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(Un)Doing and (Un)Becoming: Temporality, Subjectivity, and Relationality in Twenty-First-Century German Literature and Film

by

Simone Pflieger

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2018
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Simone Pfleger

Washington University in St. Louis

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

(Un)Doing and (Un)Becoming: Temporality, Subjectivity, and Relationality in Twenty-First-Century German Literature and Film

by

Simone Pflieger

Doctor of Philosophy in Germanic Languages and Literatures

Washington University in St. Louis, 2018

Professor Jennifer Kapczynski, Chair

This dissertation investigates how recent German-language literary and cinematic texts depict the interpellation of contemporary subjects under neoliberal capitalism. As I argue, the texts signal, reflect, and comment on the emergence of new types of subjectivities with precarious non-conforming identities, bodily desires, and pleasures struggling to persist under coercive social and economic systems. My core works express a sense of pessimism regarding both the present and future and foreground the ways in which bodies and minds are exposed to normative forces that act on, regulate, and resituate them. As I engage with questions of political agency, subjectivity, performativity, precarity, and neoliberalist capitalism in twenty-first-century German-language texts, I draw attention to how German-language texts specifically generate productive modes of inquiry when placed in conversation with queer and gender theory and vice versa. My analysis shows how these texts employ motifs of time and temporal patterns, rather than place and space more commonly emphasized in analyses since what has often been called the spatial turn, to explore the potential to engender reconfigurations of subjectivity. Tracing out-of-sync and non-teleological moments and momentums in the core texts, I show how the works uncover a temporary promise of breaking free from the dominant, restricting social structure,

even as they make clear that this schism cannot and should not be permanent. These performative acts and discursive strategies of breaking free, I argue, extend the promise of (un)doing and (un)becoming, offering the prospect of developing and refining new strategies of queer world-making.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Being and Becoming (Un)timely

From an Iranian refugee to a genetically modified woman, from thirty-somethings to teenagers, from unemployed workers to successful scientists, contemporary German literature and films are populated by a host of figures who negotiate non-normative identities, desires, and pleasures in a complex, economically driven socio-cultural and political landscape. As these characters navigate the intricacies of their respective life-worlds, they are increasingly forced to try to make themselves legible as belonging to a dominant culture that shapes and regulates their every step.

When considered through the lens of space, at first sight these figures appear to be impacted by geography and places, by the relationship between the local and the global in an era of neoliberalism. While this is surely the case, a second and closer look at many twenty-first-century texts reveals a preoccupation with a different, often overlooked regulatory system, namely time. In other words, these texts show how temporal structures and forces can act on, regulate, and resituate bodies and minds—offering a promise of intelligibility and inclusion within the dominant order. For many of the characters, however, the struggle to be included comes at a cost; the characters are able to establish relationships and occupy modes of belonging, but they also experience a sense of anxiety around this inclusion. Indeed, contemporary literary and cinematic explorations of time, as this dissertation demonstrates, make visible the anxieties inherent in the attachment to normative socio-cultural structures at the same time that they reveal a potential born out of the desire for belonging as well as escape.

In this dissertation, I intend to reevaluate a range of inter-subject relations in post-millennial German literature and film, analyzing the depiction of the interpellation of contemporary subjects under neoliberalism. By looking at a discrete sample of German-language texts, I seek not only to parse the intricate construction of identities and subjectivities, but also to demonstrate how the texts model an approach for negotiating the complex socio-cultural landscape of twenty-first-century identity politics. In order to hypothesize the ways in which my corpus of contemporary works presents the intersection of temporality and the creation and operation of identities and social worlds, I introduce the terms “timely” and “untimely” and theorize them together as (un)timely, merged with parentheses. I trace moments and momentums in which individuals are in-sync and aligned with the dominant cultural system. I also carefully examine those times when figures are out-of-sync and thus resist structures of labor time. I show how the works uncover a temporary promise of breaking free from restrictive social structures, even as they make clear that this schism cannot and should not be permanent. These performative acts and discursive strategies of breaking free extend the promise of doing and undoing, of becoming and unbecoming, and thus offer the prospect of developing and refining new strategies of world-making.

In order to introduce and elaborate on my assertions concerning the centrality of (un)timeliness for post-2000 cultural production to follow in the ensuing chapters, I divide this introductory chapter into five sections. The first section, “The Neoliberal World of the Twenty-First Century,” introduces the term neoliberalism and explains how it has shaped and impacted social structures in the last roughly twenty-five years. Furthermore, this section provides a survey of the work that has been done in roughly the last twenty-five years, with an emphasis on theoretical texts of the twenty-first century. My explorations of the intricate relationships

between subjectivity and temporality rest on a longstanding theorization of the main concepts of queerness and time. In order to delineate and clarify the implications of the phrase “neoliberal world,” I will then address the core concepts related to neoliberal world-making and governmentality¹ that circulate in the academy and are pertinent to queer theory and my own concept of (un)timeliness. Additionally, I explore how this economic system enforces particular normative identity politics and privileges for certain subjects while it renders others precarious. Section two, “Neoliberalism in/and German Cultural History,” engages with the question of whether neoliberalism, as a mainly North American economic and cultural concept, offers a useful framework for interrogating German texts. Despite objections to the applicability of neoliberal capitalism to the German context, which I will discuss, I intend to situate neoliberalism and, by extension, heteronormativity² vis-à-vis contemporary German cultural history. The next two sections, “Concepts of Identity Construction and Performativity” and “Temporal Structures of Existence,” engage with the two major categories that are foundational for the theorizations in this dissertation: identity and time. Each section introduces major concepts and key terms from the relevant scholarship of the last twenty-five years. As I show, these particular categories are pivotal notions in contemporary queer-theoretical discourses for the analysis of contemporary representations of the formation of alternative subjectivities and communities. Together, these four sections lay the groundwork for section five, “Theorizing

¹ Governmentality was conceptualized first by Michel Foucault in his 1978–79 lectures at the Collège de France and refers to the ways in which a government aims at the production of citizens who complaisantly abide by its policies and regulations (Foucault 312).

² I will discuss these two terms in more detail below. For now, I want to note that the former is more closely connected to economic practices and market conditions, the latter connotes particular socio-cultural, institutional, and political biases that organize identity categories into hierarchical binaries that valorize dominant heterosexuality, normative cis-genderedness, ablebodiedness, etc. Given that, both concepts are closely related to discourses about equality, citizenship, consumerism, and freedom of choice, which interpellate gender, sexual and ethnic minorities in ways that allow for the emergence of new types of subjects, bodies, and desires.

(Un)timeliness: Revisiting Notions of Subjectivity, Precarity, and Potential.” This final section explores the theoretical concepts that are critical to my thinking, which then culminate in an elaboration of my concept of “(un)timeliness.” While others have engaged with notions of timeliness and untimeliness—and I will comment on some of the different usages of the terms in detail below—I hope to demonstrate how my particular notion of (un)timeliness can provide a productive framework of analysis for scholars considering the complexities of identity politics in contemporary German-language literature and film not only within German studies, but also for scholars outside of the discipline.

1.1 The Neoliberal World of the Twenty-First Century

The term *neoliberalism* emerged in the 1980s and has been used to describe a set of economic theories that advocate practices of privatization, deregulation, and free trade. Drawing upon the major principles of free markets and minimal government participation of classical Anglo-European liberalism of the seventeenth century, neoliberal economic policies seek to “free” the market through the removal of regulations and restrictions in order to create an atmosphere that stimulates growth. This has commonly included the limitation of government subsidies such as social welfare programs, the removal of exchange rates, an opening and deregulation of economic markets to encourage global trade, the privatization of state-run businesses, and the endorsement of private property (Campbell, Parker, and ten Bos 100; Duménil and Lévy^{1–2}; Pinkerton and Davis 305).

While it might appear that neoliberal polemics and policies are mainly concerned with the increase of corporate profit and growth, Lisa Duggan emphasizes the intimate relationship and close correlation between neoliberalism and identity and cultural politics as well as the

intersections of class, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender (*Twilight* xii). This interrelatedness becomes ever more apparent when we consider that “class and racial hierarchies, gender and sexual institutions, religious and ethnic boundaries are the channels through which money, political power, cultural resources, and social organization flow” (xiv). These “flows” and movements not only foster and uphold the upward redistribution of resources, but they also create sharp and striking inequalities which, in turn, frame and shape the conditions “of life and death, of hope and harm, and of endurance and exhaustion” (Povinelli, *Economies* 3) of particular individuals, groups, and/or communities. Based on a plethora of imbalances, discrepancies, and disparities in the economic, cultural, political, and legal sectors, society becomes increasingly divided into those who possess goods, means, and prospects and those who do not.

As the ones on top continue to shuffle assets, capital, and supplies to their advantage, those on the bottom face a life defined by precarity and dispossession. Generally speaking, the term *dispossession* describes the condition of those who have lost land, citizenship, property, and, more broadly, a sense of belonging to the world. “Dispossession,” Athena Athanasiou aptly observes, “carries within it regulatory practices related to the conditions of situatedness, displacement, and emplacement, practices that produce and constrain human intelligibility. [It is] ... mapped onto our bodies, onto particular bodies-in-place, through normative matrices, but also through situated practices of racism, gender, sexuality, intimacy, able-bodiedness, economy, and citizenship” (Butler and Athanasiou 18). In other words, being dispossessed and having lost one’s place in the world signifies that one’s “proper place [of being] is non-being” (19). Thus, dispossession resembles a state or positionality from which one is rendered unintelligible, disposable, or precarious.

Precarity is more prevalent in discourse rather than dispossession and emerges out of robust discussion of neoliberal capitalism; it is marked by insecurity and an exposure of the individual to a hegemonic system. This system establishes a hierarchy that produces and perceives some bodies as non-normative and other. Thus, precarity, as Judith Butler notes, characterizes a body that possesses an “invariably public dimension” and is “a social phenomenon in the public sphere [that] is and is not [one’s own]” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 26). In other words, Butler understands the subject to be embedded in a nexus of communal, collective, and social relations—“the public sphere.” Based on the existence and importance of these alliances and bonds for the fashioning and formation of the body, they are concomitantly part of the subject proper and the larger realm of the public.

In a similar vein, Lauren Berlant gives prominence to precariousness and its relationships to the physical body and society, which in her analysis are multifaceted and can refer to a variety of correlations and interconnections, such as,

the relation between its [precariousness’s] materiality in class and political terms, its appearances as an affect, and as an emotionally invested slogan that circulates in and beyond specific circumstances. It’s a rallying cry for a thriving new world of interdependency and care that’s not just private, but it is also an idiom for describing a loss of faith in a fantasy world to which generations have become accustomed. (Puar et al. 166)

What distinguishes these two scholars and their approaches can best be underscored through a single word from each quotation: Butler’s “phenomenon” vs. Berlant’s “materiality,”³

³ I want to note here that the difference does not merely manifest itself in Butler’s and Berlant’s choice of words, but emanates from them working in different academic disciplines. While the former is a political philosopher and gender theorist, the latter is trained in literary analysis.

or, in other words, their differences in the theorizations of the dialogic exchange between body and bodies, or individual and society. Not only here, but also in many of her other works, Butler critically engages with what she calls the metaphysics of substance⁴ and proposes that “socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23) are constitutive of one’s identity. In this sense, she is less interested in the carnality of the body and how the individual experiences being in the world on a concrete physical, mental, and affective level and is concerned much more with relationality itself and the discursive practices that govern one’s being and being-in-the-world. Contrary to Butler, Berlant is very much invested in the felt corporal effects and responses of individuals to their surroundings. She foregrounds precisely how the relationship between individual and society shape the body somatically, affectively, and emotionally and the impact that events can have on the subject. Thus, Berlant’s primary concern is everyday life and how belonging is mediated in what she calls the “intimate public sphere” (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 4). In other words, she addresses how one’s intimate, sexual, and personal life is sustained and valued in the political and public realm.

Butler and Berlant share the understanding that while the crumbling of the “faith in a fantasy world” is experienced through dispossession and precariousness, it also carries with it a productive potential. This means that the seeming unintelligible incoherence and opaqueness of non-normative subjects does not merely disenfranchise and marginalize them. In other words, unintelligibility can be understood as a generative and valuable force that allows these social bodies and minds to form alternative bonds in order to resist becoming “expendable and disposable by forces of exploitation, poverty, machismo, homophobia, racism, and

⁴ As Butler succinctly states, this strand of philosophy argues that a person’s self-understanding of possessing a coherent sense of personhood is related to “consciousness, the capacity for language, or moral deliberation, ... [or] self-determination” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 22–23)

militarization” (Butler and Athanasiou 146). In this sense, they demand to be acknowledged and to be recognized as persons, and thus repoliticize belonging; their ideas and actions suggest that it is “not just about being and having but also about longing: perhaps longing for a different way to cohabit the political” (159), a longing that can ultimately affectively mobilize feelings of despair, rage, or anxiety into a promise of different possibilities and a sense of nonsentimental hope.

1.2 Neoliberalism in/and German Cultural History

Since the majority of scholarly works engaging with neoliberalism have been published in the United States and used this context as their point of reference, one might argue that it is less applicable to German culture or indeed not at all applicable. However, scholars in various disciplines such as sociologist Myra Marx Ferree, political scientist Thomas Meyer, and Germanists Hester Baer and Helga Druxes have challenged the assumption that neoliberalism as a concept is more closely tied to North America. They reject the notion that Germany’s social democratic policies are at odds with neoliberal policies and argue that so-called technologies of the self⁵ intervene in and impact people’s lives. While Ferree investigates the development of the German feminist movement and the impact that liberalism and neoliberalism have had on how German feminists mobilize politically, Meyer underscores how the Social Democratic Party-led government has implemented a host of “liberal” policies that secured the welfare state (at least up until 1998) but also fostered relations with business leaders and the rise of globalization (25–

⁵ Most broadly, I mean with “technologies of the self” a particular type of functionalist approach, which revolves around strategies of self-marketing and self-optimization or even a kind of entrepreneurial effort to constantly modify one’s body in the guise of self-actualization or enjoyment.

30).⁶ This trend, according to Meyer, has continued in the early twenty-first century, as becomes ever more clear when one reviews what kinds of reform proposals for the economy, the health care system, and the labor market have been part of the party program.⁷ Thus, even the SPD now has supported and called for the ratification and implementation of policies that are shaped by neoliberal governmentality and capitalism.

Furthermore, the fact that contemporary artists and writers are engaging with neoliberalism, precarity, and the construction of subjectivity is evidence that certain sets of practices and beliefs play an important role in contemporary cultural discourse in German-speaking countries. These topics are not only central to the works interrogated in this dissertation, but also key to works by many contemporary writers and filmmakers. This portrayal of particular issues includes not only authors and public intellectuals such as Julia Franck, Ulrich Peltzer, Kathrin Röggla, and Ilija Trojanow, who engage critically with socio-cultural and political issues of their time, but also many Berlin School filmmakers such as Maren Ade, Dominik Graf, Benjamin Heisenberg, and Angela Schanelec, who are deeply committed to addressing current affairs and their impact on individuals and society at large (both in Germany and beyond). All of these writers and directors explore the rise of neoliberal capitalism and how it uses a rhetoric of equality, citizenship, and freedom of choice to mask the actual constraints it produces.

Given the significance and prevalence of neoliberalism and its impact on the economic

⁶ In a similar vein, Sebastian Müller's *Der Anbruch des Neoliberalismus: Westdeutschlands wirtschaftspolitischer Wandel in den 1970er-Jahren* (2017) identifies a correlation between the political agenda of the SPD and the rise of neoliberalism in West-Germany in the 1970s. He also highlights a direct connection between "Gesellschaft und Ökonomie" (10) and argues for an analysis that takes into consideration their constitutive interactions.

⁷ First and foremost, a variety of reforms proposed as "Agenda 2010" included legislation to make it less difficult for firms to dismiss their worker, several significant cuts to health care, and more stringent limitations around unemployment benefits (Cameron-Rowe 13–16).

and cultural landscape of present-day society in literary and cinematic production, academics in both Europe and North America have engaged with these contemporary works and created various clusters of scholarly discourse that inform my work.⁸ Transnationalism and the interactions and mobility of subjects across borders emerge as one such discursive cluster. Contributions in *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature* (2015), edited by Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner, in *Transnationalism and the German City*, edited by Jeffrey M. Diefendorf and Janet Ward, and the existence of the journal *transit: A Journal of Travel, Migration, and Multiculturalism in the German-speaking World* demonstrate the prominence and significance of this discourse. While my focus is not on transnational and multicultural subjects per se, works such as *Fremde Haut* and *Kältere Schichten der Luft* certainly speak to this core concern in German Studies.

In addition to discussions around transnational identities and the construction of national borders, the definition of a transnational, cultural identity, and the development of new socio-political institutions on a local and a global scale have emerged as issues of great importance for scholarship. In particular, post-89 Germanness is best understood to be a hybrid concept, a mix of East and West, or as Valerie Heffernan and Gillian Pye claim, a “placed and placeless identity” (17): in other words, a position of residing somewhere and nowhere simultaneously, a place of in-betweenness.

While the East-West debate is often the most prominent one in scholarship concerning competing post-unification notions of Germanness, other debates of equal significance enter the

⁸ Although not related to my dissertation, scholarly inquiry in the past few years also surrounds discourses around trauma and memory (Pascale Bos, Thomas Elsaesser, Irene Kacandes, Jennifer Kapczynski, Erin McGlothlin, Anna Parkinson, Brad Prager, and Karen Remmler), family narratives (Friederike Eigler, Alexandra Merley Hill, Carrie Smith-Prei), ecocriticism (Katharina Gerstenberger, Axel Goodbody, Simon Richter, Caroline Schaumann, Heather I. Sullivan, Sabine Wilke) among many others.

conversation in the early 1990s and are worthy of attention—especially those pertaining to hyphenated identity groups such as Turkish-German,⁹ Afro-German,¹⁰ Polish-German,¹¹ among many others.¹² The construction and definition of Turkish-German identities¹³ and the notion and significance of in-betweenness,¹⁴ as both Leslie Adelson and Ayca Tunc Cox emphasize in their work, serve as points of departure for this dissertation. Indeed, I seek to depart from prominent post-unification debates that rely on the existence of dichotomous pairings as a point of reference for the determination of identity and space. Instead, my dissertation challenges binary structures

⁹ According to the 2016 census by *Destatis – Statistisches Bundesamt*, 22.53% of the entire population of Germany are citizens of immigration background, which constitutes roughly 18,567,000 million people. Out of those roughly 3 million are citizens with a migration background from Turkey (*Destatis* 63).

¹⁰ In *Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890-2000* (2005), Patricia Mazón and Reinhild Steingröver state that the number of Afro-Germans in 2005 was around “five hundred thousand out of a population of eighty million” (2). However, Germany does not file any statistic inquiry regarding race since World War II so the actual number remains unknown.

¹¹ It should be mentioned that Germany has thus far refused to re-evaluate and possibly re-instate any rights for Polish-Germans based on their minority status. This can be attributed to two factors: (1) those regions with a very large populations of Polish-Germans are not part of German territory and (2) the largest wave of immigration happened relatively recently. The influx is mostly due to the working rights that the EU extended in May 2011 to citizens of Eastern European nations that joined the EU in 2004.

¹² One of the largest groups invested in this struggle to establish a new identity is Germany’s Turkish-German population. Having entered the country mostly as *Gastarbeiter* in the 1960s and 1970s, second and third generation Turkish-Germans are interrogating what their type of hybridity implies in relation to the rest of the population. Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz comment in their essay “Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Germany” (2011) on the role that migrants played in regard to Germany’s engagement with its Nazi past prior to 1989. They argue for the importance of recognizing migrants “as subjects of national and transnational memory” (33) who offer a unique perspective and are part of the work of Holocaust remembrance.

¹³ It must be noted here that only Adelson uses the hyphenated form when referring to this particular group of individuals while Cox uses the expression “Turkish German” without a hyphen. Although not explicitly stated, I believe that this intentional step attempts to echo her main argument in her essay that the construction and performance of Turkish German identity relies both on the acceptance as well as the refusal of particular German and Turkish cultural and ethnic specificities. By omitting the hyphen both identity categories seems less tightly connected and the visual image evokes less the impression that subjectivity is constructed through drawing from both cultural backgrounds equally. Rather, Turkish German identities are plural and their production is uniquely distinct depending on the individual and their economic, socio-political, and cultural context.

¹⁴ The notion of in-betweenness as a concept to interrogate German identity construction and affirmation is one of the major themes to illustrate transition and transformations in contemporary visual and literary texts (Gerstenberger and Herminhouse 2; Abel, “Imaging Germany” 270; Abel, *Counter-Cinema* 16).

through a focus on time. Emphasizing (un)timeliness as a mode of being both in- and out-of-sync with labor time, I interrogate the representations of subjects in contemporary cultural production. The contemporary works in my corpus employ time as a means of commentary on not only the state of twenty-first-century German culture and society, but also more generally on the impact of neoliberal capitalism, mass consumerism, and precarity.

Contributing to the scholarly discussion of neoliberal capitalism and its ramifications for the construction of contemporary subjectivity, Germanists such as Baer and Druxes not only deem neoliberalism applicable to the German context, but they also underscore how neoliberal financialization has penetrated other spheres of everyday life. While Baer analyzes predominantly films by Berlin School filmmakers and demonstrates that the neoliberal marketplace successfully masks its sexist practices and the misogyny that many female directors face, Druxes shows that many of the works by female authors who grew up in the former GDR express a sense of skepticism toward neoliberalism and the subjugation of women.

Both Druxes and Baer identify in their essays what I understand to be the pervasive presence of the specter of neoliberalism, that is, they recognize it as an indiscernible force, believed not to exist within Germany's socio-political and cultural landscape and thus often not included in scholarly analysis, that nevertheless haunts the lives of many subjects. Many subjects perceive it as a form of progress and advancement, and not as an eerie presence of normative forces and dictates. In twenty-first-century Germany, ideas of identity and selfhood have become coupled with certain economic and cultural modes of thinking that coerce individuals into believing that today's world is one in which "competition is the primary virtue, and solidarity is a sign of weakness" (Mirowski 92). In this world, individuals perceive themselves to be independent decision-makers who experience a high degree of freedom and superiority over

others and thus reject any type of unionization or formation of collectives to consolidate their political power.

In a study published in 2012, political scientist John Peters draws on recent statistics published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and trade unions in order to outline the rise of neoliberalism in North American and Western Europe and its connection to the decrease in industrial unions and the decline of workers' influence on Socialist parties in Western Europe. While he does not point to a direct correlation between neoliberalism and heteronormativity, I would argue that especially the shift in votes to right-wing populist parties in the 1990s and early 2000s not only impacted the bargaining power of labor unions, but it also resulted in those "public sector reforms" (228) that hinge on the kinds of conservative socio-cultural values that these parties typically endorse and propagate. Thus, neoliberal power structures not only shaped the labor market and work practices, but its regulatory ideologies, such as heteronormativity and misogyny, have also guided the ways in which subjects are expected to operate within narrowly defined socio-cultural structures.

Keeping this reciprocal nature of economic and cultural neoliberalism in mind, I understand the works that form my corpus in this dissertation as critical of the rise and prevalence of neoliberalism in the German-speaking world in the twenty-first century. More specifically, I demonstrate that the novels and films can be understood as attempting to shape the discourse of German cultural history related to the way in which Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle theorize awkwardness in contemporary popular culture when they maintain that "feminist politics and pop culture are reliant upon neoliberal mechanisms even as these are radically rewritten, manipulated, leveraged, and/or clash" (100). In a similar vein, my project is attuned to how the literary and filmic texts show precisely the ever-changing modalities of reaction to,

reliance on, and resistance to neoliberal power structures. In other words, (un)timeliness functions as a category of analysis of modes of being in- and out-of-sync with labor time and negotiations of subjectivity.

While many of the texts can be understood as expressions of or responses to a certain type of pessimism, and evince a sense of desolation due to their growing awareness of how many of neoliberalism's promises have failed its citizens, their fatalist and apprehensive perspective also allows for the emergence of potential and possibilities. In other words, the literary and filmic texts acknowledge the presence of a general negative affective mood while they also reveal the formation of a new, more positively connoted sociality or relationality between subjects. In other words, they paint a cynical picture of the contemporary world, a world that also provides opportunities for different and unfamiliar ways for individuals to connect and forge bonds.

These representative texts are politically engaged, insofar as they all critically interrogate dominant socio-cultural power structures and normative ideas around subjectivity. In lieu of providing what Barbara Kirchner calls "Plattenkritiken ... [als] Serviceleistungen" (np), i.e., half-hearted and hackneyed arguments, she, along with the other authors who feature prominently in this dissertation, seeks to critique contemporary society and culture in substantive ways.

In line with this kind of reflective and analytical engagement, I take a cue from Jennifer Petzen's call for "queer trouble." Similar to her claim that allies in the struggle against racism "must have a commitment to an accountable positionality ... and move to a public commitment to be held accountable" (299), the core texts in this dissertation articulate the need to recognize and insist on different modes of apprehending the world. Thus, my reading practices in this

dissertation are attuned to tracing subjects and their respective relations and positionalities that insist on the accountability of readers or viewers. This type of active reader participation and engagement is prompted not only by the content of the texts, but also their form. While the content more or less explicitly addresses social, political, and cultural topics from the past and present, formal aspects of both the literary and filmic texts I discuss disrupt the frequently linear and continuous progression of the narrative. As such, the texts cause the readers/viewers to stop, pause, stumble, or re-read and re-watch certain passages. Such disruption potentially creates a sense of unease and alienation that pushes the audience to engage with the texts in a different and potentially unfamiliar manner and hopefully prompts them to think critically about their assumptions about and expectations of particular genres, text types, and characters.

1.3 Concepts of Identity Construction and Performativity

In late twentieth and early twenty-first-century Western societies, debates around issues of identity are extremely widespread and frequent and are integral to the ways in which contemporary German-language texts conceptualize and portray their protagonists. These depictions of modern subjectivities—both normative and queer—not only function as a reflection of socio-cultural, political, and economic beliefs and values, but they also shape my theorization of (un)timeliness in this dissertation. In this sense, I rely on a robust tradition within gender and queer studies that has contributed to discourses on the construction of identity, heteronormativity (and in more recent years also homonormativity), and the precarious living conditions of many subjects under neoliberal capitalism.

Often credited as inaugural for the emergence of the notion that gender is socially constructed—and by extension, other facets of identity, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*:

Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990), in combination with her *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), solidified the understanding that the construction of identity rests on certain normative ideas that circulate in the social realm. In these two texts, Butler introduces and elaborates on the notion of gender performativity, arguing that there is no *a priori* identity behind any gender expressions. She explains that these expressions together constitute rather than affirm the illusion that gender is stable and natural. Instead, as she outlines, gender expressions are culturally and socially inflected and never universal or fixed. Performative acts can therefore "disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxxiv) and thus the emergence of transformative, coalitional identity politics.

Exploring the "subversive" potential of contemporary identity formations and alternative modes of subjectivity, Ruth Goldman points out in her seminal essay "Who Is That Queer Queer?" (1996) that the term *queer* is typically used as an umbrella term to "represent a number of intersecting anti-normative identities" (169).¹⁵ Most important to my analysis is that the term *queer* offers a framework for the exploration of the aspects of cultural life that emphasize the tensions and contradictions within heteronormativity, and ultimately draws attention to the stigmatized parts of daily life that trouble socially constructed normalcy. As such, *queer* refers to non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in time and space, and, as I will show, befits the interrogation of the types of subjects that populate my core texts. *Queer* focuses on sex, gender, and non-heterosexual desires and practices as performative acts, and, as Judith Butler points out in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), seeks to

¹⁵ I want to note here that Goldman's definition is just one of many circulating in the theoretical realm of academia and day-to-day life and its citation does not suggest superiority over the other ones.

destabilize heteronormative power and agency, which, in turn, necessitates the affirmation of “the very contingency, the undetermined interval, that identity insistently seeks to foreclose” (220).¹⁶ Thus, the concept is never stable, but must constantly be reworked and revised, a type of contingency that underscores the highly productive quality of queerness.

This reconfiguration and subversion of hegemonic dominance and its ostensibly authoritarian nature allow for the construction of new identities whose “subjectivity is lodged in refusals or deflections of (or by) the logic of the heterosexual supplement; in far less simple associations attaching to state authority and religious sanction; in far less complacent relation to the witness of others” (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 71). Thus, queer can be seen as a marker of resistance, contesting any kind of normative identity categories. In this sense, the term signals an effort to avoid all of these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, to eschew adherence to any one of the given ideals¹⁷ of identity markers, and not to assume their ideological liabilities both to transgress and transcend them—or at the very least to problematize them.

Although the word was historically, at best, a slang term for homosexual, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse, it was re-appropriated in the late twentieth century and became an “umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications” (Jagose 1). While in the late 1990s it was typically used to express a “mismatch” of sex, gender, and sexual desire, by the early 2000s the word also came to incorporate such topics as cross-dressing, gender ambiguity, and any related surgical procedures as well as issues of transgender and

¹⁶ Butler’s notion of contingency is based on the concept of “radical contingency” put forth by Ernesto Laclau. Laclau maintains that existence is not purely accidental and that its conditions cannot be derived from an internal logic, but that external factors play a key role. Thus, existence is not predetermined, but arises from the interaction with external elements and forces upon which existence is contingent (Laclau 1–3).

¹⁷ In addition to my use of the parenthetical for the term (un)timely, which I discuss in detail below, I also fuse the words idea and ideal in this dissertation. I do so in order to emphasize how ideas of performative acts of subjectivity are always shaped by socio-cultural, stylized practices that seek to render certain identity markers uniform and function as ideals, which however nobody is able to embody.

transsexual identity. Through the concept's "definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics" (1), queer resists any clear-cut definition. It is unaligned with any particular identity category and denominates verbal as well as non-verbal articulations and manifestations "whose explicit basis is the criss-crossing of the lines of identification and desire among genders, races and sexual definitions" (Sedgwick, *Between Men* x).¹⁸ In this regard, the concept of queer refuses to stake its claim in order to maintain its very queerness; in the words of Judith Butler, "normalizing the queer would be, after all, its sad finish" (Butler, "Against Proper Objects" 25).

In both academic and non-academic settings, queer is used as a noun, an adjective, and a verb in a variety of different manners. As a noun or adjective, the word can be understood as a reference to and affirmation of fixed identities and practices that are *not* hegemonic or heteronormative, such as homosexuality. In this case, queer refers to the ways in which sexual desires, object choice, and pleasure are oriented toward an individual of the same sex. It is also employed to render visible, at least linguistically, those identities that do not subscribe to a dichotomous system for the classification and categorization of sex, gender, and sexual orientation: "queer" signals non-conformity and points to the multiplicity and infinity of expressions of subjectivity and sexuality. As a verb, it implies an approach to hegemonic categories or a strategy of questioning, destabilizing, and troubling dominant, essential, and ostensibly natural positions, routines, and procedures (Stewart, *Queer Crime Fiction* 5–6).

Aside from queer as a conceptual approach to situating and destabilizing rigid identity structures, the concept of intersectionality as a framework of analysis for the connections

¹⁸ This fluidity and versatility has been criticized by various scholars since "[t]he appeal of 'queer theory' has outstripped anyone's sense of what exactly it means" (Warner 18). Thus, the ambiguity of the term makes it useless, for theorizing identity, according to some.

between power, oppression, and discrimination was first introduced by feminist sociologist Kimberlé Crenshaw in “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989). Intersectionality avoids the “conceptual limitations of single-issue analyses” (149) and makes visible how various categories of identity such as gender, sexuality, race, religion, ethnicity, class, and ablebodiedness interact and intersect on various levels in ways that create, maintain, and bolster systematic social injustice and inequality. Thus, no type of bias, prejudice, and discrimination based particular identity markers exists separately from others, but should be understood as linked.

While Crenshaw’s notion was certainly productive and revolutionary in its time, Jasbir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007) reveals the methodological tensions in and limits of an intersectional critique. The work is a compelling investigation of racism, nationalism, patriotism, and terrorism in the US in the twenty-first century and introduces the concept of “assemblage.” Central to the construction of both these nationalist and terrorist bodies is Puar’s understanding of identity as assemblage, meaning that individual aspects of one’s identity cannot be separated, but need to be examined as “interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency” (212). While Puar does not dismiss black feminism and its interventions into hegemonic structures and discourses, she cautions against privileging “naming, visibility, epistemology, representation, and meaning” (215), which create a more static and affectless theorizing to diagnose difference. Assemblage, according to Puar, takes into consideration the particular historical context and standpoint of the social activist, seeks to avoid blanket transposition of US-centric frames of analysis onto other subjectivities and spaces, and

“underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information” (215). In this sense, gestures, motion, and activity take precedence over stability, position, and permanence.

Furthermore, assemblage moves away from binary thinking along the lines of queer and non-queer, but acknowledges a particular “complicity with dominant formations” (205) that is present in queer identity formations. Recognizing and accepting a certain degree of complicity also combats the “fetish of innovation” (xx) and the reification of resistance. In other words, Puar’s concept recognizes the presence of normative structure within queer identities and cautions against the glorification of queer as *the* oppositional force. Thus, assemblage not only negates and undermines narratives of exceptionalism, but it also encourages unchoreographed and unorganized detours and shifts that might include dominant logics and frameworks of apprehending individual subjects as well as social structures.

Interrogating a different force field created by contemporary “biocapitalism” (39), Béatriz Préciado’s *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (2013) explores the relations between commodification, mass consumerism, and the emergence and management of bodies and identities. Deeply entrenched in today’s “pharmacopornographic biocapitalism”¹⁹ in an era of “punk hypermodernity” (35), techno-subjectivities and corporealities are invented and materialize as the result of the influence and regulation of desire and pleasure in a “chain of excitement-frustration” (40) amidst an amalgamate of synthetic hormones, pornographic imagery, and the Internet.

¹⁹ Préciado extrapolates from Foucault’s notion of biopolitics, from the first volume of *History of Sexuality* (1976) in which he identifies biopolitics as the modernized version of sovereign power over life and death. This kind of power, bio-power to be exact, seeks to “qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize” (Foucault, *History* 144) society by disciplining the body and to regulate the population through sex and sexuality as they are key for the institutional control of a variety of sectors such as biological functions, corporal health, reproductive interventions, among others (154–58). Derivative of these notions, Préciado argues that contemporary capitalism is shaped by the production of “mental and psychosomatic states of excitation, relaxation, and discharge, as well as those of omnipotence and total control” (Préciado 39).

Based on this characterization of society and life in the twenty-first century, *Testo Junkie*, in lieu of foregrounding affect and emotions as does *Terrorist Assemblages*, centers on structural effects and institutional scripts that create a systematic network of power, production, and consumption that “at the same time produces and destroys the species” (Préciado 51) and, in so doing, determines and governs both body and subjectivity. This dual potential of biocapitalism opens a productive space for the generation of subjects that, on the one hand, has the potential to deconstruct and dismantle dichotomous structures, but on the other, reproduces these very same binaries. Thus, it is “a matter of *inventing* a subject” (54, emphasis in original) through embracing slippages and gaps that allow for the emergence of new subjectivities and bodies that are concomitantly recognizable and unintelligible within twenty-first-century regimes of discipline, dominance, pleasure, and gratification.

In line with thinking about the intersections of the normative and non-normative, Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages* introduces the term *homonormativity* in order to refer to homosexual subjects who enact certain normative desires and practices typically aligned with heteronormativity such as gay marriage, following the parameters of heterosexual marriage as well as affirmations of the gender-based hierarchy of associating masculinity with notions of dominance, power, and authority.²⁰ She further contends that discourses on race, ethnicity, and religion paired with sexuality aid in the construction of grotesque and deviant Others who are perceived as terrorist bodies while simultaneously folding homonormative patriot bodies into civic life of the nation based on the intelligibility of the performance of their identities.²¹

Lisa Duggan also identifies this alignment when she characterizes homonormativity as “a

²¹ These marginalized “terrorist” bodies do not belong to the nation based on their socio-cultural, political, racial, sexual, and gender-based unintelligibility within society’s hegemony.

politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains ... a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, “New Homonormative” 179). She emphasizes that the peril of homonormativity is the hailing of those expressions of identity that are heteronormative and thus are linked to power while punishing those who fail to exhibit the “right” gender, sexuality, race, socio-economic status, among others. Or as Puar explains it, performative stagings and enactments of cis-gendered, heterosexual coupledness result in the categorization and classification of these subjects as possessing “acceptable patriot values” (Puar 46) cutting across demarcations of race and class. Hence, they become part of the nationalist discourse and themselves serve as foils for the construction of Otherness.

Through the integration and consolidation of sexually normative and queer bodies, the nation is not only capable of veiling heteronormative ideologies that replicate class, gender, racial, and national ideals as upright, loyal, and patriotic, but also manages to construct and position homonormative, nationalist bodies vis-à-vis racialized and racially perverse terrorist corporealities. Hence, *Terrorist Assemblages* hints toward the contemporary attitudinal shift away from constructing many queers as figures of death toward an understanding of them as subjects connected to life, consumerism, production, and reproduction; a transition that permits the incorporation of queer bodies within the nation while simultaneously separating these now “properly homo” bodies from deviant terrorists. Despite, or maybe because of, the fact that the term *terrorist* calls forth a plethora of associations related to the attacks on the towers of the World Trade Center, including religious fundamentalism, racism, and hypermasculinity, among many others, the concepts of homonationalism and “terrorist” bodies allow for a more nuanced discussion regarding what types of bodies are integrated into the conception of the nation and

which ones are perceived as “terrorists,” or in other words as outsiders, and points out that queer can be, in some sense, “normalized.”

All these texts help us to see what kinds of normative and dominant forces shape our life-worlds and categorize subjects. These hegemonic structures determine the criteria for the construction of a blueprint against which all bodies and identities are compared and subsequently deemed acceptable inside the system or intolerable. While this description appears to evoke the notion that these labeling processes are at work only once and classify individuals according to two discrete categories, the construction and grouping of subjects has become increasingly multi-layered and intricate under neoliberalism in the twenty-first century. As many of the theorists introduced in this section note, the complex demands of heteronormativity, neoliberal capitalism, and nationalist endeavors re-conceptualize and constantly re-evaluate which bodies are deemed permissible and thus allow for new subjectivities to materialize and for others to become invisible and fade out of existence—for a certain period of time or forever.

1.4 Temporal Structures of Existence

Temporality and the unfolding of time have constituted one of the major concerns of queer theorists in the twenty-first century. The topic has been so prevalent that many refer to the last decade as the “temporal turn” in queer studies. On the one hand, this development indexes the importance and growing body of scholarship theorizing socio-cultural and political phenomena and interrogating texts through the lens of time; on the other hand, it poses a

response to what has often been called the “spatial turn.”²²

Extrapolating from some of the concepts that are with this queer-theoretically informed temporal turn, I trace what queer theorists such as Lee Edelman, Elizabeth Freeman, Jack Halberstam, Heather Love, and José Muñoz, among others, have identified as the centrality of time and temporality for discussions of subjectivity, desire, identity, and historiography. My conceptualization of how (un)timeliness emerges out of the German-language texts rests on these previous theorizations of past, present, and future as they are linked to instances of queer imaginings and world-making.

Elizabeth Freeman’s project in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010) pivots on the idea that “time *binds*” (3, emphasis in original), that is, it is the creation of particular normative temporal rhythms and patterns that mold, transform, and adjust subjectivity so that it becomes socio-culturally meaningful. These tempos embed individuals in the process of chrononormativity—“the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (3) for the sake of maintaining and affirming capitalism’s institutional power and its force vectors—and appear “natural” to whom these regulated paces and pulses privilege. Based on this link between time, body, and labor, only “properly temporalized bodies” (4), whose lives are organized according to conventional time lines and “normal” and “logical” sequences of traditional milestones in their development, belong and are intelligible as subjects within the dominant social order.

Freeman interrogates normative temporal structures and coins the term

²² In the late 1990s, the spatial turn emerged as a way of highlighting space as a way of apprehending the world in favor of time, which had dominated people’s conceptualization of themselves and their life-world since modernity. Proposing an alternative to time, space as a category of analysis is thus as a way to approach issues around the construction of identity, the impact of the materiality of places and spaces on individuals and society, and the expansion of global capitalism and consumer culture (Bachmann-Medick 211–13).

“chrononormativity” (3) as a way to describe the biopolitical management of subjects through the manipulation of time according to the capitalist principle of maximizing profit. This process, according to Freeman, produces “people whose individual bodies are synchronized not only with one another but also with larger temporal schemae” (3). It further orients them toward particular teleological (life) narratives that promote the organization of society around normative events and values such as monogamous marriage or coupledness, heterosexual reproduction, and the optimization of one’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These organizing principles not only privilege certain tempos and routines, but they also function as regulatory frameworks of power that valorize certain lives over others.

Working from these assumptions, Freeman’s understanding of queer temporalities is antidotal to normative ones; she offers an understanding that “propose[s] other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others” (xxii) and in so doing challenges hegemonic conceptions of (normative) time, both when considering larger socio-cultural histories and the day-to-day life of singular individuals. In this sense, Freeman unveils the importance of temporal gaps and narrative detours in literature, film, and art that emphasize asynchronous narratives of past and present. As Freeman argues, these asynchronicities provide opportunities for countering the methods of traditional historiography. *Time Binds* traces how certain individuals question and trouble the construction and regulation of ostensibly socio-culturally and economically valuable identities through temporal diversions, digressions, and deviations that render subjects meaningful. As these subjects disturb the process of chrononormativity and rearrange the ways in which people and groups relate to each other, they not only point to the gaps and fissures in the hegemonic organization of society, but they also interrogate and unsettle dominant epistemes and linear temporality.

Shifting the emphasis of inquiry away from the past and the present toward the future, José Muñoz' *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) foregrounds the potentialities of the “there and then,” or the Blochian not-yet-here.²³ According to Muñoz, “straight time” is marked through its linearity, which constructs, affirms, and reiterates static epistemological and ontological narratives of dominance, power, and normativity. Queer time, by contrast, challenges straight time's presentism as well as natural, naturalizing, and naturalized temporality. It questions the *here* and *now* with its quotidian tempos, patterns, and periodicity, and urges the subject to turn to—in the phenomenological sense—the not yet, or the *there* and *then*. This shift opens the field of vision, and directs one's view toward the horizon—a utopian space where “objects and movements . . . burn with anticipation and promise” (26) that galvanize and stimulate hope, desires, and fantasies.

In his future-oriented approach, Muñoz provides a response to antisocial negativity—a particular strand of queer theory most prominently espoused by Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, which advocates the negation and rejection of hope or the future.²⁴ Instead, *Cruising Utopia* “argues against antirelationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity,” and proclaims that “queerness is always in the horizon” (Muñoz 11)—that is, a mode of being in the present that encourages the individual to insist on cruising ahead into a future with alternative spaces, tempos, and kinship formations, rather than combating a

²³ Muñoz extrapolates from the German idealist tradition of the Frankfurt School and in particular Ernst Bloch, who offers an approach to “combat the force of political pessimism” (4), as well as Giorgio Agamben's concept of “potentiality”—“a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense” (9)—that differs from possibility insofar as potentiality is not a thing that “simply might happen” (Muñoz 9).

²⁴ Aside from its investment in theorizing the future, Muñoz' work also seeks to critique Edelman for having a relatively limited focus on particular kind of group—that is, white and middle-class subjects—and for excluding particular subjectivities from discourse based on their embodied identities.

short-sighted assimilationist perspective such as the focus on pragmatic issues like gay marriage and a stagnancy in the present. In so doing, *Cruising Utopia* sets up a temporality that does not reject past and present, but foregrounds the importance of the past “as a field of possibility” (16) for the present in order to envision a future.

In a similar vein, Jasbir Puar describes her work as an “assemblage of temporalities and movements—speed, pace, duration—which is not strictly bound to developmentalist or historical telos or their disruption” (xxii). *Terrorist Assemblages* is characterized by an understanding that time is “nonlinear”²⁵ and “nonmetric,” and seeks to “deconstruct the naturalization of the administrative units of measurement” (xxi). Arguing against the hegemonic rhythms of normative life, Puar, like Muñoz, seeks to maintain a profound sense of an “anticipatory temporality” (xix)—a temporality that is much more closely related to the future than the past and in which subjects explore the present moment while simultaneously looking ahead to what is yet to come.

Akin to both Muñoz and Puar’s investments in futurity, Heather Love’s notion of a “backward future” (147) in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007) is intended to counteract the impetus in some queer theory to idealize the past. Love cautions against blindly valorizing progress and rebukes queer scholars and community members alike for necessitating and insisting on an investment in forward movement and advancement as the only acceptable and even possible narrative. Instead of insisting on an affirmative genealogical methodology, she calls for “a politics forged in the image of exile, of refusal, even of failure” (71) in order to reconceive queer figures and events that do not fit any neat assimilationist

²⁵ In regard to the nonlinearity of time, Puar quotes Elizabeth Freeman’s insistence on the resistance of “chrononormativity” that I mentioned in more detail above.

teleological accounts of queer culture. Only once one is able to see beyond the restrictive and restricting horizon of constant advancement and improvement and embrace feelings of pain and shame, is one able to identify losses that have been ignored and forgotten and mourn them adequately.

Neither theorizing an anticipatory moment in the future nor a time in past, Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" as she emphasizes in her book of the same name, focuses on the present and individuals' ways of being stuck in the present. Positioning the idea of "good-life"²⁶ fantasies at the center of her inquiry, Berlant takes into consideration different types of relationships, "ranging from objects or scenes of romantic love and upward mobility to the desire for the political itself" (*Cruel Optimism* 2). She argues that many are attached to fantasies of the "good life," which are attachments of "enduring reciprocity in couples, family, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work" (2). Berlant examines lives in the present moment, which she conceives to be "a moment in extended crisis" (7), and tracks what happens to individuals once these idealizations and fantasies begin to fray and leave behind subjects that are labeled precarious. These precarious bodies are then left to move around in our contemporary spatio-temporal reality in which "the crisis of the present meets multiple crises of presence" (59) as each individual loses political or economic security in the process, impacting everyone's material and psychological state of well-being.²⁷

²⁶ I will use quotation marks around the phrase good life throughout this dissertation in order to indicate that the notion of having a good life is highly constructed and typically based on socio-cultural, normative ideals around coupledness, kinship relations and formations, job stability, and social security. These ideals are however unattainable fantasies for many individuals in contemporary Western societies.

²⁷ In "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics" (2009) and *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013), Judith Butler emphasizes that social and political institutions induce precarious bodies through disappearing, collapsing, or inadequate social and economic networks of support rather than minimizing it. As a result, these bodies "become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, "Performativity" ii).

Considering notions of negativity, subjectivity, and precarity, Berlant's work not only foregrounds an analysis of the collapse of the "good-life" fantasies in the "crisis of the present"—the moment of precarity—but it also couples these fantasies and desires with the rhetoric of trauma. "[T]rauma shatters the biohistory" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 81) and "[t]rauma can never be let go of: it holds you" (126), it keeps you stuck in the present, it denies you any attachments to others, and blocks your vision of a future. This particular rhetoric, which Berlant employs in the first part of her book, and the aims of her project more generally link her to figures such as Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, and Anne Cvetkovich. Berlant evokes Bersani when she describes trauma as an experience of shattering, as an event that makes identity construction possible rather than impossible; one that transforms without falling into the trap of embracing normative frameworks. Akin to Cvetkovich, Berlant locates trauma on two levels: on the one hand, it is felt on a personal level in the everyday. On the other hand, trauma is also experienced on a larger, global scale, and is related to socio-economic and political precarity in a trans-national, neoliberalist system.

Precisely this "time of dithering" (5), as Berlant calls it, does not provide us with any assurance of our identity, our place of belonging, or our relations with others. While many figures are often depicted as experiencing a sense of stuckness in the present that weighs them down and keeps them in a holding pattern, the experience of an impasse also opens up the possibility for those subjects to uncouple themselves from normative socio-cultural rhythms. Thus, they are able to break with conventional and dominant understandings of time as unfolding in a linear or cyclical fashion. This a-chronology of time is also intimately connected to the spatial realm in which these individuals reside and from where they depart or to which they return. In this sense, the representations of our contemporary neoliberal world is marked by

characters and subjectivities that are caught in a space-time continuum which pulls them into one or the other direction and reorients them. Thus, the present moment urges us to “reinvent, from the scene of survival, new idioms of the political, and of belonging itself, which requires debating what the baseline of survival should be in the near future, which is, now, the future we are making” (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 262). What we ought to strive for is to “imagine a potentialized present that does not reproduce all of the conventional collateral damage” (263); a present that allows us to experiment, to re-vision, and to create new forms of being and ways of inhabiting the world—even though we might fail in the process of doing so.²⁸

Tracing out-of-sync and non-teleological moments of stuckness or endurance and interrogating the construction of past, present, and future in order to probe the normalizing rhythms and routines of “straight time,” these queer-theoretical works are foundational for my readings of (un)timeliness in the momentums and tempos that manifest in my core texts. Drawing together this range of theoretical approaches facilitates a unique and productive conversation between queer-theoretical concepts of time and contemporary German-language texts. This dense theoretical framework, in other words, makes possible my own concept of (un)timely bodies, allowing me to show how recent novels and films collectively explore possibilities for a breaking free from dominant and restrictive social structures.

Concentrating on how, in disrupting the rhythms and routines of “straight time,” the literary and filmic subjects in my core works reveal its normalized and normalizing rhythms and

²⁸ The notion of failure as a springboard to construct and re-imagining the world features prominently in Judith Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). Halberstam’s work engages with the ideas of finding alternatives: (1) to success that is defined according to the conventional frameworks of heteronormativity and capitalism, (2) to “academic legibility and legitimization” as well as academia’s function in the “circulation and reproduction of hegemonic structures” (11), and (3) to archives that re-affirm the status of certain cultural artifacts as “high” culture. Failure, as claimed by Halberstam, “may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (Halberstam 2–3).

cadences, I deem it most productive to theorize *together* both concepts of identity and concepts of time. To this end, I have introduced a range of queer-theoretical notions of subjectivity (section 1.3) alongside other theoretical discussions of how subjects negotiate the instrumental and routinized patterns of day-to-day life (section 1.4). I bring these two strands together to culminate in my theorization of identity and temporality (section 1.5). In putting into dialogue these two distinct strands of discourse and applying them to the German-language context, I demonstrate how, in violating conventional standards and temporal norms, the protagonists in my texts challenge the normative, conventional cadences of “straight time” and instead embrace a sense of “queer time.” In so doing, these subjects make visible how certain temporal patterns structure their daily lives and enforce routines in service of not only a capitalist economic program, but also heteronormative logics. At the same time, these figures reveal that “queer time” offers a release, albeit only temporarily, from these restrictive and normative routines, enabling the envisioning of alternative worlds.

1.5 Theorizing (Un)timeliness: Revisiting Notions of Subjectivity, Precarity, and Potential

Present-day German-language literature and film, as David Clarke and Anke Biendarra both argue, reveals how global capitalism and economic insecurities impact the stability of family networks and people’s understanding of *Heimat*. Both scholars also emphasize that economic and social hegemonic structures discipline and control the subjects who traverse their life-worlds, keeping them fastened in the present moment (Clarke 139; Biendarra 466). As life is increasingly measured according to efficiency, progress, speed, and mobility, according to Biendarra, global capitalism transforms “all social spaces into mere trafficking sites for

commodities and communications” (466). These sites turn many of the figures that populate contemporary German-language literature and film into ghostly presences—specters who are located in space, yet disappearing. As they wander through the modern-day cityscapes that provide them with places that anchor them in the present, their existence is also rejected by and ejected from these spaces. In this regard, the example of these subjects shows that a liberation from the dominant social order is often accompanied by a further subjection to the very same (Clarke 151).

