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# Deutsche Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur

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### The Past Recaptured

Günter Grass and Alexander Kluge at the Turn of the Century<sup>1</sup>

In his most recent attempt to rethink German historical consciousness and national identity, the maverick literary critic Karl-Heinz Bohrer claimed that the sociologically oriented postwar German historiography – specifically the work of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Hans Mommsen – led to an occluded perception of German history at large as the prehistory of National Socialism.<sup>2</sup> According to Bohrer, the cause for this reductionist view does not lie in a genuine desire to remember the recent German past. Rather, he maintained, the tendency of German academics to sink into »kitsch rituals« of memory is in fact the result of a subtle attempt to balance the crimes of the Holocaust with a self-loathing, self-destructive (*selbstvernichtende*) perception of German history and of modern German nationalism. Bohrer thus accuses German historiography of a moralism whose unconscious aim is »to rationalize the dark side of German history.« By means of this moralism, he concludes, the horrifying extermination of European Jewry is symbolically *aufgehoben* through the actual annihilation of German history.

To be sure, Bohrer's account is reminiscent of his long-held position that postwar German culture suffers from overstated, artificial emphasis on morality – that, as he maintained during the 1990 *Literaturstreit*, postwar German literature still relies on the Schillerian marriage of aesthetics and ethics and follows the Hegelian version of *Geschichtsphilosophie*, replacing *Geist* with *Sinn* and moral values.<sup>3</sup> Even if we were to ignore

<sup>1</sup> A slightly different and somewhat shorter version of this essay appeared in: *Gegenwartsliteratur. Yearbook on Contemporary German Literature* 1 (2002), 63-86.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Erinnerungslosigkeit*, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 16, 2001. On my assessment of Bohrer's speech, see also Gustav Seibt, *Kein Pathos, nirgends. Karl Heinz Bohrer's Trauer über die verlorene deutsche Geschichte*, in: *Die Zeit*, July 5, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Kulturschutzgebiet DDR?*, in: *Merkur* 500 (October/November 1990), 1015-1018; and *idem*, *Die Ästhetik am Ausgang ihrer Unmündigkeit*, in: *ibid.*, 851-865, here 852. On Bohrer's positions during the *Li-*

Bohrer's polemic tone, along with the debatable desire to revitalize German national self-consciousness, his analysis of the prevalent exchange mechanism – moralism as a compensation for undoing reflective historical memory – offers an intriguing point of departure for viewing contemporary German culture in its attempt to narrate and interpret the German past. Looking at fictionalized historical narratives in contemporary German literature from this perspective, the question should be not so much *what* German writers tell of the past, but rather *how* they do it: How do they »emplot« it, to use Paul Ricœur's term, how do they go about the »organizing of the events into a system«?<sup>4</sup> Hayden White has emphasized that »emplotment« is »composed of a twofold order of signification: a manifest one, in which the object of interest (a referent) is submitted to a succession of descriptions, and a latent one, of which the activity and effects of figuration itself are the referents.«<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, my question involves how contemporary German literature relates to its manifest referent – the recent German past – and to its latent one – to the poetic figuration of the historical itself. What kinds of narratives and narrative strategies characterize its literary accounts of history? How do these narratives relate to epistemological, moral, and aesthetic concerns in regard to the relation between history and literature? What changes can we observe in the course of literary generational succession and decisive political events?

In what follows, I will address these issues by referring to recently published works by two prominent figures in postwar German literature – Günter Grass's *Mein Jahrhundert* (*My Century*, 1999) and Alexander Kluge's *Chronik der Gefühle* (2000). Although both authors share a leftist worldview and a seemingly indestructible desire to hold on to redemptive human emancipation, they nevertheless embody two alternative paradigms in regard to historical narratives in postwar German literature.

<sup>1</sup> *teraturstreit*, see Keith Bullivant, *The Future of German Literature*, Oxford 1994, 6. In his lucid analysis, Andreas Huyssen situates Bohrer in the intellectual tradition of German Romanticism, emphasizing his anti-Leftist modernism. See his *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, New York 1995, 61–65. On that see also Julia Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History, and the Literature of East Germany*, Durham 1997. A detailed in-depth analysis of Bohrer's agenda of aesthetic autonomy is offered in Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification, and National Identity*, New Haven 2000, 177–198.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, Chicago 1984, 31–51, here 33.

<sup>5</sup> Hayden White, *Figural Realism Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, Baltimore 1999, 145.

Günter Grass's fictionalized historical narratives not only invoke the past, they also unfold – through their »latent« referent – a Hegelian concept of history as a cohesive, intelligible process composed of an endless chain of cause and effect leading to a breach in civilization – Auschwitz – and beyond. The narration's aim is thus not just to present actual and fictive events, but to uncover the mechanisms behind the »larger« historical »process« in order to illuminate it and thus liberate his readers from it. Alexander Kluge's narratives, by contrast, display the historical as a cluttered sum that the narration can only unfold and that can hardly bring events into any intelligible order. The semantics and poetics of his historical narratives thus center on tracking the movement of individuals and collectives as they both create and cope with the chaos called history. It is not illumination, not the constitution of present or future consciousness, that motivates his narration, only the curiosity of a poet standing in front of what Walter Benjamin termed history's catastrophic pile of debris.

## I.

Throughout his literary career, Günter Grass referred to National Socialism and the Holocaust as the most significant motivation for his writings. Delivering his Nobel Prize lecture in the patrician hall of the Swedish Academy in Stockholm in 1999, Grass returned to his literary beginnings in Germany of the 1950s, speaking of the »battle« he and his generation had fought with the moral imperative of their time – Theodor Adorno's »prohibition« (*Verbotstafel*): »It is barbaric to write a poem after Auschwitz.«<sup>6</sup> According to Grass, both the generation of those who returned from the war after having served as soldiers in Hitler's army and his own, the so-called *Flakhelfer*-generation, wrote in light of Adorno's notion that Auschwitz marks an unbridgeable gap in the history of civilization: »We, the children who had had their fingers burned, we were the ones to repudiate the absolutes, the ideological black and white. Doubt and skepticism were our godparents and the multitude of gray values their present to us.«<sup>7</sup> Only by letting the German language »become memory« (*indem sie zum Gedächtnis wurde*), thus preventing the past from drifting into

<sup>6</sup> Günter Grass, To be continued ..., in: *PMLA* 115/3 (May 2000), 292–300, here 293. On the meaning of Auschwitz as the motivating power of his literature, see Grass's seminal public lecture delivered in February 1990, »Schreiben nach Auschwitz,« in: idem, *Schreiben nach Auschwitz*, Frankfurt/Main 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Grass, To be continued ... (fn. 6), 297.

oblivion, could he and his generation have kept »the historical wound,« Auschwitz, open and »the much desired and prescribed forgetting be reversed with a steadfast [*ein beharrliches*] »Once upon a time.«<sup>8</sup>

