When the World Comes to a Halt

Imagining Im/mobilized Futures in the Work of Forster, Haushofer, and Lehr

Nicola Kopf and Annegret Pelz

I. Disappearing Futures

> The resources of the future have been eroded.
> *Aleida Assmann (2020, 4)*

Knowledge of the future can only be generated under the proviso of the imaginary and therefore can only be "conceived as imagined, made, fictional future" (Bühler and Willer 2016, 9). Nevertheless, the figures, forms, cultural techniques, and social practices with which the future is imagined, thought, and designed are a condition of the formation of social realities. Since future-oriented thinking is subject to and intervenes in the epistemological conditions and possibilities of the present (Bühler and Willer 2016, 17), research in Futures Studies addresses uncertainties by sustaining rather than eliminating them and finds a way to recognize, handle, and communicate them. This is especially true of the catastrophic perspectivation of the future that emerges in cultural imaginaries of the late 20th and of the 21st century, as John Urry notes in *What is the Future?* (2016). Urry refers to a "new catastrophism" in the Western imagination and detects an apocalyptical "*Zeitgeist*" in academic discourses since the 1990s (2016, 35). Warnings concern the *End of the World as We Knew It* (Leggewie and Welzer 2011) or evoke a present *Living in the End Times* (Žižek 2011), in which the capitalist system heads towards its cataclysmic ground zero. Catastrophe has become "a ubiquitous category of crisis" for (late) modernity in the 20th century, which, in the Western imagination, does not exclusively

refer to the future (Horn 2018) but increasingly extends into the present as a "concept that reflects a condition" (Briese and Günther 2009, 188).

For Aleida Assmann (2020), the impression of a disappearing or "eroded" future stems from the crisis of a modern time regime, in which the cultural construction of the linear progression between past, present, and future breaks apart and the paradigm of modernization reaches its limits. Since 1950, the Great Acceleration has played a significant role in this development, marking the period after World War II as one in which "numerous parameters relating to consumption and the environment have escalated" (Horn 2020, 45). "Industrialization, consumption, mobility, and many other factors that had had their first major boom in the 19th century exploded after the end of World War II" and revealed their catastrophic consequences (Horn and Bergthaller 2019, 33). In the 21st century, multiplying crises culminated in the concept of the Anthropocene, which stands for the manifold ways in which humans are entangled in planetary balance and exposes the paradoxes of a modern "time regime of progress and endless growth" (Horn 2020, 46).

II. Acceleration / Polar Inertia

In discourses of mobility, the crisis rhetoric of acceleration correlates with perceptions of comprehensive temporal and spatial transformations, expressed in pithy phrases such as a "shrinking" (Lübbe 2003) or "broadening present" (Gumbrecht 2010), an annihilation of space, and "polar inertia" (Virilio 2000, 2015). What is striking in these discussions is that acceleration not only increases mobility but also provokes the opposite effect: In the German-speaking context, it is above all the sociologist Hartmut Rosa who retells European cultural history under the auspices of modern acceleration and analyzes the dynamics associated with it in his book *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (2013). Describing humanity's increasing alienation from its eco-social environment, Rosa presents late modernity as an epoch in which "all motion seems to come to an end" – by an immobilization that is not opposed to acceleration but results from it (2013, 15). The philosopher Paul Virilio (2000) already coined the term "polar inertia" in the 1990s, projecting a dystopian future in which all bodily movement terminates. He describes the fixating force of this development with the term "DOMOTICS", which refers to a state of "paralysis", as people withdraw entirely into the space of "domestic comfort" (Virilio 2000, 65). Domotics seeks to institute immobility as a prerequisite of a digital

mobility that extends into space and serves to bring about societies' "absolute sedentariness" (Virilio 2000, 31).

