

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Modernism and Speed Politics

Temporality and the Modern Imagination

Cinema, the most innovative medium of the early twentieth century, created a captivating visual imaginary for the energizing yet frightening experience of modern speed politics. Two of the most iconic films of the Weimar period, Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Symphony of the Big City) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, explored the city as a site of a contradictory modernity: on the one hand, these films celebrate modern technologies, the pleasure of speed, and the visual stimuli unleashed by a world that is constantly in motion; on the other, however, they bring into view the uncontrollable effects of a runaway world in which machines begin to transform human behavior. Released in 1927, both films created a striking visual aesthetic of urban modernity that exploited the technical opportunities of film to new effect.

Set in 2026 in a futuristic and dystopian city that was modeled on Lang's own impressions of New York, *Metropolis* follows the story of Freder, son of the wealthy industrialist Fredersen, who is the Master of the Metropolis, and of Maria, who preaches social peace to the workers in the catacombs underneath the city. Famed for its elaborate set design and special effects, the film's aesthetic incorporates visual elements ranging from modernism and Art Deco to Gothic and biblical imagery. As Andreas Huyssen notes, even though the film was praised for its visual qualities, it was in equal measure condemned for its representation of technology and, above all, the sentimental handling of class conflict as exemplified in the reconciliation of capitalism and labor at the end. For Huyssen, however, this critique is too one-sided, as it ignores the dual representation of technology in the film: while an expressionist strand "emphasizes technology's oppressive and destructive potential and is clearly rooted in the experiences and irrepressible memories of the mechanized battlefields of World War I," a second style evokes the urban landscapes of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and with it a rational view of technology.¹ For Huyssen it is no coincidence that this conflict about technology involves a female robot: the machine-vamp, argues Huyssen, recasts "the fears and perceptual anxieties emanating from ever more powerful machines . . . in terms of the male fear of female sexuality, reflecting, in the Freudian account, the male's castration anxiety."² Even though the film ends with a serene vision of technological progress, it enacts an agonistic struggle that is resolved only by way of the ritualistic exorcism of the machine-woman. And so the burning of the female robot at the stake is a premodern witch hunt launched against the dual threat of an uncontrolled female sexuality and a threatening technology. "It

1. Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *New German Critique* 24/25 (1981/82): 223. Huyssen shows that the conflict between these opposing views of technology is acted out by the machine-vamp, which "embodies the unity of an active and destructive female sexuality and the destructive potential of technology" (Huyssen, 233).

2. Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine," 226.

is,” comments Huyssen, “as if the destructive potential of modern technology, which the expressionists rightfully feared, had to be displaced and projected onto the machine-woman so that it could be metaphorically purged.”³

Similar ambivalent perceptions of modernity characterize Ruttmann’s quasi-documentary *Berlin: Sinfonie der Großstadt*: tracking a day in the life of modern Berlin from dawn to dusk, Ruttmann creates a montage that offers a totalizing view of the modern city by way of fast-paced intercutting, alternating low and high angles, and the combination of documentation with abstraction. Most critics comment on the famous opening of Ruttmann’s film, which sets up a striking visual contrast between slow nature and fast-moving technology. Within the first minute the film moves from the timeless image of rippling water to abstract geometrical shapes before the steam engine shoots into the frame from the left, immediately conjuring up the unstoppable speed of modernity. Shots of the railway tracks and overhead lines are intercut with frames through the train window: as Tony Kaes has argued, Ruttmann’s opening thus dramatizes the experience of millions of people who, before and after the turn of the twentieth century, left the countryside to seek work in the big city. Visualizing “the arrival of the migrant to the city,” comments Kaes, “the scene’s progression from water and organic nature to the fiery speed of the steam engine suggests both birth and separation and the undeniable experience of a primary loss.”⁴ And so, from the perspective of the forward-moving train,

3. Huyssen, “The Vamp and the Machine,” 236. In contrast, R. L. Rutsky argues that rather than privileging the *Neue Sachlichkeit* view of technology over an expressionist view, the film envisages precisely the type of mediation that “would restore coherence to an alienated, technologized world split by these dystopian alternatives.” In so doing the film works toward a model of organicism that was propagated by Nazism. However, both opposing interpretations emphasize the anxiety about the crippling effects of technology. See R. L. Rutsky, “The Mediation of Technology and Gender: Metropolis, Nazism, Modernism,” *New German Critique* 60 (1993): 1.

4. Anton Kaes, “Leaving Home: Film, Migration, and the Urban Experience,” *New German Critique* 74 (1998): 186.

the countryside is already marked as a premodern space that is rapidly left behind.⁵

But the train journey by no means constitutes an unambiguous celebration of the accelerating pace of modernity: while the central motif of the train suggests that modernity is on track, the motif of the spinning wheel or spiral that is employed throughout the film is much more ambivalent. On the one hand, the image represents modernity functioning as a gigantic machine—there are numerous images of cogs and wheels; on the other, modernity increasingly appears as a dizzying spiral, signaling lack of control, a sense of vertigo, and the crisis of perception. In Ruttmann's film the visual pleasure of the urban spectacle is interlaced with anxiety that the experience of an unbounded modernity can no longer be processed by the individual, who is bombarded by quickly changing images and sensations. Intercut shots of illuminated advertising, of shop window displays, and sequences of leisurely street life foreground a new urban aesthetic while also exposing the precariousness of the modern subject, who can no longer relate to a stable field of vision. Scenes of congested traffic with cars, cyclists, trams, buses, and horse-drawn coaches crisscrossing each other bring to the fore different speeds and different directions that disrupt the notion of a linear pathway to modernity. Pedestrians are shown stepping into the street and dashing to the other side, always on guard against the unforeseen. The street is a site of continual movement where the lack of urban attention can cause accidents or death. Ruttmann's film thus documents the modern

5. Derek Hillard rightly observes that the view from the train window submits the countryside to technology: "The train window marks the countryside as having already been denatured by the camera's technological gaze." Derek Hillard, "Walter Ruttmann's Janus-Faced View of Modernity: The Ambivalence of Description in *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*," *Monatshefte* 96/1 (2004): 82. See also Sabine Hake, "Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of the Big City*," in *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, ed. Stephen Brockmann and Thomas W. Kniesche (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1994), 127–37. Analyzing the film's "fetishization of spectacle and specularity," Hake argues that Ruttmann's goal was "visual pleasure, not critical analysis" (128).

city as a pulsating site of fast-paced visual stimuli that produce pleasure and anxiety alongside new modes of urban attention and distraction. In so doing the film contributes to a far-reaching debate on modern subjectivity, which was faced with the threats and thrills of modern speed.

Weimar cinema is the culmination of high modernist engagement with a new politics of speed. From the 1870s, psychologists, philosophers, writers, and artists addressed the urgent question as to whether and how the modern subject would cope with the rate of change and the experience of social and technological acceleration.⁶ Attention, distraction, lateness, and slowness emerged as central tropes in a far-ranging discourse that foregrounded the precariousness of modern subjectivity, while also exploring modern reactions and coping mechanisms. Attention became a vital cultural technique that could ward off the danger of too much distraction and ultimately of psychic disintegration. It played a disciplinary function that managed the perpetual production of the new as a striking hallmark of modernity. Distraction as the flip side of attention indicated a noneconomic temporality brought about by the onslaught of overwhelming external stimuli. The third term in the debate is the idea of lateness, which is an epiphenomenon of the modern drive toward the total synchronization of time and the superimposition of a universal time grid. Lateness designates the perceived failure to fulfill a social or economic obligation to arrive on time; it is thus produced by slowness, the fourth term, which in turn can be defined as the self's perceived inability or unwillingness to keep up with the social, economic, and cultural speed of the modern age. As two complementary modes of desynchronization the outcome-oriented notion of lateness and the procedural term slowness emerge in the cultural discourse around 1900 as symptomatic tropes giving expression to various fears about the *mal de siècle*. As the flip side of acceleration, lateness and slowness

6. See Siegfried Kracauer, "Der Kult der Zerstreuung: Über die Berliner Lichtspielhäuser" (1926), in *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 2014), 311–17.

disrupt the relentless logic of the modernizing project by critiquing the harnessing of attention, which is, as I argue below, a hallmark of modernity's high-speed society.

This chapter touches on diverse articulations of tempo from 1870 to the late 1930s that interrogate modernity and its prioritization of mobility and speed: first, the moral interpretation of lateness as both stigma and a mode of resistance to modernity's valorization of the new (Nietzsche and Mann); second, the psychic view of lateness as a modern condition (Simmel), and, third, as symptom of modern man's inflated sense of autonomy (Kafka). I will then discuss the poetological view of speed, attention, and slowness in the short prose of the Swiss avant-garde writer Robert Walser, whose quirky writings often articulate resistance to and enjoyment of modern speed. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the contribution of psychoanalysis to the modern discourse on time: I will show that Freud turns lateness into a generative principle of cultural change.

Two Visions of Late Culture: Friedrich Nietzsche and Thomas Mann

Anyone writing on lateness cannot overlook the second of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (*Untimely Meditations*): his essay *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (*On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*), published in 1873, two years after German unification.⁷ In characteristic Nietzschean fashion the notion of untimeliness carries two opposing meanings here: in the first instance, it is a mode of critical inquiry that, as the preface explains, runs "gegen die Zeit" in order "auf die Zeit und und hoffentlich zugunsten einer kommenden

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999); cited as VNN in the text. All English quotations are taken from Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); cited as UaD in the text.

Zeit zu wirken" (VNN, 5; "counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come"; UaD, 60). As a "Zögling älterer Zeiten, zumal der griechischen" (VNN, 5; "pupil of earlier times, especially the Hellenic"; UaD, 60), Nietzsche claims to have accumulated experiences that make it possible for him to interrogate the bankrupt spirit of his own epoch. Such strategic desynchronization appears as a diagnostic tool for the ensuing two-pronged attack on two forms of misguided untimeliness: historicism and the Hegelian conception of a teleological history. Nietzsche argues that, although diametrically opposed to one another, both have worked in tandem to produce a sick culture defined by lateness and an impoverished imagination. For Nietzsche, nineteenth-century historicism is not an important scientific achievement of the positivist age, but rather a form of cultural degeneration that, through the promotion of an antiquarian mind-set, has stifled and mummified life by way of an uncritical appreciation of all things past. The Rankean historian in particular appears in Nietzsche's essay in the guise of the undiscerning collector who is driven by "einer blinden Sammelwut, eines rastlosen Zusammenscharrens alles einmal Dagewesenen . . . ; oftmals sinkt er so tief, daß er zuletzt mit jeder Kost zufrieden ist und mit Lust selbst den Staub bibliographischer Quisquilien frißt" (VNN, 31; "a restless raking together of everything that has ever existed. . . . Often he sinks so low that in the end he is content to gobble down any food whatever, even the dust of bibliographical minutiae"; UaD, 75).

