

Chapter 7:

Raw Materials for the Imagination:

Kluge's Work for Television

As Christian Schröder has argued in his review of Alexander Kluge's television programs, tuning in to watch Kluge's work on late night German television is akin to the experience of stumbling upon a literary bookshop in the middle of a red-light district.¹ Wedged between the pornographic movies, crime thrillers, and live competition and shopping programs which constitute the regular evening fare on the commercial stations, Kluge's *10 vor 11* (10 to 11), *News and Stories*, *Mitternachtsmagazin* (Midnight Magazine), and *Primetime Spätausgabe* (Prime Time Late Edition) certainly strike the viewer as strange anomalies. Constructed, in a similar vein to his films, out of a highly diverse collection of raw materials (including photographs, drawings, diagrams, clips from movies, and documentary footage), Kluge's programs are – in both their form and content – certainly unlike anything on German television.

Organised predominantly around interviews with writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, academics, and directors from both theatre and opera², the aim of the programs is to provide what Kluge describes as “cultural windows” for the “old media” within the comparatively “new” medium of television. These interviews (which provide the backbone for

1. Christian Schröder: “Das etwas andere Autoren-Fernsehen”, *Der Tagespiegel*, November 1 (1991).

2. Over the years, these figures have included (to name just a few) Volker Schlöndorff, Christa Wolf, Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre Boulez, Konazaburo Oe, Sophie Rois, Helke Sander, Theo Angelopolous, Jörg Immendorf, Hannelore Hoger, Romuald Karmaker, Wong Kar-Wai, Claude Chabrol, and Werner Herzog, as well as regulars such as Heiner Müller, Oskar Negt, Christoph Schlingensief, Miriam Hansen, Manfred Osten, Joseph Vogl, Joachim Kersten, Ulrike Sprenger, Peter Berling, and Dirk Baeker.

the majority of Kluge's programs) are, however, unlike those conducted on other cultural magazine programs – a format which has become increasingly popular on German television.³ Although the basic structure of Kluge's work for television resembles the interview format characteristic of these programs, the interviewer (a role regularly performed by Kluge himself) remains predominantly off-screen – his presence marked only by the highly enthusiastic voice guiding and animating the discussions. Although these conversations are organised around the discussion of a particular theme, topic, or event (such as a documentary about techno, Werner Schroeter's staging of an opera by Bellini, the unfinished film projects of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Siegfried Kracauer's writings on film and mass culture, or the ideas of Deleuze and Foucault⁴) the discussions frequently shoot off in directions that would not appear to be related to the topic in question. Although prompted in large part by Kluge's highly imaginative and, at times, somewhat abstruse mode of questioning, these digressions are also fuelled by the quotes and intertitles which intersperse the shots of the interviewees in conversation – the comments of whom are further complicated, not only by the questions and statements that scroll across the bottom of the screen, but by the manner in which Kluge fragments, duplicates, and rotates the many photographs, diagrams, and other images which flash up throughout the course of the discussion. (See Figure 3).

3. For an analysis of Kluge's programs within the broader context of the history of magazine programs in Germany, see Knut Hickethier: "Von anderen Erfahrungen in der Fernsehöffentlichkeit. Alexander Kluges Kulturmagazine und die Fernsehgeschichte", in: Kluges Fernsehen. Alexander Kluges Kulturmagazine, ed. by Christian Schulte/Winfried Siebers, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2002, pp. 195-219. This book will hereafter be referred to as Kluges Fernsehen.

4. "196 bpm – Romuald Karmaker filmt Tekknokönig DJ Hell" ("196 beats per minute – Romuald Karmaker films techno king DJ Hell"), Primetime Spätausgabe, RTL (September 14, 2003), "Die Tochter des Miraculix – Vincenzo Bellini's geniale Oper 'Norma'" ("The daughter of Miraculix – Vincenzo Bellini's ingenious opera 'Norma'"), News and Stories, SAT 1 (September 7, 2003), "Fassbinders Gesammelte Hinterlassenschaften" ("Fassbinder's collected legacies"), News and Stories, SAT 1 (September 16, 2001), "Organisiertes Glück" ("Organised Happiness"), News and Stories, SAT 1 (September 19, 1994), "Baustellen der Macht – die französischen Philosophen Foucault und Deleuze über die 'Rhizome der Gewalt'" ("Construction sites of Power – the French philosophers Foucault and Deleuze on the 'rhizome of violence'"), 10 vor 11, RTL (November 10, 2003).

Figure 3: Images from Kluge's television programs.