The cultural tendency towards petrification, which Virilio and Rosa describe as the reverse side of modern acceleration, suggests a thought-provoking critique of common mobility narratives. For today, (late) modernity still promises to increase speed and mobility (see Conrad 1999; Borscheid 2004), while concomitant tendencies towards immobilization or the need for an energy and mobility transformation are obscured. Given global crises, the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2011, 97) argues that "prophetic reason" must seek to modify mobility, as he calls for a deeper engagement with the associated ways of life:

> Above all else, today, wising up means understanding that if we cannot end the kinetic expressionism of the last centuries, we must radically modify it. By kinetic expressionism, I mean modernity's way of life, which was enabled above all by the easy availability of fossil fuels. (Sloterdijk 2011, 97)

Rosa also poses "the question of the consequences that unchecked further dynamization would have for the earth's ecosystem", asserting (with reference to Sloterdijk 1989) that we need "a 'critique of political kinetics' and of 'mobilization'" to draw meaningful conclusions for the future – and thus also for the present (2013, 298). In this context, immobilization as a figure of thought derives its virulence from its semantic ambiguity, which oscillates between utopia and dystopia: On the one hand, it expresses the threat of stagnation and the dangerous endpoint of a spiral of acceleration, and at the same time, it feeds on a longing for temporal autonomy, for heterochronous places or another time. Calls for reversal, exit, and rethinking aim to revise the "*modus vivendi* based on fossil fuels" (Sloterdijk 2011, 101) and also touch on the current meaning of catastrophe: While the semantics of catastrophe hinge on turn and reversal, according to its Greek etymology (καταστροφή) (see Bühler 2016, 169), the modern paradigm of acceleration allows a different connotation to emerge: Catastrophe is also that which prevents reversal, which can no longer be stopped, the perpetuated dynamic of an eternal continuation. Programmatically, we can already find this notion in the writings of Walter Benjamin, who thinks catastrophe and progress together and emphasizes the revolutionary potential of interruption as a figure of thought: "That things are 'status quo' is the catastrophe" (2003, 184). Barbara Gronau, too, claims that "immobilization" can be read not only as a consequence of the paradigm of acceleration, but

also "as the negation and provocation of a temporal understanding directed toward efficiency, acceleration, and control" (2019, 8).

III. A New Turn to Stillness?

> We either slow down, and then stop,
> or face an economic and human
> catastrophe on a grand scale.
> *Ian McEwan (2023, 149)*

But what does the prognosis of 'polar inertia' mean for the claim that movement is a key concept of the new mobilities paradigm? In 2006, Mimi Sheller and John Urry argued that the sedentary bias in the social sciences needed to be overcome. At the same time, they emphasized that mobility Studies should not analyze mobility without also considering complementary forms of immobility. Accordingly, the new mobilities paradigm seeks not to idealize mobility, but rather to provide questions, theories, and methodological approaches that aim to overcome disciplinary boundaries: "We do not insist on a new 'grand narrative' of mobility, fluidity, or liquidity. The new mobilities paradigm suggests a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than a totalizing or reductive description of the contemporary world" (Sheller and Urry 2006, 226). Tim Cresswell, who has also shaped this field of research, highlights in a 2012 essay that the concept of "stillness" should not be understood as complementary to mobility but must instead be *included* in the "theorization of movement" (2012, 645). In their book *Stillness in a Mobile World*, David Bissell and Gillian Fuller also note that modern daily life is defined as much by moments of stillness as by a universally perceived mobility: "*Stillness punctuates the flow of all things*: a queuer in line at the bank; a moment of focus; a passenger in the departure lounge; a suspension before a sneeze; a stability of material forms that assemble; a passport photo" (2011, 3).

Rosa's and Virilio's thesis that hypermobility and acceleration are not opposed to sedentarism but *serve* it illustrates the complex ways in which mobility and immobility are intertwined. Exposing sedentarism as a cultural norm that continues to be valid today thus means criticizing it *within* a current paradigm of acceleration, while also examining potential ways forward. In this context, a future of polar inertia does not merely constitute a vanishing point of the cultural imagination. It also becomes what Richard Tutton (2017) terms a "wicked

problem" conjoining interdisciplinary perspectives within mobility Studies. In response to a question that is central to our field of research, namely how immobilization and movement are entangled, the proclaimed "mobilities turn" is followed by a forceful plea for a "new turn to stillness" (Cresswell 2012, 648), which views forms of immobilization as significant components of mobility, examines how movement generates stasis, and pinpoints specific dynamics that emerge precisely *from* stillness.

