

power and time

*temporalities in conflict and
the making of history*

edited by

*dan edelstein, stefanos geroulanos,
and natasha wheatley*

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and the Making of History

EDITED BY DAN EDELSTEIN,
STEFANOS GEROULANOS,
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The University of Chicago Press
Chicago and London

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

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Published 2020

Printed in the United States of America

29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-48162-3 (cloth)

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-70601-6 (e-book)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226706016.001.0001>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Edelstein, Dan, editor. | Geroulanos, Stefanos, 1979– editor. | Wheatley, Natasha, editor.

Title: Power and time : temporalities in conflict and the making of history / edited by Dan Edelstein, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley.

Description: Chicago ; London : The University of Chicago Press, 2020. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019054895 | ISBN 9780226481623 (cloth) |

ISBN 9780226706016 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Time—Social aspects. | Time—Social aspects—History. |

History, Modern—19th century. | History, Modern—20th century. |

History, Modern—21st century. | Power (Social sciences)

Classification: LCC D210 .P76 2020 | DDC 909.08—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019054895>

© This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

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Chronocenos: An Introduction to Power and Time

DAN EDELSTEIN, STEFANOS GEROULANOS,
AND NATASHA WHEATLEY

Redeeming time when men least think I will.

PRINCE HAL, in *Henry IV, Part I*, 1.2.207

In the summer of 1971, a “committee of experts” met at the headquarters of the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in Paris and produced a global typology of time. The group comprised the French priest and philosopher of Islam Louis Gardet, the Rwandan poet and ethnohistorian Alexis Kagame, the Spanish-Indian theologian Raimon Panikkar, the German-Jewish-Canadian art historian Raymond Klibansky, and a handful of others. Their brief was ambiguous: to develop a new UNESCO initiative under the rubric “Time and History.” A report on the three-day meeting recounted that the “participants volunteered rapid, on the spot—but extremely lively—descriptions” of African, Hindu, Chinese, Greek, Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic “worlds of thought, setting the concepts of time and history in their context.”¹ Together they prepared a working document that presented the project’s rationale. Their text reveals the temporal anxieties that accompanied the hardening demands of global interconnections:

Today, when time is filled with significant action and history gathers speed so rapidly that man is left behind, even though it is he who accelerates it, there is indeed an urgent need to analyse the basic conceptions of time and history prevalent in different cultures. . . . We are concerned not so much with a comparative analysis as with the effect on a diversified typology of what is becoming increasingly a whole and all-embracing history, sweeping on and ineluctably synchronizing different periods of time as they are variously experienced.²

Their “urgent need” lay both in the global variety of time and in its mutation under the influence of this now “all-embracing history.” UNESCO’s projects, which typically contrasted unity with diversity, had often tied cultural difference to problems of time. For example, the 1950 “Statement of Experts

on Questions of Race” took on racism in part by targeting an overreliance on evolutionary approaches to progress.³ Other efforts imagined, by committee, technology’s effect on future society and the temporal implications of developmental economics.⁴ Cultural preservation projects, notably of the 3,200-year-old Abu Simbel temples in 1968, had made UNESCO internationally famous well beyond the echelons in which its cadres mostly originated.⁵ But time now had grown from a background theme into something that required its own experts, committees, and lists. It became the (self-)conscious work of an international institution.

The skeletal typology developed at the 1971 gathering found fuller elaboration when a second committee of experts met the following year. Under the banner “Time and the Philosophies,” those assembled produced a dense taxonomy of time, a project map that might “tame the wild profusion of existing things.”⁶ In an attempt at what Johannes Fabian has called a “complete grammar of Time,” they arranged the taxonomy into five headings, each with its own subdivisions.⁷ This categorization spanned themes such as “the empirical apperception of time,” “time viewed as a series of points, as a sphere,” “the philosophical elaboration of time and temporality,” “consciousness of recurring time and of irreversible time,” “pathology of time,” “relativity of space-time, asymmetry of time (in expanding universe) and cosmological time,” “time and meta-time: eternity as unending duration, anterior time,” “temporal view of history and the disalienation of man (Marxism),” “eschatological view of history and history of salvation,” and, perhaps most apposite, “tragic optimism.”⁸

UNESCO’s time project represents a remarkable moment in the international intellectual history of temporality. This global taxonomy of time, and the methodological quagmires it tripped into, allows us to observe UNESCO striving to define its universalism—trying, that is, to ground a nonhierarchical universalism suitable for the new global era of cross-cultural understanding it hoped to usher into being. The project resulted in a series of promptly forgotten publications involving a no-less-complex international cast of hermeneuticians, monks, scientists, politicians, and anthropologists: *Cultures and Time* (1976), *Time and the Philosophies* (1977), *Time and the Sciences* (1979).⁹ Their eclecticism, born in part of an earnest attempt to avoid Eurocentrism, was the fruit of a nervous methodological agnosticism. The “question arose as to whether it would suffice to draw up comparative tables of different cultures without trying to work out a general anthropology from them,” recounted a report, before answering it in the negative: “anthropology” was rejected as specifically Western, and the goal of “allowing the cultures to decide for themselves what exchanges might be useful or how they might develop along parallel lines” won the day.¹⁰

A new sort of global living-together required more than surface cultural exchange—it required a mutual comprehension on a deeper level, a dialogue across the “incommunicability of the cultures involved.”¹¹ In asking how different cultures might “meet” on a plane of temporal experience, across their different histories, UNESCO’s experts were theorizing a new time that was plural but integrated. This time represented a universalism of openness rather than of singular truths. In one of the resulting volumes, *Time and the Philosophies*, Paul Ricoeur worried explicitly about the reduction of different temporalities to “a non-interpreted, non-symbolized universal time. But time cannot be apprehended in this way. The only conceivable universality is in the opening of each culture to all the others, exchanges between them as equals, each acting on and being acted upon by every other.”¹² This was a universalism of dialogue through, or alongside, difference.

Overdetermined as its answers were, UNESCO tried something quite startling through its questions: to address the extraordinary plurality, cohabitation, and incommensurability of experiences and conceptions of time.¹³ Where the League of Nations had striven for an administration of time centered on synchronization (turning temporal discrepancies into impediments to internationalization),¹⁴ UNESCO celebrated the cultural relativism of temporality as an alternate universalism of form over substance—a global equality of transtemporal communication.¹⁵ New international orders had come into being, binding “tales of time” through increasingly complex systems of governance and the convergence of new political, social, and aesthetic tensions. UNESCO’s project represents one of those moments in which historical actors themselves were highly conscious that new political formations required new temporal foundations.

✱

This book is about such “foundations” of time, both in the sense of the founding of temporal regimes and in that of the structures underlying such regimes. It takes up the history of time and the times of history in their intellectual, scientific, political, and global dimensions. It homes in on a pervasive problematic of which the UNESCO project was a symptom—namely, the co-constitution of temporal and political orders. Political reorganization, we contend, can be understood as temporal reorganization.

Capitalizing on the thirst for rigorous work on time and temporalities, our broad purpose in this volume is to bring direction to the field through the analytical pairing of power and time. Power always calls into being its own temporal explanations and calculations, its own fictions, prophecies, and preferred histories, relying on particular ways of dredging the past. In

exploring this often conflictual relationship, we aim to bring a new generation of theoretically informed questions about time into the heart of modern European and international history, to relocate questions of temporality from the esoteric margins to the center of modern historiography. *Power and Time* probes legal, cultural, and sovereign authority and asks: How has it been shaped by conceptions of time? How have various regimes worked to reshape and restructure time itself? How did quotidian, radical, literary, or scientific deployments of time contribute to particular political circumstances, events, and horizons? To what kinds of time have political, legal, and revolutionary practices appealed, and why? How is the fantasmatic unity that permeates most temporal experience made possible, and which frictions and chasms does it paper over?

In this introduction, we chart a new engagement with the relationship of time and power. Broadening history's disciplinary horizons to engage aesthetic, anthropological, biophysical, and religious formations, we offer tools for a conceptualization of different temporal regimes that moves beyond the description of their multiplicity to study their mutual interaction and competition. We propose a new model, *chronocenosis*, for conceptualizing temporality. Chronocenosis is a way of theorizing not simply the multiplicity but also the conflict of temporal regimes operating in any given moment. Our point is that power and time interface amid intensely competitive temporal formations, and not simply parallel or layered ones. This interface braces these temporal formations and their conflict, sometimes enforcing a particular temporal hierarchy, at others submitting to their breakdown and clash. We argue that power operates by arranging, managing, and scaling temporal regimes and conflicts. At the same time, these fault lines function as seams of structural weakness and possibility: power is often undone in the cut and thrust of temporal antagonisms.

Chronocenosis requires full elaboration, and to explain our reasons for it, as well as its utility in the study of time, we build to it step-by-step. We first pursue an understanding of the mutual constitution of power and time, including the different sites where it may be studied. Second, we fasten on the two dominant models, both of which posit the period 1750–1850 as the primary site through which a narrative of state-versus-revolution and modern time became the basis for continuity, rupture, and progress. Third, to undo their interpretive centrality, we turn to vectors of international and imperial history, anthropology and archaeology, law, environmental thinking, and technology, where the struggle between coexisting temporalities has come to the fore. This path allows us to reconsider key subjects like modernity, acceleration, difference, temporal conflict, and political domination in a different

key. In the process, we revisit deceptively stable categories (e.g., past, present, future) and review how different organizations of time are experienced in particular contexts as pressures, especially by political, legal, and intellectual actors. We then discuss chronocenos, its connections to other models, its value for the historian. Finally, we close by hinting at the ways in which aesthetic experience fuses together the divergent and conflictual dynamics of power and temporality.

Why should we pursue time anew *now*? Over the past decade, time has emerged as a pivot concept across the humanities and social sciences, and historians have raised anew the question of its place in historical writing. New perspectives on conceptions and politics of time have acquired a powerful yet often confusing place in academic and popular discussion. In fits and starts, different registers of historical writing—from colonial and international history to intellectual and economic history—have begun to take up the challenge. Monographs and anthologies have proliferated, to the point that a “temporal turn” was announced already a decade ago. The names of certain theorists of time and history—including Reinhart Koselleck, François Hartog, and Stephen Kern—are widely celebrated. Still, much historical writing continues to treat time as self-evident—as something we feel and then think about only subsequently. Other approaches have subsumed time under other, related problems, including memory,¹⁶ cultures of industry and labor,¹⁷ modernity and secularization,¹⁸ and horological, calendrical, or representational standardizations of culture and space.¹⁹ Indeed, it could not be conceived of independently of these problems; but quite often, such historical approaches treat time as a collateral matter, poor in its concepts, derivative in its meaningfulness.²⁰ Attendant concepts like acceleration, historicity, and multiple temporal regimes tend to become homogenized; subsumed by other intellectual priorities, they lose their potential edge. Moreover, while allowing historians to continue to treat time as their native province,²¹ these approaches have also led them to pay less heed to contributions from other disciplines—including postcolonial, anthropological, scientific, and literary studies. Rather than broaden the arsenal available for rethinking our major disciplinary categories, history writing on time has not really harassed the central categories of the discipline. “The past” that historians supposedly study remains largely unchallenged in its meaning, “the present” always too clear.²²

After the anthropological critique of non-coevalness, the rise and decline of deconstruction (with its temporization of form and dynamic formalization of time), the “memory turn” of the 1990s, the spread of systems theory and actor-network theory, the rise of a new international history, the “return”

of religion (with its emphasis on theologico-political conflicts and religious contamination of secular temporalities), and the globalization of intellectual history, it is time for historians to confront this problem, and alongside it to tackle the fragility of historical givens such as “past,” “present,” and “future,” as well as the modernist “acceleration” narrative and the presumed singularity of historicity.

Time remains a daunting topic, and to lavish attention on it is easily to raise more problems than one can address. By quietly underwriting essential concepts, by being entwined with structures, networks, and hierarchies—and cutting across epistemological and ontological frameworks—it unsheathes danger when it itself becomes a historical object. Over and over, time has escaped experimental, philosophical, and historical attempts to overwhelm and pin it down, not least as it remains shrouded in nonscientific, literary, and mythological backdrops, metaphors and language play, unexamined presuppositions, cultural complexity, truisms, apotropes, and fantasy. In staging anew time as a question and an object, we unfasten Aeolus’s sacks with trepidation but also with reason. Our opening to multiple historical approaches, to interdisciplinarity, and to perspectives that do not begin with nor privilege “Western modernity”—and our tightening of the lens to the problem of power and the latent or irruptive conflict between competing temporal orders—offer a way through. Like this introduction, the chapters that make up this book focus on revolutionary transformations of time, on creeping temporal recalibrations, on structures of conceptual continuity, on forms of futural projection, and on historical citation and prediction. They address time’s implication in problems ranging from imperial power and international law to aesthetic politics, from economics to religious and secular authority, and from social-scientific inquiries and rights discourses to human intervention on deep time.

The Mutual Constitution of Power and Time

Of all the concepts and phenomena with which time is interwoven, power holds a singular place.

In what follows, under “power” we situate political authority, institutional force, legal order, biopolitical operations by governments or other agents, economic organization, as well as political destabilization, (apparent) revolutionary chaos, sources of de- and relegitimation to which political agents appeal. We treat power less promiscuously than Michel Foucault famously did, but we do make clear how concepts and images that define it extend far beyond traditional political authority, and also that key forms of temporal

and historical consciousness derive from them. A familiar position among historians is that political authority affects the handling of time in the sense that the latter inevitably raises the “question of who had the authority to decide what people did with their time, and whether or not that authority was respected.”²³ We want to suggest that there may be far more subtle—but also more expansive—ways of conceiving of the interaction of the two. Politics and time often do not act on each other directly, hammer on nail. At stake throughout this volume is their intricate mutual constitution—the foundational debts that each owes to the other.

Under the “time” rubric we look largely at “temporal regimes,” particular orderings of time and its experience, which include literatures of the moment, records of prophecy and prognosis, experiences of temporality, archives for memory, temporalizations of critique, regularities and transformations of labor, palimpsestic rearrangements of urban and other life, religious and secular organizations of nature, and the aesthetics that temporize and temporalize politics and power.²⁴ As a nexus concept, “regime” refracts political, social, hierarchical, even aesthetic structures: it links temporal orders, encodes power and politics, forges realities and limits of experience, contributes to the perpetuation of existing systems and the claims of new ones. And of course it does not control an entire situation even as it presses against alternative temporalities.

Political upheaval, authority, revolutionary and millenarian hopes, institutions (from judicial to educational to religious), and forms of sovereignty all establish or pry apart particular temporalities. At the same time, temporality shapes the horizons, form, and dynamism of such power. This has been most evident perhaps in revolutions and moments of historical rupture, from the Glorious and the French Revolutions through the end of the First World War and the consolidation of Nazi power. Revolutions and historical ruptures (themselves important temporal concepts) undermine the habitual constellation of temporal regimes: they dislodge the expected course of affairs; establish new configurations of historicity, futurity, and political force; and also get caught in complex temporal paradoxes.²⁵

But revolutions are far from the main occasion on which time and power collide, wrap into each other, disentangle and redesign everyday life. Indeed, often-conflictual regimes of temporality suffuse even the most stable of political states. Consider how the time of political affairs is often at odds with regal or dynastic time, with a time of exception or emergency, with religious time, with cycles particular to “natural” or naturalized time, with time dependent on economic fluctuations, and with the various temporalities of displaced, oppressed, or marginalized groups. Or consider the conundrum

posed by priorities like the temporal standardization of spatial distances and political control across them. To gloss but a couple of examples, standardizations of time and forms of record keeping date to 1200 BCE in China (and clocks to 250–100 BCE), and they were closely related to sovereign power.²⁶ The Seleucid Empire introduced “the world’s first continuous tally of counted years,” sparking fantasies about apocalyptic end times.²⁷ In Roman provinces, a multiplicity of calendrical frameworks competed with the official state one;²⁸ Caesar himself consolidated power by reforming the Roman calendar and had a month named after him for his pains, as did his successor, Augustus.²⁹ Ashkenazi Jews in early modern Europe, Elisheva Carlebach has shown, struggled to manage Christian theological domination’s censoring of the design of Jewish calendars.³⁰ As we shall see, the peculiar temporal status of law in the West—at least since Justinian’s Code—cuts across the time of political regimes: it grounds and questions the language of continuity and rupture by sublimating effects of political change. Meanwhile, economic power arrogates modernity to itself and contrasts it with the other’s “backwardness” or “crisis state,” whether in colonial contexts (from the Pacific Northwest to India) or neocolonial ones (like contemporary Greece).³¹

We may adumbrate this point as follows. Every established political regime, every sovereign, pursues continuity—often even eternity—and to do so negotiates its relationships with other established forms of time: religious, labor, economic, natural, legal, political. These politically significant domains, like points of contact with other political regimes—whether past ones or current competitors—complicate the temporal biotope. At the same time, different participants, factions, and groups in this political regime—classes, genders, ethnic groups, claimants to particular traditions, elites, scholars, outsiders, and so on—may experience time differently. Some of these claimants articulate explicit theories of time; others do not. Temporality, then, defines the emergence and effectiveness of political concepts—as Anson Rabinbach shows in his chapter in this volume, including that of major concepts definitive of an era: genocide, totalitarianism, fascism. Meanwhile, political authority calls into being its own temporal explanations, its own plans and calculations, yet does not simply reign supreme. It is both generated and maintained through the management and manipulation of a dense field of conflicting temporalities.

Conversely, these temporalities, sometimes cohabiting, sometimes predatory toward each other, also allow us to understand the fragility and historicity of political orders, hovering between fragmentation and integration, continuity and instability. Different temporalities are non-coextensive even when they seem identical, and they often tend toward conflict. Some remain

altogether virtual: they intercede so occasionally as to appear negligible, or they become visible in particular occasions of resistance or struggle. To identify divergent temporalities is also to fasten on latent political clashes. What we call *chronocenosis* is this complex and volatile intersection of competing temporal regimes that allows for particular ones among them to appear dominant at given points in time.

Power, Time, and the Advent of the “Modern” State: The Revolutionary and Koselleckian Models

The linkage of power and time is conventionally aligned with the advent of the Western “modern” state and society. Modernity and the idea of a new structure of temporality are deeply intertwined, both in historiography and by mutual definition. One could roughly speak of two schools: one that sees the era of North Atlantic revolutions as a radical politicization of time and progress, and another that focuses on the stabilization of the modern state and the development of historicity in the period 1750–1900.

The first of these accounts treats the American and French Revolutions as the key plotline of a stability-versus-revolution script that would be rehearsed over the 150–200 years that followed, until at least the fall of the Berlin Wall. Radiating outward from France, the United States, and Britain, this account places the Enlightenment front and center, and it perceives time as politicized in a new fashion. Where previously agents of a given regime used temporal constructions to celebrate a particular ruler, writers and philosophers, now allied to an intellectual movement not at the direct service of a king, argued that the arc of history bent toward a specific political goal. Condorcet’s *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* was the culmination of this enlightened genre, which Voltaire had pointed toward with his *Siècle de Louis XIV*. Condorcet reconstructed the entirety of history in terms of a stadial progress moving into the present and future in a manner altogether attached to the Revolution he supported (and whose victim he became).³² In these and many other texts of this age, one’s view of the present—either as uniquely enlightened or as dangerously misguided—entailed different political agendas. Those who believed they were living in an enlightened “age” generally subscribed to one set of political measures (e.g., religious toleration, freedom of expression, judicial reform) while their opponents favored other actions (e.g., religious censorship, feudal privileges, a return to Christian timelines). To be sure, this distinction did not translate neatly into “progressive” versus “conservative” platforms. But the broader point is that the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of rival political economies of time,

which formed an ecosystem of interdependent and competing perspectives on history and progress.

The French Revolution marked, in Chateaubriand's word, a Rubicon of no return, because *all* political regimes in Europe henceforth defined themselves in relation to it.³³ The Metternichian system put into place in 1815 was just as defined by the prospect of revolution as the liberal governments that briefly seized (or sought) power between 1820 and 1850. The Trienio Liberal in Spain (1820–1823) revived the 1812 constitution, which the Spanish Cortes had enacted in Cádiz in the aftermath of Napoleon's 1808 invasion and the abdications of Charles IV and Ferdinand VII. Those abdications also whipped up the waves of revolution that swept across Spanish America. France and Belgium witnessed revolutions in 1830, as did northern Italian states under Austrian control. The Metternichian system began to crumble in 1848, when revolutions erupted across Europe, including in Vienna, which Metternich himself was forced to flee. The French Revolution is thus viewed as a cascade effect that transformed and conditioned political life throughout Europe and South America. As Victor Hugo wrote in *Les Misérables*, "Revolution is to be found everywhere in this century."³⁴ This shared frame of reference meant that regimes in power during this period articulated history in isomorphic, if often inverse, terms. To the golden age of the neo-Jacobins, conservatives responded with apocalyptic nightmares. Yet because these temporal scripts had so much in common, the kinds of political legitimation that were erected on these histories had a family resemblance. And just as the French Revolution served as the fulcrum for these regimes in the nineteenth century, the Bolshevik Revolution took its place in the first half of the twentieth. This substitution was more than chronological; its reverberations had geographical implications: Bolshevism took the revolutionary time crunch global.

The second account, more explicit on temporality, can be correlated with the recent return to prominence—even apotheosis—of the conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck.³⁵ In his principal essays on the subject, which date to the 1970s, Koselleck theorized that there exists at each historical age a multiplicity of concurrent temporal and historical planes, each of which has its own "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation."³⁶ For Koselleck (and his advocates such as François Hartog), this multiplicity of temporal orders is constitutive of modern times, as different parts of society accelerate at different paces. A stratification or "stacking" of temporal regimes takes hold, organizing experience differently but also generating a stranglehold on alternative kinds of temporal change. The stranglehold in turn results in a profusion of crises, economic, social, and political.³⁷ In the shift from a "prophetic" engagement with the future to "rational prognosis,"³⁸ the establishment of *raison*

d'état organized a basic structure of modern politics that aimed at the control of the future. The advance of military and industrial technology accelerated during the Industrial Revolution—according to Koselleck, especially during the Vormärz of 1830–1848—and then caused a fundamental “change in the sensation and consciousness of time,”³⁹ even a “denaturalization” of “the historical experience of time.”⁴⁰ Concepts of time and movement changed: “Modern concepts of movement . . . have organized our entire linguistic inventory around the idea of necessary transformation, of shift and plannable change. The central concepts here are development, progress, history itself, reform, crisis, evolution, and, of course, revolution. . . . A certain minimum thrust toward change has been accepted by all political camps.”⁴¹ Acceleration in this account did not simply involve a historian’s judgment that some things “went faster”; rather, it became accepted as a matter of course.⁴² As opposed to a presupposition of stasis, of time merely passing, it offered a dynamic where things and beings experienced time, politics, and history at ever-increasing speed.⁴³ This dynamic in turn encoded in experience a language and politics of “progress” that defined all politics of revolution and reaction and explained the aforementioned proliferation of crises. Various other accounts, often pursued toward different ends, echo elements of Koselleck’s. For example, both Stephen Kern’s *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (1983) and Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s *The Railway Journey* (1979) traced periods of cultural acceleration in which new developments in the traversal and control of space hinged on and fed into new regimes of time.



The two accounts described in the previous section have significant merits: they make clear the centrality of the age of North Atlantic revolutions and the Industrial Revolution to the sense, reported over and over, that progress had become a major category for time and history. Accompanied by an acceleration mobilized by techno-scientific discovery and by the capacity to rule across longer distances, this pressure of progress and reaction offers a useful start for thinking about the essential political regimes of historicity, about their construction, stacking, and ostensibly modern transformation. Both approaches offer tactical pointers toward an intensified state involvement in everyday life, as well as toward the spatiotemporal stakes of political, legal, and social liberalization. Both proffer secularization and modernization theories. Additionally, the Koselleckian language of “temporal regimes” delivers (conveniently for us) on the promise of differentiating between coexisting experiences of time.

Nevertheless, significant problems vex any attempt to rely on either of the two accounts. To seek an alternative model that can subsume their various

strengths is not to deny altogether this connection between the “modernity” they construct and a new stratification or organization of time, but to clarify its ideological character and to put pressure on some of its elements.

First, both arguments tend Whiggish and excessively Eurocentric. They belong to a period of scholarship that took Europe as the lead, retained a naïve sense of progress versus backwardness, and perhaps too easily identified internal temporal breaks and leaps into modernity. Indeed, by the time that Koselleck invented the *Sattelzeit* concept for the period establishing modernity, the development of instruments of the modern state, and the rationalization of prediction, the identification of temporal shifts with modernity had become boilerplate. Arthur Lovejoy claimed a “temporalization” of the Great Chain of Being for the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Alexandre Koyré located his sharp break in Copernicus’s *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, which de-centered the human and effected a new space-time.⁴⁵ Committed to the 1800 moment when dating the epistemological break between the *âge classique* and modernity,⁴⁶ Foucault also described modernity as a Baudelairean ethos marked by “consciousness of the discontinuity of time” and “‘heroization’ of the present.”⁴⁷ (Later, Foucault added that in the 1700s “reason of state” had established a specific temporal regime of enforced stasis.⁴⁸) Niklas Luhmann, quoting Koselleck, saw “the structural change from traditional to bourgeois society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” as opening multiple possible futures.⁴⁹ Even critics like Hans Blumenberg and Georges Canguilhem who bemoaned the purported modernity of progress theories allied modernity with a new historicity and temporality.⁵⁰

Second, the two accounts’ association of temporal complexity with modernity (and of simplicity with some “premodernity”) has long been dismantled, famously by postcolonial critics like Dipesh Chakrabarty: “Can the designation of something or some group as non- or premodern ever be anything but a gesture of the powerful?”⁵¹ But criticism can also be rendered “from within.” In his contribution to this volume, Dan Edelstein contrasts revolutionary political thought with emotional economies to show how the construction of utopian futures relied on the axis of present-tense demands and futural legitimation. “Modern” revolutions, in this sense, created a historicity by relying on their futures. If narratives of revolution and democratization as constructing new historicities and temporal horizons hold, or have become naturalized into a specific “modernity,” this is in part because they rely on a revolution-continuity double that reconstructs the past as singular and interpretable. Clifford Ando, following Nicole Loraux, dates this practice back to the Athenians, who he argues imagined their own *demos* as continuous—existing outside of time by comparison to “evanescent” kingdoms.⁵² Kathleen

Davis convincingly contends, in *Periodization and Sovereignty*, that the complexity of medieval time is routinely dismissed.⁵³ Historians and political actors invented a “feudal” medieval past that paralleled colonialism, building a politics of periodization that has been not a neutral segmentation of the past but a political technique aimed at the celebration of a secular, democratic present.⁵⁴ Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, in his essay in this volume, offers a similar treatment of Chinese anachronism, where the use of mottos regarding the cycles of power in late early-modern China (paradox intended) produced images of eternity. Ernst Kantorowicz also bemoaned how rarely “the element of Time has been considered as a decisive historical factor in the innumerable studies on the genesis of the modern state and the modern economy.” To remedy this, he drew out in *The King’s Two Bodies* the thirteenth-century “great crisis in man’s approach to Time” that led to the construction of the *aevum* of sempiternity, which in turn contributed to the establishment of state and corporate continuities.⁵⁵ More can be done to rethink the sharpness of the modernity break from what preceded it.

Third, recall that the same nineteenth century involved often equally strong reactionary pressures, and that such pressures similarly shaped “modernity,” including the rise of free-market liberalism and the growth of conservative movements traceable to Burke or Maistre. Koselleck’s position (especially in his early career) swerved between an acceptance of the modernity of *Neuzeit* and a nostalgia for a world preceding the crises and *Weltbürgerkrieg* (global civil war) that he claimed defined his time.⁵⁶ The “progress” scenario recounted above does not account for the persistence of aristocracy, or the complicated temporality of law, religious conceptions of time, the repeated returns of conservative and authoritarian governments, the state violence of twentieth-century movements and states (discussed in this volume by Anson Rabinbach, in an explicit critique of Koselleck), or the economic interspersal of cycles-and-crisis models (as presented here by Jamie Martin). This matters because it challenges a narrative of immanent progress or acceleration, and just as much a narrative of multiple, effectively parallel temporal regimes all moving in the same direction. Without the commitment to European modernity as the core of the argument on temporal complexity and progress, we find the time problem reemerging with very different parameters.

Fourth (Baudelaire be damned!), the modernity arguments are shackled to a frequently useful “great acceleration” thesis, to use the expression adopted by Christopher Bayly. The acceleration is variously dated to 1890–1918 (Bayly, Kern, Charle);⁵⁷ to the century ending with 1848, especially the subperiod 1830–1848 (Koselleck);⁵⁸ to the 1770s–1830s (Schivelbusch);⁵⁹ to the 1870s (Osterhammel);⁶⁰ to the entire period since 1800, with its “classic” expressions

dating to the period 1907–1950 (Rosa and Scheuermann);⁶¹ to modernism and its prophecy of modernity’s assault on society (T. J. Clark);⁶² to some of the above and also the post-1989 present time (Hartog).⁶³ Choose a period to study, and we’ll throw in a free great acceleration to match. Their strengths aside, such accounts often leave details interchangeable and flatten counterproposals. The acceleration thesis also fails to account for the repeated laments that the course toward a certain modernity was being interrupted or that speed, crises, and delays created alternative temporalities. It adduces, from a phenomenological problem—from “our” experience of time as dynamic or anxiety-ridden—a historical given. Last but not least, acceleration does not always distinguish temporal standardization, pressure, increasing speed across distances, and social acceleration. Is acceleration in the sense of a bridging of distances necessarily compatible with acceleration of communication and control? Again, once we go into details, this model is far too sweeping to hold sway.

Imperial, Nonmodern, Anthropological, Legal, and Other Times

While Koselleck was writing of multiple strata of time in the early 1970s, his UNESCO contemporaries were recognizing that the divergence between cultures of time was stark and that in cross-cultural encounters, some regimes imposed—even violated—in temporal ways on others. Recent studies of temporality have extended criticisms (like Chakrabarty’s and Davis’s) of the aforementioned Western-centered models to highlight the “global” scale and dimensions of the time problem.⁶⁴ Some accentuate specific differences from “Western time,” and others debate temporal standardization. Still others identify contrasts across distances or in specific encounters. From them, a gamut of registers has opened up, not only in comparisons of West and non-West, but in every exercise of power. By outlining such approaches, we consider the pressure they exert toward an alternative overall model. We begin with the growing differentiation of temporalities, initiated in anthropology.

Anthropologists and archaeologists have long been central to the examination of “other,” non-Western, nonmodern temporalities.⁶⁵ Canonical in the anthropology of time is E. E. Evans-Pritchard’s 1939 article on Nuer time reckoning, which contrasted his “literary sense of time reckoned in mathematical symbols” and Nuer environmental and social-structural concepts of time.⁶⁶ But earlier still, Lewis Henry Morgan and E. B. Tylor had established historicist temporalities and stadial theories that compared their objects with European criteria, and at the turn into the twentieth century, Adolf Bastian, W. H. R. Rivers, Bronisław Malinowski and others began regularly

questioning the colonial effects of the “disappearing native” whose extinction threatened all otherness, including other temporalities.⁶⁷ In the 1950s, Claude Lévi-Strauss (following Ruth Benedict’s lead) worked to refute evolutionism as a temporal logic of culture, offered a thermodynamic contrast of temporal directions of power in “hot” versus “cold” societies, and spoke of shifting “imperceptibly in time” when he first reached the Brazilian tropics that seemed “out of date.”⁶⁸ Anthropology’s engagement with the temporality of its subject—which can be unevenly grafted onto other histories, including colonialism’s grisly successes and the acknowledgment of ecological disaster and species extinction—expresses rather well the declining commitment among twentieth-century human scientists to a unidirectional, ever-accumulating, and unchangeable progression of modernity. Johannes Fabian radicalized this point and pronounced time as a fundamental aporia that challenged the very validity of his discipline: in denying “coevalness” to his subject, the anthropologist constructed an encounter that always-already registered political disproportion.⁶⁹ By Fabian’s time, however, which coincides roughly with the UNESCO debate and Koselleck’s major essays, anthropologists had recognized the complication of temporal vectors. Pierre Clastres had taken up Lévi-Strauss’s complaint about the closure of temporal otherness resulting from colonization and homogenization to argue that the emergence of the state against nomadism and “primitiveness” “created the unbridgeable gulf whereby . . . Time became History.”⁷⁰ Clifford Geertz, in his canonical “Deep Play,” recalled: “The Balinese live in spurts. Their life . . . is less a flow, a directional movement out of the past, through the present, toward the future than an on-off pulsation of meaning and vacuity, an arhythmic alternation . . . between what they themselves call ‘full’ and ‘empty’ times.”⁷¹ Indeed, to read Fabian now is to see in him anthropology’s self-reflexive cautionary note that the conflictual strategies through which backwardness had reemerged in neocolonialism would not simply be wished away: the structural imbalance of temporalities would continue even in a self-reflexive anthropology.

Since Fabian, the reworking of historicity in anthropology has correlated with the quasi-systematic reckoning the discipline has undertaken.⁷² As Jean and John Comaroff have argued, even in ostensibly static, archaic communities, change is “perennial, ongoing, inevitable.”⁷³ How an anthropologist manages that is a persistent problem. Studying contemporary Buddhism in Buryatia, Anya Bernstein tracked the spread of temporal pressures on Buryat legitimacy and seminomadic life: modernization, internal conflict, and Moscow’s power over distant regions and over religious claimants, show, she argues, how the rediscovery of material treasures hidden after 1917 rendered the pre-Soviet past more current than the now-disposed Soviet one, restaging

messianic claims and disordering the anthropologist's place.⁷⁴ In studying Haiti, Paul Farmer proposed in "An Anthropology of Structural Violence" that a thinning of social threads involves the forced weakening of certain temporalities. This "erasure or distortion of history" is one way of understanding "how structural violence comes to harvest its victims"—by pretending they were just random victims in the first place.⁷⁵ Farmer lists different temporal relations, including political orders, temporalities of care specific to the doctor and the hospital, the times of the patient as narrator of her own disorder, forms of bodily time, the course of disease, and, above all, time as it does its work in deep poverty and in inequality enforced, with ever-greater effect, over several colonial centuries.

This pressure by anthropologists is closely aligned with the work in rethinking temporality carried out by historians of empire. The renegotiation of "modernity," for example in Timothy Mitchell's edited collection *Questions of Modernity*, has paved the way. "Historical time, the time of the West," Mitchell wrote, "is what gives modern geography its order, an order centered upon Europe." Mitchell further insisted that the pressure of modernity (and hence capitalism) was, for its colonial subjects, a spatialization of time and a way of rendering "history singular by organizing the multiplicity of global events into a single narrative. The narrative is structured by the progression of a principle, whether that be the principle of human reason or enlightenment, technical rationality or power over nature. Even when discovered acting precociously overseas, these powers of production, technology, or reason constitute a single story of unfolding potential."⁷⁶

One could quibble with Mitchell's assessment and point out that "universal histories" predate modern capitalism.⁷⁷ But his argument on the construction of backwardness and unilinear temporality largely holds—even for imitators of a perceived Western power. While European colonizers imposed their political and temporal regimes on non-Western peoples, states on the periphery of Europe also actively aligned their governments, calendars, and daily lives with Western time. An early, classic example of such encounters was Russia under Peter I, who underscored his ambition to modernize Russia by transforming time. On January 1, 1700, he abandoned the Byzantine calendar, which dated years from the creation of the world (in 5509 BCE).⁷⁸ Two centuries later, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk similarly marked his own Westernizing drive by adopting the Gregorian calendar and the European way of measuring time (*alafranga* versus *alaturca*).⁷⁹ Even more tense examples than such "modernizations" follow from other encounters, as colonial ventures since the stages of European trade with non-Western states set up clashes between different sets of temporal regimes. Such, for example, was the uneasy

contiguity between the Dutch East India Company and the Japanese in the trading post of Dejima (1640–1853), a small artificial island in the harbor of Nagasaki, where the Dutch, expelled from their previous outpost on the island Hirado for inscribing Christian-era dates on its gables, were explicitly restricted from using Christian representations of time.⁸⁰

Later stages of European imperialism continue to offer a fertile field for a replowing of the relationship of temporality, modernity, and power. Vanessa Ogle has noted the effects of imitation and contrast that followed the League of Nations' imposition of a European horological schema on, for example, Middle Eastern territories—a temporality attached to the forward-aiming structure of history and battling both different visions of colonial future and religious norms.⁸¹ Ultimately, “regional considerations eclipsed both international and imperial motives in choosing times.”⁸² Joseph Viscomi presents Italian communities in Egypt (and Mediterranean diasporas more broadly) as torn between several temporalities—including late- and postcolonial ones, pressures from the *patria*, uncertainties about Arab nationalism, and broader Mediterranean change.⁸³ Critics like Achille Mbembe have presented complex temporal structures as key to the postcolonial period: “As an age, the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another.”⁸⁴ In the present collection, Marwa Elshakry, Sunil Purushotham, and Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford all take up the construction of unilinear, progress-oriented timelines. Elshakry, furthering Davis's argument on periodization, traces the intellectuals and historians of science who invented a singular Muslim golden age in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with an eye to explaining how it reordered historical registers, contributed to a stadial theory of modern progress in history of science and in imperial encounters, and imputed geographically (and religiously) the history of truth. Benton and Ford recount the problem of slow justice across great distances in the British Empire, as well as the pressures it imposed on the slave trade, abolitionism, and the capacity to control far-off colonies.

Besides the violent and nonviolent encounters that constructed theories of backwardness and occasions of crisis, several spaces and research fields have emerged around comparison and around the study of alternative historicities and temporalities. Some global and non-Western temporal regimes can be compared using terms that are in common use in North Atlantic studies (messianism, redemption, futurism) but do not necessarily map easily onto one another. Sebastian Conrad, comparing German and Japanese historiography after World War II, proposes that both “temporalized” space as a way to globalize history and modernity, manage national defeat, and often

imagine a future Marxist redemption: “‘Temporalization of space’ refers to a mode of explanation that conceives of the difference between two phenomena as a temporal gap. In this way, historiography reduces the problem of space to the category of time. Spatial difference . . . was usually provided with a temporal index, making it possible to study nations and their history on a timeline of historical development. Political-military and economic inferiority was defined as temporal backwardness, and a feeling of superiority was rationalized as modernity and progressiveness. All differences could be traced to the problem of different velocities within a scheme of unidirectional development.”⁸⁵

Studies of South Asia have also been central to imagining alternative relations of temporality and power. A. Azfar Moin’s study of attempts by the Mughal emperor Jahangir to inaugurate a new Islamic millennium, “conquer time,” and “place himself on the Throne of Time” has opened the door for reconsidering sovereignty and time in early modern Asian Islamic empires.⁸⁶ Purnima Dhavan has pursued the temporal relationship between the English East India Company and Sikh states, arguing that it hinged on the British and Indian writing of Sikh history as a means of message control.⁸⁷ For Anne Murphy and her collaborators, the rewriting of religion in India takes advantage of the malleability of “a continuing and constantly evolving ‘tradition’” along with the temporal self-reflexivity particular to theopolitical promises, so that “tradition lives in the present, a product of the past but ever present.”⁸⁸ And scholars like Uday S. Mehta and Aishwary Kumar have pointed to Gandhi and Ambedkar imagining a late- and postcolonial “possibility of a patient, nonvicarious, and spiritually embedded relationship with time” (in the case of Gandhi).⁸⁹ In this volume, Sunil Purushotham engages this last theme by examining Jawaharlal Nehru’s understanding of world history and time, especially Nehru’s growing worries about techno-scientific progress in his theorizations of a singular Indian modernity and of state power in postindependence India.

Similarly, the field of late- and post-Soviet studies has been ripe for examinations of temporality at the edges of anthropology and history. Scholars have especially asked about the temporal stakes of 1989, given its peculiar, unclear place at the end of the twentieth century’s communist project, the self-perception of Russia as the subject of history, and the different sites of nostalgic, political, and religious restoration and resurfacing.⁹⁰ Kevin Platt’s chapter in this volume takes up the politics of memorialization in the post-Soviet context and the way it contributed to establishing a “land without time.”

Given the endless comparisons and encounters, it would be a mistake to simply solidify an image of a hegemonic, temporally unified “West” and con-

trast it with a series of political and temporal “others” that are *simply* repressed—politically, culturally, or otherwise—by the West. We might expand Johannes Fabian’s argument on the non-coeval construction of the other, insofar as “denial of coevalness” is by no means the property of anthropology alone. Part of this line of argument dates to Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, who derided the “colorless light of historical time” with an eye to responding to it from a perspective of the vanquished.⁹¹ Critical theory’s prototype for that approach is Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” (1939). Drawing in part on Ernst Bloch, Benjamin enigmatically contrasted “linear time” with its interruption by a messianism that he deemed proper to dialectical materialism—a time of redemption that grasps the past in its fullness.⁹² In the essay’s paralipomena, Benjamin added: “The concept of the present, in its binding sense for the historian, is necessarily defined by these two temporal orders. Without some sort of assay of the classless society, there is only a historical accumulation of the past.”⁹³ This has proven highly influential among scholars who are themselves influential—among them, Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, Susan Buck-Morss in *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, and Moishe Postone in *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*.⁹⁴ Despite the significant play this approach has had, its contrast remains solidly anchored in a simplified scenario: linear-historical time (an “empty homogeneous” or abstract time, something akin to what Bloch’s “supertemporality”⁹⁵) versus the time particular to those oppressed by it and imagined primed for Marxist redemption. Here, political struggle pilots temporal crisis. As in Fabian’s account of the non-coeval time enforced by anthropologists, so in this binary configuration, each side of the temporal competition is reasonably tight and self-evidently articulated. The privileging and contrast of one’s object of study (or political preference) against a supposedly overarching abstract time all but begs for further theorization and can be radicalized toward a model capable of managing dynamic temporal relationships in a manner inclusive of but not limited to hegemony.

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When we speak of multiple temporal orders or regimes in European—but not only European—time, we need to see them as not mutually reducible, as working in dispersed ways and directions. Recent historical works premised not on geographical but on conceptual differences have accentuated “internal” contrasts that radically complicate the picture of “multiple temporal regimes,” offering less a “layers” or “sediments” approach than a discord-based model. For the remainder of this section, we look at aspects of social life whose contribution to its temporality has often been regarded as “merely” implicit or derivative: law, archaeology, environment, technology, gender, religion, and

the future, before turning to other “mediator” scales like adolescence, illness, and language. By multiplying the contrasts, we can begin to conceive of the extraordinary problems that temporal differentials and conflicts impose on the study of history and to approach a new fractal for understanding time.

Let us turn, then, to the first of these fields: law. The routine duration of law’s operation, of its validity, has with some regularity provoked arguments about its unruly temporalities. “Law is, in order to be law, directed toward its repeated application,” Koselleck reasoned in a 1986 essay. This continual readiness for reapplication meant that legal history had a different “temporal rhythm” and “temporal structure” from political history.⁹⁶ In his *The Cultural Study of Law*, Paul Kahn offered an alternate formulation of that “extended temporal present.” “All law remains available at every moment,” he writes.⁹⁷ “As long as the past act has not been negated, its place in the chronology of decision-making does not matter”: permanently lodged in the present, all law “exists in a condition of simultaneity.”⁹⁸ International legal scholars, like Anne Orford and Martti Koskeniemi, have mobilized some of the same temporal attributes to fend off historians’ emphasis on contextualism and “policing of anachronism.”⁹⁹

Contemporary reckoning with the temporality of law constitutes one source of pressure on a singular, accelerating present, as well as on the very categories of past, present, and future. Over the past thirty years, pressing public and scholarly debates about law, justice, and rights have pushed against a conception of time that (to borrow William Sewell’s phrasing) is “fateful,” in that it is irreversible and transformative, separating the past from the present.¹⁰⁰ From South Africa to Serbia and from Canada to Chile, issues like indigenous land rights, mass atrocities, truth commissions, “transitional justice,” reparations, and restitution have all entailed questions about present-day moral obligations resulting from past injustices. These moral remainders undermine any simplistic understanding of such injustices as “past” at all: they lived on to structure present obligations and relationships. Law, to be sure, operates with its own idiosyncratic time-justice index as a matter of routine. Through witnessing, judgment, punishment, reparation, and atonement, law holds the moral content of an event or crime to be exchangeable—time is reversible rather than fateful. But law usually sets clear limits on that temporal-moral transaction: statutes of limitations, for example, curtail the period in which a wrong is present enough, soluble enough, to be righted. As jurisdiction expires, the transgression slips into the immutability of that which is definitively past.¹⁰¹ Historical injustices like indigenous dispossession, apartheid, or slavery blow open that circumscribed time scale of moral culpability: they demand, advocates argue, new conceptions of transtemporal

or intergenerational justice that might graft centuries into the same legal present and tie dispersed generations into a common moral transaction.¹⁰² Such claims posit a virtual, elongated ethical temporality often coexisting antagonistically with the time of politics, the bio-time of human life spans, and other social-material temporalities.

But it is not only the ghosts of the past that bloat the temporal plane of moral responsibility. As a new generation of political philosophy reminds us, our present-day obligations may stem from the not-yet born as well as from the dead. The rising urgency of questions about the environment, sustainability, and climate change has led some to argue that an adequate account of justice can hardly overlook our responsibilities to future people: an indefinite population of virtual humans, a cast of projected “anthro-potentialities,” thereby become factors in the moral equations of the present. It is, moreover, not a simple or singular futurity that settles into our world but a radically uncertain one splintered into myriad variables. How many future generations (and of what imagined size) should be factored into our ethical calculations? How are those calculations affected by the possible actions of those future people themselves as well as those of intervening generations? And what about changes in technology in the meantime and the fact that our own actions are built into these chains of imagined causation?¹⁰³

The study of law indicates that we may not quite reckon with a state’s past (or present) as operating in a single or continuous movement. So too the study of archaeological sites and waste “management” sites engender several and evermore-complex temporalities. Archaeologists, long aware of the complexity of dating, have become mindful of the troubling monumentalist and usurped pasts they long created. Celebrating recent turns to ethnoarchaeology, they ask anew to what degree in their discipline “they do not exactly work with the past, but with what is left of the past in the present,” or how they can speculate about future heritage, including on matters of ecological catastrophe and nuclear waste.¹⁰⁴ Recent historical studies of ruins and environmental transformation have emphasized the capacity for superimposition of several chronological layers upon one another within a given space—such that an “enacted multi-temporality” in Yannis Hamilakis and Efthymios Theou’s words would become the basis not of a distinction of past from present but of entangling the present into redeployments and reworkings of the past. Laurent Olivier concurs that, in archaeology: “All of time is here and now, not ‘back then’ and ‘long ago.’ What remains of the past are the ruins and detritus that time, which is to say the evolving present, is constantly accumulating and breaking down.”¹⁰⁵ Rather than link antiquity to the present in a suite of succession, Kostas Vlassopoulos attends to “a temporality of

historical recurrence,” which over the past two centuries has “exploited a variety of [temporal] modes: the pattern of birth, acme, death; the pattern of rise and fall; the pattern of constitutional *anacyclosis*; the pattern of liberty and tyranny.”¹⁰⁶ Shannon Lee Dawdy speaks of the “time warps of human life” in celebrating archeology’s capacity to articulate how, “No longer singular and racing like a car down a freeway, time has multiple loops and strands.”¹⁰⁷ Historians and literary critics working on the intellectual history of ruins (from Volney’s famous scene in Palmyra and Romanticism’s interests to post-1945 urban devastation) have prioritized dynamics of reappropriation—that is, the politics associated with imagining and grasping this past—and have begun to pursue the futurity announced in such grasping, for example, projection of catastrophes based on ones identified in the past.¹⁰⁸

Recent discussions of the human de- and trans-formation of nature—now often abbreviated to “the Anthropocene”—have promoted a different attention to temporal regimes, one in which the apocalyptic tradition returns as a natural binding of the future. Anthropologists have interwoven geological and artificial temporalities such that “deep time is not purely an abstraction to be calculated, but a phenomenal experience to be encountered in the field.”¹⁰⁹ Environmental historians and critics have spoken of the climate catastrophe in terms of its warping of time. Rob Nixon writes of “a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales,” challenging scholars to rethink its representations: “to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects.”¹¹⁰ Andreas Malm has also dwelled on the ways that environmental transformation mangles conventional temporalities to the point of denaturing them: “Climate change is a messy mix-up of time scales. The fundamental variables of the process—the nature of fossil fuels, the economies based on them, the societies addicted to them, the consequences of their combustion—operate over seemingly unrelated temporal spans, all refracted in the moving, elusive present of a warming world; in an elevated sense of the term, every conjuncture now combines relics and arrows, loops and postponements that stretch from the deepest past to the most distant future, via a now that is non-contemporaneous with itself.”¹¹¹ Andrea Westermann’s chapter in this volume directly responds to these imperatives by looking at the history of plastic and its path into becoming a geological factor.

Similarly, historians of technology have emphasized how the fracturing of ideologies of progress since World War II has been tightly entwined with the deployment of new technologies, including recent consumer-based and digital ones. Several authors have tracked how different scientists concerned

with temporality—for example, in relation to relativity, which is still today the principal reference on science and time—have been blind to the ways in which the vaunted object of their research can swiftly wiggle out from their grasp.¹¹² Computerization and cybernetics were fundamentally attached to problems of temporality and social order already in Norbert Wiener's 1948 *Cybernetics* and René Thom's catastrophe theory in the 1960s.¹¹³ Moreover, just like technological ideas about time, futurity, progress, synchronization, delay, update, "breakthrough," and so on, technological effects on industry and the pace of the technological transformation of everyday life beg for renewed temporal study. Is it really possible to write the history of advanced computerized societies in a language of linear progress that dates to the eighteenth century, or in one based on ideas of acceleration modeled on distance crossing in the nineteenth? Can we do so without taking into account the disruption and differential reassembly of social time effected by technological transformation—including the production of new technologically inflected inequalities, new social classes and forms of labor and consumption, political and religious reactions to it, and even the anxious transhumanist promises of artificial intelligence?

We leave these questions to hang; the point is that, against Koselleck-style overviews and easy contrasts of abstract time to object-specific time, all these temporal problematics must be imbricated within a broader model, not left as field-specific asides. All the more fragmented is the picture that emerges once—to logics of the environment and of law, to a recovery of "the ancient," and to the technological dynamics in a society—we add the non-coevalness established within every social group thanks to gender, class, religion, race, age, technology, and related differentials. It is not simply that the past becomes an archive of superimposed regimes of citation, some of which take priority or seem more powerful. Rather, whatever the past-present-future links we encounter in such occasions may be, they are not coextensive or easily conjugated.

Historians and political theorists working on gender and the family have pioneered this sense of internal breakdown. Studies of queer temporality, notably Lee Edelman's *No Future*, have posited homosexuality in forceful contrast to a heteronormative continuity that, in Edelman's words, "affirms the endless renewal of time," notably in the familial figure of the child. *Ex negativo*, queer time appears to Edelman as disruptive, attached to the death drive, deeply individualizing, an engagement of desire rather than a "reproductive futurism."¹¹⁴ In her study of postrevolutionary Iraq, Sara Pursley similarly divides time between "one masculine/linear/heterosexual and the other feminine/cyclical/homosocial," where the cyclical female work of reproduction

and mourning serves as the motor propelling “modernized” linear historical time and Iraq itself.¹¹⁵

Religious time, too, clashes with ordinary temporalities, most famously in the very meaning of “temporal” in the sense now usually granted to “secular,” in announcements of apocalyptic temporality, and in the divergence between sacred and profane time. Historians and philosophers such as Elisheva Carlebach and Sylvie Anne Goldberg have distinguished aspects of specifically Jewish temporality from broader, especially Christian, conventions and systems.¹¹⁶ “By ignoring the calculation of time in common use and opting for a chronology more reliant on guesswork than on objective computation, medieval Jews located themselves in a temporality that kept them outside the social norms of the countries in which they dwelled,” Goldberg writes.¹¹⁷ Political theorists have emphasized the utility of “sacred time” for the initiation and execution of wars and other conflicts.¹¹⁸ To complicate things further on quasi-religious matters comes the problem of futurity, which Koselleck reduced to a modern overcoming of “prophecy” by “rational prediction,” within whose framework a new kind of prophecy arose anew in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ And yet as scholar after scholar has shown, the future is never singular, is frequently culturally specific, eats into the present differently, and is often fragmented to the point of being impossible to singularize.¹²⁰ Recent debates on the way that secularism in Europe actively marginalizes social groups—women and Islamic minorities especially—hinge on the very issue of how to balance socially complex futures that eschew secularism’s progress model.¹²¹ In their chapter for this volume, Emma Kowal and Joanna Radin study a different bifurcated present and future, the freezing of blood samples assembled from Indigenous Australians, to show how frozen blood vacillates between two “cryopolitical” states with opposing temporalities: “latent life” and “incomplete death.” Closely aligned with the political future envisaged by indigenous communities themselves, the samples seen as latent life, they argue, are oriented toward future potential and cannot be destroyed; whereas samples understood as incomplete death are oriented toward the corporeal history of their donor and require destruction. Kristen Loveland, meanwhile, excavates the political force of futures along a different line: if law’s normativity depends on a certain nonalignment with either the past or the present, as discussed earlier, she tracks the US Supreme Court’s counterintuitive reliance on the future to ground the legitimacy of law.

A proper study of “temporal regimes” ought ideally to juxtapose a near-infinite series of frequently conflicting orders and trajectories, with the paradox being less a problem than an appeal to the historian’s creativity. At the

grandest scale, we might consider the competition between sacred and geological time, eventually incorporated into evolutionary time, that defined the nineteenth century and that has formed a key node for recent studies of time.¹²² But temporalities need not be sweeping—like “progress,” the time of the state, cyclical, geological, or standardized time. Even progress has been conceived of in a variety of ways: in terms of stages, “development,” technological “advance,” acceleration, and so on. Temporal regimes might instead be small and intimate—like individual time, or the temporality set forth by illness. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes of the heart that, transplanted into him, is twenty years younger and deprives him of his proper age: “personal contingency intersects with the contingency of technological history.”¹²³ The time of a disease, of trauma and healing, recalls Beckett’s quip on “the poisonous ingenuity of Time in the science of affliction”: always singular upon *this* patient *here*, it still takes semi-prescribed, socially or statistically comprehensible, seemingly denaturing paths.¹²⁴ Rhythms of clinical care, treatments of “lost time,”¹²⁵ localized temporal gaps that encode social norms and make apparent spontaneity possible,¹²⁶ midscale mediators like the family or adolescence that make grand and intimate temporalities possible, accessible, or even hostile play similarly tense roles.¹²⁷

Language, ever a complicating factor for historians, also resists easy temporalization: it creates its own scales, orders, meters, and speeds. Émile Benveniste offered a useful, if dated, explanation when he argued that subjectivity and the present have “only a linguistic fact as temporal reference,” and he distinguished sharply between languages in which future and past have a “present” to separate them from languages that rely, first of all, on “a preterite-present opposed to a future, or a present-future distinguished from a past, these distinctions being in their turn capable of depending on variations of aspect, etc.”¹²⁸ “Linguistic time is self-referential,” he concluded, articulating a difficult and consequential paradox.¹²⁹ Temporalities of language, adolescence, and disease—like those of archaeology, the digital, or law—disturb every neat ordering of past, present, future. One or more of these orders may harden, and others wither: philosophers since Husserl and psychoanalysts since Freud have emphasized latencies of each (past, present, future) within the other but rarely a plurality of manifolds within and between them.¹³⁰ Against the consensus approach to a single, overarching past, we identify instead a multiplicity of pasts, each with different, oftentimes-ambiguous relations to “the present.” And just as we have futures past, pasts that are yet to be understood, mastered, or reclaimed—even traumatic ones that can overwhelm again—so too what is conveniently called the present has a very

different duration and tempo for different actors. The everyday use of concepts of past, present, and future covers a whole array of approaches to their definition and their place in an order of times.¹³¹

Small and mediator time scales may well appear unpolitical, yet as studies of even “the moment” show, these scales fascinate for the often-obscure ways in which they are.¹³² As even the “smallest” temporalities invariably intersect with other scales, regimes, and temporally inflected issues, they too remain suffused with power, its acts, its pathways. In his chapter in this volume, Henning Schmidgen considers one of the smallest meaningful units: the gaps between clock time and bodily time, as studied through experiments in which the body exhibits a temporality prior to its decision making. In this way he pursues how in those gaps, clashing temporal regimes—intensification, synchronization, slowing down, belatedness, immobilization—engage the body’s experience of the world, in the industrial and postindustrial “ages,” against the regularization and ostensible motorization of mobile power that is traditionally presented as acceleration.

Time as Conflict by Another Name: Chronocenosis

To summarize our path thus far: we have established that, cutting across the historiographically dominant trajectories of progress, of the establishment of a *Sattelzeit*, and of non-Western temporalities, a series of relations and temporalities tend to recur that compel both a more formal and a more densely historical analysis. The geological metaphor of temporal strata superimposed upon one another, “layers of time that pile up and interact, . . . scales [that] coexist, and complement each other,”¹³³ gives way.

Put differently, “multiplicity,” the “contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous” (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*, a concept that Koselleck drew from Ernst Bloch),¹³⁴ does not adequately capture the complex relations between temporal regimes. The metaphor of layers still rests on some unilinear “passage of time” and does not explain how past, present, and future are not stable categories but fragmented ones, differing in both profound and shallow ways depending on the circumstances. We also would like a broader structuring schema capable of handling conflicts and differentials in technological, environmental, economic, and other temporalities—how, for example, political and temporal stability, fragmentation, resistance, and so on, can be aligned or contrasted. If there exist concurrent temporal regimes, are these regimes not regularly pitted against one another by revolutions, economic crises, or ideological transformations? How do political, legal, aesthetic, and religious rationales interplay to produce ever-different or more particular ex-

periences of time, or attempt to gather them together again? How do their rhythms collide, regroup, and find ways to coexist? How do they give off an image of stasis, and what does such stasis mean? How do we resolve this ever-expanding multiplicity, the furrowing away of temporal orders and the difficulties associated with their variance and instabilities?

To these divergent imperatives, we respond by proposing the concept of *chronocenosis*. Just as *biocenosis* frequently serves as an ecological term for understanding cooperation, adaptation, and conflict within and between the populations of a particular biosphere, *chronocenosis* offers a sense that multiple temporal regimes are not merely concurrent but at once competitive, conflictual, cooperative, unstable, and sometimes even anarchic. They inhabit a complex temporal ecosystem with intricate patterns of reliance, adaptation, and violence. Within the seemingly uncontested overall movement of time—and even at times of stability—resides a volatile intersection: different claimants and groups experience time their own way, sometimes in sharp contrast to the dynamics officially on offer. Each relies on different formulations: on historicities, celebrations, narratives of past and future, accelerations and delays, durations and pulses, gaps, maps, economies and crises, tempos, resolutions, prefigurations. Each appeals to and mythologizes its own understanding of past, present, and future. Power, we have shown, traverses or underwrites each of them.

In the crisscross of different, often contemporaneous pasts and predictions (ecological, social, anthropological, familial), what we usually call “the present” is merely a fragile consensus, a silenced clash. Like populations in a biome, temporal regimes press against one another—some of them small, some shared, some ill defined, others parasitic or contingent, each carving out a space of its own. Some of the chapters in this volume focus on just such competitions, and the book as a whole engages this is kind of tense force field. In our sense, the power-time nexus fundamentally relocates the work of political rule into the structure of chronocenosis, as political authority is managed through this interlocked field of competing temporalities.

TEMPORIZING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Consider an explicitly political example, the 1789 French Revolution. The Revolution brought just this kind of temporal conflict into relief, heralding a whole new ecology of temporal regimes, many of them short lived, many in direct competition. The revolutionaries famously hitched their political platforms to new temporal configurations: the early allusions to 1789 as *l'an I de la liberté* signaled the zero point that would birth a new world and were

coupled with the rejection of the Bourbon regime (rapidly reperiodized as “old” or *ancien*). The political universalism of the Rights of Man demanded the restitution of natural rights to their dispossessed holders and promised to direct the “*future claims of the citizens*” so that these “may *always tend to the maintenance of the Constitution, and the general happiness.*” These claims did not fully map onto the expectations for an imminent, millenarian, open future. Then, the refusal of Catholic temporal power and the variant proclamations of post-Gallican, theistic, and at times even atheist, alternatives in temporal power was followed by the execution of Louis XVI, which was also conceived as a rebirth of liberty and an end to centuries of despotic governance. Add to these a whole cohort of complex political and social situations forced by the introduction of the full-blown revolutionary calendar in October 1793—rebooting year I for at least the second time while struggling against the entire Gregorian West and Julian East; by the belief (in Condorcet, for example) in stadial theories of progress; by the apocalypticism of being surrounded and eroded by enemies external and internal who belonged to the old; by the temporality of annihilation in the Terror;¹³⁵ by the punctuation offered by the festivals;¹³⁶ by continuities, such as those famously pointed out by Tocqueville on the monarchic or Jacobin efforts to centralize state power against feudal or federal alternatives;¹³⁷ by permanent revolution, brought forth by the Jacobins and demanding a different embodiment of social transformation;¹³⁸ by the complex conceptual problem posed by the “revolution” and even the question of ending it;¹³⁹ and by the legal morass that was negotiated over and over until it was settled in the Code Civil. In parallel and in direct repudiation of these efforts, counterrevolutionary theorists like Maistre sharpened their own, reactionary accounts of kingly power and its place in history, reimagining traditions to dramatically reverse Jacobin utopianism.¹⁴⁰

Time was not simply out of joint or broken asunder: as attempt after attempt showed, it could be manipulated, put together anew through the transformation of some regimes, the continuation or ignorance of others, and the interruption of yet others; thus, it could be made to promise and underwrite a new society, each of these new regimes and each of these efforts to establish the “right” new time competing with the others and pressing toward different results. But time was not so available as to be pinned down by a single attempt. In this dense, deep jungle of temporal wars—which is to say also ideological and social ones—time founded the political and continued to be founded by it; it was, per Mona Ozouf, “the raw material on which [the French Revolution] obstinately worked.”¹⁴¹ Did any revolutionary agent simply exist in, or force, a single one of these temporal regimes—or were they moved by and against several regimes at once? Were the paradoxes of particular moments

(the Constitution, the period after Robespierre's execution) not also temporal battles and negotiations? Was the neo-dynasticism of Bonaparte not at odds with the neo-Roman, revolutionary, and juridical temporalities that he also forced into power? Political power was the force with which human agents reshaped not one temporal order but a whole landscape of them. These new political mutations co-evolved in a historical environment where they fought often against one another, developing sharper and more ambitious agendas, without any one achieving supremacy.

Explicit political conflict is not, however, the only time when multiple orders of time engage one another or clash. Just as a chronocenosismay turn violently conflictual, it may also stay quiet or enable dynamic cooperation.

PRECURSOR CONCEPTS TO CHRONOCENOSIS

Ideas of “heterochrony”—about temporal orders in agonistic relations—derive from several sources, and they have been increasingly if irregularly at work in historians', humanists', and social scientists' pursuits. Three traditions help reach beyond the Koselleckian “multiple temporal regimes” and the Benjaminian contrast of the temporality of the vanquished to homogenized historical time. Taken together, they offer a wealth of possibilities against which to situate new work in temporal history and our intervention: a French epistemological-anthropological tradition, a biological approach, a tradition of Germanist art-historical writing.

The first approach begins with Michel Foucault's proposal that certain places within each social space obey rules somewhat different from its general ones. “Heterotopias” like gardens, psychiatric institutions, and cemeteries “are connected with temporal discontinuities; they open onto what may be called . . . heterochronias. The heterotopia begins to function fully when men are in a kind of absolute break with their traditional time.” Some, like museums, can be stabilizing; others, like festivals, were “not eternitary but absolutely chronic.”¹⁴² Only through these disjunctures could time and space, even “normal” time and space, be elliptically woven into one another. The anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan studied disordered temporalities to explain the advent of urban life. Radicalizing Maurice Halbwachs's proposal that social groups enjoyed distinct temporalities,¹⁴³ Leroi-Gourhan crafted an approach for which all sorts of times resymbolized and modified “natural” bodily rhythms:

The measurement of lived time refers to phenomena unrelated to measurement. . . . [At first,] the calendar of primitive peoples or of farmers, constructed upon mythical time, is a cycle marked by the return of certain game

birds or animals, the ripeness of certain plants, the tilling of the soil; time in such a calendar is a concrete, operational entity in which astronomical bodies participate either as co-partners within the vast technico-religious machine or as remote dispensers. The periodic return of the seal for the Eskimo, the sprouting of corn for the farmer, give rise to a time symbolism in which religious thought is applied in the first place to the operational reality. The development not only of an abstract measurement of time but also of an ideology that attributes to the stars the role of supreme deities came only when agricultural societies had reached a highly urbanized stage. Over tens of thousands of years a fabric of symbols, extremely loosely woven in the early stages, became superimposed upon the complex and elastic movement of natural time. . . . Not until recently, with the integration of the masses in a social mechanism where any failure on the part of a specialist can cause collective disorder, did symbolic time assume an absolutely imperative value. Socialized time implies a totally symbolic humanized space like that of our cities where day and night fall at prescribed hours, summer and winter have been reduced to average proportions, and the relationship between individuals and their place of activity is instantaneous.¹⁴⁴

Lived time, calendrical systems, registered transitory times, narrative times, paranatural times, real and mythical periodicities generating symbolism, abstract standardized time, then again “socialized” time: all these rhythms inflect bodily cadences to “integrate the subject in time and space.”¹⁴⁵ Some refuse, replace, or coopt others; this model, often reused, inscribes ambiguity into the symbolic structures of time and the abstraction of lived temporalities. It crafts individual human beings as shackled, “outdated” even, by socio-technical processes benefiting society while clashing evermore with the natural world.¹⁴⁶

Geological and biological research over the past forty years has similarly and dramatically challenged earlier assumptions of linearity and uniformity in temporal regimes. In a summary of current geological credo, the historian of science Sophia Roosth has reported what doubles as a useful critique of Koselleck’s sedimentation model:

Deposition almost always happens in little shocks or jolts, with lots of time in between for which there is no record, or even more worryingly, during which time previously deposited sediments are scoured or moved elsewhere. Even those thousands of meters of boring shale in Montana, which appear to be so regularly contiguous, most likely represent bits of time perhaps hours in duration, spread amongst decades or centuries of depositional events, occurring over tens of millions of years of basin adjustment. The irony is that a seemingly contiguous unit . . . represents an exceedingly tiny fraction of time that is anything but contiguous.¹⁴⁷

The key figure in the development of heterochrony in biology was Stephen Jay Gould. Obsessed with temporal paradoxes, Gould developed schemata to explain time in speciation, embryonic development, and human perception. In mimetic rivalry with Charles Darwin and Charles Lyell, he famously proposed “punctuated equilibrium” as the quasi-catastrophist explanation of rapid moments of evolutionary development.¹⁴⁸ He prioritized “the geologically abrupt appearance and subsequent extended stasis of species as a fair description of an evolutionary reality, and not only as a sign of the poverty of paleontological data.” Like other critics of the geological uniformitarianism that reigned since Lyell and that claimed that geological strata develop proportionately across time, Gould contrasted periods of rapid geological and biological transformation with periods of extended stasis at either or both levels.¹⁴⁹ Then, in the temporality of embryonic development, Gould offered “heterochrony” as a way to articulate why among related species (even a species and its direct ancestor) some organs develop at different times and for different durations.¹⁵⁰ Heterochrony indicated not only that phylogeny played a long-term role in new species but also that this role was anything but simple, single, or direct: developments threw the new embryo (and species) out of whack. And even in a cultural-historical vein, Gould argued that competing conceptions of time were essential because “nature says yes”—that is, it invokes different temporal modes in a both-and manner. Whereas an arrow of irreversible time and a cycle of recurring ones appear to us contrastive models, they are not simply “warring concepts, fighting for hegemony within an organism[, but] interact in tension to build the distinctions and likenesses of each creature. They interweave and hold one another. . . . They do not blend, but dwell together in tension and fruitful interaction.”¹⁵¹

Elsewhere too in biology, this question has been both ontological and heuristic—both about biological objects themselves and about their emergence and reconstruction in biological models. The mathematicians Louis J. Billera, Susan P. Holmes, and Karen Vogtmann have demonstrated that the introduction of temporality into models of species formation makes short work of the traditional “evolutionary trees” we are all familiar with. There is no direct separation of one species from another: instead, time renders the order of separations and the biologist’s groupings of species difficult to maintain: just as species do not simply separate in straightforward linear fashion, in models, too, the understanding of crisis requires complex non-Euclidean rather than linear formulations.¹⁵² This abandonment of nonlinear temporalities and their modeling—this image of heterochrony, with similar structures carrying similar functions but emerging in different orders and at different tempos—is compelling. At the very least, we can move beyond metaphors

of layers, sediments, trees, and linear evolution and treat them as specifically derived models of time.

Art-historical writings in a German tradition offer the third approach. Erwin Panofsky tasked the art historian with identifying latent and explicit elements that enabled synchronization and simultaneity in artworks. For Panofsky, temporal orders particular to styles hide in plain view; the prerogative of the art historian is precisely to detect these, like symptoms, in order to manage styles, their synchrony, and development across longer periods. “This endless multiplicity of frames of reference [unities of meaning, particular work-context relations], which seems to primarily constitute the world of the art historian, amounts to a confusing and unformalizable chaos. . . . Mustn’t we, in fact, refrain from imposing anything like an absolute temporal order on the totality of these frames of reference, which, after all, seem to stand opposite one another as completely incommensurable entities?”¹⁵³ Panofsky’s appeal echoed among his contemporaries. Benjamin spoke of “*temporal magic*” in his early writing on painting.¹⁵⁴ Aby Warburg, inspired by “hyperesthesia” and unconscious memory, further proposed that forms from the past persist only by being repeated and redirected—for example, through the recollection of elements of antiquity by Renaissance artists. Anachronism and repetition, he continued, structured contemporary aesthetics just as well.¹⁵⁵



What would it mean for historians to read “chronocentrically”—to look at moments and problems across orders of time coexisting competitively? The benefit is substantial, and the practice more common than usually recognized. Among historians, a particularly valuable occasion is offered by Caroline Arni’s study of the Saint-Simonian author Claire Démar. Arni utilizes and then goes far beyond a gender-based distinction of temporalities to establish as “copresent but diverging times” the rule under which feminist authors conceived their subject position within utopian socialism around 1830, when they marked their difference from male authors and broader sociopolitical directions: Démar’s own liberatory temporality and writing was doubled by her suicide.¹⁵⁶ Holly Case has also shown how, in the nineteenth century, great “questions” (like the “social question,” the “Eastern question,” and so on) at once propelled and arrested political temporal debate: they caused a “pathologization of the present,” heightened anxiety over the frenzied pace of crises, and instituted a kind of periodic repetitiveness of these crises, all of which promised “cathartic futures” in the resolution of these questions but also threatening dystopian ones.¹⁵⁷ Historically minded scholars in related disciplines have pursued chronocentric scenarios all the more aggressively, often

with reference to the above traditions. Historical anthropologists—like Paul Farmer, discussed earlier—have led the way. Charles Stewart, studying the reasons islanders of Naxos searched for buried icons in the 1830s after being told to do so in dreams by the Virgin Mary, brilliantly discerns in this joining of millenarianism and crisis the significance of contradictory temporalities particular to the 1830s moment on the island: (1) a cyclical time, marked by a golden, Byzantine past, whose anticipated return mobilized revolt against the Ottomans; (2) the disappointment of prophecies upon the end of Ottoman rule, which had brought independence but no second coming; (3) the Greek Revolution's shattering of linear time; (4) the Great Power-style rule begun with the appointment of a Bavarian king who brought along a more rationalist conception of government and a new, Eurocentric historicity; (5) a crisis of resources that, upon nationalization, were reorganized out of Athens; (6) renewed attention to digging and antiquities with the prehistorical moment conveyed clearly in European priorities; and (7) the transformation of working routines.¹⁵⁸ Nicolai Ssorin-Chaikov, citing Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, proposes, in an essay on birthday gifts offered to Stalin, that the exhibition of these gifts at the Pushkin Museum laid bare a very tense a “heterochrony” of “temporal disjunctures” particular to the Soviet Union at midcentury.¹⁵⁹ Among many other Soviet temporalities, Ssorin-Chaikov focuses on (1) “the political rhythms” of gifts, exchange, and labor, which were marked by both linearity and a state of haste or rush; (2) “timelessness” as a radical shortening of the present moment and a refiguration of it from the lens of the perfect socialist future; and (3) temporal fragility and the disintegration of such timelessness.¹⁶⁰

Art-historical, philosophical, and sociological examples have been similarly valuable, not least because they help toggle between different scales—from the sweeping to the intimate. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood play with the peculiar jumbling of periods in the Renaissance: they regard anachronism and the superimposition of non-coextensive past-and-present multitemporalities as explicit even in the artwork itself, insofar as it “functioned as a token of power, in its time, precisely by complicating time, by reactivating prestigious forebears, by comparing events across time, by fabricating memories.” They ask that we look in an artwork for

messages about time or memory, about the gods or the creation, about first things or last things, phrased in the wordless plastic language or embedded in the material makeup of paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, and buildings. The ability of the work of art to hold incompatible models in suspension without deciding is the key to art's anachronic quality, its ability really to “fetch” a

past, create a past, perhaps even fetch the future. . . . The artwork is more than the sum of its own origin myths. When the artwork holds substitutional and authorial myths of origin in suspension. . . . [I]t hesitates between hesitation itself (the substitutional system's unwillingness to commit itself to linear time) and anchoring in time (the punctual quality of the authorial act).¹⁶¹

A sensitivity to chronocenosism invites new analyses of sweeping historical scales as much as intimate and intermediary ones. Hans Blumenberg, in *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, joined the grand and the granular by laying out the temporal crisis anticipating and accompanying the Copernican revision of the Earth's place in the cosmos—its takeover of the structure and functions formerly attributed to the stars. The revision inflected “the problem of the reality and the measurability of time.”¹⁶² The fragmentation of the previous totality confirmed for Blumenberg that we exist in what he called (at Koselleck's expense) “the non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous.”¹⁶³ Already in his classic *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias fused a multiplicity of temporal trajectories into a tempo—“a manifestation of the multitude of intertwining chains of interdependence which run through every single social function that people have to perform”—that regulates individual acts and behaviors through broader social interconnections. Bruno Latour, meanwhile, speaks of the way even small gestures generate a “‘garland of time’ . . . which allows me to insert myself in a variety of temporalities or time differentials.”¹⁶⁴

CHRONOCENOSIS AS METHODOLOGICAL OPENING

We propose chronocenosism—and find precedents for it—because every ecology of temporalities we have outlined in the course of this introduction bears conflict. This conflict can be merely potential, latent, or parasitic, but thanks to it, temporal coexistence can shift quite radically under certain circumstances, especially political ones. The layers, loops, conflicts, virtualities, and distensions of the present, which may even oblige actors to operate in what might seem anarchic ways, are precisely what realigns power with time. Chronocenosism prompts a series of revisions in the way we conceive the time of politics: coevalness, Fabian's regulative ideal, is for the historian the wrong desideratum—itsself a political claim and myth. Similarly, presentism is an illusion; acceleration should be regarded as a phenomenological rather than an absolute kind of movement. That is, the present time is not the same present across cultures, classes, nations, political or ethnic or social groupings, not even layered in some hierarchy. Historical and political actors do not perceive the extensions of the present, nor the relations of past, present, and future,

in the same way. Do they not experience their everyday—labor, freedom, leisure, speed-ups and slowdowns—differently? Do they not structure the future with varying degrees of openness and conceive of their participation in its creation differently? Are they not confronted with technology's effects on their time depending on terms set by social and ethnic divides, kinds of tradition, relationships to the memory they treat as their own history? Co-evalness and acceleration are not identically pursued even across age groups. Within social cohesion, community, linguistic identity, there always resides a key tension: historical time is only shared because it is not. Chronocenosism offers us a thicker account of both experience and power.

The essays in this volume stand as very different examples of what may be achieved in chronocentric readings, sometimes when studying individual authors, particular situations, or broader cultural practices: for example in the contention between models of economic time—cyclical and crisis times—that Jamie Martin shows characterized economic through across the political spectrum; or the (very different) conception of cycles, of empires falling and being replaced, that Zvi Ben-Dor Benite argues was constructed in China in the late seventeenth century and backdated to ancient times, clashing directly with Chinese ideas about an everlasting polity and, more obliquely, with Western and modern Chinese understandings of cyclical time. For Maria Stavrinaki, changing projections of a deep human past coincide with, and reformulate, a supposedly posthistorical “present time” in Georges Bataille's sense of political powerlessness. In Natasha Wheatley's account of non-synchronous sovereignties between Central Europe and the settler antipodes, resurrected rights storm the present of the state and infect it with their historicism, wearing their time texture on the outside. Wheatley uncovers constellations in which the jurisdiction of the state fractures and deviates according to temporal measures: for these historical rights, the rights of the prior, grate into the present and dilute perfect sovereignty, generating forms of legal pluralism that are described and debated as temporal pluralism. Finally, Stefanos Geroulanos discusses Nazism's reconstruction of the present as the time of building a Nazi “New Man” who would rule over an alternate tomorrow.¹⁶⁵ This temporal dynamic was gradually spatialized into a binary of *Lebensraum* and apocalypse.

Aesthetics, Metaphors, and the Fusion of Regimes of Time

Does this dense ecology of times condemn the scholar to projects of endless differentiation? How can a historian study how different temporal regimes are entangled—and how these entanglements break down? In focusing on

the relationship between power and time, we have proposed that to study temporal complexity is to follow power's always incomplete and frequently failed attempts to arrange it. There is a further step that we might take to rebundle time's variety into manageable ensembles. It takes its cues from our own experience of time: if we sometimes feel its tensions, more often we experience it as a whole. To recognize this is not simply to give up and trust "experience." It is to recognize that all these elements that make up the grain of the everyday—even little ones like rhythm, timbre, anticipation, breath, even when we are not aware of them—participate in the distribution of temporal regimes. Time, we have shown, plays both in the abstract and in the dear. Thus, to ask how competing times get synthesized, a chronocentric research agenda needs both to tease apart the different temporal regimes and to ask how those are experienced without their competition always being in play or being constantly disruptive. Such an inquiry would shift attention to aesthetics, taken in the broadest sense of sensation and experience, and encompassing the smallest as much as the grandest temporal schemes. Aesthetics in this sense is what fuses power and time—just as historians, anthropologists, scientists, and art historians like Arni, Ssorin-Chaikov, Warburg, Stewart, and Leroi-Gourhan have intimated. It helps us organize the complexity and fragmentation of power by reaching for the ways it is suffered by subjects—the way temporal conflict is flattened into fantasmatic harmony.

An aesthetics of time also helps us handle the frequently and intensely argued distinction between subjective and broader concepts of time—arguments concerning what is often called "time-perception." Philosophers with their pristine concepts of time have often begun from this point, from Aristotle to Kant (on time and our representations of it), from Husserl (on "internal time-consciousness") to Heidegger (on the singularizing temporality of being-toward-death versus the dissipation of time in "the one"). Aesthetic modernism, too, has long debated the temporal implications in the artwork-viewer relationship: there is no escaping the warping of time that happens when temporality, even the temporality of an artwork, becomes "ours." Instead of emptied-out "objective" linearities, we propose that the politics of time take seriously both the differentials and clashes that we have emphasized in chronocenosism. These times are best understood in their synthesis or fusion in human experience. Over and over in this introduction we have avoided the contrast of subjective and objective temporalities, all the while making use of the forces, paradoxes, and "deeper" conflicts this contrast holds up.

This leaves us in a persistent tension regarding regimes of time and the subjective experiences of them, a tension manifest in problems of spatialization, distance, acceleration, and so on. These should not be simply transposed

from experience to historical analysis. But they can be theorized anew across the particular formative aesthetic domains where temporal regimes lay their hold. If the fragmentation of time enables periods and scales to crisscross and overlies one another, to become artificially constructed and reimagined on political grounds, then aesthetic, metaphorical, and narrative particulars hook the subject back in. Thus, several themes we discuss in this volume—the profusion of plastic, the inventions of universal history, the emotional fabric of utopian time, the shock of deep time, the violence attached to anticipation—offer us a way out of the classical discussion of time in terms of subjective and objective problems. Aesthetics allows us to rethink and link the interwovenness of rhythms, performativity, and spatiality—a matter of as much interest to the chapters on legal history in this volume as those on the discourses of “latent life,” works of art, or “lost time.”

Claudia Verhoeven’s study of the Manson Family and the Tate-LaBianca murders, for example, brings aesthetics to the fore, from Charles Manson’s delirious performances to the imbuing of physical violence with redemptive force. She accounts for a case of a violent futureless act coerced into a wager for revolution: an instance in which a cultural-political opposition refracted into a radically presentist eschatology that makes violence appear to be imperative.¹⁶⁶ Across this and other essays, it is power’s aesthetic effect—the capacity of some temporal regimes to be felt, of others to remain latent—that allows the historian to weave, out of empirical research and the chronocentric tesseract we advocate she think through, a temporally conscious narrative. An aesthetics of power and time offers a way for organizing the complexity of power, for locating the multiple and conflicting temporal regimes, and for understanding how these get harmonized into a seemingly sinuous, often undifferentiated temporal experience that largely eschews conflict.



Throughout this introduction we have sought to break down every sense that there exists some flat time, that progress and acceleration are the passepartouts of historical inquiry on it, that the time of the victors is as untroubled and boring as their sleep, that temporal oppression works one way, that we can identify a single past and present, that spatial metaphors and ideas about standardization are the golden road for studying time. We have listed and pursued a long series of temporal tropes and regimes—by no means all-inclusive—that help the historian approach the subject across different instantiations. We have proposed a shattering of time as a key to thinking its global dimensions and recurrent, ever-imbalanced links to power. In every situation that we study, one or more sets of temporal regimes collide. Like all

those who came before us, we find ourselves in the embrace and at the mercy of temporalities and historicities, often political, often dynamic, sometimes coextensive and calm, sometimes denaturing. As scholars we make decisions about which temporal conflicts to work with, prioritize, advocate; through these decisions we shape time and the past anew—perhaps, like Prince Hal, even redeem it.

Notes

1. **Development of Philosophy in the Contemporary World: Time and History**, June 22–24, 1971 (meeting), Report, UNESCO Archives, SHC/WS/194, August 5, 1971.
2. Development of Philosophy in the Contemporary World: Time and History (revised by the first meeting of experts, June 22–24, 1971), UNESCO Archives, SHC/WS/178 Rev., August 3, 1971.
3. The critique of evolutionary premises for rectilinear time and a singular, overarching history was famously accentuated by Claude Lévi-Strauss in “Race and History,” in *The Race Question in Modern Science* (Paris: UNESCO, 1956).
4. Alfred Métraux, head of UNESCO’s Race Relations office in the early 1950s, balanced support for elites imposing development (“The Rise of the New Elites,” *UNESCO Courier* [February 1958], 8–9) with sensitivity toward its cultural deformations (“One Man’s Meat Is Another Man’s . . . Taboo,” *UNESCO Courier* [April 1957], 10).
5. On Abu Simbel, see Lucia Allais, “Integrities,” *Grey Room* 50 (2013): 6–45.
6. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 15.
7. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 25.
8. Development of Philosophy in the Contemporary World: Time and History (revised June 27–29, 1972), UNESCO Archives, SHC/WS/178 Rev. 2, September 4, 1972.
9. Some examples: the Dahomey-Beninese professor Honorat Aguessy, the Indian Vishnava monk Sri Madhava Ashish, the Soviet philosopher Yakov Askin, the German hermeneutician Hans-Georg Gadamer, the Egyptian anthropologist Ahmed M. Abou-Zeid, and the erstwhile president of Nigeria’s National Assembly Boubou Hama.
10. Report on the meeting, Development of Philosophy in the Contemporary World, Philosophies and Time, June 27–29, 1972, UNESCO Archives, SHC/WS/263, September 4, 1972.
11. Preface to *Time and the Philosophies* (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), 5.
12. Paul Ricoeur, “Introduction,” *Time and the Philosophies*, 20.
13. On the “cohabitation of times,” note Chris Marker’s idea in the film *Sans soleil* (1982): “The challenge of the twentieth century was the cohabitation of times.”
14. Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
15. Preface to *Time and the Philosophies* (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), 5.
16. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005); Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *Memory in a Global Age*

(Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

17. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt* (Munich: Beck, 2009); Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey* (1979; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

18. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2002); Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983); Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Michael Saler, “Modernity and Enchantment,” *American Historical Review* 111 (2006): 692–716; Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Hent de Vries, introduction to de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001).

19. François Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey* (New York: Zone, 1992); Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Carlo Cipolla, *Clocks and Culture: 1300–1700* (London: Collins, 1967); Noah Shusterman, *Religion and the Politics of Time* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010); Sonja Perovic, *The Calendar in Revolutionary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Matthew Shaw, *Time and the French Revolution* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2011); Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012).

20. See, similarly, the appeal to the “plurality of temporalities involved in the identification and construction of the objects” in *histoire croisée*. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison,” *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 45.

21. Characteristic is Certeau’s claim (*Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction* [Paris: Gallimard, 1987], 89) that “objectifying the past, for the last three centuries, has undoubtedly left unconsidered time within a discipline that has continued to use it as a taxonomic instrument.” This is one of the passages quoted ad nauseam to declare the importance of time for history. See, e.g., François Hartog, “Time and Heritage,” in *Museum international* 57, no. 3 (2005): 5; Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage, “Breaking Up Time,” in *Breaking Up Time: Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future*, ed. Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 7.

22. The confident distinction between the two mars even an impressive recent attempt to “break up time,” which retains the essential of these categories. Lorenz and Bevernage, “Breaking Up Time,” 9–12.

23. Shusterman, *Religion and the Politics of Time*, 13.

24. On the value of “regime,” see Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), xv.

25. Edelstein, “Revolution in Permanence and the Fall of Popular Sovereignty,” in Ben-Dor Benite, Geroulanos, and Jerr, eds., *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 371–92.

26. Howard L. Goodman, "Time: China," in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 2328–31; Nathan Sivin, "Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy," in *T'oung Pao*, 2nd ser., 55 (1969): 1–73; Michael Loewe, "The Cycle of Cathay," in *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, ed. Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 305–28.
27. Paul Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 22.
28. Jörg Rüpke, "Religion in *Lex Ursonensis*," in *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome*, ed. Clifford Ando and Jörg Rüpke (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 38; Rüpke, *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995).
29. Denis Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
30. Carlebach, *Palaces of Time*; Andrea Schatz, "Eleven Calendars," in *Secularism in Question: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times*, ed. Ari Joskowicz and Ethan B. Katz (Philadelphia: Penn Press, 2015), 300.
31. Ruth Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Daniel Night and Charles Stewart, eds., *Ethnographies of Austerity* (London: Routledge, 2016).
32. Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795; New York: Noonday, 1955).
33. François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1849; Paris: Poche, 1973), 3 vols., 1:213.
34. Hugo, *Les Misérables* (Paris: Pléiade, 1951), 635.
35. Ethan Kleinberg calls Koselleck's influence "the fastest growing trend in the theory of history," in "The New Metaphysics of Time," *History & Theory* 1 (2012): 3. See also the earlier essays by John Zammito and Helge Jordheim included in that issue. Koselleck's approach serves often more as a philosophical horizon—a theory or schema for practice—rather than an approach to be engaged and amended. Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 147; Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*; Alexandre Escudier, "Le sentiment d'accélération de l'histoire moderne," *Esprit* (2008): 165–91.
36. Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation'" (1976), in *Futures Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
37. Koselleck, "Sediments of Time" (1994) in *Sediments of Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 3–4, 8–9; "History, Histories, and Formal Time Structures" (1973) and "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation'" in *Futures Past*, 97, 260; Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann and Sean Franzel, introduction to Koselleck, *Sediments of Time*, ix–xxxi.
38. Koselleck, "Modernity and the Planes of Historicity," in *Futures Past*, 19–20; "Die unbekannte Zukunft und die Kunst der Prognose," *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 203–23; "Linguistic Change and the History of Events," *Sediments of Time*, 142–43.
39. Koselleck, "Does History Accelerate?" (written 1976, published in 1985), *Sediments of Time*, 89.
40. Koselleck, 153–54; Koselleck, "History, Histories, and Formal Time Structures," 96.
41. Koselleck, "Linguistic Change and the History of Events," 148–49.
42. Koselleck for example explicitly restricted our thinking of time to *spatial* formulations. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 120: "Time, as it is known, can only be expressed in spatial metaphors."

Koselleck, in *Practice of Conceptual History*: “We are always using concepts that were originally conceived in spatial terms, but that nevertheless have a temporal meaning” (6) and “All historical categories, including progress . . . are spatial expressions by origin, and our discipline thrives because they can be translated. ‘History’ originally also contained a spatial meaning, which has become temporalized” (7). It helps to recognize that in Koselleck, as in others, acceleration is imagined in analogy to railroads and steamboats crossing long distances; even his sediments or strata rely heavily on the nineteenth-century vision of “uniformitarian” geology—Charles Lyell’s 1820s theory that assumed that geological development occurred uniformly and with regularity and that was already passé thanks to Gould and others (see our later discussion of Roosth, Gould, Billera et al.).

43. Koselleck, “Does History Accelerate?” 89, 91.

44. Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 244.

45. Alexandre Koyré, *The Astronomical Revolution* (1961; London: Methuen 1973), 15.

46. Foucault, *Order of Things*.

47. Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: New Press, 2006), 303–19. Baudelaire’s place as a precipice of modern temporality has long been canonical: Elissa Marder, *Dead Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

48. Foucault, *Security Territory Population*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007), 258–60.

49. Niklas Luhmann, “The Future Cannot Begin,” in *Social Research* 43, no. 1 (1976): 130–52, 130.

50. Georges Canguilhem, “The Decline of the Idea of Progress,” *Economy & Society* 27, nos. 2–3 (1998): 314; Blumenberg, “On a Lineage of the Idea of Progress,” *Social Research* 41, no. 1 (1974): 5–27.

51. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), xix.

52. Clifford Ando, *Law, Language, and Empire in the Roman Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 75–77.

53. Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 1–3. Jacques Le Goff criticized periodization similarly in *Faut-il vraiment découper l’histoire en tranches?* (Paris: Seuil, 2014) and “Maîtriser le temps,” *Afrique et histoire* 2 (2004): 19–29.

54. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 5. On periodizing the twentieth century, see Charles S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 807–31; and the contributions to “History after the End of History,” *American Historical Review* 121, no. 5 (2016): 1567–1607.

55. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 274–75.

56. Koselleck, “Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution,” in *Futures Past*, 43–57; and *Critique and Crisis*. Koselleck’s account of the Enlightenment is also outdated: recent accounts treat the Enlightenment as concomitant with, if not driven by, a state absolutism aimed at crushing the persistence of feudalism.

57. Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (London: Blackwell, 2003), chap. 13; see also the mostly implicit criticism of Bayly in Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), xix, 75. Christophe Charle,

Discordance des temps (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011), 31, 392. Despite the quasi-Baudelairean title, Charle commits to acceleration; he even concludes the book with “a Chinese proverb” that sees “Man” “riding a feline that will not stop accelerating.”

58. Koselleck, “Does History Accelerate?”; “Zeitverkürzung und Beschleunigung,” *Zeitschriften*, 150–203; the following chapters in *Futures Past*: “Modernity and the Planes of Historicity,” 11, 12, 22–23; “Historia Magistra Vitae,” 40–42; “Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution,” 50; “History, Histories, and Formal Time Structures,” 95. See also Escudier, “Le sentiment d’accélération.” Escudier allies with—as diagnosticians, not as political thinkers—Koselleck, Hartmut Rosa, and Peter Borscheid, author of *Das Tempo-virus: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Beschleunigung* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2004).

59. Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, 7.

60. Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 78; Osterhammel, *Transformation of the World*, chap. 2.

61. Rosa Scheuerman and William E. Scheuerman, eds. *High-Speed Society* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

62. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 2–3, 7–9.

63. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 193–204.

64. Besides the other works cited here, see Robert Hassan, “Globalization and the “Temporal Turn,”” in *Korean Journal of Policy Studies* 25, no. 2 (2010): 84; Jon May and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Timespace* (London: Routledge, 2001).

65. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Anthropology and the Savage Slot,” in *Global Transformations* (London: Palgrave, 2003), 7–28.

66. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, “Nuer Time-Reckoning,” *Africa* 12, no. 2 (1939): 189–216.

67. The figure of the disappearing native has been a trope with divergent uses in anthropological writing and in its ambiguous relations to colonialism since as early as Lewis Morgan (*Ancient Society* [New York: Henry Holt, 1877], vii–viii) and continuing through Bronisław Malinowski (*Argonauts of the Western Pacific* [London: Routledge, 1922]) and on to Lévi-Strauss. See also Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003) and forthcoming work by Sadiya Qureshi and Elizabeth Ellis.

68. On the temporal logic of culture, see Lévi-Strauss, “Race and History.” On hot and cold societies, see *Structural Anthropology II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 59. On the time of the tropics as being out of sync, see Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (1955; New York: Penguin, 1992), 87, 85, 95.

69. Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

70. Pierre Clastres, *Society against the State* (1974; New York: Zone, 1989), 200.

71. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 445; on time in Bali, see 391–98. Geertz granted “spurts” epistemological significance (25).

72. James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Paul Rabinow and Anthony Stavrianakis, *Demands of the Day* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 99; Thomas Trautmann, “The Revolution in Ethnographic Time,” *Man* 27, no. 2 (1992): 379–97; Charles Stewart, “Historicity and Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45 (2016): 79–94. A turn to the future now forms part of this disciplinary critique and transformation: Michael Fischer, *Anthropological Futures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Jan Salazar, Sarah Pink, Andrew Irving, and Johannes Sjöberg, eds., *Anthropologies and Futures* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). Consider also the rethinking of the “contemporary” given

the clip of techno-scientific change in Paul Rabinow, *Marking Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

73. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1992), 23.

74. Anya Bernstein, "The Post-Soviet Treasure Hunt," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 3 (2011): 623–53.

75. Paul Farmer, "An Anthropology of Structural Violence," in *Partner to the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 369, 356–57. See also p. 372 on Farmer's treatment of policy makers' abuse of temporal differences, where the point "Africans have 'a different concept of time'" serves oppression and disavowal.

76. Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity" in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 7, 9. See also the other essays in that volume. For a different approach to the multiplication of possible modernities, see Sebastian Conrad and Andreas Eckert, "Globalgeschichte, Globalisierung, multiple Modernen," in *Globalgeschichte: Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*, ed. Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert, and Ulrike Freitag (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007), 7–52.

77. One already finds them in, say, Eusebius. See Anthony Grafton and Megan Hale Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Tamara Griggs, "Universal History from Counter-Reformation to Enlightenment," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 219–47.

78. James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 124.

79. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 218. Thanks to Melih Levi for this reference. See also Ogle, *Global Transformation of Time*, 123.

80. Grant K. Goodman, *Japan and the Dutch, 1600–1853* (Richmond, VA: Curzon, 2000), 15–16; Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

81. Ogle, *Global Transformation of Time*, chaps. 4–5.

82. Ogle, 78.

83. Joseph Viscomi, "Mediterranean Futures: Historical Time and the Departure of Italians from Egypt, 1919–1937," *Journal of Modern History* 91, no. 2 (2019): 341–79.

84. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 14. See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for the 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37 (1992): 1–26; Warwick Anderson, Miranda Johnson, and Barbara Brookes, eds., *Pacific Futures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), where Miranda Johnson argues in the introduction that the project of decolonizing the Pacific requires a reworking of the futures imposed on the region by Western knowledges with their "weedy historicities," as Anderson puts it.

85. Sebastian Conrad, "The Temporalization of Space," in *The Quest for the Lost Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 174.

86. A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 206–9.

87. Purnima Dhavan, "Redemptive Pasts and Imperiled Futures," *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 3, no. 2 (2007): 111–24.

88. Anne Murphy, introduction to *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2011), 4.

89. Aishwary Kumar, *Radical Equality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 104; Uday S. Mehta, "Patience, Inwardness, and Self-Knowledge in Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*," *Public Culture* 23, no. 2 (2011): 417–29.

90. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Svetlana Aleksievich, *Secondhand Time* (New York: Random House, 2017); Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Boris Groys, Anne von der Heiden, and Peter Weibel, eds., *Zurück aus der Zukunft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005); Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Maria Todorova, *Bones of Contention* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009); Bernstein, "Post-Soviet Treasure Hunt"; Bernstein, "Freeze, Die, Come to Life," *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 4 (2016): 766–81.

91. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Selected Writings III: 1935–38*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 154; Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), 33.

92. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings IV: 1938–40*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), theses 2, 5, 14–16; Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 71, 83, 115.

93. Benjamin, "Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History'" in *Selected Writings IV*, 407.

94. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983; London: Verso, 2006), 22–31, esp. 24. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 186–225, 291–97, 373–78. Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 43–48, 58–63, 144, and the distinctions on temporality in 298n28, 304n87.

95. Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, 83.

96. Koselleck, "Geschichte, Recht und Gerechtigkeit," in *Akten des 26. Deutschen Rechtshistorikertages*, ed. Dieter Simon (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), 143 (in English as "History, Law, and Justice" in Koselleck, *Sediments of Time*, 117–36). For the other essay that explores these themes, see Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichtliche Probleme der Verfassungsgeschichtsschreibung," in *Gegenstand und Begriffe der Verfassungsgeschichtsschreibung: Tagung der Vereinigung für Verfassungsgeschichte in Hofgeismar am 30./31. März 1981*, ed. Helmut Quaritsch (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1983), 7–46.

97. Paul W. Kahn, *The Cultural Study of Law: Reconstructing Legal Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 52, 54.

98. Kahn, 52, 51.

99. "International legal scholarship is necessarily anachronic," Orford has argued, "because the operation of modern law is not governed solely by a chronological sense of time in which events and texts are confined to their proper place in a historical and linear progression from then to now. . . . The past, far from being gone, is constantly being retrieved as a source or rationalisation of present obligation." Anne Orford, "On International Legal Method," *London Review of International Law* 1, no. 1 (2013): 171; Martti Koskeniemi, "Vitoria and Us," *Rechtsgeschichte* 22 (2014): 119–38.

100. William Sewall, *The Logics of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

101. Bevernage, "Time, Presence, and Historical Injustice," *History and Theory* 47 (2008): 153.

102. This literature spans history, law, and moral and political philosophy. Jeremy Waldron, "Superseding Historic Injustice," *Ethics* 103, no. 1 (1992): 4–28; A. John Simmons, "Historical Rights and Fair Shares," *Law & Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (1995): 149–84; Bevernage, "Writing the Past

out of the Present,” *History Workshop Journal* 69, no. 1 (2010): 111–31; Lukas Meyer, ed., *Justice in Time* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994); Lukas H. Meyer and Axel Gosseries, eds., *Intergenerational Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Edward Cavanagh, “Land Rights That Come with Cut-Off Dates,” *South African Journal on Human Rights* 28, no. 3 (2012): 437–57; A. Dirk Moses, “Official Apologies, Reconciliation, and Settler Colonialism,” *Citizenship Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): 145–59; Catherine Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Katrina Forrester, “Reparations, History and the Origins of Global Justice,” in *Empire, Race and Global Justice*, ed. Duncan Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For an explicit critique of the “pastness” of the injustice in question, see Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, “Justifying the Dispossession of Indigenous Peoples,” in *Philosophy and Aboriginal Rights*, ed. Sandra Tomsons and Lorraine Mayer (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2013), 373–87.

103. Axel Gosseries and Lukas H. Meyer, introduction to *Intergenerational Justice*, ed. Axel Gosseries and Lukas H. Meyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–22; Forrester, “The Problem of the Future in Postwar Anglo-American Political Philosophy,” *Climatic Change* (August 2016): 55–66; Forrester and Sophie Smith, eds., *Nature, Action, and the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

104. Donald Grayson, *The Establishment of Human Antiquity* (New York: Academic, 1983), chap. 1; Bryony Orme, *Problems and Case Studies in Archeological Dating* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1982); Lloyd Currie, ed., *Nuclear and Chemical Dating Techniques* (Washington, DC: American Chemical Society, 1982). Quote from Alfredo González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance: Materiality and Time in an African Borderland* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), xiv. See also Josh Reno, “Toward a New Theory of Waste,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 6 (2014): 3–27. On nuclear waste, see Cornelius Holtorf and Anders Högberg, “Archaeology and the Future: Managing Nuclear Waste as a Living Heritage” in *Radioactive Waste Management and Constructing Memory for Future Generations* (Nuclear Energy Agency Report No. 7259) (Paris: OECD, 2015), 97–101; Andrea Westermann in this volume; Josh Reno, *Waste Away* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); Elana Resnick, “Discarded Europe,” *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 24, no. 1 (2015): 123–31; Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke, eds., *Culture and Waste* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

105. Laurent Olivier, *The Dark Abyss of Time* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 4; see also Olivier, “The Business of Archaeology is the Present,” and Yannis Hamilakis and Efsthymios Theou, “Enacted Multi-Temporality,” in *Reclaiming Archaeology*, ed. Alfredo González-Ruibal (London: Routledge, 2013), 117–29 and 181–94. On the modernist engagement with ruins, see Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

106. Kostas Vlassopoulos, “Acquiring (a) Historicity: Greek History, Temporalities, and Eurocentrism in the *Sattelzeit* (1750–1850),” in *The Western Time of Ancient History*, Alexandra Lianeri (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2011), 166. Also Lianeri, “Unfounding Times,” in *Western Time of Ancient History*, 30.

107. Shannon Lee Dawdy, foreword to Olivier, *Dark Abyss*, x. Daniel M. Knight opts for “temporal liquidity” in “Temporal Vertigo and Time Vortices on Greece’s Central Plain,” *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2016): 32–44.

108. The locus classicus for such appropriation is of course Edward Gibbon’s study of Rome’s fall.

109. Richard D. G. Irvine, “Deep Time: An Anthropological Problem,” *Social Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2014), 170.

110. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2–3.
111. Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital* (London: Verso, 2016), 187.
112. Peter Galison, *Einstein's Clocks, Poincaré's Maps* (London: Norton, 2003); Jimena Canales, *The Physicist and the Philosopher* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
113. Wiener, *Cybernetics: Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (New York: John Wiley, 1948); René Thom, *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis* (Reading, MA: Benjamin, 1975), chaps. 4.4, 5.3, 5.4; David Bates, "Catastrophe and Human Order," in *The Time of Catastrophe*, ed. Christopher Dole (London: Routledge, 2016), 99–123.
114. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 58, 35. See also José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
115. Sara Pursley, *Familiar Futures: Time, Selfhood, and Sovereignty in Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).
116. Carlebach, *Palaces of Time*.
117. Goldberg, *Clepsydra: Essay on the Plurality of Time in Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 3, 11.
118. Ron Hassner, "Sacred Time and Conflict Initiation," *Security Studies* 20, no. 4 (2011): 491–520. Early versions of this are offered in Joshua (6:4–15) and Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), bk. 1, sec. 74.
119. Koselleck, "Modernity and the Planes of Historicity."
120. To give but a few examples: Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005); Roxanne Panchasi, *Future Tense* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Nasser Zakariya, *A Final Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Jane I. Guyer, "Prophecy and the Near Future," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (2007), 409–21. On the advent of history as progress, see Bronislaw Baczko, *Utopian Lights* (New York: Paragon, 1989).
121. Joan W. Scott, *Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Mayanthi Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
122. On time and the history of geology, see Maria Stavrinaki, "‘We Escape Ourselves’: The Invention and the Interiorization of the Age of the Earth in the Nineteenth Century," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (Spring–Fall 2018): 20–37; Thomas Trautmann, "The Revolution in Ethnological Time," *Man* 27, no. 2 (1992): 379–97; Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and *Worlds before Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). On scientific epics and the cosmologies of time, see Zakariya, *Final Story*.
123. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Intruder," in *Corpus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 162, 169.
124. Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931); Todd Meyers, "The Poisonous Ingenuity of Time," in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (2016): 351–65. The literature on psychoanalytic temporalities of trauma is enormous; see the classic accounts by Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Psychiatric-phenomenological constructions of time were a subject for Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies* (1933; Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

125. Henning Schmidgen, *The Helmholtz Curves* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

126. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

127. The anthropological and linguistic literature on time and kinship is too long to cite here. In Hegel as in the French Civil Code as in criminological or policy planning, the family dominates civil and property relations and hence (to a degree) the temporality of political economy. On Hegel and the time of the family, see also Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), esp. 221. See also Melinda Cooper, *Family Values* (New York: Zone, 2017).

128. Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), 227.

129. Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*. See also Hans Blumenberg, who described the work done, in classical Greek, by aspects (particularly the durative and the punctual) and tenses (especially the imperfective and the perfect) to inflect ideas as basic as action and appearance, action for example meaning in the durative “that the accomplishment of the imagined object is its self-realization.” Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (1975; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 441–43.

130. Freud flipped between several temporalities, including (1) a stages-based temporality of maturation in the oral, anal, and genital stages whose disruption induces pathology; (2) a related but not coextensive temporality of the Oedipus complex; (3) the broadening of the Oedipus complex into a wholesale phylogenetic theory for which it would replay the original trauma of the killing and eating of the primal father; (4) the achronic unconscious, which he postulated knows neither time nor reality; (5) the temporalities of trauma, including the famous theory that two separate events are required for trauma to be experienced by the patient; and (6) the just as famous concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action. Gould offered us another example, in that his punctuated equilibrium theory would not quite coincide with his understanding of the heterochronic development of organs at the embryonic stage.

131. Regarding “the present,” for example, François Hartog has argued, not entirely convincingly, that since the late twentieth century, a “presentism” has been marked by a complete falling away of past and future. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 193–204. Maria Stavrinaki has attended to the different “heroic” presentisms in Dada—for which “the pulverized past made it all the more easy to construct a hypertrophied future.” Stavrinaki, *Dada Presentism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 6, 5.

132. Heidrun Friese, ed. *The Moment* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001).

133. Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 147.

134. Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962), 113.

135. Edelstein, *Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

136. Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 7.

137. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

138. Edelstein, “Revolution in Permanence and the Fall of Popular Sovereignty.”

139. Baczkó, *Comment sortir de la terreur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

140. Augustin Barruel, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme* (London: Le Boussonier, 1797).

141. Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 158.
142. Foucault, "Different Spaces" (1967), in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 182–83.
143. Maurice Halbwachs, "La mémoire collective et le temps," *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* (1947): 3–31.
144. André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech* (1966; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 315–18.
145. Leroi-Gourhan, 286.
146. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time I* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), for "epiphylogenesis," 140; Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967; New York: Zone, 1995), v and vi. Consider also Foucault on the "temporal modulation" of punishment, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975; New York: Vintage, 1990), 94, 107, 126, 150. For some of Leroi-Gourhan, see his *Gesture and Speech*, 252–53.
147. Sophia Roosth, "Turning to Stone," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 69–70 (Spring–Fall 2018): 65. This critique of Koselleck works equally well as one of Bernard Stiegler's epiphylogenesis.
148. Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, "Punctuated Equilibria," in *Models in Paleobiology*, ed. T. J. Schopf (San Francisco: Freeman, Cooper, and Co., 1972), 82–115; revised in Gould, *Punctuated Equilibrium* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
149. Gould, *Punctuated Equilibrium*, 3. On the history and critique of uniformitarianism, see Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987)
150. Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977); Michael McKinney, ed., *Heterochrony in Evolution* (New York: Plenum, 1988).
151. Gould, *Time's Arrow*, 194–200, 198, 200.
152. Louis J. Billera, Susan P. Holmes, and Karen Vogtmann, "Geometry of the Space of Phylogenetic Trees," *Advances in Applied Mathematics* 27, no. 4 (2001): 733–67. We are grateful to Nuala Caomhánach for this reference and her most useful notes on this section. For tree, wave, and "starburst" models in linguistic reconstructions of the deep past (and their politics), see Jeremy Lin, "Interpreting the 'Documents of Language,'" *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 69–70 (2018): 85–98. On analogies between linguistic and biological models in the nineteenth century, see Anna Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics* (London: Routledge, 1998), 86–97.
153. Erwin Panofsky, "Reflections on Historical Time," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 697.
154. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Bridgid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 223.
155. Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone, 2007), 16, 43, 86. Warburg also quietly postulated disruptive forms of temporality in his juxtaposition of myth and rationality, evolutions of nature, and rhythms of time in Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians*, 16–17.
156. Caroline Arni, "'Moi seule' 1833: Feminist Subjectivity, Temporality, and Historical Interpretation," *History of the Present* 2, no. 2 (2012): 118, 117.
157. Holly Case, *The Age of Questions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).
158. Charles Stewart, *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 5, 9, 13, 45–46, 211, 215.
159. Ssorin-Chaikov, "On Heterochrony: Birthday Gifts to Stalin," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12 (2006): 355–75, 356. Pierre Bourdieu injected a temporal dynamic into

the structure of social relations—for example, in the “proper” time gap in which a gift ought to be returned. Political rhythms and rituals, he argued, depend on that kind of temporality even when they quiet it out. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 4–15; Ssorin-Chaikov, “On Heterochrony,” 362–65.

160. Ssorin-Chaikov, “On Heterochrony,” 358.

161. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 18.

162. Blumenberg, *Genesis of the Copernican World*, 435.

163. Blumenberg, 60–61.

164. Bruno Latour, “Morality and Technology,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, nos. 5–6 (2002): 249.

165. Elsewhere, Geroulanos has also offered an example of how National Socialists, viewed a mythical, Siegfriedian past as formally and temporally more proximate than, say, Bismarck, regardless of chronological distance. Geroulanos, “The Sovereignty of the New Man after Wagner,” in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty*, 440–68.

166. Verhoeven has studied the present in terms of “temporal holes” elsewhere. For her essays on time and terrorism, see “Wormholes in Russian History,” in *Breaking Up Time*; “Oh, Times, There Is No Time (But the Time That Remains): The Terrorist in Russian Literature, 1863–1913,” in *Terrorism and Narrative Practice*, ed. Thomas Austenfeld, Dimiter Daphinoff, and Jens Herlth (Zurich: LIT, 2011); and “Time of Terror, Terror of Time: On the Impatience of Russian Revolutionary Terrorism,” *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas* 58 (2010): 254–73.

