Ethan Kleinberg
Temporal Vectors and the Compass of History
Politics and Ethics at the End-time

The micro monograph in the series *Bielefeld Theory Talks* is an innovative publication format, developed in close collaboration between the Center for Theories in Historical Research at the Department of History of Bielefeld University and Bielefeld University Press (BiUP). The aim is to encourage theoretical debates in historical research by publishing ways of thinking that are both original and interdisciplinary. The core of each micro monograph is a detailed paper on key questions of historical theory originally given as a lecture – notably a Koselleck Lecture – at the Center for Theories. Each contribution is accompanied by commentaries from a member of the Department of History at Bielefeld University and two international experts, who analyze the historical-theoretical position under review from their own scholarly perspective. Through these conversations, the series not only showcases a range of different theoretical positions, it also gives us an insight into the processes and practices of theorizing itself – a true theory in the making.

The micro monograph by Ethan Kleinberg published here is a revised version of the Koselleck Lecture "Temporal Vectors and the Compass of History. Politics and Ethics at the Endtime of Truth" he gave on 10 October 2021 at the Bielefeld Center for Theories in Historical Research.

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with comments by

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Introduction

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We have reached the end-time of truth. We aren't the first to live through such times, and one could imagine parallels with early modern Europe during the Copernican and then scientific revolutions. That was a moment of radical instability, pushback, and eventually a change to the coordinates of "true" and "false" as well as the basis on which one might make such judgments. Lorenzo Valla's famous *declamatio*, demonstrating that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery, comes to mind, as does the work of Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Francis Bacon, René Descartes, or David Hume, and of innovative Mexican thinker Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, who leveraged the new learning to argue against misogyny and in favor of educating women.

The results of this previous end-time are often retrospectively emplotted in a narrative of progress that inevitably led to our current scientific and secular standards of evidence and proof, which both naturalizes our current conception of true/false and blinds us to the frailty of the systems which hold these conceptions. The moment itself was more fraught as the debates, denials, and excommunications attest. The case of Sor Juana is especially instructive, both in how she saw her moment as an opening to advocate for women as intellectual authorities and to challenge patriarchal religious conventions, but also because of the swift retribution she faced for doing so.[1] In 1691, Sor Juana was reprimanded and ordered to stop writing. In 1694, she was forced to sell her collection of books. Sor Juana was erased from the historical narrative, while figures like Bacon and Descartes were retrospectively hailed as the founders of modern scientific thought and method.[2]

Looking back from the nineteenth century, Nietzsche decried the "good faith in science, the prejudice which dominates the modern state" that had been accomplished, and his madman famously announced the murder of God, demanding to know: "How we could drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving?

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1   See Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Carta Atenagórica* (Barcelona: Red Ediciones, 2015); and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *The Answer – La Respuesta.* Expanded Edition*,* ed. Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2009), in which she provides an account of and justification for her own interests and abilities in science/letters, but also advocates for educating women.

2   It was not until the 20th century that Sor Juana's work and legacy was reintegrated into Mexican culture as a figure of prominence.

Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continuously?" As we also know, Nietzsche's madman came to realize that he had arrived with his warning too soon.[3] Our moment is an interesting and dangerous one, as well, because we are plunging continuously. It has yet to be determined who will be our Descartes and who will be our Sor Juana, or the grounds on which such judgments will be determined. What we do know is that the authority of the expert, the scientist, the historian, has waned such that the epistemic fabric which once held our conception of truths and facts firm in relation to the authority of science has become loose, even undone.

With this epistemic loosening, the general trust in the historian's ability to provide direction has likewise diminished and, with it, disciplinary history's role as an arbiter of politics or ethics. The compass of history no longer points north. In what follows, I argue for a new understanding of the ways the past makes itself available in the present, and a new compass of history to account for this understanding. I put forth a paradigm for understanding the past as a temporally dynamic site rather than a static, sedimented, or closed one. This active and unstable temporal force is what I call The Surge.

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3   Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (New York: Random House, 1974), 181–182.

The End-time of Truth

One place where the unraveling of truth has become apparent is the proliferation of conspiracy theories, which serve as a canary in the coal mine of weakening epistemic certainty. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Marty Baron, who was the executive editor of The Washington Post, stated that we are facing a level of conspiracy thinking unlike any we have seen before. Asked whether anything can be done to reach the conspiracy-minded, Baron confessed he had no answer to the question:

> "Conspiracy thinking is deeply entrenched. Once people start to think that way, it's very hard to persuade them that they are disconnected from reality. They see us in the mainstream media as the ones who are lying. They see themselves as the ones who possess the truth."[4] Baron's conclusion is that we have entered an era of false belief with little hope that the prior consensus on standards of truth and evidence can be reclaimed.

Samuel Moyn and Nicolas Guilhot agree that we have entered a "golden age of conspiracy theories," but they argue that both the peddling and debunking of conspiracy theories are two sides of the same coin: the avoidance of genuine politics. In their view, the only way to combat them is to reduce the conditions of social inequality that produce them.[5] At the other end of the spectrum, co-authors Joseph Uscinski, Adam Enders, and Casey Klofstad are skeptical that the number of conspiracy theories have grown, relying on surveys to demonstrate little systematic evidence that belief in conspiracy theories has increased over time.[6]

The focus, however, should not be whether there are "more" conspiracy theories or not, or even whether there are more people who believe them, but on the way that our current epistemological climate enables these alternative views and those who hold them. Ideas or views previously relegated to the fringe are now accepted as part of a mainstream, albeit fragmented, discourse. In the United States, right-wing media and politicians are content and even eager to traffic in conspiracy theories regarding vaccinations, the influence of a "deep state," Q-Anon, election fraud, Barack Obama's birth certificate, or the influence of George Soros. On the left, it was the conviction that the Democratic National Committee rigged the 2016 primaries to shut down the candi-

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4   Art. "Interview with Washington Post Editor Marty Baron," conducted by Marc Pitzke and Roland Nelles, *DER SPIEGEL*, February 9, 2021.

5   Cf. Nicolas Giilhot and Samuel Moyn, "The Trump era is a golden age of conspiracy theories – on the right and left," *The Guardian,* February 13, 2020.

6   Cf. Joseph Uscinski et al., "Have beliefs in conspiracy theories increased over time?," *PLoS ONE* 17, no. 7 (2020), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0270429 [last accessed: January 10, 2024].

dacy of Bernie Sanders, and later, theories about Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. To be sure, much of this can be considered misinformation, but once unleashed, it thrives because, as Marc Bloch observed in his article on false news from 1921, "it finds a favorable cultural broth in the society where it is spreading. Through it, people unconsciously express all their prejudices, hatreds, fears, all their strong emotions."[7] The current epistemological climate provides such a cultural broth in which choosing the narrative or explanation that best conforms to one's pre-existing beliefs, wishes, hatreds, or fears has been normalized. There is no longer credible refutation, only proliferation.

Another contemporary example is the rise of cyber- or cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin or Dogecoin (the latter being a currency that began as a joke). In Goethe's *Faust part II*, Mephistopheles himself introduces the possibility of disconnecting paper money from the gold that was meant to back it when he answers the Emperor's request to procure funding:

> "I can perform as much, more than you say;
> It's easy – in a difficult way;
> The stuff lies there all ready, yet to reach it –
> There is a subtle art, and who can teach it?
> Just think: on those calamitous occasions
> When land and folk were swept by armed invasions,
> How this or that man, deep in terror's meshes,
> Would rush to hide all that he held most precious.
> This was in ancient Roman times the way,
> And ever since, till yesterday, today.
> These hoards lie buried in the ground, and it –
> The soil's the Emperor's, his the benefit."[8]

To be clear, Mephistopheles convinces the Emperor to produce paper money to cover the debts of the realm based on treasure that is ostensibly buried in the ground, but yet undiscovered. This is an illusion of wealth which holds no value beyond faith or belief in the Emperor, the land the Emperor controls, and the Emperor's ability to pay off the debts incurred today at some point in the future. Such a belief in the "full faith and credit" of the modern state has long been the basis for economic policy, but cybercurrency pushes this faith

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7   Marc Bloch, "Reflections of a Historian on the False News of the War," in James P. Holoka (ed.), *Michigan War Studies Review* 51 (2013): 1–11, see 3. Orginally published as: "Réflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre," *Revue de synthèse historique* 7 (1921): 13–35.

8   Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, ed. Cyrus Hamlin (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), Part II, Act I, 143, lines 4917–4938.

beyond even Mephistopheles's wildest dreams. It is a currency based solely on the faith in its worth, uncoupled from anything tangible, be it government, state, or land. It is worth whatever it can be worth. Its value is surely real, but also fragile and tenuous … a currency for the end-time of truth.

Like currency backed by a national bank, cryptocurrency is beholden to a belief in the future and in this way, it remains tied to the logic of progress which Reinhard Koselleck took to be the hallmark of modernity.[9] To put this in Koselleck's well-known terms, so long as the promise of gold to be found underground lies within our horizon of expectations, our experience is that the currency holds value. This can, of course, be expanded because our experience has been that currency itself holds and even gains value, so our expectation is that it will continue to do so. The state can always back up its currency in the future, and more "gold" can always be found in the "ground." But unlike national currencies, cryptocurrency does not offer actual gold or the security of a nation state. It is solely the promise of the future, a future of ever-increasing wealth, that enables cryptocurrency to hold its worth. This future, however, is one uncoupled from and distrustful of established economic authorities, and this is where we see further cracks in the epistemological structures of modernity. 2022 was an eventful year, as cybercurrency exchanges collapsed with Terra, Three Arrows Capital, Celsius, Voyager Digital, FTX, BlockFi, and Genesis all facing bankruptcy within 12 months. The massive wealth accrued in the crypto-rally of 2021 was gone as fast as it came, and belief in an unregulated currency decoupled from traditional financial assets was undermined, though not destroyed. Tellingly, it was not the ephemeral nature of cybercurrency or NFTs that was called into question, but the modernist idea of the future as progress. The modern nexus of experience and expectation was ruptured and with it, the coordinates for what we previously took to be truth.

