheres of social life primarily in terms of the theory of the life-world that Habermas, following the lead of Husserl and Schutz, has used as a basis for understanding contemporary “new social movements” that have largely replaced traditional forms of social struggle? Only by focusing on the *logics of socialization* that are specific to advanced industrial societies can one simultaneously uncover the existing capacities for social contestation. Only by following an approach that also thematizes the social *constitution of intersubjectivity* in these societies can one unearth the very real “potentials for negation” that are contained in the (universalistic) normative structures of late capitalism — about which Foucault, to the detriment of his own theory, remains so cynical. In such terms alone can one develop a social theory that is *non-monological*, one in which the constitution of modern selves is understood not merely as the foregone result of an autonomously acting “biopower” but simultaneously as a product of intersubjective activity.

To be sure, the extent to which the aforementioned normative structures

---

20. “Power and Sex,” *Telos* 32 (1977): 158.

21. As Axel Honneth’s discussion of Foucault in *Kritik der Macht* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984) attempts to show (albeit with reference to Foucault’s Hobbesian characterization of society as a *bellum omnium contra omnes*), no possible theory of social cohesion or political obligation could emerge from such a perspective. We would then indeed tumble back into a Hobbesian “state of nature.”

play a constitutive role in the various spheres of contemporary social existence is an empirical question. However, to dismiss such criteria *a priori* as “rationalist” and “dogmatic” is to deprive oneself of a potentially valuable basis of social analysis and critique (as does, moreover, the *ad hominem* argument that the claims of a theorist with whom one disagrees can be dismissed insofar as they represent the inflexible demands of a “liberal rationalist superego” [164]).

Rajchman claims that it is only by avoiding the normative baggage of traditional social theory — by undertaking, as it were, an “other” inquiry — that Foucault is able to ferret out unique analytical perspectives and gains (172ff.) — a point that should unquestionably be conceded. But then, it should also be constructive to expose the various theoretical cul-de-sacs that Foucault enters into as a result of this studied avoidance of certain intellectual traditions. One can agree with Rajchman that from Foucault’s “blindness” stems his “insight.” And yet this conclusion should not imply that the blindness is something sacrosanct and thus deserves to remain uncured.

But mutual understanding is not a one-way street; and thus it is likely that a Habermasian framework could equally benefit from closer contact with a Foucaultian analytic of power. *The Theory of Communicative Action* provides us essentially with a discourse on justice. Justice is primarily a procedural affair. Consequently, questions of social power are broached primarily in terms of the capacities of social actors to articulate their interests, wants, and demands freely. The specific content of this articulation is in no way pre-judged by Habermas’s framework. To claim, therefore, that the theory of communicative action represents a relapse into philosophical dogmatism or a new version of “foundationalism” is thus essentially misleading. The asymmetrical and systematic interference with this capacity for intersubjective agreement is deemed the source of social domination in Habermas’s framework. In late capitalist societies, the repression of generalizable interests takes on a particular dynamic. Steering imperatives that derive from the economic and administrative sub-systems of society encroach upon the autonomous decision-making capacities of social actors situated in the life-world. Spheres of social action that were heretofore governed informally and communicatively are now incorporated within an ever-expanding organizational-bureaucratic network of instrumental rationality. Thus, contradictions and disequilibriums that were once endemic to the economic system under capitalism have been increasingly absorbed, with varying degrees of success, by the sphere of state administration. In its efforts to neutralize and defuse



crisis tendencies, the tentacles of bureaucratic reason penetrate more and more deeply into the heart of civil society.

It is not hard to see from this cursory account that Habermas's critique of instrumental reason and Foucault's analysis of disciplinary technologies (in the military, prisons, schools, hospitals, etc.) are potentially complementary. Both perspectives (this is of course less true in Foucault's case) would seem to have their origins in a Weberian critique of the reifying effects of anonymous, bureaucratic power. Habermas traces this process from on high, as it were, beginning at the abstract level of the "purposive-rational subsystems" of economy and state administration that are governed by the media of money and power. Foucault, conversely, with his genial, thick descriptions of bio-power, normalization, and historical "techniques of self," analyzes this process from below.

And yet, Foucault's investigations of the micro-physics of power seem to capture a dimension of domination in contemporary societies that is absent in Habermas's approach. Foucault's method allows him to account for domination in its phenomenological, lived immediacy. He is able to portray power as an "individualizing" phenomenon, as a constitutive aspect of the modern self, in a way that transcends Habermas's "intersubjective" paradigm, i.e., his conceptualization of social action as oriented primarily toward "reaching an agreement." Habermas has forcefully criticized certain "vitalistic" residues of Foucault's analytical framework. And whereas it may indeed be advisable to view an unqualified endorsement of "the body and its pleasures" with suspicion, at the same time this somatic-existential dimension of Foucault's thought seems to have sensitized him to the non-ideological, *physiological* side of power in a way that effectively transcends the Habermasian paradigm of communication. Perhaps one of the limitations of Habermas's framework is that by attempting to understand questions of domination predominantly in terms of the problematic of "justice," he is unable to apprehend the full intricacies and dynamics of power in advanced industrial societies. As Foucault has shown us, domination, in addition to its juridical component, has its physiological side as well. It has the power to make people "say yes" to certain habits, values, and norms, in addition to depriving them systematically of "rights." It is in this sense that Foucault's descriptions of the "productive" capacities of power, as well as his related critique of the so-called "repressive hypothesis," remain instructive. For it is uncertain whether this array of considerations can be adequately theorized in terms of the paradigm of communication alone.

## *Rejoinder to Richard Wolin*

John Rajchman

In his response to my essay, Richard Wolin remarks that the recent controversy over reason and unreason in contemporary philosophy has proved to be a rather sterile one. I would agree. But in my view it is Habermas's complaint — the charges of aestheticism, cryptonormativism, nihilism, infantilism, wholesale rejection of reason and modern society levelled against poststructuralism — which has largely been responsible for this sterility. Wolin reiterates Habermas's complaint in some of his earlier essays, where he writes of a “diabolical” pact connecting Foucault to Niklas Luhmann, of Foucault's defective *Mündigkeit* or immaturity, and of his dangerous and empty “aesthetic decisionism.” Wolin also adopts an even more dismissive attitude towards Derrida in these essays. After accusing me of psychologizing Habermas, Wolin simply repeats his complaint, which seems to me to compound the very sterility to which he objects. Wolin is willing to allow only “specific limitations” to Habermas's thought in discussion: he countenances no real questioning of it.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. The “specific limitation” Wolin has in mind is the limitation of Habermas' strict focus on “formal justice.” This focus would allow no place for the “physiological dimension of power” studied by Foucault. But since Wolin thinks justice just is “formal justice,” he seems to leave no “rational” way of dealing with the question of the body raised by Foucault; he thus seems to court the very dangers of aestheticism or cryptonormativism, to which he also objects. And yet, Foucault's study of discipline was a study of the emergence of a “normalizing” view of criminality within penal justice. As such it forms part of a larger debate about legal theory, to which both Foucault and Derrida have contributed. Foucault was very interested in a critical history of the law. His assumption was that it is jurisprudence that makes the law, and not the law jurisprudence. One might therefore study the history of jurisprudential thought, and of styles of legal reasoning. This history would not seek to dissolve all “formal” reasoning

Given what he has written, one cannot help thinking that Wolin's disowning of the whole issue of reason and unreason is disingenuous. But there is also a simple conceptual consideration. The "paradigm of communicative action" is a theory of rationality and proposes an exhaustive classification of its types. (A minor "aporia" in Wolin's response is that this theory rejects, as insufficiently transcendental, the very idea of paradigms.) What stands outside this "paradigm," what it cannot classify, what "limits" it, is therefore bound to seem to it to be "irrational." This is certainly the case for Foucault and Derrida whose work does not fit into Habermas's classification of reason or of "communication." In their work he sees only "cryptonormativism" and "aesthetic decisionism." These are not rational positions; indeed, they are self-refuting. Outside "communication," there is thus "irrationality." We are entitled to ask what assumptions about communication or reason lead Habermas to this perception of irrationality. Among them I think are these. Habermas assumes that *all* critique is either normative or cryptonormative, justifying or hiding norms of judgment. Nothing can be critically questioned without a procedure of judgment. He also assumes that there is nothing philosophically significant about the contexts, forms, or frames through which arguments are made. "Aesthetics" is something distinct from critical argument — it is unsupported preference — and there is thus no "aesthetics" in and through critical or philosophical argument, just as there is no argument in and through "aesthetics." I think these assumptions are not

---

into a relativistic sea of "substance." It would be about "problematizations"; one would study the law where its applications cause conceptual problems. One would examine legal thinking in terms of the kinds of problems it was designed to solve, and the transformations to which such techniques were submitted as they confronted new sorts of experience. Thus very roughly one might say: a certain "problematization" of royal or aristocratic sovereignty would lead to a constitutional formulation of the Rights of Man, and those rights would be in turn confronted with new sorts of problems arising from labor disputes and the rise of the welfare-warfare state. The resulting jurisprudence would then be confronted with new critical experiences and questions about women, minorities, the environment, war — in short about "power." (One example of this sort of history is to be found in François Ewald's book, *L'Etat Providence*, which defends a kind of critical legal nominalism.) It is clear that this kind of critical legal history would yield results different from one based on the dichotomy between administrative reason and "the life-world" that is advanced in Habermas's theory of communicative action. It is my view that it would be a mistake to represent these differences in terms of a distinction between those problems we can solve by "formal justice" and those we cannot. For it is in *that* direction that would lie an uncritical antilegal irrationalism.

only false but are also limiting or restrictive ones for critical thought. To question something in a critical sense is neither to reject it outright nor to possess in advance the procedure that will settle it. It is thus not “irrational” or logically impossible for there to exist a critical questioning in advance of norms or rules of decision, or in which those rules or norms are themselves open to question. In such cases how to judge critically forms part of the critical question of judgment. I think these cases are central ones for philosophical reflection and argumentation.

In my essay I try to show how Derrida’s “deconstructions” and Foucault’s “genealogies” may be regarded as instances of such a critical questioning, which is willing to ask who we are historically and “aesthetically” when we judge. Their questioning of Kantian and post-Kantian thought is not an attempt to reject it outright but involves a different sort of critical argument than one which would lay down the “criteria of rationality” to judge modern societies. Thus they open new lines of investigation and styles of analysis and discover new sorts of connections with the earlier Frankfurt School, which Habermas’s account of rationality is designed to surpass. Habermas wants none of this. He says the two have contributed absolutely *nothing* to the tradition. He cannot see their kinds of critical argument, or can only see them as “irrationalism.” For he does not even consider what is *excluded* by placing the “limits” on reason and communication that he does — what, if not “irrationality”? For Wolin, it is not possible that Habermas might have a “dogmatic” view of reason, since he has a “pluralistic” one. But is the only “dogma” of reason its unity? Can there be no “dogmatic pluralism”? In his response, Wolin explains that in order to be a “pluralist” one has to be a “formalist” — think what you will as long as you follow my “universal” procedures of argument or reasoning. What does this mean in practice?

While officially an empirical “fallibalist,” Habermas is also a “transcendental trinitarian.” Reason divides into three and only three kinds, each matching with a “quasi-transcendental” Interest of the Human Species. The “plurality” of reason thus reduces to a fixed classification. *That* is the “plurality” that is to be “respected” or “tolerated.” That is why to respect “plurality” is to set out its formal limits in a “universal pragmatics.”