PART I

Temporal Pluralities in Conflict

Legal Pluralism as Temporal Pluralism: Historical Rights, Legal Vitalism, and Non-Synchronous Sovereignty

NATASHA WHEATLEY

Theoretically prior to any enunciation of law's power is the notion of jurisdiction—the “share of the world” for which that law carries force.¹ We often think about jurisdiction in spatial terms: as a zone, a sphere, a blocked-out shape on a world map; as something that travels along roads and trade routes, that clings to coastlines or extends out across oceans, that overlaps in imperial borderlands, that layers with geographically intermingled communities, or that clumps unevenly the pockmarked capacity of a “weak state.” But what if law's authority broke up and collided along axes of time and not just space?

This essay opens up the history of some temporally frustrated sovereignties—sovereignties that layered or splintered according to a temporal metric instead of (or as much as) a spatial one. I focus on state formations forced to wrestle with bodies of law and bundles of rights that stemmed from a time before the advent of their own sovereignty. As against more contained sorts of rights routinely digested into new states and assimilable without conceptual violence or structural incoherence (civil laws, for example), I am interested in rights claims that reach toward or threaten the scale of sovereignty itself. Latent, simmering, maybe half-smothered, such rights can linger as deep-set sovereign qualifications—as legal reminders that the establishment of the state was a not a totalizing phenomenon, that rights could evade its transformative grasp and puncture its pretension to seamless jurisdiction and seamless sovereignty. These are rights “from” the past that refuse to be simply “of” the past: they keep pace with history and continually reanchor themselves in the present, even if they are politically or philosophically at odds with the current sovereign order. In refusing to be subsumed by the state's legal order, these rights engender a legal pluralism whose relative strength or weakness

is contested through temporal metaphors and logics rather than spatial ones: protagonists debate the “survival” or “extinguishment” of rights, assert their “continuity” or “rupture,” their “renewal” or “relinquishment.” They ask if rights are living or if they are dead.

As Lisa Ford has shown, the alignment of territory, sovereignty, and jurisdiction—the “legal trinity of nation statehood”—was pieced together only gradually and relatively recently.² But it is not only the territorialization of jurisdiction as one of the metanarratives of the modern state—over and against welters of personal jurisdictions coexisting in the same space—that has tethered the study of legal pluralism to a spatial imaginary. Across a prolific and enormously influential career, Lauren Benton has elaborated a key insight about the deep reciprocity between law and geography. At the heart of the imperial search for sovereignty, she writes, lay a set of “odd and enduring links between landscapes (and seascapes) and law.” The physical properties of geographic formations generated correlates in properties of law—the “thin air of mountain regions,” for example, mirrored a “thin collection of sovereign attributes”—so that geography came to speak for law, its categories doubling as legal designations.³ Law’s lumpiness—that evocative, transferrable image now so closely associated with Benton’s work—was an imprint of the lumpiness of the natural world: the former grew out of attempts to describe, categorize, and control the latter.

This historical process triggers an interpretive proposition. Geography may present endless variations, but these irregularities could be (and were) experienced as recurring patterns—distinct but repeating cycles of rivers, oceans, mountains, interiors, highlands, and islands. Crucially, law worked in the same way: the (inter)imperial legal order was “fragmented in patterns.” This important insight allows Benton to explain how law could be both brimming with anomalies and nevertheless cohere into what she calls a regulatory regime; it helps her explain, in other words, how we can lack uniformity and still have law. The repetition of singular occurrences allowed analogies to be drawn and routine practices developed into norms.⁴ Benton’s own work in turn reproduces these dual historical and interpretive propositions as a conceptual framework: the vocabulary of enclaves, corridors, sea-lanes, islands, interiors, boundaries, passageways, frontiers, lumpiness, territorial unevenness, and anomalous zones, sliding between legal and geographic valances, becomes our theoretical language, too. Historical evidence, causal explanations, and analytical tools thus ventriloquize one another; tropes filter up and down the scale of abstraction so that a single usage might be descriptive and interpretive at once. The result is a spectacular, potent, and extremely

influential historiographical compound, one that has spurred productive new lines of inquiry across numerous fields and regions.

This essay explores the idea that there may be a range of possible quasi sovereignties—ones that possess a different structure, a different epistemology, and a different vocabulary. Quasi sovereignties, that is, which find articulation not in the language of geography but in the language of history.⁵ In the cases explored below, legal pluralism turns less on the (uneven) dispersal of rights throughout space than on their (imperfect) survival through time—on the patchy, friction-filled transference of law along temporal vectors toward the present (or, conversely, into the siloed dead ends of historical oblivion). So-called historical rights and residual laws can break open the state's singular legal order not only because they often trace their origins back behind the foundation of state sovereignty. They also have different temporal properties from regular state law, with its smooth, unselfconscious reliance on the present tense. Inassimilable to the state-backed law of the present, yet evading clear consignment to the past, residual rights show their duration. They wear time, they are everywhere marked by it—moth eaten with periods of lapse, redoubled with cycles of renewal, scarred by the work of resisting destruction, defiant in the face of predicted extinction. They have time texture. Often, the very nature of law's movement through time becomes the focus of debate; often, such rights survive through time in disaggregated form. Aspects of their legality cleaved apart, they might lack observance, or recognition, or legitimacy, or an underlying source of normativity. They come saturated in temporal language and infect the state with their particular historical grammar, injecting a (sharper) multiplicity of times into the legal order. In resisting alignment with the worlds and times of state law, historical rights and other residual entitlements engender a precarious legal-political chronocnosis in which state institutions strain to conceptualize, accommodate, and tame laws not of their own making.⁶

My subject, then, is what we might call "rights vitalism." In these constellations, jurists, judges, claimants, and others contest the "vitality" and health of rights. They transpose legal questions into an organicist register in which rights, like organisms, can live and die and must struggle to survive in unnatural environments—in which rights have beginnings and ends and duration in between. Perhaps the most dynamic jurisprudence of this sort today concerns the rights of indigenous peoples in settler states like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. I begin here, before opening the discussion outward and backward—to Central Europe and beyond—in search of a nonlinear genealogy of legal pluralism as temporal pluralism.

Rights, Time Tortured and Time Vulnerable: On the Subsequent Extinction of Surviving Antecedent Rights

Canberra, 1992: the case before Australia's highest court concerned three small islands in the Torres Strait—the thin wedge of water between the northernmost tip of Australia and Papua New Guinea's southern coastline, west of the Coral Sea and east of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Home to the Melanesian Meriam people, the Murray Islands were annexed to the Colony of Queensland in 1879, before the latter became a state of the Commonwealth of Australia upon federation in 1901. The eight clans of the Meriam people, represented by trade unionist Eddie Mabo, have come to court to claim rights to their traditional lands, and Justice Gerard Brennan, adamant that the common law not be “frozen in an age of racial discrimination,” is busy overturning generations of law to the contrary.⁷ But the ice is deep, and thawing requires time travel. To find for the plaintiffs, his judgment has to track back to the original British colonization of the country and, somehow, undo its legal premise—that the country was a “legal desert,” *terra nullius*, devoid of rights and people who have them.⁸ “The facts as we know them today do not fit the ‘absence of law’ or ‘barbarian’ theory underpinning the colonial reception of the common law of England,” reasons Brennan. “That being so, there is no warrant for applying in these times rules of the English common law which were the product of that theory.”⁹ The problem, of course, is that the state, too, was a “product of that theory.”

He has to get back behind the beginning of the state to find the rights he wants and then protect them from the history that follows. He has to ask the most foundational questions about the nature of empire building, about what happens when sovereigns acquire new possessions. He has to distinguish between the acquisition of “territory” and the acquisition of “property,” between the “Crown's title to a colony and the Crown's ownership of land in the colony.” He needs long digressions—by way of Blackstone and F. W. Maitland—into feudal English land law; he needs seventeenth-century cases that document how local property rights survived the conquest of Ireland and Wales—places unburdened by that “barbarian” theory. He needs cases from India and Southern Rhodesia under British imperial rule about the rights and interests of indigenous inhabitants, and also the International Court of Justice's landmark advisory opinion on Western Sahara.¹⁰ He finds the whole globe—and the whole legal history of empire—knotted into that Torres Strait archipelago. Eventually, he thinks he has found a way through, a way to show that “the antecedent rights and interests in land possessed by the indigenous inhabitants of the territory survived the change in sovereignty.

Those antecedent rights and interests thus constitute a burden on the radical title of the Crown.¹¹

Those antecedent rights—survived, scraped past the existential threat, survived to fetter the invading Crown with qualifications. Alive! Not so fast. Their journey toward the present is a temporal obstacle course: the possibility of death just won't go away. “The native titles claimed by the Meriam people—communally, by group or individually—avoid the Scylla of the 1879 annexation of the Murray Islands to Queensland,” Brennan continued, “but we must now consider whether they avoid the Charybdis of subsequent extinction.”¹²

To test the surviving antecedent rights for subsequent extinction—a judicial project temporalized four times over. Here Brennan's rights odyssey takes its darkest turn, a pernicious—and enormously consequential—noir twist. The suspected rights killers, it turns out, are not the violent invaders or the murderous settlers, or the missionaries or the assimilationists or the officials who stole indigenous children from their parents.¹³ Who, then? The suspected rights killers, in Brennan's new national-judicial fable, are indigenous people themselves.

The plot works like this. Crucially, the surviving indigenous rights come from indigenous legal systems: they have their origin in, and take their content from, traditional laws and customs. Brennan defines them as the proprietary rights that community members held within that normative order, on its own terms, at the moment of European colonization. The settler common law, he reasons, can recognize the rights produced by that legal order. In fact, the common law could not, as a matter of course, govern the alienation of those rights even if it wanted to, as they were anchored in a different source of legitimacy.¹⁴ But this disavowal of the common law's jurisdiction is also a disavowal of its responsibility. Because if an indigenous legal order stops being an order, then the rights stop being rights—because they are no longer propped up and given meaning by an underlying normative system: “The common law can, by reference to the traditional laws and customs of an indigenous people, identify and protect the native rights and interests to which they give rise. *However, when the tide of history has washed away any real acknowledgment of traditional law and any real observance of traditional customs, the foundation of native title has disappeared.* A native title which has ceased with the abandoning of laws and customs based on tradition cannot be revived for contemporary recognition.”¹⁵

If indigenous communities have stopped observing their traditional laws and customs, then they themselves have allowed their rights to shrivel and die. The clean logic of legal reasoning need not consider massacres or forced removal or dispossession or missionization or any other extralegal reason

why the order might have ceased operating in its original form. Such externalities are faded out and naturalized into “the tide of history”—an elemental, Hegelian surge of progressive time. Once dead, rights cannot be resuscitated; any lapse is fatal. To “revive” rights would be to create them anew. Law has been known to do many magical and fantastical things, but not here, not to-day. Death is death.

Theoretically, at least, the High Court’s *Mabo* decision transformed Australian sovereignty by overturning the legal principle (*terra nullius*) underpinning its foundation and by holding that preexisting, newly recognized indigenous rights had “survived” colonization. It also gave those rights a very particular temporal architecture, blunting any radical potential: they were, first, exclusively those rights in existence at the moment of colonization; and, second, they needed to be in continuous existence ever since in order to be safely teleported from the moment of colonization to the present. This formulation and the phrase that captured it—Brennan’s “tide of history”—reverberated across common law jurisdictions. In the landmark *R v. Van der Peet* (1996), a case concerning the rights of the Sto:lo indigenous people to sell fish commercially, Canada’s Supreme Court cited *Mabo* in finding that the idea of historical continuity was the appropriate way of identifying which indigenous rights were to be protected under the constitution.¹⁶ One needed to be able to draw a line from precontact practices to contemporary ones in order to offer that practice the protection of the law as an indigenous right. Did this not make rights contingent on a performance of the unchanging timelessness of indigenous culture (the most hackneyed of colonial-anthropological tropes)? Were these not, then, rights for “people without history,”¹⁷ as though one could have rights or history (your pick!) but not both at once?

The Canadian chief justice Antonio Lamer tried to have it both ways. The “concept of continuity does not require aboriginal groups to provide evidence of an unbroken chain of continuity” between practices then and now, he maintained.¹⁸ The “frozen rights” approach was to be “avoided”: “The evolution of practices, customs and traditions into modern forms will not, provided that continuity with pre-contact practices, customs and traditions is demonstrated, prevent their protection as aboriginal rights.”¹⁹ Evolution *within* continuity—another delicate temporal dance, a narrow historical tightrope between rights and their obliteration. If the Canadian courts developed a more flexible interpretation of the “continuity” requirement,²⁰ they still used this time equation to strike out rights: the Sto:lo’s trade of salmon with the Hudson’s Bay Company was held to be “qualitatively different” from Sto:lo practices that existed prior to contact.²¹

Australian courts, for their part, hardened the nascent “continuity” doctrine, shackling indigenous rights to an unattainable historylessness.²² In 1998, members of the Yorta Yorta aboriginal community brought a claim for land and waters in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales under the 1993 Native Title Act—legislation that had been introduced in direct response to the *Mabo* judgment. The “tide of history has indeed washed away any real acknowledgment of their traditional laws and any real observance of their traditional customs,” declared Justice Olney, sitting alone in the Federal Court in the first instance, finding against the plaintiffs. The “foundation of the claim to native title” having thus “disappeared,” the rights were “not capable of revival.”²³ Yes, members of the group collected “bush tucker” from the land as their ancestors had done, but it was “currently engaged in as a recreational activity rather than as a means of sustaining life.”²⁴ Yes, the Yorta Yorta community were reburying remains that had been taken in earlier periods for scientific examination, and there could be “no question about the importance of the returning of remains to the appropriate country,” “but the modern practices associated with their reburial are not part of the traditional laws and customs handed down from the original inhabitants.”²⁵ Rights could have survived only as literal pieces of the past, untouched by two centuries—the crudest Western fantasy of pristine, uncorrupted (ab)original authenticity.²⁶ Cycled through these settler jurisdictions—from Australia to Canada and back again—“continuity” as a means of stripping rights appears to have its origins purely in Brennan’s original “tide of history”: this was, as Canadian scholar Patrick Glenn has argued, “metaphor as law.”²⁷

“Indigenous peoples are often portrayed as past tense-peoples in Canada,” writes indigenous legal scholar John Borrows.²⁸ They “suffer from historicism; their constitutional status is inextricably linked to the very acts designed to diminish their land-holdings and government: contact, the assertion of sovereignty, and treaties.”²⁹ Their rights *come from* that “precontact” period: “crystallized at an arbitrary date,”³⁰ they must operate as a permanent, functioning tableau of indigenous societies at the moment of European conquest.³¹ They must show relentless life without growth—resist death but remain unchanging. Small wonder metaphors of refrigeration abound: this is a jurisprudence of “freezing rights” and “frigid sovereignty,”³² of law on ice.³³ The metric of pluralism is duration—a particular, stylized duration based on both survival and stasis. Accordingly, debates turn on the means of “extinguishing” rights,³⁴ and scholars and activists assert the enduring life of indigenous law, the “ongoing sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples.”³⁵ Our “ancient legal systems,” writes Irene Watson, “have been marginalised almost to the

point of juricide, but still the law lives and it will outlive the lives of humans, for it just is; that is the law.”³⁶

Unsurprisingly, then, the problem of **coevalness** has long trailed indigenous rights in settler states. The indigenous activists who turned to the courts to assert their land rights were well aware of the fraught temporality of inclusion and recognition. As Miranda Johnson has shown in her history of the groundbreaking court cases that changed Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian law between the 1970s and 1990s, their projects had to balance competing temporal imperatives. On the one hand, they fought to become equal, coeval, “unmarked citizens” with the same rights as everyone else. On the other, their struggle for self-determination and land rights grew out of the conviction that they “must retain their historical rights to maintain their distinct identity,” their peoplehood.³⁷ Canadian activists used the idea of “citizens plus” as a shorthand for that duality, while in 1970, Yolngu leaders in Australia subverted the discourse of “backwardness” by calling themselves the “first Australians”: rather than lagging “behind” other Australian citizens, “they were narratively prior to them.”³⁸ Coeval, *and* prior. Assertions of coevalness in the political and legal sphere had scholarly correlates, as anthropologists like **Johannes Fabian argued, famously, that the “denial of coevalness” was an ideological weapon that had facilitated colonialism by creating a distance between the anthropologist-observer and the “primitive,” backward subject. This structure of differentiated temporalities—allochronism—represented a pressing frontier for activism: “The radical contemporaneity of mankind is a project.”**³⁹

More recently, others have doubted the adequacy (and the virtue) of a politics of contemporaneity. “Homochronism” also has its dangers, writes anthropologist Kevin Birth. It could mean the “imposition of one historically and culturally contingent, and presently powerful, temporality on both the ethnographer and the subjects of ethnography.”⁴⁰ The concept of a coeval, shared present, in Mark Rifkin’s reading, can normalize and naturalize settler understandings of time, experience, causation, and the state, as it becomes “the background against which to register and assess Native being-in-time.”⁴¹ Noncontemporaneity, too, may be an important tool of emancipation, concurred theorist Berber Bevernage, as he accepted Fabian’s critique but not his remedy.⁴² As Emma Kowal shows, the muddled politics of these temporal designations allow for no easy conclusions (and good theory may mean bad politics): both coevalness and non-coevalness entrap, albeit differently.⁴³

Those time trials are everywhere written into the law. The imperative to specify entitlements with precision and to explain the reasoning behind them makes it a hothouse chronocenosism—a virulent temporal ecosystem in which

times compete and interact and graft onto one another to create new hybrids. It is not only that indigenous rights are recognized, described, asserted, and contested in such temporalized language, and that their time is different to that of the court and the state. Often, the rights themselves are bitemporal, composed of split times sawn apart and glued together. They have a dual tense and sense. The aboriginal activists of Johnson's history asserted "their *a priori* and *continuing* occupation of and belonging to the land,"⁴⁴ and the "and" is crucial. "Indigenous governance," asserts John Borrows, "is a pre-existing and unextinguished right."⁴⁵ In these time-forked rights, formerness and currentness arrive together, uncollapsed. "We once were sovereign and we still are," writes Irene Watson.⁴⁶ Were, and.

Both halves of the "prior to, and continuing" couplet threaten the settler colonial state. They force it to reinsulate—to renarrate, relegitimize, recodify—its past and its present. But it can't do both and simultaneously preserve any semblance of conceptual coherence: its new version of the "prior to" undermines its attempt to box up the "continuing." To account for the "prior to"—given that the "barbarian theory" (*pace* Brennan in *Mabo*) no longer sufficed—the courts recognized that indigenous communities in Australia prior to British colonization possessed something like sovereignty: they were autonomous communities with their own legal systems that naturally generated rights and duties. That being so, it is then unclear how, when, and why such communities (ostensibly) lost the capacity to produce new rights and duties. The land was not legally "conquered" (occupation of *terra nullius* formed the juridical foundation instead), and those systems never formally quashed, because they were, after all, not recognized as law at the time.⁴⁷ There was no need to extinguish that which didn't exist. (Until now.) So if indigenous societies could produce law then, why can they not now?⁴⁸ Historically, there was no "off" switch flipped. Colonization unfolded unevenly and gradually in different parts of the continent; many indigenous communities had scarce contact (if any at all) with European settlers for decades. As such, how does one (belatedly) recognize (prior) sovereignty but deny its continuation?

One can do so only on a theoretical level—by way of a theory about (the impossibility of) legal pluralism. The law-generating power of indigenous communities must be regarded as extinguished at the advent of Crown sovereignty simply because there cannot be more than one law-generating power in the land. In the legal ideology of the nation-state, that is a philosophical impossibility. So the jurisgenerative capacity of indigenous communities is terminated on an abstract level, even if one cannot show that process playing out in history. As the High Court of Australia explained in upholding Justice

Olney's *Yorta Yorta* decision on appeal: "What the assertion of sovereignty by the British Crown *necessarily* entailed was that there could thereafter be *no parallel law-making system* in the territory over which it asserted sovereignty. To hold otherwise," they cautioned, "would be to deny the acquisition of sovereignty and as has been pointed out earlier, that is not permissible."⁴⁹ The imperative to preserve a theory of singular sovereignty mandated that one simply could not entertain the existence of legal pluralism of that sort. It was not allowed.

At the very heart of that conception of sovereignty, then, lies the disavowal of the jurisgenerative capacity of indigenous communities. If a morally redeemed settler state, no longer "frozen in an age of racial discrimination," must recognize that jurisgenerative capacity existed prior to Crown sovereignty, then it also relies on its (mysterious) cessation after that moment.⁵⁰ The whole question of "frozen rights" is the logical corollary of this theory of sovereignty. The rights are frozen, paused at the moment of colonization, because after that point the settler state denies the capacity of indigenous societies to produce any more law:⁵¹ "Upon the Crown acquiring sovereignty, the normative or law-making system which then existed could not thereafter validly create new rights, duties or interests."⁵² The supply line has been severed, the factory lights switched off: the indigenous rights in existence at that moment constitute a finite resource. Accordingly, rights talk becomes conservationist: as the axis of "survival" and "extinguishment" attests, all you can do with rights is preserve them.

The result is a peculiar time-staggered legal pluralism. Yes, the rights generated by a separate legal order can exist and function in the present, but only as the echoes, the remainders, of an extinguished source of lawmaking. That lawmaking force is expelled from the present and isolated to the past. It is sequential legal pluralism, legal pluralism at one historical remove, in which the components of that other order (the capacity to generate rights, and the rights themselves) are broken apart so that the coexistence of orders is only partial. Legal pluralism is conscionable because it is temporally stretched out, diluted over two centuries. Perniciously, this theoretical construction is then transformed into something that indigenous communities need to prove or enact on an anthropological level, by performing only those rights (and doing so continuously) that existed at the advent of Crown sovereignty—performing, that is, their loss of jurisgenerative capacity. Indigenous culture on the ground must mirror and replicate the needs of a precarious legal theory.

Still more, while the High Court confirmed that indigenous communities could not generate new law after Crown sovereignty, it still required that the community in question demonstrate that the "normative system"

underpinning their rights had a “continuous existence and vitality” through to the present.⁵³ The aboriginal legal order needs to show full dynamic life, even if, by the court’s own mandate or admission, its underlying lawmaking capacity has been snuffed out. To have rights recognized, that is, indigenous communities need to keep behaving as if their legal systems still wielded full force. They need to show endless faith in the normative power of that system and affirm that its deeper creative power has expired. (As though those two things were not in tension—as if this expectation did not structurally tether rights to a political naivety and powerlessness: “Show us your unwavering devotion to your traditional law” and, at the same time, “Show us how sterile and feeble it is!”). The legal systems must operate on repeat, in a mouse wheel where one peddles and peddles but never moves: remaining endlessly committed to the norms in existence but never producing any more. As Kirstin Anker observed in her critique of the “incoherent” legal pluralism of the *Yorta Yorta* decision: “To speak of surviving rights and interests, or an enduring legal system, without the capacity to create law, gives the system the character of a shell empty of the organism to animate it and give it social sense.”⁵⁴ The courts require indigenous law to be alive and dead at the same time.

More precisely, the courts recognize legal pluralism only on the condition that it will soon expire, if it hasn’t already. It has a limited shelf life. Indigenous people may hold rights, but they are denied the capacity to (re)produce rights: settler law sanctions indigenous legal systems only after having sterilized them so that they are incapable of reproducing themselves. Once that last crop of rights—harvested at the moment of colonization—is used up, there will be no more. “Once traditional native title expires,” the *Mabo* judgment explains, “the Crown’s radical title expands to a full beneficial title, for then there is no other proprietor than the Crown.”⁵⁵ It is legal pluralism with an expiry date, legal pluralism with inbuilt obsolescence. Colonization is still unfolding, but soon to be complete. As such, the law resurrects and institutionalizes a juridical version of a colonial understanding of indigenous people as destined to die out. Their rights will gradually, naturally, become extinct (and, this time, will do so without troubling the conscience of the settler state). Native title rights are like a “stolen generation” of rights: forcibly removed from the context and possibility of their reproduction, they must survive in hostile institutions predicated on their pending disappearance.

Ghost States and Fantasy Law: Codifying the Undead

Does non-synchronous sovereignty of this sort have a history? If we sought genealogies for legal pluralism as temporal pluralism, where might we look?

Anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli opens up one path when she sublimates indigenous-settler relations into a broader “formation of power” she calls the “governance of the prior.” Rooted in the priority of the prior, this “mode of political imaginary and manoeuvre” underpins sovereignty but is not equivalent to it: it is the underlying problematic that sees both the state and the indigenous “caught in strategic manoeuvres of temporalization and territorialization”—a reflexive relation of “mutual implication and rejection.”⁵⁶ The governance of the prior, in Povinelli’s account, is not simply the predicament of contemporary settler colonial polities. On the contrary, she presents it as the foundational complex of the modern state more generally: “The sociological figure of the indigenous (the first or prior) person is necessary to produce the modern western form of nation-state sovereignty even as it continually undermines this same form.”⁵⁷ She gestures toward an early modern genealogy: “The priority of the prior person (or people) as a natural right of all persons and the people as such emerged as an impediment to the previous logics of kingly seizure and to the emergent logic of colonial governance.”⁵⁸ Until actually quashed or purchased or conquered, the rights of the prior must prevail: this was an emerging understanding of jurisdiction that deferred to priorness and fettered kingly prerogatives.

In his Collège de France lectures *Society Must Be Defended*, Michel Foucault isolated a similar mobilization of priorness as the origins of modern historical discourse more broadly. Who needs history—who needs history as a language of right? It is not the king, who has recourse to divine right; nor is it the emerging bourgeoisie, who rise armed with Rousseauist natural right. It is the aristocracy who, faced with the absolutist, centralizing pretensions of the king, must develop a genre of claim that resurrects and preserves their preexisting, historical rights and prerogatives. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, French and English nobility cultivated a “counter-knowledge” recovered against the current power and public right of the king, a form of knowledge that looked “to get outside right, to get behind right and to slip into its interstices,” to “attack public right at the roots, to reinsert the institutions of public right into an older network of deeper, more solemn, and more essential commitments,” to “decipher and recall everything beneath that has fallen into abeyance.”⁵⁹

The possible resurrection of all that lies beneath, of all that lingers behind and before the public right of the sovereign, haunts the inception of the modern state with its quest for centralized singularity. That foundational tension was perhaps nowhere more visible than in the Habsburg Empire, where it grew into an explicit, rolling jurisprudence on the nature of sovereignty over the last seventy years of the empire’s life. While in France revolution

obliterated those traditional and feudal rights, in the Habsburg Monarchy they had never been explicitly quashed. As the state modernized and centralized in the era of enlightened absolutism and beyond, they were merely sidelined, papered over, and willfully neglected—a stockpile of half-forgotten historical rights collecting dust beneath the floorboards of the state. Their legality technically unimpaired, they remained particularly ripe for resurrection. The case has a particular claim on our interest not only because it presents an analogously temporalized legal pluralism—one that turned on the continuity and rupture of rights, their vitality and their eclipse. More than that: in the Habsburg Empire we also witness the morphology of the rights of the prior. The debate over its sovereign structure saw rights and rights languages from different eras clash and interact—from the counterknowledges of early modern feudal-dynastic politics to the principles of liberal constitutionalism, legal positivism, and ethnic nationalism. Habsburg constitutional law tried to hold them all suspended at once, as the rights of the prior filtered through the shifting political idioms of modern history.

The initial trigger for the resurrection of these lapsed legalities came when the uprisings of 1848 forced the government to give in to liberal demands for an imperial constitution. A constitution, of course, requires one to describe the nature of the state's sovereignty—to weigh and order the world of rights and articulate the relationship of different powers. Sleeping rights, suspended rights, superseded rights—a whole army of undead laws now resurfaced as a counterknowledge against Vienna's centralism and demanded their rightful place in the great juridical accounting project of the constitution. These old bodies of feudal law—essentially connected to the traditional prerogatives of aristocratic landholders—had surprising new advocates and applications: they became a useful language of right for emerging national movements seeking autonomy within the imperial state. What had become of former sovereignty of all the empire's component lands—Bohemia, Hungary, Croatia? No one could prove they had been officially buried. Could the prior rights of these prior sovereignties really now, after slumbering for centuries, remerge back into the light to qualify and dilute the power of the emperor? Debate rolled on through the empire's various constitutional orders (1848, 1849, 1860, 1861, and 1867): historical law and historical rights became a central language of regional claim making, not least because it was more palatable to the dynasty than outright nationalist claims.

“From the legal perspective of the Bohemian people,” declared Czech politician Karel Kramář in 1896, “Bohemian state law is thus the only law that affects the lands of the Bohemian crown.” Kramář was one of the staunchest advocates for Bohemia's historical rights: if this adamant assertion of a hard

legal pluralism went further than most, its underlying worldview had animated the Czech national revival and structured constitutional claim making since 1848. Bohemia had not been smothered under the blanket of imperial sovereignty, Kramář argued, despite its amalgamation into the Habsburg Monarchy more than three hundred years earlier: it retained its legal integrity and the bundle of autochthonous rights and laws that it held at the moment of imperial incorporation. The central features of this body of law included “the right to the unrestricted legislative and administrative independence of the lands of the Bohemian crown.”⁶⁰ Kramář described this residual historical autonomy as a form of sovereignty pending renewal. Our historical state law, he maintained a few years later, “is nothing other than the legal content of the state sovereignty of the lands of the Bohemian crown, their indivisibility, unity, and constitutional individuality.”⁶¹

The problem with such claims was simple: in a basic, material sense, this autonomy, this sovereignty, patently did not exist. Few would have denied that Bohemia once possessed a full canopy of sovereign-like prerogatives, but the nineteenth-century realities of imperial rule only dimly reflected those historical rights. Centuries of slow centralization from Vienna had made it immaterial to the functioning of the state. “It is correct that the Austrian crownlands once *were* states,” the international jurist Josef Kunz would write in 1929, emphasizing the past tense. In his analysis, by the nineteenth century they had sunk to the level of mere legal shells or symbols, “*historical reminiscences*.”⁶² At the heart of these appeals to legal autonomy and quasi sovereignty, then, lay the idea that such rights still existed on a legal-theoretical plane, that they had not been formally eclipsed or superseded even if they were (unjustly) ignored by the government in the present. They may not be so visible on the material surface of state life, but they were good law nonetheless. Such arguments thus turned on the historical durability and duration of old laws: could they have survived centuries of semi-oblivion and still be live law, living law? Could the empire be politically centralized and still be (technically, platonically) legally plural?

When Kramář asserted that the Czech national “final goal” was the “renewal of the legislative and administrative right of self-determination of the lands of the Bohemian crown within the framework of a federalized Austria,”⁶³ he was clear-eyed and unapologetic about the temporal architecture of this program. “This is no romantic historicism, as is so often charged, but rather a very realistic policy, that is, [a policy of] not forsaking the legal fundamentals on which we all must stand, whether we want to or not. Precisely because our state right is a timeless, legitimate right.”⁶⁴ These rights weathered time with apparent impunity, staring down the collective weight of

lapsed centuries in defiance; one could deny their persistent legitimacy only if denied the intergenerational transfer of law more generally. Bohemian state rights were not a problem “but rather an always-existing legal state of affairs [*immer bestehender Rechtszustand*].”⁶⁵ In an argument that might remind us of *Mabo* (a century and a hemisphere away), he maintained that such laws could be undone only by a source or method recognized within that system itself. The undoing of Bohemian rights would have required the accession of the Bohemian diet: without its sanction, any imperial “laws” to the contrary could not be considered legitimate law. Their own legitimacy unimpaired, the old laws lingered on, undead.

Unsurprisingly, claims of this sort elicited the scorn of harder-headed centralists. When, during the debates of the 1849 constitutional committee of the newborn imperial parliament, the Moravian-German centralist (and future justice minister) Franz von Hein confronted Bohemian proposals for the judiciary to be classed as a prerogative of the historical lands, he did not mince words. “The Bohemians may want to remain living in the fantasy that they form an independent kingdom, but they remain in fact only a province.”⁶⁶ Fantasy states, states-in-law, were a contradiction in terms: the tide of history (we might say) had washed away the reality of those prior sovereignties.

But the life and vitality of historical rights was hard to measure, not to mention uneven across the empire’s many lands and regions. František Palacký, leader of the Czech national revival, was less optimistic about the survival of Bohemian historical rights but ruefully admired Hungary’s success in guarding its own law against supersession: “Hungary alone,” he reflected, had “preserved . . . through all the hostile efforts and through all adversity, its constitutional life and its autonomy in form and essence simultaneously, while in Bohemia and in the other lands usually only old forms, as well as some old titles and ceremonies though without significant meaning, were left in place.”⁶⁷

Rights, prerogatives, and institutions did not travel smoothly through time: they splintered and fractured, so that the content might crumble away from the symbols in which it lived. A brittle time texture. In Hungary alone were form and essence coterminous; in Bohemia and the other lands, forms had been drained of meaning, so that the trappings of sovereignty—the survival of a title here, the structure of a ceremony there—had become vessels flushed of content. If, in contemporary Australia, the courts debated whether the shells of traditional indigenous customs were still animated by normative force, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire the answer to that same question varied across the empire’s different lands. Bohemian titles and rights, according to Palacký, were not really living legal organisms—in contrast to Hungary,

where indigenous law could still (re)grow: “The core of Hungarian institutions is in itself so healthy and vital [*lebenskräftig*] that in my opinion one should cultivate it in the other lands too; it contains within itself a life-fresh [*lebensfrischen*] seed of true land autonomy” and commanded great capacity for reform and improvement.⁶⁸ *Lebenskräftig*, *lebensfrisch*—Hungarian rights lived, whereas others approached museum pieces—stiff, listless, mummified. The relative strength or weakness of the empire’s historical quasi sovereignties was measured not only through evidence of a preserved past but also against the capacity for their own emergent futures—the capacity to grow and flourish.

In recalling all that had “fallen into abeyance,” claim makers from the Habsburg lands drew attention to a kettle of historical qualifications crusted on to the authority of the sovereign. When Hungarians complained of the government’s “total disregard of historical law,”⁶⁹ or Moravians protested any measure that contravened their “independence” and their freedoms,⁷⁰ or Bohemians invoked their “unperishable rights,”⁷¹ they insisted on the priority of the prior. Unlike the stable of currently valid law, so unselfconscious in its simultaneity, these historical rights were alienated from the present and resisted its monopoly on legitimacy: thanks to the government’s disregard, they had lost the temporal neutrality of regular law.⁷² Yet they also fell short of the general atemporality of natural law. German historian (and erstwhile member of the Nazi Party) Erwin Hölzle developed a typology of legal claims of this style in his 1954 essay “Historisches Recht.” One needed to distinguish between current or prevailing (*geltende*) positive law, he wrote, and elapsed (*vergangenen*) law, which originated in positive law but had been buried through the passing of long centuries. Appeals to this “old law” (*altes Recht*) often arose when current law appeared to violate it. How best to characterize this style of claim? Karl Mannheim had identified an “originary conservatism,” which Hölzle deemed too closely tied to the historical concepts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Jurists like Karl Bergbohm and Georg Jellinek wrote of a “reactionary natural law,” whereas Friedrich Meinecke, more pertinently, had discussed a “historically converted natural law” (*historisch umgewandelten Naturrechts*). These authors were right to highlight the affinity with natural law claims in the appeal to a primeval or foundational period, conceded Hölzle. Yet these terms, too, missed the mark, because “it is in fact an historical law that is reclaimed, not a law retrieved from reason, from nature.” And “reactionary” was ill suited for a genre of legal claim that usually strove for freedom. Thus, “next to current state law [*geltendes Staatsrecht*] and eternal natural law, we must posit another ‘law,’ which is not retrieved from current validity or from reason, but from history.”

“Historical law,” in his casting, “signified a past law, but *nevertheless a law*,” and it joined together a seemingly contradictory range of human drives: it comprised a “longing for the primitive, the archetype, the natural state—the historical aspect of natural law,” connected with a “golden age” and “an eschatology turned backward,” while at the same time, in sharp contrast, “the instinct for revolution.”⁷³ Hanging back from the present, yet not consigned to history, and summoning a transformed future, these historical rights gifted imperial sovereignty its pluralist patina through the irregular syncopation of uneven time rather than the pockmarks of uneven space. Hölzle’s own positionality, meanwhile, signals a subsequent chapter in the morphology of the rights of the prior. Those sympathetic to National Socialism had their own reasons to turn back toward the old rights of the land, with their whiff of both archaism and revolution, to undercut the timeless nowhere of liberalism, as Otto Brunner and Carl Schmitt most prominently attest.⁷⁴

What does it mean for a state to be structured around laws of and from disparate times, with spatial extent marked as historical difference? This, too, was debated explicitly in the Habsburg lands. After a decade-long return to absolutism in the 1850s—in which Emperor Franz Josef tried to impose a centralized, singular sovereign order—foreign and domestic crises led the government back to the negotiating table. In 1860, the emperor created an “enlarged imperial council.” Its majority report, spearheaded by the Hungarian Antal Szécsen, argued forcefully that the empire’s foundations could be properly fortified only through recognition of the historical lands and a return to their historic laws and institutions, especially their diets—that is, a return to the empire’s historical-legal pluralism. No “theoretical conception,” Szécsen declared, could replace the particular character given through “nature, history, and those relationships ripened with time.”⁷⁵ The lands possessed a historical individuality, and this “pluralism,” in the words of Bohemian noble Heinrich Jaroslav Clam-Martinic, to the extent that it articulated a “unity in multiplicity,” bespoke the “foundational character of the monarchy.”⁷⁶

Centralists like Franz von Hein, spokesperson for the dissenting members of the imperial council, saw only temporal chaos in such a plan. Szécsen’s majority report, Hein recounted, made the participation of the lands in the functions of government dependent on the resurrection of historical institutions (especially the estates diets). Yet “these institutions have very different natures, according to the different time periods [*Zeitabschnitten*] out of which they are called up.” Some had hardly survived or were no longer fit for life. These discrepancies would create a profoundly uneven legal landscape in which equality between the lands was impossible.⁷⁷ Clam-Martinic responded that the historical institutions would be adapted to the times, not

imported from the past in frozen form (evolution in continuity, if you will). Just as much as he was against the “total misrecognition and disavowal of history,” and the desire to begin “a new time calculation [*Zeitrechnung*]” with the rupture of 1848, he was equally against attempts “to hold on to some sort of time-point expired in history, to want to fetch deceased institutions out of the past,” as the minority *Votum* charged. “I cannot concede that twelve years,” he said, referring to the period of centralist rule, “has cleanly swept way the work of centuries—but I also do not want to grant the past the power, nor the right, to supplant the present.”⁷⁸

Hein was not placated by this subtle parsing of law, time, and legitimacy. The empire’s legal pluralism, according to Hein’s warning, would involve a dangerous temporal pluralism, with institutions from different centuries, shaped by wildly varying assumptions, all revived simultaneously into the empire’s present. Different historical eras would structure legal arrangements in different parts of the polity, turning the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous into formal, positive law. This temporal disaggregation had dire sovereign consequences. In deferring so emphatically to the historical individuality of the lands, and connecting it to “autonomy in administration and internal legislation,” Hein argued, the majority report threatened to radically disperse emperor’s sovereignty. For if “one speaks of the historical-political individualities, which are accorded complete autonomy in administration and international legislation, gentlemen!, then one speaks of ‘empires,’ of ‘states,’ not of ‘crownlands’; ‘states in states,’ ‘parallel states,’ ‘Austria would be a state confederation’ and the sovereign would actually become a sovereign in every land.”⁷⁹

A revival of historical legal systems along these lines could result only in a string of separate sovereignties—a full-throated return to the medieval logic of composite monarchy where the many-crowned king was a different monarch in each of his lands. Moreover, it would hold imperial law ransom to history’s fluid instability, with each group appealing to an ungovernable plurality of precedents and periods. While the Hungarians had their own desired past, in “the other lands, one might want to reach back to institutions lying far back in history, and everywhere where one asks and listens one will receive different answers, someone will want to go far back in history, someone else less far.” This would frustrate equality in principle and practice.⁸⁰ These temporal discrepancies could not all functionally coexist in a kind of self-regulating chronocenosis: rather, their structural antagonism destroyed the possibility of empirewide legal equality and the liberal promise of the constitutional age. Against this ostensibly pathological temporal-legal pluralism, Hein asserted the necessity of a singular temporal anchor purified of history’s distractions:

“The point of departure of the minority [report] was the present, the complete power of His Majesty and the existing institutions of the present.”⁸¹

Hein’s warning notwithstanding, the Imperial Council’s majority report carried the day and fundamentally shaped the emperor’s next move. The following month, Franz Josef formally bought the decade of neo-absolutism to a close with a series of new fundamental laws that formally (if belatedly) codified the empire’s historical legal architecture into positive constitutional law. “Only such institutions and legal arrangements,” declared the October Diploma, “which accord simultaneously with the historical legal consciousness [*geschichtlichen Rechtsbewußtsein*], the existing differences of our kingdoms and lands, and the needs of their indivisible and inseparable union,” could safeguard the monarchy’s security, predominance, and peaceful cooperation.⁸² Crucially, the diploma acknowledged the legislative rights of the diets of the kingdoms and lands: henceforth, they could make law in their own right. Another law of the same day explicitly called the historical Hungarian constitution “back to life.”⁸³ Advocates of historical rights naturally understood the “concessions” of 1860 not as the creation of something new but as the continuation of that which had existed before and that, in fact, “legally had never ceased to exist.”⁸⁴

The subsequent “Compromise” of 1867 took the logic of legal pluralism to a radical conclusion, acknowledging Hungary as a sovereign state on its own terms, albeit one joined at the hip with and equally sovereign “Austria,” in an experimental bi-sovereignty that created the “dual monarchy” of “Austria-Hungary,” a hyphenated state. These constitutions and hyphens brokered compromises not only between different parts of the empire but also between times: the old historical rights of the estates (like the Hungarian diet, with its “ancient constitution”) were recalled and retooled and mashed together with the institutions and principles of a liberal constitutional state(s). If these creative legal reorderings tested the elasticity of the state form, probing its tolerance for chrono-juridical plurality, they also entailed a conceptual incoherence that would transfix scholars and stall many institutions of state over the empire’s last decades.

✱

If Johannes Fabian was right and temporal pluralism served as a legitimating force for European colonial rule in the non-European world, then it becomes all the more interesting to consider the different ways temporal pluralism figured in other (here, Continental) imperial formations. Those involved in constitutional debate in the Habsburg Empire discussed the “indigenous” law of various parts of the empire as tied to different time periods, yet these

temporal discrepancies were not necessarily hierarchical and certainly not sequential. Rather than a stigma or distancing device, historical law represented autonomy and individuality within the imperial structure, while coevalness was tied to empire and state building, tied the imposition of a homogeneous, uniform imperial jurisdiction—reversing or rearranging the values of Fabian’s schema. If centralists like Hein acknowledged the temporal diversity of imperial holdings, they did so to delegitimize any normative order founded on that diversity and to assert the need for greater synchrony and a common (legal) time. Those temporal discrepancies, moreover, did not map onto “backwardness” in the usual usage in the context of East Central Europe: the thickness or proximity of history could ground greater status and power, as in the case of Hungary.⁸⁵

This imperial quest for coevalness, and the shifting political valence of temporal alterity, invites comparison with another of the continental empires, the Soviet Union, where policy makers also worried about a temporally uneven state. Working within a Marxist developmental timeline, Lenin placed different ethnohistorical units at different stages of national development aligned with successive socioeconomic periodizations—primitive, feudal, capitalist, and so on. As a result, the challenge was to build a strong, coeval state out of these temporally disparate communities. Mixing cultural evolutionism with a Marxist theory of history, Soviet policy makers embraced a program of what historian Francine Hirsch has called “state sponsored evolutionism.” They attempted to hurry certain communities along the timeline by increasing the pace of historical development in a game of historical catch-up, so that everyone might be brought into alignment in the same stage of historical development.⁸⁶ Here, temporal alterity was to be overcome not through its subsumption into the unmarked present of the liberal state or perennially current positivist public right, but through a common leap beyond the liberal-bourgeois state: a project not of dissolving the marks of historical time but of collectively pushing them further. Coevalness as common (if coerced) motion in lockstep rather than motionless abstraction.

If the problem of non-synchrony weaves all through the making, unmaking, and remaking of states, this essay has focused on moments where that temporal pluralism becomes an explicit challenge for law—something law is forced to confront and conceptualize, something it tries to quash, tame, arrange, or regulate. In so doing, it can generate forms of legal pluralism in which the coexistence of different orders is understood and graded in temporal terms. Stretched out between feudal continental Europe and dominion settler colonialism, these cases invite us to think further about the state’s consolidation and fortification of jurisdiction as control over time and not just

space. They suggest the contours of an unfamiliar history of the liberal state in forced reckoning with the rights of the prior—with the world of rights that preceded its own founding: from the nineteenth-century heyday of liberal state making, when a would-be modern constitutional state waded through the wreckage of old princely sovereignties, to the post facto legitimacy crisis of the (settler) liberal state as it reckons with its enormous debt to empire and racial hierarchy. In both instances, the undead rights of the prior bear witness to the historical creation of the state: they are constant reminders that it has not always existed, that it is a contingent product of history, that its creation required (attempted) erasure, that its normative order is not limitless or timeless but finite and specific. They are messengers from a time-place beyond current sovereign control: their survival grates into its present and its power. As such, they confront the state with the limits of its sovereignty, and history becomes the name and the shape of that limit. These historical rights of the prior do not allow the state to rest: it must always be remaking itself, revisiting and amending the stitching of its original founding, sealing off historical wellsprings of law, and devising new ways of making old rights dead.

Notes

Thanks to Miranda Johnson, Ben Silverstein, Katharina Schmidt, the 2018–2019 Davis fellows at Princeton (I am particularly indebted to Elizabeth Thornberry’s intervention), and thoughtful audiences at the Yale Legal History Forum and the Vanderbilt Legal History Colloquium, especially John Witt, Taisu Zhang, Lauren Benton, David Blackbourn, Dan Sharfstein, and Paul Kramer.

1. Gregor Noll, “Theorizing Jurisdiction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Theory of International Law*, ed. Anne Orford and Florian Hoffmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 601.

2. Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788–1836* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

3. Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 7, 225. As she writes on p. 278: “The very notion of divided sovereignty seemed linked to the natural political and cultural fissures of enclave regions.”

4. In prioritizing these recurring practices, Benton makes a series of striking historiographical interventions, including a strident case that we need to begin with imperial law as practiced rather than imperial law in “the books.” It is because those microlegal descriptions and decisions on the ground follow patterns and refer to one another that we can view them collectively as a kind of imperial constitution. As Benton and Ford have argued together most recently, this imperial regulatory regime in turn spilled over to interimperial coordination and competition, meaning that the origins of international law arguably lie here rather than exclusively in treaties made by metropolitan states. A new history of international law thereby emerges, one with alternate sources, chronologies, and evolutionary dynamics. Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

5. Mawani's work on Indian settlers in South Africa offers another example of the temporal arrangement of empire's law: in the "Asian settler debate," she argues, "judicial-racial taxonomies were also *temporal divisions*" and corresponded to "differing degrees of political sovereignty." Renisa Mawani, "Law as Temporality: Colonial Politics and Indian Settlers," *UC Irvine Law Review* 4 (2014): 68, 69 (emphasis in original). For recent accounts that consciously combine axes of time and space in analyzing law, see Renisa Mawani and Iza Hussin, "The Travels of Law: Indian Ocean Itineraries," *Law and History Review* 32, no. 4 (2014): 733–47; Mariana Valverde, *Chronotopes of Law: Jurisdiction, Scale, and Governance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

6. See our introduction to this volume, where we propose chronocenosis as a way of theorizing not simply the multiplicity of temporal regimes but also their conflictual, competitive, adaptive interaction. As we argue there, the power-time nexus fundamentally relocates the work of political rule into the structure of chronocenosis, as political authority is made and managed through this interlocked field of competing temporalities.

7. For a brilliant contextualization of the landmark *Mabo* judgment—both in Australian history and as part of the indigenous land rights movements that emerged in parallel across Canada, New Zealand, and Australia in the 1970s—see Miranda Johnson, *The Land Is Our History: Indigeneity, Law, and the Settler State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

8. Intellectual and legal historians have produced several new histories of *terra nullius* in recent years. See Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property, and Empire, 1500–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Andrew Fitzmaurice, "The Genealogy of Terra Nullius," *Australian Historical Studies* 38 (2007): 1–15; Lauren Benton and Benjamin Straumann, "Acquiring Empire by Law: From Roman Doctrine to Early Modern European Practice," *Law and History Review* 28, no. 1 (2010): 1–38; Stuart Banner, "Why Terra Nullius? Anthropology and Property Law in Early Australia," *Law and History Review* 23, no. 1 (2005): 95–131.

9. *Mabo v. Queensland (No 2)* [1992] HCA 23, at 38, 41 (per Brennan, J).

10. *Mabo v. Queensland (No 2)*, at 18, 35, 40, 45, 48, 49, 52, 58, 59 (per Brennan, J). Ben Silverstein argues, strikingly, that the *Mabo* judges reasoned between two central legal precedents from British Africa—one from Southern Rhodesia and the other from Nigeria—and, in so doing, "reproduced the legal resolution of these struggles over sovereignty in the British African colonies of the interwar period" in their understanding of native title in Australia. Ben Silverstein, "Submerged Sovereignty: Native Title within a History of Incorporation," in *Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility*, ed. Julie Evans, Ann Genovese, Alexander Reilly, and Patrick Wolfe (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 73.

11. *Mabo v. Queensland (No 2)*, at 62 (per Brennan, J).

12. *Mabo v. Queensland (No 2)*, at 72 (per Brennan, J).

13. See A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).

14. "Native title, though recognized by the common law, is not an institution of the common law and is not alienable by the common law. Its alienability is dependent on the laws from which it is derived." *Mabo v. Queensland (No 2)*, at 65 (per Brennan, J). It is important to note, though, that native title is deemed extinguishable by "acts of state." On the resulting conceptual tangle, and the deep "ambivalence regarding the autonomy of the state" on display in the *Mabo* decision, see Ian Hunter, "Native Title: Acts of State and the Rule of Law," *The Australian Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (1993): 97–109.

15. *Mabo v. Queensland (No 2)*, at 65 (per Brennan J) (emphasis added).

16. The significance of Brennan's "tide of history" passage is its "suggestion of the importance of considering the continuity in the practices, customs and traditions of aboriginal communities

in assessing claims to aboriginal rights. It is precisely those present practices, customs and traditions which can be identified as having continuity with the practices, customs and traditions that existed prior to contact that will be the basis for the identification and definition of aboriginal rights under s. 35(1).” *R v. Van der Peet* [1996] 2 SCR 507, at 63 (per Lamer, CJ).

17. See Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

18. *R v. Van der Peet*, at 65 (per Lamer, CJ).

19. *R v. Van der Peet*, at 64 (per Lamer, CJ).

20. In *Delgamuukw* (1997), the Supreme Court of Canada held that aboriginal title included not only rights to customary practices but also the land on which they were based. Although continuity was required as proof of presovereignty occupation, the chain did not need to be “unbroken”: “The occupation and use of lands may have been disrupted for a time, perhaps as a result of the unwillingness of European colonizers to recognize aboriginal title.” The appropriate criterion was rather a “substantial maintenance of the connection” between the people and the land—a formulation he borrowed from *Mabo. Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010, at 126, 151, 153 (per Lamer, CJ).

21. *R v. Van der Peet*, at 89, 91 (per Lamer, CJ).

22. For a counterpoint to the *Yorta Yorta* case that follows, see the Noongar settlement covering southwestern Western Australia that involved a greater degree of evidentiary flexibility.

23. *Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v. Victoria* [1998] FCA 1606, at 129 (per Olney, J).

24. *Yorta Yorta* [1998], at 123 (per Olney, J).

25. *Yorta Yorta* [1998], at 124 (per Olney, J). See also Olney similar reasoning regarding the “traditional” practice of requiring member of other tribes to gain permission to enter the lands (126).

26. On tradition as a “rights-bearing sign” and the terror of authenticity, see Elizabeth A. Povinelli, “Settler Modernity and the Quest for an Indigenous Tradition,” *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 32 and generally.

27. H. Patrick Glenn, “Continuity and Discontinuity of Aboriginal Entitlement,” *Oxford University Commonwealth Law Journal* 7, no. 1 (2007): 29.

28. John Borrows, “Unextinguished: Rights and the *Indian Act*,” *University of New Brunswick Law Journal* 67 (2016): 18.

29. John Borrows, “Challenging Historical Frameworks: Aboriginal Rights, the Trickster, and Originalism,” *Canadian Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (2017): 133.

30. John Borrows, “Frozen Rights in Canada: Constitutional Interpretation and the Trickster,” *American Indian Law Review* 22, no. 1 (1997–1998): 49.

31. “Why is it that European laws, practices and traditions, some of which developed solely through contact with Aboriginal peoples, are allowed to grow and develop from the moment of contact, while Aboriginal laws and practices, which also developed from the same moment of contact, are stifled in their progression?” Borrows, “Frozen Rights,” 58. “Cultural stagnation,” Ben Golder has written of the *Yorta Yorta* decision, was “installed simultaneously as the index of *Yorta Yorta* society and as a legal prerequisite for attaining land justice.” Ben Golder, “Law, History, Colonialism: An Orientalist Reading of Australian Native Title Law,” *Deakin Law Review* 9, no. 1 (2004): 52.

32. Borrows, “Frozen Rights,” 60.

33. It is worth noting that in many senses, these recurring metaphors of freezing and refrigeration are inapt, as the prospect of successful thawing, of being returned to full life, is not part of the equation. The contrast here to cryopolitics is striking. If frozen indigenous biosamples form another crucial contemporary site for struggles over indigenous pasts, futures, and traditions, then, as Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal have shown, it is because they are suspended between “latent life” and “incomplete death.” The settler state discourse about preserved indigenous rights contains no analogous horizon of anticipation and potential. See Emma Kowal and Joanna Radin in this volume; and Joanna Radin, *Life on Ice: A History of New Uses for Cold Blood* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).

34. Borrows, “Unextinguished.”

35. Irene Watson, “The Future Is Our Past: We Once Were Sovereign and We Still Are,” *Indigenous Law Bulletin* 8, no. 3 (2012): 12.

36. Irene Watson, “First Nations, Indigenous Peoples: Our Laws Have Always Been Here,” in *Indigenous Peoples as Subjects of International Law*, ed. Irene Watson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 99.

37. Johnson, *The Land Is Our History*, 28, 29. Johnson’s subtle history shows how coevalness could be instantiated and obliterated in the same transaction: “They found that the coevalness they asserted in bringing their claims into the courtroom could be denied by legal evidentiary processes that were supposed to accommodate them” (11).

38. Johnson, *The Land Is Our History*, 15–34, 53.

39. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), xi. Also: “It takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West (and to anthropology) if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of its Other” (35).

40. Kevin Birth, “The Creation of Coevalness and the Danger of Homochronism,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14, no. 1 (2008): 16.

41. Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), viii: “Why would the concept of inherently shared time be more liberatory or less conducive to settler superintendence?”

42. Berber Bevernage, “Tales of Pastness and Contemporaneity: On the Politics of Time in History and Anthropology,” *Rethinking History* 20, no. 3 (2016): 352–74.

43. In her ethnography of “white antiracists,” Kowal explores how progressive, white antiracists are reluctant to abandon allochronism, because it offers, first, a reassuring alternative to assimilation, incorporation, and cultural destruction and, second, a means of explaining indigenous behaviors that would otherwise be coded as dysfunctional or immoral. In her compelling account, no path avoids troubling consequences: “In these examples, if allochronism were to end, it would both lessen alterity and heighten it. It would allow Indigenous people to accumulate time across the human lifespan rather than being tied to the protracted timescales of anthropomorphised culture. But it would also remove the sanitising effect of anthropological culture in explaining ‘immoral’ behaviours.” Indeed, “Freed—or perhaps exiled—from their temporal distinctiveness, disadvantaged Indigenous Australians would join the legions of needy non-indigenous people requiring assistance from the state. Whether this would be a welcome recognition or a tragic misrecognition remains to be seen.” Emma Kowal, “Time, Indigeneity and White Anti-Racism in Australia,” *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 26 (2015): 103, 106.

44. Johnson, *The Land Is Our History*, 6. As the political philosophers Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, and Will Sanders phrase it, “Indigenous peoples’ claims to prior and continued

sovereignty over their territories question the source and legitimacy of state authority.” Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, and Will Sanders, introduction to *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, and Will Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

45. John Borrows, “Unextinguished: Rights and the *Indian Act*,” *University of New Brunswick Law Journal* 67 (2016): 7.

46. Watson, “The Future Is Our Past.”

47. See Gerry Simpson, “*Mabo*, International Law and Terra Nullius,” *Melbourne University Law Review* 19 (1993): 195–210.

48. On this question, see also Silverstein, “Submerged Sovereignty,” 73–78.

49. *Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v. Victoria* [2002] HCA 58, at 44 (per Gleeson, CJ; Gummow and Hayne, JJ) (emphasis added).

50. Ben Silverstein, in “Submerged Sovereignty,” employs the language of supersession: “Where legal narratives of settler sovereignty had previously relied on the absence of any rival sovereignties for force and legitimacy, they would now be based on the incorporation of newly recognized, but superseded, Indigenous sovereignties” (61).

51. Small wonder a new generation of indigenous legal scholars are asserting and theorizing the ongoing (or renewable) jurisgenerative capacity of indigenous legal systems. See, e.g., Carwyn Jones, “The Scope and Significance of Maori Legal History,” *Te Pouhere Korero* 3 (2009): 45–62; and his experimenting with the form of legal writing accordingly: Carwyn Jones, “Maui and Kahu’s Excellent Adventure: Research Methodologies—A Maori Story,” *Indigenous Law Bulletin* 6, no. 12 (2005): 2–3. As Val Napoleon writes, “Because of the presence of Canadian law, and the lies and efforts to stop Indigenous law, some Indigenous laws are sleeping. It is time to awaken them.” Val Napoleon, “Thinking about Indigenous Legal Orders,” in *Dialogues on Human Rights and Legal Pluralism*, ed. René Provost and Colleen Sheppard (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 229. Advocating a reconceptualization of history’s role in contemporary indigenous legal worlds, John Borrows writes in “Challenging Historical Frameworks” that law must “regard the ‘past’ as a grab-bag of possibilities for present reasoning rather than as a constraint on present developments because they do not have analogues in a bygone era” (125). Here we might also note alternative ways of conceptualizing indigenous claims to sovereignty that rely not on land possession but on, for example, cultural practice and knowledge, as in the Waitangi Tribunal claim on “flora and fauna” (WAI 262). For the resulting government report, see New Zealand, Waitangi Tribunal, *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei: A Report into Claims Concerning New Zealand Law and Policy Affecting Māori Culture and Identity* (Wellington: Legislation Direct, 2011), https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/Documents/WT/wt_DOC_68356054/KoAotearoaTeneiTT1W.pdf. Thanks to Miranda Johnson on this point.

52. *Yorta Yorta* [2002], at 43 (per Gleeson, CJ; Gummow and Hayne, JJ).

53. *Yorta Yorta* [2002], at 47 (per Gleeson, CJ; Gummow and Hayne, JJ) (emphasis added).

54. Kirsten Anker, “Law in the Present Tense: Tradition and Cultural Continuity in *Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v. Victoria*,” *Melbourne University Law Review* 28, no. 1 (2004): 20.

55. *Mabo v. Queensland (No 2)*, at 66 (per Brennan, J).

56. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, “The Governance of the Prior,” *Interventions* 13, no. 1 (2011): 14, 15, 16.

57. Povinelli, 15.

58. Povinelli, 17.

59. Michel Foucault, “*Society Must be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, trans. David Macey (London: Penguin, 2004), 130, 131, 132.

60. Karel Kramář, *Das böhmische Staatsrecht* (Vienna: Verlag “Die Zeit,” 1896), 34.

61. “Weil das Staatsrecht nichts anderes ist als der rechtliche Inhalt der Staatssouveränität der Länder der böhmischen Krone, deren Unteilbarkeit, Einheit und staatsrechtliche Individualität.” Karel Kramář, *Anmerkungen zur Böhmischesn Politik*, trans. Josef Penížek (Vienna: Verlagsbuchhandlung Carl Konegen, 1906), 136.

62. “Es ist richtig, daß die österreichischen Kronländer einmal Staaten waren.” Josef L. Kunz, *Die Staatenverbindungen*, Handbuch des Völkerrechts (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1929), vol. 2, pt. 4, 216–17 (emphasis in original).

63. Kramář, *Anmerkungen zur Böhmischesn Politik*, 4.

64. Kramář, 74.

65. Kramář, 137.

66. Anton Springer, ed., *Protokolle des Verfassungs-Ausschusses im Österreichischen Reichstag 1848–1849* (Leipzig: G. Hirzel, 1885), 68.

67. František Palacký, *Oesterreichs Staatsidee* (Prague: J. L. Kober, 1866), 48 (emphasis added).

68. Palacký, 61.

69. Paul (Pál) von Somssich, *Das legitime Recht Ungarns und seines Königs* (Vienna: Jasper, Hügel & Manz, 1850), 22.

70. See, for example, the April 9, 1861, “Rechtsverwahrung” of the Moravian diet, protesting the February patent of 1861: *Beschlüsse des Landtages der Markgrafschaft Mähren in den Sessionen der Jahre 1861–1868* (Brünn [Brno]: Breza, Winiker & Co, 1869), 310.

71. “Rechtsverwahrung” signed by eighty-two delegates of the Bohemian diet, April 18, 1861, *Verhandlungs-Protokoll aus der Sitzung des böhmischen Landtages vom . . . April 1861* (Prague: Staathalterei-Druckerei, n.d. [1861?]), 114. German translation from Czech by Joseph Alexander von Helfert, *Die Böhmischesn Frage in ihrer jüngsten Phase* (Prague: Verlag von F. Tempsky, 1873), *Urkunde* 13b (second pagination) 51.

72. See Kahn’s important account of the law’s “extended temporal present,” with all law existing “in a condition of simultaneity”: Paul W. Kahn, *The Cultural Study of Law: Reconstructing Legal Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 51–52.

73. Erwin Hölzle, “Historisches Recht,” in *Aus Verfassungs- und Landesgeschichte: Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Theodor Mayer*, ed. Heinrich Büttner, Otto Feger, and Bruno Meyer (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1954), 1:267, 268, 288. For the other discussions referenced here, see Karl Mannheim, “Das konservative Denken I: Soziologische Beiträge zum Werden des politisch-historischen Denkens in Deutschland,” *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 57, no. 1 (1927): 68–142, esp. 103–5 (also interesting for Mannheim’s discussion of the temporality and reflexivity of this tradition of thought); Karl Bergbohm, *Jurisprudenz und Rechtsphilosophie: Kritische Abhandlung* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, 1892), 1:174–75n3; Jellinek, *Allgemeine Staatslehre*, 345; Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich: Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1936), 2:373 and 2:367–74 more generally.

74. See, e.g., Otto Brunner’s classic, *Land and Lordship: Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria*, trans. Howard Kaminsky and James Van Horn Melton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), originally published as *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Südostdeutschlands im Mittelalter* (Baden bei Wien: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1939).

75. *Verhandlungen des österreichischen verstärkten Reichsrates 1860, nach den stenographischen Berichten* (Vienna: Verlag von Friedrich Manz, 1860), 2:45–46.

76. *Verhandlungen des österreichischen verstärkten Reichsrates 1860*, 2:68.

77. *Verhandlungen des österreichischen verstärkten Reichsrates 1860*, 2:41–42.

78. *Verhandlungen des österreichischen verstärkten Reichsrates 1860*, 2:71.

79. *Verhandlungen des österreichischen verstärkten Reichsrates 1860*, 2:74.

80. *Verhandlungen des österreichischen verstärkten Reichsrates 1860*, 2:76.

81. *Verhandlungen des österreichischen verstärkten Reichsrates 1860*, 2:79.

82. Kais. Diplom vom 20. October 1860, RGBl, Nr. 226, zur Regelung der inneren staatsrechtlichen Verhältnisse der Monarchie, reproduced in Edmund Bernatzik, *Die österreichischen Verfassungsgesetze mit Erläuterung*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Manzschke k. u. k. Hof-Verlags- und Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1911), 228.

83. Ah. Handschreiben vom 20. October 1860 an den zum ungarischen Hofkanzler ernannten Freiherrn v. Vay, reproduced in Bernatzik, *Die österreichischen Verfassungsgesetze*, 230–32 (here 231).

84. In the contemporary assessment of Austrian politician and historian Joseph Alexander von Helfert (for example), “the defenders of the indigenous [*einheimischen*] land law” understood the throne’s concessions here not as a new formation but as a “continuation” of that which had earlier “existed for long centuries” and which “legally had never ceased to exist.” Joseph Alexander von Helfert, *Die Böhmisches Frage in ihrer jüngsten Phase* (Prague: Verlag von F. Tempsky, 1873), 21.

85. For a classic critique of the region’s ostensible “backwardness” and the temporal politics of modern nationalism, see Maria Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 1 (2005): 104–64.

86. See Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 28, 44–52, 62, 86.

The Invention of the Muslim Golden Age: Universal History, the Arabs, Science, and Islam

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The history of science is a history of the world. Or so it began. As both a discourse and a discipline, it started off as the search for the universal history of civilizations. It was an episodic history, to be sure. Yet it assumed that science was a shared enterprise, a unified and ecumenical concept, and the key to humanity's collective history.¹ This essay traces this history through only one episode of this story: how the idea of an Arab, or Muslim, "golden age" of science was collectively and gradually constructed, or told and retold, between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, and how it participated in the creation of new—both universal and historical (or historicist)—temporalities.

This was a piecemeal, palimpsestic process. The recovery or "discovery" of texts altered local historical, philosophical, and theological traditions in the region as much as it created new academic disciplines in universities on both sides of the Atlantic. By exploring how, and when, these different traditions met, this essay sets out to show, first, how the historical casting of different civilizational "golden ages" became a key part of the quest for a new universal history of knowledge (particularly science as a universal enterprise) and humanity (particularly of the "rise of the West" and the "decline of the East"). It then considers how this new spirit of universalism altered local chronologies and linguistic or regional periodizations organized around different historical "golden ages." Looking at a series of Arabic writings by Arabists, including their exchanges, appropriations, and critiques with European orientalists in particular, the essay thus considers, briefly and all too quickly, this peculiar rise of a modern Arabic historical consciousness—and the forging of a new sense of Muslim chronologies and of the Arabic discursive tradition itself.² Finally, because this historical recasting of a golden age

was ultimately a tale of a civilization's retreat from the world stage of history, the essay also explores how new conceptions of the future—as a recovery of the past—also emerged. In fact, the idea of a historical golden age gave rise to a uniquely modernist temporal drive: in a sense, modernity was recast as a return to origins, fueling many nationalist and futurist political resurrections in its wake. In contemporary Arabic writings, it led to discussions of the possible revival of a future “golden age” or, in other terms, of an ongoing bid for a civilizational, cultural, or linguistic “awakening” (what many of the late nineteenth-century figures here penned the “Nahda”).

History's Golden Ages: Science and Universalism

The idea of a golden age is arguably as old as history itself. Historians of mythology have shown that the idea of a perfect age of humanity—either one in which the gods roamed the earth or in which humans lived in a state of divine harmony—can be found in almost every narrative tradition around the world.³ The trope remained indispensable well after the ending of the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns.⁴ Yet in the early nineteenth century, a plethora of reimagined “golden ages” took on a new valence in the era of Romanticism and cultural and linguistic nationalism.⁵

The reformulation of categories of universal history in Europe by the late eighteenth century retained the idea of man's fall.⁶ But it also transformed discourses of *restitutio* and *perfectio*.⁷ As part of an ongoing temporal and spatial transformation of universal histories, it located these discourses within historical time and effectively placed “Europe” at its endpoint, altering the very nature of the “paradisial state of man” in the process. “Eden is a garden in which only animals can live thereafter, not men,” wrote Hegel famously. Humanity could thus become the subject of history only outside the fabled garden: indeed, this historicist reconstitution of an epistemic fall and restitution was to be found in the archives of man alone, to whose logic even divine books were subjected and whereby sacred texts could themselves only mark the spiritual apogee of a people at best. These apogees were the new golden ages of history, and thereafter it became possible to speak of a golden age of Vedic knowledge, of Confucianism, or of the ancient Greeks, the ancient Israelites, or the medieval Arabs.

This nineteenth-century rise of historicism, however, also gave rise to new tensions between a positivist and a historicist account of universal history.⁸ This was particularly true of universal histories of knowledge—and of science more specifically. Positivism of course, as both a method and a historical narrative, was deeply committed to a universalist vision, but this often put it at odds with historicist renditions of the rise and fall of traditions of knowledge

or even of “civilizations.”⁹ The modernist invention of a “golden age” of Arabic or Muslim science among European orientalists, Arab Arabists, and historians of science alike, for example, was suffused by this tension. Moreover, as the recovery of a historical golden age was essentially a declensionist narrative, it also brought up the question for Arab and Muslim subjects in particular of what remained after the fall—or, in other words, the question of the promise of history for the future. Both the declensionist and futurist narratives, like the orientalist and Arabist ones, came together in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the interest in “civilizations.” Indeed, hundreds of new histories organized around “Muslim civilization” or “Arab civilization” were composed in Arabic, as in other languages and for other peoples, precisely around this time.¹⁰

Ultimately, this led to the redefinition of Islam and the Arabs as new historical categories. After all, many Arabic authors writing in the new universalist vein (whether as part of a positivist or historicist vision or of a declensionist or futurist vision) departed, often in radical ways, from older traditions and chronologies (as well as futures) of classical Muslim histories. A network of correspondences and exchanges between orientalists and Arabists—alongside their many local manuscript hunters and publishers and their various international professional associations—helped to propel this new universal history of the Arabs and of Islam and its golden age.

Translation was central to this story; indeed, in the “grand narrative” in the history of science, translation plays a rather important, if not dramatic, role as the mechanism for intercultural transmission. It was thanks to the Arabic translation of Greek and then to the Latin translation of Arabic, after all, that the “torch of science” was said to have passed from the ancients to the moderns.¹¹ In that sense, the “grand narrative” was itself a narrative about translation, by and large constructed by translators or by scholars who were deeply reliant on them.¹² Which is also to say that these early, if now forgotten, histories of science allow us to better understand the impact of this universal history on local conceptions of history and science worldwide. These highly popular Arabic histories, like their many counterparts of the time, thus formed part of a series of “interconnected histories” that were shaped by ideas of science and history that crisscrossed regions, languages, and disciplines, often in surprising ways.¹³

Histories of the Arabs and of Islam: Tahtawi and Ibn Khaldun

By the mid-nineteenth century, new chronological histories of the Arabs and of Islam in light of these new universal histories of humanity were contained

within the works of orientalists, Arabists, and others. Louis-Amélie Sédillot's *Histoire des arabes* (1854) was among the first to focus so concretely on the history of an Arabic canon of science and philosophy.¹⁴ Sédillot had a long-standing interest in Arabic and Persian astronomical works.¹⁵ He also structured his history around an account of a grand historical narrative of rise and fall, or the “grandeur et décadence des arabes en Orient.”¹⁶ Much of this concerned dynastic succession, yet it differed from past chronologies in that these were then arranged within broader if not universal “tableaux”: following a brief history of the rise and fall of the ‘Abbasids and the Seljuks to the different dynasties in Spain and the Maghreb, it then turns to the arts and sciences of “Arab civilization,” beginning with the Baghdad school and emphasizing its various “inventions.”¹⁷ The categories he outlined are themselves revealing. They included sciences that would have been recognized as “sciences” by contemporary readers but excluded others. Hence, astronomy but not astrology is covered, just as logic is favored over jurisprudence.¹⁸

Around the same time that these new dynastic periodizations for Muslim history were being constructed in France around a grand narrative of the history of humanity and the human sciences and arts, the well-known Egyptian scholar Rifa‘a Rafi‘a al-Tahtawi similarly helped to popularize these tableaux of Arabic arts and sciences for Arabic readers in Egypt and beyond. He had traveled to France in the late 1820s, where he spent five years studying at the *École polytechnique*. After his return to Egypt in 1831, he too turned his attention to the origins and progress of knowledge and of science. He famously published a travel account of his visit that began by noting: “In the time of the caliphs, we were the most perfect of all countries.” Yet most Muslim states had by then neglected these subjects, he added (although he was also quick to mention that nevertheless the Franks, too, “acknowledge that we were their teachers in all sciences”). For Tahtawi, moreover, this earlier “perfection” (or progress) of the Muslim “golden age” was due to the caliphs’ patronage of all fields of knowledge. Using the example of al-Ma‘mun and highlighting the contributions of early Muslim states to astronomy, medicine, and translation, he concluded: “From this you can understand that in any period the sciences do not spread except through the support extended by the ruler to his people.”¹⁹ This was precisely the kind of moral his patron, Mehmet ‘Ali, might have been expecting: indeed, Tahtawi dedicated his work to the Egyptian ruler, whom he hailed as a “reviver” of lost knowledge, and referred to history as “the counsel of every prince, and the prince of every counsel.”²⁰

Yet in many ways, Tahtawi’s account of history—and particularly Muslim history—was also quite new. He was among the first modern Arabic writers to delineate a broader “golden age” for Muslim states in this way. Indeed, like

Sédillot, he synthesized a number of dynastic eras to construct a new chronology. In essence, he melded together various Muslim states and empires and collectively classed them as part of a broader “civilization.” Yet Tahtawi also drew on—and reformulated—a number of classical Arabic histories (as much as contemporary political theories of civilizations) to do this.²¹ Like many nineteenth-century Arabic thinkers, Tahtawi was particularly drawn to fourteenth-century historiographer Ibn Khaldun and his general historical thesis, or introduction (*muqaddima*), on the rise and fall of settled, dynastic empires or—through a broad process of rereading and translation—of “civilizations.”²²

Following Ibn Khaldun, Tahtawi also outlined a theory of the progress of knowledge. In this sense, Tahtawi combined the works of previous Arabic historiographers and classical *hikma* literature themes with an interest in a history of their own contemporary times. But Tahtawi also added to this a newer, more positivist emphasis on the progress of knowledge that he had likely encountered firsthand in Paris. He may have attended lectures by Comte—or he may have heard about them from his fellow traveler Galal Mazhar, who studied with Comte. Tahtawi also studied geography and history briefly with a “Mr. Chevalier,” most likely the noted Saint-Simonian Michel Chevalier, whose own interest—and schema—for world geography clearly resonated with Tahtawi’s. While in Paris, Tahtawi avidly read the works of French Enlightenment philosophers, geographers, and historians. Indeed, he began his history of humanity with “man in the state of nature.” As for Rousseau, this was fundamentally a mythic *âge d’or*, simultaneously the fall of a natural state of humanity and the origin of social knowledge.²³ As Tahtawi put it, “Originally man was simple and devoid of adornments, he existed in a purely natural state and had knowledge only of instincts. Then, gradually, some people acquired knowledge . . . [either] by chance, accident, inspiration or revelation.” Whether by divine or human origins, then, Tahtawi fundamentally recast the history of humanity as the progress of knowledge.²⁴

Yet one could also argue that Tahtawi’s view of the progress of human knowledge (like Ibn Khaldun’s) was ultimately cyclical (but not circular) rather than linear. Comparing the Copernican and the Ptolemaic worldviews, for example, he made the following almost offhand remark: “Although Copernicus nullified Ptolemy’s doctrine . . . and this theory has been adopted and sanctioned in Europe, let no one cry for the progress of the human mind, for Europeans may end up readapting Ptolemy’s doctrine [in time].” Every revolution in science, therefore, had the potential to revolve once again. Closing the subject, he cited a verse from the Qur’an on how the “Sun hastenth to her rest place,” simultaneously a play on heliocentrism and the idea of *revolutio* itself.²⁵

Indeed, the novelty of Tahtawi's approach to history lay in its particular palimpsestic quality. In his introduction to a work on ancient history, *Bidayat al-quduma wa-hidayat al-hukuma*, or the "Beginnings of the Ancients and the Gift of Wisdom," this sense of multiple historical and temporal narratives becomes even more apparent.²⁶ He begins the work by drawing a distinction between divine and human history and referring to an older division between *zīkr* (memory) and *tarīkh* (history).²⁷ Yet by intertwining the two narratives throughout the text, Tahtawi also makes clear that he saw these as parallel sources of knowledge of both history and humanity.²⁸

Tahtawi's turn to the classical and late medieval works of Arabic history—from al-Tabari and al-Mas'udi to Muhammad Ibn Iyas and Ibn Khaldun—grew from his classical training, even as they also reflected the growing interest among French orientalists and others in classical Muslim philosophies of history. Indeed, many of these works were then being widely reviewed and discussed by orientalists in France and beyond. Tahtawi likely read Ibn Khaldun with his tutor, Hassan al-'Attar, as a young student in Egypt and again while he was in Paris—this time with Sylvestre de Sacy, whom Tahtawi also studied with, and who had produced the first French translation of the *Muqaddima* in 1810 and included an entry on it in his *Biographie universelle* in 1816.²⁹ In his Parisian diaries, moreover, Tahtawi famously referred to Ibn Khaldun as "the Eastern Montesquieu or the Montesquieu of Islam," demonstrating his ease with thinking about Ibn Khaldun in translation by then.³⁰ This layering of references was to grow ever stronger over time, but Tahtawi was among the first to compose popular histories in translation in this way.³¹

In fact, Tahtawi helped Sylvestre de Sacy and other well-known French orientalists, such as Edme Jomard and Caussin de Perceval, in translating and discussing texts in Arabic while he was at the so-called *École égyptienne* in Paris.³² He brought to his Parisian tutors and colleagues the textual knowledge of a trained Cairene ulama as well as contact with a world of Arabic thought that French orientalism was then avidly hoping to classify. And yet while Tahtawi drew from a number of eclectic sources—Arabic and European universal histories as much as French Enlightenment political and moral theory—he saw no tension between them, just as he saw no tension between divine and human historical ends. And while he was the first writer in Arabic to refer to a broad sweep of Muslim states and empires as part of a golden age of Arab or Muslim history, his ultimate purpose was to follow history as a source of exempla for the present and as part of an ongoing promise for the future. Over time, however, this optimism faded away, and by the time he died in 1873, the growing violence and involvement of European imperial

powers in the region had created new political tensions around the question of “Muslim decline” or “decadence.”

Historicism and Its Discontents: Gustave Le Bon and Ibn Khaldun

The idea that “Arab civilization” played a critical part in the universal progression of knowledge was a key motif by the late nineteenth century. A prize essay, for the Bombay Education Society’s press on “The Reciprocal Influence of European and Muhammadan Civilization” published in 1871, makes the point even more explicitly: “The epoch which goes in Europe by the name of the Dark Ages, and which was really an epoch of ignorance and servitude, embraces the most brilliant period of the history of the Arabs.” It was not until the twelfth century that “many Arabic books were translated into Latin, which facilitated the progress of science.” As he put it, “When two or more nations come into long and close contact with each other, it is a natural consequence that they will, to a certain extent, influence each other in many things; the stronger and more cultivated will not only bestow its civilization and science, but will from its language engraft many words, and even whole locutions, on the weaker nation.”³³ This question of “reciprocal influence” would, in later universal histories, also be presented as the story of translation itself.

The book that had the greatest impact on Arabic histories of the nineteenth century and after, however, was Gustave Le Bon’s 1884 *La civilisation des arabes*. Le Bon was a French social scientist and amateur physicist, and the author of several well-known and internationally circulated works, covering such diverse subjects as psychology, physics, socialism, and racial science. His famous study of crowd psychology, *La psychologie des foules* (1895), was published in Arabic in 1909, but many of his ideas had made their way into a variety of late nineteenth-century Arabic works, the most popular being his history *Arab Civilization*, which formed part of his “civilization” series.

The term “civilization” was fast becoming a marker for historical studies worldwide. Le Bon’s idea of civilization also reflected his conception of “race,” another category of human difference then similarly gaining new institutional and intellectual form. As such, he began his analysis of Arab civilization with a discussion of “milieu,” a term he also connected to “race.” For Le Bon, as for many others of the time, the idea of race included climatic, geographic, physiological, and linguistic considerations, and even various moral and “psychological factors” such as the virtues (and vices) of any kind of group solidarity or collectivist mentality.

In his discussion of “Arab civilization,” he too seemed to follow the ideas of Ibn Khaldun. Le Bon was clearly familiar with the *Muqaddima*, whose traces

can be found throughout his own account of “Arab civilization.” Indeed, Le Bon also made an analogous argument to Ibn Khaldun’s while thinking about the progress of “civilization.” For Ibn Khaldun, the historical development of an Arab *civitas* could be appreciated only when set against the various Berber tribes they settled (or failed to); moreover, the *barbarah* were in fact morally superior to their Arab civilizers, but in the formation of new urban, political collectivities, and in the process of developing the civil sciences, arts and crafts, and trade, they lost their *ta’assub*, or what we might term a kind of group “thymos” (θυμός), or consciousness. When Le Bon lamented—at the very end of his book—that “humanity is about to enter an Iron Age, where anything weak must inevitably perish,” he argued something similar, albeit with a few notable differences. As he explained, when the Arabs had long previously conquered the East, they did not harm their subjects, for (unlike Ibn Khaldun) he thought they shared a common racial tie (or a kind of “thymic” collective mentality). Yet as “anyone who has penetrated the East knows,” warned Le Bon, the current “commercial deceptions” undertaken by Europeans in the region betrayed “the low civilized veneer” of this new conquest.³⁴ In other words, Europe’s commercial conquest of the East, unlike the conquest of “Arab civilization” there earlier, was ruinous and reactionary rather than progressive or associative. (Writing on the eve of European empires’ expansion into Ottoman lands, this formulation no doubt also explained his popularity among Arabic readers from the late nineteenth century onward.)

Le Bon’s *History of Arab Civilization*—like those of others before him—also followed a broad chronology of dynastic succession. He was also largely concerned with the conquest and fall of empires, but unlike Ibn Khaldun and like many nineteenth-century histories, he concentrated mostly on “the rise and fall of Arab civilization” as a whole, including the question of the “origin of their knowledge and educational methods” and then the later “decline” of both. He drew from his predecessors in this regard and also cited Sédillot when discussing the Baghdad school’s invention of an “experimental method,” for instance, while also following a similar organizational schema for the Arabic “sciences” (to which he also added the “industrial arts” and commerce). Once again, the transmission and translation of these histories of the Arabic sciences worked in multiple directions, bringing together disparate categories and chronologies, as much as texts and contexts, through a broad process of translation.

Islam and Science: Ernest Renan and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani

But whose golden age was it, in fact—the Arabs’ or the Muslims’? Perhaps nowhere was this question more critical than in an exchange that took place

between Ernest Renan and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in 1882, a momentous year for European imperialism in the region. Afghani was a revolutionary anticolonial Muslim intellectual whose political campaigns took him from Tehran and Hyderabad to Cairo, Beirut, and then to Paris.³⁵ It was there that he responded to Renan's Sorbonne lecture that year on the subject "L'Islamisme et la science," a debate that soon traveled as far among Muslim readers as Afghani himself had.³⁶

Renan began by painting a picture of the quintessential "Mussulman" as full of "stupid pride in the possession of what he believes to be the absolute truth." This renders him completely disdainful of "everything that constitutes the European spirit." Writing one year after the British occupation of Egypt and two years after a French protectorate was established in Tunis, Renan highlighted the current "decadence" of Muslim nations. In response to arguments that this was nothing but a "transitory phase" of decline, moreover, Renan noted how "to reassure themselves for the future, [Muslims] appeal to the past. This Mohammedan civilization, now so debased, was once very brilliant. It had men of science and philosophers. It was for centuries the mistress of the Christian West. Why should that which has been, not be once more?" Yet as Renan quickly made clear, this medieval Islamic renaissance of science and philosophy had little to do with Islam, he thought.

Reflecting his views on the power of race, not faith, he presented this past efflorescence of "Mohammedan civilization" as merely a fortuitous union of both a Persian and a Greek "inheritance" from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. Indeed, science and philosophy had been crushed in the first century of Islam, he thought, through the early brutality of religious wars and conquests, and afterward under the heavy yoke of the Umayyads. A new spirit of rationalism had been revived only under the 'Abbasids, whom he described as heirs of "the most brilliant civilizations that the East has ever known, that of the Persian Sassanidae." Through their Persian (therefore Aryan) descent, and through their Christian and Parsi translators in particular, the 'Abbasids' "brilliant caliphs"—Mansur, Harun al-Rashid, and Ma'mun, rulers who "can scarcely be called Mussulmans"—helped revive Greek rationalism and free thought. Renan thus classified this era of "Muslim" philosophy and speculative theology as ultimately "Graeco-Sassanian."³⁷ Once this "golden age" was destroyed by the "stupid barbarity" of the Turks and Berbers, the seeds of Islam's advance and its brief commitment to liberty of thought finally withered. From the thirteenth century onward, moreover, the torch of progress was carried on by the Latin West.³⁸

Afghani was an eminent, and at times enigmatic, Muslim intellectual who Renan later claimed had inspired him to write the lecture after they met

briefly in Paris. Renan referred to him with condescending admiration as “an Afghan, entirely emancipated from the prejudices of Islam; he belongs to those energetic races of the Upper Iran bordering upon India, in which the Aryan spirit still flourishes so strongly.”³⁹ Yet Afghani held Renan’s racial—and providential—view of history in little regard. In his response, published in the *Journal des débats*, he openly questioned Renan’s racialism: making a racial distinction between Persians and Arabs, Afghani thought, was meaningless, as the Arabs had taken up Sassanid culture and learning and as they were ultimately to be defined not as a biological or “racial” group but as a literary or intellectual, if not a shared spiritual, community.

Afghani also used the language of civilizational progress against Renan. Since “all nations have advanced from barbarism . . . toward a more advanced civilization,” he wrote, Renan’s notion that there was something peculiar about Islam’s disdain for “free thought” was ultimately misleading. The Arabs had propelled themselves from a nomadic tribal to an advanced civil state through both spiritual conquest and unprecedented political expansion. Similarly, they “acquired and assimilated” the Greek and Persian sciences, which they also “developed, extended, clarified, completed and coordinated with a perfect taste and a rare precision and exactitude.” To say that religious dogma and free rational inquiry were at odds, Afghani wrote, was also true but no explanation of anything special here either: as he noted, one could find a similar tension within European Christendom after all. What had led to the downfall of the sciences in Islam, Afghani thought, was precisely what explained their general decline in the present: political despotism.⁴⁰

Both men were comfortable with the idea of civilizations as actors in history, and both assumed the rise and decline of a Muslim golden age; where they differed was in their analysis of its implications for the future. For Afghani this was something yet to be reclaimed: the alternative was political paralysis. Indeed, for Afghani, as for many anticolonial intellectuals of the nineteenth century and later, uncovering and redefining a classical or golden age was crucial both for establishing one’s place in the hierarchy of civilizations and for providing a blueprint for future progress. In the end, Afghani’s own vision of Muslim “reform” and “revival” (unlike Renan’s or even many Muslim thinkers’ of Tahtawi’s generation) rested critically on his understanding of a past age of both spiritual and political harmony within the Muslim *ummah*.

Afghani’s response to Renan was also symptomatic of the tension that increasingly characterized intellectual exchanges between orientalist and their subjects over conceptions of history, progress, and time. For Afghani, recovering one’s place in the present chronology of universal history implied a return

to one's true spiritual heritage, for if a divinely inspired past was increasingly deemed revelatory of one's point of origin, it also offered a potential point of return to history. This led many other colonial subjects to similarly create new historical timelines organized around their own understanding of their civilizational—as their spiritual—contribution to the progress of humanity and thus to construct novel relations between their past and present sacral and discursive traditions in particular. This reworking of history therefore also involved a reworking of tradition.⁴¹

Between the Golden Age and the Renaissance of the Future: Jurji Zaidan among the Orientalists

The problem of periodization was a political one at heart—both for orientalist and for their subjects.⁴² Indeed, the emergence of a modern Arabic historical consciousness gave rise to new historical temporalities and periods, as well as new tensions and critiques.⁴³ It also created new histories of the Arabs or of Islam as a “civilization” defined in new and often competing terms. The late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century histories of the Arabs and of Islam by Jurji Zaidan, one of the most popular Arabic historians of his time, offer the best examples of this conflicted genre.

Jurji Zaidan was best known in fact for his vast histories of the Arabs and of Islam as a “civilization.” For Zaidan, moreover, translation was itself the core contribution of this civilization, if not of the general, humanist and universal transmission of knowledge across all civilizations over time. Zaidan had a long-standing interest in questions of language, and the future of Arabic prose in particular, and he seized on the idea of the value of translation for the history—or historical evolution—of languages generally.⁴⁴ In essence, he saw the progress and evolution of Arabic as fundamentally inseparable from a series of translation movements.

Viewing the Arabs (and Arabic) as descending from Hammurabian Babylon (and its linguistic and legal codes), he argued that they both continued the “civilizational contributions” of ancient Eastern empires and, through linguistic and intellectual innovations, marked a new step in the world history of civilizations. Of special interest to him was the idea that many of the “civilizational” contributions of ancient Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent were preserved through this linguistic heritage.⁴⁵ His views on the rise of classical or Qur'anic Arabic followed similar lines, and like other Arabic language reformers of the time, he was fond of pointing out the various non-Arabic linguistic borrowings it contained. He also thought that, while the Qur'an had standardized Arabic and given it greater specificity and scope,

the more dogmatic standardization of the language ultimately produced linguistic stasis and thus contributed to civilizational stagnation in the long run (until his present, that is, when linguistic innovation through translation was again reviving modern Arabic).

The context behind these ideas was critical. The struggle with British and other European diplomats, creditors, and colonial officials was reaching its climax in the years he was writing. For Zaidan, tracing the long gestation of Arabic before and beyond the Qur'an was no doubt tied to his desire to create a new Arab historical consciousness that was bound up with the potential rise of new political identities. Yet this did not preclude his participation in new forms of colonial rule: with his friend Jabr Dumit, who also wrote on the philosophy of language and on the history of Arabic, he joined the British army as a translator during the Walseley expedition to the Sudan in 1885. Translation thereafter remained key to his career and thought. His journal of history, science, and literature, *al-Hilal* (founded in 1892), for instance, featured numerous articles on the history and philosophy of language that were partial, summary, or full translations.

Zaidan also drew heavily from the works of contemporary orientalists. His interest in orientalism had similarly developed early: in Beirut in the 1880s, his involvement in various literary and scientific societies (al-Majma' al-'ilmi al-Sharqi and Shams al-Birr), as well in Freemasonry, led him to an interest in the deep antiquity of the Orient, and during his Beirut years, he took up the study of both Hebrew and Syriac. Shortly after Carl Brockelmann published his *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* (1898–1902), Zaidan decided to teach himself German. He also corresponded regularly with a number of noted orientalists. And from his reading notes (now held at the archives in the American University of Beirut), we see how over many years, in a neat hand, annotated in German and French as well as Arabic, Zaidan tracked the latest scholarship, plotted language change over time, and began to outline the structure of his later writings. In this way, he borrowed from the bibliographic resources of a rapidly growing global network of orientalist and Arabist scholars. In fact, in his essays in *Tarikh al-'Arab qabl al-Islam* (The history of the Arabs before Islam) it is striking how relatively few canonical Arabic sources he utilized.⁴⁶

Zaidan was a key figure behind the broader popularization of this new, ecumenical, if not eclectic, history of the Arabs (and later Muslims) as a “civilization.” He was also among the first to devise a new chronology for this. For instance, he dated the “first” Arab golden age (or *nahda*) to that of the “Year of the Elephant” in 570 CE, and not to the date of the first Muslim community or *ummah* established by Muhammad in 622 CE, which typically marks older

Arabic histories of the transition from their putative “dark ages,” or the era of Jahiliya, and which served as the beginning of the *hijri* calendar. Second, he classed the classical Arabic golden age as one among a number of other golden ages: the rise of Islam was the first—thanks to its codification of a unified Arabic language; the translation movement it created, particularly under the ‘Abbasids, formed the second; and the contemporary Nahda—a movement he helped spearhead—was the last.

Zaidan proposed a series of novel periodizations for Arab as much as for universal history. In his general history, he categorized mankind into nomadic, primitive, settled, and civilized types (distinguishing the latter two forms of settled civil communities as *hadariya* versus *madaniya*). In later writings, he pared this down to a triptych that charts the progression of humanity from barbarism and tribalism to the final stages of “civilization,” which were then categorized as one division, albeit undergoing a series of material, political, and moral progressions. In his other writings on world history, he would similarly resort to the classic tripartite division between antiquity, the middle ages, and the modern ages. Only in Zaidan’s version, the universal middle ages contained the story of Islamic civilization itself.⁴⁷

In his histories of the Arabs and of Islam (published in the early 1900s) and in his later writings and lectures on history (particularly those he composed but did not deliver for the newly founded Cairo University in 1910), Zaidan turned from the subject of universal history to Arab and particularly Islamic history.⁴⁸ Yet his basic commitment remained the same: it was through a medieval Muslim efflorescence and its dual “golden ages” that the real power and strength of the Arab peoples had contributed to the progress of history and humanity.

Zaidan also helped popularize for Arabic readers the lives and contributions of key figures from the classical Arabic golden age of science and philosophy who are largely still familiar to us: biographies of Avicenna, Averroës, Avempace, and Ibn Khaldun featured prominently in *al-Hilal* and in other of Zaidan’s writings.⁴⁹ Yet Zaidan’s cast of characters was more eclectic than this might at first suggest; for alongside these medieval thinkers, one can also find Hammurabi and Cyrus as well as Muhammad ‘Ali and his descendants. In short, the novelty of Zaidan’s argument was to stretch out the historical temporality of the Arabs and their role in universal history. For while he highlighted the unification of the Arabs through the Islamic conquest, he also traced the origins of Arabic, and of Islam’s own spiritual-legal codes, as far back as the Babylonians. Indeed, features on the ancient Phoenicians, Assyrians, Persians, and Babylonians formed a regular feature of Zaidan’s historical entries in *al-Hilal*. Stretching the genealogy of Arabs and of the Muslim

ummah in this way implied attaching Islam to a longer, and critically refashioned, sense of its own prehistory. In the process, Zaidan created a particular Arabo-Islamic antiquity, one that also brought together Islam with its own putative “dark ages,” or Jahiliya, in new ways.⁵⁰ Set against the background of many classical Arabic histories, this was a distinctive chronology, and the first of many later Arabic writers—Taha Husayn comes to mind—who redefined the history of Islam by recasting the meaning and scope of the Jahiliya.

Zaidan’s reconstruction of an Arabo-Islamic chronology and history was always cast against his reading of the categories of Western historical time: East and West formed a critical suture for Zaidan and allowed him to rethink the history of the Arabs as a series of transitions along a dual timeline. Zaidan gave new meaning to the pre-Islamic era by counting the ancient kingdoms of the East as the specific linguistic, political, and even spiritual progenitors of an Arabo-Islamic “civilization.” He also marked this era’s demise with the death of Alexander. The rise, formation, and maturity of Islam constituted an ambiguous “Muslim Middle Ages” (*al-qarun al-islamiya al-wusta*): it began with the Year of the Elephant, followed a brief detour under the Umayyads, achieved its final maturity under the ‘Abbasids, and fell to its nadir with the fall of Baghdad. The year 1258 was thus both the final death knell of its golden ages and the point at which it ceased to be significant within a general universal historical timeline.

Zaidan created novel genealogies as much as periodizations, and through his reworking of the historical tradition he helped redefine the meaning of classicism and the classical tradition of Islam. This is hardly surprising, given that Zaidan’s era can be seen as one defined by the ideals of neoclassicism in the same way that earlier generations of European intellectuals had repurposed the ancient Greeks. The Arab neoclassical restoration did something similar: a segmented literary elite attended to texts in translation, but the real neoclassical revival was for Arabic literatures and histories themselves.⁵¹ New publications of a corpus of classical Arabic works, many of which were then similarly being canonized and augmented by contemporary orientalist scholarship, were increasingly made available through the new Arabic printing presses. A prime exemplar of what Carl Schorske called “thinking with history,” Zaidan himself contributed much to this rehistoricization, and he covered numerous episodes in Arab history in *al-Hilal* as well as in scores of lengthier works, including popular histories and particularly popular historical novellas and serials. He wrote extensively on pre-Islamic, Islamic, and particularly ‘Abbasid and Andalusian Muslim Spanish rule.⁵² What tied them all together was Zaidan’s emphasis on cultural transfers, borrowings, and adaptation as the keys to the Arabs’ civilizational progress and evolution.

Indeed, translation was key to his vision of the past (and the future) of Arabic and the Arabs. As we saw from his multiple chronologies earlier, Zaidan assigned his expanded Arabo-Islamic Middle Ages—encompassing its own parabola of rise and decline—together with a broader parabola for universal history. What defined each rise (unlike each fall) was the ability to bridge cultures and worlds, both literally and figuratively: as the racial and linguistic heir of the Eastern ancients, the real mark of Arab civilizational progress in the seventh to thirteenth centuries lie in its ability to translate and preserve through language, science, and the arts the best of the known “bounds of the human empire,” to cite one of Zaidan’s historical heroes, Francis Bacon, in his 1626 *New Atlantis*.

This vision of the past was driven by the realities of the present as much as by hopes for the future. Saint-Simon had famously declared “the Golden Age is before us, not behind us.” Zaidan would certainly have agreed. For although he thought the future revival of the Arabs had begun in the eighteenth century, he also regarded it as critically incomplete. Indeed, Zaidan was a key exponent of the modernist construction of a contemporary “Arab Renaissance,” or *Nahda*. It was through the construction of these past Arab “golden ages” that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century narrative of a contemporary *Nahda* was itself forged.⁵³ Like the many modernist “renaissances” of the era, the idea of an Arab “awakening” rested on the power of these new chronological schemata.⁵⁴

For Zaidan, the “latest *nahda*” began both in Egypt, with the French occupation of 1798 and the destruction of Mamluk despotism (a favorite theme in Zaidan’s popular historical writings), and in Syria, with the arrival there of missionaries and merchants. Like many before and after him, he emphasized the new spirit of a literary, scientific, intellectual, and spiritual “awakening” that was taking hold after years of “torpor” and the senescence of a classical tradition of Arabo-Islamic sciences and *belles-lettres*. (The very terminology of “awakenings” presented by missionary acolytes like Zaidan clearly resonates with missionaries’ own account of their activities and influences in the region.)

Spelling out his futurist vision for the Arabs in a posthumously published article in *al-Hilal*, he imagined an Egypt of the early twenty-first century: with a sophisticated telecommunications and transportation system, it was both progressive and pastoral, with every man and woman tending to their own gardens to support everyday dietary and natural needs, and possessing knowledge of the basic medical arts and sciences. Esperanto would be the national and international language of communication; marriages would be contracted by the fit alone, ensuring public health; and finally, the national

religion would be a natural one, or a “rational religion” based on the twin principles of science and the public good.⁵⁵ As we can see, this futuristic vision was critically tied to a scientific resurgence as much as a political one. Indeed, as was typical of the *Nahdawi* thinkers of his generation, Zaidan was not much interested in the pragmatics of constitutional or parliamentary political reform, as his perfect state was governed more by technocracy and pedagogy than by actual mass politics. (The futurist vision of Egypt by Shibli Shumayyil and the young Salama Musa sound surprisingly similar to Zaidan’s for this reason.)

Like his *Nahdawi* contemporary, Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, whose *Fatra min al-zaman* (A period of time) offered the first time-travel narrative in modern Arabic fiction, these futurologists reworked their collective sense of the past as much as their present precisely to imagine a future resurrection. First serialized in 1898, Muwaylihi’s novel follows the many misadventures of a Mamluk soldier who, finding himself resurrected in British-occupied Egypt, then wanders about Cairo making trouble, before eventually going to Paris to visit the 1900 Exposition Universelle.⁵⁶ Like Zaidan’s own popular histories and novellas, Muwaylihi’s novel is riveted by the temporal lessons of history.⁵⁷ Inspired in part by Badi’ al-Hamadhani’s famous tenth-century *maqamat* (or rhymed prose; and which was, in this case, narrated by an ‘Abbasid scholar who was also called ‘Isa Ibn Hisham), and in part by Volney’s 1791 *Ruins* (similarly structured around a time-traveling apparition and the resurrection of the spirit of history), al-Muwaylihi’s text is an intriguing one. Both literally and figuratively, the novel—like its narrator—is frequently caught between intermingled references to different epochs and genres, taking the classical Arabic chronicle tradition of history into a future literary and first-person narrative realm. While the novel offers a humorous, political critique of the modern state, it is also nevertheless saturated with a veiled but still cogent optimism in an anticipated future anticolonial or political revolution. In the end, al-Muwaylihi offers his own fictive resolution to the problem of rise and decline: a view of a history marked by moments of “punctuated equilibrium” or stasis or perhaps even the reversal of the progress of time itself, for which the very idea of time travel (like the strange historical amnesia of the Egyptians that his protagonist discovers) can serve as only a most fitting metonym.

Many of the same authors who reframed the history of the Arabs or of Islam in terms of a new universal narrative of historical time were seeking, like Basha’s ghost, the optimism of a past sense of the future. This vision of the future was therefore necessarily riven with the contradictions of the past and by the hauntings of the present. Indeed, the exact sense and scope of the Nahda was continually being rewritten by its own futurologists for this reason. As

with other modernist historical discourses, this was one that rested on the presumptions of an “all-encompassing present, which fabricates the past and future that it needs each day,”⁵⁸ just as positing a “golden age” made it possible to forecast a new present—and future—for their own historical “traditions” even as they comprised ever reinvented genealogies. For many Arabic writers of this era, it was precisely this vision of an Arab golden age that helped to underwrite the vision of modernity they hoped to usher in.

Recovering a Universal History of Science: Orientalism and the History of Science

As Arabic scholars adapted, appropriated, or rejected classical as much as modern works of universal histories of knowledge, so too did the many orientalists and even historians of science who drew on this vast project of resurrecting a universal history of knowledge and of the “Arabic sciences” in particular. Indeed, although we do not often think of it this way, the early disciplinary history of science had more than a few affinities with orientalists and their historiographies. Consider the correspondence between Jurji Zaidan and the Russian orientalist Ignaty Krachkovsky, who corresponded in turn with George Sarton, a Belgian scholar who was the first to hold a chair in history of science in the United States.⁵⁹ In many ways the key figure in the founding of the new discipline of history of science, Sarton was as much an Arabist or an orientalist as a historian of science, as he himself admitted later in life. Founder of the journals *Isis* and *Osiris*, his very choice of titles spoke to these affinities.⁶⁰

Heir to a tradition of Belgian internationalism, Sarton’s world history of science reflected these concerns, and more than anyone else in the first half of the twentieth century, he helped popularize a timeline that, like Zaidan’s, stretched from ancient Mesopotamia to modern Europe. Also, much like Zaidan, he connected ancient and medieval with modern histories and saw their development as taking place between a series of translation movements and cross-cultural, intellectual, and practical contacts between the “East” (the original home and seat of ancient knowledge and civilization itself) and the “West” (the synthesis and apex of this narrative). Sarton was also an Arabist: he corresponded regularly with orientalists and Arabists and scholars from the region, often in Arabic.⁶¹ The network of these affiliations has not been studied, yet his work is unimaginable without them. They included book dealers, teachers, and translators as well as fellow scholars and ulama.

Sarton drew on the work of contemporary orientalists and Arabists in particular to highlight the contributions of medieval Muslims to the new univer-

sal history of science he hoped to popularize. He saw them, and particularly the ‘Abbasids, as providing a crucial link in the evolution of science from ancient Mesopotamia to the modern West, and in the preservation of the spirit of Greek rationalism to which they were heir. In this way, the old question of the relation of the Orient to the Occident was rearticulated, even as thinking across the borders of East and West continued to structure his periodization.⁶² He regarded the Arabic tradition as “a continuation and revivification not only of Greek science but also of Iranian and Hindu ideas,” and hence also regarded it as the critical medieval bridge between the ancients and the moderns and between (the Near and Far) East and the West.⁶³

If we consider Sarton’s contacts and correspondence, as well as the general institutional and metatextual background to his ideas, we see how many of these universal histories were themselves founded on a vast network of people, ideas, and institutions and forged through similarly forgotten links and translations. Sarton’s reach was extensive, perhaps unsurprisingly for a former Belgian internationalist and founder of a major professional journal and society; and yet other colleagues possessed similarly widespread contacts.⁶⁴ We could well argue that the history of science itself—as a secret history of both humanity and the world—would not have been possible without the assistance provided by such networks, whether bibliographic, conceptual, or material.

Nor were these interwar internationalists the last of their generation. Sarton’s ecumenical vision of the history of science made his work popular among many later Arabic readers too, and it even became embroiled in the cultural politics of the Cold War in the region. In the 1950s, Isma‘il Mazhar, the first to translate Darwin’s *Origin of Species* into Arabic, was commissioned by the Franklin Book Program to translate Sarton’s *The History of Science and the New Humanism*. In this way an internationalist vision of the history of science, deeply indebted to the legacies of orientalist scholarship and politics, came to be funded by the US State Department as part of its propaganda effort during the Cold War.⁶⁵ Much postwar historiography of science would express a similar interest in the flow or “diffusion” of knowledge to and from the West, a gesture fundamental to intellectual thought in the Cold War era.⁶⁶

Universalism was critical for the history of science for several reasons. Providing an origins narrative for the ecumenical roots of science was one. Offering a history of the progress of knowledge—and a fitting locus at its end—was another. Around the same time that Sarton and others were helping to professionalize the history of science across the Atlantic, new historical narratives were being written with an eye toward precisely this end of history after all: the Scientific Revolution. Alexandre Koyré—teaching in Cairo between the wars and writing on science and metaphysics—was among the first to use the

term.⁶⁷ For Koyré, revolutions in science were fundamentally metaphysical: hence, Galileo gave birth to modern science by overthrowing older Aristotelian views of space and time that moved us from the view of a “closed” to an “infinite” universe, a fitting extension perhaps of Giorgio Agamben’s declaration that revolutions set out not merely to “change the world” but also to “change time.”⁶⁸ Koyré’s vision of the Scientific Revolution—the commitment to a mathematical space and time that would give birth to modern science itself—proved influential for generations of historians of science who came to see revolutions in science as revolutions in worldviews. Indeed, Koyré later influenced Thomas Kuhn’s vision of revolutions, and of “normal science” as paradigmatic, as Kuhn himself acknowledged in his preface to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.⁶⁹ Along the way, the older universalism of the classical and logical positivists’ view of a “unified science” was overturned—or so it was claimed.⁷⁰ Yet wedding antipositivism to a tempered historicism raised new problems for science’s claims of universalism.⁷¹ Karl Popper was among the first to articulate the point: Kuhn’s view of science was nothing short of dangerous, for without holding to some view of the “transcendent reality” of science, no effective political claims could be made on it.⁷² The question of where to root the authority of science—or how to trace it as an object of coherent historical inquiry—continues to haunt the history and sociology of science. Indeed, the battle between universalism and historicism—articulated by so many of the thinkers here—remains unresolved.

Notes

1. Helge Kragh, *Introduction to the Historiography of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chaps. 1–2.

2. On modern Arabic historiography, see Youssef Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2003).

3. Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Richard Heinberg, *Memories and Visions of Paradise* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1989).

4. Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).

5. Anthony Smith, “The Golden Age and National Revival,” in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (London: Hurst, 1997), 36.

6. Tamara Griggs, “Universal History from the Counter-Reformation to the Enlightenment,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4 (2007): 219–47.

7. Reinhart Koselleck, “Progress and Decline,” in *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 218–35.

8. Thomas Kuhn, “The Relations between History and History of Science,” *Daedalus* 100, no. 2 (1971): 271–304.

9. For some of the background to this, see Kragh, *Introduction to the Historiography of Science*.

10. Early works in this vein by European orientalists include those of Alfred Kremmer, Louis-Pierre-Eugène Amélie Sédillot, Gustave Le Bon, Stanislas Guyard, and Auguste Bebel; works in Arabic include those of Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, Jurji Zaidan, Muhammad Kurd 'Ali and As'ad Dagher (among many others).

11. Quoted from George Sarton, *The History of Science and the New Humanism* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1931).

12. The literature on this subject is considerable; see my "Knowledge in Motion: The Politics of Modern Science Translations in Arabic," *Isis* 99 (2008): 701–30.

13. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Intertwined Histories," *History and Theory* 49 (2010): 118–45; and Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori's introduction to their *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

14. Louis-Amélie Sédillot, *Histoire des arabes* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1854).

15. Louis-Amélie Sédillot, ed., *Traité des instruments astronomiques des arabes composé au treizième siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1834–1835); *Mémoire sur les instruments astronomiques des Arabes* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1841); and *Prolegomenes des tables astronomiques d'Ouloug-Beg* (Paris: Didot, 1847).

16. Sédillot, *Histoire des arabes*, 164–232.

17. Sédillot, 332–441.

18. Dimitri Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (2002): 5–25; and Oliver Leaman, "Does the Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 12 (1980): 525–38.

19. Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, introduced and trans. Daniel Newman (London: Saqi, 2004), 106–8.

20. Quote from Youssef Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography*.

21. On the latter, Jean Starobinski, "The Word Civilization," in *Blessings in Disguise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1–35; Lucien Febvre, "Civilization," in *A New Kind of History*, ed. P. Burke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); Émile Benveniste, "Civilisation," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971).

22. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, chap. 6.

23. We also know that Tahtawi was familiar with Rousseau's writings. For more on Rousseau's depiction of "man in the state of nature," see Jean Terrasse, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la quête de l'âge d'or* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1970); Marc Eigeldinger, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la réalité de l'imaginaire* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1962), chap. 6.

24. Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 101, 102.

