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Professional Development Assignment – Report: Fall Semester 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

During my Professional Development Assignment in the fall semester of 2015, I was able to devote myself entirely to research and writing, and I have made significant progress on a number of projects. I would like to share with you the specifics of the work I have accomplished, and have included a brief overview below.

In late summer, I spent ten days at the German Literary Archive (Deutsches Literaturarchiv) in Marbach with research on Michael Ende, the well-known author of *The Neverending Story*. The article resulting from this research is entitled “Corrupting Capitalism: Michael Ende’s *Momo* and ‘Cathedral Station’.” It will be published in *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Literature* 40.2 (Summer 2016): *On 24/7: Neoliberalism and the Undoing of Time*. Guest Editors: Necia Chronister & Lutz Koepnick.

In September and October, I explored the Austrian National Library (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek) in Vienna, Austria, for materials on Thomas Glavinic, Ilse Aichinger, Thomas Bernhard, and Peter Handke. This research will be the foundation of a series of articles on postwar Austrian literature and its troubled representation of history, time, and memory.

In November and December, I made substantial progress on my manuscript of *Heterochronic Visions – Framing the Present*, a book project exploring theoretical aspects of various literary and artistic methods of representing time, especially contemporaneity and the present, which cumulate in the concept of “heterochronicity.” Heterochronicity displays three main characteristics, the most significant of which is its unique representation of temporality. Time, although being a universal feature of narrative, is the topic of only a few. The passage of time is the main topic for heterochronic artworks, both in literature

as well as visual art. Heterochronicity relies on a tripartite division of time into past, present and future, showing different “phases” within the same frame.¹ Heterochronicity is not the same as simultaneity.

“Simultaneity” describes things happening at the same time in different places. Heterochronicity, on the other hand, denotes the bringing together of temporally distinct objects, people or situations within the same frame. Secondly, heterochronic imaging includes an element of awareness of its own representational practices. In the photographic work of Scott McFarland, for example, we find a slight visual residue of the manufactured to create a not-quite-seamless whole. Frequently, the artists set up a competition between two representational media in order to critique the supposed veracity of certain means of representation. To remain with McFarland’s artwork for this example: Through digital manipulation, photography, which we previously may have thought of as a medium capable of documenting a single moment in time, becomes capable of showing time’s passage. McFarland’s images turn photographic practice on itself and thereby foster a reflection on representational practices and media. This self-aware and self-critical element is a trademark characteristic of heterochronic imaging. Lastly, heterochronic imaging probes “presentness” by allowing the confrontation of different presents. Heterochronic imaging thus has implications for our understanding of “historicity” and “historical awareness”.

I have come to understand heterochronic imaging as a response to a postmodern understanding of temporality and history. Postmodernity is marked by a total present. Progress is no longer an end in itself, and we have become skeptical of the loaded term “future” as a thought system dictating our present existence. The postmodern “end of history” detaches time from the subject, its history, memory, and any meaningful chronobiographical trajectory. Time, in the postmodern context, becomes identified entirely with consumption and information, the general relationship to time becomes one of impatience and a need for immediacy and even greater speed. Its immediacy and instantaneity creates a virtual present that is characterized by commodity culture (“spending” time) and “real-time” technology. The artists and writers discussed in this book use heterochronicity as a means to decelerate our postmodern experience of temporality by inserting temporal distance within the present. As time lacks a representational field of its own, we often rely on space to perceive it. Heterochronic images make us aware of this reliance upon space and use this relationship to create critical awareness of the present moment. In this relational view of

¹ By frame I mean the same pictorial space, or, in a written text, the same field of vision described by an observer.

time, space can be defined as the “trajectory of stories so far” (Massey 12). Heterochronic images are narrative in nature. The heterochronic present demands to be read and reread: Its multilayered temporality and its associative relationship to other presents create a possibility of conflict, variation, and non-conformity.

I expect to put the “finishing touches” on the manuscript over the summer, and have already contacted an academic publisher by submitting a book proposal. The review committee is expected to approve or decline my manuscript by August 1.

The research for and the writing of this manuscript has enabled me to conceptualize an interdisciplinary project called “Alternate Temporalities.” I have started a research group which includes colleagues from history, British and American Studies, Philosophy, Anthropology, and German Studies. The project presents an inquiry into how alternate versions of temporality, such as simultaneity or reverse temporal order, are imagined and represented in art, film, and literature. We explore how different forms of artistic expression relate to key theoretical temporal concepts of our epoch, such as unpredictability, the event, the messianic, the untimely, surprise, spontaneous eruption, and the unforeseeable.

Our research group will meet at the Modern Language Association’s annual conference in 2017 (Philadelphia) for a roundtable discussion. Following the meeting, I plan on turning our research findings into an edited volume of essays, for which I am currently looking for a publisher.

In closing, I would like to thank the University of Memphis and you, dear colleagues, for allowing me to devote this PDA time to my research. Since teaching responsibilities and the duties of leading the German section (administration, committee work, hiring, and undergraduate advising) take up most of my time during the academic year, I have been relying on the short summer months to further my research agenda. Having the temporal autonomy afforded to me by the PDA, I was able to concentrate on my own intellectual pursuits in significant depth. I am very grateful for the opportunity. Sincerely,

Heike Polster,

Memphis, May 3, 2016.