

Landscapes of Ice, Wind, and Snow: Alexander Kluge's Aesthetic of Coldness

NORA M. ALTER, LUTZ KOEPNICK,
AND RICHARD LANGSTON

Forecasting Coldness

In a letter from March 13, 1967, Theodor W. Adorno reveals his plans for an essay on coldness inspired, in part, by Alexander Kluge's debut feature, *Abschied von gestern* (*Yesterday Girl*, 1966).¹ Intended to pick up on unfinished business from earlier works such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Minima Moralia*, the proposed work on coldness never materialized. In poor health and besieged by revolting students, Adorno died two years later in the mountains near Sils Maria, Switzerland, before finishing his *Aesthetic Theory*. Some of his coldness project's seeds can nevertheless be found lurking in Adorno's lecture, "Education after Auschwitz," from 1966.² Here, social coldness and indifference are described as the anthropological byproduct of how human beings have come to embrace instrumental reason and strategies of self-objectification in order to survive a world of competition, commodification, and conflict. And yet, the dialectician Adorno leaves little doubt that individual expressions of human warmth, intimacy, care, and love cannot correct the historical process. In fact, injecting the warmth of personal compassion and love—the dogma of Christianity—into the coldness of modern civilization would make matters worse, because it would obscure the very conditions that foster indifference in the first place. "If anything can help against coldness as the condition for disaster," Adorno concludes,

then it is the insight into the conditions that determine it and the attempt to combat those conditions, initially in the domain of the individual. . . . The exhortation to love—even in its imperative form, that one *should* do it—is itself part of the ideology coldness perpetuates. It bears the compulsive, oppressive quality that counteracts the ability to love. The first thing therefore is to bring coldness to the consciousness of itself, of the reasons why it arose.³

Becoming self-conscious of one's own coldness was the substrate of Adorno's critical pedagogy but was sketched out only in the broadest of strokes.

Whether, as intimated in the letter, Adorno's "intention can be inserted into [Kluge's] plans" appears increasingly dubious the more we query the idiosyncrasies of Kluge's aesthetics of coldness (*WST*, 4). While his earliest stories and films do acknowledge Adorno's challenge "to bring coldness to the consciousness of itself," Kluge has strived to break free from the confines of coldness that his mentor reserved for his own consciousness-raising pedagogy.⁴ In *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (*History and Obstinacy*), coauthored with Oskar Negt, Kluge acknowledges, for example, Adorno's unfinished plans, only then to disassemble, displace, and rematerialize them.⁵ In so doing, the groundwork is laid for Kluge's more recent efforts to turn the negativity underlying Adorno's unfinished theory of social coldness into an "emancipatory positivity" within film and literature (*GE*, 487). The core of Negt and Kluge's own theory of coldness lies not in Adorno's metaphor but in the laws of thermodynamics. "In nature, coldness is the immobilization of matter," they remind us (*GE*, 1132 n. 6). The difference between "unhuman exterior nature [. . .] and human interior nature"—the gulf between the nearly absolute zero "realm of stars" or even the subzero temperatures of "ice ages" and the regulation of normothermia in the human body ($98.6 \pm 0.9^\circ\text{F}$)—constitutes, they insist, a most fundamental condition for the development of human embodiment and thought (*GE*, 50, 1029, 50). One of the "primal experiences" all life-forms share, Kluge later ventures, was the development of a well-honed lifesaving capacity for differentiating warmth from coldness (*WST*, 68). For living matter, coldness is significant because it indexes vital constitutive distinctions: between static dead matter (death) and matter in motion (life), outer and inner nature, nature and culture. Only by virtue of its opposition to coldness is life viable at all.

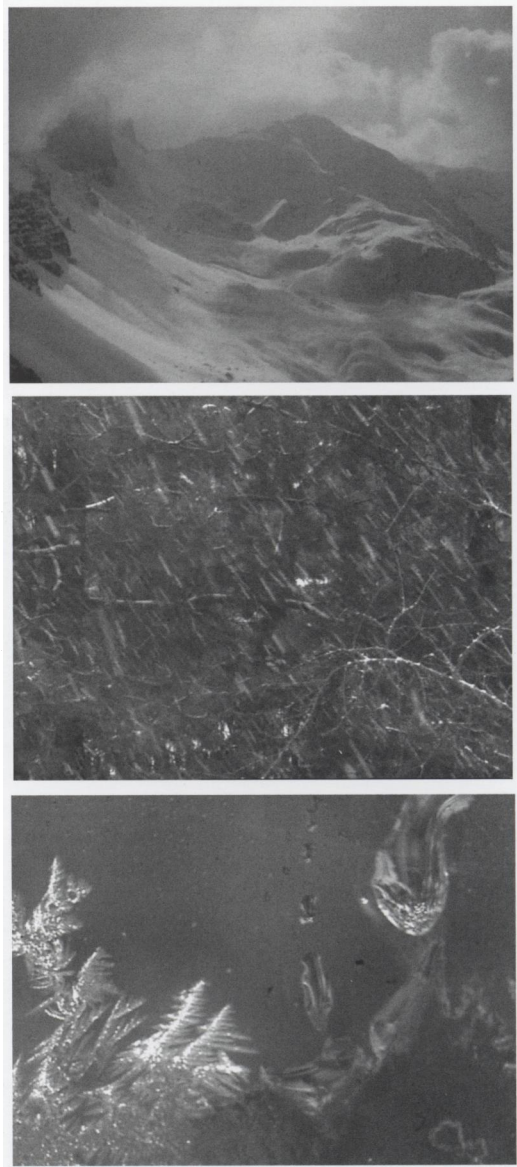
Some forty years after his exchange with Adorno, Kluge has again taken up his teacher's intentions. We find the core of Kluge's restitution of coldness in two companion pieces from 2010 involving digital video, photography, and fiction. The first is a small five-by-eight-inch illustrated "art book" titled *December* and billed as containing thirty-nine short stories by Kluge and thirty-nine photographs by Gerhard Richter. The second is a box set titled *Wer sich traut, reißt die Kälte vom Pferd* (Those who place trust in themselves yank the cold from its horse), comprising a two-hour-and-forty-minute film on DVD, *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* (Landscapes with ice and snow), and a booklet, *Stroh im Eis: Mittel gegen die "gescheiterte Hoffnung"* (Straw in the ice: Remedies for the "wreck of

hope”), consisting of forty-one stories, some of which directly reference the film’s thirty-one chapters.⁶ In our discussion of these twin projects we seek to establish how Kluge shows deference to his mentor while nevertheless being fundamentally at odds with Adorno’s nascent theory of coldness. Coldness, Kluge expounds in Adorno’s preface to *Stroh im Eis*, “is the basis for all FEELING. It can therefore be said that we humans descend from coldness” (*WST*, 5). Navigating this dialectics of coldness—as the origin and end of life, as the numbing and generation of feeling—runs to the core of Kluge’s multimedial practice. In three steps, we probe how Kluge’s media-specific techniques uniquely engage forms of natural coldness—ice, wind, and snow—and together evince an aesthetic intent on honing the human capacity for feeling unaffected by barbarism. As we cross over from film to photography and then to sound, we explicate how fundamental tenets of Adorno’s aesthetic theory—namely, the mediation and unrepresentability of nature—remain intact in and central to Kluge’s work on coldness, while also substantiating how Kluge enlists Adorno’s aesthetic mandates for new purposes. In our third and final move, we turn to the divide between Kluge’s storytelling and filmmaking in order to establish the nature of his deviation from his mentor; namely, the phenomenological foundations of his critical aesthetic of coldness.

Ice

Coldness in *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* initially assumes the form of snow: a panoramic shot of snow-swept mountains cuts to a pair of landscapes in which snow confounds our depth of perception and focus. Soon, however, these snowy scenes segue into images of ice that will make most contemporary viewers initially think not of coldness’s most concentrated form but of how warming, be it cosmic or global in origin, liquefies the earth’s frozen repositories of water. We encounter ice throughout the film’s thirty-one chapters in all its many guises: snowflakes and frost, icicles, floes, pack ice, glaciers, and even the threatened polar caps of our present. But Kluge’s primary project in *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* is not to engage the viewer in yet another discourse about the perils of climate change. Instead, his project is to develop his unprecedented aesthetic of coldness, one predicated on technological mediation. Like his reckoning with

Alexander Kluge. *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee*, 2010. Video stills from the film’s first three minutes.



