Walter Kempowski's Collection

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Walter Kempowski, *Echolot: Ein kollektives Tagebuch, Januar und Februar 1943*. Munich: A. Knaus. 1997. Pp. (for all 4 volumes), 3200. Eur 74.00. ISBN 3–442–72076–1.

Walter Kempowski, *Das Echolot: 18 Januar bis 14. Februar 1945: Fuga Furiosa*. Munich: A. Knaus. 1999. Pp. (for all 4 volumes), 3200. Eur 49.50. ISBN 3–8135–1995–3.

The Origins of Walter Kempowski's extraordinary literary project began when, as a student in Göttingen in the early 1960s, Kempowski stumbled upon photographs and letters lying in the street: "Es war die letzte Hinterlassenschaft eines gefallenen Soldaten, Fotos aus Russland und Briefe an seine Braut." Kempowski spontaneously gathered up the foot-trampled debris, and since then he has never stopped collecting the photographs, letters, diaries, and other documentary texts that provide the sources for *Das Echolot: Ein kollektives Tagebuch*, a four-volume, 3,042–page collection that spans the period January-February 1943 and appeared in 1993 to great acclaim in Germany but little notice elsewhere. Similar materials comprise the second four-volume installment, *Das Echolot: Fuga furiosa*, which spans a similar period in 1945 and appeared in 1999. For Kempowski the task is to "bend down and pick up" the testimonies of the wartime generation. Only by listening to these bygone voices, and doing so in their own former present, he insists, is it possible to "settle accounts" with the past.[1] This is strikingly similar to the words of the Brothers Grimm, who, one hundred-and-fifty years earlier, described the fairy tales they transcribed as fragments of a shattered whole, comparing the oral stories to small shafts of grass that had been protected by hedges and bushes after storms had flattened fields

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[1] Walter Kempowski, "Statt eines Vorworts," *Das Echolot: Ein kollektives Tagebuch* (Munich, 1993), vol. 1.

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of crops.[2] To retrieve these lost pieces, they urged collectors to bend down close to the ground: "quietly pick up the leaves and carefully bend back the twigs, so as not to disturb the *Volk* and furtively to glimpse this small, rare part of nature, smelling like fallen leaves, meadow grass, and fresh rain." In the case of the Grimms, this work of collecting had to proceed quickly, before "total decomposition sets in,"[3] an indication that German identity was endangered not merely by seasonal storms but the very particular historical catastrophes of Napoleonic occupation and mercantile development. Likewise, the iteration of Central European place names in *Das Echolot* — Gumbinnen, Graudenz, Bromberg, Ratibor, Danzig — gives Kempowski's enterprise the melancholic feel of a vanished German world, and this is certainly part of its appeal. Since the vast majority of the texts he has collected, cut, and pasted are those of German soldiers and their families, it appears that the forces of dissolution Kempowski wants to overpower are those that have scattered the evidence of German suffering. In this regard, *Das Echolot* compares to Edgar Reitz's 1984 film *Heimat*, which self-consciously contradicts Hollywood versions of German history staged in Holocaust (1978) and elsewhere. Moreover, the clarity with which the human disaster of Germany's defeat, first at Stalingrad in winter 1943 and then, two years later, on the East Prussian and Silesian homefronts is chronicled works on sympathies for Germans that Andreas Hillgruber invoked at the outset of the 1986 *Historikerstreit* with his controversial essays, Zweierlei Untergang.[4] However, the accumulation of texts disrupts the production of empathy and demands much more work on the part of readers, who will find themselves drawn into both historical and historiographical complicities and thereby forced to reconsider their own historical and even professional locations.

Kempowski's enormous collage, assembled without commentary, certainly retrieves both literally and figuratively the photographs and letters and thereby the family memorabilia that had been abandoned by the sides of East Elbian roads as tens of thousands of refugees fled the oncoming Russian armies. In unsettling ways, he draws readers into the lives of German soldiers, German mothers, and German children in the last years of the Third Reich. But, Kempowski's design is not rehabilitative: the voices of Germans contradict each other and they are juxtaposed to the voices of Russian and American soldiers; French and British prisoners of war; concentration camp inmates in Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau; foreign laborers; as well as leaders of state. It becomes clear that not all the people who remember German history are German. What

2. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Vorrede," 3 July 1819, *Kinder- und Hausmaerchen*, ed. Heinz Roelleke (Stuttgart, 1980), 15.

