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THE HAUNTED PUBLIC SPHERE: WOMEN AND THE POWER OF EMOTION IN  
THE WORKS OF ALEXANDER KLUGE AND THE FILMS OF THE *BERLIN*

*SCHOOL*

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Haunted Public Sphere: Women and the Power of Emotion in the Works of

Alexander Kluge and the Films of the Berlin School

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My dissertation sheds light on the German filmmaker and author Alexander Kluge and his ideas on filmmaking as they evolved out of his conception of the public versus the private spheres since the early 1960s. It was Kluge's contention that personal experiences of war and violence could not be expressed publicly in the postwar Federal Republic, causing a rift between the two realms and a haunting presence of trauma within individuals and society as a whole. What Kluge, in cooperation with Oskar Negt, called "alternative public sphere" in *Public Sphere and Experience* (1972) and *History and Obstinacy* (1981) is closely linked to Woman and so-called "proletarian" forces countering instrumental reason and the bourgeois cultural matrix. Analyzing four crucial films from Kluge's creative work, I outline the increasingly allegorical role of his concept of "female mode of production," which constitutes Kluge's aesthetics and thematic focus. How the ideas of "alternative public sphere" and "female mode of production" are linked to the cinema and Kluge's theory of film is the focus of another chapter that scrutinizes Kluge's recent literary compilation *Cinema Stories* (2007). Finally, I read a selection of contemporary German films considered the new filmic avant-garde through the lens of

Kluge's approach to film, to the "female mode of production," and to the public sphere. This allows me to compare the ethics, the formal and political attitude of the so-called *Berlin School* directors to the vanguard movement of *Young German Film* in the sixties and early seventies. I conclude that the filmic Autoren today deal with a similar problem as Alexander Kluge has done throughout his career, namely the dissociation of personal, lived experience from public representation. They also employ formal and thematic strategies that can be related to the thoughts behind the Oberhausen generation of German filmmakers. While the generation of the leftist student movements sought public recognition of the atrocities committed under National Socialism, the *Berlin School* directors deal with mediated experience in times of media and finance corporatism as virtual realities threaten to take over the empiric world.

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## Introduction

Few other terms have shaped the discourse on culture and identity in the postwar Federal Republic as vigorously as the concept of “public sphere” (Öffentlichkeit). In fact, the rift between the “public” and “private” goes back to the European Enlightenment and the emancipation of the bourgeoisie from the absolutist state, a process that in Germany was perverted under fascism. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the German public sphere has largely been discussed in the context of Jürgen Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit)*, published in 1962. The book describes the bourgeois public sphere as a historic phenomenon that is based on a shared symbolic matrix of culture, on practices of writing and reading. Individuals inaugurated into this discursive system are, in an idealized version, in a position to discuss matters of public interest freely, rationally and as equals.<sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the “public sphere” became a prime target in the Allied efforts to democratize West Germany through means of mass communication. At the same time, the German government was looking for adequate means to manifest a new national identity, seeking to dissipate the association with fascism and the Holocaust. To this end, cinema and television, the two pivotal media in the realm of public expression, were heavily subsidized and controlled by the state,

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Hansen 1993, 197: In this system only what is publicly represented has truth value in a society liberated “from self-incurred tutelage,” as the Kantian definition of Enlightenment goes. However, as the Frankfurt School theoreticians Adorno and Horkheimer argue in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this emancipation of the public also had its drawbacks. It meant a self-imposed taming of desire and emotions, restricting the body. Instead of doing away with myth and external tutelage, Enlightenment in this account created its own bourgeois myths and hierarchies, covering up the realm of bodily experiences, sensuousness and emotions.

comparable in status to the performing arts in other countries.<sup>2</sup> The result of this strict administration of public representations was arguably a continued dichotomy between an official, rationalizing discourse in the public sphere on the one hand and the realm of emotions and experience of war within each private person on the other. It also created special conditions for artists and filmmakers in postwar Germany, who found themselves torn between the wish to bypass market pressures, while criticizing state patronage and the bourgeois public sphere. Vanguard artists had to cope with a unique situation within a society that favored progress and enlightened rationality and did not recognize the developing neo-avant-gardes as such.

It was the filmmaker and author Alexander Kluge, together with the sociologist and philosopher Oskar Negt, who first theorized an “alternative public sphere” that would challenge Habermas’ concept of bourgeois public sphere, while at the same time carry on some of the most significant aspects of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.<sup>3</sup> Negt’s and Kluge’s utopian project of a “public sphere of emotions” or “proletarian public sphere,” which Kluge tried to restore in the audience with the help of his filmic and literary techniques, is theorized in *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward and Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (*Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* 1972) and *History and Obstinacy* (*Geschichte und Eigensinn* 1981).

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<sup>2</sup> Compare Elsaesser 1989, 8-35. Arguably, the boards of public television and the system of financing film production ever since the introduction of state lended guaranteed credits (*Ausfallbürgschaften*) by the Christian Democrats in the 1950s, and the establishment of the *Film Subsidy Board* (*Filmförderanstalt*) in 1967, administered by the Ministry of the Interior and certain public grant-awarding bodies, buttressed the tradition of an administered bourgeois public sphere. The FRG’s attitude towards mass media in the 1970s is illustrated in the *Filmpolitische Leitsätze* of the then ruling SPD party: “wherever the self-regulatory mechanisms of the economy cannot assure the participation of all citizens, the democratic state has to help and intervene. Since the participation of the masses in the communicative processes of the cinema cannot be assured without the arbitrating intervention of government institutions, a film policy is necessary” (quoted in A. Mayer: *Auf dem Weg zum Staatsfilm?* In: *medium*, Dec.1977, p. 16).

<sup>3</sup> In an interview Kluge states: “Our notion of *Öffentlichkeit*, or publicness, is not really opposed to Habermas’s. It is a response as part of a process of discussion” (Kluge in Liebman 42).

In line with Habermas the authors hold out the belief that a public sphere can and must exist in capitalist societies. However, they challenge a number of the foundations upon which Habermas' interpretation of the public sphere is based. For example, they show that the bourgeois public sphere is much more a result of interests of capitalist exchange than Habermas wants to admit (see Polan 37). They also question Habermas's assumption that human experience is organized "from above," and suggest that individuals experience "from below." As a key lobbyist for a financially and ideologically independent cinema with the director as "author" controlling the entire process of filmmaking and -distribution, Kluge tried to give a public voice to that which in the FRG remained excluded from public visibility: the subaltern, the particular, and the personally felt aspects of reality, which did not fit in with the ideals of moving away from an unwanted past and with the idea of the bourgeois family as the smallest cell of the socio-economic system. Kluge described the economy within this alternative reality very broadly and arbitrarily as "female mode of production."

In order to activate this "alternative public sphere," Kluge replaced mediated and abstracted notions of the body as represented in conventional narrative cinema with a more direct stimulation of the senses, creating "lived experience" (*Erfahrung*) for the recipients of his film works,<sup>4</sup> while playing with and referring to the bourgeois matrix of shared values and symbols, which are to be deciphered in a practice of reading. The type of public sphere created through and in his audience is one that relies equally on a shared

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<sup>4</sup> Miriam Hansen succinctly sums up the implications of the German term in contrast to the English term "experience": "*Erfahrung* does not have as much of an empiricist connotation as 'experience,' which links the latter to 'expert' and 'experiment' and tends to assume a basically unmediated, stable relationship between subject and object. The German root of 'fahren' (to ride, to travel), by contrast, conveys a sense of mobility, of journeying, wandering or cruising, implying both a temporal dimension, that is, duration, habit, repetition, and return, and a degree of risk to the experiencing subject... These connotations distinguish *Erfahrung* from the more neutral, singular occurrence of *Erlebnis* (event, adventure), a meaning contained in the English term 'experience.'" (Hansen 1993, 187)

symbolic matrix of culture, as well as on the primary processes of the body, such as automatic affect and the libidinal processes of desire. In this way, Kluge wanted to make emotions “useful for the purpose of enlightenment” and “enlightenment to become useful for emotions” (Kluge 1984: 186), contending that, “[e]motions, as they work now, how they are used, defend the wrong type of superstructure [Hochbau], which has been imprinted on them. They defend their motives, namely the fact that they are being used as motors [Antriebskräfte], against their better knowledge” (Kluge 1984: 186).

In his book *Visions of Violence* (2008) Richard Langston argues that direct bodily stimulation and the imprinting of bodies are characteristic devices the postwar European avant-gardes use in order to activate unmediated emotions within the recipients of their works. According to this author, aesthetic postmodernism prompted a new strand of vanguard art that can be defined through the violence done to otherwise abstracted and commodified bodies (Langston 8). The first part of my dissertation seeks to enlist Kluge in this project of postwar European avant-gardes, arguing that Kluge’s work differs from other vanguard artworks in his emphasis on a shared public sphere, which he considers crucial for any resistance against the pressures of the financial markets and media corporations.

Kluge’s emphasis on the necessity of both, a stimulation of primary processes of affect, as well as symbolic processes of reading, is a characteristic he shares with the contemporary filmmakers of what has recently been described as “Nouvelle Vague Allemande” in the *French Cahiers du Cinéma*. This movement in German film, which has been around for the last ten years, is generally comprised under the heading *Berlin*

*School (Berliner Schule)*,<sup>5</sup> and, similar to the project of *Young German Film* in the 1960s,<sup>6</sup> addresses and challenges what could be called the bourgeois public sphere on the level of form and content, deploying the symbolic matrix of a discourse that reaches back to 19<sup>th</sup> century Biedermeier values, while at the same time compromising the validity of these claims through stylistic techniques that create direct sensual effects on the side of the recipient.

This young generation of German filmmakers shares Kluge's interest in female main characters as an epitome of the incompatibility between bourgeois family stereotypes and actual, sensual human beings. Women and the small family constellation are recurring characters and themes in the works of filmmakers such as Christian Petzold, Christoph Hochhäusler, Benjamin Heisenberg, Maren Ade, and Angela Schanelec. Similarly, Kluge's idea of an "emotional public sphere," which seeks to reconcile sensual perception and symbolic representation, originates in "female mode of production," a stereotype created through the bourgeois separation of sexes and amplified in his works to the point where it sounds sarcastic and ultimately becomes a critique of bourgeois gendering. While in Kluge's early cinematic work the very literal depiction of what was perceived as weak women often carried problematic implications, his project became clearer in his later literary montages, a form of expression the author has revived since the publication of *Chronicle of Feelings* in the year 2000 (*Chronik der Gefühle*).

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Lequeret, Elisabeth. "Allemagne: La Génération de l'Espace." *Cahiers du Cinéma* 587 (2004): 47-51. Print. As an introduction to the so-called *Berliner Schule*, see Marco Abel's article in *Cinéaste*, Vol. 33, No.4, Fall 2008: "Intensifying Life: The Cinema of the 'Berlin School'."

<sup>6</sup> German *Young German Film* is the term I use for the Oberhausen generation that preceded the generation of great name authors, such as Wim Wenders, R.W. Fassbinder, Volker Schlöndorff, Werner Herzog etc. Kluge has been identified as spokesperson of this movement by numerous authors, for example R. Lewandowski, T. Elsaesser.

The young filmmakers of the *Berlin School*, I argue, realize cinematically what Kluge accomplishes towards the end of his career in the form of literature. Woman in the films I am going to analyze in the last part of this study fuels the machine of public representation in the information age and simultaneously represents its subversion. This is the role Kluge, too, ascribes to his female characters. Yet his reasons for doing so are different from those of the Berlin filmmakers. The years between the early 1960s and the early 1980s, which mark the height of his career as a filmmaker, were characterized by social unrest and the new generations' struggles to deal with the atrocities of a past they had not lived through, yet the memory traces of which they had inherited from their parents. Reading the *Berlin School* through the lens of Alexander Kluge's vanguard techniques that were motivated in the specific conditions of the German postwar public sphere not only opens up new possibilities of interpretation, it also buttresses the avant-garde status of this movement and possibly suggests a tradition of vanguard film that is specifically German due to the special relationship between public sphere and personal experience (Erfahrung) in postwar Germany.

This special relationship between public and private has been described as spectral or haunted by the invisible, ineffable and muted aspects of public discourse, namely the violence committed by and done to Germans in the course of the Second World War. Even generations after the incredible atrocities of systematic mass murder, spectral traces can be found in the unconscious of individuals of both victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust, as Gabriele Schwab expounds in her recent book *Haunting Legacies* (2010). In Germany, personal memory and lived experiences are imbued with trauma, the unbearable contradiction of unforgiveable perpetration of the Holocaust on



the one hand and incredible personal losses during the allied air raids that concluded the war on the other. As Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich argue in *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* (1975), the German people never found a proper way of relating publicly to its losses and personal tragedies in face of the atrocities committed in the name of national identity. Trauma remains encrypted in their bodies as it is handed down unconsciously from the parent generation, without necessarily surfacing in public discourse.<sup>7</sup>

The Third Reich, as *the* German trauma of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has motivated Alexander Kluge's artistic production from the very beginning of his career. Born in 1932, the allied air raids on his home town Halberstadt seem to be the secret center around which all of his works revolve. Arguably, Kluge himself tries to cope with his early experience of destruction and simultaneous consciousness of culpability through writing, producing texts on the war in ever renewed modulations. In an early interpretation of Kluge's literary work, David Roberts (in Böhm-Christl 1983) speaks of 1945 as the "abarischer Punkt" in Kluge's life, when all of a sudden historical continuity and reality as it had been known became uncanny and imaginary (78). With *Case Histories* (*Lebensläufe* 1962) and *The Battle* (*Schlachtbeschreibung* 1964) Kluge first attempted to deal with the contradictions of abstract planners making detached decisions on the one hand and the direct effect of these decisions on people "on the ground" on the other. *The Battle* assembles minute reports from the battlefield of Stalingrad in the form

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<sup>7</sup> The terms "encrypt" and "crypt" are used in Gabriele Schwab's book (1, 48, 49) and refer to Nicolas Abraham's and Maria Torok's work on transgenerational trauma. In *The Shell and the Kernel* (1994) the authors develop their concept of the crypt, a psychic space within the unconscious created to contain and seal unbearable experiences, memories and pain. The authors use the metaphor of ghosts to suggest a foreign presence in the self, which propelled Schwab to conceptualize "haunting legacies" in German families.

of news reports, governmental memoranda for acceptable reportage on the battle, official guidelines for winter warfare, clerical sermons written on occasion of the battle, interviews with officers, and diary entries.

The perspective from “below” in these accounts is not the subjective vivid account of an eye witness. Kluge omits personal sensual experiences or accounts of what he calls “lebendige Arbeit”,<sup>8</sup> and instead recreates the alienation between the concrete and the abstract perspective on the level of form, deploying distancing montage techniques that prevent the reader’s identification. In this manner, the author purports to activate the intellectual protest energy and at the same time the fantasy of the viewer, foreclosing the realm of emotions and of the sensual body as the site of lived experience. The following Friedrich Engels’s maxim is inserted in Kluge’s film *Part-Time Work of A Domestic Slave* (1973): “Everything that moves people has to pass through their heads first; but what form it acquires in these heads depends very much on the circumstances”.<sup>9</sup> It reflects the perspective of the historical materialist as opposed to psychologically motivated storytelling that propels the readers’ identification with characters on the level of plot.

Activating his readers in their historical present is Kluge’s declared goal, as well as it is the goal of the “post-fascist avant-gardes” (Langston) that mean to subvert the “modernist myths of the Bonn (and later the Berlin) Republic’s claims to radical

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<sup>8</sup> Negt and Kluge understand all practical activities of human beings as work processes that take place in the antagonism between “dead” and “living” labor (lebendige und tote Arbeit), the former representing dictated, heteronomous forms of labor, the latter representing self-paced and autonomous forms of labor (Kluge 1981, 53-60). In his conception of realism, Kluge understands the active viewer, who freely associates cinematic images with internal images as engaging in “living labor” (Kluge 1975, 208).

<sup>9</sup> Kluge 1975, 143: “Alles, was Menschen in Bewegung setzt, muss durch ihren Kopf hindurch; aber welche Gestalt es in diesem Kopf annimmt, hängt sehr von den Umständen ab.” Kluge states about his use of this and other quotations in his films: “Sie sind nicht inhaltlich zitiert, sondern sie sind zitiert als etwas Wirkliches gegen das ganz Unwirkliche eines Spielfilms“ (quoted in Gregor 1976, 169).

democratic reform” (Langston 14). As Langston explains, the myth of progress away from the past, which was promoted in the FRG during the years of the “economic miracle,” in effect propelled a continuation of the modern project, which essentially rested on the bourgeois value system and the separation of private and public, male and female categories.

My perspective in this analysis of Kluge’s work, as well as the films of Christian Petzold, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Sören Voigt as “vanguard,” is the dialectics of the body, as, on the one hand, an abstracted, gendered category in the symbolic sphere, and, on the other hand, the sensuous, living organism. The interaction and renewed bringing together of the two sides is crucial for Kluge’s intended transference between the work of art and the recipient, but it is also depicted in the narrative content of his “stories,” films and TV “Kulturmagazine.” While Langston focuses on violence in 20<sup>th</sup> century vanguard art committed by and to bodies for the sake of expanding the epistemological limits of the present (18), I look at the excess of signification, the coupling of living organisms with abstract signifying practices in Kluge’s work, arguing that the female-male dialectic of gender is the most violent and most common abstraction of the body and of lived experience, and that this has repercussions for Kluge’s stated goals.

Kluge’s notion of a “female mode of production” in *History and Obstinacy* fits the stereotype of Woman as mother and caretaker. Kluge acknowledges this image as a distorted view of reality, but at the same time, and in line with his esteem for the public sphere, argues that discourse, stereotypes, and assumed “truths” have reality effects and constitute the world we live in. He takes the mythic unconscious structure of society seriously and purports that in the symbolic realm, which underlies empiric reality, the

bourgeois values of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are very much alive, with all the authoritarian and potentially fascist repercussions they entail. “Reality” for Kluge, as for modern nations, consists of nothing but stories, and the distinction between art and life, fiction and document is a futile one. He treats myths of modernity as allegories that are to interact with the internal world of the recipients, who in effect become the vessel of a counter-reality that never materialized, but that lies hidden underneath the public realm in the form of individual personal experiences, emotions, and fantasy.

Kluge’s films *Yesterday Girl* (*Abschied von gestern* 1966), *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* (*Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* 1973), *The Patriot* (*Die Patriotin* 1979), and *The Power of Emotion* (*Die Macht der Gefühle* 1983) that will be analyzed in this study, all feature alienated female characters grappling with a bourgeois society to which they cannot adopt or which they cannot change. The four films represent a sample of Kluge’s cinematic work that in the course of his career became increasingly non-narrative. The most recent of the four films, *The Power of Emotion*, tells a multitude of stories grafted onto one another, arranged in a collage of disparate visual elements, such as images from children’s books, photographs, and film stills, moving images from documentary footage and movie scenes, staged scenes and interviews. I chose this sequence of four films to demonstrate the way Kluge’s idea of an “emotional public sphere” originated in his concept of “female mode of production,” and from there developed into a more abstract notion of the suppressed and the marginal within society, its potential for protest, and the dangers of and new possibilities opened up with the rise of new and radically democratic media formats.

To counter the hegemony of classical narrative cinema, Kluge has been preoccupied with the origins of the cinema, which at its inception represented a potential tool for the subversion of the bourgeois public sphere, but also potentially furthered the commodifying effects of the mass media proliferating into “public spheres of production.” Kluge views both types of public sphere, the bourgeois public sphere, as well as the public spheres of production, as glossing over personal experiences and difference to make bodies exchangeable. Vanguard film and the type of film Kluge promoted as signatory of the *Declaration of Oberhausen* aspires to activate the recipient through methods of an early “cinema of attractions”:<sup>10</sup> the rapid succession of spectacles rather than a linear narrative, long static shots instead of continuity editing, direct stimulation of the senses instead of a causal logic of story development. This style of filmmaking provides a collective experience for the viewer, who in early cinema of attractions was thought of as a participant in a social event rather than a passive consumer of entertainment.

In his book *Cinema Stories (Geschichten vom Kino 2007)*, Kluge reflects on film history in its entirety, returning repeatedly to the role of women as exponents of bodies that are at the same time commodified and abstracted images, as well as violated or violent in their biological, immediate nature. At the same time, on the level of form the reader is presented with visual images of women on photographs integrated in the book, which interrupt the text and speak to the recipient directly, propelling affective reactions

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<sup>10</sup> According to Tom Gunning in his influential article in *Wide Angle* 1986, “The Cinema of Attraction (s),” the silent cinema that preceded the installation of a specific code of classical narrative filmmaking around 1909 directly addressed unspecified mass audiences rather than the cinematically experienced spectator, the concept of which developed later in the course of Hollywood genre standardization. In contrast to Hollywood genre movies, early cinema didn’t see its main task in narrative storytelling, but rather in a display of curiosities, the erotic, or the exotic.

that interact with the text on the level of associations. The story “Many Spirits Feed on the Body of a Dead Star” (“Am Körper eines toten Stars nähren sich viele Geister” 73-75), for example, sketches out the mythologizing that occurs in the aftermath of a female star’s death as a fiction that acquires the status of truth. An overexposed photograph is inserted in the text, depicting the actress’s body as pervaded by light from a window behind her pale physiognomy. The woman’s white dress intensifies her ghostly appearance. This particular story is part of a complex on classical narrative Hollywood film, while other sections of the book deal with the early cinema of attractions (Gunning 1986), with the European vanguard movements, and with film in the age of television.

While the early cinema of attractions is potentially subversive, the “classical art” of Hollywood filmmaking that emerged about 1909 favored narrative and the causal development of a story.<sup>11</sup> The individual spectator as voyeur, who could see yet not be seen in the dark of the theater, emerged as part of what Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson declared *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1962).<sup>12</sup> It is this cinematic “apparatus” that puts the spectator in a masculine subject position,<sup>13</sup> as Laura Mulvey has argued in her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975). According to her, Woman is automatically turned into an object of visual desire. The bourgeois notion of the

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<sup>11</sup> Gunning dates the transformation of viewing habits as occurring around 1908; Bordwell speaks of the “classical Hollywood style” between 1917 and 1960.

<sup>12</sup> I am using *classical narrative cinema* and *classical Hollywood cinema* interchangeably here. In Bordwell/Staiger/Thompson’s volume *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Hollywood cinema is treated as a “distinct artistic and economic phenomenon” (xiii), which was declared a “classical art” by André Bazin in 1939. Unity is the basic principle of this narrative cinema’s form, which tries to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and invisible storytelling. Narrative causality, time and space have to cohere to create the illusion of reality.

<sup>13</sup> In apparatus theory, a strand of film theory derived from Marxism, the institutionalization of spectatorship is seen as an ideological operation. The cinematic institution in short functions as a mental machinery, which, “spectators ‘accustomed to the cinema’ have internalized historically, and which has adapted them to the consumption of films”(Metz *The Imaginary Signifier* 2).

passive female as the object of the male gaze is thus repeated in classical narrative film, which Kluge and *Young German Film* tried to counter. In the aforementioned story, the “spectator,” in this case the narrator who sees yet remains unexposed, is the male eye witness, who was present when the actress died and whose report is quoted in the text. He, who might have been her actual murderer, is the one who alone knows the truth. In telling her story as that of a capricious suicide he symbolically kills her again, while the uncritical reader who believes his account becomes his accomplice.

The only one who can restore a reality for Woman in this story is the critical reader who is part of a public sphere of reading individuals with the ability to freely associate the content of the photograph, the actress Olive Thomas pervaded by sunlight, with the practice of filming or the creation of an illusion through light. The reader resisting the standardized narrative of the male eye witness would thus see the presentation of Woman in this story as a fiction, a creation of the movie industry, the epitome of which is Hollywood. Accordingly, the caption to the image reads: “Olive Thomas. In the background the sun of California.” Kluge’s ideal reader would be able to “read” cues and metaphors of the movie industry (i.e. “the sun of California” as the myth of Hollywood glamour) and at the same time affectively associate words and images. The combination of both symbolic and affective elements is what constitutes Kluge’s utopia of the “emotional” or “proletarian” public sphere.

The fact that Kluge up to this day has remained occupied with questions that dominated his reflections in the seventies and eighties goes hand in hand with a renewed interest in the generation of 1968, the student upheavals and critique of bourgeois values. In re-united Germany a “new bourgeoisie” (neue Bürgerlichkeit) is being discussed,

which, as opposed to the discussions surrounding bourgeois conservatives in the sixties, is associated with “green intellectuals,” and thus with a segment of the population at the left end of the political spectrum.<sup>14</sup>

The social challenges at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have led to a debate about film and television that seems to appropriate the key concepts discussed in the 1960s and seventies. The director and script writer Christoph Hochhäusler, for example, is working on a successor project to his film *The City Below* (*Unter dir die Stadt* 2010), which was dubbed the “first German film about the financial crisis” (Ströbele, n. pag.). In his new project Hochhäusler probes into the consistency and functioning of the public sphere: “It (the film) is about how publicity is created, about the media industry... It is about the question: how is that, which we call later ‘public sphere,’ produced? What are the players” (Knörer, n. pag.)? The film is to be set in the editorial offices of media moguls comparable to the German publisher *Springer*, who had been the subject of attacks by the 1960s radical student movement.<sup>15</sup>

The ideals of the new bourgeoisie are characterized by rationality, pragmatism and materialism. Already in 1982, on taking office, Chancellor Helmut Kohl called for a “spiritual and moral turn”,<sup>16</sup> and his successor Gerhard Schröder referred to a “Neue

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<sup>14</sup> See *Der Spiegel* (7 July 2003: “Nobel statt Nabel“), *Focus* (29 December 2003: “Benimm ist in“), *Vorgänge 170* (June 2005: “Rückkehr der Bürgerlichkeit“) and *Die Zeit* (9 March 2006: “Sehnsucht nach dem Bürger).

<sup>15</sup> “Springer Presse” became a derogative term during the 1968 student uprisings, denoting a conservative, bourgeois style of news coverage that was not compatible with the leftist mood of the time. The tabloid paper *BILD* was accused of a biased coverage of the death of the student Benno Ohnesorg, who was killed by police gunfire in 1967, as well as of the attack on student leader Rudi Dutschke in 1968. Arson attacks on *Spiegel*’s venues and company vehicles followed.

<sup>16</sup> The “geistig-moralische Wende” or “geistig-moralische Erneuerung“ was Helmut Kohl’s political slogan, which brought about the reinforcement of conservative values. See Stüwe, Klaus. *Die Rede des Kanzlers: Regierungserklärungen von Adenauer bis Schröder*. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005.



Mitte” for a pragmatic attitude in face of the declining welfare state and growing inequality in the aftermath of the German unification.<sup>17</sup> The new conservatism is a sign that Negt’s and Kluge’s utopia of a “public sphere of emotions” is an aspect still lacking and a relevant aim for the avant-gardes in German society. Instead of coming closer to such an alternative public sphere, what Negt and Kluge called “public spheres of production” in *Public Sphere and Experience* proliferated in the form of consumerism and the so-called information society.<sup>18</sup>

Public spheres of production, according to Negt and Kluge, differ from the classical bourgeois public sphere in that their relationship to capitalism is much more apparent. In fact, they are created through capitalism and do not pretend to be a separate sphere independent of market relations, so that their publicness is actually feigned in that they really support private interests behind corporate business. With the spread of the new media and the privately owned media corporations, according to Negt and Kluge, the individual did not become more publicly integrated, but increasingly isolated. Since the rise of television and the demise of cinema culture and the German *Autorenkino* of the

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<sup>17</sup> In its 1998 election campaign the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) deployed the slogan “Neue Mitte.” In the so-called “Schröder-Blair Paper” of 1999 a new social-democratic positioning was outlined, which reconciled the socialist “left” with neoliberal market capitalism. The individual citizen within the “new center” of society was supposed to expect less support from the welfare state and take on more personal economic and social responsibility.

<sup>18</sup> In her foreword to *Public Sphere and Experience* Miriam Hansen gives a succinct definition of the term “public sphere of production,” which Negt and Kluge distinguish from both the “bourgeois public sphere” and the “proletarian public sphere”: “These forms of publicity differ from the liberal-bourgeois model in that they no longer pretend to a separate sphere above the marketplace but are an ‘immediate expression’ of the process of production. They include a variety of contexts, ranging from ‘factory communities’ and corporate public relations, through spaces of commerce and consumption, to the privately owned media of the ‘consciousness industry.’ Lacking political legitimation of their own, the branches of industrial-commercial publicity, esp. the mass media, enter into alliances with the disintegrating classical public sphere, epitomized by the institutions of parliamentary representation and the state” (xxix).

sixties and seventies,<sup>19</sup> Kluge has lamented the loss of the public sphere altogether, which has its consequences in the private, emotional realm, and ultimately on Woman as Kluge's cipher for authentic, sensual perception and rebellion of the body.

As will be shown, the *Berlin School* tackles exactly this problem as the loss of what Kluge would term the "female mode of production" at the time of a deteriorating German welfare state and shared realm of public expression, which is being replaced by the ubiquitous presence of high speed internet and abstracted interpersonal relationships independent of time and place. Despite the absence of a common public sphere, the protagonists in these films are still caught in bourgeois conceptions of gender and the dialectics of enlightenment in general, problems Kluge has dealt with from the outset of his career. *Berlin School* filmmakers, born two generations after Kluge, reflect on the "melancholy of the new bourgeoisie," as Christian Petzold phrases it in an email exchange with Christoph Hochhäusler and Hartmut Bitomsky (*Revolver* 16: 15). Their films are often perceived as an expression of, rather than a counter-force to, the new bourgeois status quo, which has earned them some criticism from film reviewers.<sup>20</sup> However, as with Kluge's problematic notion of a "female mode of production," there is an excess in their treatment of bourgeois family constellations. My close reading of Christian Petzold's *Yella* (2007), Christoph Hochhäusler's *This Very Moment* (*Milchwald* 2003), and Sören Voigt's *Identity Kills* (2003) reveals the filmmakers' critical stance

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<sup>19</sup> The *Oberhausen* group and *Young German Film* are generally subsumed under this title.

<sup>20</sup> Ekkehard Knörer speaks of "a rather bourgeois poetics of middle class navel gazing" (2009), and Christina Nord remarks in *NewFilmkritik*: "Die eigene Existenz ins Bürgerliche überführen wollen sie (die Figuren der Berliner Schule Filme) nicht, weil sie die Friedhofsruhe von Ehe, Familie, Beruf fürchten. Doch ein Jenseits davon wird nie greifbar. Deswegen ist die Auszeit auch nicht viel mehr als ein letztes Aufbäumen gegen das Unvermeidliche. Die Antwort auf diesen unauflösbaren Zwiespalt ist Melancholie" (2007).

towards the very system they are part of, their secret subversion of the system that still provides no public outlet for individual emotional conditions by the very means that have constituted the current demotion of the public sphere.

Bourgeois family constellations are in the center of the narrative in films such as Christian Petzold's *The State I Am In* (*Die innere Sicherheit* 2000), *Ghosts* (*Gespenster* 2005), and *Yella* (2007), where female characters and adolescents become empty, specter- or machine-like, trapped in family constellations they cannot transcend. In Thomas Arslan's *A Fine Day* (*Der schöne Tag* 2000), the main female protagonist wanders somnambulistically through Berlin, toying with the thought of leaving her boyfriend. Ulrich Köhler's *Windows on Monday* (*Montag kommen die Fenster* 2006) depicts a woman's flight from her newly established family home; in Christoph Hochhäusler's *This Very Moment* (*Milchwald* 2003) a step-mother abandons two children abroad, and the female main character in Sören Voigt's *Identity Kills* (2003) becomes first an empty shell and then a killer. It is especially women who are in crisis in these films, their bodies and desires rebelling against the loss of memory and lived experience. As in Kluge's works, these women struggle against bourgeois stereotypes and the commodification of their bodies in the market economy, putting at stake their very lives and the biological existence of these same bodies. Instead of being objects of the gaze, the women depicted in these films are spectators and observers, viewing subjects that secretly control the gaze of the camera.

The rebellion of the body in these films also takes place on the level of primary identification of the viewer:<sup>21</sup> *Berlin School* films are known for their formal features

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<sup>21</sup> Christian Metz in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (1982) distinguishes between "primary" and "secondary" viewer identification. The former is simply the act of looking, connected to the

including long, static shots, the lack of action, painfully precise images, an aesthetics of reduction, all of which Marco Abel has declared part of a “viral politics” that “attempts to encounter the desires circulating on the neoliberal plane of contemporary globalization on its own terms, on the level of desire: that is to say on the level of affect” (“Tender Speaking” n.pag.). According to Abel, the desire of the capitalist to accumulate ever more assets, this hunger that can never be stilled, is reproduced in the viewer, who physically longs for action when presented with minute-long static shots. In this way *Berlin School* can be interpreted as appealing directly to the nervous system, and fulfilling the demand of vanguard art that is supposed to have an effect not just on the mind, but on the very body of the recipient. Whereas Kluge works with “shock” that is an effect of the rapid succession of images in his montage films, the contemporary German avant-garde works with processes of “slowing down” (“Entschleunigung”) that contrast common viewing expectations in times of high-speed information processing.

Both Kluge’s, as well as the *Berlin School*’s strategies work against the mode of production of television, which operates in the present alone, as Kluge lamented with his film *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* (*Der Angriff der Gegenwart auf die übrige Zeit* 1985), where one sequence observes the daily life of a family gathered around a computer that has to be attended at all times. Similarly, Christian Petzold decries the mass media in an interview: “I think that television has never discovered or felt anything, despite its fast pace. Television is always merely present, where there are already other cameras. It is a place where the present moment is digested like in a stomach. The cinema on the other hand accomplishes a very different kind of memory work

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projection of the image upon the screen. Secondary identification involves identification with the characters on screen.

[Erinnerungsarbeit]” (in Albig 50). Like Kluge, the filmmakers of the *Berlin School* value the quality of the cinema. But whereas Kluge turned away from filmmaking, the *Berlin School* directors vigorously try to re-establish a German cinema culture against this presentness of television. At the same time, filmmakers like Christian Petzold, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Sören Voigt grew up in the age of television and in the course of their career have been financed by television funds such as the “Kleines Fernsehspiel” of the public channel ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen).<sup>22</sup> In effect, they arguably have a more relaxed attitude towards the medium and at times embrace it in order to further a cinematic public sphere.

The reason I regard these filmmakers as part of a greater movement or even “school,” even though this term seems too strong, is that they have created a discourse on the subject in the German public sphere. The filmmakers engaged in discussions about cinema and filmmaking in the journal *Revolver* take film history seriously and attempt to re-establish film as an art form, in a spirit similar to that of the generation of *Young German Film* or the French *Nouvelle Vague* in the 1950s. In their foreword to *Revolver* 16, the editors and filmmakers Jens Börner, Benjamin Heisenberg, Christoph Hochhäusler, Franz Müller, and Nicolas Wackerbarth state that for them, the most important impulse from what has become the *Berlin School*, is a new openness in thinking about film (5), and Hochhäusler states in the same issue: “*Berlin School* in my opinion is a lucky coincidence of affinity, a loose connection of more or less like-minded

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<sup>22</sup> Christian Petzold’s graduation project *Pilotinnen*, for example, was developed in cooperation with the ZDF. His next film *Cuba Libre* (1996) was released in “Das Kleine Fernsehspiel” and received the Max-Ophüls-Prize that same year. Other Petzold films produced for television in cooperation with the ZDF are *Die Beischlafdiebin* (1998) and *Toter Mann* (2002).

persons. Of course it does not claim to be a formula or to have found the ‘golden path’” (Graf, Petzold, and Hochhäusler 13).

The term *Berlin School* originally referred to the Berlin *DFFB* (*Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin*), founded in 1966. The contemporary movement is not named after this institution, even though its original members, Thomas Arslan, Christian Petzold, and Angela Schanelec, graduated there in the early 1990s, their teachers being the avant-garde and documentary filmmakers Harun Farocki and Hartmut Bitomsky. The “second generation” of *Berlin School* directors graduated from the film schools in Munich, Hamburg, Vienna, and Potsdam Babelsberg and includes Ulrich Köhler, Henner Winckler, Christoph Hochhäusler, Benjamin Heisenberg, Maren Ade, Maria Speth, Valeska Grisebach, and others.

My choice of the three directors to be discussed is a practical one: Petzold stands out as the most visible, most popular director of the movement. His film *Yella* (2007) won the silver bear at the *Berlinale* 2007 and brought the *Berlin School* to international attention. Hochhäusler is the most communicative about its goals and ideals. He is considered the philosophical head, having launched the publication of the film journal *Revolver*, a platform about and guide to the alternative German film scene that emerged around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He also administers a blog in which filmmakers share their conceptual ideas and experience with contemporary German film.<sup>23</sup> *This Very Moment* (2003) was his first full-length feature film. Sören Voigt is a rather unknown, but highly interesting alternative filmmaker loosely associated with the *Berlin School* deserving greater academic and public attention. In the fashion of the authors’ cinema,

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<sup>23</sup> [www.parallelfilm.blogspot.com](http://www.parallelfilm.blogspot.com)

Voigt acts as script writer, director, and producer of his uncompromising films. His feature *Identity Kills* (2003) is an excellent representative of *Berlin School* aesthetics. I chose it as an example of a contemporary depiction of how bourgeois values are present in the dreams and aspirations of the working class. The topic of Woman in the bourgeois paradigm is here approached from a different angle, which will add to my reading of the *Berlin School* in relationship to Kluge's "proletarian public sphere."

My first chapter situates Kluge among the postwar European avant-gardes. I delineate the concept and distinguish it from the concepts of modernism and postmodernism, specifically looking at the German *Autorenfilm* of the 1960s and 1970s as an avant-garde movement in postwar Germany. In particular, the violent German past will be considered as a force that structures the vanguard demand for disruption and the decoupling of signifiers and signified.

In a second chapter I analyze Kluge's films *Yesterday Girl* (*Abschied von gestern* 1966), *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* (*Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* 1973), *The Patriot* (*Die Patriotin* 1979), and *The Power of Emotion* (*Die Macht der Gefühle* 1983) in terms of their depiction and inception of the "female mode of production" as a symbolic inscription onto the bodies of the protagonists, as well as on the body of the viewer. Ultimately, the chapter establishes the connection between Woman as abstracted bourgeois category and image on the one hand, and Woman as sensual, living body on the other hand. Both categories of Woman are depicted in the content, as well as enacted on the level of form, where they are linked to the vanguard aesthetics of machines and technology.

Because Kluge is essentially occupied with processes of writing and inscription, with the attribution of signs and the abstraction of reality in the public sphere, his medium of excellence is literature, specifically cinematic literature that turns the reader into a spectator machine that automatically reads images projected by an external source. Chapter three thus scrutinizes Kluge's recent literary volume *Cinema Stories* (*Geschichten vom Kino* 2007), where the filmic principle is reflected upon and deployed in the realm of writing. Woman in this book is linked to film and the creation of myth in the public sphere in all epochs of film history. She is presented as the essence of the alternative public sphere that is to be realized through film, the raw material and the created image of mediated emotions and desires.

Finally, the films of Christian Petzold, Christoph Hochhäusler and Sören Voigt carry a similar message in their respective films that will be analyzed in the last chapter. While Kluge's films could only point to the sphere of the senses as the realm underlying the audience's public reality by speaking to each individual viewer and the unconsciousness, *Berlin School* directors manage to reflect upon the emotional undercurrent of contemporary German society as a whole, deploying the opposite strategies found in Kluge's films. In this way, the Berlin filmmakers continue Kluge's project of re-inscribing a public sphere that is different from the administered bourgeois public sphere Habermas theorized. While Kluge himself turned to literature, which always addresses the individual readers separated from each other and which is associated with bourgeois practices, the *Berlin School* deploys vanguard techniques in film to address collective audiences, creating shared experiences and aiming for what Kluge called the "public sphere of emotions."



## I. Kluge, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde

"We are not postmodernists. I believe in the avant- garde." (Kluge in Liebman: 57)

"Ich bin ein absoluter Anhänger, jemand, der im Grunde das, was Adorno denkt, was Benjamin denkt, ins Herz geschlossen hat. Deswegen bin ich ein Doktrinär-Moderner aus Sympathie, aus dem Gefühl heraus." (Kluge in Schulte and Siebers: 11)

"Der Avantgardist als Nachhut ist ja etwas Komisches. ... Aber was für ein herrlicher Spaß, Nachhut zu sein und die ganzen Dinge verschwinden zu sehen. Deshalb ist es interessant, Nachhut einer ehemals mächtigen Bewegung zu sein, von der ich ganz sicher bin, dass sie immer wiederkehren wird, um ihre Rolle zu spielen." (Kluge in Schulte and Siebers: 14)

"Vielfalt, das ist das eigentliche Prinzip der Moderne, nicht die Vereinheitlichung, obwohl es sie auch gibt." (Kluge in Schulte and Siebers: 35)

The quotations opening this chapter illustrate the ambivalence in Alexander Kluge's self-evaluation as he is keen to place himself within the discourse of aesthetic theory. One gets the impression of an urgency to be labeled as either modernist or avant-gardist, terms used interchangeably both by Kluge and literary scholars working on him.

The use of terms is consistent in the rejection of postmodernism, which for Kluge represents mere subjectivism without any concern for current issues in the actual world. In an interview with Peter Lutze Kluge calls postmodernism a, “philosophy that does not address questions of contemporary history. Without that, however, reality is being lost” (Lutze in Schulte and Siebers 36). Kluge views postmodernism as reactionary and affirmative, while modernism represents a positive force of change that keeps returning, for example in the form of new democratic communications technologies, such as photography and early silent film at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kluge would term the myths of postwar West Germany “bourgeois” and an extension of the same forces that, extending from the 19<sup>th</sup> into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, led to fascism. He would call his own attempts to counter these reactionary influences “modernist,” retaining innovative modernist experiments of form and distinguishing his practice from reactionary bourgeois content that led modernity astray. At the same time he decries postmodernism as that which has overcome innovative modernism through what he perceives as dangerous indifference.

When Alexander Kluge started his career in the early 1960s with his short film *Brutality in Stone* (*Brutalität in Stein* 1961), the birth of a new German avant-garde was already underway,<sup>24</sup> culminating in the *Declaration of Oberhausen* one year later, which demanded a “new German feature film” that would be free of commercial and ideological

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<sup>24</sup> In the year 1961, the Ministry of the Interior was unable to award a prize to the “best feature film” due to a lack of quality of the films submitted. Only on the level of short films there were valuable productions competing for the prizes awarded to “Kultur- und Dokumentarfilme.” The short film festival of Oberhausen would become the center for experimental film in Germany, with the filmmakers demanding similar conditions for feature films as for their production of cultural shorts (see Elsaesser 20).

restrictions.<sup>25</sup> At that time, vanguard art was associated with the aesthetic movements of the Weimar era and turn of the century, including German Expressionism, Bauhaus and Dada, as well as the French and Italian avant-gardes with the surrealists André Breton and Marcel Duchamp at their forefront. In America the New York-based *Film Cooperative* was born in 1962, supporting formal experiments on celluloid that coincided with the American variants of pop art and conceptual art.<sup>26</sup> In France, meanwhile, the cinematic *Nouvelle Vague* represented another type of European avant-garde seeking “the soul of cinema in the nature of the pro-filmic event” (Wollen 173). Peter Wollen has theorized the “two avant-gardes” in postwar film, with the American experimental film representing a very formalistic vanguard technique, while the French *Nouvelle Vague* was more “introverted” and occupied with questions of realism.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to its artistically more diverse neighbors, postwar Germany was a society suspicious of anything that would disrupt the Federal Republic’s attempts at reconstruction and economic progress away from the recent history of destruction. Postwar Germany regarded modernity as having come to an end with the Second World War, when it regressed into barbarism. The revival of artistic modernism was demanded in order to overcome the atrocities that had been committed in the immediate past. The results of this continued faith in progress and instrumental rationality, which was equated

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<sup>25</sup> For the full text of the German original, see [http://www.hdg.de/lemo/html/dokumente/KontinuitaetUndWandel\\_erklaerungOberhausenerManifest/](http://www.hdg.de/lemo/html/dokumente/KontinuitaetUndWandel_erklaerungOberhausenerManifest/)

<sup>26</sup> The Film-Makers’ Cooperative or The New American Cinema Group is an artist-run, non-profit organization founded in 1962 in New York. Its objective is the distribution of avant-garde films, which saw its heyday in the 1960s and seventies. Pop art emerged in the United States in the late 1950s, and is associated with the paintings of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns. 1961 the term “conceptual art” was coined by the American vanguard artist Henry Flynt in an article he published in *Fluxus* magazine. Influential conceptual artists include Yves Klein and Robert Rauschenberg.