IV. Imagining Im/mobilized Futures

While the new mobilities paradigm is primarily a social-sciences approach, the spatial turn, which has attended to the interlinked phenomena of im/mobility since the 1990s and early 2000s, is of particular importance for literary Studies. Since space and time are inextricably intertwined in literary representations of movement, it is primarily "immobility that gives literary texts a spatially reflexive quality" (Hallet and Neumann 2009, 21) by demonstrating the ways in which movement is central to the cultural and aesthetic construction of space. Within mobility Studies, Peter Merriman and Lynne Pearce have advocated for greater cooperation with cultural Studies approaches, emphasizing that literary Studies offer vital perspectives for conceptualizing movement. In "Mobility and the Humanities" (2017), they highlight the value added by engaging with artistic productions. They introduce the concept of kin-aesthetics to articulate aesthetic representations of im/mobility: "This is particularly the case when the concept is framed broadly as kin-aesthetics – the aesthetics of movement […]. This is movement enacted, felt, perceived, expressed, metered, choreographed, appreciated and desired" (Merriman and Pearce 2017, 498). By enacting, expressing, and choreographing movement, literature demonstrates the cultural valuations of movement while also capturing them (kin-)aesthetically. Thus, literature illustrates the concept of im/mobility prevalent in mobility Studies, where it is understood as *movement charged with meaning* (see Adey et al. 2014, 8).

In literary anticipations of the future, im/mobility has always played a central role and belongs to the defining repertoire of representations featuring utopian or dystopian worlds. Artistic productions include numerous imaginings of arrested environments, timeless spaces, or polar inertia, as Virilio or Rosa propose them. Moreover, they offer diverse images of future life forms associated with the effects of industrial acceleration (see, among others, Urry

2016, 15–53). Acceleration and deceleration constitute two sides of a specifically modern experience of mobility, at once sedentary and quickened, which, from the late 18th century onwards, has also inscribed itself in literary forms – from carriage rides to railroad poetry, the Futurists' pamphlets, and the 20th-century novel concerned with its own time (*Zeitroman*) (see Göttsche 2001; Middeke 2002; Röhnert 2015) For instance, literary stagings of movement use aesthetic strategies of deceleration (see Schneider 2013) to capture changes in the perception of space and time and to make visible the "contradictory relationship between dynamics and stasis" in European modernity (Behnstedt et al., 2007, 9).

In what follows, we will consider three literary examples that associate immobility with acceleration in various forms and anticipate a time out of joint. In historical terms, all three texts were written in periods of profound technological or industrial acceleration (around 1900, during the mid-20th century, around 2000) and mark various high points of this development. They extrapolate from the present to the future and reflect existing, declining, or futuristic regimes of mobility.

E.M. Forster: The Machine Stops (1909)

The British author E.M. Forster's short story "The Machine Stops" is one of the early paradigmatic literary texts depicting a catastrophically immobilized future. Published in 1909, it falls into that phase "before and after 1900" which experienced a "revolution in speed […] as a result of the industrial revolution and the wide impact its technological innovations had on almost all spheres of life" (Rosa 2013, 42). While the scholarly literature focuses primarily on the pronounced critique of technology in Forster's work (see, among others, Kibel 1998; Tereszewski 2020), he also proves to be an author who recognized the immobilizing tendencies of modern acceleration early on. As Urry notes in *What is the Future?*, Forster was well ahead of his time in anticipating contemporary developments: "'The machine stops' describes a future society with many echoes in subsequent science fiction and in the digital worlds that have developed since the mid-1990s" (2016, 26). Preempting Virilio's predictions of polar inertia, he outlines a vision of a civilization that *has stopped moving*. In his dystopia, inspired by H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), a digitally networked society retreats to a lifeworld in catacombs, where people live in temperature-controlled capsules and a machine provides for them around the clock. Thus, Forster's design of a subterranean form of existence hauntingly illustrates an

absolutized sedentarism that interweaves technical acceleration and spatial immobilization: "[O]ur 'civilization' has never known how to do anything other than keep extending the original urban sedentariness", Virilio writes (2000, 85). Forster tells us, "Imagine, if you can, a small room, hexagonal in shape, like the cell of a bee. It is lighted neither by window nor by lamp, yet it is filled with a soft radiance. There are no apertures for ventilation, yet the air is fresh" (9).[1] This description corresponds to Virilio's state of "cocooning" in isolation and to "home inertia" (2000, 64), in which any reference to the outside world has been lost.

