



Ein Film von  
Alexander Kluge

# ALEXANDER KLUGE

Interviewed by Jonathan Thomas

—— Jonathan Thomas: You're one of the great creators of cinematic form, so if you don't mind me asking, what is montage? What does this concept, montage, mean to you?

—— Alexander Kluge: There are several traditions of montage. I belong to the tradition of Godard, and of course of Eisenstein, although these are different. Montage is very complex. You can make montage with texts, with film, or with genres. If you have two elements, the information is either in the single element or between the antagonistic elements. In film, a good montage would mean that two pictures which have nothing to do with each other have a gap between them, a contrast, even a contradiction. And there, between the two pictures, there's an *epiphany*, an invisible picture. The process is very complicated because you have images running, on the one hand, and at the same time you have contrasts, pauses, and contradictions between these images. After a while, the spectator begins to produce his or her own images through the images that appear on screen, and then there is a second film. *This is the real film*. It is in the action between what the audience does and what the film does, and in the film, it's in the action between what the different elements do. This is what one calls montage. But you could also call montage the cutting, the architecture of the film. That would be simpler.

—— Thomas: Sometimes your montage is internalized, in the sense that it occurs within the single image and not only between lateral images. The single image multiplies internally to become a conjunction of two, or three, or ten images.

—— Kluge: Right, that's true. Within the single element you can also apply fragmentation and then have montage in the single element. You could also make montage with complete sequences, not with single images. You can take a sequence and follow it with a different sequence, and this again is montage. You could even make montage with independent films, if it's not a 90-minute film, for then it's not very practical because you cannot compare it, the montage doesn't function, because you don't see ten 90-minute films one after the other. But you could. For instance, with *News from Ideological Antiquity* [2008], this would mean that you have nine-and-a-half hours, and within

these nine-and-a-half hours you have a kind of montage. If you take the second chapter—

—— Thomas: I've only seen what is referred to as the theatrical version, which is 80 or 90 minutes.

—— Kluge: Ah yes, that is not the same. But if you take the nine-and-a-half hour version, then, in the second chapter, you find a 12-minute film made by Tom Tykwer, a very good director from Germany. Normally he makes big commercial films for a hundred million Euros, but he's capable of making art, too. On a weekend, he made a 12-minute film for me on Marx's concept of the commodity fetish. Not simple.

—— Thomas: This sequence is included in the theatrical cut.

—— Kluge: Oh yes, it's included. After this sequence, we show Peter Sloterdijk, who talks in a very intellectual way, very *discursif*, as we say. And afterwards, you have the same subject in the form of the language of laborers on strike, who talk in the opposite style of Sloterdijk. He talks of resistance, and they talk of resistance, but it is a completely different kind of speaking. Then you come to a poem by Brecht about a crane in a factory. It's a machine, a big machine, and the machine is talking with the laborers. "I will be there if you are dead," it says. "I drink oil and you drink beer. If you vanish, I'm still here." It's a very fine poem. "Song des Krans Milchsack IV." So there's the dead labor of the machinery, and in the machinery there is the labor of human beings who have vanished, who built the machinery, and this dead labor talks to living labor. This is again different from the real laborers who are on strike, and from the talking of Sloterdijk. This is a variation of montage. They are all constellations. At the Venice Biennale [2015] we showed this as a triptych.

—— Thomas: You presented your film on three screens simultaneously?

—— Kluge: Yes, on three screens, all at the same time. I divided all the interviews, which were presented in the middle, and then all scenes without interviews, whether pictures or music, were presented on the sides.

—— Thomas: Like *Napoléon*.

