

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Temporal Anxieties in the Digital Age

Timeless Time

Many contributors to the debate on time in the digital era have diagnosed a paradigm shift toward a timeless present that has swallowed up the past. Manuel Castells's trilogy on the information age provided the first sustained theory of the economic, social, and cultural effects of network society and the collapse of time. Examining how an inescapable network logic affects all domains of life, Castells arrived at this overarching conclusion:

Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in the processes of production, experience, power and culture. While the networking form of social organization has existed in other times and spaces, the new information

technology paradigm provides the basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure.¹

For Castells the new social morphology of network society shifted power away from established institutions such as governments, political parties, and labor movements. A new “space of flows” has emerged that escapes the conventional and comparatively slow mechanics of modern political governance by breaking down the spatial barriers that delay the instant delivery of information. Castells argued that in network society space organizes time and not vice versa, as suggested by classical social theories. The space of flows is made up of three layers: firstly, the circuit of electronic exchanges that provides the “material support of simultaneous practices”;² secondly, the nodes and hubs that link the network up with specific places “with well-defined social, cultural, physical and functional characteristics,”³ and, thirdly, the spatial organization of the managerial elites “that exercise the directional functions around which such space is articulated.”⁴ The space of flows, as Castells explained it originally in *The Rise of the Network Society*, thus refers to a new feature of network society: the possibility enabled by technology of practicing simultaneity without spatial contiguity. On the other hand, it also allows for asynchronous interaction at a distance.⁵ In this way the space of flows produces a new experience of a “timeless time” that overcomes the linear predictability of clock time as well as the context-dependent nature of our temporal experiences. Castells

1. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 469.

2. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 442.

3. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 443.

4. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 445.

5. Castells usefully differentiates between the space of flows and real places, i.e., our material, social, and cultural habitats. While the space of flows is a form of domination over such habitats, he qualified his argument in later publications to make room for resistance to domination by grassroots groups or social movements that exploit the net for countercultural or alternative political and social purposes. See Manuel Castells, “Grassrooting the Space of Flows,” *Urban Geography* 20/4 (1999): 294–302.

describes this profound transformation of time in network society in terms of a

mixing of tenses to create a forever universe, not self-expanding but self-maintaining, not cyclical but random, not recursive but incursive: timeless time, using technology to escape the contexts of its existence, and to appropriate selectively any value each context could offer to the ever-present.⁶

Network society thus displaces the sequential order of lived experience by way of a “real virtuality” that immerses us into a world of instantaneity.⁷ As Jan van Dijk notes, Castells’s great achievement was to provide us with a far-reaching analysis of the transformation of time and space in network society at a very early point in the history of the development of the World Wide Web. For van Dijk, however, Castells’s argument is ultimately too one-dimensional, as it adopts an instrumental or overly deterministic view of technology that, in van Dijk’s view, negates the possibility of a social struggle over networks. “Social actors,” comments van Dijk, “take positions inside the networks, communicating at centres, nodes and terminals, and they are engaged in daily struggles over the construction and use of these networks, in the role of managers and employees, producers and consumers or governors and citizens.”⁸ Rapidly evolving digital technologies have certainly infiltrated nearly all aspects of our daily lives, but their impact is more complex, heterogeneous, and unpredictable than Castells suggested. Judy Wajcman rightly observes that “the relationship between technological change and temporality is dialectical, not teleological.”⁹ A proponent of STS (Social Technology Studies), she emphasizes that the design of technology is not simply the outcome of indisputable technical imperatives but rather

6. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 464.

7. As noted by Jan van Dijk, Castells’s concept of a “timeless time” draws on Baudrillard’s notion of simulacra. Jan van Dijk, “The One-Dimensional Network Society of Manuel Castells,” *New Media & Society* 1 (1999): 127–38.

8. Van Dijk, “The One-Dimensional Network Society,” 135.

9. Wajcman, *Pressed for Time*, 9.

the product of complex social processes that reflect gender biases, racial inequality, educational gaps, and class differences as well as the unevenness of geography. Society and technology are, as Wajcman puts it, “mutually constitutive”: they form “sociomaterial ‘assemblages.’”¹⁰ The social significance of technology also points to myriad usages in everyday life: social actors are not simply passive recipients of technological innovations but active producers and users who come up with unforeseen ploys, tactics, and subterfuges that secure unique spaces of agency. As I will argue throughout this study, this subversive surplus of subjectivity escapes both discursive categorization as well as the disciplinary logic of Foucauldian systems.

Nevertheless, twenty years after the publication of *The Rise of the Network Society*, the anxiety about the disembedding effects of an unpredictable and ungovernable space of flows in the age of globalization and a new culture of immediacy that requires us to be always connected and live has not been put to rest. The ongoing debate on time and temporality revolves around a range of interconnected diagnostic tropes that aim to illuminate a fundamental recalibration of the conditions of temporality in the network era: acceleration, resonance, atomization, immediacy, the extended present, time-space compression, network time, and precarious times.

Acceleration

The ever-tighter enmeshing of human worlds with digital media and the new culture of liveness have unleashed fears about the loss of democracy, about the erosion of the very notion of experience, about the loss of both past and future as horizons of orientation, and about the atomization of our biographies into incoherent episodes. Because the new culture of immediacy promotes instant access, it erodes the expectation of temporal processing. This new

10. Wajcman, *Pressed for Time*, 31–32.

era of the “digital now” where the furthest goal is only a click of the mouse away 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. The sociologist Hartmut Rosa therefore argues in his influential book *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (2005; *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, 2015) that the prospect of maintaining reciprocal relations between selves, others, and their human habitats has been unhinged in the twenty-first century. He contends that the acceleration of all aspects of life has now reached the critical point where social integration is no longer possible.¹¹ In physics, acceleration refers to the rate of change of velocity of an object with respect to time. According to Newton’s Second Law, an object’s acceleration is the net result of all forces acting on the object. The speed of an object is the rate of change of its position. While the scientific terms *speed* and *acceleration* are by no means identical, the modern discourse on social time interweaves them in a narrative that champions scientific, technological, and social progress. Acceleration emerges in this discourse as the central agent that can close the gap between a present that is rich in creative potential and an even brighter future as the horizon of humankind’s self-realization. Rosa argues that in high modernity the technological acceleration that was achieved by more efficient modes of production, faster transportation and communication networks, and so on also facilitated the acceleration of social change and as such continual social innovation. As past experiences began to lose their relevance more quickly, individuals experienced the acceleration of their entire lives.¹² For Rosa the unstoppable tempo of modern

11. Hartmut Rosa, *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 48. See also Peter Borscheid, *Das Tempo-Virus: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Beschleunigung* (Frankfurt a. Main: Campus, 2004). Some authors promote specific forms of resistance to the regime of acceleration. See Friedhelm Hengsbach, *Die Zeit gehört uns: Widerstand gegen das Regime der Beschleunigung* (Frankfurt a. Main: Westend, 2012).

12. Rosa, *Beschleunigung*, 190.

rationalization and differentiation has brought forth late modernity as an arena where the latent pathologies of the modern time regime could finally erupt: late modernity has devoured the specifically modern horizon of expectation that propelled human beings toward the future. We now inhabit a much more fragmented and contingent temporality that turns life into a series of short-term projects. And so, ironically, acceleration gives rise to a new detemporalization of history that collapses the epistemological difference between past, present, and future in favor of the directionless experience of “rasender Stillstand” (stagnation at top speed).¹³

Because Rosa views acceleration as the unrestrained engine of modern history, all alternative temporalities and modes of agency must inevitably appear as by-products of social and technological acceleration. For Rosa the temporal pathologies of late modernity are embodied in the figure of the time juggler and time gambler whose sense of self has shrunk to a tiny atomized dot that reacts to the fast-paced change by way of a new flexibility and a “situated identity” that is lacking in any sense of continuity.

In his book on acceleration in modernity Rosa removes culture entirely from his analysis: rather than an essential component in the story of modernity, he views culture merely as a capitalist by-product. In liberal-capitalist societies, he argues, the fields of production and consumption, and our social relationships, are being controlled by the behavior patterns of the producer or consumer.¹⁴ Not surprisingly then, Rosa arrives at the utterly dystopian conclusion that expressive notions of selfhood that he associates with Romanticism have been entirely colonized by a naturalist notion of selfhood that ensures conformity with the systemic requirements of capitalism. In the age of postmodernity, Rosa concludes, the romantic-expressive paradigm loses its oppositional character and its potential to resist the naturalist or capitalist imperatives of the system.¹⁵

13. Rosa, *Beschleunigung*, 479.

14. Hartmut Rosa, *Weltbeziehungen im Zeitalter der Beschleunigung: Umriss einer neuen Gesellschaftskritik* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 2012), 167.

15. Rosa, *Weltbeziehungen*, 176.

While Rosa's vision of the commodified self is perhaps exaggerated, the rise of occupational stress in postindustrialized society seems to validate his diagnosis that many people are struggling to manage the pace of life at the beginning of the twenty-first century: in 2015 the Bertelsmann Foundation published a representative German survey on stress at the workplace. The study showed that 42 percent of the German workforce felt that their performance targets were constantly increasing, and 51 percent reported that they could not influence the volume of work they had to do.¹⁶ Similar results are reported in British and US health surveys.¹⁷ In response to these trends, the stress management industry has sprung up as a burgeoning economic sector that not only fills the shelves of bookshops with self-help books but also offers professional online training courses and corporate workshops on stress control. So-called time-saving techniques such as "trashing perfectionism," "multitasking," "power napping," or "power reading" play a prominent role alongside relaxation techniques that include physical exercise, a balanced diet, yoga, and mindfulness training. The commodification of well-being by the new time management industry corroborates Rosa's dystopian vision of the colonized self: both time-saving and relaxation techniques make us fit for life in the age of high speed and continual innovation.