25. Quote from Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography*, 29.

26. The work was also presented as a composite of various Arabic, French, and Greek histories at use at the School of Translation where Tahtawi then worked.

27. In the introduction Tahtawi makes a distinction between two types of history: a prophetic or revealed one (*tarikh athari*, lit. traditional history) and a historic or human one (*tarikh bashari*, lit. human history). Tahtawi, *Bidayat al-qudama wa-hidayat al-hukama* (Cairo, 1838), 2.

28. The remainder of the text follows the *zikr al-anbia'* (prophetic traditions), on the one hand, and various, eclectic French and Arabic histories of the "ancients" (referring largely to the Greeks, but giving way to the ancient Egyptians at the end) on the other. Tahtawi wrote only the introduction, but he may have also composed the long glossary that divides the two sections of

the book and provides a list of translations of unfamiliar Arabic words for ancient Greek places, names, and ideas. Tahtawi, *Bidayat al-quḍama wa-hidayat al-hukama*, 194–218.

29. Editions and partial translations of Ibn Khaldun also came out in the *Journal asiatique* throughout the 1820s. Aziz Azmah, *Ibn Khaldun in Modern Scholarship: A Study in Orientalism* (London: Third World Center for Research and Publishing, 1981).

30. Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 293.

31. Tahtawi's *History of Ancient Egypt* also relied in part on a contemporary French edition of Manetho's history of the Egyptian dynasties, for instance.

32. For more on the background to this "school," see Yves Laissus, *Jomard* (Paris: Fayard, 2004).

33. Edward Rehatsek, *The Reciprocal Influence of European and Muhammadan Civilization* (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1871), 64–69.

34. Gustave Le Bon, *La civilisation des arabes* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1884), 565–66.

35. Afghani has been the subject of numerous biographies, both hagiographical and critical; for more, see A. Albert Kudsi-Zadeh, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani: An Annotated Bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 1970). There is also a vast literature on Renan, including Jean-Pierre van Deth, *Ernest Renan* (Paris: Fayard, 2012).

36. The debate made its way into the Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi press; Michelangelo Guida, "Al-Afghani and Namik Kemal's Reply to Ernest Renan," *Turkish Journal of Politics* 2 (2011): 57–70; Margaret Kohn, "Afghani on Empire, Islam, and Civilization," *Political Theory* 37 (2009): 398–422.

37. For Renan, who saw history as "the great criterium of races," tracing the histories of the "Aryans" and the "Semites," those "two twins at the origin of civilization," would reveal "singular destinies in the theatre of universal history." For Renan, the Aryans brought mastery over nature, and hence a certain reordering of time and space, along with the invention of mythology and the sciences and arts; the Semites contributed merely the invention of monotheism. What characterized the Semite, by contrast, was his stagnation and immobility, in short, a general ahistoricity. See M. Rouché, introduction to *Une autre philosophie de l'histoire*, by J. G. Herder (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1943), 49, 78; Renan, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947–1961) 8:578; all discussed and cited by Maurice Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, 14, 43, 59. For the background to the nineteenth century invention of the Aryan and Semite, see Dorothy Figuiera, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

38. Ernest Renan, "L'islamisme et la science" (1883), translated as "Islamism and Science" in *Poetry of Celtic Races and Other Studies* (London: Scott, 1896), 85–94.

39. Renan, "Islamism and Science," 104.

40. Djemal Eldine El-Afghani, *Journal des débats*, April 16, 1883, and May 18, 1883; see "Renan/Al-Afghani," *Histoire globale* (blog), 2011, <http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Renan-al-Afghani.pdf>; Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 180–87.

41. On history and the modernist reformulation of tradition, see David Myers, *Resisting History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1999); Andrew Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Peter Gottschalk, *Religion, Science and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Hans Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

42. For similar works that address questions of historical periodization, of temporality, and of the progress of history, see, e.g., Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 77–102; Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul, eds., *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Alexandra Lianeri, ed., *The Western Time of Ancient History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Tison Pugh and Angela Jane, “Political Medievalisms: The Darkness of the Dark Ages,” in *Medievalisms*.

43. For an interesting parallel, or more on the late nineteenth-century crisis of historicism, see Charles Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), introduction.

44. Jurji Zaidan, *Al-Afz al-‘Arabiya wa al-falsafa al-lughawiya* (Beirut: Matba‘at al-Qiddis Jawurjiyus, 1886).

45. Jurji Zaidan, *Tarikh al-tamaddun al-Islami* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Hilal, 1900).

46. al-Mas‘udi, al-Suyuti, and Ibn Khaldun were the exceptions, of course. See, e.g., Jurji Zaidan, *Tarikh al-Arab qabla al-Islam in Muallafat Jirji Zaydan al-kamilah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1982), 10:36–39.

47. For more on this, see Thomas Philipp, “Approaches to History in the Work of Jurji Zaidan,” *Asian and African Studies* 9 (1973): 63–86, esp. 68–74.

48. Zaidan was forced from his appointment as lecturer in Islamic history before he could present these. Philipp, “Approaches to History,” 71–72, and for a translation of one of these, first published in *al-Hilal* in 1910, see Anne-Laure Dupont, “L’histoire de l’Islam au regard des autres histories,” *Arabica* 4 (1996): 486–93.

49. Anne-Laure Dupont, *Gurji Zaidan, 1861–1914* (Damascus: Institute français du Proche-Orient, 2006), 494, for references to these.

50. His *Tarikh al-tamaddun al-Islam* (History of Islamic civilization) was published between 1902 and 1906, and his *al-Arab qabl al-Islam* (The Arabs before Islam) in 1908.

51. Peter Pormann, “The Arab ‘Cultural Awakening (Nahda),’ 1870–1950, and the Classical Tradition,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 13 (2006): 3–20.

52. Carl Schorske, *Thinking with History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

53. For more on the invention and historiography of the term, see Nadia Tomiche’s entry in the second edition of *Encyclopedia of Islam*: “Nahḍa,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel (Brill Online, 2012). See also “Authoring the Nahda: Writing the Arabic 19th Century,” special issue, *Middle East Literatures* 16 (2013): 227–350; and Tarek El-Ariss, ed., *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2018).

54. Brenda Deen Schildgen, Gang Zhou, and Sander Gilman, *Other Renaissances* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Shaden Tageldin, “Proxidistant Readings,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 227–68; Stephen Sheehi, “Towards a Critical Theory of al-Nahdah,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 269–98.

55. Jurji Zaidan, “Misr ba’d mi‘at sana,” *al-Hilal* 31: 18–21. For more on this, see Lewis Beirer Ware, “Jurji Zaydan: The Role of Popular History in the Formation of a New Arab World View” (DPhil thesis, Princeton University, 1973), 139–41.

56. This was later published as the novel *Hadith Isa ibn Hisham* (1907), trans. Roger Allen, *A Period of Time: A Study and Translation of Muhammad al-Muwaylihi’s Hadith Isa ibn Hisham* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1992).

57. Unlike Walter Benjamin’s formulation of an “empty, secular, homogenized time,” we might therefore also view historical time as carrying the potential to construct alternative, and

at times disjointed, moral, epistemic, and political teleologies. Helge Jordheim, "Against Periodization," *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 151–71.

58. François Hartog, "Time's Authority," and Lianeri, "Unfounding Times," in *Western Time of Ancient History*, 33–47 and 11.

59. Ignaty Krachkovsky, *Among Arabic Manuscripts* (London: Brill, 1953), introduction; Dupont, "Orientalism and the Arabs," 4; and Rebecca Gould, "Ignaty Krachkovsky's Encounters with Arabic Literary Modernity," unpublished.

60. Sarton, "Why Isis?" *Isis* 44 (1953): 245.

61. Sarton's papers include correspondence with key orientalists, including H. R. Gibb and Louis Massignon, Louis Sarkis, and other scholars from the region. See also Thomas Glick, "George Sarton and the Spanish Arabists," *Isis* 76 (1985): 487–99.

62. Sarton, *The History of Science and the New Humanism*, chap. 2. Sarton's views on the relation between Islam and Europe also reflected the views of other internationalists of the time, particularly his fellow Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne. For Pirenne, the rise of Islam both encapsulated and led to the rise of European civilization after Charlemagne. For Sarton, the rise and fall of Muslim civilization similarly both encapsulated and then liberated Europe. Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1939). Sarton also corresponded regularly with Pirenne.

63. George Sarton, *A Guide to the History of Science* (Waltham, MA: Chronica Botanica, 1952), 26–27.

64. This is the subject of my forthcoming book, *Golden Ages: Universal Histories of Islam and the History of Science*.

65. Isma'il Mazhar, *Tarikh al-'ilm wa-al-insaniya al-jadida*; see also Louise Robbins, "Publishing American Values" *Library Trends* 55 (2007): 638–50.

66. The best example is perhaps Joseph Needham. See also George Basalla's classic article on this subject. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954–1994); George Basalla, "The Spread of Western Science," *Science* 156 (1967): 611–12.

67. Outlines of these lectures—which more or less follow the structure of his *Metaphysics and Measurement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968)—are held at the Koyré archives. Interestingly, one of his Egyptian students, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Badawi, later extended many of Koyré's own interests in this regard. Badawi wrote extensively on Arab Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism, as well on the Muslim "Middle Ages" more generally and on the contributions of Muslim thought to European in particular. See also Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), introduction.

68. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* (London: Verso, 1993), 91.

69. Thomas Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), preface. See also Yehuda Elkana, "Alexandre Koyré," *History and Technology* 4 (1987): 111–47.

70. Sarton also corresponded with Koyré.

71. Peter Galison, "History, Philosophy, and the Central Metaphor," *Science in Context* 2 (1988): 197–212.

72. For more on this, see Heinrich Rickert, *Science and History: A Critique of Positivist Epistemology* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1962).

73. Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

Rise and Fall of the *Sattelzeit*: The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and the Temporality of Totalitarianism and Genocide

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The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Foundational historical concepts), published from 1979 to 1997, is a remarkable scholarly achievement. It contains, in seven volumes, entries on 122 concepts, from *Adel* (noble) to *Zivilisation*. Its chief editors, Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, envisioned a comprehensive lexicon that would explicitly and implicitly demonstrate the range and significance of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*), which they imagined as a new approach to intellectual and social history that emphasized the semantics of historical time. According to Koselleck, “The primary interest of *Begriffsgeschichte* is its capacity to analyze the full range, the discrepant usages of the central concepts specific to a given period or social stratum.”¹ The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* is an inquiry into political and social concepts that emerged in the German language at the threshold of modernity from 1750 to 1850, a period that Koselleck, with some misgivings, called the *Sattelzeit* because of the intensity with which new experiences transfigured and generated new concepts, which in turn entailed a new structure of time and movement. Koselleck claimed that modern concepts are characterized by three characteristics: temporalization (*Verzeitlichung*), acceleration (*Beschleunigung*), and the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous.²

Koselleck’s central insight was that the distinctive feature of modern concepts is the increasing divergence of the “space of experience” from the “horizon of expectation.” “In the modern age,” or *Neuzeit*, he wrote, “the difference between experience and expectation is ever greater, or more precisely, the modern age can be regarded as a new time only once expectations are ever more distant from all experiences that have occurred up to that point.”³ This new structure ends up affecting all concepts.⁴ In other words, modernity is

characterized by a future that is not wedded to or constrained by the past and its predictable course of events.

Koselleck calls progress, with its origins in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, “the first genuine historical concept” because achieving perfectibility is secularized eschatology and historical concepts are charged with temporization: “From that point on, the entirety of history can be conceptualized as an inexorable and ever greater perfectibility, which, despite relapses and detours, can ultimately be planned and realized by human beings.”⁵ The temporizing of foundational concepts does not only extend to concepts—in Koselleck’s words, “collective singulars”—that explicitly thematize time, such as “progress” or “history,” but to a much wider vocabulary, such as “development,” “emancipation,” “liberalism,” “democratization,” and of course, “socialism” and “communism.” These concepts are both analytic and active components in the movement of history they intend to describe. Such concepts, Koselleck further argues, are also often expropriated by ideologies, which totalize the semantics of historical time in a particular direction.

In what follows, I propose investigating the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* with an emphasis on what seems to me its most glaring absence: political concepts invented in or active in the twentieth century. I argue that this lacuna is not incidental but reveals a highly significant weakness in Koselleck’s understanding of modernity. By restricting the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* to the *Sattelzeit*, conceptual history is incapacitated when it comes to the twentieth century. Concepts invented in the first half of the twentieth century, such as totalitarianism and genocide, are virtually the opposite of the concepts privileged by Koselleck, embodying a very different semantics of historical temporality. Instead of an open-ended horizon of expectation, they bring the catastrophic events of the twentieth century into the semantics of historical experience, emphasizing neither futurity nor acceleration but dystopia and deceleration. In the concluding section I attempt to demonstrate how totalitarianism and genocide incorporated this new structure of temporality. In other words, I show how the semantics of historical time were altered when the expectations of modernity were so tragically derailed.

The Politics of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and the Temporality of the Twentieth Century

Begriffsgeschichte is distinct from the traditional history of ideas (especially in its historicist version) insofar as it denies that most concepts have stable and immutable meanings over long periods of time. Koselleck’s approach is also very different, in some ways diametrically opposed to Quentin Skinner’s

focus on the pragmatics of political rhetoric, insofar as Skinner subscribes to a rigorous contextualism that views all speech acts as unique interventions in a historical force field that cannot be repeated. Koselleck, in contrast, emphasizes concepts that are not confined to any specific situation, regime, or social structure. He understands concepts as having duration but also as subject to transformation by successive generations—what he calls “long-term semiotic processes”—and as capable of being conceived at specific moments. Concepts are not merely indispensable; they constitute what may be described as a “semantic stockpile,” without which no political action or social behavior is possible. As semantic stockpiles they combine the content-oriented logic of multiple meanings with variegated temporal layers, or sediments, to use Koselleck’s term. Semantic stockpiles are by nature unstable, repurposing past and present temporalities for new historical circumstances. It is this quality of concepts as semantic stockpiles that interests me.

Before I turn to twentieth-century concepts, let me briefly subject Koselleck’s work to a more traditional sort of intellectual history. Greatly influenced by Carl Schmitt during the 1950s, the young Koselleck adopted the view that there were no neutral concepts; concepts acquire meaning only by virtue of their position in a specific friend-enemy constellation.⁶ Basic concepts are invented, reconfigured, and mobilized as incitements and polemical calls to arms (*Kampfbegriffe*).

For several decades, intellectual historians and philosophers have been engaged in a contentious debate about the relationship between Koselleck and Schmitt.⁷ Koselleck readily acknowledged his indebtedness to Schmitt: “Of all my teachers Schmitt was the most important.”⁸ Unlike Schmitt, for whom “every political concept is a polemical concept that has a political enemy in mind,” Koselleck addressed the friend-enemy constellation in the context of a broader and more circumspect theory of historical semantics.⁹ In an essay on “images of the enemy” (*Feindbilder*), he writes, “Languages alone do not provoke enmity; they are its political instrumentalization.”¹⁰

Koselleck was one of a quartet of Heidelberg students—along with Hanno Kesting, Roman Schnur, and Nicolaus Sombart—who frequently visited Schmitt in the early 1950s and believed that he represented a new point of departure for German intellectual life, beyond the “imposed” requirements of the occupying powers.¹¹ In his reminiscences of Heidelberg, Sombart nostalgically recalled the electric atmosphere around Schmitt as well as his admirers’ shared conviction that the Cold War was a civil war on a worldwide scale between the Enlightenment’s twin offshoots, liberalism and communism. The master key to this pan-European event was, of course, the French Revolution.¹²

The concept of global civil war (*Weltbürgerkrieg*), so important to Schmitt in the early 1950s, has its own conceptual history. Initially, it was designed to distinguish wars between nation-states from limitless wars that derived from political, social, or utopian doctrines sanctioned by a philosophy of history.¹³ Schmitt believed that no political alternative could challenge the “unity of the world” brought about by a Soviet-American condominium capable of planning, directing, and dominating the entire globe. What appeared to be an ideological division between East and West was in reality the same dreary “myth of technology.”¹⁴ The apocalyptic lines with which Koselleck began his 1959 dissertation, “Kritik und Krise,” were not far from this: “The contemporary world crisis, determined by the polar tension between the American and Russian world powers, viewed historically, is the result of European history . . . insofar as it has brought the entire world to a state of permanent crisis.”¹⁵

Writing in *Merkur* in 1960, the young Jürgen Habermas savaged Koselleck’s “Kritik und Krise,” along with Kesting’s *Geschichtsphilosophie und Weltbürgerkrieg*. For Habermas, both authors explained the East-West conflict by the excesses of the eighteenth century’s “utopian modern.” Dismissing both books as conservative, pessimistic disavowals of the Enlightenment, they echoed “his Master’s voice,” an obvious reference to Schmitt.¹⁶

Koselleck credited Schmitt—who endorsed his dissertation in a brief review—with having established that, as long as human beings exclude and include, as long as they actively pursue negation, concepts and counterconcepts “will penetrate conflicts until such time as new conflicts arise.”¹⁷ Like Schmitt, Koselleck conceived of his approach as a radical departure from “all utopian notions of history as a singular, unified, and goal-directed process.”¹⁸ In the 1970s, when the historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler intimated that, by contributing to a Festschrift for Schmitt, Koselleck had subscribed to the other contributors’ lack of contrition for Schmitt’s “service” to National Socialism, he replied: “The fact that I learned a great deal from Carl Schmitt, which I openly admit, did not prevent me from scrutinizing the history of National Socialism with the utmost rigor.”¹⁹ Still, it can plausibly be argued that Koselleck remained a “Schmittian” if only to the extent that concepts derived their legitimacy from the existential drama of “the political.”²⁰

Since it was completed in 1997, the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* has stimulated similar lexical projects in Spain, France, and Switzerland. It has also provoked a substantial body of criticism focusing on its methodology and on the limitations imposed by the editors’ narrow insistence on political and legal concepts to the exclusion of poetics, aesthetics, sense impressions, and metaphors.²¹ Even more dramatic was Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s accusation that conceptual history evaded the specificities of German national history by

confining its scope to the *Sattelzeit* and that German history in the first half of the twentieth century “remains passed over.”²² The concepts selected for the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* neutralize and suppress the traumatic history of twentieth-century Germany by excluding concepts derived from or constitutive of National Socialism. The self-limiting notion of a *Sattelzeit* assimilates German history into the more general history of European modernity. For Gumbrecht, the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* is no exception to the tendency of many postwar German historians to consign the Nazi era to a state of “latency,” invisible yet lurking just below the surface of events.²³

To be sure, this criticism is not entirely justified, as concepts from the National Socialist era do occasionally appear under other rubrics. For example, Hitler’s worldview is briefly discussed in the entry “idealism-materialism.” “Fascism” is included with an entry (somewhat odd) written by Ernst Nolte and devoted exclusively to Italy.²⁴ The most striking lacuna is in the book-length entry “People, Nation, Nationalism, Masses” (*Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse*), which takes up nearly three hundred pages.²⁵ The Nazi era merits less than a dozen pages devoted to Hitler’s concept of nationalism and the Nazi misuse of the word *Volk*. The overriding point is its incoherence, propagandistic distortion, and vacuity: “Despite the primacy afforded to the word ‘Volk’—from ‘Volkskanzler’ to ‘Volksempfänger,’ from ‘Volkswagen’ to ‘Volksgericht,’” it declares, “this concept was long ago drained of all content.”²⁶ The brief discussion of racial biology concentrates on the inconsistencies of the 1935 Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, concluding that race is a purely ideological concept lacking in precision. Unlike the legitimate historical and political concepts discussed elsewhere in the chapter, the semantics of the Third Reich are merely dismissed as corruptions of genuine concepts.²⁷

Finally, historians have expressed frustration with the degree to which the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* appears markedly anachronistic from the perspective of the early twenty-first century. As Paul Nolte observed: “That there is so much talk of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, of the pre-1848 era and preindustrial class society, and nothing at all of twentieth-century dictatorships, of racism and mass murder, of two world wars—can be decoded by ideological, historical, and undoubtedly biographical factors.”²⁸ Was the experience of total war, totalitarianism, and genocide simply foreshadowed and adequately accounted for by the historical semantics of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as Koselleck seems to suggest, or has the twentieth century produced its own historical semantics with its own distinctive features? In a suggestive lecture delivered in Israel in 2009, Koselleck offered some cautious thoughts about how conceptual history might contend

with the postwar era. One approach, he observed, might be to investigate the linguistic residues of the Nazi era in periodicals founded after 1945 and apparently dedicated to the establishment of a liberal discourse of reeducation.²⁹ Still, he did not address the question of why the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was so remiss when it came to twentieth-century concepts. Apart from the obvious decision to confine the project to the *Sattelzeit*, two explanations come readily to mind.

First, at the most basic level, the exclusion of the Nazi and postwar eras was self-protective, avoiding the now well-documented complicity with the Third Reich of two of the editors, Otto Brunner and Werner Conze.³⁰ Just as their biographies and works were “sanitized” after 1945, the evasion of Nazism constituted a conscious strategy of self-censorship. Second, the emphasis on the *Sattelzeit* was not merely a chronological delimitation; it was also a programmatic one. The “pathogenesis” (Koselleck’s term) of modernity had its roots not in the twentieth century but in the critical spirit and utopian expectations of the eighteenth. As Koselleck wrote in the preface to *Kritik und Krise*: “My starting-point was therefore to explain the utopian ideas of the twentieth century by looking at their origins in the eighteenth.”³¹ The Enlightenment established a disastrous template for twentieth-century totalitarian regimes, the self-delusional politics of moral rectitude as a substitute for politics, combined with the absolute certainty guaranteed by the philosophy of history. Nazism’s biologically based mass annihilation of human beings was then subsumed in an understanding of the century as a universal civil war of values and ideologies.³²

The Historical and Political Language of the Twentieth Century

The limitations of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* underscore the need for a systematic investigation of the historical and political language that was coined in the twentieth century and which in turn shaped the century.³³ Twentieth-century modernity has undergone and completed a transformation that is no less dramatic than the transformation that led into it. In short, the historical-political language of the twentieth century exhibits a very different set of characteristics from the language of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It seems to me that this opportunity need not dispense with the most productive aspects of Koselleck’s approach to conceptual history. As we have seen, for Koselleck, the threshold of modernity was characterized by a new relationship between “the space of experience” and the expectation of an open future; the distance between experience and expectation widened exponentially

as expectations for the future increasingly took on utopian and ideological features far removed from all past human experience. Indeed, to the degree that liberalism, socialism, communism, and fascism were lacking in content derived from experience, the “greater were the expectations they created.”³⁴ However, in the course of more than 150 years since the end of the *Sattelzeit*, modernity has created its own space of experience. How does a semantics of historical time look when “those expectations—fulfilled or disappointed—have themselves become historical experience?”³⁵

In what follows, and acknowledging my debt to Koselleck, I will try to develop some characteristics of two concepts invented during the twentieth century: totalitarianism and genocide. The former was a product of World War I, the latter, of World War II. Both justified their indispensability by the unprecedented character of the phenomena they claim to describe; both aimed to decelerate or arrest the laws of history and nature that derive from the philosophy of history; and last, both contained a semantic stockpile of conceptual resources capable of bridging diverse political orientations at different moments. In short, novelty, deceleration, and semantic bridge are the general temporal features of these twentieth-century concepts.

Totalitarianism, Its History, and Its Temporality

In her 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt offered the most comprehensive exposition of the concept while emphasizing precisely the temporal considerations that Koselleck had identified. Like Koselleck, Arendt sees movement and acceleration as the distinctive feature of totalitarian rule—indeed, as one of its most salient characteristics. The success of totalitarianism, she writes, can be attributed to the “perpetual motion mania of totalitarian movements which can remain in power only so long as they keep moving and set everything around them in motion.”³⁶ After the original publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she elaborated on the temporality of the totalitarian idea of history.³⁷ Unlike classical tyranny whose authority is maintained by fear and lawless power, she observed, totalitarianism is unprecedented because it revokes the very sources of legitimacy on which political authority, however arbitrary, has always rested.

Totalitarianism is novel because it owes its allegiance neither to codified law nor to a single person but to “the execution of what it assumes to be the law of History or the law of Nature.”³⁸ These laws derive not from the actions of actual human beings but rather from the fictional claim to fabricate the human species into the obedient carrier of a different order of history. In other words, the philosophy of history is one of the two features of totalitarian

domination. The difference between conventional tyranny and totalitarianism is that, for totalitarianism, “all laws have become laws of movement.”³⁹

To employ Koselleck’s terms, both the space of experience and the horizon of expectation are suspended by totalitarianism, since the purpose of the laws of nature and history is to produce a new order of mankind through incessant movement. The perspective of totalitarian theory does not therefore rely on a utopian, open-ended future. The inhabitants of a totalitarian country exist only for the “sake of accelerating its movement.” As Arendt points out, even if the aims of history and nature were proclaimed to be achieved, terror would still remain the “higher tribunal” indispensable for carrying out the triumphal movement of nature and history. For totalitarianism, there is no guilt or innocence because those designated as “unfit to live” or as “decadent classes” are “superfluous” and simply eliminated by anonymous executors of that higher order of history or nature. Because, in the Nazi worldview, life is authenticated by conformity to the law of nature, those who violate the law—Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, the disabled, and communists—literally “did not belong to life. No one can kill someone who is already dead.”⁴⁰

Although we can see how useful his approach might be for thinking about these issues, Koselleck almost never addressed the historical semantics of twentieth-century concepts like totalitarianism. This was almost certainly because they could not be encompassed by a framework that emphasized the utopian expectations of the eighteenth century and therefore, for him, constituted an elemental force in the logic of the *Weltbürgerkrieg*—the politicization of those ideals in the Cold War—that inevitably followed. There is, however, an important exception. In a 1963 review of Jacob Talmon’s *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, he wrote: “To the degree that totalitarian systems and the consciousness of a permanent crisis determine our experiential space, the conventional division between the Middle Ages and the modern age has slipped out of joint.”⁴¹ Koselleck doesn’t follow up on this murky but telling thought, but it underscores Christian Geulen’s suggestion that we can reverse Koselleck’s metaphors of space of experience and horizon of expectation to speak instead of a space of expectation and a horizon of experience: the catastrophic crimes of the twentieth century require concepts capable of expressing the ways in which perverted expectations produced disastrous experiences and undermined utopian hopes.⁴² The concept of totalitarianism is predicated on the dissolution of the distinction between experience and expectation, on the exhaustion of utopian energies, and above all, on the deceleration of historical time.

Arendt insists on the “entirely new and unprecedented” character of totalitarianism because it rests on an experience never before encountered in

public affairs. It explodes the alternative between legality and lawlessness by introducing a new kind of obedience to the suprahuman laws of nature and history. Totalitarianism is entirely novel, Arendt observes, because “the problem is to fabricate something that does not exist, namely a kind of human species . . . whose only ‘freedom’ would consist in ‘preserving the species.’”⁴³ For this reason, the concentration camps and extermination camps, are the most “consequential” elements of the totalitarian system because their purpose is not merely mass annihilation but also the fabrication of a “new man” that is possible only if “superfluous human material” is obliterated. The novelty of totalitarianism consists of an experiment in a “radical evil, previously unknown to us.”⁴⁴

Totalitarianism has always been a protean term, capable of combining and recombining meanings in different contexts and in new and ever-changing political constellations. The major theorists of totalitarianism were the systematizers of a term that had a long history before it acquired the patina of academic respectability. During the Cold War it derived its strength from encompassing both Stalinism and Nazism under a single rubric. Despite its success as a semantic stockpile, it is notoriously difficult to pin down what precisely is distinctive about “totalitarianism.” Is it compelling shorthand, as some of its first theorists insisted, to demonstrate that that modern tyranny is unique because it is more invasive, more reliant on the total assent of the “masses” and on terror than old-fashioned despotism? Is it a “project” as Arendt famously argued; an experiment in “fabricating” humanity according to the laws of biology or history, or is it an “ideal type” (in the Weberian sense) to which no “real” dictatorship actually conforms? Is it a concept that can be defended only negatively, as the ultimate rejection of pluralism, legality, democracy, and Judeo-Christian morality? Or, as François Furet argued, in an approach, which bears distinct similarities to Koselleck’s dissertation, did it demonstrate the unbroken line from the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution to the Bolshevik Revolution and Eastern European dictatorships of the twentieth century?⁴⁵

It goes without saying that the concept of totalitarianism is bloated by a large literature on the comparison between Stalinism and Nazism, emphasizing striking similarities and a multitude of disparities.⁴⁶ Yet despite the usefulness of these scholarly disputes, the work performed by invoking the word “totalitarianism” has remained remarkably stable. The concept has served as a semantic stockpile to bridge changing political affiliations at several crucial historical moments (in the 1930s, 1950s, 1970s) by suspending the ambiguities and political reservations that might otherwise inhibit the creation of new political constellations and alliances. In other words, the “moment”

of totalitarianism performs a well-established political function, defining a horizon of cognitive and intellectual orientations at the expense of moral and political ambiguities. In the 1930s it served to connect Italian Fascism with Nazi Germany, cementing the core idea of popular-front antifascism. In 1928, the grand old man of Italian socialism, Filippo Turati, could write of the “worldwide conflict between fascistic totalitarianism and liberal democracy.”⁴⁷ Antifascist antitotalitarians created a Europe-wide alliance against fascism and quasi-fascist regimes from the Iberian Peninsula to Hungary. A decade later, antitotalitarian antifascism provided a springboard to the Grand Alliance, as in the film *Casablanca*, where it figured as the vehicle that brings the “isolationist” American ex-radical Rick and the Vichy opportunist, Louis, to the Free French Garrison in Brazzaville after saving the Czech resistance hero Viktor Laszlo and guaranteeing the safety of the Norwegian Ilse Lund. As William David Jones has pointed out, the Cold War version of totalitarian theory all but obscured the “lost debate” in which German opponents of Hitler in exile—Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, Ernst Frankel, Arthur Rosenberg, Rudolf Hilferding, Franz Borkenau, and Richard Löwenthal—produced the first extensive antitotalitarian literature on National Socialism.⁴⁸

By the late 1930s, “totalitarian” increasingly meant the equivalence of the Soviet and Nazi dictatorial systems. Waldemar Gurian, a refugee Catholic intellectual at Notre Dame, was one of the first to claim that the total politicization demanded by both Nazism and Bolshevism constituted a secular and nihilistic threat that penetrated all domains of everyday life and threatened democratic societies.⁴⁹ By 1937, the anti-Stalinist left, but also Christian periodicals like *Commonweal*, *Christian Century*, and *Catholic World*, were all using the term “totalitarianism” to link, if not equate, fascism and communism.⁵⁰ Antitotalitarianism, especially as it emerged on the Left during the period of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, signaled a commitment to remain an antifascist when the Comintern had banned the use of the very term “Fascism” and when remaining an antifascist was synonymous with anticommunism. The Marxist Franz Borkenau wrote in his 1940 book *The Totalitarian Enemy* that the Hitler-Stalin pact and the invasion of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union shattered the commonly held view “that Fascism and communism were deadly enemies, and that their hostility was the crux of world politics today.”⁵¹ When the philosophers Sidney Hook and John Dewey formed the Committee for Cultural Freedom in May 1939, they brought together socialists (Norman Thomas), liberals (Dorothy Thompson and Elmer Davis), and conservatives (Max Eastman and Eugene Lyons) to oppose what all agreed was the rising tide of totalitarianism. In this new constellation, the semantic stockpile led to a cross-pollination of formerly incompatible intellectuals.

The American political spectrum was reconfigured, presaging the undoing of the antifascist consensus of the 1930s and reassembling the forces that would eventually unite under the banner of liberal antitotalitarianism after World War II.⁵²

Totalitarianism was by no means a concept forged during the Cold War. But in the late 1940s, it was the most effective vehicle that enabled anti-Fascists to exit the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union and enter the institutions of the Cold War. Postwar antitotalitarianism became the semantic bridge between anti-Nazi and anti-Communist liberalism; it enabled former “progressives” to turn from anti-Nazism to anti-Sovietism. Its revival during the 1950s led to its academic canonization in the classic texts of Arendt (1951) and Zbigniew Brzezinski and Carl J. Friedrich (1956).⁵³

With the collapse of communism, scholars and writers have come to regard antifascism in a less hallowed frame. As Furet emphasized, Stalinist antifascism changed the public face of communism; the doctrinal shift of the Comintern in 1935 transformed dedicated Bolsheviks into champions of liberty, marching hand in hand with democrats under the banner of humanity and hatred of Hitler.⁵⁴

The collapse of communism reinvigorated the totalitarian concept for obvious reasons, chief among them the historical confirmation of the inability of Soviet-type societies to reform from within or to accomplish any substantial modernization of their disintegrating planned economies. The contrast between Western European illusions and the rapidity of the collapse once Soviet power withdrew exposed the innocence of many of those who dissented from “totalitarianism.”⁵⁵ In short, it is a semantic stockpile permitting the bridging of disparate historical phenomena and political distinctions at crucial moments. After a long period of disuse and opprobrium, in the heated controversy during the debate leading up to the 2003 Iraq War, distinguished commentators once again embraced the word “totalitarian.” Respected former dissidents such as Václav Havel, Adam Michnik, André Glucksmann, and José Ramos-Horta, supported the war on liberal-humanitarian grounds. The editor of the liberal *New Republic*, Peter Beinart, complained that “three years after September 11 brought the United States face-to-face with a new totalitarian threat; liberalism has still not been fundamentally reshaped by the experience.”⁵⁶

Genocide: A Crime with a Name

As noted earlier, the catastrophic crimes of the twentieth century required a concept capable of expressing the ways in which perverted expectations

produced disastrous experiences. This is certainly the case for “genocide,” a concept coined in the last years of World War II by the Polish-Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin’s term won almost immediate acceptance because, like “totalitarianism,” “genocide” could serve as a semantic stockpile that bridged the destruction of European Jewry with other mass murders in wartime Europe. Lemkin was fond of quoting Winston Churchill’s famous August 1941 radio broadcast: “We are,” he said, “in the presence of a crime without a name.”⁵⁷ In fact, Churchill was referring specifically to the atrocities inflicted on Russian civilians in the course of the German invasion. It is questionable whether Lemkin’s classical definition of genocide (“a coordinated plan aimed at destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups”) would have applied to those crimes. As Arendt wrote at the time of the Eichmann trial, he understood that the atrocities he had witnessed and documented posed “the challenge of the unprecedented.”⁵⁸ Still, Lemkin often elided the distinction between genocide as a “modern” crime and as a universal feature of mankind throughout history.⁵⁹ In a contemporary interview, Lemkin claimed that genocide “was a crime as old as history.”⁶⁰ In his *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944), he sees Nazi crimes as essentially “a gigantic scheme to change, in favor of Germany, the balance of biological forces between it and the captive nations for many years to come.”⁶¹ However, elsewhere he wrote: “The crime of the Reich in wantonly and deliberately wiping out whole peoples is not utterly new in the world. It is only new in the civilized world as we have come to think of it. It is so new in the traditions of civilized man that he has no name for it.”⁶² Lemkin’s emphasis on “the civilized world” is clearly anachronistic, but his insistence on the modernity of “genocide” as a unique phenomenon requiring a new concept is significant. The unprecedented nature of Nazi crimes played a decisive role in the adoption of the Genocide Convention by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. Certainly, Lemkin’s popularizers chose that interpretation. In a *Washington Post* editorial titled “Genocide” on December 3, 1944, the first public use of the concept, the writer noted recent evidence of the gas chambers in Auschwitz and Birkenau, and wrote: “It is a mistake, perhaps, to call these killings ‘atrocities.’ . . . On the scale practiced by the Germans, this is something new.”⁶³

Lemkin firmly believed that a law prohibiting genocide was a matter of natural right, no different in principle from homicide: “As in the case of homicide, the natural right of existence for individuals is implied: by the formulation of genocide as a crime, the principle that every national, racial and religious group has a natural right of existence is claimed.”⁶⁴ The problem of the genocide concept, however, reveals the difficulties of translating supra-

national principles in a world where international law and sovereignty remained and remain intimately entwined.⁶⁵ Put another way, the concept of genocide has its historical origins in the last phase of World War II (1944) and, like Arendt's concept, affirms the triumph of the moral norm of positive law against the "laws of nature" or "biology" practiced and reiterated by the Germans during the Nazification of Europe.⁶⁶ Even an early critic, the jurist Hans Kelsen, concluded that "the new concept of 'genocide' is rather of political than of legal significance."⁶⁷

The ambiguity of "genocide" can in large part be attributed to Lemkin's attempt to bridge the destruction of European Jewry and the annihilation of the Polish "nation" (ethno-national murder) without adequately reflecting on its own historicity. Moreover, in his magisterial work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Lemkin justified the concept of genocide by a historical account of the events of 1939–1943 in which the Shoah was simultaneously assimilated to and distinguished from a narrative of the ethnic homogenization or "Germanization" of annexed Polish and Ukrainian (and also Western European) territory. Lemkin's historicization of genocidal practices was a countermeasure to the notion of laws of biology used to justify the Jewish genocide.

The concept of genocide was a semantic stockpile, then, designed to encompass a wide variety of ethnic, racial, and religiously motivated mass murders, past and future. Lemkin acknowledged the "biological" dimension of the Judeocide and simultaneously emphasized that the Jewish catastrophe was only prior to and larger in scale than the planned destruction of the other "Slavic" peoples.⁶⁸ In this respect Nazi genocide was, he maintained, analogous to earlier crimes committed against ethnic and religious minorities like the Kazakhs in Central Asia, the Armenians in Turkey, or the expulsion of the Greek Orthodox population from Asia Minor by the Turks in 1922. Still, Lemkin recognized that the Jews "being one of the main objects of German genocide policy" made them unique, but he did not entirely separate the fate of the Jews from the fate of the Poles (for whom annihilation was, he believed, also prescribed) and other minorities left unprotected by the post-World War I treaties.⁶⁹

However, as Lemkin later argued, the genocide convention dealt more narrowly "with the monstrous crime of wholesale destruction of nations, races and religious groups [and] requires the specific intent to wipe out all inhabitants of a country belonging to such groups in a manner that substantial parts of these groups are annihilated."⁷⁰

After the United Nations adopted the convention, critics proposed extending Lemkin's construction to include more diverse victim groups—political groups and classes—or expanding his notion of perpetrators to include not

merely states and individuals but also “representatives” of the nation-state, including soldiers, settlers, and missionaries as well as nonstate actors.⁷¹ Attempts to include, for example, mass bombardment, effects of occupation, depopulation, famine, disease, and gross negligence (e.g., Bhopal, Chernobyl) have led some scholars to propose either eliminating entirely or distinguishing degrees of intent.⁷² Others would insist on a less elastic concept, closer to Lemkin’s own, distinguishing more sharply, for example, between genocide and “ethnic cleansing”—forcible removal, expulsion or wartime pogroms, massacres, deportations, and even mass killing by bombing, none of which “intend” to destroy “in whole or in part” (Lemkin’s formulation) entire population groups.⁷³

As a semantic stockpile, the genocide concept was volatile and subject to the vicissitudes of Cold War politics. With the Korean War, the Slánský trial, and the Rosenberg espionage case dominating world headlines, the Soviet Union pressed the charge of racial genocide against the United States at the UN. In the General Assembly session of May 9, 1952, the Soviet delegation proposed a text to be included in the draft Covenant on Human Rights that would submit lynching to be under the control of the UN.⁷⁴ As Lemkin put it, “Under such circumstances it will be impossible to charge the Soviet Union with her crimes against millions of people because she will retaliate with discrimination and lynching charges.”⁷⁵

In 1951, a campaign was launched by the Civil Rights Congress, a Communist Party–sponsored civil rights organization headed by an African American lawyer, William L. Patterson, charged the government of the United States with the crime of genocide.⁷⁶ The campaign centered on a petition entitled *We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government against the Negro People*, which was signed by a number of prominent African American activists, including W. E. B. DuBois and Paul Robeson, and presented to the United Nations in December 1951 by Robeson in New York and by Patterson in Paris.⁷⁷ Rankled by the embarrassing and effective exploitation of what Senator Henry Cabot Lodge called “our Achilles heel before the world,” the State Department withdrew their passports. In Congress, Southerners and other conservatives opposed ratification of the genocide convention because it could lead to international condemnation of the United States in the United Nations.

In January 1953, Lemkin countered with his own genocide charge. Writing about the anti-Semitic “Slansky trial of thirteen Communists in Prague” (eleven were Jews), he pointed out: “The anti-Jewish nature of the indictment, and the technique of conducting the trial in a way calculated to create panic among all Czechoslovak Jews and Jews in Russia, are part and parcel of

the crime of genocide.”⁷⁸ In short, genocide, far from being an “unpolitical” concept, had become an article of mutual slander in the Cold War.

Conclusion

Genocide, like totalitarianism, is a semantic stockpile subject to its historical moment and to its deployment as an active force in international politics. These concepts perfectly illustrate Koselleck’s argument that political concepts become “the navigational instruments of the changing movement of history.”⁷⁹ Both are characterized by the fundamental categories of the “experience of temporalization and acceleration.” That neither warrant extensive discussion in Koselleck’s writing and in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* is all the more remarkable when we recall Koselleck’s brief comment on the concept of totalitarianism in his 1963 review of Talmon. The concept of totalitarianism signified, he reluctantly admitted, the ways in which conventional narratives of modernity had become “out of joint.”⁸⁰

So, indeed, had become his own narrative of modern temporality. Koselleck’s tacit acknowledgment that totalitarianism might require an account of historical temporality distinct from that of the *Sattelzeit* and more appropriate for twentieth-century political cataclysms is significant. As I have suggested, the concepts of totalitarianism and genocide illustrate a qualitatively different semantics of historical time, emphasizing the novelty of these “events” and the need for new concepts that can resist and proscribe (as in the crime of genocide) the open-ended futurity, acceleration, and ideologization characteristic of his rendering of historical time in classical modernity.

Notes

1. Reinhart Koselleck, “A Response to Comments on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*,” in *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 1996), 65.

2. Helge Jordheim, “Unzählbar viele Zeiten: Die Sattelzeit im Spiegel der Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen,” *Begriffene Geschichte: Beiträge zum Werk Reinhart Kosellecks*, ed. Hans Joas and Peter Vogt (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 456.

3. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1989), 359.

4. Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes, “Conceptual History, Memory, and Identity: An Interview with Reinhart Koselleck,” *Contributions* 2, no. 1 (1999): 99–127.

5. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 363.

6. Reinhard Mehring, “Begriffsgeschichte mit Carl Schmitt,” *Begriffene Geschichte: Beiträge zum Werk Reinhart Kosellecks*, ed. Hans Joas and Peter Vogt (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 138–68.

7. Reinhard Mehring, "Begriffssoziologie, Begriffsgeschichte, Begriffspolitik," in *Politische Ideengeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert: Konzepte und Kritik*, ed. Harald Bluhm and Jürgen Gebhardt (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2006), 31–50; see also Reinhard Mehring, "Carl Schmitt and His Influence on Historians," *Cardozo Law Review* 21 (2000): 1653–64; Timo Pankakoski, "Conflict, Context, Concreteness: Koselleck and Schmitt on Concepts," *Political Theory* 8, no. 6 (2010): 749–79; Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Postwar European Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 108–15.

8. Niklas Olsen, "Carl Schmitt, Reinhart Koselleck and the Foundations of History and Politics," *History of European Ideas* 37 (2011): 197–208.

9. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 36.

10. Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache mit zwei Beiträgen von Ulrike Spree und Willibald Steinmetz* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006), 282.

11. For Schmitt's relations to the younger generation of students in Heidelberg in this period, see Mehring, *Carl Schmitt: Aufstieg und Fall* (Munich: Polity, 2009), 463–504; Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 104–15; Dirk van Laak, *Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens: Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993).

12. Nicolaus Sombart, *Rendezvous mit dem Weltgeist: Heidelberger Reminiszenzen, 1945–1951* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2000), 270, 271.

13. On "Weltbürgerkrieg," see Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 114; Dan Diner, *Cataclysms: A History of the Twentieth Century from Europe's Edge* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 4. The concept apparently originated with Ernst Jünger. See Kai Köhler, "Der Faschismus, Ernst Jünger, und Die Gordische Knoten," in *Ernst Jünger, Politik, Mythos, Kunst*, ed. Lutz Hagedstedt (Berlin: Walther de Gruyter, 2004), 216.

14. Carl Schmitt, "Die Einheit der Welt," *Merkur* 6. Jahrgang, Heft 47, no. 1 (January 1952): 1–11.

15. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 1, translation amended.

16. Jürgen Habermas, "Verrufener Fortschritt—verkanntes Jahrhundert: zur Kritik der Geschichtsphilosophie. Rezension zu: Peter F. Drucker: *Das Fundament für Morgen*; Reinhart Koselleck: *Kritik und Krise*; Hanno Kesting: *Geschichtsphilosophie und Weltbürgertum*," in *Merkur* 14. Jahrgang, Heft 147, (1960): 468–77.

17. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 186, 190.

18. Niklas Olsen: *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck*. (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 42.

19. RK-HUW 1.12.70, German Literary Archive, Marbach, cited in Jan Eike Dunkahase, *Absurde Geschichte: Reinhart Kosellecks historischer Existentialismus* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Literaturarchiv Marbach, 2015).

20. Pankakoski, "Conflict, Context, Concreteness."

21. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Dimensionen und Grenzen der Begriffsgeschichte* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006), 261.

22. Gumbrecht, 22.

23. On latency, see Gumbrecht, *After 1945: Latency as the Origin of the Present* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

24. Ernst Nolte, "Faschismus," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), 2:329–36.

25. Koselleck, B. Schönemann, and Karl F. Werner, "Volk, Nation, Masse, Nationalismus," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Clett-Kotta, 1992), 7:399.

26. Koselleck, Schönemann, and Werner, 7:411.

27. In a two-hundred-page entry, there is no mention of George Mosse's *The Crisis of German Ideology*, which demonstrated how influential irrationalist and antidemocratic currents of *Völkisch* thought were for the formation of the Nazi worldview. George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1964). The German edition appeared in 1979.

28. Paul Nolte, "Vom Fortschreiben und Umschreiben der Begriffe. Kommentar zu Christian Geulen," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 7 (2010): Heft 1, <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/1-2010/id=4616>.

29. Koselleck, "On the History of Concepts and the Concept of History," in *Disseminating German Tradition: The Thyssen Lectures*, ed. Dan Diner and Moshe Zimmermann (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2009), 29–49.

30. On Brunner, see James van Horn Melton, "Otto Brunner und die ideologischen Ursprünge der Begriffsgeschichte," in *Begriffene Geschichte: Beiträge zum Werk Reinhart Kosellecks*, ed. Hans Joas and Peter Vogt (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011), 123–37. On Conze, see Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, eds., *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

31. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 1.

32. Diner, *Cataclysms*.

33. Christian Geulen, "Plädoyer für eine Geschichte der Grundbegriffe des 20. Jahrhunderts," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 7 (2010): H. 1, <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Editorial-1-2010>; Anson Rabinbach, *Begriffe aus dem Kalten Krieg* (Cologne: Wallstein, 2006), 73.

34. Koselleck, "Historical Time and Social History," in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Samuel Presner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 129.

35. Geulen, "Plädoyer."

36. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 306.

37. Originally published as Arendt, "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government," *Review of Politics* 15, no. 3 (July 1953): 303–27.

38. Arendt, *Totalitarianism: Part Three of The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 159, 160.

39. Arendt.

40. Boaz Neumann, "The National Socialist Politics of Life," *New German Critique*, no. 85 (Winter 2002): 107–30. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann has shown that Koselleck shared with Arendt a decisive opposition to the philosophy of history whose claims to total explanation culminated in the totalitarian idea of fabricating mankind. Both shared a similar political anthropology: Arendt a restoration of the political space of "natality"; Koselleck, a transformation of the philosophy of history into the study of the conditions of historical experience pregnant with surprise. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Koselleck, Arendt, and the Anthropology of Historical Experience," *History & Theory* 49 (2010): S212–S236.

41. Koselleck, "Der Ursprung der Moderne," *Neue Politische Literatur* 8 (1963): 863–66.
42. Geulen, "Plädoyer"
43. Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 136.
44. Arendt, 141.
45. François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Deborah Furet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 180. For a critical assessment, see Richard Shorten, "François Furet and Totalitarianism," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* (Summer 2002): 1–34. On Furet and Koselleck, see John Raimo, "Dans l'ombre des révolutions: Reinhart Koselleck et l'historiographie française," *Revue Germanique internationale* (Spring 2017): <https://rgi.revues.org/219>.
46. See Henry Rousso, *Stalinism and Nazism: History and Memory Compared* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 636; Ian Kershaw, "Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004): 249–50.
47. Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. chap. 9.
48. See the excellent account by William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Benjamin Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s–1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 67.
49. Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 140, 141.
50. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*, 141.
51. Franz Borkenau, *The Totalitarian Enemy* (1940; New York: AMS Press, 1982), 7.
52. Greenberg, *Weimar Century*, 167.
53. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Democracy and Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).
54. Furet, *Passing of an Illusion*, 224.
55. "‘More Humility, Fewer Illusions’—A Talk between Adam Michnik and Jürgen Habermas," *New York Review of Books*, March 24, 1994.
56. Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2003); Thomas Cushman, ed., *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 14.
57. Raphael Lemkin, "A Crime without a Name," *American Scholar* 15, no. 2 (April 1946): 227–30. Prime Minister Winston Churchill's broadcast to the world about the meeting with President Roosevelt, August 24, 1941, available at <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/timeline/410824awp.html>; Lemkin, "Genocide" (1946), 227.
58. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 263.
59. Raphael Lemkin, "Genocide—A Modern Crime," *Free World: A Non-Partisan Magazine Devoted to the United Nations and Democracy* 4 (April 1945): 39–43.
60. Raphael Lemkin Manuscript Collection (hereafter Lemkin Manuscript Collection), no. 60, box 7, folder 13, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.
61. Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation. Analysis of Government Proposals for Redress* (Clark, NJ: Lawbook Exchange, 2005), xi.
62. Lemkin, "Genocide—A Modern Crime," 39.

63. "Genocide," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1944. See also "Genocide," *New York Times*, August 26, 1945.

64. Raphael Lemkin, "Genocide," *American Scholar* 15, no. 2 (April 1946): 227–30.

65. Alain Finkielkraut, *The Future of a Negation: Reflections on the Question of Genocide*, trans. Mary Byrd Kelly (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 100.

66. Dan Diner, "The Destruction of Narrativity," in *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Moishe Postone and Eric Santner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 67–80.

67. Hans Kelsen, review of *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, in *California Law Review* 34, no. 1 (March 1946): 271.

68. John Connelly, "Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice," *Central European History* 32 (1999): 1–35.

69. Diner, "Destruction of Narrativity," 76.

70. Lemkin Manuscript Collection, no. 60, box 4, folder 4, "Speech on the Genocide Pact, Delivered at Yale University," n.d.

71. Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 1993), 8–25; George J. Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), especially the essays by Leo Kuper, Frank Chalk, and Israel W. Charny.

72. Henry Huttenbach, "Locating the Holocaust on the Genocide Spectrum," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3 (1988): 289–304.

73. This approach is effectively argued by Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 9–11. Weitz usefully distinguishes between genocidal acts and genocidal regimes.

74. Raphael Lemkin Papers, 1947–1959, New York Public Library, reel 3, box VIII.

75. Raphael Lemkin Papers, 1947–1959, New York Public Library, reel 3, box VIII. Lemkin recognized the prospect of including lynching under genocide as early as November 9, 1947: "If the French suggestion would be followed it would 'internationalize' even individual crimes of the murder type like lynching. This was certainly not the intention of the authors of the resolution of December 11, 1946." Lemkin to Mr. Fahy, November 9, 1947, American Jewish Historical Society, Lemkin Papers, P-154, 1:5. As he wrote to Max Sorenson, the Danish delegate to the United Nations in 1951: "While reading the draft Covenant on Human Rights I was unfavorably impressed by its legal formulation. Especially article 3 worries me, because I heard from one of the non-governmental organizations here of a planned attempt to include some of the elements of the Genocide Convention in the Human Rights Covenant." Lemkin to Max Sorensen, April 15, 1951, Lemkin Manuscript Collection, no. 60, box 2, folder 1.

76. Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government against the Negro People* (New York, 1951), 170.

77. Civil Rights Congress, 193.

78. Lemkin, "Is It Genocide?" *The ADL [Anti-Defamation League] Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (January 1953): 3.

79. Koselleck, "Historical Time and Social History," 129.

80. Koselleck, "Der Ursprung der Moderne."

A Technofossil of the Anthropocene: Sliding Up and Down Temporal Scales with Plastic

ANDREA WESTERMANN

We are all reef builders, laying down an immense detritus like our relatives, the warm-water polyps of the oceans. But unlike the polyps, humans can chart and measure the debris of culture.

GEORGE KUBLER, *What Can Historians Do for Architects?* (1965)

Plastic sheeting is protecting Alpine glaciers against rising high-altitude temperatures and rapid melting; it is a building block of sanitary landfills to prevent groundwater contamination; and it serves as an emergency containment device in case of oil spills, fending off further pollution of the oceans and the beaches. Our patching up the planet's surface with plastic makes it obvious that modern societies are tinkering with the earth in multiple ways. Ever since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Research published its first report in 1990, geoscientists have collectively argued that the earlier and ongoing societal impact on the earth system is changing its processes for a very long time to come and that societies have become a major geological force in their own right.

In earth-systemic processes, “the various parts of the Earth system—rock, water, atmosphere—are all involved in interrelated cycles, where matter is continually in motion and is used and reused.”¹ Geologists have picked up on a more recently circulating matter, plastic, as a candidate for becoming, in the deep future of the earth, an index fossil of modern society—just like the stratigraphic record of growing carbon dioxide emissions, nuclear radiation, and highly intensive global species exchange and extinction. In particular, the 2013 discovery of geologically recycled plastic waste in the form of a “plastiglomerate” generated an enormous amount of attention and debate. The stonelike entity found on Kamilo Beach in Hawaii, named for the nearby “twisting or swirling currents,” comprised melted plastic, beach sediment, basaltic lava fragments, and organic debris.² Geologist Patricia Corcoran and others have described it as a “marker horizon of human pollution” in the making.³ Artists, social and cultural scientists, environmental organizations, and the media have keenly taken up this suggestion.⁴

In 2000, climate scientist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer argued for formalizing such “marker horizons” and recalibrating the geological time scale accordingly. They invited their colleagues in the earth sciences to consider consigning the contemporary geological epoch of the Holocene to the past by superimposing a new time interval on the geologic time scale, that of the Anthropocene.⁵ A recently coined concept, the Anthropocene has been a political intervention, an attempt by its promoters to usher in a new political order with heightened environmental awareness. The responses, critical and/or supportive, were not long in coming. “In an unexpected inversion of the respective positions,” a group of earth scientists has launched a societywide debate that spurs humanists and social scientists to explore possible forms of geo-subjectivities, revise early twentieth-century geopolitical theory, or continue, with revived urgency, to study power relations made visible or invisible when engaging with global or planetary concepts. Scholars in the humanities have also started to rethink “the very framework in which history is supposed to unfold.”⁶ One would assume, after all, that the overlapping of earth and societal history is consequential not only for stratigraphic taxonomy but also for historical research.

By now, the International Commission on Quaternary Stratigraphy’s Anthropocene Working Group has suggested taking radioactivity released by atomic bomb testing to indicate the end of the Holocene around 1950.⁷ At first glance, the new geological time interval is modeled strictly as a category of contemporary history writing. Yet in contemporary history, a moving “generational” wall ensures that the contemporary epoch remains relatively short, always closely tied to those studying it: The source material for contemporary historians is slowly being overturned, dragging along only a few traces of the many pasts it leaves behind. Anthropocene geology, in contrast, reckons with and is, in fact, dependent on the ever-growing sedimentary record it has to consider—even though it can do so only in the modus of projection. As environmental historian Libby Robin described it, the Anthropocene “is an epoch that is not so much back-dated as forecast.”⁸

We have set the earth system irretrievably on the track of global warming and, because of the inertia of earth-systemic processes, its course can be fairly well projected into the near and midrange future of historical time. Yet Anthropocene geologists still insist on the earth’s open future. No one knows exactly how the story will end. They claim that this makes for an important difference between the Anthropocene and the previous geological epochs or ages: “These others have all terminated: we know their entire history. The Anthropocene is ongoing. . . . The long-term extent of the ‘built-in’ future changes is currently unknowable, as it largely depends on the interplay of

feedback effects that will either amplify or diminish the effects of anthropogenic change.”⁹

That geologists would have known Earth’s entire history up till now is of course not quite true. Dealing with unfinished narratives is their everyday business. Like historians, every generation of climate scientists is compelled, historian of technology Paul Edwards reminds us, “to revisit the same data, the same events—digging through the archives to ferret out new evidence, correct some previous interpretation, or find some new ways to deduce the story behind the numbers. Just as with human history, we will never get a single, unshakable narrative of the global climate’s past.”¹⁰ Paleoclimatologists, sedimentologists, and glaciologists have been busy excavating from marine and lacustrine sedimentary archives, or from ice cores, hitherto invisible events—meteorite strikes, extraordinary volcanic outbursts, colliding continents, and disappearing oceans—that induced climate shifts accompanied by major ecological transformations to the living conditions for flora and fauna. It is only against the backdrop of a fuller, more eventful narrative of deep time that the current human-induced temperature rise could be said to be happening at an unprecedented pace, and that its consequences could be interpreted and extrapolated.¹¹ Anthropocene geology has therefore doubled its task: not only does it continue to back-project a deep past; it also reverses the conjectural structure of nineteenth-century geology, projecting it forward into an unknown future or series of unknown possible futures.

What does the metaphor of plastic as an “index fossil” or “technofossil” of the future mean in these debates and projections?¹² This metaphor is geology’s other new notion besides the Anthropocene. Conceived as a temporal-political thought experiment for imagining the planet after our own extinction, it also lends itself to other scaling exercises. Karl Marx, for instance, not only embraced the stratigraphic notion of formation for his analysis of societies, but he already put to work the idea of fossils: “Relics of bygone instruments of labour possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economic formations of society as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals.”¹³

Scholarship involved in devising scaling practices often meets skepticism about the limits of human cognition and human ethics to reason and care about phenomena that transcend the scale of everyday or historical life. Many observers doubt that two different frameworks of measuring the collectiveness of human life in the debates about the Anthropocene, “societies” and “species,” can be mediated. They argue that these two forms of collectiveness, or as the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* says, the two “qualities of being collective” are incommensurable, one being sociologically defined, the other biologically.¹⁴

And still, we have come to accept the idea that carbon emission can serve as the metric of anthropogenic action on the planetary scale. We have come to accept, as sociologists Wendy Espeland and Mitchell Stevens argue in their much-cited article “Commensuration as a Social Process,” that making things commensurate implies “the transformation of different qualities into a common metric.”¹⁵ Despite its etymology, commensuration is not bound to numerical operations only. We have found other, nonquantified forms of bringing human societies and the human species in a single framework. As this essay makes clear, the notion of plastic as a technofossil is an imaginary device with which we slide up and down temporal scales, from the present to an unknown deep future. It is a device of what Deborah Coen, Nils Güttler, and I have called creative commensuration.¹⁶

Applying the technofossil metaphor to plastic and its waste has greatly amplified the resonance of the notion, a resonance in no small part due to our collective experience with synthetic materials: our plastic societies’ waste, on its way to becoming the imagined technofossil, looks different at different stages of decay. These stages are already visible at various social and geographical sites in the present: Consumer citizens are confronted with plastic waste as packaging or food containers waiting to be thrown away; as recently discarded loose urban litter or in more compact form after waste recollection, processing, and storage in landfills; as part and parcel of a toxic electronic-waste flow toward the Global South; as beach flotsam; and as pelagic, that is to say, deep-sea concentration of macro and micro plastic debris. Given its distinctive forms, plastic waste can be sorted into a spatialized sequence of material decay. This sequence can be followed back and forth by using the actor’s category of plastic as a scaling device. The essay will do just this.

This essay deals with the temporal scales of plastic as they are manifest in the political now: ranging from plastic’s geological or deep scales, embryonic in the stonelike, if not yet lithified, entity of the plastiglomerate, to plastic’s shallowest scales in the minute durations of our mundane interactions with single-service containers. The essay first considers how plastic as a heuristic tool is propelling the impact of human activity on the earth system into the deep future. Second, it explores how plastic waste allows us to perceive the present as a deep present, drawing on methods developed in the study of the deep past or prehistory and transposed to the archaeology of our daily lives. Third, it shows how the societal history of plastic has developed into a temporally stratified omnipresence. From the mid-twentieth century on, plastic’s properties—along with its uses—have woven together notions of the past, the present, and the future. Those properties have also helped to rhythmically pattern these temporal registers. We see a short yet growing past that is

accumulating materially in the present; a strong, economy-driven presentism in the form of disposability, and a deep future echoing, in the empirical case study on which this chapter is based, West German consumer-democratic visions of a near future of plenty. The fourth section shows that we can consider plastic's temporalities not only as an academic domain but also as a sphere of mundane consumer practice and melancholic artistic reflection. It will become clear that these pasts and futures of plastic are a result of the wide range of disciplinary engagement with the material and its properties. At the same time, disciplinary disjunctures tend to be blurred by our imagining of plastic waste as an objectlike, archaeological artifact; we tend to zoom in on a large, yet still historical, scale.

Plastic as Geological Matter

The temporal range for defining not historical but geological or “deep” futures has a wide scope. It embraces “the standpoint of the field geologist living say 10,000 years from now” or envisions the earth’s crust as far as one hundred thousand years in the future.¹⁷ Jan Zalasiewicz, a British paleobiologist and leading figure in debating the formal recalibration of the geologic timescale, has written a book in which he even imagines the earth in millions of years. He asks, “What kind of strata will be available for study, one hundred million years from now?”¹⁸ Since the human species, and hence field geologists, will presumably be extinct by that time, Zalasiewicz summons—in good geological tradition—extraterrestrial investigators landing on Earth, although this time in the distant future. Austria’s pioneer of global tectonics, Eduard Suess, in the introduction to his multivolume 1883 study *Das Antlitz der Erde*, resorted to an extraterrestrial perspective to present the earth and its surface layers as one single—and indeed, earth-systemic—object of research.¹⁹ For the futuristic thought experiments of Anthropocene stratigraphy, the extraterrestrial observer not only brings in the totalizing, empowering gaze from outer space; imagining the role of a future paleontologist also “requires shifting from a focus on visible marks to invisible voices,” voices that comment on or interpret the traces in their cultural, economic, and political significance for a lost species.²⁰

The visitors will find the earth’s surface profile radically changed as compared to today because of ever-ongoing tectonic and climate dynamics. This implies that the sedimentary archives will be far from “complete.” Large blocks of time will be lost—or better said, they will not have neatly accumulated in the first place. They will have been continuously modified or destroyed by concurrent processes of mountain building, erosion, and continental collision. Yet there is a possibility that some distinctive fossil record of human

societies will have been stored, either deposited and preserved in an ocean environment or integrated into new mountain ranges formed along margins of tectonic plates. Both circumstances could have saved it from disappearing as a result of weathering and erosion.²¹ The extraterrestrial observers might just be able to find these strata if the parts of the rock sections enclosing them crop out of the surface at some points, making them accessible for field investigation, or if they apply drilling technologies.

As the narrative suggests, Anthropocene geologists study ongoing accumulation processes in unconsolidated and more transient media; they extrapolate the compact lithosphere of the far future from an utterly diverse biosphere, hosting innumerable flows and cycles, actions, organizations, species, and artifacts. It has turned out that most of our sea- and land-sourced plastic debris ends up in the deep sea. Oceanic currents and atmospheric forces have swept together our non-biodegradable plastic waste, which has been scattering globally over sixty or seventy years, in five major oceanic gyres, or whirls made up of ocean currents that spiral around a center. New entities, simultaneously planetary and global, have emerged: the ocean garbage patches.

These ocean garbage patches are accumulating, geologically speaking, in an ideal, deep-sea environment of large-scale sedimentation. This has consolidated the notion of plastic as geological matter for speculating about the potential changes the earth will undergo in geological times to come.²² For geologists, plastic has become an “epistemic thing,” to adopt Hans-Jörg Rheinberger’s notion, something that guides and drives experimental research while remaining vague in its shape and characteristics because it simultaneously forms the object under study: “Epistemic things embody what one does not yet know,” explains Rheinberger frankly.²³ At the same time, Anthropocene stratigraphy deals with real-world experiments. The long-term decomposition of plastic in different environments, what Jeffrey Howard calls the shape and content of “highly compacted sedimentary layers comprising an anthropogenic mixture of earth materials,”²⁴ is considerably less tractable than any of Rheinberger’s epistemic things might be, located as they are in the confines of the laboratory. Unlike lab scientists, and unlike climate scientists who are modeling data and forecasting climate scenarios, stratigraphers are not able to scale down the planetary dimensions of the earth to their controlled and recurrent manipulation and reconceptualization. Geologists tend to resort to analogies instead. Going back in geological time and taking as an example the chalk strata, which started to form one hundred million years ago in a marine context, Zalasiewicz has explained that the roughly two hundred years since the onset of the fossil-fuel based Industrial Revolution would probably translate, in some privileged, erosion-low environments, into

a section of strata no thicker than one or two millimeters.²⁵ Plastic consumption started to take off globally only after 1945, further reducing the thinness of the supposed strata.²⁶ We could add, of course, the future debris and impact of human societies. Still, the figurative and aesthetic dimension inherent in archaeological fragments and in geological fossils, so important to “folk archaeological activities” and the lay public,²⁷ who in their role as eager amateur collectors have been vitally important for creating geology as a field science,²⁸ is bound to shrink to nil in the case of plastic as a sedimentary component. Future observers will find a biogeochemical signal imperceptible to nonexperts of today and probably tomorrow. To geologists, this is no surprise. Decentering anthropocentric notions of “man’s place in nature” by discovering geological time in the early 1800s has arguably been geology’s major nineteenth-century contribution to modern thinking: It turned out that, for the longest of its history, Earth had accommodated “worlds before Adam.”²⁹ And yet, by meditating about plastic’s future forms and, more generally, turning their attention to the fact that societal action is altering the functioning of the earth system, Anthropocene geologists have started to revise the boundary between Earth and human history that they had helped delineate in the early nineteenth century.

Archaeology of Plastic

It is important to note that the technofossil metaphor evokes aesthetically resonating, thing-like objects more than biogeochemical signals. Paradoxically perhaps, it redimensions the envisioned time horizon from geological to historical scales. We do not need to go all the way down, with geologists, to imagine plastic in its ultimate geological metamorphosis. Intuitively, we stop at a more recognizable, “archaeological” state of deep-time decay.

Archaeological time has been associated with plastic before. The establishment of the new image of plastics as future technofossils is an offshoot of the visual-aesthetic, discursive, and tangible experiences with plastic in its stages of slow material decay and accumulation that Western societies have been making for more than half a century. Coming from the opposite temporal direction, but with a similarly intuitive impulse, consumers and professional waste managers felt compelled, already in the late 1960s, to concede a deeper, longer-lasting present to the plastic waste accumulating around them. Sliding up the temporal scale, they looked at the decomposition of different types of plastic from an “archaeology of the contemporary world” perspective, as exhibited, for instance, in the photographic documentation of a landfill excavation from a depth of 550 meters in September 1971.³⁰ Within this

scale of observation—given the municipal concerns prompting the excavations, one could speak of an environmental time scale—plastic waste began to emerge as an archaeological object.³¹

Let me dwell a bit more on the relationship of geological time, archaeological time, and the deep present on which contemporary waste studies are focusing. The geological timescale grew not only by discovering new epochs. Considering the slow evolutionary change in fauna and flora, the time intervals themselves had to be immensely expanded, adding up to what science writer John McPhee named “deep time” in 1981.³² Why did this term that would convey geological temporalities so successfully “pop up” in his head and “just seem right,” as he recently told me over the phone? Perhaps McPhee was inspired to transpose the vastness explored by Cold War deep-space research to geology. The immediate, overwhelming rise of this notion after 1981 suggests that the space age at least provided a most receptive climate for the spatial metaphor. This fits because the analogy of astronomic space has already helped geologists imagine the immensity of geological time. Charles Lyell’s comparison in 1830 is only one of many references: “The views of immensity of time, like those unfolded by the Newtonian philosophy in regard to space” see worlds “beyond worlds immeasurably distant from each other.”³³

Another tradition also contributed to the establishment of the term. A JSTOR search suggests that “deep time” has gained some currency in prehistorical, anthropological, and archaeological studies of the 1940s and 1950s. The long-standing relationship between geology and the sciences of antiquity arguably made sure that the term traveled easily between the fields and was available to geologists and historians of geology by the mid-twentieth century. Already in the early nineteenth century, prehistorians and archaeologists had taken over the geological principle of superposition from geology: in undisturbed stratigraphic sequences, the oldest strata are at the bottom of the sequence.³⁴ In turn, geologists had benefited from their colleagues in prehistory and archaeology. Their practices of historical excavation and interpretation had helped bring about the evidentiary and contextual turn in geology, with its emphasis on empirical work at the local level and on the paleoecological conditions of the find spot at the time of fossil deposition. The site of the find became as important as the fossils found. And just as with the prehistorical record, the geological record was, by definition, incomplete. McPhee’s “deep time” perfectly captured the image of the terrestrial underground as spatialized, stored time. What started out as a metaphorical transfer of concepts—such as geologists being “antiquaires d’une nouvelle espèce” (Georges Louis Duvernoy, 1829) and notions of “rock record,” fossils as “medals” and mountains as “monuments”—had evolved, by the 1830s, into a strong set of geological

research practices identifying fragmented, ruined material evidence from beneath contemporary landscapes as traces of the past.³⁵

The emphasis is on *ruined*. “The cultural clock” with which archaeologists “chart and measure the debris of culture” in terms of patterns and temporalities mainly runs on “ruined fragments of matter recovered from refuse heaps and graveyards, from abandoned cities and buried villages,” argued George Kubler, a US historian of European art and archaeologist of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.³⁶ “Household waste is what most archaeologists study most of the time,” repeated William Rathje, founder of social-scientific waste studies or garbology.³⁷ Rathje claimed that contemporary archaeology would be well placed to examine the recent discards of household bins or landfills while sticking to (pre)historical research methods that the historian of communication John Durham Peters has succinctly summarized as follows: “It is a matter of triangulating record, transmission, and interpretation.”³⁸ A society’s accumulating waste mirrors its deeply entrenched culture; such is the premise of archaeologists and garbologists alike. This may be so either straightforwardly, when discarded things and their fragments serve as material traces of past actions or “fossil actions,”³⁹ or when the “afterlife of waste” is analyzed, thus highlighting the forms of intended and unintended transmission.⁴⁰

In yet another approach, informed by the history of mentalities, discarded things rather reflect a society’s value system. Social scientists use waste and the practices of discarding to study prevailing ideas of social order and deviance, about “purity and danger,” as Mary Douglas’s famous dichotomy describes.⁴¹ Taking these considerations a step further, scholars explore our prevailing ethics of waste, relying on the triad of “disposability, distance, and denial.”⁴² They study the corresponding practices of sanitation, convenience, technological fixes, and hazardous-waste exports, which have undergirded the rise of Western mass consumption.

Besides shared commonalities, the ways archaeologists and students of garbage approach waste also have distinctive features. Waste studies differ from classical archaeology in that they resort to and benefit from complementary records normally not available in lost societies; moreover, the knowledge gained about waste habits and management can be fed back into the observed fields of action and engage with current politics or consumer habits.⁴³ Also, while antiquities represent, in an art-historical fashion, rare treasures sought after by private and institutional collectors, the discarded item itself is arguably much less important in contemporary studies of mass waste. For one thing, the discarded items are not considered valuable simply because there are so many of them. Furthermore, a thing we dispose of has stopped being a thing and instead has become waste, an aggregate that is lumped together

materially, imaginatively, and statistically with other useless things or fragments. This is all the truer for plastic items, because, like waste, “plastic” is a collective singular or mass noun. “Plastic” is a generic name that stands for a broad range of industrial materials, just like “metal”: “Despite substantial diversity among metals, despite variations in their weight, coloration, and sonority, one generic material image stands in for all of them, the precise, clear, and immediately perceptible image of metallic existence.”⁴⁴

History of Plastic

For both epistemic and practical reasons, waste studies and contemporary archaeology work in the deep present, a longer-lasting stretch of time that is coextensive with a contemporary historian’s notion of the past. In what follows, I draw on an additional set of historical sources to explain the nuanced future-orientedness of the “plastic as technofossil” metaphor. As both a technoscientific macromolecular substance and a mass cultural artifact, plastic embodies the temporality of advancement and a tangible future. I also argue that the deep present of plastic originates in postwar growth economies’ imperative for rapid turnover.

Since the inception of celluloid in the late nineteenth century, the wide range of uses envisioned for plastic’s properties—note Bakelite’s forward-looking, early twentieth-century trademark, the infinity symbol under the letter “B” to denote myriad uses—and the everyday presence of synthetics have recurrently prompted strong utopian and dystopian visions. Representing the high-modernist dream of overcoming nature at its most radical, “surrogates” as the early plastics were called, were about to shake up not only the natural but also the social order.

With the help of these “surrogates,” groups of aspiring social climbers imitated the bourgeois lifestyle and the interior décor of the upper echelons of society. In a society segregated according to estates and class, the goal of diminishing social distinction and ignoring social boundaries was frowned upon.⁴⁵ The real thing was faked: around 1900, critics spoke of an obsession with pretense. Thanks to the production of plastics, the idea of superficiality became applicable not only to persons, to their actions and sentiments, but also to things. This semantic extension has been crucial to the image of plastics, and it has vividly substantiated the topos of the “superficiality of the mass culture” ever since.⁴⁶

By providing infrastructural support and commodities, thermoplastics were critical for reconstructing and furnishing West Germany’s public and private spaces after 1945. Their techno-scientific origin bound plastics to a present imbued with the temporal code of progress. They were claimed to be the

material that would boost not only the postwar economy but also the newly instigated consumer democracy. West Germans soon incorporated plastics into their everyday lives: annual per capita consumption of all plastics increased from 1.9 kilograms in 1950 to 15 kilograms in 1960, thus outstripping US levels of 6.4 kilograms in 1950 and 10.7 kilograms in 1960.⁴⁷ Surface applications that seemed to serve primarily aesthetic needs, such as washable public-transport upholstery, no-iron men's shirts, and cosmetic jars, turned out to be equally key technical features of mass consumption. Plastic production grew to encompass a broad range of customized substances, or "informed materials,"⁴⁸ which subsequently shaped and informed their environments: architecture, the medical infrastructure of hospitals, supermarket logistics.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, translucent cellophane was hailed as the ideal packaging material for itemized commodities, displaying their content and protecting them from getting damaged or spoiled while also informing consumers on technical details. For all these reasons, and more—think of wrapping loaded pallets with cling film for efficient stacking and safe (container) transportation—plastic packaging has become, in social scientist Gay Hawkins's aptly chosen phrase, the "skin of commerce." Anthropocene scientists have picked up on this imagery and the additional appeal of plastic in their efforts to explain the environmental stakes. Charles Moore, one of the citizen scientists whose marine research expeditions made public the existence of ocean garbage patches, opens his account of events by invoking the beautiful vista of the sea's sleek water surface: "The ocean looks like glossy blue cellophane, like a pond on a summer day."⁴⁹ In their review of research on plastic waste, Zalasiewicz and colleagues explain the order of magnitude of our all-time plastic production along similar lines: they say that by 2050, the projected amount of about forty billion tons "is enough to wrap six layers of cling film around the planet." The idea of encasing Earth in plastic had been earlier taken up by *Time* magazine and the artist Christo for the magazine's January 2, 1989, cover of the issue "Planet of the Year: Endangered Earth."⁵⁰

Anthropocene stratigraphers have embraced the idea of long-lived plastic as a deep-future trace of contemporary societies' existence on the earth not least because we are already familiar with placing ourselves in an age of plastic. Although the actual mechanisms and patterns of deep-sea accumulation came as a surprise despite several announcements,⁵¹ people have imagined themselves drowned in a sea of plastic waste or buried beneath mountains of plastic waste as early as the mid- to late 1960s: "Fighting waste amounts to either fighting the excesses of plastic consumption or fighting specific characteristics of plastics."⁵² In so doing, they commented on the widespread idea of having entered the postwar, mass-cultural "plastic age" or "plastics age."⁵³ The popular

self-designation, coined by both proponents and critics of synthetics, obviously mimicked the prehistorians' practice of defining periods according to key materials and fitting technologies, such as the Stone Age or the Iron Age.⁵⁴

Just like their nineteenth-century predecessors, postwar critics of plastic in West Germany based their arguments on fine-grained judgments of taste as indicators of class; according to their new interpretation, the superficiality, or hollowness, and cheapness of plastic underpinned the politically driven creation of a depoliticized consumer democracy. Add to this the oft-despised complacent malleability of plastic masses, an idea easily transferable to "passive" consumer "masses," and you get the picture. Meanwhile, plastic sheeting could be considered both a protective envelope and a medium of individual alienation.⁵⁵ The following fragmentary statement in a letter to the editor of an alternative, fanzine-like magazine of the late 1970s is graphic in its own way. The author is torn between feeling suffocated, somehow stuck in time and at the mercy of the relentless, questionable progress that the political and public uses of plastic design denote: "The city is kaput, and the whole plastic life, and that you can't do anything about all these political changes."⁵⁶

Such cultural reservations about West Germany's consumer democracy were thwarted, from the late 1960s and early 1970s, by environmental concerns. Plastic, the last thing that highbrow or antiestablishment pundits predicted, clearly demonstrated that consumer citizens were keen not only to benefit from economic prosperity but also to raise their political voice. Yet people did not just complain about littering and a new throwaway culture. After the discovery of occupational cancer in companies producing vinyl, they made health "a surrogate of the environment,"⁵⁷ arguing that plastics posed a threat to both the environment and consumer health. West Germans wanted to have the facts presented to them about the types of plastic, waste streams, unintended consequences, mitigation measures, and potential material alternatives. They called for more and improved market mechanisms in order to respect the democratic principles of procedural transparency and citizens' electoral freedom—in this case, freedom of choice for consumers. Only the well informed would be able to exercise the consumer-democratic right to choose, and thus would become the all-decisive market force envisioned by the theorists of social market and consumer democracy.⁵⁸ To sum up, consumer citizens experienced the slow material decomposition of plastic in yet another form besides the archaeological decay of its waste: the profound carcinogenic effects of the monomer vinyl chloride are another example of plastic's deep present.⁵⁹

Plastic's present time is, however, more varied. To the deep present comes temporariness, even ephemerality, as suggested by its property of robust lightness.⁶⁰ Architects and artists in particular saw great opportunities for lightweight

construction in the context of exhibitions, disaster relief, or provisional “mobile” dwellings. One of Christo’s first art projects, *Running Fence*, was a shimmering white temporary construction made from two hundred thousand square meters of high-tech, heavy-woven white nylon, hung from a steel cable between steel poles.⁶¹ The fence was 5.5 meters high and ran for 40 kilometers through the counties of Sonoma and Marin in California, north of San Francisco, only to plunge into the Pacific Ocean. *Running Fence* was completed on September 10, 1976, and removed after two weeks. The fabric and steel poles were distributed among the fifty-nine farmers whose private land the fence traversed. Christo and his wife and artistic collaborator Jeanne-Claude explained: “The art project consisted of 42 months of collaborative efforts, the ranchers’ participation, 18 public hearings, three sessions at the Superior Courts of California, drafting a 450-page Environmental Impact Report and the temporary use of the hills, the sky and the ocean.”⁶² It is tempting to see the project as temporally “drawing things together” in order to highlight society’s more lasting but equally heterogeneous character:⁶³ made of things, institutions, nature, and people. Ephemerality and lightness suggest each other. The robust yet flexible fence played with the changing sunlight and gently moved with the wind. The landscape art project tapped into the provisional, airy, and even poetic character of plastic. Only today, it also reminds us of environmental engineering, of glacier protection and oil-spill containment.

The disposability of plastics is the flip side of ephemerality, the commercialized version massively exemplified by the “twin icons of plastic waste—flimsy plastic shopping bags and single-serve water bottles.”⁶⁴ Because of their disposability, heavily pushed by the chemical industry and their downstream users, plastics now are the key media of the immediate. Their ephemeral omnipresence has helped realize our “to-go” everyday, which in turn ties into an economic regime appreciating the permanent availability of a flexible workforce, and hinging, for the sake of the accelerated turnover of commodities, on the planned obsolescence of things.⁶⁵ Ironically, it is the miniature timescale of disposable plastic—the temporal shallowness of a large portion of our daily interaction with plastic—that creates the thickness of its archaeological accumulation and record in the present.

Current political protests and international initiatives prompted by the oceans’ plastic-filled gyres dwell on many aspects of the archaeology and history of plastics. At the international level, plastic pollution from vessels was addressed already back in 1973 by the International Convention Relating to Pollution from Ships’ annex “Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships,” enforced by the end of 1988.⁶⁶ Today’s proliferating “beach cleanups” have also

had many predecessors, such as the widespread call for garbage collection in 1970s West Germany, organized by local groups under the national heading “Initiative: Tidy Landscape” (Aktion Saubere Landschaft) and the 1980s initiatives of US surfers lobbying for the protection of coastal environments.⁶⁷

The idea that marine plastic debris is “matter out of place” that is not only challenging moral or aesthetic norms but also chemically polluting our food chain resonates strongly with environmentally minded citizens who have long thought of the oceans as the life-enabling “sea around us,”⁶⁸ covering 70 percent of the earth’s surface. Rachel Carson suggested, in sacred phrasing, that “in every curving beach, in every grain of sand, there is a story of the earth.”⁶⁹ And yes, beaches have been perfect embodiments of planetary processes: they testify to the rise of regional or global sea levels and thus serve the paleogeographic reconstruction of the former distribution of land and water masses on the earth’s surface. Beaches have long been rendered as boundaries between nature and culture—think of Caspar David Friedrich’s 1810 *Monk by the Sea*. They represent both remote wilderness and, even in their remoteness, a deeply cultural landscape;⁷⁰ think of Kamilo Beach, in Hawaii, the locus classicus of marine garbage beachcombers, “a beach that was once a place where Native Hawaiians used to come to find logs for their voyaging canoes” but is now culturally indexed by late twentieth-century plastic waste.⁷¹

Plastic Waste and Melancholic Artistic Reflection

Individual initiatives focusing on the deep present of plastic waste reflect aesthetically on how we deal with plastic. It seems to me that we are seeing yet another pattern emerge of temporal attachment to plastics. In response to the geological futures explored in the Anthropocene debate, some artist activists are looking at our plastic culture as a *mélange* of melancholy and anticipated nostalgia. The nostalgia echoes the promised material abundance for everybody, conveyed by the plastic items of the mid-twentieth century, which seems to have come at a huge price.⁷² The melancholic bias is exhibited in the habit of experiencing landscapes or nature. Artists regularly stroll along the beaches meditating on the plastic fragments they encounter. The outworn pieces appear, at second glance, to be much more beautiful, albeit sad, than the cheap and colorful products of mass consumption they once were. How else can we explain that they inspire aesthetic labor and artistic transformation? Those who engage with plastic single-service commodities or plastic beach flotsam seem to be mourning a plastic innocence that never existed in practical terms but whose image is still sustained by the scenes of its awe-inspiring techno-scientific

invention. They mourn while at the same time acknowledging the radical societal changes that lie ahead for us to be able to manage our many kinds of waste and emissions.

The reason I turn to artistic production in this final section is, first, the amount of the work produced; second, those activists and artists who engage with the sentinel presence of plastic waste depend on the aesthetic dimension of archaeological research. Their works are shaped by the metaphor of plastic as a technofossil of the future, but they are also materially creating and shaping these technofossils in the present, thus showcasing an archaeological approach beyond the academic domain.

After collecting plastic fragments on the beach or fishing them out of the water while sailing through the garbage gyres, activist artists will invariably sort them according to not only geographical origin but also color, form, or function: bottle caps, toys, toothbrushes, flip-flops.⁷³ Most collectors seem to feel sympathy for their finds. Charles Moore writes that he collects “items that might have been culled in a children’s neighborhood treasure hunt. . . . Faded and worn from years, maybe decades, in salt water . . . they’d seem benign if I hadn’t found them where they least belong, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.”⁷⁴ Jurgen Lehl photographed washed up, fragmented flip-flops on the spot and published the pictures in the format of a specimen book, thus likening the plastic flotsam to the classic representation of nature, or naturalizing it and suggesting our carbon as much as our paleontological footprint.⁷⁵ Canadian philosopher Barry Allen concedes in his piece on trash that “the most impressive thing about our trash is how well made it is. A plastic juice container tossed in the trash is astonishingly well made: the regularity of the surfaces; the fine hard ridges of the screw top, the elegant fusion of bottom and walls; all rendered in a light, transparent medium.”⁷⁶ Note that for him, just like for many West German citizens in the 1970s and the activists pointing to the ocean’s plastic gyres today, plastic stands for modern trash tout court.

Tara Donovan’s art objects, such as clouds of new white plastic cups, engage with the original, unspoiled fascination with the material.⁷⁷ In my view, her collections and recollections point to a simplicity that never was—the idea of expanding our range of raw materials through sheer knowledge-fueled resourcefulness. In so doing, Donovan echoes the plastic scientists’ sense of beauty. Nathaniel C. Wyeth, who developed PET bottles, gave the following account of his special moment of success: “After months of frustration . . . we had grown used to seeing blobs of resin caked on the mold. This time, at first glance, it looked as if the mold was empty. A closer look revealed something else: a crystal-clear bottle. Since then I have seen countless truly beautiful PET bottles.”⁷⁸ The nostalgic and melancholic engagement with plastic waste,

its deep present and possible futures, seems to signal a more subjective apprehension of the new geological epoch; one that might not foster resignation to the global geopolitical situation but that could find productive possibilities for small-scale, earth-centered political intervention in the present.⁷⁹

Conclusion

In his *History: The Last Things before the Last*, cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer famously claims that scholars address the historical universe at micro or macro scales that are ultimately incommensurate: too many details, causalities, and contexts get lost when conceptual notions, facts, and narratives travel up or down not only the temporal but also the spatial and analytical scales of historical research.⁸⁰ We can and must live with heterogeneous, incompatible realities. As Kracauer shows, historians early on developed narrative and analytic strategies that undergirded, not obfuscated, this state of things. Some historians, such as George Kubler in *The Shape of Time*, cited approvingly by former architect Kracauer, refrained from restricting themselves to either the micro or the macro sphere, telling thickly crafted stories not bereft of their large-scale contexts by deliberate use of the arising epistemic gaps.⁸¹

I analyzed the metaphor of plastic as a technofossil of unknown futures or still-to-be-completed pasts, created by geologists and currently circulating in the sciences, the humanities, the media, and the public space of politics and activism. Taken together, it turns out that the idea of plastic in different stages of decay serves all of us as a tool of creative commensuration. Metaphors are one way, within and beyond academia, of making incommensurate things commensurate to achieve a better understanding of the unknown, and, perhaps, establish new collaborations.⁸² I propose that we do not sift, like Kracauer, the natural worlds from the historical universe but extend our analytical scope to encompass them. Collaborations across the ever more punctuated nature-culture divide are all the more important given that societal actions are a key factor to be reckoned with in geology. “Earth science has become social science” and arguably more so today than in the late eighteenth century, when it was established as a cameral science.⁸³ To make better sense of what is at stake politically, economically, and culturally today, we could look more closely at former interactions between the earth and social sciences and their respective objects of inquiry as one way, in the humanities, to become more Earth-attuned disciplines.⁸⁴

Being founded, in no small part, in the study of the oceans’ plastic gyres, the concept of plastic as a future technofossil serves as a reminder that the “modern” notion of a steady natural or chronological “time that irreversibly

passes” will be refuted over and over again.⁸⁵ In all likelihood, macro and micro plastic fragments will not precipitate and sediment down steadily or become part of a continuous, unbroken geohistorical record. I suspect that, as long as our accumulations of plastic waste undergo societal monitoring, they will continue to produce turbulent temporal “flow(s) with whirlpools and rapids” calling for political assessment.⁸⁶

As I understand it, the geological context of the Anthropocene debate does not suggest a static, synchronic picture of the rock record at any given outcrop, a picture that historians might infer from Reinhart Koselleck’s stratigraphy-inspired formula of “the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous” in societal history, with its emphasis on excavating the sheer multiplicity of temporal regimes.⁸⁷ Geology and its disciplinary history, rather, invite us to develop a more earth-systemic imagination and to conceive of bioturbation, weathering, or tectonic motion not as data loss or data corruption but as standard processes in the development of the Earth’s crust over geological time. Thinking along these dynamic lines of geological upheaval, compression, or erosion and their causalities offer thicker descriptions of the “ecology of temporalities” building up around a particular institution, artifact, substance, or group of people or animals.⁸⁸ We may all be reef builders, according to George Kubler, the deep-time expert on artifacts as fossil action, whose material culture approach to history has silently guided this essay. Yet while building, modern societies are also obliterating the coral reefs of “our relatives, the warm-water polyps.” We know this because humans “chart and measure the debris of culture.”

Notes

The research for this article was supported by an Australian Research Council Grant: “Plastic: The Skin of Commerce,” Number: DP130101249. I would like to thank Tony Bennett, Gay Hawkins, Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, Helmut Weissert, and Stefanos Geroulanos for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of the chapter, and above all Natasha Wheatley for sharing with me her creativity in thinking about time.

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3. Patricia Corcoran and Charles J. Moore, “An Anthropogenic Marker Horizon in the Future Rock Record,” *GSA Today* 24, no. 6 (2014): 4–8; Jan Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams, Colin N. Waters, Anthony D. Barnosky, and Peter Haff, “The Technofossil Record of Humans,” *Anthropocene Review* 1 (2014): 33–43.

4. For instance, Julie Decker, preface to *Gyre: The Plastic Ocean*, ed. Julie Decker (London: Booth Clibborn Editions, 2014), 12–13; Heather Davis, “Life & Death in the Anthropocene: A Short History of Plastic,” in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 347–58.

5. Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” *IGBP Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17–18.

6. Bruno Latour, “Telling Friends from Foes in the Time of the Anthropocene,” in *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis*, ed. Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil, and Francois Gemenne (London: Routledge, 2015), 145–55, 154, 149. An influential contributor, though one not overly much attuned to approaches in science and technology studies, has been Dipesh Chakrabarty, with his piece “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222. See his recent essay “The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category,” *Critical Inquiry* 46, no. 1 (2019): 1–31. Yet another important intervention is Kyle Whyte, “Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises,” *Environment & Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 2 (2018): 224–42.

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9. Mark Williams Zalasiewicz, Will Steffen, and Paul Crutzen, “The New World of the Anthropocene,” *Environmental Science & Technology* 44 (2010): 2228–31, 2230; Erich W. Wolff, “Ice Sheets and the Anthropocene,” in *A Stratigraphical Basis for the Anthropocene: Special Publications* 395, ed. Colin N. Waters and Jan Zalasiewicz (London: Geological Society, 2014), 255–63.

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11. J. J. Hsu et al., “Mass Mortality and its Environmental and Evolutionary Consequences,” *Science* 216 (1982): 249–56. For a history-of-science perspective, see Matthias Dörries, “Politics, Geological Past, and the Future of the Earth,” *Historical Social Research* 40, no. 2 (2015): 22–36; Christoph Rosol, “Hauling Data: Anthropocene Analogues, Paleoceanography, and Missing Paradigm Shifts,” *Historical Social Research* 40, no. 2 (2015): 37–66.

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13. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 1:286.

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19. See Eduard Suess, introduction to *Das Antlitz der Erde* (Prague: F. Tempsky, 1883).

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21. Zalasiewicz, *Earth after Us*, 14–15.

22. Zalasiewicz et al., “The Geological Cycle of Plastics and Their Use as a Stratigraphic Indicator of the Anthropocene,” *Anthropocene* 13 (2016): 4–17; David Barnes, Francois Galgani, Richard C. Thompson, Morton Barlaz, “Accumulation and Fragmentation of Plastic Debris in Global Environments,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 364, no. 1526 (2009): 1985–98, 1985. Yet without written sources complementing the geological record, the ocean garbage patches will not provide the future visitors of the earth with a clear-cut time boundary. Benthic organisms will burrow into deep-sea sediments today enriched with plastic in the millennia to come. Geologists reckon that a bed of one cm or two formed over the twenty-first century will be blurred by benthic mixing or bioturbation within a newly forming sediment layer of up to ten centimeters thickness or more in the next few thousand years.

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56. Westermann, *Plastik*, 297.

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issue); Edmund D. Goldberg, "Plasticizing the Seafloor: An Overview," *Environmental Technology* 18 (1997): 195–201. For a new initiative, see Reinhold Leinfelder and Rüdiger Haum, "Ozeane," in *Inwastement: Abfall in Umwelt und Gesellschaft*, ed. Jens Kersten (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), 153–79.

67. German Federal Archives, BA Koblenz sign. 25523, letter collection, Wilhelm G. from Hamburg, April 23, 1971. See the history of the Surfrider Foundation as told on the foundation's website, at <http://www.30.surfrider.org/#introduction>.

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69. Rachel Carson, "Our Ever-Changing Shore," in *Lost Woods: The Discovered Writing of Rachel Carson*, ed. Linda Lear (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 113–24, 114.

70. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–55.

71. Howard Dashefsky, "Big Island Beach Attracts Plastic Trash," *Hawaii (Honolulu) News Now*, November 9, 2007.

72. Noah Heringman, "Deep Time at the Dawn of the Anthropocene," *Representations* 129, no. 1 (2015): 56–85, 57, even identified the Anthropocene debates as being affected by evolutionary nostalgia.

73. See Moore, *Plastic Ocean*, pictures after 119; see also the plastic-waste-related works by Pam Longobardi, *Drifters: Plastics, Pollution, and Personhood* (Milan: Charta, 2009); Richard Lang and Judith Selby, "One Beach Plastic" (project), <http://beachplastic.com/About-One-Beach-Plastic>; Jürgen Lehl, *On the Beach 1 and 2* (Tokyo: HeHe, 2015); or the works of Steve McPherson as displayed on his personal website, at <http://www.stevemcpherson.co.uk>.

74. Moore, *Plastic Ocean*, 57.

75. Jürgen Lehl, *On the Beach*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: hehepress, 2016) (see the publisher's website at http://hehepress.com/onthebeach1_2/).

76. Barry Allen, "The Ethical Artifact: On Trash," in *Trash*, ed. John Knechtel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 196–213, 196. In a similar vein, Rachel Whiteread's installation *Embankment* (2005) was inspired by the nostalgia the British artist felt when going through her mother's belongings that had been stored in cardboard boxes. Whiteread found white, translucent plastic to be the perfect material to re-create and multiply the family's worn containers. Tate Gallery, Exhibition Series, 2005, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibitionseries/unilever-series/unilever-series-rachel-whiteread-embankment-0>.

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79. See Ben Dibley, "Technofossil—A Memento Mori," *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 5, no. 1 (2018): 44–52.

80. Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), chap. 5.

81. Kracauer, *History*, chap. 6, nn. 16–17.

82. Christina Brandt, *Metapher und Experiment: Von der Virusforschung zum genetischen Code* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004); Tobias Menely, "'Like a Force of Nature': Scales of Power in Early Anthropocene Energy Transitions" (paper presented at the workshop "Creative Commensuration: Histories of Scaling in Science and Society," ETH and University of Zurich, July 7–8, 2016).

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85. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 69.

86. Latour, 84.

87. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), xvii.

88. See the introduction to this volume.

PART II

Loops, Layers, Assemblages

Long Divided Must Unite, Long United Must Divide: Dynasty, Histories, and the Orders of Time in China

ZVI BEN-DOR BENITE

In China, the making and unmaking of polities is a topic of considerable weight—both for its culture and for its historians. The opening line of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*), states things this way: “Long divided must unite; long united must divide. One is bound to be replaced by the other after a long span of time. This is the way with things in the world.” The *Romance* then continues with a summary of how various Chinese states rose and fell, or waxed and waned, from ancient antiquity until the rise of the Han dynasty in 200 CE. It reads like a basic historical narrative: “At the end of the Zhou [dynasty, 1046–256 BCE] the empire was divided into seven competing principalities, warring against one another till finally they were united by Qin. When Qin had fulfilled its destiny, there arose Chu and Han to contend for the reign, and ultimately it was Han that united the country.”¹ This passage serves as a prelude for the book itself, which is based on the historical records of the Three Kingdoms period (*Sanguo zhi*; 3rd century CE) and focuses on the final decades and fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, the subsequent division of its empire into three competing kingdoms, and the reunification of the realm under a new dynasty, Jin (280–420). The novel ends with the Jin unification, and an appended “afterword” repeats the same statement made in the opening verse: “So ended the division of the land into three kingdoms, which were reunited into one empire under the rule of Sima Yan [236–290 CE] of the Jin [dynasty]. That is what is meant by ‘long divided must unite; long united must divide.’ One is bound to be replaced by the other after a long span of time. This is the way of things in the world.”² This first verse of the novel, in eight elegantly placed characters—*fen jiu bi he; he jiu bi fen*—is thus repeated verbatim on the last page and is evidently what the authors wanted to establish in the history they bound between them.

If there is a hierarchy of extremely short, generalizing aphorisms about Chinese history, this one tops it. It is certainly the most famous one. As the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is one of the most influential historical novels in China and has a long history of its own (which I discuss here), I would hazard a guess that this statement is responsible more than any other for the Western truism that history in China is “cyclical.” Translated since the mid-nineteenth century as a romance rather than an epic, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is not exactly a historical novel in the Western sense.³ It is “a historical narrative rather than a historical novel as we understand the term. . . . Hardly a single character in the book is ahistorical, and there is no plot to speak of beyond the plot of history.” The novel “attains the condition of good literature precisely because its slight fictional elaboration of history has restored for us the actuality of history.”⁴

The opening statement of the *Romance* encloses the “history” inside the book, but it is not part of that diegesis or the past narrated in it. Instead, it frames the novel to express its central idea clearly. Differently put, it serves as a metahistorical argument about the story: its scope reaches beyond the novel, concerned as it is not just with the hundred years covered in the novel but also with how one should approach the history of China as a whole. As such, this message reminds us that perhaps the best place to begin to engage questions of time, history, and historicity in the Chinese context—the topic of this essay—is historical novels and their “lessons.”⁵ In what follows, I pay close attention to this opening passage and consider its significance as a statement about Chinese history, particularly concerning questions of time and its experience. I first clarify how it serves as a modality expressing what François Hartog calls a “regime of historicity,” and what Carlo Rovelli understands as an “order of time,” to show how it helps us to think in a new light about some key issues of temporal unity and division in Chinese history. I then discuss the main issues behind this elegant eight-character phrase and focus on “dynasty” as a label that establishes the spatiotemporal terms of periodization and futurity in Chinese language and politics. I continue by focusing on the immediate circumstances in which this statement was written and by accentuating the history of its development, associating it with moments of profound disruption in Chinese political authority. These moments, as we shall see, double as significant moments of Chinese history writing.

Why do all that? The idea that Chinese history is cyclical, as opposed to linear, has been quite prevalent and impactful among modern Western and Chinese historians of China for almost two centuries. It gave way and disappeared, not completely, only fairly recently.⁶ Briefly put, the first element in the cyclical view of Chinese history is the creation of the linear view of Western

history. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinese history was vegetating inside the teeth of time prescribed for it by Hegel.⁷ Defining the “East” as the “childhood of universal history,” Hegel placed China outside of time and declared its history “unhistorical”: “Early do we see China advancing to the condition in which it is found to this day; for as the contrast between objective existence and subjective freedom of movement in it, is still wanting, every change is excluded, and the fixedness of a character which recurs perpetually, takes the place of what we should call the truly historical.” China, for Hegel, was space without time. This “unhistorical,” as he called it, Chinese history was “circular”: “This History, too (i.e., of the struggles before-mentioned) is, for the most part, really unhistorical, for it is only the repetition of the same majestic ruin. The new element, which in the shape of bravery, prowess, magnanimity, occupies the place of the previous despotic pomp, goes through the *same circle of decline and subsidence*. This subsidence is therefore not really such, for through all this restless change no advance is made.”⁸ Later thinkers like Marx, Spengler, and Toynbee replicated Hegel’s view with varying degrees of sophistication.⁹ In the 1950s, the cyclical view of Chinese history resurfaced as a point of departure if not an overall explanation why China remained “despotic” or “stagnant” and refused to “develop.”¹⁰ These Western perceptions of Chinese history would be the first two sources feeding the cyclical view. Third, in the twentieth century, historians of China found proof of the cyclical view in ancient Chinese texts: Evidence from the *Lijing* (Book of Rites), the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), the *Shiji* or *Records of the Grand Historian*, and some later “premodern” texts were read to show that the Chinese view of history was cyclical.¹¹

One cannot forget that the problem with these readings is that they were produced as evidence by scholars already thinking within the cyclical view produced by Hegel and others, before Sinology. Furthermore, ancient texts such as the *Yijing* or the *Lijing* (tenth century BCE), and even *Records of Grand Historian* (first century BCE) were written before most of China’s history even took place. One can read them in many ways; they may shape the way we see history, but they do not dictate how history took place.

This essay is not designed to prove or disprove that the cyclical view does not “work” in Chinese history. We can be very sure that Chinese history does not move in cycles, just as we can declare that the linear view of Western history—from Adam to Abraham to Jesus, and so on, and to Hegel to Trump, is equally meaningless. The “cycle” is not history. This essay, rather, revisits the cycle not as history but as what Hartog calls a “regime of historicity”—a way to look into “forms of temporal experience here and elsewhere, today and in the past—in short, . . . to explore ways of being in time.”¹² I do not follow

the cycle as understood by Hegel or the later scholars seeking to “prove” it. Rather, having introduced the distinction between the cycle as history and the cycle as a regime of historicity, I argue for a specific and somewhat different cyclicity. This cyclicity is to be contrasted not with linearity but with a sense of sempiternity (the idea of the “everlasting” polity, existing within time but infinitely), which was a recurrent structure of a regime of historicity that emerged and reemerged in China in the aftermath of the fall of dynasties. (Perhaps this is why it has been grasped with such force that scholars just won’t let go of translating it back into Western ideas of time’s cycle.)

The opening verse of the *Romance*, one of the texts regularly quoted as expressing the cyclical view, serves this essay as an excellent platform for inquiry. As we will see, in each of the “moments” counted in the opening statement of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the authors provide an account of their thinking about the relationship of space, polity, and time. The circumstances when they come to say that, we will see, are significant. Articulated shortly after the fall of the Ming dynasty and the rise of its successor the Qing, this statement marks the peak instantiation in a long evolution of one of the central ideas about Chinese history—that dynasties rise and fall. It is often quoted as the best expression of that idea.¹³ As I read it, it also raises questions about the perception of history and the order of time during the twentieth century, as China transitioned dramatically from dynastic government to the Republic and then the People’s Republic. I turn to this period late in the essay. What happened to the deeply rooted regime of historicity expressed in this message when China went through a series of significant transformations—when the question of unity and division and dynastic rise and fall was, seemingly, resolved? Finally, what happened to the order of time? In brief, what time is it in China now?

The unqualified tone of the statement concerning the inevitability of unity and division, occurrences that take place “after a long span of time” because “this is the way with things in the world” is evocative. It speaks of the historicity—in the sense of a “consciously reflected history”¹⁴—of the history told in the novel. In effect, the statement proposes a mode of historicity for Chinese history as a whole, in a sense setting up the condition of the possibility of all history. In *Regimes of Historicity*, Hartog, following Reinhart Koselleck, asks, “How, in a given present, are the temporal dimensions of past and future related?” He defines the regime of historicity “in a restricted sense, as the way in which a given society approaches its past and reflects upon it; and in a broader sense, as the modalities of self-consciousness that every society adopts in its constructions of time and its perceptions.” In this particular

regard, Hartog's ideas on regimes of historicity help us when the authors of the above statement from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* invite us to ask just these questions about the relationship of time, temporality, and history—when they tell us, for quick instance, that unity and division occur “after a long span of time.” What order of time do they, and their contemporaries, imagine? The order of time, a concept that is “hard to define” but of which “no one doubts” its existence, is where Hartog begins his thinking toward the regime of historicity.¹⁵

Though elusive on this order of time, Hartog is nonetheless clear on the existence of multiple of orders of time. He takes his cue from Anaximander, and shows how for Herodotus, following Anaximander, history “was essentially the interval, calculated in generations, between an injustice and its punishment or redress.”¹⁶ That is to say, the regime of historicity within which Herodotus was writing his *Histories* derived from the way in which Anaximander implied his order of time. Rather than the periods set by injustice and its redress in Herodotus's world, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is concerned with the intervals of unity and division that indicate the rise and fall of polities. The theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli offers an even more decisive proposition in his own book *The Order of Time*, also beginning with a meditation on Anaximander's thought that “things suffer punishment and give satisfaction to one another for injustice according to the order of time.”¹⁷ But, Rovelli maintains, there is no such thing as a unified order of time. Times, he writes,

are legion: a different one for every point in space. There is not one single time; there is a vast multitude of them. The time indicated by a particular clock measuring a particular phenomenon is called “proper time” in physics. Every clock has its proper timer. Every phenomenon that occurs has its proper time, its own rhythm. The single quantity “time” melts into a spiderweb of times. We do not describe how the world evolves in time: we describe how things evolve in local time, and how local times evolve relative to each other. The world is not like a platoon advancing at the pace of a single commander. It's a network of events affecting each other.

So, Rovelli concludes that time should not be understood as unified: “The things of this world interweave dances made to different rhythms. If the world is upheld by the dancing Shiva, there must be ten thousand such dancing Shivas, like the dancing figures painted by Matisse.”¹⁸ We continue our inquiry below by paying attention to such changing rhythms within the order of time in China.

Dynasty as Space, Dynasty as Time

In speaking of division versus unity, as opposed to just “rise and fall,” another key phrase that I discuss later in this chapter, the opening of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* addresses the spatial and geographical dimensions of the rise and fall of Chinese polities. A dynasty is proclaimed when its founders are sufficiently confident in their ability to unite the politically divided territory they have inherited. In Chinese history, the ultimate political test was almost always the ability to unite the land and keep it united.¹⁹ Clear enough: a would-be dynastic founder should know when it is time to declare himself emperor and that that time is the moment of unification. However, unity and division are not just geographically defined. The phrase declaring that states and polities created through unification are “bound to be replaced after a long span of time” suggests that temporal dimensions are at play as well. This raises a different and much deeper “when” question—when do we know that it is time for that which has been long divided to unify? When do we know that it is time for that which has long been unified to divide? Or, in Rovelli’s terms, according to what rhythm? If this is the “way with things in the world,” then how does one know, and is it possible to know, what time it is on the political “clock”? This close relationship between space and time in the Chinese context should not surprise us.²⁰ Historian of science Joseph Needham maintained long ago that time in China is “spatialized.”²¹ Philosopher Kuang-ming Wu points out that in Chinese thinking space is “timed” and time is “spaced,” with both being interwoven into a “web of experience.”²²

The moments counted in the statement about the rise and fall of states appear as a series of “dynasties,” which are listed by their names (e.g., Zhou, Qin, Han). Indeed, “dynasty” plays a crucial role in Chinese history and, more importantly, in the way one thinks about it and organizes it—a consistent attempt to block “the single quantity ‘time’” from melting, to use Rovelli’s words, “into a spiderweb of times.” This continued even long after the fall of the last dynasty, the Qing, in 1911. The great modern historian Fu Sinian (1896–1950), for instance, explained in 1920, shortly after the fall of the last dynasty, that in “the past, the autocratic dynasty was the center of Chinese political organization.”²³ Its disappearance was, for him, the main reason China had “no society” at the time he was writing. The disappearance of dynasties was certainly not the only factor causing early twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals like Fu to think that their society had been destroyed (and its time had melted), but his words clearly express the perception of many at the time. Dynasties defined everything.

Dynastic names (*guohao* in modern Chinese, literally, “state name”) in most

cases were derived from to an ancient Chinese locale—Qin, Han, Sui, Tang, Song. The last dynasties adopted names that represent an idea—Yuan (first, beginning), Ming (bright, brilliant), Qing (pure, clear). These names did indeed refer to the ruling family, but unlike in Europe, the royal family's original name was different from the dynastic name it assumed.²⁴ The latter was proclaimed when China was unified under one rule and a new dynasty announced. However, and most importantly, dynastic names defined the period and space. These names were “China”: during the Tang, China was simply known as “Tang,” and during the Ming it was “Da Ming” (Great Ming) or “Ming.”²⁵ A dynasty in Chinese history is, therefore, an entity much broader than a royal house in the European sense.

Surprisingly, despite all that baggage, the Chinese language does not have a specific word for “dynasty.”²⁶ The word used today, *chaodai*, is a very recent modern construct. Before the twentieth century we see the dynastic names in use with two Chinese characters, *chao* and *dai*, that both came together to mean “dynasty.”²⁷ These two characters behaved in very different ways. Originally meaning “visiting a senior person” and “having an audience with a ruler,” *chao* came to mean “an assembly held by a sovereign,” “royal court,” and eventually “dynasty” when it was paired together with one of the names mentioned previously. Thus, *Mingchao*, for instance, meant “Ming court” and also “Ming dynasty.” *Dai*, the second word, originally meant “to act for” or “to replace” and later came to mean “age or generation group,” “era,” “period,” or “dynasty.” Accordingly, *Qindai*, for instance, means the “Qin period” or “Qin dynasty.”²⁸ *Chao* and *dai* each came to mean “dynasty” as a result of their attachment to dynastic names in certain contexts. Crucially, these two avatars for dynasty are not identical: *chao* speaks for the spatial dimensions of the dynasty, whereas *dai* relates to its temporal ones. This can be inferred somehow from the original meanings for the words, but let us see concrete examples: the period between 420 and 589 CE, a time when China was divided between short-lived northern and southern dynasties across the Yangzi River, is known as *Nanbeichao* (Southern-Northern Dynasties). The use of *chao* in this case highlights the strong geographical (south, north) dimension that defines this period—the various states that “made” that period were located south and north of the Yangzi. The years between 907 and 960, characterized by a rapid succession of rising and falling dynasties all over the territory, is named the Wudai (Five Dynasties) period.²⁹ The names for these periods were picked shortly after they ended. *Nanbeichao* as a name for a period was already in use during the early Tang dynasty. The historian Li Dashi (570–628 CE), who lived during the very early Tang period, began compiling the *History of Southern Dynasties* (*Nanshi*) and the *History of Northern*

Dynasties (Beishi). The project was completed by his son Li Yanshou (fl. seventh century).³⁰ The name *Wudai*, for the tenth-century Five Dynasties, was already in use by Chinese historians as early as the twelfth century.³¹ One can see, therefore, that standing alone, each of the names that we call dynastic names—Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing—embodies both the temporal and the spatial dimensions of what “China” is at the relevant period. Time and space, therefore, are bounded together in each dynastic name, and the *chao-dai* “bifurcation” is subtle expression of this.