With the revealing causal relation that Grass posits between the historical event (Auschwitz) and the archetypal narrative, between time and narration, he highlights a poetics based on the conviction that literary narration related to historical circumstances is intrinsically linked to, indeed motivated by, the realm outside literature. By characterizing his writing and that of his generation as the poetic undoing of an oblivious culture, Grass emphasizes that his historical narratives aim not just at artistic expression and aesthetic pleasure, but at explicating the congruence of ethics and aesthetics in the concrete, political sphere, at re-forming the social realm, creating a better Germany. Grass's account discloses his confidence that, despite the uniqueness of the event inscribed as »Auschwitz,« the nature of fictional narrative, the trajectory of the novel, both formally and thematically, hadn't changed. A »steadfast »Once upon a time« remained for him an adequate reply to the modernist discourse of the »crisis of the novel« and to Theodor W. Adorno's epochal 1954 paradox: »One can no longer tell, whereas the novel's form demands telling [*es läßt sich nicht mehr erzählen, während die Form des Romans Erzählung verlangt*].«<sup>9</sup> Even after Adorno had repudiated the »that is how it was« (*so war es*) gesture rooted in nineteenth-century realism, a gesture that was still present in much of the contemporary novel as an anachronistic chi-

8 Ibid.

9 Theodor W. Adorno, Standort des Erzählers im zeitgenössischen Roman, in: idem, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. II: Noten zur Literatur, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt/Main 1974, 41-48, here 41. On the far-reaching consequences of Adorno's analysis as voiced in this essay and in Adorno's later *Aesthetic Theory*, see Keith Bullivant/Klaus Briegleb, Die Krise des Erzählens – »1968« und danach, in: Klaus Briegleb/Sigrid Weigel (ed.), *Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968* (= Hanser Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart 12), Munich 1992, 302-339. In his valuable analysis of the poetic premises of postwar German literature, Günter Blumberger argued that Grass and his contemporaries rejected the notion of »the crisis of the novel« expressed by Benjamin, Adorno, and Lukács precisely because of their experience of totalitarianism. They wanted to write against totalitarianism *explicitly*. According to Blumberger, although they reiterated, to a certain extent, the tradition of realism, their literature was motivated by the prevalent tendency to melancholy – a tendency so essential to modernist literature. Günter Blumberger, Versuch über den deutschen Gegenwartsroman. Krisenbewußtsein und Neubegründung im Zeichen der Melancholie, Stuttgart 1985, 65, 72-73.

mera, despite the challenges of modernism and the century's calamities, Grass (and, indeed, many of his contemporaries) continued to cling to the belief that a self-confident narration seeking to uncover and tell the past was the only adequate answer to the challenges of Auschwitz.

Any serious evaluation of Günter Grass's recent metapoetic reflections in prose must begin by examining his literary beginnings. Marked by the tradition of the picaresque novel, by Jean Paul's reconciliation of the ironic and the sentimental, and by Alfred Döblin's high-modernist, anti-idealistic modernism, Günter Grass's *Danzig Trilogy*, published between 1959 and 1963, stood in opposition to the main currents of German postwar literature.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, novels such as *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*, 1959) and *Hundejahre* (*Dog Years*, 1963) refrained from the arid realism so typical of the German postwar *Trümmer-, Heimkehrer-,* and *Kahlschlagliteratur* and shunned distinctive metaperspectives to which the reader might relate in order to arrive at a finite image of the historical totality.<sup>11</sup> Following Alfred Döblin, Grass refrained in his early novels from using any psychological tableaux or sturdy authorial sovereignty:<sup>12</sup> *The Tin Drum* and *Dog Years* thus are written from variable points of view. Even if large portions of the plot are told by a single figure, this figure hardly constitutes a stable narrative point of view from which the epoch as a whole can emerge in a static image.

The remarkable narrator of *The Tin Drum*, Oskar Matzerath, is characterized by his use of a communicative code system that exceeds the capacity of spoken or written language. As Judith Ryan has noted, at no

10 Bernhard Böschstein, Günter Grass als Nachfolger Jean Pauls und Alfred Döblins, in: *Jahrbuch der Jean Paul Gesellschaft* 6 (1971), 86-101, here 88.

11 On the context of *The Tin Drum* in the landscape of postwar German literature, see Frank Trommler, *Die zeitgenössische Prosa I: Aspekte des Realismus*, in: Thomas Koebner (ed.), *Tendenzen der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*, Stuttgart 1984, 178-214, esp. 186.

12 See Peter Demetz's insightful remarks on the relationship between Grass's poetics and Alfred Döblin's reception of Italian futurism, especially F. T. Marinetti: »Döblin demanded a narrative,« notes Demetz, in what very well describes Grass's poetics in the *Danzig Trilogy*, »that would not »talk about the world but make it present in its cosmological flux. Deriding the French preference for a thin and clear *récit*, he called for a *kinostil* of rapid montage, the use of the »Fantastic, the Epic, the Enhanced, the Fairy Tale, the Burlesque,« and a mode of »stratifying, pushing, and shoving; rather than of satisfying foolish demands for a unified plot.« Peter Demetz, *After the Fires: Recent Writing in the Germanics, Austria, and Switzerland*, San Diego 1986, 377.

stage does he step out of his role as an observer in order to analyze his situation or the larger scheme of the events.<sup>13</sup> Oskar's drumming relies not on the discursive, cognitive, referential mediation of the world, but rather on acting out the world's chaos, endowing it with a different, nonverbal, nonintelligible code system.<sup>14</sup> Though his voice seems to render him colorful and factual, Oskar leads readers through the mazes of the recent German past while constantly shifting between the first and third person. His narrative is tied intimately to the symbolic frame of the mental institution in which he is confined. From the first line on, »Granted: I am an inmate of a mental hospital,«<sup>15</sup> the narrative radically questions its own truth value. Oskar's accurate, »relativistic« gesture – »Granted« (*Zugegeben*) – undermines every subsequent statement in the remaining hundreds of pages and undercuts any attempt to encode the totality of the events.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, although the novel addresses issues of guilt, complicity, and responsibility, its mode of emplotment reflects not just a manifest order of signification – its referent, the calamitous private and collective modern German history – but a latent order that has as its referents the activity and effects of figuration itself.<sup>17</sup> Oskar appears on the stage as both the narrator of collective history and as a figure of reflection, reflecting on the very act of narrating the past. *The Tin Drum* is both »about« the German past and »about« the process by which categories such as »guilt« and »innocence« are constructed and construed.<sup>18</sup> Oskar's significance for postwar German literature results thus not only from his refreshing, blunt views and his sarcastic, artful ability to visualize the historical, but from the fact that he embodies a notion of history conscious of the fact that every fictionalized historical narrative is a linguistic formation that can and should be fundamentally questioned.<sup>19</sup> In what seems to be a direct

13 Judith Ryan, *The Uncompleted Past: Postwar German Novels and the Third Reich*, Detroit 1983, 65.

14 André S. Fischer, *Insenzierte Naivität. Zur ästhetischen Simulation von Geschichte bei Günter Grass, Albrecht Drach und Walter Kempowski*, Munich 1992, 117.

15 Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum*, New York 1961, 15.