3. "Aufforderung an die gesammten Freunde deutscher Poesie und Geschichte erlassen" (1811), in Heinz Roelleke, *Die Märchen der Brüder Grimm* (Munich, 1985), 63–69, here 65.

4. Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des deutschen und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Berlin, 1986).

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emerges from Kempowski's soundings is an almost unbearable accounting of loss and of the inability to commemorate or fully recognize loss. *Das Echolot* confronts readers with the entanglements of language and the blur of sight. Although the precision of individual detail and the sharpness of individual suffering deters (but does not entirely disable) an examination of political complicity, Kempowski's addition of more and more texts (and contexts) creates a distance, or an estrangement, that invites the judgment and interpretation of the reader. Kempowski insists on *Das Echolot* as a work of art, not history. In my view, this art should be taken as one of the most ambitious and provocative renditions of German history.

The organizational principles of the two sets of volumes are similar, but the range of voices in the second set is much wider and reveals the shared spaces of German history more clearly. *Das Echolot*, which translates as "echo sounder," is a compilation of mostly private correspondence and diaries, and some retrospective accounts, which respond to the general mobilization that the onset of the final Russian winter offensive on 12 January 1945 set in motion: the advances of the Red Army, the retreat of the Wehrmacht, the evacuation of concentration camps and the death marches, the westward treks of German refugees, and the assembly of Allied leaders at Yalta. The book ends with documentation of the bombing of Dresden on the night of 13–14 February 1945. For the most part, the texts are self-contained extracts and only one or two paragraphs long, although several larger pieces are as long as five or six pages. Many have been previously published, particularly letters and diaries from official or non-German sources, but most sources come from Kempowski's own archive, which he has collected since 1980 in an effort to create a "kleine Bibliothek der Namenlosen." With this people's archive, encompassing more than 3,000 texts and 300,000 photographs, Kempowski endeavors to reveal the "tragédie humaine," a "sehr persönlich gesehenes Geschichtsbild."[5] Like the nineteenth-century novels to which Kempowski compares his work of compilation and voice, *Das Echolot* gives social dimension and social recognition to individual fates. The letters of soldiers, nurses, and volunteers, the diary entries of householders and prisoners, and the self-indulgent notes of adolescents all create a compelling picture of the dailiness of life in wartime Germany. In contrast to the first set of *Das Echolot*, Kempowski has added in the second a large selection of letters from soldiers in the Red Army and diaries and other first-hand accounts written by concentration camp inmates. And as in the first volumes, Kempowski pastes in records of births and deaths, government announcements, household budgets, movie programs, and popular songs. He gives the vernacular German voices counterparts in Britain and to some extent

5. Quoted in Carla Ann Damiano, "Montage as Exposure: A Critical Analysis of Walter Kempowski's '*Das Echolot*,'" (Ph.D diss., University of Oregon, 1998), 94.

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the Soviet Union, France, and the United States, and he juxtaposes them to more elite texts: Joseph Goebbels's journals, Victor Klemperer's diaries, Thomas Mann's letters, Friedrich Meinecke's correspondence with Siegfried Kahler, Primo Levi's recollections. Interspersed in the text are photographs, the vast majority of them depicting scenes from the recent past when the Third Reich was victorious, its towns intact, and its favored people confident and healthy. Repeatedly Kempowski shows us the pictures that could be from the photo albums of non-Jewish Germans abandoned in 1945: they are at once the debris of 1945 and the traces of 1940 or 1941 or 1942. About one-hundred texts speak for each day, all of which are prefaced with an Old Testament proverb, a weather-related (but pre-1933) diary entry by a well-known intellectual, artistic, or literary figures (Rahel von Varnhagen, Stendhal, Goethe, Fontane, Van Gogh), and a patriotic *Fahnenspruch* ("Wir schwören . . . wir wollen"). Longer texts are occasionally fitted in between the days: statements by an anti-Nazi priest sentenced to death, recollections of a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, interrogation protocols of German prisoners of war, or, in the 1943 set, a strange account of the fate of a Hanoverian Jew and his coin collection or an immensely detailed account of the furnishings of a house in Breslau.