While the antiquarian historian is thus ridiculed in the figure of the dust-sweeper without judgment, Hegelian philosophy of history fares no better. For Nietzsche Hegelian world history has done nothing but mythologize history. Hegelianism mistakes the limited horizon of the present for all history so that "für Hegel der Höhepunkt und der Endpunkt des Weltprozesses in seiner eignen Berliner Existenz zusammenfielen (VNN, 81; "for Hegel the climax and terminus of the world-process coincided with his own existence in Berlin"; UaD, 104). The historicist and teleological views of history are nothing but symptoms of a wider cultural malaise that Nietzsche captures under the heading of "Spätzeit," the late

epoch dominated by the epigone. According to Nietzsche's scathing diagnosis, his own era had thus lost its "plastic power" and the ability to grow. Such plastic power would entail the rejection of the dead ballast of history from the perspective of the living horizon. Modern man is characterized by an emaciated and timid personality that mistakes the poor imitation of historical models for agency:

Dem, der sich nicht mehr zu trauen wagt, sondern unwillkürlich für sein Empfinden bei der Geschichte um Rat fragt, der wird allmählich aus Furchtsamkeit zum Schauspieler und spielt eine Rolle, meistens sogar viele Rollen und deshalb jede so schlecht und flach. (VNN, 50)

He who no longer dares to trust himself but involuntarily asks of history 'How ought I to feel about this?' finds that his timidity gradually turns him into an actor and that he is playing a role, usually indeed many roles and therefore playing them badly and superficially. (UaD, 86)

Lateness is thus the condition of modern man who inhabits a culture of imitation. A weakened personality that manifests itself in the split between the outer and the inner self afflicts the modern epigone, in whose personality mere remnants of man's individuality are buried without a chance to assert themselves. Lateness thus designates the condition of a degenerate and emaciated culture that has lost all vigor and power of renewal.

Nietzsche's critique of his epoch in terms of a malignant lateness is echoed up to a point in Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901) where the family's rise and fall proceed through a chain of four generations.⁸ Old Johann Buddenbrook who switches easily between High German, Platt, and cosmopolitan French and conducts his business without anxiety represents the first generation's vigorous entrepreneurship yet local rootedness. In the second generation, the mix of business ruthlessness with sentimental Pietism in old Johann's son Consul Johann Buddenbrook suggests growing tensions. While the process of erosion is only subliminally present in the second generation, members of the third and fourth generations are increasingly marked by a debilitating moral consciousness

8. Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks: Verfall einer Familie* (Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer, 1997).

that induces a sense of guilty failure when they attempt but fail to move with more ruthless times. The latter traits are embodied by Christian Buddenbrook, on the face of it, a walking annotation of the Nietzschean degenerate. Christian combines the Nietzschean gift for satirical imitation with a hypochondriac personality obsessed by the smallest bodily malfunction. Throughout the novel Christian represents the inept cultural latecomer, whose various attempts to engage in global business do not indicate expanding horizons but lack of solidity, as his failing import-and-export business witnesses. However, it turns out that his responsible brother Thomas who rises to the rank of senator is also afflicted by the malaise of cultural exhaustion: his increasing failure as a businessman is accompanied by a nervous fastidiousness that requires him to spend an hour and a half on his morning toilette.⁹ The fourth link in the chain, Hanno, is from birth marked by an effeminate weakness that makes him unfit for life in the new age. His musicality is at once a creative gift, never to be realized, and the symptom of a denial of life: Hanno's inability to keep time with changing times comes out psychosomatically in his affliction by typhoid fever, which, in the end, is the physical cause of a death that he also chooses. Of course the subtle perspectivistic narration in *Buddenbrooks* leaves open the possibility that the later family members cannot keep up with the ideal of masculinity prevalent in the new Germany, born in military victory after the French capitulation in the Franco-Prussian War and German unification in 1871. Their look backward at family traditions no longer provides valid points of orientation. In this way, Mann simultaneously sets up and undercuts the Nietzschean version of late culture.

Thomas Mann radicalized his analysis of the pathology of time in his monumental novel *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924), which, as many critics have observed, engages with various philosophies of time, from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson to Asiatic conceptions of time.¹⁰ Besides offering a philosophically

9. Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, 631.

10. See Ruprecht Wimmer, "Zur Philosophie der Zeit im *Zauberberg*," in *Auf dem Weg zum Zauberberg: Die Davoser Literaturtage 1996*, ed. Thomas Sprecher

rich discourse on diverse conceptions of time and history, the novel is, as Joshua Kavaloski rightly emphasizes, extremely performative in its handling of the relationship of narrative time and narrated time.¹¹ In his foreword the omniscient narrator declares: “Geschichten müssen vergangen sein und je vergangener, könnte man sagen, desto besser für sie in ihrer Eigenschaft als Geschichten und für den Erzähler, den raunenenden Beschwörer des Imperfekts.”¹² (“Stories as histories must be past, and the further past, one might say, the better for them as stories and for the storyteller, that conjurer who murmurs in past tenses.”)¹³ However, instead of adopting the epic preterite and maintaining his ironic distance from Castorp, the narrator regularly focalizes Castorp’s subjective and, indeed, pathological experience of a timeless present that is seemingly divorced from historical time. The entire first chapter is dedicated to the few hours after Hans Castorp’s arrival at the Swiss sanatorium. After a flashback in chapter 2 that deals with Castorp’s family background, the remaining narrative proceeds chronologically. What may look like a conventional story arc is, however, dislodged by the slow narrative pace: while the conversations between the various patients approximate narrative time and narrated time, the extensive and microcosmic descriptions of the sanatorium and its environs create a time-space that is overlaid by Castorp’s subjective perceptions, impressions, and subconscious desire.¹⁴ Chapter 3, which is over

(Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1997), 251–72; Beate Pinkerneil, “Ewigkeitssuppe kontra schöpferisches Werden: Zum Thema Thomas Mann—Bergson,” in *Thomas Mann und die Tradition*, ed. Peter Pütz (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum, 1971), 250–81; Borge Kristianson, “Thomas Mann und die Philosophie,” in *Thomas Mann Handbuch*, ed. Helmut Koopmann, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2001), 259–83.

11. Joshua Kavaloski, “Performativity and the Dialectics of Time in Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg*,” *German Studies Review* 32/2 (2009): 319–42.

12. Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer, 1979), 5; cited as DZ in the text.

13. Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2005), n.p.; cited as MM in the text.

14. For a highly nuanced critique of the so-called spatial turn and a subtle reexamination of space and time in modernist narratives, see Erica Wickerson, *The Architecture of Narrative Time: Thomas Mann and the Problems of Modern Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

sixty pages long, offers a full account of Castorp's first day; and chapter 4, which is more than a hundred pages, depicts the first three weeks of Castorp's sojourn. As Kavaloski observes, "The congruity of narrative time and story time demonstrates that the storyteller seeks to translate Hans Castorp's temporal experience into narrative practice."¹⁵ In the world of the Berghof the linearity of time is suspended in favor of an extremely slow therapeutic schedule that revolves around sleep, meals, walks, medical examinations, conversations, and special occasions. In this microcosm, the smallest temporal unit is, as Settembrini explains to the novice Castorp, a month: "Unsere kleinste Zeiteinheit ist der Monat. Wir rechnen im großen Stil, das ist der das Vorrecht der Schatten" (DZ, 63; "Our smallest unit of time is the month. We measure on a grand scale—it is one of the privileges of shades"; MM, 67). At the end of his first day Castorp is already infected by the inability to keep time: barely able to remember his own age, he explains that his first day was simultaneously "kurzweilig and langweilig" ("diverting and dull") and claims to feel considerably older and wiser (DZ, 91; MM, 100). Alarmed at the infectious spread of the temporal disorder that marks the patients on the magic mountain, Settembrini, the representative of the enlightenment spirit, commands Hans to pack his bags and catch the first train back to the real world:

Da der Aufenthalt Ihnen nicht zuträglich zu sein scheint, da Sie sich körperlich und, wenn mich nicht alles täuscht, auch seelisch nicht wohl bei uns befinden,—wie wäre es denn da, wenn Sie darauf verzichteten, hier älter zu werden, kurz, wenn Sie noch heute nacht wieder aufpackten und sich morgen mit den fahrplanmäßigen Schnellzügen auf-und davonmachen? (DZ, 92)

Since your stay here appears not to be good for you—neither physically nor, if I am not mistaken, mentally—how would it be, if you were to forego the pleasure of growing older here, in short, if you were to pack your things tonight and be on your way with one of the scheduled express trains tomorrow morning? (MM, 101)

15. Kavaloski, "Performativity and the Dialectics of Time," 325.

Castorp's temporal condition, however, has already disconnected him from such modern regimentation by the clock and, above all, from the future as the bourgeois self's horizon of self-realization. Under the spell of the Berghof's "großzügige Zeitwirtschaft" (DZ, 202; "generous time management"), he completely abandons the modern ideology of temporal discipline in favor of an empty duration that, as the omniscient narrator explains, paradoxically dissolves large units of time "bis zur Nichtigkeit" (DZ, 110; "until they seem nothing"; MM, 122). The complete abrogation of chronological time later manifests itself in Castorp's "lästerliche Gewohnheit . . . , statt 'Vor einem Jahre': 'Gestern und 'Morgen' für 'Übers Jahr' zu sagen" (DZ, 573) ("disgraceful habit . . . of saying 'yesterday' for 'a year ago' and 'tomorrow' for 'a year from now'"; MM, 674). Castorp's temporal crisis reaches its dramatic climax in the famous snow chapter, where his idyllic vision of a harmonious relationship between man and nature flips over into a nightmarish scene with two half-naked old women ripping apart a baby and devouring its limbs. This frightening hallucination of debauched barbarism, a mix of classical Bacchic frenzy with the Germanic witches, goes hand in hand with a crisis of temporality. On waking up in the snow Castorp checks his watch and finds that barely ten minutes have passed even though his nightmare appears to have lasted forever. As Kavaloski comments, "The temporal perception by the main character vastly outstrips story time and suggests an incompatibility between subjective and objective temporality."¹⁶ When, at the end of the novel, the news about mobilization and first declarations of war reach the Berghof, the enchantment is finally broken, and Castorp feels set free "von elementaren Außenmächten" (DZ, 752; "by elementary external forces"; MM, 848). The outbreak of the war not only accelerates time, catapulting all the inhabitants of the magic mountain down to the flatland, but it replaces the temporal disorder of lateness with a global maelstrom that, in all likelihood, will swallow up Castorp. The thunderbolt of the First World War abruptly ends the temporal disorder of the

