# The Contemporary Self in German History

JOACHIM C. HÄBERLEN

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Department of History, University of Warwick, Humanities Building, University Road, Coventry, CV4 7AL, UK; J.Haeberlen@warwick.ac.uk

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The history of the subject, or, in a different parlance, genealogies of the self, has received increased attention in recent years.[1] Numerous scholars, historians and cultural sociologists alike have inquired about the practices and discourses that shape the (post-)modern self. And while this is by no means an exclusively German debate – indeed, major influences come from French, British and Israeli scholarship –,[2] it is a debate that is particularly thriving within German-speaking scholarship on recent (West) German history, perhaps in part due to how graduate training and networking function in German academia.[3] Somewhat remarkably, East German subjectivities are barely ever addressed in this debate, which speaks to the fact that historiographies of East and West Germany are still rather separated, despite repeated calls to overcome this division. A possible historical (rather than historiographical) reason for this lack of interest that would deserve further inquiry might be that the self *became* important for historical actors in the Federal Republic during the 1970s, but not in East Germany. It would be equally interesting to know to what extent similar or different regimes of subjectivity emerged across the Iron Curtain and what happened to them after the end of communism – that is, if and how the 'neoliberal' regime of subjectivity that scholars have described for Western Germany spread to the East. Yet, these are open questions.[4]

Somewhat surprisingly, these debates have received rather little attention in the Anglophone world of German historiography.[5] However, for historians it is a debate

[1] Other works include Thomas Alkemeyer, Gunilla Budde and Dagmar Freist, eds., *Selbst-Bildungen: Soziale und kulturelle Praktiken der Subjektivierung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013); Andrea Bührmann, *Das authentische Geschlecht. Die Sexualitätsdebatte der neuen Frauenbewegung und die Foucaultsche Machtanalyse* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1995); Stefanie Duttweiler, *Sein Glück machen: Arbeit am Glück als neoliberale Regierungstechnologie* (Konstanz: UVK, 2007); Lutz Eichler, *System und Selbst: Arbeit und Subjektivität im Zeitalter ihrer strategischen Anerkennung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013); Sabine Donauer, *Faktor Freude: Wie die Wirtschaft Arbeitsgefühle erzeugt* (Hamburg: edition Körber Stiftung, 2015); Thomas Lemke, Susanne Krasmann and Ulrich Bröckling, eds., *Gouvernementalität der Gegenwart: Studien zur Ökonomisierung des Sozialen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000); Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).

[2] See Nikolas N. Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Free Association Books, 1989); Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul. Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-help* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009); Greg Eghigian, Andreas Killen and Christine Leuenberger, 'Introduction: The Self as Project: Politics and the Human Sciences in the Twentieth Century', in the special issue 'The Self as Project: Politics and the Human Sciences', *Osiris* 22 (2007).

[3] See, for example, the DFG funded interdisciplinary graduate school at the University of Oldenburg, 'Self-Making: Practices of Subjectivation in Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspective', https://www.uni-oldenburg.de/en/self-making/, and the book series *Praktiken der Subjektivierung*, edited by members of the school, at transcript Verlag, http://www.transcript-verlag.de/reihen/sozialwissenschaften/soziologie/praktiken-der-subjektivierung/.

[4] Philipp Ther's recent work on the neoliberal order of post-1989 Easter Europe does not address questions of subjectivity at all, see Philipp Ther, *Die neue Ordnung auf dem alten Kontinent: Eine Geschichte des neoliberalen Europa* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).

[5] This is not to say that Anglophone scholars of German history have not addressed subjectivities. See Moritz Föllmer, *Individuality and Modernity in Berlin: Self and Society from Weimar to the Wall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Peter Fritzsche, *The Turbulent World of Franz Göll: An Ordinary Berliner Writes the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011); Greg Eghigian,

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worth noting because it offers an alternative to the liberalisation and democratisation narrative or the 'after the boom' paradigm that characterise the historiography of the Federal Republic.[6] And while many case studies deal with Germany (though edited volumes also contain chapters on non-German speaking countries), the methodologically sophisticated critical perspectives on contemporary regimes of subjectification that arguably exist not only in Germany offered by these studies should be of relevance to scholars of Europe as a whole. Arguably, the issues that German debates address were of concern for other European (and American) societies as well. Indeed, in times of international conferences, comparative approaches and global history, the German debate is, with all its sophistication, somewhat strangely parochial.[7] This review article thus sets out to present some of the key studies, monographs as well as edited volumes, in the field; it outlines the implications of this work for our understanding of contemporary German history, its accomplishments and potential shortfalls, as well as the political questions critical studies of the self raise. And hopefully, presenting these German debates to an audience of historians of Europe more generally will encourage a more transnational debate about changing subjectivities in post-war Europe as a whole.

But does the subject have a history? Frequently, historians refer to a 'subjective' side in history, trying to uncover subjective feelings and experiences. The often implicit assumption is that there is a subjective core of human beings, that people have emotional and subjective experiences that relate to 'big' history in unforeseen and complicated ways. Historians, the assumption is then, can and need to uncover these subjective cores, for example by asking how ordinary citizens 'subjectively' experienced life in East Germany and how their 'subjectivities' related to social and political structures that are implicitly seen as something that is not part of social structures.[8] The scholarship presented here addresses a fundamentally different issue. It calls assumptions about a subjective core into question. Instead of inquiring about subjective experiences, this literature considers the self and its feelings a historically

'The Psycholization of the Socialist Self: East German Forensic Psychology and its Deviants, 1945–1975', *German History*, 22 (2004); Tracie Matysik, 'Beyond Freedom: A Return to Subjectivity in the History of Sexuality', in Scott Spector, Helmut Puff and Dagmar Herzog, eds., *After the History of Sexuality: German Genealogies With and Beyond Freud* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012). German and Anglophone literatures are, however, surprisingly little in conversation with each other, and while Foucault is a ubiquitous presence, the theoretical framing is markedly different. The article thus limits itself to the German debate.

[6] The phrase was coined by Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael. See Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970*, 2 ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008). See also the recent edited volume by Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Lutz Raphael and Thomas Schlemmer, eds., *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart: Dimensionen des Strukturbruchs nach dem Boom* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

[7] It is perhaps telling that most contributors to the edited volumes discussed here are working in Germany, with the exception of *schön normal*, which includes several American contributors.