<sup>27</sup> Wollen, Peter. “The two Avant-Gardes.” *Studio International* Nov/Dec. 1975. 171- 175.

with modernity, as well as modernism on the aesthetic plane, was the FRG's new identity based on the economic miracle rather than recent history. Trying to outdo socialist East Germany in terms of economic development, the project of modernity, and with it that of artistic modernism, continued to be perceived as a positive one in the FRG, where enlightenment values still stood for an escape from barbarism rather than its dialectical counterpart as it had been theorized by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).

The demand for a clear categorization and chronology, which is itself a mark of modernity, remained strong among German scholars. According to the scholar Peter Lutze, an entrenched vindicator of Kluge as the "last modernist," the filmmaker values cultural theory as a tool to better understand, and ultimately change, the social conditions of the present (Lutze 2002: 15). While postmodernism was discussed in terms of a spatialization of culture and the general dissociation of historiography and lived experience in Anglo-American scholarship,<sup>28</sup> German society remained obsessed with discussions of temporal continuity versus historical rupture until recently.<sup>29</sup>

Accordingly, the term "avant-garde" is not unproblematic in the German context. Already in the first academic studies on the category of the avant-garde, Renato Poggioli (1968) maintained that the concept never really caught on in Germany, where terms like "new romanticism," "decadence," or "secession" were more widespread (qtd.

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<sup>28</sup> See Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. 1991. Andreas Huyssen. *The Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. 1986.

<sup>29</sup> The so-called "spatial" or "topographical turn" in aesthetics and the social sciences was spearheaded by French thinkers such as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Pierre Bourdieu, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In Germany, this thread of thought was not picked up. If there is a German tradition of spatial thinking, Peter Sloterdijk could be named as one thinker who at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century picks up Martin Heidegger's thoughts about space. See Sloterdijk, Peter (1998-2004): *Sphären I-III*. 3 Bde. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.; Heidegger, Martin (1952/ 1994): "Bauen Wohnen Denken." *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Stuttgart: Neske, 139-156.

in Poggioli 6). Kluge started his career during the time of avant-garde skepticism in the 1960s, when the expansion of the mass media and the replacement of cinema with television relegated formerly vanguard techniques to the conventional.

The military term “avant-garde” is based on two preconditions: the possibility that its representatives be conceived of, or conceive themselves as being in advance of their time, and the idea that there is a bitter struggle to be fought against an enemy symbolizing the forces of stagnation and the tyranny of the past (Calinescu 318). Its rebellion against the past, while looking out for an alternative future, explains why many theoreticians see the avant-garde as caught in a double bind, unable to ever realize its utopian project. The concept of an avant-garde radically breaking with the past imposes its own problems, since such a movement will eventually exhaust itself, or, worse perhaps, attain its goals and thus become obsolete, as Matei Calinescu describes “The Crisis of Avant-Garde’s Concept in the 1960s” in his influential essay of 1975.<sup>30</sup> Utopia is per definition not to be attained, as the Greek “u-topos” stands for “no place.” Accordingly, Peter Bürger in his study *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974), too, regards the avant-garde as a historical phenomenon that ultimately failed due to its contradictory tenets. He distinguishes the classical avant-gardes of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the one hand and the American postmodern neo-avant-gardes, which in a sense corrupted the original avant-garde project, on the other. The first avant-gardes according to this account challenged the bourgeois understanding of autonomous art, criticizing the elevated status

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<sup>30</sup> In this essay, Calinescu describes how “avant-garde” became a catchword in the postwar era. Its insulting rhetoric became a cliché integrated into the popular mainstream, so that it failed “through the stupendous facility of its success” (317). This failure brought about a general criticism of the concept per se, which was regarded as inherently contradictory. See also Enzensberger: “The Aporias of the Avant-Garde” (1962) and Leslie Fiedler’s “The Death of Avant-Garde Literature” (1964). Calinescu goes on to single out exactly this state of constant crisis as the avant-garde’s defining characteristic.

of art in relation to lived reality, and the individual production and reception of artworks (Bürger 72). This view led to the conclusion that vanguard art failed by the 1960s, succumbing to market aesthetics and appropriation into the mainstream.

However, in recent scholarship Kluge is discussed mainly as a vanguard artist. A survey of contemporary research collected in *The Germanic Review*'s 2010 special edition reveals an overarching theoretical preoccupation with Kluge's heterochronic and heterotopic practices (Harris), with bodies and signs (Shahan), with Kantian dialogue (Langston) and Frankfurt School dialectics (Miller), all of which seem to treat Kluge as avant-gardist in general rather than modernist or postmodernist. Andreas Huyssen conceptualized the main difference between the two styles as a difference in the respective artists' approach toward "high culture" on the one hand and "popular" or "low culture" on the other.<sup>31</sup> Since Kluge claims to address a "proletarian public sphere," while treating the art forms revered by the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeoisie, which are understood as "high art," as the myths underlying contemporary culture, it is difficult to categorize him as either one or the other in the American academic discourse. In this study, I want to support Kluge's status as part of a German avant-garde. However, I argue that due to the rejection of the term in the German context, and due to the suppression of trauma, this vanguardism necessarily takes on a unique and specifically German form.

Richard Langston speaks of a "fundamental spatiotemporal crisis underlying Germany's trouble with the avant-garde" (2008: 13), claiming that in the German understanding, there was no place for an avant-garde as a category distinct from

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<sup>31</sup> Andreas Huyssen in *After the Great Divide* (1986) assays modernism's and postmodernism's different relationship to mass culture, distinguishing avant-gardism as a modernist movement that defines its identity in relation to on the one hand traditional bourgeois high culture, on the other hand to popular culture as it was increasingly transformed into modern commercial mass culture.

modernism and postmodernism, the latter being linked to the threat of affirmative culture. Illustrating this attitude, the West German television channels rejected filmmaker Herbert Achternbusch's first submitted film script with the following remark: "What *Das Andechser Gefühl* puts across very well, despite its immature form, are disgust with life, depression, and disorientation. We all know that such feelings exist today in everyone. What, then, is the point of reinforcing these destructive emotions with more irrationalism, instead of reflecting on them with enlightenment, distance, and a sense of direction" (Achternbusch quoted in Elsaesser 1983: 93)? German film in the postwar era was supposed to be constructive, enlightening, and to provide a sense of direction. These values had been replaced with more critical attitudes in other countries, like France, where an experimental cinematic culture was flourishing. The head of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, André Bazin, had coined the term *cinéma impur* to denote a self-conscious adaption of literary material in film. *Caméra stylo* was another concept used by Alexandre Astruc in 1948 to compare the practice of filming to that of writing (see Barg 78). Even though these terms were coined well before the conservative public attitude of the German Federal Republic under Willy Brandt's chancellorship outlined above, they are an expression of a flourishing vanguard cinema culture in which the possibilities of the medium could be openly discussed and practiced, whereas in Germany, film experiments were often dismissed at their very inception, even during the time of *New German Cinema*.

If an avant-garde did exist against all odds, Alexander Kluge must have been one of its most important proponents. In 1983, he edited a full volume of collected texts and images to document the demise of the German avant-garde's "utopia of film" with

the rise of public television. *Bestandsaufnahme: Utopie Film* is a collage of essays, opinions, interviews, quotations, hypotheses and images in a collective enterprise that enlists producers and directors, critics and intellectuals. Kluge's own accounts, which dominate the project, criticize the demise of the public sphere through the proliferation of the mass media, especially television. In his view the privately owned media corporations not only destroyed the type of public sphere Habermas advocated, but also prevented the alternative public spheres Kluge envisioned. It is the task of vanguard film in this constellation to produce enough trust to challenge the new media's propagation of arbitrariness: "It [film] has to create trust and this to an enormous degree equivalent to the rate at which the new media represent a threat to the public sphere as a whole. A radical situation emerges" (6). According to Kluge, television furthers the "modern form of fascism" through mobilizing passivity and collective distraction:

Praktische Frage: Faschismus wird in unseren Breiten niemals wieder Massenmobilisierung des Aktivismus sein wie in den dreißiger Jahren. Die moderne Form der Faschisierung ist vielmehr die **Massenmobilisierung des Passivismus, der kollektiven Unaufmerksamkeit**. Diese gewinne ich durch Arbeitslosigkeit in der Wirklichkeit und Überbeschäftigung in den Bewußtseinshaushalten, das letztere insbesondere über Medien. (473, original formatting)

The medium itself was regarded as promoting "erlebnisloses Sehen" (Färber in Kluge 1983: 18), a passive experience unrelated to the "living labor" (lebendige Arbeit) of "experience" in the sense of "Erfahrung" and personal memory. While the format of



television is “program,” the argumentation in *Bestandsaufnahme* runs, humans can never be “programmed” – they make personal experiences.<sup>32</sup>

Kluge and the other vanguard filmmakers of the 1960s and seventies quit the scene in the early eighties. Kluge stopped directing films and, in a move that seemed to contradict his critical stance towards the genre, turned to television formats.<sup>33</sup> However, as Matthias Uecker argues, Kluge’s productions represent forms of “anti-television.” The Kluge scholar describes Kluge’s “Kulturmagazine” as countering and subverting this television format (82-100), with artificial interviews mimicking the “talking heads,” and images taken from media coverage and inserted out of context. Asked why he had quit the cinema in the eighties, Kluge later contended that, “it is the same reason why Edgar Reitz made ‘Heimat’ for television, and why Herzog directs an opera. We emigrated, if you want to put it this way. The economic sector doesn’t need our abilities” (qutd. in Hochhäusler and Sorg 23). Richard Langston comments on the difficulties of postwar avant-gardes in Germany:

When the avant-garde reemerged nominally after 1945, it was categorized as just another name for German modernity committed to the present and future and inimical to the past. When the avant-garde reemerged in the guise of the postmodern, it was decried as fascism redux. And when the postmodern aesthetic finally matured in the 80s not just in word but also in deed, the avant-garde

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<sup>32</sup> “Der Vorteil davon, dass Menschen in keinem Programm aufgehen: sie machen Erfahrungen“ (Bestandsaufnahme 59).

<sup>33</sup> Matthias Uecker comments on this move in his book *Anti-Fernsehen?* (2000): “Seit 1988 hat Kluge sich so vollständig auf seine Fernsehproduktionen konzentriert, dass- von einigen Essays abgesehen- die älteren, mit emphatischen Utopien besetzten Produktionslinien Literature, Film und Theorie scheinbar verödet sind. An ihre Stelle ist eine offenbar ruhelose, ununterbrochene Aktivität in den kommerziellen Fernsehprogrammen getreten- an eben jenem Ort also, den Kluge noch kurz zuvor als den absoluten Gegenpol aller seiner Produktionsziele ausgemacht hatte“ (9).

ostensibly vanished from view, leaving modernity to fend off the onslaught of Germany's fascist specters. (13)

In light of the specifically German context outlined above, I want to extend Richard Langston's argument in *Visions of Violence* (2008), which delineates a specifically German avant-garde after fascism. While time for the historical avant-garde was always geared towards the future, post-fascist avant-gardes, in Langston's words, "jettison their forerunners' feigned disavowal of the past and instead engage the violence that once was the negative blueprint for what could be" (14). Specifically in Germany, the contemporary avant-gardes are said to focus on the body as interface of past and present (Langston 17-19). In Langston's case studies, "bodies are torn asunder; physically assaulted and polluted; stripped bare and smothered; tortured, infected, paralyzed; blinded, vivisected, and frozen; and dematerialized entirely" (18). One of his case studies deals with Alexander Kluge and his politics of time. Kluge's stories are referred to as "short pictures, flashes" (225). Their brevity and succinctness adheres to Walter Benjamin's ideas on epic storytelling, which grafts itself into the memory of listeners in the present because of its compactness that prevents psychoanalytic analysis.<sup>34</sup> Langston continues with an analysis of Kluge's television programs, which compress these stories into "literal images that flash on the screen" (226) and in this way engage the body of the viewer in an "affective labor" (226).

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<sup>34</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *The Storyteller*. 149. Cited in Langston 225. In *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin also states that, "(t)he past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" (Benjamin 1969, 255).

Only in primary processes of affect does the suppressed guilt and pain surface, which is why vanguard works of art aim at shock as a way of penetrating the body of the recipient. Langston's perspective on postwar German avant-garde artists emphasizes the "pervasive Cartesian rift between the dominant moralizing theorization of memory and mourning and the largely neglected corporeal empiricism nonetheless prevalent in cultural representations of postwar and contemporary Germany" (17). Basically, intellectual discourse in German postwar society disregarded the sensual, bodily side of German trauma as the "haunting legacies" which Gabriele Schwab, in extending Abraham and Torok's discussion, argues are encrypted within individuals even generations after the Holocaust and National Socialism.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to postmodernists, who use history merely as textual quotation or epistemological heuristic, Langston claims that postwar avant-gardes turn to the past to "materialize history to the extreme, deploying exaggerations, distortions, and fragmentations so as to explode the modernist myths of the Bonn (and later the Berlin) Republic's claims to radical democratic reform" (14). Materializing history creates sensual experience for the recipient of these works, which is crucially important for the German avant-garde trying to transcend the official attempts of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or *Vergangenheitsdurcharbeitung*, which only consider the intellect as site of coping with the past, excluding the body as a site of lived experience and sensual memory.

While Langston analyzes postwar vanguard works with respect to their shock effect and violent inscription onto bodies, I look at the way these works use the raw material of myths and symbols of modernism in content to achieve this shock on the level

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<sup>35</sup> Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies. Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010; Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel. Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1994.

of form. If postwar West German society unconsciously valued modernity for reasons that went to the very core of its identity, namely the trauma hidden underneath the surface of everyday public discourse, the avant-garde would have to address this mindset. Kluge's works ultimately expose the modern myth of development and progress in turning the readers into machines fuelled by sensual experience on the one hand and convention on the other. What Kluge depicts and tries to transcend is the two-tier structure of the libido in which he sees a potentially revolutionary force (his "alternative mode of production", "public sphere of emotions") on the one hand and the repressive and commodifying forces of society on the other ("dead labor").

What distinguishes Kluge's art from other vanguard projects is his inverted tenet that seems subtly traditional compared to the "extremist forms of artistic negativism" that Calinescu identifies as characteristic of the avant-gardes in the continental understanding of the term.<sup>36</sup> In fact, I maintain that it is a heightened awareness of affirmative signification in the content of his works, which, combined with his critical, disruptive style on the level of form, constitutes Kluge's vanguardism. Kluge is not interested in breaking the signifying chain and thus getting outside the system of language and signification. While the classical avant-gardes, such as the Dadaist movement, severed the link between artistic and ordinary language and aimed at communicating the impossibility to communicate,<sup>37</sup> Kluge affirms the connectedness of the symbolic realm

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<sup>36</sup> See Calinescu 330. Calinescu makes the point that American critics of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature do not in fact distinguish between the terms "modernism" and "avant-garde," while in the European context the avant-garde tends to be regarded as an extremist form of artistic negativism, discussed mainly in terms of its total breach with tradition. He concludes that "the anti-traditionalism of modernism is always subtly traditional" (330) and calls the avant-gardes "almost dogmatically destructive and sterile" (331).

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964) states: "The truly avant-garde works of literature communicate the break with communication. With

of public discourse and the sensuous body of the subject. His realm of operation is the symbolic, the realm of public expression that is at the same time made up of subjective impressions and experiences. Kluge thus holds on to the notion of “public sphere,” which he considers crucially important for the liberation from bourgeois hegemonic culture and the threat of vanishing authentic experience in times of global capitalism and the information society.

However, while Habermas’ public sphere is always already mediated, Negt and Kluge’s “proletarian public sphere” is a utopian public sphere of bodies and emotions that are an “immediate expression” of the process of production, of what constitutes the public sphere from the bottom up (Hansen 1993: 200). In her foreword to *Public Sphere and Experience* Hansen defines the proletarian public sphere as ultimately a “radical form of democracy [that] involves not just the empowerment of constituencies hitherto excluded from the space of public opinion, but also a different principle of organization, a different concept of public life” (xxxi). While the bourgeois public sphere rests upon a specific and specialized discursive form, Negt and Kluge suggest that the proletarian public sphere must use language that has been constructed from the direct experience of the masses (see Weisser 79). Of course, in a society heavily reliant on writing and the print media, one cannot go back to a pre-mediated reality, but has to use formal devices to trigger processes of primary production or “lebendige Arbeit” in the recipient of the communication process.

Hence there are always two forces at work in Kluge’s audience as he conceives it, namely experience as the pool of inherited images and collective myths on the one

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Rimbaud, and then with Dadaism and surrealism, literature rejects the very structure of discourse which, throughout the history of culture, has linked artistic and ordinary language” (71).

hand and the anarchic force of fantasy that can produce authentic experience on the other. Both are related, as fantasy takes its cue directly from reality. It “reproduces the distorted concreteness of this reality.” As such, subaltern fantasy is a “travestied mode of social production” (Kluge and Negt 1993: 35) In *History and Obstinacy*, Negt and Kluge further argue that “[t]he individual life and the life of the human species are not distinct. The empiric life of a society, in other words the whole that is organized in a context of violence, and the internal individual collectivity [das innere individuelle Gemeinwesen] in fact correspond with each other. Without this foundation processes of emancipation would be impossible” (Kluge and Negt 1981: 79). What Kluge means by “das innere Gemeinwesen” is the totality of personal life experiences (borrowing the Benjaminian term “Erfahrung”) that all members of society share to a certain extent. Fantasy activates this collective experience and thus mediates between individual and society.<sup>38</sup>

The connectedness of collective experience and individual fantasy also provides for Kluge’s unconventional definition of “utopia.” In *Bestandsaufnahme* Kluge defines the crucial avant-garde element of utopia as conservative: “Utopia is a conservative idea, the search for a quality of which one vaguely knows that it has existed at some point in the past” (53). This quality of the past is related to experience as *Erfahrung*, to abilities acquired in interaction with others on the level of public sphere, to meaning and signification, and in effect, to the practice of reading and speaking:

Ein Kind lernt Dinge und Menschen in seiner Umwelt zu unterscheiden; zugleich lernt es sprechen. Das Kind macht dies nicht allein, sondern benutzt Sprache und

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<sup>38</sup> In *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* Negt and Kluge had stated: “So reicht es nicht aus, das phantastische Resultat zu verwenden, sondern man muss theoretisch das Abhängigkeitsverhältnis zwischen Phantasie und Erfahrung der entfremdeten Realität begreifen; nur so kann die in der Phantasieform gebundene Erfahrung rückübersetzt werden“ (67).

Haltung der Mutter und ihrer Umgebung als Vorbild... Ich gewinne also Erfahrung, indem ich eine Distanz zu meinen Erlebnissen schaffe – und das geht nur über Sympathie und Antipathie, gespiegelt durch Dinge, vor allem aber durch andere Menschen. (Kluge 1983: 44)

The quotation reflects the imbrications, in Kluge's view, of subjective sensual experience and the public realm of signification. In order to learn something about sensuous experiences of the body and the hidden layers of the unconscious, one has to analyze public discourse, myths and symbols. Everything enunciated in public forms a "network" ("Gefüge") of meaning, a labyrinth or complex apparatus made up of mirrors or media that transmit and reflect information, and which have their own effects on bodies and sensual experience. Kluge is known for his vanguard techniques that challenge the boundaries of traditional genres and media, especially those of literature. However, this formal characteristic, which aims at disruption and shock, has to be viewed in connection with the content, in which Kluge makes use of stereotypes and established symbolic conventions, deploying the very symbolic system he means to undermine.

Alexander Kluge, as Langston presents his work, aims at the reader's sensual experience to recuperate the historical moment, which in the moment of its occurrence cannot be processed by the intellect because of its brevity that resembles the shock of flash. Kluge experienced such a historical moment himself during the bombing of his home town Halberstadt. To re-create the contiguity of shock experiences with the public image thereof is the aim of Kluge's literature, which the author calls "conscious texts" ("bewusste Texte"), constructs of a possible coherence of reality to which consciousness

can relate (see Schulte 2000: 53). Historically speaking such a re-construction of past events is the exclusive realm of the deceased, since the actual senses of the reader are barred from ever accessing actual historical experience. Redemption in Negt's and Kluge's terminology would mean the reconciliation of body and mind. It "consists of charging *dominant* memories with the task of recovering *other* discarded memories locked within the body" (Langston 47). Langston states, "[r]edemption, they [Negt and Kluge] insist, is entirely contingent on the ability to speak with dead people" (Langston 48). This impossible task can only be fulfilled through the body cells' "obstinacy" ("Eigensinn"), their inertia and propensity to work according to their own inner logic, since in that respect they resemble the cells of other people, as well as those of the deceased, independent of circumstances and acquired faculties. The body's obstinacy in this way makes it possible to link "today's social nerves and the nerves of deceased people" (*History and Obstinacy* 596). In order to establish such a sensory link, Kluge deploys techniques of montage. Shock, according to him, means heightened sensual perception, transcending the realm of contemplation.

The necessity on Kluge's part of having to talk to the deceased has spectral ramifications of which the author might not be fully aware and which might indicate German society's special relationship to its own past and present. Jacques Derrida describes the spectral in *Specters of Marx* (1994) as a side effect in societies that have a troubled relationship to reality:

If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and especially the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence,



non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself. (39)

The medium of film is particularly effective in visualizing spectrality, combining dream and illusion with a mechanic apparatus and technical device. As Kluge has stated in various interviews, his ideal moment in history is early modernism and the original collapse of “high” versus “low” culture, when the bourgeois public sphere seemed to become replaced by a “proletarian public sphere,” when the cinema became a social institution of collective emotions. Kluge not only deploys the vanguard techniques of this early medium, but he reflects on it in the content of his works, contemplating modernism as “ever returning, oscillating between subjectivity and objectivity” (Lutze in Schulte/Siebers). Reflecting on the modernist aspects of the filmic medium, Kluge materializes the most prevalent modern myths, the myth of progress, the faith in technology, the bourgeois conception of the oedipal family with its strict gender roles, and the separation of the private and the public.

All of these myths coincide in Woman, who became a pivotal icon in modernist aesthetics around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, futurists and dadaists representing machine-like women, female automatons and empty dolls in their works. Associated with natural procreation, Woman as mother has a metaphorical function for the essence of cinema, being at the same time model and counter-model for an apparatus that creates virtual realities. In terms of cinematic narrative Woman at the same time motivates action and interrupts the narrative, as Laura Mulvey has argued in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative

Cinema” (1975): “The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of the story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (part III A). Woman who freezes the narrative could thus be said to belong to an avant-garde aesthetics, as Mulvey herself contends in her follow-up project to “Visual Pleasure” in 2009 (*Visual and other Pleasures* xvii). The role of Woman in film, it seems, is always ambiguous and potentially supports both classical Hollywood conventions of the studio system, as well as experimental techniques disrupting audience identification.

Similarly dialectical is the medium of film itself. The “essence of cinema” (“das Prinzip Kino”), Kluge states in the foreword to his recent volume *Cinema Stories* (2007), means that something that “moves us internally is being communicated publicly” (7). The filmic medium is thus potentially anti-authoritative and anarchic in projecting desires and urges excluded from Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere into a collective realm of representation. Yet at the same time, it relies on the existence of such a collective sphere of representation, on the possibility of communication within the public sphere via a shared set of signs and communicative conventions.

What is central for Kluge’s late literary work, I argue, is the understanding that the capitalist machine of the “public spheres of production,” to use Kluge’s terminology, kills itself in the end by way of an excess of desire, which the system itself nourishes. Kluge’s works, and in extension, *Berlin School* films, imitate the modus operandi of the system they want to criticize in order to demonstrate on the very body of the recipient the violent inscription that this public sphere imposes – albeit with two very different forms of registers. Since the public sphere is made up of the recipients themselves, the writing

apparatus in a way inscribes its own body and thus devours itself in Kluge's work. The author thus takes to its logical end a system that is prone to collapse, which is not noticeable inside the apparatus that denies the influence of anything but rational calculation.

It is Kluge's contention that politics, the legal system and the system of public expression essentially rest on the "soft forces" of emotions and desires, both personal and collective. That this bipolar system of internal desire and public rationalization ultimately fails was already clear to Kluge in 1973, when he published *Learning Processes with a deadly Outcome* (*Lernprozesse mit tödlichem Ausgang*),<sup>39</sup> which starts with the words "Impregnable longing – a dull side-feeling..." ("Unbezwingliche Sehnsucht – dumpfes Begleitgefühl...", Kluge 2000: 827), and covers the "loss of the planet" ("Der Verlust des Planeten") in the future as a consequence of the Second World War's lingering effects in its first chapter (Kluge 2000: 831-860), and the subsequent self-destruction of remaining mankind through an insatiable lust for material goods in the remainder of the book. The Martian civilization in this political science fiction is run by men, who foreclose any access to the past and the memory of a different order of society.

In order to find "escape routes" ("Auswege") out of the inescapable logic of the "deadly outcomes" that are inevitable if one holds on to "the middle path" of modernity's tendency,<sup>40</sup> Kluge seeks to activate "obstinacy" ("Eigensinn") in the reader, in what he calls the "devil's blind spot." This exactly was the title of his recent book: *The Devil's Blind Spot: Tales from the new Century* (*Die Lücke, die der Teufel lässt. Im Umfeld des*

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<sup>39</sup> re-printed in *Chronicle of Feelings* 2000, 827-920.

<sup>40</sup> Kluge also used the rhetoric of deadly outcomes in his satiric film *In Danger and Dire Distress the Middle of the Road leads to Death* (*In Gefahr und größter Not bringt der Mittelweg den Tod* 1974).

*neuen Jahrhunderts* 2005). As if the ambiguities between original title and English translation commented on the project of this book, it scrutinizes the complex interplay of subjective experience and perception with objective reality, or what Kluge has described as the so-called subjective-objective relationship of the living response to physical events and empirical reality (“Fontane Preis Rede” in Kluge 2004: 74). His project is not just an aesthetic one, but, as in his earlier works, seeks to open up spaces for the production of counter-public spheres that could serve as forums for individual imagination and public debate that break with the consensus machine of media saturation (Harris 305).

The type of montage Kluge uses in this book as in many of his works before makes use of the modern individual’s complete determination by outside forces and the body’s automatic response to shock, and thus deploys functions similar to those of the “bachelors” in the lower half of Dadaist Marcel Duchamp’s installation *The Large Glass*. Duchamp’s installation *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1911-1915-1923, also called *The Large Glass*) is regarded as the first representation of a “Bachelor Machine.” The representation of the “bachelors” in the lower half gave this avant-garde theory its name. It was developed by Michel Carrouges, who linked the lower part of *The Large Glass* to Franz Kafka’s torture apparatus in *The Penal Colony* in his 1954 book *Les Machines Célibataires*. *The Large Glass* is divided into two parts, the lower glass pane containing a mechanic apparatus made up of what Duchamp calls “nine bachelors,” represented by their uniforms in a “cemetery of uniforms and liveries” (Szeemann in Le Bot 5). The nine flat figures are connected to a mechanism which Duchamp calls “chocolate grinder,” a description that implies sensual pleasure and technological

mechanism. The bachelors “shoot for” the “bride,” a skeleton-like figure in the upper part of the art work.

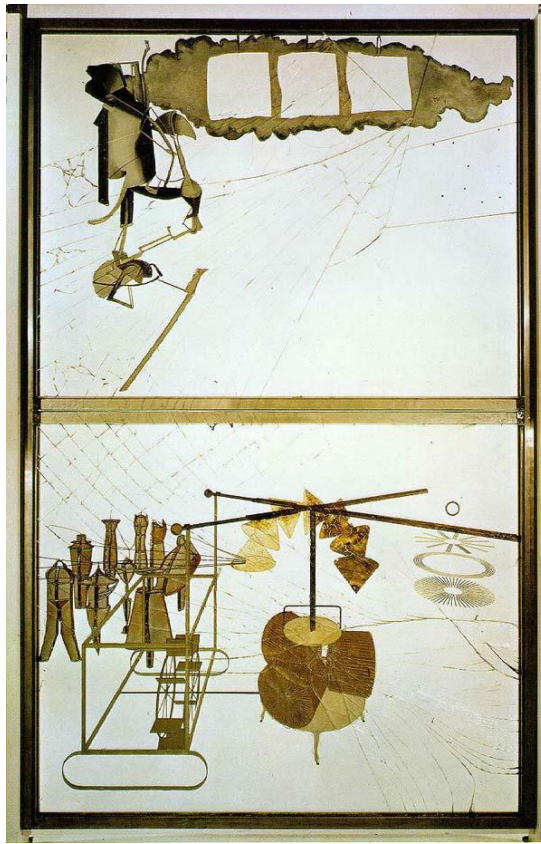


Figure 57: Michel Duchamp *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1911-1915-1923, also called *The Large Glass*)

Bachelor machines in surrealist and Dadaist art are made up of (multiple) “bachelors” in the process of artistic creation, inspired by a (single) female figure.<sup>41</sup> This “female” element has lost its function of maternal procreation. It is a Woman that is not a mother figure anymore, but an abstract ideal and exotic machine or automaton. Marc Le Bot notices that between 1850 and 1925, artists and writers conceived “the working of history, of the interrelationships of the sexes, and of man’s relationship to a higher

<sup>41</sup> Other avant-garde works that have been associated with Bachelor Machines by Carrouges and Harald Szeemann, the curator of the exhibition “Junggesellenmaschinen/ Les Machines Célibataires” of 1975, are Raymond Roussel’s novels *Locus Solus* (1914) and *Nouvelles Impressions d’Afrique* (1932), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1842) by Edgar Allan Poe, Alfred Jarry’s *Le Surmâle* (1902) and others.

authority, in terms of a simple mechanical device” (5). Essentially, the modern woman became represented as the inspiration for male mechanical invention of the reified female. Woman served as spiritual ideal and material commodity product and thus became the nodal point in the capitalist production process, a machine ceaselessly producing a desire that could never be satisfied.

As with *Woman and the Cinema* in Kluge’s works, bachelor machines operate dialectically between libidinal and mechanic processes, between belief and rational calculation, between body and intellect. If Kluge’s readers are addressed on the plane of body cells, via shock, they also collectively share the dream-like sphere of the “bride” that is represented in the upper part of Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, and which I want to link to the worldview of the by-gone bourgeois era, which is the meta-discourse and common mindset Kluge addresses as a false consciousness still underlying contemporary society. In Duchamp’s installation the upper realm is not three dimensional like the lower part, the realm of perspective that, as the *Large Glass* rises in the Philadelphia art museum, seems to extend into the visitors’ own environment. But it includes the “fourth dimension,” a transcendental realm represented in a cloud-like structure above the skeleton with its scythe-like inscription tool hanging just above the lower glass pane.<sup>42</sup> The two spheres, both of which share a sexual and a mechanic element, remain strictly separated, but the “writing” of the upper plane still determines the activities in the lower half.

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<sup>42</sup> This interpretation is part of Michel Carrouges’ analysis of Duchamp’s *Large Glass* in terms of his theory of Bachelor Machines (in Le Bot, Marc 1975, 24). It is based on Duchamp’s own notes and images the artist had collected in preparation of his work. These notes were loosely assembled in *The Green Box* (1934).

In the capitalist machine, transcendence has been replaced by clock time as the ultimate master of life and death,<sup>43</sup> which is also represented in Duchamp's *Large Glass* by the scythe-like inscription tool the "bride stripped bare" bears. What remains of the female principle when biological procreation is stripped away and replaced by the inventions of engineers, when Woman loses her procreative power, is the skeleton-like structure resembling death. This is the basic condition for a break with cosmic law, "and still more as a condition of enlightenment, freedom and magical immortality" (Carrouges in Le Bot 7). The male figures crowded into the lower half and unable to emerge into the upper portion of the glass pane furthermore indicate the mass movement nature of the utopian project they pursue. As Carrouges' interpretations of other bachelor machines suggest, these apparatuses that connect sexuality and mechanic processes, living organisms and dead machines, kill themselves in the end, that is, when they are most successful these apparatuses, which are also writing machines, write on their own bodies and thus commit suicide.<sup>44</sup>

The basic functioning of attraction and repulsion between the sexes in this type of machine that characterizes the bourgeois oedipal triangle, the "deadly outcome" of its final breakdown, and the activation of the recipient, who is included in the three dimensional space opened up by the *Large Glass*' transparent and upright nature, all

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<sup>43</sup> In addition to his interpretation of bachelor machines as sexual figurations, Michel Carrouges interprets bachelor machines as figurations of time, of the "Old Man Chronos carrying a scythe" (in Le Bot 40-42). This figure emerged out of the myth of the god Kronos, who devoured his own children until defeated by his youngest son, Zeus. As the context of mythic narration changed, so did the myth itself. Kronos the titan was replaced by Chronos the master of clocks. See Le Bot pp.40-42: "Just as Chronos Time and Kronos the Titan merged in ancient times, so here the clock and the scythe no longer form more than one monstrous machine. The mythical *mana* has passed down from the ancient kingdoms of nature (human, animal, vegetable, mineral) to the *mechanical kingdom*" (Le Bot 42).

<sup>44</sup> Carrouges analyzes the public torture machine in Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* (1919) as such an apparatus: "The function of death is exercised here by a mechanical aggregate set in motion by a military one, in a repressive odious but consistent system, until it finally caves in" (Carrouges in Le Bot 25).

parallel the way Kluge's texts work on the threshold between text and context, and between literature and film. Kluge insists that a sovereign author is needed for the writing of subjective "counter-stories" ("Gegengeschichten") against history in order to stimulate the protest energy within his readers or film viewers, whom he thinks of as a collective of individually perceiving subjects and thus "authors" who in interaction with his counter-stories produce their own counter-reactions that come closer to reality than the original story.<sup>45</sup> In other words, Kluge resembles an engineer who works with the raw material of written stories or official historiography in the public sphere on the one hand and subjective associations that are more visual and aural on the other. The effect is what Rainer Lewandowski has termed "cinematic literature" and "literary cinema" (Lewandowski: "Alexander Kluge"). Of his early work *Case Histories* (1962) Kluge says: "The stories were primarily conceptualized as film. If you look at them closely, you can recognize the 'cuts.' The literary principle in *Case Histories* is a filmic principle" (Lewandowski: "Alexander Kluge" 50).

Declaring the cut the pivotal characteristic of the "filmic principle" is characteristic of Kluge, who on the one hand wants to preserve a shared public sphere of signification, while at the same time interrupting identification within this sphere. Ultimately Kluge's vanguardism is ambiguous like the medium of the cinema itself, which can either function as a commercial or propagandistic apparatus of ideology or as experimental, consciousness raising vehicle. In the context of German postwar society

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<sup>45</sup> Kluge here re-appropriates Brecht's dictum that a mimetic reproduction of an image cannot say anything about the true nature of the depicted. Something artificial has to be constructed instead to reveal its essence: "Die Lage wird dadurch so kompliziert, dass weniger den je eine einfache 'Wiedergabe der Realität' etwas über die Realität aussagt. Eine Fotografie der Kruppwerke oder der AEG ergibt beinahe nichts über diese Institute. Die eigentliche Realität ist in die Funktionale gerutscht" (Brecht Bertolt. "Der Dreigroschenprozess." *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*. Bd. 21. Eds. Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei, Klaus-Detlef Müller. Berlin, Frankfurt am Main: 469.



this means that a public awareness of the spectral aspects within the present reality can be uncovered in that the works speak to affect, to automatic functions of the body, which all humans share, including those who have lived through those historic moments that haunt the German collective unconscious up to this day. Such a revelation is prevented if one reads Kluge's stories and views his films conventionally, focusing on their content, trying to identify with his characters and to "understand" their "meaning." At the same time, the reader or viewer requires a certain reservoir of cultural knowledge to be able to associate certain images or key words. Ultimately, the reader is supposed to function like a bachelor machine, and in that way emulate the bourgeois public sphere within him/herself, turning desire into a mechanical device and internalizing the public apparatus within the body.

How exactly this is done in Kluge's films will be the object of my study in the next chapter. After that, I turn to his recent literary works to again demonstrate the subjective and objective elements that I pointed out here. The figure of the bachelor machine will be deployed to talk about both, the relation of literature and cinema, as well as of the body as cipher and the biological, sensual body. Woman is central to both of these oppositions.

## II. Of Women and Machines: The “Counter Public Sphere”

It is this passiveness of a falling stone which men and  
women call love. (Le Bot 39)

Zu den Theorien des Geldes, der Macht und der Wahrheit  
brauchen wir eine Theorie der zärtlichen Kraft. (Kluge, *Das  
Labyrinth* 519)

This chapter will show how some crucial Kluge films operate with the bourgeois image of Woman within the oedipal family constellation on the level of content, while putting the viewer on the track of “becoming Woman” on the level of form. On the one hand, these films fulfill Langston’s criteria for postwar avant-gardes with their emphasis on the body and the violence done to it to precipitate an effect of shock. On the other hand, Kluge’s female characters are bodies used as ciphers standing for the fundamental bourgeois myth of the separation of sexes, the image of Woman as provider and caretaker, and as beautiful object of desire.

In this way Woman will be delineated as at the same time a proponent of temporality as well as textuality, the “twin obsessions of the neo-avant-gardes” as Hal Foster remarked in *The Return of the Real* (32). Foster explains that avant-garde work is traumatic and thus cannot be received by its contemporary audience. It cannot be “historically effective or fully significant in its initial moments” (29) and needs repetition

as in deferred action (Nachträglichkeit).<sup>46</sup> While the original act is disruptive and symbolically disconnecting, the repetition is restorative and signifying. In this way, “the first neo-avant-garde acts on the historical avant-garde as it is acted on by it; it is less *neo* than *nachträglich*; and the avant-garde project in general develops in deferred action” (29). Transferring this thought about the avant-gardes to the work of Alexander Kluge, I argue that there is always a disruptive element in his works, as well as there is a restorative one, which recodes the former and thus renders it visible. The two points are conflated in the reader’s or viewer’s moment of reception.

Deferred action has also been deployed in order to explain the effects of the German perpetrator trauma.<sup>47</sup> What haunts the German unconscious is a trace that only becomes real in belated acts of remembrance, such as, in the case of the German public, a sequence of acts of public remembrance that occurred in the 1980s.<sup>48</sup> The concept has two poles, one in the psychic realm, the other in the public sphere, one in the interstices of reality, the other in empiric, visible objects. Both elements are needed for the depiction of the invisible spectral aspects of reality, the suppressed past and trauma, in a public image.

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<sup>46</sup> Derrida analyzes Freud’s Mystic Writing Pad in his essay “On Freud and the Scene of Writing.” According to this account, memory, which is always unconscious, only surfaces belatedly, in certain acts that render it visible. Acts that take place in the empiric reality thus point to invisible psychic processes.

<sup>47</sup> The term “Tätertrauma” is controversial, since the perpetrators of the Holocaust did plan and execute the atrocities that caused trauma. However, studies such as Aleida Assmann’s *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (2006) argue for certain psychic phenomena shared by the second generation of the victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust (103). In both cases, the parent generation withheld crucial biographical information, which caused an unconscious transference, the kind of “haunting” Gabriele Schwab writes about in *Haunting Legacies*.

<sup>48</sup> Aleida Assmann lists among these public acts the commemoration days of 1985: forty years of war’s end, 1988: sixty years November pogroms, 1989: fifty years of war’s beginning. Furthermore, in 1986 the so-called Historikerstreit began, which brought the question of Holocaust’s role for German identity into public debate (Assmann 103).

In this chapter I argue that the interaction in Kluge's films between affect and sensual experience on the one hand and public discourse and official remembrance on the other provides alternative possibilities for dealing with the past on the threshold between the private and the public. On the level of affect the viewer is supposed to react against the "writing" of the apparatus of film, against the "message" of plot. The collective memory of the body cells, as Kluge would term it, remembers times the individual has not necessarily lived through. Bodies relate to all other bodies belonging to a society that shares a trauma, including the dead ones. Kluge incites a kind of *belatedness* in each viewer, a belated manifestation that something is wrong in the society we live in.

In order to do this, Kluge deploys images of the bourgeois family in the content of his works. In the opening to the chapter "labor of relationships" ("Beziehungsarbeit") in *History and Obstinacy* (1981), the authors emphasize the importance of the bourgeois family concept for the link that either holds society together or has the power to overthrow it:

Als zusammenhaltende oder auflösende Faktoren der gesellschaftlichen Dynamik erscheint das, was in diesen zahllosen Laboratorien des unmittelbaren Zusammenlebens (families) geschieht, je nachdem als „der Mörtel eines noch werdenden Baus“, als „Kitt, der auseinanderstrebende Teile künstlich zusammenhält, oder einen Teil des Sprengstoffes (bildet), der das Ganze beim ersten Funken zerreißt...“.(Negt and Kluge 1981: 867)

The family forms the intermediary institution between the intimate sphere of sensual needs on the one hand and public bourgeois discourse on the other. It at the same

time enables and prevents the utopian project of “proletarian public sphere.” Of course, the distinction between bourgeois and proletarian public spheres is not thought of as a distinction between classes. Rather it is meant as the distinction between public discourse or written law and the unarticulated impulses of resistance that are excluded from this realm.

Within the family, the authors of *History and Obstinacy* claim, it is the “female” or “maternal mode of production,” which ensures a child’s sociability, but it could also incite rebellion. What they call “female mode of production” has therefore a revolutionary potential, as well as the propensity to support the conservative and conventional. Negt and Kluge reverse the capitalist stigma of “unproductive labor” that is childrearing, loving, mourning, happiness. It is this mode of production, they claim, which enables all other types of production and represents “lebendige Arbeit.”

Woman is also associated with lived experience “on the ground” of the historical process, which in modernity has become so abstracted that the experiences of each agent involved in the process cannot be reconciled or comprehended in their totality or in the historical contiguity. In other words, the realm of (masculine) planners and strategists “above” the ground has no contact with the experiences of those who have to deal with the everyday results of these strategies. The disintegration of the upper and the lower sphere resembles the two parts of a bachelor machine, which has also been described in terms of Sigmund Freud’s distinction between Id, ego, and super-ego (Szeemann 2-7). In bachelor machines, as in Duchamp’s *Large Glass* and the machine in Kafka’s penal colony, the upper part, like the super-ego, contains a code that is to be transmitted to the lower part (the ego) via a process of writing, while the Id has been lost in the course of

modernity. Considering bachelor machines in connection with Kluge complicates the simple dichotomy of masculine planners “above” and female victims “below,” as the imagery of Kluge’s works might suggest. It implies that it is also a certain ideal of Woman that influences the strategists and planners, and that the sphere visually “above” the ground in Kluge’s films also corresponds to the “lower part” of the bachelor machine, which is crowded with male engineers working their apparatus.

