



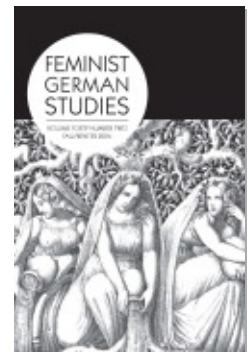
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*Untimely Bodies, Untimely Aesthetics: Temporality,
Relationality, and Intimacy in the Cinema of the Berlin
School* by Simone Pflieger (review)

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of the texts. Her prose is efficient, intelligent, free of jargon, and thus accessible to readers from multiple disciplines. Particularly haunting is the connection to our current politics: “In these narratives, those who control reproductive decisions maintain godlike control over the birthing body, and having a mother confers the rights of personhood” (6). This in turn begs the question: If having a mother confers the rights of personhood, is a mother also a person?

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Simone Pflieger. *Untimely Bodies, Untimely Aesthetics: Temporality, Relationality, and Intimacy in the Cinema of the Berlin School*. McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023. 228 pp. Cloth, \$85.95 US/\$95 CAD.

In this innovative contribution to the scholarship on the Berlin School cinema, Simone Pflieger helps us make sense of the sometimes puzzling and even disturbing relationships between the films’ characters, who frequently seem to be at an impasse, whether engaged in messy intimate heterosexual relationships, in construction projects at their family homes, or oscillating between an attachment to normative conceptions of the “good life” and fleeting engagements in non-normative, queer acts. Using as her starting point philosophies of straight and queer time and phenomenology by theorists such as Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Elizabeth Freeman, Jack Halberstam, Heather Love, and José Esteban Muñoz, Pflieger turns to temporality as a key concept from which to “analyze socio-cultural notions of intimacy and relationality that are tied to normative conceptualizations of subjectivity in the cinema of the Berlin School” (33). To accomplish this, Pflieger employs the notion of *untimeliness*, which suggests a back-and-forth between being timely and untimely, between acting in accordance with and, at the same time, out of sync with heteronormative time. Approaching Berlin School films through the lens of straight and queer temporality results in original and insightful readings that shed light on interpersonal dynamics in the films by members of this loosely affiliated group of German and Austrian filmmakers in the post-millennial age.

In four densely packed and very readable chapters, Pflieger first delves

into queer theories of time and their applicability to films produced by Berlin School filmmakers (“Of Becoming *Untimely*”). She posits that untimeliness and timeliness are co-constitutive, the italics in *untimely* signaling a fluid back-and-forth between the two states to account for the fact that the two are often not separate from each other but rather exist at the same time (31). Through this equivocal concept, she “encourages us to think beyond the binary, clear-cut division between being in-sync and aligned with straight time (timely) and out-of-sync and unhinged (untimely)” (32).

The three following chapters examine different themes and types of relationality in films by Maren Ade, Christoph Hochhäusler, Ulrich Köhler, Christian Petzold, and Maria Speth. “Tenuous Relations and Fleeting Connections” (chapter 2) looks at ruptures in normative (straight) intimacy and failing heterosexual relationships; chapter 3 highlights the “crumbling” of heteronormative marriages in family homes that are perpetually unfinished or under construction (92); and chapter 4, “Queer Affinities and Fantasies of Relationality,” highlights ways in which characters who engage in queer encounters or fantasies “grow sideways and embrace modalities of an alternative temporality,” which allows them to glimpse a different future in a dynamic exchange between the “now” and the “then” (175). The overarching theme and theories of temporality prove to be a useful barometer for exploring how and why the characters are stuck in distressful and unsatisfying relationships in the present while simultaneously breaking out (temporarily and tenuously) of normative (timely) constellations into non-normative (untimely) ones. In addition, Pflieger applies the concept of *untimely* to examine how the films’ characteristic and at times unsettling aesthetics (e.g., long takes, refusal to offer satisfying closure, silence) challenge viewers to investigate or sit uncomfortably with their simultaneous “investment in and resistance to timeliness and untimeliness at different times in their lives” (33).

Pflieger’s book is a valuable contribution to the field of German film studies, to the scholarship on the Berlin School, and to feminist and queer studies in general, not least because of its unique framing of German art cinema in the context of queer theory and philosophy. It intersects productively with Hester Baer’s *German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism* (2021), which also attends to gender and sexuality in recent German film (including Berlin School) but takes a broader, historical view. *Untimely Bodies, Untimely Aesthetics* engages with and adds a fresh perspective to the growing body of scholarship on the Berlin School and will be of inter-

est to film scholars, Germanists, and scholars and students of queer and feminist theory.

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Simone Pflieger and Carrie Smith, editors. *Transverse Disciplines: Queer-Feminist, Anti-racist, and Decolonial Approaches to the University*. University of Toronto Press, 2022. 377 pp. Cloth/e-book, \$80.00.

Edited by Simone Pflieger and Carrie Smith, *Transverse Disciplines: Queer-Feminist, Anti-racist, and Decolonial Approaches to the University* empowers the traditionally overlooked and marginalized to thrive in spaces of higher education and beyond. The volume's fourteen contributions bypass linear systems of thought, reject ethnonationalist modes of oppression, and eclipse siloed disciplinary isolation. Inspired by Lauren Berlant's distinction between structures and infrastructures, the contributors contemplate how change must "not only come at the level of structure (the structure of disciplines within an institution, structural racism in a professional organization, or the structure of the curriculum, for example), but also of infrastructure" (245). Relating these insights further, each contribution exemplifies structural and infrastructural changes. To that end—which is by its very nature a consummate beginning—the volume embodies the accountability, expansion, and interconnectedness required to uproot the settler-colonial, anti-Black, ableist, neuronormative, and heteropatriarchal violence permeating German studies.

The contributions in the first section provide transparency and accountability regarding German studies in Germany, Australia, the United States, and the UK. Claudia Breger's essay describes the richly historical and bidirectional flow of exchange between *Germanistik*, German studies, and the humanities, while simultaneously maintaining a pragmatic disposition toward disruption as detracting from those possibilities necessary in these critically precarious times. Questioning rigid conceptualizations of German studies in the Anglophone countries, Brangwen Stone interrogates the roots of an ethnonational paradigm in Australia. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming advocates translingual and transcultural approaches to advance equity,