Crucially, *chao* and *dai* were never used in reference to a current dynasty. A dynastic time was never classified as “*dai*” until it was declared as the “past.” In the ancient period, before the official histories became institutionalized, *dai* behaved in the same way. Thus, the phrase “three dynasties” (*sandai*) in reference to the three ancient dynasties Xia, Shang, and Zhou (2070–221 BCE) began appearing only when they were considered part of a lost past (note that the word used here is *dai* and not *chao*). The term *sandai* appeared first in Confucius’s (551–479 BCE) *Analects* in one of the many passages lamenting the lost past. The Zhou dynasty was “technically” still alive at the time, but since the eighth century BCE it already was perceived as having given way to a new period known as the Spring and Autumn (770–476 BCE). (It should be clear by now how much complexity is covered in dynasty-based historicity.) By Confucius’s time it was certainly considered lost, if not legendary, past. During the imperial period, becoming a *dai* probably occurred when the succeeding dynasty convened official historians, opened up the archives of the “veritable records” (*shilu*) of its preceding dynasty and compiled its official history (*zhengshi*).³² Thus, formulations such as *Yuandai* (Yuan dynasty-period) or *Yuanchao* (Yuan dynasty-court) were in use only in later dynasties, when the Yuan was already part of the past and its history the *Yuanshi* was officially published. Linguistically speaking, a person referring to the existing dynasty would use only the dynastic name alone, or terms such *Tianchao* (heavenly dynasty or court), *Huangchao* (August dynasty), or merely *benchao* (present dynasty) without the dynastic name. To recapitulate, dynastic names were paired directly with the words that meant “dynasty” only after the dynasties in question had become part of the past. It is interesting to note that in all formulations referring to present dynasties (again, without the dynastic name), only *chao*, the spatial term for dynasty, is used; *dai*, the temporal one, is not. This makes sense when a certain dynasty is “still” the “given present” but not yet a “period.” This peculiar behavior of the *chao-dai* pair of words and the way they pair with, or stay away from, dynastic names reflects the place of the dynasty as a unit of historical time: it never exists independently, but only within a sequence of dynasties that constitute its past and future. In

other words, whereas a court has a present, a dynasty does not; it is defined by previous dynasties that make its past, and future dynasties that make its future. This is the “function” that dynasties have in the regime of historicity presented here.

The Way Things Are in the World

Let us return to the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, with its statement about unity and division, and review some critical moments in the development of the novel. The *Romance* has had a long trajectory, transforming from a historical record into a compelling fictional narrative.³³ Crucially, each of the pauses on this long path came right after an intense period of crisis and resolution in Chinese history. At each new stage, the transformation of the period played out in the novel reflected recent shifts in how people in China thought about their past, present, and future. The *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi*) by Chen Shou (233–297 CE), the chronicle that served as the basis for the later novel, offers an account of a little over a century—the last days of the Han dynasty and the three competing kingdoms that replaced it and fought to reunite the land.³⁴ Chen was a minor official in the state of Shu, one of the three kingdoms. He compiled the history after the Three Kingdoms period ended, when he served as an official of the aforementioned Jin dynasty.³⁵ In the centuries after its composition, the *Records* was the basis for some commentaries on the period it chronicled (and in effect named). However, the *Records*’ first transformation, into a historical novel, occurred 1,200 years later—during the intense times of the (Mongol) Yuan dynasty (1267–1368)—when folktales and popular storytelling based on Chen’s historical records proliferated after (and in response to) the Mongol conquest. The Three Kingdoms was particularly appealing: a period rich in events, battles, and heroic acts, with prominent historical figures that included great generals, cunning politicians, and poets and masters of the language. The *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a novel by Luo Guanzhong (ca. 1330–1400) first came out in print during the early days of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644)—in the wake of another intense period—the fall of the Mongols and rise of a “real” Chinese dynasty, the Ming, that exalted the ancient, “pure” Chinese past.

The history of the novel did not end there. The version with which we are most familiar today is the one produced in the 1660s.³⁶ Its creators, Mao Lun (fl. seventeenth century), a blind literatus from the Yangzi delta, and his son Mao Zonggang (1632–1709), rewrote practically the whole novel, insisting, of course, that they were only restoring it from an “ancient and uncorrupted version.”³⁷ That version of the *Romance*, as Moss Roberts puts it, “seems to

shift the history-fiction balance toward the ‘purely literary’ end of the scale.”³⁸ The novel is a “history of [a] period of crisis and resolution” that “is both unique and universal—unique for the heroic figures that dominate it, universal for the questions it must address.”³⁹ These universal questions (e.g., How is dynastic rule established and maintained?), have been thoroughly studied with reference to the content (story or history) of the novel, which does not concern us much here.

Crucially for us, the message repeated in the novel’s opening and conclusion—according to which order of time do unity and division occur?—was appended to the novel only in this last version, produced in the 1660s by the Maos, the one that took it farthest from the actual historical record on which it was based. It was never there before. Earlier versions of the novel simply began with the narrative. Again, the statement reads as if it were true concerning all periods in China’s history. As noted, its impact on conventional thinking about “cycles” of rise and fall in China is unmistakable and quite popular even today.⁴⁰ This raises questions about why this opening was appended to the text at the time it was. I offer a more specific explanation for this question later, but for now a general understanding of the backdrop at the moment of writing suffices. At the time of writing, the editors of the seventeenth-century version were unmistakably in a reflective mood about Chinese history. And why not? They were writing right after the colossal fall of the Ming and the Manchu conquest of China, which created the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Within a short decade, the glorious Ming disappeared, and an army of seminomadic “barbarian” people took over after a swift and violent campaign. Soon after, the Manchu-Qing were sitting on the throne as the legitimate possessors of the Mandate of Heaven. The author-editors had witnessed the mighty sweep of historical events that claimed many lives of Yangzi delta elites like them.⁴¹ No surprise, then, that the question of empires falling and rising was on the editors’ mind. It also explains the resigned tone they strike when declaring, “This is the way with things in the world.”

With this historical context in mind, let us now think again about the idea that dynasties in China are bound to rise and fall. It is an old idea, rooted in ancient thinking. Commenting on the three ancient dynasties—Xia, Shang, and Zhou—that ruled China before his chaotic times, the great third-century BCE thinker Mencius declares, “It was by benevolence that the three dynasties [*sandai*] gained the throne, and by not being benevolent that they lost it.”⁴² Elsewhere, Mencius is asked by a companion why he “carries an air of dissatisfaction in his countenance” even though he is known say that a sage “does not murmur against Heaven, nor grudge against men.” Mencius, full of himself as ever, responds:

That was one time, this is another. It is a rule that a true royal sovereign should arise in the course of five hundred years, and that during that time there should be men illustrious in their generation. From the commencement of the Zhou [dynasty] until now, more than seven hundred years have elapsed. Judging numerically, the date is past. Examining the character of the present time, we might expect the rise of such individuals in it. But Heaven does not yet wish that the kingdom should enjoy tranquility and good order. If it wished this, who is there besides me to bring it about? How should I be otherwise than dissatisfied?⁴³

Mencius presents us in these two passages with the two elements of the central idea that concerns us. In the longer one, he speaks of an order of time that governs the rise and fall of rulers. Mencius “judges numerically” the order of time. In the shorter, he explains the political principle—in this case benevolence—behind the rise and fall of polities. But the great sage Mencius, apparently upset because heaven was missing the opportunity to anoint him as sage-monarch, was still only moralizing when he was speaking in the third century BCE. Furthermore, he was thinking about this issue still before the rise (and rapid fall) of the first imperial dynasty, the Qin. Sima Qian (145–86 BCE), a Han-dynasty court astrologer, creator of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, and “father of history” in China, elaborates on this idea.⁴⁴ We find his thoughts in two key locations. First, in a letter to a colleague, Sima Qian explained what he was doing in the *Records*:

I have cast a broad net across the old accounts that have been lost or neglected. Examining these in light of past events, I have gathered together all [the evidence for] beginnings and endings, having studied the underlying causes of success and failure, and of rise and decline. In altogether 130 chapters, I have tried to probe the boundaries of heaven and man and comprehend the changes of past and present, thereby perfecting a tradition for my family.⁴⁵

The phrases “gathered together all [the evidence for] beginnings and endings” and “having studied the underlying causes of success and failure, and of rise and decline” are clearly connected and seem to be leading up to Sima Qian’s stated goal—“to probe the boundaries of heaven and man and comprehend the changes of past and present.” The correspondence of the three pairs of words—“endings and beginnings” (*zhongshi*), “success and failure” (*chengbai*) and “rise and decline” (*xinghuai*)—seems to support this.⁴⁶ Sima Qian is not specifically speaking of a cycle here, but he is providing its key elements—“endings and beginnings,” “success and failure,” and “rise and decline.” In his author’s preface (*zixu*) to the *Records*, where he provides another reflection of his work, Sima Qian introduces a slightly different formulation

when he speaks of “putting in order the rises of falls of past times” (*lie wang-shi xingshuai*).⁴⁷ Here we are introduced with a fourth pair of words serving as an element of the cycle, “rise and fall” (*xingshuai*, closely related to *xinghuai*), but we still do not know much about the cycle itself or how it operates in time. Furthermore, we still do not know whether the cycle is a descriptive device or a prescriptive one. Is it simply a phenomenon of the past, or something that governs it? Sima Qian offers an explanation and an answer to this question in the body of the *Records* itself.

One cannot underestimate the impact of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, a first-of-its-kind historiographical project that covers some 2,500 years, back to mythical times. Sima Qian, a historian son of historians, completed this work after he was punished with castration for disagreeing with the emperor Han Wudi, and became concerned with the issue of posterity, maybe even of sempiternity. He was deeply conscious of the meaning of his work as the custodian of Chinese history and tradition and even had his own “personal” order of time—a historian understanding his project of writing the history of China as something that time, and not just history, mandated:

The Grand Historian remarked: My father had a saying: “Five hundred years from the death of the Duke of Zhou there was Master Kong. From the death of Master Kong right up to now it is 500 years. There is the ability to persevere with the work of the far-sighted generations, to rectify the tradition of the Book of Changes, to continue the Spring and Autumn, to base oneself on a world defined by the Songs, Documents, Rites, and Music.” His thoughts were set upon these things! His thoughts were set upon these things! *How dare his son draw back from them?*

Evidently, Sima Qian thought himself a preserver of Chinese traditions the way Mencius thought himself a sage. But in this passage, about the cycle of history, one phrase takes Mencius’s idea a step further. Introducing the history of the dynasties up to his time, the early Han dynasty, he strikes as follows: “The Grand Historian remarks: . . . the way of the Three Dynasties [*sandai*] of old is like a cycle which, when it ends, must begin over again.”⁴⁸

The similarity of Sima Qian’s declaration that “the way of the [ancient] Three Dynasties [*sandai*] of old is like a cycle which, when it ends, must begin over again” and Mencius’s passage is striking, but there are differences. Unlike Mencius, Sima Qian does not tie himself to a specific, “revealed” order of time that speaks of real years. He does “judge numerically” the order of time with regard to himself, but not when it comes to history. Mencius had somehow calculated that every five hundred years heaven *should* give rise to a great ruler. Perhaps for having been a professional historian Sima Qian

avoids such rigidly “numeric,” inevitably disappointing calculations. He narrates the rise and fall of the three old dynasties. However, instead of speaking of years, he introduces a cycle that ends and “must” begin again. Crucially, this time he is using a specific term (*xunhuan*) for the cycle, not just describing historical phenomena.⁴⁹ Let us recall Sima Qian’s discussion of “beginnings and endings,” “success and failure,” and of “rise and fall” mentioned earlier. In positing these pairs of opposites, Sima Qian seems to be simply describing history. But placing these pairs against what he says here about the cycle (*xunhuan*) itself helps us to understand that the pairs are the elements of the cycle and are governed by it. This is important, because it means that what rises is now understood as something that must fall. The early Han period was a time in which ancient history, texts, and ideas about the cosmos were being rethought to explain why the first imperial dynasty, the Qin, had fallen and why the Han rose in its stead. Indeed, the phrase “Han rise” (*Hanxing*) occurs numerous times in the *Records*; in this regard, Sima Qian’s work seems to serve a specific doctrine justifying the rise of this dynasty. The thinker most associated with this line of thinking is the grand architect of Han imperial ideology, Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BC). But it is important to note that Dong Zhongshu himself was playing a dual, subversive role in designing this ideology. Long believed to have been harnessing Chinese traditions to justify the rise of the Han, Dong has been reassessed as an intellectual “looking beyond the Han to the reign of a new sage-king, employing a . . . historical cycle to predict the imminent demise of the [House of Liu, rulers of the Han] and their replacement by the wisest of their subjects.”⁵⁰

In other words, the cycle of history, as a political tool, is indeed employed in the service of a rising dynasty. But crucially, it also stands at the same time as a reminder that a rising dynasty could fall one day. Unlike Mencius and Dong, Sima Qian was writing and working with concrete history, not just thinking about the past. But one can see how he takes the idea of moral deterioration from Mencius and the idea of a cycle and applies them to his history of China from ancient times to Han times. Furthermore, one can imagine why this man, who suffered a terrible punishment from the same emperor (Han Wudi), was, like Dong, looking “beyond” the dynasty. Let us also pay attention to the fact that when speaking about the cycle, Sima Qian remains silent on the question of how much time must pass between the rise and fall of a dynasty. We see him quite capable of counting years when he speaks of his own place in history. But when it comes to the cycle of history, he, unlike Mencius, does not. We can now better appreciate what the authors of the seventeenth-century version of the *Romance* were doing with their articulation of the cycle when introducing their version of this idea. The Maos relied on the phrases from Mencius and

Sima Qian when they crafted their elegant verse on the rise and fall of dynasties. By their time, many dynasties had risen and fallen, so they knew not to be “precise” like Mencius and speak of historical phenomena occurring every set number of years. Instead, they introduced a more flexible order less likely to provoke disappointment (“after a long span of time”). Indeed, “this is the way with things in the world” sounds like a consolation offered to the readers of the new version of the *Romance* that the Maos produced. Their readers, they knew well, were like them, elites who matured during the last decades of the Ming and had been traumatized by the Manchu-Qing conquest. The Ming had fallen, the Qing had taken over, because this is the way of the world. It, too, would one day also fall, after a long span of time.

“Using the Past to Injure the Present”

As already hinted, Sima Qian’s view of the cycle was not just about personal consolation. It must be read against a radically different regime of historicity that he knew very well, better than anyone in China at the time. In his account of the rise of the Qin in 220 BCE, the most dramatic moment comes in a fascinating passage concerning how Li Si (280–208 BCE) came to be appointed chief minister by the future founder of the Qin, Qin Shihuang (259–210 BCE), before the unification of 220 BCE and the first empire. Li Si, one of the shrewdest politicians in Chinese history and the main architect of the Qin imperium, was thinking big. When he came to the court of the then-still-just king of Qin, he presented his analysis of the Chinese world at the time and urged the ruler not to be “an idle man and miss his chance”: “Now if one considers the strength of Qin and the Great King’s own fine qualities, it will be capable not only of wiping out the feudal states just as easily as sweeping the top of a stove, but also of completing the imperial heritage and making all under Heaven into a unity. This is the one opportunity in 10,000 generations.”⁵¹ The king of Qin appointed Li Si his chief adviser. Soon after, the two defeated the rest of the states in the Chinese world and created the first Chinese imperium. The king became emperor (in fact, “August Thearch,” or *Huangdi*), and Li Si became chief minister. Sima Qian recounts another conversation, this time at a banquet in the imperial court, where “seventy scholars of broad learning” came to wish the first emperor long life. The leading scholar came forward: “Thanks to Your Majesty’s divine power and brilliant sagacity the area within the seas has been restored to order and the barbarian tribes driven off. Wherever the sun and moon shine, no one does not offer his submission. The feudal states have been made into provinces and districts, individuals are contented and pleased with themselves, and there is no worry about war

and conflict, and this will be handed down for 10,000 generations. Since high antiquity Your Majesty's authority and virtue have not been matched." Other scholars made similar comments. But then chief minister Li Si spoke: "The Five Emperors did not repeat each other, and the Three Dynasties did not copy each other, yet each enjoyed good government. It is not because they were going against each other, but because times change. Now Your Majesty has created a great enterprise and constructed an achievement which will last for 10,000 generations which is certainly not something which a foolish Confucian would understand."⁵²

Li Si was right. Like Mencius, the scholars stuck to the idea that sage rulers come and go. The Qin empire, on the contrary, would stay, forever. Moreover, the speeches Li Si made in the wake of the founding of the Qin were not an expression of triumphant boasting. In *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, Yuri Pines explained in detail that all the talk of ten thousand generations was, in fact, part of a widely spread idea slowly emerging in different parts of China during the extended period of Zhou decline and disunity.⁵³ Here, whereas the scholars speak of a "legacy" that will be "handed down" for ten thousand generations, Li Si speaks of the actual polity lasting for ten thousand generations. The scholars measure the emperor's achievements against the past and conclude that his legacy will be remembered forever (implicitly, even if his empire will be gone). Li Si's concern is not the past but the empire everlasting. He understood that the scholars, while praising the August Thearch, were placing him between the past and the future and thereby diminishing him. He proposes, therefore, getting rid of the past that has ended:

Now all the scholars do not take the present as a model but study antiquity, and thus they reject the present generation and throw the [common] people into confusion. As chief minister your servant Li Si speaks out at risk of death: in antiquity all under Heaven was divided and in chaos, and nobody could unify it, and it was for this reason that the feudal lords became active together, and in their utterances all spoke of the past to injure the present, and they made a display of empty verbiage in order to throw the truth into confusion. . . . Now the August Emperor has unified and taken possession of all under Heaven. You have distinguished white from black and established a single focus of adulation. . . . Your servant requests that the records of the historians apart from those of Qin should all be burnt. . . . Those who, using the old, reject the new will be wiped out together with their clans.⁵⁴

Let us recall the insight stated earlier about the "dependency" of dynasties on previous and future dynasties, a crucial element of the regime of historicity. In light of this, what Li Si was proposing was a radically different regime of

historicity, one in which there is only present and only one present. If the Qin dynasty was to last ten thousand generations, then the moment of its founding was also its future. What about the past? All that was left was to get rid of past and its diminishing effects that “injure” the great present. The Qin did indeed attempt a real physical destruction of the past, including the burning of scholars, archives, and documents. But history cunningly allowed it to last for only eighteen years. (Its records survived for Sima Qian to use.) With the Qin episode in mind, we can now better understand the regime of historicity Sima Qian was proposing: a “cycle, which, when it ends, must begin over again.” In addition to the consoling message buried in the cyclical view of history, in addition to the lessons that history taught—the Qin indeed fell, despite its claim to sempiternity—Sima Qian’s cycle stands against the backdrop of radical vision of history produced by a dynasty that destroyed the past and collapsed the future into its present. Perhaps no one can be more against the idea of the destruction of history, the past, and the future than a castrated historian—hence, “what ends must begin again.” Sima Qian’s cycle is therefore a regime of historicity marshaled contra the claim to eternity, or sempiternity, posed by potent rulers. With the evident affinities between the opening verse of the *Romance* and Sima Qian’s cycle in mind, we can also understand why the opening statement is so decisive in its tone. The fall of the Ming, a “cataclysmic” event in the eyes of the elites who witnessed it, probably mandated a “return” to Sima Qian’s old dictum in a new, stronger dressing—“this is the way of the world.”⁵⁵

In this regard, to “look beyond the dynasty”—because “what ends must begin again” as Sima Qian puts it, or because “this is the *way of the world*,” as Mao Lun puts it in even stronger terms—should be considered a radically subversive statement. It is stated precisely at a time when a dynasty is on the rise under a potent ruler, and that must draw our attention to its subversive quality. It reads as if one subtly wishes to remind the ruler, “Now you might be rising, but one day you will fall.” In Sima Qian’s case, it was the emperor Han Wudi, and he was reflecting on the near past of Qin while, in effect, recording the above-mentioned speeches of Li Si in the history he was writing. This raises a question: was Mao Lun facing a ruler when he was writing? We have seen already that he was writing during the times of the Manchu conquest of China and the establishment of the Qing dynasty. But looking beyond the obvious circumstances, was there a more direct reason for his project? I propose at this point that in rewriting the *Romance* and appending the specific opening, Mao Lun was not simply reacting, as suggested earlier, to the event of the rise of the Manchu-Qing that he witnessed and experienced. Rather, he was directly responding to a very significant move the Manchus made with regard to the *Romance* itself.

As they were establishing themselves as legitimate rulers of China, the Manchus engaged in numerous translation projects from the Chinese to Manchu. But it is striking that the earliest project they commissioned during their rise and conquest of China was a translation of the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*.⁵⁶ It was one of the two translations ever put to print (many other translations remained in manuscript form). More significant, the translation of the *Romance* was given priority over translations of the major Confucian classics. The classics were not completed before 1652 and not published until much later. The *Romance of Three Kingdoms* had a different trajectory. Early Manchu leaders liked to read the *Romance* with the help of their Chinese advisers already before the conquest (they were of course using a version of the Ming original novel, not the one I have been discussing). But because the text was deemed “full of fantasies,” early attempts to translate it into Manchu were halted. Things changed during the conquest of China.⁵⁷ Suddenly, the translation of the *Romance* became an urgent and serious undertaking, done “at the behest of the *de facto* ruler of the Empire”—Prince Regent Dorgon (r. 1644–1650).⁵⁸ A team of no fewer than seven Chinese scholars worked for several years on the translation, which was published in 1650, when the Manchus were still fighting and completing their conquest of China.⁵⁹ Why the haste? And why work so hard on translating a novel, as opposed to the classics, for instance, while still fighting? Andrew West suggests that the Manchus “saw the political situation of the Three Kingdoms period as being analogous to that of their own time.” So, legitimacy was the issue. As West notes, the *Romance* is “the story of the decline and fall of a dynasty . . . and the emergence of new dynastic powers.” An “imperial edict” that Dorgon issued for the occasion of the publication of the Manchu translation states: “This book can serve as a model of exemplary conduct for loyal subjects, righteous worthies, filial sons, and chaste women. It can also serve as a warning against treacherous subjects who harm their country and bad government which sets the court in disorder. Although the language is unrefined, [this novel] has great benefits, and should enable the people to understand the underlying causes of rise and fall, safety and disorder.”⁶⁰

We can see how Dorgon, who wrote the edict with the help of his highly educated Chinese officials, is directly quoting Sima Qian on the rise and fall (the phrasing is lifted verbatim from Sima Qian: *xingshuai zhi li*). In fact, Dorgon introduces a new pair of words, “safety and disorder” (*anluan*), that we might add to Sima Qian’s list of pairs describing the cycle. That is, to the “descriptive” pairs of “rise and decline,” “success and failure,” “endings and beginnings,” and “rise and fall” we can add Dorgon’s “safety and disorder.”⁶¹ Now, we know that the translation was indeed circulating in fulfillment of its

pedagogical purpose. A rare diary by Džengšeo, a middle-ranking Manchu soldier in southern China during the 1670s, makes very clear reference to several passages of the *Romance*. It is also evident that the *Romance* was the basis of “the general cult of the military heroes it celebrates among the [Manchu] soldiers.”⁶²

The appearance of the Manchu translation and the fact that it was circulating should explain why Mao Lun, the blind literatus from the Yangzi delta, bothered so much in 1660 to rewrite the whole novel and introduce a new version, one different from what the Manchus were using. More important, I suggest, we should read the introductory statement he appended to the novel—the one I have been discussing—as a response to the edict that Dorgon appended to his commissioned translation of the novel. In a way, it has a similar function to the edict—to guide readers in how to read the novel. Placing the edict and the opening statement of Mao’s *Romance* next to each other suggests that the latter is in dialogue with the former. Dorgon quotes Sima Qian’s “descriptive” term “rise and fall,” but Mao comes to remind him that this not just about describing Chinese history. He introduces another pair of words that we should count as an element of the cycle: “disunity and unity” (*fen* and *he*, respectively). But to force the “cyclical” relationship between the two, he presents them twice, each time in reverse order: “Long divided must unite; long united must divide” (*fen jiu bi he; he jiu bi fen*). But unlike Sima Qian and Dorgon, Mao Lun does not just describe. He explains that the order of this pair must be inverted. And to make sure we understand, he offers an “exegesis” to the two phrases he just introduced: “One is bound to be replaced by the other after a long span of time. This is the way with things in the world.” In so doing, he presents the cyclical view of Chinese history—the regime of historicity—in its most clear and decisive expression. This is a “peak” moment in the “evolution” of the cyclical view since Sima Qian—it brings all elements together, unity and disunity; addresses spatial and temporal dimensions; and even responds to the question of time span that Sima Qian left open. To my mind, it is no coincidence that this articulation comes right at the moment that Dorgon, a ruler of China on the rise, is using the same statement by Sima Qian for his own purposes. Mao’s statement is in response to this, subversively reminding the Manchu conqueror that a rising dynasty must, one day, fall.

The Rise and Fall of the Dynastic Histories

The century that followed the final version of the *Romance* (roughly 1670–1770) is also the period when the history of China was grouped and reorga-

nized into an official collection of twenty-four dynastic histories and into a seemingly unified body of knowledge. These histories, each containing historical knowledge covering all of China's history since mythic times, were written, in different forms and styles, since Sima Qian's *Record* and assumed a more standard form around the time of the late mid-imperial period. During the late eighteenth century, after the Qing dynasty had presided over the compilation of the Ming official history (*Mingshi*), the dynastic histories were formally grouped for the first time as one body of knowledge. Only at that time was the term *Twenty-Four Histories* (*Ershisi shi*) officially coined as a code for Chinese history.⁶³ This body of knowledge came out as a state-sponsored project under the Qing emperor Qianlong (r. 1736–1796).⁶⁴ The road to the “twenty-four histories” had begun only shortly before. Zhao Yi (1727–1814), a poet and historian, published his *Reading Notes on Twenty-Two Histories* (*Nian ershi shi zhaji*) in the 1760s. Qian Daxin (1728–1804), a noted historian and linguist, published his *Examination of Variances in the Twenty-Two Histories* (*Nian ershi kaoyi*) at the same time, and a third, Wang Mingsheng (1722–1797), published his *Critical Study of the Seventeen Histories* (*Qishi shi shanque*) in 1782.⁶⁵ These works present critical, even revolutionary, examinations of Chinese history, each engaging it from antiquity. But what we should note here is their titles: they all count numbers of dynastic histories in their titles, expressing the idea that the already-popular *Romance of the Kingdoms* pushes most forcefully: Chinese history, the way of the world, is a history of dynasties. That is, by “history,” one means “dynastic history.” Of course, great historiographic projects and works engaging and reflecting on Chinese historiography were not new—such works appeared as early as the seventh century, if not earlier.⁶⁶ But Chinese history became the history of rising and falling dynasties—seventeen, twenty-two, then twenty-four (later twenty-five and even twenty-six).⁶⁷ The phrase “seventeen histories” or “twenty-two histories” or “twenty-four histories” is therefore a historical or historiographic expression of the same regime of historicity popularized by the *Romance* since the 1660s. The phrase normalizes and naturalizes it. Earlier ambitious historical projects that covered long spans of Chinese history, such as the *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (*Zizhi tongjian*) by Sima Guang (1019–1086), did not carry such titles. Recall that the opening verse demonstrates its principle using the Qin unification and its fall, and the rise of the Han and its fall. It counts “only” two dynasties but is nonetheless isomorphic to the structure of the twenty-four histories, which, also beginning with the Qin, simply count more dynasties. The *Twenty-Four Histories* should be seen as a body of knowledge “subordinated” to that regime of historicity.

The moment at which the *Twenty-Four Histories* appears is undoubtedly a

triumphant one. China under Qianlong was three times as big as it had been when the Ming dynasty fell in 1644. The emperor Qianlong added significant parts of Central Asia to the earlier conquests of his grandfather, the emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722).⁶⁸ The empire was “pacified” and more prosperous than ever. Even the order of time seemed favorable: Kangxi and Qianlong each reigned sixty years. (Of 446 emperors, few—one of whom is the aforementioned Han Wudi—enjoyed long reigns.) No wonder Qianlong decided to launch a project of the scope of the *Twenty-Four Histories*—to own, rather than burn, the past. He is also known as one of the few people who read the whole thing.⁶⁹

Dynastic history, as a regime of historicity, survived this triumphant moment by (only) a century. The few years before the fall of the Qing in 1911 mark also the fall of the dynastic histories as a regime of historicity. In essays on “old” and “new” historiography, the leading intellectual of the time, Liang Qichao (1873–1929), declared: “The Twenty-Four Histories are not histories! They are the genealogies of twenty-four clans and that is all.” This was not the first iconoclastic deceleration in the history of Chinese historiography, but it was the first one that intentionally sought to replace the regimes of historicity as well as the order of time. As Peter Zarrow has shown, Liang was “searching out historical processes that transcended the dynastic cycle.” For him, “the pointless repetitions of the dynastic cycle did not . . . represent history.”⁷⁰ With the dynasties as the primary building blocks of the regime of historicity gone, new orders of time emerged.⁷¹ We might already suspect that to transcend the dynastic order, the new “Chinese nation’s order of time should encompass all dynasties and go back in time before the rise of the very first, mythical, or real. Indeed, already in 1902, Liang “insisted on using universal categories of analysis as a master narrative that encompassed thousands of years in a single stage.”⁷²

Liang was not alone in expressing this sentiment. Let us look at another attack, one that brings the order of time into the emerging discourse. In 1903, Liu Shiwei (1884–1919), a conservative nationalist intellectual who had flirted with anarchism, made a call to reset the Chinese historical clock according to a chronology whose starting point was the mythical Yellow Emperor. Earlier Chinese scholars have tried to calculate the years of the Yellow Emperor in China’s premodern past—but not for national purposes as Liu did, or for the purpose of establishing a new regime of historicity. In his “On the Yellow Emperor Chronology” (*Huangdi jinian lun*) he declared, “Every Nation cannot but [desire to] trace itself back to its origin” (*minzu budebu su qi qiyuan*). Liu identified the origin with a man “surnamed Xuanyuan,” namely, the Yellow Emperor, who was the “original ancestor of the 400,000,000 people of

the Han race.” He was “the first person who created [the Chinese] civilization (*wenming*) and the one who initiated [our] 4,000 years of [historical] development.” Liu tied this directly to the national project he envisioned: “If we desire to continue the task of the Yellow Emperor, then we should use the birth of the Yellow Emperor as the beginning of our chronology.”⁷³

Liang and (even more so) Liu were not only attacking the “dynasty” as the main building block of Chinese history, thereby rendering the idea of rise and fall and the cycle attached to it meaningless, they were also introducing a new order of time, a continuous order of four or five thousand years. I would like to suggest that here we can also see a new claim to sempiternity, not of a dynasty but of the Han Chinese “race” or “nation.” In 1924 Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the founding father of the Chinese republic, declared: “The Chinese people are a very old race. Our recorded history dates back four thousand years, and we have existed at least five or six thousand years. In spite of the many calamities due to natural pressure during these centuries, Heaven not only has not destroyed us, but has made us a great people with a growing population and a progressive civilization.”⁷⁴ Sun, of course, was not alone by then: his recurring phrase “five thousand years” was dominant elsewhere in discourse on Chinese history. But this became a way—like Qianlong’s and contrary to Li Si’s—to own the past. Professional historians did not necessarily agree with Sun’s order of time, but “five thousand years of history” became the official doctrine of the Guomindang, the Chinese Nationalist Party.⁷⁵

Coda: Ten Thousand Years Are Too Long!

Sun Yat-sen’s declaration could have marked the ending of the debate concerning “when is China” or how to locate China’s present. It would have certainly made a nice ending for this essay. But the temporal question should perhaps remain open—so suggested none other than Mao Zedong in a poem he published in 1963. Describing our “tiny globe” as a planet bursting with incessant insectlike human activity, Mao declared that “so many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently.” He reminded his readers, the people of China, that “the world rolls on” and “time presses.” The key verse in the poem came right after and urged doing something with the present: “Ten thousand years are too long, Seize the day, seize the hour!”⁷⁶

Was Mao calling for another destruction of the new regime of historicity? Written three years before Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, and ending with the cry “Away with all pests!” this poem has been seen as exemplifying his “impatience” with the pace at which the revolution was proceeding.⁷⁷ It might be time to read it again as an expression of the deep concerns

and questions that Mao—a ruler who was a classicist, an avid reader, and a deeply conscious commentator on Chinese history⁷⁸—had with China's time. “Ten thousand years are too long, Seize the day, seize the hour!” can be read here as a call for a new, radically iconoclastic regime of historicity—one that constantly defies the experience of time and does not even allow for a stable present to exist.

Notes

1. Luo Guanzhong, Sumei Yu, and Ronald Iverson, *The Three Kingdoms* (Rutland: Tuttle, 2014), 28.

2. Luo, *Three Kingdoms*, 895.

3. Lu Pan and Dan Yi, “From ‘Yanyi’ to ‘Romance’: Early English Translations of *Sanguozhi Yanyi* and Translators’ Identity Crisis,” *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017): 82–93. It is important to note that the *Romance* had a huge impact on neighboring cultures and countries in East Asia, from Vietnam to Korea and Japan, including nomadic societies such as the Mongols and the Manchus. For a recent thorough study on this topic, in three volumes, see Chen Ganglong and Zhang Yu’an, “*Sanguo yanyi*” *zai dongfang* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2016).

4. C. T. Hsia, *Classic Chinese Novel* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2018), 33–34.

5. Consider Reinhart Koselleck, “Fiction and Historical Reality,” *Sediments of Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 10–23.

6. The 1965 collection “Problems in Asian Civilizations” by prominent (Taiwanese) Chinese, Japanese, and Anglo-Saxon historians is probably both the peak moment in historians’ discussions on this subject and also the moment when they realized that it simply does not work. John Meskill, *The Pattern of Chinese History: Cycles, Development, or Stagnation?* (Boston: Heath, 1965), esp. vii–xvii and Edwin Reischauer, “The Dynastic Cycle,” 31–34.

7. I borrow this image from Karl Marx, “Trade or Opium?” in *Marx on China, 1853–1860: Articles from the “New York Daily Tribune”* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1951), 55. See Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, “Modernity: The Sphinx and the Historian,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 638–52.

8. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 124–25.

9. Similar views expressed by Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee are grouped in Meskill, *Pattern of Chinese History*, 15–24.

10. Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

11. E.g., Meskill, *Pattern of Chinese History*, 1–2.

12. François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 9.

13. References to this are numerous. See Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 7.

14. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 202.

15. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 1.

16. Hartog, 1–2.

17. Carlo Rovelli, *The Order of Time* (New York: Riverhead, 2018), 14–15. See also Rovelli, *The First Scientist: Anaximander and his Legacy* (Yardley: Westholme, 2011).

18. Rovelli, *Order of Time*, 17–18.

19. Yuri Pines, “Imagining the Empire? Concepts of ‘Primeval Unity’ in Pre-imperial Historiographic Tradition,” in *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared*, ed. Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67–90; “The One that Pervades All’ in Ancient Chinese Political Thought,” *T’oung Pao* 86, nos. 4–5 (2000): 280–324.

20. On this interrelation in literature, see Wilt Idema, “Time and Space in Traditional Chinese Fiction,” in *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, ed. Huang Junjie and Erik Zürcher (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 362–79.

21. Joseph Needham, *Time and Eastern Man* (London: RAI, 1964), 62–76.

22. Kuang-ming Wu, “Spatiotemporal Interpretation in Chinese Thinking,” in *Time and Space*, 17–44, 17.

23. Cited in Wang Fansen, *Fu Ssu-Nien: A Life in Chinese History and Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 43.

24. For instance, the name of the family that ruled during the Tang Dynasty was Li. “Tang” refers to the locale governed by Li Yuan, before he founded the dynasty (he was Duke of Tang). The Ming dynasty was ruled by the Zhu family, the Qing by the Aisin Jiuru, and so on.

25. In fact, the Western word “China” itself is a non-Chinese term. For a history of the name “China,” see Geoff Wade, “The Polity of Yelang (夜郎) and the Origins of the Name ‘China,’” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 188 (2009): 1–26.

26. See, e.g., the monumentally comprehensive, and imperial, *Kangxi zidian* (Kangxi dictionary) s.v. *chao* and *dai*.

27. This insight into dynasties holds true not only for China but for elsewhere too. Marie Favereau Doumenjou and Liesbeth Geevers declare that “historical dynasties are . . . in part the historian’s invention.” Marie Favereau Doumenjou and Liesbeth Geevers, “The Golden Horde, the Spanish Habsburg Monarchy, and the Construction of Ruling Dynasties,” in *Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives*, ed. Maaik van Berkel and Jeroen Frans Jozef Duindam (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 452. Favereau Doumenjou and Geevers focus their critique mostly on the temporal dimensions of the dynasties they examine. I stress the spatiotemporal dimensions as opposed to just the temporal.

28. Consider, among others, Axel Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007); Axel Schuessler and Bernhard Karlgren, *Minimal Old Chinese and Later Han Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009).

29. See the detailed dynastic table in Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 4–5.

30. Gao Minshu, Gao Kai, and Zheng Li, “Nanshi Beishi shuolüe” (Sketch of the Southern and Northern histories), in *Ershiwu shi shuolüe* (Sketch of twenty-five histories), ed. Wang Zhonghan and Qiu Anpin (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 212–41.

31. The history of the Five Dynasties, *Wudai*, period was first compiled in 974 by Xue Juzheng (912–981), an official who served some of these dynasties and ended up chief minister of the early Song dynasty that succeeded them. His history of the *Wudai* was revised by the great Song historian Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) while he was in exile. The two histories are known as *Old Five Dynasties History* and the *New Five Dynasties History*. For an abridged translation of the latter, see Xiu Ouyang and Richard Davis, *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

32. Denis Twitchet, *Writing of Official History under the T’ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). The Tang model established this principle for later dynasties.

33. Andrew West, "Quest for the Urtext: The Textual Archaeology of 'the Three Kingdoms' (Volumes I and II)," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1993.
34. Rafe De Crespigny, *The Records of the Three Kingdoms* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1970).
35. Gao Mei, "Sanguozhi Shuolüe" (Sketch of the *Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms*), in *Ershiwu shi shuolüe*, 63–86.
36. Kimberli Besio and Constantine Tung, introduction to *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), xvii–xxvi.
37. For a detailed textual history of the novel, see Andrew West, "The Textual History of the *Sanguo Yanyi*," <http://www.babelstone.co.uk/SanguoYanyi/TextualHistory/Authorship.html>.
38. Cited in Besio and Tung's introduction to *Three Kingdoms*, xxii. A brand-new three-volume critical edition meticulously identifies Mao Lun's alterations of the original text: Luo Guanzhong (Mao Zonggang pingdian), *Saoguo yanyi Mao pingben quanji* (Beijing: Xianzhi Xianxing, 2018).
39. Moss Roberts, afterword to *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel*, by Luo Guanzhong, trans. Moss Roberts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 411.
40. Chun-chieh Huang and John B. Henderson offer a critique of this common interpretation of Chinese history in their introduction to *Notions of Time in Chinese Historical Thinking* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2006), xi–xii. See also in that book John B. Henderson, "Premodern Chinese Notions of Astronomical History and Calendrical Time," and Chun-chieh Huang "Time' and 'Supertime' in Chinese Historical Thinking," 19–42.
41. Lynn Struve, *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers' Jaws* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 1998.
42. Mencius 4A:3, in James Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius* (New York: Dover, 1970), 293.
43. Mencius 2B:13, *The Works of Mencius*, 231–32.
44. Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, Michael Nylan, and Hans van Ess, *The Letter to Ren An & Sima Qian's Legacy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016); Siep Stuurman, "Herodotus and Sima Qian: History and the Anthropological Turn in Ancient Greece and Han China" *Journal of World History* 19, no. 1 (2008): 1–40.
45. Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, Michael Nylan, and Hans van Ess, trans. and eds., *The Letter to Ren An and Sima Qian's Legacy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 2016), 28–29. I am using also the original text in Chinese, which is found at pp. 125–28. The translation here is by Durrant and his coeditors, with one key modification of mine.
46. Sima Qian, *Letter to Ren An*, Chinese, in Durrant et al., *Letter to Ren An*, 128. The translators and editors of the text translate this phrase as "gathered together all the evidence for cosmic and dynastic cycles." This is probably what Sima Qian means to say (and he does mention heaven and all under heaven (which are translated as "cosmic and dynastic"). But for the purposes here, it is important to adhere to the literal translation "endings and beginnings."
47. Sima Qian, "Shiji Taishi Gong zixu," Grand Historian's preface to the *Records of the History*.
48. Sima Qian, and Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 118 (old transliteration modified to pinyin).
49. The term *xunhuan* literally means "follow, or abide by, a hoop or a ring."
50. Gary Arbuckle, "Inevitable Treason: Dong Zhongshu's Theory of Historical Cycles and Early Attempts to Invalidate the Han Mandate," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 4 (1995): 585–97. I ran a search for the terms "rise and fall" (*xingshuai*) and "cycle" (*xunhuan*) in the *Zizhi Tongjian* (Comprehensive mirror in aid of governance) by the great historian Sima Guang

(1019–1086). Completed in 1084, this huge historiographical project, covering almost 1,400 years of history, from 403 BCE to 959 CE, is the next comprehensive historical project after Sima Qian's *Shiji*. Tellingly, it does not contain either term. Evidently, Sima Guang did not think using or discussing either was crucial—perhaps because Sima Guang, a very conservative high-ranking official serving the prosperous Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), was writing during a very comfortable moment in Chinese history. Moreover, Sima Guang was writing specifically for the ruler of his time, the emperor Song Yingzong (r. 1063–1067), who commissioned the project in 1065. Yingzong's successor, Shenzong (r. 1067–1085), was even more supportive and involved in the project than his predecessor. See Sima Guang, *Zizhitongjian* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007).

51. Sima Qian, *The First Emperor: Selections from the Historical Records*, trans. Raymond S. Dawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24.

52. Sima, *The First Emperor*, 72–73.

53. Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

54. Sima, *The First Emperor*, 74.

55. On the use of Mencius, Sima Qian, and the opening of the *Romance* for the cyclical history thesis, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 6–7.

56. Martin Gimm, "Bibliographic Survey: Manchu Translations of Chinese Novels and Short Stories: An Attempt at an Inventory," *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 1, no. 2 (1988): 78.

57. Xiu Yun, "Sanguo yanyi Manwen kaoshu" (A Research of the Translation of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Manchu), *Journal of Minzu University of China* 6, no. 41 (2014): 108–13.

58. Andrew West, "The Textual History of *Sanguo Yanyi*: The Manchu Translation," <http://www.babelstone.co.uk/SanguoYanyi/TextualHistory/Manchu.html>. West's website contains more historical information than his doctoral dissertation: Andrew Christopher West, "Quest for the Urtext: The Textual Archaeology of *The Three Kingdoms*" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1993).

59. The Manchu version is available online at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. See *Ilan gurun-i bithe [Sanguozhi yanyi par Luo Guan-zhong] traduit par Kicungge et autres*, 1650, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9003013v>.

60. The edict, originally in Manchu, had been translated into Chinese by Huang Runhua and Wang Xiaohong and appears in "Manwen yiben Tangren Xiaoshuo, Liaozhai Zhiyi deng xuyan ji yiyin Sanguo Yanyi yuzhi," *Wenxian*, no. 16 (1983): 4–5 (which I consult here in my discussion). The English translation is by Andrew West with my amendments. Moreover, West adds the word "dynastic" in brackets before the words "rise and fall." But this word, as it does not exist, does not appear in the Chinese text. I have omitted it.

61. Andrew West translates *anluan* as "tranquility or confusion." It seems to me that "safety and disorder" speaks more to the situation Dorgon was addressing—the war stabilizing China after the conquest. Each alone, *an* (peace, safety, security) and *luan* (confusion, disorder, upheaval) is a very powerful word in premodern Chinese political discourse.

62. Nicola Di Cosmo, introduction to Nicola Di Cosmo, trans., *The Diary of a Manchu Soldier in Seventeenth-Century China: "My Service in the Army," by Dzengeo* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 42.

63. The title "Twenty-Four Histories" was coined in 1775. On the *Twenty-Four Histories* in English, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 689–713. The historical record of the Three Kingdoms, the third-century text by Chen Shou, is listed as fourth of the twenty-four histories—after, among others, the *Records of the Historian*.

64. Kent Guy, *The Emperor's Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch'ien-lung Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

65. Zhao Yi, *Nian ershi zhaji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008); Qian Daxin, *Nian ershi kaoyi* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2014); Wang Mingsheng, *Shiqishi shangque* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2016).

66. Isenbike Togan, "Court Historiography in Early Tang China," in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jeroen Duindam, Tülay Artan, and Metin Kunt (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 171–98.

67. No good studies exist on the writing of official histories in English. On the changing numbers of the histories, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*.

68. Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

69. Hu Changming, *Mao Zedong pingdian lidai wangchao* (Mao Zedong's commentary of past rulers) (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2016), 3.

70. Pater Zarrow, "Old Myth into New History: The Building Blocks of Liang Qichao's 'New History,'" *Historiography East and West* 1, no. 2 (2003): 204–41, 232.

71. Julia Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity: Chinese Discourses on History, Historiography, and Nationalism (1900s–1920s)* (Leiden: Brill 2017).

72. Zarrow, *Old Myth into New History*, 233.

73. Translation is Alvin Cohen's with my amendments. See Liu Shipei (Wu Wei), "Huangdi jinian lun" (1903), in Luo Jialun, ed., *Guomin ribao huipian, di 2 pian, di 1-2 ji* (Zhongyang Wenwu Gongyingshe), 1983.04 (9) (0275); Alvin Cohen, "Brief Note: The Origin of the Yellow Emperor Era Chronology," *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 25, no. 2 (2012): 1–13.

74. Wên Sun, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People, by Sun Yat-Sen*, trans. Frank W. Price (Shanghai: China Committee, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1927).

75. Tze Ki Hon, "Ethnic and Cultural Pluralism: Gu Jiegang's Vision of a New China in His Studies of Ancient History," *Modern China* 22, no. 3 (1996): 315–39; Tze Ki Hon, "National Essence, National Learning, and Culture: Historical Writings in Guocui xuebao, Xueheng, and Guoxue jikan," *Historiography East & West* 1 (2003): 242–86.

76. Mao Zedong, "Reply to Comrade Kuo Mo-jo" (January 9, 1963), in *Ten More Poems of Mao Tse-Tung* (Hong Kong: Eastern Horizon Press, 1967), 14–15.

77. Frederic Wakeman, *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-Tung's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 92.

78. Mao's commentary on the twenty-four histories is probably the most extensive. See *Mao Zedong Ping Dian "Ershisi Shi" Pingwen Quanben* (Beijing: Dangan chubanshe, 2008).

The Temporal Assemblage of the Nazi New Man: The “Empty” Present, the Incipient Ruin, and the Apocalyptic Time of *Lebensraum*

STEFANOS GEROULANOS

The Danger in the Present

In the early 1930s, just as he was completing *Der Arbeiter* (*The Worker*, 1932), Ernst Jünger curated a series of photo books, most significant among them *Der gefährliche Augenblick* (1931) and *Die veränderte Welt* (1933). His priority was to unleash a vision of the present future of technological civilization in terms of the advent of “the age of the worker.” While “bourgeois politicians” babbled on and the old social structure struggled to hold together, still a new world was dawning: technological workers would seize the throne, appropriating and powering the techno-militarist rearrangement of the earth. Their “concrete images” positioned the camera eye from which Jünger beheld his new age, dichotomizing old and new ways of perceiving change and violence.¹ *Augenblick* depicted participant-observers faced with death and at times unable to escape it (fig. 6.1), while *Welt* presented scenes of work—mostly of the nonlabor variety—to define *Arbeit* as an “art” and a “style of living” that supposedly brings men back to what is “architectural” to them (fig. 6.2).² “Two epochs conducted” the world war, Jünger wrote, its victors being not the Entente, but those secret forces who had “gone through the school of danger” and emerged in a new world, abandoning the old, neutral, neutered individual (*das Individuum*) for a new, singular-among-many, hierarchized being (*der Einzelne*). The new *Lebensstil* of work mobilizes human existence completely to wipe away the decrepit bourgeois-proletarian division clinging to power.³ When the photo essays freeze moments of anticipation, industrialized exertion, and threat, they probe the dangers that supposedly oblige the formerly dominant bourgeois into a desperate pursuit of security. If viewed from the perspective of the “age of the worker,” the images lack the intensity and horror experienced by the bourgeois.



FIGURE 6.1. Jünger, *Der gefährliche Augenblick* (1931), images and captions. *Der gefährliche Augenblick* staged scenes of danger and disaster, whether natural, technological, or political.



FIGURE 6.1. (continued)



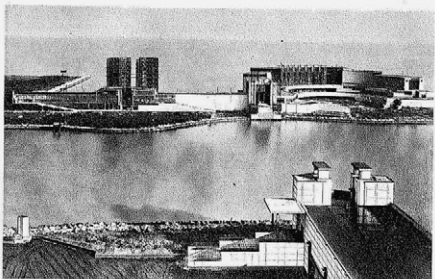
DIE TECHNIK ZEICHNET

Krieg

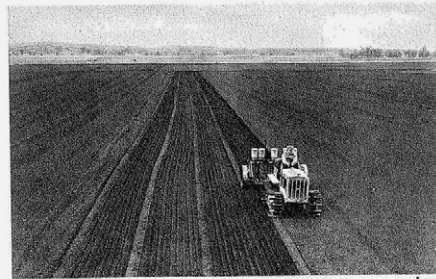


DAS GESICHT DER ERDE

Stadt



Friede



Land



Der Bürger



Der Arbeiter

FIGURE 6.2. Jünger, *Die veränderte Welt* (1933), images and captions. *Die veränderte Welt* purported to project images of that new Age.

Jünger's images and argument bifurcate the present, treating the two political orders as overlapping temporal ones. *Der Arbeiter* positions itself on the temporal precipice of their ostensible separation. In a world of "progress"—*false* progress, the only true one being technological advancement—all there is is "rapid change."⁴ Those uninitiated into the worker's age experience this change as dissolution into an empty, conflict-ridden presentness. Those who welcome the age's "New Men" supposedly replace that collapse thanks to an "armed" gaze energized by a life wrapped in danger. The worker, "temporally experienced as a relation to the future,"⁵ incorporates danger into "the theater of this era which is struggle" and curves inexorably toward a "secret pole of victory."⁶ He begins to "see the world through new eyes," "sketch its contours," and enter its "sphere of becoming."⁷ Rapidity falls away, replaced by a static experience: an extratemporal, nonevolving ideality made perennial.⁸ The photographic exhibition of this speculative anthropology depicts the perceptual and temporal shift as one in which the individual forfeits individuality—*anxiety*—to gain stability, free play, and the subsumption of violence proper to the new *Lebensstil*. Work offers archetypes mediating a continuous, mobile, confrontational future. To avoid succumbing to the danger and weight of bourgeois security, the declension and self-evacuation of the bourgeois present augurs a New Man who can end the dominance of an altogether-destructive passage of time.⁹

Introduction: The Project to Create the "New Man"

Throughout the two centuries of its history, the aesthetic, political, and scientific project to transform or regenerate human nature—to create "the New Man"—was fundamentally about a politico-anthropological reconstruction of time. Almost every version of the New Man, from the Jacobin promulgation of a morality fit for a postrevolutionary world to the Soviet and neo-behaviorist reengineerings in the mid-twentieth century, required an assemblage of time and power. What was needed to rebuild and reorient "human nature" was an embodied authority, an imagined figure, or a set of techniques capable of jumbling the past, the new, and the future, oftentimes by force. By the great battles of World War I and the October Revolution, what had lurked in scientific, utopian, and aesthetic discourse was unleashed as an ethico-political imperative. From there, each group deployed a dragnet of supposedly pure concepts (e.g., proletariat, race) and a repertoire of well-rehearsed attacks on perceived causes of bourgeois decay or oppression, and even used the term as ideological synallagma. The New Man became a propulsive virtuality that "inverted" the empty present in order to bind it, transformed, to

new futures. The New Men proposed after the war indemnified what were often well-established anthropological motifs; images of virility; theories of terroristic, eschatological, or revolutionary strength; sciences of human plasticity and government. The motif's dreams became easily recognizable and popular, its villains setpiece. The New Man contorted the contours of time; in the totalizing and often totalitarian projects of regeneration, the New Man claimed to meld the leftover shards into a new, lasting form.

In the 1930s, Germany's National Socialists developed perhaps the most ideologically complex version of the New Man, an entire chess set of knights, rooks, youthful footsoldiers, and demisovereigns whom they could deploy, whether for tactical purposes or in genuine belief. At times these pieces aided one another; at others they competed. Groups like the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) or the Hitler Youth played out at embodying a New Man in total mobilization, with some high-ranking figures, Heydrich foremost among them, explicitly described in such terms.¹⁰ Race theory proposed a bio-aesthetics of the new society: it deduced, from the supposed biological purity of a prehistoric, trans-historical kernel covered over by strata upon strata of false culture, the urgency of a restitution of this kernel to social self-consciousness.¹¹ Art was curated toward a productive tension with military ideals—Arno Breker's hypertrophied neoclassicism resting uneasily beside the idolized aviators, tank operators, and SS. Pressures for modernization and military-economic hegemony generated a demand for industrial-economic acceleration and for a society that could handle it. And unlike Mussolini, who ostensibly embodied the New Italian, Hitler was designing, awakening, and piloting these New Men.

Historians have long struggled with Nazism's temporal riddle. Jeffrey Herf proposed "reactionary modernism" to explain the cohabitation of technologization with counter-Enlightenment motifs. Charles Maier wrote of totalitarianism's "denial of time."¹² Alon Confino argued that "Jews represented time"; hence, "the Holocaust was about the Nazi dream of conquering historical time, past, present, and future."¹³ Christopher Clark countered that, despite its claims to novelty and "diverse biotope" in temporal metaphor, Nazism was not "a conscious or coordinated effort to restructure formal temporal frameworks."¹⁴ Eric Michaud guides Reinhart Koselleck's conception of "rapid acceleration" in the direction of the Nazi goal of social immobilization,¹⁵ and then synthesizes it with other tricky themes, notably the "already here but yet to come" of New Man discourses gearing toward the "eternal" Reich.¹⁶

Somewhat like Jünger's supposedly harmonious yet in fact tense marriage of temporal tropes, these formulations totalize from a singular perspective that reduces "asides" to side effects. Nor do they acknowledge key divergences between the multiple temporal vectors of National Socialism. Race,

modernity, apocalypse, purity, novelty, acceleration—all coexisted in an uneasy consistency, a plenitude with contradictions that held Nazi time together. To these, I have elsewhere added one particular loop that was key for Alfred Rosenberg's ideas: from Wagner on, the temporality of regeneration had involved an almost-ritualized return to a "pure beginning" of history to creatively dredge protean supermen out of the imagined depths of Aryan race, archaic Hellenism, Indo-German prehistory, and medieval fantasy.¹⁷ These mythical "First and New Men" became sovereign, alongside the artist-designer-politicians who raised them, to battle the degeneration that supposedly dominated their time.

That temporal loop was coefficient, yet conflicting, with other temporal regimes: bio-aesthetic racial eternity, industrial-economic acceleration, and—the subject of this essay—the New Man's advance into the future. To accentuate the value and political urgency of the New Man's anticipated temporal reign, I argue here that the Nazis created another loop, uniting an empty present—in which no peace could be found, no time genuinely experienced—with a perilous distant future, described in terms of terror at the (Soviet or Jewish) enemy's eventual triumph. The danger against which they imagined themselves struggling was thus both current and futurally ensured. Prophecy was a mainstay of Nazi writings, with a specific theopolitical role: it folded the present and the deep future over each other to present both of them in the apocalyptic language of the *Volk's* destruction. This temporal regime demanded action against both present and future: National Socialists proposed staving off the dual internal-external annihilation by establishing a figure of power capable of evacuating of the present, inverting it into a new age, and leading into the future's racial plenitude. Once in control and building "his" own world, this New Man would keep catastrophe in abeyance. Indeed, this New Man, with all his jagged edges and shardlike inconsistencies, provides the ideological agility for leaping between pillars of Nazi thought.

I present this argument by tracking four movements. First, in Nazism's early years, as in Jünger's text, the present appeared empty, meaningless, conflict-ridden, dissolute. To overturn that present through "awakening" and "building" would be the New Man's first achievement. Second, Hitler, Albert Speer, and others internalized a history of ruin into their New German, to project forward a vicious circle they saw in both the present and the past. The future replayed past destructions: it included a critical point, a year zero of annihilation, which had to be postponed. Third, National Socialist thinkers compressed the ruinous future by worrying over an imminent catastrophe inflicted by Bolsheviks as new "Asiatic hordes." This argument extrapolated insecurity about the "now" and legitimized war and colonization.

In the prognosis that catastrophe was near certain, prophecy did its work, particularly by spatializing this temporal structure. Nazism thus served up a clenched and armored New Man who could serve as counterpoint and panacea, delivering adequate space to establish an other present and future and to delay the ruin. In the collapse of the Nazi New Order, after mid-1943, the paradisiacal future enabled and fulfilled precisely this perverse prophecy of destruction.

The Empty Present and Time as Annihilation

Nazi political writings, already from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, use a fairly specific lexicon to speak of the present time: the now is empty, dissolute, a "fall," a "paralysis," "the depths of our present degradation," a collapse that mirrors the German army's in 1918, a destitution, "our present misfortune," "our present impotence."¹⁸ The present time scripts subjection to "the Jew" in the sense of subjection to, first, the political and economic deterritorialization, and second, to internal racial dilution and expropriation.¹⁹ This "emptying" is partly political—a database out of which grievances could be unleashed and dovetailed—and partly a complaint about a sped-up loss of control that served as a wholesale rejection of the present. Hitler regularly took the step from rejecting progress to formulating the passage of time in terms of annihilation, and he presented himself and those around him as resisting and potentially stopping it. In *Mein Kampf*, he wrote: "Today we are a reef; in a few years Fate may raise us up as a dam against which the general stream will break and flow into a new bed."²⁰ Fifteen years later, in 1937, he would elaborate this hydrogeology: "Time is ever-changing; the years come and go. Anything that springs exclusively from a certain given time will pass into oblivion as quickly as the time itself. . . . Those things created before our time, even the things we create today, or what might first take shape sometime in the future would similarly fade into oblivion."²¹ This argument intentionally conflated temporal forward movement as an irresistible ontological force (akin to Aristotle's sense that every present is immediately swept away) with a quasi-Spenglerian anthropological panic of passage as racial dissipation.

It was of course a pillar of National Socialist thought that, ever since Versailles, a particular regime had accelerated an already-consequential socio-economic and racial seeping out of the *Volk*. The Second Reich's collapse was "the deserved chastisement of eternal retribution . . . only the greatest outward symptom of decay amid a whole series of inner symptoms."²² Political and cultural developments had emaciated the racial body, rendering the present self-emptying: action, society, and race were supposedly being annihilated.

The postwar (temporal) regime's commitment to "progress" radicalized the dissolution in a way that mirrored—indeed strengthened—the structure of time as destructive passage: "The present epoch is liquidating itself."²³

This was not quite Reinhart Koselleck's proclamation that "the Revolution's yearned-for future deprives its present of actuality."²⁴ For Hitler, rather, the *Volk* had to be given a "granite" consistency to block both ontological and political effects of time.²⁵ In this regime, the present both did not exist and was empty enough to allow its own overcoming. A real confrontation with time required the purified massif of a timeless racial-national body that was yet to be created. Acts of true will would confront both the ontological and the political damage that time wrought.

Across the political spectrum, major interwar thinkers insistently denounced uncontrollable acceleration. Le Corbusier contrasted architecture with revolution and with the anxiety caused by a world moving too fast: "The human animal . . . feels himself to be the slave of a frantic state of things."²⁶ Acceleration did not simply replace Christian eschatology in an ever-faster syncopation of distances and experience. It denatured time to the point of destroying "natural" experience: it *enslaved*. As for Jünger, the issue was not to reject, but to block and harness progress. Even for many on the Left—from Georges Friedmann to Alexandre Kojève—too often acceleration was the by-product of political failure to harness industrial capitalism.²⁷ Fernand Léger counterposed order to acceleration: a Comte-like "Religion of the Future" could arise only from the control of frenzy.²⁸ Hitler, too, expressed terror toward acceleration as loss of control; purveying the ruins to which "enormous cities have been reduced," he decided, in Adam Tooze's words, that "to shake the populace out of its optimistic stupor and to energize it with a sense of apocalyptic risk . . . was the true task of political leadership."²⁹ Hitler's geological metaphors for standing up to time (the "reef" model) facilitated the argument that Nazism embodied fate: it battled a temporality that was pure, destructive passage. The New Man versus Time: an immobilization would brace the consolidation and purification of the *Volk* into timelessness.

Until 1933, the confrontation of the promised New German with the supposed temporal regime of Jewish-Bolshevist-internationalist dissolution and expropriation was described in terms of "awakening" and "Fate."³⁰ The "seizure of power" provided one setting—witness the assertion involved in the official title of the 1933 *Ermächtigungsgesetz*: "Law for the Redress of the Distress of the People and the Reich." And still, doubts persisted: this "awakening" of "the German"—had it occurred? Even if so, did it suffice? Or was it yet to come?³¹ Hitler, Rosenberg, Goebbels, and others anguished over this, marking quite how much "remains to be done" in forging their alternative—the

geologically styled countertemporality of racial consolidation.³² Speaking at the 1933 Congress on Culture, Hitler again presented as a given the degenerationist claim that “sooner or later” the coexistence of multiple races within a *Volk* leads to “the dissolution of any unnatural union,” emphasizing that the temporal switch into a new *Volk* had not satisfactorily occurred in the recent political success.³³ By Hitler’s 1935 *Reichsparteitag* speech before fifty-four thousand *Hitlerjugend*, “awakening” had given way to “raising”: “We must raise [*erziehen*] a New Man in order to prevent our *Volk* from perishing from the phenomena of degeneration of our time.”³⁴ Hitler then tabulated that New Man’s characteristics: “slim and lean, nimble as a greyhound, tough as leather, hard as Krupp steel.”³⁵ Force and agility were to be taught into the armored self. Meanwhile, by introducing anti-Semitism into “our time,” the phrase “the phenomena of degeneration” carried and coded temporality both as a political refusal of dispersal and as an ontologically intended buildup of the national, natural body.

Exactly a year later, with Speer’s Temple of Light flanking him and just a few days after Goering’s distribution of the “Secret Memorandum for the Four-Year-Plan,” Hitler spoke again on the *Reichsparteitag* to the *Hitlerjugend*, declaring that he was not merely state building or recovering the Reich; his program surged rhetorically from buildings to a “new German being”: “You are experiencing the birth of a great age . . . ! Perhaps that is the greatest miracle of our time: buildings are being erected, factories founded, roads built, train stations constructed—but beyond all this, a new German being is maturing!”³⁶ “Raising” had given way to “building” and “maturing,” which are themselves more than easy metaphors. Predicated on a retrieval of a nature that had not existed in a thousand years,³⁷ with no plausible “return” to either ancient Germania or the Second Reich, the “architecture” of the New Man drew strength from past purities by overlaying them on the present, to create against time.

The Value of Ruins for the Architectural Simile of the New Man

The argument on purification and construction against the “phenomena of degeneration” did not remove the threat of catastrophe; on the contrary, it internalized it as a ruin held within and cast it as evidence of Nazi grandeur. Immanent ruin persisted, at once in the temporality and doubt surrounding the strength of the new “building” and in a resolution of that internal division through ruin’s projection into a known future. This can perhaps be best seen in the so-called theory of ruin value, which Speer declared essential for the Nazi architecture that would replace the erasable buildings of the present:

buildings of modern construction were poorly suited to form that “bridge of tradition” to future generations which Hitler was calling for. It was hard to imagine that rusting heaps of rubble could communicate these heroic inspirations which Hitler admired in the monuments of the past. My “theory” was intended to deal with this dilemma. By using special materials and by applying certain principles of statics, we should be able to build structures which even in a state of decay, after hundreds or (such were our reckonings) thousands of years, would more or less resemble Roman models. To illustrate my ideas I had a romantic drawing prepared. It showed what the reviewing stand on the Zeppelin Field would look like after generations of neglect, overgrown with ivy, its columns fallen, the walls crumbling here and there, but the outlines still clearly recognizable. In Hitler’s entourage this drawing was regarded as blasphemous. That I could even conceive of a period of decline for the newly founded Reich destined to last a thousand years seemed outrageous to many of Hitler’s closest followers. But he himself accepted my ideas as logical and illuminating. He gave orders that in the future the important buildings of his Reich were to be erected in keeping with the principles of this “law of ruins.”³⁸

Later still, Joachim Fest pushed Speer to recount the episode: “Hitler became reflective and, after a long silence, mused: ‘Yes, great buildings can hold up the march of times.’ I asked Speer whether . . . he had told Hitler that this remark was quite inappropriate since both the theory and the drawing he had made demonstrated precisely the superior strength of time.”³⁹ Fest’s conviction that Hitler misunderstood his own theory follows a naïve account of time as simply eroding everything equally, with the result that ruins testify indifferently to time’s own success.⁴⁰ But Speer dramatized Hitler, assuming this annihilation all the more emphatically, the better to counter it with that “greatness” that, even in ruin, can “hold up” time. Speer’s conveniently retroactive assertion is borne out by Hitler, as early as *Mein Kampf*—in his self-depiction as a dam against time and his drama of Aryan conquerors whose traces survived in flesh and monumental ruins.⁴¹ The young Hitler had also identified the national community with an architecture that confronted ruin, carried it within, and could withstand it and outlive itself:

How truly deplorable the relation between state buildings and private buildings has become today! If the fate of Rome should strike Berlin, future generations would someday admire the ruins of the department stores of a few Jews as the mightiest works of our era and the hotels of a few corporations as the characteristic expression of the culture of our times. Just compare the miserable discrepancy prevailing in a city like even Berlin between the structures of the Reich and those of finance and commerce. . . . Works are not built for eternity but at most for the need of the moment. And in them there is

no dominant higher idea. . . . Our cities of the present lack the outstanding symbol of national community which, we must therefore not be surprised to find, seems no symbol of itself in the cities. The inevitable result is a desolation whose practical effect is the total indifference of the big-city dweller to the destiny of his city.⁴²

The “desolation” of the day carried future destruction within it.

The admiration of the ruin is of course a well-known trope, from architecture through literature.⁴³ Less studied is the advent of the idea of carrying one’s own future destruction and apocalypse, and perhaps surviving in it, which became a signal property of the Nazi New Man. Winckelmann and Herder located decay in the life cycle of a civilization’s artistic production, and Gibbon all but fetishized imperial collapse in *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. After the outbreak of the French Revolution, two famous scenes explicitly thematized ruin and survival. In a famous 1796 painting, Hubert Robert imagined the ruins of the Grand Gallery of the Louvre (fig. 6.3), and Constantin-François de Volney, writing of Palmyra in 1791 with events in France on his mind, proposed a regenerative value in the ruins that he saluted for bearing the “revolutions” of past civilizations.⁴⁴ Percy Shelley in “Ozymandias” (1817) had his “traveler from an antique land” agree, apropos a destroyed



FIGURE 6.3. Hubert Robert, *Vue imaginaire de la Grande Galerie du Louvre en ruines* (1796).



FIGURE 6.4. Ernest Meissonnier, *Les ruines du Palais des Tuileries* (1871).

Egyptian sculpture, “that its sculptor well those passions read / Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things.”⁴⁵ Yet the poem famously continues, “Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!” The work half-stands, wrecked in the endless desert.

From the 1820s on, ruin was celebrated together with the (metropolitan) grandeur of empire. The London architect and antiquities collector John Soane fantasized, like Robert and Speer, the future downfall of buildings that his architecture firm was designing. Ernest Meissonnier’s *Les ruines du palais des Tuileries* (1871) beheld the frieze of the Arc de Triomphe (fig. 6.4), still standing after the Commune and its collapse, at the vanishing point toward which recede the collapsed upper floors and windows of the Tuileries, their ruins dominating the foreground: look beyond ruin, and see victory future through victory past. Victorian archaeology developed—as part of Britain’s “offer” to the world—the European antiquities market, bourgeois tourism, and restorative veneration as redemptions of cultures past that survived through it.

Ruins were thus others from elsewhere, mostly from the past, that could be given a second life by being incorporated into the empires' power and trajectory. From architecture and politics, the model moved to biology. From the 1860s to the 1880s, vestigial forms in evolutionary theory introduced a logic of ruins into living organisms. In *The Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin imagined natural selection affecting, "in the course of centuries, the proportional numbers and kinds of trees now occurring among the old Indian ruins!" and then imported the problem into a discussion of rudimentary, vestigial organs, which he saw as structuring not only the past but also the future of species: "As the presence of rudimentary organs is thus due to the tendency in every part of the organisation, which has long existed, to be inherited—we can understand, on the genealogical view of classification, how it is that systematists have found rudimentary parts as useful as, or even sometimes more useful than, parts of high physiological importance. Rudimentary organs may be compared with the letters in a word, still retained in the spelling, but become useless in the pronunciation, but which serve as a clue in seeking for its derivation."⁴⁶ This link of vestiges to ruins would soon become dictionary material.⁴⁷ William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) replicated the appropriative gesture by which ruins of the other became internal possibilities in his 1871 presidential address to the British Association when he proposed that "life originated on this Earth through moss-grown fragments" from meteorites, "the ruins of another world."⁴⁸

The future-oriented movement of "ruins carried within" emerged more clearly in the early twentieth century. H. G. Wells's *Time Machine* featured the Time Traveler noticing the "delapidated" state of the formerly grand Eloi building, which mirrors the biological degeneration of the human species that the Eloi represent.⁴⁹ By 1910, the inherent meaningfulness of architectural remnants of the past was so commonly held as to become the bull's eye of Marinetti and the futurists' violent rhetoric.⁵⁰ Houston Stewart Chamberlain obsessed in 1899, on behalf of a future Teutonic Germany, that "everything living bears in itself the germ of its own ruin and death"; his anti-Semitic delirium externalized the threat: after past Teutonic offers of "racial friendship," "the Jew rushed in like an enemy, stormed all positions and planted the flag of his, to us, alien nature—I will not say on the ruins, but on the breaches of our genuine individuality."⁵¹ Jünger's *prima facie* claim in the photo books was that destruction had to be internalized and celebrated as a natural and artificial effect. And did not Hegel's dialectics allow for vestiges of the past to survive, transmuted, after being *aufgehoben*? Benjamin's angel, prey to the storm that "drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while

the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky,” refracted this imagery of ruins into a “single catastrophe” extending constantly into the present.⁵²

Hitler of course inherited Chamberlain’s mantle but also the bio-imperial logics. In his *Second Book*, he detailed his belief that racial degeneration is inescapable on its own, and both population management and regular struggle were necessary for training men for virility.⁵³ Regardless of size, power, and apparent dominance, each state and empire had to ensure its survival: struggle and war to harden “the race” were necessary. By his 1937 *Proklamation* on the Reichsparteitag, his language was once more firmly evolutionist: “The consequences of this German racial policy will be more significant for the future of our *Volk* than the effects of all the other laws together. For *they* are creating the New Man. They will preserve our *Volk* from doing as so many historically tragic past prototypes of other races have done: lose their earthly existence forever because of their ignorance in addressing that single question [i.e., of race]. . . . At stake is the rebirth of a nation, brought about by the deliberate breeding [*Züchtung*] of a New Man.”⁵⁴ A day later, Hitler confirmed the link of time, race, and his new being: “Socially, economically, politically, culturally, and racially we live in a gigantic break [*Umbruch*] of time!”⁵⁵ At this point, the “New Man” of art was just as intimately attached to racial development, each feeding into the other: “It is not the purpose of art to distance itself in reverse teleology from the *Volk*; rather, its only purpose can be to symbolize this dynamic process of development. The new age of today is working to create a new type of man. Overwhelming efforts are being made in countless sectors of life to elevate the nation’s people, to make better, stronger, and more beautiful men of our people, of our youth and our boys, our women and girls.”⁵⁶ Racial policy carried the weight of the as-yet-incomplete economic, political, and phylogenetic reawakening, now identifying the continued health of the race with the temporal breach of the New Man.

Hitler’s worry about “historically tragic past prototypes” and his anticipation of architectural and biological ruin as the ineluctable conclusion of his own revolution went a step further than earlier discussions of ruin. It organized a rationale of conflict, which ensured disaster as incipient within success and proposed that only grandeur can bear within it its own destruction and yet survive it, Phoenix-like. In September 1935, he had openly confronted the temporal incipience of an end: “What would the Egyptians be without their pyramids . . . the Greeks without Athens and the Acropolis, Rome without its monuments . . . ? No people survives beyond the testimonies of its culture.”⁵⁷ This redeployed the British obsession with ruins—the metropole’s anguish over overstretched imperial control—in rapidly expanding and racializing

real time. Imperial, biological, and architectural time folded into one another. The projected eternity of the Reich's archetypal human became a sempiternity aware of its future end: it bore the ruin within precisely because of its strength. As it stood up to time's ontological and political damage, National Socialism had to wrest and control the absolute and persist beyond its anticipated future apocalypse. Both the architecture, *Bauen*, and the racial fostering or education, *Erziehen*, of the New Man postulated that he stand upon ruin, face eventual ruin, and carry ruin within himself, so as to outlive it.

The Prophecy of Bolshevik Apocalypse

If time in the empty present meant the accelerated dispersal of biological and socioeconomic self-sufficiency, if a ruinous endpoint for the architecture of the Nazi racial dreamland could be extrapolated from various pasts and looped with a distant future, the threat was also imminent. If, as Klaus Theweleit argued, Freikorps soldiers projected anxieties of physical degeneration onto external threats (e.g., the body of women, the communist mass), Nazi theorists extrapolated the expropriative threat to the Soviet Union. The supposed duty to assault the "Jewish" loss of economic and geopolitical sovereignty translated easily into international conflict to avert destruction through Bolshevism. Already in *Mein Kampf*, defeat in a future war doubled "today's" internal desiccation: "Do not forget that the international Jew who completely dominates Russia today regards Germany . . . as a state destined to the same fate. . . . In Russian Bolshevism we must see the attempt undertaken by the Jews of the twentieth century to achieve world domination."⁵⁸ Spatial and temporal rhetorics fueled one another: in each sentence, the threat of German racial dissolution turned into one of external, no-less-racial domination.

With the "foundation" of the Reich in 1933, the foreign "threat" was rendered futural, an upcoming geopolitical onslaught. Responding to the supposed urgency of the annihilatory "Jewish" present was folded into confronting the anticipated assault. In this, communism was rendered as a new iteration of a recursive external threat. The future, predic(a)ted on race wars, repeated a deep past of Europe's supposed history. And the more National Socialists controlled the domestic situation, the more the Soviet and "imperialist" enemies towered spectrally over them.⁵⁹ Here, the mirroring structure of Nazi and Soviet time came to its fullest expression, the Soviets claiming to be at the forefront of history, and the National Socialists claiming to stand back and be forceful against the onslaught of time—which they identified with the Soviet Union. Speeches and texts from the 1930s are replete with predictions

of an apocalypse brought about by a Soviet invader that would overwhelm and (in temporal terms) end the new Reich. Any future defeat to the Bolshevik other would repeat and worsen the Great War's conflagration, finally fulfilling the racial *Götterdämmerung*.⁶⁰ The most explicit of these texts was Hitler's famous "Secret Memorandum on the Four-Year Plan" (August 1936), the most prognosis-obsessed policy memo of the Nazi period. Best known as Hitler's inversion of the difficulties of the German economy to muster his rearmament program into the basis of *Lebensraum* expansionism, and frequently interpreted in terms of acceleration, the Four-Year Plan also enforced the temporal rationale of a militarized Germany as the greatness that would fend off the Asiatic storm.⁶¹ "Bolshevism's victory over Germany would not lead to a Versailles Treaty but to the final destruction, indeed, the annihilation of the German *Volk* . . . probably the most gruesome human tragedy that has been visited upon mankind since the downfall of the states of antiquity[.] In light of the urgency of this threat, all other considerations must recede into the background as being utterly irrelevant."⁶² The paranoia was of course articulated in military-economic terms concerning the German inability to withstand a prolonged war.⁶³ Hitler's talk of "swiftness of pace" supports the accelerationist interpretation. Nevertheless, acceleration was adopted only to the degree necessary for grasping and freezing the acceleration that was time itself. Hitler did more than forecast; he delimited the consequences of his prediction: "It is not the aim of this memorandum to prophesy *the time* when the untenable situation in Europe will become an open crisis. My sole intent . . . is to set down *my conviction* that this crisis *cannot and will not fail to arrive* and that it is Germany's duty to secure her existence by every means in the face of this catastrophe."⁶⁴ In military-economic urgency the future bore pressure on the present to flip and become the basis for greatness. The coming of the disaster served as counterpoint to the certainty that tied together

- (a) a hardening of time as external invasion;
- (b) the act of sovereign will epitomized in the Plan; and
- (c) a logic of military imperviousness as the congealment of the racial body.

It was at this point—indeed, just a few days later—that Hitler styled himself "building" and the *Hitlerjugend* audience as "maturing." The New German being was "maturing" through "raising" and "building" made possible by the Nazis' wresting of a peacetime economy toward a militarized unity.⁶⁵ Prophecy joined not acceleration but the channeling of a racial-economic-military force: the New Man "became" this near-invincible military futurity.

By 1940, the propagandistic formula that most lucidly expressed this exteriorized pressure of the future and justified aggression and brutality against

it was Karl Megerle's, that there could be "No security or peace for Europe unless Bolshevism is destroyed."⁶⁶ Once designated a "war of annihilation" against both "Jewish domination" and "Asiatic hordes,"⁶⁷ the invasion of the Soviet Union constituted "the moment of destiny," with "destiny" referring to the temporal geopolitics of defeating, *right then*, the feared future that could be scaled between "hundreds of years away" and "tomorrow." From then on, the New Man was conducted, as if electrically, either into figures of a New German blood or into figures of a New Order whose novelty was geopolitically organized. For instance, when in May 1942 Hitler imagined himself as the designer of a new breed of men, he rapidly pivoted to outlining the new Reich, its reach, and its composition.⁶⁸

During Barbarossa, apocalypticism was replaced by *Lebensraum*, propagandistic jubilation, and the announcement of the coming, eventually static New Order. Speer reported Hitler's marshaling of the language of construction and ruination against the Soviets: "This will be the end of their building for good and all."⁶⁹ The preemptive attack on the enemy was concurrently spatialized and temporalized. Militarizing his injunction in *Mein Kampf* to "never regard the Reich as secure unless for centuries to come it can give every scion of our people his own parcel of soil" (note: "never"),⁷⁰ Hitler stated on July 16, 1941: "Never again must it be possible to create a military power west of the Urals, even if we have to wage war for a hundred years in order to attain this goal. All successors of the Führer must know: Security for the Reich exists only if there are no foreign military forces west of the Urals."⁷¹ This speech, recorded in the "Bormann memo" of the meeting on Barbarossa at Hitler's headquarters, cast the East as a perennial threat and expressed the imperative in terms of "never again" and "only if." Like this "never," the hyperbolized century of anticipated battle is marked onto the geography. In 1923, "never" and "unless for centuries" had played largely the same role; now the military-securitarian spatial formulation translated the pastoral fantasy of "parcels of soil."

Two further temporal developments guide this militarization. The first is more evident in internal documents. To the futural quality of the threat it adds a subjunctive one regarding legitimation: if Germany had not acted by invading the Soviet Union, thereby creating space to delay and perhaps end the threat, then "the wave of Bolshevism would have swept across the Continent without hindrance."⁷² The mixed conditional allowed past ruinations to be replayed in a "recent" counterfactual and looped them into the future threat. Hitler played with the subjunctive throughout the *Table Talk*, repeatedly picturing future ruins that had been averted and were thereby carried within as victories. For example: "If the Bolsheviks had dominion over us for

two hundred years, what works of our past would be handed on to posterity? Our great men would fall into oblivion, or else they'd be presented to future generations as criminals and bandits."⁷³ The "if"- "then" structure induces a sense of permanence and repetition in the threat: it does not obviate the presentation of the Soviets as a forthcoming threat, but it does flatten imagined pasts onto it. No longer merely a Bolshevik threat, or merely a Jewish one, at this point the "ensured" upcoming onslaught could be projected backward in history to the figure of the "galloping Asiatic horde." Stalin, Hitler asserted in January 1942, "has merely resurrected the tradition of Pan-Slavism. For him Bolshevism is only a means, a disguise. . . . If we hadn't seized power in 1933, the wave of the Huns would have broken over our heads. All Europe would have been affected, for Germany would have been powerless to stop it. Nobody suspected it, but we were on the verge of catastrophe."⁷⁴ The Soviets' "motorized hordes," the "barbaric Asiatic methods" denounced in military manuals, Franz Alfred Six's fear that Soviet victory would "turn Europe into a part of the Central Asian steppe," Goebbels's "waves of vile Asiatic-Jewish flood"—all of these references articulated geopolitical space together with an eternal return, "since time immemorial." Should the German New Man not be ready to repel it, it would supposedly annihilate Europe.⁷⁵

Second, policy documents on the New Order for Europe toggle between time and space in the excision of the Soviet Union.⁷⁶ The speed of the German advance, the planning of population transfers and "parcels of soil," and the racialization of the Ukraine all abide a spatial othering of the Soviet Union. By 1938, Hitler was referring less frequently to a New Man than to a New Reich, or a New German epoch.⁷⁷ Once Barbarossa began, he cast in spatial terms his order for an a priori refusal of Soviet capitulations: what mattered was not strategic control but the flight of a population, the opening of space for German control.⁷⁸ SS-Oberführer Konrad Meyer's *Generalplan Ost* opened with the exclamation, "The German armies have finally won for the Reich the Eastern territories that have been disputed for centuries" (note the scale: "finally" and "centuries"). He promptly outlined—with meticulous attention to the time that each stage of de- and repopulation would take—the ways in which Eastern territories would be "separated from their existing territorial confederation as marks of the Reich" and placed for colonization under Himmer's sovereignty.⁷⁹ As Meyer put it elsewhere:

The land *Volk* of tomorrow will be a different people from that of yesterday. . . . For our rural population the dawning of this new age means a fundamental change of character. . . . The choice between traditional or progressive, primitive or modern, can only be resolved in favor of a healthy, communally

conscious idea of progress and performance. This implies a clear decision in favor of struggle as opposed to those . . . who see the salvation of the peasantry in the protection of a nature reserve. . . . It is therefore best to give up complaining about the fact that the “old peasantry” is gone and to affirm the new peasantry of the Third Reich and to fight for it.⁸⁰

Conventional temporal and historical categories are pushed aside for a temporalization of health and struggle; apocalypticism is militarized, translated, spatialized into *Lebensraum* politics and into a temporally ordered racial separation. “Europe will *never* be safe *until it reaches* the Urals,” proclaimed Funk, too, in a formulation reiterated all the way to 1944, for example by Himmler calling the colonization plans unmovable.⁸¹ The “New Europe” was in this regard entirely concomitant with the sense of an “unthreatened,” timeless, racially ordered vastness.

The subjunctive loop and the spatiotemporal excision joined hands: thanks to added space, the cyclical threat was moved to the future—a future whose relation to the present shifted time and again and that affirmed colonization as the only basis of a longer-lasting New Germany, thereby channeling the extensive work of human transformation to the benefit of German power in the East. By 1942, with Germany still at its zenith, invocations of the New Man in the SS and in other figures of youth and the warrior no longer depended on the idea of a breakthrough into a new world but on embodying the assault against the apocalypse.

A Utopia to Postpone the Apocalypse, or the Thousand-Year Duration of the Twelve-Year Reich

In compounding existing schemas—notably Michaud’s argument about Nazi time as acceleration inverting into immobility⁸²—I have drawn a line from the pre-1933 understanding of the present time as racial-economic dissolution, through its externalization to a futural threat, to the reinscription of the supposedly Soviet-Asiatic disaster into the present moment. This was a coding of time as a renewed structure of annihilation and anticipation that demanded combat and war. With the invasion of the Soviet Union, the New Germany became temporally dependent on *Lebensraum*. This meant a radicalization of the utopia of the New Man and a greater pressure of future ruin.

Arthur Seyss-Inquart identified the German advance into the future in terms rendering territorial expansion into communal transformation: “The new community will transform the *Lebensraum* given us all by history into a new spiritual realm.”⁸³ A month after the invasion, Hitler argued, “We have to

create a Garden of Eden in the newly won Eastern territories.”⁸⁴ Megerle, outlining propaganda terms in September 1941, similarly opined that “the citizen of the new Europe will present the type of a joyful, natural, courageous and healthy human being. Harmony of body, soul, and mind, sincerity, discipline and respect for the creative personality are the ideal to which the new Europe must aspire. The new Europe offers to European peoples, great and small, the opportunity of full achievement.”⁸⁵ Paradisial opportunity gave an epochal quality to the spatial expansion. Put differently, *Lebensraum* was not merely the spatial reordering of the New Man: rather, interpreting colonization as a renewed Aryan conquest of the East and a liberation for the *Volksdeutsche*, the Nazis affixed the invasion to an overcoming of that space in a new temporality: an arrested, other time, a budding golden age full of danger and power. Resettlement plans ordered a world because, in this vast empire, the threat of internal desiccation had also arisen anew. The empire had to be employed toward the future just like Germany had been. Such plans thus proclaimed the “natural” attachment of Germans to the (invaded) lands to the east while foreseeing an activity that needed to be both planned and vigorous in its subsumption of dangers for the *Volk*. In a well-known speech in Prague on October 2, 1941, Heydrich sketched the Ukraine as a place “allowed” to exist as a “great resource and nutrition basis”:

Without the possibility of [German leadership] *culturally consolidating or strengthening the Volk there*, without the establishment of a great intelligence, an opposition might arise in later times, and [colonization] in many years may, under a weak leadership, be dissolved. On the whole, therefore, the old idea of colonization exists in these eastern territories, but, in contrast to the earlier idea of colonization by the Knights and Baltic Barons, the colonization that we seek, that is borne in the blood, is for us a stage for the domination of the space which we cannot fully populate.⁸⁶

This contrast of strength and weakness projected a purity of blood into the future and proposed it to dominate space through continuity against dissolution. Political equaled ontological dissolution; purity of blood *ad aeternam* and control of space were to preclude that.

The same figure of strength that made possible the raising of territory into a populated realm was evident in Meyer’s *Generalplan Ost* study of June 1942—perhaps unsurprisingly given the shocking scale of expulsions, starvation, and killing (between thirty-one million and forty-five million Poles, Jews, and Slavs⁸⁷) that that project promised: “On the front line of German *Volkstum* against a [Russiandom and Asiandom] lie certain areas which carry a special imperial task. What is essential for the vital security of the Reich is not

only the use of power and organization, but especially of German people as the population rooted in the soil.⁸⁸ Space in this text is negated into a sphere of ownership for and by the *Volkstum*; the racially conceived peasantry, as an “indigenous” population, inverts what is a formerly foreign space into an imperial, “vital” buffer of existence. Himmler presented the subsequent *Generalsiedlungsplan* as bulwark against a future “incursion from Asia.”⁸⁹ Other documents similarly detailed the implications of Heydrich’s planning for a “recreation” and a “Great Intelligence” that would negate any future opposition: “The size and uniqueness of the task [of mass deportation and settlement] in the Eastern territories requires special planning and implementation measures. After completion, it will be the duty of those in the administration to protect, preserve, cultivate, and increase what has been created. There is no model for the re-creation of the eastern landscape. This requires the energetic participation of all forces in the settlements and in all places in the Reich, as well as the employment of the youth in the construction and the ideal care of this creation of the *Volk*.”⁹⁰

After the defeat in Stalingrad, the apocalyptic of disaster returned: the disastrous future was actually militarily looming. Ruin and the New Man became a binary—to the benefit of ruin. Most famous of the appeals to catastrophe for the purposes of current, immediate power is Goebbels’s Sportpalast speech of February 18, 1943, known as “Wollen Sie den Totalen Krieg?” It marks the last step of the transformation of the New Man into the Nazi total war machine: Goebbels incorporated danger and will into the body of the totally mobilized *Volk*, “Hitler’s phalanx” as he called it, which he staged to respond ecstatically to his rhetorical device of the question answering itself.⁹¹ No less vicious was Goebbels’s 1944 text *The Year 2000*, which, explicitly in the tradition of dystopian anticipation, described the annihilation of Germany and the enslavement of Europe. Stalin “sees a future in which the entire world is subjected to the dictatorship of the Moscow Internationale. . . . Europe would fall into chaotic political and social confusion that would prepare the way for the Bolshevization that will follow. Life and existence in these nations would become hell.”⁹² The logic of “chaotic political and social confusion” merges and replicates the upcoming collapse with future generations. Others atop the Nazi hierarchy insisted on the racial clenching even more overtly; after the July 20, 1944, attempt on Hitler’s life, Himmler lectured high-ranking army officers that only a “bulwark” would hold off the collapse of the Reich.⁹³

And finally, in a renewal of prophecy at the moment of defeat, Hitler’s “Political Testament” (1945), with utter ruin having finally arrived, claimed: “Centuries may pass, but out of the ruins of our cities and monuments of art there will arise anew the hatred for the people who alone are ultimately

responsible: International Jewry and its helpers!”⁹⁴ He signed off, so to speak, by imbuing the recursiveness of racial consciousness with this same hope in ruins—not to mention his same enemies—and by postponing the perspective that he still dreamed would ensure triumph for a few centuries, centuries no less metaphorical than the “thousand years” that the violence of the Reich had already lasted.

I have sketched out a series of temporal imperatives that played a forceful role in the development of Nazi thought and eastward expansion. Like Jünger’s demand for a Gestalt-switch of perception, Nazi thinkers first bifurcated the present to supplant its supposed desiccation with a countertime of their New Man surging into the future, awakening, maturing, building, racially cleansing, then militarizing. These regimes of time were not simply coextensive or successive; they could be distinguished, fused together, or written onto one another as necessary. After 1938, the New Man spatialized in the expansion against the Soviet Union. In each case, the New Man constructed both an ontological and a political temporality: “he” promised a new way of being temporally, against internal and external threats, and a political triumph in quasi eternity. Still, “he” remained haunted by the internal-external ruin—a ruin that had happened, could have happened, would certainly happen, and eventually did happen, all at once. The New Man bore within, and had to slaughter, over and over, this other who committed and conditioned “his” ruin. The dissipating present, the future danger reinscribed into the present, the strengthening of the *Volk* and its blood, intended to effect a paradise and push back the end: the New Man compelled these temporal structures to organize and justify annihilation.

Notes

1. Ernst Jünger, “Über die Gefahr,” in *Der gefährliche Augenblick*, ed. Ferdinand Bucholtz (Berlin: Junker & Dünnhaupt, 1931), 14; Jünger, *Die veränderte Welt*, ed. Edmund Schultz (Breslau: Korn, 1933).

2. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter* (Berlin: Klett-Cotta, 2014): “Lebensart,” 92–95, 272; “Lebensstil,” 149, 272, 297, 306.

3. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, 18–21 and passim.

4. Jünger, 97 et al.

5. Jünger, 83.

6. Jünger, 98.

7. Jünger, 92, 83.

8. Jünger, 84; 82, 84.

9. Isabel Gil, “The Visuality of Catastrophe in Ernst Jünger’s *Der gefährliche Augenblick* and *Die veränderte Welt*,” *KulturPoetik* 10, no. 1 (2010): 62–84.

10. Robert Gerwarth, *Hitler’s Executioner* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 292, and 34 on the “violent soldier.”

11. Stefanos Geroulanos, "The Sovereignty of the New Man after Wagner" in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty*, ed. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 440–68.
12. Charles Maier, "The Politics of Time," in *Changing Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Charles Maier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 151–76.
13. Alon Confino, *A World without Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 14, 16.
14. Christopher Clark, "Time of the Nazis," in *Obsession der Gegenwart*, ed. Alexander Gepfert and Till Koessler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 156–87. The literature on National Socialism and time is expanding rapidly and with little theoretical consistency, to the point that leading historians like Clark can concurrently and with minimal comment cite diametrically opposed arguments; refuse in empiricism's name the call for methodological systematicity; decline that they argue that a new experience of time was taking hold in Nazi Germany; and then nevertheless argue for a new "temporal order" (à la François Hartog's *regime d'historicité*).
15. Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). On Koselleck, see the introduction to this volume.
16. Michaud, "Already There but Yet to Come," in *The 1930s*, ed. Jean Clair (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2008), 28–35.
17. On Tacitus, see Christopher Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book* (New York: Norton, 2011), introduction and chaps. 6–8. On Mycenae, see Cathy Gere, *The Tomb of Agamemnon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
18. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Mariner, 2002). "Fall": 225; "Paralysis": 329; "Depths of our present degradation": 225; "Our present misfortune" or "impotence": 227–28, 646.
19. Hitler, 235–36. Goebbels presented communism as the economic expropriation of a people, for example, in Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman, eds., *The Third Reich Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 133.
20. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 667. Hitler wrote in exactly the language of an erect posture against an exteriorized flood that Klaus Theweleit has presented as exemplary of Freikorps writings. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 2:3–162.
21. Hitler, "Speech at the Opening of the Great German Art Exhibition of 1937," in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 494.
22. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 229–30; also 283, 329.
23. Hitler, 435.
24. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 23; Koselleck, "Gibt es eine Beschleunigung der Geschichte?" in *Zeitschichten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 153.
25. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 329.
26. Le Corbusier, *Toward a New Architecture* (1923; New York: Dover, 1986), 271.
27. E.g., Aby Warburg, on the "machine age destroying" a "space" of devotion and reflection, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 54. Compare to accelerationist claims in, for example, Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (1923; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 12, 206.
28. See Karin von Maur, "Rhythm and the Cult of the Body: Léger and the Ideal of a 'New Man,'" in *Fernand Léger: The Later Years*, ed. Nicolas Serota (Munich: Prestel, 1987), 33–42; Eric Michaud, "Art, War, Competition: The Three Battles of Fernand Léger," in *Fernand Léger 1911–1924: The Rhythm of Modern Life*, ed. Dorothy Kosinski (Munich: Prestel, 1994), 57–63.

29. Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction* (New York: Viking, 2006), 12.
30. The Heideggerian version of this fallen present, articulated through the concept of *das Man* is too well known to require explication here.
31. On post-seizure uses of the language of awakening, see Michaud, *Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, 86–89.
32. See Adolf Hitler's speech to the Kulturtagung der NSDAP in September 1933, in which he called the success of the National Socialist revolution "superficial" despite its success in taking over political power "absolutely" and turned to advocate "racial struggle." Hitler, *Die Reden Hitlers am Reichsparteitag 1933* (Munich: F. E. Nachfolger Verlag, 1934), 23.
33. Hitler, "Speech at the NSDAP Congress on Culture," in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 114.
34. Hitler, "Hitler Youth Rally Speech" (September 14, 1935): *Freiburger Zeitung* (September 16, 1935), 4; also in Max Domarus, ed., *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen* (Munich: Süd-deutscher Verlag, 1965), 1.2.533.
35. Hitler, "Hitler Youth Rally Speech" (1935), in *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen*, 1.2.532.
36. Hitler, "Speech to the Hitler Youth," September 12, 1936, in *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen*, 1.2.642.
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38. Evans, 56.
39. Joachim Fest, *Albert Speer* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), 67–68.
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44. Nina Dubin, *Futures and Ruins* (Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2010); Biliانا Kassabova, "The Louvre in Ruins," in *L'Esprit créateur* 54, no. 2 (2014): 78–87; C.-F. Volney, *Les ruines* (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1826), xxii.
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54. Hitler, "Die Proklamation des Führers" (September 6, 1937), in *Parteitag der Arbeit 1937* (Munich: Eber, 1937), 24–25.
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61. Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 359; Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 220.
62. Hitler, "Secret Memorandum on the Four-Year Plan," in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 652.
63. Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 457.
64. Hitler, "Secret Memorandum on the Four-Year Plan," 652.
65. Fritz Todt, "The Meaning of the New Building," in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 518–21, 521.
66. Karl Megerle, "Positive Themes for Press and Propaganda, September 27, 1941," in *Documents on the History of European Integration*, ed. Walter Lippens and Wilfried Loth (New York: de Gruyter, 1985), 1:88; Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 352, 173.
67. For "Asiatic hordes," see Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk 1941–44*, ed. Hugh Trevor-Roper (New York: Enigma, 2000), 40–43 (October 9–10, 1941); 89 (November 5, 1941); 427 (July 7, 1942); 500 (August 26, 1942); Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 111, 317. The "Asiatic hordes" theme was of course a classic trope of National Socialist and generally rightwing anxiety in Germany, often as one prong of a pincers crushing Germany from both east and west. See, e.g., Ludolf Haase, "Wir brauchen ein Reichsrasseamt," in *Weltkampf* (October 1933), 293; E. H. Schulz and R. Frercks, *Warum Arierparagraph? Ein Beitrag zur Judenfrage* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Volk, 1934), translated as "Why the Aryan Law? A Contribution to the Jewish Question," in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 195; Joseph Goebbels, *Communism with the Mask Off: Speech Delivered in Nürnberg on September 13th, 1935 at the Seventh National Socialist Party Congress* (Berlin: M. Müller, 1935), republished in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 134; Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935, 1953; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 40, 41, 47; Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau, "Orders for Conduct in the East: Crushing the Jewish-Bolshevist System," in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, by Office of U.S. Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality (Washington, DC: US Government Princeton Office, 1946), 8:585–87.
68. Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk*, 371–72 (May 20, 1942).
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72. Walter Hewel, "Record of Conversation between Hitler and the Finnish Foreign Minister," in *Documents on the History of European Integration*, 93.

73. Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk*, 70 (October 25, 1941).

74. Hitler, 140 (January 5–6, 1942); "Memorandum by the Director of the News Service and Press Department (Schmidt), Berlin Nov. 30, 1941," in *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, series D, 13:908.

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77. E.g., Hitler's speech in Memel (March 23, 1939) in Domarus, *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen*, 2.1.1113.

78. "Directive of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, Führer's Headquarters, Oct. 7, 1941" (M178/M005694–95), in *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918–1945*, series D, 13:623–33.

79. "Aus der Studie *Generalplan Ost*: von SS-Oberführer Prof. Dr. Konrad Meyer," in *Euro-panstrategien des deutschen Kapitals 1900–45*, ed. Reinhard Opitz (Bonn: Paul-Rugenstein Nachfolger, 1994), 898–99.

80. Konrad Meyer, *Landvolk im Werden* (Berlin: Deutsche Landbuchhandlung, 1941), qtd. in Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 469.

81. See also the many mentions in "1944, 3. August, Posen. Rede Heinrich Himmlers vor den Reichs- und Gauleitern über die Siedlungspolitik," in Madajczyk, *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan*, 284, and in translation: *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal* (Nuremberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947), doc. no. 1919-PS, 29:110–73.

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83. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, "Meeting of the *Auslandsorganisation* of the Nazi Party (July 26, 1940)," in *Documents on the History of European Integration*, 1:72.

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86. "Rede Reinhard Heydrichs über die Grundsätze der nationalsozialistischen ‚Neuordnung‘ Europas," in Madajczyk, *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan*, 21–22 (emphasis added).

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90. "Allgemeine Anordnung Nr. 20/VI/42," in *Der 'Generalplan Ost': Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik*, ed. Mechthild Rössler, Sabine Schleiermacher, and Cordula Tollmien (Berlin: Akademie Vlg, 1993), 136.

91. Goebbels, "Now, People, Rise Up and Let the Storm Winds Blow," in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 829–30.

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93. Himmler speech to officers of Chief of Army Armaments, July 21, 1944, cited in Ian Kershaw, *The End* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 37n58.

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Prehistory and Posthistory: Apes, Caves, Bombs, and Time in Georges Bataille

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Ever since its nineteenth-century invention, prehistory has made trouble for the experience of time in the West. Those who follow Reinhart Koselleck's analyses insist on acceleration—as linked to capitalism, to technology, and to the ideologies of progress and the philosophy of history—as a fundamental temporal property of modernity. Much less thought has been put to connecting such themes to the indefinite dilation of time that was also happening at the same time. The establishment of the object, the age, and the discipline of prehistory is as modern as F. W. Taylor's stopwatches. And if it were legitimate to place acceleration in the heart of modernity, we would also have to complicate that notion, opening it to the past as much as to the future. This regressive acceleration sank deeper and deeper into an unfathomable past that shattered historical norms, defied intelligence, undermined beliefs, forced constant neologisms, and retaxonomized the world. For prehistory arises out of three great paradoxes. First, it was invented through an excess of historicism. It was through the desire to inventory everything, to enunciate the totality of the historical narrative of all that exists around him, that modern man threw himself at the wall of prehistory. Historicist excess ended up leading to the pulverization of history. Second, the closer prehistory reached the origin, the more that origin escaped anew, to the point of rendering genealogical narratives impossible. Third, from the outset, prehistory was a posthistory. In its geological version, it coincided with the scientific revelation of a temporality until then almost unknown—that of a time so long as to be unrepresentable.¹ Prehistory, across that deep past, also manifested in terms of a succession of extinctions. Then, the other way around, in the course of the twentieth century, artists and thinkers explained the accelerated time of technological modernity as endowed by a peerless power of

fossilization. This essay focuses on this latter aspect of temporality as opened up by prehistory.²

Numerous thinkers after the Second World War gave this reading paradigmatic value, notably through the intermediary of the notion of posthistory. Of them, Georges Bataille is, without a doubt, the one who imagined the symmetrical rapport between pre- and posthistory in the most complex terms. His interpretation, advanced in multiple texts after 1945, is all the more thorny because it was completely opposed to his vision of history from the 1920s, notably as he elaborated that in the journal *Documents* (1929–1931). Prehistory as he invented it in that early period undermined biological evolutionism, particularly by deconstructing the political rapports on which evolution's political authority was founded. Prehistory—always latent, always ready to reemerge—had been the matrix of a contingent and formless conception of history that was devoid of any teleological compass. But after the war, Bataille placed prehistory in his interiority, in a highly antagonistic relationship with history. His reading of the cave paintings of Lascaux, determined by the catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, permitted him to weave a narrative of universal history. To reconstitute and analyze this narrative is to interrogate the relationships between history and fiction, between *longue durée* and the event, between evolutionism and catastrophism. In Bataille's case, it allows us to track the movement of a thought that, fleeing the dystopian presentism of its era, took shelter in the Hegelian contemplation of the end of history.³

Ameranthropoides loysi: An Intermediate Step between the Monkey and Architecture

Bataille first confronted prehistory in 1929, in the second issue of the journal *Documents*. Turning the evolutionary principle inside out like a glove, he established a biological chain that spanned from monkey to architecture, passing by way of man: “Men apparently represent only an intermediary step in the morphological process between monkeys and grand edifices.”⁴ For the intermediary being that is man, there is no rupture between nature and culture: “The human order is from its origins one with the architectural order, which is nothing but its own development.”⁵ Bataille understood architecture as a symbolic constraint, which could take multiple forms in its function of extracting man from his simian state and transforming him into an upright being. But this constraint could prove to be as efficient as man could finish by resembling a true architecture, for Bataille thus recalling also the “monumental productions” that were “currently the real masters of this earth, grouping in their shadow the servile multitudes, imposing admiration and shock, order

and constraint.”⁶ Incarnated in stone, the masters of the world encourage the masses to prostrate themselves in a servile manner and thus renounce their own verticality. As happens often, evolutionism conceals within its heart its opposite: a regressive impulse, lived by men without their knowledge. Against this involuntary regression, Bataille raises a voluntary regression, which he explains as a reaction to architectural domination: “When it comes to a creature as elegant as the human being, it thus follows, a path opens—indicated by the painters—towards bestial monstrosity; as if there were no other chance of escaping the architectural prison.”⁷

Bataille thus incorporated his political critiques of fascism and of Stalinism, alongside one of those production-driven practices favored by certain avant-gardes of his time, into a lengthier story: a truly anthropological narrative, perhaps even a zoological one. He endeavored to integrate the present in a long and continuous history—that of constraints long imposed on the body, both individual and social. Admittedly, he recognized ruptures at the heart of this continuous history, which manifested by a regressive movement toward the pole of animality (explained at the end of the 1920s by a certain painter pulling the human toward the “bestial monstrosity”). Bataille’s paragonal apparatus, analyzed by Denis Hollier in *La prise de la Concorde*, consisted of seeing in painting an art that defeats what architecture creates.⁸ What images permeated Bataille’s thought when he wrote these lines? What forms corrupted the glorious bodies of architecture and man? On the one hand, there are of course the three painters who haunted the pages of *Documents* during its two intense years of existence: Picasso, Masson, Miró. On the other, there is a photograph: that of a single ape which Bataille doesn’t mention in his text but about which he learned that same year, 1929, during his studies in sociology. It survives slipped into a folder conserved in the Bataille archives at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and titled “On Apes.”⁹

★

During an expedition to Venezuela between 1917 and 1920, the Swiss geologist François de Loys discovered and killed the *Ameranthropoides loysi*. Outside the members of the expedition, nobody saw the ape, alive or dead. Regardless, a compelling postmortem snapshot appears to have permanently struck Bataille. We wouldn’t know anything about the animal, or even the exact year of its fatal meeting with the geologists’ team, if the doctor George Montandon, an avowed racist destined to become a notorious collaborator (he was eventually executed by the Resistance) hadn’t made an effort to plumb the mysteries of this outrageously anthropoid ape.¹⁰ It was thanks to his publications, two of which made their way into “On Apes,” that Bataille was made

aware of it. In a statement introduced by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl at the Société d'anthropologie, Montandon described how the members of the geological team, then in the Tarra forest, “found themselves one day in the presence of a couple of monkeys of human stature. The monkeys furiously marched toward them, upright, but stayed near the shrubs, whose branches they broke as if to use for weapons, while excreting on their hands and throwing the excrement at the men.”¹¹ Is there a more powerful illustration of the “bestial monstrosity” of the regressive pole invoked by Bataille, toward which the most interesting intellectual experiences of his time also tended?

Bataille's archive also contains a photo of the cadaver of the *Ameranthropoides loysi*. Once killed, the tall female ape was seated on a crate. Its large eyes were open, with a pole under its chin to keep its head upright, its long arms almost gripping the sides of the crate even as its legs had been opened so as to exhibit its sex. The mise-en-scène is unsettling: Is the ape dead or alive? Is it animal or human? “Master” or “slave”? As for the stick, it serves not only to guarantee the seated position of the inanimate beast; it also accentuates its verticality and its resemblance to the human species. A true prosthesis, the pole adds to its human resemblance.

The pole isn't merely a spontaneously invented device, but a real code forged in studies of natural history since the end of the seventeenth century. In all likelihood, the first ape with a staff is in the book *Orang-Outang, sive Homo sylvestris: or, The Anatomy of a Pygmy, Compared with That of a Monkey, an Ape and a Man* (1699), written by the physician Edward Tyson.¹² Its frontispiece is an engraving depicting the monkey frontally, upright, holding a stick as firmly as if it were a cane. The body of the orangutan, which fills the entire surface, is distinct from the landscape. It stands on a hill that, compared to the animal's size, looks like a little clump: the foliage doesn't extend above the thighs of this *Homo sylvestris*, appearing much sparser than the beast's fur. In this representation of the “ladder of being,” vegetation transcends minerals and animals, vegetation. The monkey derives its superiority from its resemblance, more and more evident, with man.

The second important moment in the history of apes with staffs was delivered by Carl Linnaeus in person. Some years after first classifying the human genus in the order of primates in the tenth edition of his *Systema naturae* (1758), Linnaeus proposed, in his 1763 book *Amoenitates academicae*, a special category of “Anthropomorpha,” and placed in it phantasmatic creatures such as the troglodyte and the orangutan.¹³ His illustration, which circulated quite a bit in the following centuries, is the product of a montage that unites four more or less hairy figures. Two of them, including a seated orangutan, hold

staffs. François de Loys's team thus resorted to an institutional semiotics, this time transposed to the photographic medium—which confers the image with the presumed status of “document” or “proof.” But the staff positioned under its chin exerts an even stronger visual violence than that of its preceding depictions: it denies death to feign life and imposes a stronger anthropomorphism. Literally and virtually fixed and supported, this anthropomorphism concisely summarizes colonial practices: the beast represents the native, unless it is also the master.

Monkey-man-architecture: such is Bataille's proposed taxonomy in his critical dictionary. Its goal is to dismantle, from the inside and from below, the taxonomy of reason in a Tyson, in a Linnaeus, in a Montandon. The photograph of the *Ameranthropoides loysi* condenses, despite itself, this work of subversion. It dismantles the constraining function assumed by the staff-prosthesis. What is the animal, limited to the half verticality of a seated man? What is the structured ape? What is this “intermediary step”? It is of course man himself, the *anthropos*, the colonial master, arising negatively from this photographic staging, superb in his absence. The staff or the cannon, synecdochic of “architecture,” and the “excreting,” aggressive monkey, unrelenting in its powerful resemblance to the human, constitute together the unfathomable and formless background of a new regressive painting.