Habermas tries to root his tripartite “quasi-transcendental” division of Reason in the historical “value-spheres” that would distinguish modern societies from ancient or primitive ones. He thus arrives at something more than an empirically fallible historical thesis. At the

heart of Habermas's own discourse about modernity there is a sort of "historico-transcendental doublet." To question his division of reason is to wish to escape from modern society; and to question his division of the value-spheres of modern society is to give up reason itself.

But for Foucault "reason" was not related to "society" or "history" in this manner. Foucault had no use for the doctrine of the unity of reason, nor therefore for that of society. He was thus a "pluralist," but of a different sort. He thought that the aims or interests of knowledge were not fixed by quasi-transcendental categories and corresponding historical "value-spheres," but rather through a contingent history specific to the various kinds of knowledge. A discourse is "rational" or "objective" when it puts forth an object about which there can be a "reasoning," or a way of determining true and false statements. As the forms of reasoning are various, the history of "rationality" is a plural one, and there is no such thing as Objectivity or Rationality in general. This plural history is in part social and political. But, of course, that does not mean that validity is decided only by considerations of brute force (as Habermas often assumes). On the contrary, "knowledge is power" for Foucault precisely because, in a specific manner, it is objective and relatively autonomous.

"Plurality" for Foucault was thus not a transcendental division that we must respect at the cost of irrationality. It was a positive principle of diversity and proliferation. We can never say in advance what new forms of reasoning, or what new "division" in reason, we may yet have. Thus Foucault admired in Max Weber his attempt to distinguish various "types" of rationality in modern society, but he said they were not the only ones. In response to Gérard Raulet, he declared: "In fact I do not speak of bifurcation of reason [as Habermas imagines]. Rather I speak of multiple bifurcations. I speak of an endless prolific division. I am not speaking of the moment when reason became bureaucratic."<sup>2</sup> Here there is a persistent nexus of misunderstanding, dutifully repeated by Wolin. Habermas assimilates everything Foucault says about the workings of specific forms of knowledge and power to Instrumental Reason, and then complains that he fails to distinguish it from Practical Reason. He does not see that Foucault does not *start* with this division of reason, that he *need* not, that he is a pluralist of another kind. One limit of Habermas's theory of communication is the "dogmatism" that asserts

---

2. "How Much Does It Cost For Reason to Tell the Truth?" in *Foucault Live (Semiotext(e), 1989)* 243.

that there is only a single kind of plurality in reason, one grounded in a “pragmatics” of the way we must speak or argue.

Wolin thinks that Habermas’s complaint springs from a pure desire to communicate, from the place in his tolerant heart where pure reason speaks. I am inclined to a somewhat more historical view. In relation to the “limits” of Habermas’ thought, I speak of a fear, which — to the degree that it is misplaced, rigidifying and uncontrollable — might well be termed a “phobia.” I offer the conjecture that this fear is connected to the historical experience of National Socialism. In his response Wolin misunderstands or misrepresents this conjecture in two ways. First I do not impugn or disqualify Habermas’s arguments or historical interpretations by reference to this fear; on the contrary, it is the problems with his readings and with the assumptions of his arguments that leads me to ask what motivates them. Secondly, my conjecture is not a psychopathological but a historical one: in making the conjecture I rely on nothing Habermas has not said of himself. The only thing I say about his youth — that it was a Hitler youth — I try to put together with such other well-known facts as his disillusionment with Heidegger, and his worries about the “fascism of the left” of the 60s protest movements.

My essay is not about Habermas’s psychopathology, and I do not think even a Ph.D. in literature would infer that it is. I suspect that what distresses Wolin is the context by reference to which I historicize him. It is a context that is hard to ignore. Wolin has no qualms about using biographical material in discussion of another German philosopher: *Heidegger, die Nazis, und kein Ende*. One wants to ask Wolin what it would mean for a critical philosopher of Habermas’s generation, indeed for any “philosopher of modernity” today, *not* to be concerned with this complex historical experience. My claim is simply that there is more than one way. The postwar attitude to Heidegger in Germany is after all rather different from that in France or in America. Thus, when Wolin underscores, in reference to Lukács, “in a *specifically German* historical context,” he seems to me not to eliminate, but to open, a question about just what the (predominantly German-language) “philosophical discourse of modernity” has to do with this “context.” That, and not his childhood complex, is the question I wanted to raise about Habermas and about his complaint.

In particular I raise this question in relation to the considerations which Derrida, and those sympathetic to his philosophy, have raised concerning nationalism, and more precisely what Lacoue-Labarthe has

called “aesthetic nationalism” in the philosophical discourse of modernity, of which Habermas is proposing a reconstruction. In his response, Wolin simply dismisses my entire discussion of Derrida, and of the “aesthetic discourse of modernity,” in a footnote in which he simply asserts that he, Wolin, is not convinced by it — something that is not very surprising. It is a shame that Wolin is unwilling to discuss this, since in these pages I try to expose a difficulty in Habermas’s general story of modernity and show one way in which it might be “deconstructed.”

Habermas’s complaint has served mostly to get in the way of discussion. In particular it has inhibited a more genuine or fruitful debate about his own work. I do not think that Habermas’s work *reduces* to his complaint. Here I would take issue with Wolin’s own objection in an earlier essay that Habermas “purports to offer mankind the hyper-rationalist utopia of total communicative transparency. It must be admitted, however, that this remains a thoroughly disenchanting, intellectualist utopia. The problem is that this ideal recognizes human beings only in their capacity as ‘rational animals’ . . . (it is) at points indistinguishable from the rationalizing, homogenizing tendencies of the modern age . . .”<sup>3</sup> Wolin’s point is that, at least for others less capable of *Mündigkeit*, there will always remain a little “enchantment” connected with their bodies and their senses. This resembles Wolin’s remark at the end of his response to me, where he says that Habermas cannot understand that the body is irrational in the strong sense that through it is induced an acceptance of domination that is more than just “distorted communication.” For me *this* is an “irrationalist” position, for it uncritically accepts the dichotomy between the bodily and the rational, and takes our being as rational animals as a single thing, connected with the “homogenizing tendencies of the modern age.” To the degree that Habermas is advancing such a “hyper-rationalist utopia of total communicative transparency,” it seems to me that he is offering mankind a rather poor idea of the various capacities of its *reason*, and their relations with “aesthetics,” or “power” or the body.

On my reading, there is another sort of difficulty. Habermas’s attempt to give pluralism a transcendental face (and transcendental philosophy a pluralistic one) betrays mixed motivations. On the one hand, he wants to preserve from the philosophical discourse of modernity the

---

3. Richard Wolin, “Critical Theory and the Dialectic of Rationalism,” *New German Critique* 41 (Spring-Summer, 1987): 51-2.

task of providing a criterion to distinguish rational from irrational societies or social arrangements. On the other hand, he wants to connect this criterion to a pluralism that would allow for different, and even changing, views about modern societies, social relations, and the sorts of rationality that govern them. When he finds a criticism of social arrangements, or of discourse, or of the post-Kantian tradition, other than the only one he finds “rational,” he feels justified in adopting a rather intolerant view, castigating it as irrational. Thus he can find in Derrida and Foucault only a version of the earlier and “one-sided” critique of Instrumental Reason, with its related dialectic of the Enlightenment.

I do not recognize this as a central theme in the work of either Foucault or Derrida. Foucault and Derrida were not trying to opt out of a “modernity” that would be defined by a classification of Reason. They were trying, in different ways, to question and to complicate our sense of what “modernity” (and “reason”) are. Thus, for example, Foucault wanted to show that a history of the treatment of the mad forms an integral part of the specific sort of “rationality” that determines what we think of as a normal well-adjusted individual — and thus with *one* of our notions of what is “reasonable.” Similarly he wanted to show that a certain kind of architectural regime belongs to the “rationality” that allows us speak of criminality. In questioning these specific contingent kinds and conceptions of reason, he tried to create public spaces of discussion in which prisoners and mad people might themselves have a say — spaces that would be “democratic” in the sense that the intellectual would not be their master, that he would not dominate discussion with his “criterion of rationality.” For his part, Derrida has sought to question the basic assumptions of the kind of historical scheme that runs throughout the “philosophical discourse of modernity,” down to Heidegger’s conception of “epochal regimes of Being.” His point is to open up another kind of “historicity” in critical judgment, which would provide for events that question us and open us again to invention, and which one may plausibly connect with Kant and with a certain democratic Idea. In both instances I think that what is challenging and interesting is not their supposed meta-views about reason and unreason in society. It is rather the question of what relation our philosophical and critical thought may have today with the complex history in which it finds itself. Here it seems to me that there are grounds for a more useful discussion with Habermas. Habermas’s complaint stands in the way.



## *Remembering History: The Filmmaker Konrad Wolf*<sup>1</sup>

Marc Silberman

1944. A young Red Army soldier — German by birth but whose parents had emigrated with their young children to the Soviet Union for political reasons — returns to Germany. He comes home with the triumphant Soviet Army, as a conqueror in his defeated homeland. Now begins the process of self-discovery and self-questioning: What does “home” mean in this unknown, native country?

This is the background to the film *Ich war neunzehn*, Konrad Wolf's contribution to the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1968. The struggle to find oneself, the difficult path toward self-awareness, recalls patterns from the grand tradition of the *Bildungsroman* in general and from popular working class literature of the Weimar Republic in particular. Wolf's films describe this process, but they are less concerned with the end point of that difficult path than with the struggle itself. For this was Wolf's own formative experience: “Each person must take the first steps on the often contradictory path in search of home, in discovering his place in the struggle for the only possible future of his people. After emigration and return, that has been and remains the crucial experience in my development” (Wolf 1984, p. 900). In Wolf's case, consciousness of one's own place in history is not simply a personal problem; it also implies the larger question of German

---

1. I am grateful to the American Philosophical Society for its generous financial support and to the Staatliches Filmarchiv der DDR for its friendly assistance in screening several films. With the financial support of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung a condensed, earlier version of this article was presented at the Congress of the Internationale Vereinigung für germanische Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft in Göttingen (August 1985). This short version was published in German in the Congress Proceedings (Silberman 1986).

national identity, a dilemma which has not diminished since the end of the war. Wolf's films present a unique window on the postwar German experience, and it is regrettable that up to now they have not enjoyed a broader public reception in the United States.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Wolf's status as one of, perhaps even *the* most talented film director to come from the GDR merits particular attention in considering the specific conditions and strategies of filmmaking in a socialist country. Finally, Wolf's continuous and critical examination of German history and the formal means by which he has engaged in this highly personal examination represent a productive counter-model to the phenomenon of the historical film in the Federal Republic during the last ten years (e.g., Syberberg, Kluge, Sanders-Brahms, Reitz, etc.).

Who then is Konrad Wolf? Born in 1925, son of the physician and well-known author Friedrich Wolf, he grew up until 1933 in Württemberg. With his entire generation, he lived through the rupture in German history of the Third Reich, not as acquiescent bystander but as outsider. His family, Jewish and communist, ended up in the Soviet Union in 1934 and became part of the German-speaking anti-fascist community in Moscow. As a naturalized Soviet citizen, Konrad Wolf was drafted into the Red Army in 1942 and placed in the propaganda corps, with his last active duty as lieutenant in the Battle of Berlin. This experience of the German catastrophe as a victory over the Germans — not without a feeling of satisfaction on Wolf's part — separates him from many of his German contemporaries and shaped his sense of German history (Sylvester 1980). For two years after the capitulation Wolf continued to work as a Red Army officer in various capacities within the Soviet Military Administration in occupied Germany, among other positions as one of the founders of a major daily newspaper (*Berliner Zeitung*) and as a cultural attaché for theatre and film in the state of Sachsen-Anhalt (Halle). In the latter position, he was responsible for selecting those UFA film productions of the previous twelve years which would be shown in the cinemas. In 1947 Wolf assumed a position in the Berlin "House for Soviet Culture" and began a short-lived journalistic career, writing for Berlin newspapers.

