

On Film and the Public Sphere

by Alexander Kluge

NARRATIVE CINEMA*

I wouldn't be making films if it weren't for the cinema of the 1920's, the silent era. Since I have been making films it has been in reference to this classical tradition. Telling stories, this is precisely my conception of narrative cinema; and what else is the history of a country but the vastest narrative surface of all? Not one story but many stories.

MONTAGE-FILM

This means montage. There can be no doubt that the narrative of an individual fate, unfolded in ninety minutes, can convey historical material only at the price of dramaturgical incest. The fictional threat displaces experience from the film. In the history of film, montage is the "morphology of relations" (*"die Formenwelt des Zusammenhangs"*). Then there is also the artificial opposition of documentary and *mise-en-scène*. Mere documentation cuts off relations: nothing exists objectively without the emotions, actions and desires, that is, without the eyes and the senses of the people involved. I have never understood why the depiction of such acts (most of which have to be staged) is called fiction, fiction-film. But it is equally ideological to assume that individuals could determine history. Therefore, no narrative succeeds without a certain proportion of authentic material, i.e. documentation. Such use of documentation establishes a point of reference for the eyes and senses: real conditions clear the view for the action.

AUTEUR FILM-COOPERATIVE FILM

I have always believed in the auteur film, in the continuation of early film history: Dovshenko, Griffith, Dreyer, Rossellini, Godard (if you like, Costard), Schroeter, and others. I find myself in good company among them. With delight I discover that Woody Allen (*Manhattan*) and Frank Coppola —

* This and the following excerpts are taken from *Die Patriotin* (Frankfurt/Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979).

representatives of a completely different cinematic tradition — take recourse to the same vigorous principles; their editing style is associative, they appeal to film history, it is never a risk to make personal films, or to make compact films: “You got to rely on people.”

For the auteur there is no way back to the ready-made film (*Konfektionsfilm*). Nor can auteur cinema remain in its present state. It can not incessantly deliver single works, each of which individually reinvent film history. Cinema is a program that is a relationship of production — if for no other reason than that this relationship exists in the experiences of the spectators which constantly recreate the cinema’s experiential horizon. The multitude of films in the minds of the spectators will continue to be infinitely richer than what can be seen in the cinema until a number of directors work at combining their professional skills and temperaments, their most personal feelings and impulses. This is actually a matter of respect for the spectator who always acquires experience with others, collectively. If you want to develop the auteur film further, because you believe in it, then the only way is through cooperation. Auteur cinema is not a minority phenomenon: all people relate to their experience like authors — rather than managers of department stores.

LEAVING THE GARDEN PATHS

Making films is strictly anti-academic, an insolent occupation, historically grounded but inconsistent. In the present situation there is plenty of refined entertainment — refinement of ‘serious’ topics (*gepflegtes Problem!*) too — as if the cinema was a stroll on the garden paths of a park. The observance of the prohibition on leaving the garden paths has been known to have caused German revolutions to fail. Something as refined as that does not need duplication. Indeed, children would rather go back into the bushes just as they would prefer to play in the sand or in a junkyard. Happiness, says Freud, is the fulfillment of childhood wishes. I am convinced that film has something to do with happiness: film = movie = something constantly moving forward despite all those who would stop it.

THE CRITICAL MEASURE OF PRODUCTION: WHAT IS LEFT OUT

These days German cinema is becoming famous abroad. The actual practice of German filmmakers, however, is precarious. “When skating on thin ice, the only way to keep from breaking through is to move as fast as possible.”

1. The German term “Problemfilm” does not have an equivalent in English but would certainly extend to such films as *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Ordinary People*, or *Making Love* (translators’ footnote).

The Problem of the Newcomers

In the last 17 years, the so-called New German Cinema has gone through four generations. First the Oberhauseners and pre-Oberhauseners (for example Wicki, Strobel, Rischert, Senft, Vesely, Kristl, Reitz and others), then the new ones after them (Schlöndorff, Syberberg, Fassbinder, Kückelmann, Herzog, Wenders and others), and then the third generation (Schroeter, Costard, Praunheim, Hörmann, Lemke, Kahn, Stöckl and others). Today, a fourth wave of young filmmakers is emerging, quite numerous and evidently creative, which distinguishes itself clearly from the so-called established directors. In contrast to the original "young German filmmakers" who are now almost all in their forties, this fourth generation is the real young German cinema.

