

Alexander Kluge and Hans Ulrich  
Obrist  
**What Art Can Do**

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e-flux journal #81 — april 2017 Alexander Kluge and Hans Ulrich Obrist  
What Art Can Do

*The following conversation took place on January 1, 2017.*

**Hans Ulrich Obrist:** It is the beginning of 2017. What will happen?

**Alexander Kluge:** It has been one hundred years since the Russian Revolution. Five hundred years since Martin Luther. Be careful of Silicon Valley. They're the flower children of 1968, so to speak. Which they heavily ignore. That is, the power of it.

**HUO:** Ignore in what sense?

**AK:** Rejuvenation. In evolution there are living beings that don't become fully grown but procreate in their youth and thus survive. And so they're in the position to say, we can control technology in the world, and we can control the platforms, but we can't simultaneously control the content. If you do that, it gets difficult. You can only control two of these three things.

We have to alter our communication between the arts. Every single battleship, as we know, is sunk in war. So we have to form the convoys. And they can't be separated from music, from film, from visual art. The collaborations that you encouraged with Kerstin Brätsch and Adele Röder show how valuable this is. This auratic anchoring that's possible in visual art: film can't do this. It gets difficult if it departs from what it can do. Conversely, auratic art can't really move. The aircraft carrier is missing.

Sometimes only visual art can be seen. The images of Thomas Demand, for example, have a tremendous pull on me. Precisely because nobody can be seen at work. They portray an almost dust-free other nature. And so you imagine the "impure" of reality. An entirely new, self-sufficient form of aura, which isn't based on autonomy but, on the contrary, on absorption into the other nature. From whose parallel reality we see reality.

And that's one of the great functions of the aura. We don't want to immortalize Christian martyrs or paint articles of faith. Cranach paints Luther and the religions. If films respond to this now, then they do some good. But if they just pretend to make art, then it gets difficult and sometimes tedious, that is, esoteric. But films can take up themes outlined by Kerstin Brätsch, by Kiefer, by Demand. Film can create surroundings. Proceeding from an oasis, it can comment like a work of art.

**HUO:** The thing about the oasis brings us back to the gardens.

**AK:** Building oases. In a world where there's too much silicon in the form of chips, it's very good to have oases. Because too much silicon means the desert.

**HUO:** You've called for a garden of cooperation in an information jungle.



Alexander Kluge, *Schiffsuntergänge und Meeresdramen*, 2016.

**AK:** Right. And sometimes jungle, sometimes canal-digging. There are many forms of imaginary gardens.

**HUO:** There are many possible imaginary gardens.

**AK:** The paradise garden is an old motif. It means something enclosed against the world, that also contains the world. That's what art can do.

**HUO:** The question that arises in connection with these experiments is that of the Gesamtkunstwerk.

**AK:** The authorial principle that's still there in the Gesamtkunstwerk is very imperial. The orchestra is hidden. The Gesamtkunstwerk is created by a single artist, a single spirit. And with the power of united individualities, this world has set up so many minefields in the meantime, so much dead work, that is, machinery. There is so much work done and piled up that you can say it's like lava flowing over the individual. If you want to make the Gesamtkunstwerk today, you'll become impotent. If you want courage, the opposite of impotence, you have to make alliances. And how do you make alliances while retaining the principle that something responsible, new, and authentic can only come from within? Something

that makes no compromises, so to speak? That's one of Leibniz's themes. The monad, that's the artist. It's also the viewer, who has something to do with the artist.

**HUO:** Each human being is a monad.

**AK:** Every person is a monad. A person's individual capacities, the eyes, the ears, the soles of their feet, are organized monadically. They are hermetically isolated when they produce from the world. And yet a pre-stabilized harmony comes about. This means that all monads together can form a counterworld, the merely technical world.