—— Kluge: Yes, like Abel Gance did, including the sound. The sound is loud so that the elements disturb each other. But you have to have one centered with words, and the others with music or pictures or noise, to create a condition so that the disturbance is not irrational, you see? It's like a commentary. This is a kind of montage. Because on the one hand you see a dialogue on the commodity fetish by a scientist, and then, there, you see Luigi Nono's requiem on revolution, *Al gran sole carico d'amore*. It's an opera of his that shows a requiem on lost revolutions, starting with 1905, 1917, and then Fiat workers again on strike in 1962, always with the personal losses of martyrs of the revolution. It's very good music for that. You see this on one screen, and then you see workers on strike, without music, speaking on another screen, and then a theory of revolution — it all adds up. We call that a CONSTELLATION.

Constellational filmmaking is a gravitational power, like the sun. It is not linked by hinges to the planets and the moons. They're quite independent, you see, but the gravitational power brings them into Newton's order. Complete galaxies function like this. And perhaps it's still more complicated with dark material, but I'll leave that out. It's very interesting that there's a system of combining forces, of architecture, in the cosmos. This is independent from direct links. It has gaps. It is a *montage*. You could say that the sun, the planets, the moons, the tiny particles and even the dust that surrounds the sun — this system is a constellation. In Latin, *stella* means star and *con-* means together with, so when the stars work together, it's constellation. This constellational approach to working was invented by Balzac. He put his novels all together. They are cosmos. The story is not one novel, but all of them. *La Comédie humaine*, he calls it. All good authors, Proust, or Flaubert, or Musil, they all use this principle of constellation. Without direct link, without grammatical connections, you show context. The same principle should be used in film. This is the modern type of connecting things. Not by logic, for that would be machinery.

—— Thomas: The constellation was important for Walter Benjamin.

—— Kluge: Of course, of course — he's my teacher, you see, and we want to renew

the *Passagenwerk* from the point of view of the 21st century looking back to the 20th; we imitate what he did from the view of the 1930s looking back to the 19th century. If you don't understand the century before, you cannot understand your century. It has as much to do with the future as with the past. This is Benjamin. The only possible way of making a work is montage, extended montage. That means constellation. This is the opposite of collage. Collage would mean that you are an independent author and for artistic reasons put things together, you mix things. This is not a constellation, it is patchwork. It is also good, you can do it, Dada does it, but it's not sufficient.

—— Thomas: Can you say more about your interest in simultaneity? Simultaneity within the image has characterized your montage style since you shifted into television and electronics and the internet. In film history it goes back to the early abracadabra of Georges Méliès, who used superimposition to create special effects. But consider your performance last night at the Goethe-Institut, when you and Ben Lerner read together simultaneously on stage, as a duet, in front of an audience. Or think of your film *News from Ideological Antiquity*, where you present two people reading from Marx's *Capital* in unison, as a duet. Why is simultaneity in this sense important for you?

—— Kluge: Simultaneity, polyphony, is ideal because reality is complex. If you put reality in one line, you have a vessel with a lid on it, and that's not good. You have to release the objects. You have to release the camera, and the people that I'm filming have to be released too. Then it becomes a polyphony on its own, automatically. This is below the threshold of dialectics. Things are diverse. You're still on your way to this hotel, in a sense, right now. You spent a lot of time on the train I can see, because you highlighted your papers.

—— Thomas: But as I confessed, the train was so crowded with people that I could hardly move my body on my way over here. I couldn't take my notes out of my bag to prepare on the way to the hotel.

—— Kluge: Yes, I understand this. You are at least two persons now. You have two eyes, but your eyes don't function without your ears.