The force of the rupture becomes apparent when revisiting Koselleck's "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': two historical categories" with an eye toward discerning a change in the relation between the two, and thus the understanding of history itself. For Koselleck, these two categories served as the means to understand "historical time because of the way they embody past and future."[10] More specifically, by discerning the relation between the categories, Koselleck is able to form a hypothesis as to the new meaning contained in the modern concept of history. "My thesis is that during *Neuzeit* (modernity) the difference between experience and expectation has increasingly expanded; more precisely that *Neuzeit* is first understood as a *neue Zeit* from the time that expectations have distanced themselves from all

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9   Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the semantics of historical time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 267.

10   Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 258.

previous experience."[11] The early modern age marked the space of this rupture, or end-time, of a certain form of truth in which the horizon of expectations became misaligned with the space of experience. "Above all there, where an experiential space was broken up within a generation, all expectations were shaken and new ones promoted."[12] Of course, this new regime of historicity took time to coalesce into a productive tension between experience and expectation.

In what Koselleck calls the pre-modern era, "[e]xpectations that went beyond all previous experience were not related to this world. They were directed to the so-called Hereafter, enhanced apocalyptically in terms of the general End of the World...This then is a matter of expectations that no contrary experience can revise because they extend beyond this world into the next."[13] In Koselleck's reading, the horizon of expectation was tied to the space of experience in that "the horizon of expectation was endowed with a coefficient that advanced in step with time."[14] The distance between the two categories was maintained as a constant. "As long as the Christian doctrine of the Final Days set an unmovable limit to the horizon of expectation (roughly speaking until the mid-seventeenth century), the future remained bound to the past."[15] This is a compass of history in which the Hereafter served as the atemporal vector by which to find direction and meaning in the temporal unfolding of a finite world.

In the early modern period, the stability of this relation began to erode, and the compass no longer pointed north. Here, one could consider the arrival of ghosts in early modern culture as embodying the breakdown. The horizon of expectations previously reserved for the Hereafter now revealed a porous border between that world and the world of our experience. As in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth, unfinished business was brought back into the world of experience and not left to be rectified in the Hereafter.

These borders, and the relation between the categories of experience and expectations, eventually stabilized with "[t]he opening of a new horizon of expectation via the effects of what was later conceived as 'progress.'"[16] Here, the possibility of completeness attainable in the Hereafter was supplanted by an open future characterized not by perfection in the world to come, but by improvement on Earth. In retrospect, it seems that Koselleck may have overstated the novelty of the "modern" understanding of the future, at least insofar as the relation between experience and expectation remained immune to cor-

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11 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 263.

12 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 264.

13 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 265.

14 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 266.

15 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 264.

16 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 265.

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rection by contrary experience, because the promised progress could always be deferred into the future. One could think of Francis Fukyama's argument for the end of history and Jacques Derrida's critique of it. Fukuyama's case is predicated on the realization of the final stage of history as the victory of liberal democracy/capitalism and the death of Marxism. It is based on the empirical or materialist assertion that this progress has been achieved. The empirical evidence of this conquest and victory, however, contradicts Fukuyama's narrative, forcing him to change tactics and present the victory as the future outcome of a trans-historical ideal.[17] There is a gap between the pronouncement of the good news of democracy as an egalitarian promise fulfilled and the reality of democratic societies as they exist where violence, inequality, racism, and sexism persist. The expectation of achievement, which is posited as having already occurred, and the experience of conditions in the present where it has not, necessitate a recalibration of those expectations to accommodate the deferral of achievement to the future.

The relation between experience and expectation has certainly changed in the "modern" era, but it did so when "progress" took on the role of a secular "Hereafter" into which any expectations that are at odds with lived experience can be deferred, no many how many times they are frustrated.[18] Koselleck took "[p]rogress" to be "the first genuinely historical concept which reduced the temporal difference between experience and expectation to a single concept," but I would argue that the previous notion of a "Hereafter" seems to fulfil the same purpose as "progress," providing a temporal delay to the achievement of what is promised.[19] Both mechanisms involve a deferral, or *différance*, that is both spatial and temporal and by which the present promise is to be delivered in the future. In retrospect, this is evident even if it wasn't immediately available to Koselleck.

The more salient point, and the one with which we are concerned, is that in what Koselleck calls modernity, "history could be regarded as a long-term process of growing fulfilment which, despite setbacks and deviations, was ultimately planned and carried out by men themselves."[20] This is an understanding of progress as the active transformation of this world where the benefits would be reaped in a future to come. But these benefits would come at an unexpected cost: "From the late eighteenth century, another finding joins the

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17 Cf. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006); Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 78–88.

18 Cf. Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History. For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), cf. chapter 3, "Chladenius, Droysen, Dilthey: Back to Where We've Never Been," 72–114.

19 Cf. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 268.

20 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 266.

ones we have just discussed: that of techno-industrial progress, which has an impact, albeit a varying impact, upon everyone. It became a general empirical principal of scientific invention and its industrial application that they gave rise to an expectation of progress that could not be calculated in advance."[21] As it turns out, what Koselleck saw as a varying impact was also an environmental and thus planetary one. Conditioned by an attitude of confidence, Koselleck could argue that this "future not inferable from experience released all the same the certainty of an expectation that scientific inventions and discoveries would bring about a new world. Science and technology have stabilized progress as a temporally progressive difference between experience and expectation."[22] Of course, such a belief was only possible against the background of an unchanging nature supplying resources to be endlessly extracted, like the gold Mephistopheles promised would be found underground.

This was a future of possibilities unlimited by what had previously been experienced and thus beyond expectation. *Fortschritt* (progress) was itself the expectation. "It became a rule that all previous experience might not count against all possible otherness of the future. The future would be different from the past, and better, to boot."[23] What was not expected was that the very mechanisms of progress (technology, industrialization, globalization) would have catastrophic effects on the biosphere, and these effects would not be varied. The modern understanding of progress was conditioned by an understanding of nature as unchanging, thus the realization that nature itself is historically contingent upon human actions and ultimately finite undermined the coordinates upon which expectation and experience were held. Under the concept of the Anthropocene, what once appeared as progress now appears as destruction.

The terrain has shifted as we face a future of possibilities that cannot meet our expectation (progress). It is true that all previous experience cannot count against all possible otherness in the future, but this is because it is a future of frustrated expectations. Our experience tells us we cannot obtain what was expected and thus the future as the realm of endless progress has collapsed, and with it, our faith in the shepherds of progress. We once again face a porous and unstable border between the world we experience and the horizon of our expectations.

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21   Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 269.

22   Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 269.

23   Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 267.

The End-time of History

In the discipline of history too, the stability of our previous moment has been supplanted and fragmented by a proliferation of histories offered by historians and non-historians alike. This has yielded both positive and negative results. On the negative side, and as with conspiracy theories, historical narratives and arguments previously relegated to the fringe are increasingly accepted as part of a mainstream, albeit fragmented, discourse. To be sure, these are for the most part bad-faith actors conducting poor scholarship according to the rules of the guild, but nevertheless their work has found purchase in the "favorable cultural broth in the society where it is spreading."[24]

On the positive side, the discipline of history has become increasingly diverse and heterogeneous over the last fifty years, and there is no doubt that this expansion is for the better. This very positive expansion of subjects and areas deemed worthy of historical investigation is undercut by the way these challenges to prior historical narratives continue to rely on the established and accepted methods of historical discourse. In this way, these new histories replicate the historical conceits of the narratives and fields they purport to engage with or replace. As the types of historical topics and narratives have increased, the collective fantasy of a "definite account" has been fractured by a proliferation of histories, each running on the now outdated assumption that their account of the past correlates to that past one-to-one.

This is to say, the new and positive possibilities offered by plural, multiple, or global histories is misaligned with the dominant theory of history that is used to tell them. Each relies on the view that their account is a correction that presents the event as it happened. This unleashes a perspectivalism which derails the correlationist understanding of history. To use Nelson Goodman's assessment, "[…] no one of these different descriptions is exclusively true, since the others are also true." In Goodman's constructivist analysis, this leads to the conclusion that "[n]one of them tells us *the* way the world is, but each of them tells us *a* way the world is."[25] In our current moment, the ontological realist commitment coupled with multiple correlationist understandings of the past leads to the conclusion that if all of them *can* be true, then none of them *actually* are true. Conventional historians argue that their understanding and use of perspectivalism can account for the many, and oftentimes conflicting, historical narratives, but such nuance has been crowded out by the pick-your-own-truth variant of history. This virulent strain caters to an audience increasingly inclined to believe the historical narrative that aligns with

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24   Bloch, "Reflections of a Historian on the False News of the War," 3.

25   Nelson Goodman, "The Way the World Is," *The Review of Metaphysics* 14, no. 1 (1960): 48–56, 55.

their pre-conceived notion of what they want the past to be. This is the shift from truth to post-truth.

The irony, or perhaps tragedy, is that perspectivalism actually enables the scholarship presented by bad-faith actors in the service of their ideological agenda. While the increasingly plural scholarly foci appear as "simply alternative viewpoints among so many others … Historians working in women's history and microhistory, for example, have very diverse and quite particular social and political goals, but the wholesale embracing of all different viewpoints as equally valid relegates most of them to a powerless minority."[26] This leaves the good-faith scholars vulnerable to more opportunistic populist accounts of the past, which enter the terrain as an "equally valid viewpoint." Their historical account is simply one of many. What's more, proponents of "pick-your-own-truth" history present themselves as realist historians offering an equally rigorous alternative. When talking about scientific issues, post-truthers mimic the language of empirical verification by citing insufficient proof or the need for more study. Holocaust deniers also used this language, claiming insufficient proof that the gas chambers existed because there were no eyewitness survivors to corroborate the assertion that they did exist. They want to be considered "realists." It is on these grounds that they make their claims, and it is in this regard that their methodology and underlying theoretical assumptions are aligned with the conventional historians who otherwise oppose them. As noted, "pick-your-own-truthers" are not benign actors, and their scholarship is not credible by disciplinary standards, but the one-to-one correlation they assert between the evidence they present and the facts or truths they claim is the same as that of many conventional scholars and pundits: alternative but equivalent. The Confederate statue is presented as the past, not a representation, and to tear it down is to destroy the past itself.