16. Kavaloski, "Performativity and the Dialectics of Time," 331.

magic mountain only to replace it with a new temporal pathology: that of a barbaric chrono-mania, as evident in the frenzied race for imperial power among European states in the run-up to the First World War. While Mann's novel thus echoes Nietzsche's critique of a late culture that has lost the plastic power to shape the future, he is careful not to advocate the modern power politics of competing nations and above all the relentless valorization of a new and better time that is projected onto the future. Even though the empty duration on the magic mountain drained Castorp of all vitality, the novel proposes an aesthetics of slowness that resists modernity's subjugation of subjective time to historical time.¹⁷

Attention, Distraction, and the Modern Conditions of Perception: Georg Simmel and Franz Kafka

Georg Simmel, who lived almost his entire life in Berlin, has been aptly described as "the first sociologist of modernity,"¹⁸ because he had a pronounced sensibility for the new and the modern. His famous essay "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben" ("The Metropolis and Mental Life," 1903) "seeks out the fleeting, transitory and contingent elements of modernity" by mapping out the mobility of urban street life, which engenders a rich variety of contacts, dynamic encounters, and visual impressions that can no longer be processed in their totality by the individual.¹⁹ Simmel's essay must be seen in the context of a widespread debate on attention at

17. For a discussion of the novel as a document of the era leading up to World War I, see T. J. Reed, *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition*, 2nd ed. (1973; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Ulrich Karthaus, "Der Zauberberg—ein Zeitroman (Zeit, Geschichte, Mythos)," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 44 (1970): 269–305; Paul Michael Lützel, "Schlafwandler am Zauberberg: Die Europa-Diskussion in Hermann Brochs und Thomas Manns Zeitromanen," *Thomas-Mann-Jahrbuch* 14 (2001): 49–62; Peter Pütz, "Thomas Mann und Nietzsche," in Pütz, *Thomas Mann und die Tradition*, 225–49.

18. David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Krakauer, and Benjamin* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 39.

19. Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, 46.

the fin de siècle. By the end of the nineteenth century, the collapse of classical models of vision and of the stable subjects these models had presupposed, motivated an empirical-scientific approach to the notion of human sensation, which was now produced, controlled, and observed in the laboratory environment. For psychologists such as Wilhelm Wundt or Alfred Binet, attention became the single most important category that was deemed to guarantee unity of consciousness and perception.²⁰ The Viennese philosopher Ernst Mach captured the modern self in the impressionistic metaphor of the “Elementenkomplex,” a complex of elements.²¹ Mach dissolved both the subject’s unity and the external world, which, in his analysis, was nothing but an effect of floating perceptions that were no longer integrated by Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception. The potential threat this disintegration of perception through distraction posed to social order therefore required containment by way of attention as a regulatory tool.²² Attention was meant to contain the danger of an urban environment that posed the threat of too much distraction and ultimately of psychic disintegration. However, it also allowed for the rapid switching of attention from one object to the next.²³ It thus played a disciplinary function that managed the perpetual production of the new as one of modernity’s hallmarks. The issue of attention was deemed to be particularly important in the context of the urban experience of accelerating modernity that had produced a confusing field of vision that made modern subjectivity precarious und unstable.

20. Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perceptions, Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 38.

21. Ernst Mach, *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen*, 9th ed. (Jena: Fischer, 1922; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991).

22. Siegfried Kracauer addresses the problem of distraction and attention in “Der Kult der Zerstreuung” (1926), in *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 311–17.

23. See also Georg Franck, *Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit: Ein Entwurf* (Munich: Hanser, 1998); Franck, *Mentaler Kapitalismus: Eine politische Ökonomie des Geistes* (Munich: Hanser, 2005).

In his seminal essay on the problem of attention, Simmel firstly contrasts the steady rhythm of rural life with the speed of the modern metropolis, then describes how the metropolitan self is continually bombarded by quickly changing stimuli and fractured sensations that succeed each other in sharp discontinuity.²⁴ According to Simmel, such dramatic “Steigerung des Nervenlebens” (GG, 228; “intensification of nervous stimulation”; MML, 175) requires the development of a protective mechanism against this onslaught. In reaction to the city environment and its demands on the nervous system, the modern city dweller adopts a highly intellectualized outlook that disconnects the individual from the depth of feelings. The implication here is that in his perpetual engagement with exchange values and fleeting surfaces modern man becomes a hardened self, indifferent “gegen alles eigentlich Individuelle” (GG, 229; “to all genuine individuality”; MML, 176). Hence his propensity to adopt a blasé attitude: as a cultivated form of indifference, this is an essential strategy that allows the individual to ignore the meaning and differing value of things. For Simmel this refusal of the nerves to react to external stimulation is thus a protective technique developed by the modern individual in response to a potentially overwhelming and threatening exposure to stimuli (GG, 233; MML, 179). Evidently, in this essay Simmel does not conceive of the city as an enjoyable spectacle with enormous aesthetic potential, but sees it rather in terms of a threatening environment against which individuals need to defend themselves by means of a psychic economy that ranges from modern man’s blasé attitude, on the one hand, to his striking intellectualism, on the other. It is therefore only logical that metropolitan life requires temporal organization by means of an impersonal timetable that synchronizes modern life:

Wenn alle Uhren in Berlin plötzlich in verschiedene Richtung falschgehen würden, auch nur um den Spielraum einer Stunde, so wäre sein

24. Georg Simmel, “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben,” in *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Rüdiger Kramme (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 7:227–42; cited as GG in the text. Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *Simmel on Culture*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), 174–85; cited as MML in the text.

ganzes wirtschaftliches und sonstiges Verkehrsleben auf lange hinaus zerrüttet. Dazu kommt, scheinbar noch äußerlicher, die Größe der Entfernungen, die alles Warten und Vergebenskommen zu einem gar nicht aufzubringenden Zeitaufwand machen. So ist die Technik des großstädtischen Lebens überhaupt nicht denkbar, ohne daß alle Tätigkeiten und Wechselbeziehungen aufs Pünktlichste in ein festes übersubjektives Zeitschema eingeordnet würden. (GG, 231)

If all clocks and watches in Berlin would suddenly go wrong in different ways, even if only by one hour, all economic life and communication of the city would be distracted for a long time. In addition, an apparently mere external factor—long distances—would make all waiting and broken appointments result in ill-afforded waste of time. Thus the technique of metropolitan life is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule. (MM, 177)

Punctuality is thus not just a moral virtue of the bourgeois self but, much more importantly, another essential cultural technique that manages the accelerated pace of modern life through a high degree of synchronization. Although Simmel does not write explicitly about lateness, the implication here is that lateness is a mode of distracted desynchronization and an expression of the individual's exposure to constantly changing stimuli.

A salient example of the connection between lateness and distraction can be found in Kafka's first novel, *Der Verschollene* (*The Man Who Disappeared*, 1912), which is better known as *Amerika*.²⁵ The America in this novel is the place of modernity par excellence where the temporal slackness that still marks Europe has been harnessed by Taylorian time efficiencies. The protagonist Karl Roßmann is a young European immigrant who, on his arrival in New York, meets an unknown uncle, the living embodiment of the rags to riches myth, who takes him under his wing. Uncle Jacob is driven by modern chrono-mania: he not only introduced the Taylorian time practices in his business but also applies them

25. Franz Kafka, *Der Verschollene: Roman in der Fassung der Handschrift* (Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer, 1994); cited as DV in the text. For an English translation, see Franz Kafka, *Amerika (The Man Who Disappeared)*, trans. Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin, 1996); cited as A in the text.

to his nephew, who becomes the victim of his disciplinary time regime.²⁶ At first, however, Uncle Jacob acts as Roßmann's savior and educator, submitting the young Roßmann to a structured timetable that includes English and piano lessons, riding lessons, and a step-by-step introduction to the American world of business. In the second chapter we find Roßmann standing on the balcony of his room in New York, admiring the vibrant city below with its incessant traffic patterns:

Und morgen wie abend und in den Träumen der Nacht vollzog sich auf dieser Straße ein immer drängender Verkehr, der von oben gesehen sich als eine aus immer neuen Anfängen ineinandergestreute Mischung von verzerrten menschlichen Figuren und von Dächern der Fuhrwerke aller Art darstellte, von der aus sich noch eine neue vielfältigste wildere Mischung von Lärm, Staub und Gerüchen erhob, und alles dieses wurde erfaßt und durchdrungen von einem mächtigeren Licht, das immer wieder von der Menge der Gegenstände zerstreut, fortgetragen und wieder eifrig herbeigebracht wurde. (DV, 46)

In the morning and evening, and in his dreams at night, that street was always full of swarming traffic. Seen from above, it appeared to be a swirling kaleidoscope of distorted human figures and the roofs of vehicles of all kinds, from which a new and amplified and wilder mixture of noise, dust and smells arose, and all this was held and penetrated by a majority of light, that was forever being scattered, carried and eagerly returned by the multitudes of objects, and that seemed so palpable to the confused eye that it was like a sheet of glass spread out over the street that was being continually and violently smashed. (A, 28–29)

26. On the representation of America in this novel, see Mark Harman, "Wie Kafka sich Amerika vorstellte," *Sinn und Form* 60 (2008): 794–804; Dieter Heimböckel, "'Amerika im Kopf': Franz Kafkas Roman *Der Verschollene* und der Amerika-Diskurs seiner Zeit," *DVjs* 77 (2003): 130–47; on Kafka's sources, see Hans Peter Rüsing, "Quellenforschung als Interpretation: Holitschers und Soukups Reiseberichte über Amerika und Kafka's Roman *Der Verschollene*," *MAL* 20 (1987): 1–38. On patriarchal power, Elizabeth Boa, "Karl Rossmann and, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up: The Flight from Manhood in Franz Kafka's *Der Verschollene*," in *From Goethe to Gide: Feminism, Aesthetics, and the French and German Literary Canon, 1770–1936*, ed. Mary Orr and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 168–83; Anne Fuchs, "A Psychoanalytic Reading of *The Man Who Disappeared*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. Julian Preece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 25–41.