None of the institutions of public funding in the Federal Republic are as yet responding to the alternative conceptions of the cinema being developed by this new fourth generation. This younger generation is discriminated against as soon as it attempts to operate outside the narrow academic structures of the film schools. It will be impossible, however, to restrict them to these groves of academe. (. . .)

Institutional Independence and Politics of Production

If one compares the wealth of work and experience which make up our country with the extent to which these are represented in German films, then two observations can be made: (1) most of it does not appear in the films, and (2) the art of film since the 1920's is a promise which has never been fulfilled. The success of the German cinema abroad and with the united coteries of film directors mask the fact that, measured against the potential of the medium, the German cinema is *stagnating*. There is not enough historical depth, not enough documentation to create a sense of context. (. . .) In the domain of the conventional one-way film, the imaginative US competition is sure to defeat German products on the market. This situation could be changed only if the principle of multiplicity were applied to the range of cinematic forms rather than just personal styles or subject matter. Such a strategy, which is being discussed among filmmakers with great urgency, indicates a newly gained consciousness of production; we call it politics of production, institutional independence.

THE MEDIA ARE STANDING ON THEIR HEAD

One speaks of 'film producers,' of 'film-auteurs.' Accordingly television, video corporations, the radio and the cinema consider themselves to be the media. In fact they are merely the *forms* and conditions under which the media exist. The true medium of experience, of desires, of phantasies, and actually

of aesthetic appreciation as well, are the real human beings and never the specialists. People work at steady jobs, they toil away, which in turn means they work on their relationships, they work overtime in order to survive in both work and private relationships. This is the labor of inner balance, the work of a lifetime. Life is made up of these three powerful elements, the stuff of centuries with all its misery and errors. It is *thus* that the horizons of perception and the medium of social experience are actually produced. The so-called media feed on the returns of this labor. They only reflect something which depends on being filled out by the spectators from their own experience. There is not a single Mark or dollar that the media cash in at the box office, through rental or taxes, which is not earned by the spectator or non-spectator. Our responsibility is therefore to the non-spectator whom we deceive if *we* masquerade as the media. Both, that is, non-spectators and spectators together, constitute the media and produce its reception: i.e. it is *their* imagination that animates the screen.

UTOPIAN CINEMA

The art of the cinema is young, barely 70 years old. It does not have a feudal past. Compared to the refinement of forms which music, architecture, literature, oil painting and sculpture cultivated over the centuries, supported by the traditional unity of culture and property, the cinema displays an amazing vigor, robustness, at least in its early days. Not obliged to follow the intricate ways of 'civilization and its discontents' (S. Freud), film takes recourse to the spontaneous workings of the imaginative faculty which has existed for tens of thousands of years. Since the Ice Age approximately (or earlier), streams of images, of so-called associations, have moved through the human mind, prompted to some extent by an anti-realistic attitude, by the protest against an unbearable reality. They have an order which is organized by spontaneity. Laughter, memory, and intuition, hardly the product of mere education, are based on this raw material of associations. This is the more-than-ten-thousand-year-old-cinema to which the invention of the film strip, projector and screen only provided a technological response. This also explains the particular proximity of film to the spectator and its affinity to experience.

“UNDER THE SIGN OF THE HERMAPHRODITE”

The standards of culture and aesthetic quality are ambiguous in relation to the cinema. To the future archaeologists of our film landscape, almost everything will appear as culture, even the so-called no-quality films. The federal subsidy system, however, insists upon top quality. The production of top quality films is hemmed in by bureaucracy, planning, private ownership,

centralization, business, censorship and a mechanical pragmatism which does not sound like censorship but actually represents one of the most effective instruments of present-day censorship.

