

literatur für leser:innen

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Gegenwartsautor:innen

Herausgegeben von Brigitte Prutti

Mit Beiträgen von Karin Bauer,
Simone Pflieger, Julia K. Gruber, Olivia Albiero
und Heidi Schlipphacke



PETER LANG

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Becoming Disposable: Bodies In-Sync and Out-Of-Sync with Method Time in Juli Zeh's *Corpus Delicti* (2009)

Abstract

This article analyzes Juli Zeh's *Corpus Delicti: Ein Prozess* (2009) to show how the novel explores the ways in which social, cultural, and political structures control, monitor, and regulate the protagonists' bodies and construction of their subjectivities. My discussions of *Corpus Delicti* foregrounds the possibility that performative acts which at times render the protagonist Mia Holl precariously illegible within the dominant socio-cultural system, while at other times she may still reside within the system. By doing and undoing a state of belonging and disposability, the character cannot be situated completely and permanently „inside“ or „outside“ the system. In this vein, Mia challenges the prevalent tendency of some readers to valorize resistance by embracing those instances when she registers as belonging to the dominant system. Moreover, distinct formal aspects of Zeh's text prompt readers to pause and potentially re-read passages, encouraging them to interrogate critically their own desire for both a linear narrative and an optimistic resolution with a happy ending.

Juli Zeh's novel *Corpus Delicti. Ein Prozess* (2009) introduces a state that is a health dictatorship whose mechanisms and structures ostensibly protect its citizens. However, this alleged protection is merely a guise to control and regulate the minds and bodies of the people who are governed by the so-called „Methode.“ Zeh's protagonist Mia Holl undergoes a change of status within the social order, transitioning from an initially highly productive and well-integrated citizen to a disposable subject. As Mia repeatedly attempts to overcome her own state of disposability, she is interpellated through forces from both the center and the margin, and her precarious existence is contingent on the socio-political regime of the Methode. Zeh articulates in her novel how dispossessed subjects find themselves struggling with notions of longing and belonging to normative institutional structures and ideologies even as they destabilize and actively oppose the very same.

These types of struggles are illustrative of Zeh's socio-culturally and politically critical lens, which has been one of the hallmarks of her writing ever since the 2001 publication of her debut novel *Adler und Engel*. In her novels as well as her essayistic pieces—and even a series of several songs based on her literary works, released on CD with the German band *Slut*—Zeh explores topics such as the influence of governmental structures and the systematic control of individuals. Between 2008 and 2009, Zeh co-authored an essay with Ilija Trojanow titled *Angriff auf die Freiheit: Sicherheitswahn, Überwachungsstaat und der Abbau bürgerlicher Rechte* in which they challenged their readers to reflect on how state surveillance impinges on personal freedom through the Internet and security cameras.¹ She also wrote a formal complaint to the German Interior Minister regarding the introduction of the biometric passport and its infringement of the constitutional right to privacy and sent

1 Juli Zeh and Ilija Trojanow: *Angriff auf die Freiheit: Sicherheitswahn, Überwachungsstaat und der Abbau bürgerlicher Rechte*. München 2010. Juli Zeh: *Alles auf dem Rasen. Kein Roman*. Frankfurt 2006.

an open letter to the German chancellor Angela Merkel demanding the resolution of the National Security Agency (NSA) affair, including 78,000 signatures in support of her demand together with other writers and filmmakers such as Ilija Trojanow, Eva Menasse, Angelina Maccarone, and Antje Rávic Strubel.² She was one of the founders of the global initiative „Writers Against Mass Surveillance,“ which stressed the need to save democracy in the digital age, an initiative endorsed by more than 220,000 supporters worldwide. Overall, Zeh's journalistic and essayistic writing serves as an appeal to the reader to become a conscientious citizen who champions civil rights and interrogates Germany's current political, socio-economic, and cultural landscape.

The vast majority of the scholarship on Zeh's oeuvre focuses on how she addresses human existence in the twenty-first century when she either explicitly or implicitly references the wars in former Yugoslavia, 9/11, or the 2003 invasion of Iraq.³ As critics such as Claudia Breger and Stephen Brockmann have pointed out, allusions to these events in Zeh's texts undermine assumptions that pop literature has been associated with „the world of surface, consumerism, sexual decadence, and drug excess“⁴ and is largely apolitical.⁵ Rather, Zeh's novels rebut these mainstream conceptions through their references to German and global history and their critical stance on politics and contemporary socio-cultural developments. Patricia Herminghouse and Sonja Klocke characterize Zeh's writing as anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal, emphasizing the formation of alliances and collectives with shared responsibilities among the citizens.⁶ Klocke also points to the importance of globalization in Zeh's works as a powerful force in modifying the Berlin Republic in the post-*Wende* era, with its many changes in areas such as „language, culture, the nation state, media, technological innovation in data processing and communication, consumption, as well as the latest economic developments.“⁷ Carrie Smith and Lars Richter as well as Virginia McCalmont and Waltraud Maierhofer further comment on Zeh's role as female public intellectual whose political agendas intersect with the literary and whose prose prompts

2 In their letter, the authors criticize the chancellor for strategically playing down the severity of NSA surveillance in Germany in a press conference in the summer of 2013. They also demand that Merkel takes actions in order to protect German citizens from invasive practices such as data collection and mass surveillance of worldwide Internet communications: Angemessene Reaktion auf die NSA-Affäre. *Change.org*, <https://www.change.org/p/bundeskanzlerin-angela-merkel-angemessene-reaktion-auf-die-nsa-affäre>.