Explicitly focusing on Berlin School films, both Biendarra and Clarke—as well as Marco Abel, Jaimey Fisher, and Kristin Kopp among others—gesture toward time as an important category for the analysis of various figures, but in the end foreground space when interrogating the position and spectral existence of the films’ characters. In a similar vein, Germanists such as Leslie Adelson, Katharina Gerstenberger, Valerie Heffernan, Alice Kuzniar, Gillian Pye, Katrin Sieg, Faye Stewart, and Stuart Taberner analyze contemporary literature with an emphasis on places and space as emblematic in the negotiation of identity politics. In this sense, these scholars stand in for a wider preoccupation with space in late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship.²⁹ Space as an analytical approach is a productive concept not only in the context of contemporary German-language texts. It also proves to be a useful conceptual framework in the theorizing of (political) subjectivities more broadly and in conjunction with other disciplines such as architecture, geography, and anthropology, political science, and gender

²⁹ This emphasis on space and the disregard for time in current scholarship on German-language literature and film echoes both Michel Foucault’s claim in his lecture “Of Other Spaces” in which he asserts that an obsession with time was prevalent in the nineteenth century, while the twentieth century is mostly concerned with space (22) as well as Frederic Jameson’s argument that categories of space predominate the experiences of everyday life and culture in the postmodern world (16).

and queer theory.³⁰ For instance, Butler's work on assemblage is primarily concerned with coming together as a form of asserting popular sovereignty. Butler regards claiming space and appearing together with other bodies as a way to "form networks of resistance" ("Freedom of Assembly" 62) and support. In its theorizing space in a different fashion, political and legal theorist Bonnie Honig's essay on the "politics of home" outlines her engagement with the idea of a space of home, which is positioned vis-à-vis an "elsewhere." In this sense, both Butler and Honig share an investment in conceptualizing how the position and orientation of bodies in space shapes not only the construction of their subjectivities, but also the ways in which they are able to connect to others.

Indeed, space can be a highly productive concept when theorizing subjectivity. As Butler argues, it is important to show up in public spaces as a way to speak up and out, for instance against coercive mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism, economic inequality, and precarity. Similarly, Honig points out that need for "decentered subjects" (272) as an alternative conception of subjectivity that resists "th[e] fantasy of safety and impermeability" (271) in favor of fluidity and openness. As much as my own analysis has been inspired by Butler and Honig's arguments, however, I see a need to approach the construction of subjectivity from a different angle, that is, these bodies also show up at a specific time. They have to be in time in order to be able to forge connections to others and stay for a specific (and sometimes even an unspecific) amount of time. Thus, in order to show up, they have to unhinge themselves from the daily rhythms that structure their individual lives, which might include neglecting their work, family, education, or other

³⁰ See for example works such as *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) by Doreen Massey, *BodySpace: Destablizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (1996) by Nancy Duncan, *Gender, Space, Architecture* (1999) by Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden, and "Sexuality and Space: Queering Geographies of Globalization" (2003) by Jasbir Puar, Dereka Rushbrook, and Louisa Schein.

responsibilities, in order to commit to the temporal patterns of the assembly.

Despite its merits as a category of analysis, space can have its pitfalls. First and foremost, the concept of space often centers on the establishment of a center-margin dichotomy. This binary tends to align individuals who are part of the dominant culture with the center and those who oppose mainstream standards and values with the margins. As a consequence, scholarly writing by both US-based Germanists³¹ and feminist and queer studies,³² in one way or another, understands the ability to transgress (geographical) borders as superior expressions of modern sovereign subjectivity³³ and the only means to oppose dominant hierarchies and fixed essentialized identities.

By foregrounding temporality as a framework of analysis, I intend to add to the existing scholarship that foregrounds space and offer a theoretical concept that provides an alternative to the romanticization of progressive, left-leaning scholarship and politics. To this end, I aim to resist the impetus of overvalorizing transnational mobility and uprootedness by introducing the notions of timeliness and untimeliness. I will elaborate on these terms below, but for now, I note that both describe a subject's relationship to the temporal mandates of neoliberal capitalism. While timeliness is associated with an individual's embeddedness within the system, untimeliness indexes the potential of a detachment from regulatory schedules and coercive routines. Drawing on these two categories, I offer here a concept that adds to the ways in which subjectivities are conceptualized in contemporary German-language texts. My focus on time intends to

³¹ First and foremost, I am thinking here about essays by Claudia Breger, Necia Chronister, Emily Jeremiah, Sonja Klocke, Beret Norman, Carrie Smith-Prei and Lars Richter, and Faye Stewart, to name a few.

³² See works by feminist scholars such as Rosi Braidotti, Robyn Wiegman, and Mirjana Morokvasic.

³³ I define the contemporary sovereign subject to which I am referring here as heterosexual, cis-gendered, white, middle to upper class, ablebodied, and in possession of a legal citizenship status.

deemphasizes the idea of geographical dis-/re-location as a mode of resistance and counteract the romantization and overvalorization of the idea that an escape from the known *Heimat* signals liberation from the controlling limits of the social system. Thus, time as a framework of analysis provides an additional approach to the already existing discourses that center on *Heimat*, foreign spaces as realms of (utopian) existence and resistance, and globalization or glocalization.

This shift to time is important because it allows us to reflect on what types of subjects populate contemporary literature and film and in what ways they are embedded in dominant socio-political and economic power structures. By stressing the significance of temporality as one of the distinctive features and categories of analysis of various German-language literary and filmic texts in the twenty-first century, I hope to move beyond a binary understanding of inside and outside, here and there. Further, an emphasis on temporality permits reflection on questions of the future and the past, two matters that do not enter the conversation when one is preoccupied solely with space.

As I will show, time constitutes a major motif in contemporary works. The novels and films I analyze in the coming chapters display images and concepts of temporality as a key means to explore moments of possibility, even when the individual is embedded and rooted in restrictive and normative social formations. In other words, we find numerous instances in these texts that allow for the formation of temporary temporal utopias, during which individuals are capable of loosening the tight grip of the restrictive, controlling social order and potentially forge connections. However, the subjects in the texts I examine never fully detach themselves from the system, and these moment of escape and bonding do not last. As a result, the literary and filmic figures are forced to contend with the fact that utopia's existence is fleeting. This reality does not render it worthless from the outset, but simply underscores the pervasiveness of interlocking

systems of power and dominance based on socially constructed cultural, political, and economic standards.

In order to add to the current scholarship that foregrounds space, mobility, national and transnational belonging, I take a cue from a number of the queer theorists discussed in the previous two sections of this chapter who have explored how time has been socio-culturally coded and increasingly functions as a regulatory framework in contemporary society. Based on these scholarly discourses, I strive to highlight how the portrayal of temporality in post-89 texts includes moments of nonlinear and asynchronous time. In so doing, I demonstrate how contemporary literature and film negotiates and unearths the collapse of chronological time (the structuring of one's day according to certain rhythms) and teleological time (the organization of one's life around social norms of education, marriage, reproduction, and family).

Based on the various queer-theoretical approaches to temporality discussed above, I read the representation of the protagonists in the contemporary texts of this dissertation—and more generally in post-89 cultural production—as interventions³⁴ into the rhythms of what Muñoz deems “the coercive choreography of a here and now” (162) or what Freeman understands to be “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (3), that is, the need to find and keep employment, to engage in reproductive and non-violent sexual acts, and to be legible to others as productive citizen-subjects.

Sharing an investment in the “there and then,” German film scholar Marco Abel introduces the notion of the “future perfect” (*Counter-Cinema 5*). Abel, in his seminal work on Berlin School films, aligns with Muñoz in his attempt to rethink the present moment, which, in

³⁴ By interventions I mean that these texts serve as examples that encourage active reader and viewer engagement. In this sense, the works have a mediating function insofar as they encourage us to pause and reflect.

turn, impacts our understanding and perception of the past and future. According to Abel, the future perfect is a condition that is grounded in the present—the “here and now” (15). It reveals a time that is “not yet” and always remains “to-come” (229), yet looks back at what was.³⁵ While he is concerned with a type of “presentism [that is] pursued in the name of affecting the future” (22) and that relies on the past as the point of departure, Abel does not engage with *Cruising Utopia* in his work. Yet Abel’s notion of “future perfect” not only resonates with Muñoz’s utopian line of thought, but it also uses the exact same wording. This striking similarity can potentially be attributed to the fact that both scholars draw on the writings of Ernst Bloch. Above all, Abel and Muñoz both reference *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (1954) in which Bloch asserts that “Wesen ist nicht Ge-Wesenheit; konträr: das Wesen der Welt liegt selber an der Front” [Essential being is not Been-ness; on the contrary: the essential being of the world lies itself on the Front] (18) and, in so doing, establishes hope as the central driving force for human beings that ultimately directs subjects toward the future where the “true” meaning of being in the world lies.

Expanding on Muñoz, Freeman, and Abel, I demonstrate that all of the works I examine articulate a sense of longing for a queer utopian “there and then,” yet foreclose the possibility of this future ever fully coming into being. In other words, both the literature and films I examine on the one hand identify a kind of pessimism and apprehension and on the other hand gesture toward a potential or a utopian fantasy of a world beyond the present moment. These alternative possibilities suggest that particular sexual and gendered gestures, performances, and practices hold the potential to create alternative forms of knowledge, affect, and belonging. Thus, the texts portray and grapple with pessimism that allows these subjects to find and embrace new ways of

³⁵ I want to note here that from the standpoint of English grammar, the future perfect tense refers to a time in the future by which an action will have been completed. It indicates completion of the task rather than an openendedness of what is yet to come as Abel has it.

producing, relating, and sustaining—but only temporarily. In so doing, the works entertain the possibility of a validation of subjectivity beyond dominant logics of neoliberalism and heteronormativity, while also withstanding its actualization given the current power structures in place.

This dissertation proposes the idea of (un)timeliness as a way to probe whether a study of time can help us understand how time shapes and impacts bodies and subjectivity and how individuals are positioned or position themselves vis-à-vis institutional power structures. (Un)timeliness attempts to enact an alternative to Muñoz’s “straight time” or Freeman’s “chrononormativity.” Based on the kind of systematic structuring of life within the system that Muñoz and Freeman describe, temporal patterns and rhythms serve as points of reference vis-à-vis which the degree of value and integratedness of each citizen-subject is assessed and determined. Those individuals who are able to display the type of productivity and efficiency valued by the neoliberal capitalist system receive the status of citizen-subject and are granted access to the social system, even rewarded with benefits.³⁶ Thus, the working of “straight time” within society is evocative of the notion of the panopticon as people are encouraged to police and control their behavioral patterns—and those of other citizens—in order to reaffirm and perpetuate the temporal partition and regulation of life (Bentham).

I agree with Muñoz that “[t]he here and now is simply not enough [and that] [q]ueerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (96). However, I diverge from his

³⁶ My notion of (un)timely bodies is evocative of Richard Sennett’s *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (1998) and Oskar Negt’s *Arbeit und menschliche Würde* (2001) in regard to how neoliberal capitalism imposes a new time regimes on individuals that does not allow for the formation of the narrative of a coherent subjecthood and agency.

approach insofar as I consider the present as pertinent to my theorization of (un)timeliness. Instead of urging the embrace of “[q]ueerness ... a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (1) and of emphasizing the importance of “the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1), my concept of (un)timeliness seeks to provide an alternative methodological framework to conceptualize the “here and now” as well as the “there and then” in a way that does not elevate the idea of the future as the only possibility to which one can turn. My concept of being and becoming (un)timely does not insist on the absolute rejection of the now, but acknowledges the possibility of the emergence of a potential in the present moment.

While Muñoz sees potential in the future and insists on the necessity of reaching beyond the present and Freeman connects queerness with the time of the “not now,” I aim to inquire whether there is a possibility to rethink the mandates of equating envisioning a future with advancement and improvement. Rather than necessitating progress and insisting on what Lee Edelman terms “reproductive futurism” (2) as the only possibility to inhabit the world and to form coalitions, individuals in the contemporary German-language texts that I examine develop alternative tempos and projects of world-making that challenge—in the present—the demands to obey traditional circadian rhythms, compulsory progress, individual thriving, and the neoliberal promise of “freedom.”³⁷

³⁷ My use of quotation marks signals that the kind of autonomy and self-determination that a neoliberalist system promises to its subjects relies on their embeddedness in society that interpolates and constrains its subjects. This claim echoes a dynamic visible in Michel Foucault’s works on control and authority in works such as *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and “The Subject and Power” (1982) and Elizabeth Povinelli’s notion of the relationship between “autological subject” and “genealogical society” (4) in *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (2006). Further, this notion reiterates Wendy Brown’s argument that freedom appears as a utopian articulation of a potentiality that functions as a regulating principle—“[n]eoliberal subjects are controlled through their freedom ... because of neoliberalism’s moralization of the consequences of this freedom” (Brown, *Edgework* 44, emphasis in original)—as it conceals society’s power over its members.

Engaging with the question of whether and how individuals face the need to conform to particular norms and standards, I intend to illustrate how many of the characters in contemporary literature and film are faced with constantly changing situations and conditions in their lives in the *now*. These subjects often elect and even desire to conform to the normative temporal rhythms of “straight” time or are coaxed by neoliberal narratives into a faith in self-optimization and progress. However, I do not want to lose sight of the fact that many individuals are confronted with a reality that forces them to act in accordance with the cadences and rhythms of the system.

Extrapolating from the idea of a concurrence and flux of temporal realities, I understand timeliness to characterize the state of abiding by the regulatory temporal norms and rhythms of the capitalist system. More specifically, timeliness, as I theorize it, is closely tied to work and patterns and routines of labor time. Being and becoming timely hinges on the paradox inherent in neoliberalism: namely, the convergence of economic and socio-cultural factors. To be more specific, the majority of citizen-subjects experiences a life-world in which the circulation and prevalence of a narrative of privatization, self-optimization, and “freedom” in public discourse overshadows and distracts from the fact that many lives are evermore controlled and rendered precarious. Central for the successful execution of this ostensibly liberating and empowering management, neoliberal capitalism has reshaped and reconstructed the traditional segmentation of time understood as distinct blocks of work time and free time into time when these discrete units become indistinguishable and continuous. Additionally, neoliberalism relies on the ratification of a range of social policies that have dismantled the social safety net and led to an upward redistribution of power and resources and the biopolitical regulation and alignment of bodies with heteronormativity.

Under neoliberalism, all time is labor time—even as neoliberal capitalism perpetuates the fiction of independence and self-managed and organized daily rhythms; labor time is all pervasive. Modern technology and shifts to project-based, more flexible work hours do not require the individual to abide by the traditional nine-to-five model and allow individuals to structure their day more freely. As a result, for many workers the formerly discrete units of labor time have dissolved completely and have blended seamlessly with what was known as leisure or free time. This amalgamation fuels the engine that sustains the mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism; subjects are given the “freedom” to determine their work hours however they desire. A cell phone and a five-minute ride on the subway allow people to write a short email and a café with Wifi can turn into one’s “office” at any moment.

While neoliberal capitalism rests on and successfully perpetuates the existence of labor time as an all-pervasive yet invisible force, it also presents consumption and mass consumerism as desirable activities that bestow a sense of individualism and self-determination onto subjects. As Daphne Berdahl emphasizes, people perceive the experience of purchasing those consumer goods that they desire not only as an indicator of personal freedom, but also as an expression of their “fundamental rights and democratic expressions of individualism” (235). In this sense, the culture of neoliberalism assures that “self, identity, and labor are defined primarily in relation to consumption” (241) so that work, consumerism, and subjectivity cannot be understood as separate entities under neoliberal capitalism.

Instead of existing as individual categories, they have become interlocking concepts of one system in which many people are blinded by the fantasy that they are capable of actively shaping and determining their lives both professionally and personally. Flexible work hours and constant access to a vast variety of consumer goods, that is, appear to transform individuals into

and legitimize them as the ultimate self-optimized and self-directed citizen-subjects within the market place and, by extension, the nation. In this sense, those who possess enough purchasing power become both consumer and national bodies while others might be—partially or fully—excluded from becoming legible and from affirming their status as members of society.

Given this oxymoronic, dual nature of neoliberalism and the fact that timeliness with its synonyms is typically positively connoted,³⁸ timeliness characterizes precisely the idea that the routines and cadences of individuals are regulated and directed by neoliberal capitalism. This is not to say that all subjects perceive these routines as restrictive or that they have the freedom to choose an alternative order. Indeed, close examination of my core group of literary and cinematic works indicates that there is a range of ways to relate to timeliness. Individuals can embrace their embeddedness within regulatory systems of power and can even be content with their position inside the system, despite their exposure to injustices. These subjects may desire to embrace the system when this very same system repeatedly attempts to prevent these bodies from entering the normative temporal structures or seeks to eject some of those bodies who have inhabited and claimed their position inside. Others, however, might desire to escape the system, but are forced to exist within oppressive structures in order to survive.

In contrast, *untimely* commonly refers to actions and events that are inopportune, unwelcome, or premature. As I deploy the term, being or becoming untimely signifies the potential to detach oneself from those cadences and rhythms that neoliberal capitalism prescribes and reinforces. In this sense, untimeliness describes moments when subjects are out-of-sync. In

³⁸ Wendy Brown's essay on untimeliness and political criticism introduces the notion of timeliness in the context of the importance of raising political criticism at times that might appear inopportune to many. Although my approach in this dissertation is different from hers and linked to neoliberal capitalism and its routinized labor time, Brown's understanding of timeliness as linked to "appropriateness, mannerliness, or civility," or to the notion of "temperateness about when, how, and where one raises certain issues or mentions certain problems" (*Edgework* 4) is precisely what supports this idea of being timely as being a positive attribute or quality.

this respect, the concept of untimeliness links both temporality and the construction of subjectivity. In its 2016 spring issue, the feminist zine *feral feminisms*, titled “Untimely Bodies: Futurity, Resistance, and Non-Normative Embodiment,” establishes a similar link. As the title suggests, the issue focuses on how an engagement with temporality offers ways to conceptualize bodies and their strategies of resistance. While similarities between the issue and my dissertation certainly exist, I came to my own notion of untimeliness before its publication, and my analyses move beyond the idea that acts of resistance possess a higher value than conforming to the status quo or the notion that opposition to normativity has to be exclusively tied to a future *then*.

Untimeliness describes how at times individuals actively pursue lives apart from market value, corporate profit, and socio-economic status and are able to free themselves from the shackles of a highly routinized and regulated labor time and in so doing demonstrate the possibility of being out-of-sync. In this sense, the concept uncovers a temporary promise or a fleeting hopefulness of breaking away from the hegemonic social structures emerging from capitalist-driven labor. At other times, being and becoming untimely are not matters of choice for subjects. Regardless of whether it is chosen or imposed, however, untimeliness as I theorize it, can be understood as a response to moments of stuckness, impassivity, abandonment, and endurance—moments that produce tempos that index unboundness from normative temporal rhythms, but do not exclusively direct the subject toward a *then* as a time that allows for the fulfillment of desires.

However, being or becoming untimely, as I theorize these two modes of existence above, do not necessarily indicate a complete liberation from the precarious circumstances subjects experience when embedded within the system. Individuals might be able to escape the restrictive structures of neoliberal labor time temporarily and become untimely bodies in ways that do not

automatically render them free and signal an absolute detachment. I attempt to resist the glorification of abandoning the system and fully detaching oneself in order to inhabit a position outside of the social order. In this sense, I seek to avoid the pitfall of overvaluing untimeliness, which would suggest that this mode of being might be seen as radical, liberated, and thus more desirable. Instead, I argue that on the one hand untimeliness indicates a potential to disconnect from neoliberal capitalism and enables bodies to persist and forge connections; on the other hand it may create moments of heightened precarity for certain bodies when they are extracted from those structures that shape the socio-cultural and economic fabric of their life-worlds.

Given the particular ways in which many subjects in contemporary literature and films are always in flux, moving in and out of regimes of normative rhythms and non-normative temporal formations, a conceptualization of timeliness and untimeliness as two separate categories does not accurately reflect the temporal realities of the individuals in my texts. Rather, I propose merging the two words by using the parenthetical (un)timely. Written thus, the term is meant to indicate the possibility of conditions that are indeed constantly changing and to avoid a rigidly bifurcated model of conceptualizing temporal realities. While the use of the prefix “un” appears to suggest a dichotomous mode of thinking, the subjects in contemporary German literary and cinematic texts never inhabit a single position, but are always negotiating their positionality vis-à-vis normative, temporal structures.

In this regard, (un)timeliness encourages us to think beyond a binary, clear-cut division between being in-sync and aligned with labor time (timely) and detached and out-of-sync (untimely). The parenthetical modifier foregrounds subjects’ embeddedness in neoliberal labor time, while also suggesting that they are able to push against the system. The characters in twenty-first-century literature and film I analyze demonstrate that it is not only impossible fully

to escape the cadences and structures of neoliberal time, but also that one's rootedness within the system can also render one precarious. While the instability of one's temporality can elicit affective responses that range from happy going-with-the-flow to ambivalence and even fierce resistance, what remains constant is the steady, ubiquitous beat of labor time.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter two looks at Angelina Maccarone's 2005 film *Fremde Haut* to explore the concept of endurance and the impact of timeliness on the corporeal legibility of its protagonists. The film portrays how subjects strive to endure in a world that does not always provide the resources or option to make acts of endurance possible. Thus, the characters are repeatedly forced or aspire to negotiate their desire to belong. In so doing, they contend with the exhaustion they experience from constructing and reconstructing their identities to be tolerated and inhabit a space.

Chapter three interrogates the ways in which libidinal pleasure and desire play a role in the construction and negotiation of subjectivity of three protagonists in Barbara Kirchner's dystopian crime novel *Die verbesserte Frau* (2001). My investigation of the text centers on how the temporal dictates of a neoliberal cultural economy shapes the emergence of sexual fantasies and experiences for its protagonists. As the novel's characters explore both normative and non-normative rhythms of time, they inhabit a multitude of shifting positions, which allow them to champion and challenge traditional conceptions of identity, pleasure, and desire.

Although they accomplish it through different media, genres, and plots, *Fremde Haut* and *Die verbesserte Frau* both foreground the coercive nature of the schedules and temporal rhythms of neoliberal capitalism. Both texts emphasize the impact that labor time has on the staging and legibility of the protagonists' identities. As subjects in the film and the novel are forced or decide

voluntarily to make themselves intelligible to others, they run the risk of being misread or being exposed to and by others. While one might assume that this type of exposure is negatively connoted, both texts demonstrate that under particular circumstances such misreading can be favorable for individuals, allowing them to forge connections to others, even if those bonds are not permanent.

Chapter four looks at Juli Zeh's *Corpus Delicti: Ein Prozess* (2009) and Antje Rávic Strubel's *Kältere Schichten der Luft* (2007), showing how both texts explore the ways in which social, cultural, and political structures control, monitor, and regulate the respective protagonists' bodies and construction of their subjectivities. My discussions of the novels foregrounds the possibility that particular performative acts at times render certain bodies precariously illegible within the dominant socio-cultural system, while at other times they may still reside within the system. By doing and undoing their state of belonging and disposability, the characters in these novels thwart any neat division between existing "inside" or "outside" the system. The novels' two female protagonists challenge the prevalent tendency to valorize resistance, embracing those instances when they register as belonging to the dominant system. Moreover, distinct formal aspects of Zeh's and Strubel's texts that prompt readers to pause and potentially re-read passages encourage them to interrogate critically their own desire for both a linear narrative and an optimistic resolution with a happy ending.

In chapter five, I demonstrate how the protagonists in Christoph Hochhäusler's 2005 *Falscher Bekenner* and Christian Petzold's 2005 *Gespenster* destabilize normative ideas of labor, leisure, and pleasure. I examine how the subjects in both films navigate their attachments to and detachments from coercive normative structures and how certain instances of stuckness enable the characters to glance ahead temporarily and experience a sense of hope. As two films

exemplary of the counter-cinema of the Berlin School, these texts comment on the prevailing dominant status of certain formal traditions of mainstream cinema through a unique style and film aesthetics. This atypical filmic atmosphere, which I call (un)timely aesthetics, not only defies customary practices and techniques of mainstream (Hollywood) cinema, but also gives viewers time to reflect upon their own lives by slowing down or rapid speeding up of filmic time, as the camera changes its perspective on and distance from objects and characters.

In their shared impetus to stimulate readers and viewers to interrogate contemporary regimes of cultural and identity production, both relevant realist novels by Zeh and Strubel and the Berlin School films by Petzold and Hochhäusler make visible the key transformations taking place at the dawn of the twenty-first century. As they dismantle heretofore propagated notions of essential Germanness, contextualize identity as a socially constructed and performative concept, investigate how time determines the structures of human existence, and engage in debates that connect local specificities to larger global and transnational issues, these works thematize how the cultural debates of this particular historical moment are in an in-between state and constantly shifting. Their commitment to portraying transition and transformations not only reference distinct social changes, but also seek to stimulate reflection and invigorate discussion to make such changes possible.

Chapter 2

Acts of Endurance: Corporeal Legibility and Modes of (Be)Longing in *Fremde Haut*

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We’ve just crossed over the border and left Iranian air space” (00:34–00:41). Opening with these routinized, formulaic phrases uttered over the loudspeaker system by a male voice with a crackling, metallic quality, Angelina Maccarone’s 2005 film *Fremde Haut* cuts from a long shot through an airplane window located near the wing to another long shot of the interior of the cabin. Positioned in the center of the frame, a woman wearing a black headscarf, dark sunglasses, and a black fitted coat, sits still and erect in a window seat next to a man. At first, her look and her posture convey a sense of motionlessness or stasis; this impression is abruptly unsettled as soon as the captain’s words become audible. In other words, these two sentences set things into motion, literally galvanizing some of the passengers into action, but also figuratively triggering the unraveling of the narrative of the film. As the people move around in their seats and the women take off their headscarves and loosen their pony tails, their reactions to the words make visible an act of doing and undoing of particular markers that make them legible as on the one hand belonging to—or at least staging an affinity with—and on the other hand being regulated by a specific groups of people—Western ideals on the one hand and Middle Eastern ones on the other hand. This particular gesture of unveiling also emphasizes the ways in which bodies and individuals are often forced to conform to or deliberately align themselves with dominant regimes of power. As they negotiate their

relation to power, at times they can experience a sense of autonomy and mobility while at other times they are confronted with imposed constraints and limits.

This opening sequence not only touches on some of the main themes of this film, but it is also evocative of the larger questions central to this chapter: How do identities become legible in *Fremde Haut*? How do particular identity markers of its characters allow for or restrict their ability to move, and how is their incapacity constitutive of their experiences of longing and belonging—longing for a belonging, belonging through one’s longing? Attempting to negotiate precisely this relationship of wanting and needing to have a place in the world and struggling with prevailing cultural expectations and norms, Fariba Tabrizi (Jasmin Tabatabai), an Iranian translator, escapes from Iran, where she was threatened with the death penalty after her relationship with a married woman was discovered. Upon arrival in Germany, she faces a German immigration officer in the refugee detention center at Frankfurt Airport, but refuses to state the true reason for leaving her home country. Although it is never made explicit to the viewer why Fariba chooses not to give the true reasons for her quest for asylum, a possible explanation is her fear of disclosing her same-sex sex acts in front of the male Iranian translator as the reason for being cast out of Iran. This personal revelation and the violence inflicted upon her in Iran would have potentially increased her chances of being granted asylum in Germany, but the film does not comment on Fariba’s decision to claim to be a political refugee, a lie that causes the German border control agent to deny her application for asylum. When Siamak Mustafai (Navid Akhavan), a fellow countryman whom she meets at the center, commits suicide, Fariba assumes his identity and uses his temporary residency permit to stay in Germany.

As Siamak^{F39}, the protagonist—now perceived socially as male—is re-located to a refugee home in the small town Sielmingen in Baden-Württemberg, where he faces the challenge of how to perform⁴⁰ his subjectivity in different social settings to pass as an Iranian man. In order to earn money to purchase a forged passport, he accepts a seasonal job in a *Sauerkraut* processing factory, where he meets Anne (Anneke Kim Sarnau). After her initial skepticism toward the new worker's presence, Anne goes on a date with Siamak^F because of a lost bet with co-worker and friend Waltraut (Monika Hansen). As she continues to spend time with Siamak^F, Anne begins to uncover Fariba's identity. When Siamak^F is to be deported to Iran, Anne and Fariba (now perceived by Anne to be female) successfully steal a car so that Fariba can obtain a new fake passport and stay in Germany. Just when Fariba spends the night with Anne, Uwe (Hinnerk Schönemann), Anne's former lover who is still in love with her, and his friend Andi (Jens Münchow) show up at Anne's apartment unexpectedly. When Uwe demands an explanation, the situation escalates and Anne's son Melvin (Leon Philipp Hofmann) calls the police.

These confrontations between the two men and Fariba as well as Fariba and the police toward the end of the film signal the film's ongoing investment in the question of what performative acts reveal about legibility and illegibility and one's status as a subject. The answer in *Fremde Haut* in regard to Siamak^F/Fariba is devastating to her and her budding relationship with Anne. Instead of rendering her visible as an acceptable subject and granting her the right to

³⁹ I will use the superscripted capital letter "F" to visually indicate that it is Fariba passing as Siamak. When referring to these instances, I will also use male pronouns to emphasize the gendered perception of others rather than Fariba's self-identification as a female subject. However, the pronouns are not marked with a superscript.

⁴⁰ I will provide a more detailed explanation of my choice of the use of "to perform" in the context of my analysis of Maccarone's film below. For now, I want to clarify that I employ this specific verb in order to on the one hand reference Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and on the other hand indicate my awareness that Fariba's change into Siamak is a type of performance.

belong, the falsified passport fails to save Fariba and she is arrested and deported. The film closes in a similar manner as it began with Fariba on an airplane. This time, however, she is not donning her headscarf like all the other women on the plane. During the last minutes of the film, we watch Fariba go to the bathroom where she produces Siamak's Iranian passport, which she had hidden in her shoe, and changes back into Siamak^F. The open ending of the film leaves it to the viewer to decide which acts in the film can be understood as doing or undoing a subject, and which ones reveal the potential of a temporary agentic doing and undoing.

Engaging with these questions, I turn to a variety of sequences in *Fremde Haut* in order to examine the various ways in which the film's protagonists on the one hand construct their subjecthood and on the other hand are perceived by other characters. Specifically, I focus on moments that reveal a chasm between the construction and reception of the figures' identities in which they are read and subsequently become legible and illegible, as they either succeed or fail to occupy positions that would affirm a sense of social belonging. As the use of parentheses in the chapter title as well as throughout the first few pages of this chapter might indicate, I will undertake a reading of the film that grapples with the multi-layeredness of subjectivities and the shifts and blending of various aspects of identity that each situational setting might entail, one that acknowledges the impossibility of providing one single clear-cut answer that applies to each individual and every scene.

My analysis foregrounds how *Fremde Haut* features a variety of individuals who both legally and illegally cross geographical, socio-economic, sexed, gendered, raced, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, and how the main protagonist, Fariba, transgresses all of these at various times. As she navigates the complex force fields of power within German society, she becomes a subject who strives to endure in a world that does not provide the necessary resources to make

these acts of endurance possible. The figures in Maccarone's film exhibit how a particular fluidity of identity categories positions them in precarious situations in which their identities are only partially legible and thus turns them into figures who become marginalized or who desire to resist belonging. Constantly forced to negotiate their desires both to belong and to remain alien, the characters not only serve as examples for the dissolution of ostensibly essential identity markers, but they also operate outside of the dominant logics of mass culture and can thus be read as a commentary on the changing socio-cultural landscape of German society in the twenty-first century.

With these broader concerns in mind, I show how *Fremde Haut* visualizes and encourages its viewers to contemplate two queer-theoretical frameworks that not only provide the methodological anchor for this chapter, but also serve as a springboard to unearth what I call the "temporality of tolerance"; that is, they reveal how long particular bodies are condoned within socio-cultural and political power structures and at what point they register as simply too much to tolerate. Thus, the temporality of tolerance indicates that not everybody—or rather not every body—is always welcome within the social realm. In other words, my concept makes visible what kinds of individuals are allowed to assert their presence in the present moment and which ones are overlooked or rendered invisible and excluded permanently, left merely with the illusion that there exists at some point in the future the possibility of registering as a body that matters.

In her seminal work *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler examines how the hegemonic power of heterosexuality determines what kinds of bodies matter, what kind of gender expressions are legible as "proper," and what counts as viable as far as sex is concerned. Extrapolating from Butler's notion of bodies that matter and Elizabeth Povinelli's concept of

endurance in *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011), I seek to show how the film mobilizes certain discourses around the body and identity that make visible the ways in which filmic subjects are made or make themselves legible in order to experience a sense of belonging—to/within the state—and to forge connections to others. I am particularly concerned with the various types of violence—bureaucratic and physical as well as declarative, or what Judith Butler calls “injurious speech”⁴¹ (*Excitable Speech 2*)—that repeatedly threaten the ways in which Fariba (and Siamak^F) not only chooses to express her desire to belong, but also navigates and positions herself inside or at the margins of the social realm of the filmic world.

Proceeding from this understanding of the desire both to belong and to resist belonging, the following sections in this chapter hone in on particular sequences in *Fremde Haut* that illuminate performative acts and situational settings in which subjects are forced to bear, withstand, and sustain both the direct and indirect impact of state power as well as socio-cultural discursive ideals of which bodies matter in what particular ways. Guided by both aesthetic and narrative content, my analysis seeks to identify and foreground sequences that have not been discussed in the most of the scholarship on the film, which has generally focused on space, notions of border crossing, the construct and construction of the nation, and the role of ethnic and religious otherness within the European hegemony.⁴² My reading will examine how these

⁴¹ In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), Judith Butler defines linguistic injury as “the effect not only of the words by which one is addressed but the mode of address itself, a mode—a disposition or conventional bearing—that interpellates and constitutes a subject” (2) and, in so doing, points to the fact that speech acts possess the potential to hurt doubly. Given this premises, Fariba experiences a sense of psychological and emotional violence based on both the message of the verbal insults and the act of deliverance of the very same.

⁴² A majority of the essays on *Fremde Haut* engages with the notion of nation and discusses certain scenes that are related to Fariba/Siamaka’s ethnicity and religion in order to emphasize her/his Muslim identity as a critical identity marker. For further reading see essays by scholars such as Alice Kuzniar, Sandra Ponzanesi, Rachel Lewis, and Michele Aaron, among others.

moments when characters are in and out-of-sync with normative temporal rhythms not only point to the precarious existence of particular subjectivities, but also reveal the potential for the expressions of alternative relationalities and intimacies.

Praised for its powerful depiction of intersectional subjectivity, its stunning cinematography, and its non-idealized representation of an unconventional love story, Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* was nominated for domestic as well as international film prizes in various categories, including awards for editing, best performance by an actress in a leading role, and best feature film. While these nominations and awards substantiate official recognition and validation of the film and all the people involved in the production process, *Fremde Haut* was not only hailed by film critics and festival judges (Richardson np). The movie has also received significant scholarly attention from both North American and UK Germanists and non-Germanists alike, who point to some themes already addressed by the film's critics, such as questions of gender, sexuality, nation, and nationality.

Rachel Lewis emphasizes the film's political and legal aspects and relates these to the struggles of lesbian asylum seekers in the twenty-first century. She stresses that laws are created based on the fact that most applicants are men who are persecuted for their political stance, which often does not account for and include lesbian women abused by relatives or partners in domestic settings. Such abuse is sometimes less visible to the state and subsequently goes undocumented. These women are also denied asylum based on the fact that their identities do not neatly fit into European and North American stereotypes of lesbians and are judged by adjudicators based on these false notions of "how lesbians 'look' and 'live'" (Lewis 430).

Michele Aaron articulates a similar challenge to the dominant mode of reading identities; she situates *Fremde Haut* in the genre of Queer Lesbian Film and argues that the film's

depictions of the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race, and nation challenge the dominance of Euro- and US-centric filmmaking and editing practices (324–25). Akin to Aaron, Germanists Emily Jeremiah, Faye Stewart, Britta Kallin, and Alice Kuzniar interrogate the link in the film between the constructions of nation and gender and the ways these notions fuel anxieties about normative conceptions of Germanness as well as a specific ideas of a hegemonic masculinity (Jeremiah, “Touching Distance” 591–98; Kuzniar, “Diasporic Queers” 255–59; Stewart, “22 October 2005” 598–601; Kallin np). Leanne Dawson and Sandra Ponzanesi each engage in a comparative analysis of the film in conjunction with non-German films—the US film *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999) and the British-Pakistani *Yasmin* (2004) and the Italian *The Unknown Woman* (2006), respectively. While Dawson’s comparative approach underscores how social, geographical, and bodily borders are policed in these three films, Ponzanesi emphasizes that in European migrant cinema strangers are never outsiders, but part of how Europe constitutes itself. Thus, the films negotiate questions of nationality, borders, and identity. Arguing that “[i]t is a story about us not them” (82), Ponzanesi, like Kuzniar, explains that the ways in which migrant and refugee identities are constructed reveals a lot about the anxieties of the dominant culture (Kuzniar, “Diasporic Queers” 260–61; Ponzanesi 83–84). The depictions of these subjects offer the potential for the viewer to critically interrogate their own complacency in enabling certain bodies to sustain their existence in society while denying this right to others.

While I agree with these scholars that the film serves as a commentary on German culture and its stereotypical conceptions of gender expression, its compulsory heteropatriarchal system, and its xenophobic tendencies and fear of otherness, particularly with regard to the protagonist’s Muslim identity, my take on the film differs from their approaches insofar as it intentionally seeks to make it about “them.” That is to say, I intend to focus on Fariba (and, by extension,

Siamak^F), her/his desire to belong and to forge bonds, and the different types of violence inflicted upon her/him in lieu of using her as a proxy that (1) turns the spotlight on the German nation and the identity politics of its citizens or (2) is emblematic of the Westernized version of the liberated Muslim woman. Moreover, unlike many Westerners, I do not see the moment of unveiling as a sign of Fariba's embrace of Western ideals of freedom and emancipation from the restrictive structures of Muslim culture.⁴³

Furthermore, I want to caution against characterizing Fariba as a lesbian and want to distance myself from the use of this identity category as a label for her. In order to circumvent the definition of part of her subjectivity through the use of this particular marker, I employ the phrase "same-sex sex acts and relationships" to describe her actions and connection to others. I do so not only to account for the fact that Fariba never refers to herself as a lesbian at any point in the film nor is characterized by others as such, but also to avoid the universalization and hegemonizing impetus of identity theories and politics in the global North as proposed by scholarship that theorizes queerness in the global South.⁴⁴ To be more precise, I do not wish to impose a framework of reference that relies on mapping certain identity markers onto subjects in order to make them identifiable within Western societies. Instead I focus on the acts as libidinal expressions of intimacy, desire, and relationality without requiring them to function constitutively of Fariba's subjectivity.

Throughout the last few decades a large body of scholarship within the humanities,

⁴³ For further reading see works by Lila Abu-Lughod, Saba Mahmood, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherry Moraga, as well as Elizabeth Povinelli, Amanda Lock Swarr, Gayatri Gopinath, Eng-Beng Lim, just to name a few.

⁴⁴ Some seminal works are Ashley Tellis and Sruti Bala's *The Global Trajectories of Queerness: Same-Sex Politics in the Global South* (2015), Amanda Lock Swarr's *Sex in Transition: Remaking Gender and Race in South Africa* (2012), Eng-Beng Lim's *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performances in the Asias* (2014), and Gopinath, Gayatri's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005).

political, and social sciences has emerged that critically interrogates and challenges the hegemonic position and the authoritative voice that intellectuals from the global North—particularly the US and Western Europe—assume in various academic disciplines. While many of these voices speak from within these privileged spaces of dominance, others reside outside of them and attempt to theorize practices, performative acts, and utterances of subjects in the global South from a different vantage point that does not necessitate the legitimization of their claims by Western discursive frameworks.

In breaking with the idea of making this analysis exclusively “about us,” I deemphasize particular scenes of the film that have dominated the academic discourse and film criticism on *Fremde Haut* and instead foreground instances when gestures determine the particular temporality of certain acts to address the central notions of this chapter: endurance and belonging.⁴⁵ Looking at instances in the film when certain bodies are exposed to institutional or socio-cultural power structures within which they are asked to or are required to negotiate their ways of adhering to certain temporal patterns in order to fit in, I will foreground specific moments when subjects become visible (and, as extension thereof, move from illegibility to legibility), struggle to persist, remain unseen, or register explicitly as bodies that do not matter and as a result face the threat of expulsion. I am particularly interested in the ways in which various subjects in *Fremde Haut* populate their social world and desire to belong by forging relational bonds with others. To be more specific, their longing to establish a relationship or to resist the emergence of connections, is predicated on how and, even more importantly, when

⁴⁵ Most scholars and critics analyze the film, focusing on Anne’s commentary on Fariba’s necklace with the hand of Fatima during the sequence when Anne looks at Fariba’s hand and draws a parallel to the necklace, or the shift in Fariba’s gender expression from a more masculine to a more feminine one upon revealing the truth about her identity to Anne.

particular identity markers of certain individuals are made visible and thus become legible, and when they are purposely hidden from direct view, or are misread. In this respect, the film emphasizes not only that belonging is tightly linked to performative acts that make legible or render illegible one's subjectivity, but also that individuals are forced to persist or to move on, which allows for bonds to form and rupture again.

2.1 (Un)Timely Hauntings: Persisting in/vis-à-vis the State and the Temporality of Tolerance

In *Fremde Haut*, the viewers are confronted with the idea that certain bodies matter in the eyes of German state authorities and society from the very onset of the film. I will discuss the idea of a body that matters in more detail, but for now let me say briefly that to matter means to register as present and as a subject because one's identity legibly manifests certain socio-cultural norms. I intend to show how these different modes of existence are linked to times when these bodies are asked to or deliberately negotiate their way of adhering to certain normative rhythms and temporal patterns. One of my goals in this chapter is to outline how time affects the ways these figures construct and perform their subjectivities and reconfigure their relationship and sense of belonging to the state.

To demonstrate how *Fremde Haut* negotiates issues of endurance and the (un)timely body, I return to the sequence on the airplane that opened this chapter. The initial sequence in *Fremde Haut* with the captain's announcement about leaving Iran and the airplane "cross[ing] over the border" might prompt a reading of the film that privileges spatial analyses not only of the beginning sequence, but also of the rest of the film. While such an approach is certainly highly productive and informative with regard to the forces shaping the subjectivity of the film's

protagonists, the captain's statement as a critical moment in the film is less important for its content than for its function in the sequence. To be more precise, the declaration is a signpost of temporal rupture, which makes visible a shift in tempo and speed. This particular moment reconfigures time for Fariba as she has been one of the women on the plane who are sitting and waiting for time to pass until the captain's words release them from their immobility. This pronouncement initiates movement in the female passengers and emphasizes a sudden transformation in/of the bodies of the women in the cabin, a transition from a time of stasis to activity; this activity is highly charged, for it reconfigures the visibility and legibility of subjects.

These mandates of constructing identity in certain ways to be and become legible as a body that matters and one's status as a citizen-subject in society are of course closely linked to the spaces the subject frequents. However, I intend instead to hone in on the temporal dimension of belonging and movement. More specifically, I argue that bodies are exposed to and sometimes even endorse the rhythms and cadences of "straight time" that is dictated and enforced in contemporary, capitalist-driven society. That is, bodies become legible, they matter not only when they appear in specific places, but also when they match—either by desire or demand—the tempos of the dominant social order. At times they yearn for being in sync; at other times they are coerced into being timely, into operating at the same pace as the system, and into speeding up and slowing down when the structures of labor and leisure time demand it. These shifts and changes in pace result in the fulfillment and satisfaction of their longing for recognition as bodies that matter, who are granted a sense of belonging.

At the same time, some bodies are forced or constrained to prevail in their life-worlds while others might actively choose to reject governing social norms and regulations altogether. What all these bodies have in common is the fact that they move in unfamiliar and novel ways:

that is, while some are being thrust forward, held back, or blocked completely, others opt to speed up, slow down, or come to an abrupt stop. As they are pressured or elect to change their pace and also/or merely their direction, these individuals navigate the zones of their socio-cultural present based on a speed that is incongruent with normative tempos. In so doing, they become untimely bodies, for instance, figures for whom time unfolds at a different velocity than do the routinized patterns of “straight time.” In other words, they traverse the zones of their existence at a different speed, a speed that is characterized by an out-of-synchness. This lack of synchronicity, in turn, allows them to unhinge themselves from the dictates imposed by the dominant socio-cultural, political, economic, and identity-governing structures. The detachment that proceeds from their untimeliness grants these subjects the possibility of apprehending their social worlds in ways that allow them to forge alternative relations and bonds.

While Fariba is aligned with Germany’s state mandates and thus recognized by others as an individual who exists within the system for a discrete amount of time, she is concomitantly not permitted to become a “proper” subject or, in other words, a body that matters. As part of the bureaucratic process, she has no other choice but to accept being completely immobile but nevertheless has to be ready to move whenever told to do so by the German authorities. In this respect, Fariba is not given the opportunity to engage in any of the ostensibly normative daily rhythms that other people take for granted and would allow her to become legible as a subject, and thus remains in a state of suspension. She is forced to cooperate and to endure in the present in the ways the state demands, but at the same she remains a subject that never progresses toward a *then*. In this sense, she is an individual whose very existence and legibility are always contingent on the temporality of tolerance: a time of being present but never registering as such, of being asked—or better yet forced—to endure in a *now* that never extends into a *then*. As

Fariba is allowed to enter Germany, but only granted permission to stay in the refugee detention center at the airport before being sent back to Iran, the German authorities preclude the possibility of Fariba integrating herself into society and forging bonds with other Germans. She is unable to experience any sense of belonging within German society since it is always already unattainable in the exact moment the desire for it arises.

While Siamak^F is tolerated within Germany's border for only fourteen days after meeting with the German authorities, at which point he faces deportation, Siamak^F's Polish roommate Maxim (Yevgeni Sitokhin) at the asylum home has lived in such a state of limbo for six years. Although struggling at first to connect to Maxim and unable to secure employment due to the lack of a work permit, Siamak^F manages to obtain menial labor at a *Sauerkraut* factory with the help of Maxim. Although he does not have the necessary paperwork to be employed like German citizens, with contractually protected work hours, pay, health care, social security, and vacation days, he must nevertheless abide by the routines of factory work. At the same time, he needs to adapt to certain socio-cultural customs and practices of the Western world, such as eating traditional German food with the other employees during the factory lunch hour and taking off his hat when sitting at the table.

Sitting down to eat dinner and to watch low-quality video recordings of Maxim's village and the region's landscape, Siamak inquires whether this is Maxim's village. Maxim asserts, "Ja... mein Dorf. – Schön. – Schön, ja... Bin aber lange weg. Sechs Jahre. ... Immer in diesem Zimmer" [Yes... my village. – Nice. – Nice, yes... But I've been away a long time. Six years. ... Here in this room] (34:50–35:12). Although granted permission to remain in Germany for the past six years, even Maxim—akin to Fariba and Siamak^F—represents an (un)timely body who is forced to abide by the mandates of a temporality of tolerance. On the one hand, he registers as

timely because he follows the same daily schedule as his German coworkers at the *Sauerkraut* factory and goes on trips on the weekends to visit his German girlfriend. He has adjusted to the normative patterns of labor and leisure time and is thus able to endure as a subject because of his willingness to adhere to the rhythms and tempos of the economy of the dominant culture.

Although not explicitly mentioned in the film, the possibility of choosing otherwise is not a viable option for Maxim because it is precisely his adjustment to certain temporal patterns and rhythms—labor time at the factory on weekdays, free time in the evenings and on the weekends—as well as the rigid perpetuation of these routines that keep his body contained within the hegemonic socio-cultural framework, or contained enough to push his body onward in the *now*. He is, however, never granted the possibility to advance into a *then* on his own. He is tolerated as long as he continues to remain visible to Germany’s bureaucratic institutions as the Polish migrant who is unable to live anywhere but in the asylum home and whose status does not grant access to any social services or rights. In this sense, Maxim registers as present, but is never given enough support and aid to assert his corporeal presence and subjectivity in order to register as a subject.

On the other hand, his persistence is contingent upon his complacency with the routinized structures of “straight time” that limits his field of vision. In a fashion reminiscent of the Benjaminian angel of history, Maxim’s existence in the *now*—in the present moment “in diesem Zimmer”—positions him to become an untimely body who is only able to advance toward a *then* when directing his gaze at his past. As he watches the dated, poor quality, amateur videos of his village over and over again, they become reminders of a time beyond the rhythms and tempos of the dominant German culture: that is, these acts of re-watching these videos turn into reenactments of a particular present moment, which is, by the time Maxim and Siamak^F watch

the films, already a time of the past that enables him to envision a future. To be more precise, the videos preserve the village and the landscape at a specific moment in time before Maxim left, and six years later still aid Maxim's fantasy of his village. Although such attachment to the past might seem counterproductive because it does not allow one to move forward, the videos also fuel a sense of future-orientedness in the Polish man. He derives pleasure not only from the memories of his past, but his reminiscence of his former life reminds him to carry on and to endure in order to be able, one day, to become permanently untimely, to detach from the temporal pace enforced by German society, and to return to his village in Poland.

This notion of enduring within the temporal structure of German society that is governed by the rhythms of labor and leisure time is further emphasized with Siamak^F's securing of illegal employment. Even without the necessary workers' permits and legal documents, Maxim and Siamak^F abide by the rhythms and routines of the factory. They comply with the daily schedule, eat traditional German food with the German employers and employees during the regulated lunch hour, and follow German customs and manners. By partaking in and subscribing to a particular German working-class culture, and in this particular case that of Sielmingen, Siamak^F becomes a timely body, able to adapt to the regulations and rituals of the factory. He is in-sync with the speed and habits of the German working-class labor economy, and while lacking the official documentation, registers as a body—and more specifically a working body—that matters at work and thus within a certain socio-cultural stratum.

The lack of papers forces Siamak^F to separate himself from the rhythm of labor time to avoid potential arrest and deportation. He has to become an untimely body when customs inspectors enter the factory property to review “Lohnsteuerkarten, Arbeitsverträge...” [tax records, work contracts] (37:45) that attest to the legal status of the employees. As soon as

Siamak^F sees the policemen enter the building, the regular and steady pace of labor time changes and frantic and jumpy tempos dominate the sequence. Siamak^F runs through the factory to find a place to hide while the other employees continue their work. A medium tracking shot not only foregrounds the active abandonment of the labor task but also highlights a drastic and abrupt shift in tempo. It constructs a sense of haste, that is, which creates the illusion of Siamak^F moving quickly through the halls of the factory past the other workers and machines. This emphasis on speed accentuates his untimely out-of-syncness and underscores Siamak^F's precarious position of non-belonging and isolation from the others.

This portrayal of Siamak^F's out-of-sync tempo changes, however, with a cut. The subsequent long shot depicts him still running and then stopping very abruptly. Another cut to a medium shot of Anne, who is standing inside a container, causes a change of pace and brings an abrupt halt to the momentum and velocity that dominated the previous shots. As we watch cabbages falling down steadily into the container with Anne standing in the back, we are reminded of and returned to the monotonous nature of factory work and the passing of labor time at a steady and perpetual rhythm. A reverse cut to a medium shot depicts Siamak^F and Maxim crouched in the corner of the container where shredded cabbage slowly buries the two.

While this camera position emphasizes the constant and regular cadence of time visualized and concretized through the material object of the cabbage, it also foregrounds a certain out-of-syncness of the human beings. As two hunched-over bodies amidst the cabbage are forced to endure in complete stasis and immobility, labor time progresses at its monotonous and routinized pace, made explicitly visible through the continuously falling shreds of cabbage (see figures 2.1 and 2.2). As opposed to speeding up and moving at a different speed, the two bodies decelerate and come to a stop while labor time continues at its regular tempo. In this

instance, untimeliness does not dis- or interrupt labor time, but rather coincides with its steady rhythm: that is, the present moment concomitantly discontinues and merely exists in the *now* and moves toward a *then*. While time proceeds, the two bodies are fixed in the present and thus become present and untimely. This type of untimeliness allows for a moment of coming together and of forging bonds; it permits the formation of a connection not only between the two illegal workers, despite their drowning in the physical matter produced by factory work, but also between the two and Anne, who helps them hide in the heap of cabbage.

