

Alexander Kluge and Gerhard Richter. *December: 39 Stories, 39 Pictures*. Trans. Martin Chalmers. Seagull Books, 2012. 118 pp. Cloth: \$20.00

Tara Forrest, ed. *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials for the Imagination*. Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2011. 440 pp. Paper: \$39.95.

In Alexander Kluge's world, fragments rule and chronology is the enemy. A collaboration with German artist Gerhard Richter, Kluge's 2010 collection *December*, now available in English translation, contains thirty-nine stories and accompanying photos depicting the days of December in fractured vignettes. Characters include Adolf Hitler, a monk who reconfigures time, contemporary German filmmaker Tom Tykwer, and even the author's father, Dr. Ernst Kluge. The stories capture crucial moments in history, while the stark wintery photos assert a reality that transcends human interference. Structured around the conventions of calendar stories and illustrations, *December* situates itself within a literary tradition, but it also resists aspects of that tradition. Readers expect the stories to progress linearly, building toward an overarching message that is typical of the genre. Although the stories are dated sequentially by day, they flash forward and backward in time, spanning decades and even hundreds or thousands of years. As we traverse Kluge and Richter's frozen terrain, we are left not *with* a certain lesson but *in* an uncertain place consisting of timeless snowy landscapes and plot fragments that combine and complicate the real and unreal, past and present. Martin Chalmers's adept translation captures all of the richness, depth, beauty, and horror of Kluge's real/unreal world for English-speaking audiences. In *December*, as in Kluge's other works, winter signifies the rigidity or "paralysis" of history, a literal or figurative state of inaction, creative stagnation, and even death. If the collection offers a way out—an exit from stasis—it is in the description of a "third pole," a previously unimagined space where, somehow, life and death, time and timelessness intersect. Here, we might find some meaning in the swirl of shattered memories and artifacts that make up human history.

Also recently published is the remarkable collection *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials for the Imagination*, offering a comprehensive range of sources, including writings by Kluge, interviews, film stills, and critical essays about Kluge's extensive body of work. As a cofounder of the New German Cinema movement, Kluge expanded the artistic and sociopolitical implications of film, an influence that later transformed German television as well. The texts that comprise *Raw Materials* examine Kluge's mastery of montage in reconstituting human experience on the screen and on the page. In his insightful analysis of Kluge's short films, Eike Friedrich Wenzel characterizes Kluge's craft as "construction-site artistry." Anton Kaes explores the "archaeology" of Kluge's aesthetic in his profound study of the film *The Patriot*. Kluge's films and stories blur the boundaries between documentary and fantasy, challenging viewers and readers to reconjure reality as a kind of "historical fiction." In this precarious place, we discover the potential for coming to terms with the past, particularly the German past, and for imagining what lies ahead. [Karen Mauk]

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