The action in the texts is fascinating. I was immediately struck by the scale of visuality created by the war. Across northwest Germany, people saw the launch of V-1 and V-2 rockets, which will soon smash into England, or the squadrons of Allied bombers headed east. And the start of the Russian offensive is part of everyday conversation throughout Europe. People know that they are seeing the end of the war. War has bound soldiers and civilians, prisoners and children, into a common discursive space. Kempowski goes back and forth from Iwan Seliwanow in Poland to Otto Faust in Nowe Miasto and to Wladimir Korobkow and Felix Mebes in Poland. Again and again, the Russians describe a big, ideologically inflected picture in which they smash fascism. Red Army pamphlets urge soldiers to avenge all the dead the Germans have left behind "Tötet, Tötet" (1:8). In contrast to the bold and confident strokes of the Russians, the German perspective is increasingly blinkered, passive, and individual. The German body is literally dying, and this death remains the focus of the project.

At the same time, the war is unusually distorted and mediated: in Alt-Blumenau, the first wintry night of the offensive is marked by the singing of young BDM-girls returning from the movie *Immensee*: "der erste Buntfilm meines Lebens" (1:11). A few weeks later, audiences in Elbing, outside Danzig, watched the color film *Opfergang* when the Russians took the town: "die Vorstellung muss abgebrochen werden" (3:316). "Als Kristina sang: 'Maikäfer flieg . . . Pommerland ist abgebrannt,'" wrote eighteen-year-old Helga Gross about the newly released patriotic movie *Kolberg*, "konnte ich mich nicht mehr halten: Die farbigen Aufnahmen von der Ostsee, den Dünen, vom Strand —

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und das soll man wirklich alles nicht mehr wiedersehen? Das kann doch nicht sein" (3:143). According to Goebbels, this compulsive moviegoing was a sign of "Lebensbejahung und Lebenskraft"; "es wird uns durch dick und dünn folgen" (2:237). Remarkable too is the degree to which language as well as sight was caught in the ideological and racial terms of the Third Reich. Landscapes and physiognomies were routinely scrutinized for racial characteristics, and Russians widely regarded as barbaric, poised to destroy Western civilization. Rare is the irony of a German soldier in Holland: "Ich werde dann nach 2 1/4 Jahren Untätigkeit die Gelegenheit haben, *mich voll und ganz für unsere Idee, unsere nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung, die der Inhalt meines Lebens ist, einzusetzen, um die mir so verhasste Demokratie zu bekämpfen. Ein Mensch, der mit diesen Voraussetzungen in den Einsatz geht, kann nicht besiegt werden.*" — so rare, in fact, that Kempowski has to add an exceptional interjection to remind present-day readers: "[ironisch gemeint]" (1:234). And it was not just the complicity of language and description. The documents reveal how many German families had "unseren Weiss-Russen Jan," or a Pole, or a Frenchman, whom they took along on the long treks westward (2:600, 3:250), and who were later liberated by incredulous Russians surprised at the ethnic diversity of German villages: "Wir haben so viele Russen, Polen, Italiener und Leute anderer Nationen befreit," wrote Wladimir Mosilin to his family from East Prussia, "das sind sehr interessante Begegnungen" (3:487–88). In addition, it is striking how many Germans took to reading Ernst Jünger — *Der Arbeiter, Das abenteuerliche Herz* — in the last weeks of World War II.[6] Jünger himself learned of the death of his own son as the counteroffensive opened. Always the aesthete, he recognized that with this loss he had at last joined the "true . . . secret brotherhood" of "this war" (1:183). He went on to prepare a historical study of how shipwreck victims survived the harshest challenges: es gibt einen den Schlüssel zu unserer Zeit. Der Untergang der 'Titanic' ist ihr bedeutendstes Vorzeichen" (4:130).

Already in his novels, and in their immensely popular adaptation on television (especially *Tadellöser & Wolff*, the chronicle of a bourgeois family in wartime Rostock), Kempowski created an alluring space in which the exterior markers of memory glistened and glittered. References to songs, school math problems, ersatz coffee, and movie stars allowed readers to recognize their wartime selves, not least because the everydayness of the rendition obscured the larger relations of ideology and desire that these complaisant burghers had coproduced. Nonetheless, Kempowski adds telling details that do not

6. See Ursula von Kardoff, for example, in Kempowski, *Das Echolot: Ein kollektives Jahrbuch*, 1:328, 1:499. This was already noted by Jörg Drews, "Die Toten sind nicht wirklich tot: Zu Walter Kempowskis literarischem Memorial *Das Echolot*," in idem, ed., *Vergangene Gegenwart — Gegenwärtige Vergangenheit: Studien, Polemiken, und Laudationes zur deutschsprachigen Literatur 1960–1994* (Bielefeld, 1994), 230.