One of Forster's protagonists, a woman called Vashti whose living cell is described at the very beginning of the story, embodies the forcibly standardized life in the temperature-controlled and artificially lit space. Even within her restricted radius, she does not need to move at all, since a self-propelled chair transports her through her room.[2] Basic needs are met at the touch of a button, and communication with other people takes place exclusively through a kind of digital interface. With this description, Forster not only anticipates the current facts of smart living and virtual reality but also illustrates what Virilio seeks to capture with the concept of "*domotics*": "The intelligent home presents the same kind of trials. Far from being the acme of domestic comfort, the new *domotics* involves a special kind of temporary or permanent disablement whose only parallel is the situation following a traffic accident, except that here the 'paralysis' is actually intended" (2000, 65).

Indeed, the protagonist Vashti feels no need to change anything about her living conditions or to break free from her state of physical paralysis. Her body depends on its "electronic prosthesis" (Virilio 2000, 65) and seems chained to the architecture that envelops it.[3] The fast-moving traffic of culture in its previous form is now considered obsolete, and the entire world is virtually networked. All places look the same underground, and it is no longer necessary

1 In the following section, all quotations from Forster (2013) are provided only with page numbers in parentheses.

2 For Virilio, sitting and lying are the prototypical positions of polar inertia: "Environment control, whether close or distant, is thus leading our societies towards a final technological hybrid whose ergonomic archetype is the seat or 'throne' capable of turning itself into a bed, an invalid's litter" (2000, 69).

3 Virilio writes, "In the end, people are not so much in the architecture; it is more the architecture of the electronic system which invades them, which is in them, in their will to power, their reflexes, their least desires." (2000, 66).

to travel or change location thanks to real-time communication in various media: "[W]ithout the need to be anywhere specific as one's life is lived from the arm-chair and through an internet link, it no longer matters where one is and the idea of place loses its meaning" (Tereszewski 2020, 231). Yet the machine-made restriction of mobility encompasses not only the "elimination of space", as Tereszewski puts it, but also the approach to time. In his theory on social acceleration, Rosa, comparing temporal constraints to the rules of a totalitarian regime, points out the power of implicit standardizations (2000, 191). Forster, too, describes how machines help to establish a regime of immobility, which consolidates its power by enforcing a rhythm of everyday life (see Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013). Vashti's days are structured by countless virtual contact requests, programs, and lectures, which are supposed to enable reflection and self-realization but ultimately have the opposite effect. Like others living in this "accelerated age" (14), Vashti spends her days resting, but she feels a permanent inner restlessness and has no time to contemplate her living conditions: "Men seldom moved their bodies; all unrest was concentrated in the soul" (18).

In this way, Forster exposes the contradictions of the temporal economy that underlie the media's "culture of speed" (Tomlinson 2007), which obeys the dictates of the moment and makes "tele-reality" the only yardstick of daily life (see Virilio 2000, 7). On the rare occasions that the inhabitants of the capsules leave their own four walls, they travel only in underground elevators or move about in hovering airships to traverse a supposedly toxic atmosphere. This smoothly functioning transport system is a relic from an earlier era that equated acceleration with spatial mobility: "To 'keep pace with the sun', or even to outstrip it, had been the aim of civilization preceding this. Racing aeroplanes had been built for the purpose capable of enormous speed, and steered by the greatest intellects of the epoch" (21). Forster also addresses how a lifestyle reliant on fossil fuels has exploited the earth and destroyed nature entirely, leading civilization to retreat underground. By no longer referring to the sun as the most important measure of cyclical temporality, humanity succeeds in denaturalizing time, dominating natural rhythms, and bringing them to a standstill: "The sun had conquered, yet it was the end of his spiritual dominion. Dawn, midday, twilight, the zodiacal path, touched neither men's lives nor their hearts, and science retreated into the ground, to concentrate herself upon problems that she was certain of solving" (22).