Kluge activates the dichotomy between “above” and “below” in recurring images, for example, in his literary pieces on the allied air raids: *The Air Raid on Halberstadt on 8 April 1945* (*Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945*, 1977, reprinted in *Chronicle of Feelings II*, 27-82) shifts from the perspective of the bombers high above the ground to the people hiding in their shelters, abandoning the streets, and then back again. The montage is made up of schematic images and photographs, official reports and interviews, intercepted by “stories” about the “participants” in the disaster: pilots, specialists, planners and executives are represented through their perspective that is temporally and spatially disconnected from the experiences of the town’s inhabitants: the cinema manager Frau Schrader, the unknown photographer, the female observers of the air-raid protection, the female ammunition worker, mother Gerda Baethe, the field doctor von Schroers, the fireman, the stoker, etc.. Here Kluge chose female and working class characters as the victims on the ground, and male planners and executioners with their abstracted aerial viewpoint, suggesting the incommensurability of an ultimately “male” bourgeois sphere of production and an essentially “female” proletarian realm of experience in the content of this piece.

If one looks into Negt's and Kluge's theoretical ruminations about the relationship between the sexes, the distinction becomes less obvious. Both, the part active in the empiric, public world, as well as the private, invisible elements thought of as "proletarian" are meant to be part of each person. Kluge and Negt deploy the symbolic function of sex, but assume an androgynous nature of all human beings in the empiric world. The authors emphasize that the words "male" and "female" in *History and Obstinacy* do not refer to actual men and women, but to characteristics that reside in each individual: "We have to clarify something in advance: If in the following we are speaking about purely masculine and feminine [characteristics], or in short: men's labor and women's labor, then we assume that these are analytical categories, which in reality correspond to bisexuality" (310). It seems like this explanation, which is meant to clarify the relationship between abstract and historical categories, is more problematic than the use of male and female characters in Kluge's fiction. While *History and Obstinacy* is about abstract concepts, this foreword links bourgeois gender stereotypes to actual human beings, even if it contends that these characteristics are mixed within the individual. Deleuze and Guattari contend that "[b]isexuality is no better a concept than the separateness of the sexes. It is as deplorable to miniaturize, internalize the binary machine as it is to exacerbate it" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 276).

Kluge needs the distinction between "male" and "female," which is not just meant as a gender distinction, but literalized as a distinction of sex, for his critique of the bourgeois mindset that dominates the public sphere, and materializes the distinction in his literary and cinematic works to its extreme in order to facilitate an emotional reaction of the reader and to avoid the dissociation between the abstract "above" and the sensuous

“below” in his own work. What Kluge means to express is that primary processes of the body are not compatible with mediated society anymore.

However, the impression created in *History and Obstinacy*, as well as in Kluge’s early feature films, is that actual women are incompatible with the “masculine” society dominated by instrumental reason. Negt and Kluge use literal representations of the bourgeois stereotype of the maternal woman in order to illustrate their point. One passage talks about “human (re-) production” in form of a commentary, outside the main body of text. The part is awkwardly titled “The share of women’s labor in the production of humans” (“Der Anteil von Frauenarbeit an der Menschenproduktion” 309-340), and defines the female mode of production as geared towards gratification of basic needs, linking the female gender, or, in Kluge’s figurative sense, particular feminine emotions and life experiences to socio-economic processes: “to treat the child according to its capabilities, to accommodate its needs at all costs” (311). This type of archaic production is considered diametrically opposed to the patriarchal and capitalist environment of the bourgeois type and essentially excludes women as social agents from this realm.

What happens to Woman in Negt and Kluge’s account is representative of processes of modernization in what they consider bourgeois modern society: the dissociation of private and public on the symbolic plane, while in social reality, the apparatus of modern society infiltrates the home and libidinal relationships. Desire acquires the characteristics of the sociopolitical mechanics, where exchange value matters. Authentic experience is thus severed from mediated discourse, and living human beings become treated like commodities or abstract figures in the modern myths of



enlightened society.<sup>49</sup> Jürgen Habermas theorized the myths of mediated society in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). According to him, the public sphere relied on subjectivity articulated through a symbolic matrix of culture (writing, reading, literary criticism). The hegemony of “writing” or a fixed narrative over a previously oral tradition finds its culmination in the 19<sup>th</sup> century media of the novel and opera, the latter of which Kluge calls a “factory of emotions” in his film *The Power of Emotion* (*Die Macht der Gefühle* 1983). According to Kluge, the two bourgeois forms promote a homogenized image of Woman and the romantic “uncritical” form of love (Kluge and Joseph Vogl 20). Kluge contends that “every opera that deals with salvation demands a female sacrifice in Act Five” (*Die Macht der Gefühle*, 1983).

Salvation, the idealistic goal of the enlightened romantic, is only possible with an idealized image of Woman stripped of all qualities of a living human being. This abstracted female has been materialized in the “Bride Stripped Bare” in Marcel Duchamp’s work of art. The piece is among other things a materialization of the symbolic gender relationships in bourgeois society. As actual, living women became associated with a homogenized image of Woman fabricated by the media, the avant-gardes created literal representations of female automatons and mechanic women that were the creations of male inventors and engineers. These representations functioned not necessarily as critique of high modernity. To the contrary, as in the case of futurism, they fetishized mechanic movement and the aesthetics of the machine. The embrace of the democratic apparatus of the machine was thought of as an act of rebellion against the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “Liberation from self-incurred tutelage” was the Kantian slogan of rational Enlightenment and the structural change of the public realm, which, on the other end of the dialectics as criticized by the *Frankfurt School*, also meant self-imposed taming of desire and emotions. Instead of doing away with myth and external tutelage, Enlightenment according to Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* created its own myths and hierarchies.

century bourgeois mindset. With the machines, the working class emerged. Furthermore, with the discovery of psychoanalysis, the unconscious was for the first time thought of as an apparatus functioning almost mechanically.

In creating his own montages Kluge uses the historical avant-gardes' methods and themes, linking the bourgeois stereotype of Woman to automatons and especially to the cinematic apparatus that strips living women of their biological bodies and re-creates them as image. The passage on the "female mode of production" in *History and Obstinacy* follows a commentary on automatons (294- 308). According to the passage "Automatons in theory," the modern world is filled with machines, quoting Kleist's essay "Über das Marionettentheater," Leibnitz's *Monadologie*, Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*,<sup>50</sup> and Freud's letters to Fließ, to show that "all writers speak of animated needs, are in love with living self-injected work, while speaking of automata, marionettes, machines, and wheelwork" (196). Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus (Capitalism and Schizophrenia)* re-interpret the figure of the bachelor machine, which for them "form[s] a new alliance between the desiring-machines and the body without organs so as to give birth to a new humanity or a glorious organism" (17) that would be opposed to the Oedipal or those institutions associated with it, such as the family, the church, and the nation, all of which ultimately link up to fascism (see Michel Foucault's preface in Deleuze and Guattari, xiii).

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<sup>50</sup> In their cooperative volume *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari counter the family triangle in Freudian discourse, establishing the automatic nature of all processes between and inside humans: "Everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth a machine coupled to it. The mouth of the anorexic wavers between several functions: its possessor is uncertain as to whether it is an eating-machine, an anal-machine, a talking-machine, or a breathing-machine (asthma attacks). Hence we are all handymen: each with his little machines. For every organ-machine, an energy-machine: all the time, flows and interruptions" (Deleuze/Guattari, AÖ 1-2; quoted in Negt/Kluge 1981: 295).

Deleuze and Guattari call the state of mind of the Schizophrenic, whom they regard superior to the psychoanalytic category of the Neurotic, one of “becoming Woman,” a wording they use to challenge the great binary aggregate: man versus woman. Above all, Deleuze and Guattari critique the ways in which the great “dualism machines” of the social order steal our bodies from us “in order to fabricate opposable organisms” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 276). “Becoming Woman” is presented in *A Thousand Plateaus* as the first step to becoming imperceptible, becoming pure movement and intermediary. “Pure movement” and “becoming” are terms describing film, a medium which is never anything but a mere reflection, visual illusion, and light. Kluge, too, presents Woman as an intermediary category uniting the extremes of the modern individual, the unconscious and the radically conscious, instinct and calculation. Woman is likened to the intertwinement of sensual organism and machine that is cinema. It is an apparatus that transgresses the boundaries of the spectator’s body and unites its audience in a common experience. It could therefore incite Kluge’s radically democratic proletarian public sphere. However, since affective reactions to sensual stimulation are automatic, it is also malleable.

The following analyses present my interpretations of four crucial films directed by Alexander Kluge, illustrating the shifting significance of female characters impersonating the stereotypical “female mode of production,” while the camerawork and editing process incite this mode of production in the viewer. While progressively addressing the suppressed and excluded layers of German collective consciousness in the form of pre-symbolic representations and montage, Kluge’s films, especially *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* (1975), which was heavily influenced by Negt’s and Kluge’s

two collective works, often problematically conflate empirical women with an abstract notion of “female” or “proletarian mode of production,” a flaw that disappeared towards the end of his filmmaking and in his literary works since the 1980s.

### ***Yesterday Girl (1966)***

In post-war Germany, the image of Woman often becomes an allegory of *Heimat* or Germany as a whole, as in *Germany Pale Mother (Deutschland bleiche Mutter)* by Helma Sanders-Brahms (1980). Women characters such as *Lola* in the film of the same title, part of R.W. Fassbinder’s *FRG- Trilogy* (1981), serve a different function and embody the destructive eroticism endangering bourgeois order as a construct of patriarchal society. Kluge’s first feature length film *Yesterday Girl* (1966) tries an alternative depiction of a main female character as representative of Negt and Kluge’s “proletarian public sphere” in conflict with the bourgeois public discourse. Anita G. (Alexandra Kluge), the main female character, is incompatible with the society of the Federal Republic of Germany under Konrad Adenauer’s chancellorship. This society blends out a violent past that remains vividly present in Anita’s subconscious and which surfaces in the form of affect and pre-symbolic memory bits represented in montage sequences, cut-in images and audio scores.

But not only her imagination and recollections visualize the repressed aspects of German discourse in the early 1960s. The very character Anita G. functions as a representation of what had disappeared and/or remained invisible in postwar Germany. Being a Jew, an East German, and a woman, Anita represents the gap that is left after Germany’s repositioning and changed perspective after the war. The Federal Republic’s

enthusiastic embrace of the notion of a Zero Hour and of progress away from the past rested on the secret approval of the murder having been committed in the past, and of the German partition as the legitimate price for that. While women had been an important work force during and in the immediate aftermath of the war, postwar West Germany returned to traditional gender roles with women relegated to the home and family sphere.

The first shot of *Yesterday Girl* presents the viewer with a plate that reads in white on black in the manner of early silent film: “Uns trennt von gestern kein Abgrund, sondern die veränderte Lage.” As Miriam Hansen has elaborated, the quotation, “attacks one of the most common forms of historical amnesia in West German culture, the myth of the ‘zero hour’” (Hansen 1986: 196). It implies that what has taken place since the times of the Third Reich is not a historical breach, but rather a spatial dislocation, an apparent displacement of the object caused by the actual movement of its observer.<sup>51</sup> What once was is still present if we change the point of view and look at the present from a slightly different angle.

The camera in *Yesterday Girl*, accordingly, plays with unusual angles and perspectives and starts out with a birds’ eye view of the Café Kranzler in Frankfurt am Main, which shows Anita surrounded by the emptiness of missing company around her table, while on other tables in this bourgeois setting wealthy couples enjoy the rhythms of the Viennese Waltz. The female is marginal in society, as is the subconscious within the individual, and the project of the film is to look at the margins of society in order to find out what is at the center of German identity in the 1960s.

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<sup>51</sup> Hal Foster calls this notion, which is important for the neo-avant-gardes, *parallax*, underscoring that “our framings of the past depend on our positions in the present” (xii).



Figure 58: *Abschied von gestern* 00:00:52

That Kluge's intention is to talk about a specifically German phenomenon is evident from his statements in interviews: "Anita and her story are specifically related to the Federal Republic. Her story would be different if she were living in a different society. And it would be different if the Germans had a different history" (Patalas 624). The law student Kluge wrote the short story about "Anita G." as part of his collection *Case Histories* (1962) after an actual criminal justice case during that time.

The opening depicts the actress playing Anita G., Alexandra Kluge, eating and laughing at someone's comment while seated at a kitchen table. The scene falls out of the narrative like a prologue, a "hors texte" that sets the tone for the narrative that is to follow. A cheerful conversation has just been broken off, the audience is aware of at least another person in the room behind the camera. The scene points to space and time outside the diegesis, to the present of the FRG in the 1960s, the time between the Eichmann trial and the leftist student revolts of 1968, a time also of beginning feminist awareness in Germany. The amateur actress is Kluge's sister Alexandra, observed outside her role, an authentic woman nourishing her body in a break during her work day. At the same time,

her subsequent reading of a script is clearly staged. The scene is best evaluated as in-between document and fiction. On an associative level this depiction of a woman at work laughing and eating challenges the efficiency of the film's own production process. It leaves room for the irrational in the 'antechamber' of the linear story. The capitalist public sphere of production that the film and audience are part of is potentially subverted from the very opening of the film.



**Figure 59:** *Abschied von Gestern* 00:00:09

Alexandra starts reciting an unspecified ancient text that could be of Babylonian origin, but might equally be Kluge's construct. The text asks moral questions that could point to an alternative order of justice opposed to the "bürgerliches Gesetzbuch" that defines public law in Germany: "Hat er von der Mutter die Tochter getrennt, hat er von der Tochter die Mutter getrennt? Hat er einen Gefangen nicht freigelassen, einen Gefangenen nicht gelöst? Hat er einen Eingekerkerten das Licht nicht schauen lassen, hat er bei einem Gefangenen ‚fange ihn‘ gesagt?" In a "female," alternative order of justice it would be a crime to "separate mother and daughter," and the ones that are already imprisoned should not be hunted down. As we learn towards the end of the film, Anita

will in fact deliver a child, which is subsequently taken away from her in prison, a part of the story that is only hinted at and suspended between the shots. Anita will also be “hunted down” by the police on motorcycles, as a montage at night and in fast motion suggests. In a montage sequence, she is associated with the rabbits on Jewish tombstones, which are the epitome of victimhood and hunted prey. This association is even more powerful as the viewer is aware of Anita’s Jewish background that was revealed in the court scene. On this level, the main female character symbolizes the marginal, the suppressed Jewish population and uncomfortable past that contrasts with the ignorant German society in the present.

Yet at the same time, Anita is the propagator of a public that shares a certain mythology mediated through scripture. After all, she reads from a script a text that is meant to educate its audience in an effort at *Bildung*, the project of bourgeois Enlightenment. Her reading stands in stark contrast to the reading of the book of law performed just a minute later by the judge in court. The camera’s position behind his neatly shaved neck suggests a written discourse that is detached from the bodies of living human beings. In the corner of the filmed image two open books are visible, while no human features are present. While reading in the first scene represented the proletarian public sphere grounded in a specific time and place and activated the associative faculties of the viewer, the bourgeois public sphere represented by the judge is impersonal and generalized, and exemplary for the speed with which the personal is dispatched by the impersonal of the law. The pace of reading is too fast to allow for associations to form in the head of the recipient, as he concludes the recitation of the legal definitions of “Besitz”



and “Gewahrsam”: “...ob die Möglichkeit tatsächlicher Herrschaft gegeben ist, ergibt die Anschauung des täglichen Lebens” (00:05:45).



Figure 60: *Abschied von gestern* 00:01:23



Figure 61: *Abschied von gestern* 00:05:14

Contrasting the shots of the trial-sequence, the next scene suggests Anita's time in prison. An establishing shot of the prison's hallways is followed by a semi-close-up of Anita's face as she lies in her cell. Kluge's voice over begins to recite a Dadaist poem by Christian Morgenstern, which is accompanied by drawings from a children's book and

supported by an organ playing a Christmas song.<sup>52</sup> The words seem unrelated to the narrative of the film's story, but the combination of comforting tunes, the reference to music, dance, and candy in the poem, and the childhood world of the illustration comment on Anita's internal disposition and her conflict with the reality principle of society outside. Following the montage scene, Anita is shown indulging in the pleasure of eating randomly from the fridge. The "proletarian" forces in her, which aim at the satisfaction of primary, sensual desires, outweigh reason and reflective action. Yet at the same time, her desire to consume enlists her in capitalism's project of commodification and estrangement of the individual from authentic experience.

That the "proletarian" masses are in fact the force that undergirds and holds up the ideals of a bourgeois lifestyle and the project of Enlightenment is further underlined in the sequence where Anita is portrayed as a record salesperson. Language learning records standardize oral speech and make the bourgeois ideal of *Bildung* accessible to the broad masses. Anita's boss, whose face appears repeatedly in a close-up that reveals his hard features and distance behind thickly framed glasses, emphasizes the attraction of *Bildung* for workers eager to rise in social status. Ultimately, a 19<sup>th</sup> century mindset motivates people to participate in commodity consumption, which is emphasized in the shot when her boss praises Anita for her "good" work,<sup>53</sup> which makes her confident

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<sup>52</sup> Ein Mammut, das im Eise steckt, hat unser Walter hier entdeckt  
 Jetzt aber plötzlich aufgewacht hat es die Augen aufgemacht und rief vergnügt trotz hohem Alter  
 Ei guten Morgen guter Walter!  
 Nun kam auch Eduard mit der Geich und spielte einen Walzer gleich  
 Das Mammut machte Schritt vor Schritt, der Walter der ging mutig mit  
 So tanzten sie vergnügt und lang, das liebe Mammut aber sang  
 Nun sind wir müd, nun sind wir heiß  
 Jetzt essen wir Vanillieeis und Riesenurwaldbiskuit, das brachte ich aus der Eiszeit mit!

<sup>53</sup> The definition of „good“ is a point of contestation in the previous sequence with the Christian social worker asking what Anita understands under the term. Anita's definition "Gut ist was gut tut" is rejected as

enough to dream of a more distinguished economic status, as the shot is followed by Anita's dream sequence moving from a festive chandelier to photographs of 19<sup>th</sup> century upper middleclass interiors.

The photographs of bourgeois settings are related to Anita's personal background, since a photograph of herself as a well-dressed and groomed child is among the black and white images. We know from her confession in court that Anita comes from a bourgeois background, since her family possessed factories before the war. When she treats herself to a fur coat, this actually expresses her wish to return to her previous elevated economic status. In the current environment, however, it shows her vacillation between the desire for bourgeois comforts and status objects and her economically proletarian status.

The scene follows a montage sequence on a Christmas fair that is accompanied by the same melody of a hand organ that underlaid the Morgenstern poetry in the dream sequence in prison. The market represents capitalist exchange processes in society at large that, however, rely on private feelings we carry in us from childhood. Drawings from a picture book are again intercut in the scene. In the pictures, illuminated windows in a wintry small-town setting evoke romantic feelings of home and security in a safe place, keeping the cold of the outside world at bay. The interpretation is only possible with an associative approach to the film, which reveals subconscious collective images and desires otherwise suppressed by the narrative causal logic of linear storytelling. The "proletarian public sphere" is thus activated as that which is generally suppressed and expropriated in a hegemonic discourse, and which always bears a potential protest energy

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"nicht ganz richtig" by the representative of the church institution. The record selling business was commented on by Anita: "Das ist doch etwas Gutes," and by the business man: "...etwas Gutes für die Menschen."

and rebellious force (see Negt in Schulte and Stollmann 13). At the same time, the emotions evoked by the images discussed are still bourgeois, and they are directly connected to the main female character. The “proletarian public sphere” is here not just related to the “female mode of production,” but also subservient to an ideal that was created by and supports the capitalist system, which in the film is largely represented by men. Anita’s fantasy is generic. It evokes spectator identification via an emotional response to the image



Figure 62: *Abschied von gestern* 00:16:08

Anita constantly struggles for this idealized image of security in the private world of the family setting implied in the warm window lights. Yet whatever she does, she is excluded from this sphere. Anita’s boss, who has started an affair with his successful employee, not only terminates the relationship, but also sues her when his own family security is in danger. His wife deploys the discourse of romantic love in a shot that visually separates the spouses by way of an enormously heavy bed between the two partners. The camera pans across the whole range of cold linens between husband and wife, while she asks him: “Liebster – liebst du mich?” (00:19:35) followed by the

businessman's gesture of defeat as he takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes as if to get rid of an illusion his spectacles had created for him.

After her experience with representatives of jurisdiction, of the church and of market capitalism, Anita, secretly looking for fulfillment in a bourgeois family setting and thus always wife-to-be, attracts the cultural bureaucrat Pichota, who, as the opening plate confirms, is "waiting for colleagues in the hall of his administrative building" (00:44:30). The plate implies that the ministry is run by men, and the building resembles a huge apparatus within which Anita lets herself be transported in an open lift that runs in an endless loop, displaying her beautiful image as if on a strip of film carried through the screening machine of the cinematic apparatus. The resemblance to film-strip is emphasized as the camera captures passing light sources, showing a light bulb disappearing behind the revolving cabin.



Figure 63: *Abschied von gestern* 00:44:49

Pichota resembles the voyeur of a cinematic spectacle, spotting Anita's legs first, as they appear cut-off from the rest of her body as she descends from top to bottom without stopping on Pichota's level. As Pichota joins her in the cabin, their conversation

starts with Anita complaining: “Erst sucht man die Kantine, dann sucht man den Ausgang... Warum die so’n Ding immer wie ein Labyrinth bauen müssen und nicht mal ein bisschen übersichtlicher...” (00:45:00). Obviously, she has no definite reasons for being in the building and might just have posed as beautiful image to attract the bachelor men working at the heart of the public sphere, separated from the sphere of the private realm of their wives and families.

Pichota’s answer to Anita’s comparison of the building to a labyrinth seems slightly off topic, as he says: “Naja, es dient ja auch anderen Zwecken als ein Labyrinth” (00:45:05). The answer confirms Anita’s observation in its intonation. The particles that do not verbally signify any specific content, in this case “naja” and “auch,” which agree with Anita’s observation, imply on the level of associations that Pichota thinks the building serves exactly the same purpose as a labyrinth. Ultimately, the modern bureaucracy is a huge mechanism, worked by men in their official function, which resemble the bachelor-uniforms in Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, who work the “chocolate grinder,” choking down their sensuous desires, yet always aiming for the cloud-like “bride stripped bare,” the purely abstract female that is always a flat image and skeleton-frame without the ability to reproduce, since all reproduction is run by the males on the ground administering their mechanic construction.

The moment Anita acquires the qualities of a physical, fertile woman that becomes pregnant is the moment Pichota discards her at an abandoned fast-food stand, the place for instant and short-lived satisfaction of primary desires.<sup>54</sup> The setting parallels

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<sup>54</sup> Earlier in the film, there are signs that the breakup is already underway, but the final decision is declared in this setting. The cut from Anita’s worried expression after getting the results of her pregnancy test to the angry Pichota, who rants about her lying and moral insufficiency suggests that the split is connected to Anita’s pregnancy. Both events are visually linked.

the place of their initial hangout in the canteen. While the first eatery had been part of the bourgeois public sphere belonging to the administered world, the latter represents the meeting point for workers and outcasts relegated to the street. It is here, where Pichota sends his mistress off with some money for an abortion, the sum of 100 Deutschmark ironically resembling the amount of money he previously denied Anita, as his wife allegedly controlled his accounts.<sup>55</sup> This ending had already been implicit in Anita's first glance at Pichota's huge marriage ring in the canteen, which was followed by Anita's disappointed glance to the side. Her face explicitly reveals her knowledge that Pichota is just another married bachelor, who won't release her from her status as bride stripped bare, making her his wife.

In the course of their relationship, Pichota tries to integrate Anita into the system of bourgeois and enlightenment values, values Anita already knows well, as she is the daughter of an upper class family. Yet Pichota denies her entry into the institution that lies at the heart of the bourgeois value system, namely the legitimized family bond. Throughout their relationship, Anita confronts Pichota with this contradiction between his speech and action. When she visits his apartment for the first time, she assembles the symbols of his bourgeois family life, the bric-a-brac of collected decorative items adorning the home setting, on the living room table as a clear demonstration of his double standards. Pichota, without a comment and ignoring the unspoken accusation, patiently re-locates one item after the other to its original location.

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<sup>55</sup> This intention is not explicit in the scene, and the reasons for the breakup of the relationship could be otherwise motivated. However, Rainer Lewandowski in an influential interpretation of this film links the end of the relationship to Anita's pregnancy, and Pichota handing over the money to the suggested abortion, which would foreshadow Kluge's later occupation with the anti-abortion debate in the early seventies and in his film *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* (Lewandowski 1980, 77-78).

Later in the film Anita and Pichota visit a dog training ground. Here all men read from script and appear almost comical when unable to make the least personal statement. Despite the comical effect of the scene for the outside viewer, the effects for Anita inside the diegesis of the radical split between public and private are devastating. At the dog training ground violent instincts of the tamed animals are presented as looming dangerously shallow under the surface of a sports game of mastery and submission, physical strength and instinctual obedience. Feelings are denied when rain starts pouring down and the representatives of the dog club cold-bloodedly continue their presentation, which reminds one of “yesterday’s” atrocities. The society Anita finds herself in is essentially the one “that made Auschwitz possible” (Barg 107) and that consequently victimized Anita.

The only scene in the film, where Anita is depicted from a low angle (the camera producing the effect of the female character looking down at her male counterpart) is in her relationship to a young student, who is lying in bed while she sits upright and educates him about German history. The next shot shows a radio between the two lovers in bed, visually creating affinity between eroticism and technology, privacy and publicity. The radio represents universal contiguity, the idea of “network” and the identity of sender and receiver in Brecht’s and Enzensberger’s radio theory.<sup>56</sup> The democratic medium turns around old hierarchies in the communicative process and puts Woman in a better discursive position, whereas the later ubiquity of television with its

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<sup>56</sup> Enzensberger argues, borrowing from Brecht’s radio theory, the media have to be transformed from an apparatus of distribution into an apparatus of communication (Hans Magnus Enzensberger. *Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien*. 1970. Brecht, Berthold Brecht. *Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat*. 1932.). Despite his critique of the mass media market, Kluge found this market with its goal of catering to as many people as possible, still a better model for engaging the viewer’s imagination than the bureaucratically protected enclaves of bourgeois high culture. In *Public Sphere and Experience*, the former transpires as “public sphere of production,” the latter as “bourgeois public sphere.”



programming and fixed viewer expectations, as well as its early character as status symbol in Kluge's films is again associated with the bourgeois mindset and more traditional gender relationships, as in the film *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* (1975).

The link between eroticism and technology also points to the nature of libidinal relationships in modernity as imagined by the historic avant-gardes and in the bachelor machines. The men Anita encounters are bachelors, even more so if they are married and cheating on their wives. They appear unable to commit faithfully and in all earnest, as the dialogue between Pichota and Anita shows. Pichota: "Ich werde für dich durch's Feuer gehen... oder nach Alaska... wohin auch immer... und ein neues Leben anfangen..." – Anita: "Mach's doch!" Anita is defined by her desires on the one hand, by social constraints on the other. There seems to be no place for female desires in the public sphere of the FRG, as even Pichota's wife is unfulfilled, seeking refuge in a girlfriend's company and wondering whether she should "learn something" to be able to participate in the public sphere. "Learning" is a male domain, as Mrs. Pichota sarcastically remarks in the line: "Ernst, ach Ernst, was du mich alles lernst" (00:52:42).

On the level of spoken words, the cultural minister Pichota displays a patronizing didacticism typical of the bourgeois notion of *Bildung*. In an often-cited scene, where Pichota explains Brecht's story about "Herr Keuner," Anita wittingly misinterprets the following line: "Was tun Sie, wurde Herr K. gefragt, wenn Sie einen Menschen lieben? Ich mache einen Entwurf von ihm, sagte Herr K., und Sorge, dass er ihm ähnlich wird. Wer, der Entwurf? Nein, der Mensch" (01:01:20).<sup>57</sup> Anita here forces Pichota to literalize Brecht's irony, as Pichota is trying to form Anita after his image (see

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<sup>57</sup> Bertolt Brecht. *Kalendergeschichten. Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt am Main, 1967, vol.12: 386.

Hansen in Schulte 119). Visually, the scene starts out with Pichota in the camera focus, leading the conversation as he refers to the written text in his hands. The power balance moves to Anita, however, as she shifts the focus away from the text and towards a more practical approach that also applies to her own relationship to Pichota and the bourgeois public sphere. The rack focus in this scene moves from Pichota, the didactic teacher in his sovereign position seated in an arm chair, to the smoking Anita in the background, and thus comments on Pichota's loss of discursive authority in this conversation.



Figure 64: *Abschied von gestern* 01:01:52



Figure 65: *Abschied von gestern* 01:02:23

Such moments of Anita's rebellion against bourgeois patronizing, however, are relativized in scenes in which Anita seems to enjoy her boss's compliments or follows the advice of a university assistant, who recommends that she learn the French language in order to be able to study political science (Barg 103). The character of Anita is contradictory and caught between the bourgeois public demands and her proletarian forces of desire. Thus Pichota gets nervous when Anita is taken for his wife, when the proletarian forces threaten to become publicly visible. In the end, it is Anita's function as mother that finalizes her fate as an outcast. She then does not fulfill the criteria of "bride stripped bare" anymore, while marrying and becoming part of the bourgeois system, too, is out of the question. Heide Schlüpmann in her feminist analysis of Kluge's films claims that "Kluge does not extrapolate a reality for women other than that of the mother/child relationship. He only points out the double oppression that woman experiences within this relationship" (Schlüpmann 70).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Heide Schlüpmann belongs to a critical strand of Kluge interpreters and feminists that includes Susanne Knight (*Women and the New German Cinema*, 1992), Helke Sander ("You can't always get what you

And yet, I argue that there are moments of hope and of female autonomy in the film. However, these moments are outside the narrative and belong completely to the level of form. In the end, Anita decides to turn herself in, in order to deliver her child. This is also the point in the film, where Alexandra the actress once more replaces Anita G. Another semi-documentary scene is inserted depicting female cheerfulness and complicity on the backstage level, pointing out of the diegesis, in the scene after Anita has given herself up, damaged her prison cell and fought with her obstetrician. In this shot Alexandra Kluge and the actress playing the obstetrician are shown laughing in harmony and joy, without interrupting the soundtrack, in which a female probation officer interrogates Anita. A relationship of power in the soundtrack is thus juxtaposed with the context of filmmaking, where the actresses, staging the fight, actually end up in a comical situation.



Figure 66: *Abschied von gestern* 01:21:08

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want”: the films of Alexander Kluge), and Ruby Rich (“She Says, He Says: The Power of the Narrator in Modernist Film Politics.” *Discourse* 6, 1983). Other influential interpretations of *Yesterday Girl* can be found in Miriam Hansen (“Space of History, Language of Time: Kluge’s *Yesterday Girl* (1966).” *German Film and Literature. Adaptations and Transformations*. Ed. Eric Rentschler. 1986), and Thomas Elsaesser (*New German Cinema. A History*. 1989).

The fact that the two shots discussed are the only ones of the actress with this documentary quality links them to each other. The critical viewer has to connect Alexandra's spontaneous reading of an ancient moral that could be called maternal at the beginning of the film to the depiction of female solidarity in the end. In retrospect Alexandra Kluge's declamation in the beginning thus could be interpreted as a prologue to and a comment on the whole narrative that followed it. This would counter some of the harsh criticism Kluge has received for the naïve, subservient and submissive depiction of his female protagonist. Helke Sander's complaint that "in a Kluge film only Kluge speaks to us, controlling both commentary and visual structure" (Sander 59), is not unconditionally correct. I want to argue that Anita's laughter is a recurring motif in Kluge's film, potentially forming a counter force to the controlled, rational order of the public sphere. Mikhail Bakhtin has advanced the notion of laughter as a liberating, irrepressible force that can degrade power and bring forth a truth beyond hypocrisy.<sup>59</sup> In the context of Kluge's occupation with the public sphere, laughter would be a proletarian force undermining authority, even that of the film's author.

The last shot with its closing titles "Will yesterday return tomorrow?" ("Kommt gestern morgen?") refers to the initial plate in the very beginning of the film: "Uns trennt von gestern kein Abgrund, sondern die veränderte Lage." Both plates indicate the potential continuity of the past in the present and future. However, the last question remains open, indicating that the filmmaker does not intend to make a statement about the present, but is questioning; he is not exercising power over the viewing subject, but leaving it to the spectator to decide. The question in the end represents Kluge's ideal of a maternal mode of production exercised in the style of the film. This mode involves non-

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<sup>59</sup> In *Rabelais and his World* (1965): "The History of Laughter."

performative viewing situations and non-performative speech, in short, communicative situations that do not create relationships of power and hierarchy. Such a speech involves asking questions rather than making statements.

### ***Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave (1973)***

While *Yesterday Girl* dealt with the bride-to-be in the bachelor machine of bourgeois society, *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*,<sup>60</sup> again starring Alexandra Kluge as main actress, tests out life within the small family constellation. Roswitha Bronski is the mother of three and wife to an ambitious husband, who is eager to play an important part in the public realm, but can never realize his ambitions. Feeling stuck in the family, he is nurtured by Roswitha, who conducts an illegal abortion clinic, which pays for the Bronskis' bills.

As Kluge explains in the book of the same title, published two years after the release of the film, at the core of the work lies the conflict between “natural time – industrialized time; competition – cooperation; private conduct – public and professional conduct” (10). The dichotomy, in other words, between the moral discourse and actual functioning of bourgeois society is Kluge's main objective. The former, the rhetoric of bourgeois and Enlightenment discourse, is already mocked in the words Anita uses ironically in *Yesterday Girl*. In a surrealist scene depicting her flight from the military and secret police fashioned after Nazi-officials, Anita shouts: “Nach einem Streit wieder gut Freund sein. Die faulen Eier, die einem angeworfen werden, nicht übel nehmen. Auch angesichts einer strähnigen Hausfrau oder eines stocktauben Greises die Menschenwürde

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<sup>60</sup> The film, as well as the book of the same title, will be referred to as *Gelegenheitsarbeit* in the following passages.

hochhalten.“ (00:44:20) The phrases “gut Freund sein,” “nicht übel nehmen,” and “die Menschenwürde hochhalten“ are altruistic Christian values that in reality apply, if at all, only to relationships inside the bourgeois family. In order to provide for security and warmth within the private, the relationship to the public outside is cynical and cold: “As the capitalist accumulates money, the family accumulates love, care, and warmth internally. One can also express the rigidity of this principle in other words: The existence of Auschwitz did not touch the ‘happiness’ of millions of German families” (Kluge 1975: 181). The antagonism between private and public is embodied in Roswitha Bronski’s attitude that is commented on in Kluge’s voice-over: “To be able to afford more children for herself, she conducts an abortion clinic” (00:04:27). The family is introduced from behind the glass planes of their kitchen windows in winter, Kluge commenting: “Inside it is warm; outside it is cold” (00:03:06).



Figure 67: *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* 00:03:09

While the visual metaphor would have remained without commentary in *Yesterday Girl*, or commented on by the protagonists themselves, it is the filmmaker, whose voice-over is constantly present in *Part-Time Work*. One reason for this might be

the complex narrative Kluge wants to convey. As Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's original sketches for the script reveal, *Part-Time Work* is actually a conglomeration of ideas and scenes that would have needed to be realized in three to five different films. However, the financial means only allowed for one full-length film.<sup>61</sup> The literal translation of feelings into words in many scenes diminishes some of the best avant-garde approaches that were developed in *Yesterday Girl*, since the alternative realm of emotions and desires is the opposite of the abstract and mediated realm of words. While in *Yesterday Girl*, shock and affect were deployed as artistic means in the interaction between sound, images and viewers, "understanding" *Part-Time Work* is an exercise of the intellect.

It seems like this film also smoothes out many of the gaps left blank in the previous film. For example, an abortion scene is depicted graphically and in full length as if to function as a polemical statement, while the birth scene in *Yesterday Girl* was omitted and only implied in the editing of the images, since the actress had no previous experience of giving birth. More than *Part-Time Work*, *Yesterday Girl* deployed non-professional actors acting in their everyday environment, thus drawing on actual experience instead of professional artistic abilities. Writing, it seems here, has pre-defined every scene's carefully staged action, while spontaneous play was the principle of acting in Kluge's previous film.

*Part-Time Work* starts out with a close-up image of Roswitha Bronski's face as she absent-mindedly casts her eyes to the side, accompanied by Kluge's voice-over

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<sup>61</sup> "Es geht in allen diesen verschiedenen Entwürfen um einen zusammenhängenden Aspekt, lediglich die Schwerpunkte und Perspektiven erscheinen verschieden. Richtig verfilmt wäre das Thema nur, wenn man alle diese Filme herstellte, also 3, 4, 5 abendfüllende Filme machte. Produktionsmittel hatte ich aber nur für einen Film" (Kluge 1975: 20).



commentary: “Roswitha feels an enormous power within herself. But she knows from the movies that this power does exist indeed.”



**Figure 68: Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin 00:00:04**

This shot is followed by the image of a forking path in a field on old black and white footage from the Soviet revolutionary film *Chapayev* (Sergei and Georgi Vasilyev, 1935), depicting a landscape around 1917, the year of the October Revolution. Melodramatic tunes blend into the voice-over. The associations thus created link the female character to romantic revolutionary ideas, mediated through the cinematic genre of melodrama. To activate people for revolutionary ends requires language, the mediation of ideas, as the following scene from *Chapayev* suggests. The dialogue between a partisan and Chapayev indicates that knowing languages is an essential requirement for leading a world army into battle,<sup>62</sup> and a plate carrying a quotation from Friedrich Engels reads: “Everything that moves people has to pass through their heads first; but what form

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<sup>62</sup> PARTISAN: Kannst du eine ganze Armee befehligen? – TSCHAPAJEW: Kann ich. – PARTISAN: Eine Front auch? – TSCHAPAJEW: Kann ich, Fedja, kann ich. – PARTISAN: Und die gesamte bewaffnete Macht der Republik auch? – TSCHAPAJEW: Müsste noch manches zulernen. Dann könnte ich sie bestimmt auch befehligen. – PARTISAN: Und auch die ganze Weltmacht, Vasil Ivanowitsch? Die auch? – TSCHAPAJEW: Nein. Die nicht. Kann keine Sprachen.

it acquires in these heads depends very much on the circumstances.” Ultimately, reality is mediated, and we need a common language, a public sphere to communicate ideas, which in turn incite change and become reality. In the case of the montage that started out with a close-up of Roswitha’s face, her imagination is under the influence of generic, melodramatic conventions. Since Roswitha’s fantasies are the product of circumstances, they could be instrumentalized and altered depending on the context. The female, emotional mode of production, it is indicated, responds to immediate stimulation of the senses, while being based on conventionally readable signs.

The opening sequence connects Woman to proletarian values and to the propagandistic effects of cinema, which can be deployed in favor of the suppressed class and potentially form Kluge’s utopian “proletarian public sphere,” associated with the libidinal mode of production.

However, it also implies dangerous malleability. The kind of change the female mode of production can bring about is linked to actual, male revolution in the following quote from the book *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin*, which is given as an explanation of “Roswitha’s program”:

Es gehört zur Identifikation mit einem nicht durchgesetzten anderen Realitätsprinzip der Arbeitsweise der Frau, dass sie Abstützung sucht, z.B. eigene revolutionäre Potentiale nur auf dem Umweg über Anleihen bei von Männern gemachten Revolutionen, nochmals gefiltert durch das, was das Kino davon wiedergibt, wahrnehmen kann. Die eigene Erfahrung also durch Fremderfahrung wiedererkennen. (Kluge 1975: 180)

The quote suggests that the “female principle” promotes mediation, which is in itself a superior mode of production; but under the circumstances of dominant bourgeois and capitalist values it reinforces women’s suppression. Instead, Kluge maintains, women should insist on their private and direct behavior, and walk across the walls and gates of factories just like Roswitha in the second half of the film, when she becomes active in society: “With this trust in the immediate realization of her interests and in the transferability of personal perception [to the public sphere] Roswitha represents an essentially more reasonable and rational principle than that of our society” (Kluge 1975: 179). However, most of the time the potentials of the female mode of production remain locked up in the private sphere of the family and are never released into the public.

This is why the second part of *Part-Time Work* reverses the roles in the family to test the female mode of production in the public setting, with Franz Bronski now earning money to sustain the family. Roswitha engages in politics and the public sphere, as she is trying to organize the workers of her husband’s company that is being transferred to Portugal: “Roswitha travels to Portugal in order to find proof there for the company’s intended outsourcing. Having arrived in Portugal she witnesses the company’s construction projects with her own eyes. With this proof she travels back home.” The impression the viewer gets from Roswitha’s irrational behavior is that of a “madwoman,” as Helke Sander complains in *Frauen und Film* 3 (Nov. 1974, 18):

Das besondere Kennzeichen dieses Films scheint mir zu sein, dass die Protagonistin, Roswitha Bronski, immer genau den Problemen, die sich in einer Szene stellen, aus dem Weg geht und etwas total Widersinniges macht. Die Einstellungen schreien danach, dass endlich das Verhältnis zu ihrem Mann

problematisiert wird, aber Roswitha fährt nach Portugal, obwohl ihr Problem zu Hause sitzt. Darum glauben viele Frauen, wenn sie aus dem Kino kommen, sie hätten einen Film über eine Geisteskranke gesehen. (qtd. in Kluge 1975: 22)

The relationship between the spouses “Roswitha” and “Bronski” represents all the attributes of a bourgeois small family constellation, at least in the first half of the film, where Roswitha is always the one who gives in to a conflict. Whenever family matters have to be discussed, Bronski just throws a sharp look at his wife, who then retreats without words.<sup>63</sup> The apartment is decorated with reprints of historic battle scenes and modernist paintings, lampshades, porcelain figurines and wall drapes.

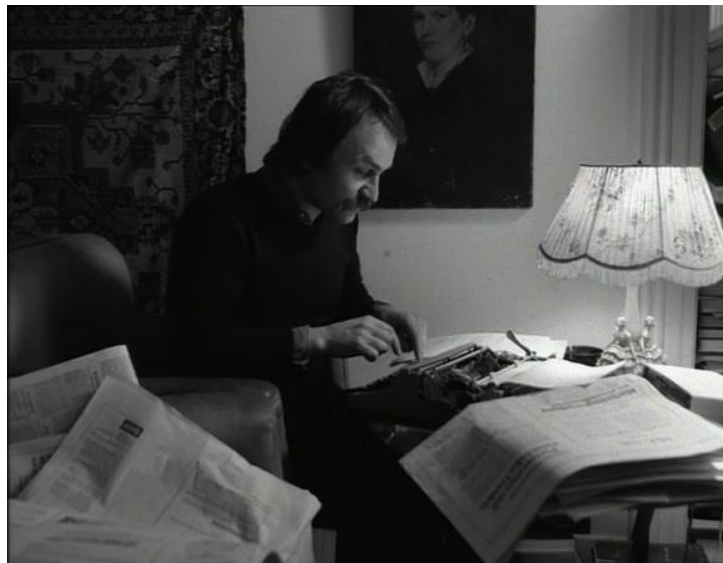


Figure 69: *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* 00:17:38

<sup>63</sup> See the film’s script in the book *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin*, scene 7: Bronski: strafend. Roswitha verlässt wortlos das Zimmer (145), scene 11: Bronski blickt sie “zwingend” an. Roswitha gibt nach. Grimasse (146), 12: Roswitha, auf einem Fehler ertappt, blickt zur Seite (147), scene 34: Bronski geht im Wohnzimmer auf und ab, kanzelt die niedrigsitzende Roswitha ab (157).