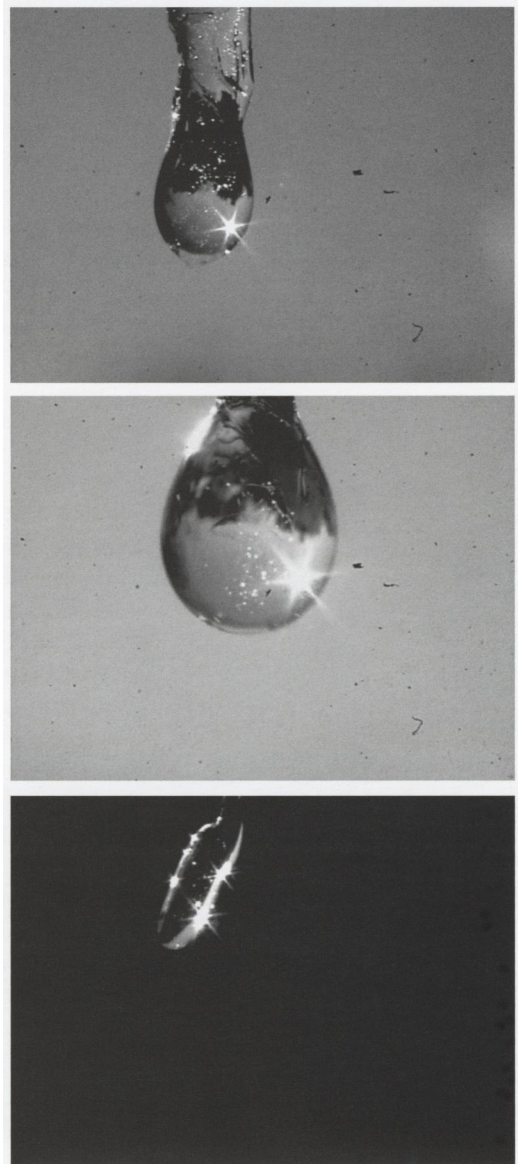
snow, Kluge shows that ice, images of which consume roughly a third of the film, is much more than just water rendered solid. On the one hand, ice embodies the contingencies of the natural world that foil humankind's best-laid plans. Polar scientist Artur Chilingarov provides one such example in his account in chapter 13 of the rescue of a research expedition trapped by the unexpected shift of ice floes in Greenland. Similarly, the transposition in chapter 6 of piled-up shards of sheet ice from Caspar David Friedrich's painting *The Sea of Ice* (1823–1824) onto stills of various locales around the world—both past and present, natural and human-made—draw a parallel between the physical coldness of first nature and the wreckage brought on by second nature.⁷ On the other hand, ice for Kluge allows for good fortune, a moment when human enterprise strikes at the right time and place. In chapter 16, poet and cultural historian Manfred Osten reports, for example, how a sudden freeze determined the victorious outcome of the French Revolution's surprise incursion into Holland in January 1795. Likewise, poet Durs Grünbein tells in chapter 19 of the icy winter conditions in Ulm, Germany, in which René Descartes found inspiration for his foundational proposition *cogito ergo sum*. Far from merely classifying the varying ways coldness in the natural world affects human life, Kluge's ambitions are aesthetic, epistemic, ethical, and phenomenal. Kluge is out to beat hardened ice at its own game by confronting us with dynamic media and concomitant messages that prevent our own powers of perception from freezing over. To this end, his ice sequences serve up ambivalences, tensions, and ironic and even humorous juxtapositions that not only throw into stark relief but also promote the melting away of social conditions of coldness along with the logic of separation, containment, and instrumental reason. In Kluge's hands, ice points toward other, warmer, more liquid states; it is the touchstone for processes of human transformation. "As long as they are alive," he notes in the second edition of his *Stroh im Eis* stories, "there can be no absolute zero point of hope for human beings. Hope burns brighter the closer they are to freezing to death."⁸ Exactly how his ice images anticipate warmth, let alone hope—states that cannot be contained within rigid boundaries and strategic formulae—remains to be seen.

Of all the moving images of ice in *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee*, those in chapter 3 best exemplify Kluge's dialectic of ice. The sequence begins with a melting icicle hanging down from the upper edge of what appears to be a window. Presented about two minutes into the film, the image is explored in three consecutive installments, all of which are announced with the intertitle: "Das Ende eines Eiszapfens mit Himmelsgestirn in der Ferne" (The demise of an icicle with the heavens in the

distance). Shot one presents the icicle's tip against a stark blue sky. The sun hangs to the right of the frame, its presence reflected as a bright and almost blinding spark in the ice itself. Black specks populate the entire frame, unsettling the sense of clarity, crispness, and simplicity suggested by the overall composition. Whether these specks result from dirt on a window-pane, a stained camera lens, or a process of converting older analog film stock into newer digital formats is impossible to determine with any certainty. What the shot achieves, however, is to draw our attention to the process of mediation itself. Kluge relies on both macrophotography and a highly reduced depth of field in order to present the icicle like a finger mysteriously reaching into the frame. Mediation, one might conclude, is the shot's theme. We see a drop swelling at the tip of the icicle every two to three seconds, an unstable form akin to a teardrop that reflects the sun; the optically inverted image of a landscape in the distance gains greater visual presence—over and over again—before the drop falls and takes with it what we just beheld.

After a minute or so, Kluge cuts to the second installment. The sky is slightly lighter now, even though the sun appears to be positioned lower. The icicle no longer pierces the frame from above; all we have is the drop, slowly swelling and then falling, providing us with a brief glimpse of the uttermost tip of the icicle during its fall. In this second shot, the camera appears closer to its object; the angle of the shot has changed as well. But the specks of shot one remain visible as before, obstructions to any ideal of unblemished transparency and purity. In shot three the frame is almost entirely black. We see no more sun, no more horizon line reflected in the drop, no more specks. A small shape, like that of a flattened crystal, inhabits the upper frame of the image, brightened by the iridescent reflection of what we are to assume is the shine of nighttime stars and moon. Unlike the previous two shots, the dynamic aspects of this third image are difficult to read, not least because the camera appears unable to realistically capture the falling of the drop in the reduced lighting conditions. What we see instead is a regular distortion of the image, a kind of visual seizing, a visual ripple, like lightning piercing a night sky, a brief disruption of the image itself, of what can be and should be seen. A final title card documents the musical arrangement dubbed over the sound of water drops during this two-minute

Alexander Kluge. *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee*, 2010. Chapter 3, "Das Ende eines Eiszapfens mit Himmelsgestirn in der Ferne." Video stills.



sequence: Morton Feldman's *Something Wild in the City* (1960), a minimalist exercise in rhythmical repetition.

Each of Kluge's prolonged three shots iterates the same constellation without producing any newness or difference. And yet they serve as momentous allegories of Kluge's media practice. In each shot, Kluge's short seeks to capture what film is all about: the representation of time and movement. Yet each sequence also draws our attention to film's root in photography, the still frame that requires technological animation in order to bestow the impression of movement. Kluge's images of icicles and falling drops are both at once: film and photography, the former exploring its uncanny reliance on the latter, the latter casting light on what is particular and energizing about the former. Moreover, in at least the first two of Kluge's three shots, the swell of the water drop allows us to see an inverted image of the world beyond. The water drop is a mobile frame within the frame, a shifting aperture onto the world that is itself part of this world, a window onto the relative coldness outside that in its very moment of disappearance assumes the power to bring the conditions of coldness—to speak again with Adorno—into consciousness itself.