3 Allusions or direct mention of these historical events can be found in *Adler und Engel* (2001), *Die Stille ist ein Geräusch. Eine Fahrt durch Bosnien* (2002), *Alles auf dem Rasen. Kein Roman* (2006), *Nachts sind das Tiere* (2014), among others.

4 Claudia Breger: Moral Play? Poetics, Ethics and Politics in Juli Zeh's *Spieltrieb*. In: *Über Gegenwartsliteratur*. Ed. by Mark W. Roche. Bielefeld 2008, pp. 105–122, here: p. 106.

5 Breger: Moral Play? pp. 105–115. See also: Stephen Brockmann: Juli Zeh, *Spieltrieb*: Contemporary Nihilism. In: *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. by Lyn Marven/Stuart Taberner. Rochester 2011, pp. 62–74, here: pp. 62–67.

6 Patricia Herminghouse: The Young Author as Public Intellectual: The Case of Juli Zeh. In: *German Literature in a New Century: Trends, Traditions, Transitions, Transformations*. Ed. by Katharina Gerstenberger / Patricia Herminghouse. Brooklyn 2008, pp. 268–284, here: pp. 271, 276–278. Sonja Klocke: Transnational Terrorism, War, and Violence: Globalization and Transborder Exchanges in Juli Zeh's *Spieltrieb*. In: *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*. 47/2011, pp. 520–536, here: pp. 524, 529.

7 Klocke: Transnational, p. 520.

readers to interrogate their own investment in privilege and hegemonic status over marginalized others.⁸

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

Through taking account of their scholarship, I seek to pursue yet another, different angle of inquiry: that is, I will undertake a reading of Zeh's text that is attentive to time and temporality and its impact and effect on subjectivity. As such, my focus of analysis speaks to the subtitle of the novel, *Ein Prozess*,⁹ which refers to a court hearing and evokes Franz Kafka's circular novel *Der Prozess* (1925) and has a temporal meaning as it points to a procedure or an activity. It emphasizes the duration of the action rather than marking a beginning or an endpoint. Additionally, my reading of Zeh attends to the call of this special issue to critically interrogate literary publications by contemporary (post 2000) female German-language writers and the ways in which their aesthetically diverse works portray heterogeneous subject positions and topics. Homing in on how *Corpus Delicti* demonstrates the possibility for being out-of-sync yet resists its glorification as a viable alternative to completely abandoning the system, I read these moments of defiance of routinized patterns and schemata as illustrative of the potential to destabilize the normative system while still residing within the very same structure, and not offering a way of leaving it altogether. Indeed, *Corpus Delicti* addresses the exposure of the subject in contemporary German society to the state's normalizing and regulatory endeavors and the violence that such a system enforces upon its citizens. Additionally, the text also foregrounds an almost obsessive investment in health and the cult of physical fitness in the global North,¹⁰ and seeks to unveil

8 Carrie Smith: Relevant Utopian Realism: The Critical Corporeality of Juli Zeh's *Corpus Delicti*. In: *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*. 48/2012, N. 1, pp. 107–123, here: p. 109. Carrie Smith/Lars Richter: Politicising Desire in Juli Zeh's *Spieltrieb*. In: *Transitions: Emerging Women Writers in German Language Literature*. Ed. by Valerie Heffernan/Gillian Pye. Amsterdam 2013, pp. 187–207, here: pp. 187–188. Virginia McCalmont/Waltraud Maierhofer: Juli Zeh's *Corpus Delicti* (2009): Health Care, Terrorists, and the Return of the Political Message. In: *Monatshefte*. 104/2012, N. 3, pp. 375–392, here: pp. 375–377.

9 Juli Zeh: *Corpus Delicti. Ein Prozess*. Frankfurt 2009. The German subtitle *Ein Prozess*, which is a semantically ambiguous term, alludes to both the novel's portrayal of a court trial and Mia's transformational development through the course of the narrative. In this vein, the word not only insinuates that the story line is connected to a process of progression in Mia's life, but it also references and simultaneously troubles the long-standing tradition of the German *Bildungsroman* as the genre which is defined through the „Bildung," the education, the learning process, or the growth of the main (understood male) protagonist.

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

the fact that the state's regulatory practices depend on a type of utilitarianism that entails the practice of blackmailing those who fail to embody or choose to disregard the norms of the system.

This particular notion of in-sync-ness and the power that resides within regulatory socio-cultural structures in Zeh's novel resembles the concept of „straight time,“ which queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz understands as a regulated and regulating time that reflects and champions heteronormative structures.¹¹ Shifting the emphasis of inquiry away from the past and the present toward the future, Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) foregrounds the potentialities of the „there and then,“ or the Blochian not-yet-here.¹² According to Muñoz, „straight time“ is marked through its linearity, which constructs, affirms, and reiterates static epistemological and ontological narratives of dominance, power, and normativity. Queer time, by contrast, challenges straight time's presentism as well as natural, naturalizing, and naturalized temporality. It questions the *here* and *now* with its quotidian tempos, patterns, and periodicity, and urges the subject to turn to—in the phenomenological sense—the not yet, or the *there* and *then*. This shift to what lies ahead opens the field of vision and directs one's view toward the horizon—a utopian space where „objects and movements [...] burn with anticipation and promise“¹³ that galvanize and stimulate hope, desires, and fantasies.