The name “Bronski” itself has a tradition in representations of bourgeois family settings.<sup>64</sup> Lew Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina* (1877) is of special importance for Kluge’s understanding of the bourgeois public sphere and repressive family constellations. In his book *The Labyrinth of Tender Power – 166 Love Stories (Das Labyrinth der zärtlichen Kraft* 2009) he dedicates a series of “stories” to the triangle “Anna – Wronski (Russian name for “Bronski”) – Karenin.” The tragic dynamics of the novel are explored as a phenomenon of the bourgeois context. In fact, the character constellation could be interpreted as bachelor machine, with the sacrifice of the main female character in the end of the book. Anna Karenina in the novel is trapped between her cold-hearted husband Karenin, who strictly pursues his career as government official, and the passionate cavalry officer Wronski, whose feelings, however, cool down once he has become Anna’s lover and destroyed her former aristocratic life. Alexei Wronski, whom Kluge characterizes as a “militant bachelor,” protects himself against emotions in a “life-long armor,” which represents “his class-status’s form of armament” (*Labyrinth* 68) attributed to the bourgeois mindset. Similarly, Bronski in *Part-Time Work* seems devoid of emotions for Roswitha and concentrates on his career, trying to break away from the family and applying for positions in a “country as far away as possible” (00:17:38). This effort is rendered ironically, since the “far away” country he applies to is Germany’s neighbor France. A silhouette story from a children’s book narrated by Kluge is inserted at this point, telling the story of “Kaspar,” who travels to America, but returns

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<sup>64</sup> The name “Bronski” at the time of the film’s release was furthermore still present in the readers’ heads in relation to Günter Grass’ *Die Blechtrommel*, which had been published in 1959. In it, Oskar Mazerath decides to remain a child in the world of grown-ups, and reports about his world of the Second World War from a perspective below. Oskar considers the post officer Jan Bronski, who is officially recognized as his uncle, his true father. In fact, the book starts out with Anna Bronski, Oskar’s grandmother, sitting on a potato field as an archaic image of the woman as mother, associated with fertile ground, warmth, and nourishment.

to his family and children once he discovers the dangers of the wide world. The montage sequence comments on the disparity between Bronski's romantic pretensions and his economic dependency on his wife's income and the comfort of the family setting, in which everything is provided for him. The effect is comparable to that of Pichota's pledge in *Yesterday Girl*, in which the minister of culture says: "Ich werde für dich durch's Feuer gehen... oder nach Alaska... wohin auch immer... und ein neues Leben anfangen..." Anita interjecting, "mach's doch," which comments on his inability to break out of the family constellation.



Figure 70: *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* 00:16:45

Roswitha's husband is pursuing a project of *Bildung*, as he studies for university, while Roswitha concentrates all her energies on nurturing the family. An intertitle reads: "All families are modeled on the bourgeois type. This type itself has perished" (00:22:46). The quote implies the rift between an assumed "truth" and empiric reality. It is Kluge's objective to make this rift visible in a sort of double exposure, which juxtaposes idealized images of the bourgeois family with the Bronskis' everyday family life. There is for example one montage sequence that combines images from Ludwig

Richter as they were common in 19<sup>th</sup> century school books, depicting an idealized childhood world and harmonious family life, with Bronski's stacking up library books to compete with his wife for superior reading habits. The quote: "Give me a spot outside the family and I will move the world" (00:21:32) is superimposed with the image of the Bronskis' wall drapery depicting a cottage in a romantic forest with river and mountain-background.



Figure 71: Ludwig Richter drawing in *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* 00: 21: 41

As opposed to *Yesterday Girl*, where dream sequences that seemed to emanate from Anita's internal world were frequent, the only time Roswitha's unconscious appears is in a short flash when she looks into a blurry mirror besides her desk, which has a note saying: "The awake [die Erwachten] share one common world; as for the sleeping, they each turn toward their own [wendet sich jeder seiner eigenen zu]" (00:17:44). It implies the illusory nature of everyday reality, which can be breached via heterotopic spaces like the mirror or film. Michel Foucault has elaborated the notion of "heterotopia" in his essay "Of Other Spaces" (1967). He regarded the social realm as made up of discourse, creating constellations of power defined through what is accepted as "truth." Discursive events

shape reality, which, accordingly, is always mediated. One way to get beyond accepted knowledge and historiography, a legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has become possible in the present era of simultaneity and spatiality, in which there exist “counter-sites” or “effectively enacted utopia,” which Foucault subsequently calls “heterotopia.” The mirror acquires a special status among the heterotopia:

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia, in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a kind of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am, since I see myself over there.



Figure 72: *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* 00:17:43

With the camera capturing Roswitha's reflection in the mirror, she is depicted as absent and present at the same time. The accompanying quote refers to a social world that



relies on rules collectively agreed upon, while every individual's personally experienced reality differs from that discourse. This reality of experience (Erfahrung) and fantasy (Phantasie) is made up of proletarian forces, forces of desire, which lead to pregnancies that have no place in the official public sphere: As the debate around the legalization of abortion dominated the public discourse in the FRG at the time of the film's making, Kluge has Roswitha conduct an illegal abortion clinic, which ironically forms the financial basis for the main character's patriarchal family. The rift between public demand and actual practice, between social regulations and primary libidinal forces, victimizes children, the weakest members of society and society's future, as an embryo in the controversial abortion scene is discarded in the garbage. Furthermore, Roswitha's own children bear all signs of neglect as their internal sense of time, their "Selbstregulierung" as Kluge calls it in the book accompanying the film,<sup>65</sup> is not attuned to the tension between the family members' private and public roles, between the world of commodity production and social reproduction, which defines the modern conjugal family (see Habermas 152-155). Kluge calls polemically for the abolition of paragraph 218, which prohibits abortion, in the book *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin*: "Wenn die Gesellschaft Frauen mit Lebensentzug und Konflikten bestraft, falls sie Kinder haben, kann nicht dieselbe Gesellschaft ein staatliches Strafmonopol gegen Frauen richten. Also Abschaffung des Paragraphen 218 ersatzlos. Die Justiz geht das nichts an" (182). The discussion surrounding paragraph 218 apparently dictated the way the abortion scene graphically depicts all steps in the operation from different camera perspectives, ending

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<sup>65</sup> "Selbstregulierung" is a term Negt and Kluge develop in *History and Obstinacy*, where it stands for the "vollständige Anerkennung der verschiedenen Bewegungsgesetze der in einem Menschen zusammenstoßenden Kräfte" (55). In the case of children brought up in the bourgeois setting, they are

with the embryo being discarded among the operation utensils and appearing alive as the thrust creates the impression of its limbs moving.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 73: *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* 00:07:17

Neither Roswitha's constant effort to keep the family together in the first half of the film, nor her efforts in the public sphere in the second half improve her children's condition. Consequently, the film advances the message that whether women are active in the public or the private sphere, their strategies remain fruitless. Roswitha's attempts at making a difference outside the confines of her home are ridiculed not only by men in the film's diegesis, but also by the filmmaker himself, as he depicts the women's attempts to change society as clumsy and ineffective. When Roswitha and her friend Silvia try to bring to public attention the wretched conditions of factory catering, the newspaper editors only laugh at their efforts, as the women fail to clearly articulate their case. Kluge comments on their irrational proceedings: "Lacking a better access to reality, they

<sup>66</sup> Kluge comments in his book: "Die Beteiligten, die aus dem Diskussionszusammenhang von Frauengruppen kommen, die gegen Paragraph 218 kämpfen, schlugen vor, auch den Embryo zu zeigen, was ursprünglich nicht vorgesehen war" (183).

memorize a song by Bertolt Brecht.” Throughout the women’s social activism Kluge intervenes with didactic statements that have a patronizing effect.

The characteristics of the female characters described here have been subject to harsh critique by feminists like Heide Schlüpmann (1990), Helke Sander (1992), and Ruby Rich (1983), who argues: “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” (Schlüpmann 71). More than in *Yesterday Girl*, the “female mode of production” in *Part-Time Work* is exclusively a trait of female characters. The analogy of “female” and “proletarian” forces is not convincing in this film, as the first and second part seem to fall apart. Justifying his film, Kluge has later tried to blame the democratic influence of his film crew on the production process of *Part-Time Work* for what seems to be an incoherent story. Kluge admits that his sister had a substantial influence on the second part of the film, after criticizing his script as, “Sowas Defaitistisches, sowas Abwieglerisches wie ein Drehbuch, bei dem diese Frau, die sich doch wirklich politisch interessiert, und dieser Mann, der doch zumindest gutwillig ist, nichts Politisches zustandebringen in ihrer Familie...” (in Gregor 160).

### ***The Patriot (1979)***

As times changed, the German student movement came to an end in the late 1970s with the “German Autumn” of 1977, when leading RAF terrorists of the first generation died under mysterious circumstances in the Stammheim prison, and industrialist Martin Schleyer was kidnapped and eventually killed. It was also the time

when oral history and the discovery of the political in the personal and vice versa challenged the traditional notion of an elitist “history from above”.<sup>67</sup>

In 1977, Kluge participated in the collective film project *Germany in Autumn*, involving eleven leading directors of the spectrum of *New German Film*. The film is loosely set in the week following the death of the Stammheim prisoners and examines the social attitudes prevalent in the Federal Republic at that time. In the famous sequences directed by R.W. Fassbinder, the director interrogates his mother, Liselotte Eder, about her stance towards politics present and past. These scenes illuminate the common perception still representative of the German population that regarded democracy as the “smallest evil” among the political systems, with Liselotte Eder concluding: “The best thing would be such an authoritarian ruler, who is very good-natured and nice and orderly” (qtd. in Kluge 1979: 13). Kluge’s character Gabi Teichert appears in *Germany in Autumn* as a confused history teacher who, in the aftermath of the German Autumn, does not know what to teach her students anymore. The voice-over comments on Teichert as she prepares for her heavy work digging the frozen ground for a “better material” to use in the classroom: “She either digs herself a shelter for the Third World War, or she digs for prehistoric finds” (Kluge 1979: 15).

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<sup>67</sup> Already in 1937 Walter Benjamin formulated in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” that, “(n)ot a man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge” (260). What the Frankfurt School theoretician called “historical materialism” would in the 1960s and seventies be practiced by historicists as “history from below.” The new understanding of history grew out of social movements such as the civil rights movement, feminism, and the anti-Vietnam protest. With an emancipating post-colonial world, history as the story of the disenfranchised and the subaltern began to render a voice to those previously silenced by dominant ideologies. Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism* (1978), outlined how in the past scholars of what used to be called the “Orient” disregarded the views of those they actually studied. In Europe, the French *Annales School* was a well organized branch of social historiography that influenced German historians of the time to approach the historiography of the Third Reich as “Alltagsgeschichte.” Martin Broszat, for example, pursued a project of local history with his *Bayern in der NS Zeit* between 1977 and 1983. Another representative of “Gesellschaftsgeschichte” in Germany is Hans-Ulrich Wehler, using the methods of the social sciences to analyze history.

The German Autumn inspired Kluge's full-length film *The Patriot*, which features the same actress, Hannelore Hoger, as Gabi Teichert, two years after the collective project, *Germany in Autumn*. By then, the utopia of "proletarian public sphere" had been shattered as the student protests had turned violent and the "bourgeois public sphere" in the Habermasian sense was being replaced by what Kluge termed the "public sphere of production," described in *Public Sphere and Experience* as "the industrialized public sphere of computers, the mass media, the media cartel, the combined public relations and legal departments of conglomerates and interest groups, and, finally, reality itself as a public sphere transformed by production" (14). Habermas himself speaks of a "derivative" private autonomy, which is grounded in the bourgeois public sphere itself instead of resting on the private individuals that rhetorically constitute the public sphere: "According to this new model, autonomy was no longer based on private property; it could in principle no longer be grounded in the private sphere but had to have its foundation in the public sphere itself" (Habermas 128). In a way, Kluge's "public sphere of production" is the derivative of the bourgeois public sphere and thus closely related to Habermas's account, even though Negt and Kluge emphasize the role of the new privately owned visual media and generally have to be seen in the context of media theory, while Habermas stays within the paradigm of Adorno's and Horkheimer's "Culture Industry" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1947) with his account of the disintegration of the public sphere following the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>68</sup> While in Habermas's

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<sup>68</sup> Miriam Hansen describes *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* as innovative in contrast to those other postwar works that strictly adhered to the Culture Industry paradigm as it had been formulated by the Frankfurt School. See Hansen (1993) 191: "Critical Theory had registered and reflected upon the impact of the mass media early on; indeed, the debate on their social, political, and historical significance was a distinctive feature of Critical Theory from the 1920s through the 1940s. Its post-war successors, however, did little to develop this debate further, let alone to explore new developments in mass and consumer culture – developments that, after all, crucially affected the constitution and conceptualization of the public sphere."

view a public sphere of consumers slowly replaced the critical reading public, and while he judges the new media against the backdrop of the former hegemony of the book, Negt and Kluge see positive democratic potentials in this development. However, these potentials are perverted in practice, since the “compact materiality of the new public spheres of production” (Kluge and Negt 1972: 15) are actually non-public and thus destroy the concept of public sphere altogether.

While Kluge’s previous films reminded viewers of early silent film in their white-on-black intertitles, *The Patriot* adopts television aesthetics with intertitles in white on a colored, mostly blue, background. The format of this film could be said to imitate the genre of the “cultural magazine” popular in German public television, or that of TV serials, with the different sections of the film forming separate thematic entities, such as “At the telescope” (“Am Fernrohr”), “At the party congress” (“Auf dem Parteitag”), “An All Saints’ Day” (“Ein Totensonntag”), “Digging” (“Graben”), etc.. As opposed to the rounded plot of narrative film, the television formats create closed-up sender units of fixed length that form potentially endless sequences within an endless stream of electronic signals. The principle of television is the principle of programming, creating a frame of reference for the viewer, which can be filled with any content, and which has come to structure people’s everyday life and worldview.<sup>69</sup> Kluge in his film deploys the openness of the format, while discarding the programmatic aspect. Artificial interviews do not inform the viewer, but trigger associations, mimicking the “talking heads”

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<sup>69</sup> See Uecker 84-85. The television format is thus akin to the thrust of historicism, which sees history as homogeneously advancing through empty time (see Walter Benjamin 262).

television genre. Images inserted without context thwart the self-explanatory nature of the mass media and are meant to “activate” the recipient.<sup>70</sup>

More than in the previously discussed films, the principle of operation in this film is the montage of images and sound. Kluge himself defines the “filmic principle” as that of the cut or the gap, which refers to the invisible static gaps between individual frames of a film, and equally to the mobile cuts inserted in the editing process. Against the grammar of continuity editing, which renders its stitches invisible, the emphasis in Kluge’s concept of filming, and ultimately his writing, is on the tension between the heterogeneous elements of the cinematic medium, challenging the dominance of the visual through an independent significance of musical, verbal and written elements. In this sense he is very typical of the *cinema d’auteurs* that emerged in the 1960s. The disruption of continuity and of the illusion of empiric reality creates what Kluge calls “anti-realism,” conveying a reality hidden from public view, the reality of emotions, desires and personal memory of lived experiences: “Realism has to be created; realism is no natural state. The natural state is ideology, dreaming. When I protest the reality principle, when I protest what reality does to me, I am realistic” (Interview Ulrich Gregor 160).

As opposed to the previously discussed films, then, gender relationships in *The Patriot* have been abstracted and replaced by the dichotomy between “lived experience” and “dead labor,” “internal perception of time” and “objective, chronological time,” “rationalized language” and “mythic language.” Gabi Teichert is a self-conscious and energetic character, who is as stubborn as Roswitha Bronski and Anita G., and retains the direct, emotional approach to reality. But these characteristics are not ascribed to a

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<sup>70</sup> About Kluge’s TV aesthetics, see Uecker, Matthias (2000).

pronounced “female mode of production.” They are materialized in the “talking dead knee” of Corporal Wieland in a surrealist hors-texte, in which Kluge’s voice-over functions as the voice of the deceased cells that rest in the interstices of reality. The film is thus less about Gabi Teichert than about the in-between, about the absences in official discourse and historiography, and about movement, the filmic principle, which is associated with the realm of affect and sensual experience rather than intellectual rationalization. All of the above are embodied in the surrealist knee, inspired by the Dadaist poet Christian Morgenstern. As Kluge maintains in the voice-over, it almost automatically moves forward, without following a precept, only its will to survive based on its experiences in the past. Its temporality is that of a future past, and thus that of the avant-garde with its simultaneous directedness at the future and at the past.

Das Knie: Nun ist festzuhalten, dass ein Knie grundsätzlich vorwärtsschreitet. Alle halben Meter einknicken und alle halben Meter straffen. ... Ich selber habe keine Grundsätze, sondern den festen Willen zu überleben, dahinzueilen, mache Erfahrungen und nicht Grundsätze. .... Ich bin nicht die Kniescheibe und bin nicht die Kniekehle; ich bin nicht der Unterschenkel und ich bin nicht der Oberschenkel, die sind umgekommen, sondern das Dazwischen. Versuchen Sie einmal einen Gegner zu finden, der das Dazwischen zielsicher trifft. (01:48:50-01:49:50)

While this monologue is spoken, the viewer is presented with jerky war scenes in forward and backward motion, emphasizing the movements of the knee, which consist of folding and tightening. A rocket-powered grenade is being fired. The images repeat



themselves, and the grenade keeps on returning to the young soldier, who might represent Corporal Wieland.<sup>71</sup> While the soldier is part of the objective realm of the living and thus becomes the target of war's projectiles, the dead are above the worldly dynamics of power and discourse. Their accounts are unbiased and especially suited for the telling of history, which is never fixed, but an oral passing on of personal experience.

Kluge's concept of history here sounds a lot like Walter Benjamin's description of materialistic historiography in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1937), where "only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments" (254). As long as redemption is still being awaited, historical accounts will be biased and historical time moves forward. This is why only the dead can be the type of "chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones" (Benjamin 254). The dead are outside of time, which is why they are the ideal historical materialists for whom the time of the now (*Jetztzeit*), in which the history is being told, stands still. Kluge's attempts to create an experience (*Erfahrung*) for the viewer via techniques of montage furthermore root his historiography in the present moment of the viewing subject, which is another characteristic of historical materialism as defined by Benjamin: "Historicism gives the 'eternal' image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past" (Benjamin 262).

Similar to the opening shot in *Part-Time Work*, *The Patriot* starts out with a close-up of the main female character's face in black and white, followed by silent film footage. In the case of *Gelegenheitsarbeit*, however, we saw highly political film scenes from revolutionary Russia with an excess of idealism typical of the female characters in

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<sup>71</sup> Kluge himself suggests this interpretation in his book *Die Patriotin* (171).

Kluge's films. In *The Patriot*, the film footage succeeding Gabi Teichert's face with the aural commentary that defines her as "Patriotin," who "empathizes with all the dead of the empire," ("Sie nimmt Anteil an allen Toten des Reiches" 00:00:22) depicts scenes of war with dying soldiers, and forgotten victims of history in gritty black and white that suggests the documentary mode, but that is actually taken from Kurt Bernhardt's film *Thirteen Men and a Girl* (*Die letzte Kompanie* 1930),<sup>72</sup> which is set in 1806 when the Prussians were facing the Napoleonic troops.



Figure 74: *Die Patriotin* 00:00:15

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<sup>72</sup> See Hillman 98, and Kligerman 22.



Figure 75: *Die Patriotin* 00:00:31

Shortly after directing *Thirteen Men and a Girl*, Bernhardt had to flee Nazi Germany and in his American exile changed his first name to Curtis. The reference to the Holocaust is absent in the visual score, but present in the music that accompanies this sequence. It is taken from Alain Resnais's documentary about the Nazi concentration camps *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et brouillard* 1955). Since the film was an obligatory component of history classes in German public schools at that time, it is likely that the contemporary viewer recognized Hans Eisler's score and perceived the haunting quality of the Holocaust's absence in Kluge's sequence, in which the fictional character Gabi Teichert is linked to recordings that look like unspecified war scenes succeeded by footage depicting anti-aircraft machinery of the Second World War.<sup>73</sup> This practice emulates the spectral presence of the Holocaust in German society and the impossibility of representing history, both of which disturb Gabi Teichert and the symbolic character of *The Knee*. Miriam Hansen remarks with respect to Gabi Teichert that, "she moves

<sup>73</sup> Kluge, dissipating all attempts at an undisputable interpretation, states in his film book: "Entweder ist es die Zeit des 7jährigen Krieges oder in den Befreiungskriegen, jetzt aber sieht man eine Fliegerabwehrkanone 1943, die von oben nach unten mechanisch schwenkt" (Kluge 1979, 51).

through the film as an allegory of historical consciousness, on a plane of figuration almost as abstract as *The Knee*” (qtd. in Schulte 128).

This abstraction includes Teichert’s enacting or mimicking the filmic medium. It is implied that the optical distortion that we experience in everyday reality can be undone by the cinematic medium, as a scene suggests, in which Gabi Teichert interviews a peeping Tom, or “Spanner,” whom she refers to as “Gegenwartsforscher”, while she pictures herself as “Vergangenheitsforscher,” recommending that he relax (*entspannen*) by blinking: “...as if you were making short recordings with the camera... this way the energy is released.” The ideal viewer of Kluge’s films and of the mode of production Gabi Teichert advocates is relaxed and takes in many images separated by cuts, as opposed to the continuous gaze absorbed by the “staring” spectator, the voyeur in the classical cinematic tradition with its female object of the gaze. For filmmakers of the *Autorenfilm*, “storytelling,” the act of narration itself, telling many stories in film was to counter the focus on one linear “story” in *classical narrative cinema* as described in Bordwell/Staiger/Thompson.

*The Patriot*’s audience is directly addressed as part of a public sphere of emotions made up of dreaming individuals in a sequence that shows facial close-ups of film spectators. The flickering light of early projection apparatuses, but also of the cuts, the rapid change of shots separated by black frames, illuminates these faces, which show spontaneous emotional reactions.



Figure 76: *Die Patriotin* 00:10:38, 00:11:04

In the film *The Patriot*, the viewer has become part of this public sphere of libidinal production, which in *Yesterday Girl* and *Part-Time Work* was reserved for diegetic characters, specifically women. In *Part-Time Work*, this mirror of the viewing, internally productive, dreaming individual finds its equivalent in the aforementioned small blurry mirror in Roswitha's desk space. The images of the private sphere, which are usually omitted in official media coverage and in historiography, here have a direct effect on the viewer, for example in a dark sequence that visualizes graphically a birth scene in the beginning of the film. As opposed to the abortion scene in *Part-Time Work*, this scene is barely visible, an authentic recording rather than staged play.

This type of material visualizes the female mode of production, which, however, is not linked to specific female characters in the film's diegesis, but to the characteristics and opportunities of the filmic medium as such. The shot is one among many inserted in the sequence "At the telescope," in which Gabi Teichert tries to bridge the gap between the perspective from "above" and that from "below" with the help of an optical device, the telescope, which brings distant objects into a range where they can be sensually perceived and processed. History, it is implied, consists of present moments in time, which the materialist historian has to zoom in on in order to give a correct account of past events. The filmic medium is in a position to do so, as Gabi Teichert at the telescope is followed by a sequence of shots taken with amateur cameras in bad visual quality: The

old Frankfurt with new skyline rising in its background, a fire in the Selmi tower which cannot be put out because of its height and disconnection from the ground where the fire hoses are located, a birth scene commented on in voice-over: “Frankfurt Nord, zweiundzwanzig Uhr” (00:08:50).

Gabi Teichert is experiencing her own world, reality in a truer sense than in the sense of what Kluge has termed the “Realroman der Geschichte,” which we are exposed to in the discourse of the public sphere. Kluge uses the term “Realroman” to point to the fictional character of reality that is always already mediated. He contends that people should tell their counter-stories (*Gegengeschichten*) in an effort to arrive at a realism that is more realistic.<sup>74</sup> In accordance with Kluge’s type of realism, Gabi Teichert says at one point: “Ich bin im Tiefschlaf am Tage und muss trotzdem die Augen offenhalten.” She thus functions as representative of an alternative public memory. She represents the wishful, libidinal counter production of fantasy against the pressure of the factual. Her idea of history is linked to the emotional history preserved in fairy tales.

In the section “fairy tale world,” a debate about the ban of political protest posters in the school building is linked to an alternative course of Hessian educational politics if Napoleon had become German emperor in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. A musical montage shows Napoleon after the battle at Leipzig. Another drawing depicts children, projecting the image of Napoleon in a circular light beam onto the wall. Again, it is the medium of film which makes possible the sensual experience of a historical moment in this image. The depicted children are staging a scene of 19<sup>th</sup> century type of classroom education, the child functioning as “teacher” using the filmic medium for a more impressive lesson. The medium could either reinforce the tenets of the bourgeois

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<sup>74</sup> Kluge 1975, 222

education system that the head of Gabi Teichert's school promotes, or spark the self-education of the children, who comment on and react to the projected images democratically. The viewer of Kluge's sequence ideally associates the drawing that is taken from a 19<sup>th</sup> century children's book with the previous debate about the power of political propaganda in Gabi Teichert's Hessian school. The term "patriot" itself goes back to the French Revolution and Napoleon, under whose rule the modern nations developed their specific identities. In Germany, this time corresponds to the Romantic period and the beginning of modernity.



Figure 77: *Die Patriotin* 01:00:27

The montage continues with a portrait of the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, and a scene featuring several men of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in a historical landscape, starting to dig in the ground. In the voice-over, Kluge comments: "At the same time as this emperor, the fairy tale scholars Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm dug intensively for German history. They dug and dug and found the fairy tales. Their content: How a people works on its dreams for 800 years." Fairy tales are very distinct historical documents; they bear many layers of mediation, in which a narrative passes from person

to person. In collecting and recording fairy tales, the brothers Grimm converted the open form of oral story telling into a standardized and fixed text. As opposed to the scene in which children educate themselves with the help of a camera, written books fix one kind of “story” that then becomes part of the shared cultural memory of a people.

Kluge complements the reference to the two writers with his own filmic projection that uses the same type of circular light beam used by the children in the drawing. The alternative “history” not taught by patronizing educators can be linked to cinematic projection and the way children fantasize reality. Kluge’s sequence puts his viewers in the position of the children in the drawing. A round film iris is used to imitate the experience of the voyeur in the early peephole boxes and penny arcades. The sequence does not educate about factual history, but about the “history of desires,” which includes the spectator desires at this present moment.



Figure 78: *Die Patriotin* 00:31:41

The colorful montage sequence is commented on in voice-over: “The human desires are manifold.” The image of a snake forming a ring around the world that is carried by elephants standing on the back of a giant turtle is followed by colorful images



of a purple starry sky, a German hut with orange illuminated windows near a stream of clear water, a sleigh ride in Russia, and a sailing ship among polar ice formations. All these images are meant to evoke a feeling of home in the vastness of the universe. Yet these romantic collective images that are supposed to speak to each recipient individually are also associated with violence against that which cannot be integrated into the community, as the citation of the Grimms' fairy tale "Die Geschichte vom eigensinnigen Kind" demonstrates: "Es war einmal ein eigensinniges Kind und das gefiel Gott und seiner Mutter nicht, und so lag es bald auf dem Totenbettchen. Als es aber begraben war, streckte es nachts immer sein Händchen aus dem Grab hervor...". It comments on the necessity to fit into the given set of values shared in a society. Gabi Teichert as a teacher should represent and coerce these shared values. On a Sunday before Advent, when the dead are commemorated she is shown correcting essays ("Ein Totensonntag"). As if commemorating the "obstinate child," she has to "get rid of the mistakes" ("Sie schmeißt die Fehler raus"), while these mistakes are, as Kluge comments, "the best part of them" ("Wenn doch die Fehler das Beste daran sind!").

Gabi Teichert's own obstinacy and desires are compromised as she struggles against her school's board and an educational program that denies the links between the past and the present. German public schools are depicted as conservative and hierarchical institutions pursuing an ideal of *Bildung* that runs counter to the revolutionary spirit of the times. In one scene the school director banishes "propagandistic" posters from the school, posters that associate the then ruling Social Democratic party with "Berufsverbote," a term that "does not exist," as the director says, "even if it might exist." The German government is thus linked to authoritarian practices and ultimately to

fascism as the most rigorous system of censorship. The history taking place at the time of the film's making, the proletarian forces of the moment here are publicly discarded in favor of a concept of time that cherishes continuity and tradition. This type of hierarchic history that is handed down from public authorities threatened Anita G. in *Yesterday Girl* (1966) and is now actively fought by Gaby Teichert. For example she attends a conference on educational reforms in a documentary sequence, in which she is shown stubbornly insisting on changing the teaching material on the spot. Her demand is met with confusion and amusement by the present politicians. That the struggle is in vain becomes evident not only from the disillusioning results of the conference, but it is implied in a nightmare image from German mythology: "A castle on top of a mountain, below a glacier, a slippery edge of ice. – A person tries to climb up the slippery wall to reach the castle" (Kluge 1979, 53).

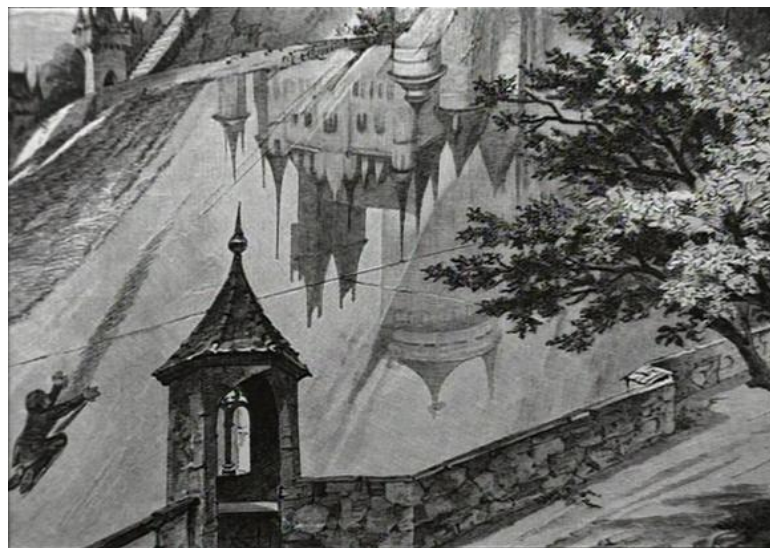


Figure 79: *Die Patriotin* 00:01:50

The individual here is faced with history as a violent force from above, which cannot be stopped or influenced from below. On the icy surface the reflection of the seat of power, represented by the fortress on top of the mountain, is inverted. It accurately

reflects Kluge's conception of mediated reality that has to be countered with lived experience. Similarly, optical devices such as the mirror, the telescope, or camera are prominently featured at other points in the film, and implicitly direct the viewer's attention to realities beyond the surface of what is positively captured in the images. The staged sequence, "A love story's relationship to history" ("Das Verhältnis einer Liebesgeschichte zur Geschichte"), emphasizes the societal mediation of love through a shot that places the young spouses in front of a mirror-tiled wall. In effect, they become like the fairy tale figure in the image above, trying to reach out to an ideal of romantic love that recedes and only reveals its image reflection on the surface of reality. The two lovers alternate their gaze, looking directly at each other, and then through the mirror, the tiles of which break up their image into fragments. The sequence thus literalizes the actual nature of the relationship, of which the public expects that it will be continued after the husband's return once the war is over, despite the rupture in emotional time.



Figure 80: *Die Patriotin* 00:51:54

The sphere of recorded images and music in *The Patriot* forms a counter-sphere to that of recorded script and practices and writing.<sup>75</sup> In the course of the film, Gabi Teichert cuts and sows, drills and even eats books. Persons associated with stenography appear as lifeless and perfectionistic bureaucrats, who take language for a rational system of clear-cut definitions. Thus, the scribe at a party congress measures the success of the speeches in syllables spoken per minute. The self-proclaimed fairy tale specialist, a former Hessian minister of education, whom Gabi visits in one sequence, dictates his rationalizing interpretations of fairy tales to his wife, who eventually types them into her machine. What remains of the emotionally stirring tales is a brief legal definition. The public prosecutor Mürke, too, is obsessed with definitions. In one scene, he is seen fighting with his son over the correct “definition of our relationship”:

Mürke: “Du sollst überhaupt einmal überlegen, wie du mich anzusprechen hast. Du sollst überhaupt deine Beziehungen und dein Verhältnis zu mir sprachlich und inhaltlich vermitteln!... Definitionen sind die Summe von Begriffen, bezeichnen menschliche Verhältnisse. Und wenn wir zu keiner Definition unserer Beziehungen kommen, kommen wir auch zu keinem Verhältnis!... Fange an, die Beziehungen und die Bezeichnungen zu mir zu versachlichen!”

The son, trying out different definitions from “Herr Vater“ to “Theo“ and “Herr Staatsanwalt,” ends up doing what is most natural to him, shouting: “Aber Papi...”

The film ends with an ambiguous outlook into the future between hope and obstinacy. It is New Year’s Eve, and Gabi Teichert is watching fireworks that look like

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<sup>75</sup> Michel de Certeau calls the symbolic codification of a cultural realm “writing machine” that writes on the very bodies of humans in his book *Heterologies*.

lightning in a heavy snow-storm. Kluge comments in voice-over: “Every year on New Year’s Eve, Gabi Teichert sees 365 days ahead of her, so that there is hope to improve the raw material for the history lessons at the high school level in the course of the coming year.” The camera cuts from the woman’s face to the nature images of revolution right outside her window: Lightning strikes, and the snow-storm bends the white tree tops. The ending reminds one of the beginning in *Part-Time Work*, where Roswitha Bronski’s face was combined with cinematic images of agitated nature, creating a melodramatic effect. However, as opposed to the effect in *Part-Time Work*, here, the “enormous power” (“ungeheure Kraft”) in Gabi, which is reflected in nature, is not generic, but an effect of her individual perception of reality. The teacher has her own internal “film” that is not part of any media conventions. In fact, she analyzes the emphatic effect of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, scribbling down its text “Ode to Joy,” while her girl-friends, sitting around the kitchen table, freely associate the lyrics. Roswitha Bronski and her friend in the previous film studied a Brecht song, writing down the lyrics and learning them by heart in order to sing out of a “lack of a better access to reality.” What was a passive endeavor due to the women’s weakness in *Part-Time Work* is a self-conscious, active undertaking in *The Patriot*.

The film concludes with titles from “Ode to Joy” that announce a new era: “Tausend Jahre fiel der Tau. Morgen bleibt er aus. Sterne treten ungenau in ein neues Haus.” The emphatic tone is either meant ironically, commenting on the impossibility and of Gabi’s dreams for the new year, or a reflection of Kluge’s approach to realism, which holds that myth and collective imagery influence empiric reality, so that revolutionary change is in fact possible at a point of time in the future.

The melancholic mood that marked the outset of the film is replaced by a seemingly optimistic and future-oriented ending that is difficult to trust. The haunted score from *Night and Fog* that accompanied the images associated with Gabi Teichert in the beginning has now changed into a celebration of new beginnings that seems to emulate the German optimism of the economic miracle years that the avant-gardes and *Young German Film* set out to counter. After all, Gabi Teichert is part of her historical present and as such susceptible to forgetting and to the overwhelming force of immediate experience. While she studies past moments with the help of mediating devices, she seems oblivious to her present condition in a run-down apartment block that is the only remaining building in a series of demolition projects making room for more skyscrapers in the finance city of Frankfurt. Her “material” obsession with the past is the inverse of the FRG’s materialistic obsession with the present, as if Kluge with this film was holding a mirror in front of his audience. In this way, Kluge’s film creates a counter sphere or mirror world, in which reality is captured in the interstices and absences of the public sphere.

### ***The Power of Emotion (1983)***

Finally, in one of Kluge’s last films, *The Power of Emotion* (1983), both Alexandra Kluge, as well as Hannelore Hoger appear as the main female characters, allowing us to see this film as a kind of synthesis of the preceding ones. Alexandra Kluge plays the journalist Mrs. Pichota and thus represents a rationalizing character arguing for the predictability of human action, similar to Anita G.’s lover Pichota in *Yesterday Girl*. However, her rationality is not bourgeois Enlightenment reason, but a rationality that

counters the illusion of necessity and tries to reconcile intellect and emotion. Kluge has thus moved away from his original notion of “proletarian” versus “bourgeois” forces derived from Marxist thought. In one sequence she interviews an opera singer, asking how he can sing with a spark of hope in his eyes, knowing that the plot will end tragically. In another interview she asks an air force colonel whether the destruction of her city through allied bombings could have been prevented had women raised a white flag above the church tower. In all her inquiries she is looking for ways out of instrumental reason as defined by Horkheimer and Adorno, which simultaneously created a derivative emotionality resting on certain romantic myths that structure contemporary thinking and that prevent context oriented decisions, inevitably leading to catastrophes.

Hannelore Hoger in her role as marriage broker Frau Bärlamm is described as “artist of connections” (Bindekünstlerin), a definition that is reminiscent of Gabi Teichert, who was constantly confused by contiguity, the side-by-side of personal experience and official discourse (commentary: “Die meiste Zeit ist sie verwirrt. Das ist eine Frage des Zusammenhangs”). Bärlamm in *The Power of Emotion* is not confused. To the contrary, she masters other people’s confusion of “emotions” or sensual experience on the one hand and “objects” or mediated and abstracted reality inherited from Enlightenment on the other. In one of the scenes, the voice-over comments on Bärlamm’s work: “Every person, says Frau Bärlamm, has all emotions at once. If everyone had only one, it would be easier from the perspective of connective art [vom Standpunkt der Bindekunst]” (01:00:50).

As in *The Patriot*, Hannelore Hoger’s role is partially allegorical. In some shots only her silhouette is shown. Wearing a melon hat, she is more of a pantomime artist than

a film character. In this way, she is outside reality and therefore not, as Gabi Teichert was in the previous film, susceptible to the forces of her own historical present. She also stands above the market forces and bourgeois conceptions of gender relegating women to the status of objecthood, which becomes clear in a satirical scene in which the marriage broker, super-conscious of what clients are usually looking for in romantic relationships, uses another marriage broker to create an ironic effect. In this scene Frau Bärlamm, who has tightened her facial skin with clothes pins in an attempt to appear younger, is interviewed by a male broker. The “power of emotion” here is closely linked to material values, as the interviewee uses the terminology of a salesperson as if emotions were quantifiable and as if love was an object that can be traded: “Bärlamm (förmlich): Ich möchte Ihnen einige Nuancen meiner Offerte näher beleuchten... Ohne mich feilzubieten, möchte ich Ihre Aufmerksamkeit auf folgende Vorteile lenken...” (00:52:33).



Figure 81: *Die Macht der Gefühle* 00:52:52

Bärlamm is filmed from behind a glass pane that reflects a checkerboard floor. The professional salesman of desires is wearing a grey business suit. The camera position



behind his neck reminds of the camera angle of the judge in the court scene in *Yesterday Girl*. The distance between Frau Bärlamm's own practice as an "artist of connections" and the practice of this man, who is also depicted as a scribe, taking notes on the quality of the "material" offered and checking the different categories that define the "product's" marketability, is emphasized in the mise-en-scène that never puts both characters' faces together in one frame. Bärlamm is staging a performance, playing the role of Woman the object of desire:

Bärlamm befühlt mit den Fingern die Festigkeit ihrer Zähne.

Heiratsvermittler: Zähne fest...

Bärlamm (off): Die Nase könnte man operativ ändern. Je nach Wunsch.

Heiratsvermittler: Nase veränderbar...

Bärlamm: Lebenserfahrung...

Heiratsvermittler: Lebenserfahrung...

Bärlamm: Eine Dame mit Restvermögen...

Bärlamm (mit zunehmender Bestimmtheit): Sie werden aufgrund meiner Vorkehrungen festgestellt haben, dass ich keine Falte im Gesicht habe. Ein Angebot nach Marktlage... (Kluge 1984, 115-116)

The female characters impersonated by the actresses of Kluge's previous films have turned into critical questioners, yet they keep their excessive obstinacy in the "slightly alarmed rhythm" of the actresses' voices, their "curious insistence, somewhat excessive of the object, a stubborn refusal to accept the naturalized codes of cultural discourse" (Hansen in Schulte 119-120). Both Alexandra Kluge as Mrs. Pichota and

Hannelore Hoger as marriage broker Frau Bärlamm represent observers of the power of emotions rather than victims caught in it.

By now, Kluge has abolished the plot completely and instead breaks up his films into disparate thematic units with titles such as “The Powerhouse of Emotions” (“Das Kraftwerk der Gefühle”), “The Storyline” (“Die Handlung”), “The Change” (“Das Wechselgeld”), etc. The overarching theme is the “power of emotions” in all its guises, dealt with in about 26 sub-plots, which, as Kluge explains in the book accompanying the film, would all have been worth developing in a full-length feature film.

Some of these stories are part of Kluge’s earlier publication *Case Histories*, such as the story “In her last hour,” about a woman trying to commit suicide after her lover has abandoned her. A rapist, taking advantage of the unconscious woman, saves her life by violating her. Emotionally, the victim feels less violated by the rapist, who physically abused her, than by her ex-lover, who abused her emotionally. In court, where she is later interrogated by a female judge, she insists that the one who should be sentenced is not the rapist, but her ex-lover, thus advocating her own kind of obstinacy against someone who could be her accomplice against a repressive male-dominated society. However, the female judge appears cold and emotionless just like the female bureaucrats and probation officers in *Yesterday Girl*. The rapist is imprisoned because of violating the bourgeois code of conduct, while the woman’s ex-lover, who drove her to attempt suicide, has not committed any crime that could be defined in terms of the *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* already criticized in Kluge’s first feature film. Not accidentally the story, as well as many others, is reminiscent of Kleist, whose narratives deal with the rift between the individual perception of reality and the laws imposed by society. In his acceptance speech for the

Büchner Prize 2003, Kluge stated that “the radicalism of Büchner and Kleist are needed when we try to depict the changed (inflated) reality within the narrative space of our century.”<sup>76</sup>

The purpose of this film is not, as in many other movies, an effective dispersion of time, but an expansion of “lived time,”<sup>77</sup> as Kluge explains in the foreword to “Die Gefühle und ihre Macht,” the written material supplementing the film *The Power of Emotion*: “I spend 1.5 hours of my time for a film and receive more than 18 hours awareness of life [Lebensgefühl]. Also topics for conversation, also experience with myself” (64). On the level of form the film thus remains faithful to Kluge’s tenet to activate the viewer’s associative faculties and provoke reactions of affect, while the highly complex content requires knowledge and the ability to “read.” The viewer has to be part of an educated bourgeois public sphere in order to get the many cues and connections, yet at the same time he is supposed to relax in the sense of “entspannen,” which Gabi Teichert recommended to the voyeur or “Spanner” in *The Patriot*. After all, the film is without suspense, without a “Spannungsbogen,” which is an obligatory ingredient in narrative film.

Kluge’s project is to deploy emotions in an alternative project of Enlightenment, which he calls “tatsächliche Aufklärung” in an interview with Florian Hopf:

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<sup>76</sup> Kluge 2003, part III: “Büchners und Kleists Radikalität brauchen wir aber, wenn wir versuchen, die veränderte (inflationierte) Wirklichkeit im Erzählraum unseres Jahrhunderts abzubilden.”

<sup>77</sup> Kluge insinuates that the viewers, by activating their associative faculties in an effort of “lebendige Arbeit,” counter modern society’s “enteignete Zeit” or “dead time” that has been created by the modern labor market with its specialized functions for each worker, who in effect becomes like a machine. The terminology goes back to Negt’s and Kluge’s *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (1972) and *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (1981), and in this context is not related to Walter Benjamin’s notion of “Jetztzeit” as the lived present that structures historiography (Benjamin 262).

Kluge: ... Dazu müssen aber die Gefühle lernen, für Aufklärung brauchbar zu sein. Die Aufklärung muss lernen, für Gefühle brauchbar zu sein. Die Gefühle, so wie sie jetzt laufen, wie sie verwendet werden, verteidigen sozusagen den falschen Hochbau, der ihnen aufgedrückt wurde. Sie verteidigen also ihre Motive, die Tatsache nämlich, dass die Gefühle als Motive (Antriebskräfte) verwendet werden, und zwar entgegen besserem Wissen. ... Man könnte sie vergleichen mit Proletariern, die sich vor die Wahl gestellt sehen, entweder sind sie arbeitslos oder sie akzeptieren Kernkraftwerke und den ganzen Schlamassel, der ihre Arbeitslosigkeit mitproduziert. Jetzt treten sie auch noch für Rationalisierung ein und sind gegen Störer. Und diesen Status haben Gefühle, sie sind Proletarier in uns, mächtige Proletarier“ (Kluge 1984: 186).