This type of censorship benefits from the gallimaufry which plagues the standards of quality in film. James Joyce, Arnold Schönberg, and the late Beethoven quartets represent indisputable pinnacles of quality in literature and music. In the cinema, these same products would frustrate an equally valid desire in the spectators which consists in asserting their non-classical needs for expression and satisfying their libidinal economy.

(. . .) This is the true meaning of diversity; hardly an abstract ideal. For this reason the history of film contains a utopian strain — which is what accounts for the attraction of the cinema — but it is a utopia which, contrary to the Greek meaning of *ou-topos* = no place, is in existence *everywhere* and especially in the *unsophisticated* imagination. This unsophisticated imagination, however, is buried under a thick layer of cultural garbage. It has to be dug out. This project of excavation, not at all a utopian notion, can be realized only through our work.

THE SPECTATOR AS ENTEPRENEUR

The film and television corporations live off of the money and the cooperation of the imaginative faculties (unpaid labor) which they extract from the spectator. They designate anyone a mature citizen who is willing to pay. Kant says: enlightenment is man's release (Ausgang) from his self-incurred tutelage (selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit). Leni Peickert says:

“People are mature
when they have their day off. . .”².

In order to cheat spectators on an entrepreneurial scale, the entrepreneurs have to designate the spectators themselves as entrepreneurs. The spectator must sit in the movie house or in front of the TV set like a commodity owner: like a miser grasping every detail and collecting surplus on everything which has any value. Value *per se*. So uneasy this spectator-consumer, alienated from his own life so completely like the manager of a supermarket or department store who — even at the price of death (heart attack) — will not stop accumulating the last scraps of marketable goods in the storeroom so that they may find their buyers. How disturbed he is when people pass by his store; how nervous he gets about objects in the storeroom which do not sell immediately.

2. “Mündig ist der Mensch, wenn er Ausgang hat (. . .).” From: Alexander Kluge, *Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos; Die Ungläubige; projekt Z; Sprüche der Leni Peickert* (Munich: R. Piper Verlag, 1968), p. 131. Leni Peickert (Hannelore Hoger), is an expert in circus reform and the protagonist of Kluge's film *Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos* (*Artists Under the Big Top: At a Loss*; 1968) and the short *Die unbezähmbare Leni Peickert* (*The Indomitable Leni Peickert*; 1970) (translators; footnote).

In a similarly entrepreneurial fashion the spectator — having reached the desired consumer maturity — scans films for their spectacle and exhibition values, for complete intelligibility, just as one is taught to gnaw a bone thoroughly, as the saying goes, so that the sun will shine. The sun, however, 'taking its thunderous course,' according to its own habits and unconcerned with human communication, does not care the least whether or not we clean our plates.

Understanding a film completely is conceptual imperialism which colonizes its objects. If I have understood everything then something has been emptied out.

We must make films that thoroughly oppose such imperialism of consciousness. I encounter something in film which still surprises me and which I can perceive without devouring it. I cannot understand a puddle on which the rain is falling — I can only see it; to say that I understand the puddle is meaningless. Relaxation means that I myself become alive for a moment, allowing my senses to run wild: for once not to be on guard with the police-like intention of letting nothing escape me.³

THE PUBLIC SPHERE*

Alexander Kluge: If we are discussing the term *oppositional public sphere* — and by this we mean a type of public sphere which is changing and expanding, increasing the possibilities for a public articulation of experience — then we must very resolutely take a stance regarding the right to intimacy, to private ownership of experience. For example, a group of people is faced with imminent eviction from an occupied building — in the Schumannstrasse no. 69 in Frankfurt where four houses were actually demolished. We know already in November that it is going to happen, and they know it as well. They have dwelled in this house for three years and have always had the plan to return something to the community in exchange for occupying the house: a tenants' counseling service and all sorts of other services. That plan never worked out. Shortly before the eviction, their political energy finally takes shape: they would like to make up for whatever they did not do in the previous three years. We wanted to film the eviction and we could assume that it would take place at a time when the entire city was celebrating carnival. We told the house-occupiers that we wanted to start shooting before the eviction because only then could we really work together. They said however: this is *our* fight and we will not allow our fight to be filmed by anyone who does not live in the

3. Fafner in (Wagner's) *Rheingold* was once a powerful giant. With his brother, he built Walhalla, a feat the gods themselves had been unable to accomplish. Then he killed his brother and is now guarding the treasure. He sits there like a dragon.