The War

Prehistory threw itself on Bataille during the Second World War. First came the discovery of the Lascaux Cave in September 1940, just a few months after the beginning of the occupation (the journal *Illustration* gave a first report of eight pages to the discovery on January 4, 1941).¹⁴ The war then saw the development of previously unseen forms of annihilation: not only in the extermination camps, to which Bataille referred once in his reflections on prehistory, but also through the deployment of the atomic bomb. The effect of nuclear weapons on the human experience was still unknown. Technology had exceeded its power of acceleration even more radically than that analyzed in 1933 by Walter Benjamin in “Experience and Poverty.”¹⁵ Experiences of the catastrophes of Nagasaki and Hiroshima weren't speechless or incommunicable; to Bataille they seemed only barely felt in their human importance. Bataille integrated this theorization of an impossible experience into his great narrative of anthropogenesis. This narrative, to which he devoted himself until the end of his life, extends beyond his 1955 book *Lascaux: or, The Birth of Art*.¹⁶ Fragmented in its form and scattered across multiple postwar texts, the tale is no less coherent.

Bataille lived the war in retreat. In a letter from February 3, 1942, to the painter André Masson (who had already emigrated to the United States), he compared life in France to that in Tibet:

Life is doubtless stranger than it outwardly seems: there, one sinks into the depths of time. Never has the real world felt more like a dream to me: one breathes the air of dreams and anguish. Curiously, I would leave behind all clear skies for the mist which here hides everything. I've never understood the few old principles with which we view history (and which make light of our longings). History cannot pass without consuming lives. I willingly give it mine to eat. I can hardly doubt that something essential is missing from life in an imagined future where nothing more is consumed and everything is free: a tension so genuine that one becomes oneself as genuinely as a crab crouched in the sand.¹⁷

Bataille extinguished the outside world to seclude himself in the “depths of time.” If he didn’t actively participate in immediate history (“politics,” as he later defined it), he nonetheless believed in sacrificing his life to a true History, such as unfolded in its most secret mechanisms. Because he couldn’t recognize himself in the clear principles of formal peace and an entirely liberated (and thus, as his teacher Alexandre Kojève said, entirely satisfied) future, he preferred to feel the “tension” created by an “unemployed” negativity.¹⁸ In the midst of history, which Bataille compared to dull stories, he thus lived his prehistory, his subjective golden age. Its diagram is familiar: what was shared by past golden ages and expressed itself in works both great and unknown remains solitary and hidden in modernity. Now that the “acephalous” communities Bataille had dreamed of were definitively finished, prehistory became an intimate golden age, maternal and protective.¹⁹ During those years, Bataille developed in accordance with this shift a thoughtful relationship to visually sumptuous prehistoric images, notably those of animals. From then on, he was distant from the anthropomorphic monkey that reminded man of his inescapable origins. The modalities, premises, and implications of this reversal merit examination.

The Fiction of Lascaux: A Beginning, Two Acts, and an End

During his *Documents* years, Bataille had centered the concept of formal alteration on his reflections on prehistory. He approached things differently after the discovery of Lascaux. The astonishing material preservation of the prehistoric paintings of Lascaux made it possible thereafter to narrate a “miracle.” This miracle didn’t just break continuous time; it also contorted it

enough to actualize prehistory at the heart of the present. It was as if Lascaux had been discovered expressly for Bataille: he, who lived during war in the “depths of time” of his interiority, could finally confront prehistory in the flesh, in a “feeling of presence, a clear and burning presence.”²⁰ It is nevertheless true that Lascaux was there for anyone who chose to face it; it was in every way a subjective invention. Bataille willingly conceded that numerous admirable works showed the understanding of prehistoric art, but he did so only to point out their form, “whose time *alters* their appearance.”²¹ At Lascaux, however, “the splendor of the underground halls is incomparable: even when directly before this wealth of animal figures, whose life and radiance astonishes us, how can we avoid entirely the momentary sense of a mirage, or of a deceptive trick? But precisely insofar as we doubt and, rubbing our eyes, ask ‘is this possible?’ only evidence of the truth comes to answer to man’s own desire to be amazed.”²² On the one hand, Lascaux delivers a “miracle,” the abolition of time in its pure form; on the other, the phenomenologization that prehistory performs allows each of us to experience the first historical reversal: the “passage” of animal to man, which Bataille also describes in his writings as the “moment” or the “decisive” “step.”²³ To understand this “passage” is, for Bataille, to understand history.

Lascaux is so well preserved that it appears fake. From this first impression Bataille wove his narrative of prehistory, which he deliberately constructed like a dramatic fabrication. A theatrical drama emerges from the intertextuality of his numerous writings: a drama with a beginning, two acts, and an end.²⁴ Prehistory is, for him, a “period on which no account left by its contemporaries can inform us.”²⁵ But this empty narrative can thus be applied and energized in its negative character by a “dialectical relationship,” a device capable of producing historical difference; this prehistoric void gives rise to a fictionalizing mechanism. First and foremost, one must not attempt to fill this gap with fragments from the oral traditions of “primitive,” far-off cultures. It makes little difference to know which gesture, which wall, which cave, was first: insofar as Lascaux is perfectly preserved, it becomes, arbitrarily (that is, by pure decision of posterity), the beginning of art. Lascaux is thus a reception history, a response that poses a question, a posterity that invents its antecedent, a repetition that activates an origin. At the exact moment when Bataille wove his narrative of universal history, Lascaux became a contemporary history.

BEFORE TIME

This narrative begins before time, with what the Germans call *Vorzeit*, as Alain Schnapp noted in *The Discovery of the Past*.²⁶ The *Vorzeit* excludes the

human. It corresponds to the unqualifiable duration that no subjectivity has experienced. As such, it is not time, but a duration that no Kantian a priori can contain. According to Bataille, time was preceded by a duration of unrepresentable length, as silent as stones and fossils.²⁷ Then there were beasts and the first representatives of the human species, who barely affected this geological inertia. This slowness, stretched over billions of years, is still governed by the laws of “stagnation,” “rut,” “repetition,” and “incubation.”²⁸ Bodies are heavy; movements, crude. Thanks to labor, the compactness of both milieu and individual bodies gradually begins to split. The *homo faber* initiates the negation of “formless” material,²⁹ including his own. This is also the first schism, still minimal, between man and beast. Work reveals two fundamental experiences to *homo faber*. First, it teaches him to wait, to delay his desire for results, to project himself into the future. However, this work also provokes stupor at death, which abruptly interrupts projection into the future. The suspension and interruption of time, by the disjunction of present and future, is the first subjective fissure in the silent mineral block. But time suddenly begins a dizzying acceleration, provoking a true cataclysm—the first subjective cataclysm, which is also the beginning of history.

FIRST ACT: THE APPEARANCE OF THE
“UNBOUND BEING”

In his text “The Cradle of Humanity: The Vézère Valley,” Bataille fictionalized history to excess, describing the “event” that interrupted the *longue durée*: “One day, at the twist of a road, perhaps in a group, perhaps alone, a new kind of man appeared . . . much larger, more slender, more human.”³⁰ According to Paul Ricoeur, “Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated in a narrative mode.”³¹ Bataille introduces this humanization of time when he begins to stage the plot of his tale, signaled by the traditional “One day . . .” It would be pointless to criticize Bataille’s numerous erroneous assertions but much more pertinent to understand their function. Counter to a slow, continuous, gradual vision of history such as that of Leroi-Gourhan, who in *Gesture and Speech* emphasized the indivisibility of the human and the animal and explicated a prosthetic interpretation of culture, Bataille theorized the rupture par excellence: an inaugural event, even a miracle. He postulated a radical caesura between, on one side, geology and natural evolution, slow and gradual, and, on the other, human history, conducive to positive and negative “disasters.” He conceived of Cro-Magnon man in the image of a new man (but also, as we will later discuss, a “new man”) with an “unbound” body.³² This unbound being was also the inventor of art, which definitively

and emphatically separated him from animality. Bataille used the term “unbound” to signify the potentiality of a free and mobile “gesture” that draws on cave walls. Already far from those continuous conceptions of artistic production handed down by Gottfried Semper or even Aloïs Riegl, who treated useful and useless artifacts indifferently, Bataille’s fiction placed a miracle at the beginning of human history, a creation *ex nihilo*: “At nearly the first stroke, art attained the power of evocation, which has thereafter only been reached with difficulty.”³³

The two acts of Bataille’s drama are articulated around two reversals, which constitute the heart of the tale and account for the prehistoric void. The animal is not upended. It is endowed with no dialectic, it can neither deny what it is nor affirm what it is not. The animal *is*, and for the long metaphysics of the West—as Jacques Derrida explained in his last seminars—the animal is not capable of experiencing or thinking of its death.³⁴ Did Bataille not write in *The Accursed Share* that “even if he has lost the world in leaving animality behind, man has nonetheless become that *consciousness* of having lost it, which we are.”³⁵

FIRST ACT, FIRST REVERSAL: THE ANIMAL
FALLS AND MAN RISES

The elevation did not occur in the economic and direct way of modern utilitarianism, or with the erection of an “architecture,” but instead in a dialectical and extravagant manner. Bataille writes, “What these admirable frescoes proclaim with a youthful vigor is not only that the man who painted them ceased being an animal by painting them but that he stopped being an animal by giving the animal, and not himself, a poetic image that seduces us and seems sovereign.”³⁶ Elsewhere, Bataille explains that the men of Lascaux “forcefully transmitted to us the fact that, being men, they resembled us, but as a means for telling us so they left us innumerable pictures of the animality they were shedding—as if they had felt obliged to clothe a nascent marvel with the animal grace they had lost.”³⁷ Bataille summarized this “chiasm” by evoking the friendship that bound man and beast and the guilt of the hunters as regards their victim: “At the same time that their cries called for death, they expected forgiveness from the animal,” “as if in a drama prearranged by a tragic fatality.”³⁸ When man freed himself from animal to become its “master,” the animal became a stranger, one radiant with “the omnipotence of an impenetrable world.”³⁹

Lascaux’s drama was, in short, the exact opposite of what took place in the photograph of the *Ameranthropoides loysi*. In the latter, the master forced the beast’s resemblance to man, making himself appear like an enslaved and violently

anthropomorphized beast. In Lascaux, man became animal's master by feigning that this animal was his god. Although in *Documents* Bataille had insisted on the alteration of the human figure, in his Lascaux years he only incidentally touched on this alteration, instead favoring the notion of man's transformation into a fascinating animal. In a way, the "drama" of *Documents* involved merely one act, eternally and randomly repeated. Such was not the case with Lascaux.

Lascaux's drama has a developing movement—the same movement that set history in motion—and a requisite dose of duplicity for its plot, as its characters pretend to be what they are not. When most prehistorians explained cave painting as part of a hunting rite, Bataille made Lascaux an "archi-rite": that of the "passage" from beast to man and man's own self-production through art. Prehistorians also speculated that magician-sorcerers may have danced (perhaps in masks and costumes) before the animals engraved and painted on the walls. Before being the object of a material appropriation, these animals would have been the object of a symbolic one. What was interpreted as hybrid or ornamentally masked figures drawn and engraved on the walls of the caves and, particularly, certain magical practices observed among the Australian Aborigines or the Southern African San ("Bushmen") supported that hypothesis. While refusing the racist evolutionism inherent in "ethnological survival" theories, Bataille's fragmented, even "miraculous" conception of human history was not much kinder to "primitive" tribes (those "survivors" of the Stone Age). He noted that these "remnants offer us only a poor representation, lacking the wealth of the creative movement of the first men."⁴⁰ The poverty of primitive ruins is in contrast to the wealth thus depleted from historical origins. For him, sovereign, sacred, and unproductive art was there from the outset, and utilitarianism only came afterward. In accordance with this conception, he converted the theory of hunting magic—or that of play as an education and useful adaptation of the man's incomplete instincts to his environment—into a phenomenological interpretation.⁴¹ What happened in the caves was an "apparition," a "nascent image" of art itself.⁴² "Before it had a magical use, art appeared," wrote Bataille, adding: "The apparition of the animal was not, to the man who astonished himself by making it appear, the apparition of a determinable object, like the apparition today of beef at the butcher that is cut up and weighed. What appeared initially had a scarcely accessible meaning, *beyond* what could be practically defined. Precisely this equivocal, indefinable meaning was religious."⁴³ The ambiguity of art was that part of human life that the animal's restricted economy could not fulfill. Doomed to remain unsatisfied, it was at once an expression of death and its answer, "that kind of immense fissure which still opens us up to possibilities besides effective action."⁴⁴ Art defined as "apparition," "miracle,"

and “passage,” in turn, is a symbolic sacrifice—the fictional destruction of the object and, thus, a temporary rupture in the long history of reification (which is the other side of anthropogenesis).

Thus, Bataille was as distant from the theories that treated prehistory as a peaceful era of leisure (when everything was in abundance and within easy reach) as from those that imagined a merciless struggle for survival in an arid environment. Prehistory, since the end of the nineteenth century, when it was devised as both a historical era and a discipline, conformed simultaneously and antagonistically to two metaphysical models: that of the golden age and that of the fall. In both cases, Stone Age man was imagined in relation to the modern proletarian. In 1894, the anarchist Émile Gravelle published the first issue of his journal *The Natural State and the Proletarian Share in Civilization*. He employed the persuasive medium of the image to argue for the return of the city dwellers to nature, which once fairly shared could have provided for the needs of all.⁴⁵ With the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe and the Vendôme Column in the background, on Paris’s outskirts a prehistoric man whose strong body was barely covered by animal skins encountered four proletarians, listless and scrawny, wearing patchwork clothes. Before the four perplexed city dwellers, prehistoric man posed self-sufficiently. In its simplified opposition, this anachronistic meeting took place in an undefined space: what we now call a “nonplace” was then the antechamber of utopia. But an encounter between the prehistoric man and the proletarian continued to shape prehistoric imaginaries—from Bataille to Marshall Sahlins, whose 1974 work *Stone Age Economics* brilliantly defended the theory of an abundant nomadic economy. The fantasy of a hard, arid prehistory when men had to fight ferocious beasts and miserly nature was explained by the anthropologist as a capitalist anachronism projected into the past. It presupposes an inept being condemned to satisfy his needs through his work. Bataille’s conception of unproductive abundance is opposed, ultimately, to this utilitarianism. It corrects the utilitarian vision of anthropological functionalism, explaining magic as supplying man’s vital needs. At the same time, it opposes the blissful vision of a free art in a harmonious golden age. Bataille articulates the inner wealth that prehistoric men would have possessed and spent: the remains of this spending were discovered on cave walls. This miracle appeared again to the discoverers of Lascaux.

SECOND ACT, FIRST REVERSAL: THREE ADOLESCENTS
DISCOVER LASCAUX ON SEPTEMBER 12, 1940

Lascaux was the true reversal, the one that counted the most, the mold in which Bataille cast the first reversal of human history. Why did Bataille, when

he tried to understand the experience of discovering the cave, use the term “reversal” so obsessively? Evidently the “discovery” of Lascaux was “overwhelming” because, though “twenty thousand years old, they have the fresh vividness of youth. Some children found them. Some children scrambled down into the fissure left by an uprooted tree.”⁴⁶ The geological “fissure” becomes a “fissure” in time, whose ancient side suddenly joins with the present. We need a phenomenological postulate, capable of provoking a truly catastrophist reversal of time, and susceptible of reproducing itself to infinity, for the most ancient paintings to appear as young as the children who found them. The Lascaux cave “will never cease to respond to this wait for a miracle which is, in art or in passion, the most profound aspiration of life.”⁴⁷ This is why Lascaux was a posterity before becoming an origin: it carries the miracle needed by all human life. It makes “communication,” and even “friendship,” possible between prehistoric and modern man. But in truth the two “resemble” each other more than one might think. Just as prehistoric man left behind the restricted economy of animality thanks to the sacrificial economy of art, modern man leaves his alienated and indigent present to accede to a shining present—to the miracle—of Lascaux.

Bataille remarked that the numerous visitors who descended the staircase to the subterranean cavern ran “the risk of staying in this present world, seeing only vaguely and from afar the reflection of a vanished world which . . . had become accessible.”⁴⁸ In his manuscript for “A Visit to Lascaux,” he even wrote that “the incessant, anonymous tourist humanity, those amorphous and insipid crowd of our time, never ceases to flow through these ancient vaults.”⁴⁹ Bataille tried to leave behind this impoverished and homogeneous present as he was “*always pushed forward by the thought of the moment when the first of our contemporaries penetrated into the cave, where they suddenly found themselves in the presence of marvels nobody had seen in over fifteen thousand years.*”⁵⁰ “At that moment, if I had been there, I think I could have truly entered that vanished world, whereas now . . . the present follows me down into the cavern.”⁵¹ Those three adolescents become true “mediators,” with whom Bataille needed to identify in order to escape his own impoverished present, in a pure and simple abolition of time. Lascaux is, deep down, an “instant,” the only temporality compatible with the fleeting experience of sovereignty. Just as it dissolved the “fifteen thousand years” that separated its paintings from their discovery, Lascaux itself could at any moment crumble with a draft of fresh air. History, abrogated from both sides, was henceforth primarily interpreted as “beginning,” pure presence, even “decision.” This is what distinguishes prehistoric man from today’s “primitive” men, those “ruins” of a past time, as evolutionary ethnologists such as Tylor or Frazer had called them.

END, SECOND REVERSAL: HIROSHIMA

Lascaux, for Bataille, is an experience symmetrical to modern art. Multiple authors have noted that Bataille wrote his book on Manet contemporaneously with his work on Lascaux. Bataille, who had observed the “rotten” painting of his time, willingly placed himself in the tradition of Baudelaire, for whom Manet was “only the first” in the “decrepitude” of his art.⁵² Manet, for Bataille, altered the corpus of art in that unlike Lascaux’s anonymous artists, he didn’t have animals at his disposal to depict in radiant images. The only sovereignty left to him was that of his painting itself, convinced that this autonomous art nonetheless pursued “through research and appearances limited to the plastic domain” “the quest for a lost world, the sacred world. Does it not often seem to us that beyond its impotence modern art pursues the end which our utilitarian disasters no longer attain?”⁵³ Thus, modern art is a brilliant, if limited, expression of wielding a “useless negativity” which remains the only suitably sacred domain in the satisfied world of modernity. Still—while artists do so within the “subterfuge” of representation, a head of state, Harry Truman, exercised this negativity on a large scale, on life itself, when he ordered the deployment of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When the need to leave the “restricted economy” behind, to expend one’s inner wealth, remains unsatisfied, it becomes a “destructive compulsion.” Bataille went even farther than Roger Caillois, who explained modern war as an expression of the sacred. He concluded instead that by its assimilation to a restricted economy, war could no longer fulfill that function.⁵⁴ In a homogeneous world, the atomic bomb constituted the only objective appearance of the sacred, because of its indisputable annihilating effect. “We, in the middle of the twentieth century,” he wrote, “are poor, very poor, incapable of undertaking an important job if it yields no return. . . . One sole exception: works of destruction, which threaten to end the species and earthly life.”⁵⁵ The potlatch now encompasses the end of the species and even terrestrial life.

That is why Lascaux’s decisive moment was its discovery, and even its mold, rather than its narrowly defined creation. On the one hand, its discovery more or less coincided with the disaster of Hiroshima. On the other, their opposition is so exact that it unites them, ipso facto.⁵⁶ “It has become commonplace today,” wrote Bataille, “to talk about the eventual extinction of human life. The latest atomic experiments made manifest the thought of radiation invading the atmosphere and creating conditions where life in general could no longer thrive. . . . I do not intend today to discuss our eventual death, but our birth. I am only struck by the fact that light is being shed on our birth at the precise moment when the prospect of death appears to

us. Indeed, it was only recently we began to discern with a kind of clarity the earthly event which was the birth of man.”⁵⁷ Implacable symmetry: Lascaux made “manifest” prehistoric man’s inner experience, and nuclear bombs “manifest the thought of radiation invading the atmosphere.” Lascaux marks the beginning of a universal history, of which Hiroshima may well be the end.

The second reversal of universal history is the moment when man, who had thought himself a recognized and satisfied master, finds himself reduced to material or slavery. Performed at Hiroshima, this reversal continues slowly, gradually, imperceptibly. In Leroi-Gourhan’s *Gesture and Speech*, and in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin (for whom human history tends toward its Omega Point), the eventuality of the human species’ slow extinction is omnipresent. Bataille’s dramatic fiction, however, needs an event capable of nourishing his dramatization of history to the end. Hiroshima is that event, the “one day.” This event is another great rite, where the reversal of master into slave, man into animal, becomes discernible. It is a return to animality, and even a return, stretched and incredibly slow, to mute geology.

Bataille’s analysis is based on testimonies gathered by the American journalist John Hersey in his 1946 book *Hiroshima*, translated into French in 1947 and reviewed by Bataille in *Critique* that same year.⁵⁸ Hersey chose to limit his reporting “to a succession of scenes recorded in the memories of his various witnesses,”⁵⁹ without spinning a thread of continuous narrative. This fraying of narrative was essential for Bataille. He presents the six main witnesses of the book as ordinary beings whom “we meet each day, to whom we give familiar names.”⁶⁰ Then, “from a serene sky and after the all-clear siren had sounded (the then-intact city lived in anticipation of ‘conventional’ bombs), the lightning bolt fell.”⁶¹ This event—the lightning bolt—mirrors the coming of the “unbound being” in the Vézère Valley. As Bataille tells it, when lightning fell, “every person, in solitude and in ignorance of the unthinkable events to follow, arrived at a miserly, horrendous, never-ending revelation. It was even the opposite of a revelation, both abused by laughably inaccurate suppositions.”⁶² Put otherwise, the inhabitants of Hiroshima underwent, like animals, an experience that eluded them in every way. They possessed only “the vision of a walled-in animal, robbed, by the mistake of opening to the future, of an event whose essence was to decide man’s fate.”⁶³ Both before and during the event, only one man knew the meaning of what was happening. Only one man had a global and continuous view of history: Truman. Immediately after the event, everyone knew what had happened, save those who had endured it: “The colossal explosion taught nothing to the person who was dazzled in Hiroshima’s streets by an immense lightning as intense as the sun, not preceded by a detonation. He submitted

to it like an animal, unaware of its immense scope.”⁶⁴ Lascaux’s revelation was overturned by the unintelligible experience of Hiroshima.

THE END OF HISTORY

The glare of the atomic bomb confronted and cloistered the dazzling images of Lascaux. Bataille often emphasized the intertwined entanglement of lines at Lascaux, which, though fortuitous and independent of one another, created “by miracle” and “by instinct” an “inextricable whole.” Henceforth, he underlined the divided and disconnected nature of the atomic experience. He excluded a single man from the total ignorance of the end. Harry Truman played the role of “decision maker”—exactly as Carl Schmitt had conceived of political decisionism—because he possessed the exceptional power of using the bomb. Nonetheless, Bataille gave himself this role, too: Truman had a monopoly on action, whereas Bataille possessed one on contemplation.⁶⁵ Who can deny that history thereafter borrowed a distinct model from Bataille’s eyes? How can we not think that the jumble of human history, far from being formless and uncertain (as it was imagined in the *Documents* era), had come to form an “inextricable whole” for those who viewed it from on high?

However, Bataille had regularly criticized the Hegelian “end of history,” whose objectification in the book marked in his eyes a kind of return to the inorganic spirit of beginnings. “To read the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or look at old Hegel’s portrait,” he wrote, “one cannot help but be seized by an icy impression of achievement wherein all possibilities are determined.”⁶⁶ He explained the *Phenomenology*, an oppressive and rigid intellectual construction, as “the tremendous series of rifts, efforts, labors, mistakes, losses, and revolts which lead to a wearying epic from the subject’s particularity to object’s universality, to self-consciousness as a universal is the real history of mankind: reduced to the changes which accomplish the necessary edifice of the spirit in the struggle, which eventually comprehends totality through knowledge.”⁶⁷ If Hegel had understood the end of history as the apotheosis of an architectural “prison” and of the book, Bataille himself could imagine a closure of the history in the order of the sensible: from the animal to Lascaux then back to the animal again. This reversal is also a reversal of Hegel.

During these postwar years, events unfolded as though subjectivity could celebrate the then-recent disasters capable of fracturing the world’s homogeneity. The human species as a whole had entered its posthistory, a concept that established itself as a result of Kojève’s “end of history.”⁶⁸ Other thinkers, including Arnold Gehlen, also deplored the coming of a homogeneous

society. To them, it seemed even duller than the hierarchical society they had dreamed of under Nazism.⁶⁹ It is obvious that an abyss separates Bataille's thought from Gehlen's. Nonetheless, it is not inappropriate to observe that even the philosopher of "useless negativity" succumbed in the postwar years to this idea of a closure of history. This strand of dealing with, with all its reactionary implications and its abandonment of thinking the complexity of the real (a real as constructed by misused technologies) exceeds the usual criteria set by the Right and the Left. What, for example, does the liberal humanism of a Lewis Mumford have in common with the thought and works of Pier Paolo Pasolini? Not much a priori. And yet "posthistory," in its inversely symmetrical relation to prehistory, haunted both of them in the aftermath of the Second World War. In his works *Art and Technique* (1952) and *The Transformations of Man* (1956), Mumford focused on the symmetry between the excess of the symbolic powers of prehistoric man and the excess of technological and rationalist powers of the posthistorical man. If the balance between the two were not restored, man would become without doubt a posthistorical creature, an ontologically and maybe even biologically extinct species. Several years after, in his 1963 documentary *Rabbia*, Pasolini mixed together a series of images of nuclear explosions, displaying immediately thereafter Marilyn's smiling face. This pop apocalypse was, to Pasolini, the result of the cult of "normality." It destroyed local differences, distributed false democracy to voters, and endlessly divided "society into masters and slaves": "When the classical world is spent—when all the peasants and craftsmen are dead—when industry has made the cycles of production and consumption unstoppable—then our story will come to an end. In these cries, this racket, these immense assemblies, these lights, in these mechanisms, in these declarations, these weapons, these armies, in these deserts, in this unrecognizable sun, begins the new Prehistory."

What differentiates the Bataille of *Documents* from that of *Lascaux* is what separates the distorted figure of *Ameranthropoides loysi* from the sumptuous images of Lascaux. If Bataille's two interpretations criticize the present, the Bataille of Lascaux no longer considered history's contingency and its materialist component. Extracting himself from them, Bataille contemplated history from above, imitating a decisionist posture and yielding to the pathos of the end. It is worth reflecting today on the political implications of these two attitudes faced with time and history. Our historical consciousness is inhabited by two dominant temporalities: the presentist dissipation of life and the entry into the era of the Anthropocene, a sort of presentism on the geological scale. More and more, we witness complacency as regards this familiar end,

whose specter seems to be back again. The question, huge and difficult, is this: is it possible to pursue the demands of critical inquiry without yielding to the sinister “privilege” of the end of history?

Translated by Lauren Kirk and Stefanos Geroulanos.

Notes

1. Maria Stavriniaki, “We Escape Ourselves: The Invention and the Interiorization of the Age of the Earth in the Nineteenth Century,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (Spring–Fall 2018): 20–37.
2. Translations of Bataille’s texts cited here have frequently been amended.
3. I have developed at length the imbrication of prehistory and posthistory after the Second World War in my book *Saisis par la préhistoire: Enquête sur l’art et le temps des modernes* (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2019).
4. Georges Bataille, “Architecture,” *Documents* 1, no. 2 (1929): 117. At the same time, Bataille succumbed to the dualism of the free beast and a constraining society.
5. Bataille.
6. Bataille.
7. Bataille.
8. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).
9. Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), Département des manuscrits occidentaux, Fonds Georges Bataille, NAF 2 28086, box X, Qc.
10. On Montandon’s study, see Pierre Centlivres and Isabelle Girod, “George Montandon et le grand singe américain,” *Gradhiva* 24 (1998): 33–43.
11. George Montandon, “Découverte d’un singe d’apparence anthropoïde en Amérique du Sud,” *L’Anthropologie* (1929): 137–41 (on the March 20, 1929, meeting of the French Institute of Anthropology). Bataille’s file “On Apes” also contains a clipping from Montandon’s “Découverte d’un singe d’apparence anthropoïde en Amérique du Sud,” *Journal de la société des américanistes de Paris* 21 (1929): 183–95.
12. Silvia Sebastiani, “L’orang-outang, l’esclave et l’humain: Une querelle des corps en régime colonial,” *L’Atelier du centre des recherches historiques* 11 (2013).
13. Carl Linnaeus, *Amoenitates academicae* (Holmie: Impensis Direct Laurentii Salvii, 1762).
14. Pierre Ichac, “La Grotte à peintures de Montignac, en Dordogne,” *L’Illustration* 5104 (January 4, 1941).
15. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 1931–1934, ed. M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 731–37.
16. Bataille, *Lascaux, or, The Birth of Art* (Geneva: Skira, 1955).
17. Bataille, *Choix de lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 179–80.
18. Bataille to Kojève (1937), in Bataille, 131–32.
19. For documentation on the “Acéphale” years, see Bataille’s *L’apprenti sorcier*, ed. Marina Galletti (Paris: Différence, 1999).
20. Bataille, *Lascaux*, 12.
21. Bataille, 14 (emphasis added).
22. Bataille, 15.
23. Bataille uses these precise terms in both his *Lascaux* book and his other texts on prehistory.

24. In “The Cradle of Humanity: The Vézère Valley” (1959) Bataille invokes a history in two acts. See his *The Cradle of Humanity* (New York: Zone, 2004), 143–75. I have adapted Bataille’s writings here to a global, synthetic narrative.

25. BNF, NAF, 28086, box 1, I, note 11.

26. Alain Schnapp, *The Discovery of the Past* (London: British Museum, 1999).

27. Bataille, “Notes for a Film,” in *Cradle of Humanity*, 183.

28. Bataille, “Cradle of Humanity,” 144–46.

29. Bataille, 150.

30. Bataille, 155.

31. Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit, I* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 105.

32. Bataille, “Cradle of Humanity,” 155. [Trans.: The term *délié* abounds in “The Cradle of Humanity.” It is translated here as “unbound” and refers to the state of being untied, unshackled, released from obligation, or discordant.]

33. Bataille, “Cradle of Humanity,” 158.

34. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vols. 1–2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009–2011).

35. Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (New York: Zone, 1988), 133.

36. Bataille, “The Passage from Animal to Man and the Birth of Art” (1953), in *Cradle of Humanity*, 60.

37. Bataille, *Lascaux*, 115.

38. Bataille, “Cradle of Humanity,” 167.

39. Bataille, *Lascaux*, 121.

40. Bataille, “Cradle of Humanity,” 162.

41. Karl Groos, *The Play of Animals*, trans. E. Baldwin (New York: Appleton, 1898).

42. Bataille, “Prehistoric Religion” (1959), in *Cradle of Humanity*, 135.

43. Bataille, 135.

44. Bataille, *Lascaux*, 29.

45. Arnaud Baubérot, “Les naturiens libertaires ou le retour à l’anarchisme préhistorique,” *Mille neuf cent: Revue d’histoire intellectuelle* 31 (2013): 117–36.

46. Bataille, *Lascaux*, 14.

47. Bataille, 15.

48. Bataille, “Lecture, January 18, 1955,” in *Cradle of Humanity*, 94.

49. Fonds Georges Bataille (BNF, NAF 28086), envelope 85, manuscript for “Une visite à Lascaux,” 29.

50. Bataille, “Lecture, January 18, 1955,” 96 (emphasis in original).

51. Bataille, 94.

52. Baudelaire to Manet, May 11, 1865, in Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, ed. Claude Pichois and J. Zieger (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1973), 2:496.

53. Bataille, “L’utilité de l’art,” (1952) in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Francis Marmade, with Sibylle Monod (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 12:209–12.

54. Bataille, *Accursed Share*, 37, 155–56, 171–72.

55. Bataille, “Lecture, January 18, 1955,” 98.

56. In introducing *The Cradle of Humanity*, Stuart Kendall underlines the symmetry between Lascaux and Hiroshima, but without interrogating it in its polysemic and arborescent potentiality.

57. Bataille, “Lecture, January 18, 1955,” 87.

58. John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Harmondsworth & Penguin, 1946); Bataille, "Concerning the Accounts Given by the Residents of Hiroshima" (1947), translated in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 221–35.
59. Bataille, "Concerning the Accounts," 225.
60. Bataille, 223.
61. Bataille.
62. Bataille.
63. Bataille, 225.
64. Bataille, 224.
65. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).
66. Bataille, "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie," in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 11:286.
67. Bataille, 286–87.
68. On the notion of *post-histoire* (a term that, contrary to what is often asserted, did not first appear in the work of Antoine-Augustin Cournot), see Lutz Niethammer, *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?* (London: Verso, 1992). The concept of posthistory was also vitalized in debates on postmodernism, for example, in Baudrillard's work. Finally, in a direct parallel to existing thought on prehistory and in an equally linear manner, Flusser theorized the existence of three eras in his writings: (1) prehistory, reign of the image; (2) history, reign of writing; and (3) posthistory, return of the image.
69. Arnold Gehlen, "Über kulturelle Kristallisation" (1961), in *Studien zur Anthropologie* (Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1963), 311–28. Gehlen began to employ the term in 1952 and often returned in subsequent publications to the notion of the end of history.

PART III

The Splintered Present

Brain-Time Experiments: Acute Acceleration, Intensified Synchronization, and the Belatedness of the Modern Subject

HENNING SCHMIDGEN

At the beginning stands the fictitious encounter, in a laboratory, between a brain researcher and a cultural theorist. The two do not seem to have much in common. One of them is from Germany, the other from Canada. The first is among his country's best-known and established scientists; the other has the reputation in North America of being an avant-garde philosopher. The first works on the cognitive and emotional control of behavior in vertebrates, the other on the role of the "virtual" in art and in politics.

Yet both share an interest in the particular connection between brain and time. Both are convinced that recent findings in this area have far-reaching consequences for other fields of knowledge, but above all for our conception of the human being, our understanding of experience, corporeality, society. And to make this point, they refer to the same experiment.

This experiment was conducted by the American neurophysiologist Benjamin Libet at the University of California, San Francisco, in the early 1980s,¹ and it is there—in the very lab, as it were, at the Mount Zion Hospital in which Libet pursued his research—that the brain researcher Gerhard Roth and the cultural theorist Brian Massumi seem to meet.

First, they look at the experimental setup. In a darkened room, a test subject sits in a slightly reclined comfortable chair. Attached to the person's head, ears, and right hand are electrodes. From there, cables lead to recording devices in an adjacent room: an electroencephalograph (EEG) to register brain activity and an electromyograph (EMG) to register muscle activity. Also housed in this room is a PDP-12 computer (fig. 8.1) that seems only to wait to register all the signals coming from the two curve plotters (the EEG and EMG).

But the computer's role is not a merely passive one. The PDP-12 simultaneously controls the screen of an oscilloscope installed in the next room, at



FIGURE 8.1. The PDP-12 computer produced by the Digital Equipment Corporation (ca. 1969). In the early 1980s, neurophysiologist Benjamin Libet used this device for carrying out his experimental studies of “mind time.” In contrast to earlier uses of computer technology in the psychophysiological lab, Libet applied the PDP-12 for calculating and storing experimental data as well as controlling the stimuli the test subject was exposed to in an adjoining room. Reproduced from *PDP-12. User Manual*, Carl Friend’s Mini-computer “Museum,” Reference Shelf, <http://users.rcn.com/crfriend/museum/doco/PDP-12/index.shtml>.

about two meters’ distance from the test subject. On this screen, a beam spot goes around in a circle. Hence the darkness. And hence the silence. Care has been taken, at least, that no disturbing noise come from the hallway and the adjoining rooms.

In our fictitious scenario, brain researcher and cultural theorist watch Libet sit down next to the human-machine assemblage of wired test subject and wired screen. After a few test runs, “Ben,” as his colleagues call him, instructs the test subject as follows: initially, she is supposed to do nothing but relax and look at the center of the oscilloscope’s screen. Then, she is asked to suddenly move the right hand, or a finger of the right hand, within a given time frame. Simultaneously, however, she is to remember at which position of the “clock” the circling spot stood when she made the decision to execute her movement. A corresponding circular scale is attached on the edge of the screen. With a supply of paper on a clipboard, Libet notes down the test subject’s calling of time.

Then, the entire procedure is repeated: start of the time frame, making the decision to execute a movement, movement of the finger, naming and noting the time, registering the EEG and EMG signals. After a signal to begin, the test subject relaxes once again, looks at the screen, moves her hand again (or bends a finger) and again tells the oscilloscope-time at which she made the decision to execute this movement. And so on, again and again, around forty times.

The visitors seem to be standing in the background, silently, watching. In our scenario, Roth and Massumi wait patiently until the current test subject and all those following her—two, three, mainly female—have been examined. Once the electrographic and manual recordings have been completed, Roth and Massumi join Libet at the computer in the adjoining room, where the data just obtained are combined with earlier data, processed, and analyzed.

Finally, the result. It is both simple and remarkable: about half a second before the hand movement is executed, the EEG shows so-called readiness potentials—a triviality because it is generally presupposed that such potentials mark the cerebral start of self-controlled movements. The surprise is that the conscious decision to execute the called-for movement does not precede the readiness potentials, as one might suspect. Instead, it follows them. It takes place about three-tenths of a second *after* these potentials emerge.

Libet smiles. Three-tenths of a second! For neurophysiologists, that's an eternity. Between the onset of cerebral activity to execute a movement and the becoming aware of the intention to move, an abyss opens up, a gap, a temporal hole, as if consciousness were lagging behind the brain, as if consciousness were only the hesitant and tarrying appendage of the brain.

The two visitors seem to turn away. Apparently, they have seen enough. They leave the lab and seem to go their separate ways. In reality, however, their paths never crossed—at least not in a physiological laboratory in San Francisco. Like so many others, Roth and Massumi merely read about Libet's experiments. What nonetheless engages both of them, so much so that they might as well have been present there, is the question of the consequences to be drawn from the published results.

In remarkable agreement, brain researcher and cultural theorist turn their back on the lab as a space of knowing and doing and limit their questions to a single aspect: how are we to understand the interval, the temporal difference between brain activity and conscious act? What is to be seen through the window between body and thought opened up by the time-measuring experiment? Their respective answers address the relation of time, power, and subjectivity.

Roth is the first to speak. For him, Libet's study shows that "free will" is an illusion: the volitional act takes place only after the brain has already decided that a movement is to be executed. This finding is said not only to question a traditional conception of the human being, largely determined by the humanities, according to which human beings' freedom to wish, plan, and will assigns them a unique place in nature. In Roth's view, it also renders everyday and juridical concepts of guilt and responsibility problematic.²

"In terms of *personal responsibility*," he argues, "human beings have nothing to do with what they want and how they decide." For what is decided in the brain—"more precisely, in the limbic system and the basal ganglia"—is largely predetermined by the genes and by prenatal as well as early childhood experiences. That is why Roth thinks that a fundamental skepticism "where the changeability of the human being is concerned" is in order. More clearly than ever—for example, by examining the improvability of criminals' brains—brain research should highlight the limits of the effectiveness of psychotherapy and the penal system.³

Then Massumi, for whom Libet's study shows something completely different. In his view, it clearly indicates that the elementary unit of thought, conscious instantaneity, is already a complex duration before it becomes a distinct perception or cognition. Accordingly, the "Libet lag" does not illustrate an emptiness but an overabundance, a preponderance of the virtual over against what happens to be currently actual; or, conversely: "Will and consciousness are *subtractive*. They are *limitative, derived functions* that reduce a complexity too rich to be functionally expressed."⁴

This turns the interval between brain activity and volitional act into a cipher for an "autonomy of affect," that is, for an intensity that is initially expressed in bodily processes before it is perceived as intention or decision. According to Massumi, such intensities are not to be conceived of as "purely" biological because they depend primarily on prior experiences. They are by no means presocial but, in a way, asocial. For Massumi, this, precisely, is what their subversive potential consists in. Affects reendow culture with corporeality—not in the sense of a phenomenological embodiedness but as a largely formless experiencing, an abstract capacity for movement and subversion.⁵

The striking divergence of these far-reaching claims pushes us to examine the long history of Libet's experimental setup. Once we take into account the materiality and semioticity of this setup, it becomes clear that the study Libet conducted is a contemporary version of an experiment that has been performed for more than a hundred years in the most varied forms: using chronoscopes and chronographs, with the aid of galvanometer needles, tuning forks, and silver threads, and employing noematachographs, neuramoebi-

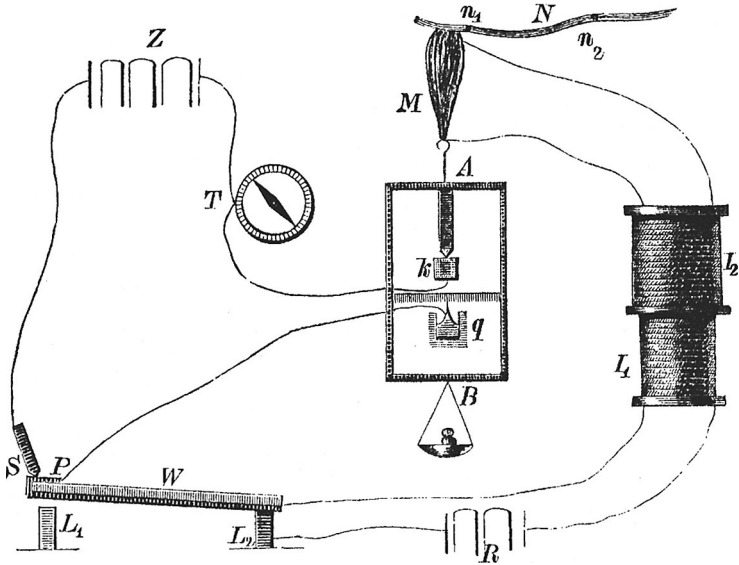


FIGURE 8.2. The experimental setup used by physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz, in 1849, for his precision measurements of the propagation of nerve stimulations. Helmholtz's setup combined two electrical circuits. In the first circuit, the battery (R), connected to the inductor coils (I_1) and (I_2), served to stimulate the prepared nerve-muscle sample (N/M). The second circuit connected the galvanometer (T) with the battery (Z). The switch (S/P) made it possible to close both circuits at the same time. The setup in the frame (A) made sure that the time-measuring current was permanently interrupted after the contraction of the frog muscle. Affixing an electrode at different points on the nerve (n_1 , n_2) allowed Helmholtz to obtain the time the nerve needed to conduct the stimulation. Helmholtz used a similar setup when carrying out his measurements of brain time in human test subjects. Reproduced from Carl Kuhn, *Handbuch der angewandten Elektrizitätslehre, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der theoretischen Grundlagen* (Leipzig: Voss, 1866), 1193.

meters, and psychometers; in physiological and psychological laboratories, in hospitals, museums, and apartments, in observatories, and on military bases. Since the 1850s, scientists like Hermann von Helmholtz and Franciscus Donders have set up research machines of a complexity similar to Libet's in order to determine the temporal distance between volitional or conscious phenomena on the one hand and cerebral or nervous processes on the other.⁶

In 1849, Helmholtz mounted nerve-muscle samples as well as entire test subjects in electromagnetic contraptions to determine the "intermediate times" used up in processes of perceiving and willing and in the propagation of stimuli via the nerves and the brain (fig. 8.2). In the 1880s, Wilhelm Wundt and his students locked their test subjects in soundproof chambers. The subjects were to telegraph reaction signals to chronoscopes set up in adjacent laboratories in order to capture, to the thousandth of a second, the difference between mere "brain reflexes" and the response actions "controlled by the

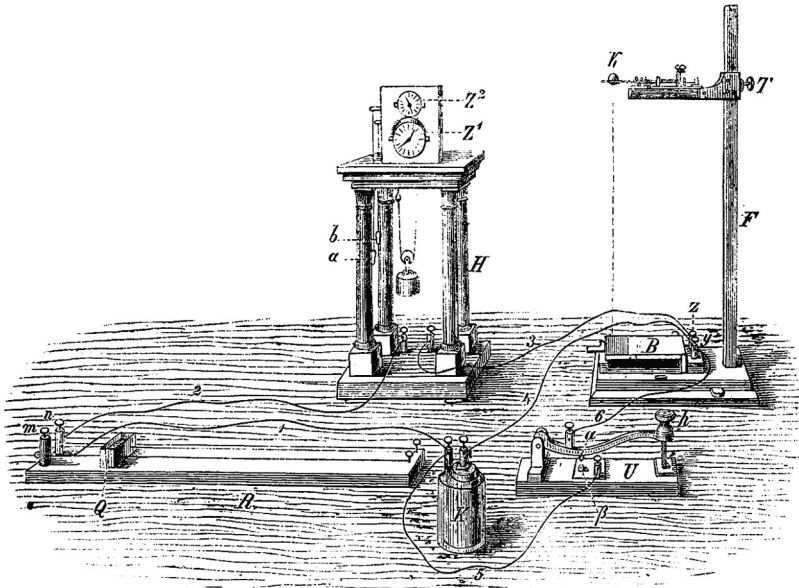


FIGURE 8.3. Wilhelm Wundt's reaction time experiment with "chronoscope according to Hipp" (1874). Wundt's setup consisted of the "Hipp chronoscope" (H), an electromagnetic precision timer, a falling apparatus (F), a telegraphing key (U), a galvanic element (K) and a rheochord (R). The test subject was asked to react to the sound made by the steel ball (k) falling onto the base of the falling apparatus. Underneath the board (B), there was an electric contact such that the mechanical pressure on the board set the chronometer into motion. The test subject reacted by letting go the telegraph key he or she had held pressed down. This stopped the chronoscope. Wundt and other psychologists later called the time measured "simple reaction time." In their corresponding studies, the experimental setup was typically distributed over several laboratory rooms connected by telegraphic wire. Reproduced from Wilhelm Wundt, *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1874), 770.

will" (fig. 8.3). Around 1910, stopwatches and philosophical question stimuli ("Who is the more significant philosopher, Hume or Kant?") served to investigate "what we experience when we think." And by 1945, comparable contrasting assemblages appeared in cybernetics. John Stroud, for one, had navy soldiers follow the light spots moving on an oscilloscope and concluded that human experience is constitutively "quantic," or discontinuous (fig. 8.4).

The main insight that these time experiments transmitted and continue to transmit is the belatedness of the human subject with respect to itself. Helmholtz observed already in the 1850s that under the conditions of laboratory research humans are beings lagging behind themselves.⁷ This insight crucially depended on precision time measurements. Instead of resulting from philosophical reasoning, individual introspection, or psychoanalytic talking, it was firmly tied to the "other scene" of the laboratory that not only has a history of its own but also depicts specific relations between power and time.

Wundt, the founder of physiological psychology, was aware of this, albeit in rather idealistic ways. While he was establishing precision time measurements as a crucial method of the new discipline he sought to found, he explained to the general public that “the first clock was the first police . . . a police that thought itself had instituted and that was connected to all later restrictions of personal freedom.”⁸

The present essay demonstrates that the material and semiotic history of the brain-time experiment tells a different story. It shows that the systematic investigation of temporal relations in the borderlands of physiology and psychology is closely tied to the acceleration and synchronization tendencies of cultural and social modernity. When Helmholtz defines the diagram of this experiment in the early 1850s, he stands, as it were, on the shoulders of the steam engine and the telegraph.



FIGURE 8.4. Psychoacoustic laboratory and control room in the Naval Electronic Laboratory (NEL), San Diego (ca. 1950). This is one of the rooms in which John Stroud, an electrical engineer, psychologist, and glowing cybernetician, carried out his experimental work on the “moment function” in human experience and behavior. The caption reads: “The operator in the foreground is manipulating controls at the console of psycho-acoustic test facility. Equipment for programming and sequencing acoustic stimuli are in racks in background. An observer (seen through glass) is being tested in quiet chamber adjacent to control room. Usually five persons are tested at the same time.” Reproduced from *Navy Electronics Laboratory Historic Photographs*, <http://www.spawar.navy.mil/sti/publications/pubs/gen/nelhist/photos1.html>.

Brain-time scholars eagerly adapted these technologies to the specific purposes of their scientific work. Instead of simply accelerating and synchronizing, they used electromagnetic clocks, graphic recordings, and other devices for repeating and slowing down the physiological and psychological processes they aimed to study. Until the days of Stroud and Libet, the brain-time experiment operates as a delay brought about by means of acceleration and simultaneification.

In other words, Libet continued an activity of experimentation that took shape and developed long before, and often quite independently of, explicit references to Helmholtz, Donders, and Wundt. What I call “brain-time experiment” is the basic framework of this activity. The term does not denote any single experimental setup but the series of connected research machines that have been used since the mid-nineteenth century for investigating temporal relations in the transitional area between physiology and psychology.

The long history of these investigations points to the existence of an experimental schema or “diagram” of considerable robustness. This diagram determines the various research machines less in terms of an articulate idea, theory, or method and more as a form anchored in the everyday business of science. The instruments, model organisms, and recording devices used in the past have traced out an experimental pathway that individual researchers need not be clearly aware of as their work advances.⁹

The efficacy of this material and semiotic figure is apparent even when the historical actors working in different laboratories no longer refer to one another by name. Thus Libet—like Stroud, but not citing him—employed an oscilloscope to conduct his investigation of “mind time.” His use of a computer and of light signals presented in circular fashion transformed this oscilloscope into a kind of clock to be observed by his test subjects. Through these interventions, Libet unwittingly brought his research machine closer to the classical setup of the reaction-time experiment of Wundt’s day. Already Wundt had asked test subjects to stare at the movements of a running clock such that he could measure the speed of their thoughts (fig. 8.5).

The development of experimental activities is often characterized by such processes of connection, substitution, and transformation. The history of an experiment, therefore, is not reducible to the simple definition, once and for all, of a particular method. It is not exhausted by the carefully calculated or quite simply lucky choice of a certain model organism or the ingenious construction of an instrument. What is at least equally important is the reinvestment, the retooling of the positions in the experimental arrangement, that takes place in the course of the historical process. Coordinating and confronting the changing parts of the brain-time experiment implies

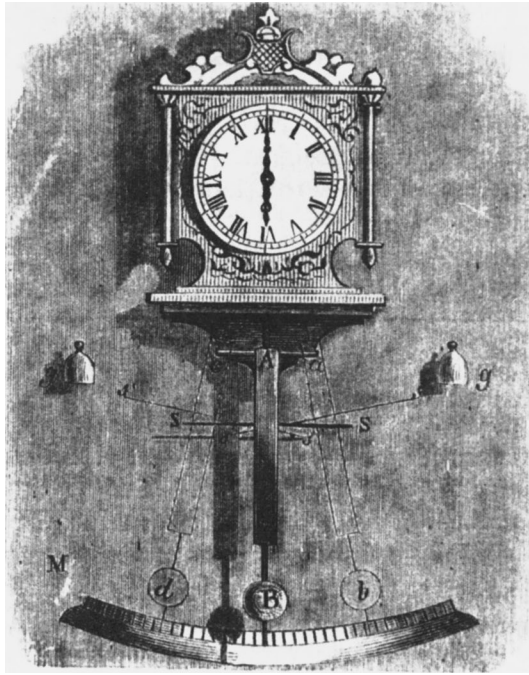


FIGURE 8.5. Modified pendulum clock, used by Wilhelm Wundt to determine the “speed of thought” (1862). In a popular article from 1862, Wundt suggested a modified pendulum clock as a means for measuring the “speed of thought.” Sidewise and at half the length of the pendulum he had mounted two small bells. A stick was horizontally fixed to the back of the pendulum. When the pendulum swung, it touched and thus rang the bells. At the bottom of the pendulum, Wundt placed a semicircular scale. The task of the test subject consisted in observing and registering the position of the pendulum that he or she perceived when the bell rang. Then, the subjectively registered position of the pendulum was compared to its actual position when ringing the bell. According to Wundt, the “time of thought” could be deduced from the difference between these positions. Reproduced from Wilhelm Wundt, “Die Geschwindigkeit des Gedankens,” *Die Gartenlaube* 17 (1862): 263–65, at 264.

the complex management of the time regimes embodied by these biological, technological, and semiological components. The history of this experiment, then, refers to and relies on what could be called the chronocenos of laboratory practice.¹⁰

Laboratories and Media Technologies

The nineteenth century has often been described as the century of speed and acceleration, as an age in which a more strongly objectified, linear, and dynamic consciousness of time replaced both the Romantics’ serene engagement with time and the political calendar of the French Revolution. A considerable number of studies—from Wolfgang Schivelbusch via Peter Weibel and Paul

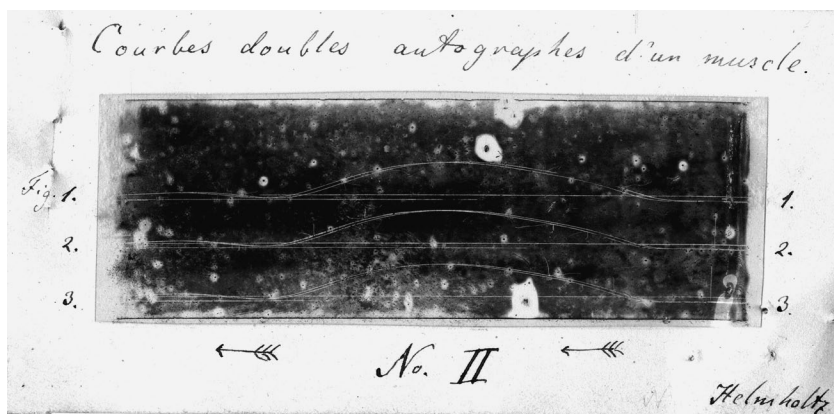


FIGURE 8.6. Hermann von Helmholtz, “Autographic double curves of a muscle” (1851). Two years after his pioneering measurements of the propagation speed of nerve stimulations, Helmholtz illustrated his method by means of these graphic recordings. On a piece of transparent “isinglass” he preserved the “print” of three double curves of muscle contractions recorded by means of the graphic method on top of one another. Between the successive trials, Helmholtz had changed the position of the electrode on the nerve that caused the muscle to contract. Since all remaining factors were considered to remain constant, he concluded that the lateral displacement in each pair of curves demonstrated the significant amount of time required for the stimulations to travel through the nerve. In other words, it is the empty space between the double curves that stands in for the physiological fact of nervous time. Reprinted with permission from Académie des sciences—Institut de France, Paris.

Virilio to Peter Borscheid—has shown how the invention and widespread adoption of steamships, railroads, telegraphs, newspapers, as well as the increasing employment of engines and machine tools in industrial production led to profound changes in the modern experience of time. Modernity lived time more intensely and more dynamically; space shrank, and human beings sensed they were alienated from themselves.¹¹

During the nineteenth century the materiality of the experimental set-ups employed for measuring “mind time” was closely linked to two of the century’s technologies of dynamization: the steam engine and the telegraph. Helmholtz’s contemporaries already saw that the “curve method” physiologists started using in the late 1840s to capture temporal processes in the living body followed James Watt’s and John Southern’s indicator-diagram method for registering the work performed in a steam engine’s cylinder (fig. 8.6).

Recent work in the history of science has established the importance of this connection. Robert Brain and Norton Wise, especially, have shown that psychophysiological time research in the mid-nineteenth century took place in a technological and economic context marked by the cult of the (steam-powered) machine and the lure of antiquity, a context in which skill in drawing,

bodily exercises, and the will to construct were meant to form an aesthetic, harmonious whole.¹²

Helmholtz's trailblazing measurements, however, connected less with steam and other engines of physical and social acceleration than with telegraphy and comparable media technologies of synchronization. As I have shown elsewhere,¹³ precise measurements executed on nerve-muscle samples and human test subjects were possible only thanks to electromagnetism. Besides physicists such as Claude Pouillet, it was the pioneers of telegraph technology—Louis Breguet, Charles Wheatstone, and Werner Siemens, to name three—who since the early 1840s pointed to the possibility of applying electromagnetism to the quasi-instantaneous communication of time and thus also to precise time measurements: in experimental setups but also in extended networks or systems of clocks (fig. 8.7).

That is why one of the first research networks to be implemented technologically—the telegraph facilities set up in Göttingen by Carl Friedrich Gauss and Wilhelm Weber in the mid-1830s for temporally synchronized

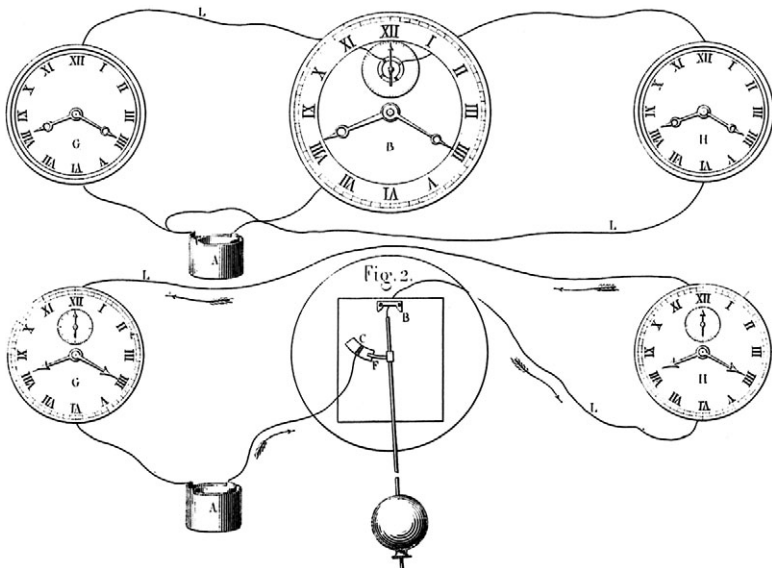


FIGURE 8.7. Illustration of a system of electrical clocks (1852). At the center, the pendulum clock that “telegraphs” the signals, on the left and right the dials and hands it controlled. (A) denotes the source of energy, a galvanic element. Below, the view of the back of the entire system shows how the time signal is given by a pendulum closing and opening a contact. Reproduced from François Moigno, *Traité de télégraphie électrique, comprenant son histoire, sa théorie, ses appareils, sa pratique, son avenir, sa législation*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Franck, 1852), table 19.

observations of terrestrial magnetism—became the decisive model for Helmholtz's measurements of the propagation speed of stimulations in nerves two decades later. Only thanks to telegraphy could a frog muscle, electric clock, and telescope be synchronized in such a way as to allow for defining the brain as an interval.¹⁴

In later decades the manufacturers of communication and time systems continued to make decisive contributions to the equipment that time-measuring physiologists, psychologists, and neuroscientists used in their labs. The telegraph manufacturer Matthäus Hipp produced the chronoscope widely used in the Wundtian school since the 1880s, just as the Digital Equipment Corporation, famous for the development of time-sharing systems, produced the PDP-12 computer Libet used in his work.

Taking these historical and material contexts into account, the functioning of the experimental setups in question appears in a whole new light. The hand movement typically required by test subjects today does not by coincidence recall the pressing of a telegraph's transmission key. It is a recurring imprint of the past on a physiological experiment whose iterations cannot be separated from the development of media technologies for communicating time.

Conversely, the brain-time experiment modifies our notion of modern culture as based on acute acceleration. It highlights intensified synchronization as a key characteristic of cultural and social modernity. In this perspective, time operates as a potential of social synthesis. To cite Norbert Elias, it conforms to the need, growing ever "more urgent" with "growing urbanisation and commercialisation," for "synchronising the growing number of human activities and [for] having a smooth-running continuous time-grid as a common frame of reference for all human activities."¹⁵ Similar aspects of synchronization already played an important role in Marx's analysis of the development from manufacture to factory labor.¹⁶

Historians of culture who studied the experimental time measurements carried out by Helmholtz, Wundt, and others emphasized different aspects of societal time. To Stephen Kern these experiments were reactualizations of the "atomistic" conception of time prompted by the mass spread of clocks and other time-measuring devices, especially in the late nineteenth century.¹⁷ Anson Rabinbach understood them as partial aspects of increasing efforts at rationalization and of an emerging science of labor that saw in the precise measuring of physiological time an exemplary application of "new scientific modes of perception to social questions."¹⁸ And Jonathan Crary conceived of them as epiphenomena of a changing economy of perception and attention that adapted subjective life, kinetically and mentally, "to machine speeds and rhythms that differed dramatically from those of the body."¹⁹

To be sure, these accounts significantly went beyond the disciplinary histories of psychophysiological chronometry published in the wake of Edwin G. Boring's *History of Experimental Psychology*.²⁰ Essentially, however, the arguments put forth by Kern, Rabinbach, and Crary reiterate those Georges Canguilhem articulated concerning the history of the concept of reflex. One of the starting points of Canguilhem's now-classic study on the formation of this central concept in psychophysiology was the observation that, in 1950s France, the speed of involuntary movement reactions had come to interest large sections of the public: "To the extent that their life and way of life depend on it, everyone today knows (or seeks to know) whether they have good reflexes."²¹

One of the main reasons for this desire for knowledge, according to Canguilhem, was an urban culture of speed. While a primarily agrarian culture "rather cultivates slow and deferred reaction," life in industrial centers is about an almost somnambulistic speed: "Man today lives in a form of civilization that has endowed the quickness and automatism of motor reactions with a double value: the value of utility and productivity for machine operators, the value of prestige for athletes."²²

In Canguilhem, however, the appreciation of speed and involuntariness is seen as being tied to a concept, that is, the "reflex." In the brain-time experiment, comparatively abstract entities take its place. In contrast to the concept of "reflex," brain-time scholars use largely nonconceptual expressions like "interval," "physiological time," "delay," "reaction time," and "zone of indetermination."²³ Such expressions become concrete only when taking into account the technologies and techniques required for determining them—and the problem these technologies and techniques responded to.

Personal Equations, Clocking Books, and Rotating Disks

As is well known, Canguilhem and other historians of science have traced back the history of psychophysiological time measurements to the problem of the "personal equation" that posed itself in astronomy around 1800. In this version of the story, 1823 was the year in which Friedrich Bessel picked up on an anecdote from the history of astronomy and thereby turned another year—1796—into a magical date in the history of psychophysiological chronometry. In December 1796, Nevil Maskelyne, Astronomer Royal at the Greenwich observatory, had fired his assistant David Kinnebrook for shortcomings in his registration of observed star transits, which were allegedly too slow.²⁴

However, interest in the temporal conditions of the physiological and the psychological already arose when the brain, the spinal cord, and the nervous

system started to be conceived of as an interconnected whole. Ever since Erasistratus and Galen, physicians, natural scientists, and philosophers took up the question of how it is possible for the will to move a muscle. Or, inversely, how is it that damage done to a nerve keeps the effect of volition from attaining the muscle, and why is a similar injury capable of blocking processes of perception and sensation in return?²⁵

To the extent that it is a theory of the transformation of substances, ancient pneuma theory already makes suppositions concerning the temporality of the processes at issue. According to Galen, the heart refines the liver's *spiritus naturalis* into *spiritus vitalis*, which the brain, in turn, distills into *spiritus animalis*. This *spiritus animalis*, however, is not only the thinnest "medium," or the only one capable of moving through the nerves' narrow tubes. It is also the fastest.²⁶

Pneuma theory preserves the knowledge about the special speed of the "nervous agent" all the way to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To give an idea of the fineness and speed of their movement, Descartes occasionally compared the animal spirits to a flame.²⁷ Yet it is Thomas Willis who fully established the analogy between reflex movement and explosions and highlighted the sudden, quasi-instantaneous efficacy of the *spiritus animales*.²⁸ Herman Boerhaave, too, was very much impressed by the speed with which the vital spirits transform the will into a muscle movement "without any sensible interval."²⁹

But we have to wait for the mid-eighteenth century and Albrecht von Haller to find the first experimental approach to the question of the exact speed with which these "spirits" (or "saps") move. Von Haller also transposed the problem from a clinical context to an everyday world characterized by problems of locomotion, transport, and media technologies. In his 1762 *Elementa physiologiae* (*Elements of Physiology*), he at first discussed the speed of the muscle or nervous fluid by way of a comparison with the muscle contractions observable in the movement of horses, dogs, rabbits, and human beings.

Von Haller then conducts a self-experiment in which he reads the *Aeneid* out loud to set a standard of comparison for time. The number of letters that can be pronounced per minute served as an indication of the muscle movements taking place in the same amount of time.³⁰ Taking into account the length of the nerve that the muscle or nerve agent has to traverse, in every contraction and every subsequent relaxation of the muscle from the brain to the tongue and back, one obtains a speed of 150 feet, or roughly 50 meters, per second.³¹

To the great surprise of the time-measuring physiologists and psychologists of the nineteenth century, von Haller—despite his largely speculative sup-

positions concerning the physiological processes involved—obtained “almost exactly” the value Helmholtz would find in his precise measurements of the propagation speed of cerebral signals in human beings one hundred years later. Helmholtz’s friend and colleague, the Berlin-based electrophysiologist Emil du Bois-Reymond, reacted to this convergence with irony: “In this case, the *Aeneid* has really proved a book of oracles.”³²

The history of psychophysiological measurements of short times yields several more instances of similar experiments involving books as timing devices. About forty years after von Haller (yet still twenty years before Bessel), Johann Christoph Hoffbauer, a philosopher interested in psychiatry, communicated his observation that “a reader of average capacity” is able to read a book page in seventy-five seconds. Presuming the number of letters per page to be nine hundred (as was the case in the layout of Hoffbauer’s *Investigations into the Diseases of the Soul*), such a reader would have to recognize twelve letters per second “and distinguish each from the others.” Accordingly, every single recognition and distinction takes just under one-tenth of a second.³³

Besides the segmented linearity of alphabetic print, it was rotating objects of the most varied kind that, well before the magical year 1796, allowed for experimental explorations of the temporal conditions characteristic of processes of sensation and perception. In 1765, the Irish-born mathematician and physicist Patrick d’Arcy, who was particularly interested in phenomena of speed in electricity and ballistics, published a treatise on the duration of visual sensations and reported on his experimental work with circular disks and large wooden crosses that could be mounted on axles and made to spin.

In one spot on the edge of the rotating disk, a hole had been drilled through which, at sufficient rotational speed, an observer could see an object set up at a distance without noticeable interruption. On the outer edge of the wooden cross he had constructed, d’Arcy placed a burning piece of coal that, seen by distant observer in the dark, transformed into a glowing circle when the cross was rotated quickly.

The example of the “circle of fire” produced by a rotating piece of coal had already been discussed in David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), as well as in Newton’s *Opticks* (1704) and Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697). D’Arcy, however, translated this example into an experimental arrangement that made it possible to measure values between 8 and 9 tierces—that is, between 0.133 and 0.15 seconds—for the duration of a visual sensation.³⁴

These measurements of short times conducted in the transitional area between physiology and psychology prior to 1796 were not mere episodes. In the late nineteenth century, psychophysiological research on reading was

to become a productive branch of research, and rotating disks (e.g., stroboscopes, color mixers) became indispensable components of the instrumental arsenal of the newly established physiology and psychology laboratories.³⁵ Nor did the questions and problems raised by these early measurements fall into oblivion. In the context of his research on the propagation speed of stimuli in the nerve, Helmholtz returned, in 1850, to the example “of the continuous circle of fire” produced “when a glowing coal is swung speedily round,” and in 1861, Albert von Bezold was to recall von Haller’s reading experiment in the context of his *Studies on the Electric Stimulation of Nerves and Muscles*.³⁶

Yet none of these experiments was to have as groundbreaking an effect as the precision time measurements conducted with the help of electromagnetism in the 1850s and 1860s. Only electromagnetism and its striking capacity to intensify synchronization made it possible to define an experimental diagram apt for multiple retoolings, thus allowing for a complex dynamic of repetition and differentiation. The result was one of the modern experiments par excellence.³⁷

Slowing Down

The specificity of its dynamic becomes palpable once we take into account that the nineteenth century, despite the familiar image of modernity as a combination of acceleration and synchronization, was also a period of slowness and delay. In Walter Benjamin’s view, at least, the rapidly growing cities of the time were not just places of hectic productivity. They were also vast landscapes in which flâneurs would wander through arcades, taking their turtles for a walk.³⁸

In these urban landscapes, a boom in the founding of museums, archives, and libraries helped turn the already “long nineteenth century” into a century of collection and preservation. And thus, alongside the steam engine and the telegraph, photography became the era’s third emblematic technology. Photography seemed to make it possible, for a moment, to arrest a greatly accelerated time by capturing it in an image—even if, in early photography, this moment ranged from several minutes to whole hours. In the years after 1840, photographic immobilization was echoed not only in the fine arts but, as Stephan Oettermann and others have shown, also in a broad range of techniques for “suspending perception”: stereoscopes, panoramas, and carefully staged spectacles that both required and made possible a sharp gaze and focused attention.³⁹

Similar strategies existed for arrest to be observed in the experimental sciences. Particularly telling was the increasing number of attempts, since

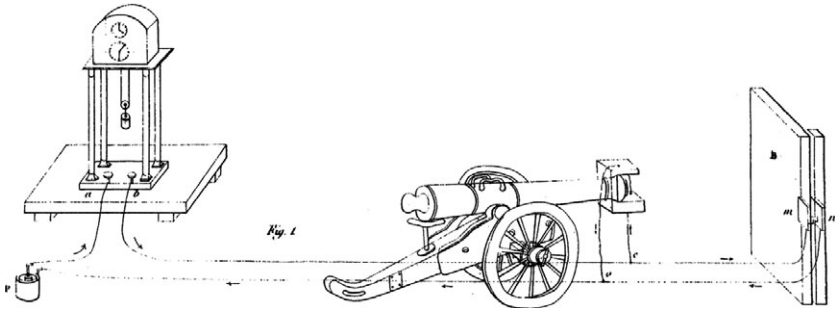


FIGURE 8.8. Experimental setup for conducting ballistic experiments with a “Hipp chronoscope” (1853). Martin de Brettes, captain of the Third Artillery Regiment in France, presented this setup meant to apply the Hipp (erroneously, de Brettes wrote “Hill”) chronoscope for measuring the time required by “a ball to traverse one or several meters.” However, because of the time differences between the connection and disconnection of escapement and hands, de Brettes was skeptical about whether the Hipp chronoscope was a reliable time observer. Reproduced from Martin de Brettes, “Études sur les appareils électro-magnétiques destinés aux expériences de l’artillerie en Angleterre, en Russie, en France, en Prusse, en Belgique, en Suède etc., etc. (III),” *Journal des Armes spéciales et de l’État-Major* 13 (1853): 5–32 and 89–98, on plate.

around 1800, to measure the speed of light, electricity, sound, and the trajectory of projectiles (fig. 8.8).⁴⁰

Many of these experiments can be understood as part of the history of physics, namely as the implementation, under new technological conditions, of a setup first outlined by Galileo Galilei. In a famous passage of his *Discorsi*, Galilei suggested measuring the speed of light by means of the reciprocal observation and answering of short signals sent by two persons equipped with lanterns who are moving away from each other. In passing, this early hybridization of measurement and communication also raised the problem of the celerity of human reactions.⁴¹

In the early nineteenth century, comparatively complex research machines were employed in tackling the measurement of the constant maximum speeds of a variety of volatility phenomena: light, electricity, sound. The use of clocks, rotating mirrors, long tubes, and cables to measure these phenomena was meant to make it possible to capture them and in that sense to conjure their seemingly ungraspable speed.

Regardless of their different purposes, their common central motif was the search for constants. In 1832, Charles Babbage had proposed determining the constant speeds of the most varied phenomena and processes. Besides the average duration, for human beings, of a day’s journey by foot, and the time needed for a crossing from Liverpool to New York, Babbage was also interested in, among other things, “Velocities—Arrow, musket-ball at several distances, cannon-ball, sound, telegraph, light,—birds.”⁴²

This search for constants played a signal role in the early versions of the brain-time experiment. Some of the instrument makers who furnished technical components for these experiments participated themselves in measurements of speeds of light, sound, and projectiles,⁴³ while experimental physiologists such as Helmholtz, Donders, and du Bois-Reymond initially assumed the velocity with which stimulations were carried across the human brain and nervous system to be constant. In their eyes, these velocities were not affected by the age or gender of individual test subjects. Only when these researchers encountered difficulties in reproducing their measurements did it become clear that factors such as the attention of test subjects and the temperature of laboratory rooms had an impact on brain velocity.

The corresponding studies situated on the border of physiology and psychology thus link back to one of the overarching efforts of scientific work at the time: the numerical acquisition and permeation of the world. Babbage's list shows how many the axioms of the time contributed to approximating, connecting, and synthesizing the heterogeneous. And in their own way, that is precisely what the time experiments conducted by Helmholtz, Donders, Wundt, and other psychophysicists did. They associated the disparate and acted to detect constants.

As a consequence, the brain-time experiment, too, has to be seen as a kind of fixing and protraction device—on the one hand because the curves and figures it produced allowed for what may be called snapshots of physiological processes, and on the other hand because it forced the scientists in the lab constantly to keep an eye on the course and results of their repeated experiments.

Against this background, the analogy between these experiments and photography proposes itself. The materiality and semioticity of the experimental setups by Helmholtz, Wundt, and others defined first of all a frame, a certain cropping of reality. In joining and juxtaposing instruments, recording devices, and human as well as nonhuman organisms, the brain-time scholars circumscribed a space of capturing, representing, and measuring psychophysiological processes.⁴⁴

However, the specific "laboratory time" that the brain-time experiment defined within the space of modernity also has cinematic traits. Taking its actual functioning in the lab into account, one might speak of a "cinematography without film," a rather performative procedure that included the recording and registering of traces, curves, and numbers but nonetheless had to be rehearsed and staged each time anew: by preparing samples of organisms (or organs), training test subjects, calibrating instruments, copying curves, taking down measured data, and calculating the results recorded but also by

dealing with disturbances that could intervene in the framework of the experiment from within or without.

In other words, the brain-time experiment creates a presence (*Gegenwart*) that is in itself dynamic, characterized by the simultaneous availability and serviceability of all of the experiment's components—the test subjects, the energy sources, and the rotating or immobile recording surfaces. Only on this basis, timescales could be observed that differed from those outside of the laboratory: it was possible to repeat individual sequences and to focus on and thereby slow down certain aspects.⁴⁵

Kern's claims about the temporality of cinematography around 1900 thus already apply to the research machines at issue here, even if these machines were invented before the rise of the cinema. Already the brain-time experiment provoked a "temporal thickening" of the present, because it succeeded in making it such that "any moment could be pried open and expanded at will"—or at least by repeating it so often that it could be observed at leisure.⁴⁶

To sum up, we might say that, within the context of modernity, the subtle immobilization and the complex restaging required by the brain-time experiment turned conducting this experiment into a comparatively slow activity. By means of its relative slowness, it distanced itself from the nineteenth century's acceleration processes—on which it was nonetheless based. However, by capturing and recording the swiftness of thinking and feeling, this experiment anchored itself even more firmly in modernity, insofar as it reinforced the latter's tendencies to slowing down and preservation.

Against this background, the diagram of the brain-time experiment can be defined, with regard to the history of modernity, as a delay brought about by means of acceleration and simultaneification. The innovative effects this production entailed were, however, not restricted to science as the realm of modern objectivity. They also had an impact on the production of subjectivity.

Time's Decentering of the Subject

Deeply anchored in the history of modernity, the long history of the brain-time experiment demonstrates that not every modern psychology is a psychology of the individual. Not every perception, not every action takes place with consciousness undivided, and not every "equation" inscribed in the body is at the same time a "personal" one. Modernity, especially nonmodern modernity (as one could say with Latour),⁴⁷ has time and again given rise to psychologies that work with relatively abstract axiomatics—implying no recourse to individuality, personality, or consciousness.

Psychoanalysis with its “linguistic unconscious” is but the most famous example. The nineteenth century was already familiar with the “hereditary unconscious” of Darwinism-inspired mass psychology, as it was with the “cerebral unconscious” of the neurologists and brain researchers. In the name of the physiologically reflexive and psychologically involuntary, this *inconscient cérébral* negated the freedom of human will and affirmed, as if in return, the creative potentials of the human body.⁴⁸

The emergence of this unconscious has been traced primarily to neurological and psychiatric clinical practices in the mid-nineteenth century. The context of the brain-time experiment offers once again a new perspective. Rather than continuing to follow Thomas Laycock, Wilhelm Griesinger, and others into their hospitals to meet with “brain reflexes” and similarly paradoxical phenomena, we are driven to accompany physiological and psychological experimental scientists to a variety of research sites—apartments, laboratories, observatories—where, since the 1850s, they have discovered and described the cerebral unconscious by means of time measurements. The cerebral unconscious thus comes to the fore, first of all, as a temporal unconscious, to play on a famous formulation of Benjamin’s.⁴⁹

It was by no means uncommon for nineteenth-century experimental psychophysicists to speak of the unconscious, and the temporal measuring of voluntary and involuntary reactions greatly contributed to differentiating the concept. In the 1860s, time experimenters like Helmholtz and Wundt saw nothing paradoxical in speaking of “unconscious inferences” by means of which the human body was said to process environmental stimuli prior to consciously reacting to them.⁵⁰

Around 1890, a student of Helmholtz’s, Sigmund Exner, similarly spoke of “unconscious formations of judgment” to subsequently cast fundamental doubts on the freedom of human thinking.⁵¹ Against the backdrop of his early experiments on “reaction time” (it was Exner who coined the expression), the Vienna physiologist voiced his conviction that the formulation “I think” is far from appropriate: “To describe the common state of our psychic life, we should say: ‘it thinks within me,’ ‘it feels within me.’”⁵² Only a few years before another Sigmund discovered a linguistic unconscious in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Exner thus gave expression to a time-based decentering of the subject.

Demonstrated not by means of case histories that could be read “like novellas” but by comparatively sober curves and figures, this decentering was certainly less spectacular than the one to be brought about by psychoanalysis. In the long run, however, it may have been all the more effective.

On the one hand, the temporal unconscious was just as inaccessible as the linguistic unconscious was. In the absence of imaging methods as we know

them today, this unconscious had to be discovered, each time anew, in its experimental effects, by measuring curves, counting vibrations, and reading off dials. Yet unlike the talking cure, time measurements as a means of isolating and determining these effects had to appear a procedure as modern as it was precise.

On the other hand, the unconscious outlined by the time measurements in physiological and psychological laboratories was itself developing dynamically. The measuring methods employed by Donders, Wundt, and others may have become ever more precise, yet research on the anatomy of the brain was very productive quite independently.⁵³

Hence the double paradox of the brain-time experiment: with the help of time, it sought to render the cerebral unconscious visible, yet what then became palpable via curves and figures was itself exposed to time and changed with time. Even more so than the psychoanalysts' linguistic unconscious, the experimental physiologists' and psychologists' temporal unconscious was an unknown, an unfamiliar. Until Libet's studies, this situation remained basically unchanged.

Conclusion

Psychophysiological time measurements tied phenomena of reflex and the unconscious to the epistemic space of the laboratory. They left behind the world of interactions between physician and patient, or human and human, and introduced instruments and machines that by means of numbers and curves established a language that, eventually, was no longer a language.

In Freud, who was an attentive user of the reaction timer devised by Exner,⁵⁴ this aspect comes to the fore when he refers to "the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception" and, more generally, "the discontinuous method of functioning" of the system Perception-Consciousness.⁵⁵

Here, the concept of reflex has lost all its importance—it is replaced by short fragments of time, perceived discontinuities, and cinemalike flickers. By the same token, the former position of the reflex concept is transformed, as are its surroundings. The conceptual polarity between the voluntary and the involuntary is overcome and replaced by processes of measurement. Where there used to be the ears of a physician, laboratory clocks have started to run.

As a consequence, the often-quoted splitting (*scission*) of the subject is not any more tied to the structure of language in the clinic and the everyday; instead, it refers to and relies on the functioning of bodies in the technological *Umwelt* of the laboratory. The divided self results not just from the dual and dueling relation between "I" and "other" but can be traced back to the

management of multiple times that laboratory scientists, in a first step, attempted synchronization by combining instruments, organisms, and recording devices, in order to be able to detect, in a second move, unforeseeable interruptions and intervals.

In this perspective, the splitting of the modern subject does not result simply from subordinating humans to machines or bodies to technologies. As a matter of fact, the statement that psychophysiological time measurements adapted human bodies and human consciousness to the speed of machines makes it difficult to perceive and study the concrete procedures that determined the respective speeds in the first place.⁵⁶ This is why the present essay has highlighted the material and semiotic cultures of laboratory practice. Before it turns into a history of contrasts and subordinations, the history of the brain-time experiment plays out as a history of couplings, connections, and cooperations between human and machine.

It seems unsatisfactory, then, when current results of the brain-time experiment (including Libet's) are mobilized in support of a neurobiological reorientation of the penal system or a subversive politics of affect. The present essay has proposed that, given the persistence with which the brain-time experiment was conducted in ever-renewed configurations between laboratory and culture, it should be understood as one of the modern experiments par excellence, crucially contributing to our understanding of objectivity and subjectivity. In other words, it is the dense materiality and semioticity of this experiment, and not its mere outcomes, that should be taken into account when it comes to discussing its impact on our notions of experience, corporeality, and society. The experimental setups devised from Helmholtz and Wundt to Stroud and Libet to investigate the relationship between brain and time are radical concretization of modernity—even, or perhaps especially, when, like Latour, one thinks that “we have never been modern.”

Notes

This essay is a condensed and heavily revised version of the introduction to Henning Schmidgen, *Hirn und Zeit: Die Geschichte eines Experiments, 1800–1950* (Berlin: Matthes und Seitz, 2014). I would like to thank Nils F. Schott and Stefanos Geroulanos for their generous help in establishing the final version of this text. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

1. Benjamin Libet, Curtis A. Gleason, Elwood W. Wright, and Dennis K. Pearl, “Time of Conscious Intention to Act in Relation to Onset of Cerebral Activity (Readiness-Potential),” *Brain* 106 (1983): 623–42. My thanks to Dennis K. Pearl for providing additional information on the experiment's setup (email, March 15, 2008).

2. Gerhard Roth, *Fühlen, Denken, Handeln*, rev. ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 541.

3. Roth, 531, 553.

4. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 29 (emphasis in original).

5. Massumi, 29–30.

6. In what follows, the term “research machine” is largely synonymous with “experimental setup” and “experimental arrangement.” However, in addition to the material elements, it explicitly includes semiotic components (e.g., recording surfaces, curves).

7. Hermann Helmholtz, “On the Methods of Measuring Very Small Portions of Time, and Their Application to Physiological Purposes,” *London, Edinburgh and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science*, 4th ser., 6, no. 40 (November 1853): 321.

8. Wilhelm Wundt, “Die Zeit,” *Unterhaltungen am häuslichen Herd* 3 (1862): 591.

9. This confronts the rather plausible idea of investigative pathways with the problem of path dependence. On the former, see Frederic L. Holmes, *Investigative Pathways* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004). On the latter, see James Mahoney, “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology,” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 4 (August 2000): 507–48.

10. “Retooling” draws on a statement by Ian Hacking: “I think of experiments of having a life: maturing, evolving, adapting, being not only recycled but also, quite literally, being retooled,” in “Do Thought Experiments Have a Life of Their Own?” *Philosophy of Science Association, Conference Proceedings* 2 (1992): 307. On the concept of chronocenos, see the editors’ introduction to this volume.

11. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (1977; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Peter Weibel, *Die Beschleunigung der Bilder in der Chronokratie* (Bern: Benteli, 1987); Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizon*, trans. Michael Degener (London: Continuum, 2006); Peter Borscheid, *Das Tempo-Virus: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Beschleunigung* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2004); Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). For a sociological perspective, see Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

12. Robert M. Brain and M. Norton Wise, “Muscles and Engines,” *Universalgenie Helmholtz: Rückblick nach 100 Jahren*, ed. Lorenz Krüger (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 124–45; M. Norton Wise, *Aesthetics, Industry, and Science: Hermann von Helmholtz and the Berlin Physical Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine*, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton, NJ: Wiener, 1995).

13. Henning Schmidgen, *The Helmholtz Curves: Tracing Lost Time*, trans. Nils F. Schott (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

14. Schmidgen, *Helmholtz Curves*, 11–12.

15. Norbert Elias, *An Essay on Time*, vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of Norbert Elias* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), 45.

16. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production: London 1887*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Waltraud Falk et al., in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe*, div. 2, vol. 9 (Berlin: Dietz, 1990). At its core, Marx’s definition of the factory system as a “dominant subject” [*übergreifendes Subject*] (366) of the production process relies on assuming a “conglomeration in one place of similar and simultaneously acting machines” (330).

17. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 20.

18. Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 86.

19. Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 309.

20. Edwin G. Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Century, 1950); Franklin Fearing, *Reflex Action* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1930); Karl Eduard Rothschuh, *History of Physiology*, ed. and trans. Guenter B. Risse (1950; Huntington: Krieger, 1973).

21. Georges Canguilhem, *La formation du concept de réflexe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Vrin, 1977), 163.

22. Canguilhem, 163.

23. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 32.

24. The year 1796 features prominently in Boring, *History of Experimental Psychology*, 134, and Canguilhem, "What Is Psychology?" trans. Howard Davies, *Ideology and Consciousness* 7 (1980): 37–50, 47. Simon Schaffer brilliantly demonstrated, in "Astronomers Mark Time," *Science in Context* 2, no. 1 (1988): 115–45, that there was no need to draw on psychology to prove individual differences in registering star transits and, if not to eliminate, then sufficiently to control them.

25. Karl E. Rothschuh, "Vom Spiritus animalis zum Nervenaktionsstrom," *Ciba-Zeitschrift* 8, no. 89 (1958): 2950.

26. On this point generally, see Marielene Putscher, *Pneuma, Spiritus, Geist* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1973).

27. René Descartes, "Treatise on Man," trans. Robert Stoothoff, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1:100.

28. Canguilhem, *La formation du concept de réflexe*, 34 and 65–66.

29. Herman Boerhaave, *Dr. Boerhaave's Academical Lectures on the Theory of Physics*, 2nd ed. (London: Innys, 1753), 2:§275, p. 290, quoted in Fearing, *Reflex Action*, 63.

30. Albrecht von Haller, *Elementa physiologiae corporis humani* (Lausanne: Grasset, 1762), 4:372–73, 481–83.

31. Albert von Bezdold, *Untersuchungen über die electrische Erregung der Nerven und Muskeln* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1861), 35.

32. Emil du Bois-Reymond, "On the Time Required for the Transmission of Volition and Sensation through the Nerves," *Notices of the Proceedings at the Meetings of the Members of the Royal Institution of Great Britain* 4, no. 44 (1866): 577.

33. Johann Christoph Hoffbauer, *Untersuchungen über die Krankheiten der Seele und die verwandten Zustände* (Halle: Trampe, 1803), 287.

34. Patrick Chevalier d'Arcy, "Mémoire sur la durée de la sensation de la vue," *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences* (1765): 450. On d'Arcy, see Nicholas Wade, "Graven Images," *Perception* 26 (1997): 123–26, and his *A Natural History of Vision* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 192–93. On the history of the "circle of fire," see D. Anthony Larivière and Thomas M. Lennon, "The History and Significance of Hume's Burning Coal Example," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 27 (2002): 511–26.

35. On the history of the rotating disk as an actor in the lab, see Peter Weibel, "Contours of a History of the Theory and Art of Perception in Austria," *Beyond Art: A Third Culture*, ed. Peter Weibel (Vienna: Springer, 2005), 16–32.

36. Helmholtz, "On the Methods of Measuring Very Small Portions of Time, and Their Application to Physiological Purposes," 314, as well as Bezdold, *Untersuchungen über die electrische Erregung der Nerven und Muskeln*, 31–39.

37. Kathryn M. Olesko and Frederic L. Holmes, "The Images of Precision: Helmholtz and the Graphical Method in Physiology," in *The Values of Precision*, ed. Norton Wise (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 198–221.

38. Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 4:3–92, 31.

39. Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997); Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*.

40. In the period from 1800 to 1850 alone, experiments in this vein were made by leading scientists such as François Arago, Albert van Beek, Léon Foucault, Hippolyte Fizeau, and Charles Wheatstone. There is no synthetic account of these experiments, but see Jan Frercks's important study on Fizeau, *Die Forschungspraxis Hippolyte Fizeaus* (Berlin: Wissenschaft & Technik Verlag, 2001).

41. Galileo Galilei, *Two New Sciences: Including Centers of Gravity & Force of Percussion*, trans. Stillman Drake (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 49–51; Renato Foschi and Matteo Leone, "Galileo, Measurement of the Velocity of Light, and the Reaction Times," *Perception* 38, no. 8 (2009): 1251–59.

42. Charles Babbage, "On the Advantage of a Collection of Numbers, to Be Entitled the Constants of Nature and Art," *Edinburgh Journal of Science*, n.s., 6, no. 12 (April 1832): 334 and 337; Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 234–35.

43. The example of Matthäus Hipp is the clearest: taking up Wheatstone's work, Hipp developed his "chronoscope" and used this precision instrument to measure the velocities of bullets and cannonballs.

44. On "cut" and "crop" in photography, Rosalind Krauss, "Alfred Stieglitz's 'Equivalents,'" *Arts Magazine* 54 (1980): 134–37. On frames in art, Georg Simmel's sociological observations in "The Picture Frame," 1902, trans. Mark Ritter, *Theory, Culture & Society* 11, no. 1 (February 1994): 11–17. From the point of view of general sociology, see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

45. On "laboratory time," see Helga Nowotny, *Time*, trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 92–93.

46. Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, 88.

47. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

48. Marcel Gauchet, *L'inconscient cérébral* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

49. Benjamin distinguished the "optical unconscious" photography is concerned with from the "instinctual" unconscious psychoanalysis treats. The optical unconscious is at least in part a temporal unconscious (Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 512, 510).

50. Robert J. Richards, "Wundt's Early Theories of Unconscious Inference and Cognitive Evolution In Their Relation to Darwinian Biopsychology," in *Wundt Studies: A Centennial Collection*, ed. Wolfgang G. Bringmann and Ryan D. Tweney (Toronto: Hogrefe, 1980), 42–70.

51. Gauchet, *L'inconscient cérébral*, 121–26. Canguilhem, also picking up on Jules Soury, already refers to this text of Exner's, *La formation du concept de réflexe*, 153n5.

52. Sigmund Exner, "Ueber allgemeine Denkfehler," *Deutsche Rundschau* 58 (1889): 103–16, 109 (emphasis in original).

53. On the history of the ideas and discourses of brain research generally, see Olaf Breidbach, *Die Materialisierung des Ichs* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997); Michael Hagner, *Homo cerebralis* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1997).

54. Freud made use of Exner's "neuramoebimeter" in the context of his early studies on cocaine. See Sigmund Freud, "Beitrag zur Kenntniss der Cocawirkung," *Wiener medizinische Wochenschrift* 35 (1885): 130.

55. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Mystic Writing-Pad' [1924/25]," trans. James Strachey, in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth, 1961), 19:231–32. See also Mary Ann Doane, "Temporality, Storage, Legibility: Freud, Marey, and the Cinema," *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 2 (1996): 313–43.

56. Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 309.

Cryopower and the Temporality of Frozen Indigenous Blood Samples

EMMA KOWAL AND JOANNA RADIN

The freezer may seem an unlikely site from which to inquire into the defining temporalities of modernity. Far from the clamor of revolutionary regimes that feature in some essays in this volume, freezing is quiet. If it makes any sound at all, it is the background hum of fridges and freezers common to scientific institutions the world over.¹ The average laboratory contains many devices for cooling: cold rooms maintained at 4 degrees Celsius, walk-in freezers at -20 degrees, laboratory refrigerators for easy access to thawing samples, and liquid nitrogen freezers that cool to -196 degrees and require personal protective equipment to use. These variations of cooling act to slow down the life processes of biological substances and prevent decay. Samples of blood, saliva, surgically excised tissue, placenta, and many other pieces of human and nonhuman organisms are collected and frozen to enable analysis by scientists along an ever-receding horizon of future time.

This chapter considers the temporal implications of scientific freezing by focusing on specific kinds of frozen samples that are increasingly associated with controversy: those collected from people self-identified or marked as native, aboriginal, or indigenous. We call attention to blood samples collected from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia and, in particular, one large collection first formed in the 1960s and currently maintained in various freezers at a major Australian university.² We use this case to illustrate two competing modes of temporality produced by the conjunction of Indigenous biospecimens and the freezer. Both are variations of “cryopolitics,” a theoretical frame we offer to analyze the effects of cryopreservation on time and life.³

The ability to freeze cells so that they could be successfully thawed became possible in 1949, when it was discovered that adding glycerol prevented irreparable cell damage.⁴ By the 1960s, mechanical laboratory freezers and

techniques for mobile cold storage using dry ice facilitated the accumulation of blood samples from hard-to-reach places. Researchers traveled the world collecting samples for transportation to the laboratory for immediate analysis and to store for future analysis. In human biology, an important boost to this global effort came with the International Biological Program (IBP).

The IBP was an international effort to take stock of the biosphere. Its Human Adaptability (HA) section was one of seven and the only one concerned with humans. Running from 1964 to 1974, the IBP-HA functioned as an umbrella section for coordinating the efforts of human biologists to collect hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of blood samples from indigenous and nonindigenous people in dozens of countries.⁵ The IBP-HA sought to place the study of humans in the context of the biosphere, enabling global science to ensure “the future of man in his environment.”⁶ This was seen as an urgent task in the face of great change, as expressed by IBP organizers in 1966: “At this stage of human history vast changes are affecting the distribution, population density, and ways of life of human communities all over the world. The enormous advances in technology make it certain that many communities which have been changing slowly or not at all will relatively soon be totally transformed.”⁷ The comparative study of humans in their environments was agreed on as the best strategy for understanding and preparing for these transformations. Organizers at IBP-HA felt that their studies had “enduring value” through providing “important base-line and reference data” with which to measure the effects of cultural, social, demographic, and technological change. Obtaining this baseline data required the creation of a massive global archive of human biovariability.⁸ As of 1974, eight hundred field visits had taken place under the auspices of the IBP, with more than 1.25 million individuals measured and/or sampled.⁹

Of special interest to the human biologists involved with this comparative project were “simple societies still living under difficult ‘natural’ conditions.” Groups today known as “indigenous” “would provide object lessons of the actual adaptability achievable by man when relying largely on his biological endowment.”¹⁰ These scientists believed that Australian Aboriginal populations, among other indigenous groups, would soon cease to live as “traditional” hunter-gatherers. Store-bought food and other European innovations would change the physiology of “simple societies” forever, leaving open only a small window of scientific opportunity to collect vital biological and genetic information.¹¹ The bodies of members of such groups were thought to contain unique markers of adaptability and heredity that could be beneficial for solving current and future health problems faced by all human populations.¹² Those involved with the salvage projects of the IBP-HA sought to

preserve this biological knowledge, and the actual bodily material it derived from, before it was too late. In this sense, they also preserved a long-standing anthropological project of situating research subjects as located differently in time than researchers themselves.¹³

Australia contributed eight projects to the IBP-HA, of which two concerned Indigenous Australians. A major figure in the Indigenous projects was Robert Louis Kirk, an English biologist who in the 1950s settled in Australia, where he began the coordinated collection of samples from Indigenous communities across Western Australia, the Northern Territory, and Queensland. Kirk's lab was an important international node of the IBP-HA, receiving samples from collaborators around the globe.

Kirk's samples were initially used to map regional variation in blood proteins that provided clues to the long history of human migration. On his retirement in 1987, the collection was passed on to departmental colleagues, who used it for similar research and, as genomic techniques advanced, extracted DNA from a few hundred of the samples. Around the same time, in the 1990s, certain scientists became concerned that using the samples for genomic and other purposes raised ethical concerns. Eventually, the director of the institute decided the collection should be closed to scientific use. It is this period that is our focus. Drawing on interviews with scientists and laboratory technicians, we consider what happened to the collection as its identity shifted from that of a scientific resource to a potential ethical violation.

At the time of the IBP, 1964 to 1974, despite resistance from several scientists who questioned the assumptions underlying such salvage projects, the collection of samples from indigenous peoples was considered a public good by those involved.¹⁴ But by the 1980s, indigenous critiques of "Western" research had begun to circulate widely and by the 1990s threatened to derail scientific projects predicated on the use of indigenous body parts.¹⁵ The Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP) became a flash point for critiquing what Indigenous scholars and certain cultural anthropologists considered oppressive research practices.¹⁶ The HGDP was a global effort to sample human genetic diversity that recapitulated the epistemological basis of the IBP in many ways.¹⁷ Indigenous groups worldwide called it the "vampire project" and saw it as an exemplar of "biocolonialism," pointing to its potential for exploiting indigenous peoples' biological resources for material gain.¹⁸

These critiques ran parallel to emerging efforts to reclaim indigenous human remains held in museums and research institutions.¹⁹ Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, bodies and skeletons of Indigenous people were obtained, often through grave-robbing or other dishonorable means, by doctors, anatomists, anthropologists, and farmers and sent to the

museums and universities of colonial and metropolitan centers.²⁰ From the 1980s, members of indigenous communities living in Australia, North America, and Aotearoa/New Zealand began to advocate for the repatriation of these remains.²¹ They argued that human (or “ancestral”) remains are cultural heritage and cultural property, rightfully owned by communities or families with responsibilities to ensure an appropriate burial. Such claims resulted in legislation and funding that facilitated the return of many remains within and across national borders, a process that continues today.

As the 1990s progressed, scientists working on Kirk’s collection began to worry that the frozen blood samples in their possession were implicated in the repatriation movement. These nascent concerns foreshadowed two cases since 2010 in which indigenous groups in the Americas have drawn on the arguments of repatriation to reclaim blood samples originally collected for scientific research. The first case involves members of the Havasupai, a Native American tribe in Arizona who objected to specific secondary uses of their samples by researchers from Arizona State University. After a long legal battle, the tribe received a settlement, and 151 remaining samples were returned to the Havasupai in a ceremony conducted by tribal elders over the freezer in the university’s laboratory.²²

In the second case, that of the Yanomami, blood samples collected in the 1960s and 1970s and held at various laboratories in the United States were claimed on cultural grounds amid fierce controversy about allegedly unethical practices of the researchers involved.²³ Yanomami and their advocates argued that frozen blood samples held in the United States prevented their deceased donors from successfully departing the world.²⁴ The Yanomami requested that samples be returned, and a large number of them were returned in 2015. Shamans and elders ritually destroyed them to ensure the separation between the world of the living and the dead. Yanomami spiritual beliefs are far more complex and heterogeneous than depicted in the international media. However, the persistence of preserved blood samples was troubling because they appeared to exist in a liminal state between life and death.²⁵ As we will see, the competing and overlapping frameworks for the relationship between life and death that surround indigenous biospecimens are also temporal frameworks. These frameworks complicate the linear notions of time that have enabled technological projects to harness the powerful effects of slowing down frozen life.

Cryopolitics

Indigenous people are not alone in their concern for the biosocial effects of freezing. Experts from disciplines as broad as bioethics, law, philosophy, his-

tory, anthropology, and sociology have sought to understand the implications of making frozen bodily extracts—be they Indigenous blood samples or cosmopolitan gametes and embryos—persist through time.²⁶ Among the vexing questions raised by cryotechnologies (including ethical questions of ownership, benefit, justice, and personhood) is that of life itself. What is the status of tissues that were once living inside bodies, and can be made to live again, at least *in vitro*?

Hannah Landecker's work is important here.²⁷ She argues that the mundane technology, the humming freezer, makes biological material mobile through time and space. This mobility is the foundation of modern biological science, enabling assisted reproductive technologies, stem-cell science, cloning, and much else. The apparent ability to stop and start time, preserving and reanimating cells at will, has changed what it means to be biological: "To be biological, alive, cellular" is now to be "suspendible, interruptible, storable, freezable in parts."²⁸

Here we need to pause to notice the intermingling of the concepts biological, alive, and cellular in Landecker's formulation. Since cell culture technologies have been developed, cells metabolizing, growing, and reproducing in culture medium have been widely considered living matter. Although Landecker uses "living matter" and "biological matter" interchangeably, the category of "human biological matter" is a larger category than living cells. For example, "biological matter" could include tissues that do not have cells (e.g., plasma) or that are not living (e.g., tissue sections on slides).

On a practical level, the distinction between living cells (or frozen cells that could be made to live again) and biological matter that is not technically living is also important. Extending the label of "life" to biological material that cannot metabolize, grow, and reproduce may imply that frozen blood samples could be readily thawed to produce living cells or even clone an organism whose genetic sequence is encoded in preserved DNA. To be clear, the sample collection of interest to this chapter was not collected with the intention of producing immortalized cell cultures and cannot be used to do so (although, as we will discuss, midcentury scientists, in general, had an expansive view of what future scientific innovation would make possible for frozen samples).

This highlights a potential disjuncture between the natural sciences and the social sciences in their usage of the concept of life. Scientists who read, for example, Rose's claim that life was "molecularized" beginning in the 1930s may conclude that social analysts of the life sciences use the term "life" loosely.²⁹ Living cells are made up of molecules, but individual molecules themselves cannot easily be thought of as living.

The point to take from this discrepancy is that social scientists see the definition of life as a social phenomenon subject to continual revision as new technologies and practices emerge.³⁰ The approach of some social scientists to the question of life is expressed in Helmreich's concept of form of life (adapted from Wittgenstein). Forms of life are "cultural, social, symbolic and pragmatic ways of thinking and acting that organize human communities."³¹ Historians have observed, for example, that the notion of life as genetic code—and more broadly as information—was ascendant in twentieth-century science, social science, and popular culture.³² Within this scheme, DNA is seen as containing the essence of life. This is an example of a form of life as opposed to a life form. Forms of life shape how "life" is understood and experienced (the conception of life as DNA code), whereas "life forms" are living beings (cells and organisms containing DNA). Both forms of life and life forms mutate as they are exposed to new technologies and fields of scientific knowledge.³³ In the context of the broader inquiry into power and time this volume presents, this chapter illustrates how different forms of life are always-already forms of time. Struggles over the proper definition of life involve debates about time, and vice versa.

We wish to focus here on one aspect of the form of life invoked by the suspendible, interruptible, storable, freezable human: the perpetual deferral of death. We propose cryopolitics as a theoretical frame to analyze the form of life brought into existence by the freezer.³⁴ Cryopolitics is a mode of Foucault's biopolitics,³⁵ which describes the intensification of the management of life at individual and population levels since the early nineteenth century. In his famous formulation, Foucault contrasted concentrated sovereign power that seeks to "let live and make die" with a distributed biopower that seeks to "make live and let die."³⁶ Public health measures that sought to maximize the health of the population (e.g., demography, vaccination, social insurance) are among those paradigmatic biopolitical strategies that arose in the nineteenth century and persist into the twenty-first. Scholars who argue that twenty-first-century life has become "molecularized" similarly recognize new forms of "molecular biopolitics," with measures to optimize individual and population health aimed at identifying susceptibility and enhancing life forms at cellular and genomic levels.³⁷

Artificial freezing, which also has its roots in the nineteenth century, has become a critical tool of twenty-first-century biopolitics.³⁸ We propose that cryopreservation produces a specific form of biopolitics. If biopolitical assemblages make live and let die, then cryopolitical ones reveal the dramatic impacts of mundane efforts to make live and *not* let die. Cryopreservation of a range of human and nonhuman tissues—from gametes to blood to whole

organisms—has come to be valued by scientists because it promises to perpetually defer the death of individuals, populations, or species, transforming life itself in the process.³⁹ The use of artificial cold as a means of deferral makes temperature work as a temporal prosthesis,⁴⁰ promising it is never too late to revive an individual, race, or species. In the specific case of twentieth-century human biologists, scientists responded to the perceived endangerment of Indigenous peoples by freezing their genetic material, manipulating time to create a form of life without death.

Latent Life

We draw on the management of Kirk's collection to illustrate how cryopolitical life vacillates between two states we elaborate here: latent life and incomplete death. Latent life, a concept used by mid-twentieth-century cryobiologists and developed by Radin in her discussion of the origins of biobanking, is oriented toward the future potential of preserved samples to yield life.⁴¹ The term was used first in the context of low temperature by Alexis Carrel, a founder of the practice of tissue culture, and popularized by Basile Luyet, a founder of the discipline of cryobiology in the mid-twentieth century, to describe a state between life and death.⁴² Latency is what happens to temporality when life becomes plastic. When linear timescales no longer apply, when the ability to bring biological material “back to life” in another time is made possible, the potentiality that would otherwise ebb with the passing of time is preserved and even intensified.⁴³

Existing between states, and within bits of bodies, in the frozen form, latent life becomes highly mobile—across space and across time—offering infinite potential for knowledge production using the novel technologies of the imagined future. Here, we extend Radin's discussion of latent life as a zone of potential, arguing that in the realm of cryopolitics, latent life may be understood to transgress the boundaries of accepted bioethical practice when it is interpreted as life without death. From the perspective of many scientists, the potentiality of latent life is often incompatible with death, which may be unacceptable to certain groups with stakes in the management of frozen biospecimens.

Samples collected for the HA-IBP illustrate these varied properties of latent life. They were collected with the explicit belief that they preserved biological knowledge of populations that would soon vanish, from disease, assimilation, or both. Freezing pieces of these thought-to-be endangered groups would allow them to be mobilized by future scientists for purposes “as yet unknown.”⁴⁴ Along with their focus on obtaining knowledge about human variation in

the short term, scientists shared a pessimistic view of the survival of indigenous peoples and an optimistic orientation toward the future of innovation over the long term.

These and other kinds of frozen samples have come to be emblematic of life without death. However, latent life is not distributed equally across all samples.⁴⁵ A case in point is the recent distinction that some scientists have begun to make between “stored” samples and “biobanked” samples. Stored samples become biobanked when they are labeled, annotated, connected with phenotypic information and a data set for analysis, all features that augment the latent life of the samples. After that point, samples should be managed so that, ideally, they are never depleted.⁴⁶ In this conceptualization, stored samples may be destroyed in the face of restricted freezer space or tight budgets, but biobanked samples should endure indefinitely. This would mean that scientists are encouraged to use existing data sets produced from biobanked samples (e.g., genome sequence data) rather than receive a portion of the actual, original sample. It would be expected that any data produced from the sample itself would be returned to the biobank and made available to other scientists, thereby further enhancing the latent life of the sample.

This form of life is closely related to a form of time that Vincanne Adams, Michelle Murphy, and Adele Clarke have explored as “anticipation.” They intend “anticipation” to signal a temporal orientation inherent to the current era, and particularly biomedical domains, whereby action in the present is structured by hopes and fears of what might happen in the future. Buoyed by hope and dampened by fear, we live our lives informed by our best predictions for the future so that we can optimally prepare for it. Anticipation is therefore a temporal mode “in which the future sets the conditions of possibility for action in the present, in which the future is inhabited in the present.”⁴⁷

As amply demonstrated throughout this volume, temporal regimes are also regimes of power. In the case of Indigenous biospecimens, anticipation grants power to scientific authority to decide what will be not allowed to die. It is Western science that initiated the cryopreservation of indigenous samples so that humanity could benefit from the evolutionary information contained within the “primitive” even if the humans carrying these corporeal traces one day perish. In the present, however, the time and the power of latent life are being called into question.

Incomplete Death

The uncertain fate of Kirk’s collection today illustrates that the biophysical state of latent life as potential also has a perceptual double: “incomplete death.”

We draw here on Deborah Bird Rose's concept of the "zone of the incomplete," a term inspired by the Christian belief that dead humans are "suspended, awaiting resurrection."⁴⁸ She develops her argument from another iteration of cryopolitics: the use of cryopreservation to save nonhuman species threatened with extinction. In the realm of nonhumans, biologists employ a range of tactics to preserve endangered species, such as captive breeding programs between zoos and wildlife reserves that mobilize frozen gametes to ensure sufficient genetic diversity, or "frozen zoos" where blood, gametes, or whole animals are frozen to preserve the possibility that endangered or extinct species might be brought back to life ("reanimated") in the future by genetically engineering animals.⁴⁹

Rose argues that while these various "de-extinction" efforts claim to reverse death, they instead suspend both death and life. For instance, species that are kept alive through captive breeding programs can lose the social behaviors integral to their survival.⁵⁰ Zoos have long been seen as producing a lesser form of animal life and diverting attention from threatened animal habitats. Frozen zoo projects take this to its logical extreme, supplanting actual living animals and preserving their parts instead. Matthew Chrulew argues that as a species becomes more endangered, animal life is made increasingly abstract, as scientists prioritize "species over individuals, code over life, genes over bodies."⁵¹ Alongside accounts of such an impoverished form of life, Rose argues that the zone of the incomplete is itself also an impoverished form of death.⁵² Efforts to preserve life and cheat death and time through freezing may suspend both life and death, erasing the potential that death may offer.

The distinction between latent life and incomplete death can be illustrated through different actors' competing assessments of indigenous biospecimens, discussed earlier. Viewing such blood samples in terms of latent life orients users toward their future potential. Viewing the same samples as incomplete death focuses on the relations to the past that are foreclosed or undermined by their persistence in the frozen state. Certain members of indigenous communities have been outspoken in their rejection of the latent potential of samples to produce knowledge prized by scientists. Instead of casting their minds toward future promise, some link samples to the past, recognizing them as coextensive with the bodies of deceased kin.⁵³ Human remains held in museums—preserved through freezing or by other means—are the paradigmatic case of incomplete death: repatriation has been considered justified when it restores the trajectory of materials such as bones, wrongly interrupted on their journey toward death. Human biological material removed from living bodies may be becoming "repatriable" in the same way, at least when such bodies are marked as Indigenous.⁵⁴ The freezer emerges from this account as

a time machine and a life machine, making things live and deferring death in anticipation of an uncertain future, and producing a temporally complex present.⁵⁵

What alternative temporal regimes might Indigenous people offer in place of an orientation to the future? This is a difficult question to answer without essentializing the manifold diversity among Indigenous Australians, not to mention diversity across indigenous groups around the globe. Nevertheless, James Clifford has identified an orientation to time common to many instances of indigenous modernity and suggested in Reardon and TallBear's account of indigenous DNA samples: a turning toward the past with one's back to the future.⁵⁶ He explains this temporal orientation through the insight of the Hawaiian historian Lilikalā Kame'elehiwa that, for Native Hawaiians, "the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge."⁵⁷ Here, action is driven by the known past rather than the unknown future. This aligns with Deborah Bird Rose's account of the Aboriginal Australians with whom she works. For them, what comes "first" is "the earth, then Dreamings, then the ancestors. We [Aboriginal people] follow along behind them, and our descendants follow along behind us."⁵⁸ The past is not something the present leaves behind but a guide to follow.