So I have four different persons in front of me, and I am still asleep, in a sense, because of the time lag. At the same time, because you have highlighted so many things and have these little Post-its in your books and papers, which I find very appealing — this is also a method that Benjamin used — there are now five-and-a-half persons that are sitting in front of me. So we could say there are ten persons here at the hotel talking to each other. If I were to record our conversation, I have the vocal track, the music in the lobby, the contrast, the montage, the silence. I can also choose not to create a montage and then I would surprise you because it doesn't look like a Kluge film. So for everything positive I also have a negative option. And now we only talked about one sequence, one shot. If I present that shot, we have a forty-eighth of a second that is dark in the cinema, and a forty-eighth of a second that is illuminated. There is then a moment in the darkness in which the eye still sees an image. The brain is more intelligent and faster than the eye. The brain sees a thousand images per second. The eye sees sixteen images per second. The brain is very happy and joyously experiences the pause between images and fills it with its own work, in the darkness. That's why Adorno says, "I love the cinema — I'm just disturbed by the images." It's not just a phrase, and it's not a joke. The spectator and the image on the screen are antagonists. So if I show something on the screen or in the sound track that is not in line with the subject matter or context, at this moment I give an opportunity to the spectator to make associations. For example, in the film I showed last night, there was the bomber pilot who had a problem with his digestion. His pilot uniform is now soiled, with shit in it. But I don't show the shit, I show a clean pair of underpants, and at that moment the spectator imagines the situation, they imagine the shit. If I were to show it on the screen, then the spectator cannot imagine anything. But if the spectator has to produce the image him- or herself, because I show the wrong or incomplete picture, then they start working. Do you understand? This is a concert between the activity of the spectator, the parameters of the film, and the reality. This is my field of work when I create montage. For example, if there were peace in Aleppo, then I have to create a different film. If Trump becomes president, the film changes. For montage, that means you need circumstances outside of the film, the

experience of the spectator, and the focused cinematic experience of images and sound, or whatever you do in the film. This is what we call *CINÉMA IMPUR*.

Montage is not a technique, it is a principle which serves to acknowledge the contradictions in the world, the diversity, the plurality in the world. And if you accept that, then as a consequence you have to fragmentize, you have to combine and focus, you have to concentrate and deconcentrate at the same moment, because if you concentrate, you make an algorithm, and you always have to have an anti-algorithm. Therefore if you ask about montage in general, it's a very difficult question. It's like swimming. Or if you were to describe to me what you do when you ride a bike, it's very complicated. You need ten pages of text to really explain what you do, with your balance, going forth, looking for traffic, etc. etc. If it rains, it's different; if there's snow, it's different. Therefore the question, "What does it mean to ride a bike?" is more complicated than one thinks. It's the same with montage.

—— Thomas: Last night you read stories on stage — cut to live piano music, then to a projection of your films, then back to a reading on stage, then to the piano, then to a film, then to a discussion. It was a montage in real time, although you chose to describe the event as *news with music*. Earlier we were talking about *News from Ideological Antiquity*, and you also have a program called *News and Stories*. What is news?

—— Kluge: News is everything that surprises you, and that makes you curious. You depend on the public sphere and news is a message that comes to you from others. It is information with public validity. You could say "poem" instead, it need not be "news," but I like the word. If I do this, for instance [Kluge reaches across the table and touches the side of my face], this is not news, you see, it is tender. It is less necessary to have music for this.

—— Thomas: You spoke of the darkness in the cinema a few minutes ago, when you mentioned Adorno, and I wonder if this darkness has been lost? I wonder if you anticipated this loss when you decided to move from cinema to television in 1988?

—— Kluge: But that's exile, you see. That's not really my wish.

—— Thomas: I understand, but it's the historical moment I'm curious about, when there was a change in the way that cinematic images were perceived. The media environment was changing, and for filmmakers like yourself, the relation to the spectator was changing too. I'm wondering if you can you tell me why you moved from the cinema to television at the end of the 1980s?

—— Kluge: Because the independent cinemas vanished from the cities. The cost of real estate went up to such an extent that it wiped out the independent cinemas. Prior to this, in the 1960s, immigrants who arrived in Germany were able to open up restaurants, and in those days you could open a cinema, too. Today you could only do such a thing in the suburbs, or at the edge of the cities, not in the center of Frankfurt, for example, and in Munich it's absolutely impossible. It's too expensive. So first we lost the cinemas, and then we lost the public, as well as the means of production. And something else needs to be considered. For twenty years, we fought together as a group. But then we had a conservative government in power that divided us effortlessly. Herbert Achternbusch, a very good independent filmmaker, and a thinker who goes against the grain, made a film, *Das Gespenst* (The Ghost), which the conservatives considered blasphemous and took as a matter for censorship. So we were forced into solidarity to express our support, to defend him, but that broke us apart, because some people were radical in their solidarity while others, although supportive of the work, said they hated this film. There were a hundred little incidents of this sort that split us up, and that was exactly the year when Fassbinder died.