In his future-oriented approach, Muñoz provides a response to antisocial negativity—a particular strand of queer theory most prominently espoused by Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, which advocates the negation and rejection of hope or the future.¹⁴ Instead, *Cruising Utopia* „argues against anti-relationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity,“ and proclaims that „queerness is always in the horizon“¹⁵—that is, a mode of being in the present that encourages the individual to insist on cruising ahead into a future with alternative spaces, tempos, and kinship formations, rather than combating a short-sighted assimilationist perspective such as the focus on pragmatic issues like gay marriage and a stagnancy in the present. In so doing, *Cruising Utopia* sets up a temporality that does not reject past and present but foregrounds the importance of the past „as a field of possibility“¹⁶ for the present in order to envision a future.

Extrapolating from Muñoz's conceptualization of temporality, I suggest the term *Methode time* to describe the social system of Zeh's *Corpus Delicti*. More precisely, *Methode time* refers to how the life of each citizen is organized in discrete temporal segments in a way that these units of time lose their distinctness and become abstracted from subjective lived experience. As each individual follows the same daily,

11 José Esteban Muñoz: *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York 2009, p. 22, 25.

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

13 Muñoz: *Cruising*, p. 26.

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

15 Muñoz: *Cruising*, p. 11.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

monthly, and yearly routines, the lives of those abiding by the rules of the system are increasingly homogenized and bereft of any sense of experiential idiosyncrasy. Methode time is the only governing frequency according to which clocks tick for its citizens.

Based on this mode of structuring of life, the temporal patterns and rhythms of the system are those that serve as points of reference for assessing the value and level of integration of each citizen-subject. Since Methode time valorizes a certain type of productivity and efficiency, its implementation and realization confer the status as citizen-subject on each individual, granting access to the social system. It even rewards them with benefits. Thus, the operation of Methode time within society is evocative of the Benthamian idea of the panopticon¹⁷; all citizens are encouraged to police and control their behavioral patterns (and those of other citizens) in order to reaffirm and perpetuate the temporal partition and regulation of life.

Corpus Delicti is a dystopian, futuristic sci-fi novel¹⁸ that centers on the protagonist Mia Holl, a thirty-year old woman who grows up in and is educated according to the standards of a totalitarian socio-political system. The Methode requires the gathering of daily evidence—food and exercise logs as well as chemical tests of bodily secretions—concerning all citizens' health. It does so by requiring all citizens to supply information and samples that indicate the amount of macronutrients consumed, their blood pressure and urine concentration, their daily physical performance output, and even their sleep schedule. If an irregular pattern is detected by the Methode, an investigation of the reason for the individual's failure to comply is conducted and the person faces charges of varying degree based on the severity of offense. Each person must conform to the ideological and hygienic norms that separate proper citizens from terrorist threats. Mia's life as a believer and conformist changes radically when her brother, Moritz, is imprisoned because of alleged terrorist acts and then commits suicide. Upon Moritz's death, Mia is likewise charged with „anti-Methode“ terrorist actions when she questions the system as she grieves for her brother. During Mia's own trial, her lawyer Rosentreter uncovers a loophole in the previously infallible Methode pertinent to Moritz's case. This uncovering of a flaw in the ostensibly unerring system allows its citizens, but particularly Mia, to see the anti-human and destructive nature of the Methode. Needing a scapegoat to prevent the collapse of the entire system, the Methode frames Mia as the leader of a terrorist group. Her trial ultimately concludes with a devastating sentence: Mia must submit to mental reprogramming, whereby she will be re-educated in the ways of the Methode until she is deemed ready for reintegration into the social order.

As Mia detaches from Methode time while spatially still positioned inside the social order, she is able to shift, change, and ultimately reframe her subjectivity in a way that places her both toward and away from the Methode and its respective advocates.¹⁹

17 Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. by Alan Sheridan. New York 1995. In his seminal work, Foucault theorizes the realization of the modern disciplinary institution through Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon.

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

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

While I recognize the importance of acknowledging how historical references and prominent discourses of the German past and present are commented on in the novel, I will resist the urge to use a teleological model of historical progression as my guiding principle for my reading of *Corpus Delicti*.²⁰ Instead, I will focus on Zeh's concerns in the novel with the precariousness of subjectivity and its repeated negotiation with reference to society's normative standards.

While the Methode in *Corpus Delicti*, with its emphasis on communal, universal well-being, collective values, and the interconnectedness of individuals, appears to be the antidote to a neoliberal system that focuses on privatization and individualism and is propelled by the highly coercive economic machinery of contemporary capitalism, the text depicts the Methode as yet another normative system. Indeed, this new social structure is even more rigid and oppressive as it valorizes some bodies over others and disposes of those who challenge its rigidity and stability. In particular, Mia's body can help make visible conditions of accession and expulsion when the woman is in-sync and out-of-sync with Methode time at various moments throughout the novel. These instances enable Mia to inhabit multiple positions from which, depending on how various forces and identity markers intersect and converge, her identity is constructed, negotiated, and performed. Even if Mia's identity and positionality appear at first sight fixed and intelligible, a second glance reveals that she is never anchored to any particular position, but capable of moving, shifting, and repeatedly finding a new and provisional place in the world.