[8] See, for example, Mary Fulbrook, 'Structures and Subjectivities in GDR History', in Andrew I. Port and Mary Fulbrooke, eds., *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn, 2013). Given how thoroughly scholars have theorised subjectivities, it is unfortunate that she ignores these debates. Thus, her discussion of subjectivities feels stunningly undertheorised.

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and culturally specific form.[9] It asks how individual human beings shape, and have to shape, their subjectivity, making use of (multiple and contradictory) cultural scripts. The analysis proceeds, as Andreas Reckwitz puts it pointedly, 'from culture to the subjects' (35).

The review article proceeds in four steps. A first section explores how scholars theorise the subject as a historically grounded cultural form, and how the study of the self is therefore necessarily a historical task. Practices play a crucial role in these theorisations. Scholars ask what people *do*, and have to do, in order to produce a specific self.[10] They have analysed a variety of practices, ranging from working to practices of intimacy, loving and sexuality, to what Michel Foucault has called 'technologies of the self',[11] such as writing about oneself in a diary or in letters, or creating an online persona in computer games. They have inquired about how people shape their minds and feelings in psycho-therapeutic contexts, or how they shape their bodies by doing sports, by following a particularly dietary regime, or by submitting to medical exams in order to create a 'healthy' self. The article's second part discusses these practices.

Conceptualising the subject as a historically specific form, scholars have pointed out transformative moments when such forms, what might be called 'regimes of subjectification', changed. And while some have examined the period around 1900 as key for the formation of a 'modern' subject, it is a later transformative moment, the 1970s, that has attracted most attention. It was in those years, scholars have argued, that a 'post-modern' or 'contemporary' self that would later become culturally hegemonic began to take shape both in countercultural scenes and in management circles. The third section examines in detail how historians and historical sociologists have examined this period as formative for the present self, thereby developing a critical perspective on the contemporary self. Finally, the article turns to the politics of the self. According to the literature discussed here, individuals are 'subject', as it were, to peculiar regimes of subjectification. As scholars such as Michel Foucault and Nikolas Rose have noted, particularly in their works on the 'psy-sciences', the study of subjectivities is always also a study of power relations, and hence has a

[9] For a perspective from the history of emotions that highlights the *doing* of emotions and thus contributes to the debate about the practicing of subjectivities, see the important article by Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory*, 51 (2012). It is noteworthy that both Pascal Eitler, who has co-edited two of the volumes under review, and Magdalena Beljan, author of another book reviewed here, have worked at the Centre for the History of Emotions in Berlin, indicating the close ties between the historical study of emotions and the study of the self.

[10] On practice theory, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Presse, 1977). Andreas Reckwitz has been at the forefront of theorizing the self in terms of practices, see Andreas Reckwitz, 'Auf dem Weg zu einer praxeologischen Analyse des Selbst', in Pascal Eitler and Jens Elberfeld, eds., *Zeitgeschichte des Selbst: Therapeutisierung – Politisierung – Emotionalisierung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015).

[11] Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

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political dimension.[12] Indeed, studies of the contemporary self are often written with the intention to historicise and thereby denaturalise the contemporary 'neoliberal' regime of subjectivity. With a focus on the self and the 'government of the self', the task of critique and politics changes. Now, the challenge is to question and undermine regimes of subjectification that instruct us (and others) how to govern ourselves (and other selves). The studies under review here seek to do this, addressing not only the 'psy-sciences' but also the role of bodies in shaping the self and how the contemporary economy requires individuals to work on their selves. They thus seek to facilitate a critical perspective on the present.

## History and Theory: Conceptualising the Self

All the books under review contain strong and at times lengthy theoretical introductions. Drawing on poststructuralist thinkers, most notably Michel Foucault but also Judith Butler, authors develop sophisticated understandings of subjectivities and how the formation of the self can be studied in a historical fashion.[13] Indeed, conceptualising the self as subject to historical change is at the very core of the intellectual projects. For historians, these studies are valuable because they provide a theoretical and methodological grounding for historising the self. Sociologists Sabine Maasen, Ulrich Bröckling and Andreas Reckwitz have provided the most detailed and sophisticated theoretical perspectives in this regard. Discussing the 'therapeutisation of sexual selves', as her subtitle puts it, Maasen emphasises that when we think to recognize sexuality 'as it is', we are already realising that sexuality is 'socially produced' (34). While we know in our everyday lives what sexuality is, this knowledge is anything but unproblematic, Maasen argues. Her study thus seeks to show how sexuality *became* a problem we take for granted. Reaching back to late antiquity Maasen examines discourses about sexual desires that constitute norms of sexual desires and simultaneously diagnose individual failures in reaching these norms, which in turn require increasingly fine methods and greater attention by individuals to their sexual desires to make them fit the norms. In other words, there is an inbuilt dynamic of constant failure and renewed efforts in the constitution of sexual selves. 'Therapeutic practices produce (real) sexual selves', she writes. Very much in line with Foucault, whom she introduced into German debates, Maasen's goal is then to show why we take it for granted that sexual selves require, in principle, therapies as a result of never successful attempts to achieve perfection. Maasen thus conceptualises

[12] See only ———, *History of Madness* (New York: Routledge, 2006), Rose, *Governing*. For a fascinating left-wing contemporary polemic against the power of psychologists, see Initiative Sozialistisches Forum, ed., *Diktatur der Freundlichkeit: Über Bhagwan, die kommende Psychokratie und Lieferanteneingänge zum wohltätigen Wahnsinn* (Freiburg: Ça-Ira-Verlag, 1984).

[13] See Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1982); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); ———, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). For a German discussion of Foucault's work, see Thomas Lemke, *Eine Kritik der politischen Vernunft: Foucaults Analyse der modernen Gouvernementalität* (Berlin: Argument, 1997).

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the 'sexual self' as a dynamic but never completed project, because the search for perfection is never complete.