16 Patrick O'Neill, *Acts of Narrative: Textual Strategies in Modern German Fiction*, Toronto 1996, 97.

17 White, *Figural Realism* (fn. 5), 145.

18 O'Neill, *Acts of Narrative* (fn. 16), 113.

19 On the questionable status of truth in Oskar's narration, and Oskar's sanity, see John Reddick, *The »Danzig Trilogy« of Günter Grass: A Study of *The Tin Drum*, *Cat and Mouse* and *Dog Years**, New York 1974, 50 and Volker Neuhäus, *Günter Grass, Stuttgart and Weimar* 1993, 25-35.

reply to modernist aesthetics, that is, to Adorno's paradox, and a candid statement about the nature of the narrative, Oskar states:

You can begin a story in the middle and create confusion by striking out boldly, backward and forward. You can be modern, put aside all mention of time and distance and, when the whole thing is done, proclaim, or have someone else proclaim, that you have finally, at the last moment, solved the space-time problem, or you can declare at the very start *that it's impossible to write a novel nowadays*, but then, behind your own back so to speak, give birth to a whopper, a novel to end all novels.<sup>20</sup> (Emphasis added)

Shifting between times and places, *The Tin Drum* does not claim to be a novel »to end all novels.« Yet neither does it claim the opposite. Doubt, contradiction, and skepticism are not its theme, but rather its mode. Concentrating on the private, the mundane, on the body, on sexuality, on the trivial – all to the same extent – it hardly differentiates between the realm of the private and that of grand world history. The historical appears in what escapes the discursive realm, in what the narration traces and exposes as the marks of the historical left on all bodies. Time and history themselves are present in the narrative only as scattered events, hardly as independent, continuous, coherent entities.

Much like the *Danzig Trilogy*, Grass's subsequent historical narratives take on the task of weaving National Socialism and the Holocaust into what increasingly appears as the »large garment« of modern German history. They do so following a notion of history as the battlefield between the agents of progress and Enlightenment and their opponents.<sup>21</sup> Grass's poetics of time, his metaphors of the historical, his allusions and evermore-convoluted allegories, try to address the »historical whole,« that is, the progressive, constant flow of events in time as they reflect the fight over Enlightenment. Whereas the *Danzig Trilogy's* emplotment of the recent German past reflected fundamental skepticism toward any attempt to narrate the historical accurately, in the course of Grass's growing involvement with politics as of the early 1960s, this doubt was replaced by realistic and documentary impulses serving Social Democratic ideological objectives, as many critics pointed out.<sup>22</sup> Striving to give his non-uto-

20 Grass, *The Tin Drum* (fn. 15), 17.

21 Martin Kugel/Stefen Soldovieri/Laura Tate, *Die Stimme der Vernunft. Günter Grass und die SPD*, in: Hans Adler/Jost Hermand (ed.), *Günter Grass. Ästhetik des Engagements*, New York 1996, 39-62.

22 The decisive moment in the process of identifying and engaging with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was 1961, when Grass experienced, in Berlin,

pian politics a poetic idiom, Grass now sought to bridge literature and politics, to overcome the dichotomy of *Geist* (intellect) and *Macht* (power) through a new mode of narration.<sup>23</sup> His larger historical canvases – *From the Diary of a Snail* (1972), *The Flounder* (1977), *The Rat* (1986), and, after German reunification, *Too Far Afield* (1995) – drew significantly on the notion that the fictionalized historical narrative can actually unite diverging aspects of historical referents into a single, cohesive whole. The voice of the narrator and that of the author now often merged into a single, commanding »I« whose main goal seems to be to instruct the reader on matters of German discourse.

Although Grass never got tired of reiterating his view that history is »absurd« and »chaotic,« he could not conceal the growing contradiction between his critique of Hegel and the concept of history emerging from his novels.<sup>24</sup> While claiming that history »has no meaning,« he emphasized in public appearances, interviews, and short comments that one can nevertheless »gain insights« from it.<sup>25</sup> And while rejecting as »wrong and superstitious« any belief in the Hegelian historical process, he points to nineteenth-century historiography as represented by Mommsen and Burckhardt (»those were historians!«)<sup>26</sup> as a model for an adequate historical writing. In contrast to the »much too specialized« twentieth-century historiography, Grass sees his own writing as an attempt to broaden our perception of history with the disparate and the enigmatic.<sup>27</sup>

Grass's tendency to emplot German history according to his engaged-enlightened poetics unquestionably reaches its peak in his attempt to offer an all-encompassing account of the twentieth century in his recent *My Century* (1999). Formally, *My Century* takes on the Baroque tradition of calendar history (*Kalendergeschichte*) that had interested Franz Kafka,

the »Berlin crisis.« See Sabine Moser, Günter Grass, *Romane und Erzählungen*, Berlin 2000, 85-88; Gertrude Cepl-Kaufmann, Günter Grass. Eine Analyse des Gesamtwerkes unter dem Aspekt von Literatur und Politik, Kronberg/Ts. 1975; and Julian Preece, *The Life and Work of Günter Grass*. Literature, History, Politics, New York 2001, 68-126.

23 See Günter Grass, *Literatur und Politik*, in: *Werkausgabe*, edited by Volker Neuhaus and Daniela Hermes, vol. 15, Göttingen 1997, 5-8, and Müller, *Another Country* (fn. 3), 66.

24 Ein Gespräch mit Günter Grass, in: Manfred Dürzak (ed.), *Zu Günter Grass*. Geschichte auf dem poetischen Prüfstein, Stuttgart 1985, 9-19, here 11.

25 *Ibid.*, 13, 14-15. On Grass' Hegel reception see Neuhaus, Günter Grass (fn. 19), 121 and Cepl-Kaufmann, *Analyse des Gesamtwerkes* (fn. 22), 115-119.

26 Gespräch mit Günter Grass (fn. 24), 16.

27 *Ibid.*

Walter Benjamin, and Bertolt Brecht, among others.<sup>28</sup> By creating a rich kaleidoscope composed of different social groups, topographical locations, and dialects from a certain period in time, the traditional calendar history aimed at presenting historical totality in an amiable manner. Structured as an archetypal historical chronicle, *My Century* seeks to employ this tradition both to capture the singular parts of the larger sequence and to relate these elements to the overarching referent – the twentieth century. All secondary referents, all the events that took place during each and every year, are set in relation to the rest through the book's focal center, the narrating »I.« The centrality of this figure is stated at the very outset: »I, trading places with myself [*ausgetauscht gegen mich*], was in the thick of things, year in and year out« (*MC*, 1; *MJ*, 7).<sup>29</sup> This personal, direct, sometimes appalling »I« will change names, gender, and form throughout the narration. Omnipotent and omnipresent at the same time, it will appear toward the end of the narration as a protagonist as important as the century itself.