Too much speed also featured prominently in the recent debate about particle physics that was ignited in 2011 when a team of Italian particle physicists called OPERA made the startling announcement that they had found particles traveling at a speed faster than light, a discovery that—if corroborated—would overturn the very

16. See "Studie zu Stress am Arbeitsplatz," *Spiegel Online*, 16 March 2015, <http://www.spiegel.de/karriere/stress-am-arbeitsplatz-jeder-dritte-fuehlt-sich-ueberfordert-a-1023685.html> (accessed 26 October 2016).

17. See "Work-Related Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Statistics in Great Britain 2015," Health and Safety Executive, <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/stress.pdf> (accessed 25 October 2016). The data shows that in 2014–15 stress accounted for 35 percent of all work-related ill health and 43 percent of all working days lost due to ill health. The main factors cited by respondents as causing work-related stress, depression, or anxiety were workload pressures, including tight deadlines, too much responsibility, and a lack of managerial support.

foundations of Einstein's theory of relativity.¹⁸ The Italian researchers reported that neutrinos—subatomic particles—had traveled the distance of 730 kilometers from CERN, Europe's particle-physics lab near Geneva, to the Gran Sasso lab in Italy at a speed that exceeded the speed of light by a fraction of 20 parts per million. The speed of light is 299,792,458 meters per second; they believed that the neutrinos were traveling at 299,798,454 meters per second. As Subir Sarkar, head of Particle Theory at Oxford University, explained, "The constancy of the speed of light essentially underpins our understanding of space and time and causality, which is the fact that cause comes before effect."¹⁹ Six months later the head of the Italian research team resigned when repeats of the test showed that the particles were traveling at the speed of light.²⁰ The science journal *Nature* reported that OPERA team members had detected two possible sources of error:

The initial result suggested that the neutrinos were reaching the detector 60 nanoseconds faster than the speed of light would allow. Both potential errors would affect the neutrinos' arrival time, as measured by OPERA's master clock. . . . The first is a faulty connection at the point at which the light from a fiber-optic cable brings a synchronizing Global Positioning System (GPS) signal into the master clock. The fault could have delayed the GPS signal, causing the master clock to run slow and thus causing the neutrinos' travel time to appear shorter than it actually was.²¹

The second error occurred when "tests of the timing system turned up a second, opposing effect: an oscillator within the master clock that keeps time between the arrivals of synchronization signals

18. Ian Sample, "Faster Than Light Particles Found, Claim Scientists." *The Guardian*, 22 September 2011.

19. Quoted in Ian Sample, "Faster Than Light Particles Found."

20. Jason Palmer, "Neutrinos clocked at Light-Speed in New Icarus Test," *The Guardian*, 16 March 2012; Geoff Brumfiel, "Neutrinos Not Faster Than Light: ICARUS Experiment Contradicts Controversial Claim," *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science*, 19 March 2012, <http://www.nature.com/news/neutrinos-not-faster-than-light-1.10249> (accessed 12 October 2014).

21. Eugenie Samuel Reich, "Time Glitches Dog Neutrino Claim: Team Admits to Possible Errors in Faster-Than-Light Finding," *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science*, 1 March 2012, 17.

was running fast. That would have made the neutrinos' travel time seem longer."²² Clocks running too slow or too fast are not what we expect of particle physics. A further factor contributing to the premature publication of faulty test results may have to do with human hastiness in response to the pressure to produce revolutionary scientific findings where the investment of financial resources has been high: OPERA team members conceded that they published their results too soon without carrying out sufficient checks.

This intriguing case, involving faulty clocks and human error, accentuates not merely the scientific but also the social dimension of time. Even though Rosa's theory of unstoppable acceleration is too one-dimensional, it does convey how acceleration as an agent of change has nurtured a speed politics that impacts all aspects of life.

Resonance

Rosa's latest book *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* (2016; *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, 2019) attempts to correct the underlying determinism of his earlier theory of acceleration by developing a "sociology of the good life."²³ Rosa now argues that the good life in the twenty-first century hinges on the development of relations of resonance between self and world. As long as the modern state continues to obey the imperatives of acceleration, innovation, and persistent investment in economic growth, it impairs the conditions for a resonant relationship between the self and her world. Rosa understands resonance as a mode of being in the world that can redress modernity's multiple alienations, including the Cartesian split between mind and body and the disjuncture between the individual, society, and nature.²⁴ For Rosa, resonance is a basic

22. Reich, "Time Glitches Dog Neutrino Claim," 17.

23. Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 2016), 14; Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, trans. James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

24. Rosa, *Resonanz*, 293.

human need and innate ability that connects human beings with others. Rather than appropriating or erasing the experience of otherness, it is premised on the recognition of a fundamental difference between the self and the Other: the resonant encounter with the Other sets in train a dialogic process of “Anverwandlung,” that is, partial absorption by or entry into the Other’s sphere.²⁵ Rosa’s theory of the good life in the twenty-first century is steeped in Romanticism: he draws on poets from Friedrich Schlegel to Eichendorff, Novalis, and Hölderlin to call for responsive and reciprocal world relations.²⁶ Rosa champions resonance as the potential cure for the ills of modernity’s crippling time regime: resonant experiences, he argues, overcome acceleration by creating a temporal bridge between past and future and transcending the chronology of linear time.²⁷ But he also concedes that his vision of the good life would require a radical political, economic, and cultural revolution.²⁸

Rosa makes no mention of book 12 of Homer’s *Odyssey*, which, in the Sirens episode, tells a foundational story about the allure, power, and threat of resonance. It is worthwhile recapitulating this story in detail because Homer tells Odysseus’s encounter with the Sirens three times: first, when the sorceress Circe advises the Greek hero about how to escape the danger of the Sirens’ song:

Plug your comrades’ ears with softened beeswax lest they listen, and row swiftly past. And if you must hear, then let them first tie you hand and foot and stand you upright in the mast housing, and fasten the rope ends round the mast itself, so you can delight in hearing the Sirens’ voices. And should you beg your crew to free you, let them only bind you more tightly.²⁹

25. Rosa, *Resonanz*, 317.

26. Rosa, *Resonanz*, 599–614.

27. Rosa, *Resonanz*, 693.

28. Rosa, *Resonanz*, 56.

29. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. S. Kline, Poetry in Translation 2004, http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/Odyssey12.htm#anchor_Toc90268047 (accessed 15 April 2015).

The second telling occurs immediately before the encounter with the Sirens when Odysseus—the first-person narrator of books 9 to 12—instructs his men to tie him to the mast and, should he beg them to free him, to tighten the ropes even more. The third telling immediately follows this instruction: Odysseus now recalls the unfolding events through an epic narration that includes the citation of the Sirens' complete song:

Famous Odysseus, great glory of Achaea, draw near, and bring your ship to rest, and listen to our voices. No man rows past this isle in his dark ship without hearing the honeysweet sound from our lips. He delights in it and goes his way a wiser man. We know all the suffering the Argives and the Trojans endured, by the gods' will, on the wide plains of Troy. We know everything that comes to pass on the fertile Earth.

The three retellings of the Sirens' episode can be read as a contest over whose voice should be heard: because Circe possesses the knowledge of the future she has the authority to instruct Odysseus. However, by communicating her warning to his men Odysseus establishes the power of the Western male subject who has access to privileged information. The switching of voice from Circe to Odysseus thus transfers authority: even though it is Circe who holds knowledge of the future, she is displaced in the retelling so that Odysseus emerges as a man of intellectual guile and cunning. When Odysseus reenacts the actual encounter through epic narration, Circe's gesturing to a perilous future has already been absorbed by the epic past tense of Odysseus' intradiegetic narration. Epic narration thus contains the dangerous allure of the Sirens' irresistible song whose singing we can only hear from the safe distance of the narrative present.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno's famous interpretation in *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, the episode therefore symbolizes the very moment when domination was institutionalized in Western thought: Odysseus's upright posture and his delectation at the Sirens' song turn him into a precursor of the bourgeois subject. The sailors are engaged in manual labor and cannot hear the beautiful singing because their ears are stuffed; they therefore represent for Adorno and Horkheimer a version of the modern

proletariat.³⁰ Indeed, Odysseus's upright posture asserts his phallic power: while the sailors are laboring at his feet, their master takes time out from the toil of travel to enjoy the Sirens' performance. But we should also note that Odysseus could bear to hear the Sirens' honeysweet song only when he is tied to the mast. It is precisely the sadomasochistic dialectic between control (of the present and future) and seduction (to the past) that unsettles the simple enactment of domination in this scene. However, this episode does not exhaust itself in the relationship of domination between Odysseus and his men: it is also a story about how the Sirens' honeysweet song enters Odysseus's ear. As Rebecca Comay points out, the ear is not just the organ of equilibrium and control but also an intricate labyrinth that renders "precarious the sense of balance and upright posture."³¹ The content of the Sirens' song adds additional complexity to the scene, as their song is anything but sweet: it provides not only a painful cultural memory of the Trojan War and of Odysseus's banishment but also the ghastly vision of everything that comes to pass on earth. While the gods may hold such knowledge, in the hands of mortals it would be deadly. By performing an omniscient and as such total memory of past, present, and future, the Sirens' song interjects radical achronicity into Odysseus's phallic and future-oriented trajectory. The interpolation of the female voice into Odysseus's passage thus foregrounds the gendered nature of chrono-politics: the achronicity of the Sirens' song remains episodic, as Odysseus manages to circumvent their deadly allure. And so book 12 of the *Odyssey* already complicates the very idea of resonance: resonance is not a panacea for the temporal pathologies of late modernity, because it is imbricated in power and gender relations.

Kafka's *Das Schweigen der Sirenen* (*The Silence of the Sirens*, 1917) demystifies the ancient myth because in his modern parable the Sirens no longer sing at all. Their silence, Kafka asserts, is an

30. See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 3:64. See Rebecca Comay, "Adorno's Siren Song," *New German Critique* 81 (2000): 21–48.