Positioned within the space of the Methode, which considers „Gesundheit als Normalität“²¹; that is, as both quotidian and regulatory, Mia lives in a totalitarian system in which undoing her own disposability is tightly connected to embodying normativity. Extending a promise of becoming, the Methode grants and acknowledges citizenship and privileges only to those individuals who possess and maintain certain socio-political, cultural, intellectual, physical, and emotional ethics and codes as well as certain material objects, which must be visible to others. As does each citizen, each apartment complex has to supply data regarding water and air quality, recycling patterns, and the cleanliness of the building itself. The reward for an efficiently working house is the title „Wächterhaus“,²² a placard that demonstrates the tenants' commitment to upholding and enforcing the regulations of the Methode, and that earns a discount on water and electricity for the tenants. In this sense, the Methode is a framework that promotes and upholds the mantra of efficiency and the possession and, even more so, the visible expression of certain normative values to guarantee the intelligibility of an individual as citizen-subject and to preserve the status it defines as the well-being of the entire society.

Given this emphasis on visibility and visibility of one's identity, the promise of becoming is tightly connected to the ability to make oneself legible in ways that are recognizable

20 Sonja Klocke: „Das Mittelalter ist keine Epoche. Mittelalter ist der Name der menschlichen Natur.“ – Aufstörung, Verstörung und Entstörung in Juli Zehs *Corpus Delicti*. In: *Das „Prinzip Störung“ in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*. Ed. by Norman Ächtler/Carsten Gansel. Berlin 2013, pp. 185–202. While not done explicitly, Klocke's article seems to create an arch of teleological temporality by drawing connections between Medieval discourses and prominent figures who were involved with trials and the characters in Zeh's novel.

21 Zeh: *Corpus*, p. 145.

22 Ibid., p. 22.

to and recognized by the system. Since this necessity regulates access to and expulsion from the dominant social order in *Corpus Delicti*, human intelligibility, to evoke Butler, is purely performative. That is, belonging and citizenship are controlled by how well individuals construct and intelligibly perform a rather inflexible ideal of subjectivity, one that however remains forever unattainable. In this sense, disposability is connected to the inability or unwillingness to adhere to or stage a particular set of norms.

Initially, Mia is seemingly an avid supporter of the Methode. She is depicted as an „[e]rfolgreiche Biologin mit Idealbiographie.“²³ She inhabits a luxurious penthouse apartment and has helped develop antidotes and vaccines against the most common diseases that plagued the twentieth century. From the standpoint of the Methode, she projects the very image of the productive and well-adjusted citizen: she is physically, psychologically, socially, and emotionally healthy, and she makes enough money to own an upscale apartment in which she lives alone. Initially, Mia can be best described as a follower and believer in the legitimacy of the Methode; she occupies a clear position inside the system and abides by its rules and regulations. Mia takes comfort in being situated inside the system based on her trust in the Methode and the scientific measurability of her world. Being located and locatable confirms what Butler and Athanasiou regard to be „a natural, if not essential, characteristic of human personhood.“²⁴ Mia's initial positionality—both spatially and affectively—thus renders her intelligible to herself as well as the state as a citizen subject and guarantees her access to the social order.

Her situatedness within the Methode changes gradually once she starts to abandon the normative temporal patterns that shape and organize her day-to-day life bit by bit. After the unjust arrest, conviction, and subsequent suicide of Moritz for a crime he did not commit, she demands nothing else but to be left alone for as long as she adequately needs to mourn her brother's death. As a result of this uncoupling of herself from the regular patterns of her life, previously marked by a specific number of hours allotted to work, fitness, nutritional intake, and sleep, Mia becomes the target of the Methode. She fails to supply a „Schlafbericht und Ernährungsbericht“ and experiences a „[p]lötzliche[n] Einbruch im sportlichen Leistungsprofil.“²⁵ As she has come to reject Methode time, Mia is perceived as out-of-sync in regard to the normative temporal rhythms. All those daily routines that have thus far embedded her in the processes of the Methode and defined her intelligibility and livelihood as a member of society have now become „eine bloße Abfolge von Handlungen,“²⁶ futile and meaningless repetitions that she is unable or unwilling²⁷ to perform.

Mia's conscious uncoupling and refusal to participate in the regimen that the social system prescribes resonate with the concept of critical utopian thinking as proposed by Rhiannon Firth and Andrew Robinson. In „For the Past Yet to Come: Utopian

23 Ibid., p. 19.

24 Ibid., p. 9.

25 Ibid., p. 18.

26 Ibid., p. 47.

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

Conceptions of Time and Becoming" (2014), they propose that „homogenous empty time“,²⁸ which emerged in capitalist societies, is ubiquitous and identical for all citizen-subjects and renders them empty of their individuality while utopian time is „experimental, experiential and subjective.“²⁹ Although Firth and Robinson do not explicitly reference Muñoz and his theorization of „straight time“, I see a connection between the three scholars and their works. I contend that the ubiquity of „empty time“ that Firth and Robinson are describing evokes Muñoz's conceptualization of „straight time“ as a linear and „self-naturalizing temporality.“³⁰ As it is linked to the enactment and affirmation of norms in the present moment, it does not allow for „other ways of being in the world“. ³¹ However, if individuals detach from „straight time“ and head toward „a horizon imbued with potentiality“, ³² they will be able to embrace their queer subjectivities. Rejecting „straight time“ in a similar fashion that Firth and Robinson repudiate „homogenous empty time“, Muñoz apprehends queer time to allow for „a doing for and toward the future“³³: that is, examinations and experimentations that offer each subject the possibility to explore their very own desires and pleasure of being in the world.