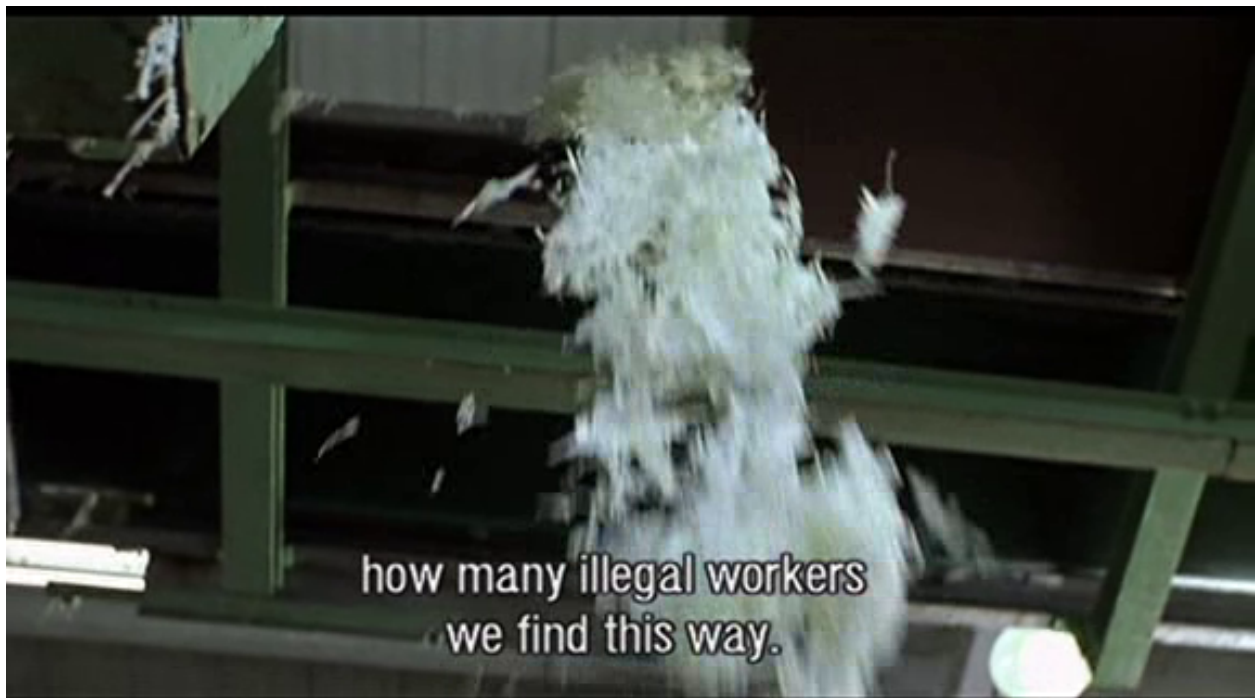


Figure 2.1 Cabbage falling down.

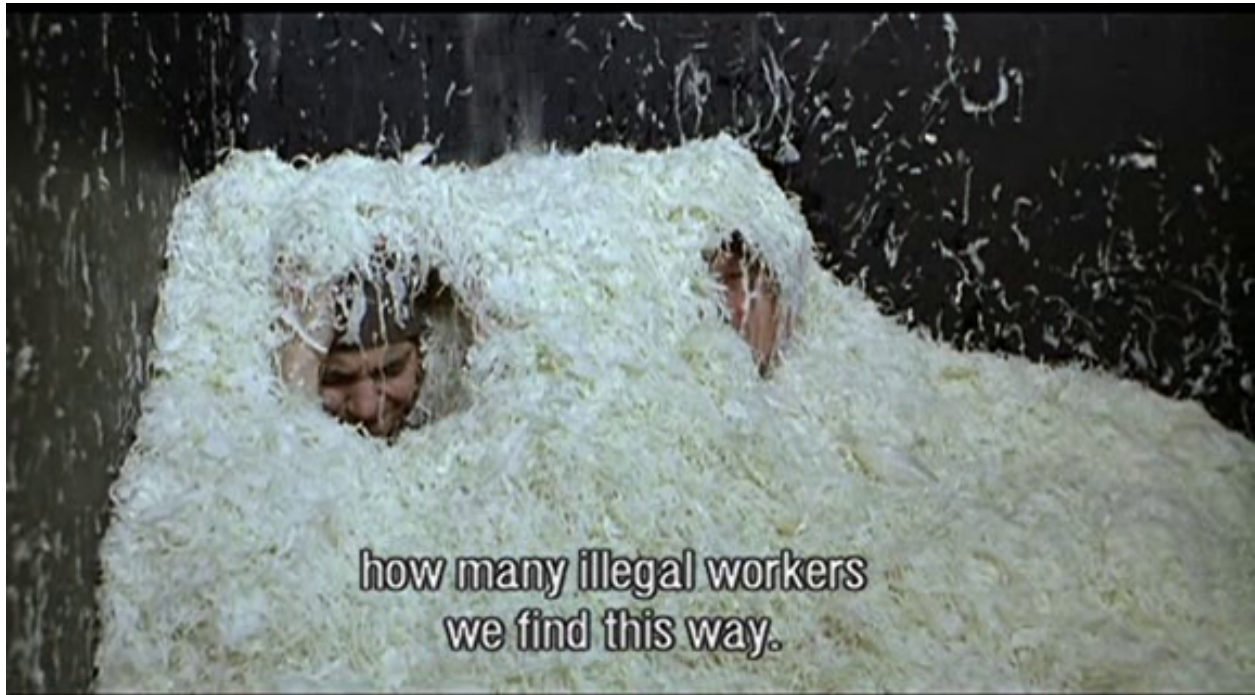


Figure 2.2 Siamak^F and Maxim in the heap of cabbage.

Endurance and time are also featured prevalently in *Fremde Haut* when Siamak^F has to go to the immigration office. We do not learn, however, whether he goes of his own volition or whether the authorities required him to come. As the film cuts to the inside of a room furnished with typical office furniture—a large desk, a file cabinet in the back, and a plant—the woman who is sitting behind the desk across from him tells him that he is able to return to his home country. A frontal medium shot of Siamak^F reveals his expression of astonishment and disbelief. Informing him that the Iranian government no longer persecutes his student group, the civil servant adds “Plätze hier sind begrenzt. Andere benötigen sie dringender” (1:09:55) [places for refugees are limited. Others need them more urgently⁴⁶] while the camera pans to the left. In contrast to the initial shot of Siamak^F, a medium shot cuts off the officer’s face at her nose.

⁴⁶ Henceforth, all translations are taken from the film’s official subtitles.

Emphasizing her moving mouth, the camera guides the viewer to a specific part of her body, which in turn directs attention to the message rather than to the woman herself or the office setting. Ignorant of Siamak^F's objections and worries, the woman seemingly follows a standard protocol, telling him to go to the Iranian embassy in order to renew his passport. As she dispassionately remarks, "Sie haben vierzehn Tage Zeit, um in den Iran zurückzukehren" (1:10:20) [You're required to return to Iran within two weeks], the camera cuts to a medium shot of the woman's hand stamping Siamak^F's residency card and thereby determining—or rather terminating—his stay in Germany.

Ignoring Siamak^F's concerns about his safety, the woman enacts a particular power over the refugee's body with the official stamp. While a potential threat officially ceases to exist in the eyes of German authorities, the stamped residency card materializes bureaucratic violence and makes explicit the temporality of tolerance. As soon as reforms take place in Iran, the German immigration agency is ready to send Siamak^F back, constructing a narrative that assumes the idea of refugees' desire to return to their home country and to start a new life. This fixed idea not only allows the authorities to follow a standard protocol to justify the act of expulsion without considering the refugee's individual story, but it also determines Siamak^F's future without his consent. Although initially granted the right to stay in Germany, he is merely tolerated and expected to endure until German officials decide that his personal well-being is no longer at risk in Iran and that he can reintegrate himself into Iranian society. According to the assumption of the bureaucratic system, he now will be able to become legible in Iran in a way that is tolerated by the country's governing regime.

In this particular case, the temporality of tolerance is tightly connected to a *now* and only expands as far into the future as the German state is willing to authorize it. Siamak^F's vision is

constrained by the looming anxiety of a sudden and unforeseen deportation and the loss of his legal status as a tolerated individual. The authority of the state does not extend any promise of becoming a body that matters to/in the state that would enable the existence of a *then* in Germany because of the reforms in Iran. By relying on her Westernized ideas about governmental reforms and by equating them with social progress, the female agent as an instrument of the state determines Siamak^F's future, which does not provide the kind of potentiality or hope that he envisions.

This kind of abandonment and disavowal of Siamak^F as a subject that matters to the German state, which is represented in the figure of the office clerk, is articulated not only on the level of content, but also on that of form. In this particular sequence, the aforementioned cuts and changes in camera position visualize a temporality of tolerance and its absence. When the exchange between the woman and Siamak^F begins, a cut indicates a shift in camera position from a long shot outside of the office to a series of medium shots of the two characters on the inside. This particular way of introducing the sequence allows us to enter the situation and then move more closely—quite literally, when the film cuts to a camera position that places the viewer in proximity to the woman, but more importantly to Siamak^F.

As the camera position shifts and pans between the two people sitting at the office desk across from each other, we also move in more closely and enter the conversation. The camera's decision to bring us into the room and foreground Siamak^F facial expressions moves the viewer in a twofold manner: it establishes a sense of nearness to the filmic figure, and also makes it possible for us to be touched by the exchange. The combination of shot distance, camera pans, and cuts allows us to enter this extremely difficult and personal conversation and to see and hear Siamak^F's reactions so that we may, but must not, feel. We are asked to linger and to endure: to

endure despite, through, or without an affective response to the situation. Thus, we are given the opportunity not only to feel, but also to feel for Siamak^F, and in so doing explore our own responses to bearing witness to a situation in which Siamak^F finds himself left with only two choices which do not promise a future: that is, the possibility of becoming a body that does not matter in Germany once the official deadline of two weeks passes and one that has to return to Iran, where he also becomes a body that does not matter.

This particular act of becoming undone is visually underlined in the last shot of the sequence when the final cut reveals a change in camera position from a medium to a medium-long shot. Akin to the beginning of the sequence, the camera is positioned outside the office, looking through the windows with semi-closed blinds as the immigration officer hands the stamped residency permit over to Siamak^F (see figure 2.3). While the blinds allow the viewer to see the two figures and their positions in relation to the office desk, the thick and dark window frames running vertically in the middle of the camera frame visually obstruct parts of the desk. The exchange of the document and the woman's explicit vocalization of the temporality of tolerance (or its temporariness) signal the ultimate termination of Siamak^F's refuge in Germany and thus the end of Fariba's performance of Siamak^F's identity. The dark bar in the center makes visible the divide between the two filmic figures in this particular sequence as well as the gap between the state represented by the customs officer and Siamak^F. Read in this way, the material barrier signals a final division: that is, the act of barring the refugee and the separation between Siamak^F and the agent gesture toward the intolerability of his body inside the state.



Figure 2.3 German agent hands immigration documents to Siamak^F.

2.2 Iterations of Subjectivity and Becoming (to) Matter

From the very moment Siamak^F is granted permission to reside in the asylum home as a political refugee, he is constructed as a body that at times does and at other times does not matter. These constant shifts become particularly apparent at the *Sauerkraut* factory, where Siamak^F, like Maxim, participates in certain socio-cultural customs and daily rhythms. While it appears that some of these rituals integrate Siamak^F into the group of workers at the factory, where certain aspects of his identity are not questioned and he is able to be legible as the male, heterosexual, Muslim, undocumented refugee, they concomitantly control and regulate the ways in which he negotiates his subjectivity around and outside of labor time at the factory. At times Siamak^F is able and at other times forced to perform certain aspects of his identity according to particular normative temporal rhythms and patterns. These tempos of straight time shape how he

constructs and has to construct his subjectivity. Depending on the setting, he is repeatedly enticed, encouraged, and even forced to become and unbecome timely in certain instances and untimely in others.

By explicitly employing the verb “to perform” and theorizing performative acts⁴⁷ in the context of my analysis of *Fremde Haut*, I want to make visible how Siamak^F’s staging of his identity is complex and, as I argue, can neither be understood as merely masquerade nor as exclusively Butlerian performativity. While I acknowledge that Fariba’s change into Siamak is a conscious and active act and thus a type of performance, I deem her acts to be more complicated than masquerade or theatrical. If we follow Butler’s argument that performance in the traditional sense is characterized as an act that is “subject to interpretation” (xxvii), then for Fariba to legibly perform Siamak’s identity, her acts should not—or rather cannot—be “subject to interpretation.” Rather, she has to reference and rely on the successful rehearsal of certain cultural scripts of maleness, masculinity, and heterosexuality that are concrete and do not signal a sense of ambiguity. In order to be tolerated and perceived as a body that matters, Fariba’s body has to serve as tangible evidence for certain identity markers; the legibility of her subjectivity depends on how corporeal matter constructs her body and materializes her as somebody.

Based on this understanding of performance, becoming timely and producing a certain type of physical legibility is connected to Siamak^F’s daily routine around his bodily hygiene, which itself is tied to the necessities of factory labor. While he must go to great lengths to

⁴⁷ While the term “performative” is often referenced in relation to Butler’s work on gender performativity, it has also been used in recent years in order to describe “action-based events” (Bachmann-Medick 73) and “reveals the constructedness of social practices” (86). As far as the humanities and social sciences are concerned, the performative turn describes a certain shift of awareness that research not only analyzes cultural artifacts and creations, but also possess a constitutive function and shapes the production of such materials. For a more detailed discussion of the “performative turn,” see Doris Bachmann-Medick’s work *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (2015). For a conceptualization of the self-referentiality and constitutive aspect of artistic production and artwork, see Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004).

prevent others from seeing his naked female body, removing the cabbage stench in the factory's communal showers like his male co-workers heightens the danger of undermining the identity he presents to the world. In order to become readable as a male Iranian political refugee, Siamak^F is forced to abide by a highly regulatory temporal rhythm different from that of Maxim or other residents of the asylum home. He sleeps fully clothed and wakes up around 4:30 a.m.—a medium shot of him lying in bed with an alarm clock close to his head explicitly displays the time of day—so that he is able to shower before his roommate or other residents of the asylum home awaken. He showers in the portable shower stall that lacks electric light and is located outside of the actual building. Battling the darkness of the early morning hour with a candle, Siamak^F is able to undress and perform acts of self-care, unbinding his breasts and showering.

This act of ascribing to a different set of normative rhythms, of rising before most of the other residents in order to stage his physical appearance to meet certain socio-cultural norms and expectations, offers Siamak^F the possibility of getting in-sync. He must adhere to a different routine in order to become aligned—and thus be in line—with the dominant temporal structure. In order to register as a “proper” subject, he has to break out of the normative temporal structure and to establish different habits by getting up when everybody else sleeps to then perform precisely those tasks that render him legible as socio-culturally tolerable not only at the asylum home, but also at the factory. He does all this to become timely within the structures of labor time without ever gaining the status of a worker: that is, he is impelled to unhinge himself from a particular framework of time in order to be able to enter another one. Fitting in merely extends the “promise” of becoming and registering as a corporeal presence—a Muslim refugee, an unskilled laborer—but it does not enable Siamak^F ever to become a body that matters.

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler argues that individuals are required to operate under and

abide by normative socio-cultural standards, which “qualif[y] a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (xii). As long as the various aspects of an individual’s identity are made visible and thus become legible in ways that secure this “within” position, their bodies “qualify as bodies that matter” (xxiv). Conversely, if subjects violate hegemonic social codes and norms, they are rendered “abject beings,” who are consequently relegated to those “‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject” (xiii). As a consequence, they find themselves in precarious situations that fail to register as such with those “proper” (citizen-)subjects.

Seen through this general idea of what it means to become legible as a body that matters, *Fremde Haut* can be understood as a visualization of how processes and structures of power create, alter, or hamper the ways in which certain subjects are forced to remain within those “unlivable zones.” When deemphasizing a bifurcated reading of the film’s social world, such zones do not automatically have to equate marginality or realms where these “abject beings” are thrust to the fringes. Rather, the film repeatedly suggests that such “improper” bodies can and do populate the center, yet do not qualify and thus do not register as valuable subjects. Particularly, within certain “zones of social life,” these non-normative subjects are constantly surrounded by those who matter, whose mere existence and presence serves a reminder of the possibility that bodies can qualify as “proper.”

Since this promise of becoming always appears to be within reach, but often times remains forever merely a promise, it enacts structural violence on all of the undocumented workers at the asylum home. Since a lack of paperwork forces all of them to accept menial and low-status jobs, the concept of the “promise” takes on a more concrete and physical dimension for Siamak^F. Faced with the threat of being sent back to Iran, Fariba is forced to construct and

perform the character of Siamak^F in a particular way, which substantiates a timeliness that is violently inscribed on his body (see figure 2.4). When she is finally able to take off the bandages⁴⁸ that she has been wearing all day and even at night, the potency and brutality of normative time are literally and visibly written on her body. In this sense, timeliness not only shapes and structures the daily rhythm of Siamak^F's life, but it also leaves its corporeal imprint on the subject.



Figure 2.4 Siamak^F's back with the marks from the bandages to bind his breasts.

(Un)timeliness and the complexities of legibility also collide during the so-called *Herrenabend*. After an early evening spent at a local bowling alley, Uwe drives Andi and his

⁴⁸ Although not central to my project with its focus on temporal structures, I want to note that Fariba's act of binding can be understood as a commentary on the legibility of contemporary masculinity as a rather constricting concept rather than liberating, powerful, and dominant. This restrictive quality echoes the arguments of gender theorists such as Jackson Katz, C.J. Pascoe, and R.W. Connell, who have pointed out that hegemonic masculinity is an extremely limiting concept, attainable only by very few (Katz np; Pascoe 330; Connell 78–80).

girlfriend Sabine (Nina Vorbrodt), Anne, her son Melvin, and Siamak^F home. When the police stop the car and fine Siamak^F for having crossed the border of the county of Esslingen into Stuttgart, the women and child abandon the men and leave in the police car. Uwe is upset about the situation and forces Siamak^F to partake in his idea of a stag night out in the city with Andi and him. Since the three men are already en route to Stuttgart, Uwe decides to take Siamak^F to a brothel located in one of the suburbs of Stuttgart. After the three men sit around a table and discuss for a while Andi and Sabine's lack of physical intimacy during her pregnancy, Uwe pays one of the women to take Siamak^F to a back room to have sex.

As soon as Siamak^F and the woman enter one of the backrooms, he sits down on the bed. The woman immediately unbuttons her shirt and takes it off, but when she starts to unzip her skirt, he stops her and asks her not to undress. The woman, looking irritated, turns toward him and walks over to where he is sitting on the bed. When the woman takes his hands and puts them on her breasts, he embraces the woman's waist, to which she responds by touching and caressing his face. This brief encounter is enough for the woman to realize that Siamak^F is not a man and to declare, "Tut mir leid. Das mach' ich nicht. Das hab' ich eben nicht gemerkt..." ["Sorry, I don't do that. I didn't realize..."] (1:00:05), referring to fact that Siamak^F is a woman. When she wants to leave the room immediately, he pleads with her to wait: "Warte, bitte! Ich will ja gar nicht... Können wir nicht noch ein wenig hier bleiben" ["Wait! Please! We don't have to do anything... but can we stay here for a while"] (1:00:17). When the woman is confused about why he wants her to stay, Siamak^F responds, "Nichts. Einfach... .. warten bis die Zeit vorbei ist" ["Nothing. Just... .. wait till the time is up"] (1:00:27). Although reluctant and with an expression of irritation, frustration, and pity on her face, the woman sits down in a chair and lights a cigarette, deliberately looking away from Siamak^F.

When shifting from moving at a swift speed and attempting to arouse her client as quickly as possible to curtailing her actions abruptly and completely, the woman reveals how movement, tempo, directionality, and desire ebb and flow in this sequence. Through her touch of Siamak^F's face, she is able to discover that his body, and more specifically his gender, reads—feels—differently from what she initially expected. Upon this realization, she gains momentum again, redirects her efforts, and is ready to leave the room. However, Siamak^F obstructs her path out through the door and invites her to become, together with him, untimely by enduring in the *now* instead of leaving the room to find her next client. Together, they exist in a present that indexes toward the near future, but does not allow for the emergence of that future. For Siamak^F, this particular time is one of dithering. He is present as a corporeal presence that registers as unwanted and undesired and will never be granted the potential or hope to become one that matters. The woman's willingness to comply with his request and to wait affirms her legibility as a prostitute and her body as commodity, which also withholds the potential to register as one who matters, albeit in a different way than Siamak^F.

In lieu of leaving the room whenever he desires to do so, Siamak^F must endure “bis die Zeit vorbei ist” [“till the time is up”] because his legibility as the male, heterosexual, Iranian refugee is contingent in this particular situation upon a temporality of tolerance: Siamak^F has to wait and persist in order to construct and perform a particular subjectivity that is legible to Uwe and Andi in precisely the ways in which they need it to be to affirm their own subjecthood vis-à-vis Siamak^F, the refugee. He has to become untimely, or rather timely according to the rhythm of the clock of the prostitute by waiting out her time, and relies on the willingness of the woman to participate in briefly abandoning the familiar temporal rhythm of labor time in exchange for a moment of “leisure” time in order to stage himself as a sexually active man to the other two.

Siamak^F is left with no other choice but to sit, doing “[n]ichts. Einfach... . . . warten” [“Nothing. Just... . . . wait”] and to endure. He has to persist, which grants him a temporary sense of belonging and enables him to register as a subject, but only as long as he is perceived to enjoy the woman’s services. As such, he is asked—or better yet forced—to endure in the *now* that never extends into a *then*.

On a level of film aesthetics, this scene appears to employ a pattern similar to the one that guides the scene in which Siamak^F interacts with the immigration officer, both in terms of how affect and aesthetics are linked and mobilized together in the viewers until the possibility of certain affective responses is ultimately curtailed. With the camera positioned in the corner of the room behind the bed, the audience is able to watch the interaction between the two figures through a series of long and medium shots. Once the woman walks over to Siamak^F in an effort to initiate physical contact to arouse him, the camera position changes to an over-the-shoulder close-up shot of Siamak^F’s hand on the woman’s bra. Her hands are on top of his, guiding his touch in the center of the frame and directing our attention to the sensual and sexual quality of the interaction. A subsequent reverse medium shot positions Siamak^F’s face in the center of the frame and highlights how he looks at the woman’s chest and then puts his face on the woman’s stomach. With another cut to a long shot of the room, we are back to the initial camera position behind the bed.

This particular succession of shots draws us in, as both camera position and distance allow for the viewer to learn what is in the room and how the characters are positioned in relation to each other. We witness the interaction yet remain at a certain distance with both figures in view. As the sequence progresses, the change in camera position and shot distance undoes the position of the viewer as an observer. This closeness suggests the audience’s participation insofar

as the shots attempt to make visible the bodily desires—sexual and non-sexual alike—evoked by the corporeal contact between the two figures and emphasize Siamak^F's affective facial responses to the woman. The sequence, however, ends with a cut to a long shot, removing the camera and along with it the viewer from the moment of mediated somatic closeness and intensity and, in so doing, limiting our proximity and intimacy. Akin to Siamak^F, we are ultimately pulled away and left to linger, and, again akin to Siamak^F, we have become untimely as we are expected to sit and endure in the *now* temporarily. This alignment with Siamak^F creates a moment in which we are given the possibility of affective responses. To be more precise, we are positioned vis-à-vis Siamak^F in a way that allows us to feel for him, but also with him. We find ourselves in an impasse, which enables, but never forces, us to experience our own affective responses during this sequence until a subsequent cut to Uwe driving his car with Andi in the front and Siamak^F in the back seat dissolves the time of suspension.

While during the brothel visit physical closeness serves as the primary means for the woman to read Siamak^F's identity, his subjectivity becomes legible to Uwe and Andi precisely through his corporeal absence when he endures in the room separate from them. Merely tolerated by the woman, he is able to create and stage the specific identity that Uwe and Andi desire to see in him: his absence at their table renders him a heterosexual non-German man. In this respect, the time with the prostitute in the backroom of the brothel turns that private room into a temporary zone of potential and of becoming, where multiple forces and discourses come together to construct and shape the legibility of Siamak^F's identity and render his body present; a body that is, in this very instance, tolerated.

It is crucial to note that in this particular sequence the tolerance of Siamak^F's presence relies on the complex interplay of various aspects of his identity, particularly the ways in which

his gender, sexuality, and ethnicity come to signify to and for Uwe and Andi. Siamak^F's ostensible willingness to spend time with the prostitute affirms, in the eyes of the two German men, his manhood and heterosexuality. His act of going with the woman, after Uwe pays the prostitute, can be read as a type of initiation ritual that enables him to come into being as a heterosexual, masculine individual, who thus indexes membership to the dominant and socio-culturally accepted group. Through his act of partaking in transactional and exploitative sex acts that are degrading to women, Siamak^F is able to secure a sense of belonging to the other two men.

Furthermore, this combination of Siamak^F being read as a Muslim man and the act of leaving Andi and Uwe to go with the prostitute constructs two conflicting images of his subjectivity. On the one hand, he represents a kind of ethnic otherness that is stereotypically perceived as less emancipated and liberal and more dogmatic and traditional in dominant Western discourse. On the other hand, he is seen to represent a kind of otherness that is hyper-sexualized and thus embodies sexual excess, intemperance, and civility and operates in opposition to the white, enlightened subject, who is, in turn, able to secure its position of power vis-à-vis this other, or rather with a capital letter, this Other.⁴⁹ Regardless of which reading of Siamak^F shapes the construction of his identity, his absence at the table is tolerated because it secures the presence of Uwe and Andi's bodies as those that matter—either as embodying the ideals of progressive, sovereign subjects or as cultivated, proper Western men. They possess power as the purchaserers of the female commodity, which they presume Siamak^F is consuming.

⁴⁹ In *Dangerous Brown Men: Exploiting Sex, Violence and Feminism in the War on Terror* (2013), Gargi Bhattacharyya explores how the war on terror mobilizes fears and sexual fantasies in the Western imagination, which aid in the construction of white racial superiority, the legitimization of imperial violence, and the normalization of violent expropriation.

Siamak^F, in contrast, is never able to acquire that status within the Butlerian “domain of cultural intelligibility” (*Bodies* xii), and is thus forever the abject Other, never the body that matters.

This tolerance, however, is fleeting and immediately changes to an unbecoming when the staging of his heterosexuality immediately transfigures his tolerable body into one that is belittled and emasculated. As Uwe drives Andi and Siamak^F back, he notes, “Anne wird sich ganz schön wundern, wenn sie erfährt, was ihr armer kleiner Freund so macht” [“Bet Anne will love to hear what her poor little friend has been up to”] (1:01:09), indicating that Siamak^F’s behavior disqualifies him from forging a relationship with Anne. While the brothel visit allows him to produce his subjectivity that extends a promise to become legible and tolerable to Uwe and Andi, Uwe suggest that this exact mode of being renders Siamak^F undesirable and unacceptable for Anne. Thus, Uwe’s comment makes visible the impossibility of belonging as a subject and exposes the highly regulatory regime of a temporality of tolerance: that is, the individual has no other choice but to persist as a body who is always coerced into becoming the manifestation of a fantasy or an image that never fully materializes as tolerable and is thus never fully allowed to matter.

2.3 Acts of Enduring and Sustaining Relations and Bonds

While a body’s (un)timeliness is central for the reading of Siamak^F’s identity in the film, an engagement with the concept also reveals that a promise of becoming grants, for brief moments, the possibility of forging alliances with others and of fulfilling the creation of a sense of the longing to belong. This potential is, however, short-lived and fleeting, and while it allows bodies to come together and establish bonds, *Fremde Haut* demonstrates that these connections are not sustaining or sustainable for Siamak^F or the other precarious characters.

These various temporal affinities and modes of being are connected to how several filmic subjects, such as Siamak^F, Maxim, or Anne, explore and express their persisting desire to endure and to establish connections to others. This particular impetus to keep on and last within—maybe even outlast—oppressive structures of power and control in *Fremde Haut* is evocative of Povinelli’s concept of endurance as outlined in *Economies of Abandonment*.⁵⁰ More specifically, Povinelli proposes the idea of a “durative present” (2), a temporality that, according to Povinelli, emphasizes length and continuation without indexing a clear starting or end point. Within the context of late liberalism and the emergence of the anti-colonial social movement in Australia, this particular temporality illuminates how marginal social projects endure in the ubiquitous net of coercive regulatory power structures in late liberalism through alternative temporal practices such as pausing, holding, and waiting. Their resilience underscores a will to persist in the “precarious zone of being and not being” (31) and to endure under, or rather in spite of, the conditions of neoliberalism. However, the necessity repeatedly to negotiate one’s neoliberal promises of autonomy alongside the constraints that the very same system imposes upon certain bodies makes it difficult to determine “the difference between being held and being held down” (Povinelli, *Empire* 93), and complicates the ways in which individuals are able to forge relationships and create intimacy.⁵¹

What makes the notions of “endurance” and “durative present” particularly productive for my theorization of (un)timeliness in connection with belonging and mobility in *Fremde Haut*

⁵⁰ Povinelli’s ethnographic work in *Economies of Abandonment* focuses on two specific contexts: 1) the illegitimization of Indigenous people in Australia’s Northern Territory through enforcing the normative socio-cultural structures and market capitalism, which validate certain subjects in settler-states as proper citizen-subjects and 2) gay and lesbian social movements.

⁵¹ Although Siamak^F builds a relationship with Maxim, through whom he is able to obtain work, as well as with Siamak’s parents, continually communicating with them via letters, I intend to focus exclusively on negotiations of (un)timeliness in regard to his budding relationship with Anne.

is the fact that “endurance encloses itself around the durative—the temporality of continuance, a denotation of continuous action without any reference to its beginning or end and outside the dialectic of presence and absence” (Povinelli, *Economies* 32). Given the coupling of these two concepts, endurance is not only tightly connected to time, but it also points to a state of being that is not linked to a teleological model of time. Without a point of departure or destination, endurance is enacted in the present moment. As time moves on and with it the present moment—always present and concomitantly about to become present—the *now* stretches out and becomes elongated and capacious in a way that defies the necessity of linear progression and genealogy. Rather, endurance and its lingering present, or its lingering presence that produces the present, points to an alternative ontology that challenges the dominant binary of “presence and absence.” This makes possible a state of being that is simultaneously non-being; a way of existing and of being present that is not perceived as such, but one that also does not efface the subject.

Precisely because of its emphasis on the durative as a mode of “the temporality of continuance,” Povinelli’s concept of endurance presents a challenge to the ostensible necessity of the division of time into a past, present, and future. While her emphasis is on the settler-colonial context of Australia, she outlines two tenses that shape the narrative of national belonging: the notion of a past perfect and a future anterior (*Economies* 12). While the former denotes how the recognition and incorporation of Indigenous traditions and practices into the present establishes what and how these individuals matter in the social world and determines national belonging, the latter critiques the idea that “[s]uffering and dying can always be referred to a horizon of time where they are transformed into thriving and birthing” (184–85). Through this problematic narrative of redemption that necessitates a vantage point in the future from which one can look back, according to Povinelli, it is possible to re-write the narrative of non-normative subjects. In

lieu of critically interrogating the violence enacted through settler colonialism, members of the dominant culture are able to conceive those who are indeed “[s]uffering and dying” in ways that transforms them into tolerable bodies, which can then be deemed acceptable and thus folded into the nation.

When understood as an alternative ontological project that unfolds both outside of the parameters of being and not being in the world and the mandates of a teleological temporal economy, endurance is instructive for a more nuanced theorization of the (un)timeliness of bodies in Maccarone’s *Fremde Haut*. It suggests that subjects can be both timely and untimely as they move through their social life-worlds and navigate different zones and modes of being. At times, they are timely, when they agree to function within particular rhythms and tempos that guarantee the visibility of their presence. This being legible as present allows them to establish and secure their presence in the now. At other times, however, some subjects do not follow the temporal and linear patterns the dominant culture prescribes and they appear unaligned or out-of-sync with the speed and beat of the social, political, and economic institutions in which they are embedded. This oppositional position vis-à-vis systems of power can—and even desires to—render individuals as being present because they function, following Butler’s notion of bodies that matter, as those bodies through which “life within the *domain of cultural intelligibility*” (*Bodies 2*, emphasis added) is defined. However, these subjects often register as illegible or only partially legible bodies in the public sphere. While some of these “improper” bodies embrace their status of invisibility, others refuse to disappear and thus register and become legible as untimely, enduring in/through their insistence on being recognized as bodies that matter.

One of these instances of becoming an untimely body that allows for the emergence of the possibility of a connection occurs at the *Sauerkraut* factory. Although Siamak^F works where

Anne is also employed, the two do not engage with each other directly until Waltraut, a coworker, provokes Anne to agree to a bet. Waltraut will purchase a bike for Anne's son if she is willing to go out on a date with the first man who walks through the factory's entrance doors that morning. While unwilling to agree at first, Anne quickly changes her mind when Uwe walks up to the door and she believes that he will be the one. Given the particular stipulations connected to the bet, Anne's date rests on the necessity of her potential partner to enter the workplace at the right time—or right on time—in order to be seen as timely. Her plan, however, falls through at the last minute when Siamak^F approaches the door and Uwe invites him to step through the door first.

Upset by her unexpected dinner partner, Anne protests to Waltraut: “Was soll ich denn mit dem reden beim Essen?” [“What on earth would I talk to him about?”] (31:32), Anne believes that the two do not have anything in common; she would find it difficult if not impossible to relate to the refugee, when in fact she knows little about him. Waltraut, however, appeases her by pointing out that she does not have to talk much and emphasizes that Anne can make it “... eben ein kurzes Essen.” [“... a short date, so what?”] (31:36).

Determining its temporal length or rather its brevity already prior to the dinner, Waltraut underlines that the meal is a discrete temporal unit with clear parameters and, in so doing, makes visible the power Anne holds—thus already assigning a temporality of tolerance to the encounter. Instead of understanding differences as an opportunity, Anne regards cultural differences as a hindrance to communication and to forging a relationship with Siamak^F. Thus, Anne will speed up time, or at least not slow it down, if she deems it necessary during the date, which allows Anne to distance herself from Siamak^F in the hopes of never having to endure in the same way that Siamak^F does. While Anne certainly has to persist and abide by the temporal

regimes that govern her own life, she endures on a different scale. Thus, her desire to not to talk to Siamak^F is indicative of her longing to prevent her own body from becoming untimely and instead to be perceived as a body that does matter.

While Anne initially expresses her worry about an inability to connect with Siamak^F, she gradually changes her stance and little by little becomes an untimely body herself. This shift is visualized on the level of form rather than content shortly after the conversation between Anne and Waltraut, when Anne leaves work with her scooter and drives past the bus that Siamak^F takes to and from the asylum home. As she drives off on her scooter and as the bus pulls up to the bus stop, Anne is positioned in the center of the frame of a long shot. A cut to another long shot with the camera positioned inside the bus looking out reveals Anne driving toward the bus. As she passes the bus on the left, the camera pans to follow her movement, exposing how Anne acknowledges Siamak^F's presence with a brief smile (see figure 2.5) (33:59). A subsequent cut to a medium shot shows Siamak^F standing at a window inside the bus looking out at Anne (see figure 2.6) (34:00). Upon receiving her smile, he turns his head to look at Anne as she drives off. The point of view medium panning shot remains on Anne on her scooter and mimics her look at Siamak^F as she drives away from the bus. The next cut displays birds flying across a field, reiterating the notion of movement; the image not only evokes Anne's scooter,⁵² but also indicates the shift in Anne's relationship to Siamak^F.

⁵² I also want to note here that a colloquial German words for scooter is "Schwalbe," which is also a type of bird.



Figure 2.5 Anne looking at Siamak^F.



Figure 2.6: Siamak^F looking back at Anne.

While the pace and rhythm of the film seems to unfold at a conventional speed up until this particular scene, here the pace of the film appears to change. When Anne drives by, looking directly at Siamak^F, who, in turn, looks directly back at her, the film employs the effect of slow motion whereby time appears to progress at a different tempo. While the interlocking of eyes and the use of slow motion is a frequently employed technique in film to foreshadow a sexual encounter or a romantic relationship, I am not interested in this kind of the signposting here. Rather, I am attentive to how the change of tempo and the modification of time allows for the possibility of the formation of a bond.

When we read the sequence with an emphasis on time and change in speed, the encounter between the filmic characters takes on a different temporal dimension and gives the viewer the impression that their locking of eyes lasts for a much longer time than the second or two it could take in real time. This variation in pace thus allows for the moment of engagement to stretch out and to last. This change in how time unfolds extends a promise of the two bodies becoming untimely: that is, this fleeting moment of slowness allows them to experience an encounter with the other person and to persist in and through that look. Although, or maybe precisely because, time decelerates only for a few seconds, they become present to one another and are thus able to sustain their glance. In the process, their glance becomes a sustaining one. As they look and, in so doing, acknowledge the presence of the other as a subject, they give sustenance to their bodies and make their bodies matter—both literally and figuratively—in a way that allows them to create and sustain a bond.

This alliance and its link to a rejection of progress narratives that follow a certain telos is further emphasized in the interaction between Sabine and Anne after the police stops Uwe's car and starts interrogating Siamak^F because he crossed the county line. While Anne is concerned

about Siamak^F, Sabine reacts with frustration and asks the policemen to take the two women and the child home. As Anne and Sabine walk up to the parked police car, the latter asks, “Was willst du denn mit dem? Das hat doch null Zukunft” [“Why bother with him? What future does that have?”] (55:06), hinting at the precarious state of Siamak^F’s existence in Germany. By using the word “null,” Sabine makes explicit the non-existence of a future (or, translated literally, “zero” future) with the refugee and thus points to the impossibility of a bond beyond the present moment. However, Anne contemplates, “Zukunft? Was ist denn mit ‘jetzt’?” [“‘Future’? What about ‘now’?”] (55:12) and elaborates, “[v]ielleicht will ich einfach nur jemanden kennenlernen, der anders ist. Der ganz woanders herkommt und anders denkt” [“Maybe I want to get to know someone who’s different, who thinks differently”] (55:19–55:24), emphasizing her investment in the *now* rather than the possibility of a *then*.

Contrary to her earlier conversation with Waltraut, Anne now voices rather vehemently not only her desire for and appreciation of cultural difference, but also her refusal to ascribe to the teleology of straight time. Repudiating the need for a future, Anne breaks with certain assumptions that are guiding principles in the sort of normative relationship narratives to which Sabine alludes: that is, the necessity of following a model of time that is progress-oriented and unfolds in a linear fashion. To be more concrete, Anne questions the demand for a *then* through the repetition of Sabine’s last word in the dialogue and emphasizes her refusal of “Zukunft” by foregrounding the “jetzt”—the present moment as a time of meeting and of coming together. By expressing her desire to get to know him despite, or maybe because of, their differences, she legitimizes and affirms his subjectivity, which is both productive and reductive. On the one hand, her declaration makes visible the power invested in her as a representative of the dominant culture to endorse and validate the existence of a minority subject. On the other hand through her

recognition of him as a subject, she is able to forge a bond with Siamak^F, which makes it possible for him to become present in the *now* as a material body that matters to her. However, this boundedness to the “jetzt” situates them in the present in a way that makes them always timely. In this particular case, being timely allows them to assert their presence in the present moment and suggest a rejection of the narrative of teleology, which allows for the temporary existence of a connection between the two characters, but does not guarantee a promise of becoming or the potential for a sustainable and sustaining bond.

A similar moment in which being timely and untimely are in constant flux to allow for the potential of a connection between Anne and Siamak^F emerges after he meets with a counterfeiter to negotiate payments for a forged passport. After Siamak^F proposes to get the man an almost new car in lieu of money as a payment, a cut to the next sequence depicts Siamak^F as he walks up to the asylum home where Anne is sitting on the stairs. As he comes closer, the long shot gradually transitions to a medium close-up through a slight pan of the camera, following his movement toward Anne. Taking a few steps towards Siamak^F, Anne reaches out to him, literally and figuratively. She places her hand on his cheek and asks, “Erzählst du’s mir jetzt?” [“So, are you going to tell me now?”] (1:17:52). Siamak^F responds with a nodding of his head and the two embrace. A cut to the next scene depicts Anne and, now for the first time since the initial flight to Germany, Fariba, sitting in Anne’s kitchen with the refugee explaining the circumstances of her flight from Iran.

While the embrace is visually and affectively emblematic of the bond between the two characters, it is crucial to note that, akin to the sequence at the bus stop discussed earlier, this connection is tightly linked to a specific moment in time, namely the “jetzt” [“now”]. This precise way of being present in the present allows Fariba to tell Anne about the particular

circumstances surrounding her affair with a married woman, her persecution by the authorities, and her escape, which all impact her status in Germany. By embracing Anne's invitation and recounting her past, Fariba is able to give voice to her identity as a Muslim woman who had a same-sex relationship and, in so doing, to narrate her female body and her sexual desires into existence. As she seizes the moment of the "jetzt" to relate her story and thus relate to the German woman, Fariba is able to come into being as a subject and to create a bond with Anne; this bond, however, is contingent upon Fariba's timeliness, of being in the "jetzt," which secures her existence and presence only in the present, but does not guarantee its extension into a *then*.

This unsustainability comes to the fore yet again the day Anne sleeps with Fariba and Uwe and Andi return with Melvin from a camping trip in the middle of that same night. As the men enter the apartment, Fariba sits in the dark at the kitchen table in a tank top, looking at her newly obtained fake passport. When they come in and turn on the light, they see Fariba and are completely taken aback by the realization that Siamak^F is a biological woman. While Andi attacks Fariba verbally, Uwe starts crying, leaning against the handle of the refrigerator and pushing his forehead into the door. When Andi tries to console his friend, Fariba slowly rises from the table and walks out the door, revealing to both the men and the viewer that she is only in her underpants and a tank top. This revelation confirms to Uwe not only that Siamak^F is a woman, but also that she most likely slept with Anne, a revelation that causes a drastic shift in his affective response to the situation, which changes from disturbed sobbing to brutal anger. He underscores his outburst of physical violence directed toward Fariba with, "Ich will dich hier nie wieder sehen, klar!" ["Don't show your face around here again!"] (1:28:48), making explicit the end of a temporality of tolerance.

Aside from the horrific force with which Uwe removes Fariba from Anne's house, his

words also exhibit a threatening energy. Using the combination of the adverbs of time “nie wieder”—literally, “never again”—Uwe underscores that Fariba will no longer be tolerated either now or at any point in the future. While some might question why Uwe would represent a voice of authority and power that is licensed to make such a pronouncement, he does epitomize the (almost ideal) “model” citizen-subject.⁵³ Aside from, or even despite, his lower socio-economic status, he embodies all those identity markers—male, white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, non-Muslim, in possession of German citizenship—that legitimize his presence as a body that matters within the nation. Contrary to the bureaucratic violence enacted by the immigration officer and the police, Uwe backs up his threatening words with actual physical violence. His actions, in combination with his verbal assertion, ultimately index the absolute impossibility of any lasting untimeliness for Fariba and revoke any potential promise of unbecoming.

In this regard, Fariba has rendered herself legible in a way that no longer allows her to remain in Uwe’s sight. Not allowed to make herself visible, Fariba is unable to construct a sustainable bond with Anne, a bond that would not only validate her presence in the present moment, but one that would also possess the potential to undo the “nie.” As Maxim points out at an earlier point in the film, being with a German woman makes one “almost German,”⁵⁴ and thus

⁵³ Various feminists and queer theorists, such as Judith Butler, Jasbir K. Puar, Wendy Brown, Lauren Berlant, and Chandan Reddy, have written extensively on the issue of what bodies are able to produce and stage certain norms and gestures which grant these bodies particular privileges and make them legible as ostensibly “proper” subjects in line with national ethics and socio-political principles of the dominant culture.

⁵⁴ After the proposal for the recognition of same-sex marriage in Germany passed in the *Bundestag* on June 30, 2017, the law was officially ratified on October 1, 2017, which finally replaces the long tradition of the *eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft*—a registered partnership that is akin to a civil union. This type of civil union has been legal since 2001, which extends various rights and obligations in areas such as inheritance, alimony, health insurance, immigration, hospital and jail visitations, and name change to same-sex partners, but, as Dirk Siegfried and Kees Waaldijk point out, does not grant the same right as a different-sex partnership. At the beginning of 2004, a foreign partner of a resident national is still not entitled to a residence permit or able to obtain citizenship easier based on the relationship with a German partner (113). Moreover, Germany failed to amend its national anti-discrimination laws, including one’s ability to express one’s sexual orientation openly as one of the many aspects in need of legal protection, for a period of six years after signing the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, which became effective in 1999.

extends the temporality of tolerance *ad infinitum*. Without any prospect for a future with Anne in Germany, she is pronounced forever timely by Uwe; “nie” able to become a body that matters, but forced to exist always merely in the *now*, which does not grant her the prospect to endure in a *then*.

This “nie” not only highlights Uwe’s attitude toward Fariba in the film world, but it also alludes to Germany’s immigration laws in the 1990s and early 2000s. In the early 1990s, Germany received a large number of asylum seekers from Eastern European countries and the Balkans due to its geographic location in Europe and its liberal laws to grant asylum to “[p]ersons persecuted on political grounds,” as per Article 16a in Germany’s *Grundgesetz*.⁵⁵ After 1993, asylum policies became much more restrictive, and many asylum seekers were only granted a *Duldung*—a word that literally translated means “toleration.” Asylum seekers with this status live on minimum state assistance, do not have access to the labor market, are required to live in state-run housing complexes, and are not allowed to leave the area of residency, barring them from obtaining and maintaining regular employment, moving freely within the state, and accessing most of Germany’s welfare programs. Despite the fact that Germany ratified a new set of laws on January 1, 2005, the country did not reform its policies for tolerated asylum seekers. It took another two years, that is, until March 2007, for the government to reach consensus on its laws regarding tolerated asylum seekers. The changes involved granting a temporary right of residency to tolerated asylum seekers who have resided in Germany for 8 years (or 6 years if they have children) by July 1, 2007 (Leise np).

Fremde Haut makes visible and critiques those conditions of *Duldung*. My concept of a

⁵⁵ In 1991, 256,112 people applied for asylum in Germany. In 1992, the number of asylum seekers increased to 438,191, with a little over a third of these applicants coming from the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Geneva* 61).

temporality of tolerance supports that critique. While Siamak^F is allowed to remain in the country and given a place to stay, the film underscores the hypocrisy of such an act: that is, Siamak^F's body registers as present within the state structures, but is merely tolerated for a discrete amount of time. His presence in the *now* and the possibility of becoming “almost German” through his bond with Anna elicit a sense of hope that is ultimately already a “*nie*,” a never that precludes the emergence and solidification of a bond in the *then* and the potential for Siamak^F to come to matter as a subject.

The film's very last sequence further underscores this ultimate pronouncement of an end of the temporality of tolerance for Fariba. In a mirror-like doubling of the very first scene, we are back in an airplane with Fariba wearing a hijab and sitting in a window seat, looking out of the window. When the captain announces, “Dear passengers, this is your captain speaking. We just crossed the border and have now entered Iranian air space” (1:30:44–1:30:48), Fariba gets up and walks through the main cabin toward the airplane restroom. The only difference between the two sequences is the position of the camera in relation to the character: while she walks toward the camera at the beginning of the film, in this case, she walks away from it.

Read against the beginning of the film, this last scene suggests the ultimate foreclosure of possibilities in Germany, emphasized by the very act of Fariba walking to the restroom with her back to camera and hence the audience. Contrary to the first sequence, when the captain's words set actions into motion, this time there are too few passengers in close proximity to Fariba to register any overt action within the camera frame. As the captain utters the words and with them seemingly a promise of unbecoming, only Fariba appears to move and be moved by the declaration. Wearing her hijab and walking away from the camera, she is headed in a different direction while the viewer, aligned with the vantage point of the camera, remains motionless and

left behind.

It is easy to dismiss Fariba's compliance with wearing traditional Muslim clothing and her return to Iran as the ultimate acceptance and integration into a system that in the view of many Westerners is stereotyped as being less advanced, open-minded, civilized, and cultured.⁵⁶ If one assumes such a perspective, Germany and Western Europe are the only viable places for subjects to establish an existence. Another cut to the restroom obstructs such a facile reading, however. As we see a close-up shot of Fariba's shoe and watch her take out Siamak's passport, where it was hidden under the insole all this time, the next cut to a medium shot reveals her head in the bathroom mirror as she removes the hijab and fixes her hair as the audience hears a voiceover reading of Siamak^F's last letter to his parents. She takes off her jacket and the film cuts to a close-up of her face. She is now wearing Siamak's glasses, looking up and staring directly into the mirror with a look of determination and assurance as she utters Siamak's name.

This final sequence after the captain's words depict her becoming timely once more, since she has to rely on the exact moment of the utterance of the words to be able to become Siamak^F. These words, as in the beginning of the film, set her in motion and enable her body to move: the announcement signals the shift for which Fariba was waiting in order to overcome her period of stasis. Precisely this "now" that the captain announces, at first glance kindles a sense of potential in the viewer. However, a closer look reveals that this final shot of Siamak^F in the restroom mirror points to the Butlerian notion that gender—and by extension any markers of identity—is always constructed vis-à-vis an unattainable ideal, always open to interpretation, and thus never essential or natural. Based on this conceptual framework, Siamak^F's mediated image

⁵⁶ See seminal works by Third World feminist Chandra Mohanty and Lila Abu-Logud who, among others, critique the assumption prevalent in many Western(ized) cultures that Muslim women are completely oppressed by Muslim culture and religion and are in need of saving.

suggests the impossibility of the manifestation of a “real” body since he is visible and legible to the audience merely as a reflection. He is present in the *now*, but the mirror reminds us that the legibility of his subjectivity is contingent upon the visibility of his body in the mirror so that the act of seeing materializes his presence.

While the passport and the transformation suggest the potential of Siamak^F becoming untimely forever and thus freeing himself from the oppressive socio-cultural, political, and economic power structures that have regulated his body throughout the film, the final cut prevents such an idealization of the last scene. The necessity to be present in order to become legible as a subject reminds the viewers to interrogate any investment they may have in a romanticized happy ending of the film in which Fariba is able to be with Anne and is completely detached from her life in Iran. The last cut from Siamak^F looking at himself in the restroom mirror to the film’s credits, however, forecloses this possibility and throws the viewers into an impasse; they have been given no definite resolution or assurance of an ostensible positive outcome. In this case, they have to contend with their affective responses evoked by the uncertainty and opacity of the film’s ending and their compulsion for closure and a much yearned for happy ending. The sudden cut to the film’s credits does not resolve the question as to whether there is a possibility of an appeal and potential repeal of Fariba’s deportation, the tolerance or even acceptance of the relationship between the two women, and the formation of a queer kinship structure with Melvin. Thus, in lieu of satisfying the viewers’ normative ideals of happiness, belonging, and a promising future, *Fremde Haut* leaves its viewers stranded in a *now* from where hope is possible, but certainly not a given.

Overall, notions of endurance and becoming and unbecoming a legible subject, or a body that matters, are two key principles embodied by *Fremde Haut*. Both have shaped my interrogation of the film in this chapter. While Siamak^F and, at the end of the film, Fariba strive to persist in the world, they do not always have access to or receive the resources or alliances to make endurance possible. Rather, they are forced to contend with the burden of constantly negotiating their desire to belong and the possibilities and limitation attributed to them through a temporality of tolerance. In this regard, these two filmic characters point to what is at stake when the mobility of various kinds offers the potential for being and becoming timely and untimely. While they are able to forge bonds and relationships with others, they also experience exhaustion from always being timely and in-sync with the doctrines of the dominant culture, a notion that also informs my analysis in the next chapter. In the case of *Fremde Haut*, this sense of fatigue ultimately renders the subjects' lives unsustainable and forecloses the prospect of hope and a future.