---

2. Konrad Wolf visited the United States only once, in April 1975 (Washington, DC, New York, Los Angeles, and Fairbanks, Alaska). His comments are recorded in an interview (Wolf 1975). The following films are distributed currently in the United States: *Stars and Lissy* (National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University), *I Was 19* and *Solo Sunny* (GDR Embassy).

The decision to pursue film studies appears to have been the result of coincidence rather than conviction. In the Soviet Union Wolf had already been involved with practical filming as a child actor in Gustav von Wangenheim's anti-fascist film *Kämpfer* (1936). Moreover, his father's notorious difficulties with film adaptations of several of his plays were known to him (Kasjanowa 1974, p. 143). Yet when he applied for film studies during a vacation in Moscow in 1949, it was as much a convenient way to return "home" as the start of professional career training. In fact, the State All-Union Institute for Cinematography accepted him in Grigori Alexandrov's directorial class. Alexandrov, who made his reputation producing eccentric musical comedies and satires (*Jazz Comedy*, 1934; *Circus*, 1936; *Volga Volga*, 1938), became for Wolf a direct intermediary to Sergei Eisenstein's legacy, as he had been a close collaborator in Eisenstein's Proletkult collective. In addition, Wolf studied with Sergei Gerassimov, who influenced the whole middle generation of Soviet directors (i.e. Sergei Bondarchuk) and whose laconic style would also increasingly influence Wolf's films. Finally, Mikhail Romm also taught at the Film Academy, and it was his late film *Nine Days in One Year* (1961) that would have an extraordinary impact on Wolf's development. During his studies in Moscow, Wolf remained in contact with the State film studios in the GDR (DEFA), assisting Joris Ivens with his documentary film on the Third International Youth and Student Festival in Berlin (*Freundschaft siegt*, 1951) and Kurt Maetzig with his film portrait of the martyred Communist leader, *Ernst Thälmann — Sohn seiner Klasse* (1954). He concluded his studies with the feature-length film *Einmal ist keinmal* (1955), the first in a series of thirteen films (and two television features) he produced at the DEFA studios.

When he died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1982, Wolf was one of the best known filmmakers in the GDR, honored with several of the highest State awards and medals and recognized as one of the few GDR directors to enjoy an international reputation in the East as well as the West. Some consider him to be the most important German director of his generation. Others regard his work as not uninteresting but acknowledge primarily his influence within the GDR, citing his many high level offices in various cultural and political organizations: Chair of the Artists' Union; President of the prestigious Academy of Arts (1965-82); and member of the Central Committee of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (1981-82). Such prestige explains why some who consider themselves to be in the opposition treated Wolf with

skepticism, as a representative of state power (Brasch 1982, p. 13). Others harbored feelings of envy because his long-standing team of collaborators seemed to enjoy special privileges, such as reduced pressure to produce on deadline.<sup>3</sup> In any event, Wolf's films have always been surrounded by controversy, and as is often the case in such situations, he was frequently praised and criticized for the very same reasons.<sup>4</sup>

It would be a mistake to characterize Konrad Wolf as a film *auteur*, that is, he cannot be identified exclusively with a single or idiosyncratic visual style, or even with an exclusive thematic interest. If there is a Wolf "signature," it is the product of a collective, of a group consisting first and foremost of cameraman Werner Bergmann (who filmed all but the last two features) as well as the set designer Alfred Hirschmeier, the composer Hans-Dieter Hosalla and the scriptwriters Karl Georg Egel and Paul Wiens (for the early films) and later Angel Wagenstein or Wolfgang Kohlhaase (cf. the filmography at the end of this article). It was the achievement of this group to reorganize again and again the visual experience of the cinema in order to undermine conventions and habits of seeing. Wolf did not regard his work as an isolated undertaking but rather as part of the more general activity of raising the aesthetic standards and expectations of the public. Together with his film team he was always seeking new ways to present everyday life by experimenting with new technical processes and modifying filmic structure. In introducing the works of Konrad Wolf, I want to examine the variety and potential of such cinematic innovations as a way of evaluating his success and reception.

Thematically Wolf's oeuvre does manifest a remarkable continuity in its preoccupation with the German past, with the quest for a position from which one might explain the vicissitudes of recent German history. There is in his films a practical, if not even didactic, attempt to pursue the traces of the past in the present and, conversely, to show how the present is part of the past. From this perspective one may divide his filmwork into four categories:

---

3. This was the case especially during the preparations for Wolf's *Goya* film project, lasting several years. It became one of the most expensive films ever produced by the DEFA studios (cf. R. Herlinghaus 1971).

4. There is as yet no adequate biography of Konrad Wolf. *Konrad Wolf* 1985a, a large picture book, contains besides numerous photographs a hagiographic essay by Klaus Wischniewski, a chronology and a complete filmography. *Konrad Wolf* 1985b contains a selection of Wolf's writings, speeches and interviews on culture and cultural politics in the GDR, especially in his capacity as President of the Academy of Arts. Other useful studies from the GDR include Tok 1972 and Richter 1983.

1) films about the thirties and the rise of fascism: *Lissy* (1956), *Leute mit Flügeln* (1960), *Professor Mamlock* (1961), Wolf's two installments of the six-part television series *Busch singt* (1981/82);

2) films about the war and the immediate postwar years: *Genesung* (1956), *Sterne* (1959), *Ich war neunzehn* (1968), *Mama, ich lebe* (1977);

3) films about contemporary GDR society: *Einmal ist keinmal* (1955), *Sonnensucher* (1958), *Der geteilte Himmel* (1964), *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* (1974), *Solo Sunny* (1980);

4) the television film *Der kleine Prinz* (1966) and the historical epic *Goya* (1971).<sup>5</sup>

That postwar German society has been so decisively formed by the past is for Wolf the consequence of a peculiar set of conditions: "Because our people did not liberate themselves on their own initiative, the liberation process after 1945 had to be realized mainly on the intellectual level, a process which was especially intensive during the first postwar decade but which, in my view, must continue still today and on into the future" (Wolf 1965, p. 380). This conviction, referring to the "today" of 1965, typifies all of Wolf's work. Thus his films, even those concerned with contemporary GDR reality, are addressed to a public beyond national German borders. Moreover, his lifelong inquiry into Germany's fascist past and its postwar development offers a completely different model than the popular "Year Zero" equation which underlies the discussion in West Germany.<sup>6</sup>

For the purposes of this overview I will introduce the films in chronological order by year of production in order to make visible their innovative formal qualities and thematic diversity. A clear change occurred in Wolf's oeuvre, a shift from the pathos and pretentiousness of

---

5. *Der kleine Prinz*, an adaptation of St. Exupéry's fairy tale for adults, was not available to me and appears to have had little impact. Although produced in 1966, it was not broadcast on GDR television until 1972. A brief description of the plot can be found in Dalichow 1983, p. 27.

6. The reception of Wolf's films in West Germany deserves a study of its own. In general, there are isolated GDR productions that enjoy runs with moderate success in West German cinemas or on television, but by and large the GDR film scene is completely unknown and a negligible presence among the distributors (unlike GDR literature). As far as Wolf's films are concerned, *Lissy* has been used for history classes to illustrate the relationship of the petty bourgeoisie to National Socialism, and his last feature film, *Solo Sunny*, even achieved the rank of a box office success after winning a prize at the (West) Berlinale Film Festival (1980). Scholarly work on Wolf has also been rare; other than an essay by Gregor 1977, and sections in a doctoral dissertation by Blunk 1984, there has been nothing of consequence.

the early films to the suppleness and discretion of the later ones. Several examples will demonstrate, I hope, that Wolf's aesthetic maturation shows a constant — if uneven — pattern of progression.

The earliest films (from *Einmal ist keinmal* to *Professor Mamlock*) share two qualities. First, usually together with Karl Georg Egel, Paul Wiens receives credit for the scripts (except *Lissy* and *Sterne*), which explains to some extent the melodramatic element and formulaic dramaturgy. For example, *Einmal ist keinmal*, a musical comedy in which a West German composer visits a small village in the GDR and promptly falls in love (a kind of socialist *Heimatfilm*), turns into a mediocre farce because of the weak dialogue and poor acting. Second, Wolf and his cameraman Bergmann search for and find effective cinematic means to compensate for the theatrics. Experiments with unusual lenses, with filming in available light and a handheld camera in *Genesung*, shots with two synchronized cameras or with an improvised zoom lens in *Lissy* are only a few of the “discoveries” which add spontaneity and novelty to the early films. At the same time they point to a further problem: the abstractness and arbitrariness of these forms vis-à-vis the content.

*Lissy*, based upon F. C. Weiskopf's novel written in the thirties, *Lissy oder die Versuchung*, was Wolf's first popular success. The narrative tells of a woman caught between the demands of her husband who, demoralized by unemployment, becomes more and more involved with the Nazis, and of her own traditional working class values. Together with Alex Wedding, Weiskopf's widow, Wolf wrote a script adaptation that remains close to the novel. More important than the psychologically convincing portrait of fascism's appeal to the petty bourgeoisie was the careful treatment of milieu and atmosphere. Both Walter Ruttmann's film *Berlin. Die Symphonie der Großstadt* (1927) as well as so-called German proletarian films of the early thirties were important formal models. Although this historical connection was not entirely submerged among DEFA directors (as was the case in the West German film industry of the fifties), Wolf's mediation is particularly marked by his training in the Soviet Union. In this respect, his formal work shows a recuperation of the aesthetic techniques, especially the montage of Eisenstein, that informed the political avant-garde filmmaking in Germany before 1933.

This is especially true in *Lissy*, where the variety of montage is striking. By means of the female voice-over and dialogue, fades and dissolves, music and contrastive cuts using image and sound, Wolf constructs

imaginative transitions and montage sequences. The frustrating job of Lissy's husband as an unsuccessful door-to-door salesman, for example, is portrayed in a masterfully edited sequence. The accelerating rhythm of images and dissolves, accompanied by faster and louder piano chords and doorbells, recalls the well-known job search motif of the bike riders in the Dudow/Brecht film *Kuhle Wampe* (1932). Another scene "quotes" the earlier film: Lissy is standing at the kitchen table peeling potatoes, lost in her thoughts about the working class family she had just witnessed being evicted (wonderfully shot as a news documentary), while her husband sits at the table reading aloud from the National Socialist newspaper how the Party will "clean up" the economy. As in the similar Mata Hari sequence in *Kuhle Wampe*, the collision of image and sound, shot and dialogue, lays bare the reality of petty bourgeois illusions by juxtaposing contradictory elements.

*Lissy* achieves its straightforward documentary quality by composing images in just such an expressive way, a quality that hints at Wolf's familiarity with the Italian Neo-Realism of a director like Vittorio de Sica. This is all the more surprising in the context of what otherwise emerged from the DEFA studios during the mid-fifties, films characterized by the socialist romanticism of the proletarian positive hero and the veritable levelling of historical contradictions. Wolf, on the other hand, avoids in *Lissy* a tendency to instrumentalize images as illustration and hence continues the creative tradition of the best films produced in the early years of the DEFA studios by such directors as Kurt Maetzig, Slatan Dudow, Wolfgang Staudte, and Erich Engel.