Scholars, and those engaging with the past in particular, should realize that the epoch of scientific authority is a historically contingent one, and they should not be surprised by the possibility that the results of scientific investigation or a preponderance of empirical evidence can no longer be taken as articles of faith. This is not new. One of Hayden White's central claims in his 1966 "The Burden of History" was that disciplinary history itself was a historical accident, "a product of a specific historical situation, and that, with the passing of the misunderstandings that produced that situation, history itself may lose its status as an autonomous and self-authenticating mode of thought. It may well be that the most difficult task which the current generation of historians will be called upon to perform is to expose the historically conditioned character of the historical discipline." At that time, White was hopeful he might "preside over the dissolution of history's claim to autonomy

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26 Kalle Pihlainen, *The Work of History. Constructivism and a Politics of the Past*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 53.

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among the disciplines, and … aid in the assimilation of history to a higher kind of intellectual inquiry." [27] As we have seen, the unravelling of our epistemological tapestry has led to quite different results.

This makes our current epistemological and political moment a perilous and important one, but as Donna Haraway remarked in the *New York Times*, "it's also an important moment *not* to go back to very conventional and very bad epistemologies about how scientific knowledge is put together and why and how it holds."[28] This is to ask, do we really want to return to the era of blind obedience to white men in white lab coats? Have we forgotten that the epistemic regime that rested on such total faith in science also featured appropriately garbed doctors selling cigarettes, advocating better living thanks to chemicals, or proselytizing eugenics? Modern-day pundits and intellectuals do us all a disservice by harkening back to the good old days before science, truth, and Enlightenment values were destroyed, all the while pointing at "facts" and "truths" and then becoming apoplectic when they aren't believed.

While historians and other scholars engaging with the past have long understood the historical contingency of the epoch of scientific authority, because their work addresses the ways that regimes of knowledge shift and change over time, this very epoch of scientific authority coincided with the formation and rise of disciplinary history. As a result, the historian's tools of analysis and argument have been blunted. In essence, the historian is entangled because their mode of analysis is itself now an object of historical analysis. In 1969, Koselleck emphasized the irony that "history pure and simple" (*Geschichte schlechtin*) or "history itself" (*Geschichte selber*) did not originally refer to objectivity and the notion of realistic representation which underpinned historical methodology, but instead signaled the need for theory in history precisely to address the historicized entanglement of the historian with their object of study.[29] Koselleck's solution to the problem or crisis of historicism was to introduce metahistorical categories outside of the time and place in which they were to be used, much in the same way the purpose of a compass is to orient the traveler. But any theory of history to which we now turn cannot be one imperiled by the end-time of truth.

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27 Hayden White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966): 111–134, 113.

28 Donna Haraway, cited in: Ava Kofman and Bruno Latour, "the Post-Truth Philosopher, Mounts a Defense of Science," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 25, 2018, URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/magazine/bruno-latour-post-truth-philosopher-science.html [last accessed: January 17, 2024].

29 Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, "On the Need for Theory in the Discipline of History," in *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1–19, 4.

The proliferation of historical perspectives at the end time of truth exposes the ways in which history is built and deployed in the present. The ways in which histories are made and not found. This is not to say that the past never happened or certain events did not exist, but instead to point out that ultimately it is more important **to convince others** that events happened in a certain way than to portray them as they really happened, or even that they happened at all. It is in this sense that Koselleck states on issues of memory and experience: "The false testimony of a contemporary will always remain a more immediate source even it if is later unmasked" and also that "it is clear that there can be no pure *Zeitgeschichte* in the sense of a mere history of the present, and at the very least, it must refer to a past present and its past: first comes the history, then its narration (which does not rule out the existence of histories that consist only of their narration)."[30] The narration includes histories of events that happened, that did NOT happen, or for which we only have the narration but no corroborating evidence. This is the game of history, and if we are successful, then such a past does exist for us and appropriates all the ontological properties we commonly afford to any commensurate happening in the present.

In *Nothing Happened: A History*, Susan A. Crane provides the striking example of a photograph taken by John Darwell depicting the empty landscape of the Kirkstone Pass looking toward Ullswater in the Lake District of North West England. The countryside is rugged and beautiful but, Crane tells us, this is not the significance of the photograph. It is only in the context of a "devastating epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease" which "broke out in Cumbria, England, in 2001" that we realize what we are looking at is a shocking absence.[31] Where there used to be sheep as far as the eye could see, we now only see empty fields and mountains.

> "Darwell's color photograph documents the site of the disaster, the now empty landscape, but it depends on the viewer's knowledge of the epidemic. A random viewer, not from that place, might see only a quiet landscape, misty clouds shrouding steep inclines, rocky walls, and a road wending its way through a pass."[32]

Crane uses this photograph for her intriguing and insightful analysis of the role and place of Nothing in history and memory. I would like to emphasize a different aspect of Crane's use and narration, the way she builds something

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30 Reinhart Koselleck, "Constancy and Change of All Contemporary Histories. Conceptual-Historical Notes," in *Sediments of Time*, ed. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 100–116, 105–106.

31 Cf. Susan A. Crane, *Nothing Happened. A History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 92.

32 Crane, *Nothing Happened*, 94.

out of that nothing. Crane presents us with a photograph of mountains, fields, stone walls, and the sky. There is nothing in the photograph itself that would suggest sheep or tourists or anything except an uninhabited landscape. But as Crane provides historical context, evidence that there used to be sheep at this site, accounts of the terrible epidemic, and testimony about "the death of the flocks and the ruin of the economy,"[33] the missing sheep appear before our eyes, if only in their absence. Crane ontologizes the absent or missing sheep in much the same way historians ontologize the absent past. Crane is a virtuous and careful historian, but a more devious or malevolent one could use the same tactics to construct a past that never was.

Still, to my mind, places such as Kirkstone Pass carry a weight that is resistant, though not impervious, to such malice because I believe historical constructions are ultimately "moved by the past," to use Eelco Runia's term, or *haunted*, to employ my own.[34] It is my conviction that the past is a site of spectrality, of ghosts and hauntings, such that in *Haunting History*, I argue that the past is both a presence and an absence, a specter or ghost that haunts our present. To quote that work, "the past is and is not, or better yet it i̶s̶. The past comes and goes, and the pieces we do have are shot through with the nonsynchronicity of prior historical tellings."[35] This argument about the past doubles as an ontological questioning of the present. If the past i̶s̶, what kind of present can now be reconceived? The present does not exist as a direct extension of the past, just as historical inquiry cannot treat the past as ontologically given. In returning to the present, inquiry must approach the present (and the intervention it seeks to make in the present), first of all as a performative interpretation, an interpretation that transforms and even hijacks the past for which it provides an account. To follow the analysis of Stefanos Geroulanos, the problem is that what present-day historians imagine *is itself anachronistic*. "In the name of a certain subjectivism, problems visible in the present are projected and sources for them derived in the past. For it, the present becomes a simulacrum of the past's future, just as this past is essentialized as the past of the historian's present."[36] The fiction of a stable past is the fiction of a stable present. Previously solid rules of evidence and argument have melted into air. As a result, the coordinates by which we understand politics and ethics have been obscured, especially the historical ones.

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33 Crane, *Nothing Happened*, 94.

34 Eelco Runia, *Moved by the Past. Discontinuity and Historical Mutation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Cf. Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 134–138.

35 Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 114.

36 Stefanos Geroulanos, "History of the Present. Or, two approaches to causality and contingency," in *Historical Understanding: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and Lars Deile (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 79–90, 87.

Temporal Vectors and the Compass of History

I want to engage with our current historical moment (both where we are in history and how we think about history) by means of two terms loosely borrowed from Distributional Semantics in the field of artificial intelligence: temporal vectors and the compass. Temporal vectors are a means to understand semantic change over time, but they are unstable, because while time is moving through them, we are also moving through time. We can think of this as akin to the vortex of historicism about which Koselleck warned us when he posited the need for meta-historical categories directed toward the temporality of history.[37] Like Koselleck's meta-historical categories, the compass serves as a heuristic device providing an atemporal vector (outside of time, as it were), stable coordinates by which we can orient ourselves. We can think of our relationship to the past as akin to temporal vectors: While the historian produces history, history also produces the historian. Each is moving through the other. Throughout the late 19th, and into the 20th and 21st centuries, the discipline of history has purported to provide a compass, an atemporal vector outside of time, to navigate our relationship to the past and provide coordinates for political and ethical pronouncements.

If we look to Koselleck's brief observation, translated into English as "Constancy and Change of All Contemporary Histories: Conceptual-Historical Notes," we might conclude that this has always been the case: "There are diachronic and synchronic dimensions at work at various temporal depths, about which historians from distant epochs can still help us gain insight for today, because history repeats itself structurally, something that is often forgotten when 'singularity' is stressed."[38] To be clear, here Koselleck is speaking of "social-psychological processes that" he considers to be "constants throughout the history of events," whether past or future.[39] This account of history and human nature actually differs little from that of Thucydides in *The History of*

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37 Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, "'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont' – zwei historische Kategorien," in *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 349–375, 354. "Ohne eine metahistorische Bestimmung, die auf die Zeitlichkeit der Geschichte zielt, würden wir bei der Verwendung unserer Ausdrücke in der empirischen Forschung sofort in den endlosen Strudel ihrer Historisierung geraten." Reinhart Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories," in *Futures Past*, 255–276, 259. "Without metahistorical definitions directed toward the temporality of history we would, in using our terms in the course of empirical research, get caught up in the vortex of its historicization."