Chapter 3

Libidinal Economies: Negotiating Identity, Pleasure, and Desire in *Die verbesserte Frau*

With Barbara Kirchner's crime novel *Die verbesserte Frau*, the reader enters the story world of the city of Borbruck where a team of scientists attempts to create a genetically modified woman, whom they label simply "Prototyp." She is a woman whom—against her will—the scientists modify in such a way that she experiences physical pain as pleasure. Not only the test subject undergoes changes, so too do the text's protagonists: Dr. Wolfgang Arndt, Dr. Ursula Olim, and Bettina Ritter constantly stage and re-stage their respective identities. On the one hand, the novel is filled with situations in which the characters produce their subjectivities in ways that allow them to fit neatly into the fixed and normative identity categories supported by a heteronormative system. On the other hand, *Die verbesserte Frau* also articulates moments of pleasure and desire that pose a serious threat to the tightly regulated social structures of the story world. As the subjects in Kirchner's novel articulate and explore their libidinal fantasies within the highly controlled social system of Borbruck, they both affirm and defy the necessity of performing quintessential class, gender, and sexual identities. *Die verbesserte Frau* is thus not simply a story about illicit actions, violence, and violations of civil and personal rights, but also about the ways in which neoliberal capitalism regulates pleasure and desire while promising unlimited uninhibited sexual experiences.

This chapter focuses on how Kirchner melds notions of identity construction,

performativity, and corporeal pleasure and pain with consumerism in a neoliberal world. The foundations for my interrogation of Kirchner's novel in this chapter are: 1) the construction, experiences, and satisfaction of desire in the main characters; 2) the distinct temporality of the question of the fulfillment and non-fulfillment of pleasure; and 3) the constant negotiations of the characters' identities vis-à-vis the daily rhythms of "straight" time. While the central figures detach themselves or are expelled from these temporal patterns and become untimely, they also embrace timeliness as they ascribe to and even yearn for an alignment with normative tempos and cadences.

In order to address these three points of departure, I center my analysis on the figure of the *Prototyp*,⁵⁷ which I understand as both the actual modified individual and as the phantasmic omnipotent ideal of carnal gratification beyond the conventional limitations imposed by the body. Based on these two different conceptions of the *Prototyp*, I highlight how the novel's fluid and shifting dynamics shape the construction of subjectivities of the novel's protagonists. I first interrogate the portrayal of Dr. Arndt's relationship to the *Prototyp* and his inability to detach himself fully from normative temporal rhythms; then I illustrate how the novel dupes its readers into viewing Ursula as a foil to Arndt, even when her portrayal in certain situations calls this opposition into question. Integral to my reading of Bettina and Dr. Ursula Olim in the last section of this chapter is the manner in which the novel presents the reader with two characters that (falsely) appear to embody dichotomous characteristics. After interrogating this ostensibly bifurcated model of identity markers in Kirchner's protagonists, I then investigate how the negotiation of Bettina's and Ursula's identities are linked to an in- but also out-of-synchness with

⁵⁷ Henceforth, I will refer to the *Prototyp* with the female pronoun "she" rather than the neuter pronoun "it" in order to highlight female-bodiedness and to indicate that, despite the genetic modifications, I consider it to be a human being.

linear, “straight” time, and how the two women at times epitomize a sense of timeliness and conformity to the norms while at other times they construct their subjectivity in ways that render them untimely.

By repeatedly participating in and abandoning normative and normalizing temporal dynamics, these characters can be best characterized as (un)timely bodies. They inhabit a multitude of positions and adhere to different temporal structures and patterns based on the construction and performance of their subjectivities as shifting. Their various acts of exploring the possibility of embracing both normative and non-normative rhythms of time allow them to indulge in pleasures they derive from both normative as well as queer sexed, gendered, and classed practices. Thus, these characters both embrace but also unhinge themselves from the routinized framework of labor time, which at times provides them with the potential to destabilize and challenge and at other times affirm and espouse the conventions of traditional and normative conceptions of identity, pleasure, and desire.

What resides at the heart of these shifts and negotiations is the *Prototyp*. Through her continuously looming presence, she determines the direction of the narrative and the performative acts of the characters. While the *Prototyp* herself does not always take center stage in the story, her existence, or the idea of her, nonetheless fuels the machinery of desires and pleasures that shape the construction and deconstruction of subjectivity for each of the characters. Thus, she aids in the emergence of certain figures in the novel as (un)timely bodies and is a connecting element whose somatic instantiation—either real or imagined—allows for the characters to forge alternative bonds and relationships.

Kirchner’s novel centers on Bettina Ritter, a student who lives in the fictional city of Borbruck, where several young women have recently disappeared, been abducted, or even killed.

When a friend goes missing, Bettina starts investigating these crimes. She uncovers a connection between the crimes and a genetics lab located on a hill called “Guter Weißer Berg” [Good White Mountain⁵⁸], where the female victims all once served as test subjects for experiments conducted by Dr. Wolfgang Arndt and his colleagues. As Bettina discovers, the aim of the research project is to modify the neurological pathways in the female body in such a way that physical violence inflicted upon the women is converted into pleasure.⁵⁹ During her investigations, Bettina becomes infatuated with Dr. Ursula Olim, one of the researchers at the “Guten Weißen Berg,” and they begin a romantic relationship. The text portrays Ursula as a sexually inexperienced scientist with strong convictions and a passion for her work, while characterizing Bettina as a somewhat promiscuous lesbian. After spending the night with Ursula, Bettina gains access to the scientist’s computer, and discovers several files that expose Ursula as a corrupt, brutal, and reckless criminal who plans to make the student her next test subject.

Kirchner’s literary and essayistic oeuvre interrogates the current and past socio-cultural and political landscapes of Germany, Europe, as well as other major global powers such as the United States. Her analysis of contemporary socio-political, cultural, and economic phenomena aligns her with many other contemporaries writers and filmmakers, such as Juli Zeh and the Berlin School. Kirchner’s work is unique, as she is both a researcher in the field of theoretical chemistry and a feminist author and journalist. Although this particular combination distinguishes her from many colleagues and gives her a distinct position as a writer, her texts

⁵⁸ Due to the fact that Kirchner’s novel has not been translated into English yet, all the translations of the text in this chapter are mine.

⁵⁹ This type of female subject is reminiscent of the perfectly adjusted and submissive female robots as idealized models of traditional femininity in Ira Levin’s satirical sci-fi thriller *The Stepford Wives* (1972).

have received little to no scholarly attention.⁶⁰ She is highly critical of the rise and dominance of neoliberal capitalism and the reemergence of pseudo-leftist politics after Gerhard Schröder and of their impact on German society in particular and global structures in general. Kirchner does not condemn people's desire for normative structures, but rather understands them to be a part of the social fabric in the twenty-first century. She nevertheless urges her readership to stand up for their human rights and to question authoritarian structures because "solange man die Herrschaft selbst unangetastet läßt, ist man dem [Herrschaftssystem] nicht nur ausgesetzt, sondern stimmt diesem Stand der Dinge sogar zu" (*Dämmermännerung* 93) [as long as one leaves the dominant structure itself untouched, one not only is exposed to it [the dominant system], but one also agrees to the status quo]. In her critique, Kirchner foregrounds the importance of critical reflection or oppositional thinking in lieu of passively consenting to established and dominant structures.

The only publication that engages with *Die verbesserte Frau* is Elizabeth Bridges's essay "Nasty Nazis and Extreme Americans: Cloning, Eugenics, and the Exchange of National Signifiers in Contemporary Science Fiction" (2014), which addresses the representation of genetic modifications of the body and eugenics. Bridges investigates whether—and if so, how—contemporary German and American science fiction novels engage with the historical legacy of the Nazis and their experiments on human beings and how this discourse influences contemporary debates on biotechnology. She concludes that, while American novels tend to rely on a narrative that evokes tropes such as Nazism when depicting terrifying techniques and their

⁶⁰ I want to emphasize that my use of the word "texts" here applies primarily to Kirchner's literary and essayistic work. After receiving a professorship in chemistry from the University of Bonn in 2006, she has taught theoretical chemistry at the University in Leipzig since 2007 and published widely in the field of theoretical and physical chemistry.

consequences in relation to biotechnological experimentation, their German counterparts appear to focus on America as the source from which horrifying visions originate.

Since bodily modifications, or at least the prospect thereof, play a key role in my reading of Kirchner's novel, I aim to provide an examination of *Die verbesserte Frau* that complements Bridges's approach. In lieu of interrogating how the text references a very particular, discrete, and often cited aspect of German history, namely that of fascism and the Nazi era, my analysis in this chapter approaches temporality in a different and more general fashion in order to reveal the pervasiveness of neoliberal capitalist labor time and its impact on conceptions of identity, pleasure, and desire. While Bridges's exploration of Kirchner's text centers on historical time, I am less interested in a concrete moment in the past or present. Rather, I intend to foreground time *per se* and emphasize how the text allows for moments of rupture of a traditional linear unfolding of time. Investigating the significance of tempo and routinized patterns for the construction of both normative and non-normative subjectivities under neoliberal capitalism, I will show that the novel serves as a commentary not only on how performative acts may simultaneously affirm and defy traditional and rigid conceptions of identity, but also on how desire and pleasure are experienced, structured, and controlled.

3.1 The *Prototyp*: Galvanizing and (Dis)Assembling Desires

Since the figure and figment of the *Prototyp* function as integral components in the creation and fulfillment of particular sexual desires and fantasies in the novel, this section not only dissects how this character kindles and stultifies such longing and bodily excitement, but also asks how these feelings are linked to the consumption-based, capitalist system portrayed in the novel. Built for sale by the dubious corporation with "Morgen & Partner" (Kirchner,

verbesserte Frau 88), which finances the research institute, the *Prototyp* is engineered for a very specific, rich clientele whose sole interest is the promise that the *Prototyp*'s "improvement" extends the transformation of sadomasochistic fantasies into reality without any feelings of guilt. Through the instantaneous neurological alteration of feelings of pain into pleasure in the *Prototyp*, the customers, who purchase the *Prototyp* to have sex with her, are not only able to enact their sadistic desires, but they are also seduced into believing that their violent acts are permissible and even appealing to the woman. In this way, the *Prototyp* becomes the commodity in an economy driven by the demand to redesign or completely remove physiological barriers in the quest for ecstasy and uninhibited pleasure.

What makes the *Prototyp* so desirable not only for customers, but also for Arndt, is the fact that she is considered a living human being rather than an example of "Maschinen, Roboter, Animatronik" (34) [machines, robots, animatronics]. Contrary to a conventional machine, whose space and time of operation is delineated by their owner, she is given "volle Bewegungsfreiheit" (35) [full range of motion] in her room and maintains "die Fähigkeit, eigene Gedanken zu denken" (65) [the ability to think own thoughts]. At the same time, her body is controlled by the schedule of daily experiments such that "[i]hre Bewegungsfreiheit zu nutzen, ... [w]ürde ihr auch nicht einfallen" (35) [taking advantage of her full range of mobility would not even occur to her]. In this regard, the *Prototyp* seems to undergo treatments similar to operant conditioning,⁶¹ which exposes her body to stimuli in order to shape her behavioral responses rather than her mental capacities or critical thinking skills.

⁶¹ This type of learning was developed by B. F. Skinner in the early twentieth century, involving stimulus control in order to modify behavior. Operant conditioning differs from Pavlovian classic conditioning insofar as it goes beyond the alteration of reflexive responses (Chance 124–28).

While she is seemingly granted some type of autonomy, the *Prototyp* is subjected to a rigid schedule of different training routines “nach der Uhr, genau nach Zeitplan” (67) [at precise times, exactly according to schedule] that are part of the modification process. These daily rhythms and regimens completely efface any ideas of and desires for “freedom” and detach her from the quotidian cadences of her “regular” life. Since her life is now governed by different daily rhythms and sequences, the *Prototyp* has been trained to be content within the boundaries enforced upon her such that she does not even consider dismantling or at least calling these limits into question.

Indeed, while the *Prototyp* represents more narrowly a modified being in a sci-fi crime novel, the novel suggests that her fate also demonstrates how many individuals in contemporary society are lured by narratives of autonomy and “freedom” into accepting the ever-increasing regulation of their bodies.⁶² The rhetoric of neoliberalism encourages them to believe that they are independent and self-determining citizen-subjects who possess, akin to Kirchner’s *Prototyp*, “volle Bewegungsfreiheit” within the geographical boundaries of their respective nations and even beyond. Globalization, as Kirchner states in *Der Implex* (2012), co-written with Dietmar Dath, has allowed a segment of population of the Global North to “jetzt mit ihrem Geld zwar überall hinkommen, aber nicht mehr raus” (18) [be able to get everywhere with their money, but they can’t escape]. In other words, twenty-first-century neoliberal capitalism champions the notion that the ideals of individualism, independence, and (global) mobility are attainable and desirable in order to mask its ubiquitous restrictive and controlling structures. Thus, while many believe that they enjoy a sense of unboundedness—that is, “volle Bewegungsfreiheit”—they are

⁶² Scott Westerfeld’s book series *Uglies* (2005) interrogates the notion of body alterations through state mandated operations in order to construct a society in which all the citizen-subjects possess a specific yet socially constructed and standardized Western ideal of beauty.

merely moving according to the dictates of another system, one that replicates limiting and regulating configurations. Much like the *Prototyp*, their life is controlled and governed by the invisible yet standardized and regulating patterns of one's daily tasks, such as standardized sleeping and waking hours, meal times, and work and leisure time, required when one desires recognition as a productive and valuable member of society. The *Prototyp* highlights the fact that even corporeal mutability, which appears to allow the subject experiences that transgress the familiar and socially acceptable, represents merely a permutation of a subject that is trapped inside the system and “[kann] nicht mehr raus.”

The particular promise of fashioning oneself as an independent and unconstrained individual that “Morgen & Partner” offers is already referenced in the very name of the company, which not only functions in an appellative fashion, but also in an indexical one. It designates that which it represents, namely a corporation, but, as Bettina rightly observes, its name “Morgen” is also “zukunftsweisend” (78) [future-oriented]. “Morgen” has a dual meaning. On the one hand, it evokes the associations of cutting-edge research and progress and conveys the potential to overcome today's stage of humanness by embracing tomorrow's—or Morgen's—transhuman enhancements. Pushing the boundaries of the human body beyond its natural limitations, these modifications or so-called “enhancements” of body⁶³ and mind echo the

⁶³ While not done explicitly, Kirchner's novel hints at the fact that the years leading up to the turn of the millennium have witnessed an increasing number of people desiring to alter their own physical appearance through surgeries or to enhance their cognitive functions through various substances as well as to long for and even demand such changes in others. For Germany, the number of total surgical procedures in 2010 was 184,639. In 2015, the number rose to 308,258, which is a 59.9% increase. While the three most common procedures in 2010 were breast augmentation, lipoplasty, and blepharoplasty, in 2015 they were eyelid surgery, silicone breast augmentation, and liposuction, with a roughly 25% increase in the two corresponding categories liposuction and breast augmentation (*International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery* np).

debate on posthumanness and transhumanness.⁶⁴ On the other hand, it also suggests a possibility that resides in the future. It lures its clients with a teleological narrative of a liberating advancement and a forward movement away from the banal and mundane present, and signals a potential that directs the client to the *then* rather than the *now*. In this vein, the name signals a promise of progress that makes palatable the undoing of our current state of being by re-directing our vision forward.

The second part of the name, namely the “Partner,” references either the process of financialization in neoliberal economic structures or the (illegal) exclusion of governmental control, depending on whether the reader aligns with Bettina's or Konstantin Morgen's perspective. In reference to the latter, these partners may represent “der Firma verpflichtete[] Figuren im Magistrat” (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 144) [individuals in the municipal administration who are committed to the firm], who ensure that the state does not get involved in the supervision of projects, enforce legal guidelines, or demand the clarification and justification of research protocols. While most of the time this type of reshaping of the human body is carried out by legitimate clinics, Kirchner's text also sheds light on the fact that some labs do not always operate in a lawful manner. However, once inspectors are “an die kurze Leine gelegt” (144) [kept on a short leash], which typically is accomplished through bribes or threats of bodily harm

⁶⁴ Although these two terms are often used interchangeably and transhumanism is perceived as a strand of thought that derived from posthumanism, the distinguishing criterium that sets these two apart is their relationship to the body. Posthumanism focuses predominately on identifying interlocking systems of communication among different species and observing how different information patterns shape the human consciousness, while transhumanism is mostly concerned with the biogenetic engineering of the body in order to change its form and enhance its functions. More specifically, posthumanism proposes that any other kind of intelligent system—be it machines, virtual technology, or even animals—affect the human being in ways that allow for the destabilization and reinvention of seemingly rigid identity categories such as sex, gender, and race, which ultimately defy any clear-cut distinction between humans as well as the human and the nonhuman “other.” Transhumanism, on the other hand, foregrounds how available nanotechnology aids in the construction of a new kind of human being that possesses heretofore unavailable or unimagined intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities, and suggests ways in which technological advances allow the human species to overcome its biological limitations (Hayles xi–xiv, 11–12; Braidotti 188–90).

or moral integrity, and instituted as favorable “Partners,” the lab is able to avoid official oversight and to operate as a private entity. Bettina’s remark, “Partner” “kl[i]ng[t] mehr wie ein Kreditinstitut” (78) [sounds more like a credit institution], evokes the growing importance of financialization in contemporary neoliberal economies. The novel thus references not only the rapid growth of creditors and credit institutions at the end of the twentieth century, but also identifies spending and borrowing as the corollaries of neoliberal capitalism.⁶⁵

This emphasis on financialization, which relies on the exchange of products or services and currency, also becomes apparent in Arndt’s description of his work as a “Lieblingsprojekt” (35) [favorite project]—an abstract term that effaces the fact that he experiments on living human subjects—whose success will “seine Prämie verdoppeln” (33–34) [double his bonus]. And yet, this increase in his salary is not enough to allow him to participate in what Arndt calls the “Scheißspiel” (34) [crappy game]: that is, to purchase his own *Prototyp*.

Echoing neoliberal discourses that center on project-based compensation of labor and that foreground an element of diversion—“Spiel”—to mask the potential menial quality of one’s work, Arndt certainly understands the detrimental nature of his participation in this game. While it seems that he is undoing himself in the labor process—it wears him down physically, emotionally, and mentally, while offering no guaranteed compensation for his work—he also embraces this very insecurity and lack of a stable and safe income. He valorizes success above all else: “[n]ichts ist so erfolgreich wie der Erfolg” (33) [nothing is as successful as success]. By relying on circular or even tautological reasoning, he willingly forfeits hard money and defines

⁶⁵ In his assessment of the role that financialization and capital play in contemporary society, economic sociologist Oleg Komlik emphasizes that “[f]inancialization is a key feature of neoliberalism. It refers to the capturing impact of financial markets, institutions, actors, instruments and logics on the real economy, households and daily life” (np).

his value in/for the system in terms of the soft currency of recognition and job success that is an integral part of the rhetoric of contemporary neoliberalism.

While the body of the *Prototyp* functions as the material commodity that can be acquired and exchanged, the fulfillment of certain desires is the service to be purchased. In this sense, the client's pleasure is not directly related to and experienced at the moment of the purchase of the body of the *Prototyp* in the present. Instead, its actualization is hinted at through the fantasy that her presence evokes, while always deferred to the future. Buyers find themselves in an exchange system in which the presence of the body does not guarantee the corporeal sensation in the *now*, but requires their investment in a fantasy that can only be realized in the *then*, if at all.

In the case of this "if at all," the clients are forever chasing an illusion of fulfillment that remains out of reach and unattainable. They are left with the impossibility of indulgence and gratification and have to accept the lack of satisfaction. The result is a seeming reversal in their relationship to the *Prototyp*. Clients must endure the impossibility of gratification, along with any negative consequences of the deferral of their desire. The ironic twist is that they find themselves in a situation that makes them experience the kinds of reactions that they seek in the *Prototyp* but these exact physical and affective responses leave her body post modifications unaffected. In this sense, they have created a scenario not merely in which the fulfillment of their fantasies is deferred to the future, but also in which the potential of attainability of pleasure at any point in time has been eliminated.

Many models of the workings and effectiveness of consumer capitalism emphasize the experience of pleasure and its corollaries, happiness, excitement, euphoria, and even ecstasy, as the ideal affective responses to the acquisition of goods in market exchange systems. While the goal is the experience of gratification of a longing for a product and the feelings the object elicits

in the customer, the actual purchasing process itself has to conjure up a different set of emotions in the buyer in order to foster a sense of need and want for the specific product. It is crucial, that is, that it generates a sense of desire in the purchaser and that the actualization of fulfillment be deferred temporally to an often distant future. This delay of gratification intensifies longing.

As this yearning to possess the particular product, the intense need for gratification, and the deferral thereof register with the client as uncomfortable and potentially even painful, Kirchner's *Die verbesserte Frau* evokes the concept of Lacanian *jouissance*—a term that describes a sense of extremely intense enjoyment that cannot be distinguished from pain (Lacan 60). Although the novel does not actually depict any of the *Prototyp*'s buyers, Morgen makes it clear to Arndt that he is expected to fulfill “die Vorstellungen” [the ideas] of each client, which are “uns bestens bekannt, es war alles ausgehandelt” (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 201) [very well-known to us, everything had been negotiated]. As the customer determines exactly the type of responses and behaviors the *Prototyp* is supposed to exhibit and is forced to wait until the experiments are completed before being able to acquire the much-desired product, the sense of longing to possess the very same can register as agonizing. The object of desire is never quite within reach. In other words, the *Prototyp* promises to become a reality at any moment, yet that moment of realization is always deferred, potentially *ad infinitum*. This form of consumerism engenders a type of masochistic experience in the buyer, who has to be willing to succumb to the unpleasant affective responses that emerge while waiting to acquire the desired object (Evans and Riley 9–13; Barnett, “Consolations” 10; Barnett, “Publics and markets” 271–86).

Furthermore, by depicting the promise of experience of pleasure as always deferred, as a promise of and in the future, the novel demonstrates how customers find themselves trapped in a system in which the figure of the *Prototyp* becomes the limit of their field of vision. In this vein,

Die verbesserte Frau emphasizes how neoliberal capitalism and consumerism are predicated on the privatization and the “freedom” of encountering a multitude of desires while successfully masking the fact that these experiences are less self-directed than they appear at first glance.⁶⁶ As the focal point of desire, the *Prototyp* dictates the parameters for the buyers’ view and indicates that this future promise is at least as prescriptive and confined as it is liberating. In so doing, she enables the construction of a world that is ostensibly based on market-driven selfregulation, autonomy, and possibility, when these prospects are merely deceptive figments of imagination.

3.2 Dr. Wolfgang Arndt: Fantasies and the Deferral of Pleasure

This idea of deferred pleasure also plays a key role for Dr. Arndt in his infatuation with the *Prototyp*, whom he has modified “so sehr zu ihrem Vorteil und seinem Gefallen, Quatsch: natürlich dem Gefallen der Kundschaft” (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 35) [so much to her advantage and his own liking; nonsense: to the liking of the client, of course]. While his main responsibility is the alteration of neurological pathways in the female body of the test subjects in accordance with the customer’s demands, his statement suggests that these changes actually may cater to his own sexual fantasies and desires. On the one hand, assuming that he carries out the wishes of the client, he fosters a neoliberal exchange system in which only a select segment of the population with the necessary economic means is able to attain access to this highly privatized and individualized form of pleasure. As he becomes a mere tool for the facilitation of

⁶⁶ In *Technologies of Sexiness: Sex, Identity, and Consumer Culture* (2015), Adrienne Evans and Sarah Riley argue that in a neoliberal consumer society, subjects “consume [them]selves into being” (10), understanding their acts of purchasing and possessing goods as expressions of individuality and “freedom,” while these products are often mass produced and extremely common items among many members of society. Thus, one’s right to consume becomes an integral part of how the neoliberal subject understands the construction of the self and conceptualizes identity and citizenship (9–12).

the exchange in the libidinal economy, he undoes his own desire in order to promise clients that they are in fact capable of shaping and molding based on their own specific fantasies. The success of the actualization is then measured and assessed by a “Tester,” who is sent by the client to determine whether the *Prototyp* acts according to the buyer’s vision (34). On the other hand, if he constructs the test subject based on his very own “Gefallen,” his intervention allows him to manage and regulate the ways in which sexuality operates and pleasure is elicited in the *Prototyp*.

While this might appear as if it is an act of rebellion against the dictates of Morgen & Partner’s clients, Konstantin Morgen reminds Arndt that, despite his desire to think of it differently, his work at the lab is not “zweckfreies Forschen” (201) [pure research]. He is embedded in a money exchange economy in which the ability to conduct his experiments relies on the “Leute, die ... alles bezahlen, denen [Arndt] gehör[t]” (201) [people who finance everything to whom [Arndt] belongs]. The idea of him realizing what he calls his very own “Gefallen” is always the product of the clients’ desires, who are not only exerting their control over the property of the research facility, but also its staff and scientists; his actions merely serve to satisfy other people, even if that goes against his will.

Based on this dependency on the financial support of the buyers, Arndt himself can be seen as a *Prototyp*-like figure, who himself does not enjoy a sense of “volle Bewegungsfreiheit” and whose actions are constrained by an entity unknown to him. Until Morgen’s explicit declaration of his position at the lab, Arndt operates under the false assumption that he is in charge of the experiments, and that, as a scientist, his involvement with Morgen & Partner is purely to explore his research agendas in the field of neurobiology. As it turns out, he actually partakes in the capitalist exchange of a commodity that traps him in a production circuit in which other

people manage the outcome. Akin to the *Prototyp*, his existence in the microcosmos at the “Guten, Weißen Berg” is founded on the illusion of his being able to exercise his free will as an autonomous subject.

While it remains unclear whether or not Dr. Arndt constructs a “bad” *Prototyp* based on his personal ideas about improving the female body—the text never specifies what exactly his “Gefallen” is and whether and how it differs from that of the clients—he does not attempt to entertain his very own fantasy of doing because he would ultimately risk the “Anerkennung ... [die] ihn entschädigen würde für den Verlust seines Lieblingsprojekts” (34–35) [recognition that would compensate him for the loss of his favorite project]. Arndt refrains from making his own fantasy of the improved woman a reality, since it might impact more than just sales. He derives great pleasure from being legible and recognizable as the successful scientist and creator of the *Prototyp* and is unwilling to jeopardize any of the lab-internal or external validations that establish and confirm the ways in which he is valued as a subject in and by the capitalist exchange system.

Although he dismisses the temptation of this promise of doing as “Quatsch,” that is, foolishness, the gravitational force of the *Prototyp* directs him to engage in other actions that satisfy his fantasies. He enjoys gazing at her through a small window in the cell door to observe how her body reacts to the changes in room temperature or the electric stimuli that are emitted through the room’s floor.⁶⁷ Arndt’s voyeurism recalls Christian Metz’s notion of scopophilia. Metz contends that spectral voyeurism always relies on “the excitation of desire and its non-fulfillment” (77). Extrapolating from this idea, one can discern that the scientist turns the

⁶⁷ Dr. Arndt’s actions call to mind feminist film critic Laura Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze from her seminal 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” which outlines the objectification of the female body and the asymmetric distribution of power based on an understanding of a bifurcated gender model.

Prototyp into a mere object whose presence promises him entertainment and the possibility of the experience of pleasure, which is however always deferred. Arndt's gazing and experience, described as "Gefallen," indicate his emotional attachment to and desire for the *Prototyp*; they also construct him as the holder of male power as well as the embodiment of a lack of satisfaction. In the process, he constructs a libidinally charged relationship with the *Prototyp*, which generates a desire that concomitantly grants and denies him access to the normative structures of society's sexual economy and erotic exchange.

Moments that suggest the allowance of gratification and relief of carnal desire are limited to the laboratory in the research facility. The creation of the *Prototyp* is tied to a complex schedule of neurological treatments and time with the "Trainingsteam" that tests whether the corporeal modification generates changes in behavior. Although Arndt's paychecks and premiums are extremely generous, he has to admit that he will never be able to buy one of the test subjects—"Lebende Menschen waren halt teuer und verbesserte erst recht" (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 34) [Living human beings are simply expensive, to say nothing of enhanced ones]. Thus, the fulfillment of Arndt's fantasies and sexual pleasure are limited by the firm's systematic regulation of both his income and his daily routines and are contingent upon the cadences of labor time in the lab.

The firm does not provide Arndt with enough purchasing power to satisfy his desires beyond the rhythmic structure of his workdays. In lieu of having access to the *Prototyp* any time at his own discretion, he has to rely on the peephole to experience brief moments of personal gratification. However, these moments are always overshadowed by the structural limitations imposed upon him by his job: that is, labor regulates pleasure. Due to this constraint, Arndt's experience, akin to that of the customers, is a complex network of affective responses that

foreground the fact that the prevalence of *jouissance* as moments of pleasure is only possible within the restrictions of an agonizing labor schedule.

Arndt's access to pleasure is always mediated and controlled by his daily routines at work, and, most importantly, it is always deferred. His experiences of gratification are contingent upon his work and cannot exist outside the labor economy that sets the schedule for when the product has to be ready for delivery. Since the time with the *Prototyp* is highly regulated, moments of pleasure are highly precarious for him, as his work constantly undermines the possibility of accessing these very moments. On the one hand, his work is necessary for constructing the being he desires; on the other hand, the successful completion of all the modification processes curtail the *Prototyp*'s time in Arndt's lab. Operating efficiently and successfully within the temporal economy of the lab, he is faced with the predicament of always merely being a timely body, that is, one who has to be timely when performing his duties in order to allow for the possibility of exploring his desire for the "improved" body and of providing himself with moments of pleasure in the present. The procedures situate him in the *now* in a way that does not direct him toward a future. Thus, his very own work necessitates his attachment to a temporal *now*, which, however, always defers and ultimately forecloses any such instances of gratification in a *then*.

When the training finally reaches the stage at which Arndt has to send the *Prototyp* to the aforementioned "Tester," who reports that the woman did not fulfill the criteria of the customer, the *Prototyp* has to be destroyed and replaced by a new one. Fueled by the desire to be with the *Prototyp*, Arndt is unwilling to accept the destruction of his test subject and determines to save her. He is completely infatuated with the thought of rescuing her from her cell in the institute and

imagines starting a life with her “[i]rgendwie, irgendwo, irgendwann”⁶⁸ (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 188) [somehow, somewhere, sometime]. He fantasizes that he will love her “und bei dem Versuch alt werden und langsam verrieseln wie Sand in einer Sanduhr” (188) [and, in an attempt to grow old together, to trickle down slowly like sand inside an hourglass]. Although he knows that this is entirely impossible, he nonetheless entertains the possibility of a life with the *Prototyp*.

In this regard, Arndt’s attraction to the *Prototyp* extends beyond the desire to transform the woman’s body and reveals a type of Berlantian cruelly optimistic attachment, which, as outlined in the introduction, describes a relationship that is detrimental to one’s thriving albeit being highly desirable. Notwithstanding his awareness of the impossibility of being with her from the very beginning of the project, he holds on to a fantasy of a normative life or the “good life”: that is, of romantic love, coupledness, and growing old together (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*). This phantasm, however, fastens him in a present moment filled with no substance, with only abstract ideals of an “irgend-“ to cling to—a mode of dithering in the *now* that offers the potential to gaze at the *then*, yet ensures that a concrete future remains out of reach. In this vein, the promise of doing that the *Prototyp* offers slowly undoes Arndt like the sand that is gathered in an hourglass. Although the sand seems to last an eternity and never runs out as it moves through the narrow portion of the hourglass, it is always contained within the structure of the bulbs.

This sense of being trapped within the system and being slowly undone becomes even more apparent when Arndt is confronted by the CEO of Morgen & Partner about why the

⁶⁸ This phrase is a reference to the 1984 love song by German pop singer Nena, which was a huge commercial success in Europe.

Prototyp is not responding to the “Tester” in the ways she is expected to do. In order to find out why she is reacting unexpectedly, the scientist enters the *Prototyp*’s cell to interrogate her. When engaging with the woman, Arndt discovers that, instead of being trained and programmed according to his plans, she “ha[.]t einen eigenen Willen” [has her own ideas] and acts accordingly, which he deems to be “der Anfang vom Ende” (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 221) [the beginning of the end]. Since the *Prototyp* acts on her own accord, she does Arndt in and renders him a timely body in the *now*. In so doing, she challenges him to come to terms with the fact that the “promise” she extended in the past has transformed the possibility of doing into his undoing in the present moment. Like the sand that is only set into movement when the hourglass is turned upside down but never truly progresses anywhere, Arndt’s vision of a life with the *Prototyp* revolves around his attachment to a fantasy of a *then* that is curtailed from the outset and only seemingly offers the potential of a future.

Determined to unearth the reason for the *Prototyp*’s unexpected behavior and unable to engage with her in a productive way through verbal communication, Arndt resorts to physical brutality and “drehte völlig durch. Prügelte auf sie ein, ... trat und würgte und quälte sie, ... bis er kraftlos an der weichen Wand herunterrutschte” (221–22) [He completely lost it. Bludgeoned her, ... kicked and choked and tortured her, ... until, completely drained, he slid down the soft wall]. By using excessive force against the woman, Arndt enacts precisely the type of corporeal violence that constitutes the sadistic programming processes that Arndt carries out in his “[t]olle Folterkammer” (36) [fantastic torture chamber]. His abuse of the *Prototyp* sparked by his intense anger and frustration only stops when he is physically so exhausted that he is unable to hit her any more.

As his body appears to be depleted of all strength, signaling the end of his maltreatment of the woman, “fing [Arndt] noch mal von vorne an” [(Arndt) started all over once again], but his interrogation techniques ultimately yield “[k]ein Resultat. Keine Antworten. Kein Geständnis” (222) [no results. No answers. No confession]. In lieu of moving on and accepting the fact that the *Prototyp* will not provide him with the answers he seeks because she has been trained according to a different program, he is stuck in a cycle of repeating his actions over and over again. Through his repetitions in the present, Arndt becomes exaggeratedly timely, that is, he represents a body that is fixated on producing its own recurrent rhythm. It fixes him in the *now* in a way that never allows for a *then* to emerge. In this sense, he is unable to produce the desired outcome and thus extends a promise of doing back on to himself that does not permit him to see beyond the present moment and to become untimely or envision an “irgend-“ in the future.

3.3 Dr. Ursula Olim: Fantasies and Staging of a (Non)Normative Subjectivity

While the *Prototyp* is constructed as an enhanced being with the qualities most desired in a sadomasochistic erotic economy, *Die verbesserte Frau* also depicts her as a strong gravitational force for Ursula. Akin to Arndt, Ursula is infatuated with the possibility of creating a modified woman for use in sexual practices that involve pain. In contrast to Arndt, she does not desire the actual physical being that is the *Prototyp*, but rather the fantasy of substantiating “de[n] Traum des HERREN; nicht einfach irgendeines kreativen Sadisten, von der echten HINGABE, von der

wahren ERGEBUNG”⁶⁹ (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 202, capitalization in original) [the MASTER’s dream; not simply that of any creative sadist, of pure DEVOTION, of real SUBMISSION]. She is less attracted to the material body of the test subjects in the lab than the “Traum” of a fantastic and an idealized woman whose desirable qualities she makes explicit during her conversation with Bettina. The revelation that the student will be Ursula’s next *Prototyp* thus extends a promise of doing: that is, the possibility of bringing to life the phantasmagoric ideal of the “verbesserte Frau.” This promise has a reciprocal quality as it also grants Ursula the promise of fulfilling her fantasy of registering as a subject who is participating in the capitalist system upon which the research lab is founded.

The words “HINGABE” and “ERGEBUNG” are reminiscent of the master-slave dialectic in Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s writings.⁷⁰ Ursula’s own gender marks her body in a way that defies and destabilizes the power that she inhabits based on her privileged socio-economic position as a widely published and respected scientist. As a woman, she has limited access to power that is afforded to men in the gendered social system. However, much like the Hegelian slave, she inhabits a space within the social realm that grants her a certain ability to transgress the normative boundaries of society’s gender-based power structure insofar as she claims authority and thus reveals the porosity of the lines of demarcation of these hierarchical systems.

⁶⁹ This is the only place in the novel where words are capitalized for emphasis. A discussion of why this is significant for my analysis follows below.

⁷⁰ The master-slave dialectic established in Hegel’s *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) was also reiterated by Nietzsche in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886). According to both philosophers, power and dominance reside with the more active master, who controls the slave. However, both dialectic conceptual approaches also highlight the possibility of power to reside not only with the dominant, but also with the submissive partner of a relationship. The slave possesses authority and control that derive from the master’s dependency of recognition and acknowledgement of superiority. In other words, authority, dominance, and control are not exclusively established through the existence of normative socio-political structures instilled by a dominant select few, but also through the acceptance and solidification of this arbitrarily constructed hierarchy by their submissive opposites. Even though Hegel does not explicitly discuss the roles of master and slave in terms of gender, Nietzsche comments in Aphorism 261 explicitly on the role of women as slaves (Hegel 230–49; Nietzsche 734).

In a similar vein, Katrin Sieg identifies “the construction of sexuality as the marker dividing fascism from antifascism, as the juxtaposition of asexual-feminist and sexual-fascist characters shows” (161), in several of *Frauenkrimi* author Doris Gercke’s crime novels. Contrary to Gercke, Kirchner does not juxtapose the two models of sexual agency and power typically coupled with fascist ideology and antifascist politics. Instead, *Die verbesserte Frau* presents the protagonists as capable of fluidly traversing discursive realms. In this sense, they do and undo their identities in multiple ways. By staging and re-staging her subjectivity, Ursula becomes an (un)timely body insofar as she continuously negotiates and renegotiates her subject position. As a result each performative act of her identity in any given situational context both affirms and destabilizes the hierarchy of power.

If we read Kirchner’s presentation of Ursula with this notion of fluidity in mind, the novel appears to encourage its readers to believe that the boundaries of the clear-cut dichotomy that Sieg proposes become untraceable, blurry, and unstable. Throughout the novel, the scientist is depicted as exhibiting a type of fluidity with regard to not only various aspects of her identity, but also her stance on ethics and feminist politics. On the one hand, she claims that she admires the *Frauengruppe*, a group of feminist and lesbian activists, and is open to listening to the group’s criticism of the methods applied at the “Guten Weißen Berg,” which they voice by interrupting Dr. Olim’s guest lecture at the local university. The members of the group are particularly appalled by the fact that a private corporation—Morgen & Partner—is conducting research that is not federally regulated or controllable and that relies on and overuses medication for the treatment of the psychological or psychiatric conditions of “volunteers.”⁷¹ On the other

⁷¹ My use of quotation marks reflects the sentiment of the pamphlet that the *Frauengruppe* distributes during their protest, in which they indicate that some women experience forced internment in research institutes or psychiatric clinics upon revealing their non-normative sexuality or gender.

hand, Dr. Olim endorses the use of kidnapped women and their genetic modification against their will for the sake of pursuing her research agenda and of making a profit. This deliberate staging of her alliance with the leftist *Frauengruppe* allows Dr. Olim—at least initially—to deceive Bettina, who asserts, “Komplizin ist sie bestimmt nicht” (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 118) [she is definitely not an accomplice]. Thus, the scientist is able to construct herself as critical of any illicit practices that Morgen & Partner is said to perform, camouflaging her complacency and involvement in the experiments.

When we consider Ursula’s ostensible alliance with the *Frauengruppe* and the novel’s construction of her as a woman who is denied the type of agency her male counterparts enjoy within a highly gendered system of power and who is ridiculed and sexualized by her male students, *Die verbesserte Frau* seems to seek to make us believe that Ursula functions as the foil to Arndt in the text. Despite her position at the laboratory, she appears to endorse and speak up for leftist politics that critique the research lab, to suffer from misogyny and heterosexism despite her complicity in upholding precisely these gender stereotypes and hierarchal structures in her sexual encounters with Bettina, and to detach herself from the lab despite her intense involvement in sabotaging Arndt’s experiments in order to take over the project of improving women herself.

The contrast between Ursula and Arndt that the novel wants readers to recognize comes to the fore in the construction of Ursula’s subjectivity as tied to certain notions and past and present discourses of German culture. By visually emphasizing the terms “HERREN,” “HINGABE,” and “ERGEBUNG” through the capitalization of each word, the text lends these German words multiple meanings. Engaging with the *Prototyp* as “Traum jedes HERREN” and the notion of physical improvements and enhancements of the body through non-consensual,

genetic modifications by the scientist, the narrative evokes a meta-discourse *sui generis* for Germany's Nazi past and particularly Hitler's necropolitical fantasy of the master race, or the so-called *Herrenrasse*. In so doing, the novel not only aligns the scientist's rhetoric with fascist ideals of power and dominance, but also constructs Ursula as one of the perpetrators of the crimes in the lab and aligns the scientist's rhetoric with fascist ideals of power and domination.

In the second part of her essay "Fascinating Fascism" (1975),⁷² Susan Sontag discusses what she terms the "eroticization of fascism" (100) and the connection between Nazism, in particular SS regalia and paraphernalia, and the staging of sadomasochistic fantasies. She claims that sadomasochism, akin to fascism, is theatrical insofar as it requires its practitioners to be "expert consumers and choreographers as well as performers" (103). According to her, sadomasochism, unlike any other form of sex, is merely carnal. By employing Nazi iconography, one to create and stage scenarios of dominance and submission in sexual role play.

Taking into account the opposition between what Ursula and Arndt represent and Sontag's argument, we can see that the novel positions the female scientist to call into question traditional, hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality. At first glance, she appears to embody a sense of fluidity and to challenge strictly bifurcated ideas of identity. Portrayed as distancing herself from and explicitly breaking with the authoritarian, gendered structures of the research lab and resisting social expectations about femininity and her sexuality, Ursula reads as a queer character or the illusion of an autonomous subject who seeks to resist dominant paradigms of

⁷² The first part of the essay focuses on Sontag's reading of the portrayal of Leni Riefenstahl on the dust jacket of *The Last of the Nuba*. Sontag critiques the inaccurate depiction of Riefenstahl's ties to Hitler and Goebbels and her position as an independent filmmaker as well as the way in which the propaganda purposes of her films were left out or cast aside. Sontag further states that fascist aesthetics are preoccupied with "situations of control, submissive behavior, and extravagant effort; they exalt two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude" (91), emphasizing the bifurcated Hegelian master slave paradigm. This foregrounding of and reliance on particular sets of binarisms has encouraged scholars to draw a direct link between fascist ideology, Nazism, and sadomasochistic sexual practices (see Monika Treut, Laura Frost, and Andrew Hewitt).

power and embraces her position of liberation and self-determination. A more nuanced look reveals, however, that she serves as Arndt's foil in the sense that she inhabits a position that reflects the capitalist endeavors of the firm and gains power from operating within/along the system and its norms. By contrast, according to Ursula, Arndt is the "Idealist" [idealist], who "sich von allem isoliert hat" (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 241) [detached himself from everything] and partook in the experiments for the sake of advancing scientific research. She is the one who believes "[w]as man nicht selber macht, ist nie sicher" (241) [what one doesn't do oneself, is never guaranteed] and thus willingly perpetuates the system rather than critically interrogating it.

The *Prototyp* is coupled with the distinct promise of becoming an autonomous subject who not only desires to do the work herself, but also is able to do so. In this sense, Ursula seems to be a modified embodiment of the Sontagian "expert consumer[] and choreographer[] as well as performer[]." She is, that is, portrayed as staging her identity in ways that allow her to be legible in various ways based on what the situation requires, but not for the sake of appearing "nice" like "ordinary people" (Sontag 103). Rather, she orchestrates situational settings that merely create the illusion that Ursula champions the importance of belonging, relationships, and community, when she is actually not interested in connecting with Bettina. Instead of forging an alliance with the young woman, the scientist focuses solely on herself and on remaining in a dominant position in the relationship. As she sets the parameters for each scene, she is not interested in a contractual agreement—as she states, "[w]enn du nein sagst. Weißt du: Das ist mir egal" (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 242) [if you say no. You know: I don't care]—but rather devises a world in which "the aim is ecstasy" (Sontag 105) in Sontag's sense, but in this case the fantasy is improvement and life rather than death.

Honing in on Sontag's term for the sadomasochist—the “expert consumer”—and considering Ursula's proclamation of disinterest, I underscore that a reading of her as a non-conforming, non-relational, and transgressive subject needs to be reconsidered in the context of neoliberalism. Margot Weiss's 2011 *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality*, for instance, reminds us that while mainstream culture tends to associate sadomasochism with its dark, leather aesthetics, notions of queer sex acts, and deviant subcultures, it is important to consider how, where, and with whom SM has been practiced in recent years. According to Weiss, SM “is based both on a liberal subject—who knows its own desires, acts with autonomy, and freely consents—and on neoliberal rationalities that delimit this subject's sphere of belonging, of self, to the private” (18). Through the commodification of fantasies and the “particular dynamics of desire and economics” (24), whereby practitioners participate in staged slave auctions, purchase SM paraphernalia, rent spaces to stage their scenes, or pay hefty entrance fees and buy over-priced alcohol in clubs, SM neither simply defies nor affirms norms, but has to be understood within a complex force field of socio-cultural, political, and economic vectors, and their impact on an individual.

If we read Kirchner's character Ursula through Weiss's lens as a non-conformist and “expert consumer” who is located in this nexus of power relations that are acting upon her, she appears to be the epitome of the neoliberal paradigm of privatization, self-optimization, and maximization of personal gain. She is portrayed as the independent, hard-working researcher who might rely on illegal methods to conduct her experiments, but, contrary to Arndt, is not afraid to work instead of merely supervise the procedures. This kind of rhetoric and way of self-fashioning is, however, symptomatic of the flawed illusions of neoliberalism. She fully embraces the capitalist production system in the lab, so fully that she has come to characterize her own

labor as essential, significant, and valuable for the progress of the project. As she points out, she firmly believes that she has to execute the labor herself in order to ensure proper results, forever prioritizing labor time in order to avoid the looming uncertainty of loss of control and power, of being “nie sicher” [never sure]. In her effort to combat the “nie,” she has to become and remain a timely body, always synchronized with the routine of labor, always forced to be present, always merely existing in and for the *now*.

3.4 Bettina Richter and Dr. Ursula Olim: Shifting and Staging Identities

The promise of doing is also thematized in the novel’s construction of the subjectivity of the two female protagonists Ursula and Bettina, who constantly negotiate aspects of their identities—gender, sex, and socio-economic status—as they mobilize identity categories and do and undo their subjectivities. As they both exist within and attempt to resist routinized patterns of time, they possess the potential to transition fluidly between being timely and untimely and are capable of becoming subjects who affirm but also resist the requirement to make themselves recognizable and available as subjects visually legible to others.

Ursula’s decision to eat lunch in the university cafeteria exemplifies this challenge to rigid and stable conceptions of identity. She tends to sit among the students consuming cheap food, despite her superior socio-economic status as a wealthy, established scientist who “sollte [das] ja nicht nötig haben, verdienstmässig” (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 23) [should not be in need of that, given her earnings]. While one might assume that the space of the cafeteria extends a promise of doing, and of potentially staging her identity in a way that it signals her belonging to a different socio-economic and professional group—namely that of low to moderate-income university students or professors—with its specific temporally regulated routines, this particular

act allows Ursula to rupture the temporal patterns established by the institute where she works. It does not, however, grant her a position completely out-of-sync with the society's temporal economy.

When Arndt reflects on her habit of eating in the university cafeteria, he understands Ursula's action as a way "sich inmitten der täglichen Routine doch irgendwie von der Firma zu distanzieren" (36) [indeed to distance herself somehow from the firm in the midst of daily routines] and in so doing points to the possibility of Ursula's unhinging herself from the structured routines that regulate the lives of the scientists at the institute. Instead of eating together "mit dem Stab" (36) [with the staff], she is able to detach herself from the conformist temporal framework that the institute imposes on all its employees. She appears to have found a possibility of escaping the regimen of the system, even if only temporarily.

While one might be tempted to read Ursula's endeavor as a form of resistance, in which she upholds a sense of individuality and radically uncouples herself from the institute, I caution against such a conclusion. While her acts are indeed a sign of withdrawal from the other researchers, a celebration of them as fully liberating would ignore the precise details of how she achieves this retreat. By eating in the *Mensa* of the university, Ursula enters yet another system that is highly temporally structured and tied to regional governing bodies. Cafeterias in Germany are typically open to the public and state-run and thus offer their patrons subsidized lunches; state money controls not only the type and amount of food available, but also regulates the times at which this food is available.

Since the cafeteria operates only during specific hours—"der Gong pünktlich um 14.00 Uhr zum Mittagessen-Ausgabestop [] dröhnt" (17) [the gong sounds exactly at 2 p.m. to signal the end of lunch time]—its temporal patterns force patrons to abide by its particular routine.

While one might assume that bodily needs such as hunger establish scheduled mealtimes, various biologists and medical and nutritional scientists have refuted such a claim in recent years. These scholars argue that the capitalist drive of the food industry has reinforced the idea of set mealtimes—breakfast in the morning, lunch around midday, and dinner in the evening—in order to finance the development and marketing of more products and structure people’s days.⁷³ In this sense, food intake is certainly linked to the corporeal need and desire to eat, but the highly structured nature of consumption regulates and coerces people into organizing their days accordingly.

Given this regimentation of time, Ursula’s act of eating in the *Mensa* does not grant her any escape. Instead it merely situates her inside another institutional power structure that enforces its own normative patterns and follows a rigid schedule. While Arndt perceives her actions as acts of resistance and offering a promise of undoing, Ursula is only able to do so by subjecting herself to a similar routinized framework and by organizing her day according to a rigid schedule that requires her to obey its order. In this sense, it undoes her by forcing her to adapt to a different type of temporal structure, one that is anything but liberating. Rather, the schedule of the *Mensa* constrains Ursula and coerces her to arrange her work and leisure time in accordance with the cafeteria’s rhythm; in the end it is simply an illusion or false choice.

When considered in the light of this understanding of the *Mensa*, Ursula seems much more similar to the *Prototyp* than at first glance. While I do not want to suggest that Ursula’s life is comparable to the fate of the women who are kidnapped and used for scientific experiments

⁷³ Research has shown that “common eating pattern in modern societies, three meals plus snacks every day, is abnormal from an evolutionary perspective” (Mattson et al. 16647). The myth that human adults should eat three meals per day—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—has been perpetuated by the media and various industries in order to sell more foods and drinks to make profits (Cassaza et al.; Longo and Mattson)

against their free will (which at that point they no longer possess), I propose that the scientist can be read as a different kind of *Prototyp*. If we move beyond the concrete microcosmos of the laboratory on the “Guten Weißen Berg” and consider the more abstract macrocosmos that emerges from the power and impact that socio-cultural discursive structures have on the individual, Ursula appears to be—of course, imperceptible to herself—the *Prototyp* of timeliness. Akin to the test subjects, Ursula is trapped, if less overtly, inside a regulatory system that governs her daily routines. Ursula is lured into thinking she possesses the ability to detach from control and confinement. This state is gratifying and pleasurable insofar as she is able to structure her daily schedule according to her needs and wants; together with the fact that she exists outside of the scheduled routine of the collective of the laboratory, this detachment is itself a powerful neoliberal fantasy. Yet the specter of timeliness looms large, imposing its tempos, shaping Ursula’s mode of being in the world.

While this being-in-sync subjugates Ursula to the hegemonic temporal regime of *Mensa* mealtimes, it also allows her to be present during the time when many of the students eat their lunch. Being present not only gives her the opportunity to see and be seen, the first step in forging connections with others, but it also holds out the promise of doing. Although she has given several guest lectures at the university, she is able to stage her subjectivity in a way so that, for most students, including Bettina, she remains “die große, blonde Geheimnisvolle” (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 21) [the tall, blonde mysterious woman]. She appears to be just another patron of the *Mensa* who is potentially affiliated with the university and regularly eats her lunch in the cafeteria, yet her corporeal presence is perceived by Bettina as containing—in the double sense of holding and restraining—secrets worth exploring. In this vein, she is able to do, or perform,

her subjectivity in a way that attracts the attention of Bettina and fuels her sexual desire for the mysterious stranger.