In Forster's world, the machine's authoritarian immobility regime condemns anyone who wants to resist the sedentary way of life and break out of the machine-housing complex to "homelessness", banishing them to the

surface of the earth. The story's antagonist and adversary is Vashti's son Kuno, who, as the prototypical embodiment of a hero, rebels against the system and questions the rule of the machine.[4] Wanting to prove that life above ground is possible, he tries to make Vashti aware of the effects of machine dependence, which threatens humans' very existence: "Cannot you see, cannot all you lecturers see, that it is we that are dying, and that down here the only thing that really lives is the Machine?" (35). Ultimately, Kuno's predictions come true: "The Machine is stopping, I know it, I know the signs" (45). The mechanical system becomes prone to error, as important features malfunction again and again. The machine comes to a standstill, marking the story's dystopian focal point, which also establishes the collapse of subterranean civilization and represents a turning point in human history. While those living in the capsules, who are dependent on the machine, die agonizing deaths, a new beginning awaits the homeless and outcasts on the surface of the earth: "I have seen them, spoken to them, loved them. They are hiding in the midst and the ferns until our civilization stops. Today they are the Homeless – tomorrow --", a dying Kuno tells his mother (52–53). Here, Forster illustrates the aporias of sedentary accelerationism and shows how a society held captive by polar inertia ultimately abolishes its own future. It is only the interruption, the disturbance, and the arrest of the world that sets human history in motion anew and brings about the apocalyptic turn that Kuno predicted.

Marlen Haushofer: The Wall (1963)

The novel *The Wall* (*Die Wand*) by the Austrian author Marlen Haushofer, translated in 1990, offers another drastic vision of catastrophic immobilization and, at the same time, of a post-industrial utopia. The novel appeared in 1963 against the backdrop of the Cold War and an emerging ecological movement, but in the 1980s, its first, feminist reception largely read it as a female (anti-)Robinsonade (see Lorenz 1979; Fliedl 1986; among others). From today's perspective, the work appears to be a striking "ecological warning text

4 It is surely no coincidence that Vashti's son Kuno opposes her as the story's antagonist. As the female protagonist, she adapts unquestioningly to spatial immobility, while the male hero revolts against it. This gendered dichotomization is ultimately relativized by the fact that Kuno encounters a female "homeless person" on an illegal voyage to the surface of the earth, as he affirms to his mother: "'Because I have seen her in the twilight – because she came to my help when I called'" (39).

of the Anthropocene" (Zschachlitz 2019) that thematizes the consequences of modern acceleration and links them to the depicted catastrophe. Caitríona Ní Dhúill declares the novel a "Text of the Great Acceleration" (2022) and locates it directly at that epochal threshold which marks the period after 1950 as a phase of extreme acceleration. Indeed, the central theme of catastrophic immobilization in Haushofer's novel expresses a profound critique of technology and civilization, in which the obsolete patriarchal world is reconstructed as a world of car factories, oil companies, and turbo-capitalists and linked to reflections on im/mobility.

For Virilio, the process of cultural petrification fueled by acceleration transforms the planet into a "*world for ever lost*" and leaves only "a residue, a 'reserve' to be preserved with the utmost urgency" (2000, 79). This insight is particularly relevant to Haushofer's stasis: The novel projects a post-apocalyptic landscape, which, following an unspecified catastrophe, is enclosed by a transparent wall that separates the nameless female protagonist from the outside world. Beyond the wall, all human and animal life is petrified, and time itself seems to have stopped. People and animals stand in front of their houses like statues; they seem ossified, like exhibits in a museum. The insular space remains spared from misfortune, as if under a bell jar, and becomes the chronotopic refuge of a new existence for the first-person narrator.

The protagonist, left with a cow, a cat, and a dog in a forest area of several square kilometres, adapts to the changed circumstances with her new animal family. Quickly realizing that she is probably the only survivor and therefore completely on her own, she settles into a hunting lodge with the animals. Her daily routine, which she recapitulates in a written account, follows the tasks of her new life and contrasts with her former existence. At first, she clings to temporal patterns from the past: "I also resolutely decided to wind the clocks daily, and cross off each day in the diary" (33).[5] But traditional "human time" (51) begins to erode more and more. Environmental rhythms, which the protagonist deduces from the weather, the season, the vegetation, or the animals in the forest, become the parameters of a new temporality: "I take my bearings from the sun, or, if it isn't shining, from the crows as they fly away and back again, and various other signs" (51). The chronotopic oasis within the wall has unmistakably idyllic features, and the cyclical rhythmization of space lends it an almost mythical quality (see Bakhtin 2017, 160–61). In minute detail, the protagonist