Emotions, Kluge maintains, can be divided into “pure emotions” and “applied emotions” (4), and the first half of the film deals with the former, the second half with the latter of the two. While all pure and individual emotions, which are the material of movies, “believe in a happy end,” applied emotions such as those of the opera, “big emotions” that move the world, lead to tragic endings. There must have been a point in history, Kluge maintains, when the pure emotions were violently separated from intellect. Kluge associates this rupture with the fall of Babylon in the middle of his film, commenting in voice-over: “Babylon wird wegen Hochbauweise zerstört. Es entsteht Sprachverwirrung. Halbzeit der Gefühle...” (00:21:03). Ever since, the “proletarian” side of the individual, the emotional side, is suppressed and dominated by what the Dead Knee in *The Patriot* terms “zänkisches Gehirn.”

The two incompatible parts combined form the mechanism that powers the avant-gardes' bachelor machines, with Woman at the core of this apparatus that tortures its own operator. The female automaton in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) sets out to destroy its creators and itself, together with the social structure that produced it, while the motherly side of Woman in this film promotes the reconciliation of the proletarian side and the high-rise side of the Babylonian project. The two aspects of Woman, one being machinic and object-like, the other being motherly and emotional, are problematized in each of Alexander Kluge's films discussed here. They embody the principles of bourgeois enlightenment carried to their extreme, and thus potentially subvert the criticized instrumental reason.

One can see how Kluge's project that started with *Yesterday Girl* comes full circle in *The Power of Emotion*: Anita's "proletarian" attitude to the bourgeois society of the postwar FRG also includes her desire to be part of this bourgeois public sphere that is the very source of her repression. She is open to the modern project of *Bildung*, since "one cannot learn not to learn." Yet, her emotions, desires, affects, the primary processes of her body, which are mechanical and biological at the same time, can never attune themselves to the abstract concepts that rule a society based on the written word and mediated ideals, such as the bourgeois family ideal created in the opera and the novel. Roswitha Bronski in *Part-Time Work* applies her associational mode of operating unsuccessfully in the public sphere. Gabi Teichert tries to counter the programmatic educational politics of her school with a more practical approach to teaching that would take into account the current political circumstances in her country. In her stubbornness, however, she seems programmatic and moralistic, as if pursuing her own project of

Enlightenment. In all three films, a moralistic ideology, “tote Arbeit,” or a language of legalistic definitions, is dialectically linked to “lebendige Arbeit” of emotions and sensuousness.

The dialectic of Enlightenment and instrumental reason has created the situation in which emotions and objects attract and repulse one another in an endless mechanical process, in which living beings and emotions become object-like, and objects acquire the status of living beings. The “world of objects” is the theme of a montage sequence in *The Power of Emotion* that features the world exhibition in London 1851, which is referenced as a “parliament of things.” The sequence is followed by a thematic unit called the “world of emotions,” which starts out with an establishing shot of the Parisian opera house, introduced in an intertitle as a “powerplant of emotions.” Just like the world exhibition in London, the opera is an invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Kluge’s film, it is portrayed as a giant organism, interstratified with arteries, which, as construction work reveals, are cracked. The organism is sick, which leads to the break-out of fire. The effect of modernization, in which emotions become object-like and objects attain the status of living beings leads to tragic endings like the ones most opera plots propose. The operas deployed as visual and aural raw material in *The Power of Emotion* are summarized in the appendix “Die Gefühle und ihre Macht” included on the DVD. The plots reveal a stunning similarity in that female characters sacrifice themselves for men, who have a certain emotional power over them and who at the same time repress them. In their deaths, those women, who had no place for their love on earth, find salvation.<sup>78</sup> An exception to the 19<sup>th</sup> century opera plots is the 20<sup>th</sup> century Czech opera *The Makropulos Affair* (Věc Makropulos, 1925) by Leoš Janáček, in which a remorseless emperor and his

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<sup>78</sup> The operas used in the film are: *Alceste* by Ch.W.Ritter von Gluck, *Rigoletto* (Verdi), and *Aida* (Verdi).

alchemist create a magic potion that grants eternal life. Because the emperor is suspicious, he decides to test the potion on his daughter, who then becomes immortal and lives 300 years up to the present as an opera singer, thus able to give an overview of the entire history of opera. The viewer of the film, of course, might not get all the references, but that the romantic love that the opera promotes violently imprints a law of exchange onto the bodies of its followers, which in the end victimizes Woman, is implied in many of the stories, such as in a dialogue between two lovers at a fast food stand in the section “Die Handlung”:<sup>79</sup>

Schmidt: Willst du damit sagen, dass du mich liebst?

Mäxchen: Wie sehr soll ich dich denn lieben?

Schmidt: Genau wie ich dich liebe.

Mäxchen: Nicht noch etwas mehr?

Schmidt: Nicht mehr und nicht weniger.

Mäxchen: Und wenn es weniger ist?

Schmidt: Dann musst du Wechselgeld herausgeben.

Mäxchen (groß): Wie macht man das?

Schmidt (off): Indem du mich um das mehr liebst, was du mich weniger liebst als ich dich... (Textliste des Films, 123-124)

The dialogue illustrates how in “applied emotions” economic efficiency dominates personal relationships that should be purely emotional. This type of realism compatible with market capitalism is the reason why the authentic, pure emotions break

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<sup>79</sup> The tragic ending provided by the melodramatic genre serves as an outlet for desires, as Kluge contends that “every opera that deals with salvation demands a female sacrifice in act five” (*Die Macht der Gefühle*, 1983).

out unexpectedly: “Humans who cannot bear something anymore still endure it for a long time. Then suddenly they break out, unexpectedly and brutally” (00:13:13). The scene immediately following this voice-over comment features a woman accused of shooting her husband in a moment of affect. The court scene parallels the scene in *Yesterday Girl*, in which Anita G. failed to answer the judge precisely and immediately. Anita’s attitude - “es war alles ganz gefühlsmäßig” -- applies to this case, in which the woman played by Hannelore Hoger cannot give reasons for her behavior. The accused says: “My shooting was not an act [Tat]... it was an incident [Vorfall].“ In language no one could explain her situation. What is needed is a different kind of medium; and Kluge suggests with *The Power of Emotion* that this medium is film.

While *Part-Time Work* and *The Patriot* started out with close-ups of the main female characters and their link to early cinema and film in general, *The Power of Emotion* opens with an emphasis on the opportunities of cinematic representation to distort the perception of reality. Film is the medium that can counter the type of public sphere that has led to the tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by speaking to a different public, which consists of emotions and intellect. A static camera films the city of Frankfurt awakening in fast motion, accompanied by a Wagnerian music score. Linking the 19<sup>th</sup> century opera with skyscrapers, cars and planes rushing by, the scene connects applied emotions of the operatic type to modernization and functional reason.

That this combination is deadly and victimizes the weakest members of society is pronounced in the next shots, in which the *Nibelungen* epic, as rendered by Fritz Lang’s 1927 film *Siegfried*, is linked to war and its victimized children. There are a lot of references to Fritz Lang’s films in Kluge’s work, since the latter worked as an assistant



for the famous director in 1958, when Lang was directing *The Tomb of Love* (*Das indische Grabmal* 1959). In Kluge's montage sequence we see soldiers and their tank of the type "Mother" advancing towards the camera, which imitates the viewfinder of binoculars used in battle. Kluge uses the moniker for the tank in his film text "Die Gefühle und ihre Macht." The epithet was indeed a common shorthand for the first tank to operate in World War I. The "Mark I," also called "Mother," "Big Willie," and "Centipede," however, looked very different from the tank shown in this scene of the film. Kluge deliberately chose the moniker to converge the emotionally charged first object of desire with a war machine.



Figure 82: *Die Macht der Gefühle* 00:03:12

The next shots are documentary footage of a dying child in bandages that has been burned all over the body and is most likely a victim of war. The child grabs a teddy bear. Next are shots from Fritz Lang's film alternating between their exposure in a circular spotlight and the binoculars that earlier spotted the tank. The impression created is that opera binoculars and field glasses used in war have a similar function, and that the same forces that led to the generic conventions of the opera with their sacrificial victims

for the sake of redemption also led to terror and destruction. Kluge's voice over contends that, "this child won't live long anymore," (00:03:58), while showing Hagen and Kriemhild's child. The voice-over comments laconically: "Then Hagen strikes the child dead" (00:04:25).



Figure 83: *Die Macht der Gefühle* 00:04:08

The plot continues with Kriemhild killing Hagen, and a fire burning down the hall in the end. The logic of war, in which one blow is exchanged for another one, is the logic of capitalist exchange of commodities, and not compatible with emotions or what Kluge earlier in his career termed the "female mode of production," in which each case is treated individually. What remains uncommented on is the popularity of Fritz Lang's film among Nazi officials during the Third Reich. In fact, parts of the film were used as fascist propaganda material, since Lang's aesthetics complied with the National Socialists' racial ideology. The German trauma thus looms unspoken over the images, reinforced in the uncanny coloring Kluge applies on the original film material.

The last sequence of the film presents one possible way out of the emotional dilemma, in which desires have become commodities, and which goes back to the same

forces that led to fascism and war: The stories of two very different couples are presented in parallel plots. On the one side, “Knautsch-Betty,” a prostitute, is bought by Schleicher, the “Pelzeinbruchspezialist.” Their “love story” starts out under conditions that are diametrically opposed to the bourgeois ideal of romantic love. Yet, in the course of the story, they cooperate to undo a crime that has been committed by another couple, Mäxchen and Schmidt, both from a bourgeois background, and in the course of their cooperation grow closer together. Their story has a happy end thanks to their rational use of emotions and their practical “female mode of production” in caring for the hostage whom Mäxchen and Schmidt almost killed. Mäxchen and Schmidt, however, who committed the crime for the sake of a diamond and Schmidt’s dreams of a stylish life, end up hiding in Portugal, where Mäxchen’s dream to have her lover all to herself comes true: They share a tiny room and, with nothing else to do, fight hard.

### III. A Case Study: *Geschichten vom Kino*

*Manche sagen: das Kino stirbt (oder es überlebt in Museen und auf internationalen Filmfestspielen). Ich halte das für einen Irrtum. Aber es kann sein, dass das Kino bei seiner Wiedergeburt eine Gestalt annimmt, die wir nicht gleich wiedererkennen.*

(Kluge 2007: 239)

Kluge's latest book, *Cinema Stories* (2007), is the most direct expression of his engagement with film up to date. It shows that the cinema for him represents the role model of how to create a public forum for what is suppressed in public discourse. It is the medium that developed when the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeoisie with its classical public modes of expression, like the novel and the opera, were in demise. Yet it preceded the new media, above all television, which for Kluge stands for the loss of not only the classical public sphere, but the concept of public sphere in general.

With this book, Kluge thus leaves behind his original polemical stance against the death of cinema with its traditional celluloid film and theater architecture that was lamented in *Bestandsaufnahme: Utopie Film* (1983) and embraces what Serge Daney has called "cinema as poetry".<sup>80</sup> This type of cinephilia celebrates film in all its guises and historical forms, and uses elements characteristic of the new media, such as the conflation of sender and receiver in the internet, to access and publish filmic material, and to

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<sup>80</sup> Daney, S. *Le Salaire du zappeur*. Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1988.

exchange and interact with the audience. The new media with their non-hierarchical forms of distribution and their possibilities of reciprocal communication, the universal availability of virtual worlds made up of digital bits and pixels, can be seen as an occasion allowing work about film history, and the meaning and potentials of the medium. With *Cinema Stories* Kluge effectively creates film theory through literary practice, employing multi-media techniques, as filmmaker Tom Tykwer remarks in an essay honoring Kluge's achievement on the occasion of receiving the "Ehrenpreis der Deutschen Filmakademie" in 2008: "Yesterday the farewell to cinema was a futuristic, seemingly unlikely vision. Today it is taking place. We say good bye to the cinema. And we immediately welcome it again, in its multimedia, ubiquitous, everyday form... In Kluge's universe of images and texts film history is omnipresent" (Tykwer in FAZnet, Apr.25, 2008).

### **"Primitive Diversity": Anarchy of Projection**

As stated earlier, within the history of cinema, the early cinema of attractions is an important source of inspiration for Kluge's work. In fact, the author argues that he does not engage with the silent films "for stylistic reasons, but because it is a question of 'radically' keeping open the elementary roots of the film" (in "The Sharpest Ideology" 24, quoted in Forrest 141). Even though Tara Forrest does list a couple of stylistic devices Kluge seems to have borrowed from silent cinema,<sup>81</sup> it is not the historical silent

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<sup>81</sup> "In films such as *The Patriot* and his 1983 *The Power of Emotion*, these devices include the color tinting of the image, a frequent use of intertitles, the employment of iris masks to frame the image, and – in a manner reminiscent of Lumiere's single-shot films – the extended presentation of natural and urban landscapes which are often divorced from any clear symbolic or narrative function" (Forrest 142).

film that interests Kluge,<sup>82</sup> but its essence, the simultaneity of realist and formalist approaches, of documentary and studio production, in short, of anarchic “primitive diversity” (Kluge 2007: 7). Early film challenged and experimented with linear time, as now clock time could be stretched and condensed, and played forward or backward. Rhythm could be created and gaps of time inserted. Flashbacks and dream sequences or glances into the future could further expand the perception of time. Especially the early city symphonies, montage films and documentary pieces involved precise calculations of duration.<sup>83</sup>

Kluge’s texts act out the rhythms and temporal manipulations of this medium in the stories that focus on early cinema of attraction, which can be found in the book’s first part, “Ein Licht das laut rattert.” At other times, Kluge’s “stories” imitate and transmute into literary form the different cinematic types, such as experimental film as opposed to conventional narrative film. The book as a whole thus covers the whole range of cinema’s potentials, be they doctrinarian or revolutionary, politically affirmative or critical, and acts out its effects on the body of the reader, who is thus turned into a reading “spectator.”

Woman in these texts appears at times as the victim, and at other times master of the machine. Her role vis-à-vis the entertainment industry and mechanical movement, especially circular movement as in dance, is ambiguous, as she seems to inspire her own

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<sup>82</sup> Siegfried Kracauer draws a realist/formative split between the early filmmakers Méliès and the brothers Lumière, the former producing fantastical journeys inspired by Jules Verne in the studio, the latter documenting reality, such as the famous arrival of a train in a station.

<sup>83</sup> The documentary theorist Bill Nichols calls this type of film “poetic documentary.” It attempted to move away from the “objective” reality in order to grasp the inner truth or essence of a situation, manipulating time and space. Some examples of this mode of filming are *Berlin: Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Berlin: Symphonie of a Great City. Ruttmann 1927), *Chelovek s Kinoapparatom* (Man with the movie camera. Vertov 1929), *Regen* (Rain. Joris Ivens 1929)

mechanization and death. As we have seen in the course of Kluge's film production, his female characters have certain characteristics of the "bride stripped bare," the allegory for mechanized femininity in the works of the historical avant-gardes. The bachelor machines with their mechanical "brides" return in the form of the apparatus of cinema in Kluge's literary volume.

The first of the *Cinema Stories* is titled "Solar Camera Jupiter" and stages the effect of early silent cinema on the viewer, and demonstrates the early viewers' resistance against commercialism. In the story, the audience, which is "proletarian" in that viewing expectations have not yet been standardized and the viewers rely on their individual affect within a collective viewing experience, does not appreciate the financial "value" of an expensive cinematic production by the entrepreneur Thomas Edison. Cinema at this point in time has not attained the fetish status of later periods yet, and filmic images are experienced directly without the filter of conventions or genre expectations, the star system and the Hollywood myths.

In the plot of "Solar Camera Jupiter," the company Edison uses an enormous camera in order to film a partial solar eclipse, a spectacle the entrepreneurs deemed fit to attract huge audiences and make a lot of profit. The preciousness of the "sun's gold," as they term it, should be reflected in economic profit: "It was Edison's plan to make this gold visible, 'sun gold,' and in this way to create a popular image of 'value' [Wert] within the spectator, so that it would be worthwhile watching such a film of one minute's length" (17). The cinema experience is introduced here as a trade practice, in which the audience's time is being "invested" in order to appropriate "value," a term conventionally used in reference to monetary exchange. In this case the value to be appreciated is that of

the sun, bearer of all life on earth, and thus the greatest source of value there is. The sun as a sort of “super mother” becomes a commodity, just like the viewers’ life-time is being commodified and exchanged for money. The machine created by Edison and his colleagues tries to subdue the origin of all creation to the mastermind of the inventors and technicians and to integrate what is beyond the social world into the market exchange system.

However, the sun in the short film does not resemble the sensual image that for example inspired ancient populations to worship it. In Edison’s short film, the image turns out so banal that it needs the explanation of the operators to be identified as the great hot celestial body with which people associate it: “An announcer had to explain to the audience that it should focus on these slightly moving dots: that they, who had paid an entrance fee, were the first living beings on the planet to ‘really’ [wirklich] see the sun and its wandering dots” (16). Edison’s realism here is not the type of poetic realism Kluge pursues with his emphasis on collective unconscious images that have powerful reality effects. The camera used as a scientific instrument strips the sun of its mystic aura and treats it as an object like every other commodity. The exact reproduction of the visual image of the sun deprives it of its aura. Yet, what people are looking for in the cinema is a re-appropriation of something lost with modernity, the unity of the “world of emotions” and the “world of objects,” as it had been formulated in *The Power of Emotion*. While Edison, like Keuner in the Brecht story recited in *Yesterday Girl*, tried to adjust the human to his plans, what is needed is a project adequate to human individual experience (Erfahrung) of time. The audience, which constitutes the public sphere (Publikum) in “Solar Camera Jupiter” decided that this was not a good film, and different ways to depict



the sun cinematically would be developed in the future. Kluge regards this kind of collective rejection of the scientific approach to reality a manifestation of “proletarian” or, since the Marxist vocabulary has become unfashionable, “emotional” public sphere.

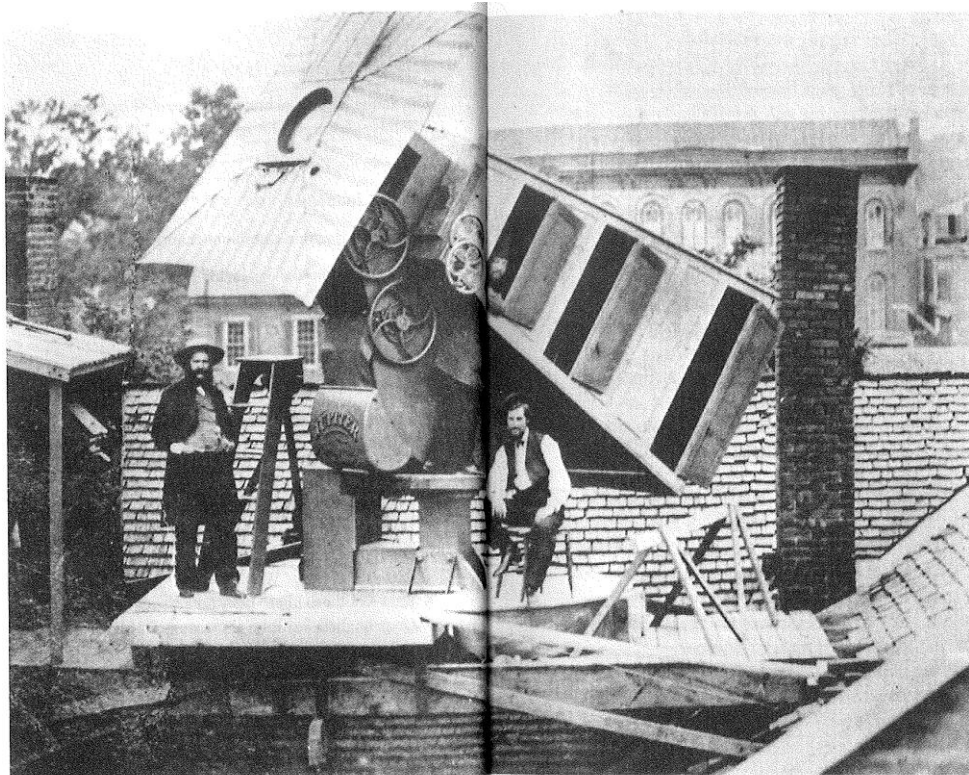


Abb.: Solarkamera Jupiter.

Figure 84: *Geschichten vom Kino 12-13*

In contrast to Edison’s company’s failure to stimulate the audience on the level of affect, Kluge provides his readers with direct sensual stimulation in form of a dialogue that is at the same time the description of an image preceding the entire passage (12-13). The caption to the photograph reads “Solar Camera Jupiter,” thus linking the image to the ensuing passage of the same title, which starts without introduction or transition. The dialogue that corresponds to the image stages one possible internal dialogue in the head of the recipient, who carefully examines the photograph, as no particular interlocutors are specified. In Kluge’s understanding, dialogues are the raw material of collective

experience. They provide each individual with the knowledge and experience of his or her society. In *Bestandsaufnahme: Utopie Film* (1983), Kluge describes the “essence of cinema” (“das Prinzip des Kinos”) as the “internal film” (“der innere Film”), the collective images in the head of each member of society that have been formed in interaction with the images in the social environment (45). Cinema thus resembles the principle of dialogue, the principle of the formation of thoughts in the interaction between “inside” and “outside.”

Accordingly, the dialogue at this point should be read as a stimulus that triggers certain associations in the reader, and propels the “film in the head of the reader” as a dialogue with the image on the page. The written dialogue begins as follows: “- Wer ist der Mann links von dem Gerät? – Das ist der Ingenieur. – Und der Mann rechts, der sitzt? – Das ist der Operator. – Warum die Steinmauer im Hintergrund? – Um nächtlichen Diebstahl abzuwehren“ (15). An authored narrative describing the photograph at this point would have prevented all potential alternative interpretations of the image, while the dialogue leaves room for disagreement.

In fact, the “activated” reader will very soon disagree, since the interpretations offered seem biased and fixated on the enormous material “value” of this camera. They stimulate the reader’s personal judgment as the dialogue continues: “- Warum die Steinmauer im Hintergrund? – Um nächtlichen Diebstahl abzuwehren. Einzelteile der Großkamera, Metall-Legierungen, waren von hohem Wert. – Und die Hütte ganz links im Bild? – Dort saß nachts der Wächter. – Das Hindernis aus Holz im rechten Bildteil? – Eine Zugangssperre, um Unfälle auf dem Podest zu verhindern, falls Laien sich nähern sollten“ (15). As the reader can easily see for himself in the photograph, there is no

protective wall or barrier against laymen as the “expert,” the knowing subject in this staged conversation, claims. The impressive camera is mounted on a rooftop and surrounded by other roofs. The protective measures are the merely subjective interpretation of the speaker, who exaggerates the economic aspect of this invention. The clash between image and text stirs the recipient and stimulates protest, which is what Kluge’s utopian film should achieve.

As the text preceding the dialogue indicates, a “system of mirrors” is at the heart of the machine, a system of reflection, codification and mediation that stands for instrumental reason taming a victimized nature: “Nach Öffnung dieser Blende war der Lichtfresser, die SOLARKAMERA JUPITER, so konstruiert, dass das Licht des Zentralgestirns in einer langen Röhre auf ein System von Spiegeln traf, die es, gedämpft, der seitlich angebauten Lichtbildkamera zuwarfen” (15). The “system of mirrors” in this passage only transmits what is visible in the empiric world. It leaves out the realm of feelings and associations usually connected to the sun. The cinematic apparatus is a public machine; it converts subjective life into communicable signs in the public sphere. The result is an image that is “gedämpft,” and thus stripped of the immediate effect of experience and lived time. While the type of montage Kluge deployed in his films was meant to zoom in on a subjectively experienced moment in history, Edison and his colleague do not reproduce a sensuous impression, but objectify their observation, rendering a material object more abstract.

In “Solar Camera Jupiter” it is not the solar eclipse or the sun that is worshipped, but male genius, as the photograph suggests, in which two “bachelor” men proudly pose besides their impressive apparatus, which has no other function than to mirror their

procreative abilities. One could think of the apparatus in Duchamp's *Large Glass* as such a machine of reflections, in which the sun would function as the "bride" in the upper part, unreachable from the ground, where the male engineers are caught up in a mechanical process that seeks to reproduce her original sensual effect, trying to transform her into an image that can be traded on the commodity market. Nature with its ever-renewing shapes and forms of life is rationalized and arrested by a scientific apparatus.

The mechanical reproduction of the visual surface of reality alone does not stimulate the viewer. Something extra is needed, namely the dimension of the mythical, which Kluge calls the internal film of the recipient, the spirit of dialogue, in which collective experience is reconciled with personal body memory. Kluge provides both sensual activation of the recipient on the textual level, which at the same time engages the recipient in an activity of reading, and thus of common knowledge of signs.

On the sensual level, the text as a whole proceeds from stasis to an accelerated movement forward. In the first paragraph the frequent use of the passive voice and inanimate objects as grammatical subjects of the sentences creates the impression of a strange backward motion and impersonal technicality:

Die wichtigste Erfindung bestand in der Vorrichtung für die Blende. Auch räumlich war dies ein großes Objekt. Nach Öffnung dieser Blende war der Lichtfresser, die SOLARKAMERA JUPITER, so konstruiert, dass das Licht des Zentralgestirns in einer langen Röhre auf ein System von Spiegeln traf, die es, gedämpft, der seitlich angebauten Lichtbildkamera zuwarfen. An wertvollem Material hatte die Firma Edison nicht gespart. (15)

In the first two sentences, a spatial association (“groß”) is first abstracted to stand for “important,” and then returned to its original meaning. The company Edison, and thus the active agent in the story, is not mentioned before the last sentence of the paragraph, while each sentence is exchangeable. There is no necessary chronology here that would indicate an authorial strategy. Every sentence in the text operates in the present moment and seemingly disconnected from the next. The effect is that of textual close-ups rather than the birds-eye view of a subjective mastermind. The reader as recipient of these “short pictures, flashes” (Langston 225) functions like the system of mirrors at the heart of the “SOLARKAMERA JUPITER” itself. The reader becomes a part of the machine, a “Lichtfresser,” taking in as much information as possible, freely associating between the sentences and the two-page photographic image.

The narrative part following the ekphrasis in the form of a dialogue narrates the moment before the historic event of the solar eclipse that is to be filmed. The natural phenomenon is to be transformed from a living moment in time into an exchangeable, indefinitely repeatable image. “Experience” is thus to be replaced by a codified historical account, a mimetically realist, documentary recording. Kluge counters this approach of the filmmakers on the formal level of his narration with temporal gaps in the text. His descriptive and at the same time subjective account of the two operators’ perspective is supposed to leave the reader a chance to imagine the moments that are not part of the description, using “fantasy,” a term Negt and Kluge developed to mean something

different from pure “imagination.” In their conception “fantasy” takes place in-between individual imagination and the restrictions of the public sphere:<sup>84</sup>

Sie hatten die Konstruktion rechtzeitig für das Ereignis fertiggestellt. Nun mussten sie noch einige Stunden warten. Die Kamera, oder besser formuliert, die „Lichteinfangkanone“, sollte ihre legendäre Filmaufnahme zum Zeitpunkt der Sonnenfinsternis durchführen. Sie sollte die rasche Verdunkelung der Sonne und sodann die neu erscheinende Sonnenscheibe auf dem bewegten Filmmaterial festhalten. Zeitraffung war notwendig, damit die Sonnenflecken in der Dokumentation eine leichte Bewegung zeigten. Das wiederum verlängerte die Belichtungszeit, d.h., es fiel immer zuviel Licht von der Sonne in das System der Kamera. (16)

The two men from the photograph that the reader assumes to be the “sie” dominating the first half of the paragraph are waiting. Time seems to stand still as every sentence accounts for a specific fact, not an action taking place in the moment. In the middle of the paragraph, however, the text seems to shift forward to the moment of the recording while staying in the past passive voice, with the sentences, “Zeitraffung war notwendig, damit die Sonnenflecken in der Dokumentation eine leichte Bewegung zeigten. Das wiederum verlängerte die Belichtungszeit, d.h., es fiel immer zuviel Licht

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<sup>84</sup> “Fantasy” (Phantasie) in Negt’s and Kluge’s understanding, like “experience” (Erfahrung) takes place in interaction between the sensual individual and the semiotic public realm. In this case, the reader in interaction with the provided text “tries out” a personal version of the story. In effect, every reader will fill in the gaps in the text differently, which makes it a radically open narrative. See Langston’s interview with Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, in which Negt remarks: “This echo method – that is, constantly trying out places in the objective world where I implement my fantasy and reason – must be sensual. ...the world is actually the epitome of the objects of possible experience” (Langston 2010, 286).

von der Sonne in das System der Kamera" (16). In fact, "Zeitraffung," a time lapse, the subject of this passage, is what the text acts out at this point, since there is no causal connection between the two men waiting and the effects of the light in the machine during the process of filming. The effect for the reader is that of a superimposition of two time- images as they are common in Kluge's montage films,<sup>85</sup> one depicting the two operators waiting, the other showing the "Lichteinfangkanone" recording. One part of this heterogeneous apparatus is taking in, the other projecting to the outside. Machine time dominates human lifespan. Machine time is also mobile and exchangeable, and can be accelerated or slowed down through "Zeitraffung." The men in this passage have become part of the machine, which dictates clock time.

The following dialogue starts in a similar fashion as the first dialogue between philosopher and expert. However, while the first dialogue clearly referred to the preceding photographic image, now the questioner opens with, "Warum bewegte Bilder?" followed by the answer of the expert, "Damit es Film wird." Meanwhile, the segment has developed some motion, from the perceived stasis of the first paragraph, the static photographic image in the beginning, to a slow motion act now becoming film in the head of the reader, as the questioner becomes a more active interrogator in the course of the dialogue and actually replaces the expert when explaining how the operators of the copier had tried to erase the sun spots on the film material, as they thought these were dirt marks. Towards the end of the dialogue, it becomes unclear which side is expert and

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<sup>85</sup> "Time-image" and "movement-image" are the two cinematic modes Gilles Deleuze distinguishes in his *Cinema* project (1983, 1985). The cinema of the "movement-image" defines itself primarily through motion, while the cinema of the "time-image" is more directly concerned with time and memory. The "time-image" is a shot that combines the past moment of its making with the present moment of the viewer's situation. It is the unity of an actual image and a virtual image, and thus corresponds to Kluge's idea of the interaction between the "film in the head of the viewer" and the film displayed.

which one the critical questioner. The roles of the passive recipient of information and the active provider of information have become reversed:

- Und was war das Interessante an dieser Aufnahme?
- Das fragten wir uns auch, nachdem wir die Bilder gesehen hatten. Ein Streifen von zwei Minuten Länge.
- Hätte man die Sonnenflecken in das Zelluloid einkratzen können?
- Hätte jemand den Unterschied bemerkt?
- Die Kopierwerksarbeiter hatten versucht, die Sonnenflecken, die sie für Schmutz hielten, aus dem Negativ zu entfernen. Auch dem Publikum musste durch einen Sprecher erläutert werden, dass es auf diese sich geringfügig bewegenden Punkte achten sollte: dass sie, die hier Eintrittsgeld gezahlt hatten, die ersten Lebewesen auf dem Planeten waren, welche die Sonne und ihre wandernden Punkte ‚wirklich‘ sahen. (16)

The last sentence seems to comment on Kluge's own film practice of inserting voice-overs or intertitles that seem to explain the image on screen. But in fact they only stage the practice of explaining images. While Kluge's language insertions in his films often treat staged acts as documents and vice versa, or create dissonance between image and narration, the explanations needed to raise the "value" of Edison's film does the opposite, confirming the material's authenticity. The affirmative nature of the production does not stir any emotions in the viewer, while Kluge's critical approach and counter-montage activate the spectator/ reader.



Both dialogues mock the unreliability of linguistic signification and visual codification, as the interpretation is doubly removed from reality, the first mediation being the photograph and the film material respectively, the second one the interpretation of the photograph or of the film material in language. The obvious rift between primary and secondary processes in this case activates the reader, who should mistrust the two poles that constitute Kluge's dialogues, the knowing expert on the one hand, and the critical philosopher on the other, and rely on his/her own perception. The questioner from the beginning of the dialogue is the answerer in the end, replying to a final question: "Kaum ein Erfolg? – Keiner"(17). The audience thus has the last word in this conversation, and accordingly, the following paragraph adapts to the audience needs of a linear narrative and dramatic story development, both in the content and form of Kluge's passage.

What is needed, the third narrative paragraph suggests, is subjective artistic creativity and the adaptation to human time rather than a distanced engineer and a machine that mimetically reproduces reality. Accordingly, this passage narrates a more or less continuous "story" with psychologically motivated "main characters" (Thomas Edison and Edwin S. Porter) with whom the reader can identify. If the passage started out as "early film" and "primitive diversity," it ends in conventional narrative "film" that provides the perspective of a centered subject, the subjectivity of an omniscient author.

In this paragraph a mode of filming is discovered that satisfies consumer needs and deploys studio production, staged play, and dramatized action. In the content, again, document and fiction are inseparable. While the previous passages referred to Thomas Edison's historic trip to Wyoming in 1878, where he set up his scientific instruments for

the very first recording of a solar eclipse, this passage talks about Edwin S. Porter, who in reality was Edison's employee between 1899 and 1909 and, after separating from Edison to make his own films, is said to have been the first to use montage-techniques like fades and dissolves to render a filmed scene more "natural" than with the previously used jump-cuts.<sup>86</sup> Porter is presented as Edison's competitor in Kluge's passage. Though historically Porter never demonstrably directed a film about the sun, Kluge here recounts such a film project by Porter that was ostensibly more successful than Edison's documentary. In the text, Porter is said to have been a successful entertainment artist, who studied audience desires during his time as projectionist in countries all around the world and could therefore very well have created a movie of this kind.

Kluge includes further pseudo-scientific, fictional elements, such as the claim: "Man weiß heute, dass sich dort (in der Sonnenkorona) beachtliche Mengen von Gold, diffus verteilt, befinden" (17). At the intersection of fiction and document, which is the point where the reader's own thoughts are to be activated, Kluge inserts a statement about "value" which is associated with the poetic metaphor "sun gold," yet which is also associated with the material value of the "entrance fee" that the audience pays to see the film, as well as with the material value of the camera. Both, the emotional and the material are inseparably connected and condition one another, as the film *The Power of Emotions* already showed.

The first part of this last paragraph of the passage "Solar Camera Jupiter" lets Edison get a chance to speak, but remains distanced from its characters, using the

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<sup>86</sup> For information about Porter's relationship to the Thomas Edison company and his full filmography, see Charles Musser. *Before the Nickelodeon. Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991.

subjunctive and the neutral pronoun “man,” as well as indirect speech: “Die Sonne selbst, behauptete Edison, sei zu allgemein. Man könne, so rechtfertigte er den kommerziellen Misserfolg des Streifens, ‚Licht selber‘ nicht aufnehmen, sondern immer nur Gegenstände oder Personen, die sich im Licht bewegen. Er selbst war von dieser ‚Entschuldigung‘ nicht überzeugt und gab noch mehrere Varianten eines Sonnenteleskops in Auftrag“ (17). Edison’s words and convictions here fall apart. What is visible publicly, in other words, what could be captured in a film about Edison, would not show this double standard of an idealist who is forced to act practically, or it would need several images and more time. Literature here is the more appropriate medium for talking about psychological motivations of subjects. Because the text is now centered on subjects and “flows” chronologically, there is also no more space for the reader’s subjectivity and personal experience. Just like in narrative entertainment film, the recipient is pacified and rendered passive.

According to Kluge’s narration, Porter directs a film entitled “Die Sonne, gesehen aus dem Abstand jenseits des Neptun.” Porter is recounted to have placed beamers behind a velvet blanket shot through with holes that let the studio light pass through to represent stars and planets: “Sehr kunstvoll die Aura der ‘Ringe des Saturn’ am seitlichen Bildrand in langsamer Bewegung um die Sonne herum; das war später ins Negativ eingemalt worden, Einzelbild für Einzelbild” (18).<sup>87</sup> The camera of Edison’s competitor has a clearly subjective perspective, lacks authenticity, but gives the representation an “aura.” The studio film is a success despite its low budget, because it incites human imagination (Phantasie). While the actual sun on the negative material of

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<sup>87</sup> With “Ringe des Saturn” Kluge references W.G. Sebald’s book of the same title.

Edison's project looked like spots of dirt, Saturn's rings are painted onto Porter's material and appear "real," because they address the audience's desires on the affective plane.

In the end, the title of the successful "movie," meant to move the audience, is revealed: "Our Mother, the Sun" evokes a feeling of homeliness and community tied to a female, maternal imagery. It is not an image of a "mother sun" that speaks to the audience's desires, but rather the title, the words used. It is an achievement of literary expression in connection with images, which creates the "third image" in the head of the spectator. Just like the poetic language of the title, the film's style has successfully created a home, a dwelling for the viewers to feel comfortable in. The audience of "Our Mother, the Sun" does not actually watch images of the sun, but moving planets and static stars. The text also mentions that the viewers imagine they are looking at their own home planet: "One could watch the film several times, because so many thoughts were moving the spectator, who could imagine to live in such a great distance, yet still be able to observe the home planet [das heimatliche Gestirn]" (18). The material value of the expensive camera equipment of the Edison Company cannot make up for the immaterial value of having created a virtual "Heimat" that unites each individual audience member in a greater collective of an emotionally moved audience.

The latter pays off at the box office, and it can be instrumentalized politically. The problematic side effects of such an activation of proletarian public sphere are not denied, but acknowledged in the ironic-sounding quotation of the title Porter chose for his film. We seem to have the choice between commercially unsuccessful film that fulfills elitist criteria of value and cheaply produced movies that are valuable in their own right. The last sentence states as a matter of fact: "The successful version with the title 'Our

Mother, the Sun' cost only a fraction of the Solar Camera Jupiter" (18). Kluge unites both versions of cinema in his own text, which functions like a meta-film that has turned into literature. The ending sounds ironic, since the reader, as much as Porter's audience, is pacified with straight narration and has reached a point of stasis in passive consumption.

### **"Ein Vaterland außerhalb des Realen": Woman and the Cinema**

Already in the first part of the book, entitled "Ein Licht, das laut rattert" (9-48), the "female principle" is both motor and victim of the cinematic machine. There are other parts in the volume, such as the stories assembled in "Ein Vaterland außerhalb des Realen" (49-82), where Woman becomes standardized as the condition for and the product of linear and subjective narration. This type of filmmaking creates a "home" for the viewer, as Edwin S. Porter had done with his film "Our Mother, the Sun." Since this type of "movie," moving people internally, proved to be the more successful variant of filmmaking, continuity editing and a human perspective onto the filmed subject became the conventions of Hollywood and studio filmmaking. This section looks at the way in which women both fuel the machine of Hollywood realism, while posing its major threat and potential subversion. While "mother sun" in my previous analysis provides for audience identification, the system within which such identification works is a paternalistic "fatherland," thus the title of the second section in *Cinema Stories*.

Since about 1909, film scholars such as Tom Gunning, David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Janet Staiger,<sup>88</sup> and Miriam Hansen argue, an early cinema of attraction was

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<sup>88</sup> Gunning dates the transformation of viewing habits as occurring around 1908; Bordwell speaks of the "classical Hollywood style" between 1917 and 1960.

slowly replaced by what André Bazin in 1939 called the “classical art” of Hollywood filmmaking. Kluge relates to this “apparatus” in the segment “The three machines that constitute the cinema” (33-41). According to this passage, the “machines” that form the essence of cinema are first of all Lumière’s photographic apparatus consisting of projector and camera, which is the subject in the segment “Solar Camera Jupiter,” and secondly the economic relationship between the public and the entertainment industry. The “third machine constituting the cinema,” which is the apparatus of peephole voyeurism, brought about the “breakthrough to cinema”:

Es ging um das Prinzip ‘Penny-Arkaden.’ Es wurde nicht von Unternehmern erfunden, sondern entwickelte sich spontan aus Zufällen und aus dem gestauten Verlangen von Passanten, die sich in New York verloren fühlten und nicht mehr als einen Cent ausgeben konnten. Ihr Verlangen, wenigstens auf kurze Zeit aus dem realen Leben auszuschneiden und durch ein Guckloch in eine fremde Welt zu blicken, begünstigte eine Reihe aufgestellter Automaten, in denen Filmstreifen gezeigt wurden. (34)

The collective habit that has led to the setting up of the thousands of exhibition machines is made up of individual concrete desires. Instead of an audience in the sense of “Publikum,” where the viewer is part of a mass experience, the peephole voyeur is a single viewer, remaining in the dark and unseen, in a position superior to the exposed image. In contrast to this new kind of filmmaking the early attractions sparked spontaneous audience interaction and were accompanied by the viewers’ commentaries, since the films did not yet have a soundtrack. The image had been an exhibitionist one,

presenting itself to the viewer in the style of vaudeville (Gunning 2004: 43-44). This principle, says Kluge, constitutes the essence of cinema, which was amplified later, with the emergence of sound film that brought back elements of the bourgeois public sphere, replacing what Kluge termed the “proletarian public sphere” of the early cinema audience.

Laura Mulvey in her famous article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” argues that the cinematic apparatus of classical Hollywood cinema inevitably puts the spectator in a masculine subject position, with the figure of the woman on screen as the object of desire. In classical Hollywood cinema, the spectator is made to identify with central male heroes, while female characters are there to be looked at, for purposes of visual pleasure alone.<sup>89</sup> According to this position, the spectator is “masculinized” as soon as he or she enters the movie theater. Mary Ann Doane actually speaks of a “transvestite” identification with the male hero and subject of the action, or, alternatively, of “narcissistic identification with the female, object of the spectacle” (in Flitterman-Lewis 7).<sup>90</sup> The scopic regime that replaced the early audience of cinema attractions relies on bourgeois romantic ideals and the melodramatic genre developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century opera and the novel, the two media that were already identified as Kluge’s “raw material” for many of his collages, as they form the background of collective images and experiences

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<sup>89</sup> Other feminist film scholars and apparatus theorists have extended the argument. Teresa DeLauretis: “The cinematic apparatus, as a social technology that transcends the work of individual directors, was and is fully compromised in the ideology of vision and sexual difference founded on woman as image, spectacle, object and locus of sexuality” (Alice Doesn’t); Raymond Bellour: “The American cinema is entirely dependent, as is psychoanalysis, on a system of representation in which the woman occupies a central place only to the extent that it’s a place assigned to her by the logic of masculine desire” (Camera Obscura 3/4).

<sup>90</sup> While these assertions were made in the seventies, they still remain relevant despite the successful implication of “female modes” of filmmaking since then. In order for a movie to be successful at the box office, it still requires a love story that fulfills all conventions of melodrama. It still takes beautiful female stars whose faces the camera lingers on, and whose erotic attractions are prominently featured.

that shape our reality perception. The function of the “female principle” in film thus became standardized, resulting in the death of Woman as an actual, living being, just like in the opera Woman had to be sacrificed in act five.

While for Christian Metz and apparatus theory the emerging cinematic apparatus was exclusively one-directional and oppressive, and the viewing experience seen as an infantile pleasure,<sup>91</sup> in Kluge’s view the pre-signifying past of early cinema never completely vanished and remains subconsciously present even in the spectator whose eyes are trained in the cinema.<sup>92</sup> The viewer in Kluge’s opinion is thus both a private consumer identifying with a representation and part of a public realm, an audience in the social world that is affected by cinematic representations.