Impelled to unravel the mystery, Bettina seeks out every opportunity to be close to Ursula, who eventually reciprocates the attention and interest—or rather, pretends to do so. When Catherine, one of Bettina’s friends, goes missing and Bettina also finds her roommate Katja violently mutilated and dead in her apartment, Bettina does not know to whom to turn. Feeling lost and terrified, she seeks comfort and consolation from Ursula, a decision that establishes the distribution of power between the two women and serves as the baseline for all their subsequent interactions. When relating her fears and concerns about the abductions in Borbruck and the death of Katja, Bettina is shy and nervous toward Ursula. The text allows for a gendered reading of Bettina as a subject who inhabits a position of powerlessness. When she stutters “[n]a ja, das war, also da war diese ...” (153) [well yes, that war, anyway there was this ...] and avoids direct eye contact with Ursula, Bettina’s fragile state of mind becomes clear even as the novel evokes traditional, heteronormative stereotypes of femininity. By contrast, the scientist remains composed in a dominant position of control. In this sense, the two reproduce certain gender stereotypes that are commonly embodied by those lesbians who identify with the terms *femme* and *butch*. Based on such a dynamic, Ursula inhabits the position of the butch as the more dominant and powerful one who comforts Bettina and Bettina as the nervous and shy damsel-in-distress registers as the femme.

During their interaction, however, the power dynamics shift, resulting in a redefinition of Bettina’s and Ursula’s initial performative acts in regard to gender. By inquiring, “‘Bettina sag’ mir mal: Du bist nicht hier wegen Katja, oder? Nicht weil du wirklich meine Hilfe willst” (162) [‘Bettina tell me, you are not here because of Katja, right? Not because you actually want my

help’], Ursula deconstructs Bettina’s role as the feminized passive and powerless object of her desire, instead assigning Bettina agency and control over the situation. In the process, the two women negotiate the idea that one either has the power or experiences a complete lack thereof. Rather, the shifts in—even reversals of—the initial gendered structure challenge the idea of gender being static and unchanging.

This shift prompts Bettina to confess that she fantasizes about the scientist when masturbating: “heute morgen [...] bin ich bei Bea unter die Dusche und habe mir auf dich einen runtergeholt” (163–64) [this morning I showered at Bea’s and jerked off thinking about you]. In the context of this particular scene, Bettina’s utterance foregrounds fluid dynamics. Particularly Bettina’s choice of words “einen runtergeholt,” typically referring to penile masturbation, gives expression to an understanding of her body as masculine. Ursula’s suggestion that Bettina is not actually seeking her help prior to Bettina’s comment has already altered the power dynamics and functions as Ursula’s recognition of Bettina’s position of power. However, while Ursula’s comment appears to identify a power differential in which the scientist characterizes herself as passive, inactive, and powerless and becomes the object of Bettina’s sexual aggression, she is nonetheless the one who assigns agency in the conversation. By granting Bettina a sense of authority and control, which the student subsequently affirms and asserts when deploying the phrase “einen runtergeholt,” Ursula ultimately remains the one in power, orchestrating the situation.

Bettina’s announcement of her desire for Ursula operates as a response to Ursula’s question—a question that in turn indicates Olim’s powerlessness and thus invites Bettina to talk about the release of her sexual urges through self-pleasuring. Her confession functions as a way of doing—that is, an evocation of her desire for Ursula. This account of her sexual gratification

is paired with the masculinization of her body. This interpellation of her own subjectivity relies on a heteronormative discursive framework as a point of reference for self-construction. Her utterance is an exemplary staging of identity by adhering to a binary. In relying on a traditional, bifurcated model, Bettina seems to endorse and confirm the hierarchal power and authority that Ursula's comment constructs in the first place, rather than calling it into question or disrupting it.

These constant shifts between normativity and queerness are further underlined through Ursula's portrayal as the asexual "puritanische Wissenschaftlerin" (165) [puritanical scientist] who admits to Bettina that she is unsure how to define herself. She is attracted to women erotically and admires lesbians who live their sexuality openly, but admits to Bettina, "[i]ch weiß nicht, ob ich je lesbisch war, oder bin, oder was" (164) [I don't know if I have ever been a lesbian, or am, or what] and claims that she has not had any sexual encounters with women. In her role as the virgin-like, sexually confused or uncertain woman, Ursula appears to represent Bettina's counterpart in a well-known dynamic. Kirchner depicts the student as sexually aggressive, active, and promiscuous when she kisses another woman the night before she sleeps with Ursula for the first time. Bettina's active pursuit of Ursula also genders both women: it feminizes Ursula in her role as the inexperienced, non-lesbian counterpart to Bettina's queer sexual potency and lesbian desire and thus inverts the previously established power dynamics.

This dichotomous structure is, however, deconstructed and negotiated anew as Bettina and Ursula's relationship intensifies. As their intellectual and emotional bonds deepen, Bettina, who falls in love, sees herself in a dream-like state: "[u]nwirklich, zeitlos, schwerelos" (166) [unreal, timeless, weightless]. While at first glance, these adjectives seem merely to reflect Bettina's use of highly conventional descriptors to characterize her feelings, a closer look at the word reveals the temporalities associated with the fulfillment of a fantasy.

Since the word “zeitlos” can be translated as permanent, but also as atemporal, it conveys two disparate notions. On the one hand, it describes a person, an object, or an idea that is enduring and lasting, perhaps also signaling continuity and progress. On the other hand, the term gestures toward the possibility of existing without relation to time, indicating unboundedness from time, teleology, and tempo. Bettina’s words indicate that for her the experience of pleasure is indeed tied to a kind of (un)timeliness, as it is at once constant and ever-lasting, and momentary and ephemeral. In this regard, the promise of fulfillment is based on sequentiality and a linear development of time, while at the same time foreclosing this very possibility. Thus, the fantasy both extends a promise of satisfaction in the future and withholds what lies ahead—that is, it offers the prospect of a *then* that necessitates a *now*.

While one might argue that this kind of temporal projection of satisfaction is a hallmark of desire and nothing else, it is nonetheless crucial to keep in mind that this state of being “zeitlos” is not completely neutral or positively connoted. The word’s various associations with experiencing life in an unconstrained and boundless fashion seem to extend a promise of liberation, of enabling the subject to uncouple itself from the limitations of social norms and rules—a promise that is very much in line with the neoliberal rhetoric of self-optimization. As elaborated on in the introduction, Lauren Berlant has labeled this rhetoric of contemporary neoliberalism cruel optimism: Bettina is infatuated with the ecstasy of the seeming promise of complete detachment—not just temporally “zeitlos,” but also spatially “schwerelos,” however, this present merely serves as the basis for projecting a future whose possibility of coming into being keeps Bettina anchored to a fantasy that can only remain forever that, a fantasy or a desire in the *now* for a *then* that can never materialize.

In rendering her “zeitlos” and “schwerelos,” Bettina’s infatuation with the scientist is in part defined by the fulfillment of pleasure that is always merely a fantasy and deferred to an indistinct *then*. Bettina is attached to an “[u]nwirklich[e]” illusion of Ursula and their relationship that she constructs during the time when Ursula has to go to work and Bettina is alone in her apartment. Left to her own devices, the student searches through the bookshelf and the computer files of the scientist, attempting to find information that allows her to conjure an even more elaborate image of Ursula. Akin to Arndt, whose fantasy of the *Prototyp* in the *now* rests on a longing for a *then*, Bettina appears to desire a phantasmagoric image of Ursula—a *Prototyp*-like version of the woman—that does not grant her any avenue for satisfying her desires, but keeps pleasure at bay in the *now*.

These shifts in the linear unfolding of time in relation to Bettina and Ursula’s performative expressions of subjectivity are also prevalent during their first sexual encounter in Ursula’s apartment, when the scientist acts confident, assertive, and “verdammt stürmisch” (Kirchner, *verbesserte Frau* 170) [extremely passionate], topping Bettina on the floor and undressing her. This combination of “Spiel und Kampf ... dauerte zehn Minuten, die Bettina vorkamen wie drei köstliche Stunden” (170) [play and fight ... lasted ten minutes that felt like three delightful hours to Bettina], vacillating in the degrees of aggression, physical force, power, and resistance applied by both women. This dynamic of playfulness and roughness in their interactions holds the potential for both Ursula and Bettina to do and undo themselves as well as each other.

In this sense, their first sexual encounter is indicative of shifts in the power dynamics between the two women. While each one has previously performed certain gendered and sexed acts that are stereotypically coded as signaling control, in this instance Bettina surrenders to

Ursula's dominance and power, lying passively on her back and finally relinquishing her control to the scientist on top of her. This act of surrender not only allows Ursula to construct her sexuality and to explore her fantasies actively, but it also signals Bettina's openness to giving up control and being undone. Thus, the student's willingness to participate in Ursula's playful fight or brutal game undoes Bettina and turns her into Ursula's next test subject. That is, she becomes the scientist's very own *Prototyp*, through which she can investigate both her desires and test her own research methods.

This blurring of the lines between titillation and violence not only offers the possibility of materializing the women's fantasies and in so doing allows for them to experience a sense of gratification and pleasure that lies beyond the realm of conventional sex acts—classically, heterosexual sex in the missionary position—that conform to social expectations, but it also allows time to unfold in a non-normative tempo. While the act itself takes ten minutes, Bettina perceives it as lasting three hours, slowing down time in the present. This deceleration seems to create an impasse, which fixes Bettina in the *now*. On the one hand, it prevents the emergence of the always impending *then*. On the other hand, it extends the present moment and, with it, Bettina's perceived experience of corporeal pleasure from several minutes to hours. For both women, the episode necessitates the presence of her counterpart in the *now* whose existence is however always already threatened by the *then*, which might emerge at any given second, becoming a moment of the present and subsequently one of the past.

Almost simultaneous with Bettina's metaphorical transformation into Ursula's *Prototyp*, “liefen anderswo längst aufgezogene Uhren ab” (166) [elsewhere, clocks that had long ago been wound up finally wound down]; the life of the institute's current test subject comes to an end. She is eliminated because, as the reader learns, the experiment did not deliver the results that the

client expected—because Ursula manipulated the conditioning process. The *Prototyp*'s physical destruction, which underscores her precarious position in the present and forecloses the possibility of a future, marks the moment of Bettina's coming into being as Ursula's next *Prototyp*. This possibility, however, requires Bettina to detach from her previous identity and to embrace a novel mode of existence. Thus, becoming Ursula's *Prototyp* gestures toward a precarious future; that is, Ursula extends a promise of doing to Bettina that simultaneously threatens the young woman's undoing by the very prospect of the corporeal "improvements" that Ursula envisions for the student.

Die verbesserte Frau ends with an epilogue that recapitulates the "Langzeitschäden" (249) [long-term damage] of the project for the protagonists. While Arndt is killed by Morgen's hitmen and Ursula manages to flee from the German police, Bettina is injured in an attempt to escape becoming Ursula's next test subject. Although severely wounded, the young woman survives the attack and ultimately lives with Bea, her employer and friend. Bea had taken care of Bettina when she was distraught over the murder of Katja, creating a relationship structure deeply rooted in homonormativity. The depiction of Bettina by the lake reminiscing about her time with Ursula and her return "zurück in die Stadt" (250) signals her acceptance of this new life with Bea, her re-integration into the social system, and the foreclosure of any possibility of undoing.

One might assume from the title of the last chapter and the fact that Bettina is left with a permanent arm injury after a violent fight with Ursula and Morgan & Partner's hitmen that the project itself has damaged Bettina. Yet, the "Schaden" can also refer directly to Bettina's situation at the end of the novel. Instead of alluding to the physical harm done to the woman's body, the word might suggest a critique of her choice to accept a homonormative life with Bea

and to embrace certain conventionally gendered patterns. The title in fact lures its reader into believing such an existence to be destructive and damaging. In the end, what harms Bettina is neither the crimes of Morgan & Partner, nor the destructive relationship with Ursula, nor her decision to embrace a life that upholds the dominant cultural structures of society far into the future.

In this case, “Langzeitschäden” might serve a dual purpose. As the title of the last chapter, it influences the readers’ interpretation of the ending of the novel and comments on our own complicity in privileging narratives of resistance and refusal. In re-enrolling at the university (and thus participating in the rituals and rhythms that this type of institution requires) and in partnering with Bea, Bettina becomes a timely body again as she integrates herself into socio-cultural structures and ultimately settles on a life of monogamous, homonormative intimacy. In labeling this return a “Schaden,” the novel encourages a Sedgwickian paranoid reading that valorizes opposition and dissent over the possibility of domesticity and the desire for a life that resembles and reiterates normative ideals of gender roles, sexuality, and partnership, a reading I wish to undermine. Taking into account Bonnie Honig’s argument of the “politics of home”⁷⁴ as a space of strategic withdrawal to forge alliances and advancing a more reparative reading of Kirchner’s last chapter, I suggest this embrace of the normative at the end of the novel might be the text’s subtle attempt to save us from our investment in a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 124) and a tendency to glorify and normalize anti-normativity. Indeed, Bettina might not be able to become untimely, but her life with Bea

⁷⁴ Bonnie Honig’s seminal essay “Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home” (1996) calls for the re-casting of the space of the home as a site for coalition building that rests on the premise of embracing differences rather than desiring the “fantasy of safety and impermeability” (271). Honig demands of individuals to “cooperat[e] with and wag[e] war against each other in a perpetual motion of mutuality, engagement, struggle, and debt” (271).

nonetheless allows for the formation of an at least temporary coalitional bond with the other woman in the *now* without demanding the necessity of a *then*.

This chapter has explored the ways in which the representations of alternative temporal dynamics in the work of Barbara Kirchner informs the author's engagement with notions of the imagination and experience of pleasure as they are tied to neoliberal consumer capitalism and global financialization. While all the protagonists navigate the various realms of the story worlds in their own ways in pursuit of fulfillment of their desires in the *now*, they also endure the agony of a satisfaction that is always within reach and sight, yet potentially permanently deferred. By calling into question rigid identity categories and by emphasizing the interplay between pleasure and pain in the quest for sexual gratification, *Die verbesserte Frau* depicts different strategies of how characters come into being, negotiate their individual identities, express and fulfill their desires, and forge relationships with each other. As the various protagonists navigate their respective environments in Borbruck, they repeatedly seek and endure instances in which they become (un)timely bodies, defying the necessity of embodying only one way of being in the world—a mode of being in the world that also guides my analysis in the subsequent chapter. Instead, the novel's characters expose the potential of and tension between doing and undoing in ways that allow them to indulge in pleasure and simultaneously satisfy both normative and queer desires.

Chapter 4

(Un)Becoming Disposable: Revisiting Notions of Access and Expulsion in *Corpus Delicti* and *Kältere Schichten der Luft*

The protagonist Anja in Antje Rávic Strubel's novel *Kältere Schichten der Luft* (2007) works during the summer at a camp in Sweden to earn some money. She is expected to fulfill her duties and remain at the campsite for the majority of the time. After she spends time away from the camp site with Siri, a mysterious young woman, she suddenly faces a predicament: none of the other camp members have missed her and it appears that she is not needed anymore: "Sie vermissten mich nicht. Sie fragten nicht, wo ich gewesen sei, sie benötigten offenbar niemanden bei den Booten, keinen, der die Paddel ausgab und ihre Vollständigkeit kontrollierte. Die Hälfte des Sommers hatte ich im Geräteschuppen gearbeitet, aber jetzt schien das nicht mehr von Belang" (57) [They did not miss me. They did not ask where I was. Apparently, they did not need anybody at the boats anymore, nobody who could hand out the paddles and check if all of them were returned again. I had worked in the tool shed for half of the summer, but that did not seem to matter anymore].⁷⁵ For a while, Anja was considered a productive individual, part of the system as she fulfilled her work duties. Now having left the community temporarily, she is not missed and her jobs as well as her presence have become dispensable.

⁷⁵ Similar to chapter three, all the translations of Strubel's novel in this section of the chapter are mine.

These few short sentences are emblematic of Anja's character in the novel as she enters and leaves spaces and constantly negotiates her position inside and outside of the system. They also evoke the concerns felt by many citizen-subjects in contemporary society as work opportunities become ever more scarce and job security is no longer guaranteed in many professions. Facing the ever-growing challenges of the labor system under neoliberal capitalism, individuals are exposed to forces that render their existence precarious even when they are firmly located inside the dominant order. In other words, Strubel's text articulates issues of becoming a dispossessed subject, or a body that once experienced a sense of belonging and still resides within the system, but is now rendered, similar to Fariba in chapter two, a Butlerian body that does not matter according to dominant hierarchies and structures.

This rather broad definition of dispossession and Anja's cues from Strubel's novel give rise to a host of key questions that emerge from Strubel's text and Juli Zeh's novel *Corpus Delicti: Ein Prozess* (2009), which I will also discuss in detail in this chapter. Under what conditions does a subject belong and when does this understanding of membership in a particular community expire or get revoked? What forces caused the expulsion? Can and will access be granted again? And, perhaps more importantly, what happens to those precarious bodies that suffer from exclusion? Where do they reside? How do they endure their state of precarity? Last, is there a way to reclaim a position of potential conviviality⁷⁶ and collectivity? In other words, is

⁷⁶ Paul Gilroy's 2004 seminal *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* defines the term *conviviality* as a way to describe a particular type of multiculturalism in contemporary urban life. According to Gilroy, a convivial society has abandoned the hierarchical structuring of social life based on racial or ethnic difference. Rather, these have become ordinary and mundane (xv).

there a way of living together⁷⁷ that does not rely on regulatory sets of norms and rules that structure social life, but one that enables the formation of alternative bonds and restores the sense of possibility that now appears to be “nicht mehr von Belang”? These questions guide this chapter.

In order to address these queries, this chapter will offer an exploration of Juli Zeh’s *Corpus Delicti* and Strubel’s *Kältere Schichten der Luft* in regard to how these novels depict threatening examples of the ways in which societies police, hierarchize, and regulate bodies. While Mia Holl in *Corpus Delicti* unsuccessfully stages the normative gender, sexuality, and healthy body that the state demands, Anja in *Kältere Schichten* struggles with rigid and ostensibly binary social understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, age, and national belonging. I will show how both texts suggest that mechanisms of control such as issues of gender identity and expression, sexual practices, and physical well-being are closely connected to corporeality. My discussion will focus on how Zeh’s and Strubel’s protagonists might appear marginalized based on particular performances of their identity, but how they also reside within the system. As their gestures and utterances signal their desire repeatedly to do and undo their own state of situatedness and disposability, they complicate the clear-cut dichotomous division of existing inside or outside the system as well as notions of belonging and precarity. In so doing, Anja and Mia not only challenge the conventional and popular understanding of resistance as a positively connoted act that signals liberation and freedom, but they also point out instances when they

⁷⁷ In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway explores the ways in which humans and non-humans ought to interrogate their place on Earth and reconfigure their relationships with each other. She introduces the term *Chthulucene* in order to encourage her readers to acknowledge the interconnectedness between many species on this planet, who are increasingly required to “stay with the trouble” (2) and to learn how to “live and die well with each other” (1). In this sense, this guiding question bespeaks Haraway’s claim that the different organisms on Earth should to make attempts at “getting on together” (28) and potentially live in a state of precarity on this “damaged earth” (2) in order to create more liveable futures.

have to embrace their own precarious modality of being in order to gain access to the dominant system.

As I discuss first Strubel's and then Zeh's novel, I will move from the social microcosmos of a summer camp in *Kältere Schichten* to the macrocosmos of a totalitarian socio-political system of a state called METHODE in *Corpus Delicti*.⁷⁸ The contrasts between these two realms may seem too stark to allow for a productive comparative analysis and I do not in fact want to imply that one can or should be equated with the other. I nonetheless display that both texts address notions of subjectivity, temporality, and spatiality in ways that merit a side-by-side reading. In these readings, I highlight how renegotiations of traditional understandings of space and time are crucial to both narratives. While most of the scholarship on Strubel and Zeh engages with notions of globalization, transnationalism, and the post-unification construction of an East German identity as well as the politicization of contemporary writing, I emphasize the concept of non-linear time over space in both Strubel's and Zeh's work.⁷⁹ My focus on time and temporal patterns emphasizes how the two texts reveal the potential for the emergence of constant reconfigurations of the subjectivities of their central characters. This shift to time reveals the possibility of instances that allow the characters to withdraw and abandon the system, even if only for a brief moment.

In this vein, my analyses of Zeh's and Strubel's novel attempt to identify an alternative to Muñozian "straight time," which I introduced in the introductory chapter. As I intend to trace

⁷⁸ Although differing in their geographic location and the type and extent of control that is enforced in the summer camp and the totalitarian state, both works are evocative of the boarding school motive in Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrung des Zöglings Törleß* (1906) as well as twentieth-century fiction that is critical of the human impulse to strive for absolute power like Ödön von Horváth's *Jugend ohne Gott* (1937) and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

⁷⁹ First and foremost, I am thinking here about essays by Claudia Breger, Necia Chronister, Emily Jeremiah, Sonja Klocke, Beret Norman, Carrie Smith-Prei and Lars Richter, and Faye Stewart, to name a few.

where and how *Kältere Schichten* and *Corpus Delicti* reveal these out-of-sync and nonteleological moments and momentums, I seek to uncover a temporary promise or a fleeting sense of hopefulness for breaking free from the dominant, restrictive social structure. However, this schism is not permanent and the possibility that opens up for the characters is short-lived and passing. By foregrounding temporality as a framework of analysis, I intend to resist the impetus of overvalorizing nomadism and transnational experiences as superior expressions of modern sovereign subjectivity and the only means to oppose dominant hierarchies and fixed essentialized identities. As my analysis will show, this much-celebrated narrative trope of leaving behind one's *Heimat*, even if only temporary, in order to go to a foreign and unknown place where one is able to explore and express oneself in a different manner needs to be investigated with care.

To provide a concept that earlier analyses have missed, my emphasis on time intends to counteract the overvalorization of space organized in the binary *here* and *there*, or *Heimat* and the foreign or unknown, and the resulting idea that an escape from the known *Heimat* signals liberation from and resistance of the controlling limits of the social system. Rather, I demonstrate that as both protagonists battle with their desires to belong to the respective system—camp and state—and to exist on its margins as well, they are able to free themselves from the shackles of linear and routinized temporality and to experience pleasure deriving from their status as simultaneously a member of society and a non-conformist. As Zeh's and Strubel's protagonists detach themselves from the dominant temporal logics of segmenting life, they are capable of negotiating their subjectivity in ways that I call being and becoming (un)timely. These notions, similar to the previous two chapters, bespeak not only the embeddedness of the individual in larger institutionally or ideologically motivated frameworks of power, but they also emphasize moments of potentiality that allow for alternative tempos and projects of world-making that

challenge the demands to obey traditional circadian rhythms, compulsory progress, individual thriving, and the neoliberal promise of “freedom.”

I read the transformations of the protagonists in both novels as (un)timely because both figures gradually apprehend their bodies in new ways and in the process develop a new mindset. This shift in how they understand their respective social realms enables the two young women in *Corpus Delicti* and *Kältere Schichten* to inhabit multiple positions vis-à-vis regulatory forces of social control. As they move around and pause or are forced to change position, their subjectivities are repeatedly under construction. Thus, they are both legible and illegible when juxtaposed with the blueprint of the idealized neoliberal citizen. Even if Mia’s and Anja’s identities and positionalities appear at first sight fixed and intelligible according to the logics of socially agreed-upon categories and perceptions, a second glance reveals that they are never completely trapped in the dominant temporal arrangement of social life. Indeed, they are capable of moving, shifting, and repeatedly finding a new and provisional place in the world, one that grants the protagonists a sense of possibility and potential.

In the tradition of “relevant realist writing,” I contend that the depiction of this duality and fluidity not only calls for a reading that interrogates the valorization of a narrative of progress and forward movement, but also sheds a critical light on social attitudes and practices in contemporary German society in regard to gender and sexuality. “Relevant realism” is a genre that emerged in the post-*Wende* era. Alluding to a literary tradition of the late nineteenth century and the 1960s and 1970s, “relevant realism” is an umbrella term for literature of the late twentieth and twenty-first century that highlights the relation between aesthetics, ethics, and

politics (Breger 105; Gerstenberger 154; Herminhouse, “Transitions” 215).⁸⁰ Relevant realist texts, much like their predecessors, are characterized by a mimetic narrative style that foregrounds the mundane and quotidian, and provides probable explanations and descriptions. The style of relevant realist texts reinforces rather than contradicts what is generally accepted as ingenuous and, as the name of the literary tradition suggests, relevant. In this vein, the works that are related to this genre articulate ethical standpoints.

The most prevalent and arguably productive format to deliver political-moralistic messages is essayistic prose by writers, such as Matthias Politycki, Eva Menasse, Hans-Ulrich Treichel, and Juli Zeh.⁸¹ The novel, however, is the main focus of critique for many contemporary writers who object to the dominance of “magische[r] Welten, Zauberer, Vampire und Raumschiffe” (Horstkotte and Herrmann 49) in twenty-first-century popular culture. By asking “Was soll der Roman?” [What should the novel do?] in a *Die Zeit* article in July 2005, a group of authors, among them Treichel, Hettche, and Politycki, published a manifesto against the uninspired and uninspiring, mediocre meaningfulness in novels and called for a “gesamtgesellschaftlich repräsentative Neubesetzung” (Tommek 294): they asserted that

⁸⁰ Although authors such as Wilhelm Raabe and Theodor Fontane complicate a simplistic definition of the literary realism of the nineteenth century, this particular literary period is often characterized as depicting mundane and banal activities and experiences in lieu of using a romanticized or stylized mode of representation. In accordance with this tradition, contemporary relevant realism foregrounds narratives that emphasize the voice of the individual and their position within a larger societal framework. Under the premise that only first person narrators are capable of giving a moral account of the subject and/or communal networks, third-person narratives are considered to be flawed and lack an ethical perspective (Hatfield 235, 249–50). Similar to, yet different from, nineteenth-century realism, narratives that are part of German new realism of the 1960s and early 1970s rely on the depiction of the extreme banal and pay close attention to how the body experienced reality. The texts by writers such as Dieter Wellendorf and Rolf Dieter Brinkmann not only comment and reflected on the social landscape of their time, but also critically engage their readers (Langston 19; Smith-Prei, *Revolting Families* 1-15)

⁸¹ While authors and intellectuals such as Robert Menasse, Eva Menasse, Thomas Hettche, and Hans-Ulrich Treichel are involved in the debate around and the production of such prose, Juli Zeh is the relevant realist writer *par excellence* in contemporary Germany. The primary medium of publication of their essayistic pieces has been German and international newspapers.

literature should have a participatory political and ethical function, confronting society with its fraudulent values and standards.

In this regard, relevant realist novels implicitly signal the end of pop literature or the so-called *Spaßliteratur*⁸² primarily focused on pleasure and fun that dominated the literary and filmic market in the early 2000s. Instead, relevant realist novels were to take up forgotten or taboo issues as well as represent local and global problem areas (Herminghouse, “Young Author” 276).⁸³ Works classified under this generic term should close “die Lücken, ... die der Journalismus aufreißt, während er bemüht ist, ein angeblich ‘objektives’—und deshalb immer verfälschendes—Bild von der Welt zu zeichnen” (Zeh, *Rasen* 219) [the gaps ... that journalism opens while it attempts to paint an ostensibly ‘objective’—and thus always distorted—image of the world]; they are thus situated in-between journalism and literary fiction. In this vein, relevant realism breaks open the traditional, closed structures and modes of narration of many of the nineteenth-century novel, and, much like new realist writing, instead incorporates multi-vocal and multi-perspectival narration and intertextuality and attempts to transcend sequential narration by subverting the chronological temporality of past, present, and future.

Instead of delivering already thoroughly developed and formulated concepts and positions, these literary texts seek to prompt their readers to question contemporary political, economic, and socio-cultural developments and to call them to action. Relevant realist texts, similar to the Berlin school films discussed in chapter five, take a descriptive and confrontational rather than a prescriptive and solution-providing approach, and urge readers to develop a critical

⁸² This type of literature has mostly been associated with *Fräuleinwunder* writers such as Julia Franck, Karen Duve, and Juli Zeh.

⁸³ Emphasizing the significance and importance of political-moralistic and socially critical writing in contemporary literature, relevant realism follows the tradition of the *Gruppe 47* (Tommek 276).

view on the world beyond literature, to reflect on how they inhabit social spaces, and to interpret notions of consumption and possession. Thus, many of these works serve as an appeal to their readers to become conscientious citizens—those who interrogate Germany’s current political, socio-economic, and cultural landscape, and champion their rights (Smith-Prei, “Utopian Realism” 109; Smith-Prei and Richter 187; Herminhouse, “Young Author” 278).

Like many of the aforementioned scholars, my primary interest in this genre is its key feature of encouraging the readers to foster a socio-politically critical mindset. I differ from most of these thinkers who analyze relevant realist writing insofar as I seek to stress that this development of analytical thinking skills enables—or even demands from—readers to embrace a sense of flexibility that allows them to change their ideas and understanding of the world. In so doing, I foreground the procedural over the terminal, or in other words, my contribution to the discussion of “relevant realism” stresses the importance of the path rather than the goal. This process-oriented approach allows me to emphasize specific moments in the text that are related to content and form alike in order to propose that the genre asks for what I call an (un)timely reading practice: that is, a type of reading that prompts readers to move along the text, to “stumble” over words, to pause, and possibly to re-read as a way of stimulating critical inquiry of their very own circumstances. In this vein, readers themselves are confronted with the necessity to allow time to unfold in a non-linear fashion: that is, they might have to slow down or stop to think, return to previous pages, or even skip portions of the novel, resisting the unquestioned teleology of the novel as reading from front to back in a linear progression.⁸⁴

Strubel’s *Kältere Schichten* champions this procedure through the choice of topics that

⁸⁴ The Berlin School films discussed in chapter five employ certain aesthetic strategies that register with their viewers in a similar fashion.

are discussed and referenced in the novel as well as through the dialogic exchanges between the protagonists on the textual level. Particularly Anja's encounters with Siri, who believes Anja to be a former lover and pursues her romantically, are often confusing, as the one does not respond to the question of the other or changes the topic completely without making those shifts explicit to either the interlocutors or readers. These awkward situations cause readers to "stumble" through the text, and force them to slow down or speed up the reading pace, to halt and reflect upon the dialogue, and to fill any conversational gaps. In so doing, the text allows for or, better yet, demands readers' engagement with both text and context, a process that holds open the possibility to move from the level of textual representation to personal reflection. Blurring the lines between normative and non-normative performative acts and utterances, *Kältere Schichten* calls for readers to pause and consider the doing and undoing of the disposability of subjects. That is, the text negotiates the traditional paradigm of social power and control, which rests on the necessity of the legibility of identities according to dominant frameworks—those who fail to construct their identities in ways that are deemed legible subsequently face displacement and expulsion from social structures.

While Strubel engages her reader with issues around gender fluidity, non-normative sexual experiences, racism, agism, and nationalism on a more indirect level through the text's dialogues and its themes, *Corpus Delicti* takes a less ambiguous, more confrontational approach in the fashion of relevant realist writing when the narrator addresses readers directly. Demanding a type of doing, or interacting with the text instead of passively examining the action to unfold, Zeh's literature takes on a political function. The texts provide readers with a set of ideas to be explored and considered instead of offering fully formed and prescriptive concepts and opinions. Zeh thereby stresses the importance of interpretive freedom that her readers have when engaging

with her texts, but concomitantly demands a sense of responsibility for critical inquiry from her readership (*Rasen* 218–19). This direct address and the participatory demand of readers in *Corpus Delicti* is foregrounded through the occasional use of the first-person pronoun “wir” [we] by the omniscient narrator. By means of this “wir,” readers gain access to the diegesis and become part of it. This act of entry and inclusion emphasizes Zeh’s investment in the idea of collectives, which she claims have lost their significance in the age of neoliberalism. The use of the “wir” form appears as a communal gesture as it makes readers participants rather than distant extra-diegetic observers, and forces them to reflect critically on the protagonists and events of the narrative.

Given the alignment between Strubel’s and Zeh’s investment in the destabilization of subjectivity and the importance of a critical reading practice, I sense a certain proximity between the genre of relevant realist writing and queer theoretical principles that assume identities to be multivalent or, in the words of Daphne Berdahl, an “on-going process, a social practice, and a cultural performance” (236). This emphasis on fluidity and changes informs my idea of alternative dynamics and rhythms. While I am surely not suggesting that I seek to supplant or render obsolete the category of relevant realism, I claim that the conceptual parallels indicate an affinity between German studies and queer theory that could potentially broaden the generic concept. By bringing into proximity different discursive frameworks that are nonetheless invested in similar issues and approach those from different—often seemingly illogical—angles, I intend to show in the following two sections of this chapter how *Corpus Delicti* and *Kältere Schichten* encourage such a reading practice. My investigations of the texts reveal how the protagonists navigate and situate themselves in their respective social realms by means of doing and undoing subjectivity, or by becoming undone. Through their constant acts of shifting and

adjusting, both Anja and Mia inspire their readers to embrace a sense of fluidity and non-conformity not only in regard to the narrative, but also in terms of their own lives by potentially inspiring them to examine their own positions in relation to the local and global historical, socio-cultural, and political contexts to which the texts allude.

4.1 Temporal and Corporeal Re-Imaginations in *Kältere Schichten der Luft*

Strubel's novel *Kältere Schichten der Luft*, like many of her other works, is filled with characters who constantly battle with notions of belonging. At times, they seek to gain access to the dominant social system; at other times, they actively resist their integration. At times, they embrace a marginal status; at other times, they resent their state of alienation. Moments like the one Anja experiences when she returns to the camp and feels out of place and abandoned are manifold in Strubel's oeuvre. The author underscores her ongoing commitment to interrogating notions of *Heimat* and spatial belonging in her interview with Beret Norman and Katie Sutton where she states that she constructs her characters relying on her East German roots while always emphasizing that she is “not interested in saving something that is lost. [She is] not interested in archives. [She is] not interested in how ‘it is’ or ‘was,’ but always in how ‘it could be’ or ‘could have been’” (104). This dual commitment to her GDR past and her drive to explore unfamiliar and utopian potentials allows Strubel's narratives to question the necessity of having a proper place in the world and of embodying certain hegemonic values.

Born in Potsdam in 1974, Strubel grew up in Ludwigsfelde—a small town near Potsdam—in the days when the GDR still existed. She was fifteen and still in her hometown when the Berlin Wall came down. Three years later, in 1992, she left school and started training as a bookseller. Two years later, Strubel enrolled at the Universität Potsdam in American

Studies, Psychology, and Literature. She subsequently studied at New York University, receiving her Master's degree in 2001. During her time in New York City, she also worked as a lighting technician at Wings Theater. While Strubel now lives in Potsdam, she also spends time in Sweden, where she owned a house for a while. Her first novel *Offene Blende* appeared in 2001 and was well-received by literary critics. It was followed by six more novels as well as guidebooks to Sweden and Potsdam and Brandenburg.⁸⁵ Strubel has also translated works by Joan Didion into German, including her memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005).

Terms such as queer, nomadic, and transnational appear frequently in the scholarship on Strubel's oeuvre.⁸⁶ The recurring use of these adjectives not only echoes the current trend in German studies of emphasizing spatiality and an alignment with the so-called "spatial turn" in general as I have outlined in the introductory chapter, but it also points to the presence and significance of non-normative bodies and subjectivities primarily regarding gender and sexuality in Strubel's texts. In particular, the latter two words reference a heightened interest in (1) issues such as location and dislocation as well as stability and transformation, (2) an engagement with (the collapse of) geographical boundaries, and (3) an interrogation of national belonging and in particular of (East) Germanness. Aside from the prominence of notions of place and space, the expression queer in relation to Strubel's works points to their emphasis on the presence and significance of non-normative bodies and subjectivities primarily regarding gender and sexuality.

⁸⁵ Out of her seven publications, Strubel's novel *Tupolew 134* (2004), which describes the conflicts surrounding the hijacking of the Polish airplane by citizens of the GDR in 1978, attracted significant attention when it won the "Förderpreis des Bremer Literaturpreises" in 2005.

⁸⁶ While very little has been published on Strubel's writing, scholars such as Emily Jeremiah, Claudia Breger, Beret Norman, Necia Chronister, Sonja Klocke, and Faye Stewart have engaged with some of the seven published novels. Aside from Andreas Erb's edited volume, there is little engagement with Strubel's oeuvre by European-based *Germanist_innen*. This face could possibly be attributed to the author's status as non-mainstream. Strubel's works are certainly less popular and less well-known than those of other contemporary female writers, such as Judith Hermann, Katrin Schmidt, Julia Franck, or Juli Zeh.

While I generally agree with the readings of Strubel's protagonists as individuals who defy heteronormative understandings of subjectivity and question essential notions of longing and belonging as they transgress various types of boundaries—geographic, erotic, identitarian—I seek to approach *Kältere Schichten der Luft* from a different angle. Using the three adjectives queer, nomadic, and transnational as points of departure, my goal in this section is twofold: to interrogate critically the linking of these terms and potential corollaries with Strubel's work; and to offer an original and nuanced analysis of various scenes in the novel that challenges the usefulness and prominence of theories of space in analyses of her work. Instead, I shift the focus of inquiry away from spatiality and suggest the centrality of time and the prominence of nonlinear temporal structures in her novel. I take my cues not only from the protagonist of *Kältere Schichten*, who becomes younger over the course of the novel, but also from Strubel's other works in which she interrogates the rigidity of our historical past, repeatedly shifting the focalizing voice of the narrative in a way that destabilizes the chronological order of narration of events, or that challenges, among other norms and power dynamics, the logics of the ostensible progression of genealogical time.

Extrapolating from queer theorists Elizabeth Freeman and José Muñoz, who, as I outlined in chapter one, are both invested in exploring alternative temporalities and in critiquing normalized patterns and rhythms that structure our daily lives and enforce heteronormative logics, I shift the focus of inquiry away from spatiality, and suggest the centrality of time and the prominence of nonlinear temporal structures in Strubel's novel. *Kältere Schichten* is a cautionary tale about the difficulty of escaping dispossession in the global North in the twenty-first

century.⁸⁷ It emphasizes how a subject's value and status is determined and rendered precarious through oppressive systems such as heteropatriarchy, labor exploitation, and neoliberal capitalism. Strubel's female protagonist is embedded in a highly coercive system of interconnected forces, and this embeddedness renders her precarious and expendable. At the same time, *Kältere Schichten* offers moments during which the character is able to uncouple herself from the oppressive teleology of modern life and to construct her subjectivity in a way that challenges the dominant order. I will demonstrate how a shift to time can reveal the possibility of instances that allow subjects to be situated within dominant spaces while concomitantly withdraw and abandon the system, even if only for a brief moment. As such, I contend that *Kältere Schichten* extends a temporary promise or a fleeting sense of hopefulness for breaking free from the restricting social structure yet does not suggest that this schism can be permanent.

Kältere Schichten is narrated in the first person by Anja, a thirty-something-year-old androgynous woman from Germany. An unemployed lighting technician, she takes a job at a summer camp in Sweden that aims to provide adventures in the Swedish outdoors to teenagers. Anja hopes to make some money and to leave behind her miserable small-town life in Halberstadt, which is filled with reminders of failed work opportunities and meaningless sexual encounters with women. The staff at the camp consists of a group of eccentric social misfits from the former GDR who have become outsiders in unified Germany after the fall of the Wall. They have accepted the job in order to drop out of German society, to escape the hauntings of their

⁸⁷ I employ the phrase "global North" in order to emphasize the political and particularly the socio-economic implications that are typically associated with the North-South divide rather than the traditional East-West dichotomy. Generally, countries belonging to the global North—including the United States, Western Europe and the developed parts of Asia—hold most of the global economic power, have enough food and shelter for their inhabitants, are politically relatively stable, and provide a certain standard of education to their citizens (Mimiko 47–48).

past lives, and to evade being part of the coercive daily rhythms of a success-oriented, capitalist economic system.

Camp life changes drastically when a mysterious woman, Siri,⁸⁸ appears at the camp and believes to recognize in Anja her long lost love, “Schmoll,”⁸⁹ a young man who is a sailor. Transfixed by the woman, Anja enters Siri’s world of attraction, seduction, withholding, and confusion. Anja is never sure of Siri’s intentions and the veracity of her stories. Despite Siri’s atypical behaviors, Anja is intrigued by her and starts to explore the fantasy of being Schmoll. Through multiple encounters between the two women, Anja gradually transforms into the sixteen-year-old “Junge” through language, narrating Schmoll’s body into existence. Undergoing this metamorphosis, Anja not only experiences her body differently, but also falls in love for the first time. Chaos, destruction, and violence ensue when the other camp members are confronted with this bond between the two women, which obscures normative perceptions of identity and relationality. The outbursts of brutality and aggression of the other camp members ultimately reveal how deeply engrained hegemonic ideas of normalcy and the necessity to conform are, even among those who choose to temporarily escape the system by working in the summer camp.

⁸⁸ The name *Siri* and her search of her lover who was a young sailor calls forth the mythological figure of the Sirens in Homer’s *The Odyssey* whose beautiful, enchanting voices lured nearby sailors to shipwreck on the rocky coast of their island. While Strubel could not have foreseen Apple Inc.’s release of a speech and voice recognition computer program in 2011, the similarity between the protagonist’s name and the technological product as well as the prolificacy and popularity of Apple products make it difficult for the 2016 reader not to think of the software when reading *Kältere Schichten*.

⁸⁹ In Strubel’s interview with Norman and Katie Sutton, the author mentions the influence of her synesthesia on her work, a neurological condition that causes an involuntary reaction upon particular sensory or cognitive stimulation of the brain. In Strubel’s case, she is able to see colors associated with certain letters which translates into her perception of an “i” as yellow while an “a” is red and an “o” black (101). While Strubel explains that “colors of the names don’t intermingle” (101), they nonetheless signal the possibility of the existence of “a whole cosmos” (101) that is linked to each name aside another one within one individual. Thus, Strubel’s explanation of the character names implies a certain impetus to make visible and draw attention to the fact that seemingly divergent aspects of identity can be part of one single character.

Despite, or maybe because of, this escalation of violence at the end of the novel, at first glance *Kältere Schichten* appears to begin as a novel full of promises as the reader is introduced to Anja and her summer job. However, a closer look unveils the presence of conventional logics of capitalism, coercive heteronormativity, and liberalism throughout the narrative. Although sequentially not the first piece of information the reader receives about the camp in the book, the advertisement promoting summer job opportunities at the camp is the first element that attracts the attention of Anja as well as the other camp workers. Placed either in a newspaper or a magazine, the advertisement is loaded with catchy phrases and persuasive promises:

Weg mit alten Hüten! Raus aus der eigenen Haut!

Lust auf was Neues?

Dann auf in die Wildnis! Die Natur stellt keine Fragen.

Engagierte Leute für Jugendcamp in Värmland,

einem der schönsten Seengebiete Schwedens, gesucht!⁹⁰ (Strubel 17)

[Away the old hats! Shed your own skin!

Do you desire something new?

Then explore the wilderness! Nature asks no questions.

Seeking involved people for a youth camp in Värmland,

one of the most beautiful lake regions in Sweden.]

In the fashion of typical neoliberal rhetoric that valorizes notions of personal liberation, freedom, and choice, the advertisement proclaims that it allows those who seek to experience “was Neues” the opportunity to shed their own skin—“[r]aus aus der eigenen Haut!”—and to leave behind familiar (and thus implicitly also familial) configurations.

⁹⁰ My aim was to visually reproduce the advertisement the way it is presented to the reader in *Kältere Schichten*.

While one purpose of the advertisement is certainly to conjure up feelings of autonomy and adventure to make the job sound more enticing to applicants, the advertisement makes this purpose appear to be the only one and does not mention the work involved in being one of the camp leaders. Strubel's heavy use of imperatives provides a mocking and satirical counterpoint to traditional job advertisements. The expressions and claims of the advertisement leave the impression that the individual's experience in the wilderness is of primary importance to the organizers. Labor is presented as only secondary or completely subsidiary: the word *work* is not mentioned in the advertisement at all. In this vein, the blurb could be mistaken for a promotional flyer for the camp's clients rather than its workers. This ambiguity adds to narrative that work should be understood as pleasurable and effortless fun rather than exhausting and onerous labor.

The location of the camp, Sweden, is associated with an ostensible openness, tolerance, and progressive way of thinking.⁹¹ This particular idea about the country creates the illusion that the same or similar values are also upheld and propagated in the camp. In contrast, it constructs Germany in opposition to Sweden. Regardless of whether Sweden really is as forward-thinking as often represented, this discourse of Swedish values certainly works favorably for Uwe, the "Chef dieses Unternehmens" (17) [boss of this enterprise]. In order to promote the job, the false fantasy of the camp in a foreign place actively turns the applicants away from Germany and orients them to a pre-conceived image of Sweden. This shift away from the *Heimat* coupled with the illusion of tolerant and liberal politics elsewhere camouflages any potential negative affective emotions or the necessity to conform to normative subjectivities that could diminish the interest of the job applicants.

⁹¹ Political scientist James Pamment points out in *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Comparative Study of Policy and Practice* (2013) that the four words "chosen to encapsulate Sweden's *progressive* self-image [are]: *open, authentic, caring, innovation*" (100, emphasis in original).

More than purely a means to earn money during the summer, the camp extends a promise of becoming and unbecoming, the hope of leaving behind the material, economic, and political formations of society as well as one's very identity. Whereas I use this phrase in chapter three to indicate the fulfillment of desire and the experience of pleasure, here I employ it to signal the potentials of reconfiguring one's subjectivity and corporeal materiality. Assuming that external subjectivity is most powerfully experienced and understood through corporeal expressions and physical materiality, the advertisement suggests that by accepting the job individuals become capable of figuratively shedding their skin as a means to reinvent themselves. This type of rhetoric is a prevalent and familiar trope in many self-help guides and seminars and serves as a commentary on the contemporary belief in self-transformation as a key aspect of modern subjectivity. The phrases in the advertisement create the illusion that applicants are active subjects who are in charge of their own process of unbecoming. Thus, it recreates precisely the type of discourse through which neoliberalism seeks to appeal to subjects, while masking the fact that malleability and compliancy, as opposed to independence and autonomy, are actually those traits, desired in individuals.

In conjunction with the rhetorics of transformation, Strubel's novel makes visible the workings of the recruitment of labor in contemporary capitalism. Rather than outlining the specific conditions under which subjects are expected to operate and function, the peculiar wording of the advertisement underscores the prominence and wide-spread practice of masking contingent labor conditions through visions of freedom and liberation. Coerced by the promise of development and exploration, individuals find themselves constantly chasing after or stuck with menial labor as the only opportunity to earn a living in a contemporary economy characterized by the accumulation of mass profit through labor exploitation.

By locating the very site of labor in Sweden, *Kältere Schichten* offers a glimpse into a world characterized not only by contingency, but also by the rise of migrant labor inside the European Union and globally. Catalyzed by the breakdown of national borders, taxes, and trade restrictions, the Schengen Agreement encourages EU citizens to seek employment in any one of the twenty-eight EU member states. While Anja is a German citizen, a country whose economic prosperity and stability has made it one of the major targets of immigration within Europe, she is the one who seeks labor outside Germany's national borders.⁹² This approach is not uncommon among many East Germans⁹³ and gestures toward Strubel's critical stance on the still precarious position that many East Germans face despite, or precisely because of, unification. Lacking any job opportunities in her city Halberstadt, which is located in the former GDR, Anja is forced to pursue employment elsewhere—even if it is working at a summer camp on an isolated island in Sweden.

The fallacy of “freedom” and of the empty promise of re-inventing one's subjectivity becomes further apparent during a conversation between Sabine, one of the camp workers, and Svenja, the appointed leader on site. When Svenja refers to the various camps by their respective numbers, Sabine grows irritated and confused: she is unable to recall which space is associated with the number that Svenja names (Strubel 16). Later on, Svenja tells a story about a man whom she encountered “am gegenüberliegenden Ufer” [at the opposite lakefront], who was waving vigorously. While Svenja assumed he needed help, she discovered that he only wanted to inquire what day of the week it was—a behavior she associates with his not being in his right mind.

⁹² Although not explicitly stated in what year the novel is set, it seems valid to infer that the narrative takes place in the twenty-first century.

⁹³ In *Prying Open Fortress Europe: The Turn to Sectoral Labor Migration* (2010), Alexander A. Caviedes points out that after the fall of the Wall, roughly 350,000 East Germans migrated to the West in pursuit of better work opportunities (55-61).

Svenja concludes that he very likely does not know his own name anymore. “Dann numerier ihn doch” (16) [Then assign him a number], Sabine suggests somberly as she throws a piece of meat towards a tub, hitting the opening precisely.

By proposing to Svenja that she merely assign a number to a human being whose actions seem odd and unconventional, Sabine’s commentary harkens back to the dehumanization and objectification of the Holocaust whereby prisoners in concentration camps were assigned numbers, which in Auschwitz were even tattooed on them. It also speaks to the ways in which the assignment of a set of numbers in various social contexts has become a standard practice in many capitalist societies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century—ranging from bank account numbers, social security numbers, and health insurance numbers to student ID numbers and gym membership numbers. Furthermore, it references a much-debated aspect of neoliberalism—namely how it constructs notions of individuality and personhood. More so than any other economic system, neoliberalism insists that society is obsolete and that all subjects are responsible for their own well-being and progress (Brown, *Undoing* 44). In lieu of relying on the social bonds, unions, and communities, all individuals in a neoliberal system are encouraged to seize every potential opportunity to break away from the restraining power structures of society and to take charge of staging their subjectivity.

This empowerment of the individual and the emphasis on freedom of choice is often mistakenly understood as a positive development because it places the subject at the center of attention: that is, each individual subject with their particular identity. It creates the assumption that all people are valued regardless of how they define their subjectivity. However, as Philip Mirowski points out, “[a] striking characteristic of the neoliberal approach to selfhood is the intransigent renunciation of most forms of classification of people” (116). What this stance

implies is that personhood and individuality as we know it are illusionary notions and that the ideal neoliberal subject is merely a receptacle, a body devoid of the idiosyncratic markers that typically signal identity. In this structure, uniqueness completely disappears and each person is just a pawn without any qualifiers, a hollow and unmarked figure who resembles everyone else.

This deemphasis of individuality and distinctiveness of human beings is further encouraged through a culture that has become obsessed with even more developed and sophisticated technological gadgets, the Internet, and social media. Svenja's comment that the man "[h]atte wahrscheinlich Wasser in seine Festplatte gekriegt" (Strubel 16) [was probably suffering from water damage in his hard drive], relies on a metaphor typically used with machines, especially computers, in order to signal that he is confused and to cast judgment on the status of his mental health. He does not know what day of the week it is and does not follow Svenja's protocols of how to interact with others as he establishes relationships on his own terms whenever necessary. Svenja's comment in *Kältere Schichten*, however, marks the man as mentally unstable and his behavior as illogical and silly. Labeling the man as mentally ill, she makes it clear that at the camp, individuals are still expected to follow normative expectations regarding the forging of social relationships and the judgment of which lives warrant such connections. Linking the man's outsider status with his alleged mental deficit, Svenja's remark makes visible the regulation of bodies and minds; that is, in the pairing of health and sickness, only particular subjects who possess physical and mental fitness are deemed acceptable and thus worthy of inclusion in society.

Aside from the discourse on health and the regulation of individuals, Sabine's comment,

“numerier ihn doch,” also evokes the Foucauldian paradigm of biopower,⁹⁴ if we interrogate what this particular act of assigning a number to human beings means in regard to the increasing popularity of virtual, artificial realms. Read through such a Foucauldian lens, Sabine’s response comments on the ways in which bodies assume new shapes and forms in these computer-generate, online spaces in popular culture in the twenty-first century. Facilitated through the rise of the importance of the Internet,⁹⁵ online social media platforms have grown tremendously in the last twenty-five years.⁹⁶ Just as the users of such technologies measure their success and value through numbers—number of friends, number of “likes” that show the approval of a post by others, number of comments on posts, etc.—Sabine’s comment signals that sociability is ever less linked to real life encounters with other people. Seen in this context, relationality is solely a numbers game in which one strives to hit the target score. Names to communicate identity and distinctiveness are at best secondary to numeral digits; at worst of no value at all.