"The idea of an artistic medium," J.M. Bernstein writes in his reevaluation of Adorno's aesthetic theory for the present, "is perhaps the last idea of material nature as possessing potentialities for meaning."⁹ What Bernstein calls the nature of a medium is an art form's material-specific potential for sense-making; it provides the quasi-transcendental condition for the possibility of artistic practice. For Bernstein, mediums are part of the world of human consciousness: a set of practices and ideas by which artists structure their material and subsume expressive visions to larger schemata. But mediums are also part of the world of nature. They are matter themselves. They provide embodied forms of engaging with inner and outer nature, and they offer models of how to reconcile the discursive demands of artistic technique with what is nondiscursive about human intuition and sensory experience. Modern rationalization may have resulted in a progressive dematerialization of human experience. Yet no matter how much twentieth-century aesthetic practice participated in this process of mechanization and abstraction, the very idea of the nature of the medium allows art to perform a certain suspension, negation, or recalibration of what modernity is doing with and to nature.

Bernstein's reflections are of great help in illuminating what Kluge does when presenting a water drop as an interface to the world. As he captures nature's ability to operate like a lens and camera obscura, Kluge aspires, in Bernstein's words, "to rescue from cognitive and rational oblivion our embodied experience and the standing of unique, particular things as the proper

objects of such experience, albeit only in the form of a reminder or promise.”¹⁰ Natural phenomena in Kluge’s film do not simply serve as mere allegories of media technologies. Rather, nature is presented as a medium itself, capable of framing and producing views onto the world and onto itself, a site in which formal differences like those between water and ice matter and have the potential to produce both aesthetic pleasure and insight. Media, for Kluge, are part of the world of nature as much as nature functions like a medium itself, so much so that we cannot resist the thought that Kluge’s melting of the ice is triggered not merely by the warmth of the heavens but by how nature here assumes the qualities of a unique and fantastic camera in order to cast a gaze upon itself.

The figure of ice, of the frozen and therefore seemingly timeless, has played a critical role in film theory, especially as it comments on cinema’s relationship to photography, of motion pictures to still images. In a 1984 essay, Peter Wollen used the metaphors of fire and ice in order to speculate on the respective logics and representational exigencies of film and photography.

Film is all light and shadow, incessant motion, transience, flicker, a source of Bachelardian reverie like the flames in the grate. Photography is motionless and frozen, it has the cryogenic power to preserve objects through time without decay. Fire will melt ice, but then the melted ice will put out the fire.¹¹

Kluge’s references to ice build on Wollen’s opposition: ice for Kluge denotes a world of spatiotemporal standstill and disaffection inherently associated with the photographic; whereas film holds the power to animate the dead and timeless and to energize what seems to exist without change and movement. And yet, like Wollen, Kluge does not stop here. He instead presents the relationship of ice and fire, the photographic and the cinematic, as a dialectical one—one according to which the cinematic cannot but incorporate the photographic just as much as photography always already entails its curious sibling, the cinematic, as its potentiality.

Nowhere does this type of thinking about the reciprocal relationship of the cinematic and the photographic—the fact that film, in André Bazin’s words, presents “change mummified”—become clearer than in a brief segment taken from *Yesterday Girl* and reused toward the end of Kluge’s *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* (chapter 26).¹² Here, Kluge recites a text by nineteenth-century German physician and poet Heinrich Hoffmann, best known for his crude moral lessons in children’s books such as *Struwwelpeter* (1845). Hoffmann’s “The Mammoth” relates the story of Walter, a boy who not only discovers a mammoth frozen in ice but witnesses the animal’s sudden

reawakening. When the mammoth steps out of his icy enclosure, Walter's friend Eduard joins them and with the help of his violin inspires them to dance a waltz together (see the video stills from *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* at the beginning of our article).

They danced with pleasure all night long
The charming mammoth then began to sing
“Now we are tired, now we are hot!
Let's eat vanilla ice-cream
And giant primordial biscuits
That I brought along from the ice-age.”

Ice in Hoffmann's poem is initially associated with stasis and self-containment. Similar to a photographic image, ice preserves seemingly immutable slices of time. Precisely because of its ability to arrest flow, however, Hoffmann's ice serves as a medium that not only preserves the past but allows for a resurrection in some distant future. The heat and fire released by dancing to celebrate the end of ice's hold on motion and the advent of states of affection make, however, mind and body long for what transported the mammoth to the present in the first place: a cooling dose of ice. In Hoffmann's poem, motion and stasis as well as heat and ice relate to one another much as the photographic and the cinematic simultaneously point to and illuminate each other. One cannot do without the other. Each feeds off or energizes what its sibling encompasses. For Kluge, film's equivalent to the mammoth is the photographic frame, twenty-four of which per second produce the illusion of motion. Photography's task is not simply to halt the flow of time but to communicate the past in all its former presentness into some unknown future. Film might be all fire and motion, but it will neither come into existence nor be safe from consuming itself if it cannot draw on the cryogenics of photography.¹³

If Kluge's dripping icicle and its allusion to Hoffmann's mammoth offer one of the key images of *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee*, the project's most important conceptual intervention is Kluge's meditation on the notion of generosity. “Magnanimity,” he writes in “Straw in the Ice,” is “[t]he ability to engage in free exchange. The permeability of empathy. The ability to give gifts as well as ‘oneself as a gift.’ ‘The opposite of forgetting’ (Adorno)” (*WST*, 79).¹⁴ Kluge's aphorism harks back to *Minima Moralia*, in which Adorno laments the modern subject's inability to give true gifts. We give gifts, Adorno argues, not in order to free the other but to tie the other to our own will and engage him or her in some scripted form of strategic exchange.¹⁵ True gifting cannot do without a fluid sense of self, something to which modern commodification is fundamentally hostile and which contemporary charity work merely

replays in farcical form. Magnanimity, in Kluge's aesthetic, liquefies hardened boundaries between self and other, the familiar and the foreign.¹⁶ Magnanimity involves what Adorno (and Walter Benjamin) envisioned as the anthropological root of aesthetic experience: a mimetic behavior—namely, the subject's ability and desire to be and become other, to enact noninstrumental forms of subjectivity that incorporate the world as much as they allow the world to incorporate the self. Magnanimity therefore inhabits a world in which subjects no longer need to fear being subjects; it envisions forms and gestures of human reciprocity and an uninhibited sense of presence.

Kluge's thoughts on magnanimity follow Adorno and thus are far removed from advocating generosity as an instant personal fix for the icy conditions of modern life. Like preachers of love, naive promoters of magnanimity blind us to and perpetuate the very conditions that make us freeze our boundaries in the first place. And yet, Kluge's media practice—his use of multimedia channels and his appeal to multifarious modes of sensory perception—at the same time has the potential to move us beyond the rigorous negativity of Adorno's position. Unlike modernity's lack of generosity that promotes our need to establish and maintain firm limits in the face of overwhelming reification, *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* engages with multiple media both old and new in an effort to probe the permeability of given borders and domains of expression. An ability to exchange freely and to recognize others as subjects, generosity may become ever more elusive amid the icy conditions of twenty-first-century culture. In spite of any such eventuality, however, Kluge's film—by allowing different mediums to relate to one another—performs the continued possibilities of magnanimity at the level of aesthetic form. At once photographic and cinematic, Kluge's image of the water drop is charged with this power of generosity. Not only does it bring the conditions of coldness into consciousness; it also reminds us at the level of form—and in the form of a promise—of a world no longer obsessed with demarcating and containing borders but intent on negotiating and traversing boundaries.

Wind

Wind blows through landscapes of ice and snow. Sometimes it even howls. Its presence is primarily discerned by its effect. Wind is notoriously unpredictable. It drives weather around the globe. It can bring warm gentle breezes, but it can also blow up storms and wreak destruction. Throughout Western literature, wind has functioned as a trope for fundamental transformation. In Benjamin's reading of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920), winds stirred up by past catastrophes hurl the angel of history backward into an uncertain future. In cinema, wind

functions as a particularly elusive object.¹⁷ Wind is also important for early film theory. In the 1920s, Jean Epstein and René Clair coined the term *photogénie* in an attempt to grasp the peculiarity of visual phenomena such as wind in film. A concept that resists easy definition, *photogénie* is considered by its advocates to be “the purest expression of cinema.”¹⁸ *Photogénie* could be a close-up of a face or a shadow falling across a room or, as D.W. Griffith once exclaimed, “the wind in the trees.”¹⁹ *Photogénie* is the characteristic of *movement* that produces the special “quality of beauty” specific to it. Epstein believed that one of the essential qualities of cinema is movement. The “*photogénie* of movement” epitomized for him what differentiates film from the older, static medium of photography. Whereas a still photograph may depict a snowy landscape, only a time-based medium such as film can capture wind blowing through the leaves of a tree.