38 Koselleck, "Constancy and Change of All Contemporary Histories," 114.

39 Koselleck, "Constancy and Change of All Contemporary Histories," 115.

the Peloponnesian War where he concludes that those readers "who want to look into the truth of what was done in the past – which, given the human condition, will recur in the future, either in the same fashion or nearly so – will find this *History* valuable enough, as this was composed to be a lasting possession and not to be heard for a prize at the moment of a contest."[40] The emphasis on the structural repetition of social-psychological processes or a permanent human condition provides a compass, an ahistorical vector outside of time, which allows for all aspects of the past to be explained from the vantage point of the present and even a future present.

In *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson provides an account of the phenomenon known as *dèja-vu*, or the sense of having previously experienced what is currently happening as if it had already taken place. On Bergson's account, what one actually experiences is not a previous occurrence, but the contemporaneous realization that one *will* remember it. It is a recognition to come, which Bergson sees as the formation of a memory of the present in real time.[41] Historians encounter something similar when they posit a permanent interpretative structure, a compass outside of time, by which to decipher, interpret, and emplot the past. The sensation appears to them as a re-encounter with something that already occurred, just like a *déja-vu*. By following this atemporal compass of history they purport "that this is the way it really happened." What they actually experience is not the past as it really happened, however, but the contemporaneous realization that they are making history. Just as the experience of a *dèja-vu* reveals the dissonance of a colliding past and present, there is a similar dissonance between the permanent structure proffered and the history presented to justify its stability. This is the place where, as in a *déja-vu*, time is out of joint, but here it is, because the historian fails to take into consideration the historical conditions, the temporal vectors, of these so-called permanent structures. These are the historically determined conditions of possibility which restrict what we can imagine as possible pasts. In *Haunting History*, I argue that our knowledge of the past is conditioned by what presents itself to us both in terms of its vestiges and in terms of our reception. The limits of what we are willing to accept as "past possibles" conditions what we are willing to accept as possible pasts. That which lies beyond this realm appears to us as simply impossible. Thus, the historian transports their sense of what "should be" back into the past, all the while ascribing a

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40 Thucydides, "On historical method," in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1. 20.2–22, as cited in: Thucydides, *On Justice, Power, and Human Nature. Selections from The History of the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 13.

41 Henri Bergson, *Matière et Mémoire* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1908), 89–100; cf. Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Bergson. Thinking Beyond the Human Condition* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 83.

sense of permanence to these normative values.[42] The order we want the past to have is taken to be the order it actually had, at the expense of other possible ways of ordering or accounting for the past.

The limited or restricted sense of past possibles dovetails with the perspectivalism discussed above, but strictly speaking, the multiplying histories should be seen as parallel accounts rather than perspectives on a singular event. This is because the belief that there are multiple perspectives of a singular event has fractured. Now we have a series of parallel histories, each telling its own story to its own audience. Such an occurrence was not inevitable, but neither should it come as a surprise if one traces the role and place of perspectivalism in the discipline of history. Chladenius (1710-1759), whom Koselleck credits as the harbinger of modernity because of his theory of perspective or standpoint, held that "histories are accounts of things that have happened. If one intends – as is presumed – to speak the truth about an event, one cannot recount it in a way that differs from one's perception of it."[43] For Chladenius, while any past event is itself one, conceptions of it are many because "different people perceive that which happens in the world differently, so that if many people describe an event, each would attend to something in particular – if all were to perceive the situation properly."[44] Koselleck acknowledges that "to state that every historical statement is bound to a particular standpoint would *today* meet with hardly any objection. Who would wish to deny that history is viewed from different perspectives, and that change in history is accompanied by alterations in historical statements about our history?"[45] What is less apparent is the way that Chladenius's historical science is predicated on his religious beliefs. "For Chladenius, who gave the first independent lecture on *Historik* in Erlangen in the winter semester of 1749–50, an explicit belief in divine providence is basic."[46] Chladenius makes this evident in the preface to

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42 Cf. Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 137–138.

43 Johann Martin Chladenius, *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernünfftiger Reden und Schrifften* (Leipzig, 1742), § 307. My translations of Chladenius are for the most part in keeping with those of Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (ed.), *The Hermeneutics Reader. Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1985); Martha Woodmansee's translation in *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics,* ed. Peter Szondi (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

44 Chladenius, *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung*, § 308.

45 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 128; Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 176.

46 Horst Walter Blanke, Dirk Fleischer, and Jörn Rüsen, "Theory of History in Historical Lectures: The German Tradition of *Historik*, 1750–1900," *History and Theory* 23, no. 3 (1984): 331–356, 340. Cf. also Peter Hans Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 43, 105.

the *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft*, where he declares that his purpose is "to defend and extoll these high truths, the truths of the New Testament," and his work is punctuated by this claim throughout.[47] What's more, writing in the first half of the 18th century, Chladenius must be considered as a pre-critical thinker in the Kantian sense of the term because despite his innovative way to determine the role and place of the observer in relation to what is observed, this relative relation is uncritical, in the Kantian sense.[48] Chladenius never questions the conditions under which cognition is possible or the knowability of things in themselves because to do so would have contradicted his orthodox Lutheran belief that the faith was governed solely by Scripture. For Chladenius, the historical record of Scripture could never be in doubt, for if it were, faith itself would rest on an unstable foundation.[49] Thus Chladenius' project of creating a historical science employing a theory of perspectivalism was predicated on the theological foundations of his faith. The truth of the event under investigation is ultimately vouchsafed by God.

The modern appropriation of perspectivalism avoids this theological motivation and requirement by focusing solely on the rules of interpretation in relation to the text. But for this to hold in the absence of God, Chladenius's certainty about the fixed status of past events must now be based entirely on rules of textual investigation. In our current secular usage, historical methodology is our only access to the past. In this view, the correct meaning is available and accessible, but the theological side of this theological-historical hold is effaced without actually being replaced, creating the illusion that the past event or object simply holds itself. When the zone of agreement no longer needs to account for a past event *per se*, but only the conceptions of the past, about which there are many, perspectivalism slips into parallelism. Here, it is not the past event that is shared or agreed upon, but the method or logic of history. So long as the account adheres to this aspect of uniformity, the histories need not agree at all. As it turns out, both right-wing and left-wing tribalism, which characterizes "identity politics," are the result of a historical logic and method which came of age in the nineteenth century, designed to serve identitarian nationalism. The difference now is that the identity no longer coincides with the nation, and the proliferation of viewpoints or perspectives has allowed this mode of historical inquiry to serve conflicting parallel causes and accounts. While perspectivalism and parallelism both run on the same logic of history, in the case of parallelism, there is no longer agreement on the past event itself. This leads to multiple competing narratives with no point of

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47 "und diese hohe Wahrheiten vertheidigen und anpreisen soll …" in Johann Martin Chladenius, *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* (Leipzig: Lanck, 1752), xvii, cf. also 176, 195, 203, 234, 243, 390.

48 Cf. Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, 55–56.

49 Cf. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, 42.

intersection or interaction. Each seeks a different audience who accepts distinct accounts that compete, yet do not touch.

In the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue to his Habilitation, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin sets up a provocative opposition between "truth" and "knowledge." "Truth," Benjamin tells us "bodied forth in the dance of represented idea, resists being projected, by whatever means, into the realm of knowledge. Knowledge is possession. Its very object is determined by the fact that it must be taken possession of – even in a transcendental sense – in the consciousness. The quality of possession remains."[50] By contrast "the opposite holds good for truth. For knowledge, method is a way of acquiring its object – even by creating it in the consciousness; for truth it is self-representation, and is therefore immanent in it as a form."[51] Without committing to Benjamin's positions, I think it productive to consider this distinction between truth and knowledge in regard to the current climate of history. Following Benjamin, perhaps we can say that while history is the realm of knowledge, it is not the realm of truth. As we have seen, history in its modern sense requires method to acquire its object. It lacks self-representation. Even so, in our current understanding, we have burdened history with truth instead of allowing it to stand as a labor of knowledge. This burden creates the mismatch of temporally dependent historical methodology and ostensibly permanent and definitive truth claims (about identity or heritage, for instance), which leads to parallelism. This misalignment restricts dialogue further because as Benjamin suggests, "Knowledge is open to question but truth is not."[52]

The matter is further complicated by the way these histories profess to guide us into the future. Aleida Assman argues convincingly that for the time regime of modernity, "[t]he future was for the temporal compass what the North Pole is for the spatial compass: a steady and reliable source of orientation-in-movement. The future was a continuous promise harboring utopian energy and serving as the 'telos' of a narrative of progress and liberation," but that particular understanding of the future has collapsed, and with it, the modern compass of history.[53] To my mind, and as argued above, such faith in the future only existed as long as we believed it to exist, and is akin to the promise of treasure buried in the ground, yet currently undiscovered. As our epistemic fabric has loosened, the general belief in history's ability to provide such a

50 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (London/New York: Verso, 2003), 29.

51 Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, 29–30.

52 Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, 30.

53 Cf. Aleida Assman, "A Creed That Has Lost Its Believers? Reconfiguring the Concepts of Time and History," in *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, ed. Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 208.

compass or such a future has waned and, with it, the authority of disciplinary history.

It is worth noting that for many left-leaning academics, the means to rectify the situation and regain authority, ethical and political, is via a return to the older notions of progress and liberation that were part and parcel of the modernity project. An article by Susan Neiman published in UnHerd is indicative of this trend:

> "What concerns me most here are the ways in which contemporary voices considered to be progressive have abandoned the philosophical ideas that are central to any liberal or Left-wing standpoint: a commitment to universalism over tribalism, a firm distinction between justice and power, and a belief in the possibility of progress. All these ideas are connected. The Right may be more dangerous, but today's Left has deprived itself of ideas we need if we hope to resist the lurch to the Right."[54]

Indeed, the true means of combating conspiracy theories and right-wing populism might be by reducing conditions of social inequality, but the political agenda put forth for this purpose relies on modernist models of progress that have become undone. The left wishes to return to a universalism that fosters solidarity, but as this relies on the notion of progress (technology, industrialization, globalization, and the ecological catastrophe this model wrought), it is no longer credible and thus fails to persuade. The crisis of the Anthropocene makes clear how the very means of achieving the ideal (infrastructure and increased means of production) are the cause of climate change and impending disaster. The earlier architects of progress have been recast as the architects of doom.