Concerning the public sphere created by film and the mass media, the modern individual has internalized the “fatherland” of narrative cinema and the market exploitation of voyeuristic desires, which victimizes Woman. Kluge wants to bring these circumstances to the consciousness of his audience. “Ein Vaterland außerhalb des Realen”(49- 82) deals with the fascination of the death of the “other,” the exotic, the minoritarian, or Woman in classical narrative cinema. In this part of the book, Kluge links the object of the cinematic gaze directly to the spectator’s fascination with death, and thus to the conventional opera plots with their female sacrifice in Act Five. The order

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<sup>91</sup> In apparatus theory, a strand of film theory derived from Marxism, the institutionalization of spectatorship is seen as an ideological operation. The cinematic institution in short functions as a mental machinery, which, “spectators ‘accustomed to the cinema’ have internalized historically, and which has adapted them to the consumption of films”(Metz *The Imaginary Signifier* 2). Metz goes on to argue that the second machine of the cinematic institution is, “the social regulation of the spectator’s metapsychology, like the first, has as its function to set up good object relations with films...the cinema is attended out of desire, not reluctance... the institution as a whole has filmic pleasure alone as its aim” (Metz 2).

<sup>92</sup> This goes hand in hand with his conviction that “we cannot unlearn,” which makes sure that previous times are unconsciously present in a pool of collective images and experiences “in the head of the spectator.”



of stories is historically chronological, creating the impression that the historical development of cinematic conventions went hand in hand with an imperialistic spread of the movie industry, and with the colonization of Woman as object of the gaze, a process that in its extreme, internalized form kills women not only on the screen, but in real life, as a sequence of stories about the early death of female Hollywood stars illustrates.

The first story of the segment recounts the execution of an elephant on Coney Island (“Die Hinrichtung eines Elefanten,” 53-55), which is still part of the early cinema of attractions, with Edwin S. Porter directing the short. The elephant is referred to as “der Afrikaner,” which makes it a representative of what Deleuze and Guattari term “minoritarian” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (291), a term denoting that which contrasts the dominant male, white, adult part of society:

...man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. ... In this sense women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian. It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman. (291)

Animals, women, children, and the “primitive” are associated with eternal becoming, while “becoming Woman” is a special category Deleuze and Guattari deploy

to describe all other becomings due to its fundamental opposition to the man-standard. Since the minoritarian is never in a position of self-determination, it cannot be oedipalized; it is not part of the bourgeois mindset, without a representative voice in the public sphere, and potentially subversive.

The story about the elephant shows that voyeuristic desire is essentially deadly for the minoritarian object of the film spectacle: “The 35-mm-recording of the enforcement of the death penalty on the African brought an unusual spectator frequency [eine ungewohnte Zuschauerfrequenz]” (Kluge 2007: 54). Just like the title “Our Mother, the Sun” in the previous part of the book, the mere announcement of “Electrocuting an Elephant” spoke to communal audience desires. In Kluge’s story the perspective of a production assistant is rendered as a subjective account that starts out with an introduction of the narrator “I”: “I, from Odessa, honoring every quarter of a dollar, in New York for two years, am lucky to serve as researcher and cable carrier for the great Edwin S. Porter” (53). Porter was already introduced in the previous story as Edison’s competitor, who developed an effective psychological realism in his films. About the project on Coney Island Porter’s helping hand says: “The whole effect of the film strip is based on the title, the announcement,” while the film itself did not show a lot: “After approximately one and a quarter of a minute, when the feet of the animal are burning, the steam cloud is discernible in the grey. Then one can see the impressive fall. The scene does not create associations with an ,execution on the electrical chair“” (54-55). It is only the word “electrocution” in the title, which creates these associations.

Meanwhile, the author Kluge spurs the imagination in the heads of his readers in referring to another film made by Porter and his assistants: “Later we filmed the

‘execution of president McKinley’s murderer’ (and surpassed the audience numbers of the elephant film). The recording was staged, the gassed convict an extra” (55). The reference to an execution using gas might spur associations with the ever present and never directly voiced Holocaust, an association that is corroborated in the last paragraph directly following the quoted passage. Porter’s assistant reflects on the most impressive moment of the execution as he subjectively perceived it: “The most exciting moment for me was not filmed: how the elephant lets himself calmly be guided to the courtyard by his keepers, he, who could have torn himself away and trampled down every barrier” (55). The associations in the head of the reader are those images that haunt the minds of the spectators of the documentary footage depicting rows of prisoners being led to death in the Nazi extermination camps. This association belongs fully to Kluge’s written text, not to the documentary “Electrocuting an Elephant,” and draws his readers together in the “public sphere of emotions” in the interplay between individual affect and collective experience.

The next passage moves from the “primitive” or “exotic” other to the female image as instigator of emotions once the medium is developed further and establishes formal conventions. This passage deals with Griffith’s epic silent film *Intolerance* (1916). The film, as recounted here, plays out three versions of female sacrifice set in different historic periods and places.<sup>93</sup> The economic failure of this big budget production is interpreted by the narrator (Griffith’s assistant) as an effect of the early death of the main female character, who dies in the segments set in early epochs of history, but

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<sup>93</sup> In the actual Griffith film, there are four segments. One segment tells the Babylonian story of the conflict between prince Belshazzar of Babylon and Cyrus the Great of Persia. The second segment recounts how intolerance led to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In a third story the massacre of Huguenots by Roman Catholics is told. Finally, a fourth account tells the contemporary story of conflict between ruthless capitalists and impoverished workers on strike.

survives in the third story: “It is evident that the market punishes a plot in which the audience’s favorite person, the mountain girl, dies in the very beginning with the early death of the film. I note: The story with a happy end has to take place in the past” (56). He thus makes the success of a movie exclusively dependent on the moment of female sacrifice in the plot, which, according to the melodramatic conventions of the opera, should happen in the end. The passage ultimately creates an awareness of the central importance of a main female character for success at the box office.

That in reality *Intolerance* failed due to other factors, such as its enormous time-consuming format and its fragmentary structure, is a fact that remains uncommented here. It is an eloquent silence, since Griffith’s episodic style with its allegorical intertitles and sequences depicting a mother rocking a cradle is very reminiscent of Kluge’s own practice of filming. The silent agreement between the filmmakers Griffith and Kluge, and, in extension, with the reader sensitive to film history, is that a film imitating the “female mode of production,” embodied in the mother figure that frames the separate stories, does not intend to make Woman the object of the gaze and victim of the plot, even at the cost of box office failure. However, in Kluge’s narrative, the reader, who is thought of as part of the public sphere or audience (Publikum), is to identify not with Griffith, but with his assistant, who narrates in the first person singular, and who defends the audience’s desires against the will of the director, who, just like Edison in “Solar Camera Jupiter,” seems to pursue his own dreams of grandeur: “If the mountain girl perishes in the first fifty minutes of the film, I whispered to him, the spectator is overwhelmed by grief, and the film ends. It ends when I will it, was the director’s answer” (57). The “message” Kluge’s text conveys thus depends on the reader’s

familiarity with Griffith's film and film theory in general. It speaks to each reader's personal life experiences and against a homogenized reading that conventional narrative film would propagate, thus arguably activating "emotional public spheres."

On the next page, as if to illustrate or comment on the story about the spectacular failure of *Intolerance*, we see a still from Kluge's montage film *The Eiffel Tower, King Kong, and the White Woman* (*Der Eiffelturm, King Kong und die weiße Frau* 1988). The image shows a gorilla and a seductive, yet at the same time fragile woman, together forming the background for the phrase "Die Utopie wird immer besser, während wir auf sie warten" (59). The Hollywood classic *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack 1933) is not mentioned, but the associations of the superimposed images "gorilla" and "female Hollywood star" immediately point to this cinema myth. The recognition value and standardized narrative of this movie has the opposite effect of *Intolerance*, with Woman serving as silver screen heroine and object of desire rather than archaic maternal image of love framing and providing for the narrative.



Abb.: »Die Utopie wird immer besser, während wir auf sie warten.«

Figure 85: *Geschichten vom Kino 59*

The image has been taken from a short film Kluge produced for television in 1988 and thus could be read as a commentary on his personal utopia of film, with which he by then tried to infiltrate the medium of television. However, the reader without the experience of Kluge's entire oeuvre will simply take the image as *King Kong*-iconography contrasting Griffith's less straightforward style of narration.

More than fifteen years separate *King Kong* (1933) from *Intolerance* (1916), and indeed, the cinematic "VATERLAND AUSSERHALB DES REALEN" (capitalization in the original 58), which is nothing but a different wording for "utopia," implying a home outside reality, has become perfected by the 1930s, at the height of the classical Hollywood studio production. In the *King Kong* plot, a female Hollywood star is taken to Skull Island to perform in a movie, surrounded by an all-male crew, including the filmmaker and her lover. Here the "beast" captures the "white woman." Kong is subsequently taken to New York City, where the filmmaker displays him for the sake of

fame through commercial exploitation. Just like the elephant in the documentary made on Coney Island, this giant ape dies in the end, sacrificing himself to prevent the death of Woman. The minoritarian in the form of the animal is defeated by the forces of capitalism and the media, and the “happy end” actually means that the female character succumbs to the law of bourgeois romantic relationships, which prohibits love between animal and human and forces the actress into the arms of a more appropriate partner, who is moreover part of the film business that turns actual women into beautiful images.

The myth of *King Kong* is actually a meta-myth that reflects on the function of classical narrative and Hollywood cinema. In the plot, Kong has to die, because he refuses to be put to symbolic death on the Broadway stage. By letting himself be killed, he allows the main female character to live. Ultimately, Kong and the white woman form a system of attraction and repulsion fuelled by the automatic forces of desire on the one hand, and social suppression of these instincts on the other. The structure is reminiscent of the bachelor machines and Duchamps’ *Large Glass*: In the plot of the film, several bachelors compete for a woman who is “stripped” of all qualities that would link her to maternal reproduction. She serves as inspiration for an all-male creation of optical illusion. The machine of male desire here is that of the movie industry and closely tied to market interests and popular entertainment of the masses.<sup>94</sup>

In the context of Kluge’s book, however, this Hollywood machine is put into quotation marks. The image is not taken from the original movie. It mimics the symbolism of Hollywood that creates a patriarchal “homeland outside reality,” a utopia

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<sup>94</sup> Schleier, Merrill. “The Empire State Building, Working-Class Masculinity, and King Kong.” *Mosaic* 2008, 41 (2). 29-54; Lorenz, Dagmar. “Transatlantic Perspectives on Men, Women, and Other Primates: The Ape Motif in Kafka, Canetti, and Cooper’s and Jackson’s King Kong Films.” *Women in German Yearbook* 2007, 23. 156-178.

coded masculine, which in the following passages of the book are linked to imperialism and war. The creation of a “home” for the viewer in successful narrative films that have happy ends and forge a romantic union has problematic political connotations when one thinks of films such as the anti-Polish propaganda film *Heimkehr* (1941) by Gustav Ucicky, the poster of which is featured in the passage entitled “Abgebrochene Matinee-Vorstellung im ‘Capitol’, Sonntag 8. April 1945, Spielfilm ‘Heimkehr’” (120- 123). In this passage,<sup>95</sup> the emotional jolt caused by the dramatic movies screened in the theater is compared to the effect of allied bombings that hit the cinema in 1945: “This was probably the strongest jolt [Erschütterung] the movie theater had ever endured under the management of Frau Schrader, barely comparable with the agitation [Erschütterung] caused by the best films” (121). The movie’s audience that afternoon is a company of Wehrmacht soldiers of the nearby barrack. In this context, “best films” like the featured *Heimkehr* are Nazi propaganda films. The cinema owner is a practical woman, Frau Schrader, who literally provides a film that tells a romantic love story with moralistic undertones and political implications. The projection room is decorated with bourgeois taste, a detail that is emphasized with special care in the first paragraph: “Die Holztäfelung der Logen, der Balkons, des Parketts sind (jetzt nach der Renovierung) in Elfenbein gehalten, rote Samtsitze. Die Lampenverkleidungen sind aus brauner Schweinsleder-Imitation” (120). The purpose of the cinema is to produce drama (“Spannendes”) through its atmosphere, the slow dimming of lights, music etc.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Originally, it was part of Kluge’s collection of stories *The Air Raid on Halberstadt on 8 April 1945 (Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945, 1977, reprinted in Chronicle of Feelings II, 27-82).*

<sup>96</sup> “Dieses Kino hat, was Film betrifft, viel Spannendes gesehen, das durch Gong, Atmosphäre des Hauses, sehr langsames Verlöschen der gelbbraunen Lichter, Einleitungsmusik usf. vorbereitet worden ist“ (121).



As the plot of *Heimkehr* illustrates, women characters serve a highly problematic function in films that serve as a tool for the propagation of an ideology. They provide meaning for male striving, representing “Heimat” and moral justice. The film poster inserted on page 120 depicts the character Marie, a teacher of the German minority of the village, prominently framed in the center between her fiancé, who in the film dies after being beaten up by Polish nationalists, and another man, possibly her future husband whom she marries after the happy relocation to the new, German “Heimat.” The lower half of the film poster shows a wintry village lane leading straight towards the horizon and, if one was to shift the vanishing point upwards, towards the framed woman that hangs suspended between the two men. The impression is that of a moral and maternal ideal inspiring the male heroes’ actions in the movie. Woman, it is implied, inspires a hostile and conservative ideology not only in the plot of this film, but also in the audience made up of soldiers, who are the victims of this day’s air raids that hit the theater. The line between victims and perpetrators in Kluge’s story is not clearly drawn. War in general is depicted as a destructive mechanic process gendered masculine that instrumentalizes emotions with the help of the mass media, and is indifferent to its destructive effects on particular individuals and their experiences “on the ground.”



Figure 86: *Geschichten vom Kino 120*

The more realistic depiction of a woman associated with war outside the plot of *Heimkehr* and inside Kluge's story is the materialistic, machine-like "Frau Schrader," who is exclusively concerned about the technicalities of the cinema apparatus and the schedule of operation in her bombed theater: "Sie wollte sich mit einer Luftschutz-Schippe daranmachen, die Trümmer bis zur 14-Uhr-Vorstellung aufzuräumen" (121). Besides being the theater director, she also works as the cashier. In Kluge's understanding of the "three machines that constitute the cinema" (see "Die drei Maschinen, die das Kino ausmachen," 33-41), she is the master of machines number one and two, of the projection apparatus consisting of camera (taking in visual information) and projector (projecting to the outside), as well as of the trade apparatus of ticket

demand and sale.<sup>97</sup> She is likened to a machine in sentences like this: “Als die Augen wieder einigermaßen funktionstüchtig waren...” (122) In her effort to provide “order” after the explosion, she puts the remaining body parts of the blown-up audience members into a laundry boiler and finishes her day in the air raid shelter, chewing a “sausage sandwich,” and feeling “not useful anymore [zu nichts mehr nütze]” (123). This feeling of not being useful implies that Frau Schrader has accepted her function as a tool or machine part that has to function and be useful. At this point, Woman has become enlisted in the purposes of instrumental reason, which treats humans as things, not just on the metaphorical level in film plots that cover up their political intentions in romantic love stories, but in the very real situation of war.

While the previous stories dealt with the symbolic death of “female mode of production” for the sake of Woman as image, machine or bourgeois ideal, the stories “Am Körper eines toten Stars nähren sich viele Geister” (73- 75) and “Der dreizehnte Buchstabe” (76) depict the real death of female Hollywood stars, whom the public feeds on, and who thus further serve the system that victimizes them, even beyond death. The capitalist machine of Hollywood cinema creates women who serve as mere images, like Olive Thomas, the silent film star whose death in 1920 spurred speculations of all kind, including murder. While in historical accounts her death due to a poisonous mixture of bichloride was declared accidental, Kluge’s text starts out with the assumption of her suicide. Kluge invents all the details of Thomas’ death in this passage,<sup>98</sup> creating the

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<sup>97</sup> The third machine that constitutes the essence of cinema according to Kluge is that of peephole voyeurism, the relationship between voyeur and object of the gaze. While most other women presented in this book are part of this third apparatus, Frau Schrader is decisively not object of the gaze.

<sup>98</sup> In all official accounts, Olive Thomas and her husband Jack Pickford went to Paris together, and after a night of partying Thomas accidentally swallowed the deadly mixture in the presence of her husband.

illusion of an objective account: “Olive Thomas, ein Künstlername. Warum hatte Olive Thomas sich umgebracht?” and goes on to describe the circumstances of this death in minute detail as a counter-story to the official discourse surrounding this star:

Olive war nach Paris vorausgefahren. Sie wollte Antiquitäten und Kleider einkaufen. Dann war sie im Club Maldoror gesehen worden, mit Figuren der französischen Unterwelt. Zwei Tage bevor Jack Pickford nach Paris nachkommen wollte, wurde sie im Hotel Crillon an der Place de la Concorde – es war ein Septembermorgen – auf dem Boden ihres Zimmers gefunden. Ein Zobel-Cape war auf dem Boden ausgebreitet. Darauf lag sie ohne Kleider. Ihre Hand hielt die Flasche mit dem giftigen Quecksilberbichlorid. Ein Zimmerkellner, der seinen Generalschlüssel benutzte, um das Frühstückstablett in die sog. Fürsten-Suite zu bringen, entdeckte die Tote. (73)

In constructing this story, Kluge stirs protest in anyone familiar with the star's fate. However, since the official account, that her death was an accident, is equally difficult to trust, this second, obvious falsification actually renders a truth, the truth that Olive Thomas served as a mere fabrication by and of male desires. Even the circumstances of her death are a fictional story told by men.

The deaths of female film stars are mythologized, as the blurry and very bright image of Olive Thomas, inserted between the two suicide stories, implies. They carry the melodramatic ending of female sacrifice into the world on the other side of the screen,

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Pickford's testimony emphasizes that Thomas did not want to die. See Vogel, Michelle. *Olive Thomas. The Life and Death of a Silent Film Beauty*. McFarland: 2007.

into the reality of the spectator, and further the exchange and conflation between the symbolic and the empiric world. In effect, reality becomes more like the narrative fiction of the bachelor machine, and the realm of codified narratives that victimize Woman has its effects in reality.

The photograph inserted on page 75 links the melodramatic plot with its mystification of the female character on the one hand, and the commodification of woman in the entertainment industry on the other. Olive Thomas is shown in “bold back-light,” as the caption reads. Her body merges with the “sun of California” that streams in through the window and makes her features appear x-rayed, glowing through the thin white fabric of her dress. Her body appears both “stripped bare” and mystified by Hollywood light. She is a literal representation of the function of women on celluloid. Her conjuring gesture invokes transcendence, while the text confirms her mere materiality and connection to death and money: “An jedem ‘publizistischen Knochen’ dieser Frau nagten einige der Figuren, die aus der Bekanntheit dieser jungen Frau Gewinn zu ziehen hofften“ (74).



Abb.: Olive Thomas. Im Hintergrund die Sonne Kaliforniens. S/W-Aufnahme in riskantem Gegenlicht.

**Figure 87: *Geschichten vom Kino 75***

Photographs are not ironic, metaphoric, or rhetorical in themselves. To use the words of de Certeau, photographic images never form a “closed circle” of meaning. They always only enter the discursive realm through the viewer’s interpretation and therefore depend on text, in this case provided by Kluge, and the context of the spectator looking at these images. Accordingly, Kluge’s stories with their inserted images cannot be interpreted completely. A rest that relies on the reader’s intuition remains. The borders of his objects remain blurred like the outline of the actress on the picture, of whom the reader does not know whether it is indeed Olive Thomas or a random image from Kluge’s stock of raw material. In the end his stories that claim to be historical are outside chronological time and official historiography and dependent on the reader’s experience and knowledge. This openness of Kluge’s book contrasts with the kind of cinema he describes. While *Woman in the apparatus of cinema* is ultimately killed, the end is

suspended in an ever-receding future in Kluge's writing: "Die Utopie wird immer besser, während wir auf sie warten." The process of waiting itself is the "land outside reality" that prevents fixed meaning and secures Kluge's "female mode of production."

### Unfilmed Images: Cinema in the Head of the Reader

Another image that centers on Woman in relationship to film and the interpretation of which is blurred in the context of Kluge's book depicts a woman behind a portable camera looking directly at the reader in an advertisement that reads: "Everyone can make films! You too" (228)!

**JEDER KANN FILMEN!  
SIE AUCH!**



Im  
Frühjahr und Sommer  
sind die  
**Heimlicht-  
Film-Aufnahme-  
Apparate**  
(Taschenformate)  
Ihre besten  
**Reisebegleiter**  
★

Im  
Herbst und Winter  
bieten  
**Heimlicht-Klein-  
Kino**  
die beste  
**Unterhaltung**  
im eigenen Heim  
★

Verlangen Sie Prospekt

**HEIMLICHT G.M.B.H.**

Abb.: Jeder kann »selber filmen«.

Figure 88: *Geschichten vom Kino* 228

The appeal in bold letters can be read in two ways. It is either a patronizing statement about the woman in the picture or an appeal to the reader, who is addressed as female, identifying with the image. The company advertising its product is “Heimlicht” and directly related to the private sphere of the “home,” the sphere with which women in bourgeois ideology are associated, but that also ultimately connotes “Heimat” and the “fatherland” that was the subject of my previous passage. As mentioned earlier, the central character in the Nazi propaganda film *Heimkehr* by Gustav Ucicky was a woman inspiring the hostile and patriotic attitude of the nationalists. Conventionalized narrative cinema as a “fatherland outside of reality” is a colonizer oppressing the marginal and minoritarian elements of society.

The image simultaneously evokes processes of reception and projection, being itself a photograph, but portraying a female photographer in the process of recording the recipient of the very image she is part of. Subject and object of the gaze overlap, and the image’s “message” remains suspended, as the “female mode of filming” in the picture also pertains to the associative “film” in the head of the viewer. This imaginative mode of reception, however, is also questioned, as it serves a commercial purpose in the image. However, the image as part of Kluge’s book as a whole also interacts with the context of other stories in the volume and with the contemporary readers’ experiences and sense of history, so that gaps in the seemingly closed circle of Woman’s commodification are opened up.

The story directly following the commercial image represents the senseless waste of life and technology at the end of the Second World War and is subtitled “The Camera in us” (229). This title encourages a reading of the previous photograph as an



allegory of an alternative mode of internal “filming” gendered female, which escapes the fascist ideological machine. The text, which carries the main title “Wie die ‘fliegenden Festungen’ im Bodensee verschwanden” (229- 231), is about an amateur filmmaker recording German bombers falling dead into Lake Constance at the end of the War and about the disparity between abstractly planned strategy and real-life experience on the ground:

Es lag eine besondere Sturheit darin, dass die Planer dieser Angriffe auf Friedrichshafen ihre schweren Maschinen stets erneut auf die Industrieanlagen, die seitlich von Friedrichshafen lagen, ansetzten. Dieses Terrain war längst zerstört. Trotzdem wurde es von der deutschen Flakabwehr in sog. ‚Flakfallen‘ verteidigt. Mit der gleichen Sturheit, mit der die britischen Flugzeuge ihre Angriffe flogen. (229)

The purpose of the bombings, accordingly, is not about eliminating a specific target, which has long been destroyed. The interaction between both sides in the war is more like modern mediated communication that does not acknowledge the emotional undercurrents in the exchange of information. It works on the basis of an exchange of comparable units, so one blow is answered with an equally destructive one. It is the principle of the commodity market and of the strategy from above that cannot relate to basic human needs anymore.

The narrating subject is not a single authorial voice, but an unspecified “we,” recalling the impressions while filming the scene from the Swiss side of the lake with a home camera that might have been of the brand “Heimlicht” from the previous

advertisement: “Wir Zeugen am anderen Ufer, also in der Schweiz, besaßen eine Amateurkamera mit Automatik, geladen mit Material aus dem Jahr 1938” (230). The filmmaker, who is at the same time narrator, stands on neutral grounds and recreates the filmed scenes in words, whereby the notion of “Automatik” and “geladen” might be associated with a weapon and war machinery. The film material used to record the events could not be processed after the war, so his memory, transformed into words, is the only source of information. In contrast to the camera, which can easily be destroyed, every human has the natural predisposition to retain images in his/her head by way of personal experience, which constitutes the “camera in us.” This organic “camera” proves to be more reliable than any mechanical model that is always dependent on a functioning market. The only factory in Germany producing the type of camera used in this story had been destroyed in the same destructive process that caused the recorded visions of violence. The camera as an industrial product thus belongs to a machinery of war that in the end destroys itself.

Technical devices such as the “Heimlicht” camera are just means to trigger the process of remembering, as the advertisement itself announces: “Im Frühjahr und Sommer sind die Heimlicht-Film-Aufnahme-Apparate (Taschenformate) Ihre besten Reisebegleiter. Im Herbst und Winter bieten Heimlicht-Klein-Kino die beste Unterhaltung im eigenen Heim” (228). The real effect of entertainment at home, however, is triggered through words, through a narrator commenting on the filmed images or the conversations inspired by the communal experience. In “The Camera in us,” the events are related to the reader through text. This text is more than just a neutral

description, but includes literary devices. “Fliegende Festungen,” for example, is a poetic image that could not have the same effect if represented visually.

The Heimlicht-apparatus consists of a recording device (“Heimlicht-Film-Aufnahme-Apparate”), as well as a projection device (“Heimlicht-Klein-Kino”), however, if the recorded film material cannot be processed, nothing can be projected, as is the case in “The Camera in us.” The human recording device is long-term memory, projection is provided by the ability to narrate. This “camera in us,” is referred to in the last lines of the passage: “Nur was wir mit eigenen Augen gesehen hatten, zeigte uns das Verschwinden der riesigen Flugzeuge nach ihrem Absturz aus großer Höhe. Dieser Eindruck verblasste im Langzeitgedächtnis nie. Der schwankende Flug und der Ansatz zum Absturz hatte eineinhalb Minuten benötigt. Der Sturz selbst und das Eintauchen ins Wasser: kaum 30 Sekunden” (231). While the mechanical camera reproduces reality mimetically and does not distinguish between emotionally tense moments of prolonged “internal time,” and homogeneous clock-time, the “camera in us” is more “realistic” in the sense Kluge uses the word, and as techniques of editing and montage can re-create reality effects.

Closely related to the idea of the camera in the head of the spectator from this passage is a category of stories in *Cinema Stories*, where projects are discussed that failed to be realized, moments in time that could never be filmed, but that appear cinematic to the trained eye. Anecdotes like “The Sun in an Unnoticed Wing of a Big Film Studio on an Afternoon Half Past Two” (18-19), “Unseen Image” (19), “Fourteen Ways to Describe the Rain,” (170-181) and “The Fountains of the Gods” (195-200) focus on a specific sentiment or atmosphere that is not visually reproducible and has to be rendered with

literary devices. Literature in these passages creates the utopia of film, since it deals with a type of cinema that cannot exist. The beauty of personal experience at a certain moment can only be captured in language, the medium Kluge chose towards the end of his career and in the form of this book.

In “Fourteen Ways to Describe the Rain” (170- 181) a filmmaker,<sup>99</sup> who is a cousin of the documentary filmmaker Thomas Heise and part of the circle around the stage director Heiner Müller, wants to film “steady rain” (“Landregen”) for the East German state-run film corporation DEFA (Deutsche Film AG). The section “Steady Rain” opens with a descriptive narrative that creates a sensual image of peaceful rain on fertile grounds in the service of human progress:

Vierundzwanzig Tage Landregen. Für die landwirtschaftliche Kolchese ein segensreicher Vorgang. Die Arbeiter hocken in ihren Unterständen, in den Scheunen und Häusern. Man kann das Mehrprodukt zählen, das nach Trocknen der Äcker gesprossen sein wird... Der Lößboden der Magdeburger Börde hält das Wasser lange am gleichen Ort. Ein haushälterischer Regen, haushälterischer Boden. (170)

The short matter-of-fact sentences and sentence fragments are centered on nouns, humans, rain and earth, as subjects of the sentences, which invite the reader’s identification. The “Mehrprodukt” or “value” created in agriculture is use-value,

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<sup>99</sup> “Vierzehn Arten, den Regen zu beschreiben” is a musical composition by Hans Eichler (1941) that was inspired by Joris Iven’s poetic silent film *Rain* (1929). A film project that was possible in early silent film, Kluge implies, cannot be produced in the German Socialist Republic, which needs rational justifications for its budget decisions.

contrasting the desire-producing machines of finance capitalism and the media industry introduced in “Solar Camera Jupiter” that tried to extract the exchange value of “sun gold.” The image created in the sentences is peaceful, almost archaic, and static, and could be associated with what Kluge once called “female mode of production” that responds to individual and subjective human needs and is not profit oriented.

The following dialogue broaches the issue of the difficulty of turning a literary narrative like the presented film script into a film. As the director proposes his planned film project “Steady Rain” to the DEFA dramatic advisor, he is asked: “Wie wollen Sie ‘haushälterischen Regen’, ‘haushälterischen Boden’ filmen?” (171) The project would have to use music and poetic language in the form of voice-over or title links in order to convey a similar impression as the few sentences used in the description of the project. Yet, the main objection of the dramatic advisor is the apparent lack of a “social statement” (172). Socialist art is supposed to stand in the service of society, while the director wants to film the “elemental,” because, as he states later, social statements are possible in the vicinity of the elemental:

– Alles Elementare muss man darstellen, weil gleich daneben Aussagen möglich sind.

– Durch das Elementare selbst?

– Nein. Das Nein sagt Heiner Müller.

– Pro Filmeinheit braucht man aber, wenn man die Mittel des Arbeiterstaates verwendet, eine Aussage.

– Man müsste prüfen, was das heißt: eine Aussage. Würde man eine elementare Erscheinung wie ‘Regen’ verfilmen (und anschließend ‘Sonne’, ‘Hagel’, ‘Blitz’, ‘Winterkrieg vor Moskau’), wäre man dem Film näher, als wenn man immer nur Reden über Filme zum Zuschauer transportierte.

– Was ist der Unterschied zwischen ‘Aussagen’ und ‘Reden’?

– Sie meinen, für filmische Mitteilungen? Etwas fehlt dem Film. Das ist die Kenntnis des Elementaren. Wo haben Sie schon mal einen Film gesehen über ‘einen Tropfen Wasser’, ‘ein Spinnennetz über einen ganzen Sommer lang’ oder ‘Blätter fallen im Wind’? (172)

The filmmaker’s standpoint is that the “elemental” can be more political than films with a clear political message. Heiner Müller, who is referenced in this passage, was a major intellectual stimulus for Kluge.<sup>100</sup> The two dramatic advisers, who in the end reject the proposed project in this passage, contradict the claim of the socialist republic’s humanism to treat everyone according to his/ her abilities. While the film attempts to depict exactly this type of use-“value,” the GDR officials want other, political “values” to be expressed in the film, abstract values that are ultimately exchangeable and thus conform to the capitalist system they rhetorically reject. With a hint at the contemporary German film scene, which tacitly links the story to *Berlin School* films to be discussed in the next chapter, the passage ends:

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<sup>100</sup> The dialogues between the two intellectuals published in *Ich bin ein Landvermesser* (1996) and *Ich schulde der Welt einen Toten* (1995) count as primary literature, videos of these conversations fill an entire online library at Cornell University (<http://muller-kluge.library.cornell.edu/en/>).

Später, nach der Wende, lernten sie (die Dramaturgen) Formen der Verschwendung von Volkseigentum durch Filmförderung kennen, die es sie bereuen ließen, nicht doch zugestimmt und das Projekt nach oben durchgekämpft zu haben. Es ist nämlich tatsächlich nötig, das Elementare wie ‚ein Fußbreit Boden‘, ‚das Wachsen eines Fingernagels an der Hand eines Verstorbenen‘, ‚das Vertrocknen und anschließende Gedeihen eines Grasbüschels‘, ‚die Säuberung eines Schwimmbades‘ zu verfilmen, damit sich endlich sinnliche Eindrücke, die dem Menschen begegnen, im Film wiederfinden. Die Sucht nach Sinngebung verhindert das. (173- 174)

### **Self-reflections: Kluge on *Young German Film***

In sharp contrast to the “unfilmed images” rendered through literary means, which make up the utopian alternative cinema Kluge envisions, his own cinematic production of the 1960s through the eighties as it is presented in *Cinema Stories* does not leave gaps for the reader’s imagination, as do the passages just discussed. The aesthetic of the gap seems suspended when the filmmaker’s own experiences are the subject of his written stories. Narrated in a rather linear and straightforward fashion, these passages use a very personal, clearly subjective tone. Read together with other much more critical, self-reflexive and formally experimental passages in the book, these accounts seem tainted with irony, as the author must be aware of the very different nature of his chapters. This of course would make them less straight-forward. Again, the intertwinement of the subjective and the objective is to be represented.

The book's last segment "Nobody Wants to Sit in Complete Darkness in Front of the Television Set" (238- 307) delivers a subjective account of German film and television history from the point of view of Kluge's own productions in the 1960s and seventies. The images used on these pages serve conventional illustrative purposes. Whereas previous photographs inserted between texts remained unspecified and the source anonymous, the picture on page 254, for example is a famous photograph of the Oberhausen signatories.

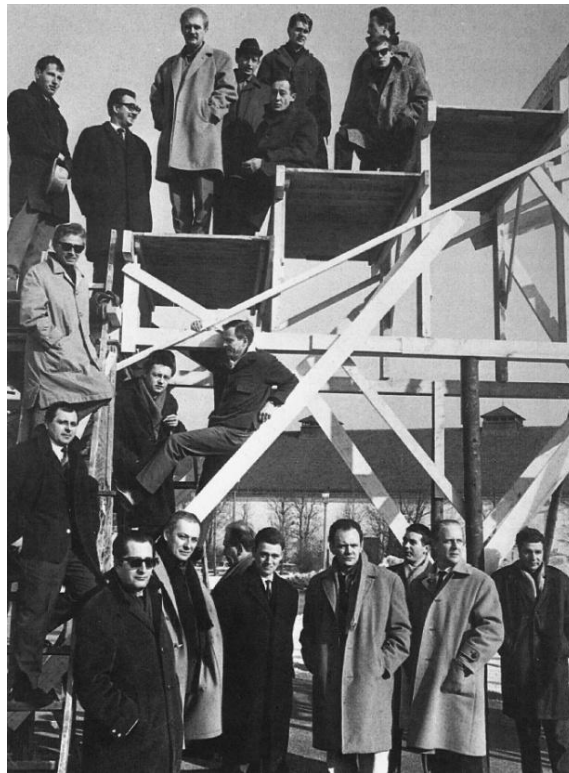


Figure 89: *Geschichten vom Kino* 254. Caption: "Die Unterzeichner des Oberhausener Manifests, Februar 1962 (Im Uhrzeigersinn von unten nach oben): Bernhard Dörries, Boris von Borresholm, Edgar Reitz, Haro Senft, Alexander Kluge, Hans Loeper, Walter Krüttner, Bodo Blüthner, Heinz Tichawsky, Raimond Ruehl, Wolfgang Urchs, Fritz Schwennicke, Peter Schamoni, Hans Rolf Strobel, Ferdinand Khittl, Detten Schleiermacher, Dieter Lemmel, Franz-Josef Spieker, Rob Houwer (es fehlen: Christian Doermer, Heinz Furchner, Pitt Koch, Ronald Martini, Hansjürgen Pohland und Herbert Vesely)."

The caption specifies the correct names of the signatories of the manifesto, indicating the historical point of time (February 1962); and even the signatories missing



in the picture are listed in parentheses. While earlier in the book captions invariably destabilized the interpretation of an image, here they add no irony and no second layer of meaning to the photograph. Instead they mimetically reproduce reality as perceived through the public sphere of the print media at the time. The absence of women in the picture and among the Oberhausen group remains uncommented.

The minoritarian is simply absent, similar to the way in previous passages and in Kluge's films what was secretly at the center of the processes of exchange between subject and object was usually omitted in word and image. The rebellion against "papa's cinema," it could be argued, was first and foremost a rebellion against patriarchal structures perceived as remainders of fascism. It was about a new way of filming Kluge would associate with the "female mode of production," against the mainstream of Hollywood's studio system, continuity editing and narrative causality. At that time, both the newly emerging feminist film, as well as *Young German Film* demanded self-expression and the right to a subjective point of view. Since Laura Mulvey's seminal essay (1975 "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema") the goal of women filmmakers was a new cinematic practice that would give voice to female desires by creating an alternative kind of spectator, one who would have to unlearn viewing habits of the classical genres.

The text following the image is titled "Die Oberhausener Erklärung von 1962" (255-256). The first half of this passage could have been inserted from a film history book, as it just summarizes the historical context of the declaration. However, while the second paragraph still speaks of "die sogenannten 'Oberhausener'," Kluge switches to the more personal "wir Oberhausener" in the third paragraph (255). The ambiguous position

of the group protesting against the dominant public hegemony while being itself quite conventional, self-absorbed and all-male, resonates in Kluge's description: "We Oberhausener talked ingeniously. We barely knew film history. One followed the advice of the other. We addressed each other with ,Sie'" (255).

Just like the narrator in the passage "The Camera in Us," Kluge projects his own memory, the "images in the head," in this story. In the last paragraph of "Die Oberhausener Erklärung von 1962" Kluge falsely renders the postulations of the Declaration of Oberhausen: "(1) The chance for a first, feature-length film; (2) The return to the tradition of short film (since we took films of this brevity for the essential form in film history); (3) 'A spiritual and theoretical film center' that could complement the mere film practice" (256). These claims are not explicitly part of the historical declaration, even though the Oberhausen group aimed for these consequences in the long run. However, Kluge, in using quotation marks and a manifesto-like tone, creates the appearance of the official wording. So, the passage has moved from the "filmed images" of official historiography to the "unfilmed images" of Kluge's internal film, starting out with a representative photograph and an objective account of the events and finishing with subjective memory.

The next passage refers to this shift. It is titled "The Unfilmed Criticizes What Has Been Filmed" ("Das Unverfilmte kritisiert das Verfilmte" 256-257) and is Kluge's subjective interpretation of the years of *New German Film* (1960-1982). Kluge looks at this part of film history from an extremely high angle, counting "seven to fourteen generations of filmmakers" within film history as a whole that had come before the collective film *Germany in Autumn* (256). With his bird's-eye view he detects a

“densification of the field of independent filmmakers until the protest movements of 1967” (256), thus deploying what he had earlier designated as “strategy from above.” He is thus doing the same thing as official historiography, generalizing and ignoring the particular, individual forces of the “strategy from below,” the people in the actual situation. The sensual activation of the reader, desires and emotions seem no longer to be the aim of the text. Instead the failed union of film and literature, and of the new mass media and film, which seemed to be possible for a moment, is registered: “Looking back networks and chances become visible, which the participants probably did not recognize themselves. For a moment there was the prospect that film and literature would form a close alliance” (256).

The next sentences talk about the upsurge of documentary filmmaking and the struggle of the workers’ movement during that time. The sentences seem disconnected and possibly revolve around some central idea in the head of the author, which is, however, not revealed explicitly. The reader can only guess that Kluge might imply that the cinema has created a new form of public sphere during these years, which reflects the general developments in society. Yet the developments in the other arts and media did not, as Kluge would have wished, join *Young German Film* in a collective effort: “In this way similar energies were bundled as those defining the public sphere of *New German Cinema* in these years. However, the chance for a ‘common public sphere’ was never seized” (257). No “common public sphere” could be created between the different strands of experimental artistic expression, as it was taking place in the “Stuttgarter Schule des Dokumentarfilms” within television, in which “Martin Walser, Lorient, Huber, Roman Brodmann and 27 others, close to the night program of Radio Stuttgart of Alfred

Andersch and Helmut Heißenbüttel” worked (257). The reader unfamiliar with some of the names cited will have to accept Kluge’s conclusion at the end of the passage, which talks about an invisible strand of vanguard art at the “end of this development” in the early 1980s:

Eine Fülle neuartiger Versuche findet sich am Ende der Entwicklung. Es entsteht eine Flut von Experimentalfilmen, einzelne Filmemacher kehren zum Kurzfilm zurück, es entsteht das Format des Ein-Minuten-Films. Inmitten des Fernsehens bilden sich Kerne der Reform, der Autorenfilm findet in den Kollektivfilmen, z.B. In *Krieg und Frieden* und *Der Kandidat*, zur Zusammenarbeit mehrerer Autoren. Es werden Filme dieser Art, die zwischen Kino und politischem Interesse vermitteln, zwischen französischen, italienischen, osteuropäischen und deutschen Regisseuren geplant. Das blieb unverfilmt. (257)

For a clarification of the passage the reader has the option to go to the section “References and Notes” in the end of the volume. Here, one can find a lengthy explanation of “The Unfilmed Criticizes the Filmed.” The explanation, which is longer and more plausible than the story itself, functions as the “unfilmed” part of the story. In the appendix, it is outside the main body of text and thus not part of the “official discourse” of the book. As it turns out, this “unfilmed” part of the story criticizes the “filmed” part, since in the last paragraph of the explanation Kluge admits his own complicity at the time in the “loss of utopia”:

Der größte Verlust an Utopie entstand dadurch, dass sich Filmemacher als Freunde verzankten. ... So haben zum Beispiel Reitz und ich unsere Kooperation

abgebrochen. Eine vereinbarte Kooperation in Frankfurt zwischen Fassbinder und mir wurde deshalb abgebrochen, weil ich (widersinnigerweise) die Regie des Starken Ferdinand von Reitz übernahm. Es ist mit Händen zu greifen, was besser gewesen wäre: ‚Das Unverfilmte kritisiert das Verfilmte‘. (334-335)

Kluge never uses the term “avant-garde” to talk about these “developments” and “utopias,” since he desires a “successful” integration of the type of public sphere of experimental film, and thus wants to avoid rather than create the aporias of the avant-garde. However, since this utopia of an alternative public sphere never materialized, since experimental art and the public sphere were never reconciled, the isolated film artists can in fact be categorized as “vanguard.”

In creating the type of a dialogue between the “perspective from above” and subjective perception and memory of a specific moment, as well as between Kluge the Believer of the sixties and Kluge the Critical Commentator of the present, *Cinema Stories* creates interaction between context and text as two countervailing forces, which are Langston’s criteria of the avant-garde after 1945 (9). Every image, and every text in this book, has to be read in relationship to the context of the other images and stories of *Cinema Stories*, as well as in the context of the reader, who is part of the new unified Germany that seeks to create its multicultural identity within a globalized world, while a collective public sphere in the sense that Kluge and Habermas used the term has vanished and been replaced by dispersed global communication networks and individualized information supply and demand via the internet.

One picture relating to *Young German Film* and Kluge's own past as a filmmaker is inserted on page 271 and depicts Edgar Reitz and Alexander Kluge at work with their camera. The image, read in the context of the book as a whole, seems like a satiric counterpart to the image "Solar Camera Jupiter" in the beginning of the book, with its two male operators posing next to the camera, observing intently the object of their gaze outside the frame.



Abb.: Edgar Reitz, Alexander Kluge.

**Figure 90: *Geschichten vom Kino* 271**

While the caption to "Solar Camera Jupiter" referred to the central object and most important apparatus in the image, the caption here simply lists the names of the two directors. Being inserted between the two stories "18 Seconds Ahead" ("18 Sekunden Vorsprung" 270) and "The Location Managers" ("Die Aufnahmeleiter" 271-272), it seems to comment on, expand or connect the narratives in both texts. "18 Seconds Ahead" talks about the "man at the camera" and thus triggers an association with the "men at the camera" on the photograph: "The man at the camera (there is no better eye in the world than his) 'anticipates,' 18 seconds before the actress experiences a real

‘breakdown’ that is not staged (the day’s strains, the situation of the heroine whom she plays, go through her nerves), that something has changed in the shooting situation and changes the optics to a close-up” (270).