For Kluge, the trope of the “wind in the trees” is deployed to achieve a “truly sophisticated film language” that eludes the “grasp of verbal expression.”²⁰ The trope is rooted in his theory of cinematic montage, which combines and integrates “verbal, auditory, and visual forms” according to the principle that one plus one is always much more than two (*WF*, 87). Kluge explains elsewhere, “If I conceive of realism as the knowledge of relationships, then I must provide a trope for what . . . the camera cannot record. This trope consists in the contrast between two shots.”²¹ “A montage,” Kluge insists, “is successful if the spectator can distinguish . . . between two radical poles” (*WF*, 86). In Kluge’s corresponding illustration of this aesthetic of differentiation based on montage, he reflects on the representation of wind blowing through the trees:

Take a tree, for example. I can shoot trees; it might be boring to watch *trees in the wind* for ninety minutes, or a tree over the course of the seasons, and yet it would still be a self-contained piece of information. . . . However, if the tree were growing next to a nuclear power plant or in a courtyard, then it would no longer be a self-contained object, which I could present in a single take. I would have to communicate this context by means of a cut, since no image could convey this information. (*OF*, 219; emphasis added)

For Kluge, then, merely to record the tree in the wind is not enough; the tree must enter into a relationship and dialogue with other images.

We find the “tree in the wind,” or more precisely the bush in the wind, in Kluge’s film *Die Patriotin* (*The Patriot*, 1979). “This bush,” Kluge’s voice-over announces following a brief silence, “stands near Kaliningrad in the Soviet Union, forty-

five kilometers away from the Polish border. Not long ago this place was called Königsberg. This doesn't affect the bush." The first shot of the windswept bush is followed by a shot of the Kaliningrad skyline (church steeple, chimneys) against the cloudy evening sky. The bush is put into history in the cut, which produces montage. Assisting this move, Kluge's voice-over points to what makes the two shots semantically distinct (natural history versus political history). Wind makes the first shot dynamic; its visible presence through the rustling branches underscores the state of flux of landscape as it is acted on by history. The swaying branches remind viewers that what they see is a filmic moving image and not a still photograph. Accordingly, wind is here a silent actor that functions on the level of the image alone. In other films, such as *Die Macht der Gefühle* (*The Power of Emotion*, 1983), Kluge includes unmotivated cuts to lengthy sequences of clouds that when blown by the wind move rapidly (enhanced by Kluge's time-lapse photography) across the screen. In these instances, wind represents the passage of time and history. The chilling effects of wind are found in *Yesterday Girl*, as when the peripatetic Anita dresses and then washes herself along the cold and windy banks of the Rhine River. Wind supplements and emphasizes the icy coldness that chills her to the bone, so much so that she is "cold even in summer." Wind is visually represented by the effect it has on the human body, or on landscapes or social events. Its presence is indicated by the *changes* it produces on its surroundings. In this respect, Kluge follows Robert Bresson's dictum that cinematography should "TRANSLATE the invisible wind by the water it sculpts in passing."²² Wind thus silently sculpts, shapes, and forms.

Yet the presence of wind in film exceeds its visible kinetic manifestation because wind has an audible component: we *hear* the wind blowing. The theory of *photogénie* was developed well before the advent of sound in cinema. But might it be possible to extend and expand this theory to include the sonic? If *photogénie* summons a sort of visual bewitching, then its correlative on the aural plane—*sonogénie*—could be used to point to an acoustic "magic" that transcends the diegetic frame. However, that would be misleading. One of the key aspects of *photogénie* is its relationship to chance and the unconscious way in which the camera captures moving images. In contrast, sound in film is consciously constructed. In the 1930s and 1940s,

Alexander Kluge. *The Patriot*, 1979. Video still.



Béla Balázs articulated an aesthetic of sound that emphasizes the construction of an acoustic landscape. Balázs conceived of sound as a physical entity that, although unbounded, works in tandem with objects to let them “speak” more clearly.²³ Balázs proposed that a carefully constructed sound montage draws the fullest meaning out of a chaos of noises, sounds, and silences. Balázs stressed that

acoustic close-ups make us perceive sounds which are included in the accustomed noise of day-to-day life, but which we never hear as individual sounds because they are drowned in the general din. If a close-up picks out such a sound and thereby makes us aware of its effect, then at the same time its influence on the action will have been made manifest. (*TF*, 210)

Unlike an image close-up that may result in a freeze-frame or a completely static shot, in the acoustic corollary the sound is never stilled or frozen. Like the wind, it is always in motion. Cinematically, wind is a visual element, whose effect can be represented only indexically. Images of wind capture only that which is immediately “past”—the sculpted. However, wind registers on the sonic plane in the present. The acoustics of wind are closer to the referent and thus threaten the order of the sign. If wind’s “pastness” is visual, then its “presentness” is acoustic.

Wind in Kluge’s earlier films is often accompanied by a soundtrack. In *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* (*Part-Time Work of a Female Slave*, 1973) the gusts that cause waves to ripple across lakes and ponds blow to the strains of Frédéric Chopin’s tumultuous Étude in C Minor, op. 10, no. 12 (*Revolutionary*). In *The Patriot*, pedestrians accompanied by Carl Maria von Weber’s cello concerto (“Grand Potpourri for Cello and Orchestra in D Major,” op. 20, J. 64) struggle like protagonist Gabi Teichert to advance against a strong headwind that threatens to push them backward into the past.²⁴ In keeping with Kluge’s early proposition that dialogue and voice-over must be liberated from any “narrative purpose” and serve instead as “a medium of reflection” and “a mutual distancing effect,” these earlier films layer—much like the bush in *The Patriot*—allegorical meaning (the chill of homelessness; the storm ahead for the abortionist and union organizer; the uphill battle of political change) on top of otherwise “boring” imagery (*WF*, 90–91). Recently, Kluge recalled of Adorno that “he liked to close his eyes in the cinema and

Top: Alexander Kluge.
Part-Time Work of a Female Slave, 1973. Video still.

Bottom: Alexander Kluge.
The Patriot, 1979. Video still.



rely solely on the sound.”²⁵ Both the earlier silent sequences of wind as well as those accompanied by nondiegetic music dislodge the quotidian meaning of wind. Visually and acoustically, wind punctuates these films, producing pauses and moments of reflection that engage both the visual and aural senses.

In *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* wind plays a vital role alongside snow and ice. On the narrative plane, wind is a sign of foreboding. For instance, in chapter 17 (“Die neun Unzertrennlichen” [The nine inseparable ones]) a weather forecast foreshadows the fate of children overcome by a winter storm. In the end, the children freeze to death on their way home from school. Wind is a cipher of historical miscalculation in chapter 7 (“Das Wetter in Stalingrad” [The weather in Stalingrad]), in which a Russian hydrometeorologist uses an intricate account of wind patterns during the winter of 1942–1943 to explain the German failure in Stalingrad. The found-footage sequence makes clear the impossibility of overcoming, let alone divining in hindsight, the wind’s unrelenting sweep. Wind produces the blizzard-like conditions in the newsreel footage; a powerful force of nature, a veritable *natura ex machina* responsible for the outcome of the Battle of Stalingrad. Struggling to regain control of their heavy machinery in the trenches, the soldiers of Hitler’s Sixth Army are devoured by unrelenting gusts and snowdrifts that bring to a grinding halt their march to victory. Wind takes on a narrative role of political agency.

Unlike snow and ice, wind is never silent, even in the imaginary. On the sonic plane in *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee*, the wind complicates not only our understanding and “knowledge of relationships” but also the audiovisual medium of video and film itself. In chapter 24, “Schneedecke mit Nordost-Wind” [Snowpack with northeaster], classical music is dubbed over images of blowing snow. In chapter 22, “Imaginary Landscape,” wind’s role enables an experimental aesthetics to emerge both visually and acoustically. In this instance, wind invisibly and inaudibly produces the abstract patterns in the natural world. Wind blows the snow in diagonal movements from right to left and left to right across the frame, not unlike Hans Richter’s and Viking Eggeling’s early studies of moving abstract forms. The soundtrack consists of a synthetic approximation of the rustling wind translated into experimental music composed by John Cage and realized by Mauricio Kagel.²⁶ But the date of the musical composition, 1942, refutes timeless abstraction

Alexander Kluge. *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee*, 2010. Video stills from chapter 24.1, “Schneedecke mit Nordost-Wind”; and chapter 18, “Büßerschnee.”