**HUO:** All the monads can create a counterforce. A twenty-first-century artwork would possibly be a monadology.

**AK:** A monadology, with which it permeates the pores of reality, and then counters reality's systemic terror by forming connections of its own. So connection is one category, monad is the other. Creation remains, as in Romanticism, as in the Renaissance, with the individual. Nothing happens without the individual. But within the individual there are forces cleverer than the individual. It's like a crystal. We have to develop the dragonfly eye. And it's true that at first everything goes through one's inner self. You're cleverest if you sit on the toilet in the morning

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Natalia Goncharova, *Mystical Images of War* [*Voina: misticheskie obrazy voyny*], 1914. Lithograph, 10 x 13 in. University of Notre Dame, Hesburgh Library, the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.

uninfluenced by anyone else, just being with yourself.

Consider the role of introspection in questions of love. Introspection is the only authority from which you can obtain advice. You can't ask the internet what you love. You can either notice this yourself or not. You can only do it through introspection. And so it fundamentally remains with the individual. But if the individual is very strong, very self-aware, then they can lower the ego barrier. Immanuel Kant says it. He turns the subjective and the objective around.

**HUO:** Kant kind of flips the verb.

**AK:** He turns it around. When someone understands something and concentrates to create something – like a craftsman, intensively involved with the details – at that moment he's being with himself. He's utilizing all the power he has.

**HUO:** When craftsmen work on the details, they are by themselves. It's subjective.

**AK:** It's subjective. And when someone says, "Today I feel the weather," this is very individual. In this sleet I have a feeling that runs through me, and my leg twitches, and I even notice my age. When Peter Handke talks about himself, he says he's the object of his distresses, inside or outside. He doesn't say that it's subjective. He has to collect himself first. That's interesting. That's the tool, so to speak, with which the ego barrier can be lowered, with which you can also be cooperative, because you're self-aware. If you're firmly anchored in your inner self, you have particularly good preconditions for cooperation.

**HUO:** Let's talk more about cooperation.

**AK:** Cooperation doesn't diminish the intensity of self-will.

**HUO:** Cooperation doesn't diminish the intensity of the I.

**AK:** But cooperation don't happen between Gesamtkunstwerks, but between the elements that make them up.

**HUO:** One such example of cooperation is the ballet *The Rite of Spring*, which was produced by Diaghilev, with compositions by Stravinsky and costumes by Goncharova and Picasso.

**AK:** But if you take Goncharova's *Angels and Aeroplanes*, that's a painting of aircraft carriers that sometimes look like angels and sometimes like aircraft carriers. And then, like Ben Lerner, I can counterpoetize. I can take a verse from his counterpoetry and write a story. Another instance of cooperation. And now, with this painting by Goncharova as a guiding aura, a navigation sign, a lighthouse, we can evolve our own expression quite individually.

**HUO:** I'd be very curious about the cooperation between you and Ben Lerner.

**AK:** I was sent *The Lichtenberg Figures* by one of my staff. That's a sequence of sonnets by

Lerner in German and English. I took some lines from it. "The sky stops painting and turns to criticism" – that's critical theory – "we envy the sky its contradictions."

Then I wrote a story to this verse, about the eastern sky of Aleppo, the Aeos, which Homer described as coming from the east, and which is very colorful in the Middle East. It's in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. The dawn is more colorful than in Poland, Germany, or Russia, where it's misty. And from this wonderful play of color, which was so magical to Caspar David Friedrich, come silver dots. And they turn out to be airplanes, which are now dropping bombs. And so I develop the idea into stories like that. There's a verse by him that fascinates me: "In medieval angelology, there are nine orders of snow."

**HUO:** It's snowing now.

**AK:** I don't think I can say what the angelic nature of snow is. But I was thrown onto the nine orders of snow. When I step before the face of God, I burn. Burning is actually the quality of the angels. They're creatures of flame. And here they're interpreted as snow. And so I come into a variety which before had neither an impression, nor an angel, nor art, but only a general idea [die weder Ausdruck, noch Engel, noch auf die Kunst, auf eine generale Idee hätte].