Ulrich Bröckling, who examines the rise of the 'entrepreneurial' or 'neoliberal' self since the 1970s, makes a similar point in discussing the 'paradoxes of the self'. Indeed, the very figure of the self is a paradox, as Bröckling argues in a programmatic chapter on the 'Genealogy of Subjectification'. The self is the object of powers that not only affect the self but produce it; and at the same time, the very fact that powers can affect the self presupposes this self (19–20). There is, in other words, an element of freedom inherent to the paradoxical conceptualisation of the self. Since this is a paradox that cannot be resolved, it appears as a 'practical task', a continuous procedure that requires work and efforts. The self, this implies, is never stable, and cannot be studied as something stable, but always 'in the mode of the gerund', as Bröckling puts it. The self is 'a social problem and an individual task; not a product, but a relation of production' (22). And this requires historicising the self. What the self is can only be understood by examining the historically specific semantics and complexes of knowledge that are invoked to shape it. His study thus does *not* address transformations of subjectivity, 'but how the subject became, in specific historical moments, a problem and what solutions were found for this problem' (23).[14] The genealogical method Bröckling proposes is therefore not interested in writing a history of how the self developed, in a story of decline or rise, but in understanding programs of managing the self at specific and disparate moments of time.

As with much of the literature discussed here, Bröckling is not interested in actual human beings, but in the self as a 'real fiction', as he puts it (35). The self is a figure; it is not merely the result of discursive effects but a figure that entails 'very practical requirements' that people have to follow, or at least try to follow, if they want to act and be recognised as persons and individuals. The self is, then, an 'invocation', a narrative ideal that appeals to people to engage in certain practices, 'technologies of the self' (Michel Foucault) that help them shape themselves in emotional, mental or bodily ways. These requirements, what might be called programmes for governing the self, do not formulate strict rules and norms that are to be followed, but have a 'pull' effect that makes certain options more likely and others less likely by creating a field of knowledge about the self into which people can tap. Importantly, this implies that there are multiple and contradictory programs. In practical matters, implementing or following these 'invocations' never happens without frictions, criticisms or experiments. On a theoretical level, Bröckling thus creates the space for a certain openness that avoids on the one hand painting an image of a strict regime of subjectification and, on the other hand, buying into the fiction of autonomous (or *eigensinnig*) individual actors resisting or working with this regime. Rather, frictions are built into the very conception of the government of the self. Empirically, Bröckling examines a variety of texts that create a specific

[14] According to Bröckling, the 1970s were a specific moment when the self became a problem in the Western world. It would be interesting to ask if (and when) something similar happened in Eastern Europe, or elsewhere in the world.

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knowledge about the self and that thereby function as 'invocations' that affect people to performatively create an 'entrepreneurial self'. However, he does not discuss what people actually do with these programmes, nor does he address who is actually affected by this programme of governmentality – workers, employees, men, women or all equally.

Contradictions, frictions, paradoxes and experiments also play a fundamental role in Andreas Reckwitz's work on the 'hybrid subject'. He, too, rejects notions of an ahistorical autonomous self, and instead approaches the self as a 'cultural form' (10) that is subject to historical change. He, too, is not interested in individual human beings but instead 'in the socio-cultural form of subjectivity that inscribes itself into individuals' (10). The question he raises is equally inherently historical: 'what are the cultures of subjectivity (*Kulturen des Subjects*) that modernity has produced' (11)? Whereas Bröckling emphasises that the self is an 'invocation', Reckwitz is particularly interested in the 'hybrid' forms of subjectivity that characterise, he argues, modernity since the early nineteenth century. Examining how cultures of subjectivity transformed, Reckwitz thus offers a history of modernity that is neither a story of liberating the self, nor of disciplining it. Rather, he treats modernity as a problem, namely the problem of how to shape the self (77). Writing as a sociologist who is ultimately interested in the present, he emphasises that any diagnosis of contemporary society would rest on shallow feet without such historical grounding.

Reckwitz sees three major eras that were all characterised by hegemonic cultures of subjectivity and aesthetic challenges of hegemonic subjectivities: the 'morally sovereign general subject' (*moralisch-souveräne Allgemeinsubject*) that characterised bourgeois modernity and the 'expressive individual subject' of romanticism that opposed it; the 'avant-garde subject' of artistic circles in the interwar period and the 'post-bourgeois employee subject' of 'organised modernity', lasting from the 1920s to the 1970s; and, finally, the 'counter-cultural subject' that came into being in the counter-cultures of the 1970s and the 'consumptive creative subject' (*konsumptorisches Kreativsubject*) that characterises post-modernity. All these subjectivities are, Reckwitz argues, hybrid forms that incorporate elements of preceding cultures of subjectivity, and that are inherently contradictory. Conceptually, the space for free choices and individual agency thus lies not in tensions between ideals and what actual human beings do, but in the cultural forms of subjectivity themselves. By virtue of being contradictory, they offer individual human beings choices and indeed force them to make choices. And by making choices, the forms of subjectivity are not only reproduced but also altered.

Similar to Bröckling, Reckwitz regards subjectivities as cultural forms to which people aspire. However, he places more emphasis on everyday practices through which the subject constitutes itself, namely practices of working and consumption, of intimacy and sexuality and of technologies of the self. Yet, whereas the focus on everyday practices might suggest a certain proximity to history of everyday life approaches, Reckwitz is not interested in carefully reconstructing what actual people did but rather in 'routinised' forms of behaviour that constitute the cultural code of a society. It is conceptually logical that his empirical chapters are based on secondary

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literature or, where he turns to primary sources, on theoretical texts, for example by Herbert Marcuse, Guy Debord or Gilles Deleuze in his discussions of the counter culture. The result is that he emphasises experimentation on a theoretical level and indeed stresses that experimenting has become a constitutive part of a post-modern culture of subjectivity, but the reader gets little sense of what the actual experimenting looks like.

These are theoretically sophisticated texts and this brief discussion can certainly not do justice to their complexity. Other authors of the works reviewed here focus on slightly different methodological issues, depending on their subject matter. Maren Möhring, who explores the shaping of the body in the German nudist movement around 1900, argues for historicising notions of a natural (and hence liberated) body. Magdalena Beljan in turn emphasises the importance of gender while analysing gay subjectivities in West Germany during the 1980s, and Jens Elberfeld and Marcus Otto, in an often quoted introduction, draw attention to the historical shift from aesthetics to ethics in the construction of subjectivities. For readers, these sometimes dense texts can be a challenge, and it is not always entirely clear how detailed discussions of Foucault's work exactly contribute to the argument. But readers open for theoretically informed perspectives on the genealogies of subjectivities will find much food for thought in these texts, and they will at least be familiar with Foucault as a result. Historians will appreciate their insistence on the historicity of the self, and will benefit from the conceptual approaches they suggest for studying the history, or genealogy, of the self.