* This and the following pieces were originally published in: Klaus Eder/Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser, 1980).

house and fight with us. To which we responded: our working schedule does not allow us to live here, but we can at least join you, we can be there with our camera when the house is cleared out; granted, in such a case we would be house-occupiers only in disguise because, having places of our own, we are not house-occupiers. To which they replied: all the less reason to allow you to film us since this is our struggle, it belongs to us. We continued to argue, although without success, and said: you can't claim private ownership of your struggle like an entrepreneur claims private ownership of his factory and would therefore order his security force to prevent us from shooting. Don't you realize that this is the same position with regard to the public sphere? Don't you see that you are copying something that the other side can do much better, namely producing a non-public sphere, producing a relationship of property and exclusion? It may be that you consider us prostitutes who exist everywhere and yet nowhere: to this we adamantly respond — exactly that is our job: it is not our business to live everywhere at once. If we were to make a film about farmers, the situation would be the same: we are not farmers and even if we lived like farmers for half a year we still would not be farmers. Just because we work in factories does not make us factory workers. We are always aware that we have another profession and can leave if we want to. A public sphere can be produced professionally only when you accept the degree of abstraction which is involved in carrying one piece of information to another place in society, when you establish lines of communication. That's the only way we can create an oppositional public sphere and thus expand the existing public sphere. This is an occupation which is just as important as direct action, the immediate on-the-spot struggle.

Klaus Eder: Would it not be appropriate to stop using the term oppositional public sphere — which dates from the time around May 1968 — since what you mean is a public sphere in the authentic sense of the term?

Alexander Kluge: We mean the opposite of a pseudo-public sphere, that is, a representative public sphere which is representative in so far as it involves exclusions. Television, for example, following its mandate of providing a universal representation of reality (a concept which its monopoly and its pluralistic authority are based upon) could never afford to show films that go so much against the grain that they would call attention to whatever scope of reality television does not include. This would destroy the facade of legitimacy on which the public sphere of television is based. If a pseudo-public sphere only represents parts of reality, selectively and according to certain value systems, then it has to administer even further cuts so it won't be found out.

This type of public sphere has recently met with competition from a public sphere appropriated by private enterprise. Within the latter, the Springer corporation is to some extent only a novice, retaining an element of personalism which sets its own limits: the reactionary attitude of the entrepreneur in fact reduces the sales figures. This will be technocratically corrected at some point, eliminating the personal aspect of Springer, and thereby realizing the

private appropriation of the public sphere. This is a great danger — if all forms of the classical public sphere have the tendency, as representative public sphere, to automatically reduce themselves. In this respect, the conception of a public sphere which is neither privately owned nor simply the classical type is of fundamental importance: the very conditions of politics depend upon it.

The public sphere is in this scene what one might call the factory of politics — its site of production. When this site of production — the space in which politics is first made possible at all and communicable — is caught in a scissors-grip between private appropriation (which is no longer public in the authentic sense) and the self-eliminating classical public-sphere (its mechanisms of subtraction and exclusion); when this public sphere threatens to disappear, its loss would be as grave today as the loss of the common land was for the farmer in the Middle Ages. In that period the economy was based on the three acre system: one acre belonged to everyone, one belonged to the lord and one belonged to the farmer. This system can only function as long as there is this common land, the public ground, which is the first thing that the lord appropriates. If he owns both the common land and his own acre, then he has superiority. No longer dependant on fighting with the sword, the lord can now also control the third acre and will soon have serfs. The loss of land also means a loss of community because, if there is no land on which the farmers may assemble, it is no longer possible to develop a community. The same thing is happening again, on a historically higher plane, in people's heads when they are deprived of the public sphere. This creates the phenomenon of the rubber wall: I sit in my room and have enough reasons for protest and for wanting to break out but there is no one to whom I can communicate these reasons, there are no proper addressees. So instead I turn to substitute addressees by writing letters-to-the-editor, for example, to which nobody pays any attention. Or I support a politician who helps me out of my impasse by shifting concrete problems into the arena of world politics which I in turn mistake for my own interests believed to be realized via this displacement.