The very notion of an atemporal compass of history, a mechanism to tell us where we've been and where to go, is indicative of the emancipatory desire at work in the modernist project of history. This desire, however, remains forestalled as an emancipatory promise, in part because it is locked up by the transhistorical, and thus changeless, mechanisms intended to serve as history's compass. History has burdened itself with a commitment to truth, as timeless as the compass, on which it cannot deliver. Our belief in such a compass of history outside of time has lost its hold.

What's more, this prior mechanism was always as much a closing of possible pasts as an opening to their truth. It was always based on what we imagined to be the only pasts possible. The compass of history as an ahistorical vector is dominated by a present that reaches back to tell the past what to be. I want to reverse this movement and this temporal flow to put emphasis on the

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54 Susan Neiman, "The True Left is not Woke," *UnHerd*, March 18, 2023, URL: https://unherd.com/2023/03/the-true-left-is-not-woke/ [last accessed: January 19, 2024].

absent past that meets us, though I want to do so without reifying the reversal. I propose that we rethink the compass of history at the end-time of truth as one shorn of its atemporal dimension, embracing instead a logic of anachrony. This would mean letting go of the "metahistorical definitions directed toward the temporality of history," which Koselleck saw as a guardrail to prevent us from getting "caught up in the vortex (*Strudel*) of its historicization."[55] This new compass of history does not stand outside of time and instead points to sites where the past surges into the present unexpectedly, touching us and connecting with our concerns, not only for the present but also the future. This might be something one sees … or hears … or feels. It is the past lifting us up, pushing us forward, or perhaps even pushing us under. We should not fight it, and we cannot control it, though we can ride it.

The Surge

This is what I call the Surge. In *Haunting History*, I describe how, at any given moment, a sudden surge can bring evidence of past vestiges to the surface. In that work, I use the metaphor of the ocean as the site of the surge, but one might also imagine a surge of wind, of power, or of sound. Recent films involving the supernatural, ghosts, or haunting spirits (malevolent or misunderstood) often signal the arrival of this present absence with a surge of electricity overtaxing the lights, or by a surge of sound – sometimes even blowing up the lights and leaving us in darkness, or reaching a deafening crescendo, leaving us in silence. We are, by and large, afraid of surges, and I would suggest that we are equally afraid of the past. This is, at least, part of my argument in *Haunting History*. The instability of such open possibilities is disturbing, and conventional history often serves as an anesthetic that desensitizes us to such jarring effects. The Surge is the unfettered intermingling of past, present, and future. It is free and generous and dangerous.

   In this regard, the Surge is a Total Other without logic, order, or time. Nevertheless, it impresses itself upon us and it is in this moment of engagement that the past or future becomes available to us. It is a moment of mediation between our position in an unstable present and the arrival of otherness, the arrival of something different, even unprecedented. Once one notices it, one can conceptualize it. Benjamin's discussion of "origins" provides a useful, though imperfect, analogy to this process of arrival and conceptualization. For Benjamin, "[o]rigin [Ursprung], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [Entstehung]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and

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55   Koselleck, "Space of Experience," 259.

disappearance." The Surge does not describe the process by which the past or future event comes into being, but is the site of becoming and disappearance. "That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight. On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete." What appears to us is not the manifest existence of the factual, but a revenant or arrivant. In the case of the past, it is not the reclamation of the event itself, but an imperfect and incomplete reappearance.[56]

Benjamin tells us that "[o]rigin is an eddy/whirlpool/vortex [der Strudel] in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis."[57] I want to turn this around to consider how Benjamin's "origin" comes *from* the eddy/whirlpool/vortex. It comes from the Surge that swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. Here, time is not a river that flows downstream from past to present to future. Instead, it is a vortex in which past, present, and future events swirl. They are pulled down and pushed up. Sucked under in one place to reappear in another or thrown in any possible direction. This casts a different light on Benjamin's analysis that "[t]here takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history."[58] The determination of the form in the present is projected into the past, thus imposing an origin point retrospectively. This *de facto* origin then becomes the basis for an explanatory narrative of cause and effect, which effaces the role of the Surge in bringing this "origin" to the present.

The modes of history we have discussed, Benjamin's included, are about controlling the past and limiting the Surge, as is the ahistorical compass limiting the temporal vectors of history and historian, even if the goal of such protections can be laudable. But as in *Haunting History*, where I demonstrate the ways that the noble goal of forging a path to the past, a *poros*, simultaneously creates an *aporia*, the purportedly ahistorical compass of history, as the arbiter of meaning deployed by conventional history, restricts our gaze and our attunement to the possible pasts and past possibles surging forth to meet us. It is to these surges of the past, these ghosts brought forth by the Surge, that we should be attuned. The ghost would become our metahistorical guide, taking the place of coordinates such as Koselleck's "space of experience" and "horizon of expectations," or, more precisely, haunting that space and horizon. When we experience the ghost, we experience the impossible, and the horizon that opens before it is that of the unexpected. It is not an imposition from without, but neither is it internal to our moment. It is somehow inside and outside, thus forcing us to question the very

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56 Cf. Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, 45.

57 Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, 45. Translation modified.

58 Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, 45–46.

coordinates by which we create stable meaning, semantic, temporal, or otherwise. These are the histories that need to be heard, not as parallel histories which are interpretatively distinct and methodologically homogenous, but as histories that create an intersection of multiple and conflicting logics of how we encounter, account for, and recount the past.

What's more, by accepting our encounter with the Surge as an encounter with that which is totally other, we are forced to reckon with the moment of mediation when we seek to bring what is beyond order into order. This is the moment when we gather and organize time according to a logic upon which our account of the past can then be brought into the present with relation toward the future. The key point here is that there is no singular or definitive way to do this. By looking at this moment of ordering and organization, we realize there is not a singular logic of time or history, but multiple possible ways of organizing them in response to the Surge. This is the moment of mediation, when we look to make sense of the past that surges forth and moves us, but also a chance to interrogate that moment. This is not perspectivalism where the same event is seen from multiple viewpoints, nor the parallelism that results from multiple competing narratives that do not intersect. Instead, starting from the Surge, this approach accepts that there are multiple competing logics of time and ways of organizing the past. These differing approaches may not agree or use the same system, but by taking each logic of history seriously, we are forced to interrogate the axiomatic claims upon which any given logic of history is founded. This is especially important for unsettling conventional or disciplinary history now that this mode of history has come undone.

The Total Other that is the Surge can be the conduit to the proximate others who surround us (spatially and temporally). Once we accept the possibility of a Total Other, the proximate other becomes available *as* other, not as something to be made the same. What's more, this recognition extends to ourselves in the realization that we are all other to someone/-thing. We are all same and other. The impersonal, if not anonymous, nature of the Surge deprives the historian of a possessive stance in response to the past or the future. Strictly speaking, it is not "ours," and here we see the possibility of an opening to the other, whose past and future we are asked to embrace, not because such a past belongs to us, but because we recognize that others have an equal right to such a past, present, and future. The "we" with which I began this paper is now challenged and contested. Who is this we of which I speak, and on what grounds can such a collective claim be made? Rather than fight to retain "my" or even "our" past, the Surge pushes us toward the concept of "their" past and "their" future as temporalities to which we do and don't belong. This pulls the understanding of the past away from the nationalist or ethnic suppositions on which the discipline of history was founded. The past of "them" as an identity that does not coincide with the self, and the Surge as a Total Other which necessarily displaces the primacy or priority of the self. The goal is to imagine what

happens when we let ourselves think about the past and the future according to a totally different logic. This means letting go of all the coordinates by which we find ourselves privileged owners of history, to imagine and enact an ethical relation to the past and future. As such, it requires a different way of looking at the logics of time and history, a new compass of history.

A New Compass of History

The compass I propose is a Surge detector that identifies the sites of political and ethical intervention when issues from the past return in ways that connect to immediate concerns. This understanding of history and mode of argument is predicated on the moment before the orderly organization of time and the categories of past, present, future. The anachrony of the Surge – the unrestrained mingling of past, present, and future – is disorienting compared to the atemporal neutrality of a magnetic compass pointing north. But just as the magnetic poles of our planet have shifted, leaving the compass misaligned, the old modes of history cannot guide us at the end-time of truth. The new compass of history is not restrained by what has been, but attracted to what can be pointing us toward critical political and ethical action.

A key question is: How can one pursue criticism and ethics without a normative definition of the two or having to resort to the concept of regulative ideas? I am sufficiently constructivist and Nietzschean to operate with an unbound and historically contingent understanding of ethics and ethical action. Then again, I do try to consider the ways the Surge either brings the past to us or helps us rise up to meet it, making for ethical and political commitments. Given this understanding, there is no one normative definition or regulative guideline, resulting in the very real potential that the prevailing "ethical" or "political" intervention may not be the one you or I would hope for. This is the danger. But is that not the case now? And would it not be better to confront this instability head on?

By attuning ourselves to the Surge and to these ghosts, to the ways they tear at conventional understandings of time and temporality, historians can take up their cause, which is our also own. I take this to be an attunement to the past that allows such an historian or thinker to hear the call of the absent, missing, or hidden dead. In this way, the dead are not taken as persons or commodities who are no longer present and whose properties and scope have been previously determined. Instead, the historian listens to the dead that haunt us as the presence of an absence from time which is, as of yet, unknown and undetermined. This allows or opens space for multiple and conflicting logics of how we encounter, account for, and recount the past. The tension and conflict between multiple pasts enable an alienation effect by exposing or creating cracks and fissures in the smooth surface of what had previously appeared to

be the singular logic of history. The actors and vocabularies may be unorthodox and the accounts may be unfamiliar, but these myriad approaches and definitions of history force us to question the dominance, politics, and ideologies behind any one variant. To return to the ocean metaphor, we must learn to surf the Surge. To ride with a history of differing logics and approaches to the past rather than battle against them by imposing methodological uniformity on an ever-increasing field of areas and subjects. The new compass of history is an attunement to the Total Other of the Surge, which is likewise an attunement to the proximate other in the present. As such, the past provides the call for a moral imperative in the present and for the future.