What makes *My Century* significant for Grass's changing notion of history and his poetics of time is the bond the book posits between subjectivity, time, and narrative. As a fable whose ultimate referent is the twentieth century, the book ties together the chronicle's segments through the enigmatic »I« who is *always* »in the thick of things,« always able to delve into the significance of different characters while representing them as history's hardly noticed, yet most decisive agents, thus endowing the narrative with an overarching meaning. This meaning results from the fact that the century, like the »I,« has the form of a lived story with a beginning, middle, and end. In fact, to a considerable extent, Grass's own life constitutes the anthropomorphic narrative frame for *My Century*. The author himself appears on the stage on several decisive occasions: in 1927, his birth year (*MC*, 66-68), on the occasion of the publication of *The Tin Drum* 1959 (*MC*, 152-153), in the period of German reunification, and in the last chapter »1999,« when a mother delivers a vivid account of her life and the life of her nearly seventy-year-old writer son (*MC*, 272-276).

28 Grass talks about this impulse in: Grass, »Wir müssen stören,« an interview with Thomas Groß, in: *Rheinischer Merkur*, March 10, 2000. For an overview on the tradition of the German *Kalendergeschichte*, see Jan Knopf, *Die Deutsche Kalendergeschichte*. Ein Arbeitsbuch, Frankfurt/Main 1983.

29 Günter Grass, *My Century*, San Diego 1999. I will hereafter quote from this edition parenthetically as *MC*, followed by the page number. References to the German edition will be mentioned parenthetically as *MJ* followed by the page number, referring to Grass, *Mein Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 1999.

The notion of history as chaotic and absurd that dominates Oskar Matzerath's »Granted: I am an inmate of a mental hospital,« is now definitively abandoned in favor of a self-assured subjectivity that presents itself, seldom with ironic gestures, as capable of uncovering the core of each and every temporal sequence, thus revealing the essence of the century, indeed, the essence of time. Appearing as a soldier, a worker, a journalist, or a mother, this »I« depicts twentieth-century German history as a neat entity: Every year is represented by means of one symbolic event. All units are told in approximately the same number of pages. The Boxer Rebellion (1900), the Auschwitz trial (1964), Franz Josef Strauss's dubious doings (1983), and the Berlin Love Parade (1995) amount to similar, small stones in the gigantic, well-balanced mosaic that comprises the whole. *My Century* thus allegorizes not only the calamitous twentieth century, but also the ability of fictionalized historical narratives to order chaos. »It was always my aim [*Absicht*],« said Grass in an interview given shortly after the publication of *My Century*, »to enlighten [*aufzuklären*] – through the act of telling [*erzählend*] – using the means of literature.«<sup>30</sup>

One of the thorniest points of *My Century's* enlightened, engaged narrative is reached when, in episode »1962,« the »I« assumes the voice of a fictive German Jew living in Israel who had managed to survive the Holocaust while his family was deported to Theresienstadt and then to »Sobibor or Auschwitz« (MC, 160; MJ, 224). After Eichmann was captured and brought to trial in Israel, the survivor's Israeli company built the glass box for Adolf Eichmann's trial. Grass's fantasy of a *Jecke* from Nuremberg whose name is Jankele and whose German sounds more like Yiddish spoken in a remote shtetl is ambiguous not only because of the inflated symbolism and the fact that it gets the figure embarrassingly »wrong,« but also because of its implied moral and its evident moralism:<sup>31</sup>

They [the media] stopped writing so much after they strung him up, but as long as the trial dragged on, the papers were full of him. The

30 Günter Grass, *Geschichte in Geschichten*, interview in: *Focus*, July 5, 1999, 82. Similar assertions could be found in his extensive conversation with Pierre Bourdieu, *Alles ausverkauft. Zivilisiert endlich den Kapitalismus!*, in: *Die Zeit*, December 2, 1999.

31 »Aber schon in Nürnberg, was mal eine scheene Stadt gewesen ist und wo früher ganze Familie lebte, war mein Vater der Herr Meister von seine Glaserie, die bis nach Schweinfurt und Ingolstadt geliefert hat.« (»Already in Nuremberg, a city that used to be beautiful, and where whole family lived, my father was the foreman of a glass factory, that delivered to Schweinfurt and Ingolstadt.«) (MC 160, translation modified MJ 223).

only competition for *our Eichmann* was Gagarin, that hailed Soviet in his space capsule, which made the Americans jealous as hell. But I remember saying to myself, »Jankele,« I said, »looks like they're in the same box, the two of them.« (MC, 161, translation modified, my emphasis; MJ, 225).

Jankele's symbolic victory following the placement of »our Eichmann« in a box made by the survivor highlights once more the core of *My Century's* mode of emplotment – its configuration of the historical and the fictional according to didactic shifts between what »had« and what »should have« happened. As »1962« helps show, the book's central figural mode is metonymy: 1962 and the Eichmann trial are not a chaotic, complex, puzzling whole, as Hannah Arendt's milestone *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and her letter exchange with Gershom Scholem document. Rather, the year and the chapter stand in metonymically for Eichmann's guilt, the moral defeat of the perpetrator, and the eventual victory of rationality and humanism over darkness. In the symbolic order of »1962,« Eichmann is indeed »captured« as the symbolic incarnation of the historical crime: Linguistically transformed into »our Eichmann,« he is »delivered,« understood, interpreted. The enigma of the crime, the enigma that is its perpetrator, appear to be securely arrested in the glass box of the word, in the intelligible invocation of Auschwitz in the context of »the historical whole,« in the »steadfast« narration of Auschwitz as if one had mastered it altogether.

## II.

It is precisely the doubt concerning any narration's ability to »capture« the past and use it that distinguishes Alexander Kluge's work to date, especially his opus, *The Chronicle of Feelings*. It distinguishes it, in particular, from Günter Grass's work, and most decidedly from *Mein Jahrhundert*. Kluge's colossus of more than 2000 pages, collecting his (partly reworked) prose to date and scores of new texts, makes it evident that the »least well-known German author among the well-known,« who hasn't published a larger prose collection since 1977, is still at the center of the German literary stage and that his exigent prose is remarkable as ever.<sup>32</sup> Like Grass's *My Century*, Kluge's *Chronik der Gefühle* primarily addresses twentieth-century German history. Like *My Century*, the *Chronik* at-

32 It was Hans Magnus Enzensberger who in a 1978 review of Kluge's *Neue Geschichten* (New Stories) wrote that Kluge was »among the well-known German authors [...] the least well-known.« Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Ein herzloser Schriftsteller*, in: *Der Spiegel*, January 2, 1978.

tempts to deliver not only a précis of the outgoing century, but also »an opening balance« (*Eröffnungsbilanz*) for the coming one.<sup>33</sup> However, although both works render the past from the Benjaminian perspective of the oppressed and the deprived, and although both follow (to differing extents) the genre of *Kalendergeschichten*, attempting to address a temporal totality through the seemingly marginal, much still differentiates them.<sup>34</sup> Whereas *My Century* presents the century metonymically as a cohesive totality, *Chronik der Gefühle* is characterized not only by its poetic account of the *condition humaine* after 1989 viewed through the theoretical lens of the Frankfurt School, but also by Kluge's incisive questioning of traditional hermeneutic conceptions regarding meaning, understanding, and rationality.<sup>35</sup> Kluge's poetics of time – his figural, metaphorical, and allegorical configuration of the historical – decisively reverses the notion of history as an intelligible, consistent entity reminiscent of the speculative *Geschichtsphilosophie*. More radically than in all of his previous volumes, the *Chronik's* texts resist interpretative closure. More than ever before, the *Chronik's* historical narratives are a work in progress – what he often terms a *Baustelle* (a construction site) – on the topic of »the historical,« rather than an attempt to depict history or to make use of it to illuminate others.<sup>36</sup>

33 *Eröffnungsbilanz* des 21. Jahrhunderts, Alexander Kluge in an interview with Jörg Becker, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 16, 2000.