In what follows, we explore the latent life and incomplete death of one Indigenous biospecimen collection. This "temporal ecosystem" is a rich site for understanding the complex patterns of competition and coexistence between disparate temporal regimes, explored in this volume as chronocenosis.

From Latent Life to Incomplete Death

The futuristic design of the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the Australian National University, Canberra, juxtaposes a zigzagging glass façade with massive concrete panels that depict scientific symbols. The new building, completed in 2012, obscures the view of the original 1960s building that has been progressively demolished to make way. Similarly, the basement freezers of the new building conceal the vital legacies of an older era of biological research. Among the millions of samples contained in freezers of various temperatures across the institute are one hundred thousand samples from around the globe accumulated by Bob Kirk, including a subset of around seven thousand collected from Indigenous communities.⁵⁹

The story of this biospecimen collection is a chapter in the larger story of twentieth century human biology.⁶⁰ One way to understand the Cold War promise of latent life and its more recent undoing is through the biography of Bob Kirk. He was born in 1921 in the Midlands of England, the last of three boys in a lower-middle-class family. Kirk was educated at boarding school

before studying chemistry at university. His progressive politics moved him to register as a conscientious objector in 1939, even though he was already exempt for service as a science undergraduate. This in turn led to an invitation from the brilliant and radical biologist Lancelot Hogben to complete graduate studies at Birmingham University.

Kirk took up an opportunity to join the zoology department at the newly established University of Western Australia in 1951 and settled into teaching and developing his genetic research program on flies and snails. An interest in human genetics arose by chance when his secretary exhibited an extreme sensitivity to potassium cyanide fumes emanating from his lab. He went on to investigate the genetic basis of this trait.⁶¹ With his interest in human genetics piqued, he began collaborating with Dr. Gerard Vos from the King Edward Memorial Hospital on blood-group research. This was a turning point in Kirk's career and the origin of what would become his life's work: studies of genetic diversity in indigenous populations of Australia and Papua New Guinea. This watershed was partly technological: Kirk and Vos began to use starch gel electrophoresis, a technique that Kirk recalled having "turned out to be immensely valuable, and a new world of anthropological genetics was opened up for us."⁶² This new world of human biological research was itself reliant on advances in mobile freezing technology.⁶³

At the same time, Kirk recognized untapped potential for research in the Aboriginal population of Western Australia, a vast state occupying half of the Australian continent, with many areas "remain[ing] largely undisturbed, except by pastoral activities."⁶⁴ Collecting and analyzing blood samples from Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and the Western Desert regions became his main research activity over the subsequent decade. By the time planning began for the IBP in the early 1960s, Kirk was in an excellent position to contribute. He was sought out by the Australian representative on the central IBP-HA committee, R. J. Walsh—himself a crucial node in global efforts to analyze blood—to lead a major study of human adaptation among Australian Aborigines.⁶⁵

Kirk's collection expanded exponentially after he moved in 1967 to the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the Australian National University. There, he assembled a state-of-the-art laboratory that occupied the bench space of two labs. The laboratory was the biggest and best facility of its kind in the world.⁶⁶ It attracted "a constant stream of samples" from researchers collecting in Asia and the Pacific, Eurasia, the Middle East, and beyond.⁶⁷ A corresponding stream of boxes of Canadian potato starch kept the starch gel electrophoresis factory running, rapidly producing multiple blood-group and protein results. This information was used to plot the geographical

distribution of genetic markers across the region. As new statistical methods were developed, Kirk worked with colleagues to create phylogenetic trees that depicted probable evolutionary relationships between different human populations.⁶⁸

Despite his initial investment in innovative starch gel electrophoresis techniques in the late 1960s, as the 1970s and 1980s progressed, Kirk's colleagues recall that they felt he was "left behind" by rapid changes in DNA technology and the reorganization of Australian universities. His meticulous methods of analysis and mapping were less valued as statistical modeling and new laboratory methods emerged. The early stages of the neoliberalization of the university were equally difficult for him; the army of support staff in the institute was gradually attenuated, including the typing pool, three staff photographers, and the large workshop that made all lab equipment and furniture to order. A former colleague compared Kirk to the main character in the 2011 movie *The Artist*, a silent film star who could not accept the transition to sound: "It was like that. Bob didn't need to make the transition. He wouldn't admit it but DNA was too hard. It was really difficult for the old guys. They lost their secretaries, they had to start using computers and the techniques of protein electrophoresis were overtaken by molecular genetics."⁶⁹ Kirk's increasing displacement from the laboratory environment had implications for the collection of samples he had assembled, contributing to their shift from latent life to incomplete death.

In 1987 Kirk retired and took up an honorary appointment with the anthropology and archaeology department. There, he built on relationships with colleagues he had developed over the previous two decades. To them, Kirk offered a useful genetic supplement to their (largely cultural) knowledge. Untroubled by the increasing sophistication of statistical methods, Kirk enjoyed participating in broad discussions of population histories. Yet by the early 1990s, Kirk had tired of even these conversations, leaving the university completely and setting up a small publishing business in the rural town of Gundaroo, north of Canberra.

Back at the lab, his former colleagues found him difficult to engage after his retirement. When asked about the collection, he gave only vague answers or deflected questions. Most samples had not been physically collected by Kirk himself but by government officials, medical officers, hospital pathologists, and researchers outside the university. Kirk was the only person who had known them and how to contact them. His unwillingness to answer questions, or link current staff with those who had directly collected samples, created challenges through the 1990s. Although samples continued to be used by research staff after Kirk's retirement, and DNA was extracted from several

hundred of them, this became increasingly difficult without him to vouch for the samples and the manner in which they were collected.

By the mid-1990s, the possibilities for the use of the collection were affected by global shifts in ethical norms for human-subjects research, in particular research involving indigenous peoples. The Human Genome Diversity Project raised the ire of Indigenous activists just as the first Indigenous-specific ethical guidelines were being produced.⁷⁰ Australian Indigenous leaders refused to participate in the HGDP, and no samples were collected in Australia.⁷¹ Regardless, the HGDP cast a long shadow over the use of Indigenous samples at precisely the time when the paradigm of Indigenous research ethics was gaining ground and changing expectations about who could contribute to shaping the goals and conduct of research. It had become clear that continuing to use the samples in their current state posed ethical challenges, and by the end of the 1990s, Kirk's collection was closed—but not destroyed—by the head of the institute. The absence of formal informed consent, which had since become accepted as best practice for human-subjects research, was the most obvious problem. It left the institute highly vulnerable to critique in an environment of increasingly global indigenous resistance to involvement with genetic research.

It was a difficult time for the current guardian of the collection (who had taken over responsibility when Kirk retired). Postgraduate students who were using the collection had to abandon their projects midway through; promising honors theses went unpublished. Using the cryopolitical terms we are proposing, perceptions of the samples shifted irrevocably away from promising latent life and toward problematic incomplete death. Kirk's abandonment of the collection contributed to this shift. His displacement from the lab and the erosion of his affective ties with his network of sample collectors and donor communities was a major factor. In his absence, the latent life of the samples could not be maintained as the political and ethical environment evolved outside the freezer, highlighting the importance of maintaining affective ties as part of the broader labor of maintaining latent life over multiple generations.⁷²

A sense of this shift is evident in comments made by the head laboratory technician whom Kirk recruited in the early 1970s. He was responsible for maintaining the collection from the time he started working at the lab after finishing university until his retirement thirty-five years later. He recounted his mixed emotions at the time the collection closed down. "I didn't know what I should do," he told me. "Do I quietly take it out and autoclave it all [destroy it through vaporization]? Do people want it back?" The identity of the samples as "Indigenous" abruptly became significant and unsettling for

lab staff. "From a management point of view its identity [of the samples] is well hidden," he said. "Aboriginal is hardly ever mentioned [on the lists of samples]. But all the names . . ." he trailed off, referring to the detailed lists of names and other information of people who contributed samples (called "bleeding lists" by scientists) kept in filing cabinets elsewhere in the building. The lists of names, kin, and language groups from those who gave the samples that provided their provenance also irrevocably marked them as "Indigenous," even if their material presence, boxes of glass tubes with aluminum stoppers and newer plastic cryovials, seemed no different from any of the thousands of other such tubes in the lab.

At this point, no Indigenous people had made any claims on the samples. Rather, the shifting political context of Indigenous rights and the changing status of human remains in museums had wider effects on other kinds of biological matter, including frozen samples, which made those who might use such materials wary. No longer simply a valuable raw material of science, the collection became also subject to a wider set of potential interests beyond the laboratory. Scientists connected to the collection could not articulate what had happened to the samples beyond a general agreement that the collection should be maintained but no longer used for scientific study.

The impulse to dispose of the samples—to "autoclave it all"—was an understandable response to this uncertainty. Terminating the material presence of the samples offers an obvious way to solve the ethically ambiguous predicament they presented. For another scientist associated with the collection, however, this suggestion was untenable and tantamount to "scientific vandalism." Scientists' attitudes toward cryopreserved artifacts, which are often compared to unique and invaluable archives,⁷³ tend to prohibit the destruction of latent life and require that death remain a perpetually receding horizon. But this destructive impulse could also be interpreted as an intuition on the part of the lab technician that the values guiding the appropriate use of such materials had begun to shift from the domain of latent life to incomplete death. The temporal regime of anticipation was challenged by an orientation to the known past and to the bodies through which the blood had once circulated.

The End(s) of Cryopolitics

The shift perceived by scientists in the late 1990s had mutated the samples toward incomplete death, effectively barring anyone from accessing the latent life of the collection.⁷⁴ Today, the future management of the collection remains fraught for the institution that holds them. The cryopolitical frame-

work presented here suggests that the tension between the potential of latent life and the angst of incomplete death must be resolved in one of two ways. Either the latent life of the samples can be harnessed in ways that generate knowledge to benefit those from whom this material was derived, or the samples should be stewarded toward a satisfactory death.

This second possibility would follow the examples of the Havasupai and Yanomami who requested the repatriation of samples so they could receive mortuary rites. Indigenous Australian communities or families may share the view that blood samples collected from a deceased relative and held in a freezer should be returned to the community of origin to complete the death interrupted by cryopolitical life.⁷⁵ If Indigenous communities express these beliefs and desires, samples may be returned. Outside the freezer, they would quickly degrade and would likely be buried or otherwise disposed.

It is striking that both repatriation of samples and autoclaving by scientists result in the same material outcome—the depletion or destruction of samples. The destruction of samples by either Indigenous people or scientists violates a tacitly accepted scientific imperative to ensure the persistence of biobanked samples. However, the two modes of destruction are grounded in very different cryopolitical states and temporal regimes. Destruction by scientists would be a defensive reaction to the foreclosure of latent life. Motivated by frustration, confusion, and anxiety, autoclaving samples in these circumstances would surely be “scientific vandalism.” In contrast, destruction by Indigenous people would constitute the fulfillment of incomplete death and the realization of a very different temporal regime.

An alternative posed by our cryopolitical framework is for the latent life of samples to be recast in ways that are perceived by indigenous people to offer potential benefits. As the long shadow of the Human Genome Diversity Project slowly recedes, some indigenous scholars have expressed interest in the potential for genetics to contribute to indigenous health.⁷⁶ Epigenetics, in particular, has attracted attention. As an explanation for how stressful life experiences affect the expression of genes across the life course and across generations, it *potentially* offers a powerful biological basis for transgenerational trauma.⁷⁷ Advocates of this approach argue that samples collected in the mid-twentieth century could, for instance, be used as the basis of comparative research to investigate the biological effects of colonial trauma over time.

In effect, this would shift samples back from the domain of incomplete death to latent life, but a form of latent life that is radically reconfigured. The latent life of samples collected in the mid-twentieth century and preserved in freezers was initially grounded in their ability to produce “as yet unknown” scientific knowledge into the indefinite future for the benefit of Western notions

of human life.⁷⁸ This alternative form of latent life would be a distinctly “indigenous” form, oriented toward indigenous futures under indigenous control, futures in which the potential of samples could be used to explore the ramifying effects of past harms.⁷⁹ Latent life in this case may be unmoored from regimes of anticipation and harnessed to indigenous temporalities, moving into the future with eyes firmly fixed upon the past. It is yet unclear what form such futures would take or whether indigenous people stand to benefit more from the productive potential of samples, from completing the death foreclosed by latent life, or from pushing science to embrace new forms of life, time, and the relations between them.

Notes

This chapter has been adapted from Emma Kowal and Joanna Radin, “Indigenous Biospecimen Collections and the Cryopolitics of Frozen Life,” *Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2015): 63–80.

1. Ruth Schwartz Cowan, “How the Refrigerator Got Its Hum,” in *The Social Shaping of Technology: How the Refrigerator Got Its Hum*, ed. Donald A. MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), 202–18.

2. “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders” is the currently accepted term for the indigenous peoples of what is now the Australian nation. In this chapter the term “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders” is used interchangeably with the term “Indigenous Australian” where “Indigenous” is capitalized. “Indigenous” is used without capitalization where it is used more generally as a concept, for instance, when referring to indigenous people internationally.

3. Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal, eds., *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 2017).

4. Bronwyn Parry, “Technologies of Immortality: The Brain on Ice,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 35, no. 2 (2004): 391–413; Hannah Landecker, “Living Differently in Time: Plasticity, Temporality and Cellular Biotechnologies,” *Culture Machine* 7 (2005); Hannah Landecker, *Culturing Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Joanna Radin, “Latent Life: Concepts and Practices of Human Tissue Preservation in the International Biological Program,” *Social Studies of Science* 43, no. 4 (2013): 484–508.

5. Joanna Radin, *Life on Ice: A History of New Uses for Cold Blood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

6. E. B. Worthington, ed., *The Evolution of IBP* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 52.

7. K. J. Collins and J. S. Weiner, *Human Adaptability: A History and Compendium of Research in the International Biological Programme* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1977), 3. It is important to distinguish the IBP from earlier kinds of scientific interest in human difference popularly known as “race science.” The nineteenth century saw a “hardening” of racial categories and a proliferation of scientific interest in racial types. Later in the nineteenth century, Darwin’s evolutionary theory was harnessed as “social Darwinism” to explain the supposed superiority of some racial groups over others. See G. W. Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968); and N. L. Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982). This form of knowledge about race was linked to

eugenics, antimiscegenation laws, and ultimately, the Holocaust. In the wake of World War II and revelations of Nazi atrocities, the idea of biological race was decidedly rejected by the vast majority of scientists. See A. Montagu, *Statement on Race: An Annotated Elaboration and Exposition of the Four Statements on Race Issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972). In its place, the “modern synthesis” in physical anthropology sought to delineate clinical variation among and between populations rather than absolute differences between races. See Sherwood Washburn, “The New Physical Anthropology,” *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* 13, no. 7 (1951): 298–304.

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30. Cathy Waldby and Susan Merrill Squier, "Ontogeny, Ontology, and Phylogeny: Embryonic Life and Stem Cell Technologies," *Configurations* 11, no. 1 (2003): 27–46; Michael M. J. Fischer, *Emergent Forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Stephan Helmreich, "What Was Life? Answers from Three Limit Biologies," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (2011): 671–96; S. Franklin and M. Lock, eds., *Remaking Life and Death: Toward an Anthropology of the Biosciences* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2003).

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34. Radin and Kowal, *Indigenous Blood and Ethical Regimes*.

35. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976* (New York: Picador, 2003); Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, "Biopower Today," *BioSocieties* 1, no. 1 (2006): 195–217.

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38. National biobanks, that seek to act on frozen, decorporealized pieces of citizens in the name of a healthy population and a blossoming bioeconomy, offer some of the clearest examples of molecular biopolitics. See, e.g., Herbert Gottweis and Alan Petersen, eds., *Biobanks: Governance in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2008); and Catherine Waldby,

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39. There are, of course, other means to preserve organisms and tissues (e.g., formaldehyde, paraffin) and to keep organisms literally alive indefinitely through artificial respiration. In fact, the development of artificial respiration for polio patients in the 1950s raised new bioethical questions about preventing death, and connections between that debate and cryopolitics would be fruitful to pursue in future work. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

40. Radin, *Life on Ice*.

41. Latent life is one aspect of a broader discourse of science as future potential. See Mike Fortun’s concept of promissory genomics in *Promising Genomics: Iceland and Decode Genetics in a World of Speculation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). On potentiality, see Karen-Sue Taussig, Klaus Hoeyer, and Stefan Helmreich, “The Anthropology of Potentiality in Biomedicine,” *Current Anthropology* 54, no. S7 (2013): S3–S14.

42. Radin, “Latent Life.” For a discussion of the early modern roots of ideas about latent life, see D. Keilin, “The Leeuwenhoek Lecture: The Problem of Anabiosis or Latent Life: History and Current Concept,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B* 150, no. 939 (1959): 149–91; and Stéphane Tirard, *Histoire de la vie latente: Des animaux ressuscitants du XVIIIe siècle aux embryons congelés du XXe siècle* (Paris: Vuibert, 2010).

43. Landecker, *Culturing Life*; Taussig, Hoeyer, and Helmreich, “Anthropology of Potentiality.”

44. Joanna Radin, “Unfolding Epidemiological Stories: How the Who Made Frozen Blood into a Flexible Resource for the Future,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 47 (2014): 62–73.

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46. A. Brooks, “Optimizing Bioprocessing and Sample Management Strategies to Achieve Successful Translational Research and Drug Development,” *ISBER 2013 Annual Meeting and Exhibits Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre (SCEC)* (Sydney, May 13–16, 2013), 109.

47. Vincanne Adams, Michelle Murphy, and Adele Clark, “Anticipation: Technoscience, Life, Affect, Temporality,” *Subjectivity* 28 (2009): 249.

48. Deborah Bird Rose, “Reflections on the Zone of the Incomplete,” in *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World*, ed. Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 154.

49. Carrie Friese, *Cloning Wild Life: Zoos, Captivity, and the Future of Endangered Animals* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

50. Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

51. Matthew Chrulew, “Managing Love and Death at the Zoo: The Biopolitics of Endangered Species Preservation,” *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011): <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2011/05/01/managing-love-and-death-at-the-zoo-the-biopolitics-of-endangered-species-preservation/>.

52. Rose, “Reflections.”

53. Jenny Reardon and Kim TallBear, “Your DNA Is Our History,” *Current Anthropology* 53, no. 5 (2012): S233–S245. As Anderson has noted, scientists may be equally troubled by the stubborn inalienability of samples that retain traces of donor personhood.

54. Indigenous people in Canada, for example, have argued that biological samples should be considered “on loan” to researchers and eventually be returned. See Laura Arbour and Doris

Cook, "DNA on Loan: Issues to Consider When Carrying Out Genetic Research with Aboriginal Families and Communities," *Community Genetics* 9 (2006): 153–60; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, *CIHR Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People* (Ottawa: Canadian Institutes of Health Research / Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada, 2007).

55. Radin, "Life on Ice."

56. J. Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 24.

57. Lilikalā K. Kame'eleihiwa, *Native Land and Foreign Desires: Pehea lā e pono ai? How Shall We Live in Harmony?* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1992), 23.

58. Deborah Bird Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004), 152.

59. For a longer and comparative analysis of this case, see Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal, "Indigenous Blood and Ethical Regimes in the United States and Australia since the 1960s," *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 4 (2015): 749–65.

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61. Robert Kirk, "Patterns in Blood: A Memoir" (unpublished), n.d.

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63. Radin, "Latent Life."

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65. R. J. Walsh, "Historical and Social Background of the Peoples Studied in the IBP," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B* 268, no. 893 (1974): 223–28.

66. According to a former staff member A. In-person interview with the author, April 23, 2012.

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71. "Concerns at 'Vampire' Project," *Green Left Weekly*, February 2, 1994.

72. Emma Kowal, Joanna Radin, and Jenny Reardon, "Indigenous Body Parts, Mutating Temporalities, and the Half-Lives of Postcolonial Technoscience," *Social Studies of Science* 43, no. 4 (2013): 465–83.

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75. Emma Kowal, Ashley Greenwood, and Rebekah E. McWhirter, "All in the Blood: A Review of Aboriginal Australians' Cultural Beliefs about Blood and Implications for Biospecimen Research," *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics* 10, no. 4 (2015): 347–59.

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“Now Is the Time for Helter Skelter”: Terror, Temporality, and the Manson Family

CLAUDIA VERHOEVEN

“Now is the time for Helter Skelter,” Charles Manson allegedly announced to his so-called Family on August 8, 1969.¹ What followed were the Tate-LaBianca murders, two infamous nights of violence that meant to “shock the world,” “instill fear into the establishment,” and start an apocalyptic race war that would be won by blacks but crown white Manson king of the world.² Given the paradoxical notions of time that shaped the communal life of Manson’s “slippies,” however, it is remarkable that they knew what he meant at all, not to mention that this unusual temporal pronouncement would have had for them the force of law.³ But apparently they did, and it matters: distinct notions of time factored into the Family’s process of radicalization and rooted whatever authority Manson had for its members. This essay therefore inquires into the theory and practice of Manson Family time. How was time understood, why was it understood the way it was, and why did this understanding have traction? How did the Family construct its regime of time, implement, and experience it? And most importantly, how was this regime related to radicalization and the race war—or revolution—that was Helter Skelter? In disaggregating and analyzing the layers of time that prepared the ground for the Tate-LaBianca murders, the essay demonstrates a strong link between terror and temporality in the Manson Family that produced a state of hyperconscious historicity animating their will to violently intervene in the present for the sake of an exalted future. Such a link is characteristic of radicalization more generally, and therefore the essay locates the Helter Skelter narrative in the long history of politico-religious voluntarism.

On August 9, 1969, film director Roman Polanski's eight-months-pregnant wife, the actress Sharon Tate, and four others were killed in Los Angeles. Because the victims belonged to the "beautiful people" and the violence was vicious—one victim suffered fifty-three stab wounds, and the crime scene included the word "Pig" printed in Tate's blood—the murders attracted global attention. When similar murders were committed the next night—again an extreme number of stab wounds and again writing in blood, this time "Death to Pigs," "Rise," and "Healter [sic] Skelter," plus the word "War" carved into one victim's stomach—it seemed the city might have a serial-cum-mass murderer on its hands. Panic ensued.

Three months later, the LAPD announced it had solved the murders and was bringing charges against what the *Los Angeles Times* called a "hippie gang."⁴ Headed by thirty-four-year-old ex-convict, semisuccessful musician, and charismatic leader Charles Manson and known as the "Family," the group consisted of some thirty LSD-infused, countercultural men and women in their late teens and early twenties. The Family divided its time between Spahn Ranch, a rundown movie set in LA's San Fernando Valley, and two nearly inaccessible compounds in Death Valley. It thus literally occupied spaces on the margins of society, although because of Manson's musical ability, there were in fact close connections between the Family and LA's music elite. Charged with the murders were Manson (aka Jesus Christ, the devil, the soul, and Son of Man), Patricia Krenwinkel (twenty-two), Susan Atkins (twenty-one), and Leslie Van Houten (nineteen). Charles Watson (twenty-four) was tried during a separate trial. Linda Kasabian (twenty) was also initially charged with seven counts of murder but later received immunity for her testimony.

During the sensational trial, Deputy District Attorney Vincent Bugliosi argued that Manson had meant for the murders to incite "Helter Skelter," an apocalyptic race war he had prophesized based on his reading of the Bible's Book of Revelation and the Beatles' 1968 *White Album* (with "Helter Skelter" as one of its songs). Sometime during the summer of 1969, Bugliosi argued, after months of pronouncing that "Helter Skelter is coming down soon," Manson grew "impatient" waiting for said race war to erupt spontaneously and began to advocate voluntarism ("I want to show Blackie how to do it"), eventually proclaiming, "Now is the time for Helter Skelter" and ordering the murders.⁵ Clues left at the scene of the crimes meant to implicate the Black Panthers—for example, "Pig" was written "because Black Panthers call white people pigs"⁶—and the hope was that the white community would blame the black community for the crimes, which would serve as a triggering mechanism for Helter Skelter. The Family would wait out the war in an (as-yet-undiscovered)

underground paradise in Death Valley known to them as “the bottomless pit” (Revelations 9:1) or simply “the hole,” where they would multiply to a biblical 144,000 (Revelations 9:14) and whence they would eventually emerge to take over power from the victorious blacks and rule the world.

All defendants were found guilty and received the death penalty, although the sentences were commuted to life with the possibility of parole when the California Supreme Court outlawed the death penalty in 1972.



That is the official history of the case. As for a historiography that might complicate it, there isn't one. Books exist, but all are popular, and until very recently none strayed from the narrative presented by Bugliosi in court and, subsequently, his coauthored “Nr. 1 True Crime Best Seller of All Time,” *Helter Skelter* (1974).⁷ This is an extraordinary state of affairs, not just because there are few such contentious cases that are always seen only from the prosecutorial perspective but also because the dominance of this narrative obscures the fact that when Bugliosi first presented the Helter Skelter theory, it was thought to be entirely unbelievable. A full three months into the trial, to wit, it was still possible for Judge Charles Older to state flatly, “So far, I can't see any connection between what Mr. Manson believed about blacks and whites in the abstract and motive.”⁸ By the end of the trial, however, even some of the defense attorneys accepted the Helter Skelter theory: “To foment black revolution and direct a blow against the establishment,” said Leslie Van Houten's attorney Maxwell Keith, “Manson masterminded and directed the seven murders previously described.”⁹ Thus, although initially even Bugliosi himself repeatedly stressed that the motive for these “senseless” crimes was “bizarre,” eventually it was the very bizarreness of the motive that made the crimes make sense—but also less serious.¹⁰ The Manson murders became available as synecdoche for the “end of the 1960s,” even while they were bracketed as a “bizarre” anachronism from their historical context, thereby containing the threat posed by the elements that made the Manson Family narrative so cohesive and the Helter Skelter theory so effective: politico-religious voluntarism, or more specifically, terrorism and revolutionary millenarianism.

No one characterized the Manson Family as “terrorist” or “millenarian” during the trial, which is not strange of course, given that the case was being prosecuted in criminal court. But the force of the prosecution's narrative certainly comes from the fact that it is constructed from elements characteristic of these radical political and religious traditions. Defense lawyer Paul Fitzgerald in fact picked up on its political implications: “I try to sort of figure out what this whole Helter Skelter sort of thing would be like. The closest I can come,

and it is undoubtedly mundane, is that it's like Mau Mau terrorism [in British Kenya during the 1950s]."¹¹ He also, however, immediately took issue with this: "But the Mau Mau had a message. . . . If the whole point of Helter Skelter was to put terror and fear in people and to start a revolution, why not make the message clear?"¹² Indeed, this is one of the trickiest things about the Manson Family: as soon as one determines that their crimes might actually have been political, elements that fall perversely short of politics conspicuously stick out; but when one decides that the crimes were pathological—or pathologically apocalyptic—political elements stupidly stare one in the face, for example, in Keith's aforementioned summing up of Manson's motive: "To foment black revolution and direct a blow against the establishment." This is also why the story of the Manson murders can continue to fascinate the American public and remains available for endless recycling in popular culture: it stitches together the most modern phenomena (e.g., hippies, hallucinogens, Hollywood) into a "bizarre" criminal patchwork but reverberates with sense that derives from much deeper, much older, even eternal and immutable, human concerns with being in time. *Helter Skelter*, in other words, is art. Whether it is also true is another story. The way to begin to finally and seriously evaluate its history and its relevance, in any case, is to focus on an element that is common to and characteristic of both terrorism and millenarianism, namely a hyperconscious concern with being in and acting on time. In exposing Manson Family time as an exceptional example of an extremely radical but historically recurrent presentism, this chapter pursues in intensified form the overall aim of this volume, *Power and Time*, to undo the standard categories of present, past, and future.



That the prosecution's case was underpinned by the logic of millenarianism—indeed, by the eschatology of its most revolutionary variant¹³—is less surprising than that elements of terrorism also figure in it. Bugliosi famously argued that the Bible was half of Manson's formula for Helter Skelter (the other half being the Beatles), and it has been popularly referred to as an "apocalyptic race war" ever since. But again, Bugliosi did not define the Manson Family as a millenarian group (or even as a "cult," which was a standard way to describe the Family from the start).¹⁴ For all the testimony Bugliosi solicited from witnesses to demonstrate the Family's obsession with the book of Revelation and its applicability to contemporary America, his actual concern was to extract from the Family's apocalypticism a sense of Manson's authoritarianism: "Charles Manson is a megalomaniac who had delusions of greatness and hungered for great power. In his warped, frenzied mind helter skelter was going to be the vehicle of death by which he rode to power . . . [and] his

family and particularly he were going to be the ultimate beneficiaries of a black-white war.”¹⁵ The apocalyptic prophet and then activist, in other words, was as much of a mask for the criminal “con man” as was the “peace loving guy” he put on display during the trial.¹⁶

Meanwhile the political motive—the specter of which the prosecution had raised itself by promoting Helter Skelter as a race-war theory—was depoliticized just as Manson’s eschatology was de-eschatologized, namely by reference to his megalomania: “That Manson foresaw a war between the blacks and the whites was not fantastic,” Bugliosi argues in *Helter Skelter*. “Many people believe that such a war may someday occur. What *was* fantastic was that he was convinced he could personally start that war himself.”¹⁷ What Bugliosi called Manson’s “fantastic” conviction that he could personally start Helter Skelter, however, has a very comfortable home in the history of terrorism: rooted in voluntarism, it informs the modus operandi of terrorists, from nineteenth-century Russia’s Narodnaia Volia (The People’s Will) to, apparently, Dylann Roof. There are, moreover, many other elements characteristic of terrorism that make up the history of the Manson murders. Never named as part of a political tradition, they nevertheless reverberate with meaning derived from the history of radicalism, and this meaning is what gives the Helter Skelter narrative its force:

- Manson ordered the murders because he had become “impatient,” a charged term in the history of radicalism that signals voluntarism as well as the ostensibly typical terrorist personality.¹⁸
- The murders meant “to instill fear into the establishment” and “to show black men how to take over the white man,” that is, to terrorize and inspire, terrorism’s typical two-pronged strategy.¹⁹
- The violence serialized and targeted an audience beyond its immediate and random but symbolic victims, namely “the establishment” more generally.²⁰
- The messages that accompanied the murders (e.g., “Pig”) mean this was communicative violence.
- The violence was unprecedented, excessive, extra-normal, and meant to “shock the world,” which is to say that it aimed for a psychological impact.²¹
- The murders meant to intervene in the historical process and trigger a violent conflagration and, eventually, a new time.

The last point essentially underlines once more the voluntarism that animates terrorism and is most important in the context of this anthology. Terrorism is a fundamentally modernist violence typified by what Foucault called “the will to ‘heroize’ the present”: its ethos is to distill from whatever “now” an occasion for its transformation into the “new,” and thereby exalt the ephemeral

to the level of the eternal.²² Terrorism's historical emergence is intimately connected to the sense of historicity that is especially characteristic of the modern age, and its perpetrators tend to be historically hyperconscious: terrorists seek, via violence, either to move history forward faster (e.g., toward revolution), to interrupt it (to puncture a particular hegemony), or otherwise to break free of it entirely (and inaugurate a "new" time).²³

What is peculiar about the Manson Family is that although the Tate-LaBianca murderers sought to intervene in the historical process, they seem to have simultaneously had no historical consciousness at all; or perhaps it is more correct to say that theirs was an antihistorical consciousness. For the Family, historical time was something to overcome and do away with: as Susan Atkins summed up near the end of the trial: "So many people have sat up here and say they don't relate to time. I have stepped out of time. You are all lost in time. I have stepped out of it."²⁴ The Manson Family was not historically hyperconscious in the way radicals and revolutionaries tend to be during momentous periods, such as were the 1960s. Members of the Students for a Democratic Society, the Youth International Party, the Weather Underground, and the Black Panther Party all experienced this decade as one in which they could "seize the time" (as the title of Bobby Seale's memoir has it) and make history, and this was for them an exhilarating experience.²⁵ The Family likewise believed that it was living in a historically unique moment—"We were living in the last few months, weeks, perhaps days, of the old order," Watson wrote retrospectively²⁶—but precisely because, on account of their violent interventions and the subsequent apocalypse, time would eventually cease and history be unmade. Thus, one thing a focus on the relation between terror and temporality in the Manson Family brings into relief is the place where political and religious radicalism converge, although with respect to historical time, it is also where these traditions diverge. A related peculiarity, from the perspective of political radicalism, is this: unlike most terrorists, who in fact do not have a great deal to say about terror, for Manson, terrorism—though he never used that term and always only spoke of "fear"—was a real ideology, and it was directly linked to his ideas on time. Most simply, it can be summed up as such: because sociohistorical time is a construct, it must be deconstructed and then done away with, and the most effective way to do so is through terror.



In one sense, "Family Time" was not atypical for the era. "Have you heard a song that is popular like right today, where, in part, the language of that song is 'Tomorrow is out of sight and yesterday is gone?'" Manson's lawyer Irving Kanarek asked the psychiatrist Dr. Joel Hochman, who, after repeatedly

interviewing the female defendants, testified that they consistently quoted Manson, including a statement that “everything is now, there is no future, no past.”²⁷ Hochman had not heard the song (which is by Kris Kristofferson), but he agreed with Kanarek that, no, this temporal attitude was “certainly not unique.” Yes, he said, it rather “permeates the youth of our country all the way from Maine to California and from Washington to Florida”; and, yes, it had to do with “the Vietnam War, with the strife that is going on in our country between various groups.”²⁸ Living for today, everyone apparently agreed, was characteristic of a youth culture that was dropping out from a system and society responsible for cutting life short both at home and abroad. But Family Time went further, because Manson essentially led a sustained assault on “clock time”—first to decelerate it, then to eliminate it altogether.

In most of the television interviews he gave during the past half century, Manson did a little musical routine that we might say, somewhat seriously, performs Hartmut Rosa’s dystopian theory of social acceleration: clapping his hands or otherwise creating a beat, Manson says that each time he got out of prison—in the late 1950s, early 1960s, and late 1960s, after time served for a series of minor offenses—popular music had sped up.²⁹ Interviewed by Dr. Joel Fort in preparation for Leslie Van Houten’s 1977 retrial, Manson explained his eventual diagnosis and prescription: “The whole thing is gonna go mad at the pace it’s going. You have to slow it down. That’s what I did. I took the clocks away. I took the TV away.”³⁰ Also in the late 1970s, Watson confirmed that Family Time had its roots in Manson’s direct command: “Charlie never allowed calendars or clocks at Spahn—time meant nothing when you lived in an eternal now.”³¹ In *Helter Skelter*, Bugliosi argued that Manson had established the temporal regime at Spahn Ranch to isolate the Family and create “in this timeless realm a tight little society of his own.”³² But at least initially there were other reasons too. “Man invented time,” Manson told Gregg Jakobson, one of his closest philosophical interlocutors during this period. “The clock is the invention and creation of man. It is a concept.”³³

So Spahn would be devoid of measured time. “All occasions at the ranch are the same,” said Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme, one of many who testified that they wore no watches, had no calendars, and did not pay attention to the days of the week.³⁴ Even those who did not necessarily “follow” Manson were affected because of this setup. As Straight Satan motorcyclist Danny DeCarlo explained: “Because we never had no clocks or calendars up there, so, hell, I didn’t know what time it was. It got dark, light, dark, and that was it. We never listened to a radio; we had no calendar, so one day went along like the next day. I did not know if it was Monday, Wednesday, or Friday.”³⁵ The situation was exacerbated whenever the Family resided in Death Valley: “I can’t

pick you no dates,” said Juan Flynn when asked about the timing of a certain event. “You don’t have no dates up in the mountains, you know. It is just days and nights, you know.”³⁶ Long-term exposure to this ultimately resulted in the obliteration of modern temporal units: “I’m so screwed up,” Van Houten told her lawyer when asked about a certain time. “It was the rainy season,” then added that she “can’t tell months, only seasons.”³⁷

This antichronism eventually also caused severe memory loss among Family members. Said Keith about his client, “It is now very difficult for Leslie to remember dates and time, as time meant nothing to her.”³⁸ Nancy Pitman said in the same vein, “I can’t remember so long ago in such a direct order because, you know, my life, you know, at the ranch, you know, wasn’t filled with time like that.”³⁹ Kasabian simply said, “I wish you wouldn’t ask me time because I don’t know time.”⁴⁰

Although it is fair to see the Family’s refusal to tell time as an effort to set itself apart from “the ones that work from 8:00 to 5:00” and as part of the long history of assaults against “clock time” analyzed by E. P. Thompson and other scholars, of course it also was meant to obfuscate the facts of Family crimes and block efforts by lawyers on both sides to make their case.⁴¹ Fitzgerald, for one, expressed serious frustration with the difficulty of pinning down with any kind of exactitude the evidence given by prosecution witnesses:

And when you would ask them, over and over again, what day?
Well, we didn’t pay any attention to days. One day merged into the next.
Could it have been a Sunday?
Yes, it could have been a Sunday.
A Monday? A Tuesday? A Friday?
Could it have been August?
Yes, it could have been August.
Could it have been July?
Yes, it could have been July.

Exasperated, he concluded: “What can you do to defend against these statements?”⁴² But again, initially, there were other grounds for doing away with measured time, and its absence was experienced as extraordinarily liberating: the timelessness it created was the backdrop to the constant, conscious “changes” that the Family sought to affect.

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“We used to have games when we played, on the movie set,” Manson told Tom Snyder during a 1981 interview. “We would take on different people. I’d be Riff Raff Rackus. And Steve [Grogan] would be John Jones who’d just come in

from Minneapolis who'd drive a truck. And then we'd just take other people and play-act other people, and then we lost track of who we were [laughs]."⁴³ "Magical mystery touring" the Family called it, with reference to the Beatles' 1967 record: they would play pirates, cowboys or rich folks, bikers and biker girls, an English maid or servant to the queen.⁴⁴ Said Squeaky, "[A magical mystery tour] is making the best that could possibly be made of every single day and letting yourself be whatever creature you feel like being."⁴⁵

As with the Family's refusal to tell time, magical mystery touring did also have a more tactical purpose for those living on the margins of society. Quoting Manson during his testimony for the prosecution, Brooks Poston said: "Put it on to keep the man from bothering you. Become something else, don't get stuck in one person; be something else."⁴⁶ Fitzgerald, for the defense, acknowledged the same about this shiftiness: members of the Family changed their names to avoid police harassment, but he emphasized that it was also because "they made a conscious effort to assume a new identity," and he called the frequent name changes "humorously poetic."⁴⁷

"We dressed differently each day," Atkins told the grand jury. "[We] were each a different person every day of our lives. Three, four, five different people. Changes. Changes. Not backward, not forward. Just changes. Changed faces, changed names, changed clothing, changed expressions. Just live every day for every day."⁴⁸ Watson wrote several years later: "The Family lived in the present, the moment and its fancies, not questioning where we'd come from, who we'd been. If one day one suddenly changed his or her name (as many of the girls did more than once) and took on a new personality, then you just rode with it."⁴⁹

The Manson Family's real devotion was thus to being in what they called "the now," although the expected Augustinian paradox—"If you do not ask me what time is, I know. If you ask me, I do not know"—occurs when one looks for definitions of this temporal unit. One of Atkins's statements is exemplary: "Now is now. Now is everything that ever was, ever will be. Right now. It is now."⁵⁰ The now therefore has to be approached in a more roundabout way, via duration. Squeaky's reference to "an aesthetic experience" in answer to a question about Manson's "philosophy of life" indicates that what "the now" is about is a kind of authenticity that enables a heroization of the present:

Each moment is different. You have to live by the circumstances surrounding each moment, as much as you put out is whatever you get. . . . Oh, yeah, [Manson] was always happy, always, and it was like—he had no frame of reference. He moved—like if there was a path—he lived for the moment, he moved,

like that if there was a path on the road, sometimes instead of going over the path—this was in the woods—we would go over the branches and through the undertunnels, and the thickets and things, and things. . . . And it's, what is it, an aesthetic experience. . . . Every minute was a different experience. Every minute was something I had never experienced before.⁵¹

The fact that this description calls forth the spirit of a situationist *dérive* should remind us that in all this there is overlap not just with 1960s counterculture broadly speaking, but rather more specifically with its avant-garde, in California groups such as the Diggers (whose name referenced the seventeenth-century English Diggers, religious radicals sometimes seen as protoanarchist) and farther east, the cinephiles surrounding director John Waters, who retrospectively wrote that he instantly detected an uncanny resemblance between his own film crew and the Manson Family.⁵² The Diggers were actually active in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district when Manson arrived there following his 1967 prison release, and he has on occasion mentioned them, although only with regard to their "free" events, such as the free-food movement.⁵³ But minus the violence—the Diggers were explicitly opposed to armed revolution—the Diggers and the Manson Family had a great deal in common. Especially relevant with respect to Family Time is the Diggers' concept of "life-acting"—adopted from their earlier incarnation as the San Francisco Mime Troupe—a "guerrilla theater" practice that actively sought to tear down the boundaries between art and life. The "life-actor" was someone who "consciously creates the role he or she plays in everyday, offstage life."⁵⁴ It meant a dedication to a "life . . . lived in a consistently improvisational manner."⁵⁵ This had a temporal aspect, necessitating a move away from a "predictable future, into the playful possibilities of existing spontaneously in the perpetual present."⁵⁶ It is possible, therefore, to underline the strong similarity between the Diggers' "life-acting" and "perpetual present" and the Manson Family's "playacting" and "eternal now." In the Family's case, however, this "presentism" was underwritten and consciously molded by Manson's very long prison experience, which eventually gave it a very different edge from the Diggers' time.

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Manson spent the last fifty years of his life in prison, and many of his statements about time are from those years, which he lived in solitary confinement, in protective units, or under psychiatric observation. However, when Manson met those who would become the Family in 1967, he had also already spent more than half of his life behind bars—some twenty years—and his

understanding of time, back then, was in fact the same as it ever was since. Indeed, for someone whose followers insisted that he was never the same, and who prided himself on always being “brand new,” Manson was extraordinarily consistent when it came to his understanding of time and history.⁵⁷

To grasp Manson’s understanding of time, it is necessary to note that Manson is first of all always-already dead. “He used to say he was already dead. ‘I’m dead. I died a long time ago,’” said Jakobson.⁵⁸ Manson told the court this very thing: “You want to kill me, ha, I’m already dead, have been all my life,” and “You killed me years ago.”⁵⁹ Specifically, Manson’s lifetime ended in the early 1950s: “I’ve been dead since 1951. . . . I died [in] solitary confinement.”⁶⁰ No evidence exists to explain what exactly happened in 1951, but for a general sense of how Manson experienced solitary confinement, we can look to a petition for a writ of habeas corpus he filed in early 1970. Manson was seeking a release from LA Men’s Central Jail’s section 2904, “the hole,” where he had been placed for a minor infraction, and he used the occasion to launch a general critique of the prison’s disciplinary techniques, above all of solitary confinement, which he wrote men “leave with a heart that only knows fear.”⁶¹ This is important, and I return to it later.

So time, as it is conventionally understood, did not exist for Manson. There are countless examples, but here are just a few taken from various moments between 1970 and 2000. The first comes from a 1989 interview on the talk show *Geraldo*:

GERALDO RIVERA: Tell ‘em [the people] what your day is like here [in prison].

CHARLES MANSON: I don’t have a day. I just live in one day.⁶²

Relatedly, during a 1997 parole hearing, the board tells Manson, “I notice that in the most recent ‘Future Plans’ . . . it says, ‘Manson offers no plans for his future.’” Manson then interrupts, “I don’t have a future . . . I never had a future.”⁶³ And most explicitly, from a 1994 interview, “I don’t think in time,”⁶⁴ which is similar to something Manson said during his 1971 defense speech: “I have never lived in time. When your mind is not in time, the whole thought is different.”⁶⁵ “See, you gotta consider,” says Manson during a radio interview with the Berkeley radio station KALX in 1985, “Thirty-six years in jail is a long time. . . . Some people can’t survive a year in jail; they’d go crazy. . . . I have sat for fifteen years, looking at the wall, with the cockroaches. Just sit there. I don’t read books. I don’t watch TV. I don’t listen to radio.”⁶⁶ Seeing a similarity with the temporal regime at Spahn Ranch seems inescapable—“We never listened to a radio; we had no calendar, so one day went along like the next day”—and to this point, too, I return.

Manson's time in prison appears as a timeless present. Asked if the years 1967–1969, which he spent in society, were “the best time of his life,” he said they were the “only time” he ever had.⁶⁷ This is also why Manson always referred to himself as a “child”: “I never grew up,” he says. “I never lived in your society. I never went to school. I never had a mother and father.”⁶⁸ On the outside, things move along and ever faster, but inside prison, historical time simply stops. Of course on one level this is not at all true: for one thing, prisons have an ever-renewing population of inmates with distinct cultural backgrounds that create different eras, and Manson's own statements testify to the fact that he was subject to their influences, from mobsters like Frank Costello and Frankie Carbo during the 1950s to Black Muslims during the 1960s. But on another level, it seems obvious that the prison functions as a kind of historical zero hour inside of which nothing ever happens—except, as Manson has it, “people getting killed all the time.”⁶⁹ Prison is thus not just any timeless present but a kind of ahistorical, Hobbesian jungle, and it is a space that forces a permanent being-toward-death: “In the penitentiary, you live with it, with constant fear of death, because it is a violent world in there, so you have to be on your toes constantly.”⁷⁰ This is also what informs the following exchange between journalist Charlie Rose and Manson in 1986:

ROSE: Last question. When you're gonna meet your God, and . . . you're down to those last few, remaining breaths . . .

MANSON: *God*, I've lived *my whole life* right in that spot.

ROSE: OK, so if it all ended tomorrow . . .

MANSON: It all, it *did* end tomorrow.

ROSE: All right, suppose it ends tomorrow for some reason . . .

MANSON: It does.⁷¹

Electrified by fear of death, each moment is equally the last. Yes, also equally full—“Oh yeah, he was always happy”—but rooted in terror.



The Manson Family was animated by an explicit ideology of terror. Obviously, fear was part of their sociopolitical program. On a small scale, for example, Manson hoped to recruit various motorcycle gangs to join the Family in “terrorizing society” and to “throw some fear into the world.”⁷² More grandly, the purpose of the murders, according to Atkins's testimony, was “to instill fear in Man himself, the Establishment. That's what it was done for. To instill fear—to cause paranoia.”⁷³

But as already indicated, fear was not all bad; because it prepares, readies, and calls you to account, fear also had a positive function. “To Charlie fear was the same as awareness,” Family breakaway Paul Watkins told Bugliosi. “The more fear you have, the more awareness. . . . When you’re really afraid, you come to ‘Now.’ And when you are at Now, you are totally conscious.”⁷⁴ The best existing evidence that Manson systematically promoted this view comes from testimony given by Bernard “Lotsapoppa” Crowe, because Crowe met Manson only once—during an altercation that led to Manson’s shooting him—and knew nothing about Family life, but still he came away remembering that Manson had said, “Fear through awareness is where it’s at, or awareness through fear.”⁷⁵ Apparently Manson argued that the best models for a way of being that linked fear and awareness were babies, who, according to him, were born in fear, but even more, animals, and the coyote above all: “The coyote . . . hears every sound, smells every smell, sees everything that moves. He’s always in a state of total paranoia and total paranoia is total awareness.”⁷⁶

To attain this total awareness, Manson confronted Family members with their fears to become free of them and/or to come to now. “Fear games,” as Watkins put it.⁷⁷ The Family would race dune buggies along the narrowest of mountain passes,⁷⁸ or, more famously, “creepy crawl,” that is, sneak into and around people’s houses, “just for the experience of getting the fear and bringing ourselves to now.”⁷⁹ Said Atkins, “Since I met Charlie, all my fears have gone.”⁸⁰ She had “reached a stage where nothing shocked her any more” and, after the murders, claimed to have felt nothing.⁸¹ About the night of the Tate murders, she said: “I was at the height of my fear. . . . My fear was just my awareness. I was aware of everything that was going on . . . and it was right.”⁸² Right—but not easy: Manson himself, according to Van Houten, used to say: “I see too much; I see what’s happening, and I don’t want it; I don’t want to be in this position. He’d say ‘I wish that someone else would.’”⁸³ As is well known, someone else did (Manson himself did not participate in the murders).

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“But by no means,” Van Houten naïvely told her lawyer, “by no means were we ever prejudiced or disliked the black, you know. It’s not that way at all. If anything, it’s we have love for them, and we’re giving them their turn, which they deserve.”⁸⁴ Racial prejudice in the Manson Family is too complex to address in the space of this short text—suffice it to say that things were more paradoxical than is generally thought—but the reason to briefly raise it at this point is to emphasize its connection with the matter of being “aware” and “right” and “seeing too much,” to explain, in short, why Family Time eventually necessitated a violent intervention in history in order to unleash Helter Skelter.

As already indicated by Van Houten's "we have love for them," there is some evidence that at least some of the Family understood their views on race to be politically progressive. Naturally shaped by the decade's various civil rights struggles, these views were ultimately legitimized by reference to Manson's extensive experiences in the penitentiary, where, as Lynette Fromme put it, "he grew up with Chicanos and black men and some white men, not as many."⁸⁵ Van Houten, Sandra Good, Catherine Share, and Nancy Pitman all delivered variations on the general theme that in prison Manson had known "black" and "brown" and "everybody that's down," and that "they would talk to him a lot . . . about, you know, what they were going to do someday. . . . They were going to, you know, break loose from their chains."⁸⁶ Fromme insisted that Manson did not hate black people, and when asked if he ever said that white people were going to kill blacks, she shot back, incredulous: "Were going to? That is all I have to say, you know, we understand what they've been through."⁸⁷ It was this understanding that ultimately required voluntarism, because, according to Van Houten, the Family had "tried talking to leaders, you know, black leaders, and we saw that they were stalling."⁸⁸ And this meant that someone else had to step up: "We didn't want to go out and actually like do somebody in, but it had, it had to be done; and we were the only ones that saw that it had to be done. . . . It had to be done just in order for the whole thing to be completed, for the whole world's karma to be completed we had to do this."⁸⁹ What the Family understood by "complete the world's karma" was perhaps most simply formulated by Juan Flynn: Helter Skelter, he said, was "a revolution in order, you see, to balance, you know, what the white man had done to the Black man."⁹⁰ The Family, though, radicalized by its hyperconscious historicity to the point of being willing and able to commit violence, saw their efforts to unleash a revolution less as "making history" or "seizing the time"—as contemporary radicals saw their own efforts—than as executing historical time as part of what Van Houten called "the plan that we have no control of."⁹¹



The plan, it is known, Manson read out of the book of Revelation, which he could quote verbatim, and interpreted via the Beatles, so that the end of times became Helter Skelter, which the Family would wait out in the "bottomless pit" and whence it would emerge to rule the millennium. Although it should be said that in terms of religion, the Manson Family, and Manson himself especially, was in fact much too eclectic to be bound by Christian apocalypticism, and if other influences are taken into account, the Family picture of the end of time becomes blurrier.

“Karma,” for one, is actually a much more prominent rhetorical tic among Family members than “revelation”—as in Van Houten’s “we’re giving them their turn” and Flynn’s “balance, you know, what the white man had done to the Black man”—and the influence of “Indian philosophy” is likewise noticeable in Manson’s conviction that death does not matter, that when the body dies, the spirit either ascends to a higher plane or returns to the earth, reincarnated.⁹² Such beliefs easily fused with Christian apocalyptics, which traditionally features the resurrection of martyrs during the millennium, such that the Family could be, as Manson allegedly told Watkins, the reincarnations of the original Christians.⁹³ The extraordinary prevalence of the term “now” in Family discourse, meanwhile, has been traced to Scientology, which Manson studied while he was in McNeil Island Corrections Center.⁹⁴ There was also what may be called a pagan strand: Manson called the girls “witches,” had them put “magical witchy things” in the trees around Spahn Ranch to scare off trespassers, and, famously, told the four Tate murderers to leave “something witchy” at the scene of the crime.⁹⁵ Relatedly, Manson associated himself with “the altars of the druids” and, most frequently, Abraxas, which we might see as the official name he came to give to his belief that humans are both—or beyond—good and evil.⁹⁶ In sum, as Jakobson put it during an interview with Bugliosi, Manson “borrowed from whatever religion.”⁹⁷ When all these borrowings are combined, it makes for a strange temporal concatenation. Let us take a closer look at just one important example, the “bottomless pit,” where the Family would wait out Helter Skelter for “about fifty years [and then] come back up.”⁹⁸

As Jakobson explained during the trial, the Family’s ideas about the pit were graphed onto the idea of a subterranean paradise of Native American traditions: “Much of it has to do with many thousand year old Hopi Indian legends, and the Hopi Indians, and many of the tribes, believe to this day—they don’t talk much of it—that there are an underground people living there now, and they left and began living underground thousands of years ago where was once a lake and is now Death Valley, the lake dried up and there is talk of great caverns and underground water, and even of finally reaching a spiritual point or a point in life where you can live and sustain yourself without food.”⁹⁹ Now take the following statement by Van Houten, explaining the Family’s beliefs about its Helter Skelter hideout: “We knew that we were parts of this Revolutions—of the Revelations in the Bible. We knew that we had a part in it. And so we read, and it talked about a hole in the desert or going to the Kingdom.”¹⁰⁰ She goes on: “And we were—we had a good idea that it was in the Death Valley area, but we weren’t sure just where. . . . And then once we got to the center [of the earth] we’d be tiny, and everything would be great big,

magnified, like the pearls. It talks about the pearls. There'd be giant pearls, and we'd be just little tiny, about maybe five inches compared to everything else."¹⁰¹ Van Houten was mixing things up: real life, Revelation, and maybe some Lewis Carroll, too. The Family had in fact found the entrance to Devils Hole, which is a cavern, or many caverns, located in Death Valley National Park, but it is extremely hazardous to explore, and the Family never did.¹⁰² And there is indeed a "bottomless pit" in Revelation, but rather than being the entry to the center of the earth and/or the kingdom, really it is a kind of "devil's hole," whence emerge "smoke like the smoke of a great furnace" and "locusts" (Revelation 9:1-3). So the kingdom is not in the bottomless pit but on "a great, high mountain." The bits about pearls and gold the Family had right, though: "The holy city of Jerusalem"—for this is the kingdom—has gates that are "twelve pearls" and the whole of the city is indeed "pure gold, clear as glass" (Revelation 21:10-21). Further, Van Houten's narrative also included the idea that "some of the Montezuma people are already under there waiting for us."¹⁰³ And finally, there was of course her revealing (and recurrent, in this interview) slip between "Revolutions" and "Revelations."

This narrative jumble—into the Devils Hole but also down the rabbit hole, toward a pit that is "bottomless" and yet a "center," meeting Aztecs, and maybe some Hopis too, and all this because "we knew we were parts of the Revolutions, of the Revelations"—should make clear that it is not so easy to insist that the Family had but one way of understanding "the plan that we have no control of." Baffled, Leslie's lawyer asked about their post-Helter Skelter plans, "Well, first of all, wouldn't you be old?" "No," said she. "We wouldn't be old, because we wouldn't age. Because to go into the hole, you would have to be perfect in your mind and in your body."¹⁰⁴

"Perfect in your mind and in your body," one presumes, meant that you had to be perfectly in the now, which is to say devoid of clock time and not in history, and not stuck in one person, meaning very good at magical mystery touring. In other words, Family Time prepared one not only for committing violence but also for surviving Helter Skelter by living in the hole—as well as in "the hole." It is difficult to avoid this tragic connection, the sense that the Family's millenarian imaginary was grafted not on a Native American utopian tradition, but rather, or also, on Manson's experience of solitary confinement, whence men "leave with a heart that only knows fear" and where he "died." It also makes one wonder, given the war of all against all that is the state of nature in prison, whether it isn't actually leaving the hole, rather than being in it, that terrorizes the heart, which might suggest that the hole functions analogously in prison's timeless present and history's end times, as an escape hatch from "people getting killed all the time."

Although let's be fair, for who but Manson, in this context, really knows what being in the hole for that long is like? Which is also why his temporal pronouncements had such authority for the Family, because Manson had died and yet survived the hole, evidently to the point of rooting his identity: Dr. Hochman testified that Atkins, Krenwinkel, and Van Houten repeatedly said about Manson that "he was like an empty or open hole," a reference to Manson's apparently frequent self-identification as "a hole in the infinite," which was also how he understood Christ: "A hole in the infinite that love poured out of."¹⁰⁵ With this identification, though, came an erasure of agency, so that it is not Manson who speaks or acts but Manson through whom is spoken or done. "Charlie," said Atkins. "I don't even like to say Charlie, I'd like to say the words came from his mouth that helter-skelter was to be the last war on the face of the earth."¹⁰⁶ Something similar emerged from the following exchange between Bugliosi and Watkins during the trial:

BUGLIOSI: Did Charlie tell you that he was going to cause this revolution that was going to occur?

WATKINS: Yes.

BUGLIOSI: He didn't, then, purport to be a prophet who was simply saying that a revolution was going to occur.

WATKINS: No. He said the soul was working through him and that he was just sort of hung there, and that he had to do it.

...

BUGLIOSI: He had to do what?

WATKINS: He had to bring it down.

Bugliosi then drew out the implication: "Not only did Manson feel that he had to show Blackie how to do it, he actually felt he had an historical duty, an historical duty, in addition, to do so."¹⁰⁷ This feeling of historical duty, in Bugliosi's view, was evidence of Manson's criminal—not clinical, for that would have meant a legal insanity loophole—megalomania. And there was that. But what rooted the logic of this "historical duty" was a diachronic revolutionary millenarianism that intersected with, as always it does, synchronic political radicalism, a timeless tradition crashing onto the shores of history.

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The Family was able to intervene in history precisely because it had stepped out of time, its presentist perspective—like prison's zero hour—securing that singular vantage point necessary for measuring an historic acceleration headed toward a collision with karma. Van Houten—clearly ventriloquizing

Manson's musical rendition of the modern world, but rooting this modernity in the power of the past—summed up the Family's judgment: "Like, we—we being the white man—have put out a lot of pressures on other groups, like the Indians when we first came over, and the slavery on the black man. And we're going to get it back, and the time has come to get it back because the cities and everything is moving at such a high speed that it's going to break."¹⁰⁸ But when it didn't break and seemed like it never would—"they were stalling"—it was time to put the clocks away and stop counting days: "Now is the time for Helter Skelter."

The Tate-LaBianca murders were a fear game the Family played with the establishment, an attempt to shock the world into the now so that everyone would become aware of everything that was going on beneath the construct of historical time, "everything" being first and foremost a war that had always already been killing black and brown and everybody that's down. This revelation would transform the situation into what some see as the "high points of politics"—those moments demanding decisions that distinguish between friend and foe—and that would unleash Helter Skelter: "You can't conceive of what it would be like to see every man judge himself and then take it out on every other man all over the face of the earth," in Atkins's words.¹⁰⁹ By then, though, the Family would be long gone, disappeared down the hole—future perfect.

Notes

1. Linda Kasabian testimony, Los Angeles District Attorney (LADA) Manson Transcripts, case 253156, box 2, vol. 30, p. 4979. Hereafter, citations to the transcripts generally reference only box, volume, and page numbers.

2. Susan Atkins grand jury testimony, box 1, vol. 9048, pp. 69 and 81.

3. For "slippies," as opposed to "hippies," see Paul Watkins, with Guillermo Soledad, *My Life with Charles Manson* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 47.

4. "Arrests Made in Tate Case," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1969, retrieved from *Los Angeles Times (1923–Current File)*, ProQuest.

5. For "impatient," see Pre-Trial Reporter's Transcripts on Appeal to the California Supreme Court, box 14, vol. 3015, p. 4493; Vincent Bugliosi final argument, box 5, vol. 169, p. 21340. For "I want to show," see Bugliosi argument to the jury, box 5, vol. 155, p. 18966. Bugliosi is most likely quoting Linda Kasabian here, but the volume in which this part of her testimony occurs was not made available by LADA. Also Bugliosi quoting Diane Lake's trial testimony, box 5, vol. 155, p. 19055. Also Juan Flynn trial testimony, box 3, vol. 103, p. 11833.

6. Bugliosi final summation, box 14, vol. 3093, p. 27745.

7. This recent academic exception proves the rule: Jeffrey Melnick, *Creepy Crawling: Charles Manson and the Many Lives of America's Most Infamous Family* (New York: Arcade, 2018). The following revisionists—notably, none of whom is a professional historian—have begun to challenge the official narrative. See Nikolas Schreck, *The Manson File: The Manson File Myth and Reality of an Outlaw Shaman* (n.p.: World Operations, 2011); George Stimson, *Goodbye Helter*

Skelter. A New Look at the Tate-LaBianca Murders (Cobb, CA: Peasenhall Press, 2014); Tom O’Neill, with Dan Piepenbring, *Chaos: Charles Manson, the CIA and the Secret History of the Sixties* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 2019); Ivor Davis, *Manson Exposed: A Reporter’s 50-Year Journey into Madness and Murder* (n.p.: Cockney Kid Publishing, 2019); Neil Sanders, *Now Is the Only Thing That’s Real: A Re-examination of the Manson Murders, Motives and Mythos* (Nottingham: Number Six Dance Publishing, 2017); Buddy James Day, *Hippie Cult Leader: The Last Words of Charles Manson* (Montreal: Optimum Publishing International, 2019).

8. Charles Older exchange with Bugliosi, box 3, vol. 87, p. 10390.
9. Keith direct examination of defense witness Dr. Keith S. Ditman, box 6, vol. 193, p. 25298.
10. See, e.g., Vincent Bugliosi with Curt Gentry, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994), 217 and 401 for “senseless,” and 218, 226, 245, 312, and 401, 482, and 494 for “bizarre”; Bugliosi, box 2, vol. 29, p. 4813; box 5, vol. 156, pp. 19197 and 19206.
11. Paul Fitzgerald argument for the defendants, box 5, vol. 156, p. 19316.
12. Fitzgerald.
13. On revolutionary millenarianism, see Norman Cohn’s classic *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).
14. When “cult” appears in *Helter Skelter*, it is either as a quotation from media sources or in reference to the celebration of Manson in popular culture. See, e.g., Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter*, 165, 340, and 492.
15. Bugliosi final argument, box 5, vol. 169, p. 21340.
16. Bugliosi final argument, box 5, vol. 168, pp. 21293 and 21295.
17. Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter*, 218.
18. For “impatient” in Bugliosi’s arguments, see Pre-Trial Reporter’s Transcripts on Appeal to the California Supreme Court, box 14, vol. 3015, p. 4493; Bugliosi final argument, box 5, vol. 169, p. 21340. For a discussion of “impatience” in the literature on terrorism, see Claudia Verhoeven, “Time of Terror, Terror of Time: On the Impatience of Russian Revolutionary Terrorism,” in “Terrorism in Imperial Russia: New Perspectives,” special issue, *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas* 58, no. 2 (2010): 254–73.
19. Atkins Grand Jury testimony, box 1, vol. 9048, p. 81; Bugliosi quoting Susan Atkins back to herself during the trial (from a conversation held on December 4, 1969), box 14, vol. 3079, p. 23481.
20. Watson claimed that, originally, the plan was to murder a third night, and a fourth, and so on, “until blacks or white would take matters in hand and Helter Skelter would begin.” Tex Watson as told to Chaplain Ray Hoekstra, *Will You Die for Me? The Man Who Killed for Charles Manson Tells His Own Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1978), 151.
21. Atkins Grand Jury testimony, box 1, vol. 9048, p. 69. See also note 2 in this chapter.
22. Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 40.
23. Claudia Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 6, 7, and 174, and passim; Claudia Verhoeven, “Oh Times, There Is No Time (but the Time That Remains): The Terrorist in Russian Literature, 1863–1913,” in *Terrorism and Narrative Practice*, ed. Thomas Austenfeld, Dimitter Daphinoff, and Jens Herlth (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), 117–35; and especially “Time Bombs: Terrorism as a Political Modernism in Europe and Russia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism*, ed. Carola Dietze and Claudia Verhoeven (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

24. Atkins cross-examined by Fitzgerald, box 14, vol. 3078, p. 23359.
25. For example, see George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (1970; Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994), 70 and 265.
26. Watson, *Will You Die*, 93–94.
27. Irving Kanarek cross-examination of Dr. Joel Hochman, box 6, vol. 198, p. 26198.
28. Dr. Joel Hochman cross-examined by Kanarek, box 6, vol. 198, p. 26198.
29. Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
30. “Charles Manson interviewed by Dr. Joel Fort” (March, 1977). The interview was conducted in preparation for Leslie Van Houten’s 1977 retrial. LADA Manson audio vol. 1 of 2, envelope 4 ex 518a cassette (77-1347).wav; also available on Cielodrive.com, posted August 3, 2015, at <http://www.cielodrive.com/updates/charlie-manson-interviewed-by-joel-fort/>.
31. Watson, *Will You Die*, 75.
32. Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter*, 484.
33. Gregg Jakobson trial testimony, box 4, vol. 129, pp. 14081–83 and 14090.
34. Lynette Fromme trial testimony, box 6, vol. 176, p. 22328 and box 6, vol. 175, p. 22242. Also, e.g., Ruth Ann Moorehouse testimony before the grand jury, box 1, vol. 9048, p. 351; Stephanie Schram trial testimony, box 5, vol. 159, p. 19786; Kasabian trial testimony, box 2, vol. 36, 5585–86.
35. Danny DeCarlo trial testimony, box 3, vol. 90, p. 10676.
36. Juan Flynn trial testimony, box 3, vol. 105, p. 12,033.
37. “Leslie Van Houten interviewed by Marvin Part” (December 29, 1969). LADA Manson audio vol. 1 of 2, A253156 envelope 3 ex 501 (77-1317) van houten int 1969.wav. Transcript available at Cielodrive.com, posted May 28, 2015, at <http://www.cielodrive.com/updates/leslie-van-houten-interviewed-by-marvin-part/>.
38. Keith examination of Dr. Keith Ditman, box 6, vol. 193, p. 25294.
39. Nancy Pitman trial testimony, box 14, vol. 3076, p. 22725.
40. Kasabian trial testimony, box 14, vol. 30, p. 4971.
41. DeCarlo trial testimony, box 6, vol. 193, p. 10884; E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 56–97, esp. 81–82.
42. Fitzgerald argument to the jury, box 5, vol. 157, pp. 19485, 19434–35.
43. Tom Snyder, interview with Manson, *Tomorrow Show* (1981), available at Mansondirect.com under “Interviews.”
44. Kanarek argument (penalty), quoting Van Houten, box 6, vol. 204, p. 27372; Pitman trial testimony, box 6, vol. 176, p. 22285; Van Houten trial testimony, box 6, vol. 193, p. 25294; Atkins trial testimony, box 14, vol. 3077, p. 23033.
45. Fromme trial testimony, box 6, vol. 176, p. 22283.
46. Brooks Poston trial testimony, box 4, vol. 136, p. 15537.
47. Fitzgerald argument to the jury, box 5, vol. 157, pp. 19480–81.
48. Lawrence Schiller, *The Killing of Sharon Tate: With the Exclusive Story of the Crime by Susan Atkins* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 93.
49. Watson, *Will You Die*, 61.
50. Atkins trial testimony, box 14, vol. 3079, pp. 23411–12.
51. Fromme trial testimony, box 6, vol. 176, pp. 22311, 22263, and 22266.
52. For similarities, see Peter Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall: A Chronicle* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1998), 73, 95–96, 109, 131–32, 182, 243, and 295; John Waters, “Leslie,” *Role Models* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011), 46, 49–50, 52, and 60.

53. See, e.g., Steve Alexander's 1970 interview with Manson in *Tuesday's Child*, available at Mansondirect.com under "Interviews," <http://www.mansondirect.com/tuesdayschild.html>. On the Diggers' free-food movement, see Coyote, *Sleeping*, 70–71.

54. Coyote, *Sleeping*, 33.

55. Coyote, 66.

56. Coyote, 21.

57. Squeaky, qtd. in Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter*, 162 and 340; Schiller, *The Killing*, 94; and interview with Manson, *Geraldo* (1989). The Geraldo interview is available at Mansondirect.com.

58. Gregg Jakobson interviewed by Deputy District Attorney Vincent Bugliosi (February 2, 1970). LADA Manson audio vol. 1 of 2, Manson-70-181 greg jacobson-bugliosi-7 inch reel to reel.wav and Manson-70-192-greg jobson-bugliosi-7-20-70-7 inch reel.wav; also available at Cielodrive.com, posted January 30, 2013, at <http://www.cielodrive.com/updates/gregg-jakobson-vincent-bugliosi-interview-three/>.

59. Charles Manson defense speech, box 4, vol. 151, p. 18130 and p. 18170.

60. Nikolaus Schreck, interview with Manson (1989), available at Mansondirect.com under "Interviews."

61. Charles Manson, Petition for a Writ of Habeas Corpus v. Peter J. Pitchess, Sheriff, and People of the State of California, February 11, 1970, box 15, vol. 4001, pp. 194–95.

62. Geraldo Rivera, interview with Manson, *Geraldo* (1989).

63. Charles Manson Parole Hearing 1997, YouTube video, posted by E. P. James MacAdams, August 26, 2015, 57:10, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=E-qWLIER1N0>.

64. Bill Murphy, interview with Manson, BBC (1994), available at Mansondirect.com under "Interviews."

65. Charles Manson defense speech, box 4, vol. 151, p. 18160.

66. Charles Manson interview with KALX Radio, February 27, 1985, YouTube video, posted by FatHawaiian Man, August 2, 2012, 1:10:07, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpT04HqeiZg>.

67. Charlie Rose, interview with Manson, *Nightwatch* (1986), available at Mansondirect.com under "Interviews."

68. Penny Daniels, interview with Manson, *Inside Story Miami* (1987), available at Mansondirect.com under "Interviews."

69. Bill Murphy, interview with Manson, BBC (1994).

70. Manson defense speech, box 4, vol. 151, p. 18141.

71. Charlie Rose, interview with Manson, *Nightwatch* (1986).

72. Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter*, 101, 96.

73. Schiller, *The Killing*, 110.

74. Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter*, 238. Watkins's testimony is not included in the files provided by LADA, but for similar statements, see Watkins's *My Life*, 39 and 55.

75. Bernard Crowe trial testimony, box 6, vol. 171, p. 21722.

76. Ed Sanders, *The Family* (1971; New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002), 89.

77. Watkins, *My Life*, 156, 158, 160, 162.

78. "Gregg Jakobson interviewed by Vincent Bugliosi" (February 2, 1970).

79. Bugliosi, quoting Atkins as interviewed by Richard Caballero during re-cross-examination of Caballero, box 14, vol. 3087, p. 26056.

80. Schiller, *The Killing*, 91.

81. Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter*, 95.

82. Atkins trial testimony, box 14, vol. 3078, p. 23351.

83. "Leslie Van Houten interviewed by Marvin Part" (December 29, 1969).
84. Van Houten interview by Marvin Part.
85. Fromme trial testimony, box 6, vol. 176, p. 22272.
86. Catherine Share trial testimony, box 14, vol. 3076, p. 22753.
87. Fromme trial testimony, box 6, vol. 176, p. 22273.
88. "Leslie Van Houten interviewed by Marvin Part" (December 29, 1969).
89. Van Houten interview by Marvin Part.
90. Flynn trial testimony, box 3, vol. 103, p. 11,842.
91. Van Houten interview by Marvin Part, December 29, 1969.
92. "Gregg Jakobson interviewed by Vincent Bugliosi" (February 20, 1970).
93. Cohn, *Pursuit*, 15–36; Vincent Bugliosi quoting Paul Watkins testimony, box 5, vol. 156, pp. 19181–82.
94. Sanders, *The Family*, 8–10. The Scientology expression is in fact "present time," not "Now." See, e.g., L. Ron Hubbard, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950; Commerce, CA: Bridge Publications, 2007), 295.
95. Jakobson trial testimony, box 4, vol. 130, p. 14155; Bugliosi examination of Kasabian, box 2, vol. 29, p. 4855; and Kasabian trial testimony, box 2, vol. 30, p. 5000.
96. For example, Nikolas Schreck, interview with Manson (1989).
97. "Gregg Jakobson interviewed by Vincent Bugliosi" (February 20, 1970).
98. "Van Houten interviewed by Marvin Part" (December 29, 1969).
99. Jakobson trial testimony, box 4, vol. 130, pp. 14223–24.
100. "Van Houten interviewed by Marvin Part" (December 29, 1969).
101. Van Houten interview by Marvin Part.
102. Description of Devils Hole at National Park Service, "Death Valley National Park, CA, NV, Devils Hole," <https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/nature/devils-hole.htm>.
103. "Van Houten Interviewed by Marvin Part" (December 29, 1969).
104. Van Houten interview by Marvin Part.
105. Hochman trial testimony, box 6, vol. 198, p. 26196; Watkins, *My Life*, 47.
106. Atkins grand jury testimony, box 1, vol. 9048, p. 106.
107. Bugliosi quoting Watkins during his argument to jury, box 5, vol. 156, pp. 19181–82.
108. "Van Houten Interviewed by Marvin Part" (December 29, 1969). See also Linda Kasabian trial testimony, box 2, vol. 36, p. 5607; Brooks Poston trial testimony, box 4, vol. 136, p. 15448.
109. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 67; Susan Atkins grand jury testimony, box 1, vol. 9048, pp. 106–7.

PART IV

Speed(s)

Legal Panics, Fast and Slow: Slavery and the Constitution of Empire

LAUREN BENTON AND LISA FORD

The timing and duration of legal cases make up a stock trope in writings on law. Accounts of suffering inflicted by lengthy litigation or appeals are commonplace, and stories of seemingly endless suits rival Jarndyce and Jarndyce in *Bleak House*. Commentary on the pace of justice also can cut the other way, with critics pointing to the injustices resulting from procedural shortcuts (think of plea bargaining) and the unfairness of vigilante-style punishments, whether at the hands of unruly crowds or through the actions of overreaching government officials.

Empires produced an especially rich trove of stories about slow justice.¹ The effects of distance stretched the duration of colonial court cases, sometimes beyond single lifetimes. Perhaps the best-known example is the protracted litigation over the privileges of Christopher Columbus and his heirs in disputes that began in the early sixteenth century and extended sporadically until the end of the eighteenth century.² Slow litigation was so common in European overseas empires that colonial subjects worked to amass paper trails about their actions even before conflicts arose. Many of the commentaries we think of as “voyage chronicles” were penned with legal positioning in mind, and sojourners returning from imperial service routinely gathered depositions and other testimonials, both to advance cases for future patronage and to preempt legal challenges. The slow pace of proceedings could work to political advantage, too, as it did when distance facilitated power grabs; rivals knew that accusations against officials for serious offenses like treason could get those leaders sent home in irons, then see them tied up in lengthy legal machinations to clear their names. The crawling pace of legal actions at times seemed itself to count as punishment.³

Delays of colonial justice could bring physical harm or even death to defendants and others caught up in the proceedings. Prize courts, where cargo and ships were routinely embargoed while cases proceeded, were sites of especially gruesome losses when the cargos included slaves. Captives sickened and died while prize crews transported ships to distant forums.⁴ Waiting in place for adjudication could also prove deadly. A tragic example occurred after a Dutch ship, the *Reimsdyke*, was captured by a British naval vessel at the mouth of the Suriname River in 1803. While the case was being adjudicated, several hundred slaves were confined on the ship, which broke free of its anchor on Christmas night in 1803 and drifted out to sea carrying all but 115 rescued slaves to an uncertain fate.⁵

Swift justice could bring its own dangers and also featured in accounts of imperial ventures. Summary judgments punctuated voyages of reconnaissance and settlement and plagued some established colonies. Captains had the authority to punish sailors after perfunctory inquiries, and they did so often with the explicit goal of instilling fear in their crews. Officials used summary trials and public executions to communicate their authority to indigenous audiences. Even without exercising jurisdiction, local elites could quickly guide the course of justice by ordering military actions, denying access to courts, blocking appeals, or engaging in other, similar tactics that hastened the outcomes they desired. Slaves, again, bore the burdens of swift justice like no one else in empire; masters had the authority to order instant and brutal punishment for the slightest insubordination of their slaves, and even in cases of serious crimes that came before magistrates, short trials and summary judgments were common.

As with jurisdictional complexity, the pace of judicial processes served important administrative functions and altered the character and feel of colonial institutions. A good example is the system for judging the performance of officials in the Spanish empire. Procedures called *residencias* routinely took place when prominent officials, especially governors and viceroys, stepped down; the trials entailed elaborate series of hearings about the record of the outgoing officials. *Residencias* were formal judicial reviews in which royally appointed judges had authority not just to report but also to rule on misconduct. Formally limited to four months for minor officials and six months for viceroys or governors, *residencias* often dragged on for years, sometimes prolonged through the efforts of political rivals. For example, by the time the Council of the Indies had sorted out a controversy over who would conduct the *residencia* of Diego de Salcedo, the first governor of the Philippines, Salcedo had been dead for three years. It took another two years for the dead governor's *residencia* to be completed.⁶

As this and other examples suggest, rather than thinking of legal time as merely a framework for colonial institutions and practices, we should regard it as constitutive of imperial power. Slow and fast colonial justice calibrated metropolitan authority and defined spaces for political maneuvering. The law's uneven tempo could make the lived experience of colonial and imperial power Kafkaesque; defendants and litigants often felt trapped in intricate processes they could not understand or control.⁷ At the same time, the confounding pace of legal proceedings became naturalized, fusing conflicts over timing at law with struggles over power and legitimacy.

Metropolitan puzzlement over the problems of slow and fast justice in empires produced patterned responses to colonial events and scandals that we call "legal panics." The panics occurred when officials in imperial centers lurched from measure to measure to address perceived dangers of fast or slow justice. The exercise of arbitrary legal authority in colonies (fast justice) was associated with controversial acts of petty despotism perceived as threats to metropolitan power. Excessive delays in colonial law (slow justice) alternately vexed colonial officials and provided them with an irresistible tactic for ensnaring rivals. Whether fast or slow, legal panics framed debates about the fundamental nature and structure of imperial rule.

This chapter illustrates these processes of time and power in empires by analyzing a linked set of legal panics in the British Empire. Legal panics in the early nineteenth-century British world operated in a manner strikingly similar to the dynamics of "information panics" described by Christopher Bayly for British India.⁸ Bayly identified moments when British officials knew they possessed inadequate or flawed information and then, in the absence of alternatives, sought more bad information, in the process making crises worse. In similar fashion, from London to distant colonies, British officials responded to legal panics with the only tool—other than mere force—they thought they had: more legal reform. A growing focus on changes to legal administration to quell colonial disorder reflected both anxieties about petty despotism in the empire (fast justice) and unease about the problem of colonial legal obstructionism (slow justice). References to legal time infused the politics of imperial reform and understandings of what was at stake in crises of administrative ordering. The multiple temporalities of law in empire precipitated crises and offered solutions. In the cases examined in this chapter they did both at once. Here "law's unruly temporalities" took on a distinctive, though not regular, rhythm and offered an erratic alternation of slow and fast justice that made imperial legal actors jittery, even as they sought opportunity in legal panics.⁹ Timing was not everything, but it accounted for a great deal in the workings of imperial law and order.

An Empire of Law

The early nineteenth century was a period of intense constitutional debate in the British Empire. We have argued elsewhere that this vast constitutional experiment to order the empire through law was as globally formative as any nationally based constitutional movement.¹⁰ The empire's constriction as a result the American Revolution was followed by its haphazard expansion during and after the Napoleonic Wars. By 1800, it comprised old legislative colonies, new crown colonies, quasi-colonies under company rule, and territories with only vaguely defined status. British officials looked increasingly to legal administration as the medium of imperial integration even as they faced a more diverse and legally complex empire.

Elaborate schemes for legal change to accommodate and order this diversity circulated widely. The plans and proposals found sponsorship among abolitionist reformers and, often, middling officials who carried projects of reform from colony to colony as they moved through posts in unplanned circuits. Proposals for law charters, new jurisdictional arrangements stacking English and other European colonial law atop indigenous law, plans to reform the magistracy, and elaborate interventions in the guise of legal inquiries—these schemes evolved not in case law or jurists' tracts but in voluminous correspondence and bureaucratic dispatches, where they were proclaimed keys to promoting order and placing British law at the center of pluripolitical regional and global regimes.

When sharp controversy or crisis struck in the midst of these processes, officials answered with more of the same: proposals for changes to legal administration. Incoherent projects of reform, in other words, generated the need for more ad hoc legal measures. Yet legal panics spawned more than mere confusion and irresolution. They also stimulated weighty debates about the imperial constitution, often with lasting effects.

Nowhere was the direct line between legal panic and imperial constitutionalism clearer than in a series of controversies about the legal order of British slave colonies. In older legislative colonies, fledgling court systems operated using odd and imprecise variants of English law and relied on local judges who had little or no legal training. From the largest slaveholding British colony of Jamaica to the tiny slave colonies of the Leeward Islands, abolitionist influence was gaining even as planters dug in to protect slavery. Slaveholding meanwhile flourished in a small but significant set of colonies more recently acquired by Britain, including Trinidad, Mauritius, and the Cape Colony. For abolitionists and abolition-supporting British officials, crown colonies represented sites of legal experimentation. Without elected legislatures, local

governance offered the promise of a new constitutional mix in which imperial authority could be deployed to control local elites, ameliorate slavery, shelter British commercial interests, and project British power into proximate regions.

Legal panics focused attention on core constitutional questions: Who figured as an imperial subject? What was the relation between law in England and law in the colonies? What was the reach of the imperial government's authority, and how did it translate to the power of the local executive? More broadly, could Britain reconcile the constitutional anomalies of plural legal orders with the search for a distinctively British imperial order? Such questions did not arise in abstract form. They attached to scandals, grew around individual legal cases, and inhabited specific reform projects, in particular a legislative agenda to "ameliorate" the conditions of slavery. The pace and tempo of colonial justice mattered. Controversies over law frequently involved either the quick and arbitrary legal interventions of petty despots in empire or the infelicities of colonial systems plagued by slow justice.

At the heart of many colonial panics was the question of how to regulate the power of masters over slaves. Masters held the legal authority to judge and punish slaves—up to a point. No matter how brutal, every slave system was embedded in a regulatory order that withheld some prerogatives from slave owners, reserving for the state the power over life and death. Whether such limits were enforced depended on political variables, including how legal actors interpreted the boundary between private jurisdictions and public power and understood the relationship of law in the metropole to law in colonies.¹¹

The blurriness of these lines in slaveholding colonies reflected one important fact: Slave owners in most colonies ran local courts and controlled the pace of legal change. In the British empire, elites who owned slaves served on juries and filled the rolls of the magistracy. As strains over abolition grew sharper, the question of magistrates' loyalties intensified, and reformers called for imperial control over the appointment of magistrates and the selection of men without property in slaves.¹²

Questions about the design of legal administration were not just the stuff of official notice. They entered deeply into the social and political life of the colonies. Even with prohibitions on the admission of their testimony, slaves could and did develop legal strategies and influence cases before the courts.¹³ There is strong evidence that enslaved people learned about and responded directly to talk of institutional reform. News about revolts in other colonies—as we know from studies of the influence of news about the Haitian Revolution—shaped slave strategies in the British Empire and elsewhere. So did rumors about legislated limits on punishment or the coming of emancipation.¹⁴

Indeed, slaves must have railed at the multiple temporalities of colonial law in the era of amelioration as the fast justice of masters and magistrates cruelly punctuated the very slow machinations of imperial legal reform.

Abolitionists regarded colonial legal reform as an essential front in their battle to end the slave trade. In Parliament, the abolitionist James Stephen—admiralty lawyer, evangelist, barrister, and member of Parliament—worked to block the extension of slavery into new British colonies. Trinidad served as test case. Acquired in the midst of the decade-long struggle in Haiti, Trinidad raised the prospect of an experiment in colonial governance; in Stephen's words, it had the potential to "become at once an example, a protection; a farm of experiment, and a fortress; to the rest of our sugar colonies."¹⁵ Antislavery advocates like Stephen pushed for reforms that would radically expand metropolitan government power over colonial legislatures, a repositioning necessary to control the treatment of slaves and to contain the slave trade. Against this constitutional gambit, slaveholders and their allies sought to define the master-slave relationship as an unregulated sphere of private property.

In regarding abolition as a movement and, in some cases, exaggerating its focus on the protection of slaves, historians sometimes forget that the abolitionists' vision was grounded in law. We glimpse the law-centered nature of the movement clearly in Stephen's goals for Trinidad, where he hoped to see "the happy formation of a new system."¹⁶ The vision depended, first, on ensuring the absence of a local legislative assembly so that all laws would spring from British Parliament. The constitutional experiment required, second, the appointment of "magistrates of great respectability, independent of the community in which they live, and precluded from holding landed property in the Island" who would be "armed with extraordinary powers."¹⁷ A new constitutional order in Trinidad (and the empire) would rest on imperial legislation and the regulation of colonial justice.

It did not bother Stephen that asserting imperial power meant restricting privileges claimed by free British colonial subjects. Nor did it bother him that the changes he proposed did not guarantee the end of slavery, or ensure equality among imperial subjects. Stephen focused on preventing the extension of "our cart-whip empire" into a new, largely undeveloped periphery and creating a replicable model of colonial governance through a strengthened imperial legal presence.¹⁸ Anything less would create "a pigmy model of the British Constitution."¹⁹ By reserving metropolitan power over legislation and insisting on the promise to keep the peace in Trinidad, the empire would promote the safety, counterrevolutionary credentials, and good government of an expanding empire.²⁰

Events in Trinidad did not cooperate. The Crown, not Parliament, held sway in the new colony, and there were minimal changes to governance. The Crown appointed a governor with a weak council, invested him with supreme judicial as well as legislative and executive power, and removed a number of legal offices established to safeguard the administration of law. Choosing the economies of legal pluralism over the costs of direct administration, the British government opted to apply a streamlined version of Spanish law until a more permanent arrangement for governance could be devised.²¹ It was an inauspicious beginning to a project bent on redefining the constitutional contours of the empire. But there was much more to come.

The Injustice of Fast Justice

What does time have to do with the politics of slavery in the British Empire? One of the privileges that slaveholders jealously guarded and that abolitionists attacked was the capacity of masters to act swiftly to punish slaves. Punishment followed a summary determination of guilt by them in most cases, so slave owners were protecting a prerogative to render swift judgment—and to do so while acting independently as legal authorities, without reference to the courts. In the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, masters also represented fast justice as a safeguard against rebellion. Indeed, the need to guard against slave rebellion threaded summary justice through island court systems. If plantations were to be kept safe, in planters' view, there could be no free and fair trial for slaves.

For critics of slavery, the cruelty of the institution found its most potent expression in the legal power of slave owners. Abolitionists and reformers argued that the arbitrary justice of masters required restriction precisely because it authorized unrestrained excess—the definition of terror. Swift justice nurtured injustice; it also symbolized a dearth of constitutional constraints on the power of masters. Flawed as they were by the composition of biased juries and the oversight of slaveholding magistrates, trials represented a check on the petty despotism of masters in part because they slowed the time from accusation to punishment, in the process opening small but symbolically significant possibilities of measured justice.

Attempts to try slaveholders for cruelty toward slaves became focal points of constitutional debate. The few high-profile trials of slaveholders engaged political adversaries across the empire and prompted metropolitan legal panics, moments of crisis that exposed the murkiness of the imperial constitution. We find the path from debate to constitutional crisis in a pair of trials in the West Indies, one of a Nevis planter for the public lashing of thirty-two

slaves and one of a Tortola planter for the murder of a slave. In 1810 on Nevis, the brutal beatings of enslaved men and women in the public marketplace were controversial because the punishment was ordered not by a court but by a plantation owner, Edward Huggins. In Tortola, a murder trial brought to light the systematic, inhumane abuse by Arthur Hodge of slaves. Witnesses accused him of ordering vicious punishments of his slaves over the span of many years, including pouring boiling water down the throats of two enslaved women working in Hodge's house. The defense in both cases rested on slaveholders' right to discipline and punish slaves on their own. Metropolitan commentators used both cases to strengthen a platform of reform that included slave registries, limits on punishments, and the appointment of magistrates with imperial rather than local loyalties.²² Both trials also exposed the limits of metropolitan power.

Time and timing were on everyone's mind as the cases unfolded. When Huggins was tried for flogging thirty-two slaves in breach of a 1798 Nevis law restraining wanton planter cruelty, witnesses in his defense argued that the flogging of Huggins's slaves could not have waited for the intervention of the island authorities. Huggins's son outlined growing discontent on his father's estate. Slaves' actions, he said, had progressed "from opposition . . . to actual disobedience; from disobedience . . . to riot; and from riot to rebellion."²³ His father had dispensed fast justice in the public interest "to deter other slaves from similar conduct" elsewhere on the island.²⁴

This line of argument was convincing enough for the magistrates who had stood by silently while Huggins had his slaves whipped in the public square. The same arguments also convinced a carefully stacked jury. But some members of the local community were less impressed, and the War and Colonial Office was furious. With the help of the Leeward Islands governor, Hugh Elliot, the office embarked on a several-year campaign to investigate the failure of magistrates to intervene to stop the whipping. Some of the magistrates were dismissed, but ten years later the courts of the Leeward Islands were still the favorite object of abolitionists in Parliament. It took twenty years for the metropolitan government to impose a slave code on the Leeward Islands that tried to restrain planters' justice. The timescales of colonial and imperial justice were very different indeed.

In the Hodge case, time turned on the capacity of an abolitionist-sympathizing governor and some self-motivated rivals of Arthur Hodge to speed the planter's prosecution. Tortola planters had long counted on the wheels of justice turning very slowly, if at all.²⁵ Indeed, Hodge was being prosecuted for a murder that had taken place three years before and that the planter had reasonably expected to remain the stuff of rumor. Hodge's local enemies brought

the murder to the notice of the governor, who urged the prosecution forward by sending a delegate to the island to open the trial.

Even Hodge's enemies might have expected a guilty verdict to lead merely to a slow round of appeals, with damage to Hodge's standing and prospects, but little more. Elsewhere, slow imperial justice had proved an ally to many a murderer. The Colonial Office had a strong bent for clemency when it came to white property holders. By the time they heard colonial appeals for mercy, imperial bureaucrats usually reckoned that the petitioner had suffered enough while waiting for the ax to fall. Pardons followed.²⁶ But in an unprecedented move, Elliot refused to pass on Hodge's appeal for the king's mercy in 1811. He hastily set an execution date. Instead of being the beneficiary of slow imperial justice, Hodge became the first British planter in the West Indies to be tried and hanged for the murder of a slave.

In the Hodge case, the governor had acted swiftly to render justice in a case of planter cruelty. But governors could use the same power to carry on their own regimes of petty despotism. In Trinidad, where governors' powers were unconstrained by local councils, this danger generated its own legal panic—a panic that puts the significance of legal timescales on bright display. The trouble began when the island's first governor, Colonel Thomas Picton, was accused and tried for the extrajudicial execution of twenty-nine enslaved and free subjects, and for the torture of a mulatto girl.²⁷

A good bit of Picton's trouble was haste. Picton had a terrible temper. Also, like Huggins, he felt the shadow of Haiti. He worried, with some grounds, that Trinidad had become a haven for free blacks with a revolutionary bent.²⁸ He wrote home of the need to take "proper measures" to reduce the number of "French free People of Colour" on the island.²⁹ "Proper measures" seem to have included arbitrary arrest, torture, and preemptory exile. Picton's accusers alleged that he instructed local law enforcement to harass the free black community. He ordered the beating of slaves who were not sufficiently cowed by their masters, and he commanded the summary execution of a soldier for theft (one of two dozen extrajudicial killings he ordered). He had a free black man imprisoned without trial in an effort to make him leave the island. He tried to stop the British merchant community from petitioning home for British law and a legislature.³⁰ Then, most famously, he had Luisa Calderon tortured to elicit evidence of her lover's crime. Dispatched both to investigate Picton's government and to help Picton rule Trinidad, William Fullarton accused Picton's regime of endemic lawlessness and willful misapplication of Spanish law, which the British had kept in place.³¹

Controversy over Picton's tyranny put more than his neck at risk; it threatened Trinidad's new constitutional project. The high stakes encouraged the

empire to respond with slow justice. After the commission of inquiry devolved into controversy, it was not at all clear what other measures might be tried. Edmund Burke had attempted and failed to impeach Governor Hastings in Parliament for his despotisms in India not very long before. Lieutenant Governor Wall's summary execution of three soldiers in Gorée in 1782 earned him a trial by special commission in 1801. Picton's colorful record was first aired in 1803 before the Privy Council under the Treason Act of 1541. This very old statute allowed the Privy Council to determine whether the king's men abroad should be tried in Britain for colonial misgovernance. In the hearings themselves the Privy Council read depositions, largely gathered by Fullarton from men with axes to grind against Picton. But the Privy Council did not content itself with the testimony of malcontents. It made its own leisurely investigation into the case, gathering statements from the Catholic clergy and reminding residents that "every honest man" was protected "under his Government."³² Four years later, in 1807, the Privy Council troubled to find that Picton could not be tried for his crimes.

The King's Bench took a similarly slow approach to William Dowding's case for false imprisonment against Picton.³³ It sent a commission to Trinidad to deliver interrogatories on Dowding's behalf. But when it got there, the commission delivered the questions only to staunch supporters of crown power. The commission returned with evidence of this free black midshipman's Jacobin sympathies and of a society on the knife's edge of revolution.³⁴ The case never made it to trial.

In 1806, Picton was tried and convicted before the King's Bench for the torture of Luisa Calderon. The narrow question answered by the King's Bench was whether Picton had followed Spanish law faithfully when he ordered Calderon's torture. In what measure had Spanish law survived conquest and colonization? And what did Spanish law have to say about torture? The prosecution argued that Picton was bound by the British constitution not to torture free British subjects of any status. No matter what the constitutional settlement of Trinidad and no matter what law was in force there, the Crown could not invest a governor with powers that could not be adjudicated by a British court. Critics of colonial despotism won the day in 1806, and Picton was convicted. But the wheels of imperial justice kept slowly turning.

Three years later the case was heard again on appeal. This time, Picton's defense attracted curious bedfellows. The prominent abolitionist James Stephen argued on Picton's behalf that the power of the Crown in Trinidad extended to administering torture under Spanish law. The constitutional settlement of the island, according to this logic, had awarded the Crown "absolute dominion over the life, rights and liberties of every one of his subjects."³⁵ The

court adjourned in 1810 and did not meet again before Picton died a hero at Waterloo. Slow justice protected both Picton and the empire's grand constitutional experiment in Trinidad.

The cases of Picton, Huggins, and Hodge prompted sharp exchanges in elite circles in London. Legal panics over the weak administration of justice in old and new West Indies colonies stimulated further proposals for reform.³⁶ They also refined London commentary about the need for stronger crown power and its extension over both cruel masters and self-aggrandizing governors. The fast justice of petty despots figured in these controversies as the supposedly greatest single danger to the imperial constitution and to the promise of extending the protection of British law to all subjects of the empire. The signature of arbitrary power was swift punishment. Against its exercise, imperial reformers ranged two temporal tactics. One was to slow legal processes through continuing or restarting prosecutions in the imperial center. Another was to speed justice when imperial agents had the upper hand. In seeking to constrict the power of slave owners, reform-minded officials had no better way to demonstrate their authority than by interceding to make the wheels of colonial justice turn more effectively and more quickly against slave owners and rogue governors. Foiling the swift justice of petty despots in the colonies by enabling the fast action of imperially minded magistrates proved an effective way to announce metropolitan power and short-circuit legal panics at home. Yet in most cases and in most parts of the evolving empire, slow justice held sway.

Slow Justice in Distant Places

When Britain conquered Mauritius in 1810, it was acquiring a colony already deeply dependent on slavery and enmeshed in a robust regional slave trade. British agents also observed with some concern that the place was crawling with lawyers. Creole elites could become lawyers without studying in France, and there were plenty of posts to hold them. Seven judges rendered judgment in local criminal cases in the French system. Slaves were tried in a special forum staffed by other judges. An island appeals court operated with a high degree of autonomy from the metropole and enforced judgments even as cases traveled on appeal to Paris, where very few were overturned in a system in which only procedure was under review.³⁷ To make Mauritius British meant to insert British law to some degree—but to what degree, and how? These were questions about the imperial constitution, and to answer them required designing a workable plural legal order while operating at the slow-motion pace dictated by distance and, as would soon become apparent, by sophisticated delay tactics of creole elites and their allies.

Mauritius planters began to develop their stance of law-centered opposition to British authority by questioning the constitutional basis for the imposition of British law. The first British governor, Robert Farquhar, was channeling the influence of creole lawyers and judges when he wrote to Lord Liverpool, the secretary of state for the colonies, in 1811 to suggest that the Capitulation Treaty that planters had signed, in promising to preserve their “laws, customs and usages,” protected not only property in slaves but also the continuation of the slave trade. Farquhar wondered whether a British imperial law like the 1807 Abolition Act could be in force in a newly acquired colony without a specific clause that made it applicable, or until it was also promulgated in the colony. Farquhar also introduced the rationale of necessity, explaining to Liverpool that the colony simply could not survive without slavery and the slave trade, so measures had to be taken to preserve both. The island’s “laws, customs and usages, recognise not only slavery, but the Slave Trade; without that trade, or some other substitute or remedy, these colonies promise shortly to be annihilated.”³⁸

London officials sought to short-circuit such arguments. Liverpool shot back a brusque clarification, instructing Farquhar that the Abolition Act banned British subjects everywhere from participating in the slave trade and certainly applied to newly acquired colonies. A law passed by Parliament was law for the empire, and anyone involved in the slave trade should be “subject to the penalties of this Act.”³⁹ It took three months from the time Farquhar penned his query for these instructions to be issued and a further five months for them to reach him in Mauritius.⁴⁰ These delays allowed planters to continue to apply their own interpretation of the Capitulation Treaty to slow the effects of British legal power. Defendants seized for slave trafficking on the coast of Bourbon, also then a British possession through conquest, brought their case to the court of appeals on Mauritius. The court pronounced that the Capitulation Treaty protected the property of former French subjects of the island and limited the application of British law. Even though the law prohibiting the slave trade had been promulgated in the Mauritius gazette, the judges reasoned, the islands of Mauritius and Bourbon were separate colonial jurisdictions and the law had yet to be announced in Bourbon. Further, the court concluded, even if the colonies were treated as a single jurisdiction, the publication of the law did not make slave trading illegal retroactively. The court supposed that French subjects would have reasonably believed that their slave trading at the time the events occurred was protected under the Capitulation Treaty.⁴¹ No doubt still smarting from Liverpool’s rebuke, Governor Farquhar responded by suspending all the judges of the Mauritius court of appeals, then writing to London for further instructions.⁴²

The episode marked a first mini-legal panic in the colony. Greater and more acute panics were yet to come. Legal delays and challenges in the colony created uncertainty about fundamental features of the administration of justice and the legitimacy of British legal authority. Colonial officials often contributed to the confusion, sometimes by arrogating unconstitutional powers to themselves, sometimes by aligning their interests with slaveholding elites. Like Farquhar in the initial confusion about the meaning of the Capitulation Treaty, successive Mauritius governors wrote to London seeking clarification, a strategy that produced its own delays. And as imperial officials cast around for models and principles to cite in directing further legal reforms, creole planters and their allies in Mauritius developed new strategies designed to slow legal processes to a crawl. Contests over slavery and slaveholding stood at the center of these crises and connected to wider constitutional debates in the empire over such familiar questions as the standing of non-English law, the structure of rule in colonies without legislatures, and the scope of legal authority implied by slave ownership.

London officials' search for a model to work from in addressing such questions led them, oddly enough, to Trinidad. Mauritius had slavery, like older British West Indian colonies, but as a crown colony with no local council or legislature, it most closely resembled Trinidad, that other site of recent legal experiment. This was an analogy laced with promise but also constitutional danger. As we have seen, Trinidad had generated its own deep debates about the colonial legal order, and attempts at reform there had produced a series of legal panics, most dramatically the long legal saga of Colonel Thomas Picton's petty despotism.

It was from the constitutional morass of Trinidad that the London government plucked a judge, George Smith, to become the first chief justice in Mauritius. He would also head the brand-new Vice Admiralty Court. Smith's appointment by the Earl of Bathurst, secretary of state for war and the colonies, responded directly to the refusal of the Mauritius appeals court to enforce British law. The Vice Admiralty Court was to provide effective adjudication of slave ship captures and "effectually put at rest all doubt and difficulty which have existed with respect to the Competence of the Island Tribunals to notice Violations of the Slave Trade Felony Act."⁴³ Once again borrowing a page from Trinidad's reforms, London also established a registry of slaves for the island.⁴⁴ Yet very little changed.

Over the next several years, amid growing anxiety about the continuing illegal trade in slaves, officials in London puzzled over what to do about the administration of justice, and they lurched from one ineffective intervention to another. Disputes in Mauritius at first took the shape of jurisdictional

conflicts between creole-controlled courts and the imperious George Smith. Unable to assert his authority over them effectively, Smith used his role as admiralty judge to lash out against creole magistrates. Each side penned long, rambling complaints about the other to the governor and, eventually, to the government in London. A young creole lawyer, Adrian d'Épinay, protested when charges were brought against him for presenting a complaint against Smith for abuse of power to the admiralty registry. D'Épinay pointed out that he was merely the messenger and that the complaint originated with two accused slave traders. Smith then sought to impeach the *procureur générale* (attorney general) for his failure to pursue the case against d'Épinay. The matter became entangled with another action by Smith against two creole bailiffs for failing to cooperate with the admiralty court. Smith packed the bailiffs off to London to be tried for "their Participation in the Plot of a projected Insurrection."⁴⁵ Bathurst sent them back, admonishing Smith for not using the local courts to keep order and affirming that there was no jurisdiction outside the colony for bringing charges against uncooperative magistrates.⁴⁶

In the background of these disputes was the still lucrative, if clandestine, slave trade. Ongoing jurisdictional tensions reflected struggles over the profits from the trade, and a boom in sugar production and growing creole indebtedness to British creditors heightened the stakes of these conflicts for planters. The slave population continued to grow, increasing dramatically in the Seychelles between 1810 and 1815, and on Mauritius between 1814 and 1818—strong evidence that the trade was alive and well.⁴⁷ Most slave traders escaped official notice by using small craft to land captives at night. But British officials like Smith who were slave owners had their own incentives for the desultory prosecution of slave traders. Capturing traders came with another set of incentives. When slave ships were intercepted and condemned, the result was bounty for the captors and additions to the colony's servile labor force since the court assigned prize slaves to various colonial residents for terms of indenture of fourteen years.⁴⁸ As in other parts of the empire with active vice-admiralty courts, abolition had made the admiralty jurisdiction a fulcrum of profit.⁴⁹

Pressures from London to implement amelioration measures through court reforms became a volatile issue in this context. In 1829, James Stephen (the son of the abolitionist of the same name who had led the push for reforms on Trinidad), serving as counsel in the Colonial Office and charged with reviewing colonial legislation, disallowed a Mauritius law to regulate the use of chains and collars for the punishment of slaves.⁵⁰ The government also sought to strengthen an existing court for the protection of slaves by appointing a

British magistrate to head it. That act promoted waves of new complaints by slaves of cruel treatment at the hands of creole masters.⁵¹

Delaying tactics pervaded the colony's legal politics. Eager to assert his legal power without interference from London, Smith used delays as a strategy in ignoring requests from London for information about the Mauritius court system.⁵² London officials also introduced delay and uncertainty. Even while calling for more vigorous action against the slave trade on the island and insisting on attention to London directives, the government found itself warning Mauritius officials not to take the law into their own hands. Sensing familiar dangers of despotism, Bathurst cautioned against fast justice for slave traders and told officials not to be tempted by "the suspension of judicial proceedings for the purpose of substituting some arbitrary power for the suppression of this crime."⁵³

Creole elites, meanwhile, were refining their strategy of judicial non-compliance. Magistrates refused to cooperate with the slave registry, penned objections to government proclamations, and quietly ignored directives.⁵⁴ Smith's successor warned that appeals and other delaying tactics by creole litigants and defendants had the power to "interrupt and paralyze the courts of justice" in the colony.⁵⁵ Most vexing was the frozen docket of the court of the office of the Protector of Slaves. In response to the appointment of the English magistrate, creole lawyers undertook a coordinated campaign to slow the court's functions. If he found a complaint to have merit, the protector of slaves could not act alone but had to refer the case to the court of first instance. There, ignored by creole judges and undermined by uncooperative slave owners and lawyers, the cases languished.

Slow justice by design emerged in the open as an oppositional strategy in 1829, when commissioners arriving on Mauritius were presented with a formal complaint prepared by local elites. The document explained that planters would simply refuse to implement laws intended to ameliorate the conditions of slaves. The planters asserted that "there was not an Officer of Justice, a lawyer, a judge, or a single individual to be found in the Colony" who would help enact the measures. And they added a none-too-subtle threat of rebellion: if the government persisted with reforms, the result would be "to erase Mauritius from the list of British possessions."⁵⁶

Here was full-blown legal panic in the making. News of the planters' intransigence arrived alongside other stories about creole lawyers bringing the business of the courts to a halt. In 1830, the French-speaking justice of the peace in the Seychelles refused to investigate the deaths of three slaves, including one called Domingue Revolution, whose owner was accused of beating

him to death. The creole prosecutor in Mauritius claimed he had no jurisdiction in the case and refused to take action.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the new British protector of slaves reported that planters would not furnish him with records of slave punishments. Some planters refused to acknowledge the authority of the protector, like the slave owner Madame Blanchard, who declared that the protector had no legitimate right to investigate the flogging of her slave Françoise.⁵⁸ In addition to such stories about small acts of resistance to the authority of the protector of slaves, rumors began circulating that planters were arming themselves in preparation for open revolt.⁵⁹

What could the government in London do in response to a revolt by lawyers? Here and elsewhere, the answer was to send new, loyal, and legally trained middling officials.⁶⁰ Casting around for someone whose authority might have a chance of gaining traction, the London government seized on John Jeremie, a former judge in St. Lucia whose main qualification appeared to be that he spoke French. Jeremie was packed off to become the new attorney general of Mauritius. News of Jeremie's appointment reached the island before he did. Planters learned that Jeremie was the author of an abolitionist tract about the West Indies. What happened next left London officials reeling. Jeremie arrived in Mauritius to find the island's legal order paralyzed, and he spent several weeks holed up in his lodgings, afraid that if he went out he would be assassinated. Jeremie was then unceremoniously deposited on a ship and returned to London. After several weeks in London trying to explain himself and describe the chaos of the island's legal politics, Jeremie was sent back to Mauritius. By then, rumors were again circulating that planters were forming militias in preparation for open revolt.⁶¹

This slow-motion legal panic—the attempt to reinstate the hapless Jeremie and the decision to fire the compromised governor, Charles Colville—occasioned a moment of reflection on the imperial constitution in London. The official line was that Mauritius was a rat's nest of unconstitutionality. The crux of the problem was not the disloyalty of creole planters. It was the failure of executive authority on the island. The governor's inability to implement laws for the amelioration of slavery amounted to a failure “to extend the protection of Equitable Laws to the whole of the Slave population.”⁶² The governor had clearly upended the constitution in submitting imperial legislation to a local committee for consideration and advice. In a crown colony with no local legislature, the simulation of colonial elite rule was a constitutional affront. And by aiding locals to inhibit the commission of inquiry, the governor had placed himself in open opposition to representatives of the Crown.⁶³

For this, after all, was what much of imperial legal reform boiled down to

in the empire in this period: a push for cleaner jurisdictional lines and a farther, more direct reach for executive authority. Reformers wanted to design colonial systems in which the cure for the arbitrary power of others, whoever they were, was the constitutionally authorized power of agents of the British Crown. The antidote for the fast justice of petty despotism and the slow justice of recalcitrant colonial elites turned out to be the same: new schemes for systematizing legal administration and strengthening imperial power.

Conclusion

As in Nevis, Tortola, and Trinidad, legal panics in Mauritius merged the politics of colonial law reform with broader constitutional debate. Questions about subjecthood, arbitrary justice, the status of non-British law, the allegiances of middling officials, and jurisdiction over the empire's most vulnerable people rolled into a broader conversation about the constitutional foundations of the empire.

The tempo of justice was integral to this process. The fast justice of petty despots symbolized unrestrained power and the constitutional dangers of empire. Tactics by recalcitrant colonial elites to slow justice down represented an imperial nightmare of another kind. Legal panics in London captured anxieties about the inability of imperial institutions to control the pace and effects of colonial legal policy. Whether explicitly or not, visions of an orderly empire of law encompassed dreams of the proper relation of time, power, and justice. But time could be anyone's ally or undoing.

The legal panics of the early nineteenth-century British Empire were rendered distinctive by the context of pervasive reform and the ascendance of British global power. But the relevance of the example to other imperial histories holds. Slow justice plagued empires and dimmed bright visions of imperial order—although there were always groups who benefited from delay and contributed to it by design. Fast justice in empires represented the antithesis to procedural integrity and the sovereign's promise of fairness. Slow and fast panics in imperial centers reacted to both threats. These contrapuntal rhythms were not inherently contradictory, but they were available to many legal actors in periphery and center in the service of private, local, and imperial interests. Less so for slaves, who in many of our case studies were buffeted by multiple and competing legal temporalities over which they had very little control. Yet even they fought to manipulate time, for example, in reacting to long-drawn-out news of promised reforms or in swiftly taking actions to slave protector courts. It pays to notice the temporal dimensions of the legal

politics of slavery. More than noise and fury, legal panics focused attention on unresolved questions about the constitutional foundations of imperial rule. The slowness or speed of conflicts mesmerized observers, drove legal strategies, and animated stories of scandal, all the while constituting empires.

