

Translated excerpt

**Alexander Kluge**  
***Das fünfte Buch.***  
***Neue Lebensläufe. 402 Geschichten.***

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**Alexander Kluge**  
***The Fifth Book.***  
***New Case Histories. 402 Stories.***

Translated by Martin Chalmers

## Foreword

The rumble of a world swallowed up, the resilience of human labour and of *love politics*, cold current, the invisible writing of our ancestors – these are the themes. This volume is entitled THE FIFTH BOOK because it is in dialogue with the previous four volumes of my stories. As in my first book, which I published in 1962, it's about CURRICULA VITAE – the course of certain lives. The stories are in part invented, in part not invented.

Alexander Kluge



Abb.: Von der letzten Flottenexpedition, die das Zeitalter der Aufklärung vor der Französischen Revolution aussandte, stammt diese Zeichnung eines inzwischen ausgestorbenen Riesenkänguruhs (vergleiche seitlich die Baumhöhe). Das ist ein Bild aus dem Reich der Antipoden zum Jahre 1789.

Man sieht das kluge Auge des Tiers, das doch für seine Nachkommenschaft nicht garantieren konnte. In der Bauchfalte das kostbare Versteck für das Frischgeborene, das mit dem Muttertier durch die Wüste hüpfte.

Illus. This drawing of a meanwhile extinct giant kangaroo (cf. the height of the tree by its side) was made during the last naval expedition sent out by the Age of Enlightenment before the French Revolution. This is a picture from 1789 from the realm of the Antipodes.

One notes the intelligent eye of the beast, which nevertheless was unable to ensure that it would have descendants. In its stomach fold the precious hiding place of the new-born offspring that hops across the desert with its mother.

## 1

**Lives and their Courses**

*In August 1914 the first impulse of Hedwig Kluge, my paternal grandmother, on receiving the news that Otto, her firstborn son, had been killed in action, was to travel to Belgium and make sure that he was given a proper burial. When she heard that there was no transport available to take parents to the front she wept bitterly.*

*A worker in Frankfurt-on-Main had worked all his life in the same plant. The factory went bankrupt. The worker went to see a doctor. Even before the factory was shut down he had been suffering from severe stomachache. The doctor prescribed pills. I have given up all the days of my life, said the worker, and in return I get these pills. I don't agree with that.*

*In August 2011 one of the EXPERIENCED TAMERS OF CAPITAL was sitting in his office tower. His eyes were fixed on his computer screen. The DAX share index signalled (as an almost vertical fall) a loss of four points in less than four minutes. A practical man, he had no theory to explain what was happening. He would have liked to do something with his hands: crack nuts, peel an apple, pour mineral water into his glass – he wanted to engage in some kind of activity and not stare at the screen and wait.*

*In the year 1800 Heinrich von Kleist drew up a BINDING LIFE PLAN. He then wanted to seal the plan with an action of some kind (sign a piece of paper in blood, dedicate the plan under oath to some beloved person). In fact, however, the tendencies in Kleist's lively mind radiated outwards. The attempt at linear concentration tore him apart. He broke off his studies and made his way to Würzburg.*

*The fresh snow on Mt. Etna, which swiftly melts directly where it borders on the black lava zone, would be, according to Tom Tykwer, the motif for the beginning of a film with the title "Nature's Paw". A film about the tremendous potential slumbering in the earth's crust.*

*Dr Sigi Maurer proposes taking the crumbling, contaminated lumps of material, which are about to be dismantled in Fukushima to the place where the earthquake started. The RUBBLE should be dumped in the depths of the MARIANAS TRENCH. The pieces could cool down there for all eternity.*

*My ancestors from the southern Harz Mountains had no idea with what alien genes they would have to co-exist today in their descendants. This line didn't have a clue that later it would be linked with my forefathers from the Eulengebirge Hills in Silesia. And the ancestors from the Eulengebirge and the southern Harz suspected nothing of the inflow from the English Midlands and the Mark of Brandenburg. All these qualities seem incompatible. The fact that such contrasts do not give rise to civil war in souls and bodies, but are united minute by minute in every pulse-beat, in every heartbeat, is a reflection of a generous and*