For these reasons, this use value, this product which is the 'public sphere' is the most fundamental product that exists. In terms of community, of what I have in common with other people, it is the basis for processes of social change. This means, I can forget about the concept of politics if I neglect the production of a public sphere. This is a claim to legitimacy which we must carefully insist upon and oppose against the many private needs — despite the fact that disappointment with the bourgeois public sphere, its failures, betrayals and distortions has led many leftist groups to reject a public sphere altogether.

Klaus Eder: The promotion and production of documentary films would thus in the end be a political question — all the more since in general only that which stabilizes domination is possible.

Alexander Kluge: Yes, but it is not the case that the domination that confronts

us is a conscious one. All methods of domination and those of profit (which do not want to dominate but rather to make profit and thereby dominate) contain a calculation of marginal utility. This means that the fence erected by corporations, by censorship, by authority does not reach all the way to the base but stops short — because the base is so complex — so that one can crawl under the fence at any time. Even television producers and board members can be examined in light of this calculation of marginal utility. In the hierarchy, a producer is subordinate to the manager who is in turn subordinate to the television board which is again responsible to still others: the producer must obey orders or he will be fired. This, however, is only true for half of his soul, so to speak; another part of him may be very curious. While in the course of time he may become resigned, nevertheless, in terms of his labor power he is more than just the functionary who is employed there. This means that in every television producer there exists a conflict and no system of domination in the world can reduce the producer completely to the functionary. In this conflict we must take the side of the television producer. We can count on the fact that no oppression is total. The issue then becomes the learning of proper ways of dealing with people (*die Lehre der richtigen Umgangsformen*).

We must produce the self-confidence which is necessary to discover the objective possibilities of production underneath these fences and we must take the offensive in fighting for this position. It is just as important to produce a public sphere as it is to produce politics, affection, resistance, protest, etc. This means that the place and the pacing of the struggle are just as important as the struggle itself.

On the other hand, in order to envisage a public sphere — of which we know very well that there is all too little — we need an almost childlike feeling of omnipotence. When, for example, the summer vacation begins I vacillate as to whether one can express oneself publicly at all: I don't believe in a single product that I could make and so I withdraw and write my secret texts, that is literature, of which I know that it will remain essentially marginal to the public sphere. Since I will not incite any large masses of people through the medium of a book, I can write whatever I like knowing that it will never engender attack. I even had the idea — in a mood of resignation — of hiding a print of my next film in the Munich Film Museum and waiting to see if any film philologist would discover it there ten years later. This merely out of frustration about the incredible struggles and compromises involved when one wants to see a film through to the public sphere.

Only among ourselves as filmmakers could we attempt to create a self-confidence that considers everything as possible. In this we will only succeed, however, if we recognize the importance of producing a public sphere. We must consider the degree to which it is essential that people live with one another in a society and that community is not something alongside of work for special occasions and future hopes, but rather that community is itself an element of social change.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PHANTASY

Q: What is the significance of phantasy (for the production of the public sphere)?

Alexander Kluge: Phantasy is a capacity that is universally employed. Everyone uses phantasy. But the proportions, i.e. in what measure we make use of it, are beyond social control. Phantasy is kept outside the public sphere, regarded as a gypsy (the unusual effect, for example, of imagining a gang of children playing away in the control booth of a nuclear power plant). As a result of this suppression, phantasy escapes domestication to some degree. It pays for this status by not using certain kinds of discipline. Other elements of phantasy, however, are made to conform. And then again, a certain amount of phantasy is absorbed by the economy of inner balance which human beings need if they want to survive in both work and personal relationships. Even as I take part in alienation, I counteract it by exporting my problems, by compensatory moves, by bribing myself. This is a form of phantasy under domination.

