

Chapter Title: Editor's Introduction

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Book Title: Alexander Kluge

Book Subtitle: Raw Materials for the Imagination

Book Editor(s): Tara Forrest

Published by: Amsterdam University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n2tx.3>

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Introduction

Editor's Introduction

Tara Forrest

Alexander Kluge, whose eightieth birthday coincides with the release of this book, is a key figure in the German cultural landscape, having worked prolifically – over some fifty years – as a film-maker, writer and television producer. Outside the German-speaking world, Kluge is best known as one of the founding members of the New German Cinema and as the director of films such as *YESTERDAY GIRL* (1966), *THE PATRIOT* (1979) and *THE POWER OF EMOTION* (1983).¹ Film, however, is just one of the mediums with which he has worked throughout the course of his career. In 1962, Kluge published *Lebensläufe*,² the first of several collections of short stories; he is the author (along with Oskar Negt) of a number of key books (including *Public Sphere and Experience*³ and *Geschichte und Eigensinn*⁴); he has written extensively on a diverse range of topics including (among others) film, television, history, politics, opera, literature and the public sphere; and – since the establishment of his own television company DCTP (Development Company for Television Programmes) in 1987 – he has produced thousands of programmes for German television,⁵ many of which can now be viewed on DCTP's fascinating 'theme park' website.⁶

As the first English-language sourcebook devoted to Kluge's work, the aim of this collection is to provide the reader with a comprehensive introduction to some of the key issues, themes, preoccupations and ideas driving the development of his groundbreaking film, television and literary productions. Following Thomas Elsaesser's introduction, the book is divided into eight thematically organised sections, the contents of which (as summarised below) contain a broad range of different texts, including: articles and stories by Kluge; critical essays on various aspects of his work; transcripts from some of his television programmes; and interviews with Kluge himself. Each of these texts explore central issues, themes and ideas that feature across Kluge's body of work, and the book as a whole encourages the reader to draw their own connections and associations between material that was produced both in different mediums and at various points in his career.

Kluge himself places great emphasis on fashioning texts (be they films, television programmes, interviews, or stories) that are neither closed nor didactic in their structure and that refrain from channelling the viewer/reader's thinking in a specific conceptual or ideological direction. As the subtitle of the book suggests, Kluge's work consists not of finished texts, but of 'raw materials' for the imagination: that is, images, stories, quotes, ideas, interviews, diagrams and

other found materials that encourage the viewer/reader to actively participate in the meaning-making process that is initiated, but not foreclosed, by his work. 'The film', Kluge notes in a programmatic statement that is true of his stories and television programmes more generally, 'takes on its existence in the spectator's head'.⁷ It is the imagination of the viewer/reader, and not Kluge himself, that 'fills out' the work in question.⁸

Film, Politics and the Public Sphere

The intersection between film, the imagination of the viewer and the task of an active public sphere is explored in the first section of the book which consists of a compilation of writings by Kluge and essays by Miriam Hansen and Heide Schlüpmann that explore, in part, the role that Kluge's films have played in the establishment of an 'oppositional' public sphere. Central to Kluge's work in this field is the distinction he draws between the role and function of an 'active' public sphere and the 'pseudo' public sphere generated by the culture industry. For Kluge, an active public sphere is an inclusive, dynamic and collaborative space where people participate in the meaning-making process surrounding issues, policies, events and ideas that impact on the world in which they live. 'The public sphere', he writes, is 'what one might call the factory of politics – its site of production' and, as such, it forms the 'basis for processes of social change'.⁹ While Hansen's essay focuses on Kluge's contribution to *GERMANY IN AUTUMN* (1978) – a collaborative film produced in response to terrorist activities that took place in Germany in the Autumn of 1977¹⁰ – Schlüpmann provides a critical analysis of three films (*YESTERDAY GIRL*, *PART-TIME WORK OF A FEMALE SLAVE* (1973) and *ARTISTS UNDER THE BIG TOP: PERPLEXED* (1967)) which questions, in part, the extent to which they could be seen to work for or against the women's movement.