Notes

1. The effects of distance in general form a minor subtheme of imperial histories. For example, Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1988).

2. The initial litigation between Columbus's immediate heirs and the Crown was resolved in a mere twenty-five years and included lengthy appeals and arbitration. Otto Schoenrich, *The Legacy of Christopher Columbus: The Historic Litigations Involving His Discoveries, His Will, His Family, and His Descendants . . . Resulting from the Discovery of America*, 2 vols. (Glendale, CA: A. H. Clark Co., 1949).

3. On the conflation of chronicles and legal writing, and also on treason charges in imperial politics, see Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chaps. 1–2. For an example of how long legal proceedings could serve as punishment, see the case of Fernando Hernández, a minor conquistador in Yucatán who ran afoul of powerful adversaries, in Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517–1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60–65.

4. A horrific example was the fate of as many as 110 slave children who died as the *Maria da Gloria* was sailed across the Atlantic by its captors to hearings before distant mixed commissions. Leslie Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade: Britain, Brazil and the Slave Trade Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 136.

5. Printed Prize Appeal from the Vice Admiralty Court of Antigua. Captured Ship: Reimsdyke, The National Archives of Britain (TNA), High Court of Admiralty (HCA), 45/51/28, 448–73.

6. Charles H. Cunningham, “The Residencia in the Spanish Colonies,” *Southwest Historical Quarterly* 21 (1918): 253–78, 260–61.

7. Adam McKeown beautifully captures this quality of law by interlacing quotes from Kafka's novel *The Trial* in his brilliant study of the origins of the regulation of border crossing. *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

8. C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

9. Dan Edelstein, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley, introduction to this volume.

10. Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). We draw heavily on chapter 1 in this section.

11. For an excellent discussion of the blurred lines of public and private jurisdiction under slave law in the French empire, see Malick Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

12. See Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, “Magistrates in Empire: Convicts, Slaves, and the Remaking of Legal Pluralism in the British Empire,” in *Legal Pluralism and Empire, 1500–1850*, ed. Lauren Benton and Richard Ross (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 173–98.

13. Mindie Lazarus-Black, “Slaves, Masters, and Magistrates: Law and the Politics of Resistance in the British Caribbean,” in *Contested States: Law, Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Mindie Lazarus-Black and Susan F. Hirsch (New York: Routledge, 1994), 252–81; Randy M. Browne, *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

14. On news and rumor in Cuba, see Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chap. 2.

15. James Stephen, *The Crisis of the Sugar Colonies; or, An Enquiry into the Objects and Probable Effects of the French Expedition to the West Indies; and their Connection with the Colonial Interests of the British Empire* (London: J. Hatchard, 1802), 202.

16. Stephen, 188.

17. Stephen, 189.

18. Stephen, 161.

19. Stephen, 190.

20. See Benton and Ford, *Rage for Order*, chap. 2. For more on the legal politics of Trinidad, see James Epstein, *Scandal of Colonial Rule: Power and Subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); for more on James Stephen’s constitutional views, see Lauren Benton and Aaron Slater, “Constituting the Imperial Community: Rights, Common Good and Authority in Britain’s Atlantic Empire, 1607–1815,” in *Revisiting the Origins of Human Rights*, ed. Pamela Slotte and Miia Halme-Tuomisaari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 140–62.

21. Millette, *The Genesis of Crown Colony Government: Trinidad 1783–1810* (Curepe, Trinidad: Moko Enterprises, 1970); John Manning Ward, *Colonial Self-Government: The British Experience 1759–1856* (London: Macmillan, 1976).

22. Lauren Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth: The Trial of Arthur Hodge and the Boundaries of Imperial Law,” *Alabama Law Review* 64 (2012): 91–122; Benton and Ford, *Rage for Order*, chap. 2.

23. “No. 7, Letter from Governor Elliot to the Earl of Liverpool, 25 November, 1810,” House of Commons, “Papers relating to the West Indies: viz. correspondence relating to punishments inflicted on certain Negro slaves, in the island of Nevis; and to prosecutions in consequence,” May 1811, House of Commons, Parliamentary Papers (HCPP), no. 204, XI 353 (hereafter “Papers relating to the West Indies: Nevis”), 29.

24. “No. 7, Letter from Governor Elliot to the Earl of Liverpool, 25 November, 1810,” House of Commons, “Papers relating to the West Indies: Nevis,” 31.

25. Planters feared that functioning local courts would provide their creditors with a forum for pressing claims. See Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth.”

26. Note, for example, the pardon granted to Hawkesbury farmers for the brutal murder of Aboriginal children three years after their conviction: Hobart to Philip King, January 30, 1802, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 1 (Canberra: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1915), 3:366–67; Lisa Ford, *Setter Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 99.

27. A complete account and full analysis of the case is in Epstein, *Scandal of Colonial Rule*.

28. Rebels from Grenada had indeed moved to Trinidad. See Kit Candlin, *The Last Caribbean Frontier, 1795–1815* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), chap. 1.

29. Picton to Hobart, February 7, 1802, Trinidad Original Correspondence: Offices and Individuals, 1802, TNA, Colonial Office (CO) 295/2, F210.

30. William Fullarton, *Substance of the Evidence Delivered before the . . . Privy Council, in the case of Governor Picton . . .* (Edinburgh: Murray and Cochane, 1807).

31. For the best account of the commission, see Epstein, *Scandal of Colonial Rule*.

32. E.g., Clergy Depositions, 28 April 1803, Trinidad: Charges brought against Col. Picton as Governor, TNA, Privy Council 1/3557.

33. See Epstein, *Scandal of Colonial Rule*, 120.

34. *Dowding v. Picton*, Court of King's Bench, General Affidavits: Dowding v. Picton, TNA, King's Bench 101/5/9.

35. T. B. Howell, Esq., ed., *State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783* (London: T. C. Hansard, 1822), 30:935.

36. The constitutional implications of the Picton case are discussed in Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, "Island Despotism: Trinidad, the British Imperial Constitution, and Global Legal Order" *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 1 (2018): 1–24.

37. See the British report on the legal system of Mauritius, TNA CO 415/16.

38. Farquhar to Liverpool, 15 February 1811 in *Parliamentary Papers* (hereafter PP) 1826 (295) XXVII, *Papers Relating to Captured Negroes; also to the Slave Trade at Mauritius and Bourbon and the Seychelles; Slave Population at the Seychelles*, 6–7.

39. Liverpool to Farquhar, 2 May 1811, PP 1826 (295) XXVII, 7–8.

40. Farquhar to Liverpool, 26 October 1811, PP 1826 (295) XXVII, 8–9.

41. Farquhar to Bathurst, 22 January 1814, PP 1826 (295) XXVII, 38–39.

42. The island's British officials continued to wrangle, too, with the constitutional meaning of capitulation treaties. Farquhar pressured the vice-admiralty court to abandon the case of a ship seized for carrying French planters and their slaves from Madagascar to Mauritius, saying that he had given his permission to the planters to transport their slaves because the Capitulation Treaty in Madagascar protected French property and therefore French planters being expelled from that territory deserved treatment as British subjects—and the right to convey their property to a safer place. Farquhar to Bathurst, 22 January 1814, in PP 1826 (295) XXVII, 38–39.

43. Bathurst to Farquhar, 30 July 1814, Mauritius, Entry Books: Letters from Secretary of State, TNA CO 168/3, 24.

44. Bathurst to Farquhar, 24 October 1814, TNA CO 168/3; and with specific reference to Trinidad as a model, see Bathurst to Farquhar, 25 October 1815, TNA CO 168/3, 69. Once in Mauritius, Smith also cited Trinidad as a model, for example in arguing for a summary court "similar to that in Trinidad" to clear small cases. Smith to Farquhar, 11 April 1815, TNA CO 167/25.

45. Bathurst to Farquhar, 5 March 1816, TNA CO 168/3, 83.

46. Bathurst to Farquhar, 5 March 1816, TNA CO 168/3, 84. More than a year later, the government was still waiting for an explanation from Farquhar about "the Authority under which you conceived yourself authorised under your instructions of the Laws of the Colony to cause the removal of those two persons." Here British officials were engaged in their own tactics of delay. Gouldburn to Farquhar, 1 April 1817, TNA CO 168/3, 138.

47. Richard B. Allen, "Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings: The Illegal Slave Trade to Mauritius and the Seychelles during the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 91–116.

48. Sixty slaves seized from the schooner *Gustave* in 1816 were assigned to work for local families, and the captives appear in the records as entering service in occupations such as port-

ers, mariners, gardeners, domestic servants, blacksmiths, joiners, house servants, shoemakers, cooks, cabinet makers, and sugar workers. Some of these designations smacked of fiction; prize returns between 1813 and 1827 list 2,998 as “freed” captives predominantly the young men in most demand as field workers for the island’s booming sugar plantations. See Lauren Benton, “Abolition and Imperial Law, 1790–1820,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 3 (2011): 365.

49. For example, on Tortola see Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth”; on Sierra Leone, see Padraic Scanlan, *Freedom’s Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017). In Mauritius, in the case of a notorious slave trader named Dorval, whose ship was chased and burned (though still somehow successful in unloading its captives to shore), the grand jury indicted both Dorval and the ship’s captain, L’Hoste. Farquhar allowed Dorval to give himself up in exchange for a pardon for all past offences, and his prosecution then failed because of a “flaw in the indictment.” Stephen to Governor, 21 February 1829, Correspondence, Original, Secretary of State: Law officers’ reports on Colonial Acts, TNA CO 323/46, 215v, 216v.

50. Stephen to Colville, 27 January 1829, TNA CO 323/46, 81v.

51. Creole elites in turn accused some British officials of extrajudicial cruelty to slaves they owned. Documents sent to London regarding the d’Epinay affair included accusations against Smith for “Judicial Despotism of the most appalling nature” in ordering summary punishments of several of his own slaves, including imprisonment for three years of a slave named Sephir who died “of illness brought on by this long, arbitrary, and painful detention.” TNA CO 167/159, 44.

52. Bathurst repeatedly urged Smith to send information about the courts. Bathurst to Farquhar, 13 May 1815, TNA CO 168/3, 61: “I await with considerable anxiety the Report of Mr. Smith upon the Courts of Justice.” Having urged Farquhar to get Smith to send a report on the courts in 1815, Bathurst was still begging for information in 1817 and operating with insufficient intelligence “as to the Mode in which Justice is at present administered and as to the precise Powers under the French Law of the various Courts already established in the Island.” Bathurst to Farquhar, 1 March 1817, TNA CO 168/3, 129. Smith finally sent the report later that year. TNA CO 415/16.

53. Bathurst to Hall, 5 June 1818, TNA CO 168/3, 187. When Hall had a dispute with Smith and removed him from office, Bathurst exhorted him to respect the legal system “in a colony where the judicial Power is the only Constraint upon the Acts of the Executive.” He ordered that Smith be reinstated. Bathurst to Hall, 15 July 1818, TNA CO 168/3, 192.

54. For example, magistrates of the court of appeals of Mauritius wrote to express their objections to legal directives from London as well as measures put in place by Smith. Bathurst to Farquhar, 3 November 1815, TNA CO 168/3, 76.

55. Extract from the Minutes of Council, 6 August 1828, TNA CO 415/19.

56. Goderich to Colville, 4 April 1823, TNA CO 168/17, 181v–182.

57. Downland to Thomas, 19 October 1830 and Blackburn to Foisy, 20 May 1831, Mauritius, Miscellaneous: Reports of Protectors of Slaves, TNA CO 172/29.

58. Report of the Protector of Slaves of Mauritius from 1st January to 30th June 1831, TNA CO 172/28.

59. Colville to Goderich, 18 March 1832, TNA CO 167/159.

60. On this remedy for colonial disorder across the empire, and more generally on British notions of middle power, see Benton and Ford, *Rage for Order*, 9–11; Benton and Ford, “Magistrates in Empire.”

61. Colville to Goderich, 18 March 1832, TNA CO 167/159. For a good account of the revolt that exaggerates its effects as a catalyst for emancipation, see Peter Burroughs, "The Mauritius Rebellion of 1832 and the Abolition of British Colonial Slavery," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 4, no. 3 (1976): 243–65.

62. Goderich to Colville, 4 April 1832, TNA CO 168/17, 171.

63. Goderich to Colville, 4 April 1832, TNA CO 168/17.

Time and the Economics of the Business Cycle in Modern Capitalism

JAMIE MARTIN

In the first half of the twentieth century, few topics dominated the study of economics more than the business cycle—the rhythmic movement from economic boom to crisis, depression, recovery, and back that had afflicted industrialized societies since at least the early nineteenth century. By the outbreak of the First World War, research on the business cycle had taken off across Europe and in the United States, with a clear canon dating back to the last third of the nineteenth century and a set of questions that were debated across national lines. The study of the business cycle inspired an enormous body of literature, particularly in Germany, Britain, and the United States. Nearly every leading economist published on the topic—A. C. Pigou, Ralph Hawtrey, Knut Wicksell, Joseph Schumpeter, D. H. Robertson, Irving Fisher, and Ludwig von Mises—and less well-remembered German and Russian scholars, such as Arthur Spiethoff and Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky, also played a large role in shaping the field. Around 1900, an American undergraduate course on the business cycle would include the works of German, French, Russian, British, Belgian, and American theorists.¹ For economists with varying political and theoretical commitments, studying the cycle promised to unlock the secrets of modern capitalist development and the reasons for its staccato rhythms and periodic breakdowns in panic. It was crucial both for the development of Marxist theories of crisis and for the early work of self-described neoliberal economists such as Friedrich A. Hayek. Few areas of social scientific research assumed as central a role for government policy after the First World War, as business-cycle research laid the foundations for the tools of macroeconomic governance taken on by industrialized states in the interwar period.² Some have argued that the very idea of “the economy,” as a self-contained sphere of human activity, emerged out of the study of the cycle in the 1930s.³

The rise of modern economic governance, and the seismic transformations of the state that it entailed, was thus accompanied by the return of a metaphor of cyclical social and political change. It has been claimed that such cyclical understandings of time had been displaced in the eighteenth century by linear notions of progressive development. Until the French Revolution, on this account, the term “revolution” was used to describe the ancient notion of the cycle of constitutional forms—from monarchy to tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, ochlocracy, and back. This cycle was as inescapable as the natural rhythms of the seasons and had its objective analogue in the rhythms of heavenly bodies. By the end of the eighteenth century, this idea had fallen out of favor. The term “revolution” had come to indicate a decisive moment of change in a unidirectional historical process. In the nineteenth century, the term “crisis” was used to describe these moments of transition from one epoch to another. The singular direction of social evolution, accelerated at moments of crisis, became a basic assumption of nineteenth-century thought. The reign of the classical cycle was ostensibly over.⁴

Whether or not this broad account holds true for other areas, it does not in the case of political economy. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the study of economic life moved away from a focus on the singular crisis to an understanding of crisis as a recurring moment in endlessly repeated cycles of boom and bust.⁵ These cycles had begun after industrialization, the rise of modern banking, and the expansion of the nineteenth-century world economy, and they were themselves a sign of economic modernity. The economic life of agricultural societies had always been determined by natural cycles of weather and harvests. But it was only the modern capitalist economy that moved as an aggregate according to periodic cycles of prosperity and depression. It was the recognition of this cyclicity at the heart of the modern economy that first gave rise to attempts to manage it.

Some social theorists have argued that the temporality of capitalism is necessarily future oriented, and that as capitalist economic and social relations replace traditional agrarian ones, cyclical understandings of economic life are, by and large, displaced by ones that emphasize a linear and open-ended temporal imagination more appropriate to profit-making.⁶ It is true that modern economic ideas and practices have, since the eighteenth century, been increasingly oriented around the problems of future uncertainty and risk.⁷ But others have pointed out the persistence of cyclical understandings alongside this emphasis on the future, and the fact that capitalism is characterized both by constant change and by the endless return of the same. The fact that the business cycle has remained a constant feature of capitalist economies since the nineteenth century, as William Sewell has argued—despite

all the technological, economic, and political transformations that have occurred since—has left us with a “hyper-eventual but monotonously repetitive” experience of time under capitalism.⁸ This fact was first diagnosed by theorists of the business cycle in the early twentieth century, many of whom argued that the periodic return of crisis was a necessary concomitant of capitalist growth, which occurred in fits and starts, with its rhythms tracing an endless loop of rise and fall, not simply according to a tempo of accelerating and ceaseless forward movement. As macroeconomics developed into a tool of governance in the interwar period, theorists of the cycle continued to draw on timeless folk metaphors of seasonal, heavenly, and biological flux.⁹ Policies for dealing with the cycle were premised not on the radical uncertainty of the future but on its fundamental legibility. It did not unfold only as progression to the new but according to a regular pattern, always repeating the past, in its basic form, on “an unceasing round.”¹⁰ When European and American economists first studied the “world economy” as a discrete entity, its interconnections were also understood in terms of the global spread of this new form of cyclical temporality. It was not only measures of trade or financial flows that showed the reality of global interdependence but also the increasingly worldwide synchronization of the timing of cyclical rise and fall.

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Economic panics had been known to European observers since early modernity. But the idea that they returned on a strict schedule became common sense only in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. It was the Panic of 1825, which came on the heels of the transition to peace in Europe and Latin American independence, that led to the earliest studies of the periodicity of crisis. Before that point, most had looked for the causes of crisis in unpredictable shocks, like bad harvests, wars, and plagues. As early as the 1660s, William Petty had described the seven-year cycle, “within which Dearthes and Plenties make their revolutions,”¹¹ and a few theories of the cycle appeared in England and the United States in the late 1820s and early 1830s.¹² From the 1840s onward, the idea became widespread. Many were baffled by the fact that panics seemed to occur with strict decennial regularity: in 1815–1816, 1825–1826, 1836–1837, and 1847. At first, it was common to look for the explanation of this periodicity in facts external to the economic system itself, like the heavens and the weather. The most common explanation was the effect that astronomical cycles had on weather conditions and the quality of harvests and crop prices. According to one account, famine recurred on a regular fifty-four-year cycle corresponding to the saros period of solar and lunar eclipses that had been observed since the ancient Babylonians.¹³

William Stanley Jevons offered the best-known astrological explanation of economic cycles. In a series of essays from the late 1870s, he posited a strict correlation between the periodical recurrence of sunspots, the quality of harvests, and grain prices. Drawing on data that seemed to demonstrate the coincidence of sunspot activity and the decennial outbreak of famine in India, he suggested that commercial crises in Europe originated in the tropical and semitropical regions to which European economic life was increasingly tied through trade and finance: India, China, Africa, the West Indies, America, and the Levant. Although most were quick to dismiss the direct link between the “cotton-mills of Manchester and the paddy-fields of Hindostan,” Jevons insisted on the counterintuitive idea that the economic health of the metropole was at the mercy of far-off fluctuations in weather and harvests. This was one of the first attempts to explain the growing phenomenon of worldwide economic interdependence. When famine broke out in India every ten years, Jevons wrote, the Indian consumer could no longer afford British-made clothes, which resulted in a loss of demand that was felt all the way back in Lancashire. Ensuring the vitality of the empire, he argued, required a reckoning with this fact. Jevons called for the building of solar observatories on the “table-lands of Quito or Cuzco, in Cashmere, in Piazzini Smith’s observatory on the Peak of Teneriffe, in Central Australia. . . . An empire on which the sun never sets, and whose commerce pervades every port and creek of the sunny south, cannot wisely neglect to keep watch on the great foundation of energy.”¹⁴

Jevons’s theory was dismissed by many of his contemporaries on the grounds that the periodicity of sunspot activity could not be accurately measured and that bad harvests themselves did not always generate bad crises.¹⁵ But his basic insight was widely shared: that the behavior of heavenly bodies determined weather conditions and the quality of harvests, which in turn shaped the broader economic conditions of largely agricultural societies. Even for those who looked for the generation of cycles not in the heavens but in the nature of capitalism itself, astronomical metaphors were ubiquitous. In his 1844 *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy*, Friedrich Engels referred to the crises that broke out every five to seven years “as regularly as the comets.”¹⁶ The heavens, the weather, the human circulatory system, and the tides were also used as metaphors to describe the behavior of business cycles long after theories like Jevons’s had fallen out of favor, a fact that suggests the persistence of older folk understandings of natural cycles in the basic assumptions of twentieth-century economics. The term used for the business cycle in German today, *Konjunktur*, was originally a medieval term for “constellation,” as was well recognized in the 1920s.¹⁷ When professional business

forecasting emerged in the United States, its practitioners used nineteenth-century practices of meteorological prediction and popular prophecy as models. The aggregate statistical indices used to predict future economic conditions, for example, were termed “barometers.” Some continued to look for the generation of crises in weather cycles and the orbit of heavenly bodies like Venus.¹⁸ One turn-of-the-century account explained the cyclical change of government control from one party to another as caused by rainfall patterns: when rain was plentiful, harvests were good, and the incumbent won. A sitting party could never by itself create the conditions needed to guarantee electoral success. The best that could be done to predict its chances were to create meteorological institutions to study “man’s relation to the universe.”¹⁹

In the second half of the nineteenth century, explaining cycles by reference to noneconomic factors, like the weather or the stars, began to give way to the search for their causes in the structure and behavior of capitalism itself. The most influential early “endogenous” account of the cycle was developed by the French physician and political economist Clément Juglar, whose 1862 *Des crises commerciales et de leur retour périodique en France, en Angleterre et aux États-Unis* deployed methods that later became standard to business-cycle research. Juglar’s theory emphasized the peculiar modernity of cyclically returning crises, which had appeared only in societies where commerce and industry were highly developed. As economic expansion occurred, excitement turned to speculative excess, leading to panic and then liquidation, which laid the groundwork for expansion again. From this point onward, as Joseph Schumpeter later argued, “the *wave* ousted the *crisis* from the role of the protagonist of the play.”²⁰

Endogenous accounts of the cycle tended to emphasize underconsumption or overproduction as the cause of transition from rising prosperity to recession.²¹ The former was important for Marxist theories of crisis, although Marx himself never developed an elaborate account of the cycle. More popular was the theory of overproduction, which took its point of departure in a refutation of Say’s law, the idea that production always generated its own demand. The Ukrainian Marxist economist Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky offered the most influential early account of this view in his 1894 dissertation on crises in England, which, translated into German in 1901, provided a crucial bridge between Marx and later theorists of the cycle like Arthur Spiethoff and Gustav Cassel.²² Keynes, for example, considered Tugan-Baranovsky the originator of the tradition of cyclical analysis he was most drawn to.²³ Tugan-Baranovsky insisted that economic fluctuations exhibited a closer correspondence with the price of iron than of grain, which suggested that the major crises of the nineteenth century had been tied less to the quality of harvests than to the

jerky rhythms of investment in fixed capital—in particular, in the railways of newly settled areas in the United States, Australia, and Argentina.²⁴ During periods of upswing, major construction projects raised demand for all goods, as loan capital was offered freely and channeled to productive investment. Prices and profits rose, leading to wild speculation. When demand for capital exceeded its supply, discount rates rose, credit tightened, and prices fell. Panic followed. But the accumulation of loan capital during the period of downswing laid the foundations for recovery. And so the cycle repeated itself, over and over.²⁵

Many of the major works on the business cycle from this period offered detailed historical accounts of the emergence and behavior of cycles during the decades of industrial development, imperial expansion, and international financial integration that had followed the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars.²⁶ There had been panics for centuries before this, caused by plagues, wars, and the vagaries of harvests. But most agreed that the origins of the first business cycle could be dated to the period of speculative frenzy following the wars of independence in Latin America, when European capitalists rushed to take advantage of new opportunities for investment in the Western Hemisphere. It was only with the crisis of 1825, as Engels put it, that “all the civilized peoples and their more or less barbaric hangers-on” had come to be “thrown out of joint about once every ten years.”²⁷

Cyclical crisis appeared to be the obvious concomitant of the twinned growth of capitalism and European empire from the 1820s onward. In his influential writings from the early twentieth century, the German economist Arthur Spiethoff offered a characteristic historical account of the rise of the cycle on the heels of this European expansion. By the autumn of 1825, the fever of speculation caused by Latin American independence had broken, as stock prices fell, banks failed, and panic ensued. Good harvests returned between 1832 and 1836, and the furious development of British and American railways, a British export boom, and the increased use of the power loom led to another period of speculation, which ended in 1836. The spread of capitalist economic organization and industrialization in the 1840s, as well as good harvests and the opening of the Chinese market following the conclusion of the First Opium War, led to another period of expansion. When this ended in the autumn of 1847, revolution broke out across Europe. Boom conditions returned in the 1850s after the discovery of gold in California and Australia. But when the cycle turned downward in 1857 following the end of the Crimean War, the resulting crisis was felt around the world—from South America to Australia.²⁸ The crisis of 1857 was the first that many considered truly universal.²⁹ It was taken as evidence of the existence of a new, world-spanning

economic organism: “Even if the cultural world had always been held together locally and temporally, and money was always cosmopolitan,” the German journalist Gustav Höfken wrote, “the civilized world had never until now formed a body with a circulatory system in which an obstruction in one limb is immediately felt in all the others.”³⁰

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By the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea that modern economic life was inherently cyclical—and that past agricultural societies had seen only the random fluctuations of harvests, the yearly changes of the seasons, and panics caused by war and plague—was a widely accepted view among economists, although the idea of the cycle as a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of capitalist development challenged the assumption of both classical and neoclassical economics that crises and cycles were aberrations of a normal equilibrium state. Few of the leading neoclassical economists, such as Carl Menger, Friedrich von Wieser, Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, and Léon Walras, had much to say about them, although Alfred Marshall was an exception.³¹ On his view, the growing complexity of business relations had made major fluctuations of credit, and corresponding bouts of unemployment, much more widely experienced than ever before.³² Noncapitalist societies did not yet experience these regular fluctuations, which were present everywhere that capitalism had taken root. The fact that even Japan had seen a severe crisis in 1907, as the American economist Minnie Throop England argued, was evidence of the country’s industrial maturation—a sign, she wrote, that “the progress of the East has placed oriental countries within the ever-widening zone subject to industrial depression.”³³ Before this point, the cycle had appeared only in those countries where credit and business were highly developed: in Western Europe and North America, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, and Russia. The fact that the crisis of 1873 and its following depression were felt in the “much less advanced” nations of Brazil, the Argentine Republic, and Peru, however, was evidence that cycles were appearing not only where a high level of “civilization” had been attained but also where progress was being made toward it.³⁴ The business cycle, as the Swedish economist Gustav Cassel put it, was the temporal manifestation of this “will to progress.”³⁵

Capitalist development came at the cost of the endless return of crisis and the destruction of value that it caused. While industrialization had freed the masses from feudalism, according to Spiethoff, the complex and interdependent economic systems it had created were more fragile than the supposedly stationary agricultural economies that had existed from time immemorial. The tulip crisis of the seventeenth century did not disrupt Dutch national

economic life to the extent that it would have had it occurred in the early twentieth century.³⁶ Schumpeter agreed with Spiethoff: the expansion of wealth and the technological innovations that had transformed the nineteenth-century world, he wrote in his 1913 *Theory of Economic Development*, could have occurred only through these rhythms of expansion and contraction—not through the kind of gradual and smooth development that characterized organic growth.³⁷ A single organism like a tree might grow slowly, but the evolution of a species progressed through spasms of mutation. The idea of *natura non facit saltum* was an illusion in economics as much as it was in biology. The expansion of the railways had happened according to the rhythms of “reckless speculation,” as had that of the modern banking system, which emerged only after the destruction of its predecessors during the speculative excesses of the 1850s: “The philosophy and history of error are still unwritten, but even so we can assert that not every error is a final loss,” Spiethoff wrote, overlooking the obvious Hegelianism of this idea. “Many a thing which in its own time was a mistake proves in the future to have been the origin of great works,” he continued. The accumulation of these failures over time led to development. Modern humans were adapting themselves to the destructive rhythms of capitalism. There was a “new man” with a new “nervous and psychological system,” Spiethoff wrote, who was shaping the destiny of nations:

The age of the rule of the business cycle is the economic age of nations. In the economic race of nations, the leaders are always those with whom the cyclical phases appear most clearly and most sharply. . . . Every nation of importance in world history must go through this stage. Every nation will overcome the rule of the business cycle just as it will overcome the predominance of economic motives. But let us harbor no illusions on this point: the growth of economic power and the vast increase in wealth will then be a matter of the past!³⁸

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By the middle of the twentieth century, the idea that the “rule of the business cycle” could, in fact, be overcome had become common sense. This was a basic commitment of Keynesian-style macroeconomic management, although the prospect of attenuating the cycle’s more violent rhythms predated the so-called Keynesian Revolution.³⁹ When policies for dealing with the cycle were first developed in the 1920s, they focused less on taming it with the fiscal or monetary powers of the state than on collecting and publishing data on its past behavior to help businesses align their decision making with its future rhythms. This would soften the inflationary excesses of a boom and accelerate recovery from the deflationary aftermath of a crash.

The first practical experts of the cycle were business forecasters, who in the wake of the 1907 crisis established firms like Babson's and Moody's to help private businesses time investment decisions. The work of American pioneers of forecasting like Roger Babson drew from late nineteenth-century works prophesizing the future occurrence of ups and downs, like the popular work of the Ohio farmer Samuel Benner, *Benner's Prophecies*, which was widely consulted on Wall Street for its accurate predictions of panics.⁴⁰ Drawing on contemporary meteorological research, Benner suggested that periods of prosperity and recession could be predicted according to the cycles of prices in pig iron, hogs, and corn. These were linked to weather patterns caused by the equinoxes of Jupiter every 11.86 years, "the Jovial Cycle," which in turn were caused by the "electric influence" of Uranus and Neptune.⁴¹ The ancients had been right to look in astrology for human fate in the stars, and now this could be aided by the insights of modern science. Mastering the art of predicting future prices and future panics was important for the development of the young country of the United States.⁴² Benner was only barely off when he predicted the outbreak of a major panic in 1891: in late 1890, the near collapse of the London merchant bank Barings Brothers from excessive speculation in Argentina sent shock waves across the world, leading to a run on US gold and a collapse in US wheat prices in 1893. Hundreds of banks went out of business and unemployment skyrocketed.⁴³

Although the links between nineteenth-century traditions of folk prophecy and the early professional forecasting work of firms like Babson's tarnished the academic credibility of the latter, Babson's work was enormously popular with businesses and was emulated by academic researchers. The Harvard Economic Service, founded by the economists Warren Persons and Charles Bullock, became the world's leading economic research institution and inspired the creation of analogous institutions across Europe. These provided important sources of expertise not only for the consolidation of modern liberal economic governance but also for the era's most ambitious projects of state making and war making—on the far left and right—and a professional setting for the emergence of neo-liberal economics. The Soviet counterpart to the Harvard group, opened in 1920 by the Russian economist Nikolai Kondratiev, put business-cycle research to the service of the Five-Year Plan; the Institut für Konjunkturforschung, set up in Berlin by the German statistician Ernst Wagemann in 1925, provided an important source of information for the Nazi war economy; and the Österreichisches Institut für Konjunkturforschung in Vienna, headed by Ludwig von Mises, provided the launching pad for the career of the young economist Friedrich A. Hayek.⁴⁴

It was in the aftermath of the devastating but short-lived depression of 1920–1921 that the governments of many industrialized states began to take seriously the study and management of business cycles, tasks that remain a priority of nearly all governments today, though with varying tools. In the United States, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover tasked the National Bureau of Economic Research with undertaking an investigation of the cycle and means to control it as part of the Conference on Unemployment set up by President Warren Harding in 1921.⁴⁵ This study was led by the leading US economist Wesley Mitchell, whose 1911 *Business Cycles* had become the single most influential work on the topic. According to Mitchell, the cycle was an inherent feature of any economic system characterized by the extensive use of money. Those parts of the economy that were not yet organized into profit-making activity saw only seasonal fluctuations. As long as the “money economy” existed, it would be impossible to eradicate the business cycle entirely.⁴⁶ But with greater knowledge of how it behaved, modern economic life could be brought under control: “We cannot arrest the terrestrial seasons in their course,” Mitchell wrote, but “we do offset their influence sufficiently to avoid freezing to death in winter.”⁴⁷

The development of early macroeconomic governing functions of the state also transformed how the challenge of understanding and stabilizing the world economy was understood. Research on economic crisis as an international problem was first taken on by international organizations, like the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the League of Nations, in the aftermath of the crisis of 1920–1921, when an epidemic of unemployment across Europe threatened the specter of labor unrest and Bolshevism, and networks of labor activists lobbied the ILO to take up the study of unemployment and its cyclical return.⁴⁸ The efforts of Hoover’s Department of Commerce and the Harvard Committee on Economic Research provided a model. ILO officials convinced their more orthodox counterparts at the League of Nations to put the League’s collection of economic data to the task of predicting future economic conditions.⁴⁹ These efforts were driven by the idea that growing economic interdependence had made economic life more fragile for everyone, now that economic fluctuations in one part of the earth spread rapidly to its furthest corners. Lasting economic stabilization on the international level required some means of controlling the international transmission of cyclical downturns.

But it was far more difficult to find an international solution to the business cycle than a national one. Besides the political challenges of this prospect, there were also basic epistemic issues. First, understanding the business cycle as an international problem required the collection of far more economic data from around the world than was politically or technologically feasible.

When a collaborative League of Nations–ILO group on economic barometers was set up in 1926, for example, its work was held back by the dearth of good data. Many states collected data in ways that made it impossible to compare to that of others, and few states collected thorough statistics on industrial production or mining. “In the case of manufactures,” as one Australian official put it in a response to a League of Nations questionnaire, “it is considered very doubtful whether any results of a value at all commensurate with the cost involved could be obtained by the monthly collection of statistics.”⁵⁰ There was also very little that was known about the international transmission of cycles. Although the contagion of crises had been obvious to observers since at least the eighteenth century, it was mysterious why modern cyclical fluctuations seemed to synchronize so perfectly in different countries—a phenomenon the British economist Frederick Lavington referred to in the 1920s as “increasing business intimacy.”⁵¹ By the late nineteenth century, not only did modern capitalist economies all move according to predictable cyclical rhythms; these rhythms were increasingly on the same schedule, even across huge distances. The fluctuations of the economies of Britain, Germany, France, and the United States all moved in lockstep.⁵²

Efforts to understand this phenomenon led to some of the earliest studies of economic interdependence—a term that had long been used to describe international economic life but that was rarely held up to empirical scrutiny. The first attempt to document this phenomenon was undertaken by Wesley Mitchell and Willard Long Thorp, Mitchell’s colleague at the National Bureau of Economic Research (who, as US assistant secretary of state, later helped design the Marshall Plan). In a 1926 study, Mitchell and Thorp charted the “vicissitudes of economic fortune” in seventeen different countries, including the major Western European states, the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, India, Japan, and China, using data taken from commercial journals and official government documents, as well as other sources like newspapers.⁵³ The data they drew on was scarce and difficult to find, so much so that they asked their readers to provide them with any they had access to. American statistics were available since the time of the Revolution, but in China, reliable information dated only from the late nineteenth century. Because a country tended to collect thorough economic statistics only after its economy had modernized and begun to move cyclically, it was impossible to understand exactly when and why the modern cycle had begun in most places. The data always chased the phenomenon it measured. What it did show was that no country, whether “young” or “old,” saw an unbroken period of prosperity that lasted longer than five or six years. Regular cyclical downturns were universal in developed economies.

The commonsense view of a “normal state of trade” was an illusion, because economic activity was in a constant state of flux.⁵⁴ But a general theory of cycles could be at best guesswork, since data had been collected only since the emergence of a specific form of economic organization in Western Europe from the late eighteenth century onward.⁵⁵

What could be shown with dramatic clarity was that cycles were occurring on a similar schedule across the entire earth, and that growth and decline in one country had far-reaching effects—“a matter which merits far more attention,” Mitchell wrote, “than it commonly receives in discussions of national policy.”⁵⁶ What explained this remarkable process of synchronization? Perhaps it was some kind of “cosmic cause” affecting “all quarters of the globe in much the same way each year.” Mitchell offered an alternative theory:

The basis of this trend toward unity of economic fortunes among communities organized on the European model is that each phase in a business cycle, as it develops in any area, tends to produce the same phase in all the areas with which the first has dealings. Prosperity in one country stimulates demand for the products of other countries, and so quickens activities in the latter regions. Prosperity also lessens the energy with which merchants, financiers, and contractors seek competitive business in central markets, and so gives a better chance to the corresponding classes in countries where the domestic demand is less active. Further, prosperity, with its sanguine temper and its liberal profits, encourages investments abroad as well as at home, and the export of capital to other countries gives an impetus to their trade. A recession checks all these stimuli.⁵⁷

The most fundamental explanation for this synchronization was, for Mitchell, the simple fact of the worldwide spread of a form of economic organization that approximated that of Western European countries. States that were less developed—Russia, South Africa, Brazil, China, and Italy before 1907—did not follow international cyclical schedules as closely. But as they modernized, they could not help but be linked into a shared timing of rise and fall. What the data showed, Mitchell and Thorp argued, was “a secular trend toward the territorial expansion of business relations and concomitant trend toward economic unity.” The process by which the United States had been unified from thirteen separate colonies into one economic system that shared one business cycle was occurring across the earth. As the world came to share the same rhythms of rise and fall, one could speak of the existence of a “world economy”—a term that was not yet in common use in English and that many still regarded as a peculiar German idea as fanciful as a “world state.”⁵⁸ But the data showed it was a reality: “Business enterprise,” Mitchell wrote, “has been silently establishing a ‘world

economy,' a 'commercial league of nations,' in which all the members prosper or suffer together."⁵⁹ The emergence of this world economy was characterized by two overlapping temporalities: the slow evolution of an economic system toward an "organization approximating that of western Europe," which, once achieved, set this system onto a returning schedule of crisis and renewal.⁶⁰

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Observation of the cyclical nature of modern economic organization was helping to cement belief, by the end of the 1920s, that the entire world, from its least developed regions to its industrial centers, was being linked together into an interdependent world-spanning system or organism. As the world had become more interconnected during the so-called first wave of globalization, more and more economic systems had begun to move on shared timetables of prosperity, crisis, and depression. The temporal axis of modernity pointed not only in a singular direction of development, with one economic system after another being peeled off from its agricultural past by the forces of technology and capital accumulation. Economic modernity was also characterized by the fact that business cycles had begun to move according to the same schedule around the world—a phenomenon that no one could fully explain. Understanding interdependence became as much a question of time as of space, since the clearest evidence of a singular world economy was the fact that its most disparate members had come to share the same present and future.

Economic globalization was thus felt not only in the shrinking of distance but also in the temporal synchronization of places that had once existed at very different times. In addition to herculean efforts to standardize timekeeping around the world, the late nineteenth century also saw the emergence of what later observers would refer to as a singular "world economic rhythm."⁶¹ This was first felt with clarity in 1857.⁶² After the crisis of 1920–1921 and the Great Depression, its existence was undeniable. Participation in this world rhythm was to observers a sure sign of economic development; random and local fluctuations, by contrast, indicated that an economic system was not yet part of the modern world order. On the national level, the modern business cycle emerged only after there had "developed a world economy of so uniform a kind," Gustav Cassel wrote, "that it is possible to regard it as an entity."⁶³ With the benefit of hindsight, it was obvious to European economists in the early twentieth century that European economic life had begun to suffer from periodic crisis only once the nineteenth century's process of economic and political expansion had taken off. Nearly all of these crises had been transmitted back to Europe from abroad, as the rapid global development of European

power in the nineteenth century, and the acceleration of the economic exploitation of Europe's colonies, set European economies onto an unstable rhythm of rapid expansion and terrifying collapse. This would stop only once the rest of the world, Cassel wrote, was "more or less uniformly equipped with the material foundations of Western civilisation."⁶⁴ Others drew the link between business cycles and empire differently. According to J. A. Hobson, it was the periodic crises of overproduction and underconsumption that motivated the expansion of European and American empire, with businesses clamoring for new markets and investments as opportunities at home narrowed. If the purchasing power of consumers could be raised through the redistribution of surplus savings, domestic markets for goods and capital could be maintained, and there would be little economic reason for imperial expansion.⁶⁵

By the interwar period, it was thus common for European and American economists to see capitalist modernity not only as a process of ceaseless expansion but also as characterized by the inevitability of its periodic breakdown according to the regular and predictable return of the past. The business cycle was reckoned as the cost of the transition to capitalism. As long as there were profit-hungry entrepreneurs, Schumpeter wrote, economic life would be governed by "these great peripeteias."⁶⁶ For some, the fact that economic growth could only ever occur in a cyclical pattern, not a linear one, meant that there had not yet been full emancipation from the kind of predestination described by the ancients. Modern humans were now in bondage to another mysterious and disastrous natural rhythm, one that was as predictable and as unstoppable as the seasons. "The modern world regards business crises," as the American economist John Bates Clark wrote in 1898, "much as the ancient Egyptians regarded the overflowings of the Nile."⁶⁷ Far from promising greater control over economic life, the increasingly sophisticated mathematical reckoning of the business cycle simply made this bondage more legible: the work of the new business cycle institutes, as Cassel put it, ultimately resulted in a "modern Western form of an ancient Eastern fatalism," according to which "everything that occurs in economic life is determined by mathematical curves and that we have only to discover these to be able to learn our predetermined fate."⁶⁸ The future of economic debate in the twentieth century was over whether or not this fate was immutable—and whether the movements of the market, unlike those of the stars, were open to human manipulation.

Notes

I would like to thank Jos Betts, Tim Barker, Katrina Forrester, Stefanos Geroulanos, Tim Shenk, Quinn Slobodian, and Liat Spiro for reading a draft of this essay and for providing insightful comments.

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History and Temporal Sovereignty in the Thought of Jawaharlal Nehru

SUNIL PURUSHOTHAM

Though I have discarded much of past tradition and custom, and am anxious that India should rid herself of all shackles that bind and constrain and divide her people, and suppress vast numbers of them, and prevent the free development of the body and the spirit; though I seek all this, yet I do not wish to cut myself off from that past completely. I am proud of that great inheritance that has been, and is, ours, and I am conscious that I too, like all of us, am a link in that unbroken chain which goes back to the dawn of history in the immemorial past of India. *That chain I would not break, for I treasure it and seek inspiration from it.*

THE WILL AND TESTAMENT OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, 1954¹

In a 1965 memorial tribute, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote of Jawaharlal Nehru as “a man of three extraordinary epochs.” The first was “the long anticolonial struggle,” the second was “the fight for peace after World War II,” and “the third epoch of Nehru’s work” was “unfolding after his death.”² By situating Nehru’s life within a framework that brought together past, present, and future, Dr. King aptly identified a problem that had occupied Nehru as both a thinker and a political actor. Nehru was obsessed with time. Ruminations on the mysterious yet inextricable relationship of past, present, and future saturated his writings, speeches, and correspondence alike. “The past,” he wrote in his 1946 *The Discovery of India*, “becomes something that leads up to the present, the moment of action, the future something that flows from it; and all three are inextricably intertwined and interrelated.”³ History was Nehru’s chosen form of intellectual exposition: all three of his major publications were vast, often rambling historical endeavors.⁴ They were, as Javed Majeed observes, “tales about time” in which the very experience of time itself was at stake.⁵

What should we make of Nehru the historical actor in light of Nehru the historian? The expanding field of global intellectual history, as Shruti Kapila argues, has raised the methodological issue that many of the important ideological innovators in the colonial and postcolonial world were more often than not also political practitioners concerned with changing the world rather

than merely interpreting it.⁶ As India's first prime minister from 1947 until his death in 1964, Nehru was extraordinarily influential in crafting the normative and institutional conditions for postcolonial India's political life. My contention here is that there was a constitutive link between Nehru's historicism and his political program, a connection evident in the regime of temporality embedded within, and enacted by, the postcolonial Indian nation-state.

The concept of chronocenos, developed in the introduction to this volume as a complex temporal ecosystem constituted through the engagement and conflict between various temporal regimes operating at any given historical moment, is helpful in illuminating important dimensions of Nehru's political thought. Temporality was a core concern of his thought, not only in his world historical narratives but also in his contemplations on the nature of individual political action and in his understanding of political power as grounded in a relationship to time. This chapter is organized into three sections. The first explores Nehru's understanding of technological modernity in what he called the "Atomic and Sputnik Age." I argue that a midcentury conjuncture led to important shifts in Nehru's political thought because of a perceived transformation in temporal experience. This conjuncture operated in multiple interconnected registers: the Second World War, the emergent Cold War rivalry, anticolonial struggles for national liberation across Asia and Africa, a perceived crisis of Western "civilization" and its notion of progress, and the advent of atomic weaponry. Other dimensions were particular to India: the bloody partition and independence of 1947 and the transformation of the national movement into a project of state sovereignty and economic development. Nehru had to take these developments into account at both practical and theoretical levels as his role shifted from oft-imprisoned dissident leader to a prime minister who consolidated his preeminent position in both government and the ruling Indian National Congress party. These shifting circumstances corresponded to shifts within Nehru's political thought and complicated the ways he perceived relations between past, present, and future.

The second section investigates the relationship between Nehru's historicism and his statism. Nehru understood politics as a process unfolding over time. Nehru's statism—like his writing of history—was animated by a desire to order time and to produce a "regime of historicity" that linked together the past, present, and future of the Indian nation.⁷ His arguments in favor of the canonical features of the Nehruvian state—republicanism, secularism, centralized economic planning, socialism, nonaligned internationalism—share a common concern with the problem of enacting historical change while mediating between past, present, and future. This was a common thread between the various dimensions of Nehru's political thought, which has been

described by C. A. Bayly as a classic case of a “historically contingent amalgam of ideological fragments.”⁸ Nehru was, moreover, keenly attuned to the power of affective registers in creating temporal regimes, driving historical change, and conditioning political life. His historical writings and public rhetoric demonstrated deep vitalist and romanticist impulses.⁹ Nehru relied on the state as a vehicle not for completely jettisoning the past but for infusing energy into what he perceived to be an enervated civilization. He argued for the necessity of an unabashed futurity but one that did not disavow the past entirely, seeking instead to selectively appropriate, refashion, and redeploy it in the making of a unique Indian modernity. His state project, moreover, sought to structure time itself, to give direction but also tempo, vitality, and purpose to the nation’s movement through history.

The third section, “Time of the Nation,” explores Nehru’s historical archaeology of civilizational repertoires that equipped India with the potential, lacking in the West, for a more humane and stable modernity. Nehru’s historiographical forays—his “discovery” of India as a historical object through the millennia—aimed to demonstrate that certain characteristics required for India’s development as a modern nation were immanent within Indian civilization. Other characteristics needed to be cultivated through modern institutions, economic development, and a political leadership aware of the present as a historical moment in a longer “chain of happening.”¹⁰ As both a historian and a political practitioner, Nehru was preoccupied with realizing India’s immanent potential while simultaneously transforming it, to “adapt the new and harmonize it with the old.”¹¹ Nehru envisioned India and India’s existence in the world as a variegated, hierarchical, and contentious temporal ecosystem.

I refer to a number of sources, including *The Discovery of India* (1946), but return frequently to a 1958 essay entitled “The Basic Approach,” which appeared in the All India Congress Committee’s *Economic Review*, a forum for technocrats and politicians of the ruling party.¹² I’ve chosen to work through this essay not because it is exceptional in any particular regard but because it offers a concise distillation of some of the major concerns of Nehru’s political thought. It addresses themes that permeated his published works, public rhetoric, and official correspondence. “The Basic Approach” was primarily intended as a set of guiding principles—a conception of procedural morality—for an Indian nation-state project that had, after more than a decade of independence, recognized the limits of incrementalism and reconciled to a retreat from more radical visions of the postcolonial. It also provides a succinct snapshot of an older Nehru as a secure leader occupying the commanding heights of the nation-state, conceptualizing a national policy agenda within a world-historical framework.

The Atomic and Sputnik Age

Nehru was profoundly shaped by the interwar and wartime experience, which, for him, culminated with the advent of atomic weaponry in 1945 and the bloodbath and freedom of 1947. Nehru's formulation of an ethical *étatisme* was developed in this context of violence—state repression, satyagraha, and “communal” violence domestically, and the violent global contestations of the first half of the twentieth century. For Nehru, the horrors of the two world wars and the new historical epoch heralded by 1945–1947 demanded a new understanding of historical time that required a fundamental rethinking of the nature of politics and global humanity.¹³ Speaking at the Asian Relations Conference in early 1947, Nehru observed that the world was “standing on this watershed which divides two epochs of human history and endeavour,” the “end of an era and on the threshold of a new period of history.” Nehru was highly conscious of the continuous present as the threshold to the future, “the edge of history.” From this threshold, he often found himself “plunging into the process of making history.”¹⁴ His position vis-à-vis historical change in this new era demanded a rethinking of the nature of political action and animated his insistence on the primacy of the state.

Nehru is often portrayed as an uncritical devotee of techno-scientific progress.¹⁵ Yet his faith in the beneficence of technological modernity was substantially qualified. Nehru after 1945–1947 would have rejected the stark dichotomy he laid down in 1934: “Our politics must either be those of magic or of science.”¹⁶ His understanding of both the emancipatory and destructive potential of science and technology deeply conditioned his understanding of political action, as well as the state project he implemented and normalized. This duality was integral to what he referred to in “The Basic Approach” as the “tragic paradox of this Atomic and Sputnik Age.”¹⁷ Nehru imagined his simultaneous commitments to technocracy and democracy as a balancing act. This equilibrium was necessary to sustain a harmonized political and economic life that could be institutionalized and reproduced over time.

The younger Nehru saw mankind's potential for action governed by certain laws of historical development and circumscribed, in large measure, by the natural environment. He considered Marxism “the only reasonable and scientific explanation of history.”¹⁸ From the late 1930s, however, Nehru questioned Marxism's analytical limitations as a theory of historical development that could interpret the past but also illuminate the future. This was a crucial dimension of his sense of disjuncture between the past and the future and of an altered sense of temporal experience produced by this midcentury conjuncture of war, partition, independence, and technological innovation. “A

study of Marx and Lenin,” he wrote of his younger self in the *Discovery*, “produced a powerful effect on my mind and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light. The long chain of history and of social development appeared to have some meaning, some sequence, and the future lost some of its obscurity.” Yet “the rise of fascism and Nazism and all that lay behind them,” as well as the “very rapid growth of technology and the practical application of vast developments in scientific knowledge are now changing the world picture with amazing rapidity, leading to new problems.”¹⁹ The future regained its obscurity.

In 1958, he began “The Basic Approach” with the observation that science and technology had led to humanity’s “conquest of external conditions” and unlocked the potential to subordinate the natural world and put it in service of mankind as never before. This was not necessarily an entirely new way of thinking for Nehru. In *Glimpses of World History* he connected the industrializing West’s ability to control nature in the nineteenth century to the brutal subordination of African and Asian peoples. Such behavior illustrated what he identified, in a Gandhian vein, as the West’s loss of self-control that accompanied this newfound power.²⁰ Yet the technological and scientific developments of the twentieth century—atomic weaponry above all—took this domination of nature and other humans to an unprecedented level. This inaugurated a new period in history in which the laws of historical development that had governed previous eras no longer applied. Time was now placed in the service of mankind. Unshackled and unmoored from these previous patterns and limits, humanity had become a radically empowered agent of historical change. This situation was laden with great emancipatory potential—thus the “Sputnik” side of the paradox—and Nehru, like other first-generation postcolonial state builders from Nkrumah to Nasser, sought to foster scientific research and development, and to discipline nature in service of the national project. As in Ghana and Egypt, the dam became emblematic of this way of thinking, what Nehru famously referred to as the “temples” of a “resurgent India.”

Human mastery over nature opened up unprecedented avenues for both the realization and the negation of freedom. Nehru laments in “The Basic Approach” that this radical empowerment was not accompanied by any substantial alteration in worldviews or an ethical revaluation of the conduct of politics: “Conquering the physical world, he fails to conquer himself.”²¹ Like other midcentury thinkers, he saw a civilizational crisis of the West, what he called the “mental exhaustion of civilization itself.”²² For Nehru, the horrors of the Second World War produced little reflection by Western powers and the Soviet bloc alike—as evidenced by the violent attempts to reestablish colonial

rule in Asia after the war, the demand that decolonizing peoples take sides in the global conflict of the Cold War, and the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. This was a moral crisis that made mankind's technological capacity potentially cataclysmic. That is, the West (including the Soviet Union) refused to responsibly grapple with the fact that the postwar order—born out of global war—owed its very existence to the immanent (and seemingly imminent) potential of global destruction. This was, for Nehru, the “tragic” spirit of the “Atomic Age” that had parallel articulations within India itself. A decade after independence, he lamented that the privileging of instrumentality over ideals was sapping the national project of power and direction: “The larger vision that inspired us and gave us strength seems to fade away and we spend our energies in petty controversies and conflicts. Not even the internal and external crises, not even the atomic and hydrogen bombs . . . seem to shake us up and pull us out of this rather parochial outlook and complacency.”²³

Nehru was concerned that human societies were incapable of absorbing all the knowledge made possible by science. This partial absorption had simultaneously empowered man and rendered him irrationally dangerous: “Science is advancing far beyond the comprehension of a very great part of the human race, and posing problems which most of us are incapable of understanding, much less solving.”²⁴ Such concerns factored into his emphasis on political responsibility as an individual disposition and into his reliance on institutions as the principal means of harnessing and (ideally) rendering nonviolent this newfound human empowerment. Politics needed to govern science, and also to determine the terms of the relationship between scientific knowledge and human life. Nehru's nonalignment and internationalism illustrated similar concerns: without shared political responsibility and responsible international institutions the world would be prone to commit “suicide.”²⁵

What further complicated the nature of political action in the Atomic and Sputnik Age was that traditional political concepts had been evacuated of meaning and spirit—what Arendt referred to as “empty shells.”²⁶ In light of the “vast and terrible potentialities of the new atomic bomb,” he wrote, “all of us have to think in new terms and discard many old and cherished notions.”²⁷ In “The Basic Approach,” Nehru labels both “Western” (i.e., liberal) and “Marxist” economics as “out of date,” leading him to conclude, “We have thus to do our own thinking.” Here is an argument for the third path enunciated at Bandung that declared the Third World as an alternative global project. But we also see how this new “age” was radically different from its predecessors and, as such, how the past no longer served as a reliable guide for making informed political decisions: “There are new problems for which we have not got parallels or historical precedents elsewhere. What has happened in the

past in the industrially advanced countries has little bearing on us today.²⁸ Here we see a tension or even the incommensurability between Nehru's cognitive perspectives as a historian and as a political practitioner: the former is committed to an understanding of the world that emphasizes deep connections and continuities dating back millennia, while the latter experiences the present as radical newness and discontinuity.

Although he continued to see history as a potential resource and as a dimension of meaning and being, Nehru increasingly saw little value in history as a guide.²⁹ This apparently discontinuous nature of the present epoch and the difficulty of discerning rational patterns of historical development, among other things, rendered Nehru cautious and even conservative when faced with the question of giving shape and substance to 1947. That freedom was subsumed under the sign of sovereignty rather than some form of radical and immediate emancipation can, further, be read in light of Nehru's rejection of an emancipatory telos and his insistence on the impossibility of transcending history or of a revolutionary consummation of time. Nehru's "tragic paradox," then, was not that technological modernity had simply empowered mankind for better and worse; it was precisely that empowerment that threatened to deprive mankind of authorship of the future, that limited the scope for political action, and that encouraged both fatalism and arrogance about the human ability to shape history. The very conditions that had made man an agent of history threatened in equal measure to render mankind a mere subject of history.

Historicism and the State in India

Although scholars continue to debate the origins of Indian historicism, what is clear is that history in the Western mode became an authoritative form of knowledge during the colonial period.³⁰ From the mid-nineteenth century, as Bayly observes, history provided "the foundations for an emerging political sensibility" among Indian public men.³¹ Nehru was arguably the arch-practitioner of this medium. His narratives wandered over the centuries, reaching deep into Indian antiquity. His interpretations of change over time placed a great deal of emphasis on statics and dynamics. He understood the relationship between time and power quite literally, as the accumulation, expression, or waning of energy. He agreed with Hegel, Marx, and Mill that India had fallen into a "stagnatory and vegetative life" (Marx) and had lost its historical dynamism: "Indian life becomes a sluggish stream, living in the past, moving slowly through the accumulations of dead centuries."³² India's loss of dynamism resulted not from a lack of history but from a combination

of internal and external dynamics: the stultifying effects of Indian society and culture (defined above all by caste) on the one hand, and the retarding effects of British domination on the other. Indeed, Nehru's statism was informed not only by his belief that power in India had traditionally been invested in society (rather than the state) with deleterious consequences but also by the assumptions of Western historicism that, since at least Hegel, privileged the state as the locus and signifying agent of history. Although he remained deeply concerned about individual liberty, the demands of modern mass politics led Nehru to the conclusion that, as Sudipta Kaviraj has argued, "to be modern was to live through the state."³³ Only the state could serve as a vehicle for reason in the Atomic and Sputnik Age whose "spirit" was irrational, or at least experienced as such.

Discovery and *Glimpses* demonstrate that the West's role as primary driver of world history was a contingent and relatively brief phenomenon—an "unhappy interlude"—rather than revealing of some fundamental truth of historical development or intrinsic civilizational superiority. Like Hegel, Nehru traced how the spirit moved from its origins in the East to the West. The crisis of Western civilization and the onset of decolonization, however, was an opportunity for the East to reclaim the spirit and Asia's central place in world history. For Nehru, the problem was not that India had no history proper, but rather that it had too much history. The problem was how to make the old new, how to inject vitality and youth into an ancient civilization.

Yet, how to activate this "vital energy, sonic inner source of strength that gives life to a civilization or a people"? Nehru argued in *The Discovery* that there are three peoples who possessed such vitality and thus historical dynamism at the time. The first, Americans, were dynamic precisely because they had no history: "a new people, uninhibited and without burdens and complexes of old races." The second, Russians, have made a "complete break from the old" and "have been reincarnated anew" through a revolutionary "shock of change, from top to bottom." The third, the Chinese, were an ancient civilization forged anew through war and collective struggle. In India, the nationalist movement under Gandhi, "through action and self-imposed suffering and sacrifice," had managed to a certain extent to "recharge the battery of India's spirit and waken her from her long slumber."³⁴ Nehru argued, however, that India could not forsake its past, nor could it be radically reconstituted through violence. Rather, the sovereign nation-state would have to mediate between past, present, and future. To open up the future as the "horizon of expectation" as a means of revitalization on the one hand, and, on the other, to ground the nation deep in history, allowing it to draw on a civilizational inheritance that could equip India to navigate the pitfalls of modernity that

had plagued the West. Thus you have the adoption of the Lion Capital of the third-century BCE Mauryan emperor Aśoka as the official emblem of an explicitly modernizing state project.

The pathological obsession that Nehru bestowed to India regarding the stability and durability of the nation as an idea, a political project, and institutional apparatus emerged, at least in part, from the recognition that the nation-state needed not just to survive over time but also to structure historical time in an age marked by indeterminacy. Scholars have examined how the colonial state worked to produce India as a national space.³⁵ Yet the nation-state, like its colonial predecessor, needed to organize time just as it commanded space and to integrate the future as the horizon of this structuring of time. It did this through five-year plans, regularly scheduled elections, and the everyday workings of the developmental state. Measuring “progress” through statistics similarly imposed a temporal framework for the life of the nation and sought to institute a determinate chronology of historical time. The state, then, was supposed to give not only direction but also a tempo, vitality, and purpose to the nation’s movement through history.

Nehru’s enthusiasm for centralized economic planning has conventionally been interpreted as a sign of his confidence in the ability of human action to master the future, a trait he was seen to share with more doctrinaire Marxists. While this may have been true in the 1930s, in the context of the Atomic and Sputnik Age in which nuclear apocalypse—what he referred to as the “sword of Damocles”—threatened to erase the future entirely, planning was a means of reinstating the future as a “horizon of expectation,” a far more modest goal.³⁶ This insistence on futurity in the face of the potential erasure of the future was evident in the Le Corbusier–designed Chandigarh, Nehru’s hypermodern city that sought to materialize the potential of science and planning in the aftermath of the traumas of the Partition. As Shruti Kapila observes, Chandigarh made zero concessions to the vernacular or the classical, the local, or the historical.³⁷ It was radically and unapologetically new, an intrusion of the future into the present. Nehru anxiously hectored his colleagues and the general public alike regarding the necessity of resisting being “pursued by the past” or, equally, succumbing to the “domination of the present” or the “passion and prejudice of the moment.”³⁸ Nehru feared that the disappearance of the future as a horizon of expectation would lead to India being overwhelmed by the past.

Nehru saw electoral and procedural democracy as a means to temper state planning as well as the market. He aspired to achieve equilibrium between these dimensions of power. Planning in India was relatively modest in comparison to the Soviet Union, China, Taiwan, or Korea.³⁹ He argued that

the “slate could never be wiped clean” and promoted instead a “gradual” approach of “democratic planning without too much compulsion.”⁴⁰ This was not an authoritarian state-directed radical overhaul of Indian society, but a belief that procedural democracy allied with a state “utilizing the new sources of power which science has put at our disposal” was a means to achieve stability in a world of both revolutionary and reactionary assertion.⁴¹ While large-scale projects became key signifiers of the Nehruvian state, the five-year plans (especially the second) sought to balance these with the promotion of decentralized “cottage industries.” This combination aimed to inject vitality into India’s static economy and to break down anachronistic social practices, while reviving the village’s role as India’s traditional unit of industrial production.

There was, moreover, a temporal dimension to this scalar blending of big and small, modern and traditional. In a discussion of Soviet planning, Nehru was asked by Tibor Mende in 1955 if the “institutions interposed between you and the masses do not slow action down.” He responded: “They do . . . but I know that it is essential to have some institutions. Otherwise it’s just chaos.”⁴² The task, then, was to create a symbiotic relationship between scientific planning and a notion of democratic accountability and political responsibility over human affairs. Moreover, slowing down was, for Nehru, at once a source of endless frustration and a necessary form of counterdemocracy that could put the brakes on the potential development of democratic authoritarianism, majoritarianism, or tyranny of the social.⁴³

Planning, moreover, signified not just the insistence on the future; it also allowed for greater judgment in the present, the “moment of action.” It provided the historically situated actor with a framework for thinking and action.⁴⁴ Even if future outcomes always remained unknowable, without such a framework, action in the present was entirely contingent and thus necessarily shortsighted, inherently interest driven, and wasteful of scarce resources. This was particularly important in light of Nehru’s understanding of the open-ended nature of historical causality. Nehru’s penchant for planning and for writing history served similar functions in making sense of an individual’s being in the world and in mediating between past, present, and future. Both gave narrative order, and thus meaning and legibility, to change over time.⁴⁵

Dipesh Chakrabarty has highlighted the role of historicism in the development of—and in our understandings of—political modernity in non-Western societies. He notes a tension between the temporal horizon of “now” intrinsic to anticolonial demands for sovereignty and the persistence of the historicist logic of “not yet” that was a central organizing principle of both European colonialism and subsequent nation-state projects.⁴⁶ This tension is

readily discernible in India's postcolonial experiments in sovereignty and democracy, and perhaps nowhere more clearly than in Nehru's often muddled ideological maneuvers. An insistence on genuine sovereignty internationally and universal adult franchise domestically, for example, were clear significations of the "now." This tension informed Nehru's statist temporal framework for the postcolonial. He was, at once, a theorist of both the "now" and the "not yet." The waiting room of history, to borrow Chakrabarty's evocative phrase, was never abandoned but remade and retrofitted with new promises and expectations, the door forced open but the threshold never fully crossed.

As late as *Discovery* (1946), Nehru expressed a desire for some sort of "mass event" like a civil war or invasion that would create a rupture, inject vitality into a stagnant society, and unshackle India from its burdensome past and stupefied present alike.⁴⁷ This was a common line of thinking among anticolonial thinkers, taken to its extreme by Mao. Indeed, Nehru wrote to his sister during his wartime imprisonment that India could benefit from the "cataclysm" and "mass experience" of war and revolution experienced in China. Even at this point, however, such a break was more an aspiration than a reality for Nehru, as he resigned himself to the idea of "building up slowly but surely a new nation."⁴⁸ The Nehru after 1945–1947 fully abandoned any such break with historical time, rejecting Maoist notions of the ceaseless iteration of the new in favor of a regime of historicity that connected past, present and future: "A complete break means break with the past, with your past culture, with everything. Well, essentially, a country does not do that. Even after a revolution it comes back to its past."⁴⁹ History could not be transcended, escaped, or fully mastered.

In previous historical eras, Nehru conceded that war and violence were rational (and even ethical) means of producing definitive political outcomes. Yet the Atomic and Sputnik Age had rendered revolution anachronistic: "Violence cannot possibly lead today to a solution of any major problem because violence has become much too terrible and destructive. The moral approach to this problem has now been powerfully reinforced by the practical aspect."⁵⁰ After 1945, and certainly after the upheavals of the Partition, Nehru became acutely aware, as Khilnani has argued, of the "destructive potentialities of politics, and therefore the need to use power with great circumspection."⁵¹ If Gandhi famously asked the British in 1942 to leave India to "God or Anarchy," for Nehru there was no God, only anarchy. The one time he did take a dramatic plunge (in 1947), millions died and millions more victimized. Although he recognized—and criticized those who failed to recognize—that the Partition constituted an irreversible departure that both foreclosed and opened up historical trajectories, after 1947 Nehru explicitly rejected the productive

potential of the event. The experience of the Partition for Nehru was one of being overwhelmed by the force of the event, when he and Indian society were rendered mere subjects of history rather than its agents.

What was important, for Nehru, was not revolutionary transformation but the fostering of a sense of historical directionality. “My own impression,” Nehru told Mende, “is that once the people realize that you are going in a certain direction, they are optimistic. They are prepared to put up with delay, a little delay, because they know that they are going toward something. It is only when they feel that they are not going any way that they become angry.”⁵² It was the responsibility of political leadership to invest meaning in the immediate, to provide the people with a particular temporal orientation, and to give meaning to new forms of deferral. Of course, Nehru’s affective efforts at fostering a sense of historical directionality were instrumental as well, including dams and a steel industry conjured from scratch, the Indian Institutes of Technology, the national laboratories, and the vast array of other modernizing and scientific institutions that were key signifiers of the Nehruvian state. This was the Sputnik dimension of technological modernity that Nehru deployed to urge Indians to find their bearings—to orient them temporally and invest their lives with a sense of historical purpose—in an indeterminate present.

Time of the Nation

Like other nationalists, Nehru grounded the nation as a project of power in a deep history. His narrative of India from antiquity to modernity was dialectical and paradoxical. From the Indus Valley civilization onward, the nation was marked by unity and continuity, “a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads.” At the same time, India exhibited unusual vitality: the nation’s movement through history was marked by continual change, a dynamic process of adaptation and assimilation. Foreign influences (most notably Islam) were absorbed and domesticated in a continuous synthesis of the old and new. Indian civilization was thus equipped with an indigenous form of secularism and pluralism, a “unity in diversity,” or what Javed Majeed has called the “paradoxical normalization of heterogeneity.”⁵³ For Nehru, India’s capacity to at once recognize and transcend difference within the national distinguished it from the West and positioned India as an exemplar for a peaceful global future. In this respect, a “plural but integrated” India was not only a model for a more advanced nationalism but also a more advanced internationalism. By capturing the plurality that defined the subcontinent, moreover, the “Indian,” because of its foundation

in this deep history, rather than the Hindu, was a more accurate category for a lasting notion of nationhood.

Colonialism had, however, interrupted this millennia-long process of historical development, sapping India of its vitality and historical dynamism. Rather than act as a modernizing force, India's subjugation allowed others to surge ahead while India and the colonial world more broadly were rendered "backwards." It was precisely this temporal disjuncture that had made Western-dominated modernity particularly unstable and prone to crisis. Nehru's assertion of India's world-historical significance as the twentieth century emerged from decades of devastating war was premised on the assumption that India's capacity for civilizational continuity could bring equilibrium and moral purpose to a chaotic world order. He thought that India had an integral role to play in the building of a nonhierarchical universal modernity marked by shared prosperity, equality, and international cooperation.⁵⁴ Through national sovereignty, India had the potential to forge a unique, and even superior, modernity by combining its capacity for stability and continuity with a state project that would deploy science, technology, and, crucially, democracy to emancipate India's suppressed energies. Despite his rhetoric of "catching up," then, Nehru didn't seek to erase the different temporal orders that, through their interaction and mutual constitution, made up the single plane of "world history." Rather, he thought that a modern India and a nonaligned Third World more generally, could provide a "countertempo" to a West he identified as both dynamic and reckless.⁵⁵ India's oldness, in other words, was an advantage amid the global twentieth-century experience of radical newness.

Nehru's argument that India's unity was defined by its diversity is well known. Less appreciated is his conception of the nation as a space of multiple, "intertwined and interrelated" temporalities: an "ancient palimpsest," a curious amalgam of the past and present that contains the immanent potential of the future.⁵⁶ Here the notion of chronocenos, of an interconnected temporal ecosystem, is highly suggestive. In Nehru's thought such an ecosystem comprised distinct but interacting tiers. The top tier was the global, which served less as a spatial category and more as a temporal one—a sort of universal zeitgeist. While universal, this zeitgeist had an impact on the world in highly differential ways, producing a variety of iterations and experiences. Modernity's impact on India, Nehru argued, was one of constitutive exclusion. Colonialism allowed the West to modernize while preventing India from becoming fully modern. Colonialism, for Nehru, was a sort of temporal trap that had locked India in a sort of ever-present past and denied the future.

As a means of reviving India's historical dynamism, Nehru sought to eradicate anachronisms preserved or produced by colonialism. Nehru's republicanism

sought to dismantle the anachronistic and enervating “feudalism” of the colonial order and to assert the Indian people as a world-historical force. Nehru pitted “the people” as a sovereign force against the nearly six hundred princely states that had formed a key pillar of the Raj’s imperial regime of sovereignty and, indeed, against landlordism more broadly. He was convinced that “the masses” alone could serve as drivers of historical change in India and that their unleashed energies would continue to animate the national project after independence. Yet these energies also needed to be harnessed and channeled through institutions. Nehru’s fear of popular politics was, as Chakrabarty has noted, “qualified by its opposite, a political faith in the masses.”⁵⁷ That the founding of the Republic of India in 1950 saw “the people” occupy and refashion, rather than displace, the institutional infrastructure of the colonial state did not mean, for Nehru, that it shouldn’t be considered a revolution. It was a revolution not in the sense of a complete break from the past or repudiation of history, but as the founding of a new body politic and the consolidation of popular sovereignty into a new governmental and legal order. It was an escape from the colonial temporal trap.

Yet the temporal framework of Indian democracy that Nehru envisioned was distinctly aspirational and progressive rather than revolutionary. As Nehru famously put it in his August 15, 1947, “Tryst with Destiny” speech, the “future beckons to us now,” but that “future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving.”⁵⁸ He was convinced that democracy could succeed only by establishing a political life that was reproducible over time, routinized, and largely institutionalized. Despite his professed commitment to socialism, Nehru refused to concede the primacy of class struggle; it was only one aspect of national liberation rather than its dominant imperative. For decades on both sides of the 1947 divide he promoted the Congress strategy of subordinating radical labor and agrarian struggles to the requisites of the national project. One lesson Nehru learned from the interwar period (and the reinvigorated right-wing assertiveness in the wake of the Partition) was that violence led to an expansion of the political domain that was more likely to lead to fascism than socialism: “It is absurd to imagine that out of conflict the social progressive forces are bound to win.”⁵⁹ Indeed, Nehru’s secularist and socialist vision had a limited purchase in the Congress Party and even among his closest collaborators, who trended toward the free market and Hindu majoritarianism.⁶⁰

That his vision ultimately triumphed was testament not only to the force of his individual will but also to his reliance on personnel and institutions inherited from the colonial state. After 1947, rather than encourage popular mobilizations, he promoted a top-down agenda of change through planned

economic development and social reform through legislation. He sought to balance this with a bottom-up one including universal franchise and system of local self-government known as *panchayati raj*. Following independence, according to Uday Mehta, the nation became a “project,” with the result that freedom itself became “subsidiary to national unity, social uplift and a concern with recognition.” Mehta argues that the Indian Constitution of 1950 created a form of “political absolutism” that empowered a state with “no outside” to its directive purview. This authorization of state power it made it possible for the nation to be “imagined, administered and made just.” Yet freedom, in this context, “existed as a future prospect, as the distant culmination of a plan.”⁶¹ This was the temporal framework of democracy as development.

There was, moreover, a hierarchy within India’s temporal ecosystem. Nehru’s state-centric developmentalism often insisted on the primacy (and justified the violence) of his vision of an industrial, techno-scientific future. “If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country,” he told villagers being displaced by a massive dam project in 1948.⁶² Many of the people displaced by industrial development since 1947 have been Adivasis, India’s indigenous or “tribal” people. Yet even as the future-oriented project of planned economic development often came at the expense of alternative or opposing temporalities, Nehru recognized that India’s variegated temporal landscape was a resource. In certain cases, he sought to internalize rather than eradicate the premodern within the modern nation. Thus Chandigarh’s radical futurity—or, more directly, that of the Bhilai Steel Plant built on tribal land—didn’t necessarily contradict his insistence that India’s tribal people “should develop along the line of their own genius.” On the contrary, he saw tribal culture as exhibiting certain features that could benefit a modern India: they were “an extremely disciplined people” who “function democratically” even without “a constitution and the like.” More than that, they could be a valuable remedy to cultural alienation under a sterile modernity: “When I look at the progress of what is called modern civilization in India, I see many good things. I also see the lack of many good things. Some of the things lacking here, which I find in the tribal folk, are the spirit of song and dance and enjoyment of life itself.”⁶³ Here again we see a familiar intellectual maneuver, not only in his marrying of industrialization to humanism but also in his identifying indigenous resources as a means of bringing equilibrium to a unique Indian modernity, one fashioned out of the interaction between temporalities.

A similar logic lay behind Nehru’s attempt to animate and stabilize a highly centralized modernizing state through a vast system of local village assemblies known as *panchayats*. From Rammohun Roy and Ram Raz in the 1820s

to socialists, Gandhians, and liberals of varying stripes in the twentieth century, the *panchayat* was revived as an ancient institution of democracy and self-government. India's antique democracy was a common theme of India's Constituent Assembly formed in 1946.⁶⁴ In *The Discovery*, Nehru portrays the *panchayat* as a complex web of local democratic institutions that protected the people's "liberties" from potentially tyrannical or overbearing monarchs. Bayly observes that for Nehru, *panchayati raj* was the "most revolutionary development in India," that the peasant assemblies would "presage a true recovering of liberties" by shaping and driving both the state and the Congress Party rather than becoming subservient to them.⁶⁵ Nehru's deep historicism thus informed his institutional vision of democratic India: the system of *panchayati raj* he inaugurated in 1959 reflected the way in which Indian history offered a repertoire of resources to be selectively appropriated and redeployed. The village, that essential unit of "traditional" India, would serve as the basic unit of the modern republic. Here, too, we see an attempt to create a synthesis and equilibrium: local self-government would balance his top-heavy administration by activating and channeling popular energies through the state.

Conclusion

By connecting his historical vision to state policy after 1947, Nehru helped transform political debates into irreconcilable debates about history, and these continue to rage in India today. History is the shared ideological terrain of Nehruvian secular nationalism and its long-standing nemesis, Hindutva. The campaign surrounding the Babri Masjid that helped transform Hindu nationalism from a social movement into a national electoral force in the late 1980s and early 1990s directly repudiated Nehru's assimilationist narrative in favor of violent confrontation and of Islam as external to the nation. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party's triumphs in the 2014 and 2019 general elections were widely seen as signifying the definitive end of the "Nehruvian consensus" that had, more or less, framed Indian political life since independence. Ultimately, the Nehruvian competition with Hindutva was not, and is not, about religious belief but rather about a deeply historical vision of society and politics.

As Hindutva displaces Nehruvian nationalism as a new normative framework for Indian democracy with astonishing rapidity, Nehru has been relegated to the same role for which he had cast the British. He is held responsible for entrenching an anachronistic and suffocating institutional and economic legacy overseen by a corrupt and unrepresentative elite. The liberalization of

the Indian economy undertaken since 1991 and the rise of Hindutva are now routinely described in terms that Nehru himself would have used: India is being unshackled, its nascent energies unleashed, finally beginning to realize its immanent potential for modernity. By promising the acceleration of time that Nehru could not deliver, neoliberal Hindutva has worked to discredit, if not displace, the temporal structure of Nehru's democratic socialism.

Yet Nehru's political life spanned a much different historical moment, the "three extraordinary epochs" of the mid-twentieth century. This was a great churning of time, as world history transitioned into a new era. The older empires were first challenged and then exhausted, new ones were being built, and across the colonial world people were on the move, seeking to claim control over their own history and, indeed, a renewed role in the future of world history. The liberation of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean took place amid Hobsbawm's "age of extremes" marked by global warfare, ideological zealotry, and unprecedented technological advances. This global context informed Nehru's commitment to India's crucial role in the future of the world, but it also informed his emphasis on the state as a means navigating historical change. This context encouraged Nehru's intellectual promiscuity, as he sought to appropriate and marry "a whole host of sometimes contradictory doctrines."⁶⁶

As much as Nehru was a central figure in the "three great epochs" of the mid-twentieth century, he was also a product of a much earlier time, as evidenced by his nineteenth-century style Romantic historicism. Indeed, Bayly argued that Nehru was a key link between a pre-1914 "idealist age" and a complex interwar ideological brew marked by the competition and intermingling of socialism, communitarian liberalism, fascism, and eugenics. The temporal structure of Indian history as a series of assimilations that Nehru presented in both *Glimpses* and *Discovery* was characterized by both a Marxist dynamic and a Darwinian social evolutionism. These were modified with an appeal to the role of individual conscience in history, amounting to what Bayly called "half-liberal, half-Marxist" history.⁶⁷ I have argued here that Nehru's conception of history, and his immediate temporal experience of the post-Partition Atomic and Sputnik Age, informed his half-liberal, half-Marxist state project.

For Nehru, power was, in essence, a set of relations with time. Power was associated with historical dynamism and a society's ability to command time. Disempowerment, in contrast, was associated with stagnation and passivity in the face of time. Nehru conceptualized decolonization and independence as altering India's relationship to time and to its history. Democracy and development were means of regaining India's historical dynamism and direction. For a self-avowed modernist, Nehru was remarkably obsessed with the

past and, more specifically, with the question of how the future must necessarily maintain a relationship with the past. The modernizing, industrializing, developmentalist republic he helmed was conceived as a project of civilizational renovation in which a mature India—"the ancient, the eternal and the ever-new"—was retrofitted and reinvigorated to achieve peace, freedom, and prosperity in India and also to prevent "disaster in this one world that can no longer be split into isolated fragments."⁶⁸

Notes

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3. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (1946; London: Meridian, 1960), 8–9.
4. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).
5. Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 175. See also Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Sunil Khilnani, "Nehru's Judgement," in *Political Judgement*, ed. Richard Bourke and Raymond Guess (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 254–78.
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7. François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
8. Bayly borrows this phrase from Raymond Geuss. C. A. Bayly "The Ends of Liberalism and the Political Thought of Nehru's India," *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 3 (2015): 605–26.
9. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Nehru and Modern India* (colloquium, University of Chicago, April 10, 2015).
10. Nehru, *Discovery*, 490–91.
11. Nehru, 42.
12. Jawahar Lal Nehru, "The Basic Approach," *AICC Economic Review* 10, nos. 8–9 (1958): 3–6.
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17. Nehru, "Basic Approach."
18. Nehru, "A Letter to England," in *Recent Essays and Writings* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1934), 123.
19. Nehru, *Discovery*, 15.
20. Jawaharlal Nehru, "China in Difficulties," December 24, 1932, in *Glimpses*, 449–50.

21. Nehru, "Basic Approach."
22. Nehru.
23. Cited in Brown, *Nehru*, 281.
24. Nehru, "Basic Approach."
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27. Cited in Khilnani, "Nehru's Judgement," 269.
28. Nehru, "Basic Approach."
29. Khilnani, "Nehru's Judgement," 261.
30. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). For precolonial historiographical practices, see V. Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time* (Delhi, 2001) and its forum in *History and Theory* 46 (October 2007), 366–427. See also A. Afzar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Anne Murphy, ed., *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia* (Routledge: New York, 2011).
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33. Sudipta Kaviraj, "A state of Contradictions: the post-colonial state in India," in *States and Citizens*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Bo Strath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 148.
34. Nehru, *Discovery*, 42–44.
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41. Nehru, "Basic Approach."
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43. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 353–54. See also Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
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45. See, e.g., "The Lesson of History," January 5, 1931, in Nehru, *Glimpses*, 6–7.
46. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
47. *Discovery*, 477–78.

48. Krishna Nehru, *With No Regrets: An Autobiography* (New York: John Day, 1945), 20.
49. Mende, *Conversations*, 50.
50. Nehru, "Basic Approach."
51. Khilnani, "Nehru's Judgement," 274.
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53. Majeed, *Autobiography*, 154.
54. Prakash, *Another Reason*, 209–14.
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PART V

**“Already Here . . . Just Not Evenly Distributed”:
Heterochronies of the Future**

Future Perfect: Political and Emotional Economies of Revolutionary Time

DAN EDELSTEIN

Revolutionaries make demands in the present tense. “The people want the fall of the regime,” chanted demonstrators across North Africa and the Middle East during the Arab Spring. They were renewing with a long tradition. The First Continental Congress, assembled in Philadelphia (in 1774), issued a declaration insisting, “[We] do claim, demand, and insist on” the repeal of recent acts of Parliament.¹ In a speech twenty years later, in February 1794, on the “principles of political morality,” Maximilien Robespierre led off with a series of anaphoric paragraphs, each beginning “We want . . .”² The present tense of revolutionary demands is often couched in the imperative mood: “Working men of all countries, unite!” closed the *Communist Manifesto*; “Stand up [*Debout*], damned of the earth,” proclaimed the revolutionary anthem “L’Internationale.” Revolutionaries are in a hurry: to paraphrase the Doors, they want the world and they want it now.³

When revolutionaries take action, they also make a show of demonstrating popular support. The revolutionary *journées* that drew crowds into 1790s Paris lived on in the protests that clogged the streets and squares of Havana (1959), Tehran (1979), Manila (1986), Leipzig and Prague (1989), Belgrade (2000), and Cairo (2011). It is “the people” who want the fall of the regime, not a few disgruntled radicals. Revolutionaries speak in the plural: “We hold these truths to be self-evident”; “The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly . . . have determined to set forth”; “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.”

The new governments that emerge from successful revolutions are accordingly expected to reflect popular support in a verifiable way. Typically, the preferred method is to draft a new constitution and ratify it through democratic suffrage, following the model set by the Americans in 1788 and by the

French in 1793.⁴ But a constitutional settlement may only be a temporary measure; demands for action can surface anew. Thomas Jefferson famously proposed that “Every constitution then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years,” to recognize the priority that “the living generation” must always have over the dead.⁵ What’s more, different groups can lay claim to the mantle of “the people,” and challenge decisions made by others.⁶ There is a tension built into revolutionary time: yesterday’s demands can be superseded by today’s.

A second and arguably graver gap in revolutionary temporality became apparent only with the French Revolution. If revolutionaries demanded present action, they were often forced to acknowledge that their desired outcomes might not take place until some later, unspecified moment. This was particularly true of those who harbored grand historical aspirations, and whose literary culture enhanced their revolutionary imagination. Robespierre continued his aforementioned speech by asking, “What is the goal toward which we tend? The peaceful enjoyment of liberty and equality, the reign of that eternal justice, whose laws have been engraved, not in marble and stone, but in the hearts of all men.” All of this was not going to be achieved overnight. Henri de Saint-Simon was even more confidently prophetic: “The golden age of the human race is not behind, but before us.”⁷ For Marx, the unification of proletarians was only the first step toward a universal social revolution whose ETA was TBD. The “tomorrow” in “L’Internationale”—“Groupons-nous, et demain / L’Internationale / Sera le genre humain”—was merely figurative.

These poetic dreams of a greater tomorrow sit uneasily with the constitutional plans that revolutionaries make in the present.⁸ The people do not always agree with, or even ask for, the rosy future that some revolutionaries propose. Many revolutionary leaders are well aware of this temporal and political disjunction, and act accordingly. It was largely for fear of losing power that the Montagnards suspended the Constitution of 1793, thereby indefinitely delaying elections (“until peacetime”). Marx saw firsthand, in 1848, what happened when the French people went to the urns: they voted for a Bonaparte. One of the earliest measures of the Bolsheviks was to disband the All-Russian Constituent Assembly a mere thirteen hours after it first met on January 18, 1918.⁹ Fidel Castro rose to power promising to restore the liberal 1940 Constitution; the Cuban people would wait another sixteen years before they were granted a (very different) constitution.¹⁰

By tearing up the constitutional script of revolution, Jacobin and Marxist revolutionaries thus ripped a hole in the fabric of political time. Before 1792, revolutions were mostly seen as brief, popular uprisings that severed political ties and then immediately set about weaving new ones.¹¹ The old regime was

dead; long live the new regime. The revolutionary interregnum was to be as short as possible. This interruption in political time was officially terminated by the advent of a new constitution. But by suspending or delaying this constitution, the uneasy present of revolutionary interregnum—neither an old nor a new regime—became indefinitely extended. The drivers of revolution were no longer chosen or guided by popular vote; they claimed power on the basis of their knowledge of how to reach some future goal. Until then, the revolution was not over. This was the script of what became known as “permanent revolution,” as defined by Marx.¹²

Given the long identification of revolution with popular revolt and suffrage, how, then, did these revolutionaries persuade their fellow citizens that they should be granted authority, in Max Weber’s sense?¹³ Considering the cases of Robespierre, Babeuf, Marx, and Lenin, I argue that they developed a novel kind of legitimation, one that might best be grasped through a grammatical analogy with the future perfect tense. I am of course sneaking into this definition the literal sense of a “future perfect,” that golden age at the end of the revolutionary rainbow. But utopian, or rather “u-chronic,” projections alone do not bestow political legitimacy. Only by yoking them to a historical process that links a particular agent or group to representations of past, present, and future times can they begin to serve a political purpose. And this is where the grammatical structure of the future perfect can help make sense of revolutionary regimes of historicity—or, to borrow Christopher Clark’s neat inversion of François Hartog’s notion, of the historicity of revolutionary regimes.¹⁴ When a given political regime claims to lead a people toward an ideal future, their success to come is what will have legitimated their present actions. Political legitimation, in these cases, is prospectively retrospective: we look forward to perfection and see what will have justified the actions taken to reach it.

This kind of revolutionary authority may be usefully contrasted with that produced by constitutional democracies. Political authority in a democratic regime typically depends on a double past. Proximately, elected leaders derive their authority from prior elections; more distantly, the extent, bounds, and timing of their authority are established by an earlier constitution. To pursue the grammatical analogy, democratic authority is “past continuous.” Parliamentary democracies can withdraw or bestow executive power at any time, by means of a no-confidence vote; but the basic authority of elected officials rests on the past continuous validity of elections.

A more concrete way of conceptualizing the production of authority in revolutionary regimes is through an economic analogy. These regimes create authority in a similar way as promissory notes deliver credit in the present,

in advance of future payment. While in the revolutionary case the maturity date is left blank, in both cases, the credit we gain through such temporal instruments is very tangible, in the sense that it is largely imaginary, yet exists firmly in other people's minds. We will see the importance that this metaphor assumes for Marx.

If this political economy of revolutionary time could be successful, I suggest in the second section of this chapter, it is because it trafficked in the most elemental currency of revolutionary demands—emotions. Indeed, as Georges Sorel recognized, a vague longing for a transformed future, often channeled through literary works, had been a staple of revolutionary movements since 1789.¹⁵ The revolutionary leaders who invoked future perfect legitimation to justify their rule were thus adapting a temporal configuration that was already in place. In addition to propping up their legitimacy, this preexisting feature of revolutionary culture can explain how they were able to exercise authority.

Jacobin Futures

Great expectations of “Saturnian rule / Returned” had greeted the French Revolution from its inception.¹⁶ But in their actual political processes, the French initially followed the standard constitutional script. At the Tennis Court Oath, the deputies of the newly named National Assembly swore not to disband until they had settled (*fixer*) the French constitution, a process that carried them forward to September 1791.¹⁷ Popular insurrections, starting with that of July 14, 1789, did not challenge the legitimacy of the assembly, but they did force it to contend with new sets of demands. Even the “second revolution” of August 9–10, 1792—which overthrew the constitutional monarch—gave rise to another, democratic process of electing representatives (to the National Convention) so they could draft a new, republican constitution. The result, moreover, would be overwhelmingly ratified by popular vote and officially enacted on August 10, 1793 (on the anniversary of the storming of the Tuileries).

But this story took an unexpected turn a mere two months later, when Saint-Just, on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety (CPS), introduced a bill to the National Convention that suspended the new constitution.¹⁸ It passed without any disagreement. For the following few months, spokespersons of the CPS—in particular Billaud-Varenne, Robespierre, Saint-Just—would regularly predict the imminent return of constitutional order. But by spring 1794, their tune had changed: it no longer sounded as though the constitution would be reinstated anytime soon; and the few mentions of constitution left it unclear whether the existing one would still do at all.¹⁹

It was in this context that Maximilien Robespierre took the stand at the National Convention on Eighteenth Floréal year II (May 7, 1794), to share his thoughts on “the connections between religious and moral ideas with republican principles, and on national festivals.”²⁰ This was the speech in which he unveiled his plans for the Festival of the Supreme Being, to be held a month later. Before arriving at this specific proposal, however, Robespierre brushed a historical portrait of where the French Republic stood in the grand scheme of things: quite literally grand, as he started with the “savages wandering in the deserts.” He then moved on to the discovery of the New World, the invention of the printing press, before arriving in the Enlightenment, with its great men: Newton, the comte de La Pérouse (a French explorer, who had recently disappeared in Oceania), and Benjamin Franklin.

But this sweeping tableau of historical epochs—unlike the other, better-known *Esquisse d'un tableau historique* that his opponent Condorcet had recently completed, before mysteriously dying in prison—was not entirely harmonious.²¹ Indeed, the central theme of Robespierre’s philosophy of history was that time was out of joint. There was a discrepancy between the two worlds that constituted human history, the moral and the physical. The moral concerned him most: “The moral world, far more than the physical world, appears full of contrasts and enigmas.” The primary contrast was that the astonishing transformations of the physical world, ever since we ceased our nomadic errancy in the deserts, were not matched in the moral sphere: “Everything has changed in the physical sphere; everything must change in the moral and political sphere. Half of the world revolution is already done; the other half must be achieved [*doit s’accomplir*].” Even though “The French people seem two thousand years in advance of the rest of the human race,” they were still some time away from their ultimate goal.

How could this temporal dissonance be resolved? In a word, Robespierre’s answer was politics, or more specifically, political institutions such as his religious festival, the linchpin of his theory of justice. In discussing this festival, he voiced a more hopeful note, placing his trust in time: “Human nature has been advancing for a long time [*depuis longtemps*] against thrones, marching slowly, along circuitous routes, but surely.” The road ahead might seem arduous and daunting, but who in the past could have imagined “the miracles achieved in the last year [*les prodiges opérés depuis un an*]”? He therefore reassured the deputies by asking, “Is what you still have to do more difficult than what you have done?”

If some deputies were uncomfortable with Robespierre’s proposals, it was not only because they feared for their necks. Since the suspension of the constitution in October 1793, the French Republic had essentially been driving blind, with no road map for the political way forward. Robespierre made

clear in his remarks that reinstating the 1793 constitution was not in the cards. Defenders of the constitution were castigated as counterrevolutionaries: “Lafayette invoked the Constitution to restore royal power. . . . In August 1792, Brissot and the Girondins wanted to turn the Constitution into a shield, to fend off the blow that menaced the throne. . . . Hébert and his accomplices clamored for popular sovereignty, in order to massacre the National Convention and destroy republican government.” In this Jacobin retelling of revolutionary history, Robespierre lumped together politicians who had defended the 1791 constitution (Lafayette and the Girondins) with those who had urged the reinstatement of the Jacobin-authored constitution of 1793 (Hébert). The latter had been carted off to the guillotine a mere six weeks prior to the speech. But the problem of the suspended constitution had not gone away. The wording of the October 10 decree, which had sealed its fate, included an implicit temporal endpoint: “The government shall be revolutionary until peacetime [*jusqu’à la paix*].”²² Seven months later, this phrasing proved awkward: as Robespierre acknowledged at the beginning of his speech, “the sound of our victories echoes throughout the universe.” Indeed, French revolutionary armies were on the ascendant in Flanders and the Pyrenees; if peace was not quite at hand, the threat of invasion was no longer imminent.

Robespierre’s proposal for the new festival can thus be seen as responding to the problem of authority faced by revolutionary governments, which have no constitutional mandate to exercise power. But how and why this festival (among others that the CPS would propose that spring) could be viewed as resolving this problem is less evident. It wasn’t the festival itself (held on June 8, 1794), a bizarre neoclassical affair cooked up by Jacques-Louis David that bestowed legitimacy to the revolutionary government. It was the way in which this festival gestured toward a future when the moral world *would have been* transformed that political legitimacy was supposed to be acquired. Ironically, projecting the rule of revolutionary government well into the indefinite future could ground it better than promising a swift return to constitutional order: the greater the social transformation that awaited, the more time the government would need to usher in change. The future perfect of the Montagnards remained hazy and undefined; but soon, glimmering visions of tomorrows would outshine the old, constitutional method of settling revolutions in the present.

Buonarroti, the Conspiracy of Equals, and the Temptation of Dictatorship

Seven weeks after Robespierre led the *conventionnels* around an artificial mountain in the Champs-de-Mars—the centerpiece of the Festival of the

Supreme Being—he was dead. The revolutionary government would live on for a few more months, but the Thermidorean convention reverted to the constitutional script. A third constitution saw the day in 1795. In France and beyond, the need to legitimate non-constitutionally-mandated governments receded into abstraction. For the next forty years, as monarchies in Spain, Portugal, Spanish America, Belgium, Italy, and France (again) were toppled, revolution continued to rhyme with constitution.²³

But the Jacobin experiment with future-perfect legitimation did not vanish entirely. As the French Republic stumbled into its third constitutional regime, a small group of neo-Jacobins plotted a return to the revolutionary ways of Robespierre. This “Conspiracy of Equals,” led by Gracchus Babeuf, would be discovered in May 1796, and its leaders executed the following year after a highly publicized trial. The full story of this conspiracy would become well known only thirty years later, when another participant, Philippe Buonarroti, published a lengthy account of its history and its revolutionary program.²⁴ Here we find a more detailed and argued case for future-perfect legitimation, one that would guide and inspire the next generation of revolutionary leaders.

The Babouvists claimed to pick up where Robespierre left off—with the “catastrophe” of Thermidor 9, which in their account marked the beginning of a new counterrevolution. They also promised to reinstate the constitution of 1793. But their plans were in fact much more elaborate. In more than one hundred pages, Buonarroti detailed the Equals’ proposals to bring about radical equality—plans that included the even redistribution of wealth across the population, the disappearance of large towns, and a Spartan national education system.²⁵ Robespierre had gestured rather vaguely to a coming “reign of eternal justice,” but the Babouvists filled in this golden-age topos with many pastoral details. Thanks largely to Sylvain Maréchal, a poet who advocated the “community of goods” even before the French Revolution, the future objective of revolutionary politics swelled under the influence of literary imagination.²⁶

As the achievements to be obtained by the next revolution grew in number and in difficulty, their delivery schedule was pushed proportionally back. Unlike Robespierre, who did not fret about the legitimacy of his position, the Babouvists (who were not in power) worried a great deal about how they could achieve all they desired without giving in to democratic pressures. More explicitly than Robespierre, they sketched out a theory of future-perfect legitimation: because they eventually hoped to replace the present “egotistical” society with a future “order of equality” (*l'ordre d'égalité*), they argued that they had a legitimate claim on power.²⁷

How this theory might work in practice was more challenging. On the one hand, the Babouvists promised a return to the 1793 constitution, which placed legislative authority in an elected National Assembly and an executive council; on the other, they wished to see through their very ambitious agenda. Who should oversee this transition (“what will this authority be”)? They floated a radical option: what if the “insurrectional committee” was “temporally [*temporellement*] invested with all the national power” in order to ensure “the complete success of the insurrection”? They recognized the danger of illegitimacy that even such a “provisional authority” might present: “converting the insurrectional initiative into a permanent and necessarily broad power would raise suspicions that the members of the insurrectional committee were ambitious and self-interested.” Such suspicions could hinder the insurrectionary committee “by not leaving them enough time to achieve the good they propose to do.” But the committee also saw a danger “in not allowing those who began the work to complete it.”²⁸ Time was of the essence: the Babouvists needed time to finish what they’d started, but if they took too long, they might lose the people’s confidence. They were leaning toward a compromise—asking the people for a decree that would “exclusively entrust” the insurrectionary committee with full political power—when they were betrayed.

Their arrest spared the Babouvists from confronting this paradox of relying on democratic legitimacy to bypass popular sovereignty. As it was, they never found themselves in a position where they needed to justify their present actions in the name of future outcomes, although the temptation was strong: some members openly clamored for a temporary dictatorship.²⁹ But what we already witness with the Babouvists, and which would become increasingly common in the following decades, was the prioritization of future ends over present means. As the revolutionary objectives to be attained ballooned in scope, specifics, and normative value, it became harder and harder to imagine how a democratic process could possibly lead to them. Faith in the good sense of the people was also fading: “Abnormally deviated from the natural order, the people were incapable of making sound decisions, and needed an extraordinary means of replacing them.” Until the people realized that they had been duped by aristocratic and moneyed interests, they would continue to be misled: they were just not *currently* “in a state where they could fully exercise sovereignty in an effective, rather than a fictive, manner.”³⁰ At the same time, the Babouvists and their successors were not prepared to ditch democratic legitimacy entirely, even as they began to question its possibility in the present. Some sort of deferring strategy was called for.

Marx's Promissory Notes

In the span between the Babouvists' fall (1796) and their literary resurrection (1828), socialist dreams for the future grew in complexity. Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, Étienne Cabet, Pierre Leroux, and Auguste Comte, among many others, sketched grandiose plans for society to come.³¹ These were also the writers whom Engels would later credit as the forerunners of communism, albeit in its "nonscientific" form.³² Marxists would mock these "utopian" writers for their overly elaborate visions, but they cumulatively contributed to the shift in focus, among many revolutionaries, from immediate desiderata to future accomplishments. If Marx famously refrained from describing his own vision of a classless society, it was in large part because he could afford to do so; the revolutionary imaginary was already brimming with phalansteries, communal farms, and happy, equal citizens.³³ The Metternich system that sought to suppress all revolutionary agitation throughout Europe involuntarily contributed to propping up these visions of future society with normative value, as the present social and political order appeared antiquated, morally bankrupt, and "unreal" to many. "Everything that was is no longer; everything that will be is not yet ready: do not seek elsewhere the source of our despair," Alfred de Musset lamented in a famous portrait of his generation. "In life there is no present," Byron despaired.³⁴

In the aftermath of Buonarroti's publication, socialist revolutionaries came to embrace the concept of temporary dictatorship, which became "virtually standard in the milieu of communist conspiratorial sects."³⁵ Although dictatorship could still trigger fears of tyrannical rule, it also conjured up images of virtuous leaders taking power during a period of crisis and then stepping down after a limited and predetermined amount of time (following the ancient Roman model).³⁶ This temporal limit is key, and it tends to get lost beneath our contemporary associations of dictatorship with military juntas and presidents for life. Unlike the king, emperor, tyrant, or generalissimo, the dictator was not intended to be permanent.

When Marx adopted the idea of a "dictatorship of the proletariat," then, he was drawing on (and adapting) a long revolutionary tradition, which extended back from the French Revolution up through Buonarroti.³⁷ Interestingly, however, neither this concept nor future perfect legitimation were prominent in Marx's early work. As late as the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels were still insisting very much on the "the movement of the present [*gegenwärtigen Bewegung*]" : "The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests

of the working class,” they wrote.³⁸ To the extent that the communists must also “take care of the future of that movement,” it was only through political alliances: “In France, the Communists ally with the Social-Democrats”; “in Switzerland, they support the Radicals”; while “in Germany, they fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way.” The proletarian revolution, in the *Manifesto*, still lay somewhere in the unforeseen future: the communists must work to “instill into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat” so that “after the fall of the reactionary classes in Germany, the fight against the bourgeoisie itself may immediately begin.”³⁹ The first order of business in the *Manifesto* was thus to ensure that the bourgeois revolution be complete; there was, as of yet, little planning for the final act of the proletarian victory.

But Marx’s theory of revolution evolved rapidly during the 1848 revolutions, whose dramatic events in France he chronicled in great detail. Marx developed this alternative theory of revolution, to which he gave the name “revolution in permanence,” in a series of articles he wrote in 1848–1850 for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, later published (by Engels) as *The Class Struggles in France*.⁴⁰ This alternative theory grew in part out of his prior study of the National Convention and in part out of his observations of the rapidly changing situation in France. There Marx witnessed what happened when the revolutionary provisional government gave way to an elected constituent assembly: it veered to the right and crushed the workers.

Marx thus came around to denouncing constitutionalism as “the republican form of government in which the rule of the bourgeois class is constituted.”⁴¹ In its place, he put forward a different script for revolution, one in which the provisional government should not elect a constituent assembly but should rather establish the “*class dictatorship* of the proletariat.” This would be the defining feature of “revolution in permanence.” Despite the temporal implications of the term “permanent,” this dictatorship was still viewed as temporary: it was merely “the necessary transit point to the *abolition of class distinctions generally*.”⁴² Marx returned to this temporal delay repeatedly, notably in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), in which he insisted that “between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.”⁴³

The justification of “transitional” class dictatorship, in Marx’s revolutionary theory, was thus to be found in the *future* abolition of social classes. A classless society was both a good in itself and a historical necessity. Bringing about that goal was thus a self-evidently legitimate aim. As with the Babouvists

before him, Marx also dismissed the normative value of present-day democratic suffrage as illusory: the people (the peasants in particular) were simply not ready to be entrusted with decisions about their fate. Only after the bourgeoisie had been dismantled could popular sovereignty become a genuinely legitimate means of decision making. Accordingly, and following the logic of future-perfect legitimation, the “dictatorship of the proletariat” would be legitimated once class distinctions had been abolished.

Curiously, Marx employed the metaphor of a promissory note to illustrate the political economy of revolutionary time and credit. In *Class Struggles*, he criticized the French provisional government for not declaring a state bankruptcy but instead raising taxes: “By honoring the bills [*die Wechsel*] drawn on the state by the old bourgeois society, the Provisional Government succumbed to the latter,” he wrote. In so doing, the government ignored the more genuine debts that the people had incurred and failed “to collect the revolutionary debts [*Schuldforderungen*] of many years.”⁴⁴ These debts were both economic and political: paying them off required more than a simple financial transaction. Marx himself thus offered a metaphorical reading of the February revolution as the date when the people’s promissory note should have matured.

Marx’s use of this metaphor was not a one-off affair. He developed it even more explicitly in a four-part article on the Prussian revolution, published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in December 1848 under the title “The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution.” Here Marx castigated the bourgeois representatives of the Prussian National Assembly for betraying their plebeian supporters by immediately allying themselves with King Frederick William IV. But he expressed this betrayal in terms that would have been familiar to Prussian bankers like Ludolf Camphausen (who had become prime minister in March 1848). “The revolution was the legal title of the people; the vehement claims of the people were based on the revolution,” he declared, before wheeling out the economic metaphor: “The revolution was the bill [*Wechsel*] drawn by the people on the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie came to power through the revolution. The day it came to power was also the day this bill became due.”⁴⁵ Instead of repaying its political debt, however, the bourgeoisie defaulted.

It is ultimately not that surprising that Marx applied economic analogies to revolutionary politics, given his materialist framework and the central place of debts and taxes in the 1848 revolutions. But the use of economics to explain politics served an argumentative purpose, as well: it allowed Marx to further sidestep the tricky issue of democratic legitimacy. The metaphor of the promissory note set up a clear distinction in the body politic between

debtors and creditors but flipped the balance sheet. The bourgeois creditors were indebted to their proletarian debtors, because they had unfairly (if lawfully) oppressed and extorted them. Following this logic, a constitutional settlement could not settle political scores. Justice would be served only when the bourgeoisie was made to pay.

Because Marx never found himself in any position of power, he was not obliged to defend any actions taken without a constitutional or democratic mantle. As a historical materialist, moreover, he viewed the advent of a proletarian revolution as a necessity. It was less pressing, from this perspective, to justify the rule of the class dictatorship that would preside over this transition from capitalist to communist society. Such a transition was dictated by the laws of history; how exactly it came about was a matter of mere empirical interest. In Marx and Engels's later work (particularly following the Paris Commune), the role of state power in this transition even diminished ("withered away") greatly.

One astute reader, however, found it necessary to address an apparent contradiction in Marx and Engels's theory. In *The State and Revolution* (1917), Lenin provided an extended gloss on the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (including the passage cited above) to work out the place of democracy in a socialist revolution. Marx had made the case for dictatorship, but he was also on record—in the *Communist Manifesto*, no less—as endorsing democracy: as he and Engels wrote there, "The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy."⁴⁶ So, Lenin straightforwardly asked, what was "the relation of this dictatorship to democracy?" In his defense of Marx, Lenin again emphasized the temporal disjunction between these categories. Rejecting "constitutional legality" as "democracy for the rich," he insisted that "a truly complete democracy . . . freed from capitalist slavery" would be possible only *after* the "political transition period" that Marx had identified.⁴⁷ Despite its apparent opposition to democracy, proletarian dictatorship would be legitimated once it had swept "false" democracy away. Lenin's use of future-perfect legitimation was more explicit than Marx's, given his full-throated acknowledgment of "true" democracy as the ultimate source of political legitimacy, and, a contrario, the recognition that dictatorship, in most other cases, was an "illegitimate" form of government.

For reasons having to do with Trotsky's appropriation of the term, Lenin avoided referring to this theory as "permanent revolution," but it was precisely what he would advocate (against most other Bolsheviks) when he arrived in St. Petersburg in April 1917. By insisting on overthrowing the provisional government, he sought not to repeat the errors of 1848 (or 1905); the

same concern informed his decision to disband the All Russian Constituent Assembly. Instead, the Bolsheviks enacted their own (nonratified) constitution that, “in view of the present transition period,” established “a dictatorship of the urban and rural proletariat and the poorest peasantry . . . for the purpose of abolishing the exploitation of men by men and [the] introduction of socialism.”⁴⁸ The long wait for payment on the revolution’s promissory note had begun.

Literature and Revolution

After 1917, this model of permanent revolution, which subsumed the Jacobin experiment of revolutionary government under Marxist theory, would largely displace the older, constitutional model. If the two still competed in post-First World War Germany, by midcentury, the idea that a revolution should conclude in a constituent assembly seemed quaint. Despite this rejection of popular sovereignty in the present moment, however, the revolutionary dictatorships that seized power in Russia, China, Cuba, and Vietnam (and to a lesser extent, Angola and Mozambique) nonetheless enjoyed genuine authority over their populations. As Stephen Kotkin argued in *Magnetic Mountain*, titanic Soviet initiatives, such as the steel foundries that he studied, could not have succeeded on the sole basis of totalitarian fearmongering.⁴⁹ Although they lacked the modern constitutional and democratic credentials we typically deem requisite for political legitimacy (in a normative sense), these revolutionary regimes do seem to have appeared legitimate in the eyes of most subjects, at least for some period. Even Castro, who had promised to restore the 1940 liberal constitution, then promptly abandoned this pledge after overthrowing Batista, was wildly popular after the revolution.

So as we move from the theory of permanent revolution to its practice, a final question presents itself: if all these peoples perceived their governments as legitimate, was it only because the promissory notes of revolution supplied good political credit? Such an explanation, while pleasing to the political theorist, would place a remarkable amount of weight on a small number of highly theoretical texts, which few subjects of these revolutionary regimes will have read. Revolutionary propaganda might have helped disseminate this argument, but even if we account for its dissemination, we still need to explain its success. What I’d like to suggest in this final section is that the political economy of revolutionary time, which I’ve been examining from a theoretical angle until now, was not deployed in a vacuum. In fact, it can be seen as the theoretical crystallization of a much broader historical phenomenon, one relating to the very experience of revolution. If revolutionary leaders could

draw political bills of exchange from their people fairly easily, it was because they trafficked in the common currency of revolutionary emotions.

There is a great deal one could say about the history of emotions in revolutionary contexts, which has become a fast-growing field, since William Reddy published *The Navigation of Feeling*.⁵⁰ But it is also worth recalling earlier work in this area, stretching all the way back to Georges Sorel. Sorel developed a theory of political myth in his 1908 *Reflections on Violence*, a theory that—while popular among fascists, notably Mussolini—is particularly well suited for describing revolutionary enthusiasm.⁵¹ Sorel's definition is also intriguing for the central role he attributes to historicity. As he writes in the introductory letter, "Men who are participating in great social movements always picture their coming action in the form of images of battle in which their cause is certain to triumph." He suggests, "I propos[e] to give the name of 'myths' to these constructions."⁵² Myths, for Sorel, are visual representations of a future, in which present conditions have been drastically (and favorably) transformed. We are back here to the literal sense of a future perfect.

But Sorel's definition adds three important elements. First, he stresses the emotional (versus the intellectual) appeal of these representations: unlike utopias (to which he opposes them), myths address not reason but a deeper sense of existential purpose. With Henri Bergson, he argues that we must seek the springs of human actions in "the inner depths of the mind." It follows, second, that Sorel's myths are largely disconnected from the particularities of political thought. It is true that he offers "Marx's catastrophic revolution" as "a remarkable exampl[e] of myths," but its strength lies precisely in Marx's notorious silence about the communist world to come, a silence that could be filled only by images.⁵³ Finally, Sorel was interested in how "revolutionary myths . . . allow us to understand the sentiments and the ideas of the masses as they prepare themselves to enter on a decisive struggle."⁵⁴ Rather than consider the problem of revolutionary legitimacy from the perspective of political leaders (as Robespierre, Marx, and Lenin had before him), he reversed the question to consider it from the perspective of their subjects. And what he highlights is the fact that the revolutionary regime of historicity precedes political theories about revolution.