These two ways of theorizing utopian time and identity resonate with the social model of the Methode that Zeh creates in her novel. In this sense, *Corpus Delicti* points to what is at stake when routines structure life: namely, idiosyncratic lived experiences turn into individual portions or fragments that are perceived as abstracted from lived time. By regulating and segmenting daily routines, the Methode ensures that all its citizens engage in particular activities at approximately the same time and thus standardizes life according to its schedule. In this vein, the life of each individual becomes a sequence of repetitions and only bears significance and merit if it is production-driven and fits into the „Leistungsprofil“ as the main guiding principle. In the eyes of the Methode, Mia's rupture of the system's repetitive temporal timeframe renders her a non-productive citizen-subject. Her body is perceived as a source of disturbance, one that is deemed expendable in relation to the Methode, she has thus lost her right to belong to the social order.³⁴

While Mia initially unquestioningly believes in the system as benefitting humankind, her perspective alters significantly over the course of the novel when „die ideale Geliebte“³⁵ enters her life shortly after Moritz's death. She is an imagined character whom Moritz sends to Mia during the time of his imprisonment because of his allegedly anti-Methode terrorist acts. Encouraged through various interactions with die ideale

28 Rhiannon Firth/Andrew Robinson: For the Past Yet to Come: Utopian Conceptions of Time and Becoming. In: *Time & Society*. 23/2014, N. 3, pp. 380–401, here: p. 383.

29 Ibid., p. 382.

30 Muñoz: *Cruising*, p. 25.

31 Ibid., p. 1.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

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

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

Geliebte to interrogate and challenge precisely the system that provided a sense of belonging for Mia's brother, Mia has become detached from Methode time, including the people and the world it constructs.³⁶ Although still residing inside the system, she understands herself as „ein Wort, das man so lang wiederholt hat, bis es keinen Sinn mehr ergibt.“³⁷ Through the endless loop of repetitions, she has lost any „Sinn“ or *raison d'être* as a subject and has become a word. Instead of perceiving herself as a corporeal being with distinct lived experiences, she has come to think of herself as an abstract conglomerate of letters that only possess sense within a normative system that endows them with meaning. In reference to the Methode, she is no longer the ideal citizen-subject, but an undesirable and unintelligible soma that needs to be eliminated from the state. Based on these references to belonging and having lost a place within the Methode, it is tempting to read Mia as a body whose „proper place is non-being“³⁸ and who is undone by the system. In this particular instance, a Butlerian reading of Zeh's initial depiction of Mia might suggest that she is a body that suffers from the inability to perform or stage normativity and consequently has ceased to matter, becoming a dispensable subject. Such a reading would, however, miss that Mia is surely *not* a non-being.

Through die ideale Geliebte, Mia is exposed to a different way of conceiving of time: one that is both non-cyclical and defies the normative, linear patterns of Methode time. Introducing the concept of the „Hagazussa,“ the witch or hedge spirit, as a fluid and liminal being who, literally and metaphorically, sits on the fence and whose „Reich ist das *Dazwischen*,“³⁹ die ideale Geliebte evokes discourses typically associated with the Middle Ages, but whose traces can be found in the Hebrew Bible and appear at different points in time throughout the history of Christianity. This idea of the witch as a being who embraces a sense of in-betweenness that die ideale Geliebte puts forth resonates with notions around institutionalized normativity and traditional gender roles that were established in the eighteenth century. While women were deemed passive and nurturing beings who were firmly situated in the space of the home—they are understood to be mothers and wives since the establishment of conceptions of bourgeois gender norms in the eighteenth century—those who left these spheres and embraced female agency and alternative positionalities were labeled witches, considered to be dangerous, and had to be eliminated from the social system.⁴⁰

36 In Zeh's novel, „die ideale Geliebte“ is also interpellated through the interaction between Moritz and Mia and she is a separate and imagined entity. That is, she is sent into Mia's life to interact with her rather than being the reflection of the performative iteration of Mia's subjectivity.

37 Zeh: *Corpus*, p. 48.

38 Athena Athanasiou/Judith Butler: *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge 2013, p. 19.

39 Zeh: *Corpus*, p. 144, emphasis in original.

40 See for example: Edward Bever: *Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community*. In: *Journal of Social History*. 35/2002, N. 4, pp. 955–988. Maggie Rosen: *A Feminist Perspective on the History of Women as Witches*. In: *Dissenting Voices*. 6/2017, N. 1, pp. 21–31. *The Bible*. Authorized King James Version. Oxford 1998, p. Ex. xxii. 18. While in the Old Testament witches were depicted as (mostly) women who used curses to harm others or bring misfortune upon them, the New Testament portrays them as wicked figures who are able to inflict bodily harm. As a result, various Bible passages prescribe the murder of witches such as „thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.“ While in fact various Councils and decrees of the Catholic Church outlawed the persecution of people as witches in the Middle Ages, witch trials started all across Early Modern Europe.