34 On Kluge's impulse from the tradition of *Kalendergeschichten*, see Alexander Kluge, *Verdeckte Ermittlung*. Ein Gespräch mit Christian Schulte und Rainer Stollmann, Berlin 2001, 48.

35 Cf. Winfried Menninghaus' significant reading in his *Geschichte und Eigensinn*. Zur Hermeneutik-Kritik und Poetik Alexander Kluges, in: Hartmut Eggert/Ulrich Profitlich/Klaus Scherpe (ed.), *Geschichte als Literatur*. Formen und Grenzen der Repräsentation von Vergangenheit, Stuttgart 1990, 258-272. Menninghaus remarks pointedly: »Seine [Kluge's] materialistische Politik und Ästhetik ist nicht mit spekulativer Geschichtsphilosophie, sondern mit einer zwischen Theorie und Empirie oszillierenden Anthropologie liiert« (262).

36 Referring to his previous volumes, Stefanie Carp calls Kluge's historical narratives a work project [Arbeitsprojekt] aimed at German history. Stefanie Carp, *Kriegsgeschichten*. Zum Werk Alexander Kluges, Munich 1987, 11. Harro Müller observes, similarly: »Kluge's Montieren unterschiedlicher Textmaterialien mit offenen Rändern zielt auf die Entwicklung eines *Geschichtsverhältnisses* bei seinen Lesern. Dabei nimmt Kluge bei der Entwicklung seiner Leitfrage keine ideologiekritische Position ein, die alles zu durchschauen glaubt, reduktiv oder subtraktiv verfährt und letztlich wenig sehen läßt ...«. Harro Müller, »In solche Not kann nicht die Natur bringen«. Stichworte zu

These phenomena unquestionably relate to Kluge's literary beginnings. From his debut, *Lebensläufe* (*Case histories*, 1962), which presented a variety of figures whose lives were decidedly marked by National Socialism and the Holocaust, Kluge's plots were never submitted to a single, overarching narrative. By dissolving the ontological difference between the historical (as symbolized in the document) and the poetic, Kluge's *Lebensläufe* did not merely present the murderous power of instrumental reason and the reduction of human beings to objects of the historical events in which they are entangled.<sup>37</sup> They questioned the basic assumption of empiricist history and realistic literature – their direct or implied claim to represent accurately a historical or natural reality. Miriam Hansen has pointed out in regard to Kluge's cinematic work that his films »can hardly be called narrative films in the conventional sense. Rather, they present a discourse on the possibility of narrative, the difficulty of storytelling in the field of history.«<sup>38</sup> Similarly, *Lebensläufe* and Kluge's subsequent volumes did not merely present the perceived world, they also constituted a discourse on the possibility or impossibility of bringing the uniqueness of a life (*Lebenslauf*), what is distinctive in the historical, into the symbolic order. In his short introduction to *Lebensläufe*, Kluge addresses the reader directly, emphasizing: »The stories of this volume raise the question of tradition from very different aspects. These are *Lebensläufe*, partly made up, partly not. Together they make a sad story/a sad history [*eine traurige Geschichte*]. One should be advised that the texts sometimes entail documentary passages or parts taken out of other textual sources.«<sup>39</sup> As »sad« stories and »sad« history, as both typical and particular, both conceivable in the context of National Socialism and idiosyncratic as the singular expression of subjectivity, the stories testify to the disparity of the historical, to the inherent impossibility of viewing the narrated events from a metahistorical perspective or of decoding the historical white noise in which they are embedded into recipes, instructive,

Alexander Kluges *Schlachtbeschreibung*, in: *Mercur* 36/9 (September 1982), 888-897, here 891.

37 On the characterization of *Lebensläufe* in the context of Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of instrumental reason see Ulrike Bosse, Alexander Kluge – Formen literarischer Darstellung von Geschichte, Frankfurt/Main et al. 1989, 54-55.

38 Miriam Hansen, The Stubborn Discourse: History and Story-Telling in the Films of Alexander Kluge, in: Christian Schulte (ed.), *Die Schrift an der Wand*. Alexander Kluge – Rohstoffe und Materialien, Osnabrück 2000, 119-132, here 125.

39 Alexander Kluge, *Case Histories*, New York 1988, 10 (translation modified).



illustrative narratives for appropriate future praxis. Rather than answering the questions posed by lives and events, rather than setting them in a causal order or chronological sequence, Kluge's stories raise the question of »tradition,« that is, they question current concepts of temporal interdependencies and overarching historical processes. To be sure, Kluge is not concerned with determining final causalities and their immediate political significance, but rather with presenting constellations: How do individuals confront the events and how do they negotiate between their emotions and a given historical reality?<sup>40</sup> In an attempt to explain the relation between narration and possible emancipation, Kluge said recently: »It is not completely true that I write these stories out of a zeal for enlightenment [*Aufklärungselan*]. I do ask myself if they are useful for emancipation, but ultimately I say: That's what I saw, that's what I love, and that's why I write it.«<sup>41</sup>

In his Stalingrad »novel« *Schlachtbeschreibung. Der organisatorische Aufbau eines Unglücks* (*The Battle: The Organizational Structure of a Misfortune*, 1964), Kluge developed his non-enlightening poetics further. Merging real and fictive documents, medical reports, military sermons, a chronicle of the events, and more, his narrative offers a sum of different aspects and perspectives of the event called »Stalingrad,« rather than trying to deliver a causal, ordered depiction. The use of documents from the time surrounding the calamitous defeat of the Wehrmacht during the winter months of 1942-43 does not merely attempt to render material and mental aspects of Stalingrad present, but also, as Stefanie Carp has observed, gives voice to the linguistic apparatus that participated in it, an apparatus that unquestionably survived Stalingrad, and, to a certain extent, the war.<sup>42</sup> The result is apparent: The »objective« report dissolves into the textual mediation of different sources, different perceptions. No internal logic, no »essence« beyond the historical, is exposed. Rather, the text calls upon the reader to reflect upon possible causes, possible effects of the amorphous »misfortune« (*Unglück*) that was Stalingrad, to engage in the attempt to transform the data into a story that might or might not

40 Cf. Christian Schulte, Die Lust aufs Unwahrscheinliche. Alexander Kluges »Chronik der Gefühle«, in: *Merkur* 55/4 (April 2001), 344-350, here 345.