Other than for Edison and his assistant in the first story of the book, who concentrated on the technology of the apparatus, Kluge and Reitz in the picture are focused on the image to be filmed, which, as the story implies, is the female main character. Her performance as an actress is not primarily important to the shot. The professional work is rather being done by the “man at the camera,” who zooms in on her face in the moment of an emotional stir. The description is reminiscent of the way the “bachelors” in Duchamp’s *Large Glass* “shoot for” the bride, stripping her of life and fragmenting her body to turn her into a cinematic image. Kluge is aware of this possible interpretation, since he inserts a footnote that links the cameraman to a hunter trapping and killing his prey: “The same camera operator recounts the narration of an Indian: A proper hunter stands for one day and one night and another day, unrecognizable for his environment, immobile like a tree trunk, at the intersection of two paths. Then the prey lopes by and is caught by the machete” (270).

The title “18 Seconds Ahead” of course proposes an uncritical interpretation in accord with the male perspective praising the ability of the cameraman to anticipate reality. The dialogue between the “official” discourse, between what is publicly “visible” on the surface in this short text, and the “invisible,” “minoritarian,” female perspective effectively re-creates how hegemonic discourse is at work in society and suppresses other, minoritarian, voices. With the picture of Reitz and Kluge at a time that could have been the time of the production of *Germany in Autumn* (1977/ 78), Kluge potentially

criticizes his own and *Young German Film*'s attitude towards an aspect of reality that remained excluded from the Oberhausen aspirations: the self-expression of actual women, not as theoretical constructs of "female mode of production," not as "bride stripped bare," but as bearer of desires and experiences that lacked public expression. Kluge's paternalistic attitude towards women filmmakers at the time this passage in *Cinema Stories* deals with can be illustrated with the following quote from *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin. Zur realistischen Methode* (1975):

Kooperation mit diesen Gruppen (groups of women making films) heißt, dass unsere im wesentlichen von Männern besetzten filmpolitischen Organisationen das Interesse dieser Frauengruppen rücksichtslos durchsetzen helfen: Drehbuchstipendien, Einbeziehung in die Förderungen, Bekämpfung der selektiven Ausstattung weniger Regisseurinnen mit Aufträgen der Fernsehanstalten unter Ausschließung der anderen usf. Dagegen ist es nicht kooperativ, bestimmte Realitätsausschnitte für Frauen zu reservieren. (224)



#### IV. “Nouvelle Vague Allemande”: The Films of the *Berlin*

##### *School*

...(S)o wie die Großeltern manchmal den Enkeln  
besonders gute Geschichten erzählen, kann das  
(Filmemachen) auch Generationen überspringen.

Also kein Ödipus-Problem, sondern eine  
Grimmsche Märchentradition, von den Großmüttern  
zu den Enkeln. (Kluge in *Revolver* 2003)

In the story “Fourteen ways to describe the rain” in *Cinema Stories*, an ambitious young cousin of the GDR documentary filmmaker Thomas Heise presents his project “Steady Rain” (“Landregen”) to the dramatic advisers of the socialist republic. In the end, his poetic project is rejected due to the lack of a “societal/social message” (“gesellschaftliche Aussage”). The director defends his project with the words: “But one has never seen something like this, and rain itself, slightly west of the Elbe river on fertile ground, this is elemental [elementar]. Everything elemental has to be depicted, since messages are possible in its vicinity” (172). To reconcile film with the “sensual impressions humans encounter,” it is concluded in the end, one has to film “the elemental”: “a foot’s length of earth,” “the growing of a fingernail on the hand of a deceased,” “the drying out and subsequent flourishing of a bunch of grass,” “the cleaning of a swimming pool” (173-174). The search for a “message” prevents this crucial link

between the sensual and the public, the link between lived experience in Kluge's terminology and its public recognition.

In an interview for the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary compilation of *Revolver* interviews and articles, Jens Börner states that "form is an at least equally political element as intention or the 'message'" (18), and Christoph Hochhäusler says: "...cinema, if it rests in itself, is political anyway. That means the purer the cinema, the more political is the film. The way the camera gazes, how the film is formed, this exactness is political, because it forces the spectator to act. A cinema that is not consumption is automatically political" (18). Because the market is everywhere, hiding the sensual "materiality of reality" (Hochhäusler and Börner 2001: 52), the depiction of things like "a drop of water," "a spider net in the course of an entire summer," or "leaves falling in the wind" (Kluge 2007: 172) resembles protest against this system, recovering the world of emotions and sensual experience similar to the way Gabi Teichert as *The Patriot* insists on a material approach to history, communicating with deceased body cells. This is where Kluge's filmmaking and late writing overlap with the approach of the contemporary new wave in German filmmaking.

*Berlin School* aesthetics of reduction and simultaneous stylization remind one of the works by Robert Bresson, Michelangelo Antonioni, Michael Haneke, and the Dardenne Brothers. A sense of otherworldliness is present in the haunting images of flat surfaces, transparent walls, and the blurred images resulting from moving objects observed from too short a distance. Visual obstruction, as well as vision through transparent media, point towards the invisible, the metaphysical, but at the same time imitate our mediated existence in the television age. While the former refers to the eternal

and unique nature of man, the latter suggests radical reduction of complexity, reproducibility, and exchangeability. *Berlin School* films are set at an almost apocalyptic end point of the Enlightenment, where absolute rationality threatens to tip over into mysticism.

At this point of fundamental insecurity avant-garde aesthetics become important again for a glance at the underside of reality's surface and the core of the spectral in what is absent. Just like Alexander Kluge, *Berlin School* filmmakers not only deploy strategies of estrangement and disruption, but they reiterate and confirm what they want to criticize until it becomes ironic. In the computer age the split between the primary processes of affect and intellectual processes of reflection has not only become more pronounced, but taken on a different form altogether, since not only the realm of emotions is commodified, but the realm of objects has become abstracted and virtual as well. While the objectification of desires was the subject in Kluge's *The Power of Emotion*, the *Berlin School* filmmakers deal with the affinities between the realm of emotions and that of abstracted matter, between the virtual realm of desire and the illusory nature of the empiric world. As in Kluge's works, female characters are the ones, who are at the same time determined by emotions and their sensual needs, while supporting their own repression as they seem to have internalized the principles of their capitalist environment. While in Kluge's films this contradiction left his characters victimized, helpless, or struggling in vain, in the films to be discussed here it leads to fatal endings or "deadly outcomes," the title of a Kluge story that dates back to 1973 (*Lernprozesse mit tödlichem Ausgang*) and was re-printed recently in *Chronicle of Emotions* (2000).

### **The world SUBJECTIVE-OBJECTIVE: Christian Petzold's *Yella***

Christian Petzold's *Yella* is a production of a DFFB graduate and first generation *Berlin School* filmmaker. *Yella* is often cited as an epitomic product of the *Berlin School*, as it embodies the main principles that have come to be associated with this type of filmmaking: long takes and precise framing, the sparse use of extradiegetic sound, narrative gaps and open ends. *Yella* is one of the better-known *Berlin School* films, and was relatively successful at the box office.<sup>101</sup> It made the label *Berlin School* a common shorthand among film scholars and a brand name that frequently comes up in the discussion of a *Nouvelle Vague Allemande* in the French *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

Petzold's successful feature length films for the cinema include *The State I am In* (*Die innere Sicherheit* 2000), *Wolfsburg* (2003), *Ghosts* (*Gespenster* 2005), *Yella* (2007), and *Jericho* (2008). In those films, as the *Berlin School* scholar Marco Abel correctly points out, Petzold typically visualizes the world as at the same time familiar and mysterious. "This effect is largely brought about through Petzold's interest in creating a penetrating, precisely framed, often almost austere mise-en-scène, frequently held in long takes and only occasionally interrupted by well-placed close-ups, quick cuts, and slowly creeping steady-cam movements, which affords viewers images whose attitude toward the world they render visible is clearly critical, without ever being patronizing" (Abel 2010: 263).

In his book *The Devil's Blind Spot* (*Die Lücke die der Teufel lässt* 2003) Kluge deals with what he calls the "Geisterwelt" of "objective facts" (Kluge 2003: 7). The wording he uses implies the inherent negativity of every "positive" meaning and value,

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<sup>101</sup> In 2008 it earned about \$30.000 on the domestic market, another \$965.000 internationally (boxofficemojo.com).

and the other way around. This thought in the foreword to *The Devil's Blind Spot* is supported by an image that depicts the following: "Five mules, surrounded by the waters of the Missouri, patiently wait for their rescue" (6).



Abb.: »Fünf Maultiere, vom Wasser des Missouri eingeschlossen, warten geduldig auf ihre Befreiung.«  
Die Angst der Tiere im obenstehenden Bild, ihre Geduld, die Wassermassen, was in den nächsten Tagen geschieht, alles das ist SUBJEKTIV-OBJEKTIV, d.h. es besteht aus Tatsachen und aus einer lebendigen Antwort.

**Figure 91: *Die Lücke die der Teufel lässt 6***

The animals on the grainy black and white photograph share a tiny patch of land surrounded by white waters that reflect the cloudy sky and some treetops upside-down. The appearance is that of a dream image, where reality and fiction flow into one another. Not the trees and clouds reflected in the water appear unreal, but the animals on their island. Reality, this image suggests, is but a gap in the flat projection surface that covers the world. The subtitle suggests that what happens in the picture is "SUBJECTIVE-

OBJECTIVE,” consisting of objective facts and living subjective answers and creating a tension without resolution or sublation (6).

All of Kluge’s works take place on these two levels, in the stories’ narrative space, as well as in the readers’ world, in the context of the receivers’ reality. The “gap” that escapes the devil thus also resides in us, as we are surrounded by a sea of mediated experiences and images on screens, just like the mules in the picture. To make us conscious of this gap, which is always inherent in the apparently universal, hermetic narrative transmitted by media images, Christian Petzold, just like Alexander Kluge, uses a system of negative reflections -- of mirrors -- in his film *Yella*.

Similar to the inverted world in the waters of the Missouri, the audience in Christian Petzold’s film *Yella* gazes upon the bizarre landscape of the Elbauen in the opening shot. The grassy area on the shores of the river that for forty years represented the German internal border is regularly flooded in spring. The main female character in this movie calls this area on the threshold between water and land her home. But before she is introduced as the agent looking out of a train window, the viewer is confronted with the sharp sound of the engine and the river landscape sweeping by, indefinable barriers in close distance interrupting the field of vision every now and then, blurring the image.



Figure 92: *Yella* 00:00:10

The opening shot preceding these images literally left the viewers in the dark as to whether what they were experiencing was diegetic or part of their own world: After the credits in bright red had disappeared, the screen remained black for a couple of seconds, while the thundering noise of the train's engine created an unsettling feeling. The soundtrack in these opening shots resembles the "shock effect" of the theater bombing in Kluge's story "Abgebrochene Matinee-Vorstellung im 'Capitol'" (Kluge 2007: 120-123), of which the operator Frau Schrader said that it topped even the strongest agitations movies were capable of producing (121). The soundtrack's harsh incursions from the outside remind the viewer of a violent external reality, of a present time that is not part of the film's diegesis, but belongs to the framing reality. The relationship between fictional realm and its context of production is also the content of the story, as we will see later in the film, when Yella has trouble distinguishing between the realm of life and death, between reality and illusion.

In the first scene Yella is on her way home from a job interview for which she had to travel across the water to what used to be the “other” Germany in the West. The two settings are on the one hand the natural river land around the Brandenburg city of Wittenberge, on the other hand the Expo site in Hannover, where the 2000 world exhibition took place. Christian Petzold describes the area as follows:

Wir haben größtenteils auf dem Expo-Gelände in Hannover gedreht, was wie eine Weltausstellung des Kapitalismus ist. Der Kapitalismus soll dort sehr schön aussehen. Es gibt keine Fabriken, keine Kinderarbeit und keine Ausbeutung. Zugleich hat die Natur einen festen Ort in diesen Entwürfen. Die Parklandschaften sind nicht dazu da, dass man sich darin aufhält, sondern dazu, dass sie ein Panorama ergeben. Jemand, der in einer Planungspause ans Fenster tritt, kann sich so der Welt vergewissern. (TAZ 2007, 02/15)

The world exhibition, this “parliament of things” is also a motive in Kluge’s work as I discussed it in the film *The Power of Emotion*, which is about the intertwining of the world of emotions and the world of objects. However, while Kluge’s film dealt with the situation in the age of mechanical reproduction, *Yella* takes place in the information age, in which living beings and dead matter have become abstract, and the processes between the two realms have accelerated to a point where shapes cannot be clearly differentiated. The space captured by cinematographer Hans Fromm is often blurred and unstable as the camera slowly adapts its focus to its shifting perspectives. The precise framing underlines the subjectivity of the camera, which does not attempt ideal visibility and a clear recording of movement as is common in the action



genre and fast-paced productions. Similarly, the sound design by Dirk W. Jacob seems to imitate subjective perception, as moments of stillness are supplanted by sharp noise or amplified extradiegetic sound.

Sound and image in this film underline the suspension of distance in the information age, where travelling has become easy and less time consuming as it had once been. Fast movement brings with it the abolition of duration and of sensual experience, comparable to the way pilots in Kluge's literary accounts have lost touch with the ground. Time pressure in Kluge's works regularly leads to catastrophes, for example in the segment "Der Eilige" in his film *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* (*Der Angriff der Gegenwart auf die übrige Zeit* 1985), in which a businessman travels through Europe from one meeting to the next, "always in a limited field of vision" as the voice-over remarks. The protagonist dies in a car accident. In Petzold's film, Yella is under time pressure to decide whether or not to enter Ben's car the morning of her departure to Hannover, as a high-speed airplane enters the diegesis with the sound of an explosion, as it is common for movement that overtakes the speed of sound and goes supersonic. The characters are as startled as the viewer. As the movement of the airplane overtakes the speed of sound, it seems as if Yella has forgotten the past and her good judgment of how dangerous Ben is. She gets into her ex-boyfriend's car, where she is trapped and cannot escape Ben's mood swings.



Figure 93: The incursions of a thundering airplane startle Yella as much as the reader. *Yella* 00:07:20

Before driving his car off the bridge and into the river, Ben takes stock of his failed business enterprise, estimating the remaining value of his heating and air-conditioning company at 2,000 Euro. As he indicates, they had just invested 70,000 to 80,000 Euro in computer- and network technology. Analogous to the deterioration of material value, Ben points to the disparity between Yella's original emotions for him and her coldness now. As he believes emotions to be tied to material values, he expects her to love him again if only his business recovered.

At least it is this materialistic rhetoric that Ben uses to make Yella feel guilty of not loving him anymore. Throughout the film, emotions are compared and linked to financial assets. To some degree Yella buys into this model of libidinal exchange value. She will later try to send Ben the 25,000 Euro he needs to start his company again, as if trying to buy herself out of this relationship. At the same time, this money was given to her by her new employer and future lover Philip, who makes his emotions for Yella depend on her loyalty in financial matters. As if commenting on her emotional unsettled

scores, the dialogue following her attempt at deceiving Philip revolves around their next customer's "unsettled scores."

Philip uses the informal "du" strategically and as part of the discourse of romantic love, asking her out to dinner in order to make Yella feel she has gotten away with keeping the redundant 25,000 Euro in what was only a test of her loyalty. The next moment Philip switches to the formal "Sie" and treats her like a business partner who has betrayed him. Yella with her propensity to mix up the objective, professional and the subjective, emotional spheres understands Philip's reaction as a rejection of her not only as business partner, but in terms of their mutual libidinal attraction, which Yella would like to turn into a conventional romantic relationship that fulfills the bourgeois ideal of small family life. Philip refuses to give in to her expectations and fends off her romantic advancements with the discourse of money and their professional relationship.

In this way, Philip "educates" Yella, imposing on her a project of "Bildung" that is different from the bourgeois project Pichota pursued with Anita in *Yesterday Girl*. While the bureaucrat Pichota was singing operas to his mistress, giving her lessons in the canon of bourgeois culture, Yella's apprenticeship in the finance business focuses on acquiring a body language that conveys superiority, professionalism and self-confidence in order to be able to deceive, which seems to be the crucial task in the world of venture capital. Her original strategy of learning business English is dropped after she has made Philip's acquaintance, just like Anita learns that her studying French will not make her part of the university with its own codes of conduct.<sup>102</sup> What is really important for social success is adapting to the dominant habitus and discourse. Instrumentalizing emotions,

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<sup>102</sup> The assumption that learning a foreign language alone can make somebody more successful is exploited in *Yesterday Girl* by Anita's first employer who sells language records to insecure customers.

however, is exactly what Kluge claims has gone wrong in the “history of emotions” as he traces it back in *The Power of Emotion*. In “Die Gefühle und ihre Macht” Kluge compares emotions to “powerful proletarians” that should not be used as motive forces (Antriebskräfte) against better knowledge (Kluge 1984: 186). In this sense Philip leads Yella astray as he “educates” her about the way emotions can be instrumentalized and ultimately strips her of her “female mode of production,” her good will towards the weak and her trust in people’s honesty. Philip’s project of “Bildung,” inaugurating Yella into the “public spheres of production,” takes place in the car, which is portrayed as hermetically sealed from the world outside. Reality here becomes a world that appears projected onto transparent surfaces, the glass panes of car windows and of office towers. It is Philip who suggests that Ben talked Yella into believing she left him for financial reasons. He is also the one who knows Ben’s business cannot be saved with the 25,000 Euro Yella tried to send him, just like her feelings for Ben cannot be bought back.

While Yella interprets the world in terms of concrete aims for her personal life, Philip is making money for the sheer purpose of investing in new projects without termination. His mode of production is not, as Negt Kluge described it in their cooperative volumes, the “female mode of production” aimed at the satisfaction of needs and producing use-value, but an abstracted process running idle reminding of the self-inducted desire of the male bachelors in the avant-gardes’ bachelor machines. Ultimately, all is a matter of appearance: “Ein Verpackungsproblem,” as Yella will sum up the principle of business success later in the film. After all, in the world of venture capital, the world into which Yella is introduced by Philip, unreal and merely projected values have reality transforming power. Harun Farocki’s documentary *Nothing Ventured (Nicht*

*ohne Risiko* 2004) served as a model for the private equity company that Philip is part of. In this film venture capital is introduced as a high-risk investment on the basis of the expected future value of the company to be funded. As Farocki's documentary illustrates, the negotiations between a start up and a venture capital company can be highly emotional, as personal convictions and belief in the success or failure of a product or entire business idea determine the amount to be invested and the share to be handed over to the private equity company. In order for a company to get a credit, it has to prove its credibility, and make the creditors believe in the success of its business idea. In order to believe without direct experience or proof, however, there has to be something extra, something spiritual and beyond the mere physical. In effect, capitalism creates its own myths and acquires characteristics of the spectral. The realm of venture capitalism is capitalism of a second degree, dealing with the exchange value of exchange values, with the expected success of an imaginary product. This virtuality with its very real consequences in the social world has something spiritual and uncanny, which the film comments on.

Philip's secret business idea to invest in drilling technology for Scandinavian oil companies seems as random as the destination "Cairo" in the song "Road to Cairo" that is repeated in the scenes depicting each character's most cherished longing: The first time the song appears is in Ben's car when he follows Yella from the train station through the streets of Wittenberge. Yella dreams of financial security and family life, which is indicated in the intimate scenes with her father and in the scenes where she glances longingly at scenes of happy bourgeois family life when she first arrives in Hannover and later, when she spots the same housewife again, realizing she is the wife of Philip's

manager client. In the end of the film, when Yella has completed her “education” in the private equity business, “Road to Cairo” is playing in the car, the keys of which Philip has now entrusted to her. She knows that the family’s apparent wealth is not real, but built on a business idea that needs private equity funding to become reality. In the end, everything is up for negotiation. Yella has realized that dreams can become reality if the right communicative strategies are deployed.

Just like language, money is at the same time virtual and real, light and heavy. The very existential consequences of being without cash become clear in the very beginning of the film, when Yella’s credit card does not work in the hotel she has booked for the night, and she is threatened to be out on the street. In this moment she discovers the roll of banknotes her father has smuggled into her pocket. It has direct use-value and satisfies her basic needs in this scene. On the other hand, the bankrupt manager Schmitt-Ott carelessly throws around banknotes he cannot use for investment purposes. His use of money victimizes Woman, as he proposes to take Yella out for oysters to a place that “has pretty good hotel rooms, too.”

Yella’s gaze through the car’s window at the symbols of bourgeois happiness – a house in the green, a car, and a successful husband kissing his wife – is hungry and full of desire that may even indicate her erotic attraction to or identification with the woman.



Figure 94: *Yella* 01:12:19



Figure 95: *Yella* 01:12:27

In fact, in the scenes before there seemed to be a secret connection between the two women as the housewife, kissing her husband good bye, gazed back at the staring Yella. Upon opening the door of the bourgeois home to the intruder, the representative of Yella's desires feels her counterpart's uncanny presence and hisses "Go away!" It is one of the moments in which the stability of the diegesis depicted in Petzold's film becomes questionable and another realm under the surface of reality opens up, pointing to the illusory nature of everything taking place in the empiric world. It belongs to the same

register as those moments in which Yella seems to be drifting into her internal world and to the constituting moment of her present situation, the moment she crawled out of the waters after Ben had driven the two of them into the river on her way to the train station. Since Yella has joined Philip, every now and then the sound of running water and leaves rustling in the wind breaks through the surface of reality. The first time this happens is in the first meeting Yella joins as Philip's assistant "Frau Fichte." Her face becomes flat and empty and she actually breaks a glass, acting out the shattering of screens.



Figure 96: *Yella* 00:30:05



Figure 97: *Yella* 00:30:18



From the beginning of her work for Philip, Yella has troubles seeing the world through the screens the financial brokers set up to better distort facts and create the impression of superiority, which is at the same time a male superiority over the only woman present. The glasses Philip proposes that she wear in order to hide her eye movement clearly don't fit, and when the opposing negotiating party tries to incapacitate her, similar to the way the male newspaper editors discredited Roswitha Bronski's request to publish a story in *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*, Yella counters not with a pose of power as Philip would do, but with sheer facts and knowledge she acquired through lived experience, in making sense of Ben's failed business.

However, the abstracted world of finance Yella has landed in is a mirror world or projection, and tying actual life to this system is dangerous, as the end reveals, when Yella goes too far and speculates on the life insurance of a wealthy client. In this moment the protective screens and panes of projection are crashed. Yella's victim breaks the water's surface and drowns, which ends the story of Yella's "career" as a venture capital broker that started after she had managed to survive her own drowning in the river Elbe. As it turns out, everything that has happened since Yella crawled out of the waters has been illusion. The scene of her drowning is repeated in the very end of the film, after she has left the scene of the suicide "on the other side" of the frame, only this time a recovery team retrieves Ben's and Yella's corpses from the river. All that has happened in the meantime, it seems, has been inserted into a few seconds, a gap in the reality of the diegesis. What the plot after the car crash reveals is a mirror world or projection, similar to the way Alexander Kluge used mirrors or reality-reproducing and -distorting optical

devices in *The Patriot* and *The Power of Emotion* to comment on the virtuality of the social world we live in.

Since Petzold based his film on both, Herk Harvey's 1962 horror-mystery *Carnival of Souls*, in which the main female character dies in a car crash and subsequently haunts the world without being aware of it, as well as on Harun Farocki's documentary *Nothing Ventured* (Nicht ohne Risiko 2004) that documents the emotional undercurrents of venture capital negotiations, *Yella* could be interpreted as the materialized specter of capital, the personification of the desires connected to money. The erotic attraction money spawns is commented on in the repeated song "Road to Cairo." In the lyrics a woman longs to "get back to my children," getting a ride from a man with a nice car, who is smoking a cigar. Philip, whom Yella feels attracted to, represents the force of money. "Right to force a sale" is the phrase that comes to his mind when he sees Yella studying business English. While Ben was forced to sell his equipment, Philip is the one who forces such sales. The system of finance capitalism is a world of projection, the film suggests, and the main female character is at the heart of the projection apparatus.

The theme of projection is omnipresent both in the content and form of *Yella*, as much as it is Kluge's main concern throughout his career. After all, the public sphere is an institutionalized collective projection, as was discussed in my previous chapters on Kluge. In the plot, Petzold's film ultimately depicts two worlds separated by the water's surface, by mirrors or glass panes. Every now and then a crack opens up, and sounds from the frame narrative, the sounds of the Elbe River, seep into this world. Yella's

reaction to these incursions resembles the viewers' reactions to the sharp noises that seem to belong not to the film, but to their immediate reality of the film's projection.

In the contemporary world, as well as in Petzold's film, the fact that reality is a mere projection is barely perceptible due to the perfect illusion technologies of the information age create. In the film's plot the computer screen functions as a stand-in for the new media that have replaced celluloid cinema. Philip is the one operating this apparatus, which is the projection plane of desires for the new generation of spectators lacking a distinction between public sphere and the private. The flat computer screen reappears in the film as the heterotopic space of reflection for the wishes and fears of those involved in the exchange of imaginary values. On the night when Yella meets Philip for the first time in the hotel lobby, she sees a powerful wave as the screensaver on Philip's laptop. The aquatic image stands for change and revolution. A similar superimposition of a woman's face with the representation of an oceanic wave appears in Kluge's film *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*, when Roswitha Bronski first feels an "enormous force" ("eine ungeheure Kraft") inside, a feeling that is familiar from the movies. In Kluge's film, the wave is linked to the Russian Revolution. In *Yella*, it is more clearly a virtual wave, doubly screened and not, as in Kluge, directly superimposed on Roswitha's face to suggest the origin of the image in the head of the female character.



Figure 98: *Yella* 00:18:52

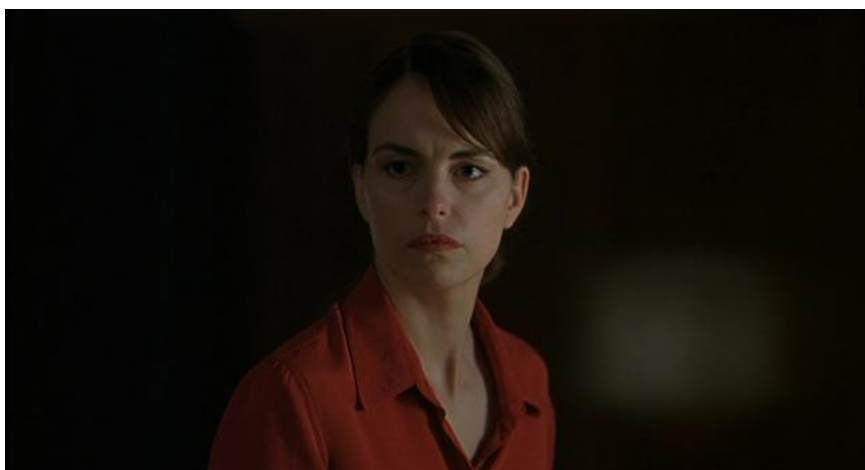


Figure 99: *Yella* 00:18:50

Yella, as opposed to Roswitha Bronski, is shown looking at the screen, encountering the wave in her environment. Her desires, this shot suggests, are desires of second degree, derivatives of desire. Deleuze and Guattari call private persons under capitalism “images of images” or “simulacra” (AÖ 264). In the private person, the public person is internalized and projected back on to the public sphere. The virtual feeds on reality and pertains to the human, who partakes in this sphere with all his senses as if it were real.

Accordingly, Yella is only on the surface following her own desires in her quest for a position in the world of finance. Since society even in the information age is still defined by values of the by-gone bourgeois era,<sup>103</sup> Yella, who actually works more precisely and professionally than Philip, allows Philip to form her similar to the way Pichota imposes his *Bildung* upon Anita in *Yesterday Girl*. While Anita took her “education” ironically and never internalized Pichota’s point of view,<sup>104</sup> Yella’s perfect learning in Petzold’s film leads to catastrophe. While Anita in Kluge’s film could not adapt to her circumstances, Yella is rebelling by conforming to the extreme, and provokes the death of a corrupt businessman in what in an opera plot would be act five, the traditional place of female sacrifice. The female sacrifice still happens in the frame story, but a gap has been opened, the possibility of a different ending that is inherent in this world, too, but that is not desirable, as Yella’s and Philip’s reaction to the suicide suggest: Yella is crying and defenselessly accepting her death the second time she is

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<sup>103</sup> See *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*: “All families are modeled on the bourgeois type. This type itself has perished” (00:22:46).

<sup>104</sup> The irony with which women in *Yesterday Girl* react to their male educators is also reflected in Pichota’s wife’s comment “Ernst, ach Ernst, was du mich alles lernst” (00:52:42).

shown sitting next to Ben, who pulls the steering wheel around towards the edge of the bridge.

Philip's face as he helps pulling Yella's victim out of the pond is cold and serious like in previous scenes when Yella failed his tests of her trustworthiness, which were also tests of her ability to break with her bourgeois conceptions of family roles. In her first test Philip caught her trying to send his money to Ben. Her second mistake causing Philip's mistrust was her wish to drive him to her father's house. As the viewer gets used to Philip's moody outbreaks, the impression is created that Yella fails her last and most important test when acting in his place, gambling for money in her function as private equity representative. If the deal is successful, she can provide Philip with the money to fulfill his dream of the drilling company. If Philip's dream is fulfilled, he might settle down and be able to comfort Yella. Ultimately, Philip represents an imaginary value, a future expectation of happiness for Yella, who comes very close to realizing her personal dreams by instrumentalizing the tools of the masculine world of deception and symbolic power.

The gap for a possibly happy ending, for the "devil's blind spot" to speak with Alexander Kluge,<sup>105</sup> is opened through the viewer, who, just like the character Yella in the plot, goes through Philip's education in business rhetorics and psychological manipulation. The viewer "believes" in the appearance of continuous plot until the very last seconds that reveal the existence of two worlds, of the story's frame. The threshold between the alternative world in the gap of reality in the film's diegesis is analogous to a

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<sup>105</sup> Stephanie Harris in her article for the *Germanic Review* analyzes Kluge's stories as quests for "Auswege" out of the historical necessity. The gaps in the texture of reality, which provide for such escape routes, are opened up through the so-called subjective-objective relationship of the living response to physical events and empirical reality (Harris 298).

threshold of second degree, namely that of the television or cinematic screen that separates the viewer from the film's diegesis. The double framing thus created is reminiscent of Kluge's writing, where each piece of text and each image have to be read in the context of other texts and images in the same book. Yella in this film is both the figure of identification for the viewer, and impersonation of the camera, through which the viewer perceives the diegetic world. While Thomas Elsaesser in 1986 said about Fassbinder films that it seemed as if "all secondary identifications were collapsed into primary identification, and the act of seeing itself the center of the narrative" (540), the center of the narrative in Petzold's film is the medium and mediation. Body language and the business language code are supported by mediating devices, screens, mirrors and other reflecting surfaces between reality and projection.

### **Defying Bourgeois Family Structures: Christoph Hochhäusler's *This Very Moment* (2003)**

Christoph Hochhäusler has in the past been renowned as a scriptwriter for Christian Petzold. He wrote the scripts for *The State I am In* and *Ghosts* before turning to his own projects as a filmmaker. In recent years, and especially since the international success of *This Very Moment*, which had its first screening at the Berlinale 2003, Hochhäusler has directed more masterpieces of *Berlin School* aesthetics and contributed to the collective project *Dreileben* (Dominik Graf, Christian Petzold, Christoph Hochhäusler 2011) with *Eine Minute Dunkel. Unter dir die Stadt* (2010) deals with the detachment of the finance world with its abstracted transactions in Frankfurt am Main from basic human relationships and sensual experiences. The dichotomy between

“above” and “below” in the depiction of the skyscraper environment of the bankers on the one hand and life on the street on the other is reminiscent of Kluge’s aesthetics in *The Power of Emotion*.

There are striking parallels between Hochhäusler’s films and the works of Alexander Kluge. In Hochhäusler’s short film *The Séance* (2009, part of the omnibus film *Deutschland ‘09*) a narrator tells the futuristic tale of mankind shifted to the dark side of the moon, where personal memories are being collectively erased and cultural artifacts from earth get lost in space. Images out of fantasy books and old photographs illustrate the narrative similar to the way Kluge’s montage sequences in the films discussed in chapter two function. The story reminds one of Kluge’s science fiction in *Learning Processes with a Deadly Outcome* (1973). While Kluge’s apocalyptic account ends with the self-destruction of the Martian warrior population, in Hochhäusler’s tale a woman manages to evade her “séance” in which her memory is to be erased. She escapes to the other side of the moon, from where planet earth is visible and, dying, writes “Deutschland” into the sand, a word that to future generations on the moon becomes a term for an unspecified longing for an unknown past and home.

That a specific identity and experience matching the word got lost in the aftermath of the Second World War was already implied in Kluge’s *The Patriot*, where the author inserts the text: “Je näher man ein Wort anschaut, desto ferner schaut es zurück” in a sequence toward the end of the film, followed by a single plate carrying capitalized letters in white on black forming the word “DEUTSCHLAND.” The word in the 1970s, it is implied, has no relationship to the experiences of destruction and murder



handed down to the generation born after the war as absence. It stands for something unreal, uncanny, the spectral aspects of the German postwar public.

Now, more than twenty years after the release of Kluge's montage film, it could be argued with Hochhäusler's films *This very Moment* and *The City Below*, the absence of identity and a German public sphere is so severe that human lives are at stake. Affect and the primary drives, when not checked through fundamental collective values and an understanding of belonging together as a group, kill the weakest of society, as *This Very Moment* suggests, and lead to terrorism, as implied in the ending of *The City Below*.

While in *Yella* the bourgeois family constellation remained the ultimate goal of female desire that proved incompatible with the absolute appropriation of the cynic system of finance capitalism in her work environment, in Christoph Hochhäusler's film *This Very Moment* the need for spiritual fulfillment and meaning extends to the political realm -- to the level of states. It reveals that politics are intimately linked to libidinal structures, and ultimately to the private sphere of the family. In the film, family structures are depicted as hierarchic and counterproductive to altruistic values such as love and friendship. "Friendship",<sup>106</sup> "partnership," and "good neighborhood" ("gute Nachbarschaft"),<sup>107</sup> however, are the terms promoted in EU discourse when it comes to the relationship between its member states. Especially the last rounds of EU enlargement to include countries of Eastern Europe sparked image campaigns promoting these

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<sup>106</sup> The values of the EU Erasmus Student Network as stated on its homepage: **"unity in diversity, diversity in the unity..., students helping students..., fun in friendship and respect..., international dimension of the life..., love for Europe as an area of peace and cultural exchange..., openness with tolerance..., cooperation in the integration"** (<http://www.esn.org/content/what-esn>).

<sup>107</sup> Especially in Germany, the Europe-discourse heavily uses family- and friendship imagery. On the German language EU internet portal "Europa", links lead to the topics "Die Europäische Union – eine immer größere Familie" and "Gute Nachbarschaft" ([http://europa.eu/abc/keyfigures/index\\_de.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/keyfigures/index_de.htm)).

idealistic values. However, just like the bourgeois family, the EU “family” is first and foremost an economic unit,<sup>108</sup> and as such based on commodity exchange and the separation of the private and the public sphere.

*This Very Moment* is modeled after an old German myth, the Grimms’ fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel.” Music and lighting in this film underline a fundamental ambiguity between mass produced smooth surfaces on the one hand, and temporal depth and decay on the other. The film’s aesthetics point to the two distinct modes of treating one’s past: one can either treat it as part of the self, or blend out discomfiting aspects of history, as has been done in Germany for large parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>109</sup> Only recently has the violent past of twentieth-century population politics become an object of public discourse. Personal traumatic experiences and their repercussions in contemporary popular consciousness remain a largely private matter that cannot be addressed in the official interaction between Germany and Poland.

The relationship between Germany and its eastern Catholic neighbor is characterized by great forces of attraction and repulsion, as well as mutual projection. Both countries have a passionate relationship with their borders, which have a long

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<sup>108</sup> The “EU-family” is also invoked in international press releases, as this article on the EU’s financial recovery strategies shows: “EU: Family Ties with rich cousin Germany turn bittersweet” (Julio Godoy. *IPS*. Feb.24, 2011: <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=54609>).

<sup>109</sup> *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich (1963) analyses the socio-psychological condition of the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1960s, arguing that the majority of Germans after 1945 eliminated National Socialism from their collective consciousness, which led to an almost absent reworking of the past and the perception of a “zero hour” at the end of the war. In 1986/87 the so-called “Historikerstreit” debated the status of the Holocaust as part of German historical consciousness and national identity, and the possible perception of National Socialists as victims (Ernst Nolte’s argument).

history of being contested.<sup>110</sup> The most sensitive aspect in this relationship represents Hitler's destruction of the young Republic of Poland, founded after WWI. Under Nazi occupation, the city of Warsaw, including the largest Jewish ghetto in Europe, was obliterated. Thousands of Poles, the majority of them Jewish, were sent to work camps, and the national elite, made up of intellectuals, military, and political leaders, partially destroyed. With the German defeat at the end of the war, thousands of ethnic Germans were expelled or fled from what became Polish territory after the Potsdam treaty 1945. A significant portion of these expellees expected to eventually return to their "Heimat" east of the Oder and Neisse Rivers.<sup>111</sup> The collapse of the Warsaw Pact at the end of the Cold War raised old anxieties along the German-Polish border. The term "frontier" became a synonym for the newly established eastern border of the European Union, which as of 1990 was the border between re-unified Germany and Poland.<sup>112</sup> The relationship between Germany and Poland today is still marked by significant asymmetries of power, which create emotional distance between the two societies.<sup>113</sup> When considering German

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<sup>110</sup> The history of the Polish-German relationship cannot be reproduced here in full. For an overview of border conflicts between both countries see "Deutschland und Polen." *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (APuZ 5-6 2005).

<sup>111</sup> The *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin dedicated a special exhibit to the topic of flight and expulsion in 2008: <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/wk2/kriegsverlauf/massenflucht/>. For more information on the topic, see Bernd Faulenbach: "Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus den Gebieten jenseits von Oder und Neiße. Zur wissenschaftlichen und öffentlichen Diskussion in Deutschland." *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (B 51-52/2002).

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, the pamphlet "A Future Without Frontiers: Young People's Europe." *Office for Official Publications of the European Communities*, 1999. For more information on the Polish-German relationship since the second World War, see *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung*, Heft 273, Dieter Bingen; the public television project on Germans and Poles at: [http://www.deutsche-und-polen.de/index\\_jsp.html](http://www.deutsche-und-polen.de/index_jsp.html)

<sup>113</sup> While both countries cover about the same amount of territory, the German population is more than twice as large as the Polish one, the German economy ten times as strong, and the Polish military expenses amount to only 20 percent of the German budget. Germany is Poland's most important trade partner, while Poland is just one among the many export markets for its Western neighbor. See Jäger 2009 (no pagination).

and Polish film history, Randall Halle speaks of an anxiety or taboo when it comes to depictions of the neighboring country: “Even after 1989, whenever there was a general engagement with the East, Russia, the Ukraine, Yugoslavia, or even Georgia appeared in film as sites of German interest more frequently than did Poland.”<sup>114</sup>

The political hierarchies outlined above find their expression in the media, in the public spheres of film and television that *This Very Moment* comments on and is part of. The *Berlin School* is generally identified with exceptionally long shots, a static camera that keeps the actors at a distance, a mix of professional and non-professional actors, and authentic settings that remind one of documentaries.<sup>115</sup> These aesthetics counter the programmatic approach of television producers and the positivistic idealization of cultural bureaucrats advertising the EUs cultural programs. Hochhäusler’s goal is to activate the viewer via a disruption of the expectations. On the formal level the viewer is held suspended between identification with and distancing from the characters, between the writing of official discourse and the oral fable of lived experience, so that the disparity between both becomes obvious.<sup>116</sup> Primary identification with the camera

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<sup>114</sup>See Halle in the *German Quarterly*, Vol. 80, 2007. Some German films that do engage with Poland are Michael Klier’s *Überall ist es besser wo wir nicht sind* (1988/89), Jan Schütte’s *Auf Wiedersehen Amerika* (*Bye bye America*, 1994), Andreas Dresen’s *Halbe Treppe* (*Grill Point*, 2002), Hans-Christian Schmid’s *Lichter* (*Distant Lights*, 2003), and Henner Winckler’s *Klassenfahrt* (2002).

<sup>115</sup> The formal devices of Hochhäusler’s film and the *Berliner Schule* in general are shared with contemporary European filmmakers such as the Dardenne brothers, Pedro Costa, Michael Haneke and the filmmakers of the Danish *Dogme 95* movement, such as Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, who are discussed and interviewed in *Revolver*, the central journal where *Berliner Schule* filmmakers exchange their ideas.

<sup>116</sup> The effect resembles a look into a mirror to see a realm both real and fictitious, both same and different, the heterotopia Michel Foucault describes in his “Other Spaces.” Heterotopic spaces are defined by Foucault in contrast to utopian spaces as realms that belong to our real, institutionalized realm of society, yet at the same time represent anti-places, actualized utopias, in which the real places are questioned and turned into their opposite. They are outside all proper places, but can be localized. One example is the

instead of the characters guarantees that the spectator is not caught in the same myth as the protagonists, who have only a flat image of Poland and remain ignorant of the “discourses... excluded by enlightened reason”,<sup>117</sup> the site where the critique of bourgeois and technological society developed. Their ignorance of emotions and primary physical needs, the loss of what Kluge would term “female mode of production” is the reason why all characters in Hochhäusler’s film fail eventually.

I will now quickly summarize the plot, before I turn to an analysis of specific scenes. The German siblings Lea and Konstantin are abandoned by their step-mother Silvia on a shopping trip to the other side of the border and left in the Polish countryside. The story, reminiscent of the Grimms’ fairytale “Hansel and Gretel,” evolves by cutting back and forth between the parents’ perspective in Germany, and the children’s struggle in the foreign environment. A Polish drifter, Kuba, who speaks their language and wins their trust, picks up the children. However, he increasingly tries to profit from them, eventually treating them like hostages. After a night of separation, Konstantin returns haggard and obviously abused. As the elder of the two, Lea finally realizes the dangerous position she and her brother are in and, like Gretel in the fairy tale where she kills the witch, attempts to poison Kuba, who abandons the two on the road. In a final shot, the children are shown walking off into the distance, the road ahead ending in a dim horizon.

The plot shifts back and forth between the two worlds “below” and “above” with the perspective of the ordered adult world on the German side of the border, and the

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mirror, which is at the same time part of our every day culture, what it reflects is at the same time real and fictitious (“Von anderen Räumen” 320- 321).

<sup>117</sup> Michel de Certeau in *Heterologies* calls this type of minoritarian discourse “fable” (15, 76). As opposed to discourses of enlightened reason, “fable” is truthful and present, speaking directly to the recipient.

children's quest in the jungle of the foreign environment. The goal, as in Kluge's works, is the depiction of contiguity, of the relationship between the subjective and the objective, between the sensual realm of emotions and affect on the one hand and enlightened public sphere on the other. The mediators between the two realms and between the two countries are the German children in Poland and the contradictory role of Woman in Germany.

The relationships between the two spouses, between the siblings, between parents and children, as well as between Germans and Poles in the film are clearly hierarchical. The children and Silvia represent the marginal within the German society, the country in possession of the code defining the cultural norms in the new Europe. When the children cross the border to Poland and are put outside their proper place, they become victims of the very public sphere created in European discourse, with Germany as the union's wealthy patron, who is in a position to impose conditions on less powerful members. The automatism of signification or symbolic representation within states as well as within multi-state organizations is a practice of dominant public memory and storytelling that exiles lived experience in favor of a virtual reality. In the case of the European Union, this process blends out the conflicted past and the actual interpersonal experiences between people on both sides of the border.