While Klocke analyzes the image of the witch in conjunction with Homi Bhabha's concept of spatiality and hybridity and bases her argument on the word „Hagazussa“ and the figure of the Medieval witch, I foreground the potential that resides in the evocation of particular discourses in relation to specific moments in time in the story world and beyond rather than constructing an argument that rests on the witch as a historical figure who populates and moves between spaces.⁴¹ In other words, I seek to move from a space-driven approach to a more fluid paradigm that centers on constructing meaning through its emphasis on temporality and relationality. In this sense, my analysis stresses the fact that the word „witch“ can be seen as the site of departure of relational vectors which point to discrete moments in time, which in turn are shaped by particular discourses: a reading that underscores temporality in connection to text and context.

Mia is an individual who exists in a precarious state of being that enables her to challenge and re-configure traditional understandings of belonging. In claiming the identity of the Medieval witch—one that is often overshadowed by hetero-patriarchal narratives of knighthood, castles, kingdoms, and the Crusades—Mia's performative acts call to mind what Heather Love urges her readers to do in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2009).⁴² That is, Love criticizes how contemporary queer culture silences and omits literary figures of the past that are associated with fear, pain, and the shame of the closet and have thus disappeared. Rather than dismissing queer figures that populate pre-Stonewall literature such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936), and Willa Cather's *Not under Forty* (1936), who might not align neatly with the progress narratives of the queer movement of the twenty-first century, Love encourages us to look backward and consider how history continues to affect us in the present.

This modality of looking backward and the impact of the past in the present comes to the fore when Mia claims her status as a witch, she references certain attributes and traits that are typically associated with women from different moments in the *then* and embodies them in the *now*. Thus, she is temporally „dazwischen“ in the sense that she exists in a present moment but continues to look to the past as a referent, without which this present moment could not exist in the first place. As such, Mia's existence in the present moment registers as a form of presence simultaneously at a distance from and infused with the past.

The blurring of temporality and its linkage to witchcraft and magic spells is also evident in Mia's exchange with Heinrich Kramer,⁴³ Methode supporter and author of a book titled „*Gesundheit als Prinzip staatlicher Legitimation*,“⁴⁴ in which he publicizes the Methode's ideology and legitimizes it with its benefits. After Kramer reveals how he

41 Homi Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*. New York 1994, pp. 55, 310–315. Bhabha's space theory seems to provide a framework of analysis that aligns with Zeh's construction of Mia, as he understands in-betweenness as „neither One nor the Other“ and proposes a third space as *the* realm of transgression, subversion, and new possibilities, both ideas that Klocke appears to support in her essay.

42 Heather Love: *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge 2007.

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

44 Zeh: *Corpus*, p. 8.

has used Mia to fortify and secure the power of the Methode, she wishes death through suffocation upon him in the fashion of a magic spell. He responds to Mia's curse by drawing a cross in the air and declaring: „Ein Hexenfluch. *Vade retro*.“⁴⁵ Although Kramer dismisses the act immediately as a joke, his reaction functions, as I will explain, as an affirmation of the temporal shifts.

Although unaware of the conversation between Mia and die ideale Geliebte, he invokes a distinct discourse of the past and, similar to die ideale Geliebte, maps the witch onto Mia's body. In doing so, he constructs Mia's presence as a subject in the present through an allusion to a haunting moment in the past when non-normative female bodies were marked, persecuted, and punished as deviant others. In this sense, Kramer's exclamation not only participates in the construction of Mia's subjectivity as aberrant in relation to the Methode, but he also participates in the destabilization of Methode time, albeit only jokingly. His own words, which cite a discrete and distinct time period, temporarily embed Mia within this particular discourse. This reference to the Middle Ages, which Kramer elicits in his declaration, simultaneously extends a promise of becoming a subject in the present moment and undoes her since she can only exist in the *now* as a being of the past.

By intertwining past, present, and future thematically and in its narrative chronology, *Corpus Delicti* disrupts linear and synchronous time, opening up the potential for readers to interrogate their own investment in and attachment to conventional assumptions about the unfolding of temporal patterns, routines, and chronological sequences. When Mia remarks, „Es hat sich nichts geändert. Es ändert sich niemals etwas. Ein System ist so gut wie das andere. Das Mittelalter ist keine Epoche. Mittelalter ist der Name der menschlichen Natur,“⁴⁶ she dissolves past, present, and future as temporal units by which to structure life. This collapse is particularly emphasized in the second sentence by the use of the present tense, which in German also has a future meaning. If nothing has changed and traces of the past are ever-present, then the *now* is always already delayed yet at the same time pointing to what is yet to come in the *then*. Although relying on the essentializing notion that time is naturally connected to humanness rather than socially constructed, Mia's words nonetheless break with the understanding that time has to follow a teleological path and daily life has to be structured according to particular rhythms; she refutes the concept of a linear progression and a cyclical repetitive rhythm. In claiming that socio-political systems throughout history are all similar and that the Middle Ages are not a period of the past, but rather a term that evokes popular meanings to describe human nature more generally, Mia not only destabilizes the idea of progression as a sign of advancement and perpetual growth, but she also hints at the significance of time as an element in defining subjectivity.