Any such superficial and ever more impersonal modes of inter-personal connections not only cause a loss of one’s individuality, but they also tear apart concrete social bonds and communal public collectives. Coupled with a strong emphasis on the privatization of life, an

⁹⁴ In the first volume of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1976), he attributes the notion of biopower to the ways in which modern states regulate their subjects through “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (184).

⁹⁵ In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Internet emerges as one of the major driving forces in a variety of economic sectors, opening up heretofore unknown possibilities for exchanging and trading goods and information as well as facilitating global communication and networks. Aside from its impact on transnational and international commerce and transactions, the Internet also grew in popularity for private households and educational institutions. According to the ITU, the United Nations’ agency for information and communication technologies, there was a rapid growth in Internet use among Germany’s general population. While in 2000 roughly 29.2% of the population used the Internet, in 2010 the percentage went up to 79.1% (“Germany: Internet Stats”). Many homes and schools were equipped with high-speed Internet access, which allowed its consumers to experience the world beyond their geographic locations on a virtual level.

⁹⁶ Philip Mirowski identifies Facebook as “the neoliberal technology par excellence” as it exudes an aura of entrepreneurial opportunity for each user to self-fashion their identity online while in reality it merely offers a “limited repertoire of relatively stereotyped materials” (112).

illusionary and imagined sense of connectedness to others foregrounds the singularity of each subject, a particularity that works in favor of the neoliberal state to separate and divorce each citizen from groups. This creation of non-belonging masks issues of structural inequality and converts them into personal problems. According to this logic, the loss of individuality and personhood and the dehumanizing gesture of numbering human beings is not at issue here, but the practice is passed off as Sabine's personal problem since she is "die einzige, die sich das nicht merken kann" (Strubel 16) [the only one who is unable to remember this] while everybody else is able to decipher Svenja's practice of numbering.

What contributes even further to the discourse around individuality and the creation of a flawed fantasy of emancipation and "freedom" is the portrayal of nature as an unquestioning entity in the job advertisement. It panders to a target audience that conceptualizes the world in binaries, and suggests the all too familiar split of nature versus culture in which nature is idealized as unrestrained, self-sustaining, and "natural." In this vein, nature appears to be a system that does not possess a hierarchal organization in the same way that any given society does. It is positioned in opposition to a stereotypical concept of city-life as full of restrictions and norms, and romanticizes nature as a highly desirable and liberating force for an individual. It does not ask questions, but grants the subject an escape from hegemonic social power structures. However, the "naturalness" of the camp depicted in the advertisement does not apply to the camp itself, which is, much like an urban center, a particularly structured and organized space with its own set of norms and regulations, which each camper and staff member has to follow.

Additionally, the phrase "[d]ie Natur stellt keine Fragen" (17) [Nature doesn't ask any questions] claims that the job does not ask any questions about the applicants' past. It thereby creates an image of the company as welcoming to all citizens and extends the promise of erasing

inconvenient pasts. Read from this angle, the advertisement comments on what Jennifer Kapczynski describes as Germany's position vis-à-vis its past as repeatedly "never over" (19): that is, the country's continued and continuing investment in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or coming to terms with the past. While the term typically refers to a very particular historical need to deal with the past, namely the process of dealing with questions of guilt, shame, and trauma related to World War II and the Holocaust, in Strubel's case it is more capacious and extends the "never over" beyond the so-called *Stunde Null* as the major event in German history that dictates the narrative. By including for example Ralf, a former East German border guard who recalls the GDR and its ideology, or other characters who are unable to maintain a stable income in the East, *Kältere Schichten* signals an awareness of the German past—particularly the twentieth century—and calls for the remembering of other major events such as the formation of the GDR, the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Cold War period, the operations of East Germany's Stasi, and the fall of the Wall and Germany's unification. In this vein, the advertisement in *Kältere Schichten* comments on a change in the attitude of society towards its own past and calls for the acknowledgement of a multiplicity of pasts that deserve and, better yet, need critical engagement and reflection.

If understood as a place for self-transformation, exploration, and autonomy, the camp in *Kältere Schichten* certainly checks many if not all the boxes necessary to categorize it as queer, nomadic, and transnational. This might explain why Strubel's text, when read through the lens of space, reveals to be a narrative, to quote Germanist Beret Norman, which allows "German women [to] travel away from their familiar *Heimat* to a foreign location, where they experience a certain level of anonymity and are open to and even expecting new experiences" (65). While I agree with Norman that in *Kältere Schichten* German women visit spaces beyond the German

border and explore uncharted territories, I want to caution against the glorification of transnational experiences and an interpretation that reinforces binary structures by linking “new experiences” with “anonymity” and the foreign and suggest the possibility of a different reading that does not place a particular emphasis on *Heimat* and transnational experiences, which is also prevalent in readings by scholars such as Emily Jeremiah and Faye Stewart. Instead, I caution against the glorification of transnational experiences and read the advertisement as a mere replication of a system that relies on contemporary neoliberal discourses prevalent in the global North. Thus, it reduplicates the economic structures existing in Germany.

While in *Kältere Schichten* German women visit and explore spaces beyond the German border where they encounter others—a part of the narrative that is central to the line of argument put forth by Norman’s, Jeremiah’s, and Stewart’s reading—I resist an interpretation that reinforces binary structures and links “new experiences” with “anonymity” and the foreign. By relying on the construction of dichotomous patterns, Norman’s reading does not do full justice to the destabilizing potential of the text. Rather, such dichotomous pairing (1) glorifies and romanticizes the non-*Heimat* as a realm of possibilities which is tightly linked to the female characters’ foreignness, (2) suggests that such experiences are impossible in Germany, (3) constructs independence and anonymity as properties of the contemporary sovereign subject, and thus (4) overlooks instances of both precarity and potential that stem from relationships and alliances of bodies. I suggest instead that the advertisement’s promise of escape embeds the applicants in a neoliberal, capitalist-driven system—the camp—rather than providing an escape from it.

What supports this specific reading of the advertisement and the camp as a replica of neoliberal capitalism is the seemingly simple description of Uwe as “der Chef dieses

Unternehmens” [the boss of this enterprise]. Uwe practices the type of business model that is common in a globalized economy: that is, while he is the CEO and in control of the finances, he is not on-site to supervise. Rather, he directs the whole operation from Germany and comes to the actual campsite only under special circumstances. While Uwe’s absence mimics a sense of autonomy within the camp, he is the only one who is in control. In this sense, his role in this structure recreates the ideals of privacy and sovereignty that, as Wendy Brown points out, many neoliberal governments pretend to confer upon their citizens (44). However, Uwe is the only person with access to money and controls the distribution of wages exclusively. With the exception of Svenja, he refuses to pay the camp members their salary after money disappears at the camp. Uwe’s financial power makes clear that any notion of the camp leaders as enjoying true autonomy is merely simulated.

Strubel further situates the camp within a language of neoliberal capitalism through her use of the German word “Unternehmen” with its twofold connotations. An “Unternehmen” may refer to a cooperation or a company, but it is also used when referring to an endeavor or an enterprise.⁹⁷ This particular layering of meanings ensures that on the one hand the camp is perceived as a summer program for teenagers to explore Sweden and to be active⁹⁸; on the other hand it is also a business invested in profit. In other words, while the camp appeals to young people and their parents with one particular set of associations alluded to by the word “Unternehmen,” Uwe himself is more concerned about the maximization of monetary profit, in the other meaning of the word. This particular mindset of “Chef” Uwe is underscored when he

⁹⁷ Note here that the word “enterprise” in English similarly carries the dual meaning of alluding to a company as well as an operation.

⁹⁸ This connection to physical movement and recreation is established through the verb form of the noun “Unternehmen,” since in German “etwas unternehmen” means to be active and to do something.

invites the “Gore-tex-Leute” (65) [Gore-tex people] to visit the camp one day. They are a group of representatives of the company assigned to survey the campgrounds and its surroundings in order to determine “ob das Sponsoring eines Jugendcamps im Sinne ihrer Firmenpolitik war” (65) [whether the sponsoring of a youth camp was in alignment with their company’s politics]. In order to entice them to commit to sponsoring it, Uwe devotes an entire day to showing them around and to taking them on a boat tour across the lake. The strategy of putting the camp and the island on display results in successfully securing a business deal with the company. This plan follows the logic of venture capitalism, and at the same time, the “Gore-tex-episode” shows the global reach of capital.

In addition to being the sole bearer of power, Uwe is portrayed as a businessman who controls the entire operation of the summer camp single-handedly and across national borders in absentia. In this capacity, Strubel’s depiction of Uwe can be read as a commentary on the emergence of a new social group in recent years: that is, the formation of the “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair 145).⁹⁹ While he might not be part of that supranational social stratum yet, his intent to secure a financial deal with the successful global company GORE-TEX^{®100} constitutes an attempt to forge alliances with a transnational corporation in order to become part of this ruling social stratum.

The camp does not function as a place of exploration away from the *Heimat*. Instead it is a space that replicates the dominant logic of neoliberal capitalism—along with its normative

⁹⁹ This particular class consists of the global corporate, political, technical, and consumerist power elite whose interests are linked globally and expressed by a neoliberal free market system unconstrained by national boundaries (Sklair 144–47).

¹⁰⁰ According to *Forbes Magazine*, the company WL Gore & Associates, which is best-known for its waterproof fabrics GORE-TEX[®], was ranked number 147 in the 2015 listing of “America’s Largest Private Companies” with a revenue of \$3.08 billion.

structures, which the subjects of Strubel's novel inhabit. The novel invites us to decouple the pairing of queerness and nomadism or transnational experiences that characterizes much contemporary literary scholarship.¹⁰¹ This particular analytical discourse suggests incorrectly that the construction and performance of queer subjectivity is linked to locations outside the borders of the home, the familiar, and the socio-political and cultural center and more aligned with the unknown that lies beyond, and it implies the ability to establish connections and experience non-normative, erotic encounters. Both these assertions rest on the assumption that certain experiences and spaces are more valuable because they are less familiar and normative than others. This binary construct of *Heimat* vs. the foreign typically functions in one of two ways: it either relies on the construction of one's *Heimat* as the dominant and ostensibly natural and normative space in opposition to the foreign as an outside space or other, or it identifies *Heimat* as negative, representative of a hegemonic center. This latter view relies on the idea that the nonfamiliar must be seen as positive and productive due to its alterity and oppositional antagonistic position.

Contrary to this bifurcated model, *Kältere Schichten* foregrounds fluid dynamics that dissolves—at least momentarily—such essentialized and essentializing dichotomies. Queer instances can and do erupt both outside and inside the novel's hegemonic frameworks as individuals align themselves with or resist dominant structures. Here, I am deliberately employing the words “momentarily” and “instances” for their allusion to time; in the following analysis I foreground a heretofore seemingly overlooked and potentially undervalued framework

¹⁰¹ Norman, Stewart, and Jeremiah emphasize the location of the camp in Sweden as a space of away from Germany as a place with liberating potential (Norman 74–5; Stewart, “Queer Elements” 54–5; Jeremiah, *Nomadic Ethics* 98, 102). Similarly, Helen Finch characterizes Anja's act of bordercrossing as a form of escape, but notes that the protagonist is nonetheless unable to escape the presence of the German past (91–3).

of analysis suggested by Strubel's text, and emphasize how these eruptions are closely linked to temporality.¹⁰² Acknowledging the Foucauldian paradigm of the ever-present interconnectedness of spaces and time (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 27), which disrupts a sense of cohesion and normalcy,¹⁰³ the following reading will be concerned with how especially Strubel's protagonists Anja and Siri follow nonlinear temporal patterns and rhythms and allow for an interrogation of the socially constructed structures regarding sex, gender, and sexuality.¹⁰⁴ While particular routines can be perceived as restrictive, I will demonstrate that they are also sites of possibility for challenges to the dominant order. In other words, while the individual can be present and placed in a particular spatial realm, non-linear and asynchronous time offers the potentiality of fluidity and malleability.

While this frame of non-teleology and non-sequentiality in *Kältere Schichten* is introduced at the very beginning of the novel, Strubel's text does not advocate a complete detachment as the key to questioning and destabilizing the system. Commenting on the lives of the camp leaders, the narrator remarks that they all lived "wurzellos. Zeitentoben" (8) [rootless. Detached from time], pointing to the representation of characters as rootless regarding time and space and suggesting a detachment both from their past lives and futures. While it might be

¹⁰² This particular aspect of Strubel's novel has been referenced in passing by Beret Norman and Necia Chronister, but the primary focus of analysis has remained on discourses of space.

¹⁰³ Michel Foucault's seminal lecture titled "Of Other Spaces" (1967) identifies the importance of a connection between space and time for the conceptualization of what he calls "heterotopias." According to Foucault, these are spaces that disrupt the cohesion and normalcy of ordinary and quotidian places insofar as they are "something like counter-sites" which are "*real sites* that can be found within the culture, and are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 25, emphasis added). This notion of being "real" distinguishes heterotopias from utopias insofar as the latter are typically characterized as highly idealized, unattainable, and imagined spaces or states of complete and utter perfection.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Butler, among many others, offers a critical interrogation of the heterocentric social structures that dictate gender and sex norms which in turn control what identities cannot exist within the dominant cultural system. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler subsumes these regulatory principles under the term *heterosexual matrix* (6, 24, 58).

tempting to read the narrator's comment on the camp leaders as exemplifying the type of possibility that I outlined above, I contend that the remark needs to be interrogated with care. I take a cue from Leslie Adelson when she deems the notion of in-betweenness problematic when an in-between position means that the individual is suspended and without the possibility of contact. This state, according to Adelson, eliminates any exchange between the dominant culture and that particular subject and thus leaves hegemonic structures in place (245). Individuals in the camp in Strubel's novel are, I will demonstrate, exemplary of this type of in-betweenness that Adelson describes.

When confronted by Anja about homophobia in the camp—somebody has written “no gays!”¹⁰⁵ (Strubel 64) on the camp's soccer ball—Svenja simply responds: “Du weißt doch, daß hier alle gern gesehen sind, Schwarze, Weiße, Indianer, Dicke, Dünne, oder ist dir schon mal aufgefallen, daß jemand was gegen dich persönlich hat?” (67) [But you know that all kinds are welcome here, Blacks, Caucasians, Indians, fat and thin people, or have you noticed that somebody has something against you?]. This reply not only makes visible the deluded denial of the existence of any type of prejudice, but Svenja also justifies her claim by relying on the classification of subjects according to narrowly defined identity markers. In so doing, she replicates a highly essentialist identity model that reinforces clearly definable and intelligible binaries. At the same time, she conflates aspects of sexuality, gender, race, and physical appearance, each of which operate, in different, albeit potentially intersecting, discursive realms

¹⁰⁵ It is noteworthy to point out here that the comment appears in the German text in English. Since it is written in the language that is considered the global lingua franca, the linguistic choice for the insult ensures its understanding by many different people. Thus, Strubel's novel seems to suggest that homophobia is still prevalent in many places. The impreciseness of the word “gays” in reference to Anja as a lesbian reflects a certain unawareness or indifference at best or a deliberate act of erasure at worst of other and more specific identity categories. Instead, the use of the English in the text appears to imply that the word “gay” functions as the universal slur for everybody who is different everywhere.

and that all together construct and shape subjectivity.

While at a first glance her assertion seems to affirm that everybody is welcome in the camp, a second glance at the phrase “daß hier alle gern gesehen sind” [that everyone is welcome here] reveals that it sets the tone for the types of power structures promoted or prescribed in the environment of the camp community. Rather than an invitation and a testament to her openness toward everybody, the phrase along with the examples points to what is at stake for individuals to gain access to or be rejected by any social system or community. That is, subjects repeatedly face the challenge of being readable and identifiable based on an either-or system of dichotomous categories. In other words, they have to perform their identities in ways that are unambiguous and comprehensible. In this regard, Svenja underscores that some people are indeed “gern gesehen” [welcome] and the double meaning of the phrase—being seen and being welcome—seems to suggest that acceptance and inclusion is securely coupled with performances that closely resemble inflexible and rigid ideals regarding gender expression, sexual fantasies and practices, race, and body shape.

The second part of the comment, namely Svenja’s rhetorical question, evokes the familiar neoliberal logic of individual responsibility for one’s happiness and progress while veiling how this discursive framework functions as a regulatory operation to control subjects. By foregrounding the importance of each person’s accountability, neoliberalism would successfully manage to redirect attention and liability to the private individual rather than interrogating larger social structures that potentially contribute to issues of prejudices and discrimination. In this vein, Svenja’s question functions as a deterrent to acknowledging the circulation of homophobic sentiments in the camp, while simultaneously accusing Anja of doubting the loyalty and friendship of the other camp workers. Thus, it is ultimately Anja who is pronounced guilty of

wrong-doing by drawing attention to homophobic attitudes rather than other members of the camp community or the collective who committed the act and thus perpetuated discrimination.

The conversation between Anja and Svenja highlights the ways in which discourses around individuality and inclusivity function as regulatory means to structure and manage the bodies of the camp's "citizens." Since the members are indeed "gern gesehen" and expected both to construct their identities as clearly legible and to conform to dominant perceptions about what identity categories mean, visible discernibility according to sex, gender, race, and body composition becomes the *sine qua non* of social acceptability. Hence, a particular kind of sensory intelligibility is not only demanded, but also rewarded through access to or acceptance within the communal structures as a subject.

Furthermore, the exchange is representative of and problematizes one of the major issues in the late twentieth and twenty-first century, namely, the paradox within a neoliberal system.¹⁰⁶ While neoliberalism puts forth and perpetuates a narrative that stresses the importance of individuality, privatization, and freedom, it nonetheless necessitates subjects to become corporeally intelligible according to the dominant standards and norms of society and to perform certain identity markers in accordance with hegemonic ideals that only then serve as the basis for the recognition of individuals as citizen-subjects. As such, Strubel's novel critiques a particular kind of identity politics that lures individuals into believing they are free from governmental, structural control yet relies on essentialist and binary models of subjectivity. Such a framework establishes a priori sets of dichotomous classes to which individuals are at best assumed to and at

¹⁰⁶ Scholars such as Isabell Lorey, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Povinelli, and Saskia Sassen, who are at home in various academic disciplines have pointed to the fact that individuals under neoliberalism increasingly face the paradoxical predicament that the system extends the fantasy of "freedom," individualism, and privacy while concomitantly demanding its citizen bodies to replicate only particular types of subjectivity that are deemed acceptable, rendering them precarious and vulnerable.

worst forced to conform while coaxed into considering themselves as independent decision-makers.

Interrogating traditional gender norms and relationships, the novel critiques not only heteronormative structures, but is also acutely aware of homonormative enactments of gender and sexuality. While Norman understands Strubel to be an author who “does not problematize heteronormativity in her fiction, but simply assumes love between women” (65), I claim that the writer is acutely aware of the roles gendered practices, same-sex erotic connections, and corporeal expressions play in both the construction and refutation of normative patterns and routines. Indeed, this impetus concurrently to affirm and complicate conventional understandings of certain aspects and performative moments of identity in the process of subject formation forms one of the driving forces in the relationship of Anja and Siri. Rather than following the classic order and anticipated progression of heteronormative coupling, the two characters unhinge themselves from the rhythms that govern life. Given this critical lens, *Kältere Schichten* constantly questions familiar premises and demonstrates that nothing can be taken for granted, nothing is fixed, and neither identity nor temporality unfolds in a routine or conventional manner.

This sense of fluidity becomes particularly apparent during one of the initial encounters when Anja complains to Siri about the types of relationships she has witnessed in other lesbians whom she characterizes as “unglücklich” [unhappy] and “Kleinbürger” (Strubel 43) [petit bourgeois]. Although these couples attempt to break with familiar and familial structures and to establish new kinds of relationships, Anja remarks that they nonetheless tend to fall back into patterns that the parent generation with a certain socio-economic status perpetuated. Anja’s observations not only address the rise of homonormativity, but they also point to the fiction

behind the notion that traditional bourgeois relationships present the ultimate means to achieving happiness.

Based on this characterization, *Kältere Schichten* disrupts the ideal of the German “Kleinbürger” family as one of the fundamental units of kinship formation, ostensibly heralding contentment and pleasure. Understood as implicitly marked heterosexual, cis-gendered, monogamous, middle-class, white, Christian, and German, this familial arrangement takes on a regulatory function and is merely a phantasmagoric, unachievable creation associated with a higher social status and value than non-normative relationships. Based on the ostensible dominance of normative relationships, the much-hailed life of a “Kleinbürger” extends the Berlantian promise of the “good life,” as it seems to allow the potential “alles neu machen [zu] wollen” (Strubel 43) [for wanting to start everything anew]. However, the pursuit of this unattainable fantasy keeps individuals stuck in an impasse¹⁰⁷ and “nach einer Weile machen sie doch wieder das Alte nach” (43) [after a while they repeat the old patterns]: that is, they repeat and re-affirm normative ideals of subjectivity and coupledness.

In the same conversation, Strubel’s protagonists not only challenge traditional assumptions about gender binarism, but they also hint at the possibility of re-imagining and staging gender along more fluid lines. When Siri asks about the camp structure and why the group needs so many tents, she suddenly pauses. Staring at the tents, she shifts the topic of

¹⁰⁷ I also discuss the notion of being stuck in an impasse that possesses the potential to engender productive changes in chapters two and five. Chapter two focuses on how particular scenes in *Fremde Haut* engender active viewer participation by asking the audience to consider their own investment in certain normative cultural scripts of subjectivity. In a similar vein, chapter five links the impasse to certain aesthetic elements and formal choices in *Gespenster*, which encourage the audience to assess their attachment to particular ideals around hetero- and homonormativity. On the level of the story-world, Petzold’s film also emphasizes the role that certain fantasies of the “good life” play in keeping characters stuck in the present, a segment of time during which these filmic figures are able to contemplate their embeddedness in normative socio-cultural structures and allows them to potentially find ways to overcome them, even if only temporarily. Chapter three also considers the impasse as a way for the protagonist to pause in the *now* in order to consider any emerging possibilities in a *then*.

conversation and declares that she is confused and surprised about her realization that Anja is a woman. The latter responds that she would like to offer something else, “[a]ber so lange es auf dieser Welt nur zwei Möglichkeiten gibt —” [but as long as there are only two options in this world —] which Siri counters with: “Man kann sich jederzeit entscheiden” (42) [One can make a decision any time], pointing to a plethora of possibilities. While Siri’s answer could easily be dismissed as a clever and quick response to Anja, cutting her off mid-sentence, I read this dialogue as a pivotal moment for the two characters as well as a brief glimpse at the text’s critique of heteronormativity. The exchange between the two characters not only sets the stage for Anja’s transformation, but it also signals to the reader the difference in how Anja and Siri perceive, construct, and read identity. While Anja’s understanding of gender follows a dichotomous pattern and is limited to two discrete, well-established options (man and woman), Siri’s vague response allows for multiple interpretations. It certainly underscores that she believes that Anja has the option to choose “jederzeit” [any time] between the two existing genders; she can identify as either woman or man at any given point in time yet continue residing within the social system. Due to its ambiguity, Siri’s answer can also be understood as a challenge to the entire structure insofar as Siri encourages Anja to decide whether or not she desires access or can tolerate expulsion—that is, whether Anja wants to remain a part of society and abide by its binary gender norms or to express herself in ways that run the risk of rendering her unintelligible.

Read either way, the comment underscores how individuals are often confronted with the need to abide by distinct normative social ideals while also recognizing the flawed and unattainable nature of such standards and expressing the desire to question and resist them. Based on this duality, an individual can at any given point in time buttress both normativity and

queerness in ways that do not align these two notions directly with heterosexuality and homosexuality, and thus be exposed to a flow forces and energies. Read in this vein, Anja's identity does not have to be pulled apart into its individual aspects out of which only a particular set can be foregrounded to support a "normative" or a "queer" reading of her character. Rather, Anja—who is depicted as having a non-normative sexuality but who also categorizes gender according a normative binary system—is able simultaneously to question and enforce heteronormative and homonormative patterns, making visible the ways in which queerness and normativity exist side-by-side and are not static or consistent but open to new configurations. On the one hand, Anja belongs to and affirms the stability of the hegemonic system, exemplified by her categorization of gender as a binary system. On the other hand, her openness to exploring the identity of Schmoll and her lesbian sexuality resists parts of the very same social order. Thus, she represents both center and margin and through her actions and conversations both does¹⁰⁸ and undoes her own intelligibility.¹⁰⁹

In making this idea central to *Kältere Schichten*, Strubel identifies numerous moments during which individuals express a yearning for access or exclusion and for a doing, a staging, or a performing of their subjectivities that renders their bodies disposable. Exemplary of such desire is Anja's commentary on her transformation into Schmoll, Siri's former lover from whom she was separated and for whom she is now searching. Anja understands Schmoll to be "[m]ein Fehler im System" (Strubel 140) [my system error], alluding to a specific kind of duality. While

¹⁰⁸ Although I employ the phrase "doing Schmoll" which echoes the vocabulary often used in relation to drag performances to refer to the ways in which a drag performer attempts to emulate particular gendered stereotypes or other individuals such as celebrities, my usage does not imply that Anja is in male drag as the "Junge." I understand her acts of "doing" as explorations of gender and sexuality in ways heretofore unfamiliar to her.

¹⁰⁹ While different than Fariba's performative acts, which are linked to the necessity to be granted asylum in Germany in order to survive, that are part of my analysis in chapter two, Strubel's portrayal of the doing and undoing of Schmoll nevertheless resonates with how Maccarone's character negotiates the construction of her subjectivity not solely as masquerade or drag.

she performs the identity of the so-called “Junge” (87) [boy] she apprehends herself as a “Fehler,” yet still inside the system. As this “Fehler” that she has fully embraced with the possessive adjective “mein,” she is both asserting her presence in and access to the social order, but as a defect always subject to erasure. In this vein, *Kältere Schichten* in general and Anja in particular encourages the reader to include the center as a space in which subjects who embrace their imperfections and “Fehler” are able to reside and to forge connections and relationship with others—even if only temporarily.

This duality of existing within yet exploring one’s non-conforming subjectivity is further emphasized in Anja’s description of her gradual metamorphosis into Schmoll “als wären ein paar Details vertauscht oder zurechtgerückt oder als bilde sich ein Körper in mehreren Umrissen ab, von denen aber nur einer aktuell sichtbar wäre” (87) [as if a few details were changed or adjusted or as if a body forms from multiple contours of which only one is visible at any given moment]. While some scholars such as Jeremiah and Norman have read Anja as a force of resistance who manages successfully to break away from essentialized and stable gender identities in foreign spaces, Ute Bettray references Jack Halberstam’s concept of female masculinity to describe Anja’s shifting identity, and others such as Necia Chronister and Stewart have proposed the label “transgender” as a possible albeit imprecise referent for Anja’s shifting identity. Honing in on the phrases “ein paar Details vertauscht” and “zurechtgerückt” as well as the use of the word “aktuell,” I propose that Strubel’s novel allows for a way of reading Anja that differs from these existing analyses. In lieu of attaching an existing and specific identity category to Anja, I eschew labeling the shifts and changes in the woman.¹¹⁰ Rather, I understand these instances as moments

¹¹⁰ My discomfort to label Anja and her conceptualization and presentation of her gender bespeaks Amanda Lock Swarr’s refusal in *Sex in Transition: Remaking Gender and Race in South Africa* (2012) to appropriate “gender liminality for the sake of gender theory or a global transgender movement” (256).

of performative potential and exploration that are temporally limited. In this vein, I refrain from employing any specific term that indexes a very particular history that, I believe, does not befit Anja's experiences narrated in *Kältere Schichten*.

In contrast to the concepts of transgender and female masculinity, Anja becoming Schmoll does not necessitate the reiteration of binaries or the categorization of these transformations. Similar to Fariba's staging of her identity, which I discuss in chapter two, this becoming is more a matter of doing and undoing and an exploration of potentials within Anja's body that are linked to a different temporal economy, one that does not follow the patterns of teleological "straight time."¹¹¹ These adjustments of small details set processes of modification into motion that render Anja (un)timely and unhinge her from conventional socio-cultural tempos and rhythms and render her out of sync, but also fasten her in the present, where Schmoll's body is "aktuell sichtbar."

These instances of Anja transforming into Schmoll are "... *eine coming-of-age-story*." Nevertheless, "dass [Anja] jünger wurde dabei, das hätten sie [the other camp leaders] nicht im Blick" (Strubel 129) [that Anja was becoming younger in the process escaped them (the other camp leaders)]. Characterized as a reversed aging process, the shifts reverse the forward development of an aging and maturing process and the linear unfolding of time, typical of a traditional "*coming-of-age-story*." The phrase "nicht im Blick" underscores the aforementioned societal expectation and the significance of the unambiguity of identity; subjects are expected or even forced to make themselves visibly legible according to rigid identity markers. Not in the (pur)view of those who operate within "straight time," doing Schmoll is connected to untimely

¹¹¹ While focusing on how Schmoll's body is brought into existence by way of narration and language, Necia Chronister's essay on *Kältere Schichten* also emphasizes negotiations of performativity through becoming and doing as central to the understanding of Anja's transformation (21–22).

moments and performative dynamics that render the body of the “Junge” illegible to others in those instances that signal both growth and advancement as well as regression. While Anja’s life is moving forward and each experience signifies another formational step, Schmoll’s development runs backwards.

This retrograde development, as Anja characterizes it, is not merely the reversal of her adolescence, but also constitutes an entirely new experience. The young woman realizes, “Ich war jetzt in einem Alter, in dem ich nie gewesen war. Vielleicht waren wir beide dort. Siri und ich” (170) [I now experienced an age that I had not known before. Maybe we both did. Siri and I], emphasizing that embracing the “Junge” enables her to become untimely and to explore a stage in life in ways which she had never before encountered, that is, she destabilizes any conventional understanding of a temporal linearity when she experiences the present moment with Siri as if it compressed instances of her past youth, which are however completely unfamiliar. By blurring the past and present, Anja constructs an amalgam of lived episodic knowledge, fantasy, and vision that allows for the possibility of forging a relationship with Siri that breaks with the dominant notion of being timely and thus meaningful and acceptable only when following heteronormative and homonormative paradigms of monogamy and commitment.

Unlike Anja’s past encounters with other women, this bond redefines not only the traditional understandings of intimacy, but it also defies the logics of temporal sequentiality of conventional relationships. When Anja laments the fact that any act, conversation, or emotion can only be experienced once for the very first time before it becomes familiar and turns into routine, Siri encourages her to envision their connection either as if “es zum Beispiel keinen Anfang gäbe. Wenn es überhaupt nie einen Anfang gäbe —” (96) [there were for example no beginning. If there were no beginning at all —] or to have the courage “dauerhaft anzufangen”

(97) [to start over and over again]. In this vein, Siri's suggestion frees the two women from the necessity of chronology of beginning, middle, and end, and seemingly contradictorily foregrounds a sense of presentism that nonetheless denies its existence in the present moment. That is, it is a permanent beginning—or potentially an impasse—that does not allow for time to develop a feeling of either pastness or futurity, a beginning that is forever a non-beginning.

This disruption of temporality also plays a role in the physical relationship between Anja and Siri. Demanding “[n]icht bloß Sex” (56) [not merely sex] and the re-imagination of intimacy, Siri wants Anja to part with any well-known conceptions of both affections and intercourse and embrace every experience as Schmoll in the present moment. Although willing to try, Anja initially struggles to avoid reverting to her prior understandings of attachment and sexual practices. “[B]einahe wäre noch einmal ein vorgeprägtes Bild in den Kopf geraten, aber der Junge wußte von diesen Bildern nichts” (168) [A predetermined image almost appeared in his head one more time, but the boy did not know anything about these images]. Unacquainted with and inexperienced in a different kind of eroticism and visceral pleasure, Anja almost slips back into patterns of the past, but manages to break with the familiar. Doing Schmoll in the *now* by employing the third person singular pronoun “er” when referring to herself during the sexual encounter with Siri, she is able to assume a different perspective that is oriented toward a *then* and to refocalize her desires through the “Junge.”

Shifting to the subjunctive mood, Anja is able to construct their sexual encounter through a dialogic exchange and is thus able to explore and indulge in experiencing physical, emotional, and mental arousal and the satisfaction of a multitude of desires: Schmoll's and Siri's alongside her own. This back and forth between Siri and Anja creates feelings of intimacy and intensity that intensify as the conversation progresses until they culminate in a climactic moment, and

“[d]ie Befriedigung der beiden war abrupt; [Anjas] dagegen verzögert, zeitversetzt” (171) [the orgasm of both was abrupt; Anja’s in contrast deferred, displaced in time]. Thus, Anja and Siri are able to narrate into existence a momentary corporeal experience of orgasmic relief not only for the two women, but also for Schmoll, which breaks with the conventions of physical closeness and temporal synchronicity as pleasure in Anja’s body becomes an experience of immediacy and mediacy. For both the “Junge” and Anja, “Befriedigung” is shared and relational, and happens, together with Siri, in the very present moment that is, at the same time, a “verzögert[er]” instance in and of the future.

As such, this moment complicates not only temporality and corporeal presence, but it also suggests the deferral of access to pleasure in the present. While the very existence of Anja’s body is the somatic anchor for Schmoll and Siri during the interaction that allows for the doing of the “Junge,” it is also this particular prevailing of the “Junge” and his access to the present that undoes Anja in this instance. In this vein, she is a figure of the *now* while concomitantly always still waiting for the *then*. Through this blurring of temporal segments, Anja’s pleasure is “zeitversetzt” or displaced in time in a way that is future-oriented yet deferred, but predicated on the experience in and of present moment that is from, Anja’s perspective, already a time in the past. The promise of becoming Schmoll thus allows Anja to embrace a modality of existence that is instantiated in the *now*. This conditions of the present or the *now*, which has also been a central idea in chapters two and three and plays a significant role in chapter five, points to a *then*—or rather multiple iterations in various directions thereof; a *then* that gestures toward both what remains behind and what is to come ahead. In so doing, it makes it possible for the past and the potential future to affect the present and vice versa.

This particular interplay between Anja and Schmoll in combination with the use of the

two verbs “verzögert” and “zeitversetzt” also permits an understanding of the experience of orgasmic relief as temporally different.¹¹² While Schmoll’s gratification is “abrupt”—sudden, rapid, and immediate—Anja’s takes on a distinct temporal quality; it is delayed while also gradual and prolonged. As such, the feeling of sensual and emotional satisfaction for the young woman is both suspended and extended, and thus simultaneously both removed and experienceable. It exemplifies a mode of being untimely as it is deferred in the exact moment it is happening and thus grants Anja access to an encounter from which she is expelled as soon as the feeling enters her body.

This disruption of temporality and moment of triangular possibility is fleeting. When Anja and Siri return to the camp to pick up Anja’s belongings so she can be with Siri, Ralf, another camp leader, verbally attacks the couple with sexist and homophobic insults. The situation turns violent quickly and in a fight, Anja hits Ralf in the head with a rock and kills him. While Siri tenaciously insists that this incident and his death is “[d]er Beweis, daß [Schmoll] da [ist]. Daß es [ihn] gibt” (180) [the proof that Schmoll is present. That he exists], Anja is completely beside herself. The distress of the initial assault by Ralf and her violent response unsettle her newly found subjectivity as Schmoll. Expressing the torment that the death of Ralf caused inside of her, Anja re-orientes herself, positioning herself “gegen sie [Siri] und gegen [s]ich und gegen den Jungen” (182) [against her [Siri], against herself, and against the boy]. This shift in positionality and relationality turns her away from Siri, who drifts away from her and disappears as if she never existed in the first place.

What remains of this shifting narrative is the ever-lasting evanescent presence of the

¹¹² Despite this difference, I do not want to suggest that the experience of either Schmoll or Anja is more valuable and liberating or richer than the other one.

“Junge” inside Anja, who was narrated into existence by Siri and brought to life through Ralf’s passing as “der letzte Beweis unserer Existenz” (188) [the final proof of our existence]. Even after Anja returns to Germany, the spectral vision of Schmoll is present in those places where Siri touched Anja’s body. While the distinct sensation of Schmoll inside of Anja undermines and unsettles her legibility to others—they consider her “gaga” [crazy] and “abgespaced” (188) [spaced out]—and throws into relief the ostensible necessity of a stable subjectivity, it also makes her realize “daß diesen Tagen, in denen sie [Siri] anwesend war, nichts folgen wird. Nichts außer einem langen Warten” (189) [that nothing will follow these days in which Siri was present. Nothing but a long period of waiting]. Detained in the present moment of non-potentiality, Anja is left to linger in the impasse and can only hope to eventually dissolve, as the novel’s title suggests, into colder layers of air.

4.2 Bodies In-Sync and Out-Of-Sync in *Corpus Delicti*

Juli Zeh’s *Corpus Delicti* introduces a state that is a health dictatorship whose mechanisms and structures ostensibly protect its citizens. However, this alleged protection is merely a guise to control and regulate the minds and bodies of the people who are governed by the so-called “METHODE.”¹¹³ Akin to Strubel’s Anja, Zeh’s protagonist Mia Holl undergoes a change of status within the social order, transitioning from an initially highly productive and well-integrated citizen to a disposable subject. As Mia constantly does and undoes her own state of disposability, she is interpellated through forces from both the center and the margin, and her precarious existence is contingent on the socio-political regime of the METHODE. Much like

¹¹³ I use small caps in order to keep with the novel’s visual presentation of the word.

Strubel, Zeh articulates in her novel how dispossessed subjects find themselves struggling with notions of longing and belonging to normative institutional structures and ideologies even as they destabilize and actively oppose the very same.

Juli Zeh was born in Bonn in 1974 and studied European and International Law in Passau and Leipzig. During her time in Leipzig, she also studied Creative Writing. She graduated in 2003 and is currently working on her doctoral thesis on international law in the Kosovo region. Since 1996, she has published several novels, short stories, and plays. She has also written an impressive number of essays and newspaper and magazine articles, published in *Stern*, *Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*, *Merian*, *Die Welt*, *Du*, *FAZ*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Stuttgarter Zeitung* among others, for which she has received several literary prizes. Zeh's socio-culturally and politically critical lens has been one of the hallmarks of her writing ever since the 2001 publication of her debut novel *Adler und Engel* [Eagels and Angels]. In her novels as well as her essayistic pieces—and even a series of several songs based on her literary works, released on CD with the German band *Slut*—Zeh explores topics such as the influence of governmental structures and the systematic control of individuals. Between 2008 and 2009, Zeh co-authored an essay with Ilija Trojanow titled *Angriff auf die Freiheit: Sicherheitswahn, Überwachungsstaat und der Abbau bürgerlicher Rechte* [The Assault on Liberty: The Obsession with National Security, Surveillance State, and the Dismantling of Civil Rights] in which they challenged their readers to reflect on how state surveillance impinges on personal freedom through the Internet and security cameras. She also wrote a formal complaint to the German Interior Minister regarding the introduction of the biometric passport and its infringement of the constitutional right to privacy and sent an open letter to the German chancellor Angela Merkel demanding the resolution of the National Security Agency (NSA) affair, including 78,000 signatures in support of her demand

together with other writers such as Ilija Trojanow, Eva Menasse, Angelina Maccarone, and Antje Rávic Strubel.¹¹⁴ She was one of the founders of the global initiative “Writers Against Mass Surveillance,” which stressed the need to save democracy in the digital age, an initiative endorsed by more than 220,000 supporters worldwide. Overall, Zeh’s journalistic and essayistic writing of roughly the last ten years serves as an appeal to the reader to become a conscientious citizen who champions civil rights and interrogates Germany’s current political, socio-economic, and cultural landscape.

The vast majority of the scholarship on Zeh’s oeuvre focuses on how she addresses human existence in the twenty-first century when she either explicitly or implicitly references the wars in former Yugoslavia, 9/11, or the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As critics such as Claudia Breger and Stephen Brockmann have pointed out, allusions to these events in Zeh’s texts undermine assumptions that pop literature has been associated with “the world of surface, consumerism, sexual decadence, and drug excess” (Breger 106) and is largely apolitical (Breger 105–15; Brockmann 62–67). Rather, Zeh’s novels rebut these mainstream conceptions through their references to German and global history and their critical stance on politics and contemporary socio-cultural developments. Patricia Herminhouse and Sonja Klocke characterize Zeh’s writing as anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal, emphasizing the formation of alliances and collectives with shared responsibilities among the citizens (Herminhouse, “Young Author” 271, 276–78; Klocke, “Transnational Terrorism” 524, 529). Klocke also points to the importance of globalization in Zeh’s works as a powerful force in modifying the Berlin Republic in the post-*Wende* era, with its many changes in areas such as “language, culture, the nation state, media,

¹¹⁴ In their letter, the authors criticize chancellor for strategically playing down the severity of NSA surveillance in Germany in a press conference in the summer of 2013. They also demand that Merkel takes actions in order to protect German citizens from invasive practices such as data collection and mass surveillance of worldwide Internet communications.

technological innovation in data processing and communication, consumption, as well as the latest economic developments” (520). Carrie Smith-Prei and Lars Richter as well as Virginia McCalmont and Waltraud Maierhofer further comment on Zeh’s role as female public intellectual whose political agendas intersect with the literary and whose prose prompts readers to interrogate their own investment in privilege and hegemonic status over marginalized others (Smith-Prei, “Utopian Realism” 109; Smith-Prei and Richter 187–88; McCalmont and Maierhofer 375–77).

Although seemingly divergent, these many avenues of analysis of Zeh’s work nonetheless identify a common denominator in the author’s oeuvre: a strong impulse to address and assess the current socio-political climate on a local, national, and global scale. While these scholars point to the fact that Zeh’s texts are acutely sensitive to issues of time and space and that these two concepts position Zeh’s writing in a socio-historical and cultural context, notions of temporality and spatiality have figured less prominently in analyses of her work. The scholarly attention that *Corpus Delicti* has received centers mainly on its contribution to discourses around medico-normativity and essentialism as well as their impact on the criminalization of the female body, the institutionalization of health care as a limitation of personal freedom, and the systematic control of individuals under the guise of productivity and teleological progress.

Through taking account of their scholarship, I seek to pursue yet another, different angle of inquiry. Inspired by the subtitle of the novel, “Ein Prozess,”¹¹⁵ which refers not only to a court hearing and evokes Franz Kafka’s circular novel *Der Prozess* (1925), but also has a temporal

¹¹⁵ The German subtitle “Ein Prozess,” which is a semantically ambiguous term, alludes to both the court trial and Mia’s transformational development. In this vein, the word not only insinuates that the situations at court represent a progressive phase in the story line as well as Mia’s life, but it also references and simultaneously troubles the long-standing tradition of the German *Bildungsroman* as the genre which is defined through the “Bildung,” the education, the learning process or the growth of the main (understood male) protagonist.

meaning as it points to a procedure or an activity and emphasizes the duration of the action rather than marking a beginning or an endpoint, I will undertake a reading of Zeh's text that is attentive to time and temporality and its impact and effect on subjectivity. Akin to *Kältere Schichten*, *Corpus Delicti* demonstrates the possibility for being out-of-sync, yet resists its glorification as a viable alternative to completely abandoning the system. Rather, these moments of defiance of routinized patterns and schemata reveal the potential to destabilize the normative system while still residing within the very same structure, and not offering a way of leaving it altogether.

The in-synchness in Zeh's novel resembles the concept of Muñozian "straight time"—regulated and regulating time that reflects and champions heteronormative structures, which I introduced in chapter one and have used throughout this dissertation. I suggest the term METHODE time to describe the social system of Zeh's *Corpus Delicti*. More precisely, METHODE time refers to how the life of each citizen is organized in discrete temporal segments in a way that these units of time lose their distinctness and become abstracted from subjective lived experience. As each individual follows the same daily, monthly, and yearly routines, the lives of those abiding by the rules of the system are increasingly homogenized and bereft of any sense of experiential idiosyncrasy. METHODE time is the only governing frequency according to which clocks tick for its citizens.

Based on this mode of structuring of life, the temporal patterns and rhythms of the system are those that serve as points of reference for assessing the value and integratedness of each citizen-subject. Since METHODE time valorizes a certain type of productivity and efficiency, its implementation and realization confers the status as citizen-subject on each individual, granting access to the social system. It even rewards them with benefits. Thus, the operation of METHODE

time within society is evocative of the Benthamian idea of the panopticon¹¹⁶; all citizens are encouraged to police and control their behavioral patterns (and those of other citizens) in order to reaffirm and perpetuate the temporal partition and regulation of life.

As Mia unhinges herself from METHODE time while spatially still positioned inside the social order, she is able to shift, change, and ultimately reframe her subjectivity in a way that places her both toward and away from the METHODE and its respective advocates.¹¹⁷ While I recognize the importance of acknowledging when and in what ways historical references and prominent discourses of the German past and present are commented on in the novel, I will resist the urge to use a teleological model of historical progression as my guiding principle for my reading of *Corpus Delicti*.¹¹⁸ Instead, I will focus on Zeh's concerns in the novel with the precariousness of subjectivity and its repeated negotiation with reference to society's normative standards.

While the METHODE in *Corpus Delicti*, with its emphasis on communal, universal well-being, collective values, and the interconnectedness of individuals, appears to be the antidote to a neoliberal system that focuses on privatization and individualism and is propelled by the highly coercive economic machinery of contemporary capitalism, the text depicts the METHODE as yet another normative system. Indeed, this new social structure is even more rigid and oppressive as it valorizes some bodies over others and disposes of those who challenge its rigidity and stability.

¹¹⁶ In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Michel Foucault theorizes the realization of the modern disciplinary institution through Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon.

¹¹⁷ I understand positionality here in a twofold interconnected manner: that is, in a phenomenological and an attitudinal sense.

¹¹⁸ While not done explicitly, Sonja Klocke's article "'Das Mittelalter ist keine Epoche. Mittelalter ist der Name der menschlichen Natur.' – Aufstörung, Verstörung und Entstörung in Juli Zehs *Corpus Delicti*" (2013) seems to create an arch of teleological temporality by drawing connections between Medieval discourses and prominent figures who were involved in the with trials and the characters in Zeh's novel.

In particular, Mia's body can help make visible conditions of accession and expulsion when the woman becomes timely and untimely at various moments throughout the novel. These instances enable Mia to inhabit multiple positions from which, depending on how various forces and identity markers intersect and converge, her identity is constructed, negotiated, and performed. Even if Mia's identity and positionality appear at first sight fixed and intelligible, a second glance reveals that she is never anchored to any particular position, but capable of moving, shifting, and repeatedly finding a new and provisional place in the world.

Corpus Delicti is a dystopian, futuristic sci-fi novel¹¹⁹ that centers on the protagonist Mia Holl, a thirty-year old woman who grows up in and is educated according to the standards of a totalitarian socio-political system. The METHODE requires the gathering of daily evidence—food and exercise logs as well as chemical tests of bodily secretions—concerning all citizens' health. It does so by requiring all citizens to supply information and samples that indicate the amount of macronutrients consumed, their blood pressure and urine concentration, their daily physical performance output, and even their sleep schedule. If an irregular pattern is detected by the METHODE, an investigation of the reason for the individual's failure to comply is conducted and the person faces charges of varying degree based on the severity of offense. Each person has to conform to the ideological and hygienic norms that separate proper citizens from terrorist threats. Mia's life as a believer and conformist changes radically when her brother, Moritz, is imprisoned because of alleged terrorist acts and then commits suicide. Upon Moritz's death, Mia is likewise charged with "anti-METHODE" terrorist actions when she questions the system as she grieves for her brother. During Mia's own trial, her lawyer Rosentreter uncovers a loophole in the

¹¹⁹ Although not part of my analysis here, I want to note that *Corpus Delicti* as a dystopian sci-fi novel is genre fiction that is very much concerned with time. As such, it presents a story-world that is set in the future yet comments on contemporary socio-political and cultural phenomena and issues of the present.

previously infallible METHODE pertinent to Moritz's case. This uncovering of a flaw in the ostensibly unerring system allows its citizens, but particularly Mia, to see the anti-human and destructive nature of the METHODE. Needing a scapegoat to prevent the collapse of the entire system, the METHODE frames Mia as the leader of a terrorist group. Her trial ultimately concludes with a devastating sentence: Mia must submit to mental reprogramming, whereby she will be re-educated in the ways of the METHODE until she is deemed ready for reintegration into the social order.

Positioned within the space of the METHODE, which considers "Gesundheit als Normalität" (Zeh, *Corpus* 145) [health [a]s the norm],¹²⁰ that is, as both quotidian and regulatory, Mia lives in a totalitarian system in which undoing her own disposability is tightly connected to possession. Extending a promise of becoming, the METHODE grants and acknowledges citizenship and privileges only to those individuals who possess and maintain certain socio-political, cultural, intellectual, physical, and emotional ethics and codes as well as certain material objects, which have to be visible to others. As does each citizen, each apartment complex has to supply data regarding water and air quality, recycling patterns, and the cleanliness of the building itself. The reward for an efficiently working house is the title "Wächterhaus" (22) [monitored house], a placard that demonstrates the tenants' commitment to upholding and enforcing the regulations of the METHODE, and that earns a discount on water and electricity for the tenants. In this sense, the METHODE is a framework that promotes and upholds the mantra of efficiency and the possession and, even more so, the visible expression of certain normative values in order to guarantee the intelligibility of an individual as citizen-subject and to preserve the status it defines as the well-being of the entire society.

¹²⁰ All translations are taken from *The Method* translated by Harvill Secker.

Given this emphasis on visibility and visibility of one's identity, the promise of becoming is tightly connected to the ability to make oneself legible in ways that are recognizable to and recognized by the system. Since this necessity regulates access to and expulsion from the dominant social order in *Corpus Delicti*, human intelligibility, to evoke Butler, is purely performative. Belonging and citizenship are controlled by how well each individual constructs and intelligibly performs a rather inflexible ideal of subjectivity, one that however remains forever unattainable. In this sense, disposability is connected to the inability or unwillingness to adhere to or stage a particular set of norms.

Initially, Mia is seemingly an avid supporter of the METHODE. She is depicted as an “[e]rfolgreiche Biologin mit Idealbiographie” (19) [successful biologist with an exemplary CV]. She inhabits a luxurious penthouse apartment and has helped develop antidotes and vaccines against the most common diseases that plagued the twentieth century. From the standpoint of the METHODE, she projects the very image of the productive and well-adjusted citizen: she is physically, psychologically, socially, and emotionally healthy, and she makes enough money to own an upscale apartment in which she lives alone. Initially, Mia can be best described as a follower and believer in the legitimacy of the METHODE; she occupies a clear position inside the system and abides by its rules and regulations. Mia takes comfort in being situated inside the system based on her trust in the METHODE and the scientific measurability of her world. Being located and locatable confirms what Butler and Athanasiou regard to be “a natural, if not essential, characteristic of human personhood” (9). Mia's initial positionality—both spatially and affectively—thus renders her intelligible to herself as well as the state as a citizen subject and guarantees her access to the social order.

Her situatedness within the METHODE changes gradually once she starts to abandon the normative temporal patterns that shape and organize her day-to-day life bit by bit. After the unjust arrest, conviction, and subsequent suicide of Moritz for a crime he did not commit, she demands nothing else but to be left alone for as long as she adequately needs to mourn her brother's death. As a result of this uncoupling of herself from the regular patterns of her life, previously marked by a specific number of hours allotted to work, fitness, nutritional intake, and sleep, Mia becomes the target of the METHODE. She fails to supply a "Schlafbericht und Ernährungsbericht" ([n]utritional records and sleep patterns) and experiences a "[p]lötzliche[n] Einbruch im sportlichen Leistungsprofil" (Zeh, *Corpus* 18) [sudden cessation of sporting activity]. As she has come to reject METHODE time, Mia is perceived as out-of-sync in regard to the normative temporal rhythms. All those daily routines that have thus far embedded her in the processes of the METHODE and defined her intelligibility and livelihood as a member of society have now become "eine bloße Abfolge von Handlungen" (47) [just a set of actions], futile and meaningless repetitions that she is unable or unwilling¹²¹ to perform.