There is no social agreement regulating the common use of phantasy. When you continue to speak even after the other person has understood, then you exceed a norm; if you threaten another person with a gun and he or she surrenders but you shoot anyway then you are a criminal; if you eat until you're full that's normal, but if you continue to eat, then that's for psychological reasons. This is to say that in all these cases there is a sense of proportion. But in the workings of phantasy, the sense of proportion is missing. On the one hand, phantasy may be used in excess while on the other hand — when you suddenly cannot imagine anything — it may be severely repressed. Phantasy also provides a kind of temporary glue which keeps people from falling apart through the production of illusions which enable them somehow to live with themselves.

In addition to language, which is public, the public sphere should grant phantasy the status of a communal medium, and this includes the stream of associations and the faculty of memory (the two main avenues of phantasy).

A continuous shifting of perspectives is typical of phantasy. In phantasy I can transport myself to Africa without effort or I can imagine myself involved in a love-scene in the middle of a desert — all this happens as in a dream. The obstacles of reality cease to exist. If phantasy has good reasons to disregard these real obstacles — as a compensation for the reality principle — then the question is how can you, for the sake of whatever cause, encourage phantasy to develop such perspectives on it (i.e. perspectives different from those inherent in things as they are). In documentary film this could only be realized via a mixing of forms — the only method which permits radical changes in perspective.

Günther Hörmann: Documentary film faces three problems. First, to a large

extent it gives an account of specific instances and can generalize only with difficulty. Second, documentary film presents people in a public sphere which is itself insensitive to that process and as a result tends to expose them. Third, by depicting reality as it really is, documentary film runs up against defense mechanisms especially among people who are afraid of reality.

Documentary film should develop forms which would make it possible to overcome these defense mechanisms. In political situations, there is the language of silence. In the psychological realm there is the fairy tale onto which real problems are transposed. In documentary film such forms do not yet exist.

Klaus Eder: The present is not one-dimensional but rather a product of history; it is coated with layers of the past. Of what significance is this for the cinema?

Günther Hörmann: This is a problem of such complexity that one can hardly deal with it as an individual any more. When I make a documentary on a strike, I don't have the time to simultaneously pursue traces of the past into which one would have to delve as well.

Alexander Kluge: When you look at an image of a factory, it is very difficult to distinguish between the ahistorical present and history. But, for example, the history of the plow, which in 8 A.D. already looked like it does today, or the history of tools cross cut with footage of a strike — that I might be able to do something with.

Klaus Eder: So you would intercut the synchronic view (*Querschnitt*) with a diachronic perspective (*Längsschnitt*), ideally with an infinite number of diachronic perspectives?

Alexander Kluge: And since every cut provokes phantasy, a storm of phantasy, you can even make a break in the film. It is exactly at such a point that information is conveyed. This is what Benjamin meant by the notion of shock. It would be wrong to say that a film should aim to shock the viewers — this would restrict their independence and powers of perception. The point here is the surprise which occurs when you suddenly — as if by subdominant thought processes — understand something in depth and then, out of this deepened perspective, redirect your phantasy to the real course of events. This is perspectivism. One basically takes the standards according to which one composes a film image (framing, perspective, depth of field, contrast) and applies them to the dramaturgy of context.

Let us take, for example, the story of a young man and a young woman, a story which certainly does not conclude with the happy ending of the film. What the two of them are doing is work; it works, they work, their feelings work, their subconscious works, their prehistory works; and when the two of them speak to each other, there are really six people there, since the two pairs of parents sit invisibly among them. This is how I maintain the historical dimension.

In literature, the interaction of all novels amongst each other constitutes the context. And in the gaps between *Ulysses*, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the complete works of Marx, Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (and the unplowed fields between them are quite elementary), in these gaps lies phantasy.

Five Aspects of Realism

The first level: the relationship between author and representation, the ideal of authenticity. A single shot of a bush near Königsberg, for instance, is authentic if I set this image clearly off from other images (were I to include a blade of grass and a house and a smokestack, then the image would not be so distinct). So I first decide on the focus, the delineation, and then on the question of context — is this bush sufficient? If, for example, I want to say that this bush is threatened by a nuclear power plant and I show nothing but the bush, then this would remain an empty assertion; I would fail to establish a context. Realism involves conceptualization (*Arbeit des Begriffs*), and requires an exploration of both the experiential horizon and the individual motif (*Motiv*). A distinction and an horizon: these two constitute a concept (*Begriff*).