41 Eröffnungsbilanz des 21. Jahrhunderts (fn. 33).

42 Stefanie Carp, Schlachtbeschreibungen. Ein Blick auf Walter Kempowski und Alexander Kluge, in: Hannes Heer/Klaus Naumann (ed.), Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944, Hamburg 1996, 664-679, here 673.

render the events and their consequences conceivable.<sup>43</sup> In a short introduction that Kluge added to the 1978 edition of *Schlachtbeschreibung*, he writes: »One should read this book about Stalingrad against the grain [*gegen den Strich*], in a decisively impractical, irrelevant manner removed from the reality of the Federal Republic.« To emphasize the limits of narrative in depicting the assumed reality, he then stresses in a short epilogue: »The book, like every fiction (not least that which consists of documentary material) contains bars at which the reader's fantasy can clutch when it moves in the direction of Stalingrad.« Stalingrad, and through Stalingrad all historical events, cannot be reached, grasped, and thus set aside as understood and mastered. The most that a historical narrative – historiographical or literary – can hope for is to move toward the event, never to reach it.

Although Kluge constantly refers to the significance of Marxism for his aesthetics and social theory – most notably in his theoretical work with the social theoretician Oskar Negt, *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (History and Obstinacy/Autonomy, 1981) – his writings underline both the historical determination of subjectivity (*geschichtliche Bestimmtheit der Subjektivität*) and its negation, the subjective determination of history (*subjektive Bestimmtheit der Geschichte*).<sup>44</sup> The historical is thus rendered not as contiguity and continuity, but rather as fracture, as the work of what is non-subsumable in humans, what Kluge increasingly refers to as »Die Gefühle« (the feelings, emotions, sentiments, and passions).<sup>45</sup> In his introduction to the volume *Neue Geschichten, Hefte 1-18: Unheimlichkeit der Zeit* (New

43 Carp writes: »Der Leser kann den Schluß ziehen, daß diese zentralisierenden und von niemandem mehr verantworteten Sprechweisen und Tatsachen, an denen aber wirklich Menschen starben, nicht nur ein Teil des Krieges sind, sondern auch seine Verursacher.« Ibid., 673.

44 Oskar Negt/Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, Frankfurt/Main 1981, 782-787. Here Kluge and Negt emphasize: »[...] vom Zentrum der geschichtlichen Prozesse können wir nichts wissen. Wovon wir ausgehen können, sind spezifische Unterschiede [...] Verluste, Neuerungen, Trennungsprozesse, Zusammensetzungen, die entweder stattgefunden haben *missen* (systematischer Ansatz) oder aus den historischen Berichten sich deutlich als Differenz ergeben (Erzählung). Wir haben dann nicht die Geschichte verstanden, aber Brüche und Folgen festgehalten.« Ibid., 542.

45 Cf. Carp, Schlachtbeschreibungen (fn. 42), 671-672 and Bosse, Alexander Kluge (fn. 37), 188. Yet, even if Kluge's prose had lost in the course of time some of its formal firmness and its radical-documentary manner it never fell back to the subjectivity characterizing the authors of the so-called *Neue Subjektivität* (new subjectivity). Ibid., 244-246.

Stories, books 1-18: The Uncanniness of Time, 1977), Kluge insists that the stories it contains are »without superordinate concept,« and that their »form is not theoretical or of an enlightening nature,« but rather that this form is »a feeling [*ein Gefühl*] that gauges things only once.«<sup>46</sup> The form of these narratives (many of them are related to the recent German past) specifically avoids corrections, explanations, and the like and focuses solely on the uncorrected, unmediated, non-intelligible element of human obstinacy, »the feelings.«

The dramatic shifts of 1989 and the years thereafter signaled for Kluge the reopening of the »horizon of hope«<sup>47</sup> and at least »the fantasy« of a »completely new world.«<sup>48</sup> The result was an intensified period of prose writing and the reorganization of his entire literary work to date in the single, all-encompassing volume *Chronik der Gefühle*.<sup>49</sup> The *Chronik* is not a mere collection of old and new materials, however, but, like Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, an attempt to characterize the century using »one architectural principle.«<sup>50</sup> Kluge's principle, as the title suggests, is the emotions. In what amounts to an epiphany, he notes in the short preface to his mammoth collection that the emotions are »the true inhabitants« of human lives (*Lebensläufe*) (*Chronik*, I, 7) and the constitutive elements of institutions (*Chronik*, I, 7). They dwell in oppressive laws (*Zwangsgesetze*), just as they do in »lucky coincidences.« The feelings move beyond the horizon into the galaxies. In short, »They are to be found in everything that concerns us« (*Chronik*, I, 7).

Since the feelings, like Leibniz's monads, are everywhere, and since they are presented as the organizing principle of the entire literary structure of the *Chronik*, indeed, of any chronicle as an organized account of

46 Kluge writes: »Ich fange aber nicht an, die niedergeschriebenen Geschichten nachträglich »auszubessern«. Ich könnte zum Beispiel Irrtümer, historisch Unzutreffendes, Mißverständnisse (»was ich selber nicht begriffen habe, während ich schreibe«) durch Zusätze aufklären. Das ist aber nicht die *Form*, in der die Geschichten erzählt sind.« *Neue Geschichten* (fn. 32), 9.

47 »Der grosse Sammler der Wahrheit«, Alexander Kluge in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 11, 2000. In another interview he says: »So viel dramatisch Neues wie zwischen 1990 und 2000 gab es selbst bei dem Umbruch 1945, also nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, nicht.« »Ich liebe das Lakonische«, Alexander Kluge in an interview with *Der Spiegel* 45/2000.

48 Ibid.

49 Alexander Kluge, *Chronik der Gefühle*, Frankfurt/Main 2000, vol. 1, 9. Henceforth abbreviated in the text as *Chronik*, followed by the page number.

50 Cf. Kluge, *Verdeckte Ermittlung* (fn. 34), 16-17. The *Chronik* as a whole pays much tribute to Musil's work. See also here 9-17.

events, one might assume that the feelings are what ties different times and events together, that they are Kluge's hidden, essentialist principle of history in the tradition of *Geschichtsphilosophie*. However, viewing the *Chronik* as a whole, starting with the title, one can soon conclude the opposite. »The feelings« mark precisely what is not to be captured by means of organizing reason. They are the fleeting, yet lasting elements that will not dissolve in any explanation or interpretation. The chronicle presented here does not attempt merely to record »real« events: The line between »real« and invented events, between document and fiction, is dissolved, and although the *Chronik*, »like memory,« progresses principally backward, it hardly moves in a sequential, successive manner, offering a causal narrative of a historical »whole.« As in his volume *Neue Geschichten* (New Stories, 1977) where Kluge emphasizes, »They [the stories] occur in the here and now (*Jetztzeit*)«,<sup>51</sup> Kluge insists in the *Chronik* that all the events that the narrative addresses happen in the »now«: »For me, the library of Alexandria still burns today.« Although the narrative time is that of the past, the time of narration is, radically, the present. The *Chronik* thus always implicitly addresses the emotions that bring about the events in the narrative, the emotions that result from them, and possible emotions that might emerge during the reading process in the present.