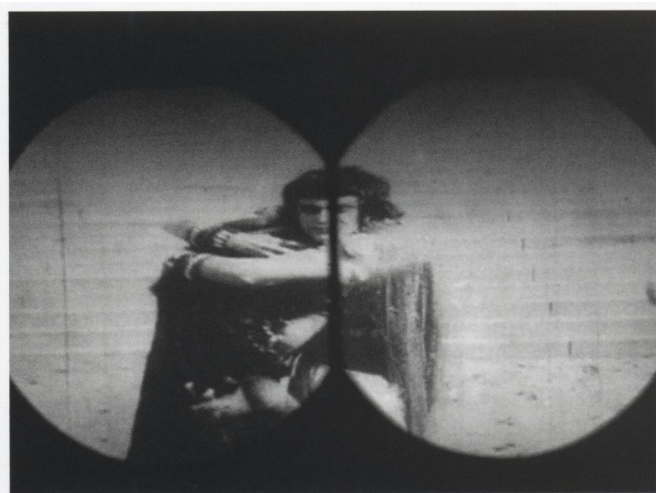


and pulls us back into the temporality of history.

In these examples, wind is not recorded as we know it in the natural world; rather, it is cloaked in music's acoustic mantel. An exceptional instance of this nondiegetic matching emerges in chapter 18, "Büßerschnee" [Penitent snow], where it sounds forth as a matched audiovisual image in which the sounds seem to emanate from and directly correspond to the visual representation of wind. And yet, as the sound begins to overpower the image, it strikes the viewer's ears as overamplified (acoustic close-up) to such a degree that it practically overtakes the visuals of the blowing wind. This exaggeration, this excess of sound, sonically "pricks" the unity of the acoustic landscape in much the same way as a visual detail might disrupt the unity of the image. Listening carefully, the attentive auditor recognizes that she or he has heard this sound before. Further attention reveals it to be the same sound bite of wind used in Kluge's earlier films. At the close of *Krieg und Frieden* (*War and Peace*, 1982), the distinct sound of howling wind accompanies an intertitle with a quote from Ingeborg Bachmann's *The Thirtieth Year*: "Destruction is under way. I'll be lucky if this year doesn't kill me."²⁷ In *The Power of Emotion*, a tinted stereoscopic excerpt of the vox populi stoning the lovers Theonis and Ramphis in Ernst Lubitsch's *The Loves of Pharaoh* (1922) is overdubbed with the same sound of wailing wind. In Kluge's last feature, *Vermischte Nachrichten* (*Miscellaneous News*, 1986), the by now familiar soundtrack of cold blustery wind accompanies a sunny summer day, replete with military helicopters crisscrossing a German skyline. In each case, the identical "canned" sound of wind magnifies the allegorical coldness between human beings that images convey. This "wind-bite" from Kluge's sound archive harkens back to Balázs's concept of the sonic close-up; it draws our attention to it and allows us to hear what might otherwise have been ignored. In this case, we might think of it as an auditory instantiation of the winds from Benjamin's allegory of the storm of progress.²⁸

Why, though, does Kluge emphasize the obvious artificiality of its construction? Kluge's abstention from recording direct sounds of nature—as was the practice of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, for example—safeguarded his auteur films from replicating the mood effects (akin to "photographed landscapes or genre paintings") that Adorno and Hanns Eisler abhorred in the dominant aesthetic practices of film composition.²⁹ Yet, how does this repetition of an artificially man-

Alexander Kluge.
The Power of Emotion, 1983.
Video still.



ufactured, Foley-produced effect function in Kluge's oeuvre? What announcement is being made by the broadcast of these acoustic close-ups that increase in intensity in *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee*? When does the sound of wind announce its presence either with or without the corresponding visual image? Does the *sound* of wind provide an acoustic corollary to the images of the silent forms of snow and ice?

The diegetic sound in "Büßerschnee" that purportedly emanates from wind rushing through ice pillars in a remote region of Kazakhstan is the same canned sound Kluge has used and recycled since the early 1980s. This sound close-up of wind howling through penitentes in far-off Kazakhstan is also the same sound accompanying the long history of human coldness beginning with Adam and Eve's exodus from Eden and continuing to the present (the Cold War and the modern world of war). Seemingly diegetic but mnemonically and aesthetically nondiegetic, the sound of wind here is a ruse, a purchase on the acoustics of nature that is neither authentic nor real. This is not to suggest, however, that Kluge's canned sound is semantically hollow. To the contrary, the rift here between the seemingly real image and its substituted soundtrack, on the one hand, productively undercuts any naive notion of the realness of the image's presumed indexicality and, on the other hand, opens up a polyphony of meanings well beyond the frame, meanings that reference a host of other images and associations throughout Kluge's massive cinematic and television career. Unlike the deliberate attempt to render a landscape using technological means (e.g., Cage and Kagel) and equally unlike the anthropomorphizing match of scenery with music, Kluge's canned sound tests our powers of careful differentiation and, in the end, suggests that no sonic choice—not silence, not music abstract or programmatic, not voice-overs, not even field recordings of nature itself—can capture the real.

Kluge appears to deliberately use the sound of wind to similar effects in much the same way music is deployed as a temporal and spatial bridge to others' films. Just as he mobilizes Eisler's haunting composition from Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955) in *The Patriot* in order to reference Johannes R. Becher's *Winterschlacht* (*Schlacht um Moskau*) (1953), so, too, does he play with wind in a similar fashion.³⁰ The repetition of that sound bite becomes a repetition of the ever same. The destructive wind keeps returning, howling through the centuries; it is the wind that accompanies barbarous deeds. If a sampling of

Alexander Kluge.
Miscellaneous News, 1986.
Video still.



music is recognizable and identifiable and can be imbued with social history, then why can this not be the case for the sound of wind? Kluge's wind as sound extends beyond the frame; it blows between the images and operates in the interstices of the montage; it becomes that which allows for "one plus one" to exceed two. The sound of wind expands the groundedness of the framed image and moves us into a different space in the imaginary—the film in the spectator's head, as Kluge would call it—and thus invites us, in Jean-Luc Godard's parlance, to hear, see, and thereby think elsewhere. Wind is so much more than the mere rustling of leaves. Although we hear neither snow nor the melting of ice, the sound of wind, like ice and snow, is change and transition itself.

Snow

The snow we see in the forty-one photographs by Gerhard Richter was originally intended to be ice. After considering photographs shot in Greenland in 1972, Richter changed his mind. Kluge later explained, "[Richter] didn't want any words to accompany the Greenland pictures. . . . They [were] supposed to stand on their own."³¹ In lieu of icebergs, he contributed to the collaboration a series of unadulterated color photographs of snowy Alpine forests. A serendipitous outcome, Richter's images of snow visually punctuate a central preoccupation throughout *December* as well as the whole of Kluge's coldness projects. At first glance, his shots of freshly snow-covered alpine forests seem both incidental and indefinite.³² Upon further inspection, the three camera angles deployed for their

composition come into view: the first and smallest group includes close-up shots of tightly cropped details of snow-covered tree branches; nearly half of all the book's images belong to the second group of shallow, medium shots of tangled trees; and the remainder are extreme long shots of snowy clearings taken from distant vantage-points. We soon deduce that Richter is engaging us in a classic perceptual game of figure versus ground. Yet the distinctions and balance often derived from this game elude us. Is the perceptual object that warrants our attention the white snow blanketing the dark dormant trees, or is it the trees and landscape enveloped in a haze of fog and snow?