—— Thomas: 1982.

—— Kluge: Yes. I was responsible for this entire group, and when I had problems, when there were riots in the group, Fassbinder would come along only to sit there. He wouldn't say anything. But he was present. He would just say, "Let the doctor talk." That's me, but he meant Goebbels. He always had irony. He shattered me, like *Kagemusha*, like a shadow warrior. They knew they could not afford to clash with him, with the one who does not speak, for his

silence didn't hide his ability to ridicule them. He helped me very much, and therefore all riots within the group could be brought to peace. But now he was dead. And at the same time, private TV emerged. There were no defenses possible. We would have lost all of our substance if we had tried to fight it, therefore we emigrated and made *cinema des auteurs* as independent TV. In our Constitution — I'm a lawyer, you see, and in our Constitution we found a principle that one cannot be 100% proprietor of a private station. So they had to give window program licenses. Not for me, for everybody.

—— Thomas: Did this shift from cinema to TV change the way you thought about form? TV is a different medium.

—— Kluge: Yes. It's much more indirect than cinema. It's an administrative system. Even if you don't want it to be, it's very indirect, because nobody can answer. You can telephone but there's no answer. If we had had the internet, it would have been much more pleasant. But also, the internet is indirect. It only has the illusion of directness. Therefore I always believe in an immediate public sphere, an analog public sphere. We're sitting here, you see. We could also telephone.

—— Thomas: And the social media?

—— Kluge: Well the social media are very interesting. But they are very indirect, if you observe. You put into the social media what you think you are in the eyes of the others. You *select*. It's rare that somebody spontaneously writes down, into the social media, what they really are, because it's very complicated to know what one really is. If you have something in mind and you write it to somebody else, what you are changes.

—— Thomas: You can also use the social media to broadcast news. They're privately owned, but dialogical, so they can be used to develop a public sphere.

—— Kluge: It's enormous what you can do. But it's a substitute for direct experience. If you make love, for instance, you could try to do it by internet, and some do, but they are illusions, they are words, and it's not exactly the same. You cannot smell by the net.

—— Thomas: That's true. I was wondering about *News and Stories*, *Prime Time*, and *10 to 11*. Did you select the broadcast time of 10-11 at night for your TV programs?

—— Kluge: No, we called it *10 to 11* because, at the start, it was 10-11 pm. But I knew that after a while, by the physics of media, it would get pushed back to after 1 am. It's like *The Hour of the Filmmakers*, which started with ninety minutes at 8:30 pm in 1986, and then for ten years had fifteen minutes at 2:30 in the morning.

—— Thomas: Did you start your television production company in 1986 or 1988?

—— Kluge: *The Hour of the Filmmakers* was made before 1988 — dctp started in 1988, well, 1987, but in 1988 we started with programming. Before that, all independent filmmakers had *The Hour of the Filmmakers*. It was a mighty powerful group who started, but you lose everything. *The Hour of the Filmmakers* did not have an independent license. Without an independent license, you lose, lose, lose, lose, lose until you vanish. With the license, it's slower — it takes thirty years, and then you lose a little bit. I agree to my programs being presented later at night. *Der Spiegel's* programs are not later. In our company we have other programs, which are primetime. But my kind of talking is more radical, reckless.