This wild mixture of impressions and stimuli blurs olfactory, visual, and audible stimuli to such an extent that Roßmann no longer has the ability to perceive any object clearly. In the eyes of his uncle, Roßmann represents the dazzled newcomer to the United States who has not yet internalized the modern self-regulation that wards off the danger of too much distraction. Even though this simultaneously fascinating and confusing concoction of sounds, smells, and dust represents precisely the conditions of the metropolitan modernity as described by Simmel, the lack of a temporal and spatial order in the above scene poses a threat to a modernity that aims to harness such “ill-afforded waste of time,” to use Simmel’s terms. This is precisely the context for Uncle Jacob’s admonition that Karl should not waste his time on the balcony like so many immigrants who stare at the streets below them like lost sheep rather than dedicating their attention to planning their future (DV, 46). Kafka spells out the connection between distraction and Roßmann’s lateness even more openly in the chapter “Ein Landhaus bei New York” (“A Country House near New York”), where his host’s daughter, Klara Pollunder, distracts Karl. At the end of the chapter Karl is given a letter in which his uncle explains that Karl has offended a basic principle by accepting Herr Pollunder’s invitation: accordingly, he punishes Karl by withdrawing his guardianship. Interestingly, the act of expulsion is synchronized with a timetable that Karl is unaware of. The envelope states: “An Karl Roßmann. Um Mitternacht persönlich abzugeben, wo immer er angetroffen wird” (DV, 96; For Karl Roßmann. To be handed to him personally at midnight wherever he may be found). In the context of such punitive regimentation of social time, it is doubtful that the sequence in the *Teater von Oklahoma* (*sic*) really envisages an alternative temporality: even though the biblical imagery of the trumpet-blowing angels evokes the notion of eternal salvation, the bureaucracy of the registration process and the ominous announcement that the identity papers of all theater applicants will be checked on arrival in Oklahoma thwart this seemingly utopian vision.

Modern Man and the Trouble with Time: Franz Kafka's *Der Proceß*

In his American novel, which was also his first, Kafka made lateness an effect of the distracted modern individual, who cannot process his environment in accordance with the rigid timetable of modernity. In his second novel, *Der Proceß* (*The Trial*, written in 1914–15, posthumously published in 1925), he gave lateness a metaphysical twist.²⁷ Here the protagonist's trouble with time no longer concerns merely its crippling effects on the self but rather the ethical ramifications of a time consciousness that is oblivious to any meaningful notion of care for the Other. Josef K. is the proverbial modern Western man whose routinized schedule underlines the functionalization of all human relations. His weekly schedule revolves around work in the bank until 9:00 p.m., followed by a short walk that takes him to a public house where he spends the evening in the company of older and professionally important men until 11:00 p.m. This habitualized timetable is complemented by a weekly visit to Elsa, a waitress who also works as a prostitute, and on weekends he accepts the odd invitation by his boss (DP, 26). The striking absence of proper friends, family, and intimate relations in K.'s life accentuates the lack of nonutilitarian time in his life: even his leisure time is dominated by calculated considerations and exploitative relations. In the pursuit of his case, K. is then confronted with a dyschronic and ultimately metaphysical schedule that paradoxically makes use of clock time only to invalidate its rule. And so even though Kafka equipped the narrative with a clear timeline—it begins on K.'s thirtieth birthday and ends one year later on the eve of his thirty-first birthday—the novel enacts temporal dyschronia to stage the crisis of modern time consciousness.

The narrative opens with an incident that overturns the routinized time structures of the protagonist's everyday life: on the

27. Franz Kafka, *Der Proceß: Roman in der Fassung der Handschrift* (Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer, 1995); cited in the text as DP. Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Breon Mitchell (New York: Schocken, 1998); cited as TT in the text.

morning of his thirtieth birthday, K. wakes up only to be arrested in his bedroom.²⁸ K. immediately attempts to rectify this disruption by asking authoritatively for his breakfast, which is normally served before 8:00 a.m. by the servant girl, Anna. But on his thirtieth birthday his request is merely met by a sniggering response that appears to emanate from the room next door. K.'s authority as a male bourgeois subject is thus challenged by the invasion of his privacy, the discontinuation of his daily routine, and the erosion of his authority as a man.²⁹ When K. demands an explanation, he is told that he is arrested and that he must return to his room and wait: "Das Verfahren ist nun einmal eingeleitet und Sie werden alles zur richtigen Zeit erfahren," explains one of the wardens (DP, 11; "Proceedings are underway and you'll learn everything in due course"; TT, 5). The trial, so it seems, is a process that will unfold according to a radically alternative notion of time that has nothing to do with the type of temporal order that defines bourgeois male identity.

The trial involves a battle between opposing time regimes: with its rational division into a public time and a harnessed private time, the linearity of modern time is cut through by a nonchronological and ultimately metaphysical "other" time that invalidates the type of functionalized human agency that K. represents. The dyschronic nature of the world of the court is a constant theme: even though K. is called to his first hearing by telephone, he is not given a time for this appointment. The rule of this "other time" is given fullest expression in two paradigmatic episodes. One day K. opens the door of a junk room at his workplace, the bank, and finds the wardens Franz and Willem being flogged because he had made a complaint about them. When K. passes the junk room the next day he opens the door again and, to his horror, finds the same scenario

28. On the opening, see Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 188.

29. "Domestic arrangements," comments Boa, "are intrinsically trivial; part of the unchanging, natural order of things, they are beneath notice. But by the same token, they belong to the very basis of patriarchy." Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race*, 189.

as on the previous evening: the whipper is still there with his cane and the two wardens, still undressed, who beg him for help, as on the previous day.³⁰

The second episode concerning other time is the legend of the doorkeeper, which the prison chaplain relates to illustrate how deluded K. has been about the court.³¹ This famous parable is shot through with temporal adverbs that evoke expectations steeped in linear time. By telling the man from the country that he cannot let him into the law right now, the doorkeeper gestures to the future as a time when the law might be reached. Accordingly, the man from the country inquires whether he may gain access later, to which the doorkeeper responds that it is possible but not now. The illocutionary and temporal logic of “now”—“not now”—“later” misleads the man from the country to waste his life waiting for the permission to enter the law. While these adverbs gesture to the modern concept of linear time, in reality they set in train a dyschronic mode of deferral that, in the end, fails to reward the man from the country and also leaves the reader unsatisfied. After long-winded attempts at exegesis, the chapter concludes with the chaplain pointing to the nonchronological temporality of the court: “Es nimmt dich auf, wenn du kommst und es entläßt dich wenn du gehst” (DP, 235; “It receives you when you come and it dismisses you when you leave”; TT, 224).

Kafka employs three temporal tropes that map K.’s growing inability to time his life: when it really matters K. is either tired,

30. On the temporal structure of the novel and the whipper scene in particular, see Beda Allemann, “Noch einmal Kafkas *Process*,” in *Zeit und Geschichte im Werk Kafkas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998) 104–5.

31. On this much-interpreted parable, see Hartmut Binder, *Vor dem Gesetz: Einführung in Kafkas Welt* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993); Aage Hansen-Löve, “Vor dem Gesetz,” in *Interpretationen—Franz Kafka: Romane und Erzählungen*, ed. Michael Müller (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 146–58; Bernd Auerochs, “Innehalten vor der Schwelle: Kafkas ‘Vor dem Gesetz’ im Kontext der traditionellen Parabel,” in *Grenzsituationen: Wahrnehmung, Bedeutung und Gestaltung in der neueren Literatur*, ed. Dorothea Lauterbach, Uwe Spörl, and Ulrich Wunderlich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 131–50; Wolf Kittler, “Burial without Resurrection: On Kafka’s Legend ‘Before the Law,’” *Modern Language Notes* 121/3 (2006): 647–78.

late, or too distracted to pay attention. On the one hand, these temporal disorders indicate that K. is falling out of step with modernity's time regime as he is increasingly consumed by his case; on the other, they also symptomatically disclose the lack of proper *Eigenzeit* in his life. K.'s rigid schedule, as sketched above, left no room for a nonfunctional experience of time. From a temporal perspective, then, it is the lack of *Eigenzeit* in K.'s life that makes him increasingly desynchronized with all aspects of time, including his daily life and the timing of the court. Precisely because K. never took time to properly care for nonutilitarian relations between the self and the Other does he end up as a time-troubled man who is out of sync with all modes of temporality.

At the beginning of chapter 3 K. is informed by telephone that there will be a small hearing concerning his case the following Sunday. He is made aware that these cross-examinations will follow one another regularly, perhaps not every week but quite frequently. Upon hanging up the telephone receiver, K. realizes that he has not been given a precise time for the hearing and decides to get there by 9:00 a.m.. On the Sunday in question he nearly oversleeps because he had stayed out drinking until late in the night. Rushing out without breakfast to make up for lost time, he then decides to walk to the hearing because he does not want to be too punctual. However, he ends up running the last stretch so that he will get there by 9:00 a.m. (DP, 43). As he reaches his destination, he slows down again, "als hätte er nun schon Zeit oder als sähe ihn der Untersuchungsrichter aus irgendeinem Fenster und wisse also daß sich K. eingefunden habe. Es war kurz nach neun" (DP, 44; "as if he had plenty of time now, or as if the examining magistrate had seen him from some window and therefore knew that K. had arrived. It was shortly after nine"; TT, 39). K's contradictory thought process points to a clash between the modern subject's assertion of autonomy, on the one hand, and a higher order that challenges such sovereignty, on the other. When the sitting magistrate tells K. on his arrival that he is precisely one hour and five minutes late, K. therefore demonstratively refuses to apologize: "Mag ich zu spät gekommen sein, jetzt bin ich hier" (DP, 49; "I may have arrived late, but I'm here now"; TT, 43). K.'s deliberate lateness

and his supposed time scarcity are complementary modes of behavior that are meant to make manifest his sense of authority and control over his life.

In the course of the novel he becomes a time gambler whose games with time are always misguided: for example, when his concerned uncle takes him to Advokat Huld for a first consultation—instead of availing himself of the opportunity to discuss his case with Huld and the Kanzleidirektor, who happens to be present—K. is distracted by Leni, who takes him to the kitchen, where he loses his sense of time in an eerie scene of rising sexual tension. When he finally leaves Huld's house, his uncle leaps out of the car, reproaching him for his inconsiderate conduct toward the lawyer and the office director, who were waiting in vain for K. to return and discuss his case. The aggrieved uncle concludes: "Und mich deinen Onkel läßt Du hier im Regen, fühle nur, ich bin ganz durchnäßt, stundenlang warten." (DP, 117; "And you leave me, your uncle, waiting here in the rain for hours: just feel, I'm soaked clear through"; TT, 110). In his conversation with Kaufmann Block the topic of waiting comes up once more when K. discovers that he had already met Block among the waiting clients in the corridor of the courtrooms where he got so violently sick. When K. says that it seemed pointless for them to be waiting in that way, Block responds: "Das Warten ist nicht nutzlos . . . , nutzlos ist nur das selbständige Eingreifen" (DP, 185; "Waiting is not pointless . . . , the only thing that's pointless is independent action"; TT, 176). Later on in the chapter, K. demonstrates once more that, as the proverbial modern man, he feels entitled to capitalize on the time of others without any regard for timeliness. Leni rightly observes that he does not seem in the slightest surprised that the lawyer, despite being ill, is willing to receive him at 11:00 p.m. at night: "Du nimmst das, was deine Freunde für dich tun, doch als zu selbstverständlich an" (DP, 190; "You take what your friends do for you too much for granted"; TT, 181).