Whereas Weiskopf's *Lissy* novel ends on an optimistic note with the protagonist joining the ranks of the anti-fascist resistance, Wolf chooses a somewhat less confident yet still heroic resolution. Lissy turns away from the Nazi movement which is responsible for her brother's murder and to which her husband and his friends belong. In the last shot we follow her as she leaves the cemetery chapel after her brother's funeral — "alone but not abandoned," the female voice-over assures — and thoughtfully walks down a tree-lined path as the camera tilts skywards. Professor Mamlock is likewise forced to accept the inevitable, but here his insight into the historical consequences of National Socialism leads to his tragic downfall. The film is an adaptation of Friedrich Wolf's play of the same name, written before Konrad's father had emigrated from Germany. Classically constructed, filled with Schillerian pathos in long, declamatory monologues, the play is still

impressive today in its logic and consistency. It had already been filmed in 1938 in the Soviet Union by German emigrant Herbert Rappaport and director Adolf Minkin. The early version is striking for its excellent acting and the unusually static camera. In contrast to both the play and the later adaptation, this film focuses on the son's communist agitation and on Nazi brutality. In a departure from the play — and probably owing to ideological conditions of the day — Mamlock injures himself rather than committing suicide, while a completely new plot emerges around the son's resistance activities in the underground. Konrad Wolf concentrates in his version on Mamlock's attitudes and behavior rather than on the son's convictions. Chief surgeon, political liberal, and assimilated Jew, Mamlock believes in the justice of the constitutional state. Indeed, he even supports in some points the demands of the National Socialists; but above all he insists that politics have no place in his professional life as a doctor. At the end of the film, after he has been fired from his position on political grounds, after his daughter has been chased from the school, after he himself is marched through the streets, a sign around his neck identifying him as a Jew, Mamlock has lost all sense of value in his life. He shoots himself in his surgery ward.

Although Wolf transfers the stage plot fairly directly to the film script, he allows himself much freedom in the transposition from one medium to the other. The camera reveals such visual opulence that there is a risk of overwhelming the story (Bergmann 1974, p. 28). For example, the film opens with a long New Year's eve sequence at the Mamlock home contrapunctually intercut with the street celebrations and with a confrontation between Mamlock's son, his communist friends and several Nazi hooligans. All of the main characters and their social pretensions are introduced rapidly and precisely. Even more remarkable, however, is the ballet-like mobility of the camera which never seems to cease its movements: tracking shots in all directions, tilts at extreme angles, parallel tracking shots with moving figures, quick cuts from close-ups to long shots, all accompanied by the uplifting chords of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The sequence's climax is reached in a series of shots, each lasting only a few seconds, which are dominated by circular movements and patterns: a round of champagne glasses held high in a toast from a bird's-eye view, the sudden reflection of light from a swiftly opened switchblade, exploding fireworks from a low angle, point of view shots of dancing couples, a record turning on



a turntable from a high angle, etc. The frenetic fluctuation of images intensifies the motif of circling and endows it with metaphoric value. The film's spectacular introductory sequence indicates the tense atmosphere at the onset of the new year 1933; at the same time it anticipates in the formal figure of the circle the consequence of Mamlock's illusions — the turning in on oneself.

Another sequence, not as complicated but equally effective, shows the flight of Mamlock's daughter from her school. The spectator follows the fugitive's dizzying movement through the point of view shots with a handheld camera as she runs down the staircase, through the schoolyard and finally into the streets. Here we find a typical strategy employed by Wolf to draw his spectator into a reflective relationship with the film: the repetition of shots, objects, details, dialogue, etc. The iteration or duplication of the same element in a new context permeates the film on all levels. When Mamlock's son argues against the Communists' guilt for the Reichstag fire, his father replies: "I can feel it to the tips of my fingers." His words come back to haunt him somewhat later when his colleague Dr. Ruoff implicates the Jews in the fire. He is shocked to hear his very words in the mouth of this woman who turns against him. Similarly, the dramaturgy iterates Mamlock's daily arrival at the surgical ward, a ritual entry performed three times during the film and each time ironically charged — at Mamlock's expense — because of the shifting power relations. The repeated deep focus on a picture hanging in Mamlock's office, a representation of the medieval grim reaper, likewise becomes a threatening, foreboding omen. The repetition of a passage from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony renders it a kind of musical vehicle for hope and a reminder of humanistic values. Finally, Mamlock's conversation toward the end of the film with his young colleague Dr. Ruoff — on the one hand, a Nazi sympathizer, on the other, in love with Mamlock's son — frames her in a symbolically doubled mirror image.

Such formal structures of iteration not only expose the illusions of the protagonist through distancing, irony and doubling but also prepare the spectator for the suicide of this man — the ultimate circular logic — who dies because of his blindness. As in his earlier film *Lissy*, Wolf ends here on a note of heroic resistance. Mamlock passes on to Dr. Ruoff his tragically acquired insight: "You must take the other, the new road [of resistance] . . . and greet my son on this road." The film ends shortly thereafter with the warning title: "There is no greater crime than not wanting to fight when you must."

Wolf's other films in this first period are formally less ambitious and, in my opinion, also less imaginative in finding visual solutions for the plots' rather obvious structural devices. *Genesung* seems to have more in common with the UFA entertainment films produced during the Third Reich than with the film language of socially critical films of the early thirties. The exaggerated pathos of the female antagonist's renunciation — in a story of postwar reconciliation and rebuilding as well as symbolically laden, clichéd motifs (e.g., the theme song of sailing into the harbor of freedom, the endless shots of sea waves) — addresses existing audience expectations without questioning the constructed image of reality from which they derive. A carefully edited, short montage of war photographs reinforced by beating drums is the only really striking sequence, an effective portrayal, or better, a summary of war and its senselessness. For the first time Wolf demonstrates here his idiosyncratic talent for dynamic image compositions which will continue to evolve.

*Sonnensucher* is the director's first attempt to make a realistic film about contemporary GDR society (in contrast to the earlier *Einmal ist keinmal*). The film shows a panorama of GDR working class life filled with contradictions in one of the most important large industrial projects of the reconstruction years, the uranium mines in Wismut in the early fifties. Wolf's portrait of "the" working class hero, constructed from several characters, has less in common with Pabst's generically related *Kameradschaft* (1932) than with Soviet documentaries of the twenties or with Slatan Dudow's *Unser tägliches Brot* (1949). The highly episodic narrative, which consists more of individual shots than of scenes, is notable for its naturalistic edge. This is all the more surprising because DEFA films in the fifties rarely, if ever, touched on controversial issues such as sexual coercion of women workers, the black market or the mutual dislike and distrust between Soviet officers of the occupation army and German workers under their direction. Yet precisely Wolf's directness and honesty in showing people who participated in some of the worst moments in German history and then had to live with this burden — fascism, brutal crimes, expulsion and flight from war-ravaged countries — make these characters believable under their difficult labor conditions and place the film among the most important documents from this period in GDR history.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless,

---

7. Produced in 1958, the film was not screened publicly until 1972 when it was

the unmotivated melodramatic ending cannot be overlooked. The film's young female protagonist Lutz loses her husband in a mining accident just after she is once again able to laugh, that is, to overcome her distrust and embrace the future. Then she walks with her young child into the sunset as strains of triumphant orchestral music swell in the background.

*Leute mit Flügeln* also attempts to portray a working class hero in the present as the consequence of personal history. This time, however, the film stresses the "typical" instead of the contradictory in the life story of a *single* figure, an aerospace engineer. Wolf employs the contrast of black-and-white stock for the historical scenes (memories of the thirties) and color stock for scenes in the present in a somewhat mechanical manner, whereas in the later *Goya* film he learns to manipulate color tones and black-and-white much more creatively as a visual key to changes in mood. I would attribute the success of *Sterne*, which launched Wolf into the international limelight, to the emotional charge of its subject matter rather than to its formal realization.<sup>8</sup> Angel Wagenstein's script takes up the story of three young adults in 1943: a Jewish woman in a refugee camp waiting to be transported to a death camp, a German non-com guarding the compound, who begins to fall in love with her, and the German officer responsible for the prisoners, who presents the "friendly" face of fascism. Just as with *Mamlock*, the young man recognizes the nature of his sympathy for the woman too late. He could have saved her but misses the opportunity. In closing, the film suggests that he may still join the struggle of the partisans. Once again Wolf employs unusual camera movements and contrasting shots and angles but without their exaggerated, almost arbitrary use as in *Professor Mamlock*. On the other hand, the film's dramaturgy tends to be dominated by dialogue and obvious symbolism.

In a discussion with Soviet directors Wolf himself later described

---

shown both on television and in cinemas. It was completed at exactly the time when the Soviet Union and the United States were beginning to discuss atomic weapon controls. Apparently a film about the struggle to increase productivity in the GDR uranium mines did not fit into the image of peaceful negotiations. Fourteen years later the film was released with an additional, historicizing prologue which represents the film conflict as finished and now overcome (a filmed text with refrain-like explanations beginning "Damals . . ." ["in those days . . ."]) (cf. Egel 1974).

8. *Sterne*, a GDR-Bulgaria co-production, was screened as the official Bulgarian entry at the 1959 Cannes Film Festival because the GDR had no diplomatic ties with France. The film won the "Prix spéciale du Jury."

this stylistic naiveté as the result of uncertainty about his audience: “When making my earlier films I sometimes consciously stopped believing in the spectator, in his ability to comprehend the stories that are taken from real life. I began to construct something like a reflection of life, ‘skirting the truth.’ That was an enormous mistake” (Kasjanowa 1974, pp. 175-76). Wolf refers here to a problem widespread in the GDR during the fifties, and not only in the cinema. 1960 was the peak production year at the DEFA studios, but the films were typically light entertainment fare that avoided any but the most oblique reference to real conditions. In contrast, Wolf, in his early films, takes up highly charged conflicts and calls on strong emotions, abandoning the “happy ending” formula after his first film. His plots introduce characters who are caught in typical and existentially demanding circumstances, but he avoids harmonizing their individual fates. The filmmaker leaves no doubt as to his understanding of the historically “correct” path, even in sometimes amazingly unreflected ways. Nonetheless, Wolf’s partisanship in these early films always aims at challenging the spectator to draw conclusions.

There are two noteworthy patterns in this textual strategy. First, Wolf always identifies society’s future, or its changeability, with the younger generation of twenty to thirty-year-olds. Friedel, the committed but sham physician in *Genesung*, Lissy, Lutz, the non-com officer in *Sterne*, the son of the Communist in *Leute mit Flügeln*, and Mamlock’s son bear the hope of the future and as such are invested with great responsibility by their “fathers.” Beyond the possible autobiographical echoes of this structure, it points to an otherwise submerged social issue in the GDR — the generational conflict and the problem of hierarchy for all patterns of change connected to it. Wolf certainly pays tribute to the achievements and sacrifices of the older generation of partisans, but he does not overlook their weaknesses. Max, the physically handicapped and demoralized former resistance fighter in *Genesung* will regain control of his legs and will even begin to study at the university. Yet the strength and imagination for his “healing” come exclusively from the young Friedel. Lissy is almost entirely dependent on her young friends in her struggle to find a way out of her husband’s Nazi activities. The only elder to whom she can turn is her father, a disillusioned Social Democrat and union member, who in fact throws her out of his home. Lutz is protected by older friends and fellow workers, but not until the film’s end does she act independently, after these “advisors” no longer

exercise influence. In *Sterne* the young adults (victims, officers, partisans) are practically the only active people, whether oppressors or rebels. *Leute mit Flügeln* combines two “young generations”: the model Communist Party member of the thirties becomes involved in political activities against his father’s will and twenty years later in the GDR confronts his own son’s political commitment — a conflict which seems more anecdotal than political. Finally, Professor Mamlock becomes the victim of the limitations in his political liberalism, recognizing only just before he dies that his son’s courageous resistance is the only answer to National Socialism. For the young people the elders may represent a source of solidarity, but they also symbolize the need for permanent struggle, often as the very negation of that bond.