I made a film about Chernobyl. It's a silent film with a soundtrack on which Svetlana Alexievich is talking to her translator, Tietze. She talks about "the wife of the machinist." In Chernobyl, during the first few hours, an electrician was responsible for the safety of the mains, and he didn't want a second, conventionally caused catastrophe to occur, so he went into the contaminated zone and disconnected all the cables. A hero. And his body was completely destroyed. A head like a melon. He was so contaminated and his body radiating so much that the doctors didn't enter his room anymore. And his wife took care of him. She injected him with two liters of vodka. She slept with him regardless. Svetlana relates this, and then she asks, "What is *Tristan and Isolde*" next to this story, "the wife of the machinist"? And now, if you like, we're back to your Gesamtkunstwerk.

**HUO:** I see it as a triad. There's Studs Terkel, Svetlana, and you. In all three cases, world literature comes about through the form of conversations. All three of you turn the interview into literature.

**AK:** This can happen as long as there is orality, like the communication of early tribal societies that didn't have writing. Trust comes from the tone. Trust in the dialect. In your tone I hear whether you're lying or speaking the truth. As long as there's this orality, there isn't only one single reality. There's always a pleonasm. There

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are always many realities.

**HUO:** It's what Carlos Fuentes told me about the novel. The novel is a polyphony of truths.

**AK:** That's true. And they chafe at each other, and each one would no longer be true. There's no element without context and correlation. And without the element there's no connection. That's a radical modernity. We want to answer Walter Benjamin after all. I have the same problem that he rightly diagnoses, namely, that film has no aura and doesn't produce one, because it blows the aura away. It may be that someone's fascinated and gripped by a single image, but that's the function of film; it's what makes the self-activity of the viewer so strong. Now we have the problem that these films can't be brought into exhibitions in the conventional curatorial way.

**HUO:** It's a conundrum.

**AK:** We can boldly say in film-historical terms: inability.

**HUO:** Harald Szeemann did an exhibition in Vienna at the end of his life, in which his attempted solution was to take three-, four-, five-, six-, seven-minute excerpts, and the public could only see these clips.

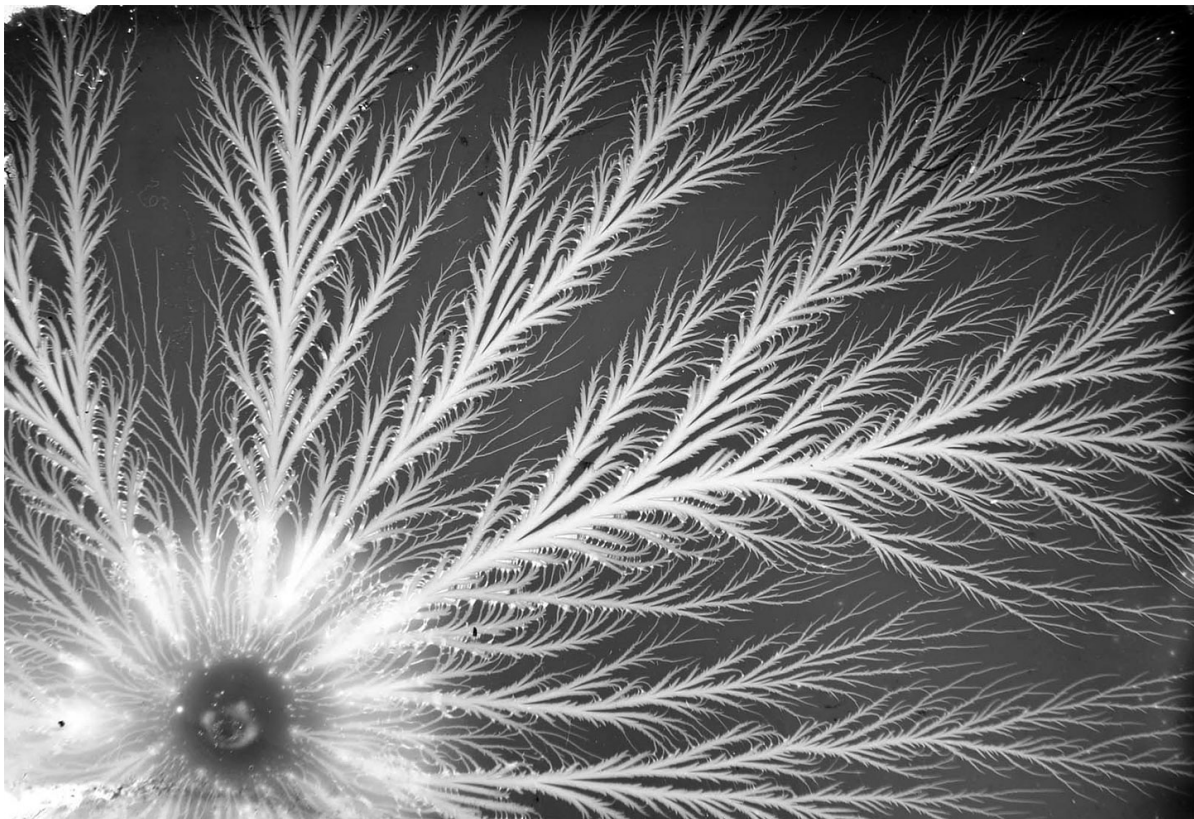
**AK:** That comes near to the MoMA chamber of horrors, where they screen art films. The