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Even more surprising, however, than the form and content of the programs themselves is the fact that they have, following the establishment of Kluge's DCTP (Development Company for Television Programs) in 1988, been variously broadcast on SAT 1, RTL and VOX – three of the major commercial channels on German television⁵. The roots of this

5. As Matthias Uecker has outlined in his study of Kluge's television programs, DCTP (which is owned jointly by Kluge (50%), *Spiegel-Verlag* (12.5%), and the Japanese advertising agency *Dentsu* (37.5%)) developed out of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kabel- und Satellitenprogramme*, an organisation established by Kluge (together with book publishers, film directors, and theatre executives) in an

strange alliance can be traced back to 1984 to the establishment of a “dual broadcasting” system in West Germany which saw the introduction of private (commercial) stations alongside ARD and ZDF – the two existing public service channels which had been established in 1953 and 1961 under the aegis of a “commitment to truth, impartiality, and balance and diversity of opinion”.⁶ In an attempt to preserve (at least, in part) these public service ideals in the face of what it viewed as the onslaught of commercial television, in 1997 the Social Democratic government (SPD) of Nord-Rhein Westfalen instituted a new broadcasting law which stated that commercial stations seeking to gain a broadcasting licence for the state would have to provide programming slots or “window programs” (“*Fensterprogramme*”) for independent cultural producers.

Benefitting from this law (and, indeed, from Kluge’s profile in Germany as a highly regarded filmmaker and author), in 1988 DCTP was – together with SAT 1 and RTL (then RTL plus) – granted joint broadcasting licences that provided DCTP with weekly program slots within the broader context of the commercial channels; the strict independence of which was, and continues to be, safeguarded by the licensing contract. The result has been that, with the exception of his *Mitternachtsmagazin* (which screens on VOX) Kluge’s programs enjoy the extremely rare privilege of occupying regular spaces on the commercial channels which are completely free of commercials.

Needless to say, this carving out of a space within the commercial channels for the creation of what Kluge has described as “*Autoren-Fern-*

attempt to create a “niche” for the so-called “old media” within the sphere of commercial television. The program *Die Stunde der Filmemacher* (The Hour of the Filmmakers), which first screened on SAT 1 in 1985, developed out of this alliance, and showcased programs produced by German filmmakers which were overseen by Kluge, who served as executive producer). For a detailed account of the events which led to the establishment of these companies, see Chapter 1.3: “Prinzip Gegenproduktion: Alexander Kluge’s ‘Development Company for Television Programs (DCTP)’”, in: Matthias Uecker: *Anti-Fernsehen? Alexander Kluges Fernsehproduktionen*, Marburg: Schüren 2000, pp. 48–63. Hereafter referred to as *Anti-Fernsehen?* For an overview in English, see Peter C. Lutze: *Alexander Kluge: The Last Modernist*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1998, pp. 180–184.

6. Peter J. Humphreys: *Media and Media Policy in Germany: The Press and Broadcasting since 1945* (Second Edition), Oxford and Providence: Berg 1994, p. 165. For a detailed account of the public service ideals of ARD and ZDF, see pp. 148–152 and 164–168 respectively.

sehen" ("Author's television"), has caused a stir with the directors of the commercial host-stations, including the former head of RTL Helmut Thoma, who has described Kluge as a "ratings killer" who makes "stone-age television"⁷. In critical reviews of Kluge's programs, the so-called "prehistoric" character of his work is often invoked, not only to describe the simple, hand-made quality of the programs (which are produced on a small budget by Kluge and a working team of three or four people) but to question whether the programs are of a suitable calibre to be shown on television at all. Mark Siemons, for example, has argued that Kluge's programs "appear to have absolutely nothing to do with television". "The sound quality", he writes,

is bad, the questions don't get to the point, things are spoken so quickly that one can hardly follow, and once images appear with which one can draw connections with previously seen material, they are then alienated through doublings, prismatic refractions or incomprehensible blocks of text [*Texttafeln*]. 'That is loveless cobbled-together stuff', say RTL- co-workers.⁸

Anyone, however, who is familiar with the many years of lobbying and negotiations that have enabled Kluge to cleave open a space for his own work (and, indeed, the work of countless others) on German television would know that his programs are not "loveless", "cobbled-together" constructions, but rather the fruit of a longstanding commitment to the creation of alternative forms of communication within the sphere of commercial television.⁹ The significance of Kluge's programs (the

7. Quoted in Christian Schulte and Winfried Siebers: "Vorwort", in: Kluges Fernsehen, p. 8. Despite Thoma's claim, Kluge argues that his programs often attract over one million viewers. See Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky and Giaco Schiesser: "In der Echtzeit der Gefühle: Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge", in: Die Schrift an der Wand. Alexander Kluge: Rohstoffe und Materialien, ed. by Christian Schulte, Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Rasch 2000, p. 365. For a detailed breakdown of the ratings figures for Kluge's programs in the first quarter of 1994, see Anti-Fernsehen?, p. 62.

