

Introduction: Approaches to Queer Temporalities in German Studies


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In their 2022 minicomic titled “Feindselig” (Hostile), the Munich-based non-binary nonfictional comics and graphic novelist Illi Anna Heger casts into sharp relief how structures of belonging informing urban design support some forms of life and living at the cost of others.¹ Across eleven panels, Heger shows how hostile designs thwart attempts by animals and humans to dwell in public settings at particular times and in particular ways. In one panel, a pigeon aims to land on one of two newspaper dispensers in one frame (Fig. 1). In another, a pigeon struggles to alight on a lamp bracket outfitted with landing spikes. Each frame contains one half of a sentence, the whole of which links the two images: “Was für manche Frieden ist, / ist für andere Ausschluss” (What is peace for some / is exclusion for others). The next set of frames includes humans. The largest frame of eleven features a park populated by six humans variously taking up space (Fig. 2). Some sit on benches; one person sleeps on one, while pigeons roam about. The next frame features a park bench outfitted with a seat divider to prevent people from lying on it. As was the case with the previous two frames, these two are linked by a sentence: “nicht willkommen zu sein macht alles schwerer/ und defensive Architektur beschränkt wie der öffentliche Raum genutzt werden kann” (being unwelcome makes everything more difficult, / and defensive architecture limits how public space can be used).

Upon first reading, Heger’s minicomic pertains to spatial politics. In outlining how public space fails to accommodate animals and humans, “Feindselig” foregrounds the biopolitical parameters of public space. Benches should be used by certain people in certain ways and at certain times. Lamps have specific functions. As such, their affordance as resting site for birds attracts undesirable effects the landing spikes are supposed to correct. Here, urban design belies its investment in openness. On the one hand, it aspires to

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Figure 1. Two frames from Illi Anna Heger's "Feindselig" (2022) featuring a pigeon struggling with human design. Used by permission.



Figure 2. Two frames from Illi Anna Heger's "Feindselig" (2022) featuring a park and commentary on hostile urban design. Used by permission.

be available to whomever. The bench, for instance, does not require prior payment or registration in order to be used. On the other hand, that resting pole in its center irritates its initial status as a welcoming public resting space. It demands order and controls how the space can be used. People can be seated next to one another, but any other use is not only unwelcome, but also structurally discouraged. Like the spikes on the lamp pole, the seat divider on the bench repulses certain uses and thus aims to sustain a status quo imagined by those planning how public spaces such as parks are to be used.

And it is precisely in moments in which the irritation between an attempt to be inviting some while repulsing other use that Heger's minicomic also pertains to temporality. Use-specific design abides by its own spatiotemporal logics. As such, those unaddressed or unaccommodated by these logics are

cast as outside or adjacent to the use-structure. As Sara Ahmed articulates in *What's the Use?*, “use” and “disuse,” or what is “of use,” do not always temporally align: the needs around the thing to be used likely vary (*What's the Use?* 9). Use of a thing must also evoke the purpose of that thing, even if only by absence, although the use and purpose need not—and probably will not—always coincide (Ahmed, *What's the Use?* 23). The park bench in Heger’s minicomic (left-hand side of Fig. 2) may have been created and placed with the intent of offering people only a place to *sit*. Nevertheless, a new use might present itself to respond to a need: an unhoused person or perhaps someone wanting to lie outstretched to enjoy a warm day might seek out the bench for such a purpose. However, unintended use of the bench qualifies as misuse from the perspective of the structural feature outfitting the bench (the divider on the right of Fig. 2). This bench not only casts those who would misuse it as nonconformists in this environment, but it also forecloses on a future Heger demonstrates is imaginable. In this future, public spaces are welcoming and accommodating of various uses. Here, “defensive architecture” describes the hostile intentionality behind the bench divider. Simultaneously, Heger’s critical contextualization of the bench articulates a longing for a better world. In Ahmed’s terms, Heger anticipates what it would mean to use the bench queerly. Queer use describes the operation when things are “used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended” (Ahmed, *What's the Use?* 199). Queer use marks a temporal departure from intended use in that it finds the “potentiality” that may be waiting for discovery or rediscovery and “release[s]” it (Ahmed, *What's the Use?* 200). Things could be different if urban planners were to hold space in such a way to foster many uses of benches (and lamps, etc.). In this light, Heger’s minicomic holds space for many futures, queer or otherwise. In so doing, “Feindselig” is an indictment of the forms dictating public life hostile to people whose experience of the world falls outside of the status quo.