This new compass of history has the potential to transform our present, but only if the particular event surging from the past, now as history, is not left in the past as though the danger were over and done with, or entirely appropriated by the present telling of what we want it to be. Vladimir Jankelevitch warned of the ever-persistent march of time that inevitably leads to forgetting and with that oblivion, a washing away of past wrongs. The historian's calling has long been to battle against this river of Lethee. But perhaps more pernicious is the way that the historical focus on evils and wrongs of the past allows us to ignore or demote the evils and wrongs of our present. This is what Berber Bevernage has called "Temporal Manichaeism."[59] The new compass of history is attracted to the Surge via an attunement to the past in the present so that like temporal vectors, each travel through the other. The evils of the past cannot be left in the past, but neither can they be co-opted by "my" present in the form of a select group or individual. The work of history should not be the work of listening to ourselves and our own laments but attunement to what arises from the Surge. Listening for and to the ghost – hearing the ghost, hearing the past – results in attunement to the other coming from a different temporal direction. A tool to puncture time. We need to learn how to let the ghosts speak and how to let the past speak rather than leaving them behind or speaking for them.

Related to this temporal shift is an emphasis on a different vision of solidarity and universality. History is a story for a future humanity and a future beyond humanity which eclipses the particularity of any past event. This cannot be a return to the universal collective of Enlightenment thought or traditional left-wing politics encumbered with the baggage of a foregone vision of "progress." The emancipatory promises of homogenous universal ideals were so often never intended to be fulfilled. Postmodern theory in its various formations sought to unsettle the hegemonic claims of master narratives and normative values that were heralded as universally available, but never

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59   Berber Bevernage, "The Past is Evil/Evil is Past: On Retrospective Politics, Philosophy of History, and Temporal Manichaesim," *History and Theory* 54, no. 3 (2015): 333–352, 333.

offered to large segments of humanity because of class, gender, or racial status. Calling out and rectifying the discrepancy between the aspirational nature of Western Enlightenment, or "true left" values, and the flaws inherent in their initial articulations, industrial implementation, as well as the unquestioned assumptions that led to such discriminatory application across the globe, was and is a noble cause. Nor can this be an understanding of the past in a possessive form, a restrictive "my" or "ours." Instead, it is a universal "they" of which we are and are not a part. This is to say, the past event can only serve us if we look beyond its particularity as past and toward its guidance toward their future. The new compass of history points us to what *can* be rather than what has already passed. It points us to the Surge, the site of dynamic temporal entanglement where the past arrives as if it were new, calling for intervention and engagement. The past as future, if you will, rather than futures past.

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Lisa Regazzoni, Kristin Platt, Berber Bevernage

Comments

History Offstage

Lisa Regazzoni

If "striving for truth … has its roots in justice,"[1] as Nietzsche wrote, what happens to justice at the "end-time of truth"? What are the consequences of the current crisis of the truth regime and truth construction for our *striving for justice*? Clearly, these issues deeply affect historical research and historiography, which begs the question of history's role at this end-time. And, if so, what kind of history? How can history pursue justice for the "wretched of the earth," the "people without history," or the "Others" if it is no longer possible to reference the category of truth? Does it still make sense to hope for the emancipatory function of history?

This is not the first time in the history of Western thought that the system of truth on which the idea of justice is based has undergone a crisis. Ethan Kleinberg reminds us that, in the early modern age, the Hereafter gradually lost its significance as the atemporal vector that gave meaning and direction to human history. It was around this time that ghosts began to make their appearance in theater and literature. In an original approach, Kleinberg combines Stephen Greenblatt's analysis of the onstage presence of ghosts in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries[2] and Reinhart Koselleck's theory of secularization. By undermining the transcendent horizon, that is, the Hereafter, which lies in an indefinite future but will undoubtedly come, "unfinished business was brought back into the world of experience and not left to be rectified in the Hereafter." (14) Consequently, Banquo and Hamlet's father appear in the present as ghosts. According to Kleinberg, this was due to the loss of that transcendent future (the Hereafter), where they would have found truth and received justice. Deprived of the future and final judgement, these spirits were destined to remain trapped in a present past.

Similar to this undermining of the Hereafter, the crumbling belief in future progress over the course of the last century has led to a loss of the future horizon and thus to the intrusion of unfinished business into the present. The

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1   Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, transl. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 57–123, quot. 89.

2   Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, N.J./Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013). In this marvelous book, Greenblatt analyses how Purgatory – the realm of the dead as invented by Western Christendom – morphed into a stage haunted by ghosts after it was banished by English protestants in the sixteenth century.

ghosts that Kleinberg addressed in his book *Haunting History* are those that inhabit Sleepy Hollow in Washington Irving's eponymous novel. "In my reading," Kleinberg writes, "it is the past that haunts history – a past of American Indian dispossession, of the Revolutionary War, of the unspoken atrocity that took place at Major Andre's tree, and countless other events great and small."[3] This is one of the few passages in which Kleinberg substantiates some of the ghosts he considers.

Reading these passages from Kleinberg, I could not help but think of the ghosts in the cinema of Ingmar Bergman, perhaps the most Shakespearean director of the twentieth century. *Summer Interlude* (1951), one of his early films, contains numerous elements that allow us to reflect with Kleinberg on the meaning of these uncomfortable revenants, but also to imagine a different ending. The opening scene of the film takes place in a theater, minutes before a dress rehearsal of the ballet *Swan Lake*. The first lines are spoken by the mailman who delivers a parcel for Miss Marie, the prima ballerina, followed by the doorman who accepts it: "What's that smell?" "It smells of thick air." The question leaves the audience in a state of apprehension as they try to imagine what the strange odor could be. A fire? A dead body? In the course of the film, however, it turns out that the smell has no physical *origin*. It comes out of nowhere and seems to accompany the unexpected and destabilizing return of the past, as it resurfaces with the delivery of the parcel and the attendant ghosts. The arrival of the latter, this absent presentness, as indeed Ethan himself observes with reference to more recent films, is always heralded by signals, such as a wave of sound or a blaze of lights. Ghosts are not visible in Bergman's film, but they are there. The parcel Marie receives contains the diary of her former lover Henrik, who died in an accident thirteen years earlier during a summer interlude they spent together. "What manifests itself in the first place is a specter"[4]: as soon as Marie opens the diary, she sees her lover's smiling face, hovering over the pages he has written by means of double exposure. The scene is interrupted by a bell announcing the start of the dress rehearsal (giving the audience another shudder.) The afternoon is filled with premonitory signs; not only does backstage staff keep noticing the smell, but the theater itself is plunged into darkness by a short circuit. When the rehearsal is over, Coppelius, Marie's old ballet master (now in his clown costume) forces her to look in the mirror. "Empty theaters are strange at night," says Coppelius, "strange and somewhat ghostly. Dwarfs with humps and big heads watch you from every corner … They grow in numbers as the theater grows older." They

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3   Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History. For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 135.

4   The quote is from Derrida, who refers here to Marx's *Manifesto*: Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York/London: Routledge, 1994), 13.

lead their own life. The wall of hard work behind which Marie has hidden offers no protection from the ghosts of the past. Neither does Coppelius's summoning of these ghosts nor Marie's perception of them, which she does not mention, dispel the sadness that has enveloped her for thirteen years. At the end of my commentary, I will return to how Marie regains her smile.

In the current essay, "unfinished business," the past that does not pass but remains trapped in the present, takes the form of a "wave" of ghosts. Kleinberg does not tell us how we should imagine these ghosts or how they manifest themselves in the present. He persistently eschews phenomenological descriptions and sociological analyses that would substantiate them. Describing the ghosts would domesticate them and deprive them of their restlessness and disobedience in the face of our spatial and temporal order. Like the past imagined by Eelco Runia, a past that moves us, "[y]ou can experience it, but you can't document it."[5] Hence ghosts elude the various epistemic systems, including the research and writing of history. It follows that not only the truth on which our system of knowledge is based would then reach its end point, but history, too, in the dual sense of *res gestae*, that is, the ensemble of historical facts concluded and buried in the past, and *historia rerum gestarum*, that is, the episteme and narratives through which we grasp them.

Kleinberg lays out the reasons for this crisis in the current essay, and what he recounts is a tragedy, not merely an epistemic tragedy, but one that is ontological and ultimately ethical. I use the term tragedy here in a specifically Hegelian sense. In fact, the regime of truth and the ideal of progress that historiography pursued and believed to be "just" in retrospect turned out to be partial and consequently "unjust." Since the writing of history is a practice that is not detached from ethical and political aims, it has – precisely as a practice – inevitably made itself guilty. To me, this is the true dimension of the tragedy presented in the essay. Believing that it serves a higher ethical truth with its idea of universal progress, historiography has in fact fixed and rationalized only a partial past. Much has remained hidden, unspoken, lost, erased. Given its epistemic tools, historiography would have been unable to recognize the latent and disturbing past, and by the same token, have created conditions for this past to re-emerge – latent and unprocessed – in the present.

For Kleinberg, then, this is not simply an epistemic crisis that can be overcome by imagining new authorities and beliefs with which to reshape it. The solution he proposes, which I am now anticipating, is bold and dangerous. He basically suggests that we deprive historiography of the orientation compass it has created, and in future, entrust the task of guiding us to ghosts, to the latent past, to unfinished business. History is asked to relinquish its traditional habitus as the tamer of the past and instead become its handmaiden.

5   Eelco Runia, *Moved by the Past. Discontinuity and Historical Mutation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 92.