## Practicing the Self

Conceptually, the literature under review argues that there is no pre-existing self that might engage in practices, but rather that the self is only constituted through engaging in historically specific practices. Hence, practices also figure prominently in empirical studies. What kind of practices are studied, and how this is done, varies greatly. Andreas Reckwitz, for example, discusses a broad variety of practices of working, of intimacy, of consumption and of 'technologies of the self', such as writing diaries,[15] to outline the contours of bourgeois, employee and post-modern consumerist subjectivities. The post-modern subject, he suggests, creates itself through permanent (self-)expression and experimenting: in the realm of labour, creative professions have become culturally hegemonic, where constant networking and trying out new forms, for example in the advertisement industry, is the rule. In intimate relations, the subject is expected to be able to express its (sexual) desires and to explore them in ever new fashions, and having children, Reckwitz claims, becomes another 'project' of self-expression.

[15] On diaries and the self, see Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). Yet, whereas Hellbeck analyses actual diaries to study the shaping of the self under Stalin, Reckwitz is not interested in the specific content of a diary and it might reveal about the creation of a self but in the practice of writing diaries per se.

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Whereas Reckwitz outlines these practices in rather broad strokes, without reference to any 'life' examples, Ulrich Bröckling turns to management practices, and specifically advice literature for managers, to trace the 'strategies and programs' (Chapter 4) of the entrepreneurial subjectivity. Creativity, for example, is, according to Bröckling, 'a governmental program, a mode of foreign- and self-governance (*Fremd- und Selbstführung*)' (153). Being creative becomes an imperative. Bröckling then traces the development and popularisation of the concept of creativity. In contrast to the 'genius', an exceptionally gifted individual, everybody has, according to the psychologists Bröckling discusses, a creative potential that can, and indeed must, be developed. Being creative is what the modern world of work constantly demands. And it is not only play, as playful as the language of creativity may appear. 'The creative imperative requires a permanent digression; its enemies are homogeneity, enforced identity, standardisation and repetition' (170). In a similar vein, Bröckling examines 'Empowerment', 'Quality', and 'Projects', all key terms that formulate a contradictory and therefore ultimately unachievable invocation. In some ways, the picture Bröckling paints resembles Reckwitz's arguments: both emphasise that subjects have to be creative, flexible and self-responsible. Yet, Bröckling limits his perspective to management practices, which allows him to zoom in and to describe in detail how such concepts call for certain personal qualities at the workplace.

While Bröckling and even more so Reckwitz offer somewhat holistic perspectives on a particular regime of subjectivity, other studies have a more specific focus, addressing bodily as well as emotional or mental practices. Möhring's book, a revised version of her dissertation and a landmark study for the history of the body in Germany,[16] provides a study of the German nudist movement between 1890 and 1930. Criticising studies that simply characterise the nudist movement as 'anti-modern' or that celebrate the movement for its alleged 'liberation' of the body,[17] Möhring is interested in the discursive and practical construction of a 'natural' body, that is in the bodily ideals and the practices people developed to produce this 'natural' body. To this end she examines in detail how nudists worked on their body by following various gymnastic schemes that should train the body, as a whole or particular part, how ancient Greek statues became a role model for training the body but were Germanized and how hygienic discourses demanded people to take care of their bodies, for example by following a vegetarian diet. Nudity played a fundamental role for these life-reform inspired gymnasts. Exposing the body to the sun and fresh air was a means to shape it in a healthy way. At the same time, exposing the body to the gaze of others was also a means to monitor it. Other gymnasts, including potential partners, could immediately assess the quality of a body without it being covered by cloths that might disguise bodily weaknesses. Working on the body was,

[16] On bodies and bodily practices, see Netzwerk Körper, ed., *What Can a Body Do? Praktiken und Figurationen des Körpers in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2012).

[17] See, for example, Michael Andritzky and Thomas Rautenberg, eds., *'Wir sind nackt und nennen uns Du': Von Lichtfreunden und Sonnenkämpfern. Eine Geschichte der Freikörperkultur* (Giessen: Anabas, 1989).

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as Möhring convincingly argues, by no means apolitical. Defining what is a 'healthy' and 'natural' body is always a question of power, in which not only the individual body is at stake but the body of the nation as a whole. Debunking histories that tell a story of liberating an 'oppressed' body, a narrative that life-reform activists told and that historians have reproduced, she seeks to show how what we consider a 'normal' body has *become* normal. While concerned with the 1900s, her book also speaks to the present, just as studies of the self during the 1970s do. Showing that what is considered healthy and normal today is itself the product of a historical process of normalisation, she denaturalises the body of the 1900s as much as the body of the present.

Two other edited volumes focus on bodies as well. *The Preventative Self* (*Das präventive Selbst*), edited by Martin Lengwiler and Jeannette Madarász, provides a history of modern health politics, covering mostly German speaking Europe, but also the United States and the United Kingdom. The editors emphasise the development of a 'logic of prevention' that entailed an 'individualisation and subjectification of health oriented behavioural rules' (15). It was (and is) not only the state's task to ensure its citizens health, but the 'preventive self' is itself responsible to act 'rationally' to avoid health problems; it has to stop smoking, eat healthily and do sports. The preventive self was by no means an invention of the post-war period. Already life-reform activists had developed individual programs for preventing health problems. But only in the post-war period did a 'liberal turn of the preventive discourse' take place that emphasised 'individual recommendations at the cost of institutional social welfare reforms' (22–3). Central for this preventive self is a permanent self-observation, for example regarding caloric intake, that facilitates rational choices about one's health.