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completely erase connections to politics. "Die ganze Familie wurde fotografiert," he sets the happy scene in *Tadellöser & Wolff*: "Die Mutter im Pelerinenkleid, Robert beim Segeln und ich im Hamburger Anzug. Vater sogar als SA-Mann unter einer Birke."[7] In similar fashion, Kempowski inserts evocative texts in *Das Echolot* that describe how Germans deliberately burned the photographs of sons and fathers and brothers in military and political uniform: "Wenn Du zwei militärische Brüder und noch solch einen Schwager hast, kannst Du Dir vorstellen, was für ein Gelumpe sich so im Haus befindet," wrote one woman in besieged Gleiwitz (2:650). Kempowski gives readers knowledge that the furnishings of German households are not innocent and that the roadside debris that survived at the war's end is incomplete and depoliticized.

In a surprisingly imperceptive review in Merkur, the historian Christian Meier concludes that while Kempowski has provided extraordinary detail that will be of great use to future scholars, *Das Echolot* fails as a work of history because it refrains from commentary and interpretation. Kempowski "lässt seine Leser weithin mit den Zeitgenossen allein," with the result that no one will stick with hundreds of protagonists over three-thousand-odd pages: "Man kann, es bleibt kaum anderes übrig, in dem Buch herumblättern, sich hier und dort festlesen, mit Hilfe des Registers ein paar Fäden verfolgen. Aber man verwirrt sich dabei immer wieder. Es ist ja kein Historiker am Werk."[8] This is an unfortunate observation, because the volumes need to be and can be read page-by-page. "In der Tat," admits a more industrious Ulrich Herbert, "dann lesen sich diese Bücher nicht mehr wie eine Quellenedition . . . sondern wie ein literarisches Produkt, bei dem die Einzelstimmen sich allmählich zu einem Chor zusammenfügen."[9] Although readers will not soon forget individual voices, who in desperate conditions articulate horrible pain, the structure and power of the project is, in my view, built less around the tragic relations between arias and chorus, personal survival and general defeat, as Herbert suggests, than around enveloping, terrifying collective movements and sobering juxtapositions that make distinctions among all the people on the move in Europe in the winter of 1945.

Weather provides an initial, common frame to the voices. "Der Boden war mit Schnee und Eis bedeckt," wrote an inmate from Sachsenhausen (2:457), who is echoed in refrain by others throughout the texts: "Immer lag eine dicke

7. Discussed in B. M. Kane, "Scenes from Family Life: The Novels of Walter Kempowski," *German Life and Letters* 28 (1974/75): 423.

8. Christian Meier, "Ein direkter Zugang zur Vergangenheit unserer Eltern," *Merkur* 30 (1995): 1132, 1129.

9. Ulrich Herbert, "Zwischen Beschaulichkeit und Massenmord: Die Kriegswende 1943 aus der Perspektive des Alltags," *Neue Politische Literatur* 40 (1995): 187.