Rethinking History

History is a topic that has preoccupied Kluge for many years and has been explored – in various ways and with different effects – in his film, television and literary work. The first chapter in this section, written by Anton Kaes, focuses on Kluge's film *THE PATRIOT* and its protagonist Gabi Teichert's highly idiosyncratic attempts to rejuvenate the high-school history curriculum. Like Teichert, who is sceptical of historicist narratives that describe a particular outcome as

'probable', 'necessary', or 'realistic', Kluge is driven by a desire to redeem those voices, memories, materials and ideas that cleave open a space within official accounts of the relationship between the past and the present within which the possibilities of both the past and the future can be imagined and explored anew. As both David Roberts' analysis of Kluge's literary montage piece 'The Air Raid on Halberstadt, 8 April 1945' (1977) and the short extract from the piece contained in this section make clear, the experimental form of Kluge's work in this field challenges the reader to conceive of the 'reality' of the past outside of the tightly organised, linear narratives that feature in the textbooks assigned to Teichert's students. 'It must', Kluge states, 'be possible to present reality as the historical fiction that it is. Its impact on the individual is real [...]. Men die as a result, are pulled apart, are subjected to bombing raids, are dead while alive, are placed in asylums as mad etc.',¹¹ but this does not mean that these realities could not have been prevented, that the 'deadly outcomes'¹² suffered by these people could not have turned out very differently.

Realism as Protest

The above quote is taken from an article that appears in this section: an extract from a book Kluge wrote in 1975 that contains, among other materials, a number of short essays that explore what Kluge describes as the task of a 'realistic method'.¹³ As both the article by, and the interview with, Kluge contained in this section make clear, realism is a concept that occupies a very central position in his work, and it is a term he employs in a dialectical fashion to both describe and undermine the limitations placed on our conception of what is and is not possible by politicians and the pseudo public sphere.¹⁴ As Kluge has maintained throughout the course of his career, the so-called 'real' state of affairs 'is not necessarily or certainly real'. Alternative possibilities and the roads not taken 'also belong to reality. The realistic result, the actual result, is only an abstraction that has murdered all other possibilities for the moment'.¹⁵ Drawing on Kluge's delineation of the role of a realist aesthetic, Eike Friedrich Wenzel's chapter in this section analyses a series of short films produced early in Kluge's film-making career (including, among others, *BRUTALITY IN STONE* (1960) and *FRAU BLACKBURN, BORN 5 JAN. 1872, IS FILMED* (1967)) in order 'to demonstrate how Kluge's idea of realism is concretised as an independent form of documentary observation'.¹⁶

Opera as a ‘Power Plant of Emotion’

Among the contributions contained in this section are an interview with Kluge about his film *THE POWER OF EMOTION* and essays by Gertrud Koch and Caryl Flinn that explore the impact that Kluge’s longstanding fascination with opera has had on his film, television and literary work. In her analysis of *THE POWER OF EMOTION*, Flinn highlights a crucial scene in the film that illustrates both the sense of inevitability generated by the ‘fatalism of tragic operatic narrative’¹⁷ and (in keeping with his criticism of historicist accounts of history) Kluge’s desire to overcome it. The scene in question features Frau Pichota (a character played by Kluge’s sister Alexandra) in discussion with a singer who has performed the same role in a tragic opera eighty-four times in a row. When asked why, in act 1, he reveals a ‘spark of hope on [...] [his] face’, even though he knows – as a veteran performer of the role – that things are going to end badly in act 5, the singer suggests (in a matter-of-fact style reminiscent of Gabi Teichert’s approach to history) that, in act 1, there is still a chance that the story could unfold in a different direction.¹⁸ As Kluge himself has noted, his aim in producing *THE POWER OF EMOTION* was to enact a ‘disarmament of the fifth act’:¹⁹ a practice which, as Koch points out, is also apparent in the reworking of opera plots that feature in his experimental literary and television work.