If I proceed to combine a number of individual elements into something that can be projected onto a screen, a mere pattern will acquire significance. That is the case even for a single shot — if I show nothing but a tree for ninety minutes, then this takes on a privileged meaning relative to everything I am not showing. When Clausewitz says that all the potential battles — those that do not take place — are just as important as those that do, he has understood a certain dialectic: he acts like a realist.

Next comes the relationship of the filmmaker to the product and to each individual shot, the interaction with the spectator which takes place even if the filmmaker is absent. That, too, is the filmmaker's responsibility: to assess whether this relationship is realistic, to take sides (*eine parteiliche Haltung einnehmen*). There is, however, a contradiction in this relationship in that the filmmaker works for six months or a year on a single film, the spectator, however, only ninety minutes: in terms of the quantity of time spent, even the most modest author starts out with an advantage over the viewer. The filmmaker has to bridge this gap, as if by translation, knowing that the viewer will decipher a code of meaning out of the first sequences which will determine the reading of the entire film. This code affects both the mode of comprehending the film (the track) and the kind of information which will be absorbed (the vehicle on the track). Both processes in turn (that of information being absorbed on the level of content and that of the code structuring the reading of a film primarily by means of form or through the difference between form and content) involve a two-fold reading: a reading determined by the pre-existing (previously acquired) cultural understanding of the spectator (which is not at all objective but is actually itself produced by a resistance to objectivity) as well as a desire for objectivity. It is with these real, ambiguous, subjective-objective interests of the spectator that the filmmaker interacts.

The next step is to consider the question of realism in the sense that the spectator never deals with single films but with clusters, with relationship between films — the films the spectator knows, his or her concept of cinema, genre expectations. This is why only films in series have a proper influence and function in the public sphere.

The real product is thus neither the single shot nor the combination of shots in one film, neither the relationship of the filmmaker to the spectators nor even the reception by the spectator — but rather the production of a public sphere. The public sphere provides a structure upon which depends all future communication of experience in a society. In that sense, all the products of new German Cinema are flawed: they leave out broad aspects of the experience of reality. On this point, there is absolutely no difference between Wildenhahn's position⁴ and my own; we obviously share the notion that "the critical measure of production is what is left out." Rather than defending hermetic viewpoints which we could easily use against each other, it is more important to create such a public sphere through joint efforts, through cooperation, by changing the products.

MONTAGE, AUTHENTICITY, REALISM

Klaus Eder: To what extent are your films conceived before you begin shooting, or, to what extent are they created on the editing table?

Alexander Kluge: Montage is a theory of relationships. When making films, I am always confronted with the problem that whatever I can see does not actually contain these relationships. On the subject of realism, Brecht says⁵: of what use is an exterior view of the AEG if I can not see what is going on inside the building in terms of relationships, wage labor, capital, international investments — a photograph of the AEG says nothing about the AEG itself. Thus, as Brecht says, most of the real conditions have slipped into the functional. This is the heart of the problem of realism. If I conceive of realism as the knowledge of relationships, then I must provide a trope for what cannot be shown in the film, for what the camera cannot record. This trope consists in

4. German documentary filmmaker who is a strong spokesman for a classical realist concept of documentary; cf. *Ulmer Dramaturgien*, pp. 135 ff.

5. The actual passage reads as follows: "The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does a simple 'reproduction of reality' tell us anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupps factory or of the AEG yields practically nothing about these institutions. The genuine reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations; the factory say, no longer gives out these relations. Hence it is in fact 'something to construct', something 'artificial,' 'posited.' Hence in fact art is necessary." — B. Brecht, *Der Dreigroschenprozess* (The Three Penny Trial) *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp), vol. XVIII, p. 161. Translation cited from Ben Brewster, "From Shklovsky to Brecht: A Reply," *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1974), p. 93 (translators; footnote).

the contrast between two shots which is only another way of saying montage. At issue here are the concrete relations between two images. Because of the relationship which develops between two shots and, to the degree that movement (the so-called cinematic) is generated between such shots, information is hidden in the cut which would not be contained in the shot itself. This means that montage has as its object something qualitatively quite different from raw material.

