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Cold Countermemory? Narrative Empathy and Processes of Memory in Alexander Kluge's Prose

Is there a paradox underlying the oeuvre of Alexander Kluge? On the one hand, Kluge incessantly emphasises the importance of affectivity in interviews and through the titles of his books. On the other hand, Kluge's texts refuse sentimentality and demand that the reader intensively engages with them on an intellectual level in order to make sense of their micro-stories. This has led many critics to associate the texts with coldness, but this catachrestic attribution may be more accurately described in terms of *contre-histoire* and especially counter-memory: Kluge's oeuvre is the prime example for the distinction between official, state-sanctioned memory and the memory projects of intellectuals living, commemorating and writing in these states. In this project, affectivity remains central, but its articulations and functions are anything but straightforward. Its 'coldness' amounts to the demand for the reader's active engagement with both Kluge's texts and the commemorative culture in which she lives.

1 Introduction: Responding to Kluge's Prose

Affectivity is central to Alexander Kluge's oeuvre – so much is clear from interviews with the author as well as from the titles of many of his collections: *Chronik der Gefühle* (2000), *Die Herzlichkeit der Vernunft* (2017), *Macht der Gefühle* (1984), *"Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter"* (2013) – not to mention in Kluge's films.¹ Yet at the same time, Kluge's oeuvre is perceived as cold. This attribution is not a recent phenomenon; and even if this attribution is understandable, it is equally problematic. This article takes this paradox as a starting point to analyse three of these attributions and through them, analyse their origins and implications. The concept of counter-memory offers an alternative vocabulary, which should explain the logics of attributing coldness while offering more precision in describing the idiosyncrasies of Kluge's literary oeuvre.

Already in 1985 Erhard Schütz attributes a 'cold gaze' to Kluge's texts. But it is apparently a motivated choice, since Schütz's first epigraph is a quotation from *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, a sociological study which Kluge co-wrote with Oskar Negt and in which coldness is equated with rejection (Schütz 1985: 50). What follows is an attribution of coldness to Kluge's oeuvre both through Kluge's own theoretical texts and through the reception of *Ein Liebesversuch* – this text and its reception will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

A few decades later, Mark Anderson contrasts Kluge to W. G. Sebald along the temperamental catachresis: whereas the latter's use of photographs is supposedly warm, the former's (in *Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945*) is "'cold'; justifiable as documents, they irritate or perplex the reader as elements of a personal story that refuses to be personal" (Anderson 2008: 136). Anderson's use of quotation marks does not solve the two problems that arise: on the one hand, it is very questionable whether Sebald's images do not similarly perplex – they, too, fulfil a Barthesian *effet de réel* but remain, ultimately, ephemeral and aloof.² On the

¹ One may think especially of *Die Macht der Gefühle* (1983).

² Sebald's prose and his use of photography will not be discussed in this article, but let it be briefly reminded that some of his photographs caused considerable irritation as well – notably the photograph depicting heaps of deceased concentration camp prisoners in *Die Ringe des Saturn* (for an elaborate discussion, cf. Öhlschläger 2006: 187). For the *effet de réel*, cf. Barthes 1968.

other hand, Anderson's argument is contradictory: either this irritation goes, indeed hand in hand with "the style and content of the verbal text, which foregrounds the extreme neutrality or even absence of the narrating self" – or "at times the story seems to mock the victims and their automaton-like responses" (Anderson 2008: 136). Can stories mock, or is this something that authors and narrators do? And if they are (seemingly absent), can they be said to be mocking? The attribution, in other words, is vague and imprecise.³ Issues of empathy are indeed at stake, but never for their own sake, as Anderson seems to suggest.

Stefanie Harris's response to Anderson rejects the matter of empathy altogether, claiming that

the premise of the text rejects from the outset the demand that the reader sympathize or not with individual actors depicted in the work. Rather, we as readers are compelled to consider the dominant practices of rational structures of control and how those rational structures are duplicated and thereby continuously reinforced in the mediation of events. (Harris 2010: 304)

She suggests reframing Kluge's coldness through Marshall McLuhan's dichotomy of hot and cold media – but these refer more to the quality of information and referentiality that they offer, and only indirectly to the emotional responses they elicit: "hot media are consumed passively. [...] Cold media [...] are high in participation and completion because of their 'low definition' or the meager amount of information given" (Harris 2010: 305). The question is, then, whether empathy equals the presumably passive emotional response to a hot medium, or rather whether it implies the "involve[ment]" of cool media (Harris 2010: 305). Harris offers an indirect answer: she explicitly differentiates between cold and "unemotional or unfeeling media" and points out that Kluge refutes being called cold (Harris 2010: 305). Instead, Kluge "seeks to open up spaces for the production of [...] counter-public spheres that could serve as forums for individual imagination and public debate that break with the consensus machine of media saturation" (Harrison 2010: 305). In what follows, I will argue that Kluge's texts not only constitute counter-public spheres, but also participate in alternative discourses of memory, so-called counter-memories. To be sure, it is also by resorting to these alternative discourses that the counter-public sphere can be established as such. With this vocabulary, I hope to describe more accurately what others have perceived as Kluge's coldness; moreover, I hope to describe what Kluge's literature *does*, not per se what it *is*. The notion of counter-memory is situated in an antihegemonic philosophical tradition, reaching via Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci to Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. For Lauren Berlant, affectivity is central, investigating the relation between counter-memory, i.e. popular memory, and official, state-sanctioned memory in an attempt of offering "an explanation of ongoing collective practices, and also an occasion for exploring what it means that national subjects already share not just a history, or a political allegiance, but a set of forms and the affect that makes these forms meaningful" (Berlant 1991: 4). These forms of belonging constitute, in Berlant's terms, the "National Symbolic", which "aims to link regulation to desire, harnessing affect to political life through the production of 'national phantasy'" (Berlant 1991: 5). That fantasy is marked by contradictions resulting from the

³ As is his perception of "unemotional" language in Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* (Anderson 2008: 132).

overlapping but differentially articulated positions [of] the official and the popular; the national and the local; the rule of law and the rule of men; the collective and the individual; the citizen as abstraction and the citizen as embodied, gendered; utopia and history; memory and amnesia; theory and practice. (Berlant 1991: 5–6)