movie theater has to be dark, or people won't pay. In the theater, film has to keep pace in a particularly modern way with depictive realism, with all forms of art. It has to be pre-chewed, the whole plot. Manufactured film is pre-chewed food. There's no ideal of authenticity anywhere. I'm not talking about Murnau; I'm not talking about Godard. I'm talking about the few who work differently. Even my favorite, Fritz Lang, is manufactured. He's unsuccessful in this. There are elements of genius in it, but he had to take the films apart. But Szeemann's right there, when he only takes the authentic scenes from the Doctor Mabuse films, the ones pervaded by Fritz Lang's temperament. If we only had these moments, we'd have a wonderful impression of film history continuing. But this impression is weakened in a strong context. If you've seen it once, you think you've understood it and don't need to repeat it. Everyone thinks he knows what the Doctor Mabuse series is, and forgets the details. You should rather emphasize the details and the overall history.

**HUO:** You could pick out singularities.

**AK:** The concept kills the particular. But the particular is the real heart of art. You have to do something or other. I'm not saying you should make blind art but that you have to form convoys.

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An original photograph of the Kinraide negative documents a "filiciform discharge" also known as the "Lichtenberg Figures."



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Alexander Kluge, *The Artist in the Circus Dome: Clueless*, 1968. 1' 43"

The minesweeper has a different task from the submarine and the aircraft carrier and the GPS guiding the fleet.

**HUO:** With Svetlana and you and Studs Terkel, it's about listening. Can one function of art be to make people listen?

**AK:** You can't dictatorially say, "You should listen." Art needs to open itself up. Luther says that seeing and the worker's hands are worldly, while hearing is a matter for God, which is one-sided. And mildly dictatorially.

But this is true of all forms of communication. It's true of the tribal society that could only speak and couldn't write. It's true of writing, which begins with the Mesopotamians and goes from accounting to literature and can record something. It's true of the sphere of Gutenberg, who can print everything and deliver us from handwriting. And it's true of the digital revolution, which really is a revolution of all these elements except orality, which hardly occurs in the digital world.

In each of these phases there is a human habit and a refusal. Criticism, for example, is a defense mechanism that comes about because of the inflation of writing in human society. Criticism only comes about after Gutenberg. And finally it leads, in the three volumes of Immanuel Kant, to what we can't or shouldn't or wouldn't like to know. These are defense mechanisms against the too-much.

People react against it. They defend their earlier forms of communication. The solitary writing of the monk. The level of personal trust in the tribe. They defend it against this modernity of Gutenberg. I can't read everything, so I look for a reason to reject everything. It's the Trump effect. Yeah?

**HUO:** It describes one part of the Trump effect.

**AK:** One part. The other is the principle of the charisma of the drunken elephant. Namely, that I'm not allowed. I'm sitting in the Rust Belt, in the Bible Belt somewhere in the US, and I'm being disciplined. Reality is torture, but I don't cross the boundaries. Now, if somebody ostentatiously and successfully tramples down the boundaries all at once, then half of my soul, the part that isn't suppressed and disciplined, says: I want to be like that. Max Weber saw it. That lack of self-control, along with even lying and propaganda, belongs to the charisma of the dictator. The lack of self-control of the controllers. The fat Göring, who stole so many paintings in Europe.