8. Mark Siemons: "Zwölftonmusik im Zirkus: Das Fernsehen Alexander Kluges", in: Fernsehen. Medien, Macht und Märkte, ed. by Helmut Monkenbusch, Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch 1994, p. 108.

9. For an account of Kluge's efforts in this regard, see Gertrud Koch and Heide Schlüpmann: "'Nur Trümmern traue ich [...]': Ein Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge", in: Kanalarbeit: Medienstrategien im Kulturwandel, ed. by Hans Ulrich Reck, Basel and Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern 1998.

form and content of which, far from being arbitrary, is intimately bound with his alternative conception of the possibilities of the medium) can, however, only be fully appreciated when viewed in the light of his long-standing criticism of the monodimensional, information-heavy content of programs which, he argues, have dominated (and continue to dominate) the perceived role and function of the medium.

7.1 Information, Storytelling, and Experience

In *Public Sphere and Experience* (a book which Kluge wrote together with Oskar Negt in the early 1970s¹⁰) the authors draw implicitly on Benjamin's criticism of the information driven content of modern forms of communication in their criticism of the manner in which television programs such as news broadcasts both address, and communicate with, their audience.¹¹ Central to Benjamin's analysis of the rise of information as a means of communication is the decline in both the art of storytelling, and the communicability of experience, with which he argues this rise is intimately associated. For both Benjamin and Kluge, what is significant about storytelling as a mode of communication is the extent to which the storyteller is able to recount a tale in such a way that its meaning is not communicated to the listener directly. In a fashion reminiscent of Kluge's delineation of the task of a radical cinema, Benjamin argues that "it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it".¹² "The most extraordinary things, marvellous things", he writes, "are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader".¹³ Rather, the tale is recounted in a manner that prompts the listener to draw on his or her own experience and imagination in an attempt to fill out the contours of the story.

10. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge: *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1993. Hereafter referred to as *Public Sphere and Experience*.

11. Walter Benjamin: "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov", in: *Benjamin: Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, London: Fontana Press 1992, pp. 83-107. Hereafter referred to as "The Storyteller".

12. "The Storyteller", p. 89.

13. *Ibid.*

In stark contrast, Benjamin argues that the “prime requirement” of information “is that it appear ‘understandable in itself’ – a quality which, in ‘lay[ing] claim to prompt verifiability’, is clearly at odds with ‘the spirit of storytelling’.”¹⁴ Taking the form and content of daily newspapers as his prime example, Benjamin argues that the “replacement of the older narration by information [...] reflects the increasing atrophy of experience”.¹⁵ “Every morning”, he writes,

brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information.¹⁶

In keeping with his analysis, in “Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, of the modern decline in the capacity “to assimilate data of the world [...] by way of [one’s] experience”¹⁷, Benjamin argues that “[i]f it were the intention of the press to have the reader assimilate the information it supplies as part of his own experience, it would not achieve its purpose”¹⁸. “But its intention”, he claims:

14. *Ibid.*, p. 88. “The value of information”, he writes, “does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time”. pp. 89-90.

15. Walter Benjamin: “Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, in: Benjamin: Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, London and New York: Verso 1997, p. 113.

16. “The Storyteller”, p. 89. See also Benjamin’s short piece “The Handkerchief” (1932) which anticipates his criticism of newspapers in “The Storyteller” by way of a story about his discussion with a sea captain: “‘You can learn nothing from the papers’, he said. ‘They always want to explain everything to you.’ And in fact isn’t it half the art of journalism to keep the news free of explanations? And didn’t the ancients set an example for us by presenting events, as it were, dry, draining them entirely of psychological explanations and opinions of every sort?” Benjamin: *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, ed. by Michael W. Jennings/Howard Eiland/Gary Smith, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press 1999, pp. 659-660.

17. “Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, p. 112.

18. *Ibid.*

is just the opposite, and it is achieved to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader. The principles of journalistic information (freshness of the news, brevity, comprehensibility, and, above all, lack of connection between the individual news items) contribute as much to this as does the make-up of the pages and the paper's style.¹⁹

In a similar vein to Benjamin, Negt and Kluge argue in *Public Sphere and Experience* that the emphasis on brevity and the cultivation of immediate comprehension characteristic of television news broadcasts impacts negatively, not only on the viewer's capacity to assimilate news items by way of his or her own experience, but on the viewer's ability to conceive of the meaning of a particular situation or event outside of the terms within which it has been framed by the program. "A sensational news item", they argue,

is broadcast; but it is not accompanied by programs that might meaningfully interpret this news in the light of social contradictions or develop it in relation to the viewer's own experience. It is only on such a broadened basis that grief, sympathy, incorporation into a historical context, or an autonomous reaction by the viewer become possible. [...] Insofar as experiences do manage to penetrate the items on the evening news, they are, in the commentaries, translated into an esoteric language that promotes the rapid consumption of events.²⁰