*tolerant constitution, expansive of human rights, in which the generations live.*

*It's not only people whose lives run a course, but also things: clothes, work, habits and expectations. For humans the course of their lives is a dwelling when there is crisis outside. The courses of all lives together form an invisible text. They never live alone. They exist in groups, generations, states, networks. They love detours and loopholes. The courses of lives are linked creatures.*

**I****The Fly in the glass of Pernod****The fly in the glass of Pernod**

It appears motionless. With the rubber end of my pencil I fetch it out of the green liquid and put it down on the wickerwork of the basket. I assume that it's dead. But after a few seconds the insect makes vigorous movements. The next minute the fly, the short-lived thing, has disappeared from sight. Evidently airworthy. It did not appear to be "drunk". A tenacious creature, which has my respect. During the course of our meeting many years (by its reckoning) have passed. Should it ever have descendants, its line will outlive me. It has existed for 18 million years. Thanks to their favourable attitude to the accidents of the world light fliers of this kind have almost eternal life.

**Flowers in the city**

The man, a body packed in jeans, circulation pulsing. He goes through the day with a calm face. Nervousness is foreign to him. In the first

instance he's young. The young woman fidgeting beside him, on the other hand, is restless. She evidently wants to receive something, which he is not yet ready to give: permanence. Now the two of them sit down at a table in the garden of the Italian restaurant. Spring day.

Her shirt is made in such a way that one shoulder is always exposed. The man loves order. He wants to know whether a situation is intimate and tricky or whether it's only a matter of a meal together in the sun. He pushes the piece of clothing over the naked shoulder. Because of the way it's cut it then falls off the other shoulder, revealing its nakedness in turn. That creates unease.

The day must be stressful for the young woman. She tries on six to eight facial expressions, each gaze of different strength; then she suddenly has to yawn, saves herself with the telling mouth at his chest. A frown and a smile. With her face she is commenting on a conversation, which is not, in fact, taking place. The man's features remain impassive.

If they continue carrying on like that all day, says the journalist Douglas von Pymont, who's observing the celebrity couple, they'll have no energy left for the sudden advent of real intimacy, for example when they're alone in the evening. What will they want to do with each other then? In the course of the day they'll have used up the daily portion of magic in small doses and nudges of rapprochement (yet again he kisses her quickly on the mouth).

With his broad hand the man stretches out to her ear, pulls at it, reaches into the hollow behind the ear, shows off his property with a sovereign air. Then, reaching through her long hair, he kneads her neck. Whether she appreciates it or not is impossible to tell from her face. It shifts between various expressions, her gaze searches for his gaze and then for his mouth. Von Pymont, however, believes that the changing expressions represent a kind of pause. He has counted the shifts in expression in her face: 19 per minute. One could also, according to von Pymont, consider the changing expressions to be *one* expression.

The man thrusts his hand up the sleeve that covers the upper arm, above which the naked shoulder gleams once again. Probably to distract him, her mouth approaches his. Perhaps it's her way of shaking her partner's irksome crawling hand out of her sleeve. The kiss is already over. The scene already in the past. For a moment both sit passively, don't know how to go on. But things have to go on, and their repertoire is not yet exhausted. A game like this is their daily bread. Now, in the middle of the day, they are too lethargic, the performance is faltering. Nor do they take any notice of the observer, although they well know that they are being observed.

Their youth, health, unreels in two temperaments as a single machine. They are glad they're alive, don't give of themselves, but perhaps give a whole day of the rich flow of their lives. That is what they present to one another, without being able to answer the question, whether that's the way the other wants it.