If Richter's iceberg photos were to remain exempt from commentary, what then about his images of snow merits juxtaposition with Kluge's stories? Do, conversely, Kluge's stories echo the flirtation with Gestaltism in Richter's photographs? *December* stands out for Richter as the only photography

Below and opposite:
Alexander Kluge and Gerhard
Richter. *December*, 2010.
Examples of close-ups, medium
shots, and long shots by Richter.



book to include coherent narratives with images (c.f., *Eis* [2011], *Wald* [2008], and *Sils* [1992]). But unlike Richter's photographs, Kluge's stories do not easily evince any overarching thematic, compositional, or organizational logic. Divided into two sections, *December* begins with forty-three "calendar stories" that count off the thirty-one days of the month of December.³³ For each day, one or more short stories tells of a historical incident or anecdote that ostensibly took place, with a few notable exceptions, over the course of the previous eighty years. In spite of this chronological frame, *December* nevertheless weaves its disparate narratives about coldness together such that they reveal past episodes like layers of sediment comprising sundry thematic columns. Consider, for example, the stories from 1932, 1941, 1944, and 2009; all concern the intertwined financial histories of Greece and Germany. Over one third of the stories reference events from World War II, especially in the years 1940–1945, and include significant world political events such as the Wannsee Conference (December 8, 1941) and personal events such as the fifty-third birthday celebration of Kluge's father. The second-largest concentration of stories dates to 2009, when Kluge was presumably working on his twin coldness projects. The themes of these stories range from an anomalous snowstorm in Washington, DC, on December 19, to filmmaker Tom Tykwer's sojourn in Sils Maria on December 15, to Kluge's personal musings on the thirteenth fairy in the Cinderella fairy tale on December 31.

The book's second section, titled "Calendars Are



Conservative,” is no less vertiginous than the first; it includes a mere seven stories, the first of which relates the calendar reform attempted during the French Revolution. Another describes an isolated monastery somewhere between Kurdistan and Tajikistan. And still another meditates on the “future anterior.” The volume concludes by reflecting on the power of capital to alter calendars: at a trade meeting in December 6, 2009, German and Chinese industrialists negotiate industrial norms for the number of workdays and weeks in a year. For all their thematic and chronological diversity, Kluge’s stories in *December* all share wintry weather conditions from both hemispheres—snow and ice, rain and deluges, coldness and wind—that presumably contribute, according to the dust jacket, to the volume’s underlying “subversive moral lessons.” But if a morality lurks in Kluge’s stories, then we shall find this good behavior only by digging deeper into the individual stories themselves, for that is where the relevance of Richter’s play with perception reveals itself. Take, for example, the story of Dr. Klaus Wernecke from the first half of the book. An outlier to the temporal core of *December*, Wernecke’s story transports us to the evening of December 20, 1832, when the doctor left the Saxon village of Dingelstedt on foot after successfully overseeing an especially difficult childbirth. After excessively celebrating with a strong drink, he—inebriated and uninhibited—thinks not twice whether a trek along the snowy sixteen-kilometer path back to Kluge’s hometown of Halberstadt is safe. Considered by superstitious locals a “WAY OUT OF THE VILLAGE INTO DEAD NATURE,” the snow-enveloped footpath quickly brings the presumptuous doctor to realize he is literally in over his head.³⁴ Deep snowdrifts encumber his gait, his sight, and his memory. Fearing he is lost, he is stricken by visions of his frozen corpse buried underneath snow. Looking down at his infallible watch, he realizes he has, at most, five hours to live, at which point he thinks he has begun to go mad:

For a moment, he was wiping his eyes with his cold hands, he thought he could make out a tiny flash in the distance. Now, he thought, the delusions are beginning . . . , optical illusions and . . . false sensory impressions. . . . An iceberg of skepticism that grew with fatigue closed in on the exhausted man. (*D*, 60)

In spite of the harrowing circumstances, Wernecke’s story ends happily by pure chance. A remote light he first takes to be an illusion is the coincidental flicker of a sexton’s lamp aloft in the towers of Halberstadt’s St. Stephanus and St. Sixtus cathedral. “The light had guided his obstinate heart. So the doctor found his way to the first houses of the town” (*D*, 60). Full of implied varying camera angles in its account of Dr. Wernecke’s foolish

way into and miraculous rescue out of “DEAD NATURE,” the moral of Kluge’s story revolves around the same conundrum captured in Richter’s photographs.³⁵ Our powers of differentiation, so necessary in potentially fatal crises, sharpen the more our sensory perception is perturbed.

The common denominator that Kluge’s stories and Richter’s photographs share is what Kluge calls the “capacity for differentiation.”³⁶ A rudimentary production of feeling that dates back, according to Kluge, to the origins of all biological life that emerged from the inhospitable ice ages that marked the Cryogenian period, this capacity is seated in our cells and therefore knows nothing of the tricks that modern feelings use to produce “warmheartedness” on top of a “stream of coldness” (*WST*, 70). Crucial for the activation of this more elemental capacity are “cold places” and their concomitant atmospheric conditions, natural states that, according to phenomenologists such as Gernot Böhme and Hermann Schmitz, push human perception to its limits.³⁷ The atmospheric, though by definition comprising but a brief moment in the mediation of perceptual experience, is the primary constituent of our encounters with natural phenomena that are meteorologically instable and fleeting. Just one among many such destabilizing natural phenomena, snow is the defining atmospheric condition that perturbs perception in so many of the stories and photographs in *December*. The antipode to the capacity for differentiation, atmospheric in Dr. Wernecke’s story in particular, and Richter’s photographs, in general, not only represent an ultimate challenge to differentiated perception but point toward a noumenal space beyond the reach of visual technologies intent on differentiating reality into ever more minute details. The relative differences evinced by Richter’s play with focal length and depth of field—not even his most extreme long shots can encapsulate the whole of any landscape without fading into a blur of snow and fog—are not unlike the elusive visual points of reference on the horizon Dr. Wernecke seeks and ultimately finds by sheer happenstance.³⁸ In this absence of any clear “WAY OUT,” Kluge’s stories point toward an overall atmospheric of end time, much as the play with (in)differentiation in Richter’s photographs, practically devoid of human life, convey a timeless sense of atmospheric space. The cold month of December—the twilight month of the Gregorian calendar year, Kluge writes—is characterized by a “shortage of time,” an “acceleration of passing time,” and a “dislocation of time” (*D*, 1, 22, 68). December is, he adds, that month of the year when time itself escapes us human beings, when the experience of historical temporality threatens to come to a standstill, when Dr. Wernecke’s “obstinate heart” nearly freezes to death (*D*, 60). Above all, it is that moment when the ordered

semblance of modern time comes undone, when the time of modernity is exposed as an illusion.

If we think of *December* the book as playing out the limits of human perception in the face of the mediation of nature's atmospheric, then the film *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* might be best thought of as the companion piece querying techniques for navigating the quandaries of atmospheric indiffer-entiation. These techniques are a function of Kluge's media shift from the fixed word and image to the dynamic realm of time-based arts, a shift that literally allows for seeing through atmospheric conditions. In the thirty-one shorts constituting Kluge's film, the phenomenon of snow assumes a myriad of guises. On a scientific level, snow, mineralogist Hans-Wolfgang Hubberten says in an interview from chapter 27, is the cold crystalline form of water that, when compacted, becomes ice. Geobiologist Bernd-Dietrich Erdtmann tells us in chapter 30 that snow constituted the frigid crust enveloping the earth prior to the dawn of human life. On a more metaphorical level, snow, in excerpts taken from D.W. Griffith's silent short *The Golden Louis* (1909), conveys the coldness of capitalism to which the victims of history succumb. But snow assumes purely atmospheric guises in Kluge's film as well. For example, the falling snow in the untitled short from chapter 2 could have been shot on location with Richter in Sils Maria. In chapter 18, "Büßerschnee," snow blows through blades of hardened snow and ice. In chapter 22, spectators see an "Imaginary Landscape," in which we read and then see "Snow flakes from right to left; later from left to right and from top down." In these chapters in which snow appears to be snow and nothing more, Kluge arguably comes the closest to approximating with moving images the subject of Richter's own timeless atmospheric photographs in *December*. And yet the intrusion of language suggests that Kluge's shorts are purposefully incomplete, requiring supplementary signals in the form of words, images, and sounds.