If Berlant uses the term counter-memory to refer to "the residual material that is not identical with the official meanings of the political public sphere" which works, through popular memory, "in contradistinction to the official material that so often becomes the 'truth' of a historical period and political formation" (Berlant 1991: 6), that contradistinction does not necessarily lead to a strict opposition between official and counter-memory: counter-memory may reframe official memory without intended political ramifications, and this is possible because both forms of memory tap from (and constitute) the national fantasy. While Berlant writes about the national fantasies of the United States of America in the middle of the nineteenth century, a similar case can arguably be made for Kluge's prose, even though few would consider it to be 'popular'. Indeed, while Kluge's prose is inevitably framed by the (West) German context in which it is written, it questions both the official forms of memory *and* the mainstream (and thus properly 'popular') constellations of memory in the media.⁴ If these official and mainstream forms of narrative offer a sense of 'easy', 'cozy' closure – if they, paradoxically, enable a comfortable disengagement from the past, its questioning (in the form of counter-memory) does not only lead to affective backlashes, but functions through a perceived 'coldness': a problematisation of affect in relation to history.

2 Perpetrators (I): The Problems of Empathy

In *Ein Liebesversuch*, first published in *Lebensläufe* (1962), Kluge uses the perpetrator's perspective to describe the inhumanity of the medical experiments performed on the inmates of the concentration camps. In this particular 'love experiment', two erstwhile lovers are reunited in a cell and incentivised to engage in sexual intercourse. The rationale behind this experiment is to test whether the sterilisation experiments, which serve in the Nazis' genocidal biopolitics as pendant to the gas chambers, are successful. But for reasons that remain unspoken, the incentives do not achieve the perpetrators' aim; the victims do not enter carnal relations and are ultimately shot. While the text initially appears to be an interview, consisting of questions answered by the perpetrator, it becomes clear towards the end of the text that the perpetrator has been the one asking the questions, too. In essence, the text appears to represent an introspection by the perpetrator. This is betrayed by the first-person plural pronoun in the third last question:

Wurden wir selbst erregt?

Jedenfalls eher als die beiden im Raum; wenigstens sah es so aus. Andererseits wäre uns das verboten gewesen. Infolgedessen glaube ich nicht, daß wir erregt waren. Vielleicht aufgeregt, daß die Sache nicht klappte. (Kluge 2000: 772)

To be sure, this introspection does not lead to profound historical insight. Rather than offering a moment of subversion, the matter of (forbidden) arousal only confirms the victims' dehumanisation: they are nothing more than research objects. At the same time, it is clear that this perpetrator's perspective does not necessarily

⁴ This is already evident from Kluge's signing of the Oberhausen Manifesto in 1962, which called for a rejuvenation of West German film, which would result in the New German Cinema.

invite the reader to empathise with him, as is often feared;⁵ on the contrary, his own lack of empathy has not seldom been described as 'cold' or 'detached': "[i]n Kluges 'Liebesversuch' blickt ein Beobachter des distanzierten, teilnahmslosen kalten Blicks auf die mutmaßlich Liebenden" (Schütz 1985: 55).⁶ The fact remains, however, that our knowledge of the experiment comprises only what the perpetrator tells us; we have no way of reconstructing the victims' inner lives.⁷ Moreover, the narrator uses no narrative strategies that are typically thought of as inviting empathy *for him*⁸ – on the contrary. His cold gaze does not only erase his victims' inner lives, but also removes himself (rhetorically) from the crime scene: he repeatedly uses the passive voice ("das war nicht anzunehmen", "es war durch das Bullauge [...] nicht zu erkennen", "[d]ie widerspenstigen Versuchspersonen wurden erschossen"; Kluge 2000: 770–772) and vaguely refers to a collectivity of perpetrators ("[w]oher wußte man das?", "[w]ir gaben ihnen Eiweißgallert aus Eiern zu trinken", "[h]at man denn alles versucht?"; Kluge 2000: 771–772). He does not describe his particular involvement, whereas he does describe the activities of a certain Oberscharführer Wilhelm, "der etwas davon verstand" (Kluge 2000: 772). Emotions and attitudes are only attributed to other perpetrators: "[z]ur Enttäuschung des eigens herangereisten Obergruppenführers A. Zerbst und seiner Begleitung ließ sich das Experiment nicht durchführen" (Kluge 2000: 771).⁹

Again, the hiding in a community of perpetrators is remarkable, as is the not-so-straightforward empty reply to the straightforward question. While we see the arousal as problematic because of its dehumanising implications, the perpetrator denies it, probably insincerely, because his ideological framework – and his superiors – do not condone it (the arousal implicating the attractiveness of 'Rassenschande' for the perpetrator).

In short: the perpetrator's narrative does not allow us to have empathy for the victims, because he does not show any empathy for them. Moreover, he uses various strategies that do not allow us to experience what he experienced – he dodges responsibility, which he subtly shifts towards other perpetrators, and he does

⁵ Erin McGlothlin's approach to narrative empathy in perpetrator fiction addresses the unease that such texts often evoke: "[w]hat happens to readers when they experience narratives about the Holocaust that probe the mind of the Nazi perpetrator [...]? How do texts that feature the uncomfortable and morally questionable perspective of genocidal murderers stimulate the affective processes that result from autodiegetic narration and narrative focalization, such as character identification and empathy?" (McGlothlin 2016: 253–254)

⁶ Schütz attributes, somewhat problematically, an "eigentümliche Affektlosigkeit" to these "faschistischen Greuel Täter" (1985: 51) – but clearly this pertains to their utter lack of compassion or empathy. As Hans-Joachim Hahn notes, this perpetrator type (highly educated, lacking empathy, rational) is typical for Kluge's prose; Gunther Martens situates this perpetrator type in a broader question underlying Kluge's texts: "the role of the intellectual faced with war and dictatorship" (Hahn 2015: 229; Martens 2014: 69). To be sure, this perpetrator's rationality is purely bureaucratic and "instrumentell" (Hahn 2015: 229).

⁷ The closest observation that we get is marked by hedging: "[i]ch glaube, sie wollten nicht" (Kluge 2000: 771).