The contributions to the volume cover a variety of topics, ranging from the inclusion of food into preventive health politics (Jakob Tanner), to the decline of bacteriology as a field in Weimar Germany (Silvia Berger), to the 'duty of being healthy' in the context of chronic illnesses between 1918 and 1945 (Jeannette Madarász), the transformation of risk prevention for pregnant women from group prevention to individual prevention (Ulrike Lindner) and endurance sports in 'times of fears about calories' (Tobias Dietrich). Unfortunately, many of the contributions do not quite address questions of subjectivity, despite the book's title. Few chapters engage with the broader literature on subjectivities. Dietrich's chapter on jogging is somewhat an exception to this. He provides an empirically dense discussion of how jogging became a mass phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s, with its own specialised market for products and advice literature. Jogging came to express a 'new symbolic care for one's own health', Dietrich writes (299). But, paradoxically, jogging resulted in a new range of health problems, such as injuries related to jogging. And despite all the efforts by health campaigners to advertise jogging as a means to fight obesity, it never turned into a mass movement, Dietrich claims, precisely because it was burdened with 'cultural, social and political meaning' (300) – an argument that remains somewhat underdeveloped. The book provides interesting case studies. Drawing attention to how taking care of one's health is part and parcel

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of contemporary subjectivity that emphasises self-responsibility and self-discipline is certainly important. But overall, the book disappoints because its empirical chapters do not quite illuminate and theorise the preventive self.

A second edited volume, *Beautiful Normal* (*schön normal*), edited by sociologist Paula-Irene Villa, examines what people do with their bodies to be who they want to be – how they undergo plastic surgery, how they submit to dietary regimes or do sports to form perfect bodies. Engaging in this body work (*Körperarbeit*) is not simply about 'external' beauty; rather, it is 'always and necessarily work on the social self', Villa writes in the introduction (8). This work on the self can be creative, but also – 'and above all' – it means a 'submission to merciless norms' (8). Working on the bodily self is thus a form of social work, because bodily norms about beauty are deeply social.

The volume contains a thematically diverse set of contributions by scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds, including sociologists, cultural anthropologists and literature and media scholars, as well as scholars in gender studies. They address topics as diverse as bodily performances by artist Stelarc and Valie Export (Markus Brunner), ethnic plastic surgery, taking Michael Jackson's nose as a case study (Kathy Davis), everyday practices of beautification or enduring pain (Nina Degele), the treatment of fitness in satirical texts (Anne Fleig) and the self-legitimisation of plastic surgeons (Barbara Meili). Sources vary from artistic productions to interviews with ordinary people involved in creating beautiful bodies, their own or, in the case of plastic surgeons, others. These are often highly thought stimulating pieces, not least because many chapters succeed in highlighting ambivalences.

Kathy Davis provides an excellent example of a scholar with a keen awareness of ambivalences. She voices discomfort with the common notion that women who undergo cosmetic surgery are simply the victims of an ideology that prescribes what they have to look like. Having talked to various women who have undergone plastic surgery, she came to acknowledge the real suffering of these women. Having thus questioned her own writing that was critical of plastic surgery for women, she seeks to use these insights to question usual assumptions about ethnic surgery, that is plastic surgery that seeks to make people look more 'white'. Whereas even feminist colleagues found it acceptable that women have plastic surgery to adhere to common assumptions about beauty, it seemed utterly inacceptable for people of colour. 'In general, the discursive space that seems acceptable for "ethnic minorities" is much smaller than the space acceptable for "whites"' (53). Michael Jackson's facial operations – he had four nose operations – provide a case in point. Some critics have blamed him for denying his black identity, a charge Davis dismisses. Rather, she points to the gender aspect of his bodily transformation. Just as much as he might have wanted to be 'white,' he wanted to have a 'female, asexual and young appearance' (55), an aspect, however, that is rarely discussed. While white people can experiment with their (bodily) self, this possibility is not given for people of colour, Davis suggests. She thus argues for accepting plastic surgery, for people of colour as much as for women, as a means to alleviate bodily suffering, though she emphasises that each case needs to be understood in a specific context. It is an instructive text

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that demonstrates how bodily practices, like plastic surgery, are interwoven into a contextual net of power relations, in which (white) critics play an important part. In this context, her argument implies, an act like a nose operation can be a moment of resistance.

For historians, two more essays in the volume might be of particular interest, as they show how the making of the self is a process that functions according to ever changing informal rules and norms. Both Nina Degele and Barbara Meili draw on ethnographic fieldwork, mostly interviews, related to plastic or aesthetic surgery. Degele has asked more than 160 interviewees, mostly during group discussions, what 'making yourself beautiful' means for them. The material she presents indicates how being beautiful, but also enduring pain, is about being 'normal': the decision to undergo plastic surgery, for example, is often the result of years of suffering and the desire to be 'normal' again. In Degele's analysis, women who make such choices submit, if unknowingly, to norms set by new technical imperatives and standards of normality set by (often male) doctors (74). Similarly, enduring and expressing pain, for example while giving birth, happens within parameters of normality. In all cases, dealing with beauty and pain is a means of being normal. Barbara Meili approaches plastic surgery from the opposite side, as it were, asking how (male) surgeons legitimise their practice, given that plastic and aesthetic surgery are not considered part of the 'regular' medical profession. Her case study shows, as she notes in the conclusion, that plastic or aesthetic surgery – drawing boundaries is impossible, as her interviewees note – is not (yet) normalised, but in the midst of a transformative process, which is precisely why it is so important for surgeons to legitimise their practice. We can thus observe a 'gradual legitimisation' of plastic surgery in society (140). While Degele shows how women's seemingly free choices are embedded in expectations of bodily normality, Meili's work emphasises that the expectations of normality and the means used to create a 'normal' body in a legitimate way are themselves changing.

Other volumes approach the formation of subjectivities by focusing more on shaping minds and feelings, though the very distinction is insofar problematic as bodies are always embedded in discursive and hence social formations. Magdalena Beljan examines the history of male homosexual subjectivity in West Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. She inquires how homosexuality was turned into a 'problem' (17) in a specific way, and how in the process a specific knowledge about homosexuality was produced. Homosexuality was increasingly perceived, she argues, as 'truth' about oneself (18). This approach in the tradition of a Foucauldian discourse analysis unveils the 'disciplining, regulation and normalization of bodies' (33). Discursively produced truths become the norm and are presented as 'natural'. Beljan spends an entire chapter introducing her theoretical apparatus before she turns to the empirical study that starts with a discussion of changes in the legislation regarding male homosexuality; questions of subjectivity play only a marginal role in this rather empiricist chapter. A third chapter, entitled 'Being Gay Means Becoming Gay', discusses how being gay required working on the self. Finding a (positive) term was an important step in this regard, and hence Beljan discuss how 'gay' (*schwul*) was appropriated as a positive

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term designating male homosexuality. 'Be proud *Schwule*', an activist demanded (96). Not least, it made being gay a *political* subjectivity.