The alternative conception of the possibilities of the medium outlined in *Public Sphere and Experience* takes as its starting point the need to replace

19. Ibid.

20. *Public Sphere and Experience*, p. 108. Like Benjamin, Negt and Kluge argue that the inability to assimilate information presented by news broadcasts by way of one's experience is further enhanced by the "hodgepodge selection of news items: A train crash, a strike in Italy, the death of a philosopher, the abduction of a young girl, a controversy about the Deutsche mark (appearing in the form of a point-counterpoint between two politicians), a weather report, and so on – all of these items contain, in and of themselves, genuine information, but this information is cut off from its real social roots". p. 119. See also Siegfried Kracauer's 1928 analysis of newsreels and the "hodgepodge" of "shots of ship christenings, destructive fires, sports events, parades, and idyllic scenes of children and animals" out of which they were constructed. Kracauer: "Film 1928", in: Kracauer: *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. by Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press 1995, p. 311.

the “monologue”²¹ format of information-heavy programs such as news broadcasts with program formats that are genuinely organized around mobilising the participation of the viewer. Drawing on Bertolt Brecht’s 1932 analysis of the extent to which radio could be “transformed from an apparatus of distribution into one of communication”²², Negt and Kluge argue that “the foundation of a possible emancipatory development of television” must be organized around the creation of the “self-determination of [its] viewers”.²³ “Radio”, Brecht argues,

would be the greatest conceivable communication apparatus of public life, an enormous system of channels, that is, it would be this if it were to understand how to not only transmit, but also receive, in other words, how to make the listener not only hear but also speak, and how to bring him into the relationship instead of isolating him.²⁴

In a similar vein to his delineation of the collaborative nature of the spectatorial relationship cultivated by *Autorenfilm*, Kluge (following Brecht) argues that the greater the degree of reciprocity between the viewer and the program on screen, the more effective the program is in generating a public sphere within which viewers are encouraged to participate in the meaning making process surrounding issues, events and ideas that impact on their own concerns, experiences, and interests.²⁵

21. Public Sphere and Experience, p. 114.

22. Brecht quoted in Public Sphere and Experience, note 9, p. 103, and Brecht: “The Radio as a Communicative Apparatus”, in: Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio, ed. by Marc Silberman, London: Methuen 2001, pp. 41-46.

23. Public Sphere and Experience, p. 103.

24. Brecht quoted in Public Sphere and Experience, note 9, pp. 103-4, and Brecht: “The Radio as a Communications Apparatus”, p. 42. See also Hans Magnus Enzensberger: “Constituents of a theory of the media”, New Left Review, No. 64 (Nov/Dec, 1970) in which Brecht’s analysis of the possibilities of radio is employed to make a similar argument about the possibilities of television. See also Walter Benjamin’s short piece “Reflections on the Radio” which opens with the statement: “The crucial failing of this institution [the radio] has been to perpetuate the fundamental separation between practitioners and the public, a separation which is at odds with its technological basis”. Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 2, p. 543.

25. See, for example, “In der Echtzeit der Gefühle: Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge”, p. 361.

For Negt and Kluge, one of the greatest obstacles to the cultivation of such a public sphere is what they describe as the “problem of *television realism*”.²⁶ In keeping with Kluge’s analysis of the degree to which our capacity to conceive of the possibilities of both the past and the future is foreclosed by historical narratives that describe particular outcomes and occurrences as “necessary” and/or “realistic”, Negt and Kluge argue that the tightly organised, unambiguous manner in which news items are packaged on television news broadcasts naturalises the occurrences being represented – providing the viewer with the impression that it is not possible to do anything to change the current situation.²⁷

A staunch critic of the manner in which such packaging prohibits us from conceiving of the extent to which things could, in fact, be very different, Kluge argues that an emancipatory television practice would channel its energies toward stimulating the imagination of the audience into reconceiving the possibilities of the present. In the realm of the imagination, he argues,

[t]he obstacles of reality cease to exist. If the imagination has good reasons to disregard these real obstacles – as a compensation for the reality principle – then the question is how can one, for the sake of whatever cause, encourage the imagination to develop such perspectives on it (ie. perspectives different from those inherent in things as they are). In documentary film this could only be realized via a mixing of forms – the only method which permits radical changes in perspective.²⁸

In keeping with Kluge’s analysis of the active spectatorial relationship cultivated by the loosely woven, mixed form characteristic of his films, Negt and Kluge argue that “the artisanal production of individual items”²⁹

26. Public Sphere and Experience, p. 128.

27. One can detect the influence of Theodor W. Adorno’s analysis of magazine stories in Kluge’s delineation of “the problem of television realism”. Such stories, Adorno writes, “teach their readers that one has to be ‘realistic’, that one has to give up romantic ideas, that one has to adjust oneself at any price, and that nothing more can be expected of any individual”. Adorno: “How to look at television”, in: Adorno: The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture, ed. by J.M. Bernstein, London: Routledge 1991, p. 141.