Fields dedicated to the study of intersectional lived experiences burdened by hegemonic systems offer important insights in this regard. They have long nurtured lines of inquiry concerned with how normative expectations of *use* have wide implications for how bodies inhabit space and time. In disability studies, for instance, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s concept of the “misfit” “offers an account of a dynamic encounter between flesh and world” (592). Focusing on the materiality of surroundings shifts attention from the entities that do not “fit” to the act itself of trying to make them fit (Garland-Thomson 592–593). The concept of the misfit relies in part on the unsuitability of forcing the items into contiguity—assuming a proper, universal fit where the opposite may be more productive or realistic. Expectations and limitations of the space and time around us favor particular entities over others, creating misfits of both the circumstance and the entity that does not

conform to majority expectations (Garland-Thomson 594). In the example of Heger's minicomic, the park bench participates in a certain supposition about which bodies will use the bench as well as why and when.

The contentious relation of living beings to the world as articulated in Heger's evocation of foreclosed futures calls attention to a dynamic at the heart of this project. Biopolitical force as articulated in the broader institutions governing social life always pertains to temporality in that it seeks to correct what appears derailed. It thereby lays claim on the present and future and casts these as domains of hegemonic power. For this reason, temporality emerges as a potent analytic category to examine queer life as reflected in cultural history. The points of irritation to hegemonic structures that queer subjectivity enacts in lived experience pertain to the points of contact between possible and foreclosed queer futures. Here, recourse to formal, thematic, and methodological considerations about time, history, and its related structures provides generative means by which to study queer cultural history.

In this special issue, we seek to activate a series of methodological approaches, theoretical considerations, and textual analyses that center such concerns about queer time. The contributions are less intended to be authoritative than they seek to invite subsequent studies about how queer time as an analytic concept could help us examine queer German cultural history.

I. Queer Theory and the Spatiotemporal

In the 1980s and 1990s, a concentration on spatial concerns was most germane to developments in gay and lesbian studies. The spatial metaphor of the closet came to articulate much of the theoretical interest in how biopolitical force shapes queer intimacy, public/private relations, and public life. Of particular interest here is the work of scholars such as Michel Foucault (*The History of Sexuality*, 1978), John D'Emilio (*Intimate Matters*, 1989), Allan Bérubé (*Coming Out Under Fire*, 1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (*Epistemology of the Closet*, 1990), and Michael P. Brown (*Closet Space*, 2000). For these scholars, the closet became a central site for analysis of the various factors shaping queer life. More recent theoretical contributions have, in turn, been drawn especially to temporal questions. Taking cues from Elizabeth Grosz (*The Nick of Time*, 2004) and Jack Halberstam (*In a Queer Time and Place*, 2005), among others, queer theory analyzed how time and its uses allowed for theorizations of normative and non-normative arrangements of life. It was important for these theorists to engage with, for instance, changed perspectives on untimeliness as experience or condition for life in an ever-changing, unideal world (Grosz). Moreover, concerns about how the HIV/AIDS pandemic shifted queer relations to temporal markers such as life expectancy or longevity (Halberstam). Too slow as measured by heterocapitalist rhythms of life, not quite aligned with received patterns of living, or doomed to have no access to futures, queer subjects came to be burdened by time.

