

INTRODUCTION

Temporal Anxieties

Time is intangible and yet omnipresent: its flow is measured and controlled, but it is also controlling; it governs every aspect of our lives from cradle to grave. It expresses itself through timetables, schedules, temporal imperatives, modes of sequencing, and processes that create “orders of time,” to appropriate François Hartog’s phrase.¹ As Norbert Elias so succinctly put it, time is above all a “cognitive symbol” that allows human actors to monitor their behavior with reference to three interdependent levels: the cycles of nature, the social setting, and their individual biographies.² As a

1. François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and the Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 1.

2. Norbert Elias, *Über die Zeit*, ed. Michael Schröter (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), xvii and xxiv.

complex synthesis, relating events across different times and places, time is a regulatory mechanism that is internalized by social actors.³

Although Elias emphasized the social dimension of human temporality, he did not explicitly address the role of technology in our relationship with time. Since the invention of the World Wide Web in 1990, digital technologies have revolutionized the relationship between individuals, their worlds, and their temporal horizons.⁴ There is a widespread perception that digital devices are causing frenetic activity as the constant stream of Twitter feeds, news alerts, WhatsApp messages, and Facebook posts drive us to stay connected. The ever-tighter enmeshing of human worlds with digital media alters the very notion of experience. The advent of Web 2.0 with its built-in capacity for interactivity in real time has led to the ubiquitous growth of social media platforms that have produced new forms of participatory online communication. The ontological difference between lived and virtual experience is diminishing as technology transmutes dispositions, habits, and perceptions. Because the information age promotes instant access, it also erodes the expectation of temporal processing. The new era of the “digital now” challenges not only established notions of delayed gratification but also the very idea of time as a multidimensional concept that integrates past, present, and future into human experience. In 2016, participation in social media networks surpassed 2 billion users globally, with an average daily social media usage of 135 minutes.⁵ Teenagers in the US are reported to spend up to nine hours per day on digital devices, either chatting on social media, playing games, listening to music, or

3. Elias, *Über die Zeit*, xxxiii.

4. Tim Berners Lee is credited for the invention of the World Wide Web: in March 1989, Berners Lee wrote “Information Management: A Proposal,” which formulated his vision of the web. By October 1990, he had written the three cornerstones that remain the foundation of today’s web: HTML (HyperText Markup Language), URI (Uniform Resource Identifier), and HTTP (HyperText Transfer Protocol). At the end of 1990 the first web page was launched in CERN, and in 1991 the new web community was opened to users outside. See <http://webfoundation.org/about/vision/history-of-the-web/> (accessed 27 December 2016).

5. See <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>.

watching TV.⁶ Health experts and educators are worried about the detrimental effect this is having on the physical and mental well-being of these so-called digital natives. Disorders attributed to heavy social media usage include sleep deprivation, lack of physical exercise, reduced attention spans, digital addictions, increased loneliness, stress, and lack of self-esteem. Besides growing concerns about excessive social media usage, there is widespread temporal anxiety about the loss of time as duration. The vocabulary of crisis is omnipresent; it infects not only media coverage but also sociological debates on the transformation of society in the age of social acceleration. Anthony Giddens already employed the metaphor of a “runaway world” in the 1990s; Thomas Hylland Eriksen spoke of the “tyranny of the moment,” Manuel Castells coined the oxymoron “timeless time,” and Paul Virilio diagnosed a “dictatorship of speed,” terms I will discuss in chapter 1.⁷ Evidently, much of the initial optimism that the continuous technology revolution would create ever more leisure and overcome social inequality has evaporated.

At the other end of the spectrum are the technology optimists and cyber gurus who welcome new modes of citizenship and online participation. For example, Scott McQuire analyzes the “smart mob” as a self-organizing and self-directing urban phenomenon that makes use of precisely the same technologies that are usually employed by the state for surveillance purposes.⁸

6. Hayley Tsukayama, “Teens Spend Nearly 9 Hours Every Day Consuming Media,” *Washington Post*, 3 November 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2015/11/03/teens-spend-nearly-nine-hours-every-day-consuming-media/?utm_term=.d93d18429e9b.

7. Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalisation Is Reshaping Our Lives*, 2nd ed. (London: Profile Books, 2002); Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2001); Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age—Economy, Society, and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizon: An Essay in Dromoscopy*, trans. Michael Degener (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008).

8. Scott McQuire, “City Times: Negotiating Public Space in the Twenty-First-Century City,” in *Time, Media, and Modernity*, ed. Emily Keightley (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 123–42.