In his later films Wolf returns again and again to this young generation, even to the younger twenty-year-olds, while the role of the fathers diminishes. The demographic tendency of ever younger audiences demanding films which treated their problems had begun to make itself felt in the GDR, as was the case internationally in the 1960s. Sociologically, this older generation’s role in decision-making in GDR society was waning (which is not to claim that a new generation of fathers did not establish itself in its place!). More important, though, is the new film dramaturgy developed by Wolf in the course of the sixties. By dispersing plot structure and relinquishing traditional forms of audience address based on emotional identification, he can abandon the narrative strategy which presents the spectator with a “reflection of life,” one which strives to contain in itself a ready-made interpretation of reality.

A second significant element in these early films is the role of the women characters. Wolf extends the theme of women’s emancipation embarked upon by Dudow (*Frauenschicksale*, 1952; *Verwirrung der Liebe*, 1959; and the unfinished *Christine*, 1963) with a series of female figures: Irene (*Genesung*), Lissy, Lutz (*Sonnensucher*), Ruth (the Jewish woman in *Sterne*) and Mamlock’s colleague Dr. Inge Ruoff (two others in later films, Rita in *Der geteilte Himmel* and Sunny in *Solo Sunny*, must be considered, as I argue below, in another light). On the one hand, these women function as important vehicles for the respective plot resolution: they either embody a coming-to-consciousness or act as a catalyst for the insights of another (male) character. On the other hand, each of the female figures incorporates the stereotypical image of women as victim, that is, she finds her fulfillment in renunciation, her social satisfaction in serving

others' needs. In contrast to Wolf's male protagonists the women become active, socially responsible characters through an emotional engagement, through love relationships. More interesting, however, and more exceptional in these early films is a characteristic of the women which all the male figures lack: the ability to live in and live out contradictory situations — Irene, the wife of the handicapped resistance fighter *and* former lover of the sham doctor; Lissy, wife of a petty bourgeois fascist *and* working class woman with an intact tradition of progressive political commitment; Lutz, working woman, mother *and* widow; Ruth, concentration camp prisoner *and* mentor in the broadest possible sense; Inge Ruoff, doctor and Nazi sympathizer *as well as* guide and rescuer of Mamlock's communist son. Wolf takes note of women's social role with its diverse and often mutually exclusive demands. Consequently he multiplies the identificatory possibilities for the spectator and thus awakens more sympathy for them than for the male figures. That Wolf resorts still to harmonizing such conflicts by showing the "triumphant" renunciation of his heroines rather than probing further dialectically, confirms his suspicion that he was "skirting the truth." His later films no longer do so.

The filming of Christa Wolf's novel *Der geteilte Himmel* remains thematically consistent with Wolf's earlier work yet marks a breakthrough in the filmmaker's formal development. If we consider Wolf's films to be a socially mediated structuring of reality in which a process of coming-to-consciousness is set in motion by his characters' experience and reflection, then it follows that he is trying to make this process accessible to his audience. Such access is, however, also mediated by the evolution of the particular national film industry as well as cinematic tradition and, in the case of the GDR in the fifties with its cultural program defined by the narrow strictures of socialist realism, it was difficult to create new modes of address. This dilemma accounts for the gap between intention and formal realization in the early films, where a tendency toward declamatory thematic explication often works against the reflective, formal strategies. *Der geteilte Himmel* signals the beginning of an attempt to overcome this dilemma by insisting on a radically new narrative structure and style. As a result, Wolf manages to avoid the generalizations and platitudes of the earlier films, relying increasingly on associational techniques which assume the participation of the spectator in the construction of conflicts.

This breakthrough cannot be credited to Wolf alone. It is symptomatic that his script is adapted from a contemporary literary source,

for since about 1960 a new trend in the literary scene known as the “Bitterfelder Weg” had begun, a trend which focused on everyday issues while eschewing vulgar didacticism. Somewhat later a series of what are called “everyday films” (“Alltagsfilme”) also began to appear, among them Rolf Kirsten’s *Beschreibung eines Sommers* (1962, also the adaptation of a contemporary novel by Karl-Heinz Jakobs), Egon Günther’s *Lots Weib* (1965) and Günther Rucker’s *Die besten Jahre* (1965). With the stress on current issues, historical material diminishes in interest, and by accenting the everyday nature of conflicts, the film characters’ actions and motivations tend to become impoverished. Yet at the same time a formal language begins to evolve that enriches the visual experience of the film story and enhances the spectator’s participation in the construction of the film characters’ subjectivity. At times this innovative formalism gets out of control, as in Wolf’s film *Der geteilte Himmel*: hardly a shot from a normal angle, unexpected cuts from an extreme long shot to a close-up, almost every frame calling attention to itself by its unusual composition, as if the filmmaker were concerned with demonstrating his imaginative ideas more than structuring his filmic text. Yet this is the product, I believe, of a genuine desire to overcome the clichés of run-of-the-mill socialist-realist filmmaking.

It can be no accident that Konrad Wolf discovered his impetus to renew the visual language of the GDR film in an adaptation of Christa Wolf’s novel (she is not related to the director). The story concerns the young woman Rita, who collapses physically when forced to choose between her emotions and her convictions after her lover leaves the GDR for West Berlin — the divided heaven of the title. For Rita, the process of convalescence entails reflection on the nature of language. Her final separation from Manfred is the result of their inability to communicate, to assume the same meanings when speaking the same words. To the extent that she rejects the oppressive function of language when it absolutizes or renders harmless, Rita is able to escape the strait-jacket of her thoughts and finally to recognize the discrepancy between her world view and her experience. That this understanding always includes the danger of failure, that the narrative presents no unproblematic affirmation of socialist society as it exists, that the story is dominated by a tone of resignation and despondency rather than ideological one-upmanship — all this was new to GDR literature, and all this takes shape in Wolf’s film. The challenge of transforming the novel into a film involved representing multiple narrative perspectives which are

interwoven on three planes: the first-person narration in the present, the protagonist's internalized reflections, and the third-person narration of the protagonist's past. The dispersal of the narrative onto three planes defines the reader's role and demands an active process of reading. The director's task was to find cinematic techniques which would engage the spectator in the process of constructing the narrative plot so as to stimulate a similar self-reflective activity. For that, five scriptwriters (including Christa Wolf and Konrad Wolf) worked together to find a satisfactory solution (*Der geteilte Himmel* 1964, p. 569ff.) As Christa Wolf confirmed, the film's success is the result of the scriptwriters' refusal simply to illustrate the epic work: "That the film [. . .] is a successful 'adaptation' must be attributed to the fact that the film differs from the story: and as remarkable or interesting as it may seem, nobody noticed that; at least the difference appears to create the impression that it is a successful 'adaptation'" (C. Wolf 1964, p. 51).

As I have tried to demonstrate, Wolf was able in his early films to take the first steps beyond classical film dramaturgy. The narrative framing in *Genesung* and *Sterne* anticipates the consistent use of two narrative levels in *Der geteilte Himmel*, where they are necessary for analyzing feelings and thoughts. The complicated montage sequences in *Lissy* and *Professor Mamlock* lead in the later film to a much freer, associative handling of time and space in order to define the logic of the emotions. The short visionary sequences in *Sonnensucher* and the contrast between color and black-and-white stock in *Leute mit Flügeln* are unsophisticated antecedents to the reconstructive acts of memory, the interior monologues of Rita. The goal of all these experiments is not to narrate a story but to formulate situations which the spectator must invest with meaning. This is especially pronounced in the film's epic structure of complicated montage sequences. By means of foreshortened camera angles, repeated interruptions in the flow of the plot, and symbolic images such as the highway overpass or the river, Wolf establishes a fragmentary style of representation that functions not through suspense but in a Brechtian kind of dialectic.

The three-part conversation in the middle of the film exemplifies the means by which the filmmaker combines a central thematic motif with subtle formal techniques. The interchange takes place at a banquet organized by Rita's factory. An older, highly respected worker tells Rita about his proletarian background, the war and his years as a prisoner of war in Siberia. Cut parallel to and framed with the first pair



in a wall mirror behind them are Rita's shop foreman and Manfred, who are arguing radically opposed views of history. Although neither pair is aware of the other, they are directly connected by the camera's careful framing. Rita, who listens silently, is from the spectator's point of view filmically confronted with these variously articulated philosophical positions on historical necessity. The following shot — in Manfred's attic room — leads into a dialogue between him and Rita about his dream of a sinking boat, the metaphorical anticipation of their shipwrecked relationship as well as a symbolic representation of their opposing social expectations. A later scene, which marks the turning point in the love story, reveals such an overlapping of meanings in another way. At a party with his university colleagues, who are sarcastically introduced by a series of close-ups and a long tracking shot, a disappointed and cynical Manfred learns from a friend that his research project has been rejected. This social gathering, which the camera clearly presents as composed of two groups — the sensitive and the arrogant ones — corresponds to the tension between the lovers. At a point where Rita identifies herself with the first group, Manfred agrees with the simple-minded self-righteousness of the other. The shot then freezes (a long shot of the group), the background noise and the dance music cease, and the scene dissolves into the present as Rita remembers when she first read Manfred's letter from West Berlin.

A poetic quality grows out of the film's rhythmic punctuation of repeated shots, which also serves to guide the spectator through the shifts from one narrative plane to another. The wide-angle shot of a poplar-lined road, the intersection in front of Rita's factory from a high angle, the close-up of Rita convalescing in bed, the highway overpass outside her window which is linked more and more frequently with her recovery, the footbridge to the river always shot from an extreme low angle: these are only a few examples of the many strategically shot frames which complicate the narrative flow in order to make it meaningful. Similarly Wolf uses music (a combination of jazz quotes and popular songs) and noise to comment on image sequences, often in striking or unusual ways. The West Berlin scene near the end of the film is a good example. The highly stylized, almost exaggeratedly comic encounter of the two lovers is accompanied by electric organ chords which sound like the cacophony of automobile horns. With such sober, astute compositional principles Wolf is able to construct a highly complex — and contradiction-laden — image of socialist realities. Like the novel,

the film was greeted with criticism and bewilderment by some reviewers and spectators because it was deemed too intellectual and too demanding. Such negative views stem from those widespread, habitual reception patterns which Wolf was trying to counteract: a positive hero and a clearly marked, optimistic resolution. In addition, critics suspected that the dissolution of spatio-temporal relations into paratactic and iterative patterns pushed the film in the direction of “bourgeois modernism” (Fellini was the red herring mentioned in this context). Yet in retrospect, this non-linear structure, interrupted by associatively juxtaposed flashbacks and flashforwards, effectively reproduces Rita’s process of coming to herself and represents the turning point in Wolf’s directorial work.