⁸ For a discussion of these techniques, which include first-person narration and internal focalisation, see Keen (2006: 219–220). Keen stresses, however, that "there is no guarantee that an individual reader will respond empathetically to a particular presentation" and that "[n]o one narrative technique assures readers that our empathetic reaction precisely catches the feelings embedded in the fictional characters" (2006: 222).

⁹ This is even more outspoken towards the end of the text, where the question is raised whether 'we' were aroused.

not talk about his feelings.¹⁰ That avoidance would find a real-life penchant a few years later during the first Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt: the contemporary legal doctrine demanded that the prosecutors had to prove the perpetrators' desire to comply with their criminal orders ('Täterwille') or their initiative in instating violence. Consequently, eleven of the accused faced charges of "Beihilfe" instead of murder (Jasch / Kaiser 2017: 141–143). It seems likely that Kluge, a law student, would have known of the case-Staschynski and the 1962 ruling of the Federal Court of Justice, which provided the legal doctrine of 'Täterwille'. The question of empathy – and especially the refusal of empathy – is, then, not merely a literary concern, but a legal and sociological reality. As mentioned in the introduction, Schütz motivates the attribution of 'coldness' through Kluge's sociological writing and even suggests that coldness is the leitmotiv par excellence in Kluge's project:

Tatsächlich ist Kälte bei Kluge nicht ein Motiv unter anderen, sondern konstitutiv für seine Prosa. Denn nicht nur ist ständig von Situationen der Kälte die Rede – am dichtesten in der *Organisation des Unglücks* im Stalingrad-Winter [...] –, nicht nur haben die Figuren in den *Lebensläufen* ständig Furcht vor Erkältung oder einen Schnupfen, sondern die Texte selbst sind Produkte eines "kalten Blicks." (Schütz 1985: 58)

According to Schütz, this cold gaze differs, however, from the 'cold gaze' that Helmut Lethen (1994) famously attributes to the authors of New Objectivity in the 1920s, notably to Ernst Jünger and Bertolt Brecht. The narrator's unreliability as a perpetrator enables a doubling of the cold gaze: it is not merely tied to the sense of surprise that such perpetrator testimonies (be they fictional or not) may evoke in the reader – and thus shatter a sense of coherence – but also to the resulting cold gaze which at least registers the incoherence:

Für die Gesellschaft als Ganze verhält sich das individuelle Auge kalt (wie auch jeder andere isolierte Eigensinn). Das gesellschaftliche Auge wiederum, das es nicht als Subjekt, sondern nur als ungeheure abstrakte Sammlung zerrissener und in Scheinsysteme falsch zusammengefügt Teile gibt, gewissermaßen als summierte Splitter, verhält sich zu den Individuen und kleinen Produktionsgruppen von Menschen kalt. (Kluge / Negt 1981: 724; qtd. in Schütz 1985: 59 and Hahn 2015: 231).

Here, Schütz convincingly argues, Kluge's coldness differs from the coldness of an Ernst Jünger, who was still looking in his memories for harmonies that transcend death.¹¹ Indeed, Kluge does not look for such narrative fetishisms. Hahn offers a slightly different interpretation: he suggests a link between *Ein Liebesversuch* and Adorno's philosophy by referring to the centrality of the doctor figure in an excerpt titled *Widersprüche* attached to *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. In this excerpt, two young men discuss whether to become a doctor: the argument against this career choice posits that the institutionalisation of medicine may lead the doctor to become a representative of hierarchies rather than a person charged with healing; the other position claims that even if one does not become the doctor, one profits from the institutionalisation (presumably as a patient) without having to soil one's hands. Therefore, becoming a doctor does not increase any guilt: the guilt is already anchored in the system from which one cannot remain aloof (Hahn 2015: 231).

¹⁰ Of course, we as readers can have compassion for the victims since we can – and ought to – emancipate ourselves from the perpetrator's narrative control. Moreover, if we do feel compelled to empathize with this narrator, the result is likely to be empathic distress: "a feeling with a character whose actions are at odds with a reader's moral code" (Keen 2006: 215).

¹¹ Schütz refers to Jünger's *An der Zeitmauer* (1958).

Through *Widersprüche*, Hahn links the perpetrator's coldness to the coldness that Adorno attributed to the societies that produced such perpetrators. In *Erziehung nach Auschwitz* (1966), Adorno recapitulates his theory of the manipulative character as suggested in *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950): "[d]er manipulative Charakter [...] zeichnet sich aus durch Organisationswut, durch Unfähigkeit, überhaupt unmittelbare menschliche Erfahrungen zu machen, durch eine gewisse Art von Emotionslosigkeit, durch überwertigen Realismus" (Adorno 1970a: 102). Adorno claims that the perpetrators' egodocuments, which had only become available after the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality*, demonstrate the manipulative personality of Höss, Eichmann and the like. This perpetrator type is notably similar to the one that Kluge develops throughout his prose; but Adorno equally speaks of the authoritarian personality:

[b]ei dem Typus [...] handelt es sich, schlicht gesagt, um Menschen, die nicht lieben können. [...] Sie sind durch und durch kalt, müssen auch zuinnerst die Möglichkeit von Liebe negieren, ihre Liebe von anderen Menschen von vornherein, ehe sie sich entfaltet, abziehen. [...] Ich sagte, jene Menschen seien in einer besonderen Weise kalt. (Adorno 1970a: 105).