Mia's conscious uncoupling and refusal to participate in the regimen that the social system prescribes resonate with the concept of critical utopian thinking as proposed by Rhiannon Firth and Andrew Robinson. In "For the Past Yet to Come: Utopian Conceptions of Time and Becoming" (2014), they propose that "homogenous empty time" (383), which emerged in capitalist societies, is ubiquitous and identical for all citizen-subjects and renders them empty of their individuality while utopian time is "experimental, experiential and subjective" (Firth and Robinson 382). Although Firth and Robinson do not explicitly reference Muñoz and his

¹²¹ In *Willful Subjects* (2014), Sara Ahmed explores willfulness "as a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given. ... Willfulness involves persistence in the face of having been brought down" (1–2). According to Ahmed, it refers to a mode of willing wrongly and willing too much, exemplified by various literary figures such as the willful child in Grimm's fairytales and George Eliot's works.

theorization of “straight time” and Muñoz does not include Firth and Robinson in his reflections on different strands of utopian thinking, I see a connection between the three scholars and their works. I contend that the ubiquity of “empty time” that Firth and Robinson are describing evokes Muñoz’s conceptualization of “straight time” as a linear and “self-naturalizing temporality” (Muñoz 25). As it is linked to the enactment and affirmation of norms in the present moment, it does not allow for “other ways of being in the world” (1). However, if individuals detach from “straight time” and head toward “a horizon imbued with potentiality” (1), they will be able to embrace their queer subjectivities. Rejecting “straight time” in a similar fashion that Firth and Robinson repudiate “homogenous empty time,” Muñoz apprehends queer time to allow for “a doing for and toward the future” (1): that is, examinations and experimentations that offer each subject the possibility to explore their very own desires and pleasure of being in the world.

These two ways of theorizing utopian time and identity resonate with the social model of the METHODE that Zeh creates in her novel. In this sense, *Corpus Delicti* points to what is at stake when routines structure life: namely, idiosyncratic lived experiences turn into individual portions or fragments that are perceived as abstracted from lived time. By regulating and segmenting daily routines, the METHODE ensures that all its citizens engage in particular activities at approximately the same time and thus standardizes life according to its schedule. In this vein, the life of each individual becomes a sequence of repetitions and only bears significance and merit if it is production-driven and fits into the “Leistungsprofil” as the main guiding principle. In the eyes of the METHODE, Mia’s rupture of the system’s repetitive temporal timeframe renders her a non-productive citizen-subject. Her body is perceived as a source of

disturbance, one that is deemed expendable in relation to the METHODE, she has thus lost her right to belong to the social order.¹²²

On an extradiegetic level, the fictional universe of *Corpus Delicti*, akin to *Kältere Schichten*, addresses contemporary cultural debates. Like Strubel, Zeh's novel evokes an all-too-familiar part of German past and, in so doing, encourages her readers to re-visit the issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and as with Strubel, Zeh connects the term not only with Germany's coming to terms with its Nazi past—and the representation of the METHODE and its practices in *Corpus Delicti* is highly evocative of this particular history and discourse—and the fashioning of a German pride that derives from a narrative of the historical “victory” of Western democracy, but also a variety of other subjects related to the regulation of corporeality and one's state of well-being. *Corpus Delicti* also addresses the exposure of the subject in contemporary German society is exposed to the state's normalizing and regulatory endeavors and the violence that such a system enforces upon its citizens. Additionally, the text also foregrounds Germany's almost obsessive investment in health and its cult of physical fitness,¹²³ and seeks to unveil the fact that the state's regulatory practices depend on a type of utilitarianism that entails the practice of blackmailing those who fail to embody or choose to disregard the norms of the system. In this sense, the evocation of these issues functions as Zeh's way of encouraging her readers to pause and think and thus to break with their steady rhythm when reading the novel.

¹²² My use of the word “disturbance” echoes Klocke's essay on *Corpus Delicti* in which she argues that Zeh's intention with the novel was *Aufstörung*, a term she borrows from Carsten Gansel, or the attempt to attract attention, rather than Niklas Luhmann's concept of *Störung*, a constructive disruption which eventually leads to the creation of a new system.

¹²³ This obsession with physical fitness is certainly not a contemporary phenomenon and dates back to Johann Friedrich Ludwig Christoph Jahn (1778–1852), a German pedagogue, who is considered to be the father of the turner movement.

While Mia initially unquestioningly believes in the system as benefitting humankind, her perspective alters significantly over the course of the novel when “die ideale Geliebte”¹²⁴ [the perfect lover] enters her life shortly after Moritz’s death. She is an imagined character whom Moritz sends to Mia during the time of his imprisonment because of his allegedly anti-METHODE terrorist acts. Encouraged through various interactions with die ideale Geliebte to interrogate and challenge precisely the system that provided a sense of belonging for Mia's brother, Mia has become detached from METHODE time, including the people and the world it constructs.¹²⁵ Although still residing inside the system, she understands herself as “ein Wort, das man so lang wiederholt hat, bis es keinen Sinn mehr ergibt” (Zeh, *Corpus* 48) [a word that’s lost its meaning because it’s been repeated to death]. Through the endless loop of repetitions, she has lost any “Sinn” or *raison d’être* as a subject and has become a word. Instead of perceiving herself as a corporeal being with distinct lived experiences, she has come to think of herself as an abstract conglomerate of letters that only possess sense within a normative system that endows them with meaning. In reference to the METHODE, she is no longer the ideal citizen-subject, but an undesirable and unintelligible soma that needs to be eliminated from the state.

Based on these references to belonging and having lost a place within the METHODE, it is tempting to read Mia as a body whose “proper place is non-being” (Butler and Athanasiou 19) and who is undone by the system. In this particular instance, a Butlerian reading of Zeh’s initial depiction of Mia might suggest that she is a body that suffers from the inability to perform or

¹²⁴ I use the original wording “die ideale Geliebte.” While the German word *Geliebte* can refer to a man or a woman, the article that accompanies the noun indicates feminine gender. To render the gender explicit, a translation of the phrase in English would require an additional adjective.

¹²⁵ Despite a seeming similarity to Schmoll in Strubel’s text—die ideale Geliebte is also interpellated through the interaction between two characters, namely Moritz and Mia—she is a separate and imagined entity. That is, she is sent into Mia’s life to interact with her rather than being the reflection of the performative iteration of Mia’s subjectivity, much like Schmoll is in Anja’s case.

stage normativity and consequently has ceased to matter, becoming a dispensable subject. Such a reading would, however, miss that Mia is surely *not* a non-being.

Through die ideale Geliebte, Mia is exposed to a different way of conceiving of time: one that is both non-cyclical and defies the normative, linear patterns of METHODE time. Introducing the concept of the “Hagazussa,” the witch or hedge spirit, as a fluid and liminal being who, literally and metaphorically, sits on the fence and whose “Reich ist das *Dazwischen*” (Zeh, *Corpus* 144, emphasis in original) [the between is her realm], die ideale Geliebte evokes discourses typically associated with the Middle Ages, but whose traces can be found in the Hebrew Bible and appear at different points in time throughout the history of Christianity. This idea of the witch as a being who embraces a sense of in-betweenness that die ideale Geliebte puts forth resonates with notions around institutionalized normativity and traditional gender roles. While women were deemed passive and nurturing beings who were firmly situated in the space of the home—they are traditionally understood to be mothers and wives—those who left these spheres and embraced female agency and alternative positionalities were labeled witches, considered to be dangerous, and had to be eliminated from the social system.¹²⁶

While Klocke analyzes the image of the witch in conjunction with Homi Bhabha’s concept of spatiality and hybridity and bases her argument on the word “Hagazussa” and the figure of the Medieval witch, I foreground the potential that resides in the evocation of particular

¹²⁶ While in the Old Testament witches were depicted as (mostly) women who used curses to harm others or bring misfortune upon them, the New Testament portrays them as wicked figures who are able to inflict bodily harm. As a result, various Bible passages prescribe the murder of witches such as “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (*King James Version*, Ex. xxii.18). While in fact various Councils and decrees of the Catholic Church outlawed the persecution of people as witches in the Middle Ages, witch trails started all across Early Modern Europe.

discourses in relation to specific moments in time in the story world and beyond.¹²⁷ In other words, I seek to move from a space-driven approach to a more fluid paradigm that centers on constructing meaning through relationality. In this sense, my analysis stresses the fact that the word “witch” can be seen as the site of departure of relational vectors which point to discrete moments in time, which in turn are shaped by particular discourses: a reading that underscores temporality in connection to text and context.

Mia is an individual who exists in a precarious state of being that enables her to challenge and re-configure traditional understandings of belonging. In claiming the identity of the Medieval witch—one that is often overshadowed by hetero-patriarchal narratives of knighthood, castles, kingdoms, and the Crusades—Mia’s performative acts call to mind what Heather Love urges her readers to do in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2009). That is, Love criticizes how contemporary queer culture silences and omits literary figures of the past that are associated with fear, pain, and the shame of the closet and have thus disappeared. Rather than dismissing queer figures that populate pre-Stonewall literature such as Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Summer Will Show* (1936), and Willa Cather’s *Not under Forty* (1936), who might not align neatly with the progress narratives of the queer movement of the twenty-first century, Love encourages us to look backward and consider how history continues to affect us in the present.

When she infuses her present subjectivity with the attributes of the witch which belongs to a distant past, Mia is interpellated through forces and notions from different moments in time;

¹²⁷ Using both margin and center as reference points for her understanding of Zeh’s notion of the *Dazwischen*, Klocke reads this realm in the vein of Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “third space” (Bhabha 5). Bhabha’s space theory seems to provide a framework of analysis that aligns with Zeh’s construction of Mia, as he understands in-betweenness as “neither One nor the Other” (313) and proposes a third space as *the* realm of transgression, subversion, and new possibilities, both ideas that Klocke appears to support in her essay.

she is rendered present in the *now* due to the existence of and knowledge about the *then*. Thus, she is temporally “dazwischen” in the sense that she exists in a present moment that necessitates the past as a referent, without which this present moment could not exist in the first place. As such, Mia’s existence in the present moment registers as a form of presence simultaneously at a distance from and infused with the past.

This blurring of temporality is also evident in Mia’s exchange with Heinrich Kramer,¹²⁸ METHODE supporter and author of a book titled “*Gesundheit als Prinzip staatlicher Legitimation*” (Zeh, *Corpus* 8) [Health as the Principle of State Legitimacy], in which he publicizes the METHODE’s ideology and legitimizes it with its benefits. After Kramer reveals how he has used Mia to fortify and secure the power of the METHODE, she wishes death through suffocation upon him in the fashion of a magic spell. He responds to Mia’s curse by drawing a cross in the air and declaring: “Ein Hexenfluch. *Vade retro*¹²⁹” (232) [A witch’s curse. Vade retro]. Although Kramer dismisses the act immediately as a joke, his reaction functions, as I will explain, as an affirmation of the temporal shifts.

Although unaware of the conversation between Mia and die ideale Geliebte, he invokes a distinct discourse of the past and, similar to die ideale Geliebte, maps the witch onto Mia’s body. In doing so, he constructs Mia’s presence as a subject in the present through an allusion to a haunting moment in the past when non-normative female bodies were marked, persecuted, and punished as deviant others. In this sense, Kramer’s exclamation not only participates in the construction of Mia’s subjectivity as aberrant in relation to the METHODE, but he also participates

¹²⁸ Zeh’s figure references the historical figure of Heinrich Kramer (1430–1505) who was a German churchman, inquisitor, and author of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487), which describes witchcraft and endorses detailed processes for the extermination of witches.

¹²⁹ The phrase “vade retro” is Latin and is the command form for “move back.”

in the destabilization of METHODE time, albeit only jokingly. His own words, which cite a discrete and distinct time period, temporarily embed Mia within this particular discourse. This reference to the Middle Ages, which Kramer elicits in his declaration, simultaneously extends a promise of becoming a subject in the present moment and undoes her since she can only exist in the *now* as a being of the past.

By intertwining past, present, and future thematically and in its narrative chronology, *Corpus Delicti* disrupts linear and synchronous time, opening up the potential for readers to interrogate their own investment in and attachment to conventional assumptions about the unfolding of temporal patterns, routines, and chronological sequences. When Mia remarks, “Es hat sich nichts geändert. Es ändert sich niemals etwas. Ein System ist so gut wie das andere. Das Mittelalter ist keine Epoche. Mittelalter ist der Name der menschlichen Natur” (235) [Nothing has changed. Nothing ever changes. One system is as good as another. The Middle Ages is not a historical period; the Middle Ages is the name of human nature], she dissolves past, present, and future as temporal units by which to structure life. This collapse is particularly emphasized in the second sentence by the use of the present tense, which in German also has a future meaning. If nothing has changed and traces of the past are ever-present, then the *now* is always already delayed yet at the same time pointing to what is yet to come in the *then*. Although relying on the essentializing notion that time is naturally connected to humanness rather than socially constructed, Mia’s words nonetheless break with the understanding that time has to follow a teleological path and daily life has to be structured according to particular rhythms; she refutes the concept of a linear progression and a cyclical repetitive rhythm. In claiming that socio-political systems throughout history are all similar and that the Middle Ages are not a period of the past, but rather a term that evokes popular meanings to describe human nature more

generally, Zeh not only destabilizes the idea of progression as a sign of advancement and perpetual growth, but she also hints at the significance of time as an element in defining subjectivity.

This concept of the disintegration of temporal segments along with Mia's new way of thinking of herself as "dazwischen," encouraged by die ideale Geliebte, enables her to comprehend herself as a subject who resides within the system, but is able to separate herself from the dominant logic of METHODE time. When capable of embracing a sense of untimeliness, she finally understands and embraces what it meant when Moritz told her: "[m]an muss flackern. Subjektiv, objektiv. Subjektiv, objektiv. Anpassung, Widerstand. An, aus. Der freie Mensch gleicht einer defekten Lampe" (149) [a constant flickering, that's what freedom is for humans. Subjectivity, objectivity. Conformity, resistance. On, off. A free man is like a faulty light bulb]. Like the "defekte Lampe," flickering erratically and unpredictably between light and darkness, Mia defines her state-of-being as a liminal and precarious subject. As a kind of spectral being, Mia appears constantly to materialize and fade out of existence at any given minute without adhering to a specific pattern or sequence, and, in so doing, simultaneously affirms and defies a coherent reading of her personhood. She is constantly becoming and unbecoming a subject inside the system which both allows her to maintain a sense of unbound independence from the METHODE and subjects her to its forces and structures.

Espousing this mode of being a "flackern[des]" subject, Mia points to what is at stake not only in Zeh's novel, but also in many of the contemporary texts discussed in this dissertation, namely, the over-glorification of acts of resistance and an emphasis on the liberating experiences as one leaves behind the dominant system. While Mia appears to maintain a sense of unbound independence from the METHODE and to be able to resist her own expendability as a subject,

Moritz' words caution against such a one-sided and purely optimistic reading of her character. Embodying being untimely, she is able to seize moments of possibility that allow her to withstand the crushing forces of the system. Yet, these instances are always paired with conformity and Mia's existence inside the METHODE, underscoring the impossibility of an absolute and permanent escape from the system.

Claiming agency by removing a microchip that the METHODE places in the arm of each citizen, Mia embraces her precarious position as both a powerful and disposable subject and, in so doing, espouses the promise of unbecoming as she temporarily leaves behind her position within the system. To the METHODE, Mia matters only insofar as she possesses a body capable of producing information to be stored on the microchip, which can be seen as an act of performing work or bodily labor in order to become and remain visible within the system of the METHODE. She is understood as a being that constructs a virtual self that is nothing more than a set of binary codes that computer scanners can identify and convert into intelligible text—images, numbers, language. Her physical body is viewed purely as an entity that produces data. Upon removing the chip from her arm with a long needle and handing the bloody object, with all the personal data it contains, over to Kramer, Mia simultaneously does and undoes her own disposability in relation to the system. On the one hand, her act of doing actively frees her body from those normative matrices that render her expendable. On the other hand, the removal of the chip undoes her as a legible subject within the METHODE and she separates from the one source of meaning production for its citizens; an act that also renders her data unreadable and thus her body dead to the system.

When doing and undoing her own disposability by uncoupling herself from the system—a gesture that indicates Mia's own act of disconnecting herself from METHODE time while her

body is still emplaced inside the system of the METHODE and responds to it—Mia is able to conceive of her body as a remnant that “gehört niemandem mehr. . . . Vollkommen ausgeliefert, also vollkommen frei” (Zeh, *Corpus* 248) [belongs to no one, therefore to everyone. . . . Completely vulnerable; completely free]. In so doing, she emphasizes her position as an out-of-sync being that points to what is at stake for a disconnected body. While her position is highly unstable and precarious and makes her available to everybody as a representational figure—as an iconoclast, a rebel, a dissident, a martyr, a terrorist?—she concomitantly belongs to nobody. This particular relation of existing detached from the normative temporal rhythms of the METHODE yet existing always in relation to, and more specifically within, the system constructs a powerful force field with vectors that push and pull subjects in multiple directions and allow them to champion being and becoming timely and untimely. Driven by her own desires as well as those of the system, Mia concomitantly does and undoes her own disposability and situates herself in a realm that signals both power and vulnerability, certainty and uncertainty, precarity and stability.

While this type of relationality could be understood as a form of non-belonging—a way of existing in the world that disconnects Mia from a place of being and propels her into suspension—she is grounded and inhabits a location from which she is able to interact with other characters. After being arrested and put on trial based on a false accusation that she is the leader of the terrorist underground group RAK (Recht auf Krankheit) [Right to Illness], Mia is incarcerated and tortured. When the trial reveals both her brother’s innocence and the fallibility of the METHODE, Mia is ostensibly stylized into a martyr figure by the public. In his attempt to villainize Mia and redeem the system, Kramer visits her in prison where the inmates are typically granted no privileges and, in severe cases like Mia’s, no contact with other people. Their various

interactions demonstrate how each pursues the goal of bringing down and defeating the other person by taking advantage of opponents and their status within the METHODE.

This strategy becomes apparent during one particular exchange between Kramer and Mia that is a pivotal moment in their respective campaigns for and against the system. Although in a prison that is controlled by the METHODE, the young woman is spatially positioned inside the METHODE while concomitantly still, or yet again, temporally detached from the system's routines and mandates of time that would render her a citizen-subject. This particular situation emphasizes Mia's state of timeliness, which enables her to publicize and disseminate her passionate and potent critique of the system as she uses Kramer—and, by extension, the system—"als Sprachrohr" (184) [my mouthpiece]. Recognizing the position of power and authority that Kramer holds in society, Mia orders him to write down and distribute her ideas among the citizens of the METHODE. Relying on the highly gendered notion of him being an "Ehrenmann" (184) [man of honour]—an ideal of honor, integrity, and trustworthiness that references a highly stylized masculinity—when she addresses Kramer directly, she reaffirms his sense of control and dominance in this situation and tricks him into doing her bidding. Thus, Mia's attempt to destabilize the system relies on its stability and, in so doing, takes advantage of key figures like Kramer to make her ideas public.

Mia proclaims whom and what she refuses to trust; that is, she overtly rejects a system that regulates its populace through a set of temporal routines within a clearly defined and discrete space and denies the existence of any flaws or imperfections. When she deems the METHODE too lazy "sich dem Paradoxon von Gut und Böse zu stellen" (186) [[to] confront the paradox of good and evil]—a contradiction that results from enforcing its norms to establish and stabilize its own normativity—she points to the fact that both good and bad are part of the same system and that

their presence needs to be acknowledged. By ultimately revealing that she “entzieh[t] [sich] das Vertrauen ...” (187) [refuses to trust herself], she engages in, or in other words, enacts her own expulsion from the METHODE. This act allows her to briefly entertain the possibility of the promise of unbecoming.

As she disposes of her status as a citizen-subject, she believes that she is finally able to be completely out-of-sync with the vision of the system. This fantasy of being “vollkommen frei,” as Mia herself remarked, comes with its counterpart of being “vollkommen ausgeliefert,” which she does not realize at first. While Mia indulges the pleasure of seemingly being detached, Kramer views Mia’s words as a “rhetorische Massenvernichtungswaffe ..., die er zu nutzen wisse” (188) [political weapon of mass destruction ... [and he will] put it to good use]. From his perspective, the woman’s statement is of great value for his goal to obtain social control and dominance again, but he does not specify how he will achieve his goal. He remains cryptic in his conversation with Mia, and merely tells her that he will take advantage of Mia’s words and circulate them as a “Vertrauensfrage” (188) [vote of confidence] on the part of the METHODE. Playing with the political notion of the vote of confidence,¹³⁰ Kramer seizes this pivotal moment and reappropriates Mia’s declaration in order to denounce her as a terrorist and to reaffirm the system. In so doing, he converts Mia’s doing into an undoing of expulsion and presents her words in the context of being a promise of becoming.

This undoing of expulsion is further emphasized by the METHODE’s practices of re-integrating Mia into the system. While the techniques of torture could be solely understood as a means of inflicting physical pain on Mia’s body—and I agree that this is the case in *Corpus*

¹³⁰ The “Vertrauensfrage” is an integral part of modern democracies, particularly the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and is used in moments of crisis. It forces the parliament to either express confidence in the government or to vote it out of office.

Delicti—seen through the lens of temporality, these acts constitute a way of resyncing Mia’s body with “METHODE time.” Designed to inflict pain on Mia’s sensory and nervous system, the light in the cell is programmed such that it “schaltet sich in regelmäßigen Abständen von jeweils 1,5 Sekunden an und wieder aus” (Zeh, *Corpus* 238) [every 1.5 seconds the light turn off and on]. The incessant fluctuation of light and darkness with which Mia is bombarded re-introduces a stable and systematic routine of discrete temporal segments back into her life. In this vein, the METHODE’s preferred method of torture follows a rhythm. This rhythm in particular tortures Mia as it counteracts her random “flackern.”

When Mia has to appear in front of court one last time to receive her final verdict, she initially receives the same ruling as all dissidents before her. She accepts the sentence of being flash-frozen indeterminately as the punitive head of the terrorist anti-METHODE group, “wieder und wieder und immer wieder, siehe früher im Jahrhundert und spät im Jahrhundert und mitten im Jahrhundert” (259) [see above, see above and see above. See the beginning of the century, the end of the century, the middle of the century]. As she is about to become yet another individual that has to follow a METHODE verdict that merely repeats itself advertisement infinitum, the system breaks its own temporal pattern.

While the narrative does not explicitly state the reasons why Mia’s verdict is revoked at the last minute and who is responsible for the repeal, the procedure is stopped immediately. The METHODE “saves” Mia in the eleventh hour with a court reprieve. Instead of being flash-frozen, she is to go home as she is “[f]rei” (Zeh, *Corpus* 264) [free], and sentenced to undergo “Alltagstraining” (264) [training for normal life]: personal and psychological counseling and political education. Although this sentence could be read as the last attempt to save Mia from eternal confinement as a deep frozen body, this shift in the execution of the court ruling is, in my

view, the METHODE's acknowledgement of Mia's potentially powerfully precarious position as a flash-frozen body completely detached from the system's normative temporal sequences.

Consequently it must act to prevent this eventuality from happening.

The prescribed acts of "reintegration"—or more aptly, ideological brain-washing—necessitates Mia's release from prison and the routines of the METHODE; she has to be rendered an unbound and out-of-sync subject one last time to enforce her assimilation into the system again. Thus, this final step of propelling Mia back into METHODE time is contingent on her expulsion: she faces both the pleasures and agonies that arise from the potential of the promise of unbecoming. In Mia's case, this is also an unwanted promise of becoming or rather a "promise" of forced return to the status quo. In this vein, the freedom of undoing herself and of becoming disposable undoes her and does her in—she is finally "vollkommen frei" yet "vollkommen ausgeliefert" to the METHODE, which leaves her with little to no hope of ever escaping the system.

Akin to the fate of Strubel's Anja, Mia's ultimate return to the system re-programs her so that she is part of the temporal patterns of the METHODE again. The system's sets of normative practices can be enforced upon her body, mind, and soul. This reintegration forces Mia to realize "[dass] jetzt ... wirklich alles zu Ende [ist]" (264) [only now is it all truly finished], and keeps her temporally fixed and present in a present. Forced to face the absolute "Ende" prevents her from envisioning a future *then*, and coerces her to endure her own abandonment as a subject in an everlasting cycle of the non-potentiality of METHODE time.

Accession and expulsion play a central role in the construction of the main characters in *Kältere Schichten* and *Corpus Delicti*. As both Anja and Mia struggle to do and undo their very own disposability from the social system, their bodies and minds are exposed to normative forces that act on, turn, and resituate their bodies. Strubel's and Zeh's texts propose that alternative temporalities hold the potential to advance a promise of temporary escape from the dominant order—be it neoliberalism or not. This very promise, which will also play a significant part in my analysis in the next chapter, however does not guarantee permanent and definite break, but is merely temporarily based on the particular performative gestures of the individual at any given moment. Thus, both novels point to the desire for flight from the social order in its protagonists, but repeatedly remind us how this promise is less a commitment than a fleeting moment of potential.

These explorations of ostensibly foreclosed possibilities serve as a means for Strubel and Zeh to encourage their readers to think about the conditions of the subjects in their novels and to evaluate and interrogate critically their own positions in contemporary society. Like Anja and Mia, many of Zeh's readers currently inhabit a place of ambivalence in the spatio-temporal reality of contemporary Germany, that is, a position that can serve as a point of departure in various directions. This place represents a location from where readers are encouraged not only to think about the conditions of belonging to their lifeworlds, but also to interrogate the various possibilities and/or dangers of a possible *then*. They might get stuck in a Berlantian impasse, blindly holding on to a “good life” that weighs them down and exposes them to violence or to a political or economic insecurity that renders them materially and psychologically precarious.

They do, however, also have the opportunity and possibly also the responsibility as conscientious citizens to interrogate the present, the *now*. Both authors encourage their readers to envision alternative spaces of world-making so as to become cognizant of the fact that the past informs the *now*, which in turn informs the *then*, and to embrace methods of living that keep them future bound.

Chapter 5

Queer Affinities and Fantasies of (Non)Relationality in

Gespenster and *Falscher Bekenner*

The figures of Armin Steeb in Christoph Hochhäusler's *Falscher Bekenner* and Nina in Christian Petzold's *Gespenster* exemplify a tendency in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century German-language texts to question normative rhythms and tempos in service of a critique of heteronormativity and familial relationships. Praised by film critics and scholars alike for their unsettling cinematic aesthetics and their refusal to offer a cathartic ending to their audiences, both 2005 films star protagonists who wander through life without direction. They appear detached, passive, and indifferent; are unable to get a job; and display an unsettling awkwardness and ineptness when interacting with others. Illustrative of such incompetency in interpersonal relations, Armin struggles to have a brief superficial conversation with the girl in whom he is sexually and romantically interested and Nina saves a woman who is sexually harassed in a park but does not know how to express her infatuation. This strangeness or better yet estrangedness that Armin and Nina exhibit not only comes to the fore during interactions with potential lovers but also with family members, as the films critique the seeming comforts of a traditional model of the loving, monogamous, heterosexual family unit in contemporary society.

Throughout this dissertation I have demonstrated how various literary and filmic characters must contend with José Muñoz's conception of "straight time." As in my discussion of Maccarone's Fariba in chapter two, Kirchner's figures Arndt, Olim, and Bettina in chapter

three, Strubel's Anja, and Zeh's Mia in chapter four, I read the performances of the protagonists in *Falscher Bekenner* and *Gespenster* at times as affirmations and at other times as interventions into the rhythms of what Muñoz deems "the coercive choreography of a here and now" (162). Both Armin and Nina are indeed embedded in neoliberalism's restrictive structures of the *now* and its coercive cadences and temporal patterns of labor time, even as they also challenge the system—expressing their longing for a queer utopian *then* when they refuse to find and keep employment, to engage in reproductive and non-violent sexual acts, and to be legible to others as a productive citizen-subject. In other words, *Falscher Bekenner* and *Gespenster* portray what David Clarke deems characteristic of many Berlin School films, namely a sense of liberation that is accompanied by a further subjection to the dominant social order (146). They depict characters whose particular sexual and gendered gestures, performances, and practices create alternative forms of knowledge, affect, and belonging that exist beyond the dominant logics of neoliberalism and heteronormativity, yet the films ultimately foreclose the possibility of the permanency of these alternative modalities.

As Armin's and Nina's actions point to what is at stake when an individual's behavior disrupts notions of instrumental and routinized enactments of labor, leisure, and pleasure, both *Falscher Bekenner* and *Gespenster* make visible and critically interrogate the persistence of those norms and regulations that fuse and unite, but also separate and estrange subjects. As exemplary works of what Marco Abel calls the "counter-cinema of the Berlin School" (*Counter-cinema*), these two films serve as a commentary on the troubling dominant status quo of contemporary mainstream cinema with its majority heteronormative narratives and characters. They also call implicitly for viewers to reexamine their traditions and values, through a signature film aesthetics that conjures a film world that feels both real and immediate and that

simultaneously allows viewers to abstract themselves from their empirical reality.¹³¹

Emphasizing these stylistic qualities, I look specifically at how the subjects in both films navigate their attachments to and detachments from coercive normative matrices and how moments of stuckness allow for a glance toward the horizon of futurity and a non-sentimental prospect for hope.

These various affective ties to others generate fantasies and attachments that turn them into what Valerie Kaussen calls “quasi-invisible specters” (156). While this type of existence could be understood as a form of non-belonging—a way of existing in the world that disconnects main characters Nina and Armin from a place of being and propels them into a state of suspended non-relationality—the two characters are better understood as (un)timely. As I read *Gespenster* and *Falscher Bekenner*, I highlight how both figures are able to leave the system temporarily. At the same, however, both films also throw into relief how these moments of detachment fail to grant the respective individuals a permanent escape. Indeed, both films programatically withhold from viewers any opportunity for a romanticized reading of these two figures as removed from the structures of the dominant social system. On the one hand, Nina and Armin are legible to others as subjects because of their ability to traverse normative paths and to reproduce rehearsed patterns that signal belonging to mainstream society. On the other hand, they are capable of stepping outside of the present moment and abiding by different rhythms, blurring the temporal patterns and sequences of labor time. In so doing, they become (un)timely bodies, detaching from and reattaching to normative cadences. Following alternative rhythms,

¹³¹ Some of the characteristic features of this particular style are: long takes, long shots, clinically precise framing of the images, deliberate pacing paired with very little movement, sparse or no use of extradiegetic music countered with a poetic use of diegetic sound, and the predominance of mostly unknown and unprofessional actors (Abel, *Counter-cinema* 15).

Armin and Nina are able to glance ahead into the future and recognize moments of potential and possibility, even if these do not always materialize clearly as ways of existing in the present.

5.1 The Berlin School and Its (Un)Timely Aesthetics

One of the goals of those filmmakers categorized under the moniker Berlin School is to challenge and subvert the patterns of mainstream (Hollywood) films such as a clear narrative arc, a happy ending, stock or token characters that allow easy recognition, an emphasis on sentimentality (often underscored with pop musical soundtracks), or an increased use of visual and auditory special effects. Berlin School films, as Roger Cook, Lutz Koepnick, Kristin Kopp, and Brad Prager indicate in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema* (2013), “have a politics predicated on confronting spectators with static images and with sporadically disjunctive sounds” (8) in order to draw close attention to the action in the frame(s) and dialogic exchange between the characters. Many Berlin School films—and *Gespenster* and *Falscher Bekenner* are no exception here—employ what Cook, Koepnick, Kopp, and Prager call “dysnarration” or “aesthetics of refusal” (8). For Berlin School filmmakers, the aim of their films is not to create a sense of comfort in the viewers, but to engage topics critically to encourage the viewers to interrogate their investment in hegemonic normative narratives both on screen and in/for their own lives.

Unlike Hollywood cinema that “thrives by feeding the audience illusionary forms of reality” (14), Berlin School films derive their political potential from “denying the spectator what it is that they want or expect to see,” and, in so doing, “rebuff the pleasures of affirmative cinema” (8). Films such as *Gespenster* and *Falscher Bekenner* are exemplary of these impulses: that is, they (1) convey narratives that eschew identification with the characters or immersion in

the plot; (2) begin their stories in medias res as well as end them abruptly without offering resolution and closure; (3) employ alienating aesthetic elements, such as long takes or sound—including absolute silence; and (4) are often “at best, a-political” (Abel, “Intensifying Life” np) as they abstain from directly engaging in socio-cultural and political polemics.

In lieu of supplying answers or solutions, delivering propagandistic messages, or soothing the viewer into an escapist utopian world, Berlin School films present rather than represent, introduce rather than reduce, and depict rather than restrict. They introduce the viewer to events, settings, or characters and film worlds that resist conjuring up sentimentality, nostalgia, or melancholia. Instead, many of the films of the Berlin School understand their images to possess a certain impetus or force, as Abel emphasizes, and a potential to transform the reality of its viewers. They tend to “engage the seemingly familiar as something unfamiliar while never alienating us from what we see” (Abel, *Counter-cinema* 20), and, in so doing, demand that viewers reflect critically upon their own ideals and conceptions of life (Abel, *Counter-cinema* 17–21; Baer 77; Fisher 15–17; Kopp 285; Roy and Leweke 20–22).

The reflection on this triangularity between the familiar, the unfamiliar, and the alien can open gaps and fissures that construct distinct tempos and rhythms, engendering a sense of time that unfolds in unfamiliar ways. As Kristin Kopp points out, Hochhäusler’s *Falscher Bekenner* in particular and Berlin School films in general privilege the act of (visual) showing over (narrative) telling (286). While the images of many Berlin School films seek to depict, and often even embrace, stuckness, hopelessness, and an absence of futurity on screen, they do not resolve these issues for us within the diegesis. Rather the films provide scenarios and situations through what I call (un)timely aesthetics—both slowing and accelerating the viewers’ experience of temporality. On the one hand, this (un)timely aesthetics compels viewers to endure a slowing

down of time. We see this in *Gespenster* when the camera lingers on objects and characters, making already long takes seem to last even longer. On the other hand, this aesthetics challenges viewers with a radical use of the jump cut (as in *Falscher Bekenner*), which creates a sense of non-coherence between sequences. Rapidly speeding up filmic time and prohibiting the possibility of the development of a linear narrative, these jump cuts leave the audience feeling apprehensive and constantly questioning what is to come.

By providing unique temporal patterns and rhythms for the audience, the (un)timely aesthetics of the Berlin School makes visible how neoliberal capitalism has transformed social relations. These transformations, Anke Biendarra notes, almost exclusively privilege the traffic of commodities and communication while rendering any other form of interaction or relationship obsolete or insignificant for the propagation of the labor economy and mass consumerism (466). Emphasizing this shift, the films seek to encourage the viewers to ponder what these irregular tempos and cadences reveal about our very own attachment to and embeddedness within structures of labor time and mass consumerism. These films provoke audience members to become active spectators and to contemplate in the present moment their own attachment to “good-life” fantasies and narratives, to the desire to be legible as proper citizen-subjects. Some of these fantasies index the wish or need to be(come) timely and to create sentimentalized notions of optimism, economic prosperity, independence, heterofamilial bonds, and normative modes of procreation. Still others engender moments of crisis in the present. Through these moments, as Lauren Berlant has it (*Cruel Optimism*), we may affirm our presence in the *now*—a means of investing the energy and affective labor necessary to be(come) untimely and, from that vantage, to reexamine and potentially alter the *then*.

This duality of desiring visibility within the dominant structures of society while

concomitantly experiencing a longing for detachment and struggling to establish bonds with others creates what some feminist theorists describe as the double bind.¹³² On the one hand, belonging to core society rests on the individual's willingness to adapt to the normative rules and regulations that confer subject status. On the other hand, resistance and separation from socio-cultural frameworks of power engenders the predicament of becoming complicit through opposition in the investment in the authority of a telos of progress. In this sense, both the former and the latter modes of existence rest on the idea that the individual is driven to entertain a certain fantasy of what is ostensibly the quintessential perfect outcome.

Viewers of Berlin School films are encouraged to engage with, interpret, and negotiate their own affinity to and embeddedness in constructed and highly gendered, racialized, politicized, and economized institutions such as traditional kinship relations, monogamy, conventional family units, capitalism, and neoliberalism. In so doing, these viewers, much like the contemporary readers of relevant realist novels by authors like Juli Zeh and Antje Rávic Strubel (discussed in chapter four), are encouraged to revisit, revise, and re-envision ways of longing and belonging, ways of being in the world, ways of having a place, a present, and a future. These moments of being and becoming (un)timely offer opportunities to create, amend, and reject imagined life-worlds and to investigate if new forms of living are viable and attainable.

¹³² The term *double bind* was coined by Marilyn Frye in her essay "Oppression," published in the 1983 collection *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* and designates a situation in which an individual has very few options which all "expose [them] to penalty, censure, or deprivation" (2). This notion of the double bind parallels Butler's concept of precarity.

5.2 Revisiting “Good Life” Fantasies and Desires of (Non)Belonging in *Gespenster*

In affect theory, the word *optimism* denotes a force or a way of conceiving the world that enables—and even invites—us to engage with our surroundings in a way that we might not be capable of generating on our own. Attachments and relations to objects and subjects function affectively to engender fantasies and desires of what scholars have coined the “good life.”¹³³ For many, the concepts of optimism and striving for the “good life” become associated with advantages and positive thoughts, utterances, gestures, and actions. Additional scholarship on affect theory and several queer theorists have, however, shifted their focal point toward constructing avenues of exploration and theorizing that foreground, as Sianne Ngai aptly puts it, “the aesthetics of the ugly feelings” (2), that is, affective responses such as anxiety, irritation, envy, disgust, and paranoia.¹³⁴ These ugly feelings then inform and sometimes alter our interactions with the world insofar as they encourage pursuits of Berlantian “good-life” fantasies, which seemingly produce feelings of happiness but mask the ways in which they impede the individual’s thriving. As elaborated on in chapter one, subjects indeed cling to certain desires and fantasies of relations with others that are “cruelly optimistic” (1) as they seem positive, but are in fact restrictive and normative.

As outlined in detail in the introductory chapter, Berlant’s “cruel optimism” emerges as a response to unattainable fantasies of what she dubs the “good life.” Instead of being able to

¹³³ Scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Sianne Ngai, Melissa Gregg, and Gregory J. Seigworth have shaped the academic discourse on affect theory and what it means to desire, construct, experience, and maintain an ostensible good life.

¹³⁴ Investigations of the notion of, in the words of Ngai, “ugly feelings” have featured prominently in writings of Judith Halberstam, David Halperin, and Mel Y. Chen as well as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Sara Ahmed, and Lauren Berlant.

thrive in our respective life-worlds, we often desire those relationships that present an obstacle and keep us fastened in an impasse or a “time of dithering” (5). Precisely Berlant’s theorization of affect, desire, and impasse as a crisis of the present moment and her idea of the reciprocity of good-life fantasies, which I have discussed in detail in chapters two and four, relates to my concept of (un)timeliness. What makes Berlant’s concept so generative is her emphasis on the present moment both as the temporality of the *now* in a state of crisis and as a time of suspension; in other words, the *now* is both immediate and prolonged, both discrete and indeterminate. As such, cruel optimism rests on a notion of the crisis of the present that is inherently timely, in the sense that it is linked to the *now* or the present moment out of which subjects emerge. The individuals’ stuckness in the Berlantian impasse and the time of dithering, however, also render these subjects untimely or, rather, require them to embrace becoming an untimely body. They are fastened in the present, are weighed down and kept in a position of suspension that extends the time of the *now* ad infinitum. This untimeliness generates the potential of a possible future by impeding progress toward that future.

Although, or maybe because, *Cruel Optimism* pivots on the idea that stuckness in the impasse offers a possibility for experimentation and revision, Berlant’s work takes a descriptive and confrontational rather than a prescriptive and solution-providing approach. Through an analysis of the life-worlds of North Americans in the twenty-first century as well as literary and visual texts, the scholar exemplifies how different subjects experience the failure and disintegration of what they have hitherto perceived as their good-life fantasies. In other words, Berlant outlines how these individuals struggle with situations of crisis, facing moments of precarity and trauma that, in turn, present occasions to reconceive and reinvent ideals of belonging. Berlant does not provide any universally applicable answers as to how to overcome

the impasse, but allows for the literary and filmic texts that she discusses to provide potential responses.

Extrapolating from this framework of cruel optimism, I examine Christian Petzold's film *Gespenster*. The film exemplifies Berlant's notion of attachment to and desires of the "good life," particularly in its portrayal of the ambivalent longing for physical and emotional closeness to another human being and inclusion in a traditional family. As I seek to show in conversation with Berlant, the "good life" can take multiple forms, and subjects may at times desire inclusion in the fold of normalcy and at other times wish to escape the very same. I analyze the aesthetics of the Berlin school—Petzold's specifically—in light of the Berlantian idea of cruel optimism and my own concept of (un)timeliness. I focus particularly on Nina's fantasy of the "good life" as well as certain aesthetic elements and formal choices, which together highlight the possibility of overcoming the impasse but ultimately return the protagonist to the normative structures in which she was embedded in the first place. In so doing, *Gespenster* provides a sense of alternative, of hope, and of futurity, but stops short of suggesting that this liberation from normative rhythms is permanent or even sustainable.

Christian Petzold's *Gespenster* is the second film of the so-called Ghost Trilogy, along with *Die innere Sicherheit* (2000) and *Yella* (2007). In the vein of various other Berlin School films, *Gespenster*'s narrative begins in medias res and introduces the viewer to Nina (Julia Hummer), a teenage orphan who lives at a home for troubled youth. Nina meets Toni (Sabine Timoteo), with whom she experiences a fleeting moment of intimacy, and Françoise (Marianne Basler), a woman in her early forties who comes to believe that in Nina she has found her lost daughter, Marie, who was kidnapped as a child. Because Nina possesses the specific physical markers—a scar on her left ankle and a mole on her back—that could identify Nina as Marie,

Françoise offers Nina the promise of hope that she has a family and a place of belonging. However, it is not entirely clear whether Nina really believes in this fantasy. Although she follows Françoise and encourages the woman to tell her about her life and her past, Nina continues to appear affectless, which makes it difficult from the perspective of the audience to tell whether Nina buys into Françoise's fantasy throughout the film. The possibility of Nina's connection with Françoise is ultimately ruptured when her husband Pierre (Aurélien Recoing) forces her to leave Berlin and Nina leaves the hotel where they met and walks through a seemingly empty and lifeless city.

When the viewer is initially introduced to Nina, she seems to epitomize many of the characteristics of an impassive and detached teenage girl. She lives at a public foster home, has no clear direction in life, and, as many Berlin School scholars have noted, embodies a ghostly presence. North American Germanists such as Abel, Biendarra, Clarke, and Fisher, but also academics in Germany such as Petra Löffler, Beate Ochsner, and Johanna Schwenk identify a lack of presence in all of the film's characters (Abel, "Imagining Germany" 270; Biendarra 267–68; Clarke 145–46; Fisher 5–6; Löffler 27; Ochsner 64–66; Schwenk 73–74). Negotiating personal and collective identity, subjective as well as national memory, the film's protagonists appear ghostly as they interact with others and the urban cityscape in the post-unification capital Berlin (Webber 67–69).

This particular type of spectral presence while engaging with others crystalizes when Nina is assigned to a work detail picking up litter at a local park—part of her community service sentence for having been caught shoplifting. While this is a fairly standard form of punishment for minor offenses, it is nonetheless striking that the corrective measures of the justice system revolve around routinized labor. In lieu of being removed from society in a juvenile prison or

detention home, where the offenders' daily routines are often re-structured, labor in a public place like a park is commonly understood as an act of retributive justice. It is seen as a disciplinary measure due to the fact that the tasks are often menial and dull. The emphasis is, quite literally, on putting in the time, which is thought of as correcting teenagers' behavior and attitude because the work forces them to engage in something unpleasant, tedious, and beneficial for the community.

While we might question the value and effectiveness of such a punishment, more fruitful for understanding Petzold's film is to focus on the specifics of the practice itself, aspects that are less overtly discussed, potentially overlooked, or even obscured by the state. Regardless of what task the offender has to complete, it is organized and scheduled labor that is deemed the appropriate measure for rehabilitation of the delinquent. This type of punishment suggests that the introduction and rehearsal of labor situated within a temporal routine is part of the process of transforming the individual from an improper to a proper member of society. Understood in this vein, subjects are embedded in a highly regimented program and made timely. Since it is compulsory in nature, this inscription of timeliness registers as oppressive and, by extension, renders the normative rhythms of everyday daily life or ordinary citizens comparatively liberating.

Given this punishment, at first glance Nina might register as an untimely body—appearing detached from the temporal routines and patterns that would render her a proper subject. She is a teenager who does not know her parents and has moved in and out of foster families, is a social outsider, does not attend school regularly, and has come in contact with the law various times. A second and closer look, however, reveals that Nina is anything but disconnected from such regimes and instead is embedded in them. This duality of appearing to

be detached from the system when Nina is actually firmly embedded within its normative structures is reminiscent of Juli Zeh's Mia Holl and her time in prison because of her alleged terrorist activities. *Corpus Delicti*'s Mia seems to be able to free herself from the shackles of METHODE time when in reality she is lodged inside the system, which is similar to Nina's situation in *Gespenster*. In fact, Nina has to abide by the rules and schedule of the foster home or the social worker who monitors the park and, like Fariba in *Fremde Haut* in chapter two, is only tolerated and able to participate successfully in society when she makes herself legible as a timely body.

Returning to Berlant's notion of the impasse as a time of halting, hesitating, and refusing to continue to move along or allow time to unfold at its regular pace, Petzold's film suggests that there is potential in the moment of stuckness for Nina to embrace untimeliness. This duality of interruption and progress as a way of becoming (un)timely is visualized particularly in *Gespenster*'s final scene. Nina returns to the park to retrieve Françoise's wallet, which Toni earlier stole and, after emptying it of money, discarded in a trash can. The sequence is introduced to the viewer through a long shot that depicts Nina walking up to the fork of a gravel path that is positioned approximately at the center of the bottom third of the frame where she stops. While she has entered the frame via the left trail, the right one points toward the back right of the frame toward a place unknown to the viewer. Following the tilt of her head and the direction of her gaze, it appears that she is looking down at the other path (see figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 Nina standing at a crossroads.

Nina has several options as to how to continue her journey, in the literal sense as she walks through the park and in the metaphorical one as she tries to maneuver through the trials and tribulations of life. She is positioned at a fork that allows her to select one of two different paths and resituate her body in a different direction, and she is depicted at a standstill in the *now* for a few moments. This initiation of a time of inertia foregrounds the shift in Nina's progressive forward movement and draws attention to her body in a way that asserts the presence of her body in the present. At the same time, her stop and state of rest while time progresses allow her to become untimely—untimely in the sense that she is detaching from the present moment of labor and consumer time and contemplating the possibility of moving toward what lies ahead in the future. By pausing, she becomes hyper-visible and present in the *now* while at the same time lingering in this moment as a body that can potentially be oriented toward a *then*.

As she looks down at the trail, viewers are forced to pause and become untimely with her.

While time moves on, the audience has to contend with the fact that it is stuck with Nina. As the long shot positions her in the center of the frame, she becomes our anchor point of untimeliness: that is, we stop with her and have to accept that while filmic time continues, these moments do not signal any clear intent, offer any explicit resolution, or indicate any progress. Rather, the film shows Nina as she is presented with several options and forced to make a decision: a decision that will either turn her spatially toward the unknown future that lies ahead of her beyond the camera or that will redirect her toward what lies behind her. This second return then denies her any forward movement, any progress, or any future distinct from her past.

Taking either path would leave her with two choices: she could continue on the path, and, in so doing, remain within its known linear trajectory. The second possibility would be to turn and head to an unknown place that is spatially located at an angle and behind her, which Nina seems to be contemplating. This move away from the current position of the camera, away from the screen, and thus away from the viewer would turn her away from the *now* and return her—despite the difference in angle—to the place from where she departed. In this sense, she would return to a cycle of what Valerie Kaussen calls “compulsive repetitions, rituals that depend upon the ghostly status and the quasi-invisibility of the homeless teenager” (156)—a life of relationships that never fully grant her a way of belonging and of asserting her place in the world through bonds to other human beings. That is a life in which she functions as a temporary placeholder, that is, a corporeal being that does not register as meaningful to others, and whose sole purpose is to fill a gap or a void.

After pondering for a few seconds at the fork, Nina looks up and into the distance and starts moving somewhat briskly toward a place that is located to the left of the camera, somewhere beyond the frame. As she passes the camera, the film cuts to a shot of her walking

toward the garbage can, reaching in and taking out the wallet Toni earlier stole and discarded. An over-the-shoulder close-up allows the viewers to see Nina open the wallet and take out some pictures that were stored in one of the inside pockets. By way of positioning the camera behind Nina's left shoulder, the film introduces the audience to two pictures: first, the image of a roughly two-year-old girl, presumably Marie, sitting on a picnic blanket in a park, and then a black and white close-up of the head of the same child printed on a piece of paper. As we gaze at the image while Nina's hands unfold the paper, the process gradually reveals four images of a young girl: the first one on the far left depicting Françoise's daughter, while the subsequent ones appear to be computer-generated (CG) progression shots of the girl's aging process.

This particular act of unfolding the paper unveils the final image of a teenaged Marie, who looks very similar to Nina. A cut to a medium close-up frontal shot of Nina's upper torso and her head tilted downward looking at the images depicts her hair and face—particularly her mouth—in a way that enhances the resemblance between Nina and Marie (see figures 5.2 and 5.3). By cutting back and forth between the teenage girl looking at the images and the pictures of Marie, the sequence establishes a consistent, circular rhythm as its shot and counter-shot editing draws the viewers closer in. The close camera distance, a rather slow frequency of transition between each shot, and the long shot duration (of roughly five seconds per image and a total of twenty-eight seconds combined) generate a sense of elongation of the present that simultaneously transports us back to various concrete moments in the past and creates an (un)timely aesthetics through the specific combination of these components.

By lingering on either Nina's face or the four faces in the images, this particular sequence forces the audience to halt and to adapt to a different tempo of narrative progression and invites us to bring a range of stories to bear on the scene. While the arrangement of shots in this circular

fashion encourages us to ponder whether Nina is Françoise’s kidnapped daughter and whether she was indeed robbed of having a traditional family life, they also repeatedly jolt us out of and pull us back into the present. Moving back and forth between the actual person and the CG images that index different moments in the past, we find ourselves both present in and encouraged to detach from the *now*—a detachment that breaks with the telos of the narrative through the creation of its own telos.



Figure 5.2 CG images of Marie.



Figure 5.3 Nina looking at the images of Marie.

As the resemblance is indeed striking, the editing choice of the shots in this final scene—shots and reverse shots that seem to reinforce visually a connection between Nina and the images of Marie—and the use of these CG images makes visible a particular temporality and the unfolding of time in a distinct way, allowing the viewer to construct Nina as (un)timely for a brief moment. While both the linearity of the images on the paper and the specific camera position depicting the way in which Nina unveils the photo progression emphasize a sense of linearity and teleology, the images and the physical presence of Nina blend past and present. In this sense, the sequence of shots constructs a complex temporal structure that questions and defies but also affirms and perpetuates the normative sequentiality of time that is evoked through the progression displayed in the images.

This particular defiance aids in constructing Nina as (un)timely: that is, the presence of the images keep her stuck in the *now* and point to a *before*. As such, these photos serve as

indexical referents to a past that can only emerge through Nina's engagement with the images in the present moment. In other words, the presence of Nina's body serves as a material foundation unfolding an alternative world—one in which Nina is given the opportunity to entertain the idea of being Marie and is integrated into the normative rhythms of family life. This promise of being not only allows Nina to construct a past that she might have experienced but was too young to remember, but it also establishes a sense of her belonging to Françoise and Pierre's heteronormative familial configuration in/for the *then*. In this regard, affective attachments and a familial bond to the couple are only made possible if Nina is able to invest in a particular segment of time and its linear unfolding as suggested by the progression of CG images. In order to receive the status of a family member, however, Nina must rehearse a fictitious past that lacks any connection to the present. This narrative of Nina as Marie concomitantly affirms her presence in the present by giving her a past and denies her the ability to materialize as a subject because of its lack of substance; it relies on the acceptance of a linear progression of time from two-year-old Marie to teenage Marie, but can only transform Nina into Marie through Nina's reversal of this very same temporal sequence. She must move backward in time in order ultimately to become the two-year-old girl and then move through a past she never had.