5 In the following section, all quotations from Haushofer (2022) are provided only with page numbers in parentheses.

relates her daily errands, her walks in the woods, and her profound experiences with the animals. She claims to cultivate a new way of seeing in which the uneven, diverse, and overlapping rhythms of the environment become apparent for the first time: "It's only since I've slowed down that the forest around me has come to life" (189–90). The novel, composed of an account written by the first-person narrator, thus reflects its own poetic implications, which arise from a "kin-aesthetic" of immobilization and deceleration (see Schneider 2013, 259; Merriman and Pearce 2017).

The novel looks back on a vanished world, portraying its accelerated society as one whose capitalist constraints were primarily temporal: "Before, I always was on my way somewhere, always in a great rush and furiously impatient; every time I got anywhere I would have to spend ages waiting" (190). The first-person narrator emphasizes that a characteristic impatience and boredom, from which she herself suffered as if from a disease, are symptoms of a hectic way of life. Her observations correspond to the consequences that Rosa (2013) associates with social acceleration: The narrator's memory of a profound sense of alienation from her eco-social environment interweaves the compulsions of capitalism with the consequences of catastrophe. She imagines "that a person tortured by the sense of permanent anaesthetization has conceived the wall to break free from the monotony of an alienated, perpetually accelerated society" (Zschachlitz 2019, 75). In this reading, the reality of immobilization presents itself less as a "nightmarish vision" than as a secret "wishful dream" that signifies a way out of the simultaneously monotonous and destructive logic of progress that inheres in a constant "more-of-the-same" (Strigl 2007, 62).

Criticism centers on the past, with its fossil-fuel system of "[g]as-pipes, electrics and oil conduits" (190) and, therefore, on motorized mobility as the most concise emblem of late-modern industrial society. The first-person narrator distances herself in an almost cynical way from the proclaimed fetishization of the car, the "undisputed cult object of the fifties and sixties" (Strigl 2007, 262), by abandoning the old Mercedes, which the host Hugo had parked in front of the hunting lodge before the catastrophe, and feeling gratified that with time, the vehicle becomes "overgrown with vegetation, a nest for mice and birds" (190). She herself changes as well, as she comes to feel more and more attached to the forest: "Sometimes my thoughts grow confused, and it is as if the forest has put down roots in me, and is thinking its old, eternal thoughts with my brain" (157). The protagonist's dog Lynx, her cats, her cow, and the young calf Bull become companions with whom she 'makes kin' and whom she soon con-

siders her new family.[6] The boundaries between human beings, animals, and the forest become increasingly blurred, intertwining in the rhythms of their common habitat.

At the end of the narrative, the utopian features of this post-catastrophic biotope, which saves movement from immobilization and dissolves the stasis of an accelerated meritocracy, are reversed once again: One day, a stranger appears on the mountain pasture where the protagonist has spent her summers and kills her young bull. When the protagonist discovers the stranger, he also slays her beloved dog Lynx with an axe, and so, unhesitatingly, she shoots him. The event on the mountain pasture upsets the spatial and temporal order of the post-apocalyptic landscape again, and the murder of the animals becomes the true catastrophic climax of the plot, where human history ends once more. While the stranger appears as a representative of a patriarchal and destructive civilization (see Zschachlitz 2019, 88), the symbolism of the act extends even further: Arguably, the act of violence signifies nothing less than the 'murder of time', a topos that the protagonist herself introduces to the plot. She conjectures that once she is no longer alive, the cultural idea of time will also end: "I'm owed some gratitude, but no one after my death will know I murdered time" (204). Thus, the first-person narrator becomes the model of an eschatological temporality that inheres in her account and, at the same time, establishes the poetics of catastrophe which shapes the plot. Its essential core is the immobilization of space as an apocalyptic fantasy that suspends time, calls it into question and renders it reflexive, and preserves movement in a paradoxical reversal. It is only after the event on the mountain pasture that the protagonist begins to write her account and sets the narrative dynamics in motion in her chronistic retrospection.