Storytelling and Politics

Since the publication of *Lebensläufe* in 1962, Kluge has produced several collections of short stories and other literary texts including, among other recent books: *Chronik der Gefühle* (2000);²⁰ *Die Lücke, die der Teufel läßt* (2003);²¹ *Tür an Tür mit einem anderen Leben* (2006);²² *Geschichten vom Kino* (2007);²³ and *Das Bohren harter Bretter* (2011)²⁴ – the first of which includes, in addition to new material, reprints and reworked versions of a number of Kluge’s earlier texts.²⁵ As Andreas Huyssen points out in his analysis of Kluge’s early writings in this section, what marks Kluge’s literary work as distinct is the manner in which it systematically undermines the conventional channels via which meaning is communicated to the reader. ‘All traditional notions of narration’, he writes, ‘such as plot, character, action – are suspended, and one has great difficulty orienting oneself’.²⁶ Kluge, however, states that ‘confusion strengthens the muscles of [our] power of imagination’,²⁷ and it is the open, the fragmentary, what Kluge describes as, the ‘cut short’ quality of his stories²⁸ (characteristics which – as the stories contained in this section reveal – are also exhibited in his recent

literary work²⁹) that encourage readers to become active 'co-producers' in the meaning-making process. As Kluge states in his speech on literature, realism and politics also contained in this section, the politics of such stories lies not in their development along the lines of 'a particular political praxis', but in the extent to which they can help 'to recuperate [...] what is considered unpolitical as a political matter.'³⁰

Television and Counter-Public Spheres

In the interview contained in this section, Kluge states that his work in television proceeds from the assumption that the public sphere is richer the more it engages the viewer at the level of his/her own experience. In keeping with both his delineation of the task of an active public sphere and his criticism of films that seek to pedagogically impress their ideas upon the viewing audience, Kluge's television programmes are constructed out of an eclectic collection of 'raw materials' (including photographs, drawings, diagrams, quotes, interviews, scrolling text and clips from fictional and documentary footage) that encourage the audience to draw on their own experience and imagination in an attempt to engage creatively with a diverse range of issues and ideas pertaining to (among other topics): war, fascism, history, love, opera, nuclear power, neuroscience, literature, philosophy, art, music, film, architecture and economics. While the essays written by Christian Schulte and I provide an overview of the unconventional form – and spectatorial effects – generated by Kluge's television experiments, Tim Grünewald analyses a series of programmes that Kluge produced on Islam in the post 9/11 period that 'resist mainstream aesthetic television conventions' in an 'attempt to circulate an alternative image of Islam within the mass media.'³¹

Television Interviews

In Schulte's analysis of Kluge's television interviews contained in the previous section, he highlights what he describes as Kluge's 'astonishing ability to simulate the imagination of his interlocutor' and 'to set in motion the work of memory'.³² The interview with Heiner Müller that Schulte cites by way of example is included in full in this section,³³ as are transcripts of television interviews with DJ and musician Jeff Mills and academic Joseph Vogl – each of which demonstrate the lively manner in which Kluge's intuitive mode of questioning seeks to

animate the conversation by igniting the associative and imaginative capacities of his interview partner.

Early Cinema/Recent Work

In 'On Film and the Public Sphere', Kluge states that he 'wouldn't be making films if it weren't for the cinema of the 1920s, the silent era' and, in his writings on film, he often highlights the important role that a return to the 'origins' of cinema could play in rejuvenating our conception of the possibilities of the medium. Citing the work of Georges Méliès and Louis Lumière as examples, he notes that '[i]n each of these origins, "cousins" and other relatives of what actually developed can be found, and these can be adapted for the New Media in interesting ways'.³⁴ As Miriam Hansen points out in her essay in this section, a number of stylistic devices characteristic of early cinema are employed in Kluge's film and television work in his attempt to 'reinvent [the] possibilities' of both mediums.³⁵ While Hansen provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between Kluge's fascination with early cinema and his writings on the public sphere, the final chapter in the book written by Christian Schulte focuses on Kluge's recent film *NEWS FROM IDEOLOGICAL ANTIQUITY: MARX – EISENSTEIN – CAPITAL* (2008): a film inspired, in part, by Sergei Eisenstein's plans to produce a film version of Karl Marx's *Capital*.