The employment of montage exclusively, however, would not be sufficient; it would be absurd for it would eliminate the basis which makes montage at all possible: the immediate, identificational representation in which the object of which I speak is also present in the image. But how many objects are there in the world which are completely self-contained (that is, for our Western type of imagination, in Poona⁶ that might well be otherwise)? Take a tree for example. I can shoot trees; it might be boring to watch trees in the wind for ninety minutes, or a tree over the course of the seasons, and yet it would still be a self-contained piece of information. But then again, I could also say: this bush near Königsberg is unaware of the fact that Königsberg is no longer part of Germany and is now called Kaliningrad. This is an authentic statement which is self-contained. It needs no further explanation since from the perspective of the bush it is of no consequence in which country it is located. However, if the tree were growing next to a nuclear power plant or in a courtyard, then it would no longer be a self-contained object which I could present in a single take. I would have to communicate this context by means of a cut, since no image could convey this information.

In the case of the bush near Kaliningrad (*Die Patriotin*), I felt it was necessary for the film as a whole to shoot this scene. This is to say that the bush existed before the entire film; the bush and its relationship to Kaliningrad. It subsequently disappeared among the outtakes and was only incorporated in the final version of the film. There is thus a decision being made during shooting which calculates the proportions which relate this information to all other information. When you start shooting a film, you simply lay in supplies.

A puddle on which the rain is falling is likewise a self-contained object: it can not be so old as to have any connection with the bombings of 1945. Basically it has a history of three days and, as a result, represents a non-human patriotic attitude. One could think of further examples representing nothing but a single object or a person in repose. This is the starting point. I can not convey the perspective of two thousand years without such a starting point, a zero degree of proportion against which to measure.

A montage is successful if the spectator can distinguish (in pure Aristotelean fashion) between two radical poles, two designations of time and place

6. A slur against the Ashram-Baghdwan sect popular in the Federal Republic which used to have its center of pilgrimage in Poona, India (Bombay Province). The pseudo-documentary *Ashram in Poona* (cf. *Pflasterstrand*, no. 77 (April 1980) is also being shown in this country.

because only then can one decode everything else, independent of whether such decoding is actually carried out. If a sailor such as Odysseus, for example, is sailing on the Mediterranean, he can determine his locations by taking the measurements of two stars; calculating the distance between the stars and between stars and horizon with the help of a sextant, he can figure out his position. Montage involves nothing more than such measurements; it is the art of creating proportions. What is decisive in this case is that Odysseus does not measure the location itself, but rather the relationship; it is this relationship which is contained in the cut, at exactly that point where the film does not show anything. Whatever is shown, on the other hand, is both the insignificant part of the message and yet, to a certain extent, the condition of its communicability.

Klaus Eder: Do you reject the practice of associational montage?

Alexander Kluge: Montage involves associations and encourages them; but these associations are basically contained in the cut. If I were to structure my montage in an associative fashion, then I would neglect the proportions and that would be a very arbitrary act. This is basically no different from the situation where poets write poems and schoolchildren are forced to memorize them — why on earth should people with a phantasy of their own be forced to learn something by heart which was conceived in an associative fashion by somebody else? It is necessary to impose a structure on these associations which functions in extremes. Between two extreme poles I can proceed to work with all the intermediate values in an associative manner.

Q: To come back to that bush near Kaliningrad which you mentioned earlier, would it be legitimate and would it correspond to your notion of authenticity if you were not to shoot it near Kaliningrad but rather somewhere else and then cut it into the film?

Alexander Kluge: I would have to consider if the substitution of a authentic bush by just any bush would have a different use value for the spectator, whether it would change something. If I assume that the bush near Kaliningrad conveys a relationship rather than just a bush, an object, then this relationship can be created in the mind of the spectator independently of where I have shot the bush. However, I would not look for doubles for Strauss or Schmidt, for example. In other words, if I want to work from an object or a person as such, then I would have to accord to reality.

*Translated by Thomas Y. Levin and
Miriam B. Hansen*