Similarly, Carmen Leccardi celebrates resistance to neoliberal corporate governance in the antiglobalization movement through clever deployment of digital technologies as smart, flexible forms of self-organization.⁹ And, according to Robert Hassan, digital technologies can give rise to new asynchronous experiences of time that overturn the rule of the clock and our regimentation by linear time.¹⁰

Even though the two sides in the debate are polarized, at bottom they both subscribe to various degrees of technological determinism: both cyber-optimists and resigned techno-pessimists have a tendency to regard technology as an objective historical agent beyond human control. As the sociologist Judy Wajcman observes, “Temporal demands are not inherent to technology. They are built into our devices by all-too-human schemes and desires.”¹¹ Technological determinism whether of the optimistic or dystopian kind leads to one-dimensional accounts of modern temporality that are excessively totalizing. While it is undeniable that our lives have been transformed by rapidly advancing digital technologies, we must be mindful of the fact that time remains an embodied and embedded mode of experience that is shaped by complex biological, cultural, social, and economic factors in interaction with technology. It is often not technology as such but the prevailing social narrative that massively influences our social experience of time, as, for example, in the modern celebration of speed as progress during the Industrial Revolution. Modern art and literature then punctured the one-dimensional vision of the industrial age by way of aesthetics of slowness that aimed to recover nonutilitarian experiences, a point to which I return in chapter 2. Instead of adopting a technology-driven focus on time in network society, this

9. Carmen Leccardi, “New Temporal Perspectives in the High-Speed Society,” in *24/7: Time and Temporality in the Network Society*, ed. Robert Hassan and Ronald E. Purser (Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books, 2007), 25–36.

10. Robert Hassan, “Network Time,” in *24/7: Time and Temporality*, 37–61.

11. Judy Wajcman, *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 3.

study therefore investigates our temporal anxieties from a broad cultural-historical perspective that illuminates alternative temporal trajectories and experiences. Alarmist metaphors abound in the contemporary imaginary: according to many commentators, we are moored in an everlasting present without any future horizon; we are simultaneously flooded by pasts that we can no longer integrate into meaningful narratives. We are stagnating at top speed; our experience of time is flat, disembedded from context and without duration. Our sleep has been wrecked by the 24/7 imperative of uninterrupted standby. We have entered the era of the fragmented now, bereft of past and future. The anxiety that we are no longer the authors and agents of our own fate is pervasive. This is precisely the territory of my study: I ask how and to what extent cultural attachment to the past and experience of the length and depth of time are being reconfigured in our globalized era of turbocapitalism. Given the premium placed on instant delivery, liveness, and connectivity, how are the temporal conditions in the twenty-first century to be understood? Have we entered the age of a timeless connectivity that depletes the future while also eroding our relationship to the past?

My study probes this crisis narrative by analyzing how contemporary literature, film, and photography stage, perform, and bring forth other kinds of time. Instead of merely tracking the discursive exploration of time in our anxiety-ridden era, I focus on aesthetic interventions in a debate that is far too monolithic and deterministic. Literature, films, and artworks do not merely represent the times we live in but can challenge prevailing consensus and open up alternative trajectories. My analysis of contemporary aesthetic interventions in the debate on time unfolds in dialogue with the history of modernity and of modernism. The comparison of our age with the shifting conceptualizations of time through different phases of modernization will help to draw out continuities and discontinuities in the multifaceted history of lived time from the late nineteenth century to the present. Even though the very idea of modernization seems to entail the speeding up of change to reach a better future, the modern imaginary was overall much more pluri-temporal than is commonly recognized.

Modern Speed Politics

One of the most cited passages from Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* is his dramatic summation of the sweeping transformation of nineteenth-century society by the ruling bourgeoisie:

Die fortwährende Umwälzung der Produktion, die ununterbrochene Erschütterung aller gesellschaftlichen Zustände, die ewige Unsicherheit und Bewegung zeichnet die Bourgeoisiepoche vor allen anderen aus. Alle festen eingesteten Verhältnisse mit ihrem Gefolge von altherwürdigen Vorstellungen und Anschauungen werden aufgelöst, alle neugebildeten veralten, ehe sie verknöchern können. Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft, alles Heilige wird entweiht, und die Menschen sind endlich gezwungen, ihre Lebensstellung, ihre gegenseitigen Beziehungen mit nüchternen Augen anzusehen.¹²

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.¹³

As Marshall Berman observes, the impassioned style and dramatic imagery of Marx's analysis of the process of modernization and of the historical struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat reenact the frenzied pace of capitalist expansion.¹⁴ "He makes us feel," Berman comments, "that we are part of the action, drawn into the stream, hurtled along, out of control, at once dazzled and menaced by the onward rush."¹⁵ Marx describes the bourgeoisie positively as a pivotal revolutionary force that liberated humankind from the

12. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Das Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*, Kommentierte Studienausgabe, ed. Theo Stammen and Alexander Classen (Munich: Fink/UTB, 2009), 23.

13. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party: A Modern Edition*, with an Introduction by Tariq Ali (London: Verso, 2016), 10.

14. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982; London: Verso, 2010), 91–98.

15. Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 91.

shackles of tradition. As *the* agent of the capitalist economy, the bourgeois class embraces perpetual innovation, ruthless competition, and a politics of high speed to reach new markets. Of course, for Marx this explosive acceleration of historical change does not stop here: the energies unleashed by the bourgeoisie will sweep it away when the oppressed proletariat discovers its collective power and finally engages in a revolutionary struggle of world-historical proportions.

Marx's metaphoric language vividly captures the dramatic acceleration of history in the age of industrial modernity. His materialist critique of capitalism is laced with a deep fascination with the vitality and inventiveness of his age.¹⁶ Modern man inhabits a dynamic and transitory present that reaches into a radically new future. As a result of this investment in a new and better life the relationship between past, present, and future becomes asymmetrical. The emphatic orientation toward the future forges a strong alliance between modern time and progress: in measuring the gap between what has been achieved so far and what can be achieved in the future the idea of progress propels modern time forward. As the British sociologist John Tomlinson observes, toward the end of the nineteenth century the acceleration of history increasingly also produced unruly speed and an unstable dynamic of social and economic modernization. This risk could be intermittently contained by the enforcement of social time-discipline through the promise of the good life. "The intrinsic benefits of mechanical production in delivering the fruits of material modernity, then, tends," Tomlinson comments, "to bind speed in with progress. To this extent, an increase in the pace of life, though it may not be particularly attractive in itself, may appear as a matter for pragmatic acceptance as part of the cultural bargain with modernity."¹⁷ Even though capitalism depended on the temporally disciplined subject for its success, it ultimately favored speed over discipline to drive modernization. And this is why, as Enda Duffy argues, the modern imaginary conceives of movement and speed not merely as objective agents of

16. John Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy* (London: Sage, 2007), 4.

17. Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed*, 22.

change but rather as genuinely modern desires that bind the modern self to the capitalist project of innovation.¹⁸

As a desire clearly nurtured by capitalism, it [the desire for speed] may be the desire par excellence in Western culture that is fostered and tolerated in order to reconcile human actors to their lot as actors in a “dynamic” capitalist economic milieu. Speed, intimately woven into a new paradigm of the modern subject’s nexus of desires, becomes the new opiate and the new (after)taste of movement as power.¹⁹

The Futurists’ obsession with speed is an extreme but nevertheless symptomatic example of a specifically modern semantics of speed as pleasure. Filippo Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto, published in 1909, declared with programmatic panache: “The world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed. . . . We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal omnipresent speed.”²⁰

Temporalization

The modern speed fantasy, as outlined above, is part of a long-term process that already begins in the premodern period with the introduction of the clock and results in what the German historian Reinhart Koselleck called “*Verzeitlichung*,” the temporalization of history. The introduction of the mechanical clock in the thirteenth century progressively led to a new organization of human time: the division of the day into twenty-four hours prepared the ground for a competition between commercial time and liturgical time in the early modern period.²¹ The clock spread quickly from

18. Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 23.

19. Duffy, *The Speed Handbook*, 35.

20. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbo Apollonio (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 22.

21. Rather than simply replacing liturgical time, modern clock time began to overlay other time practices, creating complex local temporal zones. On the

the church tower to the town hall, and then into the living rooms of wealthy tradesmen and merchants before it made its way inside the watch pockets of the bourgeoisie. While in the sixteenth century the clock could indicate minutes, by the seventeenth century its hand showed seconds. It thus not only indicated the progressive “denaturalization of time” but actually prompted “a disciplining and rationalizing of the human world of work and its latitude for action.”²² However, it was only in the eighteenth century in the context of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution that the idea of historical time began to challenge and replace the notion of a chronological order that was preordained by God. The process of temporalization affected all areas of life. As Dirk Göttsche observes, from now on “subjectivity, history, nature, culture and even the universe all become subject to historicity and open to change.”²³ Once history was subject to “criteria which could only be derived from an understanding of history itself,” people could discover an open future as horizon for political, social, and economic planning.²⁴ The Enlightenment notion of progress thus emerges in the eighteenth century as an instrument of historical acceleration: once the difference between the past, the present, and the future was brought into view, the future became the horizon of urgent human planning and action. Acceleration, Koselleck explains, “provides evidence of a history in which time continually seems to overtake itself.”²⁵

complexity of the history of clock time, see Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, *Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales, 1300–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

22. Reinhart Koselleck, “Time and History,” in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner, foreword by Hayden White (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 104. See also Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *Die Geschichte der Stunde: Uhren und moderne Zeitordnungen* (Cologne: Anaconda, 2007).