His hand (the only disturbance he spreads) now pushes her hand down towards her lap, half under the table. She parries by thrusting her fingers into his hair, clasping his head in her hands. At that he abandons his attempt. Von Pymont doesn't dare take a picture, but is determined to write about the pair in his tabloid. He asks himself whether these two people are preparing for a longer relationship or a single evening and day? What interests do they have in common?

That is impossible to tell. As little as a will can be ascribed to a bright morning. These two people are a piece of nature like a day, a meadow, they are not plotting a novel. In a sense, notes von Pymont, they are FLOWERS IN THE CITY.

**“He has the heartless eyes of one loved above all else”**

I've just come from comforting my best friend Gesine. I am meanwhile certain that she's not going to kill herself. She hasn't got over it at all. I saw for myself how he put her down and slammed the door of the flat shut behind him. He has the sensitivity to go on living in her place, because he shies away from paying for a hotel room. From her apartment he pursues his business interests, calls on his new lover, a married woman, for the sake of whom he has downgraded Gesine.

When I say my words of comfort (usually I only take her silently in my arms and put her to bed) I have to take care not to feed her hopes that he will return to her in some fantastic guise. I've seen his eyes.

Gesine doesn't stand a chance. No one in the world stands a chance of getting something from him that he doesn't want to give. And he's satisfied. Well-fed by the attentions of women whose tribute he is used to since childhood.

Strictly speaking it's not the *eyes* but his *gaze* that documents his mercilessness. The eyes themselves appear rather expressionless, somewhat dull. Precisely because of its lack of expression his gaze has that "negative" quality that is shocking. It's a mystery to me what Gesine ever wanted from this spoiled boy. Even when he was chatting her up, in the very first hour (I was there and then went home too early), he was satiated, his gaze a "negotiating gaze". That's why I was quite sure: "That's something one doesn't even have to ignore." Except Gesine saw something else. She saw in his blotchy face, as in a mirror, what *she* felt.

I've always thought that mothers who love their sons plant a seed of tenderness in them. It is then harvested by the people who meet these young men later on. Instead, in such cases a complacent lordly attitude makes itself felt, the settledness of a whole string of male ancestors who only take and never ask for anything. Monsters grow inside sons who don't have to fight for the affection of their mothers, that's my impression. I don't want to generalise and am doing so nevertheless. My anger at Gesine's occupier has loosened my tongue to make general assertions.

"He has the heartless eyes /  
of one loved above all else."

### **The secret story of his happiness**

After the war, when he saw a film starring Kirk Douglas, about the raids of the Vikings, and heard that this leading actor came from a clan of White Russian Jews, former First Lieutenant Ferdy Bachmüller felt certain that he had done the right thing. Although it was not his responsibility he had picked out a man with piercing blue eyes from a group of Jews rounded up near his battalion. He had provided the man with documents from his division and placed him in the mess staff of his unit as a volunteer auxiliary (Hiwi). One day during the retreats the man disappeared.

Bachmüller had acted on a sudden impulse when he got the incompetent guard detail to hand the man over to him. All the same he was strongly influenced by racist ideas, believing “strong” blue eyes, which he knew only from postcards, book illustrations and from films, and a “martial” and “Germanic” posture, with an upwardly curved chest, to be something valuable (although he himself was not concerned to breed future generations). As a woman he would have been charmed by a glance from such a pair of eyes. He kept a sufficient distance from this giant of a man whom he had saved and to whom he felt attracted.

Later, in the vicinity of Uelzen, he was taken prisoner by the British without a fight and only two weeks later reached home with valid discharge papers. He took it as certain that here as in all the years of

advance and retreat two blue eyes, like a good fairy, had saved him in countless dangerous moments, even when the Hiwi, after the change in fortune of German arms, had physically taken to his heels: “and made off sideways into the undergrowth”, Bachmüller recited.<sup>1</sup> He was much preoccupied by the “enigmatic” nature of his find. “His brow mysterious, the nose exceptionally beautiful and the mouth, although too thin-lipped and sometimes twitching at the side, always charming enough.” Bachmüller had often inspected the mess section, which he had rarely done before the stranger was taken on:

Consisting of two field kitchens, several four-wheel carts on which the provisions had been loaded, it followed the battalion looking something like a band of gypsies on the move. Just to unobtrusively catch sight of the young, blond man. With an authority only asserted and seized, which would not have stood up to any examination, he had bought the man’s freedom (let’s say, reckoned in the currency of power relations, for 30 thalers), even if at this level there are no coins anyone can pocket and no reciprocity. The foolish SS guards had received practically nothing for handing over their prisoner to the army unit apart from the possibility of carrying on.