Ten years later Wolf candidly stated that he no longer considered this film to be among his successes. He came to the conclusion that “we got stuck in unresolved formal problems in the search for an original and adequate film structure for Christa Wolf’s novel structure” (Wischniewski 1975, p. 26). I think this judgment is too harsh because it overlooks the fact that working on these formal problems, even the unresolved ones, saved Wolf from a dead end. Without *Der geteilte Himmel* films such as *Ich war neunzehn*, *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz*, *Mama, ich lebe*, and *Solo Sunny* would be unthinkable. The director avoids visual distancing and sudden ruptures in these later films without abandoning his dialectical view of reality. Wolf becomes increasingly comfortable with open textual structures and emphasizes more and more forthrightly the unheroic quality of everyday life. At the same time he takes imagination seriously, not in a didactic way but rather as a point of departure for careful observation. These later films, then, are characterized by their thoroughly undramatic form; they intend to make reality visible by tracing what seem to be the non-essential details and achieve in this way an authenticity. A crucial ingredient in these later films was Wolf’s collaboration with the scriptwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase, who had already established a reputation for successful scenarios about the problems of youth (e.g., *Eine Berliner Romanze*, 1956, and *Berlin - Ecke Schönhauser*, 1957, both directed by Gerhard Klein). Together with the cameraman Werner Bergmann, the trio coined a laconic narrative style that no longer depends on the external plot motivation of a struggle between positive and negative figures but rather rests on a principle of inner dramaturgy for delving into the intellectual and affective world of the main character. To this

end examples of formal innovation in the Soviet cinema of the time were especially important to Wolf, for instance, Grigori Chukhrai's *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) and Mikhail Romm's *Nine Days in One Year* (1961) in the case of *Ich war neunzehn* (Wolf 1964, p. 56).

This film holds a privileged place in Wolf's oeuvre and can be counted, in my opinion, among the most successful DEFA studio productions in general. Wolf had left behind him the dimension of grand existential questions — fascism or resistance, Germany's defeat and division — without forsaking his political thematic. In *Ich war neunzehn* he is still struggling with the problem of how to pose political questions meaningfully by asking: What does it mean to be a German today? Gregor's basic conflict derives from his inability as a returnee ("Heimkehrer") to recognize not only rationally but also emotionally and empirically that Germany is his home. Thus time and time again the Soviet soldier born in Germany reacts shyly and only involuntarily to the question of national identity. In fact, the film is an elaboration of Wolf's own diaries from the last days of the War (Ruschin 1968, pp. 5-25). Here he describes his feelings of hate, powerlessness and hope toward the events with a sensitivity that allows for no distance. The film opposes this historical directness to the subjectivity of memory. Gregor, who often reacts in a confused, embarrassed or simply naive manner, whether in comic or tragic situations, exposes his emotions and innocence. Six independent episodes, framed by a prologue and an epilogue (their journal-like character underscored by introductory titles and the short, informative comments of a voice-over narrator), present this "hero." The task of the spectator is to construct questions and answers, theses and countertheses out of the juxtaposition of the episodes with their contrapuntal motifs.

Camerawork is, of course, indispensable in the film's structural composition. Bergmann's experience with short films and documentaries converge with the main character's observant posture. Despite a script planned out in careful detail, the film gives an impression of improvised direction which seems particularly apt for capturing the material's gesture of authenticity with seemingly uncomplicated and inconspicuous technical means. A scene toward the film's beginning is exemplary in the way the camera, with a single, long, calm pan, feels its way gently around the room and objects of a deceased elderly woman. In addition, sections of documentary footage are intercut: archival shots of battles and ravaged landscapes as well as a long scene from a

Soviet documentary about the Sachsenhausen concentration camp (*Todeslager Sachsenhausen*, 1946) in which a camp guard quietly and with amazing complacency talks about how the death apparatus functioned. The fact that this sequence (and a later conversation in the fourth episode between two SS-officers in the Spandau fortress) cannot possibly be explained from Gregor's point of view — that is, it introduces a break in the narrative perspective — is symptomatic of the film's structure. This very break intensifies the uniqueness of the horror that is shown here and guarantees the shock on the part of the main character as well as of the spectator. That the Sachsenhausen footage is furthermore interrupted twice by short shots of Gregor under a shower creates a striking image that immediately brings to mind the associative montage sequences in *Der geteilte Himmel*. Here the technique serves to heighten Gregor's feeling of ambivalence toward the Germans in the film (soldiers, officers, refugees, anti-fascist resistance fighters, etc.) and his sensitivity toward the question of self-identity as a German.

On another level too the film poses this question in a subtle way. The consistent use of nature — both in image and theme — suggests a peculiarly German narrative of which Gregor is just barely conscious. The images of a peaceful Oderbruch landscape in the prologue, disrupted by a slowly turning raft with a German deserter hanging by a noose; the scene with the landscape architect sitting in front of a large painting of a garden as he tries to justify philosophically his “inner emigration” during the preceding years; immediately after that the shot of a kitsch sun-down with croaking frogs in the background while Gregor's friend recites Heine's famous poem “Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland . . .”; finally, the penultimate sequence where Gregor's grief for his senselessly killed comrade turns into despair and the camera blends into an endless pull-back tracking shot during which the frame expands to include first Gregor, then the pond, then the road, then the whole countryside: the interweaving of these natural motifs produces resonances of an inherited tradition which once again is linked to Gregor's basic conflict. Similarly the film music: it consists not of an original score but of quotes, notably from German music — from Bach's “Goldberg Variations,” the folksong “Ähnchen von Tharau,” the Prussian “Hohenfriedberg March,” the Spanish Civil War song “Rio Guarama” sung by Ernst Busch. Wolf achieves an extraordinary textual density in this film which invites the spectator to share in the main character's coming-to-consciousness so that the spectator's own sensitivity might in turn lead to self-reflection.

Wolf and his team essentially perfect this approach in his subsequent films. Rather than providing narrow interpretations of events, he treats the material or the respective film characters as encounters (the sculptor Kimmel in *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz*, the four German soldiers in *Mama, ich lebe*, and the pop singer Sunny in *Solo Sunny*). He concentrates his attention on the nuanced shifts in the figures' assumptions and behavior, while leaving to the spectator the responsibility of explaining the contradictions in the prosaic rhythms of daily life. *Der nackte Mann* is remarkable for its almost unfinished camera work, more laconic even than in *Ich war neunzehn*. The film aims at the most sensuous, non-abstract experience possible of artistic creation by constructing the narrative logic around the daily routine of the sculptor Kimmel, who struggles with narrow, popular notions of art's function in society. Perhaps the dominant atmosphere of understatement, of banality, which Wolf uses to humanize his artist figure, explains the cinema audience's resistance to the film with its highly demanding paratactic form. It remained one of the least successful DEFA films at the box office during the seventies. A later film, *Mama, ich lebe*, again takes up memories of World War II and as such continues explicitly Wolf's examination of German identity. Four German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union voluntarily agree to participate in an anti-fascist retraining program. Later three of them are sent behind German battle lines as partisans and killed. This "betrayal" appears even stranger than it might because the plot unfolds in an almost peaceful atmosphere. Yet the reality of war is practically invisible in this war film in that it focuses on the uncertainties and inhibitions of these four Germans in their Soviet environment.

At first glance *Solo Sunny* seems to return to the pattern of an action film such as *Lissy*. Yet the exposition of a highly dramatic plot and character — the singer's performance, her unhappy love affair, the suicide attempt, the new beginning — barely conceals the intrinsically episodic quality of the dramaturgy evolved by Wolf over the preceding twenty years. The quick-paced montage sequences and editing during the film's first half, the energetic use of the camera with its rapid movements and the lively musical rhythms all contribute to the discontinuous textual structure (Wolf and Kohlhaase 1984). In this respect, it recalls *Der geteilte Himmel*, also because of the stylized photography and the female lead. Contrary to his earlier female figures, these women are not satisfied to make a "correct" political choice and join the men in the political struggle. What they have achieved politically is self-evident to them, and they

now make more radical demands on society to live as full-fledged people with all their emotional and intellectual capabilities. In *Solo Sunny* Wolf once again follows a woman's difficult process of self-discovery through her vulnerability and distress. In contrast to the reflective, even passive tendency in Rita, Sunny is insistent. She is intense, assertive and does not fear the provocations of her environment, especially those of the men around her. The claim for self-realization, here carried by a young woman, was an attempt by Wolf to respond to the cultural policy situation in the seventies, especially to the critical retrospective and debate which took place at the Third Congress of Film and Television Producers in May, 1977 (Wischnewski 1980). That Wolf chose in this film such an uncompromising non-conformist as the main character earned him sharp attacks, but this highly successful production represents in fact a summary of his entire aesthetic and thematic development as a filmmaker.

Two other films from Wolf's late period are somewhat less typical for this development. *Goya oder Der arge Weg der Erkenntnis* is an historical epic about the Spanish painter Francisco de Goya adapted from Lion Feuchtwanger's novel of the same title (1951). Feuchtwanger focuses on the artist's personality as it asserts itself among opposing social forces — monarchy, church, revolution. As such, the Goya figure shares the ethical force of Brecht's Galileo in the struggle to live out the relationship between art and politics, between radical formal experiment and revolutionary content. When Goya's "demons" are materialized, when he can trap them on canvas, he makes visible the reactionary, oppressive conditions of his beloved Spanish homeland during the French Revolution. Wolf, for his part, takes this figure as an opportunity to investigate the historical and psychological limits of the creative personality, yielding an incredibly dense text that encompasses not only the Goya story but also echoes Feuchtwanger's experience as an artist in political exile as well as his own practical knowledge about the effect of constraints on imagination in the GDR. In one sense, Goya is the historical counterpart to the artist Kimmel in *Der nackte Mann*, but aesthetically speaking, one could hardly imagine a wider gap between the two films. Not only the enormous production apparatus, including actors and technicians from eight countries and on-location shooting spread all over eastern Europe, but also the tendency toward a mega-film in the Hollywood studio style has little in common with Wolf's previous practice. He himself expressed certain inhibitions about filming a script to which he had no direct or

personal access, as had been the case in all previous features (H. Herlinghaus 1971, p. 13). That might explain why the entire last part of the film fails. In picture-book fashion, we “page” through the painter’s late work intercut with staged scenes from the Spanish Revolution. Here there is none of the authenticity that Wolf was able to formulate so convincingly in other films. Instead he introduces a declamatory, folkloristic quality that is supposed to suggest the latent power and anguish of the common people. However, Wolf’s skill does surface in the eloquent music and the careful use of color nuances from Goya’s paintings.

Wolf’s last project, completed only after his death, was a six-part television series on the folksinger Ernst Busch. Wolf is credited with the idea and artistic responsibility for the entire series as well as directing two of the segments. Part III, *1933 oder Das Faß der Pandora*, is a relatively straightforward documentary film consisting of archival material, filmed interviews and a selection of Busch songs which stress the struggle of the artist against the growing fascist threat in Germany. Part V, *Ein Toter auf Urlaub*, concerns Wolf as much as it does Busch, for here the filmmaker embarks on a kind of archaeological journey, following the traces of the folksinger’s exile, flight, imprisonment and liberation (cf. *Busch singt* 1982). At the same time, however, it is a self-presentation: the counterposing of the director’s anti-fascist youth with reflections on his own artistic development. Without exaggeration or false pathos Wolf employs a broad range of filmic techniques to transform historical experience into the artistic process. He succeeds too in creating a poignant homage to Busch which gains credibility from the dialectical play of objective and subjective narratives about history.

