

supranational organizations and corporations that do not observe the political or economic borders of individual states. What lessons about justice and the right to violence were confronted in the decentralized conflicts of the seventeenth century, but still remain to be worked through today?<sup>241</sup> Do the theologically tinged knowledge structures of the seventeenth century, so many assets of which were disavowed under the Enlightenment's project of secular modernization, in fact provide us with solutions to some of the problems that we are facing now?<sup>242</sup> With the proliferation of forms of asymmetrical, postnational warfare and with the uptick of politically motivated religious fundamentalisms worldwide, we may need the resources, intelligence, and ingenuity of pre-Enlightenment thought more than ever before. Like Bloch, who sought to recover the protosocialist elements within the chiliastic dreams of medieval theology,<sup>243</sup> or Agamben, who has recently investigated prefigurations of modern political economy and strategies of governmentality in early Christian doctrine,<sup>244</sup> Negt and Kluge hope to learn from the strategies of revolutionary consciousness (and unconsciousness) that existed long before the philosophical formalization of the Marxist dialectic in the nineteenth century, and that might ultimately prove indispensable for progressive politics today.

The remote past may hold the answers to many of the questions now facing us, but these solutions are not readily available. Accessing them requires what Kluge calls "counterhistory" (*Gegengeschichte*) or, in the famous phrase of Benjamin's seventh thesis on the philosophy of history, brushing history against the grain. In his writings on the *longue durée*, Braudel likewise enjoined historians to "react against the advantages of their professions, and study not only progress, the prevailing movement, but also its opposite, that harvest of contrary experiences which fought hard before they went down."<sup>245</sup> *History and Obstinacy* is the yield of that harvest. On the one hand, the inventory of experiences and capacities that this book provides seems utterly factual and objective, delivered in the rationalist idiom of a reference work, but at the same time, this counterhistory also appears fundamentally unrealistic, if not outright bizarre and fantastical. Kluge explains that these scenarios appear so utterly improbable because they have been systematically marginalized by the dominant ideological narrative of our culture, a hegemonic fiction that he dubs the "novel of reality."<sup>246</sup> Even such a hardened realist

as V. I. Lenin defended the merits of revolutionary imagination and counterhistory when he insisted, against the crushing force of fate, that "there is always a way out."<sup>247</sup> And finding this way out requires thinking unrealistically, imagining that "the same story can take a different direction." Running against the entrenched patterns of "realistic" thought, the heterotopist wins positions from which the irregularities and unmotivated incidents of history begin to appear as necessary and interconnected.<sup>248</sup> The heterotopist establishes an "economy of combined trivials" that challenges the dominant economy of reality. Although purely hypothetical, these positions are in fact of inestimable tactical value, as the shrewd military theorist Carl von Clausewitz proposed when he observed that the battles that never actually took place are just as important as the ones that did.<sup>249</sup> "What you notice as realism . . . is not necessarily or certainly real," Kluge in turn explains. "The potential and the historical roots and the detours of possibilities also belong to it. The realistic result, the actual result, is only an abstraction that has murdered all the possibilities for the moment. But these possibilities will recur."<sup>250</sup> The imaginary will inevitably one day return as reality.<sup>251</sup>

Recovering these murdered possibilities requires a bent for counterfactual thinking. It is a talent that Kluge has in abundance. Over decades of writing and filmmaking, his rehabilitation of the lost futures that were smothered by a hegemonic reality principle has yielded a body of work that is difficult to situate generically, poised as it is on the boundary between documentary and fiction. "One never knows whether what Kluge reports as fact is indeed fact," Jürgen Habermas notes. "But the way he reports events makes it clear that it could have happened like that."<sup>252</sup> Subjunctive and indicative are on par in Kluge's work. Just as his thought experiments in prose regularly place historical figures in invented scenarios to consider how they would have responded (and what we can learn from this response), many of Kluge's films, conversely, place invented characters in real-life, documentary situations in which the fictional protagonist interviews well-known political figures or joins in actual historical events such as street protests and public performances. By undermining the boundary between reality and fiction in this way, Kluge demonstrates that the hegemonic conception of reality is neither objective nor unassailable. Our blind faith in facts and the immutability of reality is just a secular equivalent of the religious

fetish, Negt and Kluge explain. Against currents of modern positivism that seek to conceal the manufacture of reality, they therefore emphasize its madeness and its susceptibility to revision.<sup>253</sup>

Negt and Kluge's counterhistory of Europe coalesces around those moments when the dominant frameworks for human experience became brittle and collapsed, rendering a shared reality momentarily vulnerable to imaginative reconceptualization. Take, as a dramatic example, the precipitous ideological deflation of the Berlin Wall over one night in November 1989: during the time of the Cold War, this structure had appeared permanent and eternal, but with the sudden annulment of its political foundations, the Wall was transformed within hours from a seemingly timeless pseudo-objectivity into what Hegel called a *realitätsloses Gebilde*, a construct with no symbolic authority or even basis in reality.<sup>254</sup> Even the most concrete of realities can be liquefied, revoked in an instant. The work of Negt and Kluge is rife with such instances of rapid ideological decommissioning that reveal the fragility of our conception of reality and of the sociopolitical institutions that sustain it. These episodes of collective derealization are both traumatic and liberating, experiences of loss, crisis, and potentiality all at once: thus, the firebombing of Kluge's birth town Halberstadt in 1945 caused an entire community to disappear from one day to the next, but in so doing, also exposed the permanence of the thousand-year Reich as pure fantasy. Likewise, the activities of the Red Army Faction in the 1970s shattered the utopian ideals of the German Left, but the desperate state violence that the terrorists provoked also revealed the fundamental insecurity of the Federal Republic and the tenuousness of its claim to democratic legitimacy. At moments such as 1945, 1977, and 1989, the monolithic account of reality becomes permeable to counterhistories. And by imagining alternative courses at these critical historical junctures, it becomes possible "to disarm the fifth act," as Kluge puts it, and dispel the aura of destiny and fatefulness that enshrouds our conception of reality.<sup>255</sup>

In our present era of uneven development, when the pluralization of history globally has scumbled the contrast between progress and regress, the untimeliness of Negt and Kluge appears timelier than ever. Revolutionary activity today entails as its corollary the kind of radical historiography practiced by Negt and Kluge, which draws connections between distant and noncontiguous episodes in time.