—— Thomas: I wanted to read you a quotation from Godard. It's something he said in an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1962, after the release of *Vivre sa Vie*, and it reminded me of you. Godard was a writer during the 1950s, a critic, but by 1962, after *Breathless* and *Le Petit Soldat*, having made a number of films, the public considered him an important filmmaker. When asked about his background in criticism, he says: "Even when I was a critic, I already considered myself a filmmaker. Today I still consider myself a critic, and in a sense I'm more a critic now than ever before, only instead of writing a critical essay, I make a film and introduce the critical dimension into the film itself. I consider myself an essayist. I construct essays in novel form, and novels in the form of essays, except that I film them rather than write them. If cinema were suddenly to disappear, I'd make the most of a bad thing and move over to television; if television were to disappear, I'd revert to paper and pencil. To my

mind, there is a profound continuity among the various modes of expressing oneself. They are all part of a whole, and it is simply a question of knowing how to approach it from the direction that suits you best."

—— Kluge: That's good.

—— Thomas: You also express yourself in different modes. You write stories, you're a filmmaker, you're a theorist, a lawyer, and you were just talking about how you took your tools into television when the cinemas started to disappear at the end of the 1980s. I know you're a partisan of the cinema, but I wonder if you can talk about working in these different ways?

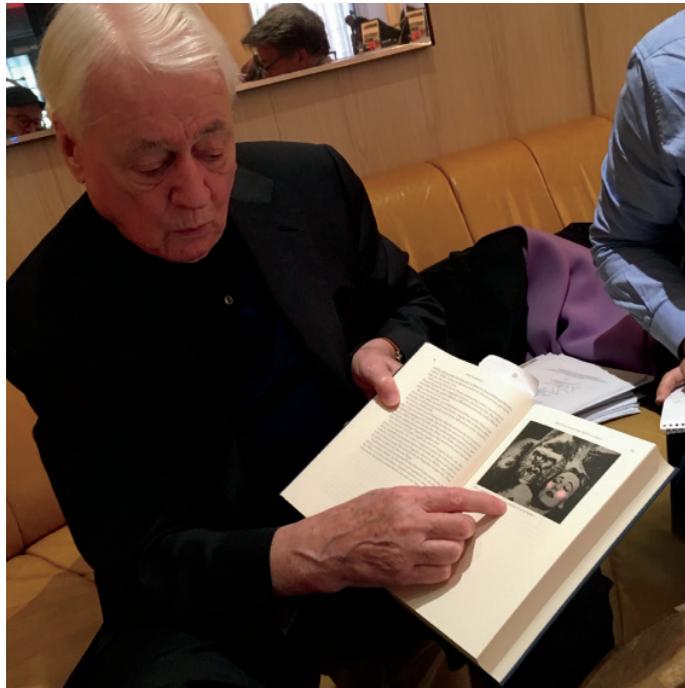
—— Kluge: We believe that you always have to stick to the analog medium. We present the films and programs on soil, in cinemas, in theaters, and this is the anchor. Therefore you don't lose the direct public sphere. But if TV vanishes, you go back to paper and pencil, as he says. If you are on the internet, you also have to have an actual site, a direct public sphere. *Perhaps we are amphibious creatures? We need water and land.* And now you can guess, what is the water? I think the water is real cinema, real assembly, the soil, the direct public. And television or the internet is the continent, the desert, the mountains, the woods.

—— Thomas: There was a surprising moment in your interview with Godard, when you spoke with him after the release of *Éloge de l'amour* in 2001, when he says that he had suddenly realized, just recently, that his mother could only have seen silent movies before he was born.

—— Kluge: I love that.

—— Thomas: You were born two years later. He was born in 1930 and you were born in 1932. Your generation is born with the *talking* picture, and when I think of your cinema, it's hard not to think of talking pictures.

—— Kluge: Yes, and different pictures talk with each other, too. But really, aesthetically, I come from the 20s. Today we have too much of everything. We have too much silicon in the chips; we have too much information — pure information. We have too much talk. Therefore, to produce silent films would be excellent.