Both K.'s ill-judged choice to let others wait and his inability to wait for others underline his poor timing: as the warden Willem already observed in chapter 1, he has no sense of the "richtigen Zeitpunkt," the right time. Prior to the trial his life was ruled

by a rigid and utterly functional timetable that left no room for nonalienated relations and meaningful human interactions. In the course of the trial K.'s modern belief in self-determination is then gradually eroded: he turns from a temporal control freak into an untimely man who is out of sync with the timing of the court as well as the modern time regime that produced his type.

And so in Kafka's novel K.'s lack of presence symbolizes his loss of authority and growing sense of alienation from his habitual world. A salient example in this regard is his visit to the court offices in the company of the court usher the Sunday after his first hearing. As he is being led through the corridor of the attic rooms of the court, K. is overcome by an overwhelming sense of tiredness, which makes him implore the court usher to take him immediately back to the exit. Astonished that K. has already lost his sense of orientation, the court usher explains that he will have to wait until he has delivered a message. But we already know that K. is notoriously unable to wait for others. As a young woman fetches an armchair for K., another court employee who turns out to be the information man joins her. Even though the young woman points out that the information man has an answer to all questions, K. can barely follow this intermediary's explanations about the workings of the court. While such moments have often been read in terms of the protagonist's moral flaw, they also highlight the precariousness of the modern subject, who can no longer mobilize his attention from a stable subject position.³² Looked at from this angle, the failure of Kafka's protagonists to stay attentive when it really matters has little to do with a moral flaw but much with the fact that distraction is "an effect of the many attempts to produce

32. On the question of guilt, see Hans H. Hiebel, "Schuld oder Scheinbarkeit der Schuld? Zu Kafkas Roman *Der Proceß*," in *Das Schuld-Problem bei Franz Kafka*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus and Norbert Winkler (Klosterneuburg: Böhlau, 1993), 95–117; Ritchie Robertson, "Reading the Clues: Franz Kafka, *Der Proceß*," in *The German Novel in the 20th Century: Beyond Realism*, ed. David Midgley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 59–79; Klaus-Peter Philipp, "'K. lebte doch in einem Rechtsstaat': Franz Kafkas *Der Proceß*—ein Proceß des Mißverständnisses," in *Aufklärungen: Zur Literaturgeschichte der Moderne*, ed. Werner Frick (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 259–82.

attentiveness in human subjects.”³³ Kafka employs the metaphor of a ship during a violent storm to give expression to K.’s crisis of orientation: he feels as if he were suffering seasickness on a rough sea and as if crashing waves were hitting against the wooden walls with thunder swelling up from the depths of the corridor (DP, 84). Having been led to the exit propped up by the young woman and the information man, K. is deprived of his sense of autonomy and violently made aware of his bodily reality, which appears to cause him a second trial (DP, 85). On the one hand, dyschronia gives expression to the crisis of the modern time regime that, in Kafka’s world, can no longer guarantee control over the future. On the other hand, K.’s lack of presence of mind indicates a new temporal modality that, in the end, attunes him to the alternative unfolding of his trial.³⁴

In sharp contrast to the opening scene, in which K. was surprised by his arrest, at the very end he awaits his executioners, who arrive about 9:00 p.m., the evening of his thirty-first birthday. Even though he was not notified that they would be coming, he sits in a chair near the door, dressed in black, slowly putting on new gloves and behaving as if he were expecting visitors. When his executioners arrive, he immediately stands up and asks whether they have come for him (DP, 236). K.’s timing at the end indicates his submission to a higher force. But this synchronization of clock time and metaphysical time that culminates in K’s horrifying execution “like a dog” (as he himself describes it) stands for a brutal new order in which temporal efficiency services archaic practice.

33. Crary, *Suspensions of Perceptions*, 49.

34. This also explains why the novel no longer unfolds in the paradigm of the Bildungsroman (developmental novel) with its teleological biographical script but rather as a “Folge von Probeläufen” (a sequence of trial runs), which, as Gerhard Neumann observes, continually rewrites the opening scene. Gerhard Neumann, “Der Zauber des Anfangs und das ‘Zögern vor der Geburt’—Kafkas Poetologie des ‘riskantesten Augenblicks,’” in *Nach erneuter Lektüre: Franz Kafkas “Der Proceß,”* ed. Hans Dieter Zimmermann (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1992), 128. Also Neumann, “‘Blinde Pabel’ oder Bildungsroman? Zur Struktur von Franz Kafkas *Proceß*-Fragment,” in *Franz Kafka: Experte der Macht* (Munich: Hanser, 2012), 101–36.

Speed Politics in Robert Walser's Short Prose

In his study *Reading Berlin 1900*, the historian Peter Fritzsche analyzes the emergence of Berlin as a text-producing and text-consuming metropolis. By the turn of the century, the city had morphed from a provincial backwater into a modern metropolis, as the substantial growth of its population (from 400,000 inhabitants in 1848 to 2 million in 1905), the expansion of the city boundaries, and the development of a modern transport system and infrastructure make evident. "A rich stream of texts," comments Fritzsche, "guided and misguided its inhabitants, and, in large measure, fashioned the metropolitan experience."³⁵ On their daily journeys through the bustling city, Berliners encountered a myriad of print forms and images, in mass circulation newspapers, posters, advertisements on the omnipresent *Litfaßsäulen* (advertising pillars), schedules, announcements, and traffic signs, which, in Fritzsche's words, brought forth a "word city" that overlaid the built city with heteroglossic text.³⁶ New print technologies had boosted the newspaper industry in Imperial Germany: in the period from 1881 to 1897 the market expanded from 2,437 printed daily papers to 3,405,³⁷ and in Berlin alone approximately ninety newspapers were in circulation.³⁸ By 1920 the three main publishers—Ullstein, Scherl, and Mosse—all published midday, evening, and night editions on top of their regular morning editions of the *Berliner Morgenpost*, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, and the liberal *Berliner Tagblatt*, in which the Swiss modernist writer Robert Walser published his feuilletons and short prose sketches.³⁹ The metropolitan city thus constituted itself through a continually evolving

35. Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1.

36. Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*, 5.

37. Werner Faulstich, *Medienwandel im Industrie- und Massenzeitalter 1830–1900* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 31.

38. Christian Jäger and Erhard Schütz, *Städtebilder zwischen Literatur und Journalismus: Wien, Berlin und das Feuilleton der Weimarer Republik* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 1999), 9–10.

39. Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*, 29.

text world that orchestrated the exciting and unnerving dynamic of modernity through a polyphony of dissonant voices.

The prime locus for the continual traffic between the city as lived texture and published text was the literary feuilleton, that is, short prose piece, which appeared “unter dem Strich” (below the line), topographically separated from the more important news items.⁴⁰ By around 1900 the feuilleton had established itself as a modern genre that was especially suited to capturing the fast-paced dynamic of modernity. It secured its place in the newspaper by taking care of seemingly nonpolitical affairs, including articles on fashion, art, and culture, and everyday observations and subjective impressions about modern life.⁴¹ Precisely because it seemed so marginal to mainstream political news coverage, it became an experimental field where the boundaries between fiction and autobiography, reality and imagination, and the city as material environment and the city as text were constantly crossed. As a lively forum for cultural commentary, the feuilleton thus occupies a central role in the archive of modernity’s cultural history, tracking, as Christian Jäger and Erhard Schütz put it, “the self-perception of the age.”⁴² As a “genre beyond established genre boundaries,”⁴³

40. See Günter Oesterle, “‘Unter dem Strich’: Skizze einer Kulturpoetik des Feuilletons,” in *Das schwierige neunzehnte Jahrhundert: Germanistische Tagung zum 65. Geburtstag von Eda Sagarra im August 1998*, ed. Jürgen Barkhoff et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 235.

41. The author of a detailed history of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, published in 1911, highlights the enhanced importance of the feuilleton as a dynamic form that now competed with the *Leitartikel* (the lead article) for the reader’s attention. *Geschichte der Frankfurter Zeitung von 1856 bis 1906*, ed. Verlag der Frankfurter Zeitung (Frankfurt a. M.: August Osterrieth, 1911), 919.

42. Christian Jäger and Erhard Schütz, eds., *Glänzender Asphalt: Berlin im Feuilleton der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Fannei & Waltz, 1994), 336. In the same vein Andreas Huyssen observes that “the modern miniature as a specific mode of writing may indeed be more central to the new in literary modernism than the novel or poetry.” Andreas Huyssen, “Modernist Miniatures: Literary Snapshots of Urban Spaces,” *PMLA* 122/1 (2007): 29.

43. Thomas Althaus, Wolfgang Bunzel, and Dirk Götsche, “Ränder, Schwellen, Zwischenräume: Zum Standort Kleiner Prosa im Literatursystem der Moderne,” in *Kleine Prosa: Theorie und Geschichte eines Textfeldes im Literatursystem der Moderne*, ed. Thomas Althaus, Wolfgang Bunzel, and Dirk Götsche (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007), ix. See also Dirk Götsche, *Kleine Prosa in Moderne und Gegenwart* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2006).

the miniature prose sketch defined itself programmatically through a heightened self-reflexivity that accentuated the subjective experience of modernity. For Thomas Althaus, Wolfgang Bunzel, and Dirk Göttsche the genre's intrinsic marginality is its driving engine: by combining cultural analysis with fleeting everyday observations and a heightened self-reflexivity the genre became the playing field par excellence for literary innovation in German modernism.⁴⁴

Beyond such poetological considerations, the boom of modern short prose around 1900 has to be understood as "a reflection of an accelerated pace of life in the fragmented post-metaphysical universe of modernity—and as a critical response to this very experience: an antidote to the temporal logic of modernity that reappreciates the living moment (Augenblick)."⁴⁵ Between 1900 and the 1930s, the feuilleton and the genre of short prose became a playing field for an exploration of the aesthetic possibilities of both acceleration and desynchronization through slowness or lateness. While an accelerated mode of being was celebrated as a way of energizing one's subjectivity through the exposure to a new intensity of stimuli, lateness and slowness were simultaneously discovered as authentic expressions of an autonomous subjectivity that had salvaged the ability to step outside the demands of the relentless modern timetable.