Historicizing memory, remembering history: Konrad Wolf’s films call forth this process by addressing the question of his own place in history as well as the larger problem of national identity in Germany. That the main characters in his last films are almost all artists (Goya, Kemmel, Sunny, Ernst Busch) indicates Wolf’s diversion from epochal political questions to an exploration of experiences of isolation, disappointment and failure in the private sphere. Yet these characters all take their place within particular social structures, and their struggles and sufferings are the consequence of everyday social pressures. Wolf’s protagonists, especially the artists, all seek happiness and self-realization, even if that is only possible despite and against social norms. In the critical representation of the everyday, Wolf discovered a vehicle both for revealing the mechanisms of social change and for articulating the responsibility of individuals to realize such change.

## Works Cited

- Barthel, Kurt. 1964. "Der geteilte Himmel - Zur filmischen Umsetzung." *Filmwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen* 5.3: 565-95.
- Bergmann, Werner. 1974. "Gespräch mit Werner Bergmann am 16.11.1973." *Aus Theorie und Praxis des Films* 1. "Film monographie *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz*" (VEB DEFA- Spielfilme): 24-37.
- Blunk, Harry. 1984. *Die DDR in ihren Spielfilmen*. München: Profil.
- Brasch, Thomas. 1982. "Er drehte sich um und ging weg." Nachruf auf Konrad Wolf. *Filmfaust* 28/29: 13.
- Busch singt*. (1982) Sechs Filme über die erst Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Dokumentation. Berlin/GDR: Akademie der Künste der DDR.
- Dalichow, Bärbel (ed.). 1983. *Regie: Konrad Wolf*. Potsdam: Filmmuseum.
- Egel, Karl Georg and Paul Wiens. 1974. *Sonnensucher. Filmerzählung*. Berlin: Henschel.
- Gregor, Ulrich. 1977. "Konrad Wolf: Auf der Suche nach Heimat." *Film in der DDR*. München: Hanser. 77-98.
- Herlinghaus, Hermann. 1971. "Gespräch mit Konrad Wolf." *Weimarer Beiträge*. 17:12: 10-27.
- Herlinghaus, Ruth (ed.). 1971. *Goya. Vom Roman zum Film*. Berlin/GDR: Deutsche Akademie der Künste.
- Kasjanowa, Ludmilla and Anatoli Karawaschkin (eds.). 1974. *Begegnungen mit Regisseuren*. Berlin/GDR: Henschel. 133-86.
- Klunker, Heinz. 1980. "Sunny politisch Sorgen herzungewisse. Zur deutsche-deutschen Rezeption des DEFA-Films *Solo Sunny*." *Jahrbuch Film* 80/81. Ed. Hans Günter Pflaum. Munich/Vienna: Hanser.
- Konrad Wolf*. 1985a. *Selbstzeugnisse, Fotos, Dokumente*. Eds. Barbara Köppe and Aune Rank. Berlin/GDR: Henschel.
- Konrad Wolf im Dialog*. 1985b. *Künste und Politik*. Eds. Dieter Heinze and Ludwig Hoffmann. Berlin/GDR: Dietz.
- Probleme des sozialistischen Realismus in der darstellenden Kunst*. 1964. Behandelt am Beispiel des DEFA-Films *Der geteilte Himmel*. Berlin/GDR: Akademie der Künste.
- Richter, Rolf. 1983. "Konrad Wolf." *DEFA-Spielfilmregisseure und ihre Kritiker*. Ed. Rolf Richter. Berlin/GDR: Henschel: 250-87.
- Ruschin, Thomas (ed.). 1968. *Der Film "Ich war neunzehn"*. *Intention und Wirkung*. Berlin/GDR: Akademie der Künste.



- Silberman, Marc. 1986. "Erinnern - Erzählen - Filmen. Die Filme von Konrad Wolf." Albrecht Schöne (ed.). *Kontroversen, alte und neue. Akten des VII. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses*. Tübingen: Niemeyer. 10: 339-352.
- Sylvester, Regina. 1980. "Rot ist eine schöne Farbe." Gespräch mit Konrad Wolf und Eberhard Geick. *Sonntag* 18.
- Tok, Hans-Dieter. 1972. "Konrad Wolf." *Regiestühle*. Ed. Fred Gehler. Berlin/GDR: Henschel. 111-28.
- Wischniewski, Klaus. 1975. "Auf der Suche nach dem Lebenszentrum." Werkstattgespräch mit Konrad Wolf. *Film und Fernsehen* 4: 18-26.
- . 1980. "Was heißt denn 'Happy End' . . . Ein Gespräch über *Solo Sunny*" [mit Konrad Wolf und Wolfgang Kohlhaase]. *Film und Fernsehen* 1: 9-15.
- Wolf, Christa. 1964. "Diskussionsbeitrag." *Probleme* 1964. 51-4.
- Wolf, Konrad. 1964. "Diskussionsbeitrag." *Probleme* 1964. 55-61.
- . 1965. "Sozialistischer Film. Erforschung des Unerforschten." Gespräch mit Heinz Baumert. *Filmwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen* 2: 366-83.
- . 1975. "In Amerika." Gespräch mit Konrad Wolf. *Film und Fernsehen* 9.
- . 1984. "Selbstäußerungen." *Sinn und Form*. 36:5: 897-902.
- Wolf, Konrad and Wolfgang Kohlhaase. 1984. *Solo Sunny*. Ed. Lars Bardram and Bent Lantow. Copenhagen: Gjellerup & Gad.

### Konrad Wolf Filmography

*Einmal ist keinmal* (1955)

Script: Paul Wiens, Dramaturgy: Karl Georg Egel, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Music: Günter Kochan, Sets: Alfred Tolle, Producer: Alexander Lösche, Cast: Horst Drinda (Peter Weselin), Brigitte Krause (Anna Hunzele), Paul Schulz-Wernburg (Edeltanne), Annemone Haase (Elvira), Christoph Engel (Erwin), Friedrich Gnass (Hunzele), Georg Niemann (Düdelit-Düdelat), Lotte Loebinger (Muhme), Hilmar Thate (Buhleemann).

*Genesung* (1956)

Script: Karl Georg Egel/Paul Wiens, Dramaturgy: Willi Brückner, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Music: Joachim Werzlau, Sets: Willi Schiller, Producer: Eduard Kubat, Cast: Karla Runkehl (Irene Schorn), Wolfgang Kieling (Friedel Walter), Wilhelm Koch-Hooge (Max Kerster), Wolfgang Langhoff (Ernst Mehlin), Eduard von Winterstein (Professor Behaim), Erika Dunkelmann (head nurse), Angela Brunner (nurse Hilda), Harry Hindemith (public prosecutor).

*Lissy* (1956)

Script: Alex Wedding/Konrad Wolf, Hans-Joachim Wallstein, Camera: Werner Bergmann/Hans Heinrich, Music: Joachim Werzlau, Sets: Gerhard Helwig, Producer: Eduard Kubat, Cast: Sonja Sutter (Lissy), Horst Drinda (Fromeyer), Hans-Peter Minetti (Paul Schröder), Kurt Oligmüller (Kaczmierczik), Gerhard Bienert (Lissy's father), Else Wolz (Lissy's mother), Raimund Schelcher (Max Franke) Christa Gottschalk (Toni Franke).

*Sonnensucher* (1958)

Script: Karl Georg Egel/Paul Wiens, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Music: Joachim Werzlau, Sets: Karl Schneider, Producer: Hans-Joachim Schoeppe, Cast: Ulrike Germer (Lutz), Günther Simon (Franz Beier), Erwin Geschonneck (Jupp König), Victor Avdyushkho (Sergei Melnikov), Vladimir Yemelyanov (Major Fedosseyev), Willi Schrade (Günter Hollek), Manja Behrens (Emmi Jahnke), Norbert Christian (Josef Stein), Erich Franz (Weihrauch).

*Sterne* (1959)

Script: Angel Wagenstein, Dramaturgy: Willi Brückner, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Music: Simeon Pironkhov, Sets: Maria Ivanovna/Alfred Drosdek, Producer: Siegfried Nürnberger/Vyltsho Draganov, Cast: Sasha Khrusharskha (Ruth), Jürgen Frohriep (Walter), Erik S. Klein (Kurt), Stefan Peytshev (Bai Petko), Georgi Naumov (Blashe), Ivan Kondov (Ruth's father), Milkha Tuykhova (a female partisan), Stilyan Kunev ("doc").

*Leute mit Flügeln* (1960)

Script: Karl Georg Egel/Paul Wiens, Dramaturgy: Willi Brückner, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Music: Hans-Dieter Hosalla, Sets: Gerhard Helwig, Producer: Siegfried Nürnberger, Cast: Erwin Geschonneck (Bartuschek), Wilhelm Koch-Hooge (Dr. Lamert), Hilmar Thate (Henne), Franz Kutschera (Dr. Dehringer), Rosita Fernandez (Ines), Otto Dietrichs (Dr. Klinger), Fred Mahr (Friedrich), Georg Gudzent (Max), Mathilde Danegger (Mother Friedrich), Norbert Christian (Kneipack), Albert Hetterle (Alyosha).

*Professor Mamlock* (1961)

Script: Karl Georg Egel/Konrad Wolf, Dramaturgy: Willi Brückner, Camera: Werner Bergmann/Günter Ost, Music: Hans-Dieter Hosalla, Sets: Harald Horn, Producer: Hans-Joachim Funk, Cast: Wolfgang Heinz (Professor Mamlock), Ursula Burg (Ellen Mamlock), Hilmar Thate (Rolf Mamlock), Lissy Tempelhof (Dr. Inge Ruoff), Doris Abesser (Ruth Mamlock), Ulrich Thein (Ernst), Harald Halgardt (Dr. Hellpach), Herwart Grosse (Dr. Carlsen), Peter Sturm (Dr. Hirsch), Franz Kutschera (Dr. Werner Seidel).

*Der geteilte Himmel* (1964)

Script: Christa and Gerhard Wolf/Konrad Wolf/Willi Brückner/Kurt Barthel, Dramaturgy: Willi Brückner, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Music: Hans-Dieter Hosalla, Sets: Alfred Hirschmeier, Producer: Hans-Joachim Funk, Cast: Renate Blume (Rita Seidel), Eberhard Esche (Manfred Herrfurth), Hans Hardt-Hardtloff (Rolf Meternagel), Hilmar Thate (Wendland), Martin Flörchinger (Mr. Herrfurth), Erika Pelikowsky (Mrs. Herrfurth), Günther Grabbert (Schwarzenbach), Horst Jonischkan (Martin Jung), Petra Kelling (Sigrid).

*Der kleine Prinz* (1966) [Television film]

Script: Angel Wagenstein, Dramaturgy: Klaus Wischnewski, Camera: Günter Marcinkowsky, Music: Kiril Cibulka, Sets: Alfred Hirschmeier, Producer: Herbert Ehler, Cast: Christel Bodenstein (Prince), Eberhard Esche (Pilot), Inge Keller (Snake), Klaus Piontek (Fox), Anna-Katherina Matschat (Rose), Wolfgang Heinz (King), Horst Schulze (Vain man), Fred Düren (Lantern lighter), Jürgen Holtz (Businessman).