—— Thomas: I bring up the talking pictures as a way of returning to Socrates and my question from yesterday. There's a Socratic principle that characterizes your approach in various forms. I thought it might have started with the cinematic interviews you make for television, but if we look at the first collection of stories you published in 1962, *Case Histories* [Lebensläufe], we see that the very first line of the first story in your first book is a question. It is a question that puts everything into motion. The second story also begins with a question; and in "An Experiment in Love," again, it's a sequence of questions and answers that structures the form of your text. We see this in so many of your films and television programs, and also in many of your writings, in your *Cinema Stories*, in *The Devil's Blind Spot*. So I'm curious, what is it that draws you to the question or to the interview as one of your primary tools?

—— Kluge: It's true what you say. Socrates said, *I know that I don't know anything*. It's a famous saying. I would change it slightly and say: *I know what I do not know*.

—— Thomas: That almost sounds like Donald Rumsfeld, which reminds me of your story "The Devil in the White House."

—— Kluge: He's right, he's correct. He's not a poet. He uses the correct idea for the wrong target. I'm interested in what I don't know, you see? That's natural. I'm not a person, I'm an instrument, and the instrument has a self-consciousness, a production code.

—— Thomas: You're an instrument?

—— Kluge: Yes, of course. Of course I'm a human being, the son of my parents, but in addition, I am an instrument. I'm not a consumer, I'm a production instrument. I'm a producer, a probe, an orbiter, and the orbiter behaves self-consciously, proud of its capacity to be a probe. I'm not a patriot of my country, but I can observe a female patriot just beside me, and I am a male patriot. I hesitate to be a patriot of a country that murdered.

I'll give a different example. We all come from the rib of Adam, they say, and there's a saying of a French philosopher that I adopt in response. We philosophers are from the rib of Eve. This is a slight variation of what is told in the *Bible* on where we come from. Where we come from creates this evil history. And if we came from the rib of Eve, then maybe we could have a few variants that are more benevolent? This corresponds with my experience. My sister

can guide me. My son can guide me. Godard can guide me. Something that I love can guide me. When I'm sent out as a probe, coming from what I love, then I'm Kong.

—— Thomas: Kong?

—— Kluge: King Kong. It's my new book, *Kong's Great Hour*. [Kluge points to an image of Kong] *This is me*.

—— Thomas: Why Kong?

—— Kluge: Kong is a principle. He's a monkey on the Empire State Building defending the woman he loves. Now he's a probe for this woman, the servant of what he loves. So I am a rocket pushed forth by those I love. I work for somebody, and sometimes he is dead. For instance, Adorno is dead. But from Elysium he gives me commands in the night. Benjamin cannot work anymore. He was a very good probe, a very good probe, with very little private life. It's strange what he did as a private man. But he's strong in what he did as a probe, a writing probe. And I love these people. Ovid, Benjamin, Adorno, these comrades are with me, and they push me. They make an instrument for me. To some extent I'm responsible for doing what they tell me. This is the motivation for questioning. Utopia gets better while we wait for it.

—— Thomas: You write about utopia in *Die Patriotin* [1979]. In that text you say "the history of film contains a utopian strain ... but it is a utopia which, contrary to the Greek meaning of *ou-toupos* = no place, is in existence *everywhere* and especially in the *unsophisticated* imagination. This unsophisticated imagination, however, is buried under a thick layer of cultural garbage. It has to be dug out. This project of excavation, not at all a utopian notion, can be realized only through our work."

—— Kluge: That's true, and we are archaeologists for this purpose. And if you have a spade, as an archaeologist, you are questioning. This is the motivation of asking questions. It does not depend so much on the single person. If I'm tired, the next person will dig.

—— Thomas: What would it mean for utopia to exist everywhere?

—— Kluge: Utopia's everywhere. It's the opposite of the "no place" of the ancient Greek *ou topos*. I don't believe it is nowhere. I believe it is subjunctive. I believe in the *possibility* of utopia. The potential is very broad and everywhere you have to find it. But it's hidden, like Herculaneum and Pompeii, under the lava of the volcano. And the garbage, the education, everything lies on top of it. You have to find it because utopia is the possibility of emancipation. It's something very simple, on the robust side, not on the complicated side.