28. Kluge: “On Film and the Public Sphere”, New German Critique, No. 24-25 (Fall/Winter, 1981-2), p. 215. Translation modified. See “Die Rolle der Phantasie”, in: Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge: Ulmer Dramaturgien. Reibungsverluste, München and Wien: Carl Hanser 1980, pp. 62-63.

29. Public Sphere and Experience, p. 114.

is more effective in cultivating the imagination and participation of the television audience. For Benjamin, too, it is the simple, handspun quality of the storyteller's tales that is essential to their capacity to engage an audience. "In fact", Benjamin writes, "one can go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful and unique way".³⁰

In the light of these comments, one can begin to get a sense of the extent to which some of the key criticisms that have been levelled at certain characteristics of Kluge's television programs (such as the loose, handcrafted quality of the work, and the perceived inability of the programs to "get to the point") are actually characteristics which are central to Negt and Kluge's alternative conception of the possibilities of television as a medium: a medium which – instead of bombarding the viewer with preprocessed units of information – would actively encourage the audience to draw on their own imagination and experience in an attempt to engage with the materials on screen.

7.2 Raw Materials for the Imagination

In a 1996 episode of the aptly titled *News and Stories* (a forty-five minute program which is broadcast on SAT 1 on Monday evenings) Kluge evokes an image of television that is in keeping with the delineation of the shortcomings of the medium outlined in *Public Sphere and Experience*. The episode in question is entitled "Detonation Deutschland/Sprengbilder einer Nation von Julian Rosefeldt und Piero Steinle" ("Detonation Germany/Explosive images of a nation by Julian Rosefeldt and Piero Steinle")³¹, and revolves around a discussion between Kluge and two German artists – the recent work of whom includes "Detonation Deutschland": an installation of video footage depicting the state-sanctioned demolition of a number of historically and/or architecturally significant buildings in Germany. (See Figure 4).

Towards the end of the program (and over an intertitle announcing "Detonation Deutschland" as the third project of Rosefeldt and Steinle) Kluge asks the latter (who subsequently appears in medium close-up) whether the remains of a demolition typically consist of "raw material"

30. "The Storyteller", p. 107.

31. *News and Stories*, SAT 1 (July 8, 1996).

Figure 4: Images from “Detonation Deutschland/Sprengbilder einer Nation von Julian Rosefeldt und Piero Steinle”



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(“Rohstoff”), or whether it is “scrap metal and rubbish” (“Schrott und Schutt”) that remain after such an explosion. After listening to Steinle (who confirms that, “as a matter of principle”, it is scrap metal and rubbish which constitute the remains of a demolition) Kluge enthusiastically suggests that television, too, could be likened to such an explosion.³² Although located off-screen, Kluge’s highly enthusiastic presence is reflected in the somewhat bewildered, politely smiling face of Steinle, who

32. See also Uecker’s analysis of this discussion in *Anti-Fernsehen?*, p. 100.

pauses uncomfortably before seeking to respond to Kluge's observation. Although cryptic within the immediate context of the program, viewers familiar with Kluge's conception of the task of a radical cinema would have already drawn a connection between his observations about the installation, and his frequent likening of his own films to "construction sites" or buildings in process³³ – the unfinished, open structure of which encourages the spectator to engage creatively with the raw materials out of which films such as *The Patriot* and *The Power of Feelings* are constructed.

In the context of the program, Kluge's likening of television to an explosion that produces scrap metal and rubbish (rather than the raw materials favoured by Kluge) could be said to echo his and Negt's negative delineation of the closed-off, monodimensional content of information-heavy programs elaborated in *Public Sphere and Experience*. Indeed, in stark contrast to these programs, Kluge's work for television does not provide the audience with preprocessed units of information which – like the scrap metal and rubbish left behind after a demolition – cannot easily be incorporated into new constructions (nor the structures of meaning generated in the spectator's head which are frequently discussed by Kluge³⁴). Rather, in keeping with both Kluge's delineation of the task of a radical cinema, and the call – in *Public Sphere and Experience* – for program formats that are genuinely organised around mobilising the participation of the audience, Kluge's television programs are constructed out of a diverse collection of raw materials – the unfinished, open structure of which encourages the spectator to draw upon his/her own experience and imagination in an attempt to fill out the contours of the program.