*Ich war neunzehn* (1968)

Script: Wolfgang Kohlhaase/Konrad Wolf, Dramaturgy: Gerhard Wolf, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Sets: Alfred Hirschmeier, Producer: Herbert Ehler, Cast: Jaecki Schwarz (Gregor), Vassili Livanov (Vadim), Alexei Eibishenkho (Sasha), Galina Polskich (Soviet girl), Jenny Gröllmann (German girl), Michail Gluski (general), Anatoli Solovyov (policewoman), Kalmursa Rachmanov (Dsingis), Rolf Hoppe (major), Wolfgang Greese (landscape architect).

*Goya oder Der arge Weg der Erkenntnis* (1971)

Script: Angel Wagenstein/Konrad Wolf, Dramaturgy: Walter Janka/Alexander Dymshitz, Camera: Werner Bergmann/Konstantin Ryshov, Music: Kara and Faradsh Karayev, Sets: Alfred Hirschmeier/Valerie Yurkevitch, Producer: Herbert Ehler/Genrich Chochlov, Cast: Donatas Banionis (Goya), Olivera Katarina (Princess Alba), Fred Düren (Esteve), Tatyana Lolova (Queen Maria Luisa), Rolf Hoppe (King Carlos IV), Mieczyslaw Voit (Grand Inquisitor), Ernst Busch (Jovellanos), Gustav Holoubek (Bermudez), Wolfgang Kieling (Godoy), Michail Kasakov (Guillemardet).

*Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* (1974)

Script: Konrad Wolf/Wolfgang Kohlhaase, Dramaturgy: Gerhard Wolf, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Music: Karl-Ernst Sasse, Sets: Alfred Hirschmeier, Producer: Herbert Ehler, Cast: Kurt Böwe (Kimmel), Ursula Karusseit (Gisi), Martin Trettau (Hannes), Günter Schubert (mason), Else Grube-Deister (collective farm director), Helmut Strassburger (man with glasses), Erika Pelikowsky (Aunt Marie), Dieter Franke (factory director), Werner Stötzer (mayor), Walter Lendrich (cashier), Marga Legal (apprentice), Ute Lubosch (Regine), Vera Oelschlegel (Miss Fritze), Katharina Thalbach (soldier's wife).

*Mama, ich lebe* (1977)

Script: Wolfgang Kohlhaase/Konrad Wolf, Dramaturgy: Wolfgang Beck/Günter Klein/Klaus Wischnewski/Dieter Wolf, Camera: Werner Bergmann, Music: Reiner Böhm, Sets: Alfred Hirschmeier, Producer: Herbert Ehler, Cast: Peter Prager (Becker), Uwe Zerbe (Pankonin), Eberhard Kirchberg (Koralevski), Detlef Giess (Kuschke), Donatas Banionis (Mauris), Margarita Terechova (Svetlana), Yevgeni Kindinov (Glunski), Michail Vasskov (Kolya), Ivan Lapitkov (general).

*Solo Sunny* (1980)

Co-director: Wolfgang Kohlhaase, Script: Wolfgang Kohlhaase, Dramaturgy: Jutta Voigt/Dieter Wolf, Camera: Eberhard Geick, Music: Günter Fischer, Sets: Alfred Hirschmeier, Producer: Herbert Ehler, Cast: Renate Krössner (Sunny), Alexander Lang (Ralph), Dieter Montag (Harry), Heide Kipp (Christine), Klaus Brach (Norbert), Fred Düren (physician), Harald Warmbrunn (Benno Bohne), Regine Doreen (Monike), Hans-Jürgen Hürig (Hubert), Klaus Händel (Bernd).

*Busch singt* (1981/1982) [Television series]

Conception and Artistic Director: Konrad Wolf, Directors: Reiner Bredemeyer/Erwin Burkert/Ludwig Hoffmann/Peter Voigt/Konrad Wolf, Camera: Eberhard Geick/Lothar Keil/Ernst Oeltze, Producer: Hans-Joachim Funk, Narrator: Jürgen Holtz/Ulrich Teschner (Part III and Part V directed by Konrad Wolf).

*Now at Indiana*

# The American Journal of **SEMIOTICS**

Edited by Dean MacCannell & Juliet Flower MacCannell

The *American Journal of Semiotics*, the quarterly journal of the Semiotic Society of America (SSA), includes critical essays that examine the theory and method of semiotics and their practical, political, and other implications and tendencies, and the theory and methods of academic disciplines from the standpoint of their relationship to semiotics.

The *American Journal of Semiotics* is published by Indiana University Press in April, September (a double issue) and December, and offers a discounted rate to students.

Volume 6 (1988/89) will include two thematic issues: the semiotics of pornography and African semiotics in America.

## **The Semiotic Society of America**

The Semiotic Society of America is a professional organization devoted to fostering research, teaching, and other forms of information dissemination in the field.

Rights and privileges of membership in the Semiotic Society of America include a subscription to the *American Journal of Semiotics*; participation in annual meetings and in election of SSA officers; receipt of the *Semiotic Scene*, the newsletter of the SSA, which includes announcements of upcoming national and international events of interest to semioticians; and discounted purchase of the *Proceedings* of the annual meeting.

Subscriptions are \$25 per volume (4 issues) to individuals, \$40 for institutions. Regular membership in the SSA is \$30, \$40 joint, \$20 for students, and \$30 for joint student. Foreign subscribers add \$5 for surface post. Further information, including bulk order discounts, is available from:

**Journals Division  
Indiana University Press**

10th & Morton Streets, Bloomington, Indiana 47405

AVAILABLE BACK ISSUES OF NGC

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 27*

*Women Writers and Critics*

MARTIN: Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault  
FEHERVARY: Christa Wolf's Prose BENJAMIN:  
Shame and Sexual Politics POORE: Disability as  
Disobedience?

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 28*

MARKOVITZ: Reflections on the West German  
Elections MEWES: The West German Green Party  
HOHENDAHL: Beyond Reception Aesthetics

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 29*

*Mass Culture and Imperial Germany*

HUYSEN: Adorno in Reverse TROMMLER:  
Working-Class Culture and Modern Mass Culture  
SCHULTE-SASSE: Toward a "Culture" for the  
Masses BUCK-MORSS: Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 30*

ADELSON: Subjectivity Reconsidered SCHERPE:  
Reading the Aesthetics of Resistance LINDNER:  
Hallucinatory Realism KLUGE: Mass Death in  
Venice FEHER: On Peter Weiss

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 31*

SCHNEIDER: Damaged Relationship WEIGEL:  
Contemporary German Women's Literature HAN-  
SEN: Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and Feminist Dis-  
course JAY: Adorno in America

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 32*

WEIGEL: Overcoming Absence HERMAND: Mod-  
ernism Restored BLUMENBERG: To Bring Myth  
to an End ADORNO: The Essay as Form SAYRE  
and LÖWY: Romantic Anti-Capitalism

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 33*

*Modernity and Postmodernity*

HUYSEN: Mapping the Postmodern JAMESON:  
The Politics of Theory FOSTER: (Post)Modern Po-  
lemics HABERMAS: The French Path to Postmo-  
dernity BENHABIB: Epistemologies of Postmoder-  
nism

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 34*

MARKOVITS: Anti-Americanism in West Germany  
*Special Section on Walter Benjamin*  
BENJAMIN: Central Park KOCH: Re-Visioning  
Feminist Film Theory RABINBACH: Modern Jew-  
ish Messianism FEHER: Lukács and Benjamin

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 35*

*Special Issue on Jürgen Habermas*

HOHENDAHL: Habermas' Critique of the Frank-  
furt School MCCARTHY: The Seductions of Sys-  
tems Theory BENHABIB: The Utopian Dimension  
in Communicative Ethics FRASER: The Case of  
Habermas and Gender

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 36*

*Special Issue on Heimat*

HANSEN: Dossier on Heimat RENTSCHLER:  
New German Film and Bitburg ADORNO: "What  
is German?" LEVIN: Nationalities of Language  
THEWELEIT: The Politics of Orpheus

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 37*

*Special Issue on the German Question*

FEHER/HELLER: Eastern Europe Under the  
Shadow of a New Rapallo FETSCHER: Two  
Replies SUSS: Detente and the Peace Movement  
ESCHE AND SEMLER: Occasion for Unrest  
MEUSCHEL: On the German Vulcano

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 38*

*Special Issue on German-Jewish Controversy*

Symposium on Fassbinder's *Garbage, The City, and  
Death* KOCH: Jewish Figures in Fassbinder FUNKE:  
Bitburg, Jews and Germans ROBERTS: The Birth  
of Postmodernism

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 39*

*Second Special Issue on Walter Benjamin*

WOHLFARTH: The Arcades Project WITTE: Paris  
— Berlin — Paris BUCK-MORSS: The Flaneur, the  
Sandwichman and the Whore KITTSTEINER:  
Benjamin's Historicism IVERNOL: Paris, Capital of  
the Popular Front

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 40*

*Special Issue on Weimar Film Theory*

KAES: Literary Intellectuals and the Cinema LEVIN:  
Reading Lukács on Film ELSAESSER: Cinema,  
The Irresponsible Signifier KRAGAUE: The Cult  
of Distraction (1926) SCHLÜPMANN: Kracauer's  
Phenomenology of Film PETRO: Sexuality in Ear-  
ly German Film Theory HANSEN: Benjamin, Cin-  
ema, and Experience

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 41*

*Special Issue on Critiques of the Enlightenment*

HABERMAS: The Idea of the University WOLIN:  
The Dialectic of Rationalism WILSON: Punching  
out the Enlightenment LOVE: Marx, Nietzsche  
and Critical Theory GOODING-WILLIAMS: Nie-  
tzsche's Pursuit of Modernism DICKEY: Blumen-  
berg and Secularization

*NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE NO. 42*

*Special Section on Lukács*

EORSI: The Unpleasant Lukács LÖWY: Naphta or  
Settembrini? HOHENDAHL: Art Work and Mod-  
ernity JOHNSON: Jauss's Dispute with Adorno  
BIRUS: Hermeneutics Today WOODHULL: Fas-  
cist Bonding and Euphoria COATES: The Apolo-  
gist of Inauthentic Art

**BACK IN PRINT**

**ngc#13**

**Special Feminist Issue**

Nancy Vedder-Shults, "Hearts Starve as Well as Bodies"

Ulrike Prokop, "Women's Daily Life"

Jessica Benjamin, "A World Without Fathers?"

Christa Wolf, "Self-Experiment"

Women and Film

a discussion of feminist aesthetics

and articles by Schlaeger, Sudau, Stefan, Mayer, Jacobs

---

**ngc#17**

**Special Walter Benjamin Issue**

Walter Benjamin on Fascism and the Doctrine of the Similar

Anson Rabinbach, "Critique and Commentary/  
Alchemy and Chemistry"

Jürgen Habermas, "Consciousness-raising or  
Redemptive Criticism"

Irving Wohlfarth, "Walter Benjamin's Image of Interpretation"

Ansgar Hillach, "The Aesthetics of Politics"

R.G. Davis, "Benjamin, Storytelling and Brecht in the U.S.A."

---

*Also Available:*  
special back issues

#17,34,39 Walter Benjamin	Critiques of the Enlightenment	#41
#19,20,21,38 Germans and Jews	Jürgen Habermas	#35
#22,26,33 Modernity and Postmodernity	Weimar Film Theory	#40
#24/25 New German Cinema	Lukács	#42

Back issues are \$8.50 (\$17.00 for institutions). For subscription information and a full list of back issues, write: Telos Press, 431 E. 12th St, New York, NY 10009

*Cost of a single issue: \$8.00*