Thomas Lehr: 42 (2005)

In his novel *42*, published in 2005, German author Thomas Lehr goes even further than Haushofer. He imagines an eschatological scenario that anticipates nothing less than an actual halting of time and depicts the future as it turns into a stagnating present: An accident in the particle accelerator of the nuclear research center CERN triggers a chronospheric apocalypse in which the surroundings of the few survivors congeal into a static backdrop, a kind of

6 Thus, Haushofer illustrates what Donna Haraway would refer to as 'making kin' with other species (Haraway 2016, 99).

three-dimensional still shot. At 12:47 and 42 seconds, the clocks stop. People, animals, plants, and objects freeze, becoming sculptures that resemble accessories: "no airplane, no car, no motorcycle, no Vespa, no bicycle, no scooter, and not even a pair of roller skates" can move anymore (104).[7] In the arrested world under an eternally blazing sun, the survivors must resort to walking as the final type of movement, and so the protagonist Adrian is forced to cross all of Europe on foot. The narrative is a retrospective dystopian travelogue, in which the first-person narrator writes against the spatial expanse of an eternal moment.

To date, Lehr's novel has been analyzed primarily in terms of the physical and philosophical theories of time that it evokes (see, among others, Reulecke and Lehr 2008; Gamper 2016; Haupt 2021). Yet it can also be linked to discourses of mobility and acceleration, in which the relationship between the present and the future, marked by catastrophe, comes into focus (see Kopf 2022).[8] It stands to reason that the author chooses Geneva as the starting point of the chronospheric apocalypse given the symbolism associated with the city: As the center of the early Enlightenment, Geneva was also the cradle of a European belief in progress, and today it houses the world's most powerful particle accelerator, CERN's so-called "world machine". This is certainly significant, given the critique of acceleration that may be associated with it, and recalls Virilio's dromopolitical writings. In his manifesto *The Great Accelerator*, Virilio presents the eponymous "Great Hadron Collider" as the symbol of a society that pursues acceleration, arguing that "CERN's 'Great Hadron Collider' in Geneva has become the perfect symbol of a postmodern return of illuminism", which he refers to hyperbolically as "the cult of light speed" (2012, 30).

Thus, it proves to be an especially suitable artifice that Lehr erects the fictional wall of time under a frozen sun, which literally *illuminates* the space. The light that irradiates the characters' new reality and penetrates every corner of their present is a central motif of the entire text and correlates with pervasive photographic metaphors: "Everything would remain, just like in a photograph" (12). The present of what has been chronified has literally been transformed into an image in which "brightness" becomes a "poetological principle" (Völker 2015, 327). The sun also seems emblematic from another perspective: "The suspension of the cycles and rhythms of natural temporal sequences also shows that world time is out of joint", Metin Genç (2016, 260) writes, arguing that a

7 In the following section, all quotations from Lehr (2005) are provided only with page numbers in parentheses.

8 Parts of the following Passage appeared in German in the cited article (Kopf 2022).

"total exploration of nature" and "mastery over nature" serve to overcome natural time (2016, 261). The static sun suggests nothing less than that the world or the planet has ceased its rotation in space and come to a standstill. If we also understand the motif as a symbol of global warming, the themes of technology and acceleration evoked in the narrative acquire an additional dimension. Notably, the characters experience the heat of an endlessly repeating August day, which contrasts with "numerous word-images of ice" that characterize the changed aggregate state of a "frozen world" (Orth 2014, 42).

From the outset, a paradoxical movement within immobilization shapes the development of the narrative and figures as a plane of reflection for various meanings and their implications. The central – and initially clearest – moment of reflection is the leitmotif of the journey, which emerges, from the perspective of the first-person narrator Adrian Haffner, as the fundamental condition of one's own existence: "[I]t was only the restlessness that stayed with all of us […] which produced that half-conscious physical certainty that we had not yet been transformed into statues" (65). The survivors set out, in groups and on their own, to gauge temporal immobilization in spatial terms and to demarcate the topographical boundaries of the apocalypse: "We agreed that traveling was most important" (103). The routes and long-distance trails, roads, and highways on which the first-person narrator walks on his expeditions through Germany, Switzerland, or Italy present themselves as relics of a prehistorical time that is nearly impossible to remember and that highlights the enduring contrast between divergent speeds: "Highway interchanges lie in the summer grass like the immobilized joints of slain giants. Tire depots, junkyards, gas stations […] follow to mock us with the memories of former mobility" (163). As former junctions of modern mobility, the misused and inoperative train stations, gas stations, and parking lots now become all the more visible and "present in their dysfunctionality" (Völker 2015, 326).