31. Comay, "Adorno's Siren Song," 27.

even deadlier weapon than their singing.³² According to Kafka's version, Odysseus stuffs wax into his own, rather than his men's, ears, even though it is well known that such measures are childish and offer no protection against the Sirens' penetrating song. Yet Odysseus, so it appears, believes that the Sirens are singing: for a fleeting moment he sees their throats rising and falling, their breasts lifting, their eyes filled with tears, and their lips half-parted before he fixes his gaze on the distance where they literally vanish from his sight. And as the ship draws nearer, Odysseus—far from succumbing to the Sirens' song—proves to be oblivious to their charm. The impersonal narrative voice observes that had the Sirens possessed any consciousness, they would not have survived this moment of their erasure. Kafka's story thus enacts a decisive shift from sound and hearing to sight: by describing what Odysseus sees rather than hears, Kafka introduces the notion of visual mastery into the story as a decisive moment in Western history. By fixing Odysseus's gaze on the distance, he exposes the hero as master of all he surveys and as the proverbial male subject.

Kafka concludes with a further twist in a codicil: Odysseus knew all along that the Sirens were not singing and merely employed pretense as a protective shield. But whether Odysseus was oblivious to the singing or knew all along of the silence, the story disrupts a naive model of resonance: Odysseus merely pretends to listen to something that he cannot hear or that he knows does not exist. Kafka turns the Sirens' desire for resonance into an instrument of male power: phallic Odysseus outwits the female Sirens with guile and displaces Circe's voice through his own authoritative retelling.

Kafka wrote his last story, *Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse* (*Josefine the Singer or the Mouse People*) in 1924 when

32. Franz Kafka, "Das Schweigen der Sirenen," in *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer und andere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1994), 168–70. On this parable, see Vivian Liska, "Was weiß die Literatur? Das Wissen der Sirenen: Adorno, Banchot, Sloterdijk," *KulturPoetik: Zeitschrift für kulturgeschichtliche Literaturwissenschaft* 4 (2004): 1–18; Liliane Weissberg, "Myth, History, Enlightenment: The Silence of the Sirens," *Journal of the Kafka Society of America* 9 (1985): 131–48.

advanced tuberculosis was ravaging his voice. It too explores the achronic temporality of voice and resonance: the story unfolds in terms of a male discourse on the effect of female performance on a downtrodden and disempowered community, the mouse people. Surrounded by enemies and pressured by poor economic conditions, the mouse people are engaged in a never-ending battle for survival that leaves no room for childhood, youth, and pastimes. The mouse folk live in a timeless time of an everlasting present without historical depth. Kafka skillfully contrasts the gender identity of the patronizing male mouse narrator who acts as spokesperson for his people with Josefine's identity as a female performer whose voice we never hear outside this male discourse.³³ And yet, even though the narrator goes out of his way to denigrate Josefine's art—he claims that her singing is nothing but the most ordinary mouse piping and furthermore that the mouse people are unmusical—he unwittingly acknowledges the utopian power of her concert performance to lift the mouse people out of the common drudgery of life. At the very end of the story the narrator attempts to reassert his authority by assigning her voice to oblivion:

Bald wird die Zeit kommen, wo ihr letzter Pfiff ertönt und verstummt. Sie ist eine kleine Episode in der ewigen Geschichte unseres Volkes und das Volk wird den Verlust überwinden. Leicht wird es uns ja nicht werden; wie werden die Versammlungen in völliger Stummheit möglich sein? Freilich, waren sie nicht auch mit Josefine stumm? War ihr wirkliches Pfeifen nennenswert lauter und lebendiger, als die Erinnerung daran sein wird? War es denn noch bei ihren Lebzeiten mehr als eine bloße Erinnerung? Hat nicht vielmehr das Volk in seiner Weisheit Josefinens Gesang, eben deshalb, weil er in dieser Art unverlierbar war, so hoch gestellt?

Vielleicht werden wir also gar nicht sehr viel entbehren, Josefine aber, erlöst von der irdischen Plage, die aber ihrer Meinung nach Auserwählten bereitet ist, wird fröhlich sich verlieren in der zahllosen Menge

33. See Elizabeth Boa, "Performance and Femininity: *Josephine the Singer or the Mouse People*," in *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 175–80; Ruth V. Gross, "Of Mice and Women: Reflections on a Discourse in Kafka's *Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse*," *Germanic Review* 60 (1985): 59–68; Michael Minden, "Kafka's *Josefine die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse*," *German Life & Letters* 62 (2009): 297–310.

der Helden unseres Volkes, und bald, da wir keine Geschichte treiben, in gesteigerter Erlösung vergessen sein wie alle ihre Brüder.³⁴

Soon the time will come when her last whistle sounds and falls silent. She is a little episode in the never-ending story of our people, and the people will get over her loss. It won't be easy for us; how will our assemblies be possible in complete silence? Then again, were they not silent, even with Josefine there? Was her actual whistling noticeably louder and livelier than in our memory it was? Was it ever more than a memory, even while she was alive? Was it not rather the people in their wisdom valuing Josefine's song so highly, because in such a way, it was impossible for them ever to lose it?

Perhaps therefore we shall not even miss her, but Josefine, released from the earthly torment that in her opinion is the lot of the chosen ones, will happily lose herself in the numberless crowds of the heroes of our people, before long—as we don't keep any history—to be accorded the heightened relief of being, like all of her brothers, forgotten.³⁵

The narrator's blatant attempt to erase Josefine from cultural memory is, however, undercut by his intense and, arguably, obsessive preoccupation with a voice that has escaped his own phallic discursive practice. And so in spite of his denunciatory intentions, his own narration unwittingly assigns her voice a place in cultural memory and as such resonance. In Kafka's last story resonance overcomes domination by traveling in an unpredictable fashion across space and time. This is perhaps Kafka's most optimistic story, as it does not so much stage the absence of Josefine's voice but her continued presence through absence. Her absence irritates and beguiles the narrator who fails to master or curb her cultural resonance through his controlling narration.

The literary examples sketched here accentuate the gendered conditions of resonance; in so doing they foreground conditions of domination and power alongside a radically alternative temporality that disrupts the linearity of time. While in Homer the Sirens' ghastly and honeysweet song contains all times ever, Josefine's singing enters a latent cultural memory that punctures the seeming

34. Franz Kafka, "Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse," in *Ein Landarzt und andere Drucke zu Lebzeiten* (Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer, 1994), 294.

35. Franz Kafka, "Josefine, the Singer, or The Mouse People," trans. and with an introduction by Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 244.

rationality of the male mouse narrator. Separated by 2,000 years, these two examples also voice a surplus that eludes the discursive practice of phallic protagonists and male mouse narrators.

Atomization

The notion that acceleration has been the driving engine of modernity is a commonplace in much of contemporary discourse. Like Hartmut Rosa, Fredric Jameson argues that “time is today a function of speed, and evidently perceptible only in terms of its rate or velocity as such.”³⁶ Paul Virilio, the maverick French critic, goes even further by making time the main principle of power: in his view history is an ever-accelerating competition of speed. For Virilio it is the fastest mover in history who holds political power.³⁷

In sharp contrast, Byung-Chul Han holds that it is a mistake to attribute the temporal crisis of today’s world to acceleration. He diagnoses instead a state of “dyschronia” for which he blames the atomization of time and the attendant dissolution of narrative integration. People in today’s world, he argues, are bereft of duration and the notion of the right time because they lack the “temporal gravitation” that, in his view, is indispensable for the experience of a meaningful present that is enclosed by the past and the future.³⁸ Time, suggests Han, tumbles down on us like an unstoppable avalanche precisely because it is divested of anchorage and the possibility of closure.³⁹ Network society has relinquished the possibility of meaningful experience and the condensation of time felt as significant in favor of the timeless neutrality of the information that savagely annihilates memory.⁴⁰ Time in the information

36. Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern* (London: Verso, 1983), 50.

37. Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizon: An Essay in Dromoscopy*, trans. Michael Degener (London: Continuum, 2005).

38. Byung-Chul Han, *Duft der Zeit: Ein philosophischer Essay zur Kunst des Verweilens* (Berlin: Transcript, 2009), 10.

39. Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 12.

40. Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 13.

age, contends Han, consists of a series of disconnected points that “buzz” around without direction: discontinuous and unstructured, this new temporal dissipation results in a lack of orientation rather than enhanced freedom.⁴¹ A directionless movement characterizes this new “point time,” a form of continual “buzzing” that is indifferent to historical acceleration.⁴² For Han, acceleration is therefore not the cause of our sense of stagnating in an unbounded present but merely a symptom of deeper processes that have to do with the lack of temporal direction. He writes, “Acceleration and deceleration have their joint origin in narrative detemporalization. They are different manifestations of the same process.”⁴³ By offering countless arbitrary options and links, the internet intensifies for Han the atomization of time: it favors browsing and surfing and such directionless movement.⁴⁴ Net space and net time are discontinuous and as such imprisoned in a now without duration.

In his discussion of time Han employs a strikingly Heideggerian spatial metaphoric: he invokes the notion of a gravitational time-space that embeds, holds, and anchors the self through modes of communicative relatedness.⁴⁵ Conceding that Heidegger’s model of ontological groundedness produces the dead end of an antimodern apotheosis of an archaic world,⁴⁶ he then attempts to resolve the dilemma by way of a second metaphoric that is extremely evocative and sensual: time should be “fragrant,” he suggests, like Proust’s madeleine, which, steeped in lime blossom tea, releases a sense of duration free from the contingency of life. Such metaphors feed into a sensorium of temporality that helps to translate the abstract notion of time into lived experience: while singing, piping,

41. Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 38.

42. Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 39.

43. Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 31.

44. Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 44.