Adorno links this personality trait to a fetishization of technology and hence to the modernity. The perpetrator's coldness is, thus, the product of a sociological coldness:

Wäre [die Kälte] nicht ein Grundzug der Anthropologie, also der Beschaffenheit der Menschen, wie sie in unserer Gesellschaft tatsächlich sind; wären sie also zutiefst gleichgültig gegen das, was mit allen anderen geschieht außer den paar, mit denen sie eng und womöglich durch handgreifliche Interessen verbunden sind, so wäre Auschwitz nicht möglich gewesen, die Menschen hätten es dann nicht hingenommen. [...] Unfähigkeit zur Identifikation war fraglos die wichtigste psychologische Bedingung dafür, daß so etwas wie Auschwitz sich inmitten von einigermaßen gesitteten und harmlosen Menschen hat abspielen können. [...] Die Kälte der gesellschaftlichen Monade [...] war als Indifferenz gegen das Schicksal der anderen die Verantwortung dafür, daß nur ganz wenige sich regten. Das wissen die Folterknechte; auch darauf machen sie stets erneut die Probe. (Adorno 1970a: 106)

In a pessimistic (but decidedly anti-sentimental) streak, Adorno warns us that there is no easy solution to overcome that societal coldness: "[i]ch möchte nicht die Liebe predigen. [...] Liebe predigen setzt in denen, an die man sich wendet, bereits eine andere Charakterstruktur voraus als die, welche man verändern will" (Adorno 1970a: 106–107). And in a text on education after the Shoah, he points to the limits of education: in line with psychoanalysis, he stresses the importance of education and upbringing in the earliest phases of childhood, but questions whether a 'warm' education is possible, when the parents themselves are 'cold': "[v]or allem kann man Eltern, die selber Produkte dieser Gesellschaft sind und ihre Merkmale tragen, zur Wärme nicht animieren. Die Aufforderung, den Kindern mehr Wärme zu geben, dreht die Wärme künstlich an und negiert sie dadurch" (Adorno 1970a: 107).¹² Similarly, *Ein Liebesversuch* does not offer a way out. Towards the end of the text, after the perpetrator's remarks on the problems of arousal, two verses are inserted: "Will ich liebend dir gehören,/kommst du zu mir heute Nacht?". They are separated typographically: centred and italicised, and thus emerge as a voice disrupting the perpetrator's "anti-dialogue" (Prager 2017: 3). It is unclear to whom the voice belongs, but it is clear that the sentimental quality of these schlager-like lines cannot compensate for the perpetrator's cold gaze – if anything, their emotional insincerity is in line with the perpetrator's disingenuity.

¹² 'Erziehung' can be translated as 'education' and as 'upbringing' or 'raising'.

3 Irritating Memory

The title of this subchapter is intentionally ambivalent: while Kluge's texts amount to memory that irritates the reader's expectations, they do so because they irritate the official, state-sanctioned forms of memory. This may suggest a Manichean conception of time – as if there were a period where there were no institutionalised German commemoration, and a period where there suddenly were. To be sure, this is more an oversimplifying construction *ex posteriori* than an ontologically or epistemologically precise description of historical phases – *Ein Liebesversuch* irritates the conventions of memory in the 1960s, when universalistic and potentially sentimentalist depictions of the Shoah, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and its adaptations, were the only depictions that enjoyed some popularity (cf. Kramer 2015: 113). *Ein Liebesversuch* refutes such 'easy' depictions because they tend to blend out the historical responsibilities that many Germans bore but refused to acknowledge – depictions which were relatively popular precisely because they enabled such a refusal. The confrontation with the perspective of the perpetrator disables philosemitic reactions (while the aesthetic qualities of the text inevitably break that perpetrator's problematic perspective).

That being said, the dichotomy of (early) avoidance and (belated) intensive commemoration has the dangerous potential of considering our contemporary politics of memory as ethically and politically superior to those of the first post-war decades. This is exactly one of the issues that are repeatedly addressed in Kluge's later prose works, but that this is not substantially different from the ruptured silences in his early prose. Indeed, the preface to Kluge's very first collection of short stories, *Lebensläufe* (1962), opens with a statement that remains relevant for his later works: "Die Erzählungen dieses Bandes stellen aus sehr verschiedenen Aspekten die Frage nach der Tradition" (Kluge 2000: 675). The statement is as much true for the *literary* tradition – Kluge notes that the stories in the collection are "teils erfunden, teils nicht erfunden" (Kluge 2000: 675) – but, as Hans-Joachim Hahn notes, it applies to 'traditions' beyond literature as well: "[g]efragt wird nach dem Verhältnis zur nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit als einer in die Gegenwart ragenden Tradition" (Hahn 2015: 217). Whereas this relationship was arguably more concrete in the 1960s – with many old Nazis having been reinstated in industrial enterprises and various state services, or never having been charged at all, there was a biographic continuity between the Nazi regime and the new German states¹³ – it has shifted to a more symbolic relationship, and, in this sense, come closer to the actual meaning of 'tradition'. To be sure, the notion of tradition is under no circumstances neutral and (an identified) tradition is often the subject of polemical debates in identity politics. It may be summarised as a set of beliefs and actions which is thought of as inherent to a cultural or societal or ethnic group and which is thought to have originated in the (not always identified) past and to which that group clings for their self-understanding *as* a group. Understood as a remnant of the past in the present, it is often evoked to challenge modernisation or phenomena that come with it out of a fear of losing that group identity. In other words, whereas the tradition in 1962 may be understood as the continuity of historical constellations in spite of social and political reorganisations and its effects

¹³ Hahn links this plausibly to Adorno's diagnosis, in *Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?*, of a "Nachleben des Nationalsozialismus in der Demokratie", which Adorno considers more dangerous than fascist sentiments directed against democracy (Hahn 2015: 217–218; cf. Adorno 1970b: 10).

on commemoration, the tradition in the 21st century relates rather to commemoration and its effects on and legitimation of social and political systems. Moreover, just as Kluge's early 'coldness' confronted his contemporary audience with an uneasy past and the silences surrounding it, his more recent prose must equally be seen as an intervention or even a symbolic disruption of the commemorative practices in the 21st century. With *"Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter."* *48 Geschichten für Fritz Bauer* (2013) he releases a series of hitherto unpublished micro-narratives as a homage to Fritz Bauer, and while the Shoah has been a recurring topic in Kluge's prose, this collection is the first in which it is the predominant, if not exclusive theme.¹⁴

But before we continue with a discussion of the ways in which Kluge's topics irritate our commemorative habitus, let us take a brief look at his untimely irritations. The prime example is the publication of *30. April 1945* in 2014 – not seventy, but sixty-nine years after that fateful day, and, as one reviewer remarked, in the centenary of that other world war (Kuhlmann 2014). This choice is reminiscent of Horst Krüger's sardonic remarks on a commemorative culture centred around jubilees:

Sollte es sich um eine Erkrankung des Zeitgeistes handeln, so würde ich sein Zustandsbild "Jubilitis" nennen. Jubiläen gehen in diesem Lande jetzt um wie Heuschnupfen-Anfälle. Frühe Anlässe, späte Rieseneffekte. Benötigt dazu wird eigentlich nur eine Zahl, eine magische Zahl muß es sein. Keineswegs muß diese Zahl historisch exakt stimmen. Nur rund muß sie sein und möglichst hoch. Sie muß wie beim Lottogewinn mit möglichst vielen Nullen imponieren. (Krüger 1993, 45)¹⁵

The simile to the lottery points to the lucrative business that cultural commemoration is, and the pathology may be ironical but bears nonetheless a critical message: Krüger documents a fear that such apparently joyful celebrations – like 1,000 years of Christianity in Russia, or the 2000th anniversary of the city of Bonn – are used for antagonistic cultural-political statements, *in casu* against the officially atheistic USSR resp. the GDR. Simultaneously, Krüger points to the relative novelty of this phenomenon, and explains it by a rekindled interest for history, which he claims was tabooed "in der Nachhitlerzeit". Biographical reasons made a lack of historical confrontation attractive to many (erstwhile) soldiers, lawyers, doctors, civil servants, and businessmen – through the 1960s and 1970s, when critical ideologies treated history with suspicion and emphasised a contemporary political consciousness (Krüger 1993: 47–48).

What stories does Kluge tell us, sixty-nine years after Hitler's suicide? Very few about Hitler. This book's golden thread is not a topic but a precise moment in time. With the usual blend of nonfictional and counterfactual stories, Kluge takes a global perspective on 30 April 1945 – a perspective that reaches far beyond the ruins of Berlin where the 'Third Reich' was finally broken militarily and politically. Indeed, one could argue that Kluge's book is an anti-*Der Untergang*. Oliver Hirschbiegel's 2004 film was a commercial success and has been lauded, especially for Bruno Ganz's portrayal of Hitler, but it has also been criticised by film makers (e.g. Wenders 2004) and academics (e.g. Wildt 2005) for offering a problematically naïve account, in which the perpetrators may be humanised but in which the

¹⁴ Bauer had already appealed in *Abschied von gestern* (1966). This is not the only link to this film: film stills featuring hares on gravestones are integrated directly after the prologue, and while they are identified as such, no commentary is given (Kluge 2013: 10–11).

¹⁵ I have consulted the version reprinted in 1993, in *Diese Lust am Leben*, which must be considered a revision: it mentions the replacement of 17 June as German national holiday by 3 October (Krüger 1993: 46) – but this happened in 1990 with the reunification of both Germanys.

enormity of their crimes is downplayed. Instead of isolating the historical moment, Kluge's subtitle links the historical moment with its historical implications: the German 'Westbindung' (which, as the current war in Europe demonstrates, extends far beyond the Cold War). The mixture of counterfactual and nonfictional stories and Reinhard Jirgl's "Gastbeitrag" of avantgarde poetry pose epistemological challenges and invite the reader to re-evaluate their relation to history 'as it happens' in their own lifetimes.

The contrarian jubilee logic does not underlie *Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht*, which was published a neat fifty years after the start of the first Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt. It seems straightforward that Kluge wishes to honour Bauer but not Hitler, but he does so without referring to Bauer's life and times or the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. Between the prologue – which is not labelled as such – describing Bauer's funeral and the dedication at the end of the collection, the reader will look in vain for direct links to Bauer. Indeed, even the title only refers indirectly to a time/space relevant to Bauer's death: it is a quotation by the artist (and art theoretician) Bazon Brock and was part of an art happening in Frankfurt in 1968: "Der Tod muß abgeschafft werden, diese verdammte Schweinerei muß aufhören. Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter" (Der Spiegel 1968). Kluge attributes the final sentence of this quotation – the title of his collection – to Bazon, but without any information as to its context. The first sentence is omitted, but it is poignant that the attribution by Kluge happens on the very first page of the collection, in the midst of Bauer's funeral. Given that Bauer died in Frankfurt in the summer of 1968, Bazon's quotation is linked to the time/space of Bauer's demise. What does the omission of the first sentence mean, however? Is Kluge indirectly mourning Bauer?

It is well known that it took the efforts of the returned émigré Fritz Bauer to bring about the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial.¹⁶ Although he did not appear in the courtroom – to avoid cheap antisemitic accusations of Jewish revenge from drawing attention from the trial – he prepared the trial meticulously and led a pre-trial meeting with the expert witnesses, whose reports were to deliver a factual historical basis for the judges (Turner 2018: 1). Under his auspices, a list of 599 (!) names of persons suspected of having 'served' in Auschwitz was compiled in January 1960, to which Hermann Langbein added another 254 by March. After further investigation as to the whereabouts of those on the list – which showed that many had already died – 124 names remained (Renz 2015b: 59–61). Bauer envisioned the trial very much as a tool to bring about a political purpose as much as an ideal of justice. This should not be astonishing since Bauer had been politically active for the German Social Democrats before Hitler's rise to power. Bauer had also been incarcerated, as a Social Democrat and as a Jew, in a German concentration camp in 1933 before he could emigrate to Denmark (and finally, to escape to Sweden in 1943). Werner Renz emphasises the continuity of Bauer's political engagement in exile and situates his philosophy of law in this context: "Auf der Grundlage des geltenden Rechts war nach Bauer die geforderte 'Abrechnung [mit den Kriegsverbrechern]' nicht möglich" (Renz 2015b: 10). Considering Nazism to have been a revolution, Bauer sees an adequate legal response to it only in the form of a counterrevolution, which necessitates the use of retrospective legislation (Renz 2015b: 10). Yet this did not materialise, since the post-war trials were mainly held by the occupying Allied powers and not by German courts. When Bauer was finally in a position to

¹⁶ He was also instrumental in bringing Adolf Eichmann to justice, albeit in Jerusalem – Bauer informed the Mossad because he deemed the risk of old Nazis informing Eichmann too big.