If you show a lack of self-control, you're forgiven. And in the Bible Belt there's an additional Calvinistic element. Because God has preordained everything and is cruel, I can only ascertain the mercy of God in successes, like a

scout. And if against all probability one person has such a vigorous effect, then it can only be God's will. That's the fine print of the writing on the wall. Those are the instructions for reality.

**HUO:** So you've always loved elephants?

**AK:** Yeah, always loved elephants. My grandparents were simple peasants. As a child, I saw two elephants in the circus. What I do isn't art. It's recording something through the optics of art as a lens.

**HUO:** That means that art in this sense isn't autonomous. It becomes a tool instead.

**AK:** A very respectfully used tool. It's as if the image emerges from the material. Alienation is unnecessary here. It's only used on things that contain their own cliché.

**HUO:** So it's interdependence.

**AK:** Interdependence, yes, and you must not do it extremely exactly. It should be free so that you can choose.

**HUO:** You can see it again and again. It's like a painting. You can see it again.

**AK:** It's not linear montage.

**HUO:** Circular montage.

**AK:** Someone wants to invent gold and discovers porcelain. A good alchemist. We don't have the luxury of also wanting to do everything right. In the face of Silicon Valley and the reality principle of this massive objective reality that almost kills everything, our mistakes are just as important as the things we do right.

**HUO:** But they have to be present.

**AK:** The main thing is for them to be personal. I mean, the Trump election is a kind of mistake. If I look at why such mistakes occur, I can suggest a different mistake to this root, and so we could grope forward together. Art is a navigational aid here. But to go back to the circular montage. It can link the aura of an artwork. Film can do this.

**HUO:** You combine two things, if you like, that otherwise aren't combined.

**AK:** Exactly. The more you stay with film and don't pay attention to art, the better you can combine the elements of the artwork. I noticed that Okwui Enwezor's exhibition "Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic" at the Haus der Kunst, which I think is great, doesn't contain music. If I count from 1945 to 1965, the greatest piece of music was written for an opera, *Die Soldaten* (The Soldiers), by Bernd Alois Zimmermann. It's the greatest work of the twentieth century. It isn't present. Even if you only played three minutes of it over the loudspeaker, the work would be present. Around the same time, Arno Schmidt was writing his novel *Zettels Traum* (Zettel's Dream), a continuation of Joyce, and there's nothing of it in the exhibition. He and Bernd Zimmermann were both at the TV channel WDR. They must have

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worked together. They ought to have worked together. Museums should actually enable cooperation.

**HUO:** Just like the encounter between Joyce and Eisenstein.

**AK:** It took place in 1929, in the same month as Black Friday. And we shouldn't let go of 1929. And if the project they discussed was never completed, then you have to realize it.

**HUO:** It remained an unrealized project, the film version of *Ulysses*.

**AK:** That kind of thing needs a place in the world. It can't be commercial cinema, which is covered with the lava of producers' intentions. Film history doesn't progress that way. Michael Haneke would belong there, or Edgar Reitz, but they're only really visible at festivals.

**HUO:** So it's about the realization, then, of this unrealized project, not as part of commercial cinema, but by doing this nine-hour film on *Capital*. In this context you describe yourself as an archaeologist.

**AK:** Yes. In archaeology there's the good image where we have to ride away. In the archives of the past we'll find the future.

**HUO:** And that's even more important in the current dystopian moment.

**AK:** Absolutely. It's very comforting. We can

do it. Parallel with a reality that's becoming more and more crazy. You can dig tunnels, alternative mines. There's nothing else you can do.