23. Dirk Göttsche, “Introduction,” in *Critical Time in Modern German Literature and Culture*, ed. Dirk Göttsche (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 3.

24. Koselleck, “Concepts of Historical Time and Social History,” in *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 120.

25. Koselleck, “Time and History,” 113.

Picking up this thread, Peter Osborne explains that the temporal matrix of modernity comprises the following three facets: firstly, it valorizes the *historical* present over the past “as its negation and transcendence,” thereby making it possible for an event to change its meaning according to shifting interpretive parameters. Secondly, the modern orientation toward the future “is characterized only by its prospective transcendence of the historical present, and its relegation of this present to a future past.” Thirdly, it tendentially eliminates the present “as the vanishing point of a perpetual transition between a constantly changing past and an as yet indeterminate future.”²⁶ Together these three temporal moves offer a dynamic vision of history that turns it into an always as yet unaccomplished project.

Multiple Modernities

Neither Koselleck’s nor Osborne’s reflections on the modern transience of the present suggest that modernity followed a singular trajectory or narrative. In Osborne’s words, the modern politics of time contains “a range of possible temporalizations of history within its fundamental most abstract temporal form.”²⁷ In order to avoid painting a monochrome picture that is blind to the plurality of temporal perspectives and experiences in modernity, it is therefore useful to distinguish between, first, *modernity* as a datable period; second, the *modern* as an experiential notion that is subject to continual and dynamic change; third, the technological, administrative, and social processes of *modernization* that steer social change; and fourth, *modernism* as a divergent and highly self-reflexive discourse about the above phenomena. Once we move away from the monolithic notion of a homogeneous modernity toward the pluralistic idea of what Lutz Koepnick terms “multiple modernities, alternate modernism, and vernacular modes of

26. Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995), 14.

27. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, 118.

modernist experience,”²⁸ we can also bring into view temporal pluralism and heterogeneity as defining signatures of a divergent modernity that, by valorizing the new, also produces new attachments to the past and new forms of traditionalism. What is at stake then, Koepnick comments, “is to show that the normative association of Western modernism with pleasurable speed and ceaseless movement often rested on rather lopsided definitions of the temporal as a sphere of dynamic change and of space as a dimension of static simultaneity.”²⁹

The approach adopted here will complement and extend Koepnick’s book *On Slowness*, which analyzes the ways contemporary visual art forms complicate time:

The wager of aesthetic slowness is not simply to find islands of respite, calm, and stillness somewhere outside the cascades of contemporary speed culture. It is to investigate what it means to experience a world of speed, acceleration, and cotemporality, experience understood—in Miriam Hansen’s words—as “that which mediates individual perception with social meaning, conscious with unconscious processes, loss of self with self-reflexivity . . . ; experience as the matrix of conflicting temporalities, of memory and hope, including the historical loss of these dimensions.”³⁰

Aesthetic slowness today, Koepnick argues, “recalibrates how certain modernists of the early twentieth century already questioned the dominant association of modernism with speed, acceleration, shock and ceaseless movement.”³¹

Following in the footsteps of Peter Osborne, Marshall Berman, and Lutz Koepnick, I attempt to map our own anxieties onto the modern temporal imaginary with its contradictory pathways. Temporal anxiety, I argue, is a feature of a multifaceted modernity, whose future-oriented optimism has always been haunted by the

28. Lutz Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 18.

29. Koepnick, *On Slowness*, 18–19.

30. Koepnick, *On Slowness*, 10.

31. Koepnick, *On Slowness*, 11.

copresence of other timescapes. To be sure, the arrow of time is a central figure in the speed-as-progress narrative. However, the modern discourse on time also abounds in images of cyclicity, lateness, and distraction that puncture the very idea of human-kind's linear progression through history.