The central device employed by Kluge for generating these raw materials is the interview format around which the majority of his programs are constructed.³⁵ What is unique about these interviews (which

33. See, for example, Jürgen Bevers et al.: "‘Eine Baustelle ist vorteilhafter als ganze Häuser’: Ein Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge", *Spuren: Zeitschrift für Kunst und Gesellschaft*, No. 1 (Februar/März, 1980), p. 17.

34. See, for example, Alexander Kluge: "Pact with a Dead Man", in: *West German Filmmakers on Film: Visions and Voices*, ed. by Eric Rentschler, New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1988, p. 236, and Edgar Reitz, Alexander Kluge, and Wilfried Reinke: "Word and Film", *October*, No. 46 (Fall, 1988), p. 87.

35. Although the interview serves as an anchor for the majority of Kluge's programs, a significant number of the programs do not feature interviews, but are constructed out of a diverse montage of materials (such as photographs, dia-

typically take place in busy public spaces such as bars, cafes, theatres, museums or, alternatively, in the storeroom of Kluge's Munich office) is the dynamic way in which Kluge as interviewer seeks to engage the interviewee in a conversation which ricochets imaginatively between a broad range of topics while seeking to address the complexity of the issue in question. In the majority of these interviews, it is Kluge's highly enthusiastic mode of questioning which sets the tone of the conversation, and which ensures that the topic is addressed from multiple perspectives. Although this is sometimes achieved through the presentation of interviews with a range of different subjects³⁶, these multiple perspectives are more regularly generated by Kluge himself who demonstrates, what Christian Schulte has described as, the "extraordinary capacity, through unexpected changes in perspective, to [both] stimulate [...] the imagination of his dialogue partner", and to "set his capacity for memory into action".³⁷

The example provided by Schulte (which is taken from one of the many dynamic interviews that Kluge conducted with Heiner Müller³⁸) is an interesting example of the way in which Kluge's curious mode of questioning animates the conversation by seeking to ignite the associative and imaginative capacities of his interview partner. In this particular

grams, clips from films, quotes, and electronically generated images) which address a particular theme or topic. See, for example, "Das Xmas Project" ("The Xmas Project"), 10 vor 11, RTL (December 12, 1993), "Darwins Waltzer", Primetime Spätausgabe, RTL (August 26, 1990), and "Jahresüberblick" ("Overview of the year"), News and Stories, SAT 1 (January 3, 1994).

36. See, for example, "Ein Straßenbahnfahrt durch eine Stadt in den neuen Bundesländern" ("A tram ride through a city in the new federal states"), 10 vor 11, RTL (March 9, 1992). In this program (which provides a portrait of the history of tram travel in Halberstadt) these multiple perspectives are generated through discussions with a range of interviewees, including a tram driver, transport superintendent, mechanic, passenger, and town chronicler.

37. Christian Schulte: "Fernsehen und Eigensinn", in: Kluges Fernsehen, p. 78.

38. "Im Zeichnen des Mars" ("In the Sign of Mars"), Primetime Spätausgabe, RTL (January 23 1994). This interview, and several others with Müller, have been published in two volumes. See Alexander Kluge and Heiner Müller: "Ich schulde der Welt einen Toten": Gespräche, Hamburg: Rotbuch 1996, and Alexander Kluge and Heiner Müller: "Ich bin ein Landvermesser": Gespräche mit Heiner Müller, Hamburg: Rotbuch 1996. The interview in question appears as "Charakterpanzer und Bewegungskrieg" in: Ich Schulde der Welt einen Toten: Gespräche, pp. 85-91.

example, the process begins with Kluge enthusiastically encouraging Müller to describe “the moon” to the television audience:

Müller: The first thing would be that the moon is something that one shouldn't walk on. All other planets first, then the moon. The moon is something that one shouldn't colonise, shouldn't touch, one should simply let it stand, the way it is, or let it continue, the way it is. I'm saying this now in a very associative fashion [...]

Kluge: But how would you begin to narrate the moon, would you begin with the sun, would you begin with the planets, would you begin with the stars? You have begun: It should not be walked on. I find that very consequential, but attempt to describe, to describe to a stranger, what it is.

Müller: With the moon, one has something that one needs to sleep. It is something that one needs to know what time it is, where one can sleep.³⁹

As is revealed in the discussion that follows, the moon also plays an important role in an unpublished poem written by Müller, the recollection of which leads him (via a childhood memory) to recall his first experience of politics:

Müller: And I remember, 1934, it was nearly evening, the bells rang in this village [...] because Hindenburg had died. And that was very strange, that was actually my first experience of politics or history. I noticed that it was something like a decisive point [*Einschnitt*] for the adults. Something had come to an end, some kind of protection or[...].

Kluge: A sense of security [...]