45. Commenting on Proust, he writes: “Man braucht nur tiefer ins Sein hineinzublicken, um zu erkennen, daß alle Dinge miteinander verwoben sind, daß jedes geringste Ding mit einer Weltganzheit kommuniziert.” (You only need to look deeper into Being to recognize that all things are interwoven and that even the smallest thing communicates with the totality of the world.) Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 51.

46. Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 79.

and buzzing appeal to the aural sense, the Proustian notion of fragrance adds the sense of smell to the vocabulary of duration. Han adds a further example of a sensual temporality that has the power to reanimate duration and the conditions for a *vita contemplativa*: the ancient Chinese hsiang yin clock apparently measures the passage of time by burning off incense.⁴⁷ But the poetic turn of Han's argument begs the question of whether and how such bounded experience of duration can repair the atomization of time in the age of dyschronia. Does his argument not reinstate precisely the narrativization of time, the conditions of which, as he insists, no longer really exist? In the last analysis, the idea of the "fragrance of time" is a poetic metaphor that simply bypasses the challenges of temporality in the digital era.

Han's reading of atomized time is reminiscent of philosophical impressionism around 1900: his temporal metaphors resonate with the work of Ernst Mach, who in his seminal *Die Analyse der Empfindungen* (*The Analysis of Sensations*, 1897) described the modern self in terms of a fleeting *Elementenkomplex* (complex of elements) without the Kantian unity of apperception. The disintegration of the grand historical narratives and the experience of an atomized time without an integrative horizon already characterize much of the literature of classical modernism.⁴⁸ Looked at from a historical angle, Han's argument is thus not new: it is a continuation of the modernist fascination with a temporally unstable and fragile subjectivity.

However, his philosophical eclecticism takes on a more problematic tenor in his later essay on the transformation of democracy in the age of big data.⁴⁹ Debating the dissolution of Habermas's communicative public sphere in the digital era, Han suggests that

47. Han, *Duft der Zeit*, 59–63.

48. See Johannes Pause, *Texturen der Zeit: Zum Wandel ästhetischer Zeitkonzepte in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2012), 52.

49. Big data is the term used for extremely large and complex data sets that are submitted to so-called data mining, i.e., sophisticated computational analysis that captures patterns and trends by way of algorithms.

the web might bring about a new form of a “pre-communicative” and “prediscursive rationality” to replace the Habermasian discursive idealism with a new form of digital materialism.⁵⁰ Instead of dialogic participation in the public sphere, Han envisages a democracy based on the digital rationality of big data. Because big data has the capacity to map and objectify the totality of our desires, inclinations, beliefs, fears, and wishes, it makes possible a new digital biopolitics that, in his eyes, can respond to the collective unconscious in real time.⁵¹ Euphorically celebrating the egalitarian potential of digital rationality in real time, he perversely suggests that it is precisely the absence of the requirement to actively participate in the public sphere that might create a more inclusive democracy.⁵² Rather than an instrument of surveillance and behavioral manipulation, data mining is welcomed here as a democratic tool that would no longer require conscious input by active and emancipated citizens. For Han this objectified collective unconscious is beginning to evolve passively through billions of mouse clicks, thus eliminating the need for a Habermasian discursive rationality, which demands from citizens the effort of participation in argumentation and dialogue. In my view this dream of “direct” democracy unfolds a totalitarian vision of society as a messy soup of unconscious desires and inclinations that no longer need discursive expression. There is no recognition here that coding technologies and digital protocols can also “impose a hegemonic logic onto a mediated social practice,”⁵³ thereby designing and steering the behavior of users of the net. But does the largely asymmetrical power relation between the corporate organizations and individual users not raise the question of “what is social about social media”?⁵⁴

50. Byung-Chul Han, *Digitale Rationalität und das Ende des kommunikativen Handelns* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2013), 19.

51. Han, *Digitale Rationalität*, 27.

52. Han, *Digitale Rationalität*, 33.

53. José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31.

54. Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 27.

Immediacy

The question raised at the end of the last paragraph prepares the ground for the third diagnostic trope in the discourse on time: the idea that a new culture of immediacy has superseded the modern culture of speed. So what does the shift toward a culture of immediacy entail? For John Tomlinson it denotes first of all “a culture of instantaneity—a culture accustomed to rapid delivery, ubiquitous availability and the instant gratification of desires.” Secondly, it involves a “sense of directness, of cultural proximity” that finds expression in “an increasing sense of connectedness with others, or as a prevailing sense of urgency and, perhaps, of compulsion and drivenness in our short-term preoccupations.”⁵⁵ However, we need to note that Tomlinson does not propose a naive binary model that posits an authentic subject that confronts an alienating technological world. He argues rather that the inescapable embedding of human selves in a technologically mediated world has gained a new quality by, thirdly, *ostensibly* closing the gap that separates “now from later, here from elsewhere, desire from its satisfaction—the gap which . . . constituted the motivating challenge of speed-as-progress.”⁵⁶ In this way the cultural imaginary of the early twenty-first century has conjured away the human effort that, as I would argue, also lent classical modernity a particular heroic tone. As long as the pursuit of progress required effort, modernity remained a deeply heroic project that accentuated the perfectibility of man. Pleasure and effort were intertwined in a modern speed politics that produced a simultaneously disciplined and temporally sovereign subjectivity. And so the figure of the (male) inventor plays such a central role in the modern imagination: the inventor demonstrates an ingenuity and resourcefulness that services the common good. By sharp contrast, the new script of effortlessness in the digital era erodes the conditions for a heroic subjectivity: if everything is—at least in theory—always just a computer click away,

55. Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed*, 74.

56. Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed*, 74.

then everything is equally banal. Accordingly, I suggest that the culture of immediacy might be termed “disenchanted accessibility” in an age that disavows the heroism of effort that was at the very heart of the age of mechanical modernization.

Because the new culture of immediacy promotes instant access to goods, services, and media, and the constant availability of social interaction (be it work- or leisure-related), it also erodes the expectation of temporal processing and of the duration of time. In the modern age of mechanical acceleration at the turn of the nineteenth century, by contrast, the dream of ever-greater speed was still bogged down by the wear and tear of machines and infrastructures. In spite of the ideological nexus between speed, power, and capitalism, the speed fantasies of what Tomlinson terms “mechanical modernity” were hampered by the relative slackness of the age of machine acceleration. In contrast, the new age of immediacy comes with the promise and the threat that temporal delays are a thing of the past: pressing the transaction button on one of our digital devices is now sufficient to move vast amounts of capital or to create global audiences for local events. Of course this does not mean that this new culture has really overcome temporal inefficiencies: these still show up in the slow delivery of goods, unplanned waiting periods, and unwanted delays in service provision and travel. Broadband congestion, long airport security queues, automated answering loops of service providers, and the permanent traffic congestion in and around urban centers are everyday experiences in the twenty-first century. They show that the gap between departure and arrival remains an integral part of the human experience. However, the cultural script of instant delivery does make immediacy a new cultural value and a prized asset that arguably delegitimizes slower forms of temporal processing, the value of memory, and the idea of duration as a prerequisite of human experience.

A striking symptom of this new culture of immediacy is the ubiquitous phrase 24/7 (“twenty-four/seven”), which, as Jonathan Crary argues, “announces a time without time, a time extracted from any material or identifiable demarcations, a time without

sequence or recurrence.”⁵⁷ Following Deleuze and Guattari, Crary interprets 24/7 as a “mot d’ordre,” an order word, which commands human time:

It effaces the relevance or value of any respite or variability. Its heralding of the convenience of perpetual access conceals its cancellation of the periodicity that shaped the life of most cultures for several millennia: the diurnal pulse of waking and sleeping and the long alterations between days of work and a day of worship or rest.⁵⁸

And so 24/7 is *the* imperative of our culture of immediacy. Its time regime of uninterrupted connectivity requires the contemporary self to constantly download system updates and novelties that herald greater choice, while in reality entrapping us in a compulsory system of capitalist consumption. The promise of continual innovation at an ever-accelerating rate wrecks the conditions of familiarity with new technologies and with the rapidly changing environment: forever attempting to catch up with the latest “digital revolution” and new information, the self is always behind and ultimately estranged from the very products that augur enhanced experiences and performances.

Enabled by the World Wide Web as well as the neoliberal penetration of the economic and social spheres, the new culture of immediacy is characterized by the following features: it has eroded the clear demarcation line between work and home life or leisure, while also favoring flexibility and short-term gains at the workplace above and beyond loyalty, stability, and experience. The cult of immediacy undermines the conditions for familiarity with systems and technologies, thereby contracting the self to the project of continual self-innovation. Further to this, it erases both past and future by turning the present into a sphere of never-ending, fast-paced consumption of technological innovation. As a new delivery norm,

57. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), 29. Crary demonstrates that the time regime of 24/7 even invades our sleep by undermining “distinctions between day and night, between light and dark, and between action and repose” (17).

58. Crary, *24/7*, 29–30.

immediacy comes with opportunities and challenges for established institutions, such as libraries, archives, academies, that no longer control access to learning and knowledge. It aids information rather than learning, which is a hermeneutic process across time, while also engendering the expectation of the real-time transmission of historical events on a global scale. The ubiquity of screens and digital media in our everyday environment has virtually closed the gap between the simulacrum and reality. Arguably, the expectation of immediacy has also had profound political implications: it has facilitated the shift away from the social-democratic vision of a consensus society toward the neoliberal shareholder society, which favors short-term gains and short-term transactions over long-term results and social contract. The cult of immediacy also enthralls a global youth culture for which technological gadgets and social media are indispensable modes of experience. Connected with this, immediacy fuels new social pathologies, such as cyberbullying and tech addictions. While the above list is of course not exhaustive, it makes clear how the radical transformation of social life and human experience by a culture of immediacy has created the right ecosystem for neoliberal capitalism.