—— Thomas: I asked about your "talking" pictures, but I'm also curious about your "reading" pictures.

—— Kluge: This is good.

—— Thomas: The way you present writing on screen is one of the unique aspects of your cinematic style. Of course we can look back to the intertitles of the silent cinema, or even to the magic lantern shows for that matter, to the shots of text that would interrupt the diegesis to narrate from the outside. But you create durational sequences from words, from a written story or a philosophical text that you partition into short fragments of words that are presented sequentially on screen over a number of minutes, as a literary sequence within a larger constellation. You fold literature into cinema so that spectators become readers. Within these sequences, which are accompanied by music, the spectator is asked to look at language and to read not words in the service of images, but rather *words as images*. Semantic meaning is still important, but the words are presented with typographic stylization that calls attention to itself. This reminds me of the interwar avant-gardes, but it also feels very contemporary. Your recent work feels very fresh. Can you talk about your interest in the presentation of written language in the cinema?

—— Kluge: I try to leave out everything that has to do with graphics. There are principles of graphics and the best of them have long been usurped by advertising. I have two co-workers, two musicians, and according to their own taste, they create the presentation of words on screen. I don't give them any instructions. They just imagine it and then they create. It's not aleatory, and it's not planned. It's as if looking

through a lens, an optic. It's simply the imagination of a person. I could also ask my secretary, and her approach is similar. I will only say, it has to be BIG, or the entire compositional field has to be taken advantage of and covered. But I tell her not to think of graphics, only to think with her feelings and emotions.

—— Thomas: You mentioned Fassbinder earlier, which reminded me of Thomas Elsaesser's "A Cinema of Vicious Circles," where Fassbinder is quoted as saying that "The only kind of realism that interests me is the realism that happens in the head of spectators, not the realism on the screen." You're often quoted as saying the same thing, that cinema is what exists in the spectator's head, not on screen. That's what you mean when you described the epiphany that occurs between images, when I asked you about montage. In *Cinema Stories* you say that this is why cinema is older than the art of film, and why it will continue after the film projectors are gone. This is the principle of cinema — that it exists in our heads, that it passes through us — and you say something very similar about *the city*. A couple nights ago you screened *The Emergence of Civilization from Paradise and Terror, and the Principle of the City* [2014] at Anthology Film Archives. This film was made recently, but it's connected to a text you wrote thirty years ago called "The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time." There you say that a chronicle of the modern city cannot be represented in the form of the essay, but is rather a *cinematic* theme. You stress your interest in the "invisible city," "the urban structure which is lodged in our nerves, feelings, and knowledge." Your new film refers several times to the cities that exist in people's heads, the subjective cities that we carry within us, and so I was wondering if you could tell me about this principle of the city?

—— Kluge: The principle of the city is that you live close to each other, but you don't kill each other.

—— Thomas: Like Schopenhauer's parable of the porcupines.

—— Kluge: Ahh, very good, very good. That's an excellent observation. That's exactly it, the core. The needles of the porcupines are very sharp, so you have to be careful not to get too close to each other. But in the winter,

in Siberia, they get close to each other to stay warm, to survive, and they hurt each other. That's exactly the principle of the city. It requires a very precise balance, and this balance doesn't always work out. It's not always achieved because in the city you have a social fever, because we are not porcupines. That's why you have aggressiveness, pent up aggression that is suddenly released from time to time. The religions, for example, do nothing but attempt to moderate that with an organized fever. And if religions lose their importance, as they have now in civil society, then you have another temple, and that's the opera house. Adorno says, Up there is the sky. Those are not the real gods but the painted gods. The opera is a weak form of the old rituals, but it balances the contradictions of the city. It's the scapegoat principle. The opera deals with the question of how to moderate the pent up aggression in the city, because the porcupine principle does not function exactly. We have no needles. We're too close or we're too far apart, and therefore there's aggression. There's hatred toward the people you live with, who produce aggression, and the operas describe that very well. So either you have Stalinism or Fascism, or something else — or opera, but opera doesn't heal, it only demonstrates, to show what is going on.