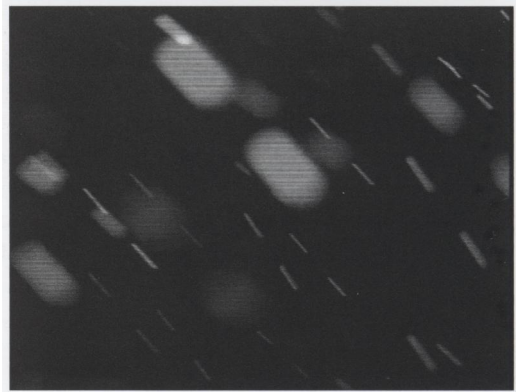
The logic of supplementarity reaches its apex in "Zeitraffer mit Schneetreiben vor meinem Balkon, Elisabethstraße 38" (Time-lapse with driving snow in front of my balcony, Elisabethstraße 38). This last short features an artificially lit nocturnal snowy landscape. In the foreground, we see in the acceleration of time-lapse photography a male silhouette in profile and the glow of a lit cigarette. Beyond both the balcony railing and the bright snow outside, a window in the distance is illuminated from within. The seemingly boundless expanse of snowy darkness suddenly shrinks to the definite geometry of a modern city, if only for a brief moment. Then the scene cuts to nocturnal shots of falling snow, delivering us back to the atmospheric conditions of a snowy dark night full of wind and

ice, the very conditions that brought on Dr. Wernecke's nearly fatal "delusions and the illusory sensations." Accompanying these final snowscapes is the sonatina from Johann Sebastian Bach's early funerary cantata "Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit" (God's Time Is the Very Best Time, BWV 106). Of greatest significance in this closing to *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee* is Kluge's exploitation of the apparatus's technical abilities to augment our sense of sight and mediate our powers of differentiation. We see, for one, how the mise-en-scène's depth of field circumscribes the snowy landscape, thereby allowing for spatial and temporal distinctions: depth and distance, inside and outside, coldness and warmth all come into view. We see but cannot hear a man talking and smoking. But also rendered visible by virtue of the decelerated camera speed is the time his mundane acts entail. In contrast to the useless exactitude of Dr. Wernecke's chronometer in the face of endless snow, Kluge's time-lapse photography reveals the atmospheric of time by derealizing it. Above all, we hear Bach's dirgeful sonatina, originally composed for two recorders and viola da gambas and here estranged by György Kurtág's piano transcription. Intended as both a commemoration of the end of life and a celebration of eternal life everlasting, the *molto adagio* tempo opening Bach's cantata composed in common time also approximates the time of the human heart (sixty to ninety beats per minute). All at once we hear the time of life subtending the remembrance of a passing lifetime and the salvation of messianic time. If, as Kluge insists, the capacity to differentiate multiple temporalities is indeed an effect of our elemental capacity for differentiation acquired in the face of prehistoric coldness, then cold atmospherics like snow and their aesthetic equivalents are precisely what is needed in our modern age to heighten these powers and recalibrate feeling such that it does not engender the indifference endemic of cold currents subtending catastrophes both big and small.³⁹

Coldness and Critique

At the biannual Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics, held in the summer of 2012, an eighty-year-old Kluge began the first of his four contributions, titled "Theory of Storytelling," by exclaiming how exciting it was to stand before such a massive audience of over a thousand readers in an age when big turnouts in auditoriums seem like a thing of the past for auteur cinema.⁴⁰ A heady mix of theoretical musings, readings from *Das fünfte Buch* (2012)—where he reprinted much of "Straw in the Ice"—and clips from his 3,000 hours of

Alexander Kluge. *Landschaften mit Eis und Schnee*, 2010. Chapter 31, "Zeitraffer mit Schneetreiben vor meinem Balkon, Elisabethstraße 38." Video stills.



television and feature films, Kluge's mash-ups made clear that his literature has always already been intimately bound up with the philosophical and the cinematic. No medium takes precedence over any other for Kluge, even when today the "clattering of the film projectors disappears."⁴¹ If "cinema" (unlike "the art of film"), as he recently declared, is indeed "immortal," then his concurrent recourse to other cinematic platforms—television, DVD, and streaming video—attests to Kluge's enduring commitment to the "principle of the cinema" alongside his relentless propensity for storytelling.⁴² Kluge's double identity as author and auteur has never been more obvious than today. Since 2000, he has published ten volumes comprising over 2,000 stories and has released eleven films clocking in at nearly fifty hours.⁴³ More is still to come. Instead of thinking of Kluge's recent spate of books and films as a gargantuan antidote to what Adorno once called in his letter to Kluge the "incessant reproduction of barbarism" so endemic to social coldness, Kluge's twin coldness projects may be grasped as exemplars of his incorporation of coldness into emancipatory aesthetic experiences grounded in generosity, change, and difference (*WST*, 4).

What's more, Kluge's projects, unlike Adorno's, which sought to tackle coldness sociologically, take a sharp turn into the terrain of the aesthetic.⁴⁴ While Adorno's letter undoubtedly serves as Kluge's muse some forty years on, the latter's project is anything but an orthodox realization of the former's intentions. Traces of Adorno's aesthetic theory do subtend Kluge's books and films, but their ends could not be more different. While natural states of coldness (e.g., the melting icicle) allow Kluge's apparatus to reveal, for example, what Adorno insists is nature's own essential mediatedness, and while his deliberate yet subtle construction of film sound (e.g., the howling wind) heeds Adorno's charge that art can never capture nature, Kluge's aesthetic nevertheless calls upon neither mediation nor the limits of representation in order to stage a micrological critique of the administered world. Instead, the aesthetic encapsulates for him a dialectical movement within one medium that points to, if not yearns for, another. Yet Kluge's aesthetics of coldness—a ceaseless traversing between fire and ice as it were—does not, however, entail grand pronouncements on the inherent specificity, ontology, and reciprocity of different aesthetic mediums. Rather, Kluge's peripatetic aesthetic is ultimately borne out of an underlying conviction that critique can be grounded only in the sensuous experience of the most fundamental material differences. What we thus unearth beneath the aesthetic of Kluge's dialectic of coldness is nothing less than a critical phenomenology, a mode of philosophical inquiry Adorno himself believed to be always already implicated in

processes of reification and thus unqualified for inciting the “thinking experience” necessary for critique.⁴⁵ Ultimately, Kluge’s phenomenologically informed aesthetic emanates from experiences that precede thought itself; namely, living human beings’ inherent capacity to sense even the most basic of differences and therewith orientate themselves to safety in the face of debilitating and disorientating ice, wind, and snow.

Notes

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1. Alexander Kluge, *Wer sich traut, reißt die Kälte vom Pferd*, booklet (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010), 4. Cited henceforth parenthetically as *WST*. A translation of Adorno's letter is contained in the excerpted "Straw in the Ice: Stories" in this issue of *Grey Room*.

2. Theodor W. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191–204.

3. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz," 202.

4. In his early prose (e.g., *Attendance List for a Funeral* [1962; trans. 1966] and *The Battle* [1964; trans. 1967]), Kluge performs a satirical "behavioral research" into the cold conduct subtending individual and national histories from the disastrous twentieth century. One of the earliest studies on Kluge and coldness is Paul Mog, "Kälte: Satirische Verhaltensforschung in Alexander Kluges *Lebensläufe*," in *Alexander Kluge*, ed. Thomas Böhm-Christl (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), 11–25. Another important station between these early works and his book with Gerhard Richter *December* is sequence 11, titled "Coldness," from *Die Patriotin (The Patriot)*, dir. Alexander Kluge (Kairos-Film, 1979). See Alexander Kluge and Gerhard Richter, *December*, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Seagull Books, 2012).

5. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, vol. 2 of *Der unterschätzte Mensch: Gemeinsame Philosophie in zwei Bänden* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 2001), 724. The English translation is forthcoming from Zone Books. Cited henceforth parenthetically as *GE*. After dabbling in the theme for decades, Negt, too, invoked Adorno's distress over the lingering potential of fascist barbarism—what he called the "stream of coldness" coursing through German social history—in the wake of pogroms in Hoyerswerda, Rostock, and Solingen shortly after reunification. See Oskar Negt, *Kältestrom* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1994), 4, 13.