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Schneedecke auf der Erde," noted Basil Henry Liddell Hart from London (2:740). This tundra of total war facilitated the Russian advance, which proceeded quickly over hard, icy ground, and in two weeks the victorious armies had established forward positions on the west bank of the Oder, the icy expanse of which tanks crossed easily. The terrible cold also froze the bays and sounds between Königsberg and Danzig, opening up one last escape route for German soldiers and refugees who found themselves surrounded. By early February, Nazi leaders in Berlin placed their hopes on a general thawing, which broke apart the ice bridges across the Oder and slowed the Russian advance, but clearing skies also permitted the resumption of Allied bombing that devastated Berlin and then Dresden on pleasant, spring-like days. Kempowski first draws our attention to the slow, inexorable, and then increasingly rapid slide of the German Reich: the Red Army marches forward, the Wehrmacht retreats. Five days after the start of the Russian offensive, the first refugee trecks, village by village, evacuate Silesia and East Prussia: "Lang, endlos lang kommt der Treck. Die Strassen sind vereist. Es ist bitter kalt" (1:468). Train service in the east is disrupted — "Überhaupt gibt es nun keine fahrplanmässigen Züge mehr. Das Elend wurde ständig grösser; Kinder ohne Eltern, Eltern ohne Kinder" — and then comes to a halt altogether. On and on the flight continues, clogging roads and filling towns, and at night settling thousands of cold, hungry people onto snowy market squares, wharves, and railroad platforms: "Es ist unheimlich, nichts zu sehen, nur zu hören: Das Fluchen der Männer, das jämmerliche Weinen der Kinder in den Planwagen, das trostlose Trösten der Mütter, das Hupen der schweren Autos, das machtlose ächzen der Räder, das klagende Wiehern der erfrierenden Pferde! Alles wie eingehüllt in das schwarze Fahnentuch des Todes" (3:256). Kempowski brings this westward movement to a kind of climax in the besieged cities of Breslau and then Königsberg, where thousands of refugees (and Nazi fighters) are literally pressed to the waterside in the outlying port, Pillau, and struggle to find room on ships like the KdF liner Wilhelm Gustloff, which the Russians torpedo and sink on 30 January 1945, the twelfth anniversary of Hitler's assumption to power, with the loss of 5,600 lives. The provenance of the texts moves westward as well, from Gumbinnen and Ortelsburg in East Prussia to Königsberg and Breslau, and finally to Dresden, which provides the climax to fourth volume of *Das Echolot*.

On this hard winter ground, Kempowski brings other movements into view, however. Paralleling the refugee trecks westward, but never intersecting with them, is the pitiless evacuation of Auschwitz and the forced death marches into Germany. Throughout Kempowski's documentation, the testimony of inmates continually interrupts the laments of refugees. "Je weiter wir marschierten, je mehr waren die Gräben an den Seiten mit erschossenen Häftlingen angefüllt" (2:170). Along the side of this road, three-days march from Auschwitz, Rolf Weinstock points out the debris not of family belongings, carts, suitcases, or

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photoalbums, but of human beings. Day after day, uncovered freight cars deliver the dead and the half-dead from Auschwitz: 917 to Buchenwald on 23 January, 2000 to Sachsenhausen on 30 January. Thousands of other victims continued to be gassed and cremated — "*Hochbetrieb*:" "Die weisse Landschaft wurde mit Russ bedeckt" (1:70). "Anscheinend sollen alle Juden mit der Zeit ausgerottet werden," concluded Odd Nansen, a political prisoner from Norway. German prisoner-of-war camps east of the Oder were also evacuated. Kempowski returns repeatedly to "Jerry's" rough two-week march of British prisoners in Pomerania. At the same time, in mid-January, the Russians occupy Romania, and able-bodied members of the country's ethnic German communities are forcibly transported to the Soviet Union, where the first trainloads of men and women arrive on January 29. In Munich, the effects of the vast mobilization of the winter are visible as well: "Handwagen mit allerlei letztem Hausrat, von drei Frauen in Hosen geschoben. Zwölf Männer schleppen irgendwo eine Eisenschiene. An der Bennokirche . . . stehn zwei Gefangene mit dunkler Haut, schwarzen, gleichsam fiebrigen Augen, von etwas semitoidem Ansehen, in Mantel und gemeiner Pelzkappe, auf Schaufeln gestützt, und tuen nichts, starren unbewusst ins Leere: zwei Inder. Die Strassen fast leer, allenthalben. Überall zerschundene Bäume — besonders grausig" (1:642).

Only occasionally do the streams of movement intersect, and it is Kempowski's achievement to yoke them together in second-hand juxtaposition. However, in January 1945 a Red Cross nurse did take note of Nazi guards driving prisoners down a street in Schweidnitz. "Erst bei diesem Anblick wird mir klar," she writes in one of Kempowski's privately archived texts, "dass alle Gerüchte über Juden, Ausländer und politische 'Verbrecher' in furchtbaren Lagern Wahrheit sind" (2:169). The divisions of the war between the Germans and the Allies, between racial desirables and undesirables, between civilians and prisoners, pretty much delimit the horizon of empathy, introspection, and commentary. Kempowski's montage ably recognizes these limits, and, at the same time, he keeps the reader two generations removed from the events from submitting to them. Not all rhythms of life were calibrated to the end of the war. Whereas in his 1943 documentation, he scattered entries from the register of Weissensee, the cemetery of Berlin's Jewish community, all of which were suicides, here, in the 1945 volumes, he submits entries from the register of births from a Mecklenburg hospital as well as "*Suchanzeigen*," the search notices for German soldiers, East Prussian children, and Jewish Germans that were published in newspapers in Germany and abroad well into the 1980s. There is no escaping the sense of utter loss, and there is also no way to reconcile the losses. For non-Jewish Germans, the Russian advance was very fast, and led to gruesome scenes of rape and shooting, as in the case already on January 19 of the small town of Pitschen, and for Jews, as Victor Klemperer notes from Dresden on 8 February, "Es geht zu langsam für uns" (4:237). Auschwitz was

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not liberated until January 27; the Russians overtook civilian treks but not death marches.