prosecute Nazi crimes, in 1956, he was confronted with the fact that he would have to do so based on the legal code from 1871 – which, he realised, was not an adequate foundation: it had the perverse consequence, in the Frankfurt courtroom, that the gassing of several thousand persons was not considered murder, whereas the shooting of a single person could, under circumstances, be considered as such (Renz 2015b: 11–12). Nonetheless, this does not mean that the option of forsaking trials would have been the preferable alternative: indeed, Bauer wanted to use the courtroom to both educate the German population and to force it to pose self-critical questions. As Renz formulates: "[i]n einem Prozess der Selbsterkenntnis sollten sie zu dem Ergebnis gelangen, dass sie hätten Nein sagen, sich dem Regime, seinen Untaten, seinen verbrecherischen Befehlen, verweigern müssen" (Renz 2015b: 12). Such notions can be traced back to Bauer's humanistic education, as Kerstin Steitz demonstrates: she reconstructs Bauer's self-positioning in the tradition of Lessing and Schiller and points to Goethe, Heine, and Tucholsky as literary influences (Steitz 2017: 80, 82). As a young student at the University of Heidelberg, Bauer was influenced by Gustav Radbruch's philosophy of law, and Bauer considered Radbruch to have been influenced by Goethe, and particularly by *Faust*. As Steitz points out, this influence may be explained by the fact that Goethe himself was a lawyer (as were his father and grandfather) and that this legal background may have left traces in his literary texts (Steitz 2017: 82). This humanistic background may also explain why Bauer called upon a division of labour when dealing with the genocidal past: judges have to judge (and punish), literary authors need to educate (Steitz 2017: 82). To be sure, the immediate literary responses to the Auschwitz trial were vast.¹⁷ Yet Bauer's humanistic views clashed with the rigorous legal codes by which the accused would be judged, leaving him utterly frustrated and disappointed with the trial: his expectations were simply too big, too idealistic, too unrealistic (cf. Steitz 2017: 84), and it is clear from his correspondence with Thomas Harlan that Bauer was embittered (cf. Renz 2015b: 7). How does literature address this humanistic tradition, fifty years after the trial, which had not lived up to Bauer's humanistic aspirations?

"Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter" (2013) was released shortly before two German films that thematise the struggles that Bauer faced in the prosecution of Nazi war criminals and mass murderers: *Im Labyrinth des Schweigens* (2014, directed by Giolio Ricciarelli) and *Der Staat gegen Fritz Bauer* (2015, directed by Lars Kraume). Quite aptly, the titles of both films immediately evoke a sense of antagonism and conspiracy and therefore immediately suggest whom to side with – especially in the second case. If Kluge's title articulates such an antagonism, it does so more indirectly by questioning well-established emotional reactions, which, although perhaps well-intended, are not appropriate or even detrimental. As such, the very title already has the potential of upsetting the reader and demands how to commemorate the Shoah: which affects are appropriate for such undertakings?

It should come as no surprise that the trope of coldness is found in *"Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter"*: in the dedication, Kluge argues that

¹⁷ The event still evokes literary responses, notably Dieter Schlesak's *Capesius, der Auschwitzapotheker* (2006) and Annette Hess's *Deutsches Haus* (2018).

[d]ie Eindrücke aus den Ermittlungen und Prozessen waren voller Frost. Abends saß Fritz Bauer oft im Foyer des Frankfurter Hofes. Ziemlich allein. Gelegentlich besuchte ihn Alfred Edel, der, ebenfalls meist allein, in der Nähe wohnte. (Kluge 2013: 113)¹⁸

While Kluge does not explain what this 'frost' consists of, it is easily linked to the cold gaze of the perpetrators and their sociological portraits exemplified in *Ein Liebesversuch*.¹⁹ It is no coincidence, however, that the driving force behind the persecution of mass murderers faces a lonely existence; indeed, Bauer himself famously claimed that as soon as he left his office, he entered hostile territory (cf. Renz 2015a: 25n.68). The coldness that, according to Adorno, enabled the emergence of the Shoah, permeates after the war in a social coldness surrounding those addressing it. To be sure, in Kluge's 2013 text, that coldness is still diegetically situated in the 1960s, and it remains an open question whether it is contained to that period, or whether the reader should infer that the shift in commemorative politics has not altered that coldness, because the matters of class and means of production have by and large remained the same.

However the reader answers that question for herself, it is clear that "*Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter*" still irritates expectations: in a commemorative culture which increasingly discussed the Shoah from the perspectives of trauma and human rights (and thus from the perspective of the victims), it does not offer 'warm' stories that supposedly heighten the reader's empathy, but still reiterates the perpetrator's perspective. A prime example is the story *In der Zeit, in der noch nichts endgültig entschieden war*. As the title suggests, the background of the story is the persecution of the Jews in Germany prior to their and their European neighbours' destruction from 1941 onwards. The story pertains to statisticians presenting estimates of the numbers of "wehrfähiger Juden im Reich" in preparation of the law on military conscription, which was reintroduced in 1935 (Kluge 2013: 27). The narrator sticks to the Nazi legal framework – also proclaimed in 1935 – by referring to so-called 'Mischlinge', i.e. people with both Jewish and non-Jewish (grand)parents. Moreover, the statistics do not only count male Jews. On the contrary: at first, there is an addition of "Volljuden mosaischen Glaubens", "Volljuden nicht mosaischen Glaubens" and "Mischlinge 1. und 2. Grades", totalling ca. 1,500,000 people. Only afterwards the statistic is reduced by accounting for gender, age and nationality, totalling ca. 308,000 Jewish men between the ages of 18 and 45 in the possession of German citizenship.²⁰ Is this statistic of 1,500,000 not serving other purposes, then? Does it not pre-empt and, in a way, prepare the kind of statistic used in the protocols of the Wannsee conference? The report, which is real, stems from a time where nothing may have been decided, but where steps were undertaken that would enable the registration and destruction of Germany's and Europe's Jewish populations.²¹ The text irritates, and not merely

¹⁸ Here, we find yet another link to Kluge's *Abschied von gestern*: Alfred Edel played the role of the lecturer in this film.