This concept of the disintegration of temporal segments along with Mia's new way of thinking of herself as „dazwischen,“ encouraged by die ideale Geliebte, enables her to comprehend herself as a subject who resides within the system, but is able to separate herself from the dominant logic of Methode time. When capable of embracing a detachment, she finally understands and embraces what it meant when Moritz told

⁴⁵ The phrase „vade retro“ is Latin and is the command form for „move back.“ Ibid., p. 232.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 235.

her: „[m]an muss flackern. Subjektiv, objektiv. Subjektiv, objektiv. Anpassung, Widerstand. An, aus. Der freie Mensch gleicht einer defekten Lampe.“⁴⁷ Like the „defekte Lampe,“ flickering erratically and unpredictably between light and darkness, Mia defines her state-of-being as a liminal and precarious subject. As a kind of spectral being, Mia appears constantly to materialize and fade out of existence at any given minute without adhering to a specific pattern or sequence, and, in so doing, simultaneously affirms and defies a coherent reading of her personhood. She is constantly becoming and unbecoming a subject inside the system which both allows her to maintain a sense of unbound independence from the Methode and subjects her to its forces and structures.

Espousing this mode of being a „flackern[des]“ subject, Mia points to what is at stake, namely, the over-glorification of acts of resistance and an emphasis on the liberating experiences as one leaves behind the dominant system. While Mia appears to maintain a sense of unbound independence from the Methode and to be able to resist her own expendability as a subject, Moritz’ words caution against such a one-sided and purely optimistic reading of her character. Embracing an existence outside of Methode time, she is able to seize moments of possibility that allow her to withstand the crushing forces of the system. Yet, these instances are always paired with conformity and Mia’s existence inside the Methode, underscoring the impossibility of an absolute and permanent escape from the system.

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

When doing and undoing her own disposability by uncoupling herself from the system—a gesture that indicates Mia’s own act of disconnecting herself from Methode time while her body is still emplaced inside the system of the Methode and responds to it—Mia is able to conceive of her body as a remnant that „gehört niemandem mehr. ... Vollkommen ausgeliefert, also vollkommen frei.“⁴⁸ In so doing, she

47 Ibid., p. 149.

48 Ibid., p. 248.

emphasizes her position as an out-of-sync being that points to what is at stake for a disconnected body. While her position is highly unstable and precarious and makes her available to everybody as a representational figure—as an iconoclast, a rebel, a dissident, a martyr, a terrorist—she concomitantly belongs to nobody. This particular relation of existing detached from the normative temporal rhythms of the Methode yet existing always in relation to, and more specifically within, the system constructs a powerful force field with vectors that push and pull subjects in multiple directions and allow them to champion being in and out-of-sync with Methode time. Driven by her own desires as well as those of the system, Mia concomitantly does and undoes her own disposability and situates herself in a realm that signals both power and vulnerability, certainty and uncertainty, precarity and stability.

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

This strategy becomes apparent during one particular exchange between Kramer and Mia that is a pivotal moment in their respective campaigns for and against the system. Although in a prison that is controlled by the Methode, the young woman is spatially positioned inside the Methode while concomitantly still, or yet again, temporally detached from the system's routines and mandates of time that would render her a citizen-subject. This particular situation emphasizes Mia's alignment with Methode time, which enables her to publicize and disseminate her passionate and potent critique of the system as she uses Kramer—and, by extension, the system—„als Sprachrohr.“⁴⁹ Recognizing the position of power and authority that Kramer holds in society, Mia orders him to write down and distribute her ideas among the citizens of the Methode. Relying on the highly gendered notion of him being an „Ehrenmann“⁵⁰—an ideal of honor, integrity, and trustworthiness that references a highly stylized masculinity—when she addresses Kramer directly, she reaffirms his sense of control and dominance in this situation and tricks him into doing her bidding. Thus, Mia's attempt to destabilize the system relies on its stability and, in so doing, takes advantage of key figures like Kramer to make her ideas public.

Mia proclaims whom and what she refuses to trust; that is, she overtly rejects a system that regulates its populace through a set of temporal routines within a clearly defined and discrete space and denies the existence of any flaws or imperfections. When she deems the Methode too lazy „sich dem Paradoxon von Gut und Böse

49 Ibid., p. 184.

50 Ibid.

zu stellen⁵¹—a contradiction that results from enforcing its norms to establish and stabilize its own normativity—she points to the fact that both good and bad are part of the same system and that their presence needs to be acknowledged. By ultimately revealing that she „entzieh[t] [sich] das Vertrauen ...“,⁵² she engages in, or in other words, enacts her own expulsion from the Methode. This act allows her to briefly entertain the possibility of the promise of unbecoming.

As she disposes of her status as a citizen-subject, she believes that she is finally able to be completely out-of-sync with the vision of the system. This fantasy of being „vollkommen frei,“ as Mia herself remarked, comes with its counterpart of being „vollkommen ausgeliefert,“ which she does not realize at first. While Mia indulges the pleasure of seemingly being detached, Kramer views Mia's words as a „rhetorische Massenvernichtungswaffe ... , die er zu nutzen wisse.“⁵³ From his perspective, the woman's statement is of great value for his goal to obtain social control and dominance again, but he does not specify how he will achieve his goal. He remains cryptic in his conversation with Mia, and merely tells her that he will take advantage of Mia's words and circulate them as a „Vertrauensfrage“⁵⁴ on the part of the Methode. Playing with the political notion of the vote of confidence,⁵⁵ Kramer seizes this pivotal moment and reappropriates Mia's declaration in order to denounce her as a terrorist and to reaffirm the system.