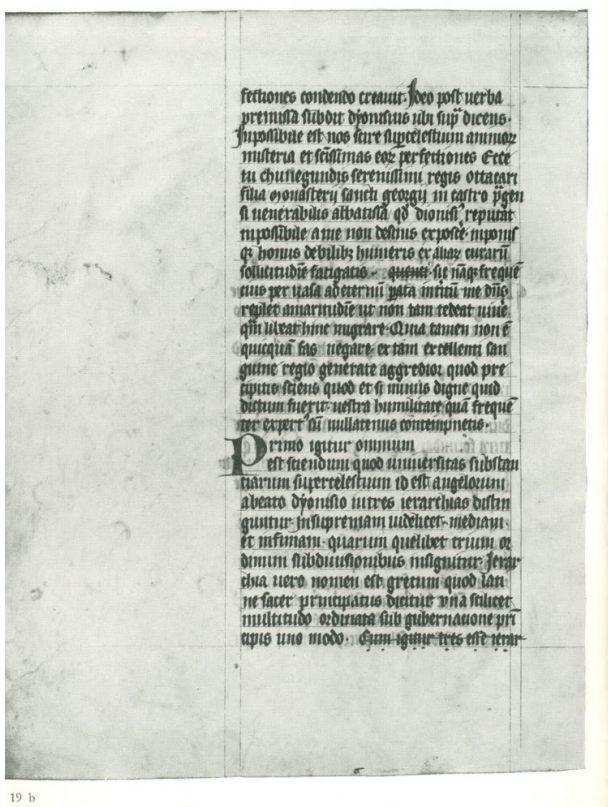
**HUO:** How can you do Eisenstein's unrealized film of Marx's *Capital* now? A few years ago you said that our time could be read with a false map, but it remains a false map, because it isn't the map of our time. How can we read the present era via this matrix?

**AK:** If you read Marx, Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, and critical theory, then you can choose the principle of antagonism, which is the human reaction when people are injured and adversely affected by reality. And thus you deselect civilization under the condition that it is a component of reality. Only civilization isn't only anchored in the reality principle but also in dreams and the libido. So civilization is more richly anchored than we think. It's as Blumenberg said: we've embarked on a sinking ship.

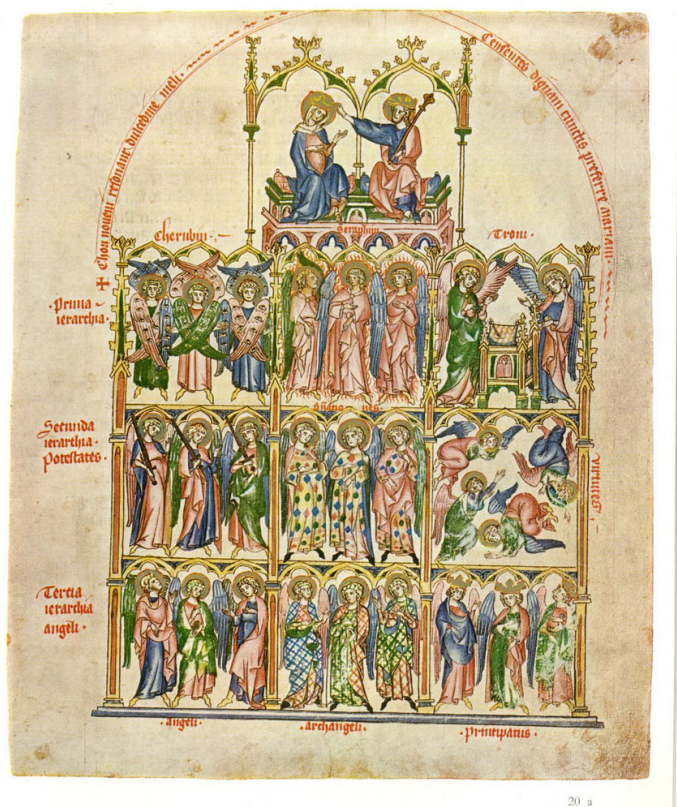
**HUO:** It's not that here is you and here is the raft. You're on the raft. And Sloterdijk then also says that a lot of ships no longer have captains in the Anthropocene age.