The reference to milk in the German title points to the role of the mother or pregnant woman as a figure of expectation, nourishment and future. It is significant that we find Silvia the opposite of a maternal figure.<sup>118</sup> On the one hand, she is referred to as

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<sup>118</sup> In German film the image of mother often becomes an allegory of *Heimat* or Germany as a whole, as in *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* by Helma Sanders-Brahms (1980). Women characters such as *Lola* in R.W.

step-mother of the children, Lea and Konstantin; on the other hand, the film depicts her as potentially pregnant in the scene after she has abandoned her step-children on a shopping trip to Poland. The German title *Milchwald* furthermore corresponds to the feeling of disorientation that can be experienced when walking through thick, foggy woods. “Milchwald” denotes the mythic forest, where clear vision is impossible and paths are visually obstructed. Hansel and Gretel in the fairy tale experience the world from below, like the walkers in de Certeau’s “Walking the City” (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 91- 110). Always connected to the ground, they are blind to the whole; they are lost in space and have to rely on tactics, on decisions made in the very moment, hence the English title of the film that refers to the present in which one moment is disconnected from the next, as in the narration of Kluge’s story “Solar Camera Jupiter” discussed in my chapter on *Cinema Stories*.

The children’s way of experiencing can therefore be linked to the type of film countering narrative film that provides for audience identification, as well as to the type of montages Kluge creates in his own films to reproduce the condition of German society in an exaggerated form. The children cannot take advantage of experience, which is connected to temporal continuation. In this sense their weakness is the weakness of a Germany oblivious to its own past. The apparent superiority of German cleanliness and, in fact, the sterile appeal of the newly built structures in the scenes depicting the family house represents a lack of identity and acknowledged experience. Ultimately, Germans, like the marginalized, live in “this very moment,” and have to rely on tactics when changing places.

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Fassbinder’s *BRD- Trilogie* film of the same title (1981) serve the opposite function and embody destructive eroticism endangering bourgeois order.

The film starts out with a shot on the German side of the border, which is haunting in its expressionistically extreme angles and clear lines of flight, its stasis and the uncanny music score intercepted by amplified noise from the “outside,” which is the empiric reality inside the diegesis: the noise of the approaching car. A wavy road with electric posts along its side emerges out of the vanishing point in the extreme left of the image. The road widens, leading towards the viewer and the right side of the frame. Clear lines mark this shot, which leaves an impression of lurking danger as the siblings Lea and Konstantin wander at the side of the road toward the camera. Germany is depicted as a country with perfect conditions for mediated communication, made for traffic, an infrastructure rather than a landscape, in which nature has been tamed and smoothed out for clear vision over great distances. The iconography is reminiscent of the American West. But instead of the sheer endless possibilities of Westward expansion that the Western implies, the frontier here is that of an East German province that has recently opened its borders to Poland and become a new, yet empty, center of transnational exchange. With children marginal in society, this shot focuses on the margins of the image. The children seem displaced. Benedikt Schiefer's electronic music leaves an uncanny impression of a world fundamentally out of joint. The music is also reminiscent of traditional *film noir*.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> The theme in the classical *film noir* of the postwar era is male failure in face of a world out of joint, as Elsaesser formulates it: “The disaster, the catastrophe, has already happened. It is definitely too late (for action), yet too early (for closure)” (author’s translation, “Hollywood Heute” 43). Border experiences challenge the protagonists’ capacity to act and mix up their sense of time, banning them in a state of permanent present. *Neo-Noir*, Elsaesser claims, has to do with an excess of experience in the postmodern world, where the individual is so saturated with perception via the media, that these experiences cannot be handled by the protagonist, who consequently becomes numb for human emotions, as if he was already dead: “It hurts so much that I don’t feel it anymore” (Foster 106). The main protagonists of these movies are “in a state of inversion. Despite their anticipation of catastrophe they are unable to help themselves and become observers of their own destruction” (author’s translation, “Hollywood Heute” 46).





Figure 100 *Milchwald* 00:01:37

The tension created by music and moving image in the first scene reaches its climax with Silvia's car overtaking the siblings. Lea has just proven her superiority by commanding "Konsti" to come along. As the older of the two, she has already learned to use language as a code that can be used as a means to an end. She is establishing her authority through performative speech when she ironizes her step-mother's attempt to engage Konsti in a song and later mocks her chiding tone, turning her words into empty signifiers. Still being a child, Lea can already instrumentalize feelings and deceive in order to attain her goals. Obviously she does not accept Silvia as her mother and attempts to undermine Silvia's authority as a model for Konsti to follow. When Lea claims she has to "go pee," Silvia's patience has run out. She stops the car and in a short-circuit reaction abandons both children in a Polish field at the side of the road.

When Lea and Konstantin are left alone on the street and start walking into the field, the protective shield of detached language games lifts, and material reality enters the purely symbolic and rhetorical space that Lea had created in the car. The camera in this shot is installed close to the ground on the road and follows the gradual

disappearance of the children in the road ditch, while a tractor passes through the frame in extreme close-up, thus visually running over the two. The diegetic sound of the machine is exaggerated, and a cut to Silvia's car suggests her complicity with the world of traffic that is threatening the children. Both the vehicles on the road and the automatic power discourse are destructive machines colonizing the mute body of the other—of the innocent child Konstantin in the first scene and of both children as foreigners in Poland in what follows.

While the children experience the harsh materiality of the neighboring country, Silvia is in control and emotionally detached from the surroundings, yet oscillating between ascetic suppression of feelings and excessive emotionality. In one scene of *This Very Moment*, Silvia tears out of a travel map the page containing the area in Poland where she left Konsti and Lea. A buzzing cello dramatizes this scene, as she leans over the map, all-powerful and in possession of the geographic knowledge from birds-eye's view. The shot before depicted the siblings walking up an inclined plane, the camera peeking through the trees, emphasizing their being down there, in the jungle of the actual world not represented on the map. For Silvia, the children's whereabouts are just a matter of abstract location, a point on a map, while for them the whole body is involved.



Figure 101: *Milchwald* 00:09:26

Hunger leads them to approach the drifter Kuba, who, like the witch in “Hansel and Gretel,” lures them into his dwelling, a van full of cleaning supplies. He speaks their language and provides food without pursuing an immediate personal interest in helping the children. The value system needed to accommodate the weak and defenseless ones in a foreign environment is the maternal one in the sense Kluge speaks of the “female mode of production,” which regards every human being as equally valuable. In other words, a social system contrary to capitalism is needed, which recognizes use value instead of exchange value.

Remnants of such a system can be found in the maternal type of Polish female characters, which render Poland a heterotopic space in the sense that Michel Foucault uses the term—a space existing in social reality, pointing to an alternative order. Lea catches a glimpse of this motherly alternative order when she sees a simple woman in a household dress cutting an old man’s hair in a Polish motel room, both conversing peacefully and quietly. Another maternal figure in the film is the female social worker helping out at the Catholic fair in a small town. While Kuba takes off to visit his girl-

friend, the siblings stay in a tent next to the church, where a woman provides soup and pets Lea on the head.<sup>120</sup>

The clear hierarchies visible in the mediated communication between Joseph and Silvia are the opposite of the loving care the children witness outside the confines of their own family constellation. As Joseph arrives home, he does not notice Silvia, and goes straight into what seems to be his office. Various attempts from his side to ask for the children and from her side to tell him are obstructed. Joseph only finds out that the children are missing when listening to the messages on the answering machine. He carefully keeps Silvia out of his investigations and lets her stay at home when going out to search for the children.

Yet it is Silvia who is secretly the subject of knowledge and of the gaze.<sup>121</sup> This is epitomized in a scene where she watches Joseph moving around the stage of an old amphitheater from an elevated view-point in the spectators' ranks. The camera is positioned behind her, so that the viewer can identify with her gaze. Joseph, who walks towards the center of the stage, is marginalized in this shot. Since the time of the Greek Polis, the amphitheater represents the visibility of the public sphere and collective decision-making. Significantly, this specific location functioned as an assembly ground for Germans during the Third Reich, and was later transformed into a Polish memorial site. It thus speaks of a highly sensitive issue in each country's national identity and

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<sup>120</sup> She is also the one who will shelter Lea the following night and comb her hair in a scene reminiscent of the hair cutter's scene in the motel.

<sup>121</sup> The traditional constellation of female objectification by the male gaze in cinema (see Mulvey) has been replaced by a de-sexualized, distanced, almost cold view. In fact, critics of the *Berliner Schule* lament exactly this lack of emotional attraction. Silvia is presented almost boyishly, with short hair, a skinny figure, and little makeup.

respective historical consciousness.<sup>122</sup> Silvia knows that Joseph will not find their lost children in this environment, and stays behind as her husband walks onto the stage. Joseph seems to be without the historical sensibility of his wife, who is aware of the family's "history" and, it could be argued, embodies a model of personal memory through life experience that seems absent in the representatives of the public sphere "on the stage" of public decision making.



Figure 102: *Milchwald* 01:02:30

What distinguishes the Polish landscape, buildings and interiors from the ones on the German side of the border is the visibility of time, of wear and tear, of the past that nobody cares to clean up or that people are open to preserving. Reality changes all the time, and space is in constant transformation and cannot be summed up in a fixed image that has conquered time in favor of place. The Polish environment indicates a social history, similar to the way Vermont's Shelburne Museum in de Certeau's essay, "includes innumerable familiar objects, polished, deformed, or made more beautiful by

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<sup>122</sup> A full analysis of the memory site of Annaberg/ Góra Św. Anny can be found in James Bjork and Robert Gerwarth. "The Annaberg as a German-Polish *Lieu de Mémoire*." *German History* 2007, 25(3), 372-400.

long use; everywhere there are as well the marks of the active hands and laboring or patient bodies for which these things composed the daily circuits, the fascinating presence of absences whose traces were everywhere” (“The Practice of Everyday Life” 21). The “presence of absences” in this quotation is of course an aspect of reality that is of pivotal interest to Alexander Kluge and his character Gabi Teichert who tries to collect such “material” for an alternative teaching of German history. Yet, as was shown earlier, this type of material is difficult to find in Germany.

In contrast to the parents’ house, which is hermetically sealed with window blinds, the Polish motel, where Kuba and the children spend the first night, is full of light, with doors and windows wide open, similar to the way Wim Wenders used to depict the spaces inhabited by his transitory figures. Lea can walk along the corridor and peek into the different rooms, in one of which a red telephone is ringing without anyone picking up. For the viewer, this creates an association with Silvia, who stayed at home as Joseph told her, “in case somebody calls.” Later, Kuba is shown picking up the same red phone to call the parents.<sup>123</sup> This call, as well as the next, remains unheard, as Silvia is fast asleep with tranquilizers and Joseph is out on the public stage, looking for them.

The complicity between Kuba and the children only lasts as long as economic interests and public discourse are kept out of the equation, and they are involved on a purely private level. The willingness to help is immediately corrupted once economic interests enter the equation, when Kuba decides to return the children to their parents for money after having seen their pictures on the German news. Kuba’s earlier attempts to communicate with the siblings on equal terms are now forgotten. Initially, the camera had

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<sup>123</sup> He uses the children’s secret code to remember the number, which is “2Esel” in computer script turned upside down.

framed him and the children sitting next to each other in the truck, thus making them equal in a community of passengers, as opposed to the individual framing of each passenger in Silvia's car.

Without any money, and without each other, the children are turned into potential commodities, relying completely on the charity of the people around. They become the test case for how friendly the German-Polish relations really are, since the children have no means to buy the friendship or help from their environment. Polish children turn out to be their enemies, who fight over the coins in a public fountain. Having no sense of history and political relations or even their mutual "otherness," their relationship consists merely of economic competition, which is inevitably hostile. The woman selling the bus tickets is not helpful either, as she does not accept the wet coins as proper payment and could not care less about the children's fate. She proves unable to empathize with the children, for whom the coins, assembled in the fountain battle, have great value.

While in the mediated and artificial German environment the children's inequality just led to games of power among the siblings, now the dangers of traffic are real and life-threatening for Konstantin. The German "Verkehr" stands for communication, commerce, and sexual intercourse, all of which mutilate Konstantin, who experiences something terrible during the night in which he is separated from his sister. It is implied that Konsti is raped during the night he spends next to a night club, while Lea, instinctively avoiding the dangers of the adult world she had a chance to observe earlier, found shelter and nourishment in a church, the institution that starkly contrasts to the radically secular world of traffic, which is associated with the parents. As opposed to

Konstantin, Lea is able to turn sexuality into a weapon, using her communicative strategies to blackmail Kuba when she says: “I will tell them you did something to me.” Having observed Kuba earlier as he was having sexual intercourse with one of his girl friends in the motel, Lea, as opposed to Konstantin, seems to be aware of this aspect of the grown-ups’ world.

As I want to argue, the problem with the cultural politics of the European Union is that they are implemented from above, by planners who don’t experience the countries and their people from below, like the bombers in Kluge’s works, who do not know have to experience their own destruction “on the ground.” What is needed for a true understanding among the different peoples of the European Union, which Poland joined shortly after the film was released, is personal contact and the effort to learn each other’s languages. This effort is featured in the film in a touching scene following Kuba’s unsuccessful call to Germany from a phone booth. Turning to leave the grounds, Kuba picks up a flower growing between the cobble-stones and makes it “speak” to Konsti. In the course of this conversation Konstantin learns the Polish words for “yes” and “thank you.” It resembles the kind of cultural exchange EU bureaucrats would like to implement, but is not possible without the good will of the people involved, the willingness to understand each other without pursuing personal interests and to put oneself on equal grounds even with an economically weaker neighbor.





Figure 103: *Milchwald* 00:43:42

The type of direct personal communication displayed in this scene is diametrically opposed to the mediated communication that mainly takes the form of phone calls between Joseph and Silvia. This distanced form of communication is also the basis for Joseph's negotiations with Kuba. In this conversation Joseph makes the same mistakes as in his relationship with his wife. Instead of taking him seriously, Joseph prefers to keep the hierarchy intact and to pretend that he is still in control of the course of events. A conversation on equal terms with Kuba would have been much more effective, just like an honest conversation with Silvia would have been. It was the father's idea to offer a reward for the children and to publish their images on the television screen, thus making them objects of trade and at the same time turning Kuba into a criminal.

That the amphitheater is designated as the spot where the exchange is to take place, and where it eventually fails, is significant in terms of the German-Polish political relationship in times of European integration. It points to the inadequate strategy Joseph applies to retrieve his children. While Kuba always solves problems on the personal

level—asking people on the street (in one scene a man on a balcony) for help and refraining from calling the police—Joseph makes personal problems public. Instead of talking to his wife, he organizes a police search and posts the pictures of his children on television, creating a crime story. In a way he creates a prosthetic trauma to cover up his own guilt of implementing his own family politics from above without ever considering the feelings and emotional relationships among the other family members. Joseph is an urban planner by profession and thus the perfect allegory for the EU projects engineered by professionals and detached from the real-life circumstances of personal relationships and emotional attitudes towards others in European borderlands.

For Silvia and Joseph the decisive turn of the story occurs when they are forced to cross the border together. Not only do they now have to leave the comfortable center and deal with the neighboring “periphery” on its own terms, they also have to confront each other, neither of them able to walk out or flee to another room as they had done previously in the house. Meaningful gazes are exchanged at the border post, indicating Silvia and Joseph’s mutual recognition of the truth—of their own guilt. They became the accomplices in a crime against their own children in trying to cover up the original sin, sexual desire so overbearing that it turned against the children’s needs for a healthy family. After all, both partners broke up previous family ties in order to be together.

In a metaphorical reading, which I have partially insinuated in paralleling the couple Joseph and Silvia to Germany as a whole within the larger context of the European Union, the marriage could be interpreted as a metaphor for the inner German relationship between East and West. Just like the characters in the film, the two states at the time of the film’s making have just recently been united. The “new house” is partially

still under construction, and especially the “children” of the dominant western part do not necessarily accept their new “parent.” In such a reading the German-Polish border becomes a test case for the future of the unified country. Silvia’s breakdown and the children’s drifting in the end would then point to a full failure of Germany’s relation to itself and to its others.

While Poles seem to have some knowledge of German contemporary society,<sup>124</sup> Silvia and Joseph remain ignorant of the neighboring country and appear chauvinistic when they cannot stop laughing about the clumsiness of the motel restaurant waitress, who walks into another waiter and drops her dishes. This moment represents one of the rare occasions of mutual understanding between the spouses. Joseph, in his telephone conversation with Kuba, is conscious of his superior status and demands to talk to his children. To him it is very self-evident that people in Poland speak German and would be glad to earn some extra cash. Even from a distance he thinks he can control the situation. Kuba, finding himself pushed, just shouts “no” and hangs up.

Silvia at the same time represents and is the victim of the rational world of the machine. The perpetrator and victim side of her identity cannot be integrated, which becomes clear in the scene in a public bathroom of the motel, where she and Joseph expect to receive the children. Through the open door she sees her naked son being washed and prepared for the exchange. Kuba cannot be seen as a wall with huge mirrors obstructs Silvia’s vision. Instead, the camera juxtaposes Silvia’s mirror image with the image of Kuba the perpetrator, who is ready to sell the children like commodity products.

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<sup>124</sup> Kuba probably knows the German language from experiences as a migrant worker doing manual labor for a low salary in Germany. In another scene, Kuba is shown in the apartment of one of his girlfriends, watching a German news broadcast. German media have the power to transcend the border, and German language infiltrates Polish homes.

Realizing her guilt and ultimate complicity with the kidnapper, Silvia falls apart, the camera now framing her leaning against the mirror and thus presenting her doubly in the image.



Figure 104: *Milchwald* 01:12:52

In this moment reality and the symbolic fall apart, and Silvia falls out of the texture of the human world. In the next shot she emerges out of the backdoor, between the huge letters of the Polish motel, virtually exiting writing, this crucial element of the public sphere as Habermas defined it. Instead of words, nature speaks to her when in her final appearance in the film the road signs in the form of huge arrows point towards the highway as if leading her in this direction, while a jungle drum accompanies Silvia.



Figure 105: *Milchwald* 01:20:18

This time, her blackout at the side of the road seems final; the mise-en-scène now suggests that she is crushed under the oncoming cars that visually speed across her body in a blurred close-up repeating the image in which the children were first seen disappearing into the field behind the traffic on a Polish road. All the while Joseph is waiting for something that is not going to take place in an empty parking lot that again indicates his absence from the heart of the problem.



Figure 106: *Milchwald* 01:20:46

Time and space appear out of joint, as the children are seen in the back of Kuba's car again after the exchange has apparently failed. The audience does not know what has happened in the meantime or where Kuba is taking the children. Now, with Silvia as the provider of knowledge, the secret center of the story is gone, and it is the viewer who is in the dark, just like Joseph before. Enlightenment has failed at last, and the sun is descending in the last shot, leaving a whitish, milky light as the children vanish into the horizon, walking down the open road and away from the film's audience. The film here forms a perfect closure, circling back to the first shot, in which Lea and Konstantin walked towards the camera and into the story. The music score ascends and descends at the same time, moving upwards in octaves, and downwards in scales, leaving an uncanny impression reminiscent of the music in the opening shot. Up until the last shot two antagonistic mechanisms, namely that of commodity exchange of the adult (and German) world versus that of the children's need for unconditional care, move in opposite directions, and the happy end of Grimms' "Hansel and Gretel" is turned into an unsatisfactory ambiguity or the openness of a non-classical Hollywood film. The iconography of the American West which was alluded to in the beginning now returns in inverted form. While the Western hero in the conventional genre film is seen riding towards the wide horizon in anticipation of new adventures and regained freedom, the last shot of *This Very Moment* indicates the absence of a future for the children. The horizon is cut off, and there is no depth of vision, no road for the children to walk.



Figure 107: *Milchwald* 01:24:08

It is the spectator who is abandoned at last, as the only remaining characters walk out of the film side by side, turning their backs on the corrupt grown-ups' world. Their rescue would have been possible if something like Kluge's "public sphere of emotions" based on the "female mode of production" existed, if there was a more honest handling of personal life experiences and less mediation and money involved. If the film solicits any hope, it might be the possibility of transcendence in Poland, where women are motherly providers and *Heimat* still seems possible. The Catholic procession that Kuba and the children encountered on their way was depicted in beautiful images of compassion and life. It is a church worker, who provides soup at a church fair, and Lea finds shelter in a church after she got separated from Konstantin. Yet, the moments of loving care and direct personal contact are corrupted in the next instant. The female church worker, who combs Lea's hair in one scene, ultimately cannot protect the girl from Kuba. Kuba's pregnant girl-friend, who is presented as another motherly figure and is shown mending Kuba's pants, talks about painting the apartment and creating a nice home for her newborn, while obviously betraying her husband. Poland becomes a

“heterotopia,” pointing both toward and restricting alternatives for the existing order, similar to the mirror world Petzold creates in framing his narrative.

### **Becoming Specter: Sören Voigt’s *Identity Kills* (2003)**

Sören Voigt is one of the *Berlin School* “authors” who consciously defines his style of filmmaking against the backdrop of *New German Cinema* in his interviews in *Revolver*. Voigt is one of the lesser-known Berlin filmmakers. He graduated from the Berlin film school *DFFB* (Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin). His first feature film was a comedy produced for television, *Perfect Sight* (*Tolle Lage* 2000), in which he had to comply with aesthetic demands of the broadcaster. With *Identity Kills* (2003), he directed a film without having to comply with market demands, as he financed it by himself. This allowed him to insert estranging effects, such as long cuts and the use of documentary techniques, a static camera, and the insertion of dream images falling out of the narrative. In volume 9 of *Revolver* (Müller 2003: 65), Voigt stated that, as in the 1960s, today Germany needed some filmmakers to start filming at their personal financial risk, since there was no place for independent films, and thus no room for discussion, conflict, and, in effect, life, in the German subsidy system. Directly referring to the German *Autorenkino* of the 1960s, he remarks that “what we are doing is not different from what those people did who were against ‘grandpa’s cinema’” (in Müller 66).

In this last part of my study, I want to compare *Identity Kills* to Kluge’s first feature film *Yesterday Girl* in order to return to Kluge’s original ideas about the role of Woman in film. While Kluge’s film was shot at the peak of the mechanical age, when mass processing of commodity products replaced individual lived experience, *Identity*



*Kills* takes place in the information age, where virtuality and the visual have replaced the power of objects. Kluge's main female character is faced with the "public spheres of production," and the character Karen in *Identity Kills* is part of the mediated subjective-objective world discussed in *Yella*.

While *Yesterday Girl* employs precise montage and camerawork, and a style that reminds of early cinema, Voigt's film is shot with a handheld video camera and thus directly imitates the new, democratic media that the audience is a part of as it participates in the video exchange on YouTube for example. Both films use amateur actors and characters impersonated by actual employees of the profession they represent, thus blurring the line between fiction and document.

Despite the formal differences between the two films, Voigt's film communicates with the earlier movement of *Young German Film* and its occupation with the continuation of the past in the present, the inherited culpability that reaches back to the times of National Socialism. Voigt's main character Karen is likened to Helma Sanders-Brahms' heroine in *Germany Pale Mother* in a scene in which she narrates a horrible tale to her colleague's two children. The tale about a child in the house of a cannibal is reminiscent of the Grimm fairy tale "Der Räuberbräutigam" Sanders-Brahms' main character Lene tells her daughter in the forest. The telling of fairy tales in Kluge's theoretical and fictional volumes, too, is valued as part of the "female mode of production," passing on to children vital information about the values and beliefs of the community in which they are growing up. The uncanny accounts of violence and survival in the murderer's house link Karen to Lene, and thus to the violence done to women in the postwar era. The coldness with which Karen otherwise treats the children is

reminiscent of Silvia in *This Very Moment*. Since she has no personal stories to tell, the fairy tale genre is her way to communicate with them.

In Karen Voigt depicts the fate of a young Berlin woman, who suffers from the irresponsibility and that lack of identity typical of her generation, the “Generation Berlin”.<sup>125</sup> From the very beginning the audience is not asked to identify with Karen, as the camera remains distanced. Instead, the young woman is shown identifying with random people on the street, imitating their gestures, absorbing life around her. Karen’s hair is wet as she wanders the streets, as if she had just stepped out of the water, has been reborn and starts anew from an initial catastrophe or accident. In her appearance she is strikingly reminiscent of Yella after her drowning in the river Elbe. Like the main character in *Identity Kills*, Yella showed signs of identity theft when she intruded into the home sphere of another, in her eyes more successful woman and provoked the death of a third party. As in so many *Berlin School* films, at the outset something has already happened in the past and is likely to return in the future. The same outlook is present in Kluge’s *Yesterday Girl*, where the opening captions read: “Uns trennt von Gestern nur die veränderte Lage.”

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<sup>125</sup> The term “Generation Berlin” arose after the release of Tom Tykwer’s fast-paced Berlin film *Run Lola Run* (*Lola Rennt* 1998) and with the growing popularity of Berlin mass events such as the *Love Parade* and the Soccer World cup in 2006 (Bude 2001). Like Lola, young Berliners believe in their own strength rather than in authority, and in the future rather than the past. They are highly mobile and appear dynamic, despite their limited financial assets. Heinz Bude dedicated a book to the “Generation Berlin” and with it established the notion as a term discussed in the media and academia.



Figure 108: *Identity Kills* 00:00:33

What is to follow is the creation of Karen's new identity as a revenant or specter. In contrast to Kluge's main character Anita G., Karen's personality appears empty. While Anita had a distinct past, personal memories and the goal to fit in with the FRG society, Karen's pale flat face with her tied-back red hair is devoid of expression, a blank page awaiting inscription by the world around her. Karen's explanation of her suicidal dream in the therapeutic session at the beginning of the film parallels the court scene in Kluge's film, where Anita has to explain her flight from the GDR and theft of a cardigan. However, Karen is faced not with the male representative of state justice, but with a female therapist. The world cannot be divided into the male-female polarities anymore, and Karen is allowed to speak. However, she cannot fully express herself, and it remains unclear what it is that makes her tears flow. While in Anita's world an understanding environment would have made her situation easier, Karen's enemy is within herself, and a relief or cure not possible. In her recount of the dream she had after taking pills in a suicide attempt, Karen describes the absence of a sense of herself, a

feeling of not knowing where she begins and ends. In her dream she was “just there” in empty space.

Yet, in waking life, too, Karen seems lost. This makes her an easy victim of exploitation in her relationship with her boyfriend Ben, who has no innate personality either, but defines himself through his friends and status symbols of the party generation, such as fast cars and techno music. Karen seems doomed to fit in with the role others prescribe for her, while these others too are just actors playing roles. The figure of Ben who is financially dependent on his girl friend Karen yet complains and egoistically puts his own desires first, is reminiscent of Roswitha Bronski’s husband in *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*, only this time the setting is not the petty bourgeoisie with its ideal of family harmony and *Bildung* in order to attain a higher status, but the new young proletariat. Ben also shows resemblances with Yella’s first lover of the same name, who drives the two of them off a bridge once Yella does not love him anymore. It is possible that Petzold formed his characters after watching Voigt’s film, which was released four years before his award-winning work.

The troubling aspects of the concept of “identity” are embodied in Karen: on the one hand the subject, in identifying with its environment, assimilates aspects of an ‘Other’ and is transformed, wholly or partially, into the model this Other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified.<sup>126</sup> At the same time, the identifying subject becomes exchangeable, a mere type assimilated to categories such as nation, class or gender. Identity in this sense implies reproducibility

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<sup>126</sup> See the entry for „identification“ in Laplanche, Pontalis (1988)

and exchangeability. It is an economy in which parts of a person's inside and a social outside are being interchanged.

Karen is exchangeable from the very beginning of the film, where she returns home after therapeutic treatment, only to discover Ben's ex-girlfriend in her apartment. There always seems to be a substitute already there, ready to take her place as soon as she turns her back on her home. The impression of exchangeability is enhanced as we see Karen's apartment bloc with its endless rows of identical flats, and her tiny mailbox surrounded by hundreds of other boxes of the same size. Karen's environment here effectively mirrors her identity in crisis.



Figure 109: *Identity Kills* 00:06:33

Ben's holding on to Karen despite his obvious lack of affection and his exploitation of her weakness are crueler than the way Anita G. in Kluge's film is dropped by her lovers. His attitude to Karen is cynical in the sense Derrida uses the term, calling the exchangeable commodity "cynical" because it effaces differences. This leveling cynic prostitutes itself, because it is "always ready to exchange not only soul, but body, with each and every other commodity" (Derrida 162). Ben agrees to marry her to ensure his faithfulness, but participates in the registrar's ceremony wearing his every day shirt.

Behind Ben a male guest likely to be his father is partially visible, looking at him critically. The exchangeability of women for Ben becomes obvious in the scene when Karen meets his brief girlfriend Sara in a train station. Sara is portrayed in front of a huge commercial poster promoting beer with an over towering Brandenburg Gate in the background. Both girls wear the same necklace, which was apparently given to Karen first, but then handed to Sara, while Karen replaced the original with a copy acquired in the store. Ben keeps Karen in an intermediate state of a dead life. For him, Karen is a mere tool for the satisfaction of his needs. She resembles the pieces of silverware she produces as a worker in a huge factory. The film cuts from Karen's image on the Berlin streets to the factory machines stamping pieces of metal into the shape of expensive-looking forks. Long shots observe assembly lines with the rhythmically appearing and disappearing industrial products at certain stages in the production process. These shots are inserted regularly after scenes of Karen's everyday-life outside the factory, showing advanced production stages in later moments of the film, indicating on the one hand Karen's advancing production of identity, on the other hand making us aware of the production of the film itself, which, too, is a commodity product.

One cut directly connects the machine giving the final shape to one fork after another to the social machine optimizing women for the job market and the market of desires. At a hairdresser that serves multiple women at once in the manner of mechanical mass processing, Karen sits in a row with other women trying to acquire the looks and confidence needed for success. The place that promises the satisfaction of desires by way of commodity acquisition is the shopping mall. This is where Karen spends her free time, and many scenes take place here.



Figure 110: *Identity Kills* 00:16:39

The mirroring taking place between the world of objects and the world of emotions is illustrated in a shot at the mall, where Karen's image is reflected in a ceiling mirror between two moving escalators. Karen here floats across the screen like a ghost, and the viewer remains uncertain as to which part of the screen represents a reflection of second, or even third degree.



Figure 111: *Identity Kills* 00:02:04

In another shot surveillance cameras capture her image. In this way Karen's mediated visual representation replaces the actual woman. The filming effect is doubled, and originals cannot be discerned anymore. In one scene we see her flat, white face

behind a glass jewelry showcase filled with crystal animals. As we learn later on, the young woman is fascinated by the manifold reflections of light these figures evoke, being at the same time artistic representations of life and gaining an artificial life of their own by the light passing through them. These animals have manifold surfaces, which fascinates Karen, who is herself purely surface.



Figure 112: *Identity Kills* 00:02:11

These animals return in the scene where Karen recounts the dream she had after taking pills to commit suicide. She is playing with a glass turtle, saying that the crystal animals made her remember the dream of a dark tunnel or subterranean void, in which she could not discern her own outlines from the surrounding blackness. In that dream, she also saw her own past and re-lived experiences from a long time ago. The crystal animals allow for Karen's present and past to merge. The "film in Karen's head" is triggered first in the moment of dying, then again in losing herself by looking at the multitude of reflections the crystal animals emit. Kluge's montage films had a similar aim: the activation of the "film in the head of the spectator." It could be argued that the crystal reflects reality from many sides at the same time, extracting little fractions of the



surrounding world, which interfere with personal experiences and collective images. Gabi Teichert recommends this mode of perception as a way to release energy to the “Spanner,” whom she refers to as “Gegenwartsforscher.” Karen seems to have a problem with the present, which is too one-dimensional and flat and needs to be supplemented by the in-between like the blackness of the screens between Voigt’s cuts.

Kluge, too, inserts the image of crystal glass into *Yesterday Girl*, in form of the magically glittering chandeliers in the Hotel in which Anita G. works as a cleaning lady. Here they represent the shining, beautiful things children try to grasp and for which grown-ups still long, the ideal of luxury and the temptation of money. In Kluge’s film we do not observe Anita fascinated by this crystal, but it is the viewer himself, who is supposed to identify with the character and admire the mystically shining object in the midst of the otherwise bare walls. The spectator is distanced from the effect in Voigt’s film, just like the characters are distanced from their own bodies and emotions.



Figure 113: *Abschied von Gestern* 00:21:26

The cheap double of the crystal, the carved glass, a commodity everybody can buy and enjoy is a substitute for real luxury in Voigt’s film. Fanny, the woman Karen

envies for her independence and success, owns a whole cabinet full of such animals, and Karen takes them over as a substitute for the original that she is denied. What happens in the following scenes is illusion, as virtual reality takes over reality proper. Karen becomes entangled in the spectral, the world of illusion and surfaces created with light, which is also the world of cinema. Her body proper disappears in the course of the film as we watch her stage an alternative reality within the world of the film. What we see is the image of an image, while the film's style connotes documentary reality. The effect is one Freud would call "unheimlich" or uncanny, when life and death, reality and fiction become indistinguishable.

The gap between Karen's everyday life and the glass world of mercenary identities is significant: While getting her hair done, she witnesses another customer telling her hairdresser about an exciting job offer with a hotel chain in the Dominican Republic. Listening to the future plans of the self-confident young lady named Fanny, Karen's face empties and becomes the screen for projections of contiguity, in this case the projection of (another person's) future. In this moment Karen becomes the spectator of her own internal film, triggered through Fanny's narration. Shortly after her visit to the hair salon, Karen is sipping a milkshake in the lobby of the mall's cafe, when the head of the travel agency whom Fanny was supposed to meet for the job interview approaches her, thinking that she is the applicant. Karen enjoys the mistake and pretends to be Fanny, until her inability to speak Spanish foils her pretension.

As a result, Karen registers for language lessons in an environment reminiscent of the mall. She thus resembles the potential customers that Anita in Kluge's film had to approach with the promise of better career chances to sell her language records. The

English title of Voigt's film suggests translatability and comments on the universality of the public spheres of production, within which everything can be bought for money, except for authenticity and lived experiences. Translatability can be associated with currency exchange and insinuates the exchangeability of skills and individuals in times of the mass production. Karen ends up selling some of the silverware she produces in the factory to tourists on the highway, speaking English to strangers who do not care about the fate behind the desperate move of this girl. In the end, Karen does not only sell silverware, but sex to a client, who mentions that there are "other ways to earn money," followed by a camera pan from the silverware box in front of Karen's belly to the customer's pants.

The money is needed for the realization of Karen's dream of the Dominican Republic incited through Fanny and the travel agent. Having kept Fanny's job search advert in the paper, Karen slips into the role of the travel agent to retake the interview with Fanny and thus turns into the male part, the agent of capitalist society and exchangeability, similar to the way Yella takes appearance for reality in the end and plays the role of the money broker in Petzold's film. While Anita G. remained the victim and was on the run until the end of *Yesterday Girl*, Karen here turns into the hunter. Like in *Yella*, too, her perfect adaptation to the capitalist system of investment will lead to death in what turns out to be a "learning process with deadly outcome," as Kluge called the processes of efficiency programming in a world that has replaced the "female mode of production" with the perfection of bachelor machines.

Karen's hunting is more of a haunting, as it is tied to her role-playing, to a theatrical staging. While role-playing and making believe in an imaginary value were a

crucial part of success in the finance business in the film *Yella*, Karen goes farther, not only deceiving her counterpart into believing she will get the job, but entrapping and willfully killing her victim. The theatricality of Karen's role has to remain invisible in order for Fanny to believe in the deception. The role-playing of the character parallels Sören Voigt's concept of improvised action to avoid an "artistic effect" in the film. Voigt did not provide a detailed script or a written dialogue and had just two professional actors, Brigitte Hobmeier alias Karen, and Daniel Lommatzsch as Ben, while other characters, such as salespersons, agency representatives, factory workers, Ben's friends and even Fanny were chosen to play their proper selves in their day-to-day environments. In this way, non-theatrical theatricality is doubled in the film. It turns back on itself, and talks about its own form in the plot. Kluge, too, used amateur actors in his film, with his sister Alexandra Kluge in the main role. Yet, the character of Anita G. does not role-play in *Yesterday Girl*. We always see the character herself, not a secondary image of her, which is why Anita is perceived as a person, Karen increasingly as a ghost.

The transition from Karen's uncertain self to her substitute identity is fluent and unspectacular, as if there were no boundary between reality and fiction. This is illustrated in a scene in a public bathroom, a very private, yet public realm, where Karen familiarizes herself with a new situation her role requires. Under time pressure, she has to invent a meeting that will keep her from entering the plane as Fanny insisted on accompanying her to the airport. In front of the mirror she warms up before fitting into the role without ever directly looking at her own image.



Figure 114: *Identity Kills* 01:08:28

The audience here becomes a direct witness of the process of adaptation. Karen inserts herself into her played role, becoming one with the character she is playing, just like the actress Brigitte Hobmeier becomes Karen in front of the camera, without any cinematic effect distancing her from her role. While Karen becomes a character the bathroom, Anita G. is shown taking a pregnancy test in a public toilet. In *Yesterday Girl*, the public space is the place where Anita becomes a mother and thus cannot switch between different versions of her life anymore. In *This Very Moment*, too, the main female character changes dramatically in a public bathroom, where Silvia realizes her status as victim and perpetrator and falls apart into two reflected images, just like Yella divides into two lives by touching the mirror of the water's surface. Voigt's main character in front of the mirror becomes invisible and visible at the same time, exposing herself willfully, but hiding under a mask after the bathroom scene.

The utopian spaces to which Karen wants to escape are the tourist resorts of the Dominican Republic, which are only familiar to her via visual representations in travel brochures. In such an artificial landscape the employees are interchangeable, and since

there is no man and no children for whom Fanny could be irreplaceable, Karen can take extreme measures, killing Fanny in the last scene in order to take on her (replaceable) identity. The initial interview situation with “Mr. Sanchez,” who took Karen for Fanny, appeared very unprofessional, suggesting that it really does not matter who gets the job as long as that person can function as a medium, being able to converse in different languages. Anita G. experiences a similar cynical treatment in her position as a salesperson for language records, when her boss explains how to utilize certain rhetorical strategies to catch customers, reducing people to types that can be manipulated with words. However, Kluge’s main character still wants to arrive in the here and now, while Karen’s goal is not definable and remains forever suspended in the future and absent space.

In the last scene of *Identity Kills*, Karen is again one small particle in an endless stream of nearly identical commodities: Driving out into the open with the stolen car, she aligns herself with the queue of cars on the highway, suggesting that the murderous pressure of identification and assimilation will continue. Becoming one with the traffic on the highway, she represents that which is menacing Anita G., who in one scene is shown running from a mob of motorcycles and from the headlights of a car chasing her down. Instead of a life-giving mother like Anita, she becomes a death-bringing specter. While Anita is shown singing, playing, living with her lovers, Karen turns herself into a commodity, into a dead object. While the final sequence in Kluge’s film clearly marks an unhappy ending and the defeat of the female mode of production, Voigt’s ending is ambivalent and disturbing, for Karen has escaped her oppression at home and become an independent woman at the price of another female character.

The character of Karen does not allow for identification, as any insight into her emotions is impossible, maybe due to an absence of this realm altogether. The viewer does not find out at what point exactly Karen decides to kill Fanny, and her motivations can only be deduced from her outer appearance. While Kluge in *Cinema Stories* dealt with Woman at the core of the cinema machine and of emotions both primary and derivative, Karen is in the present only, establishing her identity in every moment anew. As a medium she embodies the television format that feeds on already processed reality and works according to principles of “program.” The events in which Karen is involved unfold as if they could not take a different course and in accord with Karen’s “program.”

This takes us back to the initial assertion that *Berlin School* filmmakers, like the directors of *New German Cinema*, initiate a process of primary identification in the viewer. The viewer identifies with Marcus Stein’s camera rather than the characters, when it captures Karen’s fascination with the crystal animals from over the shoulder of the saleswoman, when following Karen through the streets or statically observing her in the factory. Even though the plot avoids dramatic effects, a dramatic development is visible formally. The more artificial Karen becomes, the more cuts are inserted, and the longer becomes the time during which the screen is black, implying that what is invisible is what is really going on in the story. The cuts have the effect of closing eyes, as if the camera was trying not to look. What is not supposed to be seen remains unseen, but can be anticipated as if by looking through the eyelids.

In the moment Karen decides to kill Fanny with a heavy ancient female statue, the camera does not follow her into the room, from where we then hear a thud and a stumbling noise. Instead the camera remains statically fixed on the hall, from which one

door leads to the outside and one to Fanny's bedroom. Karen chooses the path to Fanny's bedroom. Instead of going out into the public, Karen invades another person's private realm. We do not look, and still we look at the crime. The next shot peeks through the half-opened door showing Karen naked, taking off Fanny's cloths and smelling them as if she wanted to inhale the life from these corporeal remnants. Derrida in *Specters of Marx* marks the lack of smell of the spectral, and Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* claims that the sphere where an intimacy occurs between the subject and the object it must be the world of smells, which is being eliminated everywhere in the modern world (Lefebvre 197).



Figure 115: *Identity Kills* 01:15:50

Another blink of an eye and the viewer is on the balcony with Karen, now transformed into a spooky Fanny, wearing a thick layer of makeup, a wig resembling Fanny's haircut, and Fanny's red dress. She waters the flowers as if they were hers. This shot only lasts a second. The eyes of the camera close again for a cut that lasts as long as the shot itself and Karen/Fanny can be seen asking neighbors to water the flowers in her absence. Apparently, the neighbors did not know Fanny, and they do not suspect anything



upon receiving the keys to Fanny's apartment. A murder without consequences has become possible in a society without real social relationships, where personal commitment is not valued. In this world, the visual cannot be trusted anymore, but intuition is needed to distinguish between original and simulacrum. This ability has to reside in the viewer if he is to take the ending for what it is, a bizarre displacement of a character.



Figure 116: *Identity Kills* 01:16:40

What Voigt shows in his film is a world where the female mode of production, the one Kluge valued in his work, has been banned and replaced by specters. As we have seen, the information age with its multiply mediated realities leads to a de-valuation of the subject, which becomes not just exchangeable as it had been in the times when Kluge made his films, but, as the objects and commodities too, it becomes virtual. Killing and being killed amounts to nothing in this world, which is haunted by the specters of money rather than the specters of the past as in Kluge's works.

The task of an author as authority, according to Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, would be not just to detect the spectral in the contemporary world, but to speak to oneself

through these ghosts and thus help the living cope with the present: “Could one address oneself in general if already some ghost did not come back? If he loves justice at least, the ‘scholar’ of the future, the ‘intellectual’ of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet” (Derrida 176).

How does the film speak to the audience via ghosts? The answer would be as in the era of *New German Cinema*, through primary identification of the viewer. While in the plot, the female mode of production is lost, the camera reproduces this interiority in the filmic style. As in the films of *Autoren* like Kluge, the viewer is activated. The shots, in German “Einstellungen,” are at the same time perspectives, moral points of view, derived from “finding oneself or putting oneself in a particular place” (Elsaesser, “Primary Identification” 541). They create a public sphere in that the individual viewer is inaugurated in a system of shared values and a common understanding of the environment he or she lives in. The viewer’s own experiences and associations, even if in the unconscious, contrast and oppose what is seen in the plot. This way, the film produces the viewer as a subject, who opposes the development of the film’s main character. One could thus argue that the cinema of the *Berlin School* filmmakers, just like that of *New*

*German Cinema*, functions as an “identity machine,”<sup>127</sup> using a main female character as a medium we do not identify with, but observe from a distance.

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<sup>127</sup> Elsaesser “American Graffiti” 305: “Insofern Film als eine diskursive Form der Wahrnehmung gelten kann, reproduziert das Kino nicht so sehr eine mehr oder weniger illusionäre, ideologisch verformte Realität, sondern produziert etwas ganz anderes: den Zuschauer als Subjekt.“

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