While Kramer's techniques of torture could be solely understood as a means of inflicting physical pain on Mia's body—and I agree that this is the case in *Corpus Delicti*—seen through the lens of temporality, these acts constitute a way of resyncing Mia's body with „Methode time“ and re-integrate her into the system. Designed to inflict pain on Mia's sensory and nervous system, the light in the cell is programmed such that it „schaltet sich in regelmäßigen Abständen von jeweils 1,5 Sekunden an und wieder aus.“⁵⁶ The incessant fluctuation of light and darkness with which Mia is bombarded re-introduces a stable and systematic routine of discrete temporal segments back into her life. In this vein, the Methode's preferred method of torture follows a rhythm. This rhythm in particular tortures Mia as it counteracts her random „flackern.“

When Mia has to appear in front of court one last time to receive her final verdict, she initially receives the same ruling as all dissidents before her. She accepts the sentence of being flash-frozen indeterminately as the punitive head of the terrorist anti-Methode group, „wieder und wieder und immer wieder, siehe früher im Jahrhundert und spät im Jahrhundert und mitten im Jahrhundert.“⁵⁷ Right when she is about to become yet another individual who has to follow a Methode verdict that merely repeats its self-advertisement *ad infinitum*, the system breaks its own temporal pattern.

While the narrative does not explicitly state the reasons why Mia's verdict is revoked at the last minute and who is responsible for the repeal, the procedure is stopped

51 Ibid., p. 186.

52 Ibid., p. 187.

53 Ibid., p. 188.

54 Ibid.

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

56 Zeh: *Corpus*, p. 238.

57 Ibid., p. 259.

immediately. The Methode „saves“ Mia in the eleventh hour with a court reprieve. Instead of being flash-frozen, she is to go home as she is „frei,“ and sentenced to undergo „Alltagstraining“⁵⁸: personal and psychological counseling and political education. Although this sentence could be read as the last attempt to save Mia from eternal confinement as a deep frozen body, this shift in the execution of the court ruling is, in my view, the Methode's acknowledgement of Mia's potentially powerfully precarious position as a flash-frozen body completely detached from the system's normative temporal sequences. Consequently, it must act to prevent this eventuality from happening.

The prescribed acts of „reintegration“—or more aptly, ideological brain-washing—necessitate Mia's release from prison and the routines of the Methode; she has to be rendered an unbound and out-of-sync subject one last time to enforce her assimilation into the system again. Thus, this final step of propelling Mia back into Methode time is contingent on her expulsion: she faces both the pleasures and agonies that arise from the potential of the promise of unbecoming. In Mia's case, this is also an unwanted promise of becoming or rather a „promise“ of forced return to the status quo. In this vein, the freedom of undoing herself and of becoming disposable undoes her and does her in—she is finally „vollkommen frei“ yet „vollkommen ausgeliefert“ to the Methode, which leaves her with little to no hope of ever escaping the system. Mia's ultimate return to the system re-programs her so that she is part of the temporal patterns of the Methode again. The system's sets of normative practices can be enforced upon her body, mind, and soul. This reintegration forces Mia to realize „[dass] jetzt ... wirklich alles zu Ende [ist]“⁵⁹ and keeps her temporally fixed and present in a present. Forced to face the absolute „Ende“ prevents her from envisioning a future *then* and coerces her to endure her own abandonment as a subject in an everlasting cycle of the non-potentiality of Methode time.

Corpus Delicti explores the ways in which social, cultural, and political structures control, monitor, and regulate bodies and foregrounds how accession and expulsion play a central role in the construction of the main characters in *Corpus Delicti*. As Mia struggles with a socio-political system that aims at making bodies vulnerable and rendering them disposable if they are not legible as „proper,“ her body and mind is exposed to normative forces that act on, turn, and resituate her. Zeh's texts propose that alternative temporalities and being out-of-sync with Methode time holds the potential to advance a promise of temporary escape from the dominant order. This very promise however does not guarantee a permanent and definite break but is merely temporarily based on the particular performative gestures at any given moment. Thus, Zeh's novel points to the desire for flight from the social order in its protagonists, but repeatedly remind its readers how this promise is less a commitment than a fleeting moment of potential.

These explorations of alternative temporal structures and ostensibly foreclosed possibilities extend beyond the novel discussed in this essay and span across many of the literary texts in Zeh's oeuvre such as *Adler und Engel* (2001), *Spieltrieb* (2004), *Schilf* (2007), *Nullzeit* (2012), and *Unterleuten* (2016). Despite their differences in

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 264.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

narrative focalizers, topics, and settings, with their plot inconsistencies, partially incredible characters, and non-linear, jumping plot lines, these works exemplify Zeh's tendency to encourage her readers to think about the multiplicity of possibilities and the ways in which particular performative acts at times render certain bodies precariously illegible within the dominant socio-cultural system, while at other times they may still reside within the system. Being in-sync and out-of-sync with those normative temporal regimes that each narrative constructs has an impact on whether the protagonists belong or become disposable. Based on their respective positionality and their relationship to time, the characters thwart any neat division between existing „inside“ or „outside“ the system. Indeed, Zeh's fictional and non-fictional works alike challenge her readers' prevalent tendency to valorize resistance and position it in opposition to the desire to reside within the dominant system. As such, the texts prompt readers not only to think about the conditions of the *now*, but also to interrogate the various possibilities and/or dangers of a possible *then* with alternative spaces of world-making.