This precedence of the emotional economy of revolutionary time takes a number of forms. In a historical sense, the emotional experience of revolution predates its theoretical expression. Saint-Simon's quip about the golden age lying in the future was not simply a socialist revision of Virgil's *redeunt Saturnia regna*. Describing revolutionary change in terms of a returning golden age was already a cliché by 1789.⁵⁵ The excitement occasioned by the French Revolution gave birth to a new imaginary—or rather, breathed new life into

the well-worn classical imaginary of pastoral idylls, royal accessions, and utopian communities.⁵⁶ As a revolutionary imaginary, however, these visions of natural, peaceful societies became a political prize: revolutionary leaders sought to harness their political platforms to these literal and Sorelian myths. Robespierre and his associates on the CPS made precisely this attempt, most notably with the festival of the Supreme Being, although David's classical allusions may have been overly subtle. The Babouvists similarly sought to turn literary visions into political ideology.

Among fervent revolutionaries, this mythical future horizon remained a fixture throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Many authors commented on the sway such captivating visions of a world to come had over idealist thinkers.⁵⁷ In Dostoyevsky's novel *The Adolescent* (1875), Versilov, a Russian nobleman, describes an enchanting dream that he had around the time the Paris Commune was being crushed. In this dream, Claude Lorrain's painting, "Acis et Galathée"—which he tellingly renames "The Golden Age"—strangely came to life: "It was exactly as in the painting—a corner of the Greek archipelago, and time, too, seemed to have shifted back three thousand years; gentle blue waves, islands and rocks, a flowering coast, a magic panorama in the distance, the inviting, setting sun—words can't express it." This sublime image, inexpressible in language, produces an overwhelming emotion: "Here European mankind remembered its cradle, and the thought of it seemed to fill my soul with a kindred love." The power of this feeling was such that, while Versilov was conscious that such a dream could never be realized, he also recognized that this image was irresistible: "A wonderful reverie, a lofty delusion of mankind! The golden age—the most incredible dream of all that have ever been, but for which people have given all their lives and all their strength, for which prophets have died and been slain, without which the peoples do not want to live and cannot even die!"⁵⁸ The allure of revolutionary myths reveals itself in this example to extend beyond mere emotional and imaginary appeal: myths also offers existential promise, giving meaning to people's lives. This existential grounding, which Sorel similarly highlighted, infused revolutionary myths with an irrefutable sense of certainty. Even as the Communards lay dying in Paris, Versilov had trouble shaking the quasi-religious conviction ("prophets have died and been slain") that his dream imparted.

Dostoyevsky's analysis of this dream is all the more notable that he himself opposed such political enthusiasm—even Versilov calls it a delusion. But Dostoyevsky also knew from his own youthful dalliances with revolutionary conspiracies how such delusions could take hold.⁵⁹ What this passage ultimately highlights is how the apparent contradiction between a mythical ideal

(the golden age) and its failed realization (the Paris Commune) did not rise to the level of a logical refutation, given the temporal disconnect between the two. The failure of the Commune in the present was essentially irrelevant for the possibility of a perfect world on the horizon of history: "Time, too, seemed to have shifted back three thousand years." Versilov's dream expresses the emotional historicity of the revolutionary mood in which little to no affection is invested in the present, and all desire is projected into a fantastic future, often modeled on a mythical past.

The precedence of this emotional regime of historicity was also biographical. Revolutionary leaders who embraced future perfect legitimation typically had experienced this emotional longing at an early stage of their lives. Here again, literature played a key role, though in this instance, it was often an enabling one. Where Dostoyevsky sought to diagnose and defuse the revolutionary temptation, other authors fanned the flames of revolutionary feelings. Indeed, Versilov's dream was the counterpoint to an earlier, literary dream by the heroine of Nikolay Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel *What Is to Be Done?*⁶⁰ This novel is a curious mixture of realism and utopianism; it begins "On the morning of July 23, 1856," in St. Petersburg, but also features a famous dream sequence in which the heroine, Vera Pavlovna, foresees a future social order in which women gain equality with men, cities are emptied, and people inhabit giant aluminum palaces in the fertile countryside.⁶¹ This dream sequence is famous for the attraction it exerted on a young Vladimir Lenin, who titled one of his own revolutionary treatises after this book.⁶²

While most commentators have noted the Fourierist influence on Chernyshevsky—the great aluminum palace resembles nothing more than a *phalanstère*—the temporal structure of this vision is equally determining. The social order to come is not simply a millenarian city on a hill (of wheat) but the result of an epochal dialectic process. It is announced by a new woman, who had remained *in potentia* at earlier points in history: she combines Astarte, the great mother goddess of preclassical antiquity; Aphrodite, who inspired Greek norms of beauty; and chastity, the medieval feminine ideal. But none of these precursors extended to women the same "equal rights" as men, and so none of these earlier ages could reach social perfection. The future age of full equality had only recently been prefigured by Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* and was just coming into focus. Its arrival was therefore a predictable event, overdetermined and inevitable, like the result of a historical law. A brilliant, socialist, utopian future was already bursting out of the mundane, bourgeois, empty present.⁶³

It is in literary representations such as these that we can appreciate the role that the revolutionary imaginary had on political leaders who resorted to

future perfect legitimation. If the necessity of a temporary “transition period” was already established in the hearts and minds of revolutionary enthusiasts, it was to be expected that would-be dictators should justify their rule in such terms and also that such justifications would appear legitimate to those on the receiving end. While Marxists made much of their disdain for so-called utopian socialism, to which they opposed their own “scientific” version, one cannot underestimate the importance of a mythical imaginary for them, either. The socialist G. D. H. Cole readily recognized that it was William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890)—another dream narrative set in a socialist, arts-and-crafts, utopian future—that converted him to socialism.⁶⁴ And Marx himself acknowledged the “eternal charm” of the Greek mythological world in the *Grundrisse* (1857): “A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child’s naïveté, and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? Does not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children? Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm?”⁶⁵ Socialist revolutionaries thus formed an imagined community, but a community that (in contrast with Benedict Anderson’s) was premised on an imagined future.⁶⁶ To partake in this community did not require any profound knowledge of socialism: as Émile Zola observed, even uneducated coal miners bought into this *régime d’historicité*.⁶⁷ The role of socialist theory and political legitimation, for revolutionary supporters and leaders alike, was mainly secondary. As Albert Camus remarked in *The Rebel*, “We could count on one hand those communists who came to the revolution by way of studying Marx. First you convert, then you read the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church.”⁶⁸

Conclusion

The historicity of revolutionary regimes after 1789 grew increasingly future-heavy, under the influence of seductive literary fictions and continuous disaffection with present circumstances. This *fuite en avant* translated into an emotional economy defined by delayed gratification. Future-perfect legitimation, the argument by revolutionary leaders that their actions will have been legitimated once a new state of affairs has come to pass, borrows this same temporal structure and in many respects responds to the emotional expectations of revolutionary sympathizers.

While highly similar, it should be noted that the effects of the political and the emotional economies of revolutionary time are not identical. As we saw earlier, revolutionary theories aimed primarily at legitimizing undemocratic

forms of government (e.g., “class dictatorship of the proletariat”), whereas the emotional experience of revolutionary time could have much broader and more powerful results. In Sorel’s account, this experience was the very spring of revolution itself, what drove men to action, even in the face of near-certain defeat. But because revolutions are not self-organizing systems, this spring usually ended up being sprung at the command of others—a revolutionary party or leaders.

The structural parallel between political and emotional economies of revolutionary time can thus shed light on the reason revolutionary leaders were often viewed as exercising legitimate power. It’s one thing for the leaders themselves to legitimate their actions, but it’s quite another for their subjects to view them as such. In Weberian terms, this second issue is less directly a matter of legitimacy than of authority: political leaders have authority when their subjects voluntarily obey their commands (i.e., do not have to be coerced by force or threat of force). Of course, a determining factor in the production of authority is the perception of legitimacy. By modeling their claims to political legitimacy on the emotional expectations of the people they would rule, revolutionary leaders were thus more likely to appear legitimate in the eyes of their people, who would be accordingly more likely to recognize their authority.

Even if we grant that political regimes of revolutionary time tend to be subordinate to the emotional experience of revolution, this does not entail that revolutionary theorists or leaders are “irrationally” carried away by their enthusiasm. On the contrary, one can view their political crystallizations of this enthusiasm as both a by-product of revolutionary emotions and an attempt to manipulate them. In other words, while Robespierre’s or Lenin’s appeals to a future perfect may well be the logical corollaries of their own desire for revolutionary change, they are also adroit attempts to channel this desire in others for their own political purposes. Arguments over political legitimacy that might seem dryly theoretical to us could thus have had a dual purpose. Leaders capable of harnessing the authority born of revolutionary myths in this way might appear as the beneficiaries of “charismatic authority” (which is indeed how Weber described political authority in revolutions).⁶⁹ But appearances can be misleading: as the rapid succession of political champions during the first years of the French Revolution suggests, revolutionary authority was far more fleeting and could be gained or lost in a matter of months, if not minutes. The secret of leading a revolution, particularly one unshackled from constitutional restraints, may instead have laid in the deft control of the people’s emotional attachments to their history.

Notes

1. The Avalon Project at Yale University, available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/resolves.asp.
2. "Rapport sur les principes de morale politique," in *Œuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, ed. Société des études robespierristes, 10 vols. (Ivry: Phénix éditions, 2000), 10:354. Subsequently abbreviated *Rob*.
3. The Doors, "When the Music's Over," from the album *Strange Days* (Elektra Records, 1967).
4. The 1791 constitution was not ratified by popular vote. See Michael P. Fitzsimmons, *The Remaking of France: The National Assembly and the Constitution of 1791* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
5. Jefferson to James Madison, September 6, 1789, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. James P. McClure (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950–), 15:392–97.
6. Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
7. Saint-Simon, *De la réorganisation de la société européenne* (Paris: A. Egron, 1814), 112. On this text, see Frank Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 172–79.
8. Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, eds., *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).
9. Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 554–56.
10. Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 53.
11. Jack Rakove, "Constitutionalism: The Happiest Revolutionary Script," in *Scripting Revolution*, 103–17.
12. Dan Edelstein, "Revolution in Permanence and the Fall of Popular Sovereignty," in *The Scaffold of Sovereignty*, ed. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 371–92.
13. See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), esp. 1:50–51.
14. François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Seuil, 2003). Clark offered this revision of Hartog in *Time and Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.
15. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
16. William Wordsworth, "The Excursion," in *Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 622. On the golden age in French revolutionary culture, see my *The Terror of Natural Right* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), chap. 2.
17. Keith Baker, "Fixing the Constitution," in *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
18. See my "Do you Want a Revolution without a Revolution? Reflections on Political Authority," *French Historical Studies* 35, no. 2 (2012): 269–89.
19. See my *Terror of Natural Right*, chap. 5.
20. "Sur les rapports des idées religieuses et morales avec les principes républicains, et sur les fêtes nationales," *Rob*, 10:452.

21. Robespierre spent some time in this speech attacking Condorcet (who had died in March 1794), leaving open the intriguing possibility that he may have been an early reader of the *Esquisse*, which would be published later that year.

22. Saint-Just, “Rapport sur la nécessité de déclarer le gouvernement révolutionnaire jusqu’à la paix,” in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Michèle Duval (Paris: Ivrea, 1984), 520–30.

23. See Linda Colley, “Writing Constitutions and Writing World History,” in *The Prospect of Global History*, ed. James Belich, John Darwin, Margret Frenz, and Chris Wickham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 160–77; and Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, 252.

24. *Conspiration pour l’égalité dite de Babeuf, suivie du procès auquel elle donna lieu, et des pièces justificatives* (Brussels: Librairie romantique, 1828). On the Babouvists, see notably Maurice Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal, l’égalitaire* (Paris: Spartacus, 1950); R. B. Rose, *Gracchus Babeuf: The First Revolutionary Communist* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978); and James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

25. *Conspiration pour l’égalité*, 109, 215, 221, 238.

26. See Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal*; and my *Terror of Natural Right*, chap. 2.

27. *Conspiration pour l’égalité*, 9–11.

28. *Conspiration pour l’égalité*, 134, 200, 93, 201, 202.

29. *Conspiration pour l’égalité*, 138.

30. *Conspiration pour l’égalité*, 133.

31. See, e.g., Paul Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); Frank Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); D. G. Charlton, *Secular Religions in France, 1815–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*; Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and his World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

32. See Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880).

33. See notably Gareth Stedman Jones, “Religion and the Origins of Socialism,” in *Religion and the Political Imagination*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Stedman Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 171–89. I return to this argument in the final section.

34. For Musset, see *La confession d’un enfant du siècle* (1836; Paris: GF, 1993); for Byron, see *Manfred* (1817) II.2. More broadly, see Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

35. See Hal Draper, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution*, 3 vols. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), 3:37.

36. See Peer Baehr and Melvin Richter, eds., *Dictatorship in History and Theory: Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

37. See, for instance, this comment in *The Holy Family*: “The French Revolution brought forth *ideas* of the entire old world system. The revolutionary movement which began in 1789 in the *Cercle social* . . . and which finally was temporarily defeated with *Babeuf’s* conspiracy, brought forth the *communist* idea which *Babeuf’s* friend *Buonarrotti* re-introduced into France after the Revolution of 1830. This idea, consistently developed, is the *idea of the new world system*.” *Holy Family* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), 161.

38. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 38. This emphasis on the present was even stronger in the German original: “Sie kämpfen für die Erreichung der unmittelbar vorliegenden Zwecke.”

39. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 38–9.

40. See Marx, *The Class Struggles in France* (London: Electric Book Co., 2001).
41. Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, 106.
42. Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, 140.
43. *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 3:13–30; also available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch04.htm>.
44. Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, 55.
45. Marx, “The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution,” *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* 170 (December 16, 1848). English translation available online, at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/12/16.htm>.
46. *Communist Manifesto*, 25.
47. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), chap. 5, sec. 2, 372–73.
48. 1918 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, art. 2, chap. 5.
49. See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995).
50. See William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). On the French Revolution, see also Lynn Hunt, “The Experience of Revolution,” and Sophia Rosenfeld, “Thinking about Feeling, 1789–1799,” *French Historical Studies* 32, no. 4 (2009): 671–78 and 697–706, respectively; and Sophie Wahnich, *Les émotions, la Révolution française et le présent: Exercices pratiques de conscience historique* (Paris: CNRS, 2009).
51. In general, see Jack J. Roth, *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); John Stanley, *The Sociology of Virtue: The Political and Social Theories of George Sorel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); and Roger Griffin, *Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993).
52. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 20.
53. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 20, 26; and Sorel, *La décomposition du marxisme* (Paris: M. Rivière, 1908), 54.
54. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 28.
55. I discuss these representations in *The Terror of Natural Right* (chap. 2), along with other details in this paragraph.
56. See Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).
57. In addition to Dostoevsky, discussed below, see Flaubert, both in *L'éducation sentimentale* (1869) (at the “Club de l'Intelligence”) and in *Bouvard et Pecuchet* (1881) (with the schoolteacher); and Zola, *Germinal* (1885).
58. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 2003), 466–67. See also Richard Peace, “Dostoyevsky and ‘The Golden Age,’” *Dostoyevsky Studies* 3 (1982): 61–78. This same vision features in the famous chapter of *The Possessed* (*Demons*), “Stavrogin’s Confession,” which was excised from the original edition. See Joseph Frank, *Dostoyevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865–1971*, 5 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4:488–92.
59. On Dostoyevsky’s experiences in the Petrashevsky Circle, see Frank, *Dostoyevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821–1849*, 5 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 1:258–72.

60. See notably Irina Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988). On Chernyshevsky's influence on Dostoyevsky, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860–1865*, vol. 3 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

61. Chernyshevsky, *A Vital Question, or, What Is to Be Done?* trans. Nathan Haskell Dole and S. S. Skidelsky (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1886), 378–88.

62. See, e.g., Vincent Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism* (London: Methuen, 1987).

63. Chernyshevsky, *A Vital Question*, 377, 373.

64. G. D. H. Cole, *William Morris as a Socialist* (London: William Morris Society, 1960), 1.

65. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), 246.

66. The emphasis in Anderson is very much on “simultaneity” in the present. See *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991).

67. See Émile Zola, *Germinal* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2000), 222, 265.

68. Albert Camus, *L'homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 125n1. This theme of an “irrational” conversion to the revolution is common in the secondary (especially Anglo-American) literature on revolutionary history. See, for instance, Edmund Wilson's assessment of “the purely emotional character of [Mikhail Bakunin's] rebellion,” in *To the Finland Station* (1940; New York: New York Review of Books, 2003), 279.

69. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (1922), ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff et al., 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1:268. See also David A. Bell, *Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

The Future in the US Supreme Court

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“It is emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what the law is,” wrote Supreme Court Justice John Marshall in *Marbury v. Madison*, the 1803 case that established the principle of judicial supremacy in the United States.¹ Since then, the US Supreme Court, along with lower courts, has largely been understood to hold the power to not only check violations of the United States Constitution by the executive and legislative branches but also to interpret what the Constitution means. It is an awesome power, particularly in light of abstract provisions of the Constitution, such as the defenses of “liberty” and “equal protection” found in the Fourteenth Amendment, whose meanings are left to the Court to interpret.²

The Court’s interpretive power is all the more surprising given how little material power it wields. The Supreme Court does not have its own military, nor does it control any of the financial strings of the United States’ vast administrative state. The Court’s power lies in opinions that are literally paper thin. So the question arises, what sustains the Court’s power? Why do “powerful political actors . . . pay attention to what judges say?”³ Why do “people with money and guns ever submit to people armed only with gavels?”⁴

Until the past decade, legal scholarship tended to focus on normative questions of how judges should decide cases, ignoring the more fundamental question of why powerful political actors submit to those decisions in the first place.⁵ In so doing, scholars neglected to ask which nonnormative factors might influence judicial decision making or, the question at the heart of this essay, how judges might seek to exercise power through their decisions.⁶ The focus of legal scholarship on normative questions contributed to the notion of a law-politics divide: that judges should be insulated from and independent of politics, allowing themselves to be guided by the law alone.⁷

But as legal scholars have emphasized more and more in the past decade, judges are not independent of politics; they are embedded in it.⁸ The 2016 fight between Democrats and Republicans over the Supreme Court nomination of Merrick Garland, or the response of President Donald Trump to the federal courts' rejection of the first iteration of his immigration ban, only deepens this impression.⁹ Across American history, the courts have been vulnerable to attack by the other branches, backlash by the public, and a refusal to enforce by the executive. Presidents Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt all threatened to defy the Court, and in some cases made good on the threat.¹⁰ The perception that the Court is an unelected institution whose decisions undermine the people's will in the "here and now" has buoyed opposition on the part of the public.¹¹ Swaths of the public, supported by state and national officials, famously defied the Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* that public schools must integrate.¹² Even without open defiance, court decisions have provoked powerful backlash. The Court's 1973 abortion decision, *Roe v. Wade*, gave legs to an energetic prolife movement that has laid siege to abortion rights ever since, leading some scholars to ask whether it is better for civil rights movements to lose the legal battle so as to win the political and social war.¹³

Nonetheless, "open defiance of the Court has been the exception rather than the rule."¹⁴ Yet if the American courts cannot stand outside politics, how do they constrain politics? The explanation that most constitutional lawyers and theorists have assumed is that the Court's power lies in its legitimacy—in the public's perception that the Court decides on the basis of law or principle, not politics or personal preference.¹⁵ There may be some truth in this, but it is an incomplete explanation that maintains the artificial division between law and politics. Scholars have more recently offered explanations that go beyond that divide. One way the Court maintains power, for instance, is to render opinions that a majority of Americans will agree with. Although the Court has been labeled countermajoritarian, scholars have shown that the Court's opinions tend to follow the preferences of politically powerful constituencies, especially national majorities.¹⁶ Sometimes, however, the Court diverges from the "people's will."¹⁷ To explain why the Court retains authority even in the case of highly unpopular decisions, constitutional theorist Daryl Levinson offers an explanation based on institutional stability and entrenchment.¹⁸

This essay is also interested in the power of the Court. But it pursues a more modest goal. It seeks to understand the ways in which the Court asserts its authority through its opinions. One might seek to understand this by looking at the sources the Court uses or the claims it makes. For instance, to assert and reaffirm its neutrality in a politically fraught opinion, the Court might

state forthrightly that “the Court’s power lies . . . in its legitimacy.”¹⁹ This essay is especially interested in the role temporality—and in particular the temporality of the future—plays in establishing the Court’s authority.

The temporality typically associated with judicial power is not the future, but the past. The courts’ reliance on precedent ensures uniformity in the law, but it is also a statement of a present court’s neutrality. The use of precedent allows courts to claim that their decisions are neutral, based on already established law rather than present-day politics.²⁰ As Paul Kahn writes, the “point of legal interpretation is always to recover, i.e., to make present, something that appears already to exist. . . . An interpretation that fails to appear as a rediscovery will appear as an illegitimate construction of new law.”²¹ In this chapter, I show that the Supreme Court sometimes seeks to assert power and authority, and thereby constrain politics, by reaping a harvest of expectation rather than experience. Several recent key decisions have asserted judicial power by invoking the future, rather than the past.

The judiciary faces a particular problem when it comes to the future. It has few of the tools for prediction or planning that might be found in the executive or legislative branches of the US government. It also often lacks the capacity to respond to the future it envisions. Analyzing the relationship between judicial power and time, legal scholar Alison LaCroix has suggested that the Court exercises imperial control over temporality, acting as the sole arbiter of how the law operates in time.²² This view has credence for the temporalities of past and present.²³ But the Court cannot similarly exercise “imperial control” over the future. It may lay down precedent, but justices on the present Court have no power to decide how justices on a future Court fifty years later will apply that precedent. Nor can they guarantee how other political branches will react to the decisions it issues. One might therefore ask whether the Court merely seeks to exercise what Cass Sunstein has described as “decisional minimalism” in discussing the future. By drawing attention to the openness of the future, the Court may be drawing attention to how little it has decided in the present.²⁴

Yet I argue that the Court’s discussion of the future may in fact be a tool by which it also seeks to shape the politics of the future. Because the Court lacks the requisites of prediction and planning and immediate response, the only means it has to affect the future is through its words. Because major Supreme Court opinions can reverberate through the federal and state governments, any discussion of the future may take on the character of “a political prognosis that alters the situation as soon as it is made,” as historian Reinhart Koselleck writes.²⁵ Hence speculation about how judicial decision making might change in response to contingent events may be warnings to those positioned

to prevent the contingencies from taking place. Statements about future justiciability may be performative acts that serve to keep the other branches on notice of future judicial intervention.

Legal scholars have thus far paid little attention to how the Court invokes the future, never mind how such invocation may be wrapped up in an assertion of judicial power. The idea of the future has mainly appeared in ideas about jurisprudential evolution and precedent, but only implicitly. Hence, canonical legal theorist Alexander Bickel thought the Court should seek to maintain continuity in the face of change, so that the law functioned as a “continuum” rather than a series of “violent spasms.”²⁶ To do so, Bickel argued, courts should lay down precedent that could endure beyond the present case and remain aware of not only “contemporaneous results” but also their “portentous aftermaths.”²⁷ Most explicitly, scholars have been attentive to the idea of the “slippery slope.”²⁸ Yet the slippery slope is just one of many ways judges discuss and imagine the future.

Taking just four opinions in a four-year time span—*Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, *Grutter v. Bollinger*, and *Bush v. Gore*—this chapter reveals a Court that seeks to control a future over which it has far from imperial control.²⁹ Instead of pronouncements, it issues warnings, predictions, and aspirations. The chapter analyzes the conceptual preconditions for warnings, predictions, and aspirations, and suggests the political imperatives that lie behind these declarations. Legal scholars have long been aware of the import of the past in judicial decision making. This chapter seeks to draw attention to the idea that judicial power may hinge just as much on how the Court conceives the future.

Hamdi v. Rumsfeld

In *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, the Court upheld the US government’s right to detain US citizens as enemy combatants for the duration of hostilities. In doing so, a plurality of the Supreme Court decided that the experiences of past wars were still applicable in the post-9/11 War on Terror, and consequently so were conventional laws of war. Yet even as it affirmed the repeatability of wartime experiences, the Court foresaw a future in which war might become so different and interminable that the experiences of past wars lost relevance. Failing to elaborate what that future looked like or how the laws of war might change, the plurality’s vision should be read as a warning of a future to avoid rather than a prediction of events the Court thought might actually come to pass.

Hamdi involved a dispute over the status of a US citizen, Yaser Hamdi, who had been captured in 2001 in Afghanistan, detained at the detention cen-

ter Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and finally transferred to a naval brig in South Carolina once his American citizenship was ascertained.³⁰ Classifying him as an “enemy combatant,” the US government argued it had the power to detain Hamdi until the end of hostilities. Hamdi challenged the government, claiming it could neither hold American citizens as enemy combatants nor hold enemy combatants indefinitely.³¹ While a plurality of the Court insisted on Hamdi’s right to due-process checks, it also held that the government had the power to detain an American citizen as an enemy combatant for the duration of hostilities, drawing on a World War II case, *Ex parte Quirin*, to justify its decision.³² Most significantly, the plurality responded to Hamdi’s contention that the government could not hold him indefinitely by claiming that the government’s detention of Hamdi was no more unusual or indefinite than any other wartime detention.³³

Justice O’Connor wrote for the plurality, and her description of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent Afghanistan invasion might have applied to any conventional war. Prominent targets in the United States had been attacked. In response, and with congressional authorization, the president had ordered US troops to Afghanistan to “quell the Taliban regime” that supported those attacks.³⁴ Pearl Harbor and the American entrance into World War II might have been described no differently than the War on Terror: an attack followed by military action against a foreign government that sourced the attack.³⁵ For the Court, the experience of war had not changed across time. Consequently, in interpreting what exactly Congress had authorized the executive to do in Afghanistan, the plurality could make assumptions about the requisites of war based on wars past: “Detention of individuals . . . for the duration of the particular conflict in which they are captured, is so fundamental and accepted an incident to war as to be an exercise of the ‘necessary and appropriate force’ Congress has authorized the President to use,” wrote Justice O’Connor.³⁶

Yet even as Justice O’Connor affirmed that the present war was just like any war before, she discussed a future in which the experiences of past wars might no longer prove informative. To Hamdi’s claim that the indefiniteness of his detention was unlike any other wartime detention, the government had replied that a prisoner’s detention in the middle of World War II would have seemed just as “indefinite.”³⁷ But although she rejected his claim in the present, Justice O’Connor recognized that the indefiniteness Hamdi challenged was not whether the War on Terror might end in three versus five versus ten years, but whether it might last for the rest of his life. What Hamdi feared he faced was “the substantial prospect of perpetual detention.”³⁸

In the case of a perpetual conflict, Justice O’Connor acknowledged, the category of war could lose the power it currently had to limit the detention

of enemy combatants. “If the Government [did] not consider this unconventional war won for two generations . . . Hamdi’s detention could last for the rest of his life,” she wrote.³⁹ Under traditional laws of war, enemy combatants would be released as soon as a peace treaty was signed. But a peace treaty might never be signed in the War on Terror. Although Justice O’Connor began her opinion by describing the war in Afghanistan as a conventional war, she went on to recognize its potential to become unconventional. Because the national security imperatives underlying the War on Terror were “broad and malleable,” the war might continue for generations, making the prospect of perpetual detention hardly farfetched.⁴⁰ In turn, if the conditions of a conflict became “entirely unlike those of the conflicts that informed the development of the law of war,” the Court’s interpretive framework for this case, and for the War on Terror overall, might “unravel.”⁴¹

Legal historian Mary Dudziak has argued that wartime should no longer be considered a discrete and temporary event but instead an enduring and ongoing feature of American life.⁴² For Dudziak, the reality of war in American life has already broken from the traditional understanding of war. Justice O’Connor, however, wrote that a break with traditional understandings lay still in the future. In doing so, she forewarned that a change in jurisprudence might one day be required, yet she did not speculate what that change would look like. The plurality also did not suggest that the Court modulate the legal treatment of war to respond to smaller shifts in the nature of war. Only when the nature of war had changed so dramatically that it was “entirely unlike” any conflict that had come before, it seemed, would the law be forced to revise its treatment of war. At that point, the law’s understanding would not readjust; it would “unravel.” Law and war ran as two parallel lines. Change would be sudden: if all at once the line of war turned perpendicular, so should the line of law.

Justice O’Connor suggested that if the present war lasted two generations, at which point Hamdi might have been detained his entire life, the Court would know the nature and law of war had changed.⁴³ Like political watchers in early modernity who based their calculations on the life spans of rulers, the Court calculated according to the life span of a prisoner.⁴⁴ It tethered its understanding of the future to what history had taught; namely, that wars were not expected to last for the rest of a young person’s life.

The Court’s statement about the future of war should not, however, be considered a prediction about the likely course of history. Koselleck writes of prognosis as a “rational forecast,”⁴⁵ and indeed, the Court provided reasons to think the War on Terror, broad and malleable as it was, might eventually change the meaning of war. Yet the Court provided no details beyond this

prospect. The Court did not suggest how likely it was that these events would come to pass or what exactly war would look like and how the law would respond. The content of the new was at most defined as the antithesis of the old. The plurality's prediction was primarily epistemological. In two generations the Court would know whether the nature of war had changed or not. The Court predicted nothing about how the law should change in response.

Having established in the present that war still existed in its traditional sense, why did the plurality even need to consider a future that might never come to pass?⁴⁶ On the one hand, the plurality may have sought to emphasize the limits of its opinion, to highlight that even as it insisted the government provide some due process for Hamdi, its opinion was marked by restraint. In doing so, the Court may have wanted to ward off those who would inevitably criticize the Court for "unwisely inject[ing] itself into military matters."⁴⁷ The plurality's decision to highlight a prospective future could thus be considered a "technique[] of 'not doing.'"⁴⁸ In deferring an issue that was not yet ripe, the plurality confirmed its adherence to the status quo. But courts do not typically deal with the question of whether an issue is ripe unless the issue is important for deciding the case, and the plurality in *Hamdi* did not need to contemplate the future of war to determine Hamdi's status or its consequences.

Phrased in the conditional, Justice O'Connor's discussion of the future of war might instead have doubled as a warning to the executive branch that the jurisprudence of war threatened to change dramatically if the War on Terror continued interminably.⁴⁹ Given the Court's reluctance to deviate from the conventional laws of war, it is unlikely that the Court wished to goad that future into existence. Instead, in envisioning the future, the Court may have sought to forestall its realization.

Since the 1930s, it has been widely recognized that the United States has been almost constantly at war, with the line between war and peace blurred. The Court has not shared this recognition. If the Court could not see that the traditional laws of war did not apply to the War on Terror, one wonders whether the US Supreme Court will ever recognize a time when the traditional laws of war no longer apply. Perhaps instead it will forever issue warnings to the political branches of a never-to-be-realized future.

Vieth v. Jubelirer

Although legal scholar Alison LaCroix claims that the Court furthers its own power by acting as a "master of time," *Hamdi* demonstrates that the Court cannot control all temporalities.⁵⁰ The Court may indirectly seek to exert pressure on the other branches of government by referencing a prospective

future, but one would be hard-pressed to call the Court the master of that future. However, the Court can assert a sort of mastery over at least one element of the future. It can decide to wholly absent itself from it by declaring an area of law nonjusticiable: beyond the reach of the federal judiciary.

The most determinate way that the Court can plan the future, then, is to cede its power over the future. In *Vieth*, a case about partisan gerrymandering, Justices Scalia and Kennedy agreed that the present case was nonjusticiable but took opposing views on whether all partisan gerrymandering claims running into the future should be declared nonjusticiable. At heart, their argument was about the pace of judicial change and the amount of historical experience required to conclude that the Court would never be able to adjudicate a class of cases.

Vieth began with a new congressional districting map drawn up by the Republican-controlled Pennsylvania General Assembly after the 2000 census. The Democrats brought suit to challenge the partisan electoral map, although the plaintiffs had reason to think the case would not go far. The Court in *Davis v. Bandemer* had declared partisan gerrymandering claims to be justiciable, but in the eighteen years between *Bandemer* and *Vieth*, no lower court had struck down an instance of gerrymandering as unconstitutional.⁵¹

Faced with this record, the Supreme Court asked in *Vieth* whether there was in fact any justiciable standard by which to distinguish an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander from politics as usual. Justice Scalia, writing for a plurality, thought experience had made clear that such a standard did not exist. *Bandemer* had resulted in “eighteen years of judicial effort with virtually nothing to show for it.”⁵² Though sometimes unconstitutional, partisan gerrymanders were never justiciable.

Concurring in the judgment, Justice Kennedy nonetheless protested the lesson Scalia drew from the past for the future. He agreed with Justice Scalia that at present there was no justiciable standard for determining an unconstitutional gerrymander.⁵³ But Justice Kennedy sought to hold open an uncertain future. Someday, he hoped, the Court might hit upon such a standard. Arguments against justiciability were not so compelling as to justify barring “all future claims of injury from a partisan gerrymander.”⁵⁴ To declare that no workable standard could ever exist would require “a difficult proof: proof of a categorical negative.”⁵⁵

Yet the disagreement between the two justices went beyond the provability of categorical negatives. Their disparate views on the future were informed by different ideas about the pace of judicial decision making and the extent and type of historical experience required for the Court to make so definite a determination about the future as to absent itself from it.

In his opinion, Justice Scalia first recounted a history of partisan gerrymandering already present at the founding.⁵⁶ “There were allegations that Patrick Henry attempted (unsuccessfully) to gerrymander James Madison out of the First Congress,” Scalia noted. The term gerrymander itself originated in 1812, “an amalgam of the names of Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry and the creature (‘salamander’) which the outline of an election district he was credited with forming was thought to resemble.”⁵⁷ Yet a long history of partisan gerrymandering said almost nothing about the history of their constitutional adjudication. Most critical for Scalia were the eighteen years since *Bandemer* in which partisan gerrymanders had been litigated without a court once providing redress. Eighteen years of wasted effort justified a reconsideration of whether courts should consider such claims in the first place.⁵⁸

Although eighteen years is at most a generation’s worth of experience, Scalia may have felt that those years took on more weight because they proved a prognosis made by Supreme Court justices at the outset. In *Bandemer* Justices O’Connor and Powell had already predicted the impossibility of finding a standard for partisan gerrymandering claims.⁵⁹ “The . . . most basic flaw in the plurality’s opinion is its failure to enunciate any standard that affords guidance to legislatures and courts,” wrote Powell. For Scalia, “that prognostication ha[d] been amply fulfilled.”⁶⁰ With one judicial prediction realized, Scalia may have felt less compunction about making his own. The interplay of past prognosis and present realization rendered a generation’s worth of judicial experience enough to foreclose a future of judicial intervention.

For Kennedy, Scalia drew his conclusion too quickly. Justice Kennedy thought the pace of judicial decision making far slower than Justice Scalia allowed. “By the timeline of the law 18 years is rather a short period,” Justice Kennedy noted,⁶¹ too short to provide insight into judicial decision making’s future. Justice Kennedy advocated a “more patient approach,” citing the time it took the Court to hit upon the idea of “one person, one vote” in representational apportionment.⁶² A “dearth of helpful historical guidance” should cause agnosticism, not certainty about the future of partisan-gerrymander adjudication.⁶³ Yet Justice Kennedy proved himself an optimistic agnostic, providing a modern twist to his theory of moderate legal evolution. Although the pace of judicial change typically ran slow, he suggested that the law might be on the point of breakthrough in the area of partisan gerrymandering because of “the rapid evolution of technologies.”⁶⁴ New mapping technologies might enable more exacting analysis of the burdens partisan gerrymanders imposed on representational rights. Technology held the promise of accelerated judicial change.

Justice Scalia, in turn, mocked Justice Kennedy’s “empty talk.” It was the courts’ function to provide “relief, not hope.”⁶⁵ But keeping the hope of future

judicial intervention alive may have served an important political purpose for Justice Kennedy. At the end of his concurrence, he spoke of the need for restraint in all three branches of government, especially in the legislature. Although the Court was not in a position to declare the actions of the Republican-controlled Pennsylvania General Assembly unconstitutional, Justice Kennedy had no doubt that legislative restraint had been abandoned.⁶⁶ He feared that “if courts refuse[d] to entertain any claims of partisan gerrymandering, the temptation to use partisan favoritism in districting in an unconstitutional manner [would] grow.”⁶⁷ Justice Scalia took the opposite view. He suggested that removing the judiciary from any further involvement in partisan gerrymandering claims might spur the political process to afford genuine relief.⁶⁸

Justices Kennedy and Scalia used a temporal register to put forth two different understandings of the relationship between law and politics. Neither disavowed that the law might have a role to play in ensuring the functioning of the political process. But for Justice Kennedy, even when the law did not act, the presence of the law could corral politics into a democratic mode. History, in a sense, could never prove much for Justice Kennedy, because there was success to be found in the absence of experience. In contrast, Justice Scalia thought the mere presence of the law could cause political dysfunction by promising too much. Hence if the law had historically failed to solve problems in the democratic process, it should remove itself from the field. Yet some of the very history he recounted challenged the idea that the judiciary’s removal could spur political action. As Scalia pointed out, gerrymandering was as old as the Republic. Yet the Court had entered the fray only eighteen years before.⁶⁹ In the many decades before *Bandemer*, when the Court had been absent from the field of partisan gerrymandering, legislatures had done little to right their own representational wrongs.

In 2019, the Supreme Court removed itself from the future of partisan gerrymandering. In *Rucho v. Common Cause*, Chief Justice Roberts, writing for the majority, held that partisan gerrymandering claims presented political questions beyond the reach of the judiciary.⁷⁰ In so holding, he imagined a dangerous future in which an unfettered judiciary intervened “into one of the most intensely partisan aspects of American political life.”⁷¹ Better instead to look to the experience of “the past 45 years” in which the Supreme Court had “never struck down a partisan gerrymander as unconstitutional.”⁷² Chief Justice Roberts thereby portrayed the decision as simply maintaining the status quo, even as it declared that the threat of judicial intervention would no longer hang over the practice of partisan gerrymandering.

Grutter v. Bollinger

The justices' debate in *Vieth* went no further than the question of whether to leave the future open or closed to the possibility of legal development. By contrast, in perhaps the Court's most famous reference to the future, the Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger* specifically envisioned the end of affirmative action in twenty-five years' time. In *Grutter*, the Court's 2003 opinion upholding the University of Michigan Law School's affirmative-action program, the Court applied its strictest test to find that the law school's affirmative action policy was not unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment's equal-protection clause.⁷³ At the end of her opinion for the majority, Justice O'Connor declared: "We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today."⁷⁴

Justices at the time and scholars since have debated whether the Court's expectation that affirmative action should last no more than twenty-five more years should be understood as a prediction or a decree. Justice Ginsburg assumed that it was the former, and Justice Thomas assumed it to be the latter. The implications are profound. If the "expectation" were a prediction, it would be possible that affirmative action might continue past the twenty-five-year mark if conditions did not change as forecasted. If the expectation were a sunset clause, then the Court in effect rendered a deferred decision. Affirmative action would definitely be unconstitutional in twenty-five years because it was already unconstitutional today. The Court had merely provided a time lag for society to adjust to the idea. This chapter argues against both readings and suggests that the power of the Court's "expectation" lay in its very indeterminacy.

The seeming precision of the Court's twenty-five-year timing and the language of "expectation" suggests a historically or data-based prognosis. In an era featuring a wealth of demographic information on educational prospects and progress, if the Court wished to base its expectation on statistics, it might have been able to do so.⁷⁵ Indeed, the majority gestured toward data, citing a vague claim from oral argument that in the previous twenty-five years "the number of minority applicants with high grades and test scores ha[d] indeed increased."⁷⁶ But it did no more than that. Justice Thomas's dissent, by contrast, marshaled concrete educational data demonstrating stasis, not progress. Arguing that the majority could not "rest its time limitation on any evidence that the gap in credentials between black and white students is shrinking or will be gone in [twenty-five years]," he noted that in recent years there had been no change in the proportion of African American law school applicants with LSAT scores above 165.⁷⁷

Given a lack of data, the expectation could instead be understood as a prognosis based on historical experience, which might have created expectations about how the future would play out.⁷⁸ For instance, the Court might have assessed changes in race relations in the twenty-five years since the Court issued its first university-based affirmative-action decision in 1978's *Bakke*. Based on the pace of change from 1978 to 2003, the Court might have felt confident that if race relations progressed apace, affirmative action would no longer be necessary twenty-five years in the future. Yet the Court's only assessment of change over the past twenty-five years was the one statement about minority applicants' improved grades and test scores. The Court gave no reason to think that the grades and test scores of minority applicants would reach a point of equipoise in twenty-five years' time.

Indeed, if anything, much of the Court's opinion in *Grutter* presumed an absence of progress between 1978 and 2003. One of the primary justifications for upholding the University of Michigan Law School's affirmative action program was its resemblance to the Harvard affirmative action program endorsed twenty-five years earlier in *Bakke* by Justice Powell.⁷⁹ It is difficult to establish a sweeping narrative of historical progress in an opinion whose rationale relied so much on precedent. The conceptualization of historical change found in Justice Ginsburg's concurring opinion better justified the Court's reliance on *Bakke*. Justice Ginsburg noted that it had been only fifty years since school segregation was declared unconstitutional and cited data demonstrating the continued existence of de facto segregation. On the basis of this history, she thought Court's expectation was unrealistic as a social prognosis: "From today's vantage point, one may hope, but not firmly forecast, that over the next generation's span, progress toward nondiscrimination and genuinely equal opportunity will make it safe to sunset affirmative action," wrote Justice Ginsburg.⁸⁰ If the Court's expectation should be understood as a type of prediction about the future, it was at best prophecy, requiring neither data nor history to justify its vision.⁸¹

Some scholars have suggested that the Court's expectation would better be understood as a sunset clause, or deferred present. In an article published soon after *Grutter*, Professors Vikram David Amar and Evan Caminker argued that the Court was worried an abrupt about-face on affirmative action could undo national progress in race relations. The authors hypothesized that the twenty-five-year expectation was intended to set a transitional period during which society might gradually wean itself off affirmative action before the law changed in fact.⁸² Instead of predicting the future, the majority may have in effect been stating that affirmative action was presently unconstitutional "but we will delay implementing that law until tomorrow."⁸³ Justice

Thomas, for one, shared this reading. Dissenting from most of the majority's opinion, he concurred with the Court's sunset clause alone. For Justice Thomas, race-conscious admissions would be unconstitutional twenty-five years from now because they were already unconstitutional today.⁸⁴

There are problems with both readings of "expectation." If a sunset clause, the Supreme Court in effect authorized unconstitutional action. If a prediction, it was a baseless one, setting the Court up to be proved wrong in twenty-five years. Perhaps the expectation clause should instead be read as both prediction and sunset, but also neither. The very power of *Grutter's* "expectation" lay in its ambiguous nature. It was no less an act of judicial power to leave society wondering whether the Court had definitely set an end date to affirmative action as it would have been to clearly articulate such an intent. Moreover, the ambiguity of the expectation gave the Court leeway to decide what it actually meant after twenty-five years. If the Court wished to continue affirmative action, it could say the expectation had been a mere prediction, now proved wrong. If it sought to end affirmative action despite society's failure to close the racial gap, it could declare that the expectation clause had been a sunset all along and that the present Court was respecting the previous Court's wishes. In the meantime, the Court could suspend the contradiction between the two and protect itself from political backlash, leaving society to wonder which it meant and what it should prepare for.⁸⁵

Bush v. Gore

In *Hamdi*, *Vieth*, and *Grutter*, justices on the Court confronted and disputed the knowability of the future. In *Bush v. Gore*, the controversial Supreme Court opinion that ended the 2000 American presidential race, the Court confronted a uniquely unforeseen present. It responded by declaring that its decision should have no precedential effect, seeking to foreshorten the future of its decision. Perhaps the Court was concerned for the legitimacy of this first foray into the middle of a presidential election. But this chapter suggests the Court's concern may have been less with the legitimacy of *Bush v. Gore* itself than with the unknown and potentially rapid aftereffects of its unprecedented decision.

In their per curiam opinion, the Court's five conservative members in *Bush v. Gore* applied what one scholar has called "a sweeping, but rather vague rendition of equal protection,"⁸⁶ to find that Florida's approach to recounting votes in the 2000 presidential election was standardless, had led to the "unequal evaluation of ballots," and had thereby violated equal protection.⁸⁷ Deciding that it was too late to restart a legitimate recount, the Court

declared an end to Florida's recount, thereby guaranteeing the presidency to the Republican candidate, George W. Bush.

Yet even as it announced its decision, the Court took the odd step of disavowing its precedential value. Because "the problem of equal protection in election processes generally presents many complexities," the Court declared that its opinion would be "limited to the present circumstances."⁸⁸ The attempt to limit a Supreme Court decision from having any precedential effect on the future was unique.⁸⁹ Did the Court really mean that in future cases, lower courts should wholly ignore the way in which *Bush v. Gore* had applied equal protection to election law?⁹⁰ Why seek to rend the fabric of time in this of all cases and insist that the judicial present should have no effect on the judicial future?

Beyond the complexity of election processes, the Court provided no reason for its limit. The idea of "complexity" seems a straw man at best. Precedents typically operate by finding analogues between current and prior cases, no matter how complex the prior case might be. Rather than complexity, underlying anxieties about the judiciary's present and future legitimacy may better explain the unique nonprecedent of *Bush v. Gore*.

The nonprecedent may have resulted from a concern for the legitimacy of the Court's present decision. After a questionable intervention into presidential politics, perhaps the nonprecedent was a declaration of disarmament. The Court's power to review decisions made by the democratically elected political branches relies in part on a myth of political neutrality.⁹¹ Effectively announcing the victor of a presidential election threatened to reveal that the Court was a very political institution indeed. It did not help that the Court had split straight down the conservative-liberal line, with five conservatives voting for a position that decided the election for Republican George W. Bush and four liberals voting for the position that would have kept Democrat Al Gore in the race at least a little longer. One of the four liberal justices' dissents warned that the majority's decision risked losing "the Nation's confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law."⁹² Justice Ginsburg characterized the Court as stepping beyond not just its constitutional but its temporal bounds as well by deciding that there was no time for a proper recount: "The Court's conclusion that a constitutionally adequate recount is impractical is a prophecy the Court's own judgment will not allow to be tested. Such an untested prophecy should not decide the Presidency of the United States."⁹³ The Court may have declared a nonprecedent to cabin the perceived illegitimacy of *Bush v. Gore* to *Bush v. Gore* itself.

Yet it is unlikely the Court thought the declaration of a nonprecedent would wholly prevent future judicial interventions into elections or forever

shelve *Bush v. Gore*'s equal-protection analysis. For one, the Court failed to enunciate the scope of the nonprecedent. Might *Bush v. Gore* at least be applied to cases involving situations very like that of Florida in 2000? Second, beyond stating the nonprecedent, the Court did little to encourage lower courts to follow such an unusual instruction. Were lower courts really expected to give a major Supreme Court decision "the weight of an unpublished opinion, at most an equal protection holding for a class forever to be limited to one member"?⁹⁴ As one commentator noted: "It is no wonder that *Bush v. Gore* has caused such confusion in the lower courts. It is as if the Supreme Court had written an opinion, and then, in a bow to René Magritte, put as its last sentence: 'This is not an opinion.' What is a lower court to do?"⁹⁵ Some lower courts knew exactly what to do. In a 2006 opinion holding that the use of older voting machines in some counties in Ohio represented an equal-protection violation, the Sixth Circuit majority responded to the objection that *Bush v. Gore* was not precedent by stating, "Respectfully, the Supreme Court does not issue non-precedential opinions."⁹⁶ Third, the Court effectively acknowledged that if called upon to decide such a matter again, the Court would do so. "None are more conscious of the vital limits on judicial authority," and "none stand more in admiration of the Constitution's design to leave the selection of the President to the people," wrote the majority. But "when contending parties invoke the process of the courts," it became the Court's "unsought responsibility to resolve the federal and constitutional issues the judicial system has been forced to confront."⁹⁷ If the Court's opinion was not in fact to be ignored and if, when called upon, the Court would just as readily involve itself in another presidential election, the legitimacy or illegitimacy of *Bush v. Gore* itself does not fully explain the Court's nonprecedent.

Perhaps the Court's strange disavowal might be explained instead by the very unexpectedness of having to intervene in a presidential election in the first place. The Court's concern may have been less with the legitimacy of *Bush v. Gore* itself than with the unknown and potentially rapid aftereffects of this unforeseen and unprecedented decision. Confronted by the unexpected and momentous political events of November and December 2000, the Court may have feared its decision would trigger a spate of judicial interventions into the course of future elections. Issuing a nonprecedent might have been an attempt to inhibit the pace of such litigation, cautioning plaintiffs and the judiciary against reading *Bush v. Gore* as a green light for similar judicial involvement in elections going forward.

Under this theory, the nonprecedent stemmed from the way the Court related, in Koselleck's language, a former future to the present's future.⁹⁸ *Bush v. Gore* was a case that significantly affected the relationship between the Court

and the political branches but for which the Court had neither precedent nor foresight. The present was a wholly unexpected former future. Taken unawares, the Court may have feared that the consequences of this chance case might spiral out of control.

Koselleck describes chance as a “pure category of the present.” It is the sudden manifestation of a future that has never before been experienced and could not have been predicted but may set off a long chain of historical consequences.⁹⁹ The Court of course does not foresee every case that comes its way. But being asked to intervene in a presidential election at the eleventh hour was historically unique. Indeed, the only precedent the Court drew on in *Bush v. Gore* directly implicating presidential elections was over one hundred years old.¹⁰⁰ The other precedents had to do primarily with the long-established constitutional value of “one person, one vote.”¹⁰¹ Conventional issues of representational apportionment could hardly have alerted the Court to the fact that one day it would intervene to stop a presidential ballot recount. The Court itself described the decision as “unsought” and “forced.”¹⁰²

Even when the Court makes a sudden shift in doctrine or opens a new line of precedent, the decision typically occurs under foreseen circumstances. Other revolutionary decisions in the Court’s history—whether *Brown v. Board*, *Roe v. Wade*, or *Obergefell v. Hodges*—were hardly sudden or unexpected in the same way that *Bush v. Gore* was. *Brown* was the last stage of an NAACP long game.¹⁰³ *Obergefell* came down about a year after the Court denied certiorari in a series of other gay marriage cases.¹⁰⁴ In contrast, there were only thirty-five days between the 2000 election and a Supreme Court opinion that for the first time effectively declared the winner of a presidential election.

Unprepared for the present it was confronting, the Court may have been unsure as to its future. Most of all, it may have feared that its decision would result in frequent judicial interventions in the middle of in-process democratic elections, requiring swift judicial decisions and similar leaps in doctrine. It is unlikely that the Court expected lower courts to never cite *Bush v. Gore* as precedent. However, issuing the nonprecedent may have served as a signal to litigants and lower courts that the Court did not wish *Bush v. Gore* to set off a cascade of similar litigation and legal developments. Justice Breyer argued that “what it does today, the Court should have left undone.”¹⁰⁵ The Court did not seek to undo the present, but it did try to foreshorten its future.

Conclusion

In four major opinions in the past twenty years, the Court’s conceptualization of the future has played an important role in the way it has decided the case

before it. In *Hamdi*, the Court's acknowledgment that in the future the nature and laws of war might change allowed it to maintain that war in the present reflected the traditional status quo. In *Vieth*, Justice Scalia's conviction that the Court would never discover a justiciable standard for partisan gerrymandering, no matter how long it tried, allowed him to already declare the nonjusticiability of such claims. In *Grutter*, the Court's pronounced expectation sent society two signals at once, both confirming the constitutionality of affirmative action and suggesting its demise. And in *Bush v. Gore*, the Court's unique declaration of a nonprecedent provided a buffer against the consequences of its unexpected intervention into American presidential politics.

Although the Court may not be able to master the future, it can still seek to shape it. The Court's conceptualizations of the future should be understood not as mere descriptive acts but as signals sent to other branches of government, to society, and to the judiciary. The Court may try to issue warnings or maintain the possibility of future judicial action to constrain other branches of government, as Justice O'Connor did in *Hamdi* and as Justice Kennedy did in his *Vieth* concurrence. Ambiguous signals about the future may be attempts to both protect the Court and provoke responses on behalf of society. The expectation in *Grutter* can be read as either a hopeful prediction on the Court's part or a spur to society to prepare for a sunset. The declared nonprecedent of *Bush v. Gore* could deter a future spate of similar litigation even as its anomalism left lower courts doubting they should take the Court at its word.

Legal scholarship still has much to learn about how the Court understands and conceives the future. Further projects might seek to taxonomize ways the Court has engaged with the future or look for changes in the nature and methods of its conceptions over time. This chapter has analyzed the ways the Court has conceived the future with particular attention to the relationship of judicial power; the co-constitution of past, present, and future; and the tempo of judicial change. It has sought to demonstrate that for scholars to fully understand the Court and its decisions, they should look to the Court's understanding not only of the past but also of the future.

Notes

1. *Marbury v. Madison*, 5 U.S. (1 Cranch) 137, 177 (1803).

2. Some Supreme Court Justices have suggested that it is left to each new generation to develop their understanding and interpretation of those terms. For instance, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which invalidated a state ban on same-sex sodomy under the Fourteenth Amendment's due-process clause, Justice Kennedy wrote: "Had those who drew and ratified the Due Process Clauses of the Fifth Amendment or the Fourteenth Amendment known the components of liberty in its manifold possibilities, they might have been more specific. They did not presume

to have this insight. They knew times can blind us to certain truths and later generations can see that laws once thought necessary and proper in fact serve only to oppress. As the Constitution endures, persons in every generation can invoke its principles in their own search for greater freedom.” *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558, 578–79 (2003).

3. Daryl J. Levinson, “Parchment and Politics: The Positive Puzzle of Constitutional Commitment Parchment,” *Harvard Law Review* 124 (2011): 661.

4. Matthew C. Stephenson, “‘When the Devil Turns . . .’: The Political Foundations of Independent Judicial Review,” *Journal of Legal Studies* 32 (2003): 60, qtd. in Levinson, “Parchment and Politics,” 661.

5. See Barry Friedman, “The Politics of Judicial Review,” *Texas Law Review* 84 (2005): 1; Levinson, “Parchment and Politics,” 659–60.

6. Friedman, “Judicial Review,” 13.

7. Friedman.

8. See especially Friedman, “Judicial Review”; Levinson, “Parchment and Politics.”

9. See, e.g., Jeffrey Toobin, “Court Politics,” *New Yorker*, March 20, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/28/merrick-garland-and-the-politics-of-the-supreme-court>; Thomas Fuller, “‘So-Called’ Judge Criticized by Trump Is Known as a Mainstream Republican,” *New York Times*, February 4, 2017; Friedman, “Judicial Review,” 5.

10. Levinson, “Parchment and Politics,” 733–34.

11. Alexander M. Bickel, *The Least Dangerous Branch: The Supreme Court at the Bar of Politics* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 16–17.

12. Levinson, “Parchment and Politics,” 78.

13. See, e.g., Mark Tushnet, “An Essay on Rights,” *Texas Law Review* 62 (1984): 1363–1404.

14. Levinson, “Parchment and Politics,” 734.

15. Levinson, 738.

16. See, e.g., Barry Friedman, *Will of the People: How Public Opinion Has Influenced the Supreme Court and Shaped the Meaning of the Constitution* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010).

17. Levinson, “Parchment and Politics,” 736.

18. Levinson, 739–44. Levinson elaborates how the courts serve important functions, including coordination, settlement, repeat play, and reciprocity. In addition, the Court provides a package of probabilistic outcomes for political actors.

19. *Planned Parenthood of SE Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 865 (1992).

20. For Stephen Griffin, constitutional law is a law that “draws on the past in order to provide legal authority to the present.” Stephen M. Griffin, “Constitutional Theory Transformed,” *Yale Law Journal* 108 (June 1999): 2129.

21. Paul W. Kahn, *The Cultural Study of Law: Reconstructing Legal Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 52–53.

22. Alison L. LaCroix, “Temporal Imperialism,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 1329 (April 2010): 1329–73.

23. As LaCroix describes (1348–66), the Court has the power, for example, to determine whether a new holding should apply retroactively or not.

24. Cass R. Sunstein, *One Case at a Time: Judicial Minimalism on the Supreme Court: Judicial Minimalism on the Supreme Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3–4. As Sunstein notes, a court that decides as little as possible reduces the risks of unanticipated bad consequences that accompany any “single-shot intervention” into a complex system.

25. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 64.

26. Bickel, *Least Dangerous Branch*, 109.

27. Bickel, 130–31. As Bickel wrote: “Principle is intended to endure, and its formulation casts large shadows into the future. Today’s declaration of constitutionality will not only tip today’s political balance but may add impetus to the next generation’s choice of one policy over another” (131).

28. Eugene Volokh, “The Mechanisms of the Slippery Slope,” *Harvard Law Review* 116 (2003): 1030.

29. *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 507 (2004) (plurality opinion); *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, 541 U.S. 267 (2004) (plurality opinion); *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003); *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98 (2000) (per curiam).

30. *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 507, 510 (2004) (plurality opinion).

31. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 519.

32. *Ex parte Quirin*, 317 U.S. 1 (1942).

33. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 521.

34. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 510.

35. As John Yoo writes, “A four-Justice plurality of the Court agreed with the government that the September 11 attacks had initiated a state of war, that the Afghanistan conflict was part of that war, and that enemy combatants could be detained without criminal charge as part of that war.” John Yoo, “Courts at War,” *Cornell Law Review* 91 (January 2006): 580.

36. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 518.

37. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 520.

38. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 520.

39. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 520.

40. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 520.

41. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 521.

42. Mary Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 136.

43. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 520.

44. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 21.

45. Koselleck, 18.

46. *Hamdi*, 518 U.S. at 521.

47. Yoo, “Courts at War,” 574.

48. Bickel, *Least Dangerous Branch*, 169.

49. As Dudziak writes “The Court did not have to face the prospect of endless detention, however, at least not yet.” Dudziak, *War Time*, 121.

50. LaCroix, “Temporal Imperialism,” 1332.

51. *Davis v. Bandemer*, 478 U.S. 109, 127 (1986); Matthew M. Weiss, “Where Do We Draw the Line? The Justiciability of Political Gerrymandering Claims in *Light of League of United Latin American Citizens v. Perry*,” *Georgia Law Review* 41 (Spring 2007): 1073.

52. *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, 541 U.S. 267, 281 (2004) (plurality opinion).

53. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 306–9 (Kennedy, J., concurring). Although he suggested that the First Amendment, with its protections for political participation and expression, might be a more fruitful location than the Fourteenth Amendment for gerrymandering claims, Justice Kennedy did not endorse a First Amendment inquiry in the present. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 314–15.

54. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 309.
55. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 311–12.
56. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 274 (plurality opinion).
57. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 274.
58. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 281.
59. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 282.
60. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 282.
61. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 312 (Kennedy, J., concurring).
62. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 310.
63. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 310.
64. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 312.
65. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 304 (plurality opinion).
66. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 317 (Kennedy, J., concurring).
67. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 312.
68. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 305 (plurality opinion).
69. *Vieth*, 541 U.S. at 274.
70. *Rucho v. Common Cause*, 139 S. Ct. 2484 (2019).
71. *Rucho*, 139 S. Ct. at 2507.
72. *Rucho*, 139 S. Ct. at 2507.
73. *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 320 (2003).
74. *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 343.
75. Though acknowledging that such distant projections could not be definitive, a group of economists attempted to project the racial composition of elite universities in 2025 and found that African American students would continue to be substantially underrepresented in that year. Jesse Rothstein, Alan Krueger, and Sarah Turner, “Was Justice O’Connor Right? Race and Highly Selective College Admissions in 25 Years,” in *College Access: Opportunity or Privilege*, ed. Michael McPherson and Morton Schapiro (New York: College Board, 2006), 35–46.
76. *Grutter v.*, 539 U.S. at 343.
77. *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 376 (Thomas, J., dissenting).
78. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 18.
79. *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 329 (majority opinion); *Regents of Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978) (opinion of Powell, J.).
80. *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 346 (Ginsburg, J., concurring).
81. Koselleck describes how prophecy “transgress[es] the bounds of calculable experience,” in *Futures Past* (19).
82. Vikram David Amar and Evan Caminker, “Constitutional Sunsetting? Justice O’Connor’s Closing Comments in *Grutter*,” *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* 30 (Summer 2003): 550–51.
83. Amar and Caminker, 552.
84. *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 375 (Thomas, J., dissenting).
85. Rothstein, Krueger, and Turner admonished that if the future Supreme Court went ahead with Justice O’Connor’s intention to ban affirmative action and if higher education did not adjust in other ways, there would be a substantial decline in the representation of African Americans at elite institutions. Rothstein, Krueger, and Turner, “Was Justice O’Connor Right?” 36.
86. Samuel Issacharoff, “Political Judgments,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 68 (2001): 648.

87. *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98, 106 (2000) (per curiam).

88. *Bush*, 531 U.S. at 109.

89. Linda Greenhouse notes that “one of the oddest elements of *Bush v. Gore*, as well as its greatest understatement, was the majority’s explanation of why the holding would apply to this case and this case alone.” Linda Greenhouse, “Learning to Live with *Bush v. Gore*,” *Green Bag 4* (2001): 388.

90. Legal scholar Samuel Issacharoff, for one, doubted either the validity or sincerity of the Court’s “disingenuous limiting instruction.” Issacharoff, “Political Judgments,” 650.

91. Herbert Wechsler’s canonical essay, “Toward Neutral Principles of Constitutional Law” argues that “the main constituent of the judicial process is precisely that it must be genuinely principled, resting with respect to every step that is involved in reaching judgment on analysis and reasons quite transcending the immediate result that is achieved.” Herbert Wechsler, “Toward Neutral Principles of Constitutional Law,” *Harvard Law Review* 73 no. 1 (1959): 15.

92. *Bush*, 531 U.S. at 129 (Stevens, J., dissenting).

93. *Bush*, 531 U.S. at 142 (Ginsburg, J., dissenting).

94. Greenhouse, “Learning to Live,” 388.

95. Chad Flanders, “Please Don’t Cite This Case! The Precedential Value of *Bush v. Gore*,” *Yale Law Journal* 116 (2006): 141, 143. Flanders goes on to say that “*Bush v. Gore* is wholly unique in using limiting language to (apparently) nullify the principle of an opinion, not in a concurrence to the opinion, but in the majority opinion of the very case.”

96. *Stewart v. Blackwell*, 444 F.3d 843, 874 (6th Cir. 2006), vacated (July 21, 2006), superseded, 473 F.3d 692 (6th Cir. 2007).

97. *Bush*, 531 U.S. at 112 (per curiam).

98. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 11.

99. Koselleck, 115.

100. *Bush*, 531 U.S. at 103 (citing *McPherson v. Blacker*, 146 U.S. 1, 35 (1892)).

101. *Bush*, 531 U.S. at 108.

102. *Bush*, 531 U.S. at 112.

103. “The Evolution of *Brown v. Board of Education*,” *Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise*, PBS, http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/factsheet_history.html.

104. Amy Howe, “Today’s Orders: Same-Sex Marriage Petitions Denied,” *SCOTUSblog*, October 6, 2014, <http://www.scotusblog.com/2014/10/todays-orders-same-sex-marriage-petitins-denied/>.

105. *Bush*, 531 U.S. at 158 (Breyer, J., dissenting).

Commemorating the End of History: Timelessness and Power in Contemporary Russia

KEVIN M. F. PLATT

With regard to the future: we have a kind of time machine. It exists. This apparatus is called “history.” One must study history, meticulously, in order to objectively understand it. And then it will be clear how one must act in order to build the future—and the future is being created today.

VLADIMIR PUTIN, 2017¹

From 2009 to 2013, the twentieth anniversaries of the events of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union served as occasions for widespread public reflection on the tumult of recent history. In Russia, current events appeared to be synchronized, in some cryptic fashion, with those of two decades earlier. The anniversary of the August putsch of 1991, which led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, immediately preceded the sudden appearance of new opposition movements and mass demonstrations in Russia during the fall of 2011, which yielded to a slowly rising tide of repressive policies and patriotic drum-beating following Vladimir Putin’s reelection in March 2012. The anniversary of the constitutional crisis of 1993, which ended with Boris Yeltsin’s disbanding of a recalcitrant Russian parliament with artillery fire, was observed in the fall of 2013, just prior to the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine that raised the anti-Western dither of Russian public life to its highest point since the early 1980s. As the anniversaries passed, in Russia and in the West, discussions turned first to a new wave of Russian political mobilization whose only precedent was the mass demonstrations of the early 1990s, and then to a “new Cold War” and the reassembly of a Russian sphere of influence modeled on Soviet geopolitical legacies.² Somehow, either clocks were running backward or the political dispositions set in place at the conclusion of the Soviet era were leading to belated and momentous outcomes.

Yet exactly how the events of the end of the Cold War and those of the ostensible new one were related to each other remained obscure. In Russia, the 1991 and 1993 anniversaries were observed with great ferment. Every major Russian journal and news outlet published reminiscences and analysis.

Television programs showcased talking heads debating the significance of the end of the Soviet era. Intellectuals and cultural figures convened art projects and exhibitions devoted to documentation of and debate over the early 1990s. Yet despite the fevered production of memory work and historical discourse, no consensus emerged regarding the significance of those events. Quite to the contrary: this burst of public discourse regarding the early 1990s placed on display the great range of conflicting interpretations, or, alternately, confined its focal point at the level of personal experiences of events. Most agreed that the events of the Soviet collapse and its aftermath held great significance for Russia's subsequent course, yet the nature of this significance was a subject of contention. The early 1990s, it seems, had been slotted into a special and rather overused category in the vocabulary of Russian history: the "pro and contra" period, event or figure, on which no consensus can be reached.³ Most curious of all, presiding over this scene of disunited memory, Russian political figures remained silent—strikingly so, given that the events in question constituted the founding of the current political and economic order.

The current essay is devoted to this curious regime of competing and interwoven temporalities, or chronocenos, in which recent, founding moments are pregnant with an ill-defined historical meaning and the disorder and multidirectionality of the past renders the politics of the present inscrutable. In the introduction to this volume, the editors propose that political power operates by wresting and controlling the ordering of conflictual temporal regimes. This formula aptly describes how modern political formations have sought to impose hegemonic reorderings of temporality, or at least to dominate the field of competition between alternate temporalities—as exemplified, for example, in the temporal regimes of the revolutionary states, from the French to the Bolshevik, described by Dan Edelstein in his contribution to this volume. However, as I argue in what follows, the intersection of power and temporality in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union has been characterized by a *sui generis* configuration of chronocenos, in which a powerful state, rather than exerting control over competing temporalities, has not only refused to impose order on time but also has actively fostered an uncontrolled and disordered multiplicity of temporalities—one that has yielded particular advantage for the maintenance of power. As we shall see, in contemporary Russia, temporal incoherence is political strategy.

On April 27, 2007, Yeltsin was buried with all of the pomp appropriate to a great statesman. Yet throughout the days of ritual surrounding the death of his predecessor, president Vladimir Putin was remarkably tepid. On the day of Yeltsin's death, April 23, he delivered a brief address. Throughout the day on April 27, during televised coverage of burial services, Putin was present,

yet silent. In the evening, he pronounced a short speech at a banquet in the Kremlin in memory of the departed. Finally, on the day following the burial, Putin began his yearly “Address to the Federal Assembly” with discussion of Yeltsin’s memory:

As you know, the tradition of yearly Addresses to the Federal Assembly—in fact, direct addresses to the people of Russia—was founded with the Constitution of 1993: the Constitution that was adopted by the initiative of President Yeltsin. He considered direct, frank dialogue with the people to be extraordinarily important. He held that it was necessary to bring forth for public discussion both the problems and the priorities of state politics. And he saw in this a significant instrument for the unification of society—an instrument for real democracy. At that time, the country was being torn apart by complex social conflicts, as well as partisan and ideological contradictions. Separatism was a real threat to the security and integrity of Russia. And furthermore, resources for the resolution of the most urgent, vitally important problems were sorely lacking. But precisely in this complicated moment, the foundation for future transformations was laid. We have worked together for many years in order to overcome the consequences of the transitional period—to step beyond the excesses of a profound and by no means unequivocal transformation.⁴

Yeltsin, who oversaw the dismantling of the Soviet Union and who personally appointed Putin as his successor, could be thought to constitute one of the main components of the Russian Federation’s foundational myth. Yet Putin’s treatment of Yeltsin, in this address and throughout those few days, fell short of the piety one might expect given the circumstances. Putin himself laid plain the logic of his restraint: the “transitional period”—and Yeltsin too, we might add—constituted “by no means unequivocal” figures. The period over which Yeltsin presided, far from representing a revolutionary moment establishing the basis of present legitimacy, was instead to be regarded as an era of crisis, one whose “consequences” must be “overcome.” Putin did not elaborate on the nature of this crisis. Ironically, in appealing to Yeltsin’s tradition of “open and frank dialogue with the people of Russia,” Putin said very little about Russia’s founding father and his era. The most eloquent moment in his address, one might propose, was the moment of silence that preceded these words.

Putin’s reticence at Yeltsin’s graveside contrasted with a clamor of other responses to his death. Among political elites there was little consensus as to the public significance of Yeltsin’s life and accomplishments. The day after Yeltsin’s death, when the State Duma convened a session devoted to the first Russian president, representatives from the Communist Party—the largest bloc apart from Putin’s own United Russia party, with which it usually votes

in solidarity—refused to stand to honor the memory of the departed. Confronted by their Duma colleagues, the leader of the communist delegation, Mikhail Zapolev, fulminated that “a great destroyer has died, and so by Orthodox tradition he deserves only a wooden stake through the heart from all those whom he deceived and robbed”⁵—hinting, with the figure of the vampire, at the root problem of temporal incoherence: was Yeltsin and the politics he created actually dead, or did they threaten to rise again? Meanwhile, the disenfranchised democratic opposition assumed a different stance of dissent. In St. Petersburg, a public meeting in Yeltsin’s memory was organized on April 25 on Sakharov Square, the traditional gathering point for prodemocracy rallies, where participants expressed their hopes that “the death of Boris Yeltsin would not become the final burial of Russian democracy” and praised him as “the first and last president of a free Russia.”⁶ In Moscow on April 26 a meeting in support of arrested demonstrators began with its own moment of silence for the deceased, following which the prominent democratic activist Mikhail Kasianov explained that when Yeltsin came to power, “everyone had thought that the regime of security agents would be eternal, but it soon became clear that it was not so.”⁷ Newspapers—in which one might expect obituaries that looked past Yeltsin’s failings to his role as a founding father—instead published arrays of personal evaluations and reminiscences that ran the gamut from denunciation to glorification. As a commentator from the mass newspaper *Moskovskii komsomolets* summed up, “From where he is now, it’s easier for Boris Yeltsin to understand and forgive us than it is for us to do the same for him.”⁸ Facing denunciations, on the one hand, for his inheritance of Yeltsin’s corrupt oligarchic greed, and on the other, for his betrayal of a legacy of democratic reform, reticence was perhaps an understandable strategy on the part of Putin and his speechwriters.

Since Yeltsin’s death, this moment of official silence and popular clamor has stretched into years. The most peculiar lacuna with regard to Russia’s first president is the paucity of monuments dedicated to him—a striking mark of the current leadership’s inattentiveness to Russia’s first president and his legacy. To be sure, Yeltsin’s grave in the Novodevichy Monastery in Moscow is marked with a monumental sculpture in the form of a huge, abstract Russian flag. Yet this awkwardly imposes generic political significance on an individual grave site—a far cry from a figurative, centrally located public monument that might enshrine Yeltsin’s continuing significance in the state symbolic order. In fact, the only state monument to Yeltsin in the entire Russian Federation stands before the Yeltsin Presidential Center in the first president’s hometown Yekaterinburg, in the Urals, which then-president Dmitry Medvedev dedicated on February 1, 2011, the eightieth anniversary of Yeltsin’s birth.⁹

In an illustration of Putin's historical judgment, this monument has attracted the "by no means unequivocal" attention of nonstate actors. Two days prior to its unveiling, Yekaterinburg communists installed a competing "tribute" to Yeltsin in the form of a memorial plaque (quickly taken down) on the house where he lived, detailing the negative economic consequences of the Yeltsin era. That same month, the art-activist group OffArt created another alternative monument in Yekaterinburg, dedicated to "the father of Russian democracy" and entitled "The Hands That Changed History."¹⁰ On August 23, 2012, likely in reference to the twenty-first anniversary of the putsch of 1991, unidentified vandals disfigured the official Yeltsin monument with violet paint.¹¹

As the case of memory of Yeltsin shows, Russian history and memory practices regarding the founding moments and figures of the early 1990s may be described as official symbolic silence enveloped in a cacophony of dissenting, unofficial clamor. While the early 1990s may be remembered as an era of falling monuments to Soviet leaders, the post-Soviet era has neglected to erect its own statuary on the vacant pedestals. This pattern, typical of post-Soviet memory practices, is indicative of a peculiar state of affairs. Generally speaking, modern states are deeply preoccupied with their founding myths. In Russia, however, a state known for its heavy hand has, surprisingly, ceded control over this important symbolic capital to "private interests." In a reversal of a well-worn phrase of Aleksandr Pushkin, the people are quite vociferous, while the state is silent (*bezmolstvuet*). This silence should be seen as a deafening one. Its analysis is crucial for a comprehension of the political discourse and what might be termed the historical ontology of present-day Russia. Thanks to Francis Fukuyama, it is a commonplace that the 1990s brought the "end of history," equated with the global triumph of the democratic and liberal order. In Russia, that moment has been experienced, rather, as history's vanishing. The first post-Soviet years were dubbed a period of "transition," with expectations that a future of free-market capitalism would soon dawn and Russian temporality would become synchronized with that of modern, Western liberal societies. Yet this convergence never arrived, and the regime that came to replace it, during Putin's now seemingly endless sequence of terms as president, in "overcoming the consequences of the transitional period," has not congealed into a stable alternative temporal hegemony either. Russia in the twenty-first century is a land without time, one where the political potentials of the present are constrained by their inability to gain traction in an ill-defined historical order and where maximal maneuverability is available to those who can dictate how a range of other, deeper historical referents are deployed.

How did Russian political life arrive at this peculiar configuration of temporality? Consideration of the prehistory of the combination of official si-

lence and public clamor surrounding Yeltsin's death leads to the conclusion that, ironically, this, too, was one of Yeltsin's legacies. From the early 1990s, Russian public life consistently devoted little official memory work to the founding of present-day Russia on the ashes of the Soviet Union. One major complicating factor in state memory projects may have been the difficulty of identifying a single founding moment in the field of possibilities, including the events following from the failed August putsch of 1991, leading up to the liquidation of the Soviet Union in December of that year, or alternately, the *de facto* founding of the current juridical order with the adoption of the Constitution of the Russian Federation in 1993. Nor are these the only candidates: one might propose the June 1990 declaration of the sovereignty of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and of its constitutional priority over the Soviet Union—another moment tied Yeltsin, who signed the declaration as the president of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet. And in the early 1990s, many already imagined the polity's foundations, quite apart from contemporary events, as located in the historical deep past of "epic events" and distant founding moments—the Great Fatherland War, the Battle of Borodino, the Christianization of Rus', and so on. As we shall see, the meanings of these moments and episodes are mutually imbricated in a complex web of counterpoised ideological and historical potentials.

Yet despite the panoply of potential foundational myths, one may speculate that, from the perspective of the Yeltsin administration and its supporters, the events of August 1991 constituted the most obvious candidate for designation as the moment of the new polity's birth, not least because of Yeltsin's own heroic role in those events. If there is one episode in Yeltsin's biography that has reached the status of myth, it is the moment when he clambered onto a tank at the barricades at the Russian White House and rallied the crowd in resistance to an authoritarian state of emergency bent on resuscitating already petrified Marxist-Leninist dogma.¹² The defense of the White House was memorialized to some degree from its immediate aftermath onward. Official Soviet institutions even managed to contribute to memory work, before the Belovezh Accords rendered Soviet officialdom itself a memory in December 1991. The three victims of the putsch in Moscow—the young men Ilia Krichevskii, Dmitrii Komar', and Vladimir Usov, who were crushed to death by troop carriers near the White House—were posthumously recognized by Mikhail Gorbachev as Heroes of the Soviet Union and granted the Order of Lenin. Commemorative postage stamps of the USSR Post in their honor were created before the end of the year. By the following year, Yeltsin, leader of the now independent Russian Federation, took over memory work to make the three martyrs the first recipients of a new honor, the medal "Defender of

Free Russia,” subsequently granted to many other participants in the defense of the White House. A memorial stone was laid on the Novoarbatskii Bridge above the underpass where the deaths took place, later replaced with a permanent stone cross. On anniversaries of the August events during the 1990s, the Yeltsin administration laid flowers at the site. Furthermore, in 1994 Yeltsin pronounced August 22 the Day of the State Flag of the Russian Federation, commemorating the adoption of the Russian tricolor on that day in 1991.

Yet for all of these symbolic gestures, official memory work devoted to August 1991 remained sparse. Russian Flag Day is not even a day off from work, and official commemorations of the 1991 events were never more than a muted affair. No monuments to the defense of the White House were erected—although one might easily imagine such a project at the White House itself. The political scientist Kathleen Smith has proposed that the official reluctance to memorialize the events of 1991 reflected in part the hesitation of Yeltsin and his team of liberal free-market reformers “to indulge in patriotic mythmaking, a practice that they associated with heavy-handed Communist party propaganda rather than with the Western capitalist democratic societies that they took as their models” (although it might be countered that Western capitals do not lack for monuments).¹³ Perhaps of greater significance, by 1993, as Smith also points out, celebratory memory of the events of 1991 faced interference not only from those who disputed the heroism of the events and the beneficial significance of the Soviet collapse, but also from memory of the standoff at the White House of October 1993. This event played out like a fun-house-mirror reflection of the confrontations at the barricades at the White House of 1991. In 1993, that same edifice was occupied by Yeltsin’s former allies in the Supreme Soviet, who crowned a year of efforts to impeach the president with calls for an insurrection against the Kremlin. Yeltsin dispersed the rebellious legislative body by means of an illegal decree and force of arms, shelling the building and causing many more deaths and injuries than had been incurred in 1991, in order to force through a new constitution of his own design. These two episodes, superimposed on the same urban landscape, one providing legitimacy to the new Russian state and the other undermining it, present a fine allegory for the chaotic political events of the era, that at the time already appeared too compromised to be memorialized as a triumph of democracy.

However, even more so than in the case of memory of Yeltsin in the recent past, during the Yeltsin years the reticence of the state regarding the history and memory of the early 1990s was complemented by a clamor of other passionate voices. Within days of the putsch of 1991, the defenders of the White House came together in their own societies, Living Ring (*Zhivoe kol'tso*) and Russia Troop (*Otriad “Rossiia”*)—organizations “created from below” rather

than by the efforts of powerful leaders, devoted to “support of democracy in the country, support of the new state structure and its institutions . . . , and support of the positions of president Yeltsin.”¹⁴ Among their other activities, these groups organized commemorations of resistance to the putsch, with assistance from other political groups and both federal and city government, including the presidential administration itself. In the recollections of Konstantin Truevtsev, longstanding president of Living Ring, in the early 1990s these commemorations were mass events attracting thousands to public demonstrations, political rallies, fireworks, and concerts (including one performance by the popular and appropriately named rock group Time Machine). In 1992, the first such commemoration included speeches by Yegor Gaidar, architect of Russia’s free-market reforms; Ruslan Khasbulatov, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet; and others. Yet both the scale of participation in these commemorations and the level of state involvement rapidly decreased in the course of the 1990s, according to Truevtsev, so that after 1994 attendance at political addresses fell into the hundreds, rendering them essentially “chamber” events.¹⁵

These commemorations provoked counterdemonstrators even before the constitutional crisis of late 1993, yet afterward, the new round of White House bloodshed elicited its own yearly commemorations and the growth of an unofficial shrine on Druzhinnikovskaia Street in central Moscow.¹⁶ Although the struggle of the Supreme Soviet against Yeltsin had been over the power to direct reform in the new Russia, memory of October 1993 was “adopted” in retrospect by communists and Russian nationalists as a symbol of their own disenfranchisement.¹⁷ As the decade wore on, the 1993 events appeared to overshadow those of 1991 in collective memory. By 2000, representatives of Living Ring and the Russia Troop were bitterly complaining that the powers that be were failing to commemorate the victory of democracy with proper piety.¹⁸ Business interests, which had, according to Truevtsev, never been generous in donations to Living Ring, provided so little support following the economic crisis of the late 1990s that the organization had ceased functioning by 2003 and was hard-pressed to gather more than a few hundred demonstrators to mark the ten-year anniversary of the putsch’s defeat in 2001.¹⁹ In contrast, two years later, a march marking the tenth anniversary of the events of October 1993 stopped traffic with thousands of participants.²⁰

This contestation over memory of the early 1990s reflected the progressive loss of legitimacy of Yeltsin’s administration, which we may describe as a crisis in hegemonic temporal regimes. The emblematic discourse of temporality of the last years of the Soviet era—of the perestroika, or “reconstruction” epoch overseen by Gorbachev—had been that of a last-ditch attempt to reinvigorate

the Soviet society's progress toward a perfected socialist modernity. At the start of Gorbachev's rule in the middle 1980s, the state sought a "return to Leninist norms," but eventually economic and political crisis engendered programs for rapid restructuring and the introduction of a market economy—for instance in the abortive "500-day" plan of 1990.²¹ Nevertheless, for all the efforts of reformers, until the brink of Soviet collapse, time appeared to be stubbornly locked in place. To borrow Aleksei Yurchak's trenchant phrase, "everything was forever, until it was no more."²² The putsch and the Soviet collapse shocked Russian politics and society into frenetic motion, launching a period of "transition" in which the ascendant power and legitimacy of Yeltsin and his team was bound up with the projection of a rapid social and economic transformation that would lead Russians to freedom and prosperity. The temporal regime of transition, figured as movement away from the planned economy and one-party rule into a salvific era of free markets and democracy, was still potent enough, with the help of savvy media management, to grant Yeltsin another term as president in the elections of 1996.²³ But by the end of the decade, following the Russian currency devaluation and default of 1998, with the promise of a stabilized future of liberal well-being still held in abeyance, the power of the politics of transition had dwindled to naught.

Who can wonder, given the raw emotions, growing political divisions, and flux in the chronocenos of the transitional era, that official attempts to shape a coherent account of the new state's founding moments were muted? The challenges facing memorialization projects relating to the recent past help to explain why the historical consciousness of new elites was focused on a more easily implemented vocabulary of patriotic symbols from remote periods of history—such as the Russian flag itself that was eventually to figure as Yeltsin's headstone, or other history and memory spectacles like the reburial of the remains of Nicholas II in 1998.²⁴ Russian film turned from denunciation of Soviet mass violence, as in Nikita Mikhalkov's Oscar-winning 1994 film *Burnt by the Sun*, toward the same director's 1998 Russian Imperial-era costume drama *The Barber of Siberia*.²⁵ The single largest monument commemorating the founding of the new state dating to the 1990s, one might propose, is the reconstructed Cathedral of Christ the Savior, a replica of the seat of the Orthodox Church in Moscow that had been demolished by order of Joseph Stalin in 1931. This monument, completed in 2000, eventually to serve as the site of Yeltsin's funeral service, enacts the significance of the revolution of the early 1990s by eliding that period in an attempt to reclaim pre-Soviet traditions and identities—as though the twentieth century had never taken place at all, as though this revolution was in fact simply a restoration.²⁶

As the above makes plain, then, Putin's reticence at Yeltsin's death, with which I began this chapter, was based on an already established tradition of official inattentiveness to the founding moments of the new Russia. This continuity in temporal regimes between the 1990s and 2000s may come as something of a surprise: given that Putin was determined to overcome the pathologies of Russia's transitional political life of the 1990s, wouldn't one expect his administration to dedicate itself to establishing a hegemonic regime of temporality in place of the flux of the preceding era, constructing a coherent account of the foundation and historical momentum of the new Russian state? Instead, under Putin, official disinterest in the events of recent history took on a more studied and complete form. In 2004 the Putin administration ceased participation in commemoration of the deaths of the three martyrs of 1991. Observances of Russia's Flag Day have never moved either Putin or Medvedev even to speak. The last significant awards of the medal "Defender of Free Russia" were in 2001, since which time only one medal has been awarded. In contrast, the surviving leaders of the putsch, who were briefly jailed before being amnestied in 1994, have returned to public life, their role in the events of the early 1990s conspicuously overlooked. The last head of the KGB, Vladimir Kriuchkov, was invited to his former underling Putin's first inauguration as president in 2000. Soviet minister of defense Dmitrii Yazov, who was the last living Marshal of the Soviet Union, was awarded high civil and military honors three times after 2004, including the medal For Service to the Fatherland and the Order of Alexander Nevskii. In the Putin years, no one appears to be concerned that these same men once attempted an armed coup against the political order that now honors them.²⁷

Nonstate memory work, too, became more marginal in the 2000s. In place of the public commemorations of the 1991 putsch and the events of October 1993, in the Putin era the cacophony of competing conceptions of recent history retreated to the newspapers, emerging in public in more limited acts of protest. Commemorations of the 1991 defense of the White House were banned entirely in both Moscow and in St. Petersburg in 2009.²⁸ More reflective interventions in history and memory appeared only in marginal intellectual or cultural fora: a special issue of the cosmopolitan scholarly journal *New Literary Observer* from 2007 devoted to analysis of the year 1990 in the interests of recovering a moment of heroic democratic activism, or the 2012 internet-video documentary of video artists Margarita Novikova and Elena Mikhailovskaya devoted to personal rather than collective remembrance of August 1991.²⁹ A 2016 sociological survey by the Levada Center found that fewer than half of Russian respondents, when asked "What happened on

August 19–22, 1991?” answered by indicating the putsch.³⁰ Yet in spite of the seeming amnesia of public life, the counterpoised assessments of talking heads and protest actions occasioned by Yeltsin’s death also suggest that somewhere beneath the façade, the history of the early 1990s constitutes a frozen reserve of unfinished business.

The metaphor of façade is well suited to the case of Russia in the 2000s. Andrew Wilson has described Putin-era political life as a “virtual politics,” in which public life is managed to project a semblance of civil society and political contestation where in fact none exists.³¹ The present configuration of temporality is supported by such mechanisms of oversight and management in two particular spheres of public discourse that enjoyed a relative autonomy in the 1990s that has been lost in the 2000s: education and televised media. Examination of these areas of active state discursive management illustrate the peculiarities of the relationship of power to temporality in the Putin era. Beginning in 2003, the Kremlin made concerted efforts to extend political control over history education, resulting in the articulation of official narratives that attest to the official silence regarding the new Russia’s founding moments. Perhaps the most scandalous episode in the retrenchment of official history in Russian schools was the publication of the “handbook for teachers” *Modern Russian History, 1945–2006*, credited to the authorship of Aleksandr Filippov, assistant director of the National Laboratory of External Politics, and thought to have been composed at the express orders of the Kremlin.³² The lion’s share of critical attention regarding this textbook was directed to its equivocal, perhaps even apologetic, treatment of Joseph Stalin. Yet its coverage of the early 1990s is also telling. In treatment of August 1991, Filippov’s work presents a sparse chronicle: discussion of the announcement of the state of emergency, a list of the putsch’s leaders, and mention of the fatal hesitation of Alpha elite interior ministry troops to arrest Yeltsin. No mention at all is given of mass resistance or of the barricades at the White House. Only a brief quote from Yeltsin’s memoirs mentions troop movements in Moscow. The textbook dismisses the putsch itself as a “caricatured, stupid conspiracy scenario”—hardly the stuff of a founding myth.³³

Officially approved elementary school textbooks of more recent years offer a slightly more informative picture. In the 2010s, one of most widely used elementary school textbooks for twentieth-century history was created by a Moscow State University team led by Andrei Levandovskii. Like Filippov’s handbook, Levandovskii’s coverage of the putsch begins with an account of the declaration of the state of emergency. The textbook then adds that “troops were brought into Moscow” and offers a single short paragraph on the events of August 19–22 that explains how “the population of the country, in general,

maintained calm,” while “the President of the RSFSR Boris Yeltsin (elected to this position in June of 1991) managed to organize thousands of his supporters in active opposition to the measures of the State Committee for the State of Emergency (protest meetings, the creation of barricades at the building of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, and so on). Representatives of the economy’s private sector held unequivocally pro-Yeltsin positions. Given that the GKChP practically took no action at all, this was enough to liquidate the putsch.”³⁴ In short, Levandovskii’s textbook presents the events of August 1991 as a minor struggle between ineffective plotters and Yeltsin’s highly partisan mobilization—not material for heroic memorialization. Other officially approved textbooks present similarly dismissive portraits of those effectively “silenced” events.³⁵

Televised media presents a more complex case of political management of public life. Although Russian television has since the early 2000s been dominated by the state and its oligarchic allies, it nevertheless concertedly maintains an illusion of autonomous discourse. Its contributions to the history and memory of the early 1990s are distinct from both the pronouncements of political authorities and the competing representations at the margins. Typically, televised history and memory projects present a seemingly open contest of voices that attests to the actual range of conflicting views in Russian society, yet which more or less subtly orchestrates them in support of official positions. The Name of Russia Internet and TV project of 2008, for instance, invited the audience to vote on the “most valuable, remarkable and symbolic personality of Russian history,” selecting their choice from any of five hundred historical figures.³⁶ On the basis of the project’s initial stage of internet voting, Yeltsin did not make it past the top fifty most significant names in Russian history and therefore did not become the focus of his own televised show, unlike Ivan the Terrible and Joseph Stalin, who both were finalists for the “name of Russia” prize, which was ultimately bestowed on the thirteenth-century prince and Orthodox saint Aleksandr Nevskii. The description of Yeltsin and his era on the Name of Russia website, making a hash of an unattributed quotation from Marx, reduces Yeltsin’s era to the status of laughable muddle: “As many joke, Russian history teaches only that one can learn nothing from history. Truly, sometimes historical epochs repeat in uncanny manner. A tragedy in the first instance may turn out as a classical farce, or perhaps an even greater tragedy. Historical figures, somehow, are reincarnated. Boris Nikolaevich [Yeltsin] at times resembled in suspicious manner Tsar Boris Godunov, while the 1990s in Russia seemed to beg comparison with the 1600s and the Time of Troubles.”³⁷ With regard to the events of August 1991 themselves, we may turn to a 2010 episode of Nikolai Svanidze’s

popular history television show *Court of Time* that presented mock trials of historical figures and events. Svanidze's framing of his broadcast dedicated to August 1991 says it all—which is to say, very little: “The State Committee for the State of Emergency of 1991: a putsch or an attempt to avoid the breakup of the Soviet Union.”³⁸ Somehow overlooking the fact that both options were accurate, the ensuing debate left no room for the possibility that August 1991 was the founding scene of the present polity.

How are we to explain the ideological logic of the uneven distribution and character of memory work regarding the 1990s—this peculiar configuration of chronocenos and its relationship to dynamics of power in post-Soviet Russia? First, let us consider again the problem of history and memory during the 1990s themselves. Beyond the explanations for post-Soviet elites' disinterest in history offered above, a more fundamental cause for their neglect of the past derived from the unstable and fallen character of the very category of history during those years. The demise of the Soviet Union was propelled by a tsunami of historical revelations concerning the illegitimate violence of the twentieth century—the Great Terror, the Gulag, the secret addendum to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and more.³⁹ It was these revelations that drove the nails into the Soviet Union's coffin of economic malaise and ideology fatigue, weakening the legitimacy of the Soviet project to the point that no one could be found to defend it in August 1991, apart from a coterie of only nominally sober old men. To Soviet men and women, it seemed that everything they had been taught about the past stood revealed as lies. Yet the downfall of false history did not lead to the rise of a true one in Russia. The end of the Cold War coincided with and was the historical precondition for the “end of history”—the postmodern, neoliberal moment that introduced elites the world over to peculiar new forms of temporality and political life. Perhaps more completely than anywhere else, in Moscow, ground zero of the transformations of the late twentieth century, it seemed that history could largely be dispensed with. Its outcome was clear in the new world order of triumphant liberal economic and political institutions. Local historical experience, revealed as a tissue of false ideologies and bloody measures in their support, had been rejected as a deviation from the “correct path” of global development. In Russian halls of power in the 1990s, the past held a purely negative significance, if it had any at all. Time itself was dismissed as irrelevant in a moment of suspension, this “transition era” when, in a concentration or caricature of the spatial logic of postmodernity, the most significant phenomena was the progressive penetration of global regimes of economy, communications, human and capital mobility into the state socialist territories from which they had been banned during the preceding seventy years.⁴⁰ Time had been banished by geography.

Yet these conditions changed rapidly in the 2000s. From the start of the new millennium, the Putin administration sought to reassert Russia's interests and historical path as distinct from those of the west. The reasons for this turn to the local and the historical are manifold, and they include both the political imperative to find alternatives to the by-then-discredited political rhetoric of democracy and liberalism and the evident failures of the economic policies of the transition years, as well as a more pragmatic realization that any continued political reform would threaten the concentrations of power and wealth created in those same years.⁴¹ As it unfolded, this pivot from participation in global affairs and institutions to civilizational distinction and from posthistorical transition to historical depth met with significant conceptual stumbling blocks. Putin and his allies are the heirs of Yeltsin's Russia, both in the literal sense of continuity of elites and structures of power and in terms of their continued promotion of neoliberal oligarchy—of the principles and institutions that made possible the radically uneven and rapacious privatization on which the economic, political, and media power of both Yeltsin's and Putin's regimes has been based. Yet in the face of nearly universal derision for the slogans of the 1990s, the Putin administration has worked steadily to co-opt the political positions of Yeltsin's opponents—the patriotic rhetoric and symbolism associated with mourning the loss of Soviet territorial grandeur, military might, and great-power status. In parallel, Putin's Kremlin promised and largely delivered a return to law and order and economic stability for a society that had been shocked by criminality and economic collapse in the 1990s. Perhaps Putin's most frequently reproduced utterance is his pronouncement in his 2005 "Address to the Federal Assembly" that "the destruction of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."⁴²

In this light, it becomes clear that the crucial figures and events of the early 1990s are truly of "not unequivocal" significance for the representatives of the current regime, who need to have it both ways. In some sense, control over Russia's present requires the projection of an equivocal, unresolved account of the recent past—a hegemony of temporal cacophony. The fall of the Soviet Union was necessary but regrettable; Putin and his elites may in equal measure be identified with the neoliberal victors and the communist and nationalist losers of the early 1990s. Putin himself stands both with the representatives of the state security services that declared the state of emergency of August 1991, with whom Putin passed his first two decades of state service, and with the democratic resistance that manned the barricades at the White House that summer, with whom he cast his lot in the years after. In short, Russian elites require a regime of equivocation and contradiction regarding recent history—of

temporization rather than temporalization. Official silence and managed public dissonance were therefore the only viable option for Russian memory politics. To put it bluntly, this configuration of chronocenos is an intentional mystification that allows the state, its current leadership, and its oligarchic allies to maintain legitimacy. Putin-era Russia depends on a neoliberal conceit of history's end, under erasure. Rather than coming to a triumphant conclusion, as in Western constructions of history's endpoint, in Russia history descended into a knot of contradiction and then simply vanished.

The implications are far reaching, for as Putin and his "political technologists" have realized more thoroughly with each passing year, inattention to the actual, compromised foundations of the current polity makes possible endless play with other dimensions of history and temporality that provide convenient, interchangeable costumes for current political life. Shortly after he assumed power, Putin reinstated the Soviet national anthem as that of the Russian Federation, with suitably modified lyrics.⁴³ This symbolic restoration was only the first of many ironic, palimpsestic gestures of Russian official history that beg the question of where today's Russia begins and ends in time. The present-day polity is distinct from the political and social realities of the Soviet Union. Yet in official narratives these two periods also bleed over uncontrollably one into another, making possible a selective sympathy for some, but not all, of the Soviet era's legacies. The resulting incoherence has been diagnosed by Ilya Kalinin as a form of historical "museum work" that ranges in epic free association across centuries and periods, an analytically flaccid historical bricolage, in which any historical image or symbol with perceived utility may be combined with any other to project an affectively charged whole: "a vaunted applied dialectics, called upon to reconcile unity with multiplicity, is turned towards the past, which has been transformed into a museum, an exhibition of the achievements of the national economy."⁴⁴ At one moment—Putin's third inauguration, for instance—present institutions may appear rooted in the grandeur of the Russian Empire, its palaces, and its Orthodox Christianity. At another—at Russia's more and more elaborate Victory Day parades—it is the heir of the geopolitical might of the Soviet Union. The state's strategic silence with regard to its founding moments in the 1990s, and therefore its positioning in time, is the foundation of this ability to reach past boundaries of the present to lay claim to any element of the historical record. This historical mobility allows Putin's Russia to appear as heir to both Soviet and pre-Soviet greatness, while it remains, in fact, the defender of post-Soviet oligarchy, property, and unregulated accumulation of capital.

The resulting temporal incoherence is the foundation of Russia's dysfunctional, postideological political landscape. Let us return to the unfathomable

resonance of current events with those of the early 1990s over the past decade, with which we began. The protest movements of 2012 witnessed frequent demands that “power” should cede its monopoly over political discourse in order to open a new space for the participation of “society” in politics. Yet the protest movement faced challenges not only in creating the space for civil society and political discourse but also in articulating what, exactly, the opposition was opposed to, apart from the corruption and rigged elections of the party of “crooks and thieves”—Aleksei Navalnyi’s memorable moniker for Putin’s United Russia Party. The unstable coalition of liberals, leftists, and nationalists that massed in opposition rallies—repeating and enlarging the odd opposition coalitions of the preceding decade such as Another Russia, where the neo-Bolshevik Eduard Limonov and the anti-Putin liberal Garry Kasparov had joined forces—was a reflection of the ironic, or empty, politics of the Kremlin, founded on its unique regime of managed temporal flux. How, truly, is one to establish a political stance in response to an ideological contradiction? On February 26, 2012, opposition groups surrounded central Moscow in a huge circle of thousands of protestors, proclaimed a “Living Ring,” in explicit reference to the defense of the White House of 1991.⁴⁵ Yet given that president Putin, notwithstanding his pedigree in the security forces, is also heir to the cause of the democrats at the barricades, the rhetorical power of such historical referents was limited. Throughout the protest year of 2011–2012, Putin’s United Russia Party staged its own rallies that co-opted not only the form of the mass demonstration but also the political language of democrats, liberals, and nationalists alike. By not articulating a coherent account of the history and memory of the current political order, the Putin-era establishment disarms the political field, demonstrating the peculiar potency of silence and timelessness.

In conclusion, let us note that the Russian configuration of chronocenosism disarms not only Russia’s domestic opposition but the West as well. In the summer of 2015, as conflict in Ukraine ground on into its second year, the *Washington Post* presented a history lesson in the form of a five-hundred-word op-ed, challenging the “willful untruth” of Kremlin accounts of Western involvements in post-Soviet Russia: “Mr. Putin’s assertion that the West has been acting out of a desire to sunder Russia’s power and influence.” According to the *Post*, “thousands of Americans went to Russia hoping to help its people attain a better life. . . . It was not about conquering Russia but rather about saving it, offering the proven tools of market capitalism and democracy, which were not imposed but welcomed.”⁴⁶ This account of a noble attempt to institute free-market democracy in Russia that for some reason went wrong, leading to a reassertion of Russia’s age-old legacies of nondemocratic rule,

constitutes perhaps the most common account in the West of Russia's post-Cold War trajectory. Yet while this version of events presents a fuller engagement with recent history than do Russian accounts, its own blind spots limit its ability to counter the latter. Certainly, as the *Post* argues, the United States did not come "to bury Russia" in the 1990s in an attempt to make it into a vassal state. Nevertheless, the West did participate in the subjection of Russia to an iniquitous regime. Western advisers and businessmen who participated in the "democratic" privatization of Soviet wealth in the 1990s turned a blind eye to the criminality and corruption of Yeltsin and his oligarchy, so helping to build the political and economic foundations of Putin's Russia. The failure of politicians and elites to confront the ambivalent consequences of Western involvement in Russia's development supports the structure of simplistic, mutually reinforcing finger-pointing that made Western states and media so ineffectual at countering Russian propaganda since the events in Ukraine in 2014—the more Western critics have repeated their own mystifications, the more representatives of the Kremlin have been secure in their symmetrical negotiations. Ultimately, some part of the current crisis of governance in the West may be blamed on the blindness of Western elites to the actual nature of Russia's current regime as an object lesson in the formidable potential of a politics based on unimpeded accumulation of capital, combined with a brazen refusal of ideological coherence and a flare for populism.

For if there is one thing that Putin got right in his eulogy to Yeltsin in 2007, it is that the history of the 1990s bears "not unequivocal" significance for the present. In Western and Russian analyses alike, the lion's share of critique with regard to post-Soviet politics of history has been devoted to the representation and reinterpretations of elements of Soviet history—most notably Stalinism and World War II. These are undoubtedly important matters. Yet we should pay equal attention to the problem of deafening silences and intentional temporal incoherence. For among the crucial rhetorical supports of Russia's present regime is its mystification regarding the era of its founding. Critics often lament that current Russian political and public life, moved by nostalgia, has failed to renounce the Soviet legacy. What is in fact necessary for the reinvigoration of Russian politics is adequate comprehension of the legacies of the early 1990s—of democratic mobilizations, dreams of broadly shared economic opportunity, but also of oligarchic and authoritarian revanche and their imbrication in the politics of reform from the inception of the post-Soviet era. An understanding of this recent past would lay the basis, as well, for a different relationship to the Soviet legacy—one that could distinguish between, on the one hand, the authoritarian repression common to the putschists and Putin, and, on the other, the egalitarian aspirations common to Soviet dissidents, to

the defenders of the White House, to protestors of 2011–2012, but also, in a different manner, to the institutions and social programs of the Soviet state itself. Such a reengagement with the recent past would replace current simple yet incoherent historical narratives with complex yet coherent accounts, in order to reaggregate the ideological inheritances of the past around defined political positions in the present. For which principles, past and present, does the Russian state actually stand? And for which principles, therefore, should oppositional movements mobilize? To determine the answers to these questions, Russians must undertake a rearticulation of shared temporality, providing for new horizons of political possibility, based on an excavation of the “by no means unequivocal” founding moments of the present order.

Notes

This essay is based on lectures delivered at the Centenary Conference of Slavic Studies at Leiden University, at the Maya Brin Symposium on the “Soviet Legacy” at the University of Maryland in College Park, at the University of Amsterdam, and at the “Time and Political Authority” symposium at New York University, Berlin. I would like to express thanks for comments to the organizers and audiences of those events, especially to Ellen Rutten, Dmitry Bykov, and Serguei Oushakine.

1. “Priamaia liniia s Vladimirom Putinyim,” June 15, 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54790>.

2. The phrase “new Cold War” or “Cold War II” has been widely bandied about since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Dmitri Trenin, “Welcome to Cold War II: This Is What It Will Look Like,” *Foreign Policy*, March 4, 2014, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/2014/03/04/welcome-to-cold-war-ii/>; “Medvedev konstatiroval nachalo novoi kholodnoi voiny mezhdru Rossiei i NATO,” *Interfax*, February 13, 2016, www.interfax.ru/world/494512.

3. Russian history is rich in moments of political polarization and revolution; traditions in historical interpretation are often similarly polarized. In the post-Soviet era, one efflorescence of these historical tendencies has been the rise of the catchphrase “pro et contra,” which became the title of a popular series of anthologies of assessments of historical figures, phenomena, and so on, published by the Russian Christian Humanities Academy since 1994 and now including more than seventy volumes: “Serii ‘Russkii put’,” *Ruskaia khristianskaia gumanitarnaia akademiia*, www.rhga.ru/about_us/publishing_house/izdat/catalogue.htm. The phrase also served as the title of a bilingual Russian-English web journal published by the Carnegie Moscow Center until 2014.

4. Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie Federal’nomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, April 27, 2007, <http://www.rg.ru/2007/04/27/poslanie.html>. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are mine.

5. Siuzanna Farizova, “Kommunisty otkazalis’ pomianut Borisa El’tsina,” *Kommersant*, April 26, 2007, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/762392>.

6. Mariia Ol’kina, “Eto byl, konechno, Boris El’tsin s ego neobychainoi moshch’iu,” *Kommersant Sankt-Peterburg*, April 26, 2007, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/762278>.

7. Ivan Tiazhlov, “Pravozashchitniki postoiialii protiv Vladimira Putina,” *Kommersant*, April 27, 2007, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/762844>.

8. Aleksandr Minkin, "Proshchaite Boris Nikolaevich," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, April 24, 2007, <http://www.mk.ru/old/article/2007/04/24/151820-proshchayte-boris-nikolaevich.html>. For an extensive example of the genre "collection of diverse opinions about Yeltsin," see "Chto vam delal Boris El'tsin?" *Kommersant*, April 27, 2007, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/762501>.
9. "V Ekaterinburge otkryt pamiatnik pervomu Prezidentu Rossii Borisu El'tsinu," February 1, 2011, Prezident Rossii, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/10189>. The only other official monuments to Yeltsin in existence, to my knowledge, are located outside of Russia: in Cholpon Ata in Kyrgyzstan (erected in 2003) and in Estonia (erected in 2013).
10. Sergei Antonov and Maksim Ivanov, "Iubilei Borisa El'tsina vstrechaliu vystavkami i memorial'nymi doskami," *Kommersant*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.kommersant.ru/Doc/1577156?ThemeID=546>; Aleksandr Beliaev, "V Ekaterinburge postavili al'ternativnyi pamiatnik El'tsinu," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, February 13, 2011, <http://www.kp.ru/online/news/830531>.
11. "Vandaly oskvernili pamiatnik El'tsinu v Ekaterinburge," *RIA Novosti*, August 24, 2012, <http://ria.ru/incidents/20120824/729703043.html>.
12. Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 98–108; Victoria Bonnell, Ann Copper, and Gregory Freidin, eds., *Russia at the Barricades: Eyewitness Accounts of the August 1991 Coup* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994).
13. Kathleen Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory During the Yeltsin Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 3.
14. Interview with Konstantin Mikhailovich Truevtsev, January 4, 2017.
15. Interview with Truevtsev.
16. Boris Klin, "Podgotovka k godovshchine putcha: Godovshchina mozhet byt' otmechena krov'iu," *Kommersant*, August 8, 1993, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/56891>.
17. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 150–51, 191–92.
18. Klin, "Gosudarstvennyi flag prosto opustili," *Kommersant*, August 18, 2000, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/155695>.
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20. German Prokhorov and Roman Skol'skii, "Na dva dnia v devianosto tretii god," *Gazeta.ru*, October 2, 2003, <http://www.gazeta.ru/2003/10/02/godovsina.shtml>.
21. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 90–91.
22. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
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29. "Putesel' (Putschyoursel)," *Artconnect*, <http://www.artconnect.com/projects/self-putsch-yoursel>.
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33. A. V. Filippov, *Noveishaia istoriia Rossii, 1945–2006: Kniga dlia uchitel'ia* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2006), 317–19.
34. Andrei Levandovskii et al. *Istoriia Rossii, xx-nachalo xxi veka: uchebnik dlia 11 klassa obshcheobrazovatel'nykh uchrezhdenii* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2013), 308–9.
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36. From the subpage "O proekte" on the "Name of Russia" ("Imia Rossiia") website, <http://www.nameofrussia.ru/about.html>.
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42. Vladimir Putin, "Address to the Federal Assembly," 2005, <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2005/04/87049.shtml>.
43. Martin Daughtry, "Russia's New Anthem and the Negotiation of National Identity," *Ethnomusicology* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 42–67; Platt, "Post-Soviet Is Over."
44. Il'ia Kalinin, "Arkheologiiia national'nogo znaniia," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 1, no. 81 (2012): 90.
45. Sergei Parkhomenko, one of the organizers of the protest action, explained "Do you remember the Baltic Way of the 1980s [a 1989 protest of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on its fiftieth anniversary that involved a line of tens of thousands of protestors across the Baltic State]." "Op-positsiia 26 fevralia reshila okruzhit' Kreml' gigantskim 'khorovodom,'" *Newsru.com*, February 9, 2012, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/09feb2012/karavay.html>.
46. "After the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. tried to help Russians," *Washington Post*, May 4, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/after-the-fall-of-the-soviet-union-the-us-tried-to-help-russians/2015/05/04/cc4f7c20-f043-11e4-8666-a1d756d0218e_story.html.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the Provost's Global Research Initiative at New York University, which generously supported the 2015 conference "Time and Political Authority" and the current publication, parts of which developed out of that conference. Without Katherine Fleming, none of this would have been possible. In New York, Jair Kessler has been extremely helpful, as have Dominik Fungipani and Gabriela Ekmektsoglou in Berlin. We should also like to thank Richard Baxstrom, Christopher Clark, Sara Pursley, and Arnd Wedemeyer for their engagement and criticisms at that event. Stefanos would like to thank the students of his Fall 2017 graduate course on Time and Power at NYU, who were closely involved in debating and refining some of the ideas he has contributed to this introduction. Priya Nelson worked closely with us from the early stages of the conceptualization of this volume, coordinated detailed and extremely useful feedback (indeed, offered the most useful recommendations at every stage), and has been a delight to work with. At the University of Chicago Press, we are also very grateful to Dylan Montanari for his careful work on the volume, to the four anonymous reviewers, for criticisms that helped focus important parts of our argument, and to Katherine Faydash for skillful copyediting, which has improved the prose throughout the book. Finally, we are grateful to Jorinde Voigt and her studio for giving us permission to use her work for the cover of the book.

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