Kempowski's microhistorical approach, which focuses closely on individual, personal fates, enables identification with German civilians and soldiers as victims. Readers will be drawn into the stories of the violence in Pitschen, the shell-scarred treks across East Prussia, the horrific tales of survival in the Baltic Sea, and the bombardment of Dresden. A wife writes to her husband in the generic of poignancy: "Ach lieber Bernd . . . Seh doch zu, komm recht bald wieder Heim" (4:656), and, earlier, from Stalingrad, a soldier replies: "Meine liebe Mutter, wird es noch einmal Tage geben, wo ich bei Dir sein kann? Wo Deine Hände mich hegen u. pflegen? Ich kann es kaum noch begreifen, dass es noch mal so schön werden kann. Alles war ein Traum."[10] These books made me confront my own autobiography and my own deployment of the pronouns of empathy. My father was a soldier in January and February 1945, and my mother was a schoolchild evacuated from Berlin, and her parent's families lived in Danzig. Reading Kempowski, I came to feel a connection to their fate in 1945, one that I know I have worked against in my rather untroubled identification with the "we" of American armies and, in a more mediated way, in my interpretation of broad ideological complicity in the rise of the Nazis.

What the texts cannot do, edited as they are into a paragraph or two and recording the attempts to escape death, is document the long-term exchanges between the two collective nouns "Germans" and "Nazis." Scenes from everyday life are compelling, but they are cropped of their political frame and obscure ideological commitments which moved many, many civilians in Pitschen, Dresden, and elsewhere. For all the obscene texts written by Goebbels, or Hitler, or fascist literary figures like Hans Friedrich Blunck, Nazism as a social phenomenon fades away page by page, and one is left simply with the effects in 1945, which are death and dispersion. This is the problem with the history of everyday life, which has a hard time accounting for the social origins of ideological belief. Kempowski's production of empathy for German civilians is therefore troubling, but so, too, is the feeling of being troubled, and Kempowski produces enough texts in which political complicity is recognizable: the racialized language, the delimited horizons, the inability of contemporaries to see others as victims. Most civilians were preoccupied with saving themselves, and one story Kempowski tells is the way they throw off ballast to get to a postwar condition. "Einen Eimer, einen Lampenschirm, eine blaue Emailleschüssel, 1 hohe Glasvase und ein Bild im vergoldeten Rahmen" — this is what the artist Eva Richter-Fritzsche itemizes as she watches one old man in the Berlin subway in January 1945. "Es fällt schwer, sich vorzustellen, dass wir es fertigbringen sollten, auch diese Vorstellungen noch alle mit uns mitzuschleppen," she

10. Kempowski, *Das Echolot: Ein kollektives Tagebuch*, 1:474.

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comments; "aber man wirft meistens eher zuviel Ballast ab — um nur den Aufschwung, den neuen Start nicht zu gefährden" (1:262).[11] A fifteen-year-old antiaircraft gunner confides in his diary that he has no problem leaving his time and place: "Heute habe ich auf Posten ein Lied geschrieben, es kam mir ohne Schwierigkeiten zugeflogen. Ein Hawai-Lied . . . Es erscheint mir oft seltsam, dass ich mich in solche nie erlebten Stimmungen hineinleben kann" (1:311).