Perhaps the most interesting part of her work engages with the coming-out process, an issue that was widely discussed in the gay movement. Coming out was not simply a moment of saying the truth about oneself and one's sexual desires, but, according to gay activists, a process that made 'homosexuality part of the entire person' (107). In the eyes of activists coming out was a crisis all gays had to go through and that hence helped constitute them as a particular group. This, too, gave coming out a political dimension. A fourth chapter turns to the thorny issue of male homosexuals and minors, as there were factions in the gay movement who argued for decriminalising such relations. And finally, the fifth chapter discusses the reactions to AIDS in the homosexual movement. Beljan interprets the worry about AIDS as a form of caring about the self – in German, *Sorge vor Aids als Sorge um sich* – a wordplay that can't quite be translated into English. The fears about being infected with AIDS not only called for *safer sex* practices but for a different way of dealing with oneself, one's sexual desires and one's body more generally. A gay magazine for example urged its readers to avoid unhealthy food, such as hamburgers and cola, and not to take too many antibiotics; at the same time, it argued against promiscuity given the threat the AIDS epidemic constituted. In that sense, the AIDS debates required homosexual men to regulate their sexual desires, which some activists bemoaned as a loss of sexual liberty that resulted in a deficient 'sorrow sexuality' full of fear (224). All in all, while her study is sometimes somewhat descriptive, it provides an interesting account how homosexual male subjectivities were produced in a social field, how they gained political meaning and how they were affected by the AIDS crisis.

The edited volume *The Counselled Self (Das beratene Selbst)*, too, addresses developments in the 'long' 1970s, namely the 'genealogy of therapeutisation'. The volume is interestingly structured. After an introductory chapter written by co-editor Sabine Maasen, she provides a brief 'genealogical note' to each of the ten chapters. The chapters examine what Maasen calls a peculiar technique of 'governmentality of counselling' that acts upon the 'counselled self' (10). In the 1970s, the volume suggests, a 'therapeutic society' emerged. The contributions explore this society along three axes that reflect the different objects therapies seek to affect: the psyche, the body and feelings, often in combination with each other. To this end the chapters engage with various therapeutic practices during the 1970s (with the exception of Uffa Jensen's chapter that traces the history of 'psycho-knowledge' in the early twentieth century), ranging from the 'psycho-boom' and the vast explosion of psychology as a profession in the 1970s (Maik Tändler), to family therapies (Jens Elberfeld), advice literature on how to deal with stress (Patrick Kury), (somatic) self-therapeutisation in the New Age (Pascal Eitler), sexual therapy (Annika Wellmann) and therapy in prisons (Marcel Streng), to name only some themes. The volume is interesting for the approach the contributions take. Mostly, the chapters draw on psychological guidance and advice literature. Jens Elberfeld, for example, traces the American influences on the development of German family therapy, the organisational history of various agencies and the contexts in which family therapy was applied. In an interesting

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analysis, Elberfeld notes that the very notion of what meaning ill meant changed. Rather than distinguishing between healthy and pathological family structures, the question was which family was functional and which was dysfunctional, and hence required therapy. In the discourse about family therapy, a certain norm about family life and communication within the family was established that therapy would produce. Ultimately, Elberfeld provides an informative discourse analysis that shows how different therapeutic discourses merged. What is, however, missing is a sense of what happened in therapy sessions. This is true for most of the chapters in the book. They provide interesting accounts of the guidance advice literature offered, for example how one might deal with stress, or how yoga should be performed in the context of New Age movements; but how this literature had an impact and how people made use of this literature, remains unclear. Nevertheless, the volume offers rich descriptions of various guidelines for psychic, bodily and emotional therapeutic practices that would, in one way or another, 'heal' the self.

## The Contemporary Self

In much of the literature reviewed here the 1970s emerge as an era when a new form of subjectivity developed.[18] Reckwitz sees the decade as the moment when an expressionist-consumerist subject came into being, and Bröckling locates the origins of the 'entrepreneurial' self in this decade. Maik Tändler's dissertation *The Therapeutic Decade* (*Das Therapeutische Jahrzehnt*) explicitly focuses on the decade, as does the edited volume *Contemporary History of the Self* (*Zeitgeschichte des Selbst*). Maik Tändler addresses a development that has already been addressed in *Das beratene Selbst*, a volume he co-edited. In three larger sections, Tändler discusses the scientification, the liberation and the democratisation of the self. The first part traces the explosion of psychology as an academic field in the post-war period, particularly in the (late) 1960s and 1970s. In the 1970s the discipline gained a political reputation as 'progressive' because of its alleged ability to liberate people from restrictive social conditions. This issue is discussed at greater length in the second part of the book, which examines various more or less left-wing movements that struggled for liberating the self, for example in sexual contexts but also in communes and consciousness-raising groups. Tändler is keenly aware how what seemed to be liberating practices turned into new pressures. For example, the breaking of old taboos about talking about sexual desires could easily produce no less demanding pressures to discover and 'liberate' those desires, and those unwilling to do so face massive pressure in groups.

[18] The vibrant German literature on contemporary history since the 1970s mostly ignores debates about subjectivities. See in addition to the work by Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael cited above, Morten Reitmayer and Thomas Schlemmer, eds., *Die Anfänge der Gegenwart: Umbrüche in Westeuropa nach dem Boom* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014); Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008). For a critical perspective informed by cultural history approaches, see Maren Möhring, 'Rezension von: Anselm Doering-Manteuffel / Lutz Raphael: Nach dem Boom. Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2008', *sehepunkte* 9 (2009).