In his attempt to serve as an archival worker collecting the most significant elements of the century for centuries to come, in this volume, Kluge returns repeatedly to the recent German past. He does so in a mode that is especially evident in chapter 4 of *Chronik der Gefühle*, »Heidegger auf der Krim« [Heidegger in the Crimea] and the first story that bears the same name. In a short prologue to this chapter invoking the canon of the German philosophical and literary tradition – Leibniz, Kant, Nietzsche, and Goethe's Faust (however as a National Socialist) – the narrator remarks: »In the middle of the twentieth century, thinking [the word *Denken* at this point adverts to Heidegger's philosophy, in which *Denken* refers to non-metaphysical thinking] has lost the world. [...] Today, thinking [*Denken*] that comes from other worlds and practical life [*Lebenspraxis*] hardly match« (*Chronik* I, 415). The ironic inversion – the apotheosized, Heideggerian *Denken* loses the world, and not, as expected from the perspective of Europe in the 1940s, the other way around – sets the tone for what follows: a cold, scrutinizing, fictive reflection on the place of philosophy in times of extreme conditions, of personal and collective emergen-

51 Kluge, *Neue Geschichten* (fn. 32), 9.

cies (*Ernstfall*) such as was the case during the German occupation of the Crimea.<sup>52</sup>

Using decisive quotes from Heidegger's work, especially from the *Heraclitus* seminar – »Thinking [*Denken*] begins only when we have found out that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most insistent adversary of thinking [*Denken*]» (*Chronik* I, 417) – the narration places the fictive Heidegger in a moment of personal and theoretical uncertainty and confronts him with an *Ernstfall*.<sup>53</sup> On December 4, 1941, Martin Heidegger and other leading German scholars embark on a journey to the recently occupied Crimea. Their mission is to secure archeological findings and to represent German scholarship »in a self-conscious« manner (*Chronik* I, 420). Behind the front, or rather in its midst, intellectual work (*Gedankenarbeit*) should continue (*Chronik* I, 420). From changing perspectives, the narrator and Heidegger unfold a »criminal« situation in the occupied Crimea: a German civil servant sexually assaults a young boy. The boy's family seeks vengeance, and the occupier is stabbed. In order to avenge and deter, the Wehrmacht authorities decide to execute twelve civilians (*Chronik* I, 420-421). Because those sentenced to death move anxiously during the execution, some of the bullets aimed at them miss their target and hit the spectators. Heidegger notes: »The use of the military for deterrence is ineffective, and I would like to say: unreal« (*Chronik* I, 421). Watching the events with Heidegger is SS *Gruppenführer* Otto Ohlendorf from the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*. Ohlendorf – a historical figure – was responsible for the *Einsatzgruppe* I D, whose task was to follow the Wehrmacht and liquidate Jews. Like Heidegger, Ohlendorf is convinced that the military execution is and is bound to remain »amateurish« (*Chronik* I, 421).

Heidegger is now invited to watch an execution led by Ohlendorf. He is impressed by the »workmanlike« (*fachmännisch*) procedure and the calmness of the detainees. Heidegger doesn't recognize, however, the different nature of this execution: These detainees are Jews of the area. They are put in groups of twelve to sixteen and transported to a different location where they will be killed. Although it seems clear that the death of the civil servant is already avenged, Heidegger asks the officer (*Polizeirat*), Wernicke, what the deterrent effect might be if the detainees do not know that they are about to be executed and no spectator from the area is

52 Kluge himself points to the term »Ernstfall« that was essential for the radical revolutionary right in the twenties and thirties as his point of departure in the story. Cf. Kluge, *Verdeckte Ermittlung* (fn. 34), 61-62.

53 Ibid.

allowed to watch. Wernicke answers that the deterrent effect of the execution sets in *after* the execution. At this decisive point, a footnote breaks the fictional account: »Simultaneity [*Gleichzeitigkeit*] is just as superfluous as a rational or causal linkage« (*Chronik* I, 424). Although it remains unclear who is uttering this notion, its »ironic edge,« to use Linda Hutcheon's term, is clear: it is »unbalanced in favor of the silent and the unsaid,«<sup>54</sup> because it hints at the impossibility of finding an internal logic between »crime« and »punishment,« between cause and effect in this inhuman setting. Moreover, while Heidegger's question implies that the harsh critic of the Enlightenment and of reason still relies on thought procedures based on causality and rationality, Wernicke and Ohlendorf are already »free« of these – they are focused on carrying out the mission: »Do you see, Herr Professor, the calmness of the queue? Do you see any gawpers? These are decent working terms. We restrict the number of the victims to the most necessary« (*Chronik* I, 424).

The scene peaks when, in a short moment of chaos, a mother who is about to be transported manages to get her child into Heidegger's vicinity. The child reaches for the hand of the absentminded philosopher, who will soon notice a small hand in his and thus that he is holding destiny by the hand – the narrator significantly uses the Heideggerian term *Geschick* (»destiny«; *Chronik* I, 424). Since Heidegger feels obliged to look after the child, he decides to keep it and perhaps take it with him back to the Reich: »To hold [*halten*] means originally to watch [*hüten*]« (*Chronik* I, 425). The situation, though, gets complicated, because Heidegger has to face the fact that the child is Jewish. The autonomous decision of a philosopher who was so concerned with authenticity now poses a real problem. As Wernicke notes: »We are not here in the Trojan War and you [Heidegger] are not the young Ajax« (*Chronik* I, 425). Now that this wishful »Greek« Mignon<sup>55</sup> is in Heidegger's custody, the philosopher is confronted with the *Ernstfall* (*Chronik* I, 427). Although he will not give up hope that the child is not of »Slavic« descent (*Chronik* I, 428), he will soon find out about Ohlendorf's actual task and what it means for his Mignon (*Chronik* I, 429). The remaining pages of this parable are cen-

54 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, London 1994, 37.

55 The narrator notes in a footnote that »Greek« is a three-hundred-year-old notion: Wilhelm Meister buys the child Mignon from a wandering group of Gypsies (*Chronik* I, 428). Kluge himself refers to the story of Mignon as one of the references to »Heidegger auf der Krim«, in: *Verdeckte Ermittlung* (fn. 34), 63-64.

tered on Heidegger's concern for the child and thus on his philosophical notion of »care« (*Sorge*): Does the philosopher of »care« remain authentic, that is, concerned with his own being, while he is being concerned – the narration uses the term *Fürsorge* (»to care for someone«; *Chronik* I, 431) – for the child, or does he act out of sheer pity? One of Heidegger's colleagues, Professor Hirtz, threatens to file a complaint against him in the professional association and at his university. Soon thereafter, the responsible military officer informs the philosopher that the military has enough concerns (*genügend Sorgen*) of its own and doesn't need to add to it those caused by Heidegger (*Chronik* I, 431).

The end comes abruptly: While Heidegger is gone for a time, the child is taken away from his lodgings: »The philosopher feels deprived [*enteignet*]« (*Chronik* I, 433). On his way back to the Reich, he has nothing in his hand »but his small suitcase« (*Kofferchen*; *Chronik* I, 433). The child, he is told, is transported to the north of the island. No one takes interest in the philosopher's plight. Heidegger's last comment – »from the gigantic [*Riesenhaften*] we crash into the tiny [*ins Kleine*]« (*Chronik* I, 434) – serves only to underline further the story's basic mode. From the »thinking« that has »lost the world« to the »intellectual work« in the occupied Crimea; from the »amateurish« and »workmanlike« executions to the no longer viable »simultaneity« of crime and punishment and to the apotheosis of »the Greek« in the vein of Goethe's Mignon and the many incarnations of »care,« the mode of emplotment in this narrative is irony.