6. Fourteen of the forty-one stories as well as a majority of the accompanying index from the booklet to *Wer sich traut, reißt die Kälte vom Pferd* appear in translation in "Straw in the Ice: Stories" in this issue of *Grey Room*.

7. See Kluge's story "The Wreck of Hope" in the excerpted stories from "Straw in the Ice" in this issue of *Grey Room*.

8. Alexander Kluge, *Das fünfte Buch: Neue Lebensläufe* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012), 227.

9. J.M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006), 75.

10. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, 7.

11. Peter Wollen, "Fire and Ice" (1984), in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), 78. Originally published in *Photographies* 4 (April 1984): 118–120.

12. André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," trans. Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1960): 8. See also, Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

13. And yet when we consider the original use of Hoffmann's mammoth poem in *Yesterday Girl*—during a scene depicting the incarceration of Anita G.—we find no such dialectical relationship between fire and ice. Kluge's voice-over of the ice-cream party ends with a shot of Anita's melancholy

countenance frozen by the camera (see the figures at beginning of our article). Unlike the mammoth, she proves incapable of freeing her own familial history of suffering under National Socialism from the ice in which it has been encased after 1945. We might therefore think of the hopeless *mise en abyme*—the story of Anita the wandering Jew—in terms of what it lacks with respect to the core narrative (namely, Hoffmann’s poem) as well as Kluge’s refraction of its dialectics of coldness into his own media practice.

14. See Kluge’s entry on generosity that concludes “Straw in the Ice” as well as the eponymous story that begins the translation in this issue of *Grey Room*.

15. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 42–43.

16. Generosity is but one concept belonging to an entire constellation that Negt and Kluge call the “labor of relationships.” Along with generosity, this constellation includes reliability, navigating, measuring and differentiating, and enlightenment. Love, too, counts among these many constituents. See *GE*, 863–966.

17. See, for example, Jean Epstein’s *Le tempestaire* (1947), and Joris Ivens’s *Pour le Mistral* (1965) and *A Tale of Wind* (1988).

18. Jean Epstein, “On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*,” in *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 1:315.

19. See Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or, The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 115. Much of our discussion on *photogénie* is indebted to Keathley’s study.

20. Edgar Reitz, Alexander Kluge, and Wilfried Reinke, “Word and Film,” trans. Miriam Hansen, *October* 46 (Autumn 1988): 86. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *WF*.

21. Alexander Kluge, “On Film and the Public Sphere,” trans. Thomas Y. Levin and Miriam B. Hansen, *New German Critique* 24–25 (Fall/Winter 1981–1982): 218–219. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *OF*.

22. Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 36.

23. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1952), 198. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *TF*.

24. Kluge’s transcriptions of these films only sometimes mention explicitly the presence of wind in the *mise-en-scène*. The sound of wind advances in presence and importance in Kluge’s film productions from the early 1980s (circa *The Power of Emotion*, 1983) onward.

25. Martin Weinmann and Alexander Kluge, *Neonröhren des Himmels: Filmalbum*, p. 108, a book included in the DVD boxed set *Sämtliche Kinofilme*, dir. Alexander Kluge (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 2007).

26. The musical piece in question is John Cage’s *Imaginary Landscape no. 3* for six drummers and electronic sounds composed in 1942 and realized later by Mauricio Kagel. A recording is available on *Siemens-Studio für elektronische Musik*, Audiocom Multimedia 400AZ5, 1998, compact disc.

27. Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Thirtieth Year: Stories*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 18.

28. In conjunction with his transcription of *The Power of Emotion*, Kluge evokes Benjamin’s ninth thesis: “Sound: Storm winds as in the story of paradise.” See Alexander Kluge, *Die Macht der Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 1984), 131.

29. Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London: Continuum, 2005), 69.

30. For a detailed analysis of the many uses of Eisler's composition in works including *Night and Fog*, *Loin du Vietnam*, and *The Patriot*, see Nora M. Alter, "Composing in Fragments: Music in the Essay Films of Resnais and Godard," *SubStance* 41, no. 2 (2012): 24–29.

31. "Gerhard Richter zeigt den Winter," *Rheinische Post*, 21 October 2010, A7.

32. As explained in the inside flap of the dust jacket, the images were all taken on the grounds of Hotel Waldhaus in Sils Maria, where Kluge and Richter celebrated New Year's Eve in 2009 and where Adorno had succumbed to a heart attack forty years earlier.

33. The German genre of the *Kalendergeschichte* ("calendar stories" are akin to a farmer's almanac) is an admixture of folksy knowledge and moral guidelines tied to cycles of the seasons. For an introduction to Kluge's adaptation of the calendar story, see Wolfgang Reichmann, *Der Chronist Alexander Kluge: Poetik und Erzählstrategien* (Bielefeld, Germany: Aisthesis Verlag, 2009), 67–89.

34. Alexander Kluge and Gerhard Richter, *December*, 58. The translation of this and subsequent passages has been slightly modified. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *D*.

35. The majority of Richter's medium-shot images replicate diurnally what Dr. Wernecke experiences in the dead of night: dizzying snowy thickets appear hemmed in and devoid of depth and distance. In contrast, the many long shots frame whole landscapes that often vanish into a haze of snow and fog. The longer the focal length, the more the natural world becomes a blur in Richter's images. While Kluge's story of the lost doctor and the lifesaving lamp deploys chance as the variable needed for vision to save human beings in inhospitable natural spaces, no such drama unfolds in Richter's photographs of ahistorical illegible surfaces and vanishing horizons.

36. See Kluge's stories "The Evolution of the Sense of Beauty from Ice" and "A Short-Statured Woman with High-Heel Shoes" in the excerpted stories from "Straw in the Ice" in this issue of *Grey Room*.

37. We base our discussion of atmospherics on Gernot Böhme, *Asthetik: Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001); and Hermann Schmitz, *Die Wahrnehmung*, vol. 3.5 of *System der Philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1989).

38. See Gertrud Koch, "The Richter Scale of Blur," *October* 62 (Autumn 1992): 136.

39. See Kluge's "Adorno on the Cold Stream" in the excerpted stories from "Straw in the Ice" in this issue of *Grey Room*.

40. Alexander Kluge, *Theorie der Erzählung: Frankfurter Poetikvorlesungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2013).

41. On Kluge's distinctions between film and cinema, see the foreword to Alexander Kluge, *Cinema Stories*, trans. Martin Brady and Helen Hughes (New York: New Directions Books, 2007), n.p.

42. Kluge, *Cinema Stories*, n.p.

43. Kluge's collections of short prose since 2000 include *Chronik der Gefühle* (2000), *Die Lücke, die der Teufel läßt* (2003, trans. 2004), *Tür an Tür mit einem anderen Leben* (2007), *Das Labyrinth der zärtlichen Kraft* (2009), *Geschichten vom Kino* (2007, trans. 2007), *Dezember* (2010, trans. 2012), *Das Bohren harter Bretter* (2011), *Das fünfte Buch: Neue Lebensläufe* (2012), "Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter": *48 Geschichten für Fritz Bauer*

(2013), and *Nachrichten von ruhigen Momenten* (2013), his second collaboration with Gerhard Richter. Excluding Kluge's two box sets of feature films (*Sämtliche Kinofilme* [2007]) and selected television programs (*Seen sind für Fische Inseln* [2009]), his recent DVD films include *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike* (2008), *Früchte des Vertrauens* (2009), *Der letzte Sommer der DDR* (2009), *Der Blitzkrieg: Das Prinzip der Überraschung* (2009), *Nachrichten vom Tausendfüßler* (2009), *Der Erste Weltkrieg* (2010), *Landschaft mit Eis und Schnee* (2010), *Die Wunder unseres Sonnensystems* (2010), *Das böse nebenan: Auf den Spuren menschlicher Abgründe* (2011), *Mensch 2.0* (2011), and *Was ist Dada?* (2012).

44. Coldness as a natural state does not figure into Adorno's concept of nature or natural beauty in *Aesthetic Theory*. Even in those few places where he claims that the content of art acquires its expression "through coldness," coldness connotes metaphorically a particular affective register of the work of art far more than it denotes a quality of nature. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 44.

45. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 122.