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The last part then examines various group-dynamics events (*Gruppendynamiken*) as a method to 'democratise everyday life'. Learning how to communicate in groups, the argument went, would enable participants to engage in equal and meaningful discussions. The programme targeted particularly teachers, and, as Tändler shows, the seminars were at least initially quite popular amongst younger teachers. But soon enough, the plans devised by the organisers blew up because participants did not act the way they were expected. High political expectations were quickly disappointed. Indeed, the case study is noteworthy because it shows the multiple problems that theoretical programmes encountered when put into practice. Tellingly, in another article Tändler reports how teachers complained about students who did not behave according to theory.[19] Such probably disappointing experiences must have been very common. They point to an important issue that is often mentioned at a general level but rarely explored in empirical detail: that the programmes of governmentality that authors discuss so skilfully often don't quite work, that the people they try to affect don't quite do what they are expected to do. Yet, what this means for our understanding of the government of the self often remains somewhat elusive.

The edited volume *Zeitgeschichte des Selbst*, to which Tändler contributed an article, broadens the perspective. The volume explores how 'being oneself' became an increasingly difficult task in the decades after 1968. It seeks, as a thought stimulating introduction by the editors Pascal Eitler and Jens Elberfeld argues, to connect a history, or genealogy, of the self with questions of social history historians more frequently ask. Changing subjectivities are, they argue, a fundamental part of a changing society, and to understand how subjectivities changed an investigation of all social spheres is necessary to find 'unexpected elective affinities' (14). A contemporary history of the self thus needs to address love relations as much as workplace relations, family histories as much as processes of urbanisation. The project they propose is explicitly critical of narrating the history of the self as a story of 'individualisation'. Instead, it inquires what a society, or a segment in society, requires people to do to be recognised as 'authentic' individuals. In that sense the history of the self is indeed a deeply social history. Very much in line with what Bröckling and Reckwitz, who also contributed a theoretical chapter to the volume, have proposed, Eitler and Elberfeld argue that becoming a subject in a historically specific context is always a process of subjugation under impositions or invocations by others, and by oneself.

The volume's contributions highlight three processes central for understanding the contemporary self: first, the therapeutisation of the self, with contributions by Maik Tändler, Jens Elberfeld, Marcel Streng and Tobias Dietrich, all of whom also contributed chapters to other books reviewed here; second, the politicisation of the self, with contributions on migration and the end of the bourgeois subject (Massimo Perrinelli), on discos and youth observation (Alexa Geisthövel) and the construction of 'democratic selves' in films about Neonazis (Julia Stegmann); and

[19] Maik Tändler, 'Erziehung der Erzieher: Lehrer als problematische Subjekte zwischen Bildungsreform und antiautoritärer Pädagogik', in Pascal Eitler and Jens Elberfeld, eds., *Zeitgeschichte des Selbst: Therapeutisierung – Politisierung – Emotionalisierung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 107–8.

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third, the emotionalisation of the self, with contributions focusing on psychedelic drug consumption around 1970 (Florian Schleking) and job satisfaction and emotional knowledge in work related discourses (Sabine Donauer), to name but a few themes. These are diverse articles, with regards to both content and quality. They show the multiple sites for the formation of the self. Of particular interest is perhaps Massimo Perinelli's chapter. Making use of Gilles Deleuze's work, he presents the migrant as a figure that does not recognise boundaries, a figure of constant change that has no stable self and hence represents the 'de-subjectification' of the bourgeois self. This is, to be sure, quite an abstract text that does not rely on much empirical evidence. But it offers an interesting alternative to the focus on subjections because it indicates the possibilities of escaping the impositions and requirements of regimes of subjectification that other authors, drawing mostly on Foucault, highlight.

Differences in approaches and emphasis not withstanding, certain features that characterise the contemporary self emerge from this literature. It is a self that is required to constantly work on itself; it has to improve its mental health and emotional wellbeing, not least in bodily ways, for example in wellness resorts; and it has to work on its body to be beautiful and healthy. The contemporary self has to learn how to communicate and express its feelings and desires, it has to be open to new experiences, it has to be ready to engage in experiments and it has to be flexible to build new relations and networks. The contemporary self is a project of continuous but never completed improvement. This is a deeply social project. A plethora of agencies, ranging from therapists to advise literature to ideals conveyed in media and advertisements, promotes an image of such a happy, healthy and flexible self. This image formulates both a promise – how to become happy, how to remain healthy, how to succeed on the labour market – but also a threat: if you don't do this, if you don't work on yourself, then you will fail in life.

Studies of the contemporary self and its history show how this government of the self that instructs people of how to govern themselves emerged historically. One particular aspect of this history, emphasised by various scholars, deserves attention: the features that characterise the contemporary self, the ability (and necessity) to speak about oneself, one's feelings, to experiment and to work on oneself, emerged first in the leftist countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s.[20] It was imagined as an attempt to restore an authentic self that had been buried under capitalism. Exploring the potentialities of the true self, engaging in (not least sexual) experiments, building flexible networks rather than strict hierarchies was an attempt to disrupt capitalism. Yet, what started as a project for the liberation of the self from capitalism effectively helped bringing about what scholars have termed the 'neoliberal self'.

[20] See also Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005).

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## The Politics of the Self

Questions of subjectivity are deeply political, both for historical actors engaged in what leftists in the 1970s called 'politics of the first person' and also for scholars writing about the self.[21] Indeed, Michel Foucault's work, a common reference point for contemporary scholarship, is very much part of the historical moment of the 1970s when political activists were very much concerned with the self.[22] While many books address the politics of subjectivity, the edited volume *The Self Between Adaptation and Liberation* (*Das Selbst zwischen Anpassung und Befreiung*) addresses the politics of subjectivity most explicitly from a historical perspective, focusing, once again, mostly on the 1970s, although the book also contains chapters on the early twentieth century and the post-*Wende* years in former East Germany. In the final third of the twentieth century, the editors suggest, knowing oneself was considered a prerequisite for achieving social and political change: 'psy-knowledge' was to deliver the 'basis for emancipatory or even revolutionary politics' (31). By the 1980s these political hopes waned, though the ideals of creativity, emotionality and self-fulfillment remained and became the 'norms of subjectification' of the now hegemonic 'entrepreneurial creative subject' (34). Empirically, the book's contributors (among them Maik Tändler, Jens Elberfeld and Pascal Eitler) turn to familiar themes, such as couple's therapy (Elberfeld), how psycho-knowledge conveyed in advise literature informed parenting in the first years of childhood (Miriam Gebhard), the role of psycho-therapists in the West-German peace movement (Claudia Kemper) and debates about the role of politics in psychoanalysis within the profession itself (Anthony Kauders).