Robert Walser, the Swiss avant-garde author and writer of short prose par excellence, moved to Berlin in 1905, where he produced more than 100 short prose pieces, which appeared in leading newspapers and journals, including *Die Schaubühne*, *Die Neue Rundschau*, and the *Berliner Tagblatt*.⁴⁶ These pieces cover a broad

44. Althaus, Bunzel, and Göttsche, "Ränder, Schwellen, Zwischenräume," xx.

45. Dirk Göttsche, "Epistemology, Poetics, and Time in Modernist Short Prose around 1900," in *Time in German Literature and Culture, 1900–2015: Between Acceleration and Slowness*, ed. Anne Fuchs and Jonathan Long (Basingstoke: Macmillan Palgrave, 2016), 72.

46. His brother Karl, who had already made his name as a stage designer for Max Reinhardt, introduced him to the literary and cultural elite, including the publishers Bruno Cassirer and Samuel Fischer and the head of the Berlin Secession Max Liebermann. Karl Walser produced the set for Reinhardt's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which used a revolving stage for the first time. See Bernhard Echte and Andreas Meier, eds., *Die Brüder Karl und Robert Walser: Maler und Dichter* (Zurich: Rothenhäusler Verlag Stäfa, 1990), 178–82.

territory, ranging from fictionalized literary portraits, unconventional reviews of theatrical productions, short dialogic sketches, reimaginings of literary characters, and sketches about food and fashion to topographical explorations of the city environment. Walser was particularly interested in Berlin as a site of an astonishing and fast-paced modernity. In pieces such as “Aschinger,” “Tiergarten,” “Gebirgshallen,” and “Berlin W” he experimented with an ephemeral aesthetics that took its cue from impressionism and the figure of the flâneur. A typical example is his prose piece “Friedrichstraße,” which appeared in *Die Neue Rundschau* in August 1909 and depicts the buzzing street life from the perspective of the pedestrian. The piece opens with a vertical upward perspective that is drawn toward large-lettered advertisements at roof level before zooming in on the street as metropolitan site of a ceaseless flow of movement. Walser’s description combines elements of a metropolitan modernity that is designed to create visual spectacle with a nature imagery that captures an invigorating vitality:

Bis zu den Dächern hinauf und über die Dächer noch hinaus schweben und kleben Reklamen. Große Buchstaben fallen in die Augen. Und immer gehen hier Menschen. Noch nie, seit sie ist, hat in dieser Straße das Leben aufgehört zu leben. Hier ist das Herz, die unaufhörlich atmende Brust des großstädtischen Wesens. Hier atmet es hoch auf und tief nieder, als wenn das Leben selber über seinem Schritt und Tritt unangenehm beengt wäre. Hier ist die Quelle, der Bach der Fluß und das Meer der Bewegungen.⁴⁷

Right up to roof level and even beyond advertisements hover and cling. Large lettering catches the eye. And people incessantly walk along. Never since this street has existed has life come to a standstill here. It is the heart, the continually breathing bosom of metropolitan organism. Here life itself breathes deeply in and out as if it were uncomfortably restricted on every step of the way. Here is the source, the stream the river and the sea of all movement.

The typically Walserian anthropomorphism evokes the street as a theater of a vibrant totality of life. In “Friedrichstraße” social

47. Robert Walser, *Sämtliche Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. Jochen Greven (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 3:76; cited as SW in the text. All translations of Walser’s prose pieces are mine unless otherwise indicated.

antagonisms and differences are neutralized by way of an organic proximity of people and things. For Walser the choreography of crowd movement on the street produces a new form of social tolerance and acceptance, "weil jeder einzelne, durch den Zwang des zusammengeknäuelten Verkehrs genötigt, ohne Zaudern alles, was er hört und sieht, billigen muß" (SW 3:77; because by force of the tightly controlled and gagging traffic everyone must willy-nilly tolerate everything that he hears and sees). The intensity and speed of the traffic enforces new forms of mutual toleration in the public domain: "Jeder Bettler, Gauner, Unhold usw. ist hier Mitmensch und muß einstweilen, weil alles schiebt, stößt und drängt, als etwas Mithinzugehöriges geduldet werden." (SW 3:78; Each beggar, crook or ogre is a fellow creature here and because everybody keeps pushing, elbowing and shoving has to be tolerated for the time being as part of the crowd.) Rather than a locus of anonymity and alienation, the street is the true "Heimat der Nichtswürdigen, der Kleinen" (SW 3:78; home of the undeserving, the little people). It is not moral conviction or political consensus that inspires this new form of tolerance but merely the steady footfall of rushed pedestrians and traffic flow patterns. The small form is particularly suited to paying attention to the little people even in their metropolitan massification.

At the same time the production of a specifically metropolitan code of toleration also comes with new modes of self-discipline and uniformity that ache for release. Friedrichstraße is thus shown to morph at night into a titillating stage for entertainment, unleashing pent-up passions. As people chase their unfulfilled desires, "ein wollüstig auf und nieder atmender Körpertraum" (SW 3:79; a sensual bodily dream, breathing up and down) descends on the street. With this final and strikingly anthropomorphic image Walser envisages the urban street as a vital organism pulsing with the flow of desire and life.

While "Friedrichstraße" unfolds a chronological schedule that takes the reader from daytime activity to the electrifying nightlife, "Guten Tag, Riesin!" (Good Morning, Giant!) delves into the polychronicity of urban life in the early morning hours: here, the pathways of blue-collar workers, small salesmen, early travelers, and

girls from all walks of life cross with an assortment of late night revelers who are being catapulted out into the streets (SW 3:65). Such dissonances invite fleeting engagement that favors the fragmentary detail over the totalizing panoramic view:

Immer gehst du und flüchtige Blicke für alles, für Bewegliches und Feststehendes, für Droschken, die träge forttrumpeln, für die Elektrische, die jetzt zu fahren beginnt, von der herab Menschen dich ansehen, für den stupiden Helm eines Schutzmannes, für einen Menschen mit zerrissenen Hosen . . . , für alles, wie du selber für alles ein flüchtiges Augenmerk bist. (SW 3:65)

You are always walking along fleetingly noting everything that moves or stays still, coaches that sluggishly rumble along, people looking down at you from the tram which is just starting up, the stupid helmet of the policeman, a man with torn trousers . . . , everything, as you yourself are for the others, only a fleeting glance.

The impressionistic annotation of a world in flux takes the place of the authoritative description of a stable urban physiognomy. As Peter Fritzsche comments, the feuilletonists of the early twentieth century “did not nail down city matters but merely alerted readers to detail and fluctuation. As a result, the city became equally unknowable and equally astonishing to all its readers.”⁴⁸

“Guten Tag, Riesin!” singles out the observing self in the crowd by addressing this self in the second-person singular. By contrast, Walser’s prose piece “Auf der Elektrischen” (On the Tram) adopts the perspective of the impersonal “man” (one) to foreground the experience of urban massification. The piece, which describes the “billiges Vergnügen, Elektrische zu fahren” (the cheap pleasure of a tram ride), appeared in the morning edition of the *Berliner Tagblatt* on 28 April 1908: in all likelihood, it was placed in the early edition to catch the attention of commuters traveling to work.⁴⁹ Walser’s narrative perspective alternates here between identifying collective

48. Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*, 94.

49. Robert Walser, “Auf der Elektrischen,” in *Kritische Ausgabe sämtlicher Drucke*, ed. Wolfram Groddeck and Barbara von Reibnitz, vol. 3.1: *Drucke im Berliner Tagblatt*, ed. Hans-Joachim Heerde (Basel: Stroemfeld/Schwabe, 2013), 22; cited as AdE.

patterns of behavior among the passengers and the self's ultrasubjective perception. The piece mimics a tram journey by depicting how the tram arrives and the passengers, including the narrating self, board the carriage: the self immediately adopts the mask of everyman by employing the impersonal "man" (one) throughout. However, this anthropological perspective is soon disrupted when the self announces that he is musically gifted because melodies and songs are playing inside his head and, indeed, that he may have morphed into a new Mozart. Evidently, Walser adopts an ironic tone here that highlights the gap between urban sameness, on the one hand, and a heightened individuality in the city environment, on the other. The ensuing description of the tram journey emphasizes, first, the uniformity of the experience: standing on the platform at the back of the tram, the self is shown to look straight ahead like most passengers. The journey is lacking in excitement because of its length and the passengers' immobile position: feeling increasingly bored, the self is actively looking for distractions by studying the face of the conductor before gazing straight ahead: "Ich muß bekennen: im Gradausschauen habe ich es bereits bis zu einer gewissen technischen Vollendung gebracht." (AdE, 23; I must admit, I have developed a certain technical perfection in gazing straight ahead.) As a mechanical means of public transportation the tram dictates a quasi-Taylorian disciplinary mode of engagement with the environment: it enforces the forward-looking perspective of the age of mechanical acceleration. Faced with such enforced uniformity, Walser's self then attempts to regain a sense of autonomy by breaking the rules and engaging the conductor in conversation or by embarking on "eine kleine Rundreise mit den Augen" (a short round trip with the eyes) on the lookout for visual distractions (AdE, 24). Walser's piece about the tram ride undercuts the common association of new technologies with titillating speed: even though the tram was a relatively fast means of transportation around the turn of the twentieth century, here it engenders a sense of boredom. The uniform practice of *Gradausschauen* mobilizes resistance in the traveling self, who, by undertaking a round trip with his eyes, discovers interesting everyday details that, in turn, engender further visual exploration of the urban environment in flux.

Besides delving into urban modes of behavior, Walser's prose pieces explore the transformative effects of modern speed politics in other settings. In Walser's great prose narrative *Der Spaziergang* (*The Walk*) of 1917, the reader encounters a perambulating self whose leisurely excursion into the suburbs of an unnamed Swiss town is replicated by a meandering narrative voice that is evidently unperturbed by the economy of speed.⁵⁰ Surrounded by a working population that has internalized the time management of modern life and is therefore quite hostile to this walking misfit, the Walserian peripatetic self stimulates his poetic imagination through deliberate desynchronization. When a passing worker on a bicycle accuses him of being out for a walk again during regular working hours, the self waves to him, calmly walking on "ohne mich im Ger- ingsten über das Ertapptwerden zu ärgern" (SW 5:18; "without the least annoyance at having been found out"; TW, 62). And when the tax inspector later challenges his application for tax exemption because he is always out for a walk, he delivers a theatrical speech that defends the principles of poetic perambulation (SW 5:50; TW, 85). The Walserian self emphasizes the emotional connectedness with the living world that is brought about by an intrinsically democratic mode of perception that aims to do justice to all phenomena, be they small or large. However, it would be a mistake to read Walser's perambulations in terms of an antimodern turn: instead of relating the measured walk that he promised at the outset (SW 5:15), the narrator-walker strategically employs digression, *mise en abyme*, and a narrative pace that, at significant moments, mimics urban behavior and modes of perception. Toward the end of his walk, the Walserian self enumerates the things that make up the exterior world:

Ferner an Läden: Papier-, Fleisch-, Uhren-, Schuh-, Hut-, Eisen-, Tuch-, Kolonialwaren-, Spezerei-, Galanterie-, Mercerie-, Bäcker- und

50. Robert Walser, *Der Spaziergang*, in SW 5:7–77. A slightly edited version appeared in *Seeland*. See SW 7:83–151. For an English translation of the first edition, see Robert Walser, *The Walk and Other Stories*, trans. Christopher Middleton (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992), 54–104; cited as TW in the text.