The Extended Present

The map of our temporal anxieties places immediacy in close proximity to the chronotope of an extended or burgeoning present that is divorced from the future as the human horizon of orientation. Besides François Hartog, the literary critic Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has written an apocalyptic crisis narrative about the present that is colored by a good dosage of posthistorical melancholia. Analyzing the transition from classical modernity to postmodernity, Gumbrecht suggests that postmodernity is marked by the shocking realization in the aftermath of the Second World War that the entire catalogue of Enlightenment promises proved illusory. Indeed, the idea that all life on the planet could be ended by the continued exploitation of all natural resources and the cumulative destruction of the environment no longer appears as the hysterical vision of a

minority of eco-freaks but rather as the likely scenario within our lifetime. Faced with this dystopian prospect, Gumbrecht glumly observes that the Enlightenment discourse on human perfectibility has had to give way to a new discourse on the preservation of the planet, which, however, appears already belated.⁵⁹ Under the condition of a profoundly threatening future, Gumbrecht suggests, the only horizon of expectation left to humanity is that of the end of all times. From Gumbrecht's posthistorical perspective of the future perfect, then, the present comes into view as a stranded object of reflection, or, as Gumbrecht puts it, a past that is made up of the totality of missed final chances.⁶⁰ Gumbrecht's dystopian reflection on the end of all times does not, as one might expect, really prepare the ground for a sustained ecological critique; rather, he merely gestures toward eco-criticism in order to set in train a melancholy lament that is conservative in its cultural sensibility, caught up in a particular generational identity, and gendered as male.

So what, according to Gumbrecht, defines living in our post-millennium "broad present"? To understand Gumbrecht's argument, we need to briefly recapitulate the salient traits of modern historical consciousness, as he sees them: first, in this form of consciousness the subject imagines a linear pathway that aligns past, present, and future. Second, all phenomena are subject to historical change because time is the absolute agent of history. Third, modern subjects believe that they continually shed their pasts. Fourth, the future appears as an open horizon of endless possibilities that, fifth, turns the present into a short moment of transition. Finally, this temporal linearity of modernity creates a short present that is the epistemological habitat of the Cartesian subject.⁶¹

As discussed above, like Hartog, Gumbrecht argues that modern historical consciousness has been irretrievably replaced by the new chronotope of a broad and ultimately timeless present. On

59. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Präsenz*, ed. with an afterword by Jürgen Klein (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 2012), 42.

60. Gumbrecht, *Präsenz*, 17.

61. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Unsere breite Gegenwart* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 2010), 15.

the one hand, the broad present is closed off from the future as an open horizon; on the other, it is flooded by pasts that we can no longer shed in our hypermediated world. As a point of convergence between a multitude of electronically mediated pasts and a threatening future, the present expands ever more into a time of intransitive simultaneity. Aleida Assmann observes that for Gumbrecht the present is thus no longer a moment of transition but merely the “Wartesaal der Weltgeschichte,” the waiting room for the world-historical end of all time.⁶² She rightly places Gumbrecht’s dystopian vocabulary in the tradition of a hyperbolic rhetoric that, as she notes, risks attachment to a depressed mood.⁶³ For Gumbrecht it is only embodied presence that could possibly heal the Cartesian split between mind and body as well as the painful dislocations of our globalized nonexistence. Like Han, he draws on Heidegger’s ontology to envisage the alternative of an embodied presence. However, his palliative prescription of temporary relief from the painful entrapment in a broad presence takes an altogether problematic turn in the apotheosis of sport (especially American football) as the realization of a true corporeal experience through performance and spectacle. Surprisingly, Gumbrecht ignores the fascist celebration of the collective experience of the body in the modern sport arena, as paradigmatically enacted in Leni Riefenstahl’s film aesthetics of corporeal presence.

In contrast to Gumbrecht’s linear reading of the modern historical consciousness Peter Osborne takes a different, less monochrome line. He argues that modernity does indeed “valorize the new as a product of a constantly changing self-negating temporal dialectic.” But he also emphasizes that it remains open “to a variety of competing articulations.”⁶⁴ Moreover, the modern obsession with the new also leads to the remorseless production of the old that, in turn, provokes “forms of traditionalism, the temporal logic of which is quite different from that of tradition

62. Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?*, 255.

63. Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?*, 256.

64. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, xii.

as conventionally conceived.”⁶⁵ Indeed, as the next chapter will demonstrate, from the 1870s onward European culture—and its German form in particular—was concerned with lateness as an “untimely” temporal trope that, to quote Nietzsche, runs “counter to our time,” thereby “acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.”⁶⁶ A different type of lateness also features in Freud’s psychoanalysis: he showed that we can never really know ourselves because our conscious being is always punctured by a repressed past. Psychoanalysis provided a method for indirectly recovering the memory of this hidden past through retrospective acts of interpretation. In this way, psychoanalysis established itself as a modern discipline that, by foregrounding the relevance of the subject’s repressed past for the present, explicitly challenged the modern attraction to and investment in a rapidly passing present. And Bergson’s hugely influential antireductionist theory of memory challenged the old Cartesian split between mind and body. Only insofar as we are able to delay the automated reaction to external stimuli and remember our past, Bergson argues, do we possess consciousness. For Bergson, the “movement of memory” requires a temporal operation that involves “pure memory, memory-image, and perception, of which no one, in fact, occurs apart from the others.”⁶⁷

65. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, xii.

66. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 60.

67. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1911), 169. He writes: “Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui genesis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past—a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes into the actual; and as its outlines become more distinct and its surface takes on color, it tends to imitate perception. But it remains attached to the past by its deepest roots, and if, when once realized, it did not retain something of its original virtuality, if, being a present state, it were not also something which stands out distinct from the present, we should never know it for a memory” (170).

These examples illustrate that modern “politics of time” are—in the words of Peter Osborne—defined by “a competition or struggle between these different forms of temporalization.”⁶⁸ Around 1900 the ideal of a future that could be attained through a rational process of modernization had already been frustrated by the experience of a contradictory and often unpredictable social dynamic that, as Lucien Hölscher has shown, escaped the control mechanisms of continual technological innovation and enhanced administrative planning. And so the very social dynamic that had been unleashed by the modernization of society created a massive clash between people’s experience of history and their expectations.⁶⁹

The ideological fixation on the future was further eroded by the peculiarly modern fascination with the past as an object of inquiry. Modernity’s “self-negating temporal dialectic”⁷⁰ and the modern apprehension of history thus brought forth a variety of dynamic pasts that were filtered through the lens of a fast-paced present. Stephen Kern argues that the modern heightened sense of the value of the past centered around four key issues: “the age of the earth, the impact of the past on the present, the values of that impact, and the most effective way to recapture a past that has been forgotten.”⁷¹ Bergson, Freud, and Benjamin demonstrated the relevance of the human past for the present; scientific debates about the age of the earth then added a hitherto unimaginable timescale of millions of years to the modern imagination. “While geologists and biologists tried to work out patterns of development through those vast stretches of time,” comments Kern, “the history of man came to appear increasingly as a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity.”⁷²

68. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, 116.

69. Lucian Hölscher, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 131.

70. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, xii.

71. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 37.

72. Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 38.

From the perspective of evolutionary or geological timescales, modernity was less than a tiny dot in natural history.⁷³

Time-Space Compression

The modern fascination with vastly different times and places manifested itself in the discovery of primitivism in fine art, the cubist break with linear perspective, and the embrace of an aesthetics of simultaneity, the quest in modernist literature for both the shortest moment as well as extended memory, the philosophical inquiry into both duration and the fragmented moment or the psychoanalytical investigation of the dynamic interrelationship of past and present in the subject's formation. All of these movements foreground asynchronous timescapes that infiltrate the modern narrative about speed as progress. Only if one ignores the modern enthrallment with a multiplicity of temporalities, can one claim that speed is the sole pleasure invented by modernity or that the modern subject—which in this narrative tends to be gendered as male—continually sheds his past. This misconception of a modernity that is fundamentally deprived of temporal complexity is the necessary building bloc in a disaster narrative that understands the digital era only in terms of a flat, homogeneous, and intransitive present moored in a sea of everlasting and timeless simultaneities.

This grim view of life in our posthistorical global era also rests on a misleading dualism of space and time. As Doreen Massey notes, the triumphant narrative of globalization glorifies the “free”

73. Darwin's theory of evolution also undermined the idea of human free will and with it the notion that human beings can determine their future. As Martin Middeke argues, even though Darwin's notion of evolution accentuates the idea of progress through evolutionary development, his large timescale undermines the importance of individual action and planning. Darwin's timescale places the individual “in eine indifferente Zeitreihe, deren Bestandteil der Mensch ist und nichts weiter” (on an indifferent timescale of which the human being is one component and nothing more). Martin Middeke, *Die Kunst der gelebten Zeit: Zur Phänomenologie literarischer Subjektivität im englischen Roman des ausgehenden 19. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), 51.

movement of capital by subsuming space into time. In her view the victory of neoliberal globalization is

a sleight of hand in terms of the conceptualisation of space and time. The proposition turns geography into history, space into time. And this again has social and political effects. It says that Mozambique and Nicaragua are not really different from “us”. We are not to imagine them as having their own trajectories, their own particular histories, and the potential for their own, perhaps, different futures. They are not recognised as coeval others. They are merely at an earlier stage in the one and only narrative it is possible to tell.⁷⁴

The triumph of time over space has been somewhat misleadingly associated with Marxist geographer David Harvey’s work on time-space compression. In his seminal *The Condition of Postmodernity* Harvey recognized “the multiplicity of the objective qualities which space and time can express, and the role of human practices in their construction.”⁷⁵ Adopting a materialist perspective, he then argued that space and time are tied to material practices and processes and hence to social life. Even though space is a seemingly commonsense category in our daily lives and as such part of our tacit knowledge,

conflicts arise not merely out of admittedly diverse subjective appreciations, but because different objective material qualities of time and space are deemed relevant to social life in different situations. Important battles likewise occur in the realms of scientific, social, and aesthetic theory, as well as in practice. How we represent space and time in theory matters, because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world.⁷⁶

Ever since Adam Smith, Marx, and Weber, social theory has tended to privilege time over space because it foregrounds social change and as such processes of technological, social, and political

74. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2010), 5.

75. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), 203.

76. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 205.

modernization. By positing that temporal processes transform pre-existing spatial orders, social theory thus turns space into a secondary category of analysis. Harvey notes that, by contrast, the aesthetic thrust of modernism is to investigate “how different forms of spatialization inhibit or facilitate processes of social change.”⁷⁷ Interlacing his discussion of the dynamics of time in social theory with the representation of time and space in modernism, Harvey then analyzes the radical readjustment of time and space in the wake of 1848 and the economic depression that engulfed “the whole of what was then the capitalist world.”⁷⁸ For Harvey the crisis of 1848 called into question the time-as-progress narrative, “as too many people had been caught up in the maelstrom of hopes and fears, not to appreciate the stimulus that comes with participant action in ‘explosive’ time.”⁷⁹ These events then also gave rise to the “insecurities of a shifting relative space in which events in one place could have immediate and ramifying effects in several other places.”⁸⁰ While European modernism reflected on a profound crisis of representation by exploring the heterogeneity of time and space through experimental forms, imperialism responded to the rapacious need of capitalism for ever-expanding markets through colonial conquests that simultaneously deterritorialized and reterritorialized space according to the requirements of competing colonial administrations.⁸¹ Facilitated by new communication and transport technologies, the modern phase of time-space compression thus serviced capitalist growth.

So how has globalization affected the contemporary experience of time and space? Harvey discusses the transition from modernity to postmodernity as an intensification of time-space compression by electronic means. The post-Fordism era promotes not only flexibility, instantaneity, and innovation as social values but above all continual image production and marketing. Such unprecedented

77. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 207

78. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 260.

79. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 261.

80. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 261.

81. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 264.

mediatization also transforms the experience of space. "The image of places and spaces," comments Harvey, "becomes as open to production and ephemeral use as any other."⁸² Citing Marshall McLuhan's vision of the global village in which electronic technologies "have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned,"⁸³ Harvey argues that the elimination of spatial boundaries in network society does not decrease the significance of space:

Not for the first time in capitalism's history, we find the evidence pointing to the converse thesis. Heightened competition under conditions of crisis has coerced capitalists into paying much closer attention to relative locational advantages, precisely because diminishing spatial barriers give capitalists the power to exploit minute spatial differentiations to good effect. Small differences in what the space contains in the way of labor supplies, resources, infrastructures, and the like become of increased importance.⁸⁴

Under the conditions of a global market, the uniqueness of locality matters ever more. And so the dissolution of spatial barriers in the global era results precisely in the emphatic reaffirmation of place within the space of the global. Local food production, the revival or invention of local traditions, and the focus on local politics are prominent trends that underline "the search for secure moorings in a shifting world."⁸⁵ Harvey sees such investment in place-bound identity as an understandable reaction against globalization, which, however, runs the risk of becoming "a part of the very fragmentation which a mobile capitalism and flexible accumulation can feed upon."⁸⁶ He thus makes the case for a theory of uneven geographical development that takes account of "the different ways in which different social groups have materially embedded their modes of sociality into the web of life, understood as

82. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 293.

83. Marshall McLuhan, quoted in Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 293.

84. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 106.

85. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 302.

86. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 303.

an evolving socio-ecological system.”⁸⁷ The rich metaphor of the “web of life” evokes the idea of inhabited places as sites of diverse social, symbolic, and temporal practice.

Harvey’s notion of the web of life resonates with the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, who describes place as a “field of care” brought about by the “affective bond between people and places.”⁸⁸ Places are not only composed of material objects and defined by power relations but also made up of imprints of past attachments, present perceptions and feelings, and future orientations. Jon May and Nigel Thrift too accentuate the disparate geography of lived temporality: “The picture is less of any simple acceleration in the pace of life or experiences of spatial ‘collapse’ than of a far more complex restructuring in the nature and experience of time and space reaching through the nineteenth and in to the early decades of the twentieth century.”⁸⁹ They argue that for most people the experience of acceleration and time-space compression is more intermittent and less dramatic than is commonly acknowledged:

Thus, the picture that emerges is less that of a singular or uniform social time stretching over a uniform space, than of various (and uneven) networks of time stretching in different and divergent directions across an uneven social field. . . . The result is therefore a radical unevenness in the nature and quality of social time itself, with this spatial variation a constitutive part rather than an added dimension of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of social time or what, for precisely these reasons, we prefer to call “SpaceTime.”⁹⁰

Doreen Massey’s book *For Space* also refutes the “discursive victory of time over space.”⁹¹ For Massey “the really serious question which is raised by speed-up, by the communications revolution,

87. David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006), 77.

88. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 4.

89. Jon May and Nigel Thrift, eds., *TimeSpace: Geographies of Temporality* (London: Routledge, 2001), 10.

90. May and Thrift, *TimeSpace*, 5.

91. Massey, *For Space*, 71.

and by cyberspace is not whether space will be annihilated but what kinds of multiplicities (patternings of uniqueness) and relations will be co-constructed with these new kinds of spatial configurations.”⁹² Space is “always under construction”—it is “a simultaneity of stories so far.”⁹³ Her performative notion of multiple, contested, and open spaces not only rewrites the narrative of the information age from the perspective of the local production of the global, but it roundly rejects all deterministic interpretations of human subjectivity and agency. Like Harvey, May, Thrift, and Massey, this book too argues that subjectivity in the twenty-first century is capable of negotiating varied temporalities in multiple spaces by way of differentiated modes or tactics of social relatedness. While cyberspace and the culture of immediacy do indeed constitute genuinely new arenas of social interaction, these do not necessarily signal the end of social relations, the flattening of time, the erosion of presence, or the end of memory.

Network Time

That the World Wide Web and cyberspace have created a new, totally unparalleled reality of connectivity is a commonplace observation. Digital technologies have moved the broadcast age into the postbroadcast era, in which production and reception are fundamentally intertwined. Social media and new forms of media-tized interaction have given birth to new forms of agency and participation in the public domain.⁹⁴ But, as José van Dijck argues, whether this new culture of connectivity really delivers more citizenship is doubtful in the light of the rapid commodification of a “platformed sociality” that manipulates and quantifies social

92. Massey, *For Space*, 91.

93. Massey, *For Space*, 9.

94. See Andrew Hoskins, “Anachronisms of Media, Anachronisms of Memory: From Collective Memory to a New Memory Culture,” in *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, ed. Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 278–88.

notions, such as popularity, friendship, participation, and citizenship.⁹⁵ For example, on Facebook, the idea of friendship no longer involves social investment over a period of time but has been turned into a quantifiable commodity. Users of these platforms are often unaware that they

produce a precious resource: connectivity. Even though the term “connectivity” originated in technology, where it denotes computer transmissions, in the context of social media it quickly assumed the connotation of users accumulating *social* capital, while in fact this term increasingly referred to owners amassing *economic* capital.⁹⁶

The coding techniques behind these platforms are neither neutral nor innocent: they alter the very nature of our social experience in that they demand certain activities, such as “sharing” or “following.”⁹⁷ As van Dijck further notes, this culture of connectivity services neoliberal principles: “Connectivity,” writes van Dijck, “derives from a continuous pressure—both from peers and from technologies—to expand through competition and gain power through strategic alliances.”⁹⁸

And yet, in spite of the radical transformation of the social sphere in networked society, we need to be mindful of the social embeddedness of the experience of time. Our biological body clocks, the natural world with its rhythms of seasons, the passage of day and night, the cycle of birth and death, continue to shape our experience of time even though these spheres have been infiltrated by digital technologies.⁹⁹ In social life, notes Barbara Adam, time is clustered around “timescapes,” that is context-dependent temporal practices that are tacitly understood. And so in our daily

95. Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 5 and 13.

96. Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 16.

97. Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 20.

98. Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 21.

99. Apparently, many people interrupt their sleep to check their smartphones during the night. This new practice is symbolic of the penetration of all aspects of life by digital technologies. See Crary, *24/7*. Nevertheless, birth, aging, and death remain ontological facts.

lives we traverse a multitude of places that come with a wide range of habitual modes of temporal behavior and remind us “that time is inseparable from space, and . . . that context matters.”¹⁰⁰ If we recognize that we remain socially embedded in a temporal ecology that involves everyday practices, the conventional clock, biological needs alongside analogue and digital technologies, then we can ask to what extent and how the “information ecology” transforms the very notion of context.¹⁰¹ For Robert Hassan this new information ecology forms a living amorphous system that is as real as the built environment:

Contexts may combine and separate in the space of nanoseconds—or last for hours or days or weeks. Contexts traverse geographic space, dissolving it into the virtuality that is the network society. . . . Importantly, this digital environment or ecology is as real as the built environment that comprises the cities and towns and as actual as the natural ecology that provides the building blocks (the contexts) for life on earth.¹⁰²

The intensification of the human-machine interconnectivity is often perceived in terms of the arrival of so-called real time and the cancellation of temporal depth, duration, and latency. But the transfer of real time, a technical term that was originally designed to capture the speed of computing operating systems, to the social sphere is misleading, as it ignores the inherent asynchronicity between the internet and human beings. Network time is defined by “connected asynchronicity,” which displaces not so much the ontological condition of our temporal embeddedness but rather the linearity of clock time. “What we experience, albeit in very nascent form,” comments Hassan,

is the recapture of the forms of temporality that were themselves displaced by the clock. What digital networks make possible is the conscious creation of temporal contexts and the freeing of embedded times

100. Barbara Adam, *Time* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 143.

101. Robert Hassan, “Network Time,” in *24/7: Time and Temporality in Network Society*, ed. Robert Hassan and E. Purser (Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books, 2007), 47.