The decelerated movement that characterizes the aesthetics of the text leads the reader to perceive not only immobilized time but also space expanding in slow motion. Digressive descriptions of events, of sense perceptions, and attentive introspection, stretch narrated time. The accompanying acoustic phenomenon of this state is silence, which extends the motif of immobilization. Far from civilizational infrastructures, the wanderers themselves are sometimes overcome by the illusion of a vacation-like calm, as they "surrender themselves, for several restful, delusional minutes, to the belief […] that they have escaped the frenzy or the hectic pace of urban life" (91). While Lehr thus hints at connotations of immobilization as a break and hiatus, these are, at the

same time, ironically fractured and repeatedly thwarted by extreme feelings of loneliness. Thus, the protagonist Adrian and the others who have entered this chronified state experience a strange alienation from their surroundings, as they feel cut off from any resonance with reality, which has become a kind of "foil" (144). Nevertheless, they can help themselves to the "sculpture garden" of the world, can use their individual time to "infect" the environment and can thus access food, clothing, and other commodities at will (34). Even humans – and this is their most monstrous ability – can be revived by physical approach to such an extent that they become movable, or *compliant*, as it were. The whole world thus seems objectified, exhibiting a power imbalance that unfolds between movement and immobilization.

Meanwhile, the chronostatic reality in the novel is stylized as a post-apocalyptic spirit world situated at the border between life and death. The characters in a chronified state refer to themselves as "zombies" (168), and the other people, too, remain motionless and comatose, like "photographs" (78). This morbid metaphor is reflected in the number 42, which – as the novel explains rather early on – means nothing other than death in Japanese (36). Consequently, the survivors cannot restart time even in a final physical experiment in CERN, which only brings the catastrophe to a head: Ultimately, the first-person narrator Adrian is the only survivor, while the others who had remained now also become statues. In this way, the author shows how the dictate of acceleration symbolized by CERN collapses into a state of radical immobilization and reduces an implied "longing for an entirely different temporal order" to absurdity (Horstkotte 2017, 415).

V. Conclusion

In the three texts, a setting of catastrophic deceleration conveys the authors' critique of the temporal structures of Western late modernity, which includes the representation of im/mobility. Contemporary diagnoses of acceleration, such as Virilio's polar inertia and Rosa's theory of alienation, become ways to mirror theoretical reflection and are fixed in the literature in the moment of spatiotemporal stasis. In the work of Lehr, Haushofer, and Forster, this is compressed into the image of an immobilized future that escalates in technical acceleration and indicates the end of human history. The tension between utopia and dystopia opens a time out of joint and presents varying implications of the meaning of stasis. For Virilio, Rosa, Forster, or Lehr, stasis results from a

sedentary dynamic of acceleration but, as a moment of disturbance or interruption, it also calls attention to avenues of escaping this dynamic. It is not coincidental that we can discern, in all three texts, an apocalyptic longing for the end of modern mobility, which also promises the end of a Great Acceleration and proposes deceleration as a refuge, a final sanctuary before a global catastrophe of petrification. Whereas this place of refuge remains largely intact in Haushofer's work, it does not do so in Lehr's portrayal, and time dissolves in the dystopian aporias of history. Against this backdrop, immobilization becomes the equivocal watchword of a precarious future, promising dystopian stagnation and utopian escape, generating fatalism, or nurturing the hope for change. From the viewpoint of mobility Studies, it seems vital to understand this new perspective and to consider how literary works depict the menacing or redemptive moments of im/mobilized futures.

Translated by Naomi Shulman.[9]

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9 Naomi Shulman also translated the citations from Behnstedt et al. (2007); Bühler and Willer (2016); Briese and Günther (2009); Horn (2020); Horn and Bergthaller (2019); Horstkotte (2017); Genç (2016); Hallet and Neumann (2009); Leggewie and Welzer (2011); Lehr (2005), Lübbe (2003); Orth (2014); Sloterdijk (2011); Strigl (2007); Völker (2015) and Zschachalitz (2019).

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