Zuckerbäckerläden. Und überall, auf allen diesen Dingen, liebe Abendsonne. Ferner viel Lärm und Geräusch, Schulen und Schullehrer, letztere mit Gewicht und Würde im Gesicht, Landschaft, Luft und etliche Malerei. Ferner nicht zu übersehen oder zu vergessen: Aufschriften und Ankündigungen, wie “Persil” oder “Maggis unübertroffene Suppenrollen” oder “Continental-Gummiabsatz enorm haltbar” oder “Grundstück zu verkaufen” oder “Die beste Milkschokolade” oder ich weiß wahrhaftig nicht, was sonst noch alles. Wollte man aufzählen, bis alles getreulich aufgezählt wäre, so käme man an kein Ende. (SW 5:70)

Further, in the way of shops; paper, meat, clock, shoe, hat, iron, cloth, grocery, spice, fancy goods, millinery, bakery, and confectionary shops. And everywhere on all these things delicious evening sun. Further, much noise and uproar, school and schoolteachers, the latter with weighty and dignified faces, an air and much else that is picturesque. Further, not to be overlooked or forgotten: signs and advertisements, as “Persil,” “Maggi’s Unsurpassed Soups,” or “Continental Rubber Heels Enormously Durable,” or “Freehold Property for sale,” or “The Best Milk Chocolate,” and I honestly don’t know what else. If one were to count until everything had been accurately enumerated, one would never reach the end. (TW, 99–100)

Instead of delivering “tiefsinnige Landschaftsschilderungen” (SW 5:68; “profound landscape descriptions”; TW, 102) the walker-narrator creates here a list of all kinds of things, ranging from material objects to auditory impressions, that are no longer integrated into a coherent whole. While this enumeration parodies the modern preoccupation with taxonomies of knowledge, the passage also gestures to the capitalist economy of attention that transforms the walker willy-nilly into a potential consumer: even though he advocates a quasi-mystical union with the smallest things (SW 5:51), here he succumbs to the fetishist appeal of the consumer product. In the end, it is no longer the romantic sunset but the advertisement billboards that captivate his attention.

Walser’s fascination with modern speed politics is particularly striking in his prose pieces that place his perambulating self inside railway stations. In “Bahnhof II,” which was written during his Bern years in the 1920s, the railway building is introduced as a space “der das Maschinenzeitalter veranschaulicht und etwas Internationales verkörpert” (SW 20:76; which represents the machine age and embodies internationalism). As a node in “einem weitverzweigte(n) Bildungs- und Zivilisationsnetz” (SW 20:76; in

a branched-out network of education and civilization) it interconnects the province with European metropolitan centers. A busy and modern transport hub, the railway station is the right setting for the performance of autonomy through the self's leisurely perambulation. In "Bahnhof I" the self describes how he enjoys strolling among the crowd of hurried travelers before embarking on an imaginary trip:

Ich war der Meinung, der Bahnhof eigne sich zum darin Spaziergehen gut, und was eine Reihe von Plakaten betraf, an denen ich vorbeifilierte, fand ich den Vierwaldstättersee vor, den anmutige, duftige Ufer auszeichnen. Die Stadt Wiborg war samt ihren Altertümlichkeiten wirkungsvoll abgebildet, Luzern bei Nacht mit Tausenden von Lichtern ergab ein anschauliches Bild. Einer Kathedrale in England widmete ich mit Vergnügen meine achtungspendende Aufmerksamkeit. Eine französische Stadtwiedergabe ließ mich an die Vortrefflichkeit gewisser bürgerlicher Romane denken. (SW 20:73)

I was of the opinion that the railway station is a great spot for perambulating, and as regards a series of posters that I was passing by, I saw Lake Vierwaldstätter with its charming balmy shores. The city of Wiborg was depicted well with all its antiquities; Lucerne at night presented a most pleasant view. I dedicated with great pleasure my respectful attention to a cathedral in England. The representation of a French city made me think of the greatness of some bourgeois novels.

This imaginary encounter with tourist sites supersedes here the need for a real trip to new places. It is striking how the passage transfers the bipedal mobility of *Der Spaziergang* and other peripatetic texts onto the mobility of the flâneur's eyes, which travel swiftly from poster to poster in a brief package tour inside the railway station. It is precisely the flâneur's decelerated movement around the railway station that makes possible an accelerated journey through Europe. While the ironic description of the tourist sites that are displayed on these posters points to the commodification of the desire for authenticity in modern tourism, as analyzed by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Walser deconstructs the opposition between kitsch and authenticity.⁵¹

51. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Eine Theorie des Tourismus* (1958), in *Einzelheiten I & II* (Hamburg: Spiegel Verlag, 2006), 177–203.

And so the posters of various tourist sites fulfill the same function as the idyllic landscape descriptions in *Der Spaziergang* and other Walser texts: they give expression to the desire for a timeless otherness that, however, remains unattainable precisely because the movement of this mobile subjectivity is under the spell of modern speed politics.

From Lateness to Latency: Sigmund Freud

In the texts discussed so far lateness and slowness feature not only as reactive temporal modes that aim to correct the modern intoxication with speed. They are also manifestations of a broader aesthetic intervention that disrupts modern speed politics and the linearity of time by bringing to the fore alternate trajectories and temporalities. A qualitatively new understanding of the problematic of lateness emerges with psychoanalysis. Freud removed the debate on lateness from its specifically modern context by turning it into a universal category of both onto- and phylogenetic development. The idea of lateness in Freud's work develops alongside his theory of sexuality. In *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (*Three Essays on Sexuality*, 1905) Freud argued that the Oedipal phase is normally superseded by a latency period in which the early sexual drives of the small child are divested of their sexual object in favor of a rechanneling of these energies toward new aims.⁵² A process of sublimation, which helps to put in place the ethical restrictions that are governed by the superego, accompanies this period of latency. Lateness and its topological equivalent, latency, act as powerful psychological drivers of the integration of the primary drives under the command of a higher censor, the superego. However, while latency thus plays a major role in the process of individuation, it gains an even more pronounced function in Freud's trauma theory. In their *Studien über Hysterie* (*Studies on Hysteria*, 1895) Freud and Breuer had first traced the condition of hysteria

52. Sigmund Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud et al. (Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer, 1999), 5:27–145.

back to experiences that had a traumatic effect rather than to physiological causes.⁵³ Although in his early work Freud adhered to the seduction theory based on a real sexual event in early childhood, even at this point he maintained that trauma was the effect of a latency period.⁵⁴ For Freud it was not the events as such, but rather the delayed recall of a first event through a later memory trigger that created the conditions for trauma. Latency is simultaneously the precondition for the manifestation of a traumatic disorder and a protective mechanism that allows individuals to cope with undigested experiences and legacies. Only once individuals have reached adolescence can they understand the sexual meaning of early childhood experiences. And so that latency carries within it a temporal structure that makes one's past accessible only through deferred and retrospective acts of interpretation. By ascribing such a significant role to the notion of an incubation period in the etiology of trauma, Freud implicitly challenged the prevalent culture of immediacy with its strong attraction to surfaces and spectacles, as expressed in much of fin de siècle culture.⁵⁵ For Jonathan Crary the dismantling of the separation of appearance and reality was one of the price tags of a modernity that invested hugely in the titillating immediacy of fleeting sensations. Freud, however, confronts such cultural fascination with immediacy by interpreting all present appearances as mere symptoms of a buried past. "Nachträglichkeit," a term that is difficult to translate (often rendered in French as "après-coup" and in English as "deferred action"), is thus an

53. Sigmund Freud, *Studien über Hysterie*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 1:75–312.

54. "According to the temporal logic of what Freud called *Nachträglichkeit*, or 'deferred action,'" comments Ruth Leys, "trauma was constituted by a relationship between two events or experiences—a first event that was not necessarily traumatic because it came too early in the child's development to be understood and assimilated, and a second event that also was not inherently traumatic but that triggered a memory of the first event that only then was given traumatic meaning and hence repressed." Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 20.

55. On the staging of reality as spectacle without depth and the commodification of attention, see Jonathan Crary's excellent interpretation of Seurat's painting *Parade de Cirque*. Crary, *Suspensions of Perceptions*, 150–279.

indication of an inescapable connectedness with the depth of one's personal history.⁵⁶

Over time, Freud developed the notion of latency into a generative principle that drives cultural development and the process of civilization.⁵⁷ This is most evident in his last and perhaps most problematic book, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (*Moses and Monotheism*, 1939), which was written in the context of the National Socialist persecution of the Jews and his own exile.⁵⁸ Debating the question of anti-Semitism by way of a highly speculative examination of the emergence of monotheism, Freud argued that Moses was an Egyptian and a follower of the Aton religion, a strict form of monotheism that the Egyptian people rejected because of its ethical harshness. Leaving Egypt, Moses imposed monotheism and the rite of circumcision on the Jewish people, whom he led to Canaan. In Freud's dramatic narrative the Jews then killed their overly demanding father figure, before joining up with related tribes and accepting the worship of the God Yahweh. Although the memory of Moses was submerged for generations after the murder, it survived latently among the Levites, the people of Moses. By keeping Mosaic traditions alive, they tried to forget their feelings of guilt. For generations, the Mosaic tradition existed only in repressed form, but continued to exercise latent influence over the cult of Yahweh, which eventually collapsed into the Mosaic God. Freud lends additional urgency to his model of cultural development by arguing that the three steps—the

56. See Sigrid Weigel, "The Symptomatology of a Universalized Concept of Trauma: On the Failing of Freud's Reading of *Tasso* in the Trauma of History," *New German Critique* 90 (2003): 85–94.

57. See Anne Fuchs, "Defending Lateness: Deliberations on Acceleration, Attention, and Lateness, 1900–2000," in "Figuring Lateness," ed. Karen Leeder, special issue, *New German Critique* 125/42 (2015): 31–48.