102. Hassan, “Network Time,” 48.

in humans, in nature, and in society that form the timescapes that intersect our lives but that we have been unable to fully experience, appreciate, or understand because of the deadening implacability of the clock.¹⁰³

Scott McQuire discusses “the smart mob” as a potentially “self-organising and self-directed urban multitude” as exemplified in the Arab Spring and the social unrest of disaffected youth in London in 2011.¹⁰⁴ Emily Keightley too argues that both events overturned “comfortable notions of process and ordered duration.”¹⁰⁵ The evidence is overwhelming that digital technologies transform the public sphere by creating a society that is always live. For Andrew Hoskins the postbroadcast era has generated a new memory ecology that is characterized by the fluidization of digitized content, new modes of participation in semipublic memory, and the intermedial and transmedial dynamics of old and new media.¹⁰⁶ He introduced the term “connective turn” to capture the shifting dynamic of memory in the digital era.¹⁰⁷ The distinction between production and reception and as such the status of established broadcast media and their power to create and control media events have been eroded. Memory in the digital era is therefore much more diffuse and perhaps harder to pin down. Hoskins concludes that this new memory ecology requires new analytical tools to capture the dynamic of connectivity.

What all this means, then, is that in network society social actors continue to inhabit multiple timescapes, which, rather than immersing them passively in a world of timeless simultaneity, give rise to radical asynchronicities that can be used to very different effect. As long as human beings inhabit multilayered temporal environments that come with different patterns, rhythms, and

103. Hassan, “Network Time,” 51.

104. McQuire, “City Times,” 132.

105. Emily Keightley, ed., “Introduction,” in Keightley, *Time, Media, and Modernity*, 2.

106. Hoskins, “Anachronism of Media, Anachronisms of Memory,” 279.

107. Hoskins, “Anachronism of Media, Anachronisms of Memory,” 287.

durations, the machine/human interaction will remain inherently asynchronous. As Hassan puts it,

To be able to achieve true real-time response would mean the ultimate surrender of human agency to digital technology, where latencies have been driven out and where lags no longer occur. This would constitute the militarist dream of absolute power through absolute speed (Paul Virilio 1986) and the capitalist Nirvana where production and circulation function “at the speed of thought” (Gates 1995). Both dreams are destined, however, to be unrealizable because imperfect humans constantly get in the way of perfect systems.¹⁰⁸

According to Hassan it is far too simplistic to assume that we are blindly headed toward Virilio’s dystopian vision of a “digital serfdom” that ushers in a dictatorship of speed. He sees us rather enfolded in a rhizomatic temporality that amounts to “a political and creative reestablishment of social control over time, space and speed.”¹⁰⁹

As a central feature of network society, “connected asynchronicity” has produced a new temporal ecology that is far from flat.¹¹⁰ Emily Keightley therefore suggests that “a re-evaluation of mediated time” is required “that attends to the interactions between the times of technologies, texts and social contexts in order to move beyond a one-dimensional characterisation in which speed and immediacy monopolise accounts of how time is encountered and lived.”¹¹¹ Lived time then is an essential notion that holds together multiple timescapes, including clock time, network time, biological time, and social time, which intersect in our daily lives in complex ways.

Precarious Times

Despite vastly differing explanations, it is evident from the discussion so far that the various approaches to the perceived crisis of temporality in the twenty-first century share a diagnostic rhetoric.

108. Hassan, “Network Time,” 51.

109. Hassan, “Network Time,” 58.

110. Hassan, “Network Time,” 51.

111. Keightley, “Introduction,” 4.

Digital serfdom, dictatorship of speed, stagnation at top speed, point time, atomization of time, timeless time, the broad and never-ending present, the cult of immediacy—these metaphors not only capture the profound impact of digital technologies on our daily lives but also stage a deep crisis of historical time. In the era of globalization world history appears to have become more volatile, fractured, and unpredictable than during the Cold War. The world after 1989–90 can no longer be interpreted in terms of the postwar order, which, with hindsight, some commentators see as a comparatively stable and secure historical epoch. As Tony Judd observes,

With the passing of the old order many longstanding assumptions would be called into question. What had once seemed permanent and somehow inevitable would take on a more transient air. The Cold-War confrontation; the schism separating East from West; the contest between “Communism” and “capitalism”; the separate and non-communicating stories of prosperous western Europe and the Soviet bloc satellites to its East: all these could no longer be understood as the products of ideological necessity or the iron logic of politics. They were the accidental outcomes of history—and history was thrusting them aside.¹¹²

While the political revolution of 1989 turned the period from 1945 to 1989 into a kind of prolonged world-historical interim or a “postwar parenthesis,”¹¹³ the date was retrospectively also used to either corroborate or challenge the chronological historical imagination. The fall of the Berlin Wall signaled—in the words of Peter Fritzsche—the “basically impermanent, even unstable nature of all social political constructions; on the other, however, it gave rise to the ‘illusion of inevitability.’”¹¹⁴

The instantaneous recognition that 1989 marked the end of the established certainties of the postwar period not only prompted the “retrospective illusion of . . . inevitability”¹¹⁵ but it also gave

112. Tony Judd, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Random House, 2007), 1–2.

113. Judd, *Postwar*, 2.

114. Fritzsche, “1989 and the Chronological Imagination,” 18.

115. Fritzsche, “1989 and The Chronological Imagination,” 18.

rise to considerable anxiety about the contingent nature of history. In the last analysis, the idea of historical inevitability builds on precisely the type of “chronological imagination” that, by way of its dating systems, advances the grand narrative of history, which is all too often complicit with the historical victors, in this case the Western model of liberal democracy and capitalism. Western “trajectorism,” comments Arjun Appadurai, “always assumes that there is a cumulative journey from here to there, or more exactly from now to then, in human affairs, as natural as a river and as all-encompassing as the sky. Trajectorism is the idea that time’s arrow inevitably has a telos, and in that telos are to be found all the significant patterns of change, and history.”¹¹⁶ Trajectorism is a way of thinking that habitually eliminates the tentative, fractured, and precarious experience of history that was arguably at the very heart of the unpredictable events of 1989. To be sure, the so-called Monday demonstrators in Leipzig envisioned a radically emancipated future that was meant to leave behind a drab present. The East German protesters articulated the gap between their experience of a stagnating reality and their expectation of a democratic future, thereby attempting to steer history toward a better future. And yet, even though, in the end, the *ancien régime* of the GDR was swept away, in the autumn of 1989 the collapse of socialism had been neither predictable nor intended. From the perspective of the participants, 1989 stands rather for a precarious moment in which hope was interlaced with fear. The pictures that went round the world of jubilant East and West Germans dancing on the Berlin Wall became iconic because they seemed to capture the power of the human spirit in the face of adversity. And yet, the iconicity of these images merely disguises the contingency of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was contingent because it was the outcome of both free will (as enacted by the GDR demonstrators) and historical chance (as underlined by Günter Schabowski’s improvised press conference on 9 November 1989).

116. Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London: Verso, 2013), 223.

However, since 1989 this liberating sense of nondetermination seems to have been overtaken by a profound experience of precariousness that also marks the end of the Western politics of time. Globalization, the advance of casino capitalism, the move to the shareholder and so-called knowledge society in Western democracies, and the erosion of the postwar social security systems in both East and West have fueled the experience of “a runaway world.”¹¹⁷ As Richard Sennett has shown, in the first half of the twentieth century social capitalism was so successful not least because it produced “long-term, and incremental and above all predictable time,” which was administered by institutions and a bureaucracy that organized the citizens’ lives from cradle to grave.¹¹⁸ “Rationalized time,” comments Sennett, “enabled people to think about their lives as narratives—narratives not so much of what will necessarily happen as of how things should happen.”¹¹⁹ The narrative expectation of what ought to happen requires precisely the type of temporal security that has been devalued in the culture of immediacy and in neoliberal society. According to Sennett, the institutional architecture that underpinned the social capitalism of old has been eroded by three factors: the casualization of labor; the layering of institutional relationships by flexible and fluid structures; and the nonlinear sequencing of tasks, which turns colleagues into competitors as they race against each other in the production of the best result in the quickest time possible.

For Guy Standing, precarization is the child of the neoliberal economy that disembedded the economy from society in order to create global markets. The commodification of all aspects of life undermined the principle of social solidarity that had been at the very core of the Western postwar welfare state. The security of long-term employment was given up in favor of functional flexibility that enabled international corporations to quickly shift or shed

117. Giddens, *Runaway World*.

118. Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 23.

119. Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, 23.

their workforce.¹²⁰ This resulted in the exponential growth of job insecurity alongside the contractualization of life and the erosion of collective bargaining power in the hands of the trade unions. According to Standing these conditions have produced the precariat as a “class in the making.”¹²¹ Unlike the proletariat, whose subordination to the employer was rewarded with labor, the precariat no longer entertains enduring social contracts. “To be precariatized,” writes Standing, “is to be subject to pressures and experiences that lead to a precariat existence, of living in the present, without a secure identity or sense of development achieved through work and lifestyle.”¹²² Social and economic precariousness thus implies an unpredictable future that escapes the practices of self-governance that, ever since the 1800s, have produced the temporally disciplined but sovereign bourgeois subject. In the eighteenth century the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie began to develop a strong sense of temporal sovereignty: while the sphere of work was a sphere of economic expansion and growing influence, the private sphere designated a zone of retreat where meaningful cultural pursuits (such as reading or playing music) cultivated the self. The interdependence of both spheres meant that the bourgeois idea of temporal sovereignty remained tied to the advancement of the self through hard work and education through leisure. Until now *Bildung* (education) and hard work have been the essential contributors to the successful acquisition of social capital. Postwar West Germany was a typical meritocratic society in which the so-called elevator effect (“Fahrstuhleffekt,” Ulrich Beck) rewarded social actors for their biographical effort with upward social mobility. Members of postwar society could accrue social capital through investment in their career rather than having to (merely) rely on their inherited family background. In recent decades the “biographical pact” between the

120. Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 62.