After contemplating the possibility of this past and her connection to Françoise and Pierre, Nina crumples up the pictures and tosses them back into the garbage. Through this act, Nina—regardless of whether she is Marie—actively unhinges herself from the fantasy of and attachment to having a family, from having a fixed life narrative materialized through the CG images, and, along with that, from having a distinct and concrete past. In so doing, she becomes an (un)timely body, appearing to uncouple herself not only from the restraints of the necessity of lineage and linearity for defining her subjectivity, but also from conventional desires of

belonging. Instead, she seems to reject Françoise's "good-life" fantasy in favor of inhabiting a position in the *now*, a position that turns her away from the normative familial narrative, but does not automatically engender the possibility of forging alternative bonds in the *then*.

Akin to Nina, viewers are also placed in a state of (un)timeliness; a position that forces them to negotiate their own wishes for both Nina and themselves. As they reflect on the resemblance between Nina and the picture, they find themselves entangled in their own compulsion to construct the image of a traditional family unit, to sentimentalize Nina's state of longing for belonging based on their own socio-culturally, emotionally, and psychologically over-determined desires and practices, and to link identity to concrete and discrete units as evidence of constructing a heteronormative life-world. Thus, the film's final sequence suggests that it is only of secondary importance whether or not Nina believes herself to be Marie; whether or not Françoise truly believes Nina is Marie; or whether Toni was aware of Nina's infatuation with her or not. The main questions that all these relationships and bonds raise are whether or not the audience finds itself entangled in the demands for consumable fantasies, desires, and pleasures; whether or not viewers tend to envision and fashion their lives in such ways that detach them from teleological structures; and whether or not they are capable of embracing these moment of being in the *now*. Akin to Marie, viewers find themselves in this *now* as a moment that offers two options from which to choose. In this sense, the audience is given the opportunity to pause and then to continue in the same vein as they have done thus far or to take a different path and discover, test, and modify a new mode of being in the world.

Upon discarding the pictures and, with them, the possibility of participating in the narrative of belonging to Françoise and Pierre's family, Nina continues down the same path that led her to the garbage can and appears to be headed toward an indefinite point in the distance.

This transition from engaging with the images and then walking away is emphasized on a formal level through the cut to a medium shot of Nina's face, which then pans away from the young woman and transitions gradually into a long shot as the camera stops its movement while Nina keeps on walking with her back turned to the camera (see figure 5.4). The viewer is left behind to watch as the dark colors of Nina's clothes blend more and more with the dark green leaves of the trees, whose branches droop and partially obstruct the view (see figure 5.5).



Figure 5.4 Nina walks away from the garbage can with her back to camera.



Figure 5.5 The view of Nina's body is obstructed by the branches of the shrubs and trees.

While Abel identifies Nina's desires and pursuit of a seemingly "good life," of belonging, and of forming and maintaining relationships to be an overarching theme in the entire oeuvre of Petzold, the final sequence of *Gespenster* supports a different reading. When she has ultimately turned away from any connections to others and dissociated from the fantasy of being Marie, Nina seems to have no other choice but to turn away from the images that epitomize Nina's longing for a bond. She is left with no option but to direct her physical body and her gaze toward a vast grassy area devoid of any other human beings with whom she could interact. Cook, Koepnick, and Prager describe this particular kind of emptiness as "urban landscape [as] a desert" (13), a claim that implies that Nina is headed toward a life that keeps her pursuing the dreams of a seemingly "good life," that is, an existence motivated by striving, by hoping, and by longing, in spite of a present life that offers nothing but loneliness and isolation, lacking any

relationships with which she might construct a shared or collective future or past.

While this final sequence appears to accentuate Nina's unfulfilled yearning for conventional and normative family bonds and to emphasize her stuckness, certain aesthetic characteristics of the Berlin School allow for a reading of the film's ending that is in conversation with the Berlantian concept of cruel optimism, but also considers the importance of the audience as active participants in the viewing experience. *Gespenster's* final sequence permits an alternative reading, despite, or maybe because of, its negotiation of notions of physical and emotional attachment to what constitutes the "good life." Rather than valorizing Nina's act of resistance and refusal of the "good life" as progressive and liberated, Petzold underscores instead viewers' own investment in her dismissal of normative fantasies. In other words, the film seeks to make visible the audience's tendency to idealize struggle and opposition.

In this sense, Nina's act of wadding up the images and throwing them away can be read as signaling her active and conscious decision to relinquish the desire to be a part of Françoise's family. As the medium shot of Nina's face before she discards the pictures urges us to construct a fantasy that ties the girl to Françoise and her husband, the subsequent over-the-shoulder close-up of Nina's hands tossing the wallet and the images foregrounds her action rather than her body and her surroundings. The downward tilt of the camera encourages the audience to align with Nina's point of view; we watch the items dropping into the garbage instead of inhabiting a position from which to observe Nina. To be more precise, viewers bear witness to the moment when Nina decides to face the images directly one last time before she lets go of them completely, turns away, and walks off.

We watch Nina's body move through an area of the park that does not have any signs of the Berlin cityscape in the background and suggests complete social isolation. She has her back

to the camera and the audience can hear only some ambient noise such as the wind rustling the leaves of the trees in the park. This final sequence invokes an affirmative rejection and abandonment of the “good life” represented by the pictures, while both the lack of extra-diegetic sound and the abrupt ending of the movie deny us the chance to sentimentalize this moment. Rather, the fairly long duration of the shot—thirty-eight seconds, to be precise—and Nina’s blue T-shirt and jeans, which create a stark contrast to the soft green grass and foliage of the trees, make her hyper-visible and emphasize her presence in the present. As her body moves forward, the camera stays with her. The audience is forced to linger and watch her figure gradually become smaller and smaller without any references that indicate the potential of an existence in the *then*.

While walking away could be read as a sign of Nina’s determination to abandon normative conceptions of heterofamilial bonds and modes of procreation and reproduction to embody complete detachment and freedom and to move on, the scene’s (un)timely aesthetics complicate such an attempt to idealize the film’s ending. Particularly the combination of the shot duration and Nina’s slow movement challenges the mere glorification of Nina as ultimately becoming an independent subject. Rather the interplay between formal aspects and *mise-en-scène* and filmic characters evokes a sense of extension or prolonging of the present moment; or a *now* that creates a force field in which Nina registers as present, but is not able to assert her presence.

Without any reference to any other objects or subjects in the story world in that final sequence that might point to a potential future or relational bonds, Nina’s existence is reduced to her presence in that *now*, which renders her both timely and untimely at the same time. On the one hand, she registers as timely due to the fact that her clothes and her presence in the park echo

her work of picking up trash in a park at the beginning of the film and her subsequent exchange of her own shabby, ill-fitting clothes for more mainstream, mass produced garments. She exists in this very moment of the present, which is a temporality of neoliberal capitalism with its regulatory scripts of proper subjects. On the other hand, this lack or absence of buildings or other people suspends her from the present and its normative patterns and cadences and allows her to embrace an alternative tempo. This type of untimeliness thus extends the promise of envisioning a tangible *then*, although it might never be realized on a concrete level. In this regard, Nina becomes present as an (un)timely body both in the present and vis-à-vis the present.

While the final sequence calls into question Nina's attachment to and repudiation of desires for the "good life," an earlier sequence in *Gespenster* already confronts viewers with the film's (un)timely aesthetics. The film does so by emphasizing the gravity and urgency of contemplating investment in narratives that function in a twofold manner. They construct (often queer) alternatives to what is traditionally considered a "good life" within the frameworks of heteronormativity and/or they present homonormativity as offering possibilities of detachment and escape. At a party hosted by the television producer Oliver (Benno Fürmann), Nina and Toni have a sexual encounter during which they share a moment of intimacy and connectedness. The next morning, Nina wakes up on a fold-out couch, covered with only a blanket, naked and alone. After a medium shot of Nina's torso as she is lying on the couch, the film cuts to a long shot. Nina is positioned in the center of the frame, sitting on the sofa with her arms wrapped around her knees and her legs tucked in. She has covered her legs and the front of her torso with a blanket while her bare back and part of her right breast are exposed to the camera. Sitting on the couch, she turns her head to the left and the right with an anxious expression on her face as if she were trying to orient herself in the unfamiliar location and to look for Toni (see figure 5.6).



Figure 5.6: Nina naked and alone on the couch in Oliver's house.

When walking through the house that, aside from the rooms that were used for the party, is under construction, Nina discovers Oliver's wife upstairs in the bathroom. Throughout the brief exchange, presented through a medium long shot and reverse shots sequence, both women stand in a doorframe: to be more specific, Oliver's wife is positioned in the frame of the balcony door, Nina is located in the frame of the bathroom door. When Nina inquires as to where Toni is, the other woman bluntly responds: "Du kriegst gar nix mit oder? - Wieso? Wo ist Toni denn? - Deine Freundin ist mit meinem Mann weg zum Ficken. So und jetzt verschwinde aus meinem Haus" [You don't get anything, do you? - Why? Where's Toni? - She's gone off with my husband for a fuck. Now get out of my house.¹³⁵] (1:11:40–1:11:51). After the wife indicates crudely that her husband and Toni left together—and thus forming yet another ostensibly non-

¹³⁵ Henceforth, all translations are taken from the film's official subtitles.

normative relation that dissolves both the bonds between Toni and Nina and Oliver and his wife, respectively—Nina turns around and exits through another door behind her.

A subsequent cut to a frontal long shot as Nina walks away from the house through a field of tall grass that is surrounded by trees and shrubs—a shot that is later repeated in the final sequence as I have described above—evokes the idea of (un)timely aesthetics and suggests her lack of belonging, solitude, and isolation from urban spaces as well as other human beings. At the same time, the long shot of Nina might insinuate that Nina has turned away from the very location where she experienced the momentary fulfillment of her cruelly optimistic yearning for intimacy with Toni. She is present in the present, which, due to its lack of reference, concomitantly unhinges her from the *now* and could be either a dream or fantasy or a cut to a different moment during that same day or even the following. Although Nina is still wearing the same outfit, we cannot be sure when or if the scene takes place. Regardless of whether this scene represents an illusion or a temporal jump ahead or back in time, it does constitute a particular rupture of the linear unfolding of time—one that is evidence of the (un)timely aesthetics of *Gespenster*. In this sense, Nina can be viewed as a subject that comes into existence in the *now*, which simultaneously indexes a time that may or may not be the present moment.

What the (un)timely aesthetics of this sequence allow and potentially even encourage the audience to do is to consider their own investment in discourses of normalcy and resistance. As the viewers watch Nina depart the premises, the long take and the sparseness of sound forces them to linger in the moment. This state of endurance allows viewers to contemplate what conclusions to draw from this depiction of Nina and to consider how their own ideas of desire, coupledness, and commitment inform their reading of the sequence. As in the final scene of the film, the formal aspects of this morning-after scene enable the audience to interrogate critically

whether Nina is merely walking away from the site of the party or whether she is rejecting the types of fantasies and desires that her encounter with Toni might have engendered. Such a critical reading reminds us that their relationship was only temporary and not founded in any sense of commitment and loyalty and that longing does not guarantee a transformation into belonging. It also signals that the short-lived gratification of desires can sometimes camouflage impasses only to stimulate our yearning for exactly those situations and the resulting affective responses over and over again.

While such interpretations are valid ways of looking at the sequence, they nonetheless valorize very particular, normative ideals of intimacy, compassion, and care. More specifically, they foreground the understanding that Toni's abandonment of Nina to run away with Oliver returns her to the realm of heterosexuality, which is—within the confinements of conventional German socio-political and cultural hegemony—sanctioned as preferable, proper, and stable: a world from which Toni departed only momentarily during her night with Nina. This rejection and abandonment not only leaves Nina stuck in the present moment as she is rejected and isolated, but it also forecloses the possibility of the fulfillment of Nina's desires.

Such a foreclosure is also suggested in the previous sequence when a series of medium close-up shots of the two women dancing and kissing create a sphere of intimacy. Led to invest themselves emotionally in the emerging bond between Nina and Toni at Oliver's "work party"—people are there to network and are not really enjoying time off from work—viewers are, literally and metaphorically, cut off from that fantasy through the film's deployment of (un)timely aesthetics. As the audience is connected to Nina and Toni kissing in the present, their moment of intimacy is abruptly shattered when the film cuts to the shot of Nina lying on the sofa alone. Akin to Oliver's provisionally furnished house to create an illusion of style, opulence, and

grandeur for the party, Toni's charm and attention to Nina merely serves her own interests and personal benefit and is her way to attract the attention of Oliver (see figure 5.7).



Figure 5.7: Nina and Toni kissing while Toni looks at Oliver.

While one might assume that Nina is becoming an untimely body in this sequence, forging an intimate connection with Toni in a part of the house that is separate from the main house where the party is hosted, this kind of becoming is complicated by Toni's actions. Although the two women seem to have escaped the realm of the work party, they are entering another sphere in which their bodies perform a certain type of labor. Nina, albeit unknowingly through Toni's repeated looks at Oliver, is participating in Toni's performative work of creating a visually pleasurable moment for Oliver. As they hug tightly and kiss passionately, their bodies stage a type of homoeroticism that is done for Oliver's benefit and thus renders the two women timely. Their performance becomes an act of corporeal labor and allows Oliver to indulge in

gazing at Nina and Toni. In this respect, this scene echoes Laura Mulvey's "male gaze," and embeds the scene within the highly gendered hierarchal notion that women exist merely for male pleasure (19–21). Oliver's gaze read through the lens of Mulvey is all the more significant since he is the producer of some type of TV show about friendship and interviews Nina and Toni at the casting. In this sense, the encounter between the two women is staged for him by Toni while Nina is unaware of her involvement in the situation; or better, the encounter is produced by and for him, which firmly fastens the two women in the *now* as timely bodies, rather than being granted the opportunity to become untimely.

Furthermore, this sudden change from the kiss to Nina on the sofa propels the audience back into the *now* and prevents the romanticization of the sexual encounter between Nina and Toni. Just as Nina experiences yet another moment of crisis in her life in which she has been abandoned and left behind, viewers are confronted with their own almost compulsive impulse to construct "good-life" fantasies for the character, fantasies that are deeply rooted in the creation and reiteration of both hetero- and homonormative images and plots. By abandoning these notions, the audience might be able to understand Nina's solitude as one mode of existence and her departure as simply that, Nina moving on without forging any meaningful connections. She is neither the abandoned victim nor the progressive subject who actively resists socio-cultural norms.

Deconstructing and re-visioning cruelly optimistic pursuits of desires that seemingly promise a "good life," the above-discussed sequences emphasize one of the main aims of *Gespenster*, that is, the film makes its viewers aware of their own potential cruelly optimistic attachments to "good-life" fantasies. While it is only of secondary importance whether or not Nina believes she is Marie, whether or not Françoise truly believes Nina is Marie, or whether

Toni was aware of Nina's infatuation with her, the main questions that all these relationships and bonds raise is whether or not viewers expect their everyday desires and fantasies to be represented on screen,¹³⁶ whether or not they tend to envision and fashion their lives in ways that keep them stuck in impasses, and whether or not they are capable of embracing these moment of stuckness to create, test, modify, and rewrite to ultimately discover a new presence in the present.

5.3 Chrono(Non)Normativity and Queer Potentials in/of the Present in *Falscher Bekenner*

With the notions of the impasse and stuckness as important concepts that emerge from *Gespenster's* depiction of Nina, I return here to Armin in *Falscher Bekenner*. He is emblematic of a subject whose (un)timeliness allows him to navigate the intricate force field and networks of power that neoliberalism has created. Like Fariba in my discussion in chapter two, the characters in *Falscher Bekenner* must embody certain dominant standards and normative identity markers as fully as possible if they desire to become legible as bodies that matter. In negotiating the various regulatory realms present in his life-world, Armin is able to be present within the structures of the system and embraces certain rhythms while concomitantly experiencing moments that allow him to detach from these very same patterns and routines.

In this sense, I understand *Falscher Bekenner* to speak to Freeman, Muñoz, and Puar, three scholars whose work I introduced in detail in the first introductory chapter of this

¹³⁶ The expectation to see one's desires and fantasies represented on screen bespeaks Linda Williams' argument in *Screening Sex* (2008) that the development of film in the early twentieth century sparked a shift from understanding sexuality as reproductive to pleasurable. Acts that were "once considered ob-scene (literally off scene) because they had the capacity to arouse have come 'on/scene'" (7).

dissertation. As a brief reminder, Freeman furthers the idea of performative acts as having the possibility to challenge the “binding power” (3)—in the dual senses of “uniting” and “compulsory”—of chrononormativity, while Muñoz’s and Puar’s works theorize how subjects can be grounded in the present moment while simultaneously being encouraged to look ahead to what is yet to come.

If we focus on how Hochhäusler works with the subject of time in *Falscher Bekenner*, we find a strong emphasis on the unsettling of normative rhythms and the stark division of labor and leisure time in the *now* as a means to envision a potential *then*. The film introduces the viewer to the teenager Armin, who has recently graduated with a mediocre degree from a *Realschule* and still lives with his middle-class parents in their family home. He is unemployed, but is also relatively unperturbed about the fact that the few job interviews he is able to secure are completely unsuccessful. While he appears attracted to Katja, he is unable to connect with her, and at the same time he also fantasizes about or engages in anonymous sexual encounters with members of a biker group in public restrooms along the highway.¹³⁷ When he reads about a fatal accident in the press, he becomes the titular “falscher Bekenner” [pseudo confessor]—sending anonymous letters to a local Mönchengladbach newspaper, claiming responsibility for the collision and other violent events that have occurred in close proximity to where he lives. Armin

¹³⁷ The association of bikers and motorcycle gangs as subjects and groups that are deemed marginal subjects evokes a variety of associations. For one, it reverberates one of the major themes in classics such as *The Wild One* (1953) starring Marlon Brando or *Easy Rider* (1969) directed by actor-director Dennis Hopper. It also connotes the most notorious motorcycle club in the United States and Canada called Hells Angels. While certainly embodying the outlaw biker lifestyle, riding Harley Davidson motorcycles, donning leather gear, and having shaved heads and many tattoos, the gang is today considered to be one of most organized criminal enterprises in the US and Canada.

appears to drift through life, emotionally detached and without orientation, until the film culminates in his arrest by local police and he is driven off in a police car.¹³⁸

While Abel understands the film's final scene—with Armin sitting in the car and smiling at the camera—as the pivotal moment that signals Armin's escape from the “comfortable yet boring life afforded him by his suburban, provincial upbringing” (“Counter-Cinema” 37),¹³⁹ his readings rely on the understanding of Armin's world as divided into rigid binaries. Abel's work thus describes *Falscher Bekenner* as a film that insists on the existence of “private environment” and “public ... [or] corporate spaces” (*Counter-cinema* 165, emphasis in original). Abel sees two discrete and distinct realms that establish and shape the protagonist's subjectivity and, as he emphasizes, affirm a separation of “private” and “public” that seems to hold up until the very end of the film. In this sense, his argument rests on the premises that the film introduces various set of dichotomies such as public bathroom and private home, work and leisure time, or normative and queer fantasies and attractions, and Armin is able to turn his back on his normative life only because he was firmly situated within its structures in the first place.

While I agree with Abel's analysis of the collapse of binarisms at the end of the film, I, question the very existence of the strict division of dichotomous structures from the onset. Instead, I propose that *Falscher Bekenner* exemplifies what I call (un)timely aesthetics; that is, the film is filled with moments and instances of temporal and identitarian fluidity that occur

¹³⁸ What I find particularly striking about this ending is the fact that Armin is indeed captured by the police and transported off in their car instead of escaping from the officials. Since the film ends with Armin in the car, the viewer has no knowledge of what will follow, but can assume that Armin will face the law and receive a punishment. This depiction of Armin remaining part of the very system from which he so desperately attempts to break free, I argue, echoes the final chapters of Juli Zeh's *Corpus Delicti* which also ends with the reintegration and reprogramming of Zeh's protagonist instead of her expulsion from the novel's totalitarian system.

¹³⁹ Akin to Abel, Clarke reads the depiction of Armin in *Falscher Bekenner* as emblematic of a “dissatisfaction with the affluent world of Germany's middle class” (149).

because of the ways in which desire, pleasure, and labor affect and determine Armin's position as an (un)timely body in a world governed by neoliberal ideals and doctrines.

The private space and corporate space are never fully divided. Rather, the film shows them as overlapping: the private is constantly encroaching upon what is considered public or corporate, and vice versa. For example, the living room in the home of Armin's parents serves as a space for the re-enactment of a job interview, with Armin as the applicant and his older brother Martin Jr. as the employer. The scene infuses family time with interactions that are typically marked as belonging to corporate time. Later, Armin's actual job interviews at various firms resemble a personality test or questionnaire that Armin has to complete as quickly as possible. Instead of inquiring about the sorts of professional qualifications important in a corporate environment, Armin's future employer asks the young man to identify personal preferences and emotions with regard to colors, flowers, and the like. One interviewer even goes so far as to reveal information about his own family history. By sharing intimate family details, the employer blurs the lines between private and corporate.¹⁴⁰

These examples demonstrate that the tempos and cadences of Armin's life follow a nontraditional and nonlinear, or, to reappropriate Freeman's term, a "chrononon-normative" pattern. There is no clear division between corporate and family time, or what I term labor and leisure time: rather, the two are interspersed and—at least partially—overlapping. On the one hand, family time with his brother is turned in the mock interview into scenes of simulating time within a corporate environment. On the other hand, the allegedly necessary fast-pace rhythm of

¹⁴⁰ This blurring of the private and public is reminiscent of Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's seminal essay "Sex in Public" (1998). They argue that the public sphere is infused with heteronormative forms of intimacy and thus upholding heteronormativity as "a fundamental motor of social organization" and "a founding condition of unequal and exploitative relations" (564) while "[q]ueer culture, by contrast, has almost no institutional matrix for its counterintimacies" (562).

the job interview to measure Armin's aptitude is disrupted by the personal account of the employer's family history, slowing down the progression of the interview and unsettling the steady pulse of labor time.

In this sense, the interviews become exemplary of an erosion of discrete moments of time within neoliberal systems and set up the audience for Armin's sexual encounters with the motorcyclist. As the present moment is overshadowed with various rhythms that blur the temporal patterns and sequences of labor and leisure time, and the difference between these two distinct temporal segments crumples until it ultimately collapses completely. *Falscher Bekenner* suggests that moments of desire are connected to the unfolding of time in a different way. Thus, the interruption of corporate time and the possibility of experiencing pleasure during private time become available to Armin only when he detaches himself from normative cadences of chrononormativity and becomes (un)timely.¹⁴¹

In addition to the dissolution of labor vs. leisure time, Armin's sexual encounters with one of the members of the motorcycle gang underscore how his subjectivity is shaped by his desires and experiences of pleasure. Particularly the construction and performative acts of his sexuality are not depicted as stable or permanent, but are constantly shifting and render his identity malleable and fluid. Although he stages rather traditional heterocentric romantic attractions—he desires and pursues Katja (at least to a certain extent)—the viewer is never exposed to any of Armin's fantasies involving her or any kind of physical contact between the two. Rather, the only sex acts in *Falscher Bekenner* pair Armin with an anonymous biker with

¹⁴¹ As already mentioned in the introduction, Marco Abel proposes the notion of the “future perfect” (5), which he understands as a condition that is grounded in the “here and now” (*Counter-cinema* 15). From this moment in the present, the subject is able to look ahead to what remains “to-come” (15), a position in the future from where it looks back at that which, by then, will have been. Thus, the future perfect is a type of “presentism [that is] pursued in the name of affecting the future” (22), which however also relies on the past as the point of reference.

whom he practices both active and passive oral as well as anal sex.

While Germanist Sascha Harris reads Armin's sexual encounters with the motorcycle gang members as aggressive attacks on the gang's part and acts of "Selbstbestrafung" (Harris np) by the young man, the film supplies no visual or auditive cues that would encourage and support such a claim. Instead, precisely these moments reveal non-normative pleasure and enjoyment rather than punishment. Although a close-up of Armin's reaction to the first contact during which he performs oral sex on the motorcyclist (see figures 5.8, 5.9, and 5.10) appears to emphasize astonishment, novelty, and alienness, a close-up of Armin's facial expression during the second of these sex acts—this time Armin is the recipient of oral stimulation—underscores my claim that the film does not depict the moment as one of punishment (figures 5.11 and 5.12).



Fig. 5.8 Armin looking at the motorcyclist's pelvic region.



Fig. 5.9 Armin starting to perform oral sex.



Fig. 5.10 Armin performing oral sex while looking up.

Notwithstanding his initial look, which appears stern and tense, and evinces a mixture of affective responses such as defiance, fear, hesitation, and apprehension (see figure 5.11), Armin's facial expression changes drastically as the camera cuts from one medium close-up to the next (figure 5.12). While the majority of the bystanders, whose faces are mostly hidden behind their motorcycle helmets, gaze downward, the man without a helmet who stands next to him and has his arm around Armin's shoulder moves slightly to the left and tilts his head to the left and forward so it is no longer covered by Armin's head. While Armin has his eyes closed and his mouth slightly ajar, smiling in a way that suggests he is experiencing a sexually charged and highly pleasurable moment, the motorcyclist's look and slight grin communicate a sense of approval and pride, as if Armin's response to receiving oral sex marks a type of initiation or rite of passage.



Fig. 5.11 Armin facing the motorcyclist.



Fig. 5.12 Armin's changed facial expression.

Furthermore, the multiplicity and variation of passion and lust reflects Armin's fluid subjectivity as he destabilizes any conventional concepts of sexuality. It also requires a transformation and redefinition of identity that reaches beyond the reliance on binary structures of sexual desires and practices. My reading of Armin echoes queer theorist Licia Fiol-Matta's claim that queerness and normativity are sutured insofar as individuals both reproduce and trouble dominant cultural formations and power structures through an insistence on freedom and boundaries, on disorder and structure, and on autonomy and governance.¹⁴² Indeed, Armin's first

¹⁴² In *A Queer Mother for the Nation: The State and Gabriela Mistral* (2002), Fiol-Matta's work is biographical and aims at unpacking the complex nuances of the public figure and private person of Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) who was not only the first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, but also a “closeted lesbian” (xiv), human rights defender, and supporter and representative of the Chilean authorities. As Fiol-Matta points out, Mistral serves as the prime example of both the disruption and the stability of binary structures, and, in so doing, helps “not to see the world as simplistically divided between the dominant power, along with its discourse, and the dominated, with their resistance strategies. Instead, the picture presented here is complex, shifting, and unstable” (218).

two sexual encounters not only accentuate the malleability and fluidity of his sexuality as gay and straight and of his position as giver and receiver of pleasure, but they also point to and culminate in providing the possibility of forging an alternative bond alongside the heteronormative family constellation epitomized by his relationship to his parents and brothers.

This initial opening or undoing of fixed identity categories is linked to the mouth, the orifice crucial for giving and receiving oral sex. Foregrounded aesthetically in both sequences as the central element of the close-up shots, Armin's mouth performs bidirectional operations. As such, it represents a site of alternative potentialities. Akin to, yet different from, Bersani's seminal reconceptualization of the rectum as a locus of power in homosexual sex acts (rather than a body part typically associated with excretion, penetration, and submissiveness),¹⁴³ Petzold's filming of the mouth presents it as an orifice that allows for penetration like the rectum. However, it is not a closed cavity, or a Bersanian "grave," but rather an opening or a site of exchange, of in and out, of ingestion as well as ejection, and thus an orifice emblematic of the ability both to consume¹⁴⁴ and disgorge.

Theorizing the mouth in this way, I understand it as the point of convergence that grants Armin access to a heretofore unexperienced form of pleasure and sexual practice that destabilizes and redefines his identity. Through exploring the potential of his mouth, he engages in nonheterosexual sex acts that defy a clear categorization. Rather, he has become an

¹⁴³ In "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987), queer theorist Leo Bersani outlines how the rectum figures as a grave in traditional conceptions of gay male sexuality during the 1980s AIDS epidemic in the US. Rejecting conventional notions about gender, sexuality, and power, Bersani proposes new ways of thinking about the rectum in homosexual anal sex. While conceived as the place of insertion which makes the penetrated the one who must give up power and yield to the penetrator—" [*t]o be penetrated is to abdicate power*" (212, emphasis in original)—Bersani cautions against this kind of thinking and demands a re-thinking of notions like sexual promiscuity and embrace the "possibility a certain refusal of sex as we know it" (215).

¹⁴⁴ The mouth's ability to consume is emphasized when Armin sits at the kitchen table and eats breakfast with his parents.

assemblage of normative and queer desires, practices, and figurations made visible through his involvement with both the biker gang and his family. On the one hand, Armin rides on the back of the motorcycle of the man with whom he had sex as a sign of queer solidarity and intimacy. On the other hand, he continues to enjoy the comfort of his life in his parents' home as they embrace norms and values that grant the family particular privileges within the traditional hegemonic framework of German society. These two seemingly separate worlds are fused temporally through Hochhäusler's use of jump cuts.

Hochhäusler's editing choices in both sequences produce this particular duality, suturing private and public on a formal level. In the case of the first of the two scenes mentioned above, the close-up of Armin's performance of oral sex is followed immediately by a jump cut to a medium shot of the parental kitchen with Armin and his brother, Stefan (Florian Panzner). While Stefan is packing a bag, Armin, still in his coat, leans against the kitchen counter, talking and holding a carton of milk. By moving from the sequence of Armin performing oral sex to the family kitchen, the film condenses—or rather completely collapses—the linear unfolding of time and fuses the two separate spheres—public bathroom and family home.

This suturing effect of time is further intensified through Armin's actions in the home, which reference his performance of oral sex on the motorcyclist. While he is talking to his brother, he drinks milk out of a carton, bends over sideways toward the sink, and lets the milk slowly trickle out of his mouth. In this particular instance, the white liquid references not only the potential presence of semen from oral sex in his mouth, but also the primary food source for newborns. As such, it also foreshadows the end of the film, which I will discuss in further detail as a birthing sequence. When questioned about his action by his brother, he responds that he has a strange taste in his mouth (figure 5.13) and, in so doing, references not only the oral sex, but

also reminds the audience of its immediacy and temporal closeness.



Fig. 5.13 Armin bent over the sink, spitting out milk.

While this particular cut between the two sequences and their respective content not only encourages the viewer to wonder whether the encounter in the highway restroom is more than merely Armin's fantasy, it also affects the linear unfolding of temporality—moving time ahead swiftly. Since the audience does not know precisely when the second scene with Armin's brother happens, this cut condenses time and makes it seem as if the two sequences in the film are no longer isolated from one another. Rather, they appear temporally fused, making visible how heteronormative family time is tightly connected or even already fused with the time of non-normative sex acts, with the result that the former becomes illegible and thus loses its dominant essentialized and essentializing status.

In this regard, Hochhäusler's film ultimately ruptures the heretofore shielded boundaries

of the home and creates a sphere of contact in which the traditional logics of normative identity, private space, and “straight time” are infused with elements of non-normativity. This spherical force field that encompasses different and seemingly disparate potentialities allows for the emergence of (un)timely aesthetics, exemplified in the film’s fusion of family and corporate time and suturing of queer sex acts with family gatherings. In turn, this pairing constructs a realm of possibility in which identity emerges as an amalgam of energies, and queer time becomes palpable as a figuration of normative temporal routines and vice versa.

This dissolution of discrete tempos and temporalities, coupled with the disintegration of the private space of the traditional family unit, culminates in the final sexual encounter between Armin and the motorcyclist, which takes place prior to the concluding scene of Armin’s arrest at the end of the film. The scene portrays Armin opening the door for the motorcycle rider, who is outside of Armin’s family home. The man enters and, for the first time in the film, takes off his helmet. However, he is positioned in the medium shot in such a way that his back is turned to the camera, denying the viewer even a brief glimpse of his face. Armin, facing the man, simply responds, “Mein Zimmer ist oben” [My room is upstairs] and leads the motorcyclist up the stairs to his room. Another cut accelerates time yet again, and we see Armin and the man engage in anal sex.

It is crucial that Armin takes the man to *his* room—the all-too-familiar German *Kinderzimmer*¹⁴⁵ with a small bed, a desk with computer, and posters on the walls that reflect Armin’s interest in cars, music, and film stars—and not any other place in the house. In contrast

¹⁴⁵ The notion of the German *Kinderzimmer* or *Kinderstube* as a space of children’s development, experience, and education that separates the children from the father emerged in the nineteenth century (Budde 194). While this room can be found in most houses and apartments today, it was an indicator of class in 19th-century Germany. Although depicted in *Biedermeier* paintings such as those by Johann Michael Voltz (1784–1858) as the epitome of a harmonious and happy childhood, only children of the upper class living in cities enjoyed the privilege of having a room of their own (Weber-Kellermann 27–28).

to the domestic spaces shown earlier in the film, Armin's room possesses a unique and unfamiliar aesthetics. With its lack of lighting, the room is so dark that it is difficult for the audience to discern the figures of the two men. As the audience hears loud electronic music blasting, Armin is bent over as the motorcyclist penetrates him from behind (figure 5.14¹⁴⁶). As the camera pans from right to left and past the two bodies, the left portion of the room is much lighter than the right, which makes visible Armin's hand, which in the midst of their sexual encounter suddenly and almost violently appears from behind the biker's body (figure 5.15).



Fig. 5.14 Armin bent over with the motorcyclist standing on the left side of the frame.

¹⁴⁶ I want to note that this is not the original image. Due to the relatively small size of the image and the dark colors, I modified certain settings and effects for a somewhat better visualization.

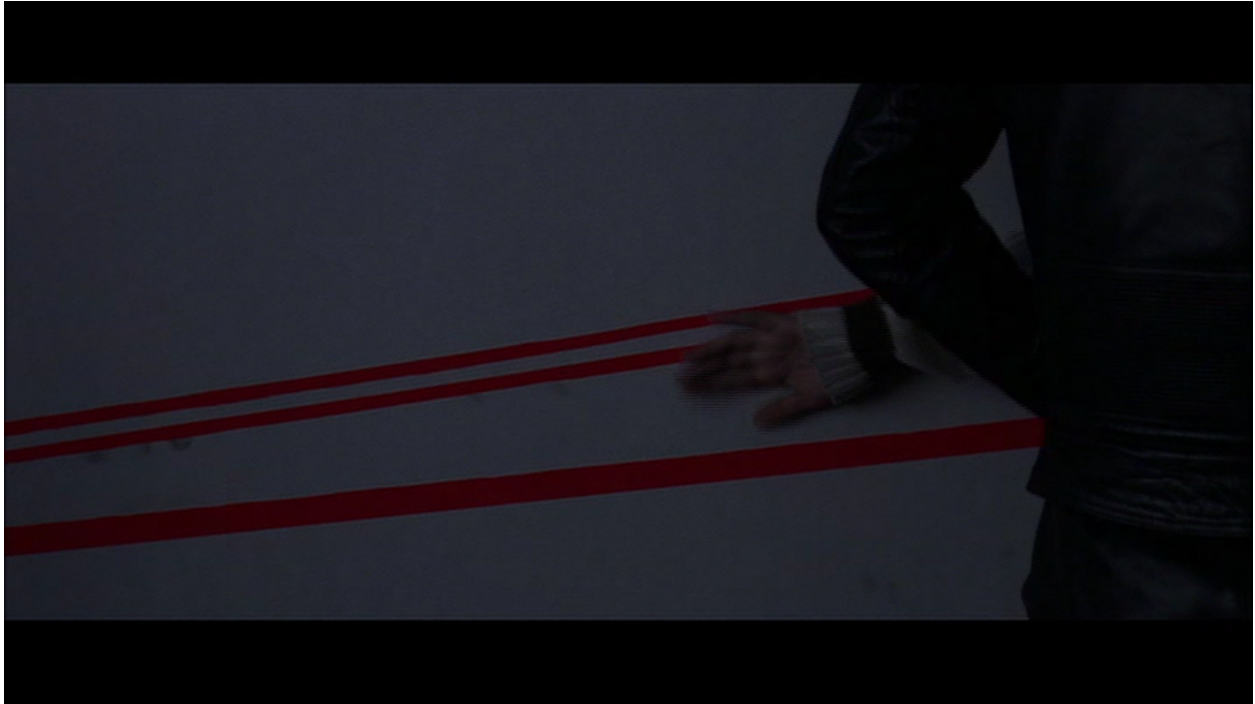


Fig. 5.15 Armin's hand appears from behind the motorcyclist's body.

The atmosphere transforms the room from the stereotypical room of a teenager into a realm that is highly ambiguous. On the one hand, the room's dim lighting and the diegetic sound evoke the impression of a dark room in a gay club or bar, that is, a backroom typically reserved for anonymous sexual encounters and sadomasochistic fantasy play, and thus a space that both Bersani and Lee Edelman would possibly characterize as a realm of no futurity. It is a sphere in which bodies are confronted with being absolutely timely and expected to obey by the tempo and beat of the electronic music, where subjects are split asunder in the pursuit of raw physical pleasure and sexual gratification by the destructive—since non-reproductive—force of both oral and anal sex.

On the other hand, the addition of a diegetic sonic element to the visually dark frame allows for a different way of reading this sequence. As the two figures step into the

Kinderzimmer, the Chicks on Speed song “Universal Pussy” is heard playing in the room. In this instance, the song turns the room into a womb-like space, which Armin and the biker entered together. Thus, the young man’s room turns into a productive and fertile realm from and in which the sex act between the two men can signify differently. Instead of possessing a shattering and destructive impetus, the sex act is reinscribed in a way that it enables new subjects to emerge and thrive, and provides room for the possibility of the development and gestation of untimely bodies amidst the domain of the heteronormative family.

By creating this sphere of fluidity and mobility, *Falscher Bekenner* serves as a commentary on Edelman’s notion of no future, which I outlined in the first chapter. By taking Edelman’s claim to “[f]uck the social order and the Child” (29) somewhat verbatim by literally fucking the child—in this case with a lowercase “c,” represented in the figure of Armin—as well as the family structure in which it is embedded, the sex act between the two men critiques the linear progress narratives traditionally attributed to heteronormative family relations and procreation as symbolizing the possibility of a future. As Armin is bent over, facing the wall and being penetrated from behind, the camera is positioned at a medium close-up and pans from right to left. With the room barely lit, it is difficult for the audience to discern any details about the two bodies for a few seconds until the camera moves far enough so that both bodies appear on the far right of the frame. Upon the completion of the camera movement, the lighting changes and the audience is able to bear witness to how, from behind, the motorcyclist incessantly thrusts into the child. While the audience’s attention is focused on the man’s rhythmic pelvic motion, Armin’s hand, appearing from behind the body, interrupts the man’s steady motion. This abrupt emergence of the hand leaves the impression that through this act of anal sex inside the realm of the “universal pussy,” Armin is birthed by the other man, emerging hand first, suddenly and

unexpectedly as if ejected from the man's pelvis.

However, the film's (un)timely aesthetics prevent a reading that would allow Armin to become a queer, heroic subject, embodying resistance and liberation from all restrictive socio-cultural structures. While the Chicks on Speed song is still playing to create acoustic continuity, a cut to a medium shot of the front door of the house reveals Armin's parents returning home, looking confused as to why the door is open. As they slowly walk upstairs, viewers are not only reminded of the subtle yet ineradicable presence of heteronormative structures embodied by the parents, but they also have to contend with the fact that Hochhäusler's editing choices have thrust them out of the "universal pussy" and into the world, where they are forced to follow the heteronormative couple. With each step toward Armin's room, the parents come closer and closer to disrupting this moment of queer intimacy and potential. This approach slowly heightens in viewers a sense of tension and discomfort, but also possibly curiosity and voyeuristic pleasure at witnessing the parents' reactions to the encounter with Armin and the motorcyclist.

The parents never reach the top of the stairs because the film cuts abruptly to the next scene of Armin walking through a parking garage at night and looking for an oil spill on one of the empty parking spots. Nevertheless, before the film moves on to the next scene, viewers have to endure a brief alignment with the camera and thus with the parents. This succession of cuts from Armin's room to the entrance of the house and then to the parking garage introduces a type of (un)timely aesthetics that makes it difficult for the audience to create a sustainable bond, either with the sights and sounds of queerness in Armin's room or with a certain notion of heterofamilial normativity epitomized by the parental couple. Thus, *Falscher Bekenner* refuses to privilege and thus ascribe more value to either scenario and as the one scene is undone by a cut to the next, the film not only denies its audience the possibility of the emergence of a sense of

identification with the characters, but it also points to the instability of both heteronormativity as well as queerness within the story world. This unreliability of identity in the filmic characters in turn encourages active spectatorship, coaxing the audience to question the dominant socio-cultural narrative around the stability of identity categories.

In sum, my readings of the two films reflect, in the words of queer theorist Annamarie Jagose, “the as-if inevitable clash of the normative and the antinormative” (44). While this chapter focuses on the category of time as a means to suture the queer and normative in the figures of Nina and Armin, the films’ (un)timely aesthetics more generally create a sense of mediated immediacy that allows or even demands that we reflect critically upon our investments in and resistance to both normative and queer figurations and formations. What Nina and Armin demonstrate is that when they embrace modalities of an alternative temporality, which possess the potential to undo the hegemonic rhythms of normative life, they are able to glance ahead into the future to perceive a form of existence in the *then* which, in turn, allows them to gaze back and recognize, retrospectively, possible moments of pleasure that they might not be able to see in the *now*. In so doing, *Gespenster* and *Falscher Bekenner* demand that their viewers reexamine traditions and values and ask them to revisit and revise their own ways of longing and belonging in this world. In this sense, the two protagonists encourage us to ponder the possibility of getting stuck in a present moment that weighs us down or exposes us to violence and a political or economic insecurity that renders us materially and psychologically precarious. However, as the films also show, we also have the opportunity and possibly the responsibility as conscientious

citizens to interrogate the present or the *now*. If we do so, we may be able to envision the potential of a *then* to embrace methods of living that allow us to explore queer affinities and forge bonds but also to reject them altogether.

Epilogue

Championing the *Now* and/or Moving Onward Toward a *Then?*

As this dissertation shows, neoliberal labor time and rhythms and cadences of “straight time” have taken a strong hold and shaped discourses around the legibility of subjects in contemporary German-language literature and film. These temporal rhythms and routines manifest in myriad ways, and (un)timely bodies are indeed ubiquitous. By titling this epilogue in terms of a question rather than an affirmative statement, these final pages seek to encourage my reader to become active, rather than propose fixed answers and concluding thoughts; it is a call to reflect on the present state of affairs in the *now* and to ponder where to go from here.

As for many contemporary scholars, thinking about the coercive mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism, economic inequality, and precarity is integral to my scholarship and at the heart of this dissertation. While many thinkers engage with notions of space as a concept when thinking about subjectivities and forms of asserting popular sovereignty, claiming space, and appearing with other bodies in order to “form networks of resistance” (Butler, “We, the People” 62) or to participate in the formation of what Michael Warner calls “counterpublics” (423), I have argued here that the arrangements of bodies showing up together can be approached slightly differently. That is, these bodies also show up at a certain time, follow a specific schedule or routines, or endure for a specific (and sometimes even an unspecified) amount of time in order

potentially to forge connections with others. In so doing, they at times embrace and at other times unhinge themselves from the daily rhythms of neoliberal capitalism; at other times they are subject to temporal discipline, either forced to abide by its normative structures or removed from the system altogether.

In introducing the concept of timely and untimely bodies, I hope to have provided a new approach to twenty-first-century literature and film and thus added to a robust corpus of German studies scholarship on contemporary literature and film. While my focus of inquiry is on time, my initial thinking was influenced by concepts of space and then shifted when I set out to write this dissertation. I organized the first dissertation chapter I wrote around a concept I called “trans-positionality”—a term that I employed to contemplate how the center might be re-considered as a limiting and limited space. I was committed to a conceptual thinking that moved beyond a reliance on oppositional politics as the one and only possible answer to hegemonic epistemologies and identity formations. Considering the constant vacillation between normative and non-normative forces, I attempted to describe subjects who perform their identities in a multiplicity of ways that include, but are not limited to, the dominant normative or marginal aspects and markers.

While this mode of conceptualizing the identities of the various protagonists in my core texts is still essential to my analyses in this dissertation, my engagement with my core texts made me realize that the notion of straight time—and particularly labor time—emerges from all the texts I investigate. It serves as a common denominator in how these literary and filmic representations comment on contemporary socio-political and cultural conditions of the rise and prevalence of neoliberal capitalism. Uncovering this connection between the core works resulted in a conceptual reorganization that underscores precisely that adjustment in the term itself. In its

emphasis of the word *time*, the change to (un)timeliness brings to the fore visually my focus on temporality—and in particular labor time—rather than space. Specifically, I have highlighted the coercive nature of neoliberal capitalism and its rhetoric of “freedom,” self-determination, and productivity in select works of contemporary literary and filmic production. Given this analytic emphasis, I engage with the depictions of heteronormative patterns and rhythms of “straight time” that structure the lives of the protagonists in my core texts and the possibilities that emerge from either upholding or refuting normative routines and tempos.

Based on my interrogations of the works of my text corpus, I offer this dissertation as an intervention into the field of German studies. My study does so by introducing and drawing connections to contemporary gender and queer-theoretical approaches, which are part of queer theory’s temporal turn and are seldom referenced by Germanists either in North America or Europe. What these concepts have allowed me to do is to provide new readings and modes of analysis of the core texts by exploring notions of identity and the potential to forge relations among subjects. In this sense, these texts paint a bleak picture of their protagonists’ life-worlds, a gloomy and negative image that is only occasionally lightened by those temporary moments of hope and potential in which the characters are able to establish bonds with others. I thus uncover in these works a sense of pessimism but also potential directed at the cultural, economic, and political conditions of twenty-first-century German society.

This sense of hopelessness and cynicism about the present moment is characteristic and particularly prevalent in the two Berlin School films I analyze in chapter five, Christian Petzold’s *Gespenster* and Christoph Hochhäusler’s *Falscher Bekenner*. Both films display in Nina and Armin examples of failed and perverse existences that register with viewers as estranged and detached. Although both seem to fail at their efforts to establish bonds with others, these

characters also display a desire to become and remain visible within the dominant structures of society. As such, they vacillate between being untimely and yearning to become timely, while never fully embracing either mode. Both figures ultimately persist in their life-worlds without substantive connections to others.

A lack of hope and potential, although in a different sense, is also at the heart of Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut*, the subject of chapter two. While Nina and Armin exhibit a sense of awkward disconnectedness from the world around them, Fariba's, or rather Siamak^F's ability to endure an oppressive social system depends on both the performance and legibility of his identity. This time of endurance is linked to the temporal limits of tolerance, which draws attention to how long the socio-political order condones Siamak's^F presence within it. *Fremde Haut* shows that those bodies that do not register as "mattering" are not welcome within the social realm. Siamak^F is not always granted permission to become timely, that is, to assert his presence in the present moment; instead, he repeatedly must negotiate both his visibility and the experience of becoming untimely.

Questions of intelligibility and modes of being and becoming (un)timely also feature prominently in the two novels by Juli Zeh and Antje Rávic Strubel respectively that I examine in chapter four. I concentrate on the depiction of methods of policing, hierarchizing, and regulating bodies, and how these are enforced by the respective social systems of the texts—a summer camp in Strubel's *Kältere Schichten* and a totalitarian health regime in Zeh's *Corpus Delicti*. At the same time, I probe the ways in which the protagonists Anja and Mia trouble any clear-cut division between existing inside or outside the system. In this sense, the two central figures of these novels challenge the idea that liberation and freedom can only come through acts of resistance and suggest that contemporary subjects are able to embrace their own precarious

modality of being in order to gain access to the dominant system and to establish non-normative relationships and connections to others.

Central to my analysis of Barbara Kirchner's *Die verbesserte Frau* in chapter three are negotiations of normative and normalizing temporal dynamics as well as the desire and pleasure the novel's characters Bettina, Ursula, and Dr. Arndt get from exploring both normative as well as queer sexed, gendered, and classed practices. I organize my analysis around the *Prototyp* as the central figure, who, although not always physically present, shapes the construction and performance of subjectivity for each of the characters. I show that the *Prototyp* aids in the emergence of certain figures as (un)timely bodies in a manner that allows them to forge alternative relationships.

In my analysis of these novels and films and their contribution to and commentary on twenty-first-century literary and cinematic production, I hope to have shown in each chapter that contemporary German-language writers and filmmakers are preoccupied with time and its correlation to the establishment and enforcement of dominant power structures. Their works compel us to think about the impact of neoliberal capitalism in the German context and its ramifications for the construction of contemporary subjectivity. While often perceived as a form of progress and advancement, in twenty-first century Germany subjectivities and selfhood have increasingly been coupled with certain notions of economic status and cultural standards that coerce individuals into believing in false narratives of independence and self-optimization. Rather than forging bonds, collectives, and coalitions, subjects desire to experience a high degree of freedom and superiority over others. These ideal neoliberal subjects, like the protagonists in all four of my chapters, do not rely on the existence of connections and lines of support, but are

driven by striving for personal achievements and independence instead of championing solidarity and relationality.

Furthermore, I have suggested that (un)timeliness unfolds at the level of aesthetics and form. Although each of my core literary and filmic texts accomplishes this unfolding in a distinct fashion, they all attempt to encourage readers and viewers to detach from a reliance on linear narration. By defying conventional modes of filmmaking and writing, the works urge their respective audiences to halt, endure, and re-read or re-watch in order to make sense of the story-worlds. In the process, these works further prompt readers and viewers to think through potential attachments to normative routines and patterns, not only as these shape literary and filmic texts, but also their own lives. In so doing, all of these works challenge the receivers to examine their desires to be and become timely or untimely.

This dissertation has focused mainly on labor time and its impact on the regulation of bodies, desires, and identities. Of particular interest for this project has been how bodies are aligned with or turned away from normative temporal rhythms and tempos. Given the fact that social relations are transforming under neoliberal capitalism, a notion at which I briefly hinted in chapter five, a closer investigation of the relationship between labor conditions and mass consumerism might be a different direction of inquiry to pursue. With this focus in mind, I wonder about the ways in which capitalism and consumerism determine and regulate the definition and formation of a “proper” citizen body.

While many white urban middle-class citizen-subjects might regard global capitalism and consumerism—such as the accessibility of a plethora of products at any time—as some of the advantages of the contemporary world, the enjoyment of this availability often overlooks or purposely ignores the downside of global capitalism: that is, while it promises access to

consumer goods and the “freedom” to purchase anything, or at least many things, global capitalism also exposes individuals to conditions that negatively impact their livelihood. In this sense, I speculate about what happens to those bodies that are unbound from any seasonal restraints, for example, through access to imported products, but in exchange are left with little choice but to ascribe to neoliberalism’s temporal patterns and norms. Are they forced to get in sync with the temporal patterns of the system to register as an acceptable body, as a proper citizen-subject of the globalized world? Must they become bodies “in time” who have adapted to the changes of the logics of a now capitalist-driven society? Will they embrace a sense of being in-sync with the temporal structure of the larger system or will they seek escape? And if so, is getting away even a valid possibility? And if so, who are those bodies that are unable to enjoy such liberty? Despite all promises and potential moments of self-optimization and “freedom,” will there always be “improper” bodies, and if so, how do we reconcile this?

This dissertation can ultimately be read as an invitation, or offered as a temptation, to interrogate the *now* in an effort to examine the coercive structures of the present moment and potentially to move onward and to turn toward a *then*. (Un)timeliness as I have characterized it throughout the five chapters of this dissertation is about the refusal of absolutes—of both the control and fatality of neoliberal capitalism of the present moment and the euphoric, unrestricted optimism and possibility in the future. This dissertation is an assessment of a few samples of twenty-first-century German literature and film and a companion for engaging in textual analysis through the lens of temporality; it is hopefully also a resource for my readers to use the framework of (un)timeliness to enable them to interrogate critically their own embeddedness in and attachment to “straight time.” This dissertation is thus meant to be not only an analytical tool, but also a potential political guide; a compass of and through the *now* to direct us neither

here nor there. From this mode of being present in the present moment we are given the opportunity to look up and around, and shape the *then* accordingly.

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