Contingency

An important by-product of modern temporalization is the notion of historical contingency. In opposition to necessity, contingency is the child of the turn from theology to history that, in the words of Richard Rorty, "has helped free us, gradually but steadily, from theology and metaphysics—from the temptation to look for an escape from time and chance."³² Following the German historian Ernst Troeltsch, Hans Joas explains that the modern scientific revolution created the "image of a causally determined universe, ruled by the laws of nature in the sense of a clock-work like mechanism."³³ While this shift destroyed the metaphysical certainty of a preordained world, only to replace it with mechanical determinism, paradoxically, it also gave birth to contingency in the dual sense of chance and free will. "The longing for complete certainty," Joas argues, "moved from the ontological to the epistemological level—the clearest expression of this move is the Cartesian belief in the possibility of a methodical procedure in human cognition as warranting complete certainty."³⁴ The modern turn toward reason undermined the preordained authority of the divine Creator and gave rise to liberal notions of individual autonomy and self-determination that promised to free the self from the chain of tradition. Embracing the future as a field of action emancipates the modern self from the burden of the past. And so the dialectical flipside of contingency is the

32. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 28th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xiii.

33. Hans Joas, "Morality in the Age of Contingency," *Acta Sociologica* 47/4 (2004): 394.

34. Joas, "Morality," 394.

effort to control its effects: the more contingent history is, the more it requires human planning. Contingency in this sense services historical acceleration on the journey toward a brighter future that is—at least theoretically—open to all.

Precariousness

In our own era, the liberating dimension of contingency and a brighter future appear to have morphed into the anxious experience of a precarious present. The future is no longer the horizon of ideological contestation but rather the projection screen for dystopian visions of the final ecological catastrophe. Countless blockbusters imagine the apocalyptic end of humankind. In the so-called age of the Anthropocene, that is, the epoch in which human activity has a decisive impact on the earth, the planetary risks appear to be reaching the tipping point at which minor developments could precipitate major catastrophes. According to the risk theorist Ulrich Beck, we now inhabit a “world risk society” in which the negative effects of global capitalism, and the risks of global terrorism and irreversible global ecological disaster, outrun the ability of sovereign nation-states to contain and control them.³⁵ The notion of risk, according to Beck, addresses the possibility of future events; risks anticipate catastrophes.³⁶ The less calculable a risk is, Beck argues, the more it is subject to cultural interpretations and perceptions.³⁷ For Beck, then, the transition from the modern risk society into the world risk society is marked by the revocation of the type of insurance policy that, in the modern period, turned risk into a calculable quantity. Global risks are for Beck fundamentally deterritorialized, incalculable, and noncompensatory; they therefore fuel a pronounced sense of ontological precariousness.³⁸ Whereas Beck developed a global risk theory, other sociologists tend to debate precariousness in terms of the growth of global inequality and

35. Ulrich Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft: Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sicherheit* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), 61.

36. Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft*, 29.

37. Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft*, 34.

38. Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft*, 103.

with reference to the erosion of the social security systems in much of the Western world. Precariousness in this sense is the effect of globalization, which, instead of distributing wealth downward, has exacerbated existing inequality. As global companies ruthlessly outsourced their production to cheaper Asian countries, blue-collar workers in the US and in Europe saw their industrial jobs in steel and coal production and in other manufacturing industries disappear. The Brexit referendum and the US election in 2016 underline the failure of mainstream political parties—including those on the left—to adequately respond to the growing misery of their former constituencies in the American postindustrial “rust belt,” in areas of industrial decline in northern England, or in Wales where voters began to embrace post-liberal right-wing populism. Precariousness is the dark underside of modern contingency: while contingency enables the modern self to convert chance into free will, precariousness tips the experience of chance into incalculable risk.

When it comes to artworks, however, the term conveys more than the dismal prospects of our worried age. As I shall argue, contemporary art practice often explores the precariousness of living in the present through an aesthetics of the unfinished. Contemporary art and literature have lost faith in the chronological imagination that presents history in terms of an overarching master narrative. I borrow the term “chronological imagination” from Peter Fritzsche’s essay of the same title, which analyzes the way in which the historian emplots history as a series of turning points that demarcate periods.³⁹ The literary texts, films, and works of photography under discussion here intervene in the current discourse on time. They bring into view alternate experiences that rupture the chronological imagination as well as our immersion in the new culture of immediacy. They articulate radical uncertainty about time as a

39. Peter Fritzsche, “1989 and the Chronological Imagination,” in *Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989*, ed. Anne Fuchs, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, and Linda Shortt (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), 17–29. For a discussion of Fritzsche, see chapter 2 in this study. See also Hayden White’s seminal analysis of the literary tropes that shaped historical discourse in the nineteenth century. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1975; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

mode of order that can generate biographical, social, and historical meaning. They also query the positive potential of historical contingency. And so the experience of historical chance in these works oscillates between meaningful moments of ultrasubjective freedom at one end of the spectrum and a profound sense of ontological disorientation at the other.