The tragedy recounted by Kleinberg in the first two chapters of this essay affects the historical discipline on all fronts. First of all, it involves the ontological belief in the *object of historical knowledge*, namely, the past. Crises and problems are the ontological realism on which history, in Kleinberg's view, will continue to be based. Even the perspectivism proclaimed and adopted by the discipline, he argues, essentially reflect nothing more than naive positivism, that is, the belief that the object of knowledge, the past, while observable from different perspectives, is a stable reality. This constitutes the basis of the historians' claim to "correct" earlier or contemporary versions by proposing their own account. But the result, says Kleinberg, is a proliferation of competing, often parallel and mutually exclusive histories. All of them, nonetheless, are founded on the same claim to truth.

Secondly, the tragedy impacts the *temporal structure* postulated by the philosophy of history and adopted by history between the nineteenth and the twentieth century; a structure, moreover, from which it drew its emancipatory role, but also its ruinous effects. This temporal compass has long since collapsed, and with it the belief in the emancipatory power of history, that is, the possibility of leveraging knowledge of the past to contribute to a more equitable and hence more just future. The extent to which this idea of history has excluded entire segments of humanity from our history textbooks and, with its faith in technical progress, contributed to environmental catastrophes is no secret.

Finally, the very method on which historical knowledge is based – and whose core Kleinberg identifies as "empirical verification" – does not escape a tragic fate. Faith has ebbed in the historical method as the last bastion of the historical discipline and what is shareable. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, "bad-faith actors," as Kleinberg calls them, also make use of (or at least ape) this method (18). As we read further on, it leaves "good-faith scholars" vulnerable: post-truthers see each historical viewpoint as "equally valid." It should be noted here *en passant* that Bruno Latour went further in his diagnosis of the epistemic crisis. He argued that the criteria used to distinguish bad-faith from good-faith scholars could also be in crisis.[6] Secondly, Kleinberg tells us, method, metahistorical categories and temporal structure are themselves products of history. In one passage, he states that the historical method was "designed" (as indeed was ontological realism) in the nineteenth century

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6   Indeed, Bruno Latour believed that the epistemic crisis involved not only the object and method of knowledge, but also the criteria with which the critic claimed to distinguish the scholar from the naive believer. Cf. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–248, esp. 240–242.

precisely "to serve identitarian nationalism"[7] (25). Here, he deconstructs the method from a historico-genealogical rather than a theoretical perspective, that is, he reveals the ontological realism on which the method was to be based.

Let us take a closer look at this last quotation to highlight a key theme of this essay. It concerns the relationship between "empirical verification" and theory (or philosophy). Kleinberg suggests a reconstruction that sees method as "designed" in the modern age to serve a specific historico-philosophical idea and as serving a specific ethical and political purpose. This view of the relationship between method and theory is consistent with an implicit, albeit central, postulate of the entire essay: There is a correspondence, or rather perfect adequacy, between method, defined by Kleinberg as "empirical verification," theory and the regime of truth within which that method operates. In other words, the crisis of the truth system inevitably goes hand in hand with the crisis of method and vice versa. In the following paragraphs, I question this postulate and reconsider Kleinberg's philosophical proposal.

If we admit with Kleinberg that method can be reduced to "empirical verification," then tracing this kind of evidential procedure back to a particular historical period would be almost impossible. Think of Carlo Ginzburg's essay on the "evidential paradigm," which tells us the inductive method of analyzing traces as evidence of past events already existed in prehistoric hunters' venatorial techniques.[8] Or the far more significant argument that a method reducible to empirical verification probably never existed. This is demonstrated, moreover, by the philological-antiquarian method used since the early modern age, of which Kleinberg cites some examples at the beginning of his essay. Although it was certainly capable of error and contributed to the collapse of sacred history, fabulous hagiographies of religious orders, mythic-pagan and later religious stories about the origins of peoples, the method did not of itself create new narratives or historical meaning. Paradigmatic is Bolingbroke's polemic and its contempt for the inability of antiquarianism to provide the action-oriented narrative for which he advocated.[9] Echoes of this critique are still present in Nietzsche: If history were reduced to this kind of

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7   Cf. a similar argument on page 30, where Kleinberg writes about "nationalist or ethnic suppositions on which the discipline of history was founded."

8   Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, transl. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 87–113.

9   Henry Saint John, 1st Viscount of Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1752); Markus Völkel, *"Pyrrhonismus historicus" und "fides historica" die Entwicklung der deutschen historischen Methodologie unter dem Gesichtspunkt der historischen Skepsis* (Frankfurt a. M./New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 261–272; Carlo Borghero, *La certezza e la storia. Cartesianesimo, pirronismo e conoscenza storica* (Milano: Fanco Angeli, 1983), 417–422.

critical-philological knowledge, it would be detrimental to life and to action.[10] In order to provide narratives, method always had to fall back on theory in the broadest sense (theology or philosophy). Whether it was the *historischer Zusammenhang* invoked by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Droysen's ethical forces, Hegelian *Vernunft*, Ranke's contest between nations (also directed by ethical forces), progress or retrogression, ethnic nationalism, or the laws of history, empiricism without these scaffolds was and still is a dead letter or a mute object. Thought, in Hegel's words, remained history's "most powerful epitomizer" to this day.[11]

Bearing this analysis in mind, instead of saying the historical method was designed to serve identitarian nationalism, one could ask how it was possible to construct linear and progressive histories that stand up to empirical scrutiny. If applied rigorously, such verification could only disprove master narratives. The real issue is that nineteenth-century historians took it upon themselves to tell the Truth – the meaning of history – left vacant by sacred history and religion. Kleinberg mentions this latter aspect in his essay. In my opinion, the tension – or *aporia* – at stake here is rather one between empirical verification and theory, between different degrees of certainty in history and philosophical truth. A correspondence or adequacy of method (itself a multi-layered reality) with theory, but also with regimes of truth (likewise multi-layered), never existed, at least not in historiographic practice.

This tension between empirical evidence and theory (or philosophy) has haunted any historian who seriously reflects on their discipline. It is therefore not surprising to find it a recurring theme in Reinhart Koselleck's work. He was well aware that Chladenius and his perspectivism (*Theorie der Standortbindung*) had contributed to the process of relativizing historical knowledge and, consequently, the object of knowledge, that is, history as *res gestae*. Now, precisely because theoretical (and epistemological) reflection had made the past an object of study that could change depending on the perspective and over time,[12] understanding the past inevitably became intrinsically linked to and dependent on theory. Both the cause and the product of historical relativism, this constant tension between a theory of history and the sources gathered compels historians to work without cease. Work that is necessary,

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10 Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," 72–76.

11 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 16.

12 However, Chladenius had not yet considered that the temporal process could also alter the quality of a history *ex post*. Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, "Perspective and Temporality. A Contribution to the Historiographical Exposure of the Historical World," in *Futures Past. On the semantics of historical time*, transl. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 128–151, here 138.

and indeed, as Koselleck writes, productive.[13]

That said, I would like to emphasize that – again in Koselleck's interpretation – Chladenius was able to hold firm the difference between "partisanship" (*Parteilichkeit*), that is, the tendentiousness that prompted the production of a particular version of history, and perspectivism (*Standortbindung*), that is, the conditions of knowability of the past that make all knowledge relative and variable. In the 1970s, when Koselleck wrote on this topic, he could still claim the validity of the theoretical framework that distinguished between the "perspectivist mode of forming judgments" (*perspektivische Urteilsbildung*) and "partisanship" (*Parteilichkeit*).[14] Despite the relativistic "strudel" Kleinberg mentions with reference to Koselleck, the latter held fast to this distinction. The debate on historical skepticism in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – which, to my knowledge, Koselleck had not addressed systematically – demonstrates admirably that reflection on this distinction was in fact tantamount to an objection to Pierre Bayle's exemplary assertion of partisanship in all of history. According to Bayle, each nation prepared meat (the *res gestae*) with a sauce to suit the national taste. Chladenius's *Theorie der Standortbindung* was also a theoretical response to skepticism and its generalized accusation of tendentiousness throughout human history.

To conclude, not only has empiricism gradually come to see the need to interpret different theories and produce arguments and/or narratives, but theory likewise became fundamental to the struggle against skepticism. Returning to Koselleck, yes, he admitted the historical dimension of theory (such as the metahistorical categories cited by Kleinberg himself), but did consider its function in the practice of historical research to be diminished. The productive tension with theory saved history from being reduced to mere antiquarianism, on the one hand, or relapsing into the philosophy of history, on the other. After all, Koselleck considered the philosophy of history – rightly or wrongly – to be the condition that made the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century possible. The historian's task is thus one of vigilant and untiring work on his or her own categories and theory, which are necessarily temporalized. It involves the willingness to constantly rethink and correct historical interrogation and the historian's theoretical apparatus.[15]

Kleinberg, however, sees the solution adopted by Koselleck as no longer viable or even desirable. His cardinal concern, which is crystal-clear from the

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13 Koselleck, "Perspective and Temporality," 149.

14 Koselleck, "Perspective and Temporality," 136.

15 The historical dimension and temporalization of theory was skillfully problematized around this time by Ágnes Heller, *A Theory of History* (London/Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). She called the theory of history "an *incomplete* philosophy" for several reasons, including the fact that "any theory of history applies historicism to itself, it temporalizes both Is and Ought." 311.

very first lines, is not the "salvation" of historical knowledge *per se* but ethical and political action in the present and, therefore, the realization of a society that is more just because it is more equitable. This entails an indictment of the entire modern historiographical project, held partially responsible for ongoing injustices, and at the same time, the elaboration of what is, in my opinion, a new philosophy of history.[16] I use the term philosophy of history here in the specific sense of an ontological meditation on ways of being/not being from the past (not its reification) and on the temporality that is needed to guide and enable human action.