While the book as a whole explores many of the key themes, issues and ideas that have preoccupied Kluge throughout his career, when dealing with a figure as prolific as Kluge, it is difficult to do justice to the breadth and significance of his work in one volume. I hope, nonetheless, that the essays, interviews and stories contained in this collection (many of which appear here for the first time in English) spark thoughts and associations that inspire further thinking about Kluge's extraordinary body of work

Notes

1. The German title of the film, *DIE MACHT DER GEFÜHLE*, is variously translated by different authors in the book as *THE POWER OF EMOTION*, *THE POWER OF EMOTIONS* and *THE POWER OF FEELINGS*. I have not standardised the title because of the different associations drawn out by their own translations.
2. Alexander Kluge, *Lebensläufe* (Stuttgart: Goverts, 1962). A selection of these stories was first published in English translation as Alexander Kluge, *Attendance List for a*

- Funeral*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966). This collection was subsequently republished as Alexander Kluge, *Case Histories*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York/London: Homes & Meier, 1991).
3. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). The book was originally published in German as *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972).
 4. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (3 vols.) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993). An edited version of this book is soon to be published in English translation as *History and Obstinacy*, ed. Devin Fore (New York: Zone Books, forthcoming 2012).
 5. For comprehensive lists of the television programmes produced between 1988 and 2007, see 'Kulturmagazine' (1988-1999), in *Die Schrift an der Wand. Alexander Kluge: Rohstoffe und Materialien*, ed. Christian Schulte (Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Rasch, 2000), pp. 401-438, and Beata Wiggen, 'Kulturmagazine 1999-2007', *Maske und Kothurn: Internationale Beiträge zur Theater-, Film- und Medienwissenschaft* (Vol. 53, No. 1, 2007), pp. 137-192.
 6. www.dctp.tv/#/themen/ (last viewed 1 February 2011). See also DCTP's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/dctpTV (last viewed 1 February 2011).
 7. Alexander Kluge, 'Pact with a Dead Man', in *West German Filmmakers on Film: Visions and Voices*, ed. Eric Rentschler (New York/London: Holmes & Meier, 1988), p. 236.
 8. Alexander Kluge, *Die Patriotin: Texte/Bilder 1-6* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979), p. 294.
 9. Alexander Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere', p. 40-41 of this book.
 10. GERMANY IN AUTUMN is just one of three collaborative films produced by Kluge together with other filmmakers and writers (including, among others, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Volker Schlöndorff, Stefan Aust, and Heinrich Böll). The other films include DER KANDIDAT (1980) and KRIEG UND FRIEDEN (1982).
 11. Alexander Kluge, 'The Sharpest Ideology: That Reality Appeals to its Realistic Character', p. 191 of this book.
 12. The phrase is taken from the title of Kluge's 1973 novella *Learning Processes with a Deadly Outcome*, trans. Christopher Pavsek (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1996).
 13. See the section entitled 'Kommentare zum antagonistischen Realismusbegriff', in Alexander Kluge, *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin: Zur realistischen Methode* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 187-250.
 14. For Kluge's analysis of this dialectical approach, see Ulrich Gregor, 'Interview', in *Herzog/Kluge/Straub*, ed. Peter W. Jansen and Wolfram Schütte (München/Wien: Carl Hanser, 1976), p. 160.
 15. Jan Dawson, 'But Why Are the Questions So Abstract?: An Interview with Alexander Kluge', in Jan Dawson, *Alexander Kluge & The Occasional Work of a Female Slave* (New York: Zoetrope, 1977), p. 34.
 16. Eike Friedrich Wenzel, 'Construction Site Film: Kluge's Idea of Realism and His Short Films', pp. 173-174 in this book.