New perspectives on 1945 are not revealed from within the particular texts or events themselves, but are produced after the fact by their juxtaposition. In a 1993 interview, Kempowski compared his principle of arrangement to a game of dominoes: "so zwei Vieren aneinander und so weiter . . . Der eine berichtet, dass er in der Oper war, der andere über einen Besuch im Konzert."[12] Russian soldiers talk about beginnings, and Kempowski follows with a text in which their German counterparts refer to endings. In similar fashion, the treks are counterposed to the hunger marches, *Heimat* to Auschwitz, displacement to liberation. Photographs of Germany in 1940 or 1941 interrupt the documentation of disintegration and destruction in 1945. Again and again, the montage effect raises questions about the self-contained quality to the horrors documented at the present moment in 1945 and about the ways in which an earlier past produced that present. The wealth of information provides points of conflict, contradiction, and thus inquiry. Kempowski not only reveals the vast silences that made up one support of the architecture of postwar memory in postwar Germany, but also retrospectively breaks those silences by leading readers away from a compulsive identification with German victimhood. He has listened carefully to recollections around the *Stammtisch* and the *Skatspiel*, stories that endlessly reworked German suffering at Stalingrad, along the trecks, and in Dresden, but he does not reproduce their effect. The principle of collage and rearrrangement, and the changing geographical focus, result in a *Verfremdungseffekt*: the testimonies of strangers are repeatedly inserted and they disrupt a nostalgic sense of home or of home lost. At the same time, Kempowski does not dismiss the statements he is trying to disturb. The everyday details that he edits in not only reveal historical context but distinguish the vernacular testimonies from the generally pompous, solipsistic, and unenlightening writing of well-known writers such as Blunck, and also Jünger, Gerhart Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, Heimito von Doderer, and many others. This particular juxtaposition illuminates the production of the private archive, the impulse of ordinary people to write in conditions of separation and displacement, and the ability, however tendentious, to historicize oneself, often in a clear, painful prose

11. See also the motif of the small wooden cart in 1945 photographs analyzed by Dagmar Barnouw in *Germany 1945: Views of War and Violence* (Bloomington, 1996), 95.

12. Walter Kempowski, interview with Paul Jandl, "Deutsches Domino," *Der Standard* (Vienna), 26 November 1993, cited in Damiano, "Montage as Exposure," 20.

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that makes intellectuals appear almost speechless. "Im letzten Vierteljahr 1942 erhielt ich 199 Briefe, Päckchen und illustrierte Zeitungen," writes one twenty-one-year old in Russia," and "schrieb selbst 176 Briefe."[13] This work of vernacular archiving is both preserved in and reproduced by Kempowski's "Bibliothek der Namenlosen." From a concentration camp in Osterhagen in the Harz, an inmate wonders "Warum weiterschreiben?" "Warum überhaupt mit abgenutzten Worten etwas ausdrücken, was sich ein normaler Mensch gar nicht vorstellen kann?" he continues (4:220). Kempowski's play of German dominoes, his association of words with words, people with people, movement with movement, works against any dulling of meaning. As Carla Damiano insightfully puts it, montage is exposure, and it inhibits overfamiliarization and settlement.[14] It retrieves lost voices, but does not rehabilitate them.

In this work of retrieval, Kempowski stays within a long folklorist Romantic tradition of meditating on the place of the nation, the lapse of tradition, and the general condition of homelessness. In an odd way, the texts are stories from the German forest, which is a place of exile and refuge, violence and concealment, and unlikely encounters. In the vigor of his displacing moves, Kempowski both recovers and reproduces one basic action in German historiography, which is the thematization of the loss of home. It is unfortunate that historians themselves are so numb to the reasons for the production of stories about the past, and to the imaginative, fragmentary, and tentative quality to history, but Kempowski himself cannot seem to get out of the forest. He produces his own, contemporary version of the Grimms' fairy tales, which are brusque and authentic and even admonitory, but seem to have appeared from nowhere on a winter landscape.

In the end, I think more is gained than lost by Kempowski's method of "show, don't say" because the composition is so carefully rendered and is sufficiently self-reflexive. Not only do the texts interrupt one another, they also disturb each other's aesthetic surfaces and make plain the conditions of their historical production. In the face of this extraordinary achievement, then, it is puzzling why Kempowski reframes the entire project with the obvious markers of the absence of Germans rather than the presence of loss: at the very end of each volume, Kempowski inserts a blueprint of a German church destroyed by the Allies, the Abteikirche in Danzig, the cathedral in Allenstein, St. Nikolaus in Graudenz, and the Frauenkirche in Dresden. Readers will be irritated, but in the end they will also be provoked and will be invited to find their own exposures in this profound sounding into twentieth-century history.

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13. Kempowski, *Das Echolot: Ein kollektives Tagebuch*, 1:142.
14. Damiano, "Montage as Exposure."

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