**AK:** That's right. On the art side there are enough people who know and say that, and are also trained in navigation. But curators of

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Illumination detailing the hierarchies of angels as found in the book *The Passional of Abbess Kunigunde* (1312–21).



exhibitions sometimes seem foolish or delayed to me. There are brilliant people too, whom I admire very much, but I'm surprised that this transformation of viewing sites into production sites, this remedial maintenance ...

**HUO:** These are places of observation transformed into places of production. And that's of course what Cedric Price says with his unrealized *Fun Palace*, which we're now recreating with Tino Sehgal. It was never realized. That's similar to Eisenstein with the film on *Capital*. There's this big unrealized project by Cedric Price. Not only can we learn from the past but also from unrealized projects.

**AK:** You're coming to the point where there's a fascination, an aura, in the arts. And then you can depict Caspar David Friedrich's *The Wreck of Hope* and then vary it until hope looks out. You would build a raft from this wrecked ship. And by some means you have to reach the North Sea and a harbor. Not "ta-da, we've reached the sea," but rather "we're on shore again." That's one task of the convoy, which can counter Silicon Valley to a certain extent, and is thus able to cooperate with Silicon Valley. We're on equal footing if we use content on equal footing.

**HUO:** You said in an interview last year that human beings are not interested in reality. They have wishes.

**AK:** They're creatures of illustration. It's what Nietzsche says the whole time. We are trained for illustration purposes, otherwise we couldn't bear it. And by mistake we can still think, and as a by-product we can be political for a moment. Then we poison Socrates once again. When we're really political, it's never for long. And with these barren means, this dearth of mutations, the human creature is suitable neither for predation nor peace. Originally the human being is a scavenger who can only walk. The gazelles are much faster. We're neither quicker nor can we bite better than other animals.

But it's repeating today. People are in a pre-objective world shot through with minefields, in which we can actually predict that things can only go awry. We shouldn't imagine building a Noah's Arc and then bringing on the animals – no way. We have to build an entire fleet of boats with trunks of writing in the holds. All of literature, all the tomes have to go in. The pictures that move us. On the scale of Demand and Kiefer, I need both. I need the reductive image, which omits and thus has an antirealist effect. Antirealism has to do with inner forces that don't just consist of wishes but continually want to supplement something. You see something, and there's something missing, and you have the desire to complete it.

**HUO:** The way Adorno pushes Bloch up

against the wall and demands that he finally tell him what utopia is and Bloch says: "Something is missing."

**AK:** I can enter this "something missing" with my imagination. This basic principle of the playful element in the human being.

**HUO:** There was a good interview with Judith Butler in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* the day before yesterday, where she quotes Adorno to the effect that she can't lead a good life in a bad world.

**AK:** But we have to. There's no right life in the wrong one. But because we have nothing other than the wrong one, it's a matter of navigation in the wrong one. In the middle of the shipwreck, we're called upon to repair the ship.

**HUO:** That leads us to the principle of resistance. Lyotard did an exhibition at the Musée Immatériaux. It was the first exhibition in which he raised the issue of the internet. And then much later, when he was much older, he wanted to do a second exhibition, which was never realized. It was called "Resistances." The interesting thing is that he wanted to do a group exhibition. He said that the problem with exhibitions is that they take place and then come apart. Lyotard said that he would like there to be a ubiquitous aspect to this group exhibition, as in a film, which you can show anywhere.

**AK:** And projects should come about from the exhibition. Connections between people. And then they collaborate. Every exhibition is a cooperative context that goes on working.

**HUO:** And that's the project we are trying to resurrect. It will be the first exhibition in the history of art curated by a dead philosopher. Lyotard couldn't do it anymore, so we're doing it with Philippe Parreno and Daniel Birnbaum at the LUMA Foundation.

**AK:** Great idea. If you can imagine the 1905 revolution in Russia – it wasn't very much, but it whipped up feelings. It wasn't guilty of anything, because it didn't have the opportunity. We wouldn't be celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution now if it weren't for the one in 1905, without which the one in 1917 wouldn't have happened. We should reassess the 1905 revolution. A group of people, and then those that came after them, worked continuously and tirelessly starting in 1905 to eventually bring about the revolution of 1917. That gives us hope. That's resistance in reality. There is no resistance in the moment of despair.