Arising from these considerations, many scholars have examined how temporal patterns and their normative enforcement can have lasting impact on queer subject development. Ahmed, for instance, has observed that “lines that direct us” can delimit normative standards for living (*Queer Phenomenology* 12). Conventional milestones of heteronormative temporalities (e.g., birth, adolescence, marriage/coupling, procreation, death) assist in the maintenance of proper directions of being—what Elizabeth Freeman has called chrononormative trajectories (2010, 3). In this line of thought, Kathryn Bond Stockton (*The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, 2009) has argued that queerness can be found at the point when a subject deviates from chrononormativity. Related theoretical perspectives on queer politics and sociality have emerged from scholars representing positions sometimes called negative or antisocial. A prominent example in this line of thought is Lee Edelman’s recourse to “no future” as a definitive experience of queer life as not predicated on conceptions of reproductivity conditioning straight life (2004). Other scholarship, in turn, is situated in a more affirmative or aspirational vein. For example, José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia* (2009) sees in the resilient manifestations of queer of color life an anticipation of queer futures. Scholarship at the intersection of queer and disability studies—in particular the work of Alison Kafer (2013) and Robert McRuer (2018)—has pursued lines of inquiry related to queer time by discussing *cripping* and *crip time*. McRuer, for instance, discusses the “straighten[ing]” of time as experienced by disabled people subjected to normativizing structures for living (24). Such chrononormative forces “foreclose other crip possibilities” while cultural imagination calling attention to queer crip struggles are part and parcel of cultural practices that help imagine better queer crip futures (56).

Finally, queer histories have revealed how negative affects can play a distinct role in the enactment and interpretation of cultural events. Queerness and its relationship to historiography can be complex, sometimes with characteristics of the antisocial disavowal of standard history-telling while also desiring representation in it (Nealon 2001). In a related vein, Heather Love (2009) theorizes queer people’s investment in negativity as a mode of “feeling backward” in which one perceives past queer life, sometimes uneasily, as a way of comprehending and working through a violent and difficult present. Here, literature, film, photography, and other cultural texts can be viewed productively with attention to these questions of temporality.

II. Queer German Studies and Temporality

Over the course of more than thirty years, queer incarnations of German Studies, in the form of examinations of history, literature, film, and other media, have expanded the field and altered notions of what one could properly choose as objects of study. As in feminist readings before them, scholars such

as Alice Kuzniar (1996), Christoph Lorey and John Plews (1998), Robert Tobin (2000), Susan E. Gustafson (2002), and Randall Halle (2004) published work that demonstrated how one could *queerly* engage in German Studies scholarship. Gay and lesbian studies and then queer studies approaches were fair game in analyzing German cultural products, even those from historical periods and authors long claimed by more conservative interpretations that could willfully ignore or dispute the substance of queer material. Particular moments, events, and figures in queer cultural history have received sustained scholarly scrutiny over the years as more materials have become available and new methods have provided novel insights. For example, the history of sexology and the high degree of involvement of German-speaking sexologists or sexual theorists—e.g., Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and Magnus Hirschfeld—in the development of homosexual, trans, and other non-normative gender and sexual identities has been formative for queer studies broadly speaking (Bauer 2017; Sutton 2019; Lang 2021). Queer German Studies scholarship has also contributed greatly to analyses of the Holocaust (Hájková 2021), history (Marhoefer 2015; Huneke 2022), film (Kuzniar 1999; Baer 2016; Layne 2016; Frackman 2022a and 2022b; Malakaj 2019; Deuber-Mankowsky and Philipp Hanke 2021; Layne and Malakaj 2022), literature (Breger 2008; Weiman-Kelman 2018; Pflieger and Stewart 2019; Stone 2020; Sutton 2021), and other cultural products and media (El-Tayeb 2013; Spiers 2016; Evans, et al. 2018; Dawson 2018; Sweetapple 2018; Kelly 2018; Samper Vendrell 2020; Frackman 2022b).

The contributors to this special issue seek to extend this long line of inquiry in queer German Studies by calling for sustained engagement with conceptions of queer time in queer German cultural history and media. In a reflective essay for *GLQ*, Elizabeth Freeman observes that queer temporalities are amazingly generous in their utility and allow for a rich variety of applications to study queer life and cultural production (91). The contributions to this special issue of *Monatshefte* bear this out. This special issue's journey through queer temporalities of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries begins with Katie Sutton and Birgit Lang's article "An Ethics of Attentiveness", which concentrates on photographic evidence of gender and sexual difference. Visual records of non-conforming individuals from the early twentieth century, which usually stem from legal, medical, and scientific purposes, are often treated somewhat suspiciously by scholars as transmissions of dominant (and oppressive) interpretations of subjectivity. Sutton and Lang find evidence for a more ambivalent interpretation by identifying "deviant dwelling," forms of representation that reveal histories of deviation, conformity, and pragmatism. In addition to analyzing photographic evidence, Sutton and Lang's article also thematizes exhibition practices that engage with ongoing questions of power and intent, calling particular attention to dynamic engagement cultures that transcend temporal limits.