Aesthetic precariousness, as I use the term, designates the various artistic and literary strategies through which subjective time is tentatively recovered in these works. Photography and films in particular are “slow” art in Koepnick’s sense: their slow plotlines and minimalist aesthetics turn the act of reception into a mode of attentiveness that also cares for the Other. The ethical dimension of aesthetic precariousness ties in with the etymological meaning of the term: while the Latin noun *prex* means “request, petition, and prayer,” the verb *precor* translates as “to beg, beseech, and entreat.”⁴⁰ The term *precariousness* captures both the experience of an atomized, displaced, and fragmented reality as well as resistance to the loss of “proper time.” Aesthetic precariousness also accounts for the myriad ways in which works of literature and art can engender *Eigenzeit*, that is, intimately subjective modes of temporality that dislodge the temporal imperative to be always live and connected.⁴¹ The literary and artistic examples discussed in this study are very diverse, but they all pay attention to interiority and intimacy as essential conditions of cultural connectedness.

Eigenzeit

From around 1800 the separation of the public and private spheres evolved in step with modern civic society, which also brought forth the self-restrained bourgeois subject. According to Helga Nowotny,

40. According to Korte and Regard, “Precariousness forces me to acknowledge the presence of an other as an addressee.” Barbara Korte and Frédéric Regard, eds., *Narrating Precariousness: Modes, Media, and Ethics* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2014), 9–10.

41. See Helga Nowotny, *Eigenzeit: Entstehung und Strukturierung eines Zeitgefühls* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1993); Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

Eigenzeit designates the modern subject's ability to cultivate "temporal sovereignty" over local time in the face of the commodification and acceleration of time in the public sphere. The modern era, Nowotny argues, gave rise to a specific "I-time," a time of the self, by polarizing the public time of work and the self's private time of leisure.⁴² It was precisely this division of human temporality into two opposing time regimes that helped to legitimate modern subjectivity because the self's time was now part of "the objective spatio-temporal reality."⁴³ *Eigenzeit* emerges in Nowotny's book as a fundamentally ambivalent category: on the one hand, it is an integral part of the capitalist temporal economy that subjugates all aspects of human temporality to the rule of the mechanical clock. *Eigenzeit* is permissible only to the extent that it does not threaten the modern valorization of accelerated speed and perpetual innovation as quintessential temporal resources in the pursuit of profit. On the other hand, the very notion of the subject's own time entails the possibility of temporal resistance to modernity's regimented time regime. The potential of *Eigenzeit* to resist or disrupt the dominance of public time was then delegated to a different arena: as technological innovation, accelerated social change, and an increased tempo in everyday life were harnessed in the service of progress, modern aesthetic discourse became the domain that took care of the subject's desire for *Eigenzeit*. The dandy's ennui and mannered cultural boredom at the end of the nineteenth century, the literary exploration of *durée*, the celebration of a new intensity of life in short prose, and the cultural fascination with the condition of lateness underline the deep modernist engagement with diverse modes of temporality that challenged the capitalist time regime by way of a differentiated aesthetics.

What gives the texts and artworks discussed in my study a particular edge is the precariousness of *Eigenzeit*: as an unstable category that remains tied to temporal anxieties, *Eigenzeit* in these texts is simultaneously recuperative and abysmal. And this is so

42. Nowotny, *Time*, 13.

43. Nowotny, *Time*, 28.

because our era has eroded the binary division between the private and the public spheres, which are becoming enmeshed in ever more complex ways through new modes of connectivity and liveness. While the perspective of I-time or *Eigenzeit* enabled the modern self to exercise relative temporal sovereignty, this realm has now been destabilized by the culture of 24/7 connectivity, which even has the power to invade our sleep. The penetration of everyday life with streams of information produces a new economy of attention that favors interruptive action. The continual information stream binds the self into feedback loops that generate the illusion of agency and choice, while in reality undermining the conditions for *Eigenzeit*.

Chapter Outline

Times and temporalities in the plural, then, are the focus of this study, which takes its cue from the fall of the Berlin Wall and the invention of the World Wide Web, which occurred in close historical proximity. My focus is on the Western experience of time, in particular on German culture, which, as I aim to demonstrate, is a particularly fertile field of inquiry because, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, many writers, intellectuals, and artists responded to the shocking experience of a radically contingent history.