Müller: [...] a sense of security was gone, and a sense of agitation, a sense of fear were there, and everyone stood completely dumb at the fence and heard the bells.

Kluge: And what does that have to do with the moon?

Müller: For me, that has something to do with the moon. I don't know why, I can't give reasons for that now. The moon was a source of agitation, but also a source of security.⁴⁰

39. “Charakterpanzer und Bewegungskrieg” in: Ich Schulde der Welt einen Toten: Gespräche, pp. 88-89.

40. Ibid., pp. 90-91. Sections of this interview are also quoted in “Fernsehen und Eigensinn”, p. 76-78. See also Kluge's interview with Jeff Mills – “Jeff Mills/Godfather des Techno”, News and Stories, SAT 1 (September 7, 1998) – which is also partly animated by a mutual fascination with the solar system. A transcript of this interview has been published in Alexander Kluge: Verdeckte

Although the mode of questioning demonstrated by Kluge in this passage is typical of the highly associative, imaginative manner in which interviews are conducted on his programs, not all of Kluge's interviewees demonstrate Müller's willingness to partake in a conversation that is continually shifting in its parameters and focus. Jean-Luc Godard, for example (whom Kluge interviewed in 1990 at a press conference for the release of Godard's *Nouvelle Vague*⁴¹), responded in an impatient and somewhat indifferent fashion to Kluge's curious line of questioning, resulting in a one-way conversation that was stilted and uninspiring in its awkwardness.⁴²

In more general terms, it is also true to say that a number of figures who appear on Kluge's programs exhibit signs of frustration when their answers and/or explanations are re-diverted by Kluge, preventing them from being able to communicate their ideas in a manner which is systematic and linear in orientation. Indeed, such frustration appears to be particularly pronounced when it becomes clear that the direction in which Kluge is diverting the conversation leads directly to his own area of interest and/or expertise – a tendency that could, at times, be said to stunt (rather than stimulate) the imaginative and associative capacities of his interview partner.⁴³

Kluge does not, however, conceive of the interview format as a fo-

Ermittlung: Ein Gespräch mit Christian Schulte und Rainer Stollmann, Berlin: Merve 2001, pp. 127-139.

41. "Wie in der Liebe: 'Keine Erklärungen'/'Magazin zu Godards 60. Geburtstag" ("Just like in love: 'No explanations'/'Magazine for Godard's sixtieth birthday"), 10 vor 11, RTL (March 12, 1990).

42. The questions posed by Kluge in the interview revolve around what Godard's parents did for a living, and whether he could describe the wallpaper and the position of the bed in his childhood bedroom. Surprised and unimpressed by Kluge's line of questioning, Godard simply responds by stating that it would take too long – and require too much effort – to answer such questions.

43. Uecker goes a step further, arguing that Kluge's "way of steering the conversation in the direction of his own interests can at times appear aggressive, even violent, rather than just persistent; for example, when he loses patience with an opera singer and starts to explain the character of Wozzeck in Alban Berg's opera to him rather than giving him a chance to make any more statements". Matthias Uecker: "'Für Kultur ist es nie zu spät!'- Alexander Kluge's Television Productions", in: "Whose Story?": Continuities in contemporary German-language literature, ed. by Arthur Williams et al., Bern: Peter Lang 1998, p. 345. See also Uecker's discussion of this topic in *Anti-Fernsehen?*, p. 109.

rum within which the interviewee is simply required to rehearse his or her fully formed ideas about a particular topic for the benefit of an attentive television audience.⁴⁴ Indeed, the interviews conducted on Kluge's programs do not (save those moments in which Kluge himself dominates the conversation) seek to close down meaning by instructing or persuading the audience of the benefits of a certain interpretation of events, or a particular line of thinking. Rather, in keeping with the call for interactivity outlined in *Public Sphere and Experience*, the interviews conducted by Kluge are both dynamic and porous in their structure – prompting both the interviewee *and* the audience to establish their own connections with the raw materials generated by the discussions.

This emphasis on interactivity (which is absolutely crucial for an understanding of the significance of Kluge's television, film, and literary work) is also evident in the highly eclectic "mixed form" of the programs themselves, which (in a manner reminiscent of Kluge's films) are constructed out of a diverse collection of raw materials. Also reminiscent of films such as *The Patriot* and *The Power of Feelings* is the manner in which Kluge employs devices and techniques redolent of early cinema in his attempt to create program formats that are organised around cultivating the active participation of the television audience.⁴⁵ In Kluge's programs, these devices (which include a frequent use of intertitles, iris masks to frame the image, the shooting of landscapes from moving vehicles⁴⁶, and a liberal use of colour tinting) are supplemented by a plethora of possibilities opened up by digital video (including the layering of image and text through superimposition, the production of complex collage effects created by montage within the frame, the generation and animation of digital images, the employment of scrolling text mes-

44. See, for example, Rainer Lewandowski's interview with Kluge, and Kluge's annoyance at Lewandowski's frequent attempts to draw the conversation back into the direction that he had anticipated when forming his questions. In response to Lewandowski's claim that Kluge's response did not address the point which he had wanted to make, Kluge states that he should focus on participating in the discussion, rather than seeking to "pedagogically" draw out a certain opinion. *Die Filme von Alexander Kluge*, p. 47.