Kleinberg suggests reframing the co-presence of past and present by reversing the temporal vector and letting the past in its latent nature meet us in the present.[17] Whether it reappears in the form of ghosts (as in *Haunting History*) or – as in the essay published here for the first time – a "Surge," this past emerges in unexpected forms, times, and places. We can neither predict nor dominate it. As hauntological thinker Jacques Derrida[18] wrote, we must learn to live with these ghosts. Imagining a past resurfacing at unpredictable times and in unforeseen ways would seem to be Kleinberg's strategy to disempower the prescriptive, future-oriented, and decisionist vocation to manage the past, regardless of whether it comes from good- or bad-faith actors or from the left or the right. In this case, however, there is a danger that a past thus imagined escapes our predictive control completely and its outcomes might not be to our liking.

As early as 2013, Kleinberg had begun to rethink the past as "the forces that press upon us but that are not accessible,"[19] as offering no comfort, but troubling us instead. Inspired by Derrida, Kleinberg developed the idea that the past is of a porous nature, devoid of physical properties and yet latently present, gnoseologically elusive and yet capable of challenging our historical categories and narratives, something that is unimaginable, and yet has happened. One could even say that the ghostly past now haunting us is all of the

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16 With reference to this attempt, Kleinberg uses the term "metaphysics": cf. Ethan Kleinberg, "Introduction: The New Metaphysics of Time," *History and Theory* 1 (August 2012): 1–7.

17 Cf. Margrit Pernau, "Stones and Jinns. Time between Layers of Sedimentation and Hauntology," *Geschichtstheorie am Werk*, January 24, 2023, URL: https://doi.org/10.58079/pcy9 [last accessed: June 23, 2024].

18 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, transl. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). At Bielefeld University, Marcus Wystub is writing his Ph.D. thesis on the relationship between hauntology, historical justice, and historiography.

19 Ethan Kleinberg, "Presence in Absentia," in Presence: *Philosophy, History, and Cultural Theory for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ranjan Ghosh and Ethan Kleinberg (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 8–25.

Lisa Regazzoni

past that has failed to find entry into the historical narrative. In Kleinberg's words, "[h]istory, as conventionally conceived, is precisely the repression of differences in an attempt to generate a singular intelligible narrative that necessarily overwrites those aspects that confuse, confound, or contradict that narrative."[20] Just as Derrida employed the idea of *différance* to counter these forms of repression, Kleinberg suggests trying to "imagine doing history with *différance* in mind."[21] In addition to providing a better understanding of his argument, *Haunting History* gives us a vague glimpse of pasts that are hidden, forgotten, or lost in – notably American – history books and continue to haunt us, chief among them the ghost of the "violent dispossession of Native Americans."[22]

In the current essay, Kleinberg presents the past we encounter in terms of Emmanuel Levinas's Total Other; an Other that is not us, that is inaccessible, but affects our history. The moment we try to determine or explain it with causal logic and verify it with our evidence system, it is trapped in rational, restrictive, and constrictive knowledge, evading a possible encounter in the process. To paraphrase Levinas, it is an *Other on Other's own side*, incommensurable with the *Other on our side* because it transcends our finite abilities to conceive it. In his latest book, devoted indeed to Levinas, Kleinberg makes visible the *aporia* that emerges when one seeks to understand Levinas as a philosopher in the tradition of Western thought, but also to do him justice as a believer and profound interpreter of the Talmud, as an advocate of a transcendent and inaccessible truth. Kleinberg chooses an approach that involves two narratives presented in two parallel columns running throughout the book. They speak of two pasts (the two Levinases, the Talmudist and the philosopher) that respond to two utterly different logics. One column reports Levinas's talmudic-metaphysical reflections on a past-present detached from temporality; the other column describes the linear and chronological development of his thought according to the canons of intellectual history. These two pasts co-exist in the book and run parallel. Graphically, they never touch. Interpreting Walter Benjamin, the former concerns the sphere of truth (transcendent and inaccessible), while the latter is about knowledge as a form of possession. A knowledge that has, however, burdened itself improperly with a commitment

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20 Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 143.

21 Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 143.

22 Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 138. Joan Wallace Scott's book *On the Judgment of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020) presents other pasts that might emerge – for example, those associated with nationalism and racism. The American historian raises questions similar to those addressed by Kleinberg, but without going as far as to propose a true hauntology. Cf. furthermore, Achim Landwehr, *Die anwesende Abwesenheit der Vergangenheit. Essay zur Geschichtstheorie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2016), esp. 303–304.

to truth, and thus with the pretension to make claims that endure or unfold over time. But the very moment history takes on this burden, it becomes violence. Consequently, Ethan Kleinberg thinks of the "Surge" as analogous with the Total Other, as a set of possible pasts, silenced by traditional historiography: "These are the histories that need to be heard, not as parallel histories which are interpretatively distinct and methodologically homogenous, but as histories that create an intersection of multiple and conflicting logics of how we encounter, account for, and recount the past" (31). Achim Landwehr rightly states that in his book on Levinas, Kleinberg describes vividly "what it can look like when different understandings of time collide, when other temporalities meet and when time is encountered as Other".[23]

This begs the question whether or not Kleinberg, in his current essay, has chosen to employ two conflicting logics: traditional intellectual history with which Kleinberg offers a short genealogy of historical method, on the one hand, and transcendent-metaphysical logic with which he proposes to rethink the past in terms of hauntology, on the other. But unlike in Kleinberg's book on Levinas, these two logics do not run parallel without touching each other. On the contrary, the current essay uses the historico-genealogical reconstruction of the dawn of the historical method to corroborate the need for a metaphysical turn that simultaneously denounces the historico-genealogical way of doing historiography. Isn't Kleinberg entangled in contradictions here? But the question now is even more fundamental: How can we imagine a new theory that is not based on a critique of past theories reconstructed with the traditional historico-genealogical method?[24]

Returning to the question of how to implement *différance* in historiography: How do we imagine history books with historical entries "at different levels, in different time dimensions"[25] that may even be incommensurable with each other? Books in which, to argue with Kleinberg's example of Native Americans, the narrative supported by archaeological records of how the Arctic and North America were populated across the Bering Straits sits alongside the oral tradition of Native American communities that reject the idea of immigration in favor of an "emergence" and "a transformation from an ancient, prehuman time" that occurred precisely on American soil? If it is possible at the theoretical,

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23 Achim Landwehr, "Vergangenheit darf nicht vergangen bleiben. Zu Ethan Kleinbergs 'Emmanuel Levinas's Talmudic Turn,'" *Geschichtstheorie am Werk*, February 8, 2022, URL: https://doi.org/10.58079/pcwy [last accessed: January 17, 2024].

24 The same objection could be raised with respect to Kleinberg's book *Haunting History*, where a historico-genealogical reconstruction of historical theory from Chladenius and Droysen to Dilthey leads to the need for a new, deconstructive historiography.

25 Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World* (New York: North Point Press, 2000), 114.

academic, or even school level to live with this wave and imagine multi-column works, how then should we react when these ghosts begin to demand justice and do so on the basis of what Kleinberg calls "competing logics of time and ways of organizing the past"?

Once again, the issue of Native American dispossession is an excellent example. The activist and anthropologist Hugh Brody pointed out, for instance, the incommensurability of the Canadian legal system and the divination practices of the Dunne-za, an Athabascan-speaking group, when it comes to land claims and, consequently, to questions pertaining to the rules of evidential verification, witness authority and historical "truth." How do we deal with the stories reported by the Dunne-za elders, who claim they travel in dreams "along the trails of time" and witness the arrangements settlers made with their ancestors at the living moment they occurred?[26] Again, what is to be done when Indigenous groups make claims on the basis of an alleged collective identity, whereby "descent is tacitly assumed to represent the bedrock of collective identity"?[27] How do we accept the idea of collective identity so abhorred by "our" historiography for its ability, according to Amartya Sen's formula, to kill?[28]

To conclude, if the theorist can – and must – learn to live with these contradictory logics, *aporias* and the "Surge" of ghosts, society will be constantly driven to act and to choose a logic, an approach and a narrative on which to base its decisions. Without decision there can be no social action, and without action, no justice on earth. This is precisely the tragic dimension of *aporia*. The fact that every decision implies a *determinatio*, and that each determination – as Derrida teaches (and Leibniz, Benjamin and Adorno before him) – is a negation that supplants the Other and leads to oblivion. In this sense, justice and the truth in which it is rooted are no longer of this world, but instead swept away into a future that will never come.

Kleinberg's anti-decisionist (and anti-determinist) proposal is the imagination of a new compass, the "Surge," which I call the chronoanarcoid (re-)emergence of unaccomplished business, the past as presence *in absentia*. To this indeterminate and out-of-control "Surge," Kleinberg ascribes the responsibility to call "for a moral imperative in the present and for the future" (32). Obviously, delegating a call for a moral imperative to the "Surge" is risky. We may not like the past that emerges and the imperative it dictates.

I prefer a different method of escaping the determinism of the past and its pendant, namely, decisionism in terms of the future. It does not involve a

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26 Brody, *The Other Side of Eden*, 134. Adam Kuper, *The Reinvention of Primitive Society: Transformations of a Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 173–175.

27 Adam, *The Reinvention of Primitive Society*, 175.

28 Amartya K. Sen, *Identity and Violence: the illusion of destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006).

new metaphysics of the relationship between past, present, and future, but instead argues for *redescribing* what we call the "historical method." That is why I recommend abandoning the belief that historical "method" is a consensual monolith that is inextricably bound up in a regime of truth and "designed" for specific purposes, as Kleinberg suggests (*25*). What we call "the" method is diffused in a set of heuristic and interpretive rules and practices that are constantly adapted, forced, disregarded, challenged for inadequacy, improved, or even betrayed. This not *despite*, but very much *because* of the unrelenting (aporetic) tension between theoretical demands and empirical evidence.

If we think of the body of methodological practices in these terms, then, in agreement with Kleinberg, this body remains a historical product. At the same time, it is recognized as the fluid outcome of collective and intergenerational work that consequently eludes decisionism, that is, individuals' claims to determine for all and sundry what "the" method is or should be.[29] Considered in an intergenerational and long-term perspective, methodological tools may turn out to be the *interim* outcome of mini-acts pushing in different and thus in no specific directions. Only under these conditions can future history and