Chapter 1 analyzes the key terms in the debate on time. Acceleration, atomization, immediacy, the extended present, and time-space compression capture a pervasive sense of crisis. François Hartog has coined the term “presentism” for the experience of an omnivorous present that, in his view, has taken the place of authentic historical time.⁴⁴ One symptom of a profound crisis of time is the current memory boom that, for Hartog, reacts to the disappearance of the open future by transmuting memory into a “theological category.”⁴⁵ But presentism also extends into the future itself through catastrophism—a presentist figure of thought that

44. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, xviii.

45. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 7.

attempts to manage uncertainty through risk management, prevention, and security.⁴⁶ For Hartog, presentism is deeply pathological precisely because it extends our present into the future and into the past, thereby destroying our historical relatedness to both the past and the future as ontological categories. Burdened with its “twofold memory of the past and the future,” Hartog concludes, “it is also shadowed by entropy”—presentism is therefore a “monstrous time.”⁴⁷ Aleida Assmann too diagnoses a reconfiguration of our relationship to past, present, and future: she argues that the time regime of modernity ended in the late 1980s when the future finally lost its shiny gloss against the backdrop of the unparalleled violence of twentieth-century history and in the context of emerging ecological threats.⁴⁸ But Assmann evaluates the disappearance of the modern time regime in a very different light: even though the future as horizon of ideological investment has collapsed, the present remains a site where social actors manage to construct and synthesize their experiences of the past and expectations of their future.⁴⁹ For Assmann, cultural memory is the key instrument in the handling of our temporal experiences, as it provides us with indispensable cultural frames. Assmann’s reading of the “culturalization” of time thus deontologizes the very category of time in favor of a constructivist perspective that takes account of the genuinely human ability to recall the past and project expectations into the future.⁵⁰

Other terms in the debate on time also point to a new temporal ecology that engenders opportunities alongside threats: resonance, time-space, and network time promise to overcome the rule of the clock but also threaten our chronological imagination, which is wedded to the kind of historical narrative that we tell about our lives. Chapter 1 engages with the temporal anxiety that we

46. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 199.

47. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 203.

48. Aleida Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen? Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne* (Munich: Hanser, 2013), 18.

49. Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?*, 273.

50. Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?*, 277.

can no longer narrate history and our own lives as coherent stories and concludes with a more detailed discussion of the idea of precariousness.

Chapter 2 returns to the *fin de siècle* to show that our temporal anxieties are part and parcel of the complicated story of modernity. A wide range of examples from the domains of literature, sociology, philosophy, and psychology from the 1870s to the late 1930s showcases the rich modernist discourse on time. Neither modernity nor modernism can be adequately summed up under the heading of the speed-as-progress narrative: even though the processes of modernization invest in the future by driving technological innovation and rationalizing time, the modern imagination was also hugely fascinated by foreign and distant pasts, as the rise of disciplines such as archaeology, psychoanalysis, geology, and anthropology, whose time frames reach far back into the (pre)history of humankind, provides witness. Nietzsche, Simmel, and Freud are among those pivotal figures that provided the theoretical scaffolding for human untimeliness and asynchronicity. Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, and Robert Walser are modernist writers who explored very different temporal itineraries that disrupt modern speed politics. Chapter 2 therefore offers deliberately disparate readings that, together, complicate the story of modernity. I also track how acceleration and progress are crosscut with attention, lateness, and slowness in the modern debate on time.

The earliest text discussed is Nietzsche's *Über den Nachteil und Nutzen der Historie für das Leben* (*On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*): published two years after German unification in 1873, it is a milestone marking the modernist fascination with radically different time spans and itineraries that stretch from the shortest moment of attention and the modern experience of immediacy, as exemplified by Simmel's seminal essay *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* (*The Metropolis and Mental Life*, 1903) and Robert Walser's short prose pieces, to the extended present of Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924) or the metaphysical and transcendent other time in Kafka's *Der Proceß* (*The Trial*, 1914). Freud, whose writings reach into the pre-history of humankind, exemplifies the modern enthrallment with

an ultimately inaccessible and far-flung past that haunts the present. Mapping the complex and contradictory temporal itineraries of the modern imagination from a cultural-historical perspective, chapter 2 abandons chronological narration: although it deals with texts that were written or published between 1873 and the late 1930s, it deliberately defies decisive turning points and moments of innovation. I view the period rather in terms of a rich cultural tapestry or spatiotemporal map that comes with diverse speeds and temporal directions. The metaphor of the map reminds us that the debate about time is always also a debate about space and place: the discussion of time-space compression in chapter 1 takes issue with the misleading dualism of time and space that characterizes much of the current debate on time. With geographers David Harvey and Doreen Massey, I argue throughout this study that space and time are performative categories that are tied to social, material, and cultural processes that can produce very uneven time spaces.