When the fortunate Bachmüller, who after 1949 had successfully set up a factory making sticking plaster, saw the film SPARTACUS – and he did so twelve times – he believed he could feel that descendants of his saved White Russian must now be living in the world. Perhaps in Australia or in the USA. One was probably working as a mercenary or as a ship owner in the Congo. So while watching the movie

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<sup>1</sup> “und schlug sich seitwärts in die Büsche” – quotation from the poem “Der Wilde” (The Savage) by Johann Gottfried Seume (1763-1810). (trans)

Bachmüller experienced a bit of the “wide world”, took in impressions, which he had never perceived during any of the campaigns of conquest of the Wehrmacht. He was the king of great novels, indeed in some sense linked to these blue eyes (signalling toughness, power and unfaithfulness). He was more closely connected to the prisoner than might be assumed, as it was impossible to discount him, and his deed, as progenitor of the former’s line of descent. So, while quite distinct from homosexuality, which was absolutely to be avoided, a virtual erotic contact could be noted, at once disconcerting and satisfying to Bachmüller, better than any performed sexual intercourse known to him, which in this case, as he said to himself, would at the time have been threatened by severe punishment. There had not been a physical pleasure but an immaterial one in that idea of his (and the impression made by the blue eyes of the prisoner); it was something lasting, because spiritual. And I can be sure, thought Bachmüller, it was a spontaneous decision, not a moral one.

While he was at the cinema to see the film SPARTACUS, during which in his imagination he replaced the image of Kirk Douglas with that of the White Russian he had begotten, he swore a holy oath to himself that in future he would never trust any kind of contemporary spirit, tell no one the secret story of his luck and would always live and die in the hope of unmediated divine assistance, which follows from the temper in which one hears the voice of one’s heart (full of prejudices and yet with a fresh presentiment).

## **Two dreamers cause confusion on a Friday evening**

The detectives of the abduction department, responsible for the Rhine-Main area as far as and including Wiesbaden, were already looking forward to a convivial evening. Then they were alerted. A new-born child had been stolen in Frankfurt-Hoechst Municipal Hospital. Frenzi F., dressed as a nurse, had taken the baby from Z., its mother, who later wanted to call the little girl Zinat. Frenzi F. had taken charge of the infant under the pretext that it was to be examined and then not returned. It happened a few hours after the birth. The mother's statements remained confused.

The investigators immediately got a search of the environs of the hospital underway using helicopters, which were ordered up, from the military airfield at Wiesbaden-Erbenheim. There were small areas of woodland. The experienced police officers hoped to find indications as to the escape route. They made drawings on which the possible movements of a woman with a baby towards the town or into the wilderness were entered. The perpetrator must have a goal.

The young woman had deceived everyone: those who were strangers to her, and also the woman she was living with. She had displayed an aggressive criminal will and had nevertheless had no luck.

After artificial insemination 28 year-old Frenzi F. had suffered a miscarriage, but then fooled her partner into believing she was pregnant for the second time. The couple was determined that their

life together should be crowned by a child they would bring up. The two women lived in a suburb of Frankfurt am Main.

Dusk fell. The helicopters shone powerful searchlights at the ground, focussing on particular spots. Calls for the public to be vigilant had been broadcast and printed in the evening papers.

Then at about nine pm the information which came as a relief to everyone. Neighbours of the two women had become suspicious. Where had the infant in their apartment come from? It was possible to look into the kitchen and one room from neighbouring flats. They reported their observations to the police.