17. Caryl Flinn, 'Undoing Act 5: History, Bodies, and Operatic Remains: Kluge's *The Power of Emotion*', p. 214 in this book.
18. See *ibid.*, p. 217, and Alexander Kluge, *Die Macht der Gefühle* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1984), pp. 78-79.
19. Alexander Kluge, 'Text der Pressekonferenz mit Alexander Kluge über *Die Macht der Gefühle* in Venedig am 5. September 1983', *Kinemathek* (vol. 20 September, 1983), p. 4.
20. Alexander Kluge, *Chronik der Gefühle: Band I – Basisgeschichten* and *Chronik der Gefühle: Band II – Lebensläufe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000).
21. Alexander Kluge, *Die Lücke, die der Teufel läßt: Im Umfeld des neuen Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003). A selection of the stories contained in this book have been published in English translation as Alexander Kluge, *The Devil's Blind Spot: Tales from the New Century*, trans. Martin Chalmers and Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions Books, 2004).
22. Alexander Kluge, *Tür an Tür mit einem anderen Leben: 350 neue Geschichten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006).
23. Alexander Kluge, *Geschichten vom Kino* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007). A selection of these stories has been published in English translation as Alexander Kluge, *Cinema Stories*, trans. Martin Brady and Helen Hughes (New York: New Directions Books, 2007).
24. Alexander Kluge, *Das Bohren harter Bretter: 133 politische Geschichten* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011).
25. These include (among others): *Lebensläufe*; *Lernprozesse mit tödlichem Ausgang*; and *Schlachtbeschreibung*. An earlier version of the latter text has been published in English translation as Alexander Kluge, *The Battle*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York/Toronto/London/Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1967).
26. Andreas Huyssen, 'An Analytic Storyteller in the Course of Time', p. 272 in this book.
27. Alexander Kluge, 'Ich liebe das Lakonische', *Der Spiegel* (no. 45, 2000), p. 337.
28. 'A few of the stories', Kluge notes in his introduction to *New Stories, Notebooks 1-18: The Uncanniness of Time*, 'appear to have been cut short. Then it is precisely this being-cut-short which is the story'. See Alexander Kluge, 'Selections from *New Stories, Notebooks 1-18: The Uncanniness of Time*', trans. Joyce Rheuban, *October* (no. 46 fall, 1988), p.103.
29. These stories, which have been grouped together under the title 'At the 2003 International Security Conference' were originally published in German in *Die Lücke, die der Teufel läßt: Im Umfeld des neuen Jahrhunderts*. They were not, however, included in the selected collection of these stories that was published in English translation as *The Devil's Blindspot: Tales from the New Century*.
30. Alexander Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feeling', p. 288 in this book.
31. Tim Grünewald, 'Reframing Islam in Television: Alexander Kluge's Interviews on Islam and Terrorism since 9/11', p. 331 in this book.
32. Christian Schulte, 'Television and Obstinacy', p. 326 in this book.
33. See also the subtitled interviews with Müller on the Cornell University Library website: <http://muller-kluge.library.cornell.edu/en/index.php?> (last viewed 7 January 2011).

34. Kluge, 'Why Should Film and Television Cooperate', trans. Stuart Liebman, *October* (no. 46 fall, 1988), p. 99.
35. Dawson, 'But Why Are the Questions So Abstract?', p. 37. 'I do not', Kluge claims, 'take up the silent film in my films for stylistic reasons but because it is a question of "radically" keeping open the elementary roots of the film'. 'The Sharpest Ideology', p. 195 in this book.