These theoretical and cultural-historical perspectives prepare the ground for the analysis of time in contemporary culture. Focusing on visual art, chapter 3 debates the concept of slow art in dialogue with international art practice, as exemplified in the performance art of Lee Lozano and Marina Abramović, before analyzing the representation of time in the works of two prominent German photographers: West German Michael Wesely and East German Ulrich Wüst. I show how Wesely's time photography invalidates the indexicality of the photograph through radical experiments with exposure times. Wüst's *Später Sommer/Letzter Herbst* (Late Summer/Final Autumn, 2016) plays with the representational conventions of the photobook to displace the drama of the summer of 1989—in his narrative the fall of the Berlin Wall appears as an unreadable and strangely absent event that nevertheless haunts his photographs of the GDR. Christian Petzold is an internationally renowned German filmmaker: his acclaimed film *Barbara* (2012) is another example of a slow artwork that engages with the memory of the GDR from enhanced historical distance. Petzold's strikingly slow cinematography not only foregrounds a two-speed Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall; it also probes the protagonist's search for subjective time under the conditions of surveillance. The

chapter continues with a discussion of the aesthetic of stillness in Austrian filmmaker Ulrich Seidl's feature film *Paradise: Glaube* (Paradise: Faith, 2012), the second part of a trilogy that explores the doomed quest for happiness and transcendence in the lives of three female protagonists. The analysis of disruptive performances in Maren Ade's acclaimed tragicomedy *Toni Erdmann* (2016) focuses on the quest for *Eigenzeit* and the good life in the age of turbocapitalism. The works discussed in this chapter exemplify the contemporary interest in slow art in response to the culture of immediacy and instant delivery. They envisage an aesthetics of precariousness that foregrounds the fragility of our anchorage in social time.

Chapter 4 turns to the experience of precarious times in contemporary German fiction. The first part of the chapter queries the binary distinction between modernist and postmodernist literature in the light of striking epistemological and narratological continuities that capture the uneven experience of time. The ensuing close readings then analyze diverse articulations of precariousness in contemporary literature: Julia Schoch's novel *Mit der Geschwindigkeit des Sommers* (With the Speed of the Summer, 2009), Karen Duve's *Taxi* (2008), and Clemens Meyer's *Als wir träumten* (When We Were Dreaming, 2006) deal with protagonists for whom 1989 represents a nonevent yet also, paradoxically, a disturbing rupture in their biographies. Schoch's novel is set in provincial East Germany close to the Polish border, Duve's narrative in Hamburg, and Meyer's text in Leipzig before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The protagonists of these texts are drifters who know their locality well but have no sense of orientation. In their existential dislocation they are akin to Wilhelm Genazino's protagonist in *Das Glück in glücksfernen Zeiten* (Happiness in Unhappy Times, 2009), who embodies the new educated precariat facing social and economic decline. In his encounter with a reality that is simultaneously drab yet demanding, Genazino's hero fine-tunes a tactics of temporal resistance to the just-in-time ideology of the neoliberal era. Similarly, the protagonist of Arnold Stadler's *Sehnsucht: Versuch über das erste Mal* (Longing: Attempting to Capture the First Time, 2002), is a first-person manic-depressive narrator who ekes out his

living with consumer advice seminars, an idea that he developed after dropping out of his university degree in forestry. Embroiled in a mundane world of consumption, the protagonist regularly succumbs to sexual voyeurism as a mode of transcending the here and now. But the protagonist's carnal desires are also the underside of his religious longing for transcendence. Stadler's intriguing text *Salvatore* (2008) is the companion piece to the novel: it employs a complex circuit of exchange between diverse genres and media to recover the possibility of transcendence as a precarious experience.

The chapter concludes with an in-depth analysis of Jenny Erpenbeck's novel *Gehen, ging, gegangen* (2015; *Go, Went, Gone*, 2017), which tackles one of the most urgent political issues of our times: the refugee crisis. Besides discussing the narratological handling of time in dialogue with the prominent chronotopes in this text, I show how the narrative envisages a precarious politics that recognizes cultural difference alongside a shared humanity.

Thematically and stylistically diverse, these texts have one feature in common: they all explore highly individualistic temporal itineraries that collide with the prevailing desire for digital connectivity without, however, reinstating the historical imagination. Each of these works homes in on the experience of being out of sync with one's time through a mode of writing that displaces the culture of immediacy and liveness. They all protest against the imaginative poverty and temporal scarcity of a reality that is perceived as atomized, disembedded, and without future horizons. My epilogue attempts to connect the analysis of time and temporality with a broader perspective on the future direction of the humanities.