The culprit, said one of the detectives to his regular table companions in a bar in the Frankfurt district of Sachsenhausen (because of the appeals in the media the case was no longer confidential), had wanted at all costs to appear as a winner in the eyes of her partner. Beaming, she had shown the little living thing to her girlfriend. The child could not yet know that it would be called Zinat, but had an identification strip around its leg on which this name and a number were marked. Frenzi F. said she had just come from the hospital. It was a fantastic story she had to tell, how the contractions had started on the Underground and she had just managed to reach the delivery room in time. And the doctors had let her take the child with her right away? Frenzi's friend did ask questions, but was too excited to wait for answers. For a moment what her partner claimed seemed to bewilder her.

Will she be prosecuted as an accomplice? asked a reporter on the local paper. Then one would have to prove that she had knowledge of the crime, said the experienced investigator. Wasn't that obvious? You underestimate the confusion in such situations, replied the detective. The relationship between the two women, he said, was not at all characterised by realism. Two dreamers? Dreamers whose relationship was very important to them.

### **Miss Clärli**

Small ad in the classified section of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 30<sup>th</sup> April 1945:

"I am looking for the female skier in the blue ski blouse who on Easter Sunday travelled on the 4.18 pm train from Küblis to Davos with a girl friend and whom I met again and talked to on Easter Monday on Weissfluhjoch.

I am the skier in grey ski pants and grey windcheater who sat diagonally opposite you on Easter Sunday.

Unfortunately all efforts to trace your address were in vain, so that only this way remains open to me. I would therefore beg you to send your address to the Classified Section of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* under box number V 6696."

The young man who had placed the advert, to which the young Swiss woman replied, expressing her interest, was a womaniser from Flanders. Their meeting did not lead to marriage but only to brief sexual intercourse. Afterwards the lover, who had been so keen in his

search, made off to France; he believed that he was needed for post-war reconstruction there. At the moment he had placed the small ad he had sincerely been of the opinion that his life depended on the fateful meeting on the train. He possessed a lively imagination, did not know himself well. Also Switzerland was not his native land. The young woman, however, insultingly described by the legal advisor of the fugitive father of the child as an “accident waiting to happen”, gave birth to a son. She defended the illegitimate birth. Without losing many words, without a father and in poverty she brought the child on. This son was later the founder of the marriage guidance business Matrimonia & Co. in Zürich. He for his part had two daughters and a son, all of whom, because they always stuck together, studied at Princeton and later occupied senior posts in New York’s financial world. Their children became pop musicians; they too were close. As Swiss-Americans they commuted between the continents and together refused the demands of their parents, who wanted to make MONEY PEOPLE out of them. They answered this demand with defiance. The AGED CLÄRLI, now 85, who still lived in her simple apartment in Zürich, invited all these descendants to the Hotel Baur au Lac in the city. She had never asked for anything from her family, of which she had been the start, had never accepted anything as thanks or present. Now she gave voice to her thoughts in an after-dinner speech. She had long ago forgiven the original deceiver, the keen placer of the small ad, who had looked for her so determinedly and then left her so swiftly, the cause of the existence of all those present here and their families. On the contrary: When she looked at her capable children and children’s children and their evidently very diverse interests she was grateful to the man,

unfaithful overactor that he was. “This success is not to be had without the criminal origin,” is how Max Frisch put it. A scoundrel has achieved something good, she added, simply thanks to an element, of which he himself was not in control: the eagerness with which he looked for me. If she could choose, she said to applause, then she would once again choose those same eyes and give up THE MAN AS A WHOLE. Men, she continued, were a race of liars. But the energy, which keeps the lies in motion, was indispensable to progress.