—— Thomas: So the principle of the city is something we carry within us, coiled up, and opera is a way of letting it loose?

—— Kluge: You can't see the city within us, but you can see one of the problems of the city within us in the opera, extrapolated in the 5th Act when you have to kill the soprano. But the city within us repeats the experience of the early cities in Mesopotamia. We have now a structure within us, the superego governing the libido, but the libido does not obey, it makes riots. You have a very difficult city government within you. The ego is like a rider on a horse, Freud says. The structure of the ego is formed in modern Homo sapiens like the constitution of a city. And all the problems that you have outside in the cities are now inside constituting the subject. The peasant agrarian society forms a different kind of man than the cities, but after 300 years, if you live in a city, you become the city within you. For instance, all Jews, all Armenians, all people who are in exodus in the world, who lost their original country, they have to bear their cities within them. And to some

extent writing is a city too. The *Kabbalah*, for instance, is a city of text.

So everybody who has a city within him is removed from the soil. It's a Marxian idea. In England the people have fields with sheep grazing, because wool is important. These people will have to move to the cities, and the aggression that is exercised against them is internalized. It's an internalization of the aggressor. In this case, the city is not the aggressor; it's the expropriation which makes cities. This is one way of having a city within us. The other is connected with happiness. At first, people lived very close to each other in something like a paradise. The lions and the gazelles, wild beasts and tamed animals, coming together — it's the image of paradise. And this is what happens in a city. Previously you had hunters who could not get close to each other. They could not combine or assemble and every clan had to live on its own, for itself. But now you have everyone together, your own people and the outsiders, and they come together in the city. At the same time you have plantations developing, more nourishment than ever, and you must now find and collect the nourishment, or hunt for it. You can produce it. This is the principle of the city. And this is something very happy. This is not founding a city by force, only by force of nature. But then rich cities come into being beside the rivers. The aquaculture of the Nile in Mesopotamia always connected to the first cities. At this moment, the moment of cooperation, the moment of a community coming together, there's a kind of happiness, an early paradise. But you lose it at once, because immediately the occupier arrives and he sees how rich the city is. He comes from the city of Assur and occupies Uruk, you see? And now you are suppressed. Oppression and the principle of the city mix with each other. You can understand a lot about civilization and the

problems of the dialectics of Enlightenment if you study this, which is our history, the history of modernism. Modernism does not come from the agrarian source. The agrarian source of mankind is very rich. There are even hunting societies, like in Japan, which miss the Iron Age, the Bronze Age, and in 1853 they arrive at capitalism. They're not really capitalists. There's a mask. But an unreal capitalist is much better at capitalism, actually.

This is critical theory, to observe and question for a long time, until we find the origin of contradictions. At the end, we cannot solve any problem. If we arrive at the origin, you can go this way or that way. The origin is not railed, it's not on a specific track. Afterwards there's a train on the rail. You must never believe in the power of fate. But if you come to the present, you cannot defeat fate. You have to observe, and to find out, and personally I believe, like Benjamin believed, that the *possibilities* which are at the origin of the dialectical constellation are still alive. They are waters streaming beside us, even within us. We have not only a city within us, we have several cities within us, and some of them are more habitable than we know. Therefore within subjectivity you can find something that does not exist in objective life. Here again, Fassbinder: I am not interested in what is on the screen (that means the objective reality), I am interested in what is within the audience. At which point the spectator could say, *Well well well, I don't believe in film, I believe in the exit.*

—— Thomas: In the exit?

—— Kluge: In leaving the cinema, which is sometimes a good idea.

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