Kluge's plot clearly doesn't serve to set the philosopher or his work in demonic light, nor does it attempt to ridicule. The plot configures the historical circumstances of the German occupation of the Crimea in conjunction with the virulent *Ernstfall* philosophy of the 1920s and 1930s while focusing on and examining all the possible feelings involved – »care« for oneself in an extreme situation and care for others.<sup>56</sup> Hence it doesn't try to configure this »real« and fictional past in order to illuminate. Rather, it opens a realm for reflection, a realm of differentiation. Kluge's irony relates to a discursive community that is capable of recog-

56 Kluge notes in an interview given shortly after the publication of the volume: »Mich interessieren sehr die Gefühle, die man nicht sofort als Gefühle erkennt, die also eingebaut sind in den Institutionen, die überhaupt erst in Erscheinung treten im *Ernstfall* durch *Selbstvergessenheit* also im Einsatz, wie man sagt.« [My emphasis, A. E.], *Verdeckte Ermittlung* (fn. 34), 43. Significantly, Kluge uses here two Heideggerian terms in a non-pejorative manner to illustrate his poetic interest. The description applies very well to the situation in »Heidegger auf der Krim.«

nizing it and of weighing the potentialities of this and similar situations.<sup>57</sup> It offers no more and no less than what Kluge calls »orientation«: a horizon of possible, partly contradictory meanings without any trace of imposed interpretation. »Reality,« Kluge emphasized in a recent interview, »is porous. It has many holes. It is open to nonplausible stories that strike us as not documentary [i.e. not real] at all, yet as true just the same.«<sup>58</sup> The openness inscribed in his textual realities is directly related to what he conceives as their moral dimension: »A text is moral, then, when it creates the capability to differentiate [*Unterscheidungsvermögen*]. If it deals with evil, it is not to give an example [*beispielgebend*], but rather to differentiate in this foreign terrain.«<sup>59</sup> »Critique,« he goes on, using his preferred Frankfurt School vocabulary, is »the ability to differentiate, »*différence*« in French.«<sup>60</sup>

Unlike radical notions of irony such as J. Hillis Miller's, notions that center on its irresolvable ambiguities and its »ontological« resistance to »mastery,«<sup>61</sup> Kluge's irony remains related to the historical events involved and their horrific consequences, as »Heidegger in the Crimea« demonstrates. His irony avoids both the sheer, playful collapse of possible meanings and melancholic retreat. Although his plot is at no point sentimental, it provokes feelings. As Linda Hutcheon emphasizes: »Irony does not simply add complexities or richness [...] to discourse; it does much more [...] irony also conveys [...] an attitude or a feeling.[...] In setting up a differential relationship between the said and the unsaid, irony seems to invite inference, not only of meaning, but of attitude and judgment.«<sup>62</sup> Kluge's irony relies heavily on the reader's ability to read not just the said, but also the unsaid, to be attentive to the suggested »attitude,« the implied »feeling.« Thus, it testifies to the text's and indeed the author's constant search for idioms that might be able to address the German past in a

57 Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* (fn. 54), 89. On the »potentiality« involved in Heidegger's (fictive) situations, see Giorgio Agamben's note: »To be free is not simply to have the power to do this or that thing, nor is it simply to have the power to refuse to do this or that thing. To be free is [...] to be capable of one's own impotentiality, to be in relation to one's own privation. This is why freedom is for both good and evil.« Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Stanford 1999, 183.

58 Ich liebe das Lakonische (fn. 47).

59 Verdeckte Ermittlung (fn. 34), 49.

60 Ibid.

61 J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, Cambridge, Mass. 1982, 106, and idem, *Others*, Princeton and Oxford 2001, 12.

62 Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* (fn. 54), 39.

way that avoids falling back into the sentimentalities and escapisms of the realist novel. Unlike Grass's »steadfast« telling, Kluge's historical narratives are a continual search for an adequate language, knowing that finding one is highly questionable. In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published shortly after his *Chronik* appeared in print, Kluge pointed out: »Nothing of what we produced until now is an adequate weapon against Auschwitz. Thus, we have to rely on unease [*Also müssen wir auf die Unruhe vertrauen*]. Searching, always searching on [*Suchen, immer weitersuchen*].«<sup>63</sup>

Kluge's ongoing search for possible idioms that might draw us closer to the German past, his feelings-provoking and reflection-provoking irony finds a clear echo in what Jean-François Lyotard in *The Differend* similarly termed »feeling.« According to Lyotard, what could be established by historical inquiry into the Holocaust is »the quantity of the crime.«<sup>64</sup> Yet, since many of the documents validating the crime were destroyed, and since the crime is of inconceivable dimension, a silence surrounds the events. This silence is, in Lyotard's terms, a »sign« in the Kantian sense – the opposite of a meaning-generating referent subjected to »the cognitive regimen.«<sup>65</sup> Kluge's poetics, his avoidance of common realistic tableaux, his »searching, always searching,« echoes this silence, reiterating Lyotard's position that what is at stake in a literature, a philosophy, and a politics confronting the recent German past is the need to bear witness to the fact that »something which should be able to be put in phrases cannot be phrased in the accepted idioms.«<sup>66</sup>

Like Günter Grass, Kluge seems to believe that historical narratives enhance the human existential search for meanings, that the reading process is not one confined to aesthetic pleasure, but also involves participation and reflection. Looking back at the traumatic events that defined the twentieth century and looking forward, anxiously, to the twenty-first century, both seem eager to strike a balance, to find a guiding principle that would help prevent similar man-made calamities in the future. Yet, unlike the work of Grass and of other authors of his generation such as Christa Wolf, Siegfried Lenz, and Martin Walser, Kluge's narratives are silent in Lyotard's sense. Their signs do not impose themselves on readers searching for meaning, nor do they seem to wish to illuminate them.

63 »Der grosse Sammler der Wahrheit« (fn. 47).

64 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, Minneapolis 1988, 56.

65 *Ibid.*, 56-57.

66 *Ibid.*

Rather, these signs limit the narration of the past to the realm of searching, what Kluge calls »orientation.« Whereas Grass's poetics of history is at its core metonymic, that is, commanding and moralistic, Kluge's poetics is, in the philosophical sense, ironic – it provokes continuous reflection. Significantly, these poetic choices comply with the two alternative positions Karl-Heinz Bohrer identifies in postwar German culture's attempts to make sense of the German past. With Bohrer, and works like Kluge's *Chronik der Gefühle*, one could plead for a porous, yet reflective approach to telling and commemorating the past as a whole – what Kluge calls »the thrust of 20 billion years.«<sup>67</sup> Unlike Bohrer, however, one should regard the task of telling the past with a considerable amount of cautious irony. After all, if the German past is hardly suitable for moralistic politics in the present, it is equally incapable of helping to establish any future German national identity.

67 Kluge, *Chronik der Gefühle* (fn. 51), vol. 2, 7.