58. Sigmund Freud, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 16:101–246. On Freud's method of speculation and his original denomination of the essay as a historical novel, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). On monotheism, see Jan Assmann, *Die mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (Munich: Hanser, 2003).

killing of Moses, followed by a latency period and the return of the repressed—had repeated an earlier trauma concerning all human-kind: the killing of the primal father by his sons in the primal horde, a thesis that he had already put forward in *Totem und Tabu* (*Totem and Taboo*, 1912). By making the murder of Moses a symptomatic return of the repressed killing of the primal father, Freud converts history into myth or anthropology. On the one hand, this eclipsed history at the very moment when Jews were being persecuted. Freud's hesitant style and his tortured prefaces in *Der Mann Moses* indicate a heightened sense of anxiety about the direction of this project. On the other hand, the idea that the killing of Moses was a collective and subconscious act of repetition introduces the notion of the *longue durée* of traumatic memory as a driving force in history. Freud thereby turned latency into a dormant deposit account with massive transgenerational interest. Repression and repetition are the key devices that pass down the memory of earlier experiences to later generations. As Jan Assmann has pointed out, repression achieves an encryption of this legacy, forestalling a simple working-through; repetition complements this by ensuring the transgenerational transmission of trauma. In this way, Freud's speculative narrative about Moses highlighted the cultural function of guilt, repression, and remembrance in the history of religion and in the history of civilization.⁵⁹

Freud's theoretical elaborations resonate across a wide range of literary texts that profile latency and the return of the repressed. Two outstanding examples in this regard published around the time of *Totem und Tabu* are Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (*The Confusions of Young Törless*, 1906) and

59. Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 233. Assmann's view diverges from Freud's in one important respect: unlike Freud, who views all cultural objectifications in terms of symptomatic disguise of a latent and repressed reality, Assmann argues that writing itself can be a locus of latency. He writes: "It becomes a place of refuge to which the repressed and the inopportune can retreat, and a background from which what is forgotten can re-emerge, a place of latency" (99).

Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1912).⁶⁰ In both narratives the protagonists' personal transgressions flow from dark cultural undercurrents, which, as a return of the repressed, haunt Europe's modernizing project. Both narratives employ what one might call "a geography of latency," which punctures the surface appearance of all things.⁶¹

In fin de siècle discourse lateness emerges as a flexible trope that allows for extremely divergent evaluations of compressed time as modernity's main resource. Freud departed from this paradigm by decoupling lateness from its modern currency and transforming it into the notion of latency. With this decisive step, Freud remodels lateness from a category of desynchronized time into a generative principle of cultural development. While the modernizer eagerly embraces accelerated speed as a means of achieving technological and cultural progress, Freud's reading suggests that it is above all the *longue durée* of culture that fuels the process of civilization. Lateness is neither a moral failure nor a psychic mechanism for the achievement of an autonomous subjectivity, but rather a very powerful, subconscious mode of cultural encryption that creates diachronic connectivity with the past.

Conclusion

My analysis of a wide range of temporal positions in German cultural discourse from the 1870s into the late 1930s when Freud wrote his last major work shows that, despite the modern

60. Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig und andere Erzählungen* (Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer, 1987); Robert Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*, in *Gesammelte Werke in neun Bänden*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1981), 6:7–140.

61. Musil connects the uncanny doubleness of all things with Indian Buddhism. Likewise, in *Death in Venice*, a web of uncanny symbols unfolds that is associated with the sirocco, the wind that travels up the south/north axis but carries Indian cholera. For a nuanced analysis of Mann's cultural geography, see Elizabeth Boa, "Global Intimations: Cultural Geography in *Buddenbrooks*, *Tonio Kröger*, and *Der Tod in Venedig*," *Oxford German Studies* 35 (2006): 21–33.

investment in the future as the horizon of man's self-realization, this period is by no means solely in the grip of speed. To be sure, the established view of modernity rightly emphasizes the transformation of the modern temporal experience in terms of a seismic paradigm shift that, facilitated by a wave of technological revolutions, replaced a cyclical temporal consciousness with the idea of linear temporal progression. While the former drew on the past to make sense of the imminent future, which was not yet separated from the present, the latter devalues the past in favor of a radically different future that leaves behind both past and present. Reinhart Koselleck has shown that the experience of time needed to be denaturalized before a modern historical consciousness could emerge that then understood history as taking place in the space between the past and the future.⁶² Modern temporal consciousness differs from earlier notions of temporality because it projects progress onto a radically different future that requires urgent intervention and planning. "The shortening of the time spans necessary for gaining new experiences that the technical-industrial world forces upon us," explains Koselleck, "can be described a historical acceleration."⁶³ Dirk Götsche emphasizes the rich metaphoric of time that marks German literary and intellectual discourse from around 1800: terms such as *Zeitgeist*, *Zeitangst*, *Zeitgeschichte*, *Zeitnot*, and so on entered public discourse,⁶⁴ articulating a new historical consciousness that registered its own contemporaneity "in terms of a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality."⁶⁵ Capitalism was the main driver in this new economy of time, which, as Marx observed, annihilated space with time. And so speed became what Enda Duffy calls "the desire par excellence in Western culture."⁶⁶

62. Koselleck, "Time and History," 100–114.

63. Koselleck, "Time and History," 113.

64. Götsche, "Introduction," 4. See also Dirk Götsche, *Zeit im Roman: Literarische Zeitreflexion und die Geschichte des Zeitromans im späten 18. und im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001).

65. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, 15.

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

Speed was “fostered and tolerated to reconcile human subjects to their lot as actors in a ‘dynamic’ capitalist economic milieu. Speed, intimately woven into a new paradigm of the modern subject’s nexus of desires, becomes the new opiate and the new (after)taste of movement as power.”⁶⁷

Against this backdrop, this chapter analyzed how modernist authors, intellectuals, and filmmakers articulate, dissect, and displace the modern fascination with speed, even when they overtly celebrate its thrills. To be sure, the *Zeitroman* of the nineteenth century already explored the sociopolitical consequences of modern temporalization. But the aesthetic potential of modern time consciousness was only fully discovered through modernist experiments with all kinds of (narrative) speeds and modes in different settings and through different genres. The double encoding of technology in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* and the filmic representation of the spectacle of speed alongside the anxiety-inducing images of cogs and wheels in Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Sinfonie der Großstadt* are cases in point: while both aesthetically celebrate technologically enabled new visual pleasure, they simultaneously enmesh anxiety about the uncontrollable effects of technology with the thrilling experience of speed. In the domain of literature then the modern fascination with and ambivalence toward modern time finds expression in two genres: the modernist novel and modern short prose. Whereas the first gravitates toward length and fairly plotless narration, as in the great modernist writers from Woolf, Joyce, and Proust to Musil and Mann, the latter attempts to capture the ephemeral experience of a reality in flux. I touched on Mann’s *Zauberberg* because this monumental novel articulates Castorp’s subjective and increasingly pathological experience of circular or stagnant time through an extreme aesthetic of slowness that approximates narrative time and narrated time. Long dialogues, extensive descriptions, and analeptic renditions of

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

memories create a slow-motion effect that suspends the politics of speed in the faraway flatland. From a Nietzschean perspective, the retarded movement and slow speed in the world of the Berghof would be symptomatic of a crippling lateness that for Nietzsche had emaciated modern culture. At the end of the novel, historical time then reasserts itself violently with the outbreak of the First World War. Besides Nietzsche it was Freud who provided the theoretical scaffolding for this modern pathology of time: from Freud's perspective, the outbreak of war marks the return of the repressed after a period of latency.

It is essential to emphasize, however, that the modernist engagement with these temporal tropes remains profoundly ambivalent: Castorp's absorption into the world of the Berghof may be pathological from the perspective of the disciplinary modern time regime. However, on the level of discourse it leads to a mode of narration that foregrounds how space and time are filtered through consciousness. Besides continually evaluating Castorp's experience of time and space from an omniscient perspective, the narrator immerses the reader in Castorp's subjectivity through a focalized perspectivism that brings into view a composite reality that is overlaid by memories, reflections, and desire. The narratologically produced experience of *ästhetische Eigenzeit* pushes against the linearity of modern time. A similar ambivalence characterizes Kafka's exploration of time in *Der Verschollene* and *Der Proceß*: at plot level Kafka's protagonists are always punished for their inability to keep time; on the level of discourse, however, their apparent distractions can bring forth glimpses of fulfilled time or *Eigenzeit*. Rossmann's absorption by the never-ending traffic patterns of New York City or Josef K.'s theatrical reenactment of his arrest in front of Fräulein Bürstner exemplify such rare moments. In *Der Proceß* Kafka employs a mode of narration that overlays the overt realism with symbolic meaning. The guards, lawyers, and judges that make up the world of the court are simultaneously representatives of the modern bureaucracy as well as mediators of an absolute metaphysical order beyond human control. And so it is that Josef K. (and the reader) keeps misreading these doubly encoded signs. Besides

staging the clash between the modern and the metaphysical, Kafka also exposes the inherently contradictory effect of modern time: on the one hand, it subjugates the modern self under the rule of the clock, thereby producing the type of utilitarian and impoverished human relations that prevail in Josef K.'s life. On the other, it equips modern man with a false sense of autonomy and hubris, which the trial then exposes as unfounded in the most cruel way.

The texts discussed in this chapter all employ tropes of attention and distraction to explore new conditions of subjectivity in the context of accelerating modernity. The fragmentation of the visual field emerged as a major problem in philosophy, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, and the medical disciplines.⁶⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century the problem of attention had become "part of a dense network of texts and techniques around which the truth of perception was organized and structured."⁶⁹ In Simmel's discussion, modern subjectivity adapts to the relentless onslaught by external stimuli in the metropolitan environment via a selective attentiveness that protects the self from being overwhelmed. For Simmel attention is both a social and a psychic technique that gives birth to the blasé metropolitan self. In contrast to this disciplinary effect of attention on the impersonal modern subject, writers of modern short prose often stage the dialectic interplay between attention and distraction to foreground a mercurial and highly mobile modern subjectivity. Robert Walser's short prose pieces from his time in Berlin, and his Biel and Bern years, reclaim individuality through a choreography of mobility that exploits the aesthetic possibilities of modern speed politics. In Walser's prose pieces both speed and slowness can give rise to ultrasubjective perceptions of the environment, regardless of whether the context is urban or not. Walser's grammar of mobility articulates both the exhilarating experience of modernity and the commodification of perception by capitalism.

68. See Crary, *Suspensions of Perceptions*, 17–46.

69. Crary, *Suspensions of Perceptions*, 22.

What this chapter shows then is not so much the one-sided fascination of modernist writers with speed but rather with temporal desynchronization. Slowness, lateness, attention, and distraction have emerged here as central tropes in a multifaceted discourse on time that accentuates the precariousness of modern subjectivity. Slowness, attention, distraction, and lateness are tactical and provisional positions of a precarious modern self. On the level of form, however, these tropes give rise to experiments with form that generate *ästhetische Eigenzeit* in the interaction between text and reader.