121. Standing, *The Precariat*, 11. See also Mona Motakef, *Prekarisierung* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015).

122. Standing, *The Precariat*, 28.

state and its citizens has been weakened by an ideology of individualism, innovation, and flexibility. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and German unification, it was middle-aged East German workers who were hit hard by the sudden experience of precariousness: the notion of a cumulative *Lebensleistung* in terms of a meaningful contribution to the common social good was swept from under their feet along with their professional self-esteem. According to Heinz Bude, the social experience of redundancy often leads to the shocking realization that one can no longer formulate a meaningful biographical project.¹²³

British filmmaker Ken Loach's film *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) is very relevant in this context: it relates the story of a carpenter in Newcastle who, after a major heart attack, can no longer work. As he is trying to sign on for benefits, he meets and befriends Katie, a single mother from London who has been relocated with her two kids to the northeast because housing for the unemployed is too expensive in London. Faced with a social benefits system in the age of austerity, Dan finds the Kafkaesque bureaucracy humiliating and inhumane: a nonmedical assessor deems him fit to work even though his medical consultant has declared him as far too unwell. As Dan has never been on the web, he finds the online application system—which keeps timing out before he can complete his application for the job seekers' allowance—an ordeal. When he takes issue with the assessor's medical competence, he is told that the Decision-Maker, a figure as powerful and beyond human reach as the judges in Kafka's *The Trial*, will decide his case. As Peter Bradshaw comments, Loach's film exposes a benefits system that "has been repurposed as the 21st century workhouse in our age of austerity: made deliberately grim, to deter or design out all but the most deserving poor."¹²⁴

123. "‘Die Überflüssigen’: Ein Gespräch zwischen Dirk Baecker, Heinz Bude, Axel Honneth, und Helmut Wiesentahl," in *Exklusion: Die Debatte über die ‘Überflüssigen’*, ed. Heinz Bude and Andreas Willis (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), 37.

124. Peter Bradshaw, "Ken Loach's Quiet Rage against Injustice." *The Guardian*, 20 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/oct/20/i-daniel-blake-review-ken-loach-film-benefits-system> (accessed 7 November 2016).

The post-2008 recession and the ensuing fiscal austerity across Europe created youth unemployment on a massive scale, particularly in Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy, and in Portugal, where young people who had gone through the university system were either unemployed or in low-paid precarious jobs or forced to emigrate.¹²⁵ In recent years, the emergence of the so-called gig economy has produced new pernicious forms of precarious employment: because workers are classed as independent contractors rather than employees, they lose protection against unfair dismissal, they have no right to redundancy payments and no right to paid holidays or sickness pay. This shift toward freelance or short-term contracts thus exacerbates the sense of existential insecurity.

The growth of the global precariat is further fueled by ongoing warfare and the destabilization of the Middle East and North Africa, which has resulted in the death and displacement of millions of people.¹²⁶ Refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants are often blamed for driving down wages, burdening the public health and education systems, and exploiting social benefits. The demonization of migrants was particularly toxic in the Brexit debate in the UK in 2016 in which politicians on the far right fanned xenophobic resentment by portraying foreign workers as social security scroungers or cheap laborers responsible for the tribulations of the local workforce.¹²⁷ But political parties on the far right have made electoral gains in a wide range of European countries. Included

125. By 2010 youth unemployment in Spain was over 40 percent, in Ireland 28 percent, and in Greece 25 percent. Standing, *The Precariat*, 132.

126. According to UNHCR, in 2015 an unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world were forced from home. Among them were nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom were under the age of eighteen. A further 10 million people were stateless, as they had been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and freedom of movement. <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> (accessed 14 October 2016).

127. A particularly obnoxious example was UKIP's anti-immigration poster, which showed a seemingly endless queue of migrants walking in a long line. The photograph used was of migrants crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border in 2015, with the only prominent white person in the photograph obscured by a box of text. See <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants> (accessed 14 October 2016).

among them are the Front National in France (even though the party was defeated in the French elections of 2017); UKIP (UK Independence Party) in Britain, which drove the Brexit agenda; the right-wing Law and Justice Party in Poland; and Victor Orbán's governing Fidesz party in Hungary. Other European parties on the far right have made great strides, including the Party for Freedom in Holland, the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany (AdF), the Five Star Movement in Italy, and the Freedom Party in Austria—they all reject globalization in favor of a populist identitarian politics that disallows the very notion of otherness.¹²⁸ Precariousness undermines solidarity by fueling fear. The Brexit referendum in June 2016, the US election in November of the same year, the huge gains of the AdF in the German elections in 2017 and of the Five Star Movement in the Italian elections of 2018 exemplify the backlash of those who felt abandoned by all established political parties. Right-wing populism successfully channeled the social experience of disenfranchisement into backward-looking nationalistic agendas. "Nation," comments Francis Fukuyama, "almost always trumps class because it is able to tap into a powerful source of identity, the desire to connect with an organic cultural community. This longing for identity is now emerging in the form of the American alt-right, a formerly ostracized collection of groups espousing white nationalism in one form or another."¹²⁹ Paradoxically, this angry right-wing nationalism is now an international phenomenon that cleverly exploits the opportunities of social media and information sharing across national boundaries.

Looking beyond Europe, life at the beginning of the twenty-first century is for the majority of the world population an altogether precarious affair. Growing inequality pushes more and more people globally into abject poverty. Jason Hickel quotes reliable figures that demonstrate that today a staggering "4.3 billion people—more

128. See "How Far Is Europe Swinging to the Right?," *New York Times*, 5 July 2016. See http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/22/world/europe/europe-right-wing-austria-hungary.html?_r=0 (accessed 14 October 2016).

129. Francis Fukuyama, "US against the World?," *Financial Times Weekend*, 12/13 November 2016, Life & Arts, 1.

than 60% of the world's population—live in debilitating poverty, struggling to survive on less than the equivalent of \$5 per day. . . . Meanwhile, the wealth of the very richest is piling up on levels unprecedented in human history.”¹³⁰ In a report published on the occasion of the Davos World Economic Forum in 2017, Oxfam produced the following shocking comparisons:

Since 2015, the richest 1% has owned more wealth than the rest of the planet. Eight men now own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world. Over the next 20 years, 500 people will hand over \$2.1 trillion to their heirs—a sum larger than the GDP of India, a country of 1.3 billion people. The incomes of the poorest 10% of people increased by less than \$3 a year between 1988 and 2011, while the incomes of the richest 1% increased 182 times as much. A FTSE-100 CEO earns as much in a year as 10,000 people working in garment factories in Bangladesh.¹³¹

However, precariousness is not only a socioeconomic category but also a condition that is shared by all life on the planet in the so-called Anthropocene. Precariousness in this literally universal sense affects the fundamental vulnerability of the very category of life, which encompasses plants, maritime life, animals, and humans. Environmental degradation through climate change causes habitat loss and threatens biodiversity and the survival of many species. As a *conditio humana*, precariousness makes us dependent on and involved in the care of others. Precariousness can therefore engender either ethical relations or violence. In her book *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler shows that precariousness is subject to a politics of representation that can dehumanize the Other through triumphalist or degrading images as evident in the media coverage of the Iraq War.¹³² Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas's notion of the

130. Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: William Heinemann, 2017), 2.

131. Oxfam, “An Economy for the 99%,” *Oxfam Briefing Paper*, January 2017, <https://www.oxfam.org/sites/.oxfam/.bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf>. (accessed 6 December 2017).

132. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

human face, she explores the ethics of recognizing the Other's life as precarious. For Butler, then, a broader problem consists in the normative schemes of intelligibility, which "establish what will and will not be human, what will be a livable life, what will be a grievable death."¹³³ Even though Butler does not explicitly address the problem of time, it is apparent that a proper engagement with the Other often requires time, patience, and human resources—that is, a chrono-politics of care.

As already mentioned in the introduction, precariousness gains an aesthetic dimension in the literary, artistic, and filmic narratives that scrutinize and foster diverse modes of asynchronous or achronic time that disrupt or displace the dominant narrative about historical change. In many of the works featured here, 1989 is an uncertain caesura that does not so much signify an enabling historical turning point but rather a historical event that cannot be absorbed into one's biography. In spite of the obvious diversity of media, styles, and themes, the works under discussion in chapters 3 and 4 share one striking feature: the built-in tension between a diagnostic perspective on socio-temporal precariousness in contemporary Germany, on the one hand, and the aesthetic encoding of nonchronological time, on the other. It is precisely this tension between the two levels that opens an alternative space that—like Castells's space of flows—breaks with the linearity of time. However, rather than engendering Castells's "timeless time," the space of flows intersects the temporal anxieties of the digital era with duration. We will see that precariousness in these texts is thus not just a thematic concern and a social condition but a mode of attention that engages the reader in a continually fluctuating move between temporal anxiety, social criticism, and aesthetic attention. While the articulation of anxiety and social criticism lends my corpus a compelling diagnostic tenor, these works simultaneously probe the potential of alternative temporalities to foster or create aesthetic *Eigenzeit*, the self's own time.

133. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 146.

Before illuminating artistic and literary responses to the temporal anxieties of our era, chapter 2 returns to the *fin de siècle* to explore the temporal ambivalence inherent in modernism, especially in the semantic field of acceleration, lateness, and slowness. The analysis of these temporal tropes in texts by Nietzsche, Simmel, Kafka, Thomas Mann, Robert Walser, and Freud reveals a multifaceted experience of modernity, which resists the capitalist doctrine that time is money. By exploring uneconomic temporal behavior, modernist texts often challenge the homogenization of time and the commodification of social experience. Against this backdrop, chapter 3 then illuminates the fragile recuperation of *Eigenzeit* in photography and film.