¹⁹ This prototypical cold perpetrator manifests itself in this collection in the micro-story *Erst forschen, dann töten* in the characters of Dr. Elfriede Fliethmann and Dr. Dora Maria Kahlich, two anthropologists tasked with researching the Jews in the Tarnow area, who complain that the *Einsatzgruppen* kill their research material. Their rationale is guided entirely by (pseudo)scientific arguments and ideological motivations; the Jews are utterly dehumanised (Kluge 2013: 16–17; cf. Hahn 2015: 229–230n.56).

²⁰ For the time being, that is: the Nuremberg Laws would distinguish between *Reichsbürger* and *Reichsangehörige*, the Jews belonging to the second category.

²¹ Moreover, the concluding remarks are baffling, too. Major Hoßbach, the responsible for the Wehrmacht, writes that "die Zahl von 308,000 Wehrpflichtigen 18 zusätzlichen Divisionen

because the reader knows what would happen six years after the memo was handed to Hitler's military adjutant, Friedrich Hoßbach. The second reason is that Kluge tacitly demands that we challenge the report. He offers no sources for the story, but a source elsewhere is helpful: in *Ein später Sieg des Spartakus* Kluge describes the uprising in Sobibor on 14 October 1943, and he quotes from Saul Friedländer's *The Years of Extermination*. This book is the second part of Friedländer's *Nazi Germany and the Jews*. In the first part, *The Years of Persecution*, Friedländer mentions the Burgdörfer report. But he adds that "it was not clear how this total had been arrived at. (The Ministry, in fact, admitted that there was no precise method for making such an estimate.)" (Friedländer 2007: 150). The historian has obligations that the *romancier* has not: contextualisation. While Friedländer mentions that the statistic was a gross exaggeration, he uses the perpetrator's admittance against their ideology by pointing out that *any* statistic would have been questionable. The careful reader understands that this is a subtle indictment of the Nazis' racialised categorisations. The tacit intertext shows that a linear reading of Kluge's stories does not suffice. Friedländer is only referenced to *after* the story about the report, necessitating the reader to retrace her steps. But retracing one's steps proves fruitful, since it demonstrates a discrepancy between both versions. Friedländer mentions that the report was signed by Hans Pfundtner, whereas Kluge heavily implies that it was authored by Friedrich Burgdörfer, who did compile statistics in matters of military conscription, but also compiled statistics on the Jewish population – with genocidal implications (cf. Klee 2005: 85–86). It seems that Kluge inserts a degree of narrative unreliability, which is not easily attributable – who narrates the story? – but which seems to underline the perpetrator's unreliability and serves to distance Kluge from the perpetrator.

In *Wie in einer anderen Welt, durch eine unsichtbare Wand vom Übrigen getrennt* Kluge recounts the deportation of the Jews from Rhodes and Kos, but the register chosen is once again that of the perpetrators:

Am 23. Juli 1944 trieb man die 1750 Juden von Rhodos und die 96 verhafteten Juden von Kos zusammen, die man mit Booten nach Rhodos transferiert hatte, und verfrachtete sie auf Lastkähne, die in Richtung Festland den Hafen von Rhodos verließen. Aufgrund des Wetters suchten die Kähne dann Schutz in einer Bucht und bewegten sich erst am 28. Juli auf das Meer hinaus: in Sicht der türkischen Küste; in kurzer Flugdistanz zu den britischen Flugplätzen auf Zypern, durch ein Gebiet, das unter vollständiger Kontrolle der britischen Marine stand. [...] Am 1. August Landung auf dem griechischen Festland. Die Evakuierten wurden in Güterwagen verladen. [...] Die Transportzüge, die auf der schwierigen Strecke auf den zum Teil eingleisigen griechischen Bahnen mit Vorrang abgefertigt wurden, kamen am 16. August in Auschwitz an. Die Gefangenen wurden sogleich in die Gaskammern geführt. (Kluge 2013: 84).

At first sight, the discourse does not differ substantially from the anonymous perpetrator's in *Ein Liebesversuch*: the victims are even more anonymous than J. and P. since they are reduced to statistics. Their suffering during the three-week deportation (!) goes utterly unmentioned, and one is almost astonished that there were survivors upon arrival in Auschwitz. The account relies on the passive voice

entspreche, also verteilt auf das Gesamtheer die Stärke von zwei Armeen ausmache", while the narrator points to the exclusion of Jews and "Mischlinge" from military service (Kluge 2013: 28). How are we to interpret this final remark? It is obvious that 18 additional divisions would not have won the war – but it is equally obvious that this is not Kluge's point. Rather, the exclusion from military service may be seen as stripping the Jews of yet another protection mechanism, as yet another step preparing, albeit unwittingly, their destruction.

and the use of the generic 'man', which leads in the perpetrators' comfortable anonymity. We are even offered a variation on the debates concerning the bombing of the extermination camps or even of the railways leading there: could the Allies not have done more to save Jewish lives? And if so, why didn't they? While these questions remain pertinent, they may further detract from the actual perpetrators who were, as the story tells us, not impressed by the presence of the Spanish consul: "[d]er Diplomat meinte, nicht mehr tun zu können, als sich zu zeigen und den Wachmannschaften gegenüber auszuweisen. Das sollte heißen: 'Die Welt sieht zu, was hier geschieht'. Den Vollzug der Verladung und die Abfahrt verhinderte das nicht" (Kluge 2013: 84). Is this remark pointing towards the killers' fanaticism, exemplified in the priority that these deportation trains are granted – at a time where the military situation of Nazi Germany is disastrous on all fronts? Or is it emphasising the lukewarm response of the Spanish diplomat? Such questions are not easily answered; the sheer economy of Kluge's narrative pre-empts closure. Rather, the reader is again invited to take an active role in the assessment of such matters – a role that is not fundamentally different from the relation that Kluge had sought vis-à-vis his cinematic audiences: Kluge seeks to initiate a dialogue with his viewer, because "der Film realisiert sich für mich im Kopf des Zuschauers, nicht auf der Leinwand. Er darf auf der Leinwand zum Beispiel porös, schwach, brüchig sein; dann wird der Zuschauer aktiv, dann kann seine Phantasie eindringen" (qtd. in Schulte 2004: 235). In this case, the porousness of the text consists not only of the brevity of these stories, but also in their juxtaposition, which at times leads to contradictions. While *Wie in einer anderen Welt, durch eine unsichtbare Wand vom Übrigen getrennt* blends out the victims' experiences in the cattlecars, the following anecdote (*Der Pogrom von Iași*) emphasises precisely these experiences. This is a barely known pogrom, having taken place in Romania in the summer of 1941 after the invasion of the Soviet Union. Kluge reminds us of the death trains that transported thousands of victims not to extermination camps, but through the vicinity with no destination in mind:

Nach der Mordaktion wurden auf dem Güterbahnhof Waggons zweier dort verfügbarer Transportzüge mit Juden gefüllt, die Türen mit Plomben geschlossen und die Züge auf eine ziellose Fahrt geschickt. Im ersten der Züge lagerten (als er, vom Lokomotivpersonal verlassen, auf offener Strecke stehend aufgefunden wurde), erstickt und verdurstet, 1194 Tote. (Kluge 2013: 85)

Indeed, as Susanne Marten points out, Kluge's micro-stories, when read in isolation, remains incomplete; one can only make sense of them by relating them to the book as a whole (Marten 2015: 118). We may add: by relating them to other micro-stories. Nevertheless, one clear principle underlying *Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter* is the following: Kluge's homage to Bauer, who may have been acknowledged only belatedly but is nowadays a well-known historical figure in German history, consists of micro-stories that are much less known than either the trial in Frankfurt or the events in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Kluge's collection reminds us that the Shoah was not one event but a series of events – and that there is not one master narrative that can do justice to the experiences of all victims. Just as much as he discusses such poorly known but potentially uplifting stories such as that of the uprising in Sobibor (Kluge 2013: 40–42), he confronts us with uneasy topics, such as the question of perpetrator trauma.

4 Perpetrators (II): The Unease of the Perpetrator

Indeed, typographically it is singled out in the title, which is the only title to feature words entirely written in capital letters: *Das Leiden eines Täters. Der Fall einer POSTTRAUMATISCHEN BELASTUNGSSTÖRUNG bei einem SS-Obergruppenführer im Osteinsatz*. While novels like Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* (2006) and films like Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012) may have kindled an interest in the traumatic experiences of the perpetrator, Sarai Mohamed rightfully stresses that popular, legal and academic discourses usually associate trauma with the victim's experience, leading to a moralisation of a psychological phenomenon. Refuting the idea, tacitly or overtly, that perpetrators can suffer after (and due to) their crimes denounces their humanity, frames them as monsters, and allow us to tacitly deny that we, too, could be the authors of heinous crimes (Mohamed 2015: 1157 and *passim*). Of course, this insight does not entice us to feel pity or compassion, let alone sympathy, for the perpetrator. Indeed, if Kluge includes this uneasy topic, his laconic commentaries block these feelings. In a footnote, Kluge explains that 'Obengruppenführer' is one of the highest ranks in the SS, and laconically notes that "[d]ie peinliche Entzündung der Hämorrhoiden nimmt keine Rücksicht auf den hohen Dienstgrad des Patienten. Die ramponierte Seele sucht den körperlichen Ausdruck" (Kluge 2013: 66). Indeed, the treating doctor's letter to Heinrich Himmler, which Kluge (supposedly) quotes, implies that the physical ails are linked to "der sehr schwere allgemeine und insbesondere nervöse Erschöpfungszustand", which entails "Vorstellungen im Zusammenhang mit dem von ihm selbst geleiteten Judenerschießungen" (Kluge 2013: 67).²² The corporeality of the disease is even more pronounced in the doctor's report: "die Wiederherstellung der normalen Darmtätigkeit", "Eindickung der Kotsäule", "der Darm mit der Hand ausgeräumt werden", "Schleimhaut des Afterings" (Kluge 2013: 67). The emphasis on problems pertaining the digestive system and faeces medical report subverts the authority inherent to such high ranks. The consequence is a double demystification: that of the aura of the rank *and* that of the perpetrator as monster.

5 Summary

To summarize, the attribution of coldness to Kluge's oeuvre relates to three phenomena: the perpetrator's mentality (especially his utter lack of empathy, also upon reflection, after the act of perpetration), Adorno's philosophy and sociological observations and Kluge's epistemology, which demand a high degree of involvement on behalf of the reader (and are thus 'cold' in McLuhan's sense). That does not mean, however, that there is no room for affect in these texts. Because of this potential misunderstanding, I prefer to consider Kluge's texts as counter-memory – to describe what they demand from us rather than to catachrestically describe their 'being'. After all, even if Kluge invokes notions of coldness, the perpetrator's point of view is incessantly 'broken' by his narrative unreliability; the perpetrator is a curiosum. Kluge's counter-memory lies in its inclusion of uneasy episodes barely mentioned in mainstream commemoration, but it also lies in the provocative articulation of affect without resorting to oversimplifying emotional codes of sentimentality. In short: in order to create counter-memory, Kluge resorts to a stylistic coldness, which relates (catachrestically) to societal and philosophical notions of coldness and which

²² This document, too, is real – but the doctor is named not Graditz, as Kluge would have it, but Grawitz (cf. Hilberg 2003: 337–338; Klee 2005: 198).

demand a critical assessment on behalf of the reader. Sentimentality would not teach us anything about the past; it would indirectly serve the status quo. Before the upheavals of the student revolts in the 1960s, it sufficed to thematise the involvement of 'ordinary' bourgeois perpetrators to provoke unease. In the 21st century, the unease is provoked by deviating from set categories. But it is clear that these counter-memories do not lead to relativisation. Indeed, they resist instrumentalisation altogether. Kluge's 'coldness' is not the perpetrator's coldness; his texts affirm the project of the Enlightenment, in which rationality and affect are not diametrically opposed. As the Auschwitz survivor and public intellectual Jean Améry said: "Emotionen? Meinetwegen. Wo steht geschrieben, daß Aufklärung emotionslos zu sein hat? Das Gegenteil scheint mir wahr zu sein. Aufklärung kann ihrer Aufgabe nur dann gerecht werden, wenn sie sich mit Leidenschaft ans Werk macht" (Améry 2018: 15). Kluge's ideal reader, then, is analytical and passionate at the same time.

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