**HUO:** Resistance is not the moment of despair, but hope.

**AK:** In 1928 I could have created conditions with eight hundred thousand teachers that would have prevented me from sitting powerlessly in a basement in 1945. I can start now to solve the problems of 2026, which my

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children will live to see. And if we set up this working group now, it's better than only doing it in 2036, in mourning for what went wrong in 2026.

**HUO:** With all the catastrophes of 2016, there's the question of what can art do.

**AK:** It can't do anything in 2016. Aleppo can't be liberated through art. But in 1918–21, when Syria was founded, it could have. With preparation, they could have set the course differently at every fork in the road. And art can't do what I'm telling you, but it can celebrate and orient, so that you have a sense of possibility. This is why we need curiosity cabinets again – science and art.

Art doesn't collect. It has gravitation. Science and art together are something strong again. Now they need to play. Play is not a matter for children. Freud says play is quite serious.

**HUO:** And Robert Louis Stevenson says that art is like play, but with the seriousness of children playing.

**AK:** Exactly. What else does Anselm Kiefer do but play, albeit with the seriousness of children? All these things require a change of thinking in these little oases that we call museums.

**HUO:** So we have to rethink our oases.

**AK:** Modernity doesn't consist in an imaginary future or in today's obsessive will to reform. Time is past and a new one is coming. That's Alexandria and the Museion. The last authentic departures from the Museion are the scholar artists from Byzantium in 1453. They are banished and go to Tuscany and cofound the Renaissance. It wasn't the banker sons and the bankers themselves. It was infection by the scholars. And musicians are involved as well, and all the others.

**HUO:** You talk about rethinking the museum, turning it into a production site, a laboratory.

**AK:** A laboratory – and it shouldn't just make the products themselves but do development work.

**HUO:** A laboratory that does a kind of R&D.

**AK:** At the beginning of this development there should be a combination of people who know each other. At best they should fall in love with one another. Now we've come to the Platonic symposium.

**HUO:** It's a wonderful combination: the combination of people who fall in love with each other. It's the museum, it's the laboratory; like what J.G. Ballard said: it's junction-making. A creation of connections.

**AK:** You're a specialist there. The way you sent Sarah Morris to me. That was such a nice day.

**HUO:** I sent her to visit you in Munich

because she rang me, and then she told me for about ten minutes what she wanted to do. And when she talked, I interrupted her. I said it's absolutely obvious. You and Alexander can do it. It was just so obvious that you two have common ground.

**AK:** And this itself is a work of art – to put brains or senses together. How do you call this? Fingertips; fingertips of two persons belong together.

**HUO:** That's what happened at Black Mountain College.

**AK:** Yes, exactly, and we need an imaginary Black Mountain College. Yeah?

**HUO:** And how could it work, an imaginary Black Mountain College?

**AK:** Like you do.

**HUO:** So we do an imaginary Black Mountain College by intensifying the junction-making; that's a nice motto for the new year.

**AK:** That's a perfect motto for the year. Reality is only accessed via museums, not via the stock exchange.

**HUO:** One last question: I'm continuing to work against the disappearance of handwriting. We're putting out a sentence, a doodle, every day on Instagram. Jane Goodall, who works with animals – she's now working in Tanzania – says that by working together we make this a better world for all. Not just for people but for all living beings. Or Etel Adnan: the world needs togetherness, not separation. Love, not suspicion. A shared future, not isolation. I wanted to ask if you could write something down for the beginning of the year.

**AK:** [*writes*] Not to make yourself stupid from the power of others and not from your own powerlessness.

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**Alexander Kluge** is a German author, philosopher, academic, and film director.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist** is a Swiss curator and art critic. In 1993, he founded the Museum Robert Walser and began to run the Migrateurs program at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris where he served as a curator for contemporary art. In 1996 he co-curated Manifesta 1, the first edition of the roving European biennial of contemporary art. He presently serves as the Co-Director, Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery in London.

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