Politics matter not only historically. In many ways, scholars writing about regimes of subjectivity do so with a critical impetus. Through demonstrating how what is considered natural and normal has *become* natural and normal, historians and historically minded sociologists question the normality of the present. Maren Möhring, for example, writes that the 'analysis of historically specific normalistic technologies of the self is meant to make us more aware of new (neoliberal) forms of subjectification with which we are already "coincidating" and that have to be criticised so that we are "not being governed like that and at that cost", neither by others nor by ourselves' (88).[23] The contributions of *schön normal* are perhaps most explicit with their political statements. They develop a critique of the normative requirements of 'being beautiful'. Once again discussing plastic surgery, Sabine Maasen, for example, sees an 'unavoidable ambivalent pressure for aesthetic self-government', a phenomenon she describes as 'bio-aesthetical governmentality' (101). Women who undergo plastic surgery are aware of these pressures but nevertheless

[21] See the discussion in Reichardt, *Authentizität*. For contemporary left-wing texts, see, for example, Jörg Bopp, 'Der linke Psychodrom', in *Kursbuch* 55 (March 1977), 73–94; and Forum, ed., *Diktatur der Freundlichkeit*.

[22] On the West German alternative left's reception of Foucault, see Philipp Felsch, *Der lange Sommer der Theorie: Geschichte einer Revolte* (Munich: Beck, 2015).

[23] Möhring quotes Michel Foucault, 'What is Critique', in Sylvère Lotringer, ed., *The Politics of Truth: Michel Foucault* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1997), 45.

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insist that working on their bodies offers them opportunities and hence new freedoms. Yet, willy-nilly, these attempts to increase freedom rest on a 'moment of constraint: the rigid self-control of one's actions' (114). Making these self-imposed but deeply social constraints visible is an essential part of writing critical accounts of contemporary regimes of subjectification.

Ulrich Bröckling formulates a more elaborate programme one that resists or perhaps rather evades the neoliberal government of subjectification. Critical positions, he argues, face a paradoxical situation. By trying to be different, critics are precisely following the imperative to distinguish themselves from the homogenous masses. Even the 'nomadic' subjects poststructuralist theories construct as counter figures are ultimately unable to escape 'the imperative of flexibility of a radicalised market economy' (285). An alternative might be to avoid any subjectification, that is, not to develop a *different* subjectivity, but to pursue a program of 'de-subjectification' that 'seeks to overcome the requirements of having-to-be-a-self, but without losing itself in self-dissolution or self-extinction.' (287). This requires a flexible critique, a critique that knows no firm grounding, but that moves according to its target, and that is able to succeed only for a moment. Analysing how regimes of subjectification work, and making the impositions of such regimes visible, is thus a strategy that *cannot* provide people with clear guidance how to escape the field, but it can highlight 'irritations' in the fissures of the power field that constitutes the regime.

By way of concluding his book, Bröckling cites the 'Happy Unemployed' (*Die glücklichen Arbeitslosen*) initiative from Berlin that became famous in the late 1990s. The group created 'Without-Me-AGs' (a reference to the German *Ich-AGs*), or 'coalitions for simulations' ('you pretend to create jobs, we pretend to work'). Their pamphlets were a welcome alternative to the 'prudish boredom of social-scientific treatises' (295), but ultimately, even being lazy became an acceptable position in the market place: guidance literature that does not promise material wealth but explains how to be lazy and how to get along without material possessions is booming. It was only logical that the *Happy Unemployed* stopped their interventions, which had become part of the game. It had become necessary to find new positions from which to attack, a new way of being different.

## Conclusion

The literature discussed here offers fascinating insights into various aspects of the governmentality of the self in (West) Germany, especially since the 1970s. Arguably, societies across Western Europe, perhaps even across the Iron Curtain, experienced similar developments, though we still have to see a literature that investigates the issue in a transnational fashion.[24] Given how central shaping the self in its mental, emotional

[24] For some preliminary reflections on the construction of authentic subjectivities in Eastern European alternative movements, see my 'Conclusion: Dropping out of Socialism? A Western Perspective.' in Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan, eds., *Dropping out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (Lanham: Lexington, 2017).

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and bodily dimensions was and is, this body of scholarship certainly deserves attention, not least from a politically critical perspective. To conclude, however, I would like to point to one issue that I consider a weakness. Many studies note, on a theoretical level, that it would be a mistake to believe that people simply follow the rules that governments of subjectivity impose (which are, of course, contradictory in themselves). The 'entrepreneurial subject' that Bröckling discusses, for example, is an invocation that makes certain actions more or less likely. But what people actually do with these instructions or invocations is rarely explored. Sabine Maasen provides a telling anecdote: women who participated in a course on sexuality on a Tuesday morning, in which they were supposed to talk about sexual issues in their marriages, noted how absurd it was to go to the meetings amidst grocery shopping and picking up children from kindergarten. Relying on more or less normative and instructive texts will not get to this level of what happens in practice. Yet, to understand how regimes of subjectification function, how people submit to them, avoid them, alter them or resist them, it would be necessary to not only study, to use a metaphor suggested by Ulrich Bröckling, the various powers that seek to affect students, but also what actually happens in the classroom. This strikes me as important for at least two reasons: first, many scholars note ironical reactions to the impositions of a regime of subjectivity. Indeed, Reckwitz notes that irony is a fundamental aspect of post-modern subjectivity. Yet, what does it mean if people refuse to take a regime of subjectivity seriously? And second, one might wonder about the role (critical) studies of subjectivity play for the regime of subjectification itself. In other words, how does a popular and critical knowledge about the workings of regimes of subjectivity change them?[25] Engaging in such questions would, I believe, enrich our understanding of subjectivities both empirically and conceptually.

[25] For such an argument, see Maik Tändler and Uffa Jensen, 'Psychowissen, Politik und das Selbst: Eine neue Forschungsperspektive auf die Geschichte des Politischen im 20. Jahrhundert', in Uffa Jensen and Maik Tändler, eds., *Das Selbst zwischen Anpassung und Befreiung: Psychowissen und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012).

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