In the second article by Adrienne Merritt, Robert Musil's novel *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906) provides an opportunity to analyze Musil's fragmented narrative for the functions of what Nicole McCleese calls "sadistic" and "masochistic" times. Merritt's interpretation of *Törleß* sees a symbiotic sadomasochistic relationship between the novel's protagonist and its narrator, intricately connecting S/M to the content and form of the novel. Beyond this use of particular forms of temporality, Merritt argues, *Törleß* deeply involves the reader in its manipulation of temporal reception with techniques of "delay" and "acceleration."

Domenic DeSocio's article, "Friends with Benefits," focuses on ideas of queer friendship and how it appears as a continuous construction in two novels from the first half of the twentieth century. DeSocio takes inspiration from varying experiences of time in friendships, sexual encounters, and other relationships, linking these realities to temporalities of queerness. This article is situated in the interwar Weimar years, choosing two complementary texts—Klaus Mann's *Der fromme Tanz* (1926) and Siegfried Kracauer's *Georg* (1934)—to illustrate how these narratives can posit forms of queer friendship as having an extraordinary, if not unique, relationship to temporalities.

Simone Stirner's article, "Untimely Belongings," puts two fascinatingly divergent works in dialog: Ulrike Ottinger's *Freak Orlando* (1981) and May Ayim's poem "deutschland im herbst" (1992). Both strikingly different aesthetic approaches are inspired by the memory of *Kristallnacht*, the so-called Night of Broken Glass (November 9–10, 1938), and manipulate temporalities in order to provoke questions about violence and belonging in German society during and after the Nazi period.

In the fifth article, Kyle Frackman turns to contemporary German film to examine temporal qualities of queerness and how these can manifest in cinematic works. The article is inspired by the transnational New Wave Queer Cinema, first identified in 2012, and finds evidence for an incarnation of this cinematic mode in German film. Building on the idea of "precarious intimacies," Frackman shows how queer cinema deploys "slow" aesthetic techniques to highlight the complexity of queer intimacies. Analyzing two films—*Sturmland* (2014) and *Neubau* (2020)—this article examines the conflict between queer potential on the one hand and the temporal (and sometimes spatial) hazards of queer eroticism or nonconforming gender on the other.

Finally, Robert Tobin's article on "Queer German Roots of the Alt-Right" demonstrates a circularity of temporal relationships by illustrating connections between the Italian fascist thinker Julius Evola (1898–1974) and nineteenth-century German-speaking theorists of gender and sexuality. Evola, who is not a household name or even well-known among academics who study the history of far-right thinking, borrowed some of his core concepts from figures associated with the homosexual emancipation movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Evola's sources include Karl

Heinrich Ulrichs, Otto Weininger, and Hans Blüher, all of whom had influential ideas about the complex relationship between gender and sexuality.

Drawing on the traditions of scholarship cited above—both in queer theory and in queer German Studies—this special issue of *Monatshefte* seeks to use the insights from scholarship about queer temporality as points of departure to examine queer German cultural history and media. Like the work of earlier scholars who began explicitly interrogating time and its relationship to cultural texts, this issue's articles convey how temporal issues lie at the heart of how we can interpret cultural phenomena pertaining to sexual difference and embodiment. Can one distinguish recurring patterns of queerness in German cultural texts? Are there modes of historiography that are more amenable to the questions entertained by queer German Studies? Which forms of temporality and timeliness are most apposite to these objects' study? In addressing these and related questions, this special issue aims to present methodological and theoretical examples from queer German Studies. As a vibrant subfield, queer German Studies will continue to yield scholarship integral for the understanding of queer lived experience and cultural history. We believe that considerations about queer time will continue to play an important role in this work and see this special issue as a means to catalyze more on this line of inquiry.

¹For an extensive analysis of Heger's work in the context of queer studies, see Nichole M. Neuman's (2020) scholarship on grammatical futurity.

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