45. For Kluge's comments on his attempts to "reclaim film history for television", see "In der Echtzeit der Gefühle: Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge", p. 363, and "Nur Trümmern traue ich [...]": Ein Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge", p. 21.

46. See, for example, "Ein Straßenbahnfahrt durch eine Stadt in den neuen Bundesländern", 10 vor 11, RTL (March 9, 1992).

sages to pose questions and display quotes, and the fragmentation, duplication, magnification, and rotation of the image).⁴⁷ (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Images from Kluge's television programs



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In the opening sequence of “Geisterstunde mit Bildern” (“Ghost-hour with Images”)⁴⁸, for example, a black and white intertitle announcing the themes of the program (which include “What is real?”, “Plato’s Cave Parable in *The Republic*”, “The 100th Anniversary of the death of Karl Marx”, and “The Philosopher in front of the electrical monitor”) is followed by an elaborately crafted collage of both still and moving images. The screen is divided into two parts: The right hand section features a monitor which is stacked with yellow tinted books, and which displays a

47. As Uecker has pointed out, it is this manipulation of the image that enables Kluge to incorporate a broad range of materials into his programs without having to seek copyright permission. See Uecker: “‘Für Kultur ist es nie zu spät!’- Alexander Kluge’s Television Productions”, p. 347. See also Arno Makowsky’s comments in this regard, to which Uecker also refers: “Der Pate als Quotenkiller”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, No. 240, 16-17 October (1993), p. 10.

48. 10 vor 11, RTL (August 27, 1990).

montage of black and white footage of crowd scenes and the public display of Lenin's body, while the left hand section consists of a full-screen montage of black and white footage of planes in bomber formation which is overlaid with iris-framed, red and blue colour-tinted footage of what appears to be army personnel. In the sequence which follows (which is briefly preceded by a montage of still images of iris-framed maps, and a photograph of a bust of Socrates) Oskar Negt is shown seated in a dark room in front of two monitors – both of which display black and white documentary footage of war scenes, including images of burning buildings, and bomber pilots in action. (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: Images from “Geisterstunde mit Bildern”



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In a similar vein to the active television viewer envisioned by Negt and Kluge in *Public Sphere and Experience*, Negt uses the raw materials that appear before him on the monitors as springboards for the formation of his own associations, connections, and ideas. These associations (which provide a form of voiceover narration reminiscent of Kluge's films) prompt him to question both the goal of warfare, and the image of reality projected by such images – a train of thought that leads him to a consideration of Plato's cave allegory (in which prisoners mistake the

shadows projected on the wall of the cave in which they are imprisoned for reality itself).⁴⁹ Pointing to the images of warfare on the monitors, Negt states in a critical tone that, according to Plato, such images are shadows of ideas, and that it is ideas (and not the source of the shadows) which constitute reality – a point which Negt then correlates with Hegel's analysis of the spirit of progress driving world history, stating critically (as he gestures toward the monitors) that it is not the progress of history, nor the progress of consciousness, which is unfolding before us in this footage.

Apart from providing the audience with a model of a highly imaginative, dynamic mode of spectatorship, what is interesting about this sequence is the extent to which Negt's observations and associations speak (albeit in an opaque, condensed fashion) to Kluge's analysis of the extent to which the highly circumscribed image of events presented by the mainstream media actively shapes our understanding of what is appropriate and/or acceptable behaviour, and impacts negatively upon our capacity to conceive of the extent to which an event, or series of events, could in fact have turned out very differently.

In keeping with his criticism of both films and television programs which seek to pedagogically impress their ideas upon the viewing audience, Kluge's work for television does not provide alternative "readings" of topical issues or events, nor do his programs endeavour to channel the observations and associations of viewers into conceiving of the benefits of a particular idea or outcome. Rather, in cleaving open a series of "cultural windows" within the commercial channels for the so-called "old media", Kluge has endeavoured not only to rejuvenate our conception of the possibilities of television as a medium, but to actively encourage the viewing audience to draw on their own imagination and experience in the aid of the creation of different cultural and historical imaginaries.

49. See "The Simile of the Cave" in: Plato: The Republic (Part Seven, Book 6), London: Penguin Books 1987, pp. 316-325.