The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reported the curious family celebration in brief, because the starting point of the affair had been a small ad in the more than 200 year-old newspaper. That news item in turn prompted a descendant of the young Belgian who had placed the ad on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1945 to write a letter to the *NZZ*. As a result half-cousins, demi-cousins and half-siblings met, even if very belatedly, without this “chance meeting”, as they expressed it, being an extraordinary experience. Absent here was the pressure of an error or an illusion, which causes chance, encounters to turn somersaults.

### **The girl from Hordorf**

My sister rarely gets her news from the newspaper. She was eager to help me with my research. She knew a former schoolmate in Halberstadt, who was being treated in the District Hospital at the time. My sister called the woman on the phone. The latter then went ahead and talked to the nurses and doctors. In this kind of acquisition

of news, events still have the contours, which town-talk and intensive conversations in hospital have given them. This is living news.

At first it was said that the ten year-old girl who had been admitted on the night of the accident in Hordorf had meanwhile died after all. Later, inquiries revealed that she was still alive. The surgeon was holding her in his arms. The hospital was proud of the dramatic operation, which by midday on Sunday had put the smashed child together again. The girl had lost her mother, her sister, her brother, her stepfather and her grandmother when the passenger train, a night train, had been wrecked on the single-track stretch by the violent force of the freight train loaded with 1400 tons of calcium carbonate. All these relatives on her mother's side were dead. The family owned a piece of land in the village of Langenstein. It had been necessary (thanks to news coverage the death of all the owners had become known) to place the property under guard because there was a fear of looting, as my sister's school friend related. The natural father of the ten-year old had not yet been traced. The search was hindered by a lack of concrete information, because the seriously injured child could not respond to questions.

A lonely child, said my sister's acquaintance. They talked for a long time on the phone about what should become of the girl. Such a badly injured child could not simply be placed in a home without a period of transition. Nor after recovery could she simply be allowed to "go home", to a house of the dead, even if a social worker (and in addition a nurse from the hospital) were to look after her every day. The child

was of school age, but it was to be expected that to begin with she would have to be accompanied to school.

### **The first witness**

The Kingdom Hall of the Jehovah's Witnesses was only 100 yards from the scene of the accident at Hordorf Station, where on a single-track stretch of the line a freight train collided with a rail bus (numerous dead and injured). The spacious hall was made available for the initial medical care of the victims and as operational headquarters of the emergency services and the police (soon also of visiting politicians). The caretaker of this meeting place of the faithful had been first on the scene of the catastrophe as it lay there in silence. There was not a sound to be heard in the wreckage (the man still had the echo of the collision in his ears), as if everyone was dead. Even if God enfolds His People, He does not take from them perception and memory. The caretaker couple of the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, still bewildered by the impressions of that night, accepted the offer of counselling provided by the Aneos St. Salvator Hospital in Halberstadt. The psychologist drives out to Hordorf three times a week.

### **The second witness**

The master car mechanic heard a tremendous crash. He had opened the front door to his wife, who had just come from work. Later he

thought he had seen a flash of lightning. He got his bicycle and rode to the station. The scene of the train crash was completely silent. That was what so shocked the witnesses.

The passenger railcar coming from Magdeburg had been pushed off the track and thrown on its side by the goods train. Now the side windows were the “roof”. The man, experienced in making repairs, climbed up onto the wrecked track vehicle, had his feet on the windows and looked for a way of opening one of these windows. Below he saw jumbled objects and passengers.

There was still the terrifying silence. The master car mechanic noticed another witness who had already got there before him. They agreed that one of them should open the level crossing barrier on the road 200 yards from the station. It was said that emergency services were on their way, although it was impossible to say what the source of the information was. Their vehicles had to make their way to the accident, hence the opening of the level crossing barrier. The two witnesses looked for a way in which they could do something useful on this terrain.

The master car mechanic turned back to the track vehicle and looked for a point of entry. He didn't have any tools with him. Meanwhile the driver of the freight train came running up, the thrust of his goods wagons had pushed him 500 yards beyond the point of the collision. First voices and the sounds made by living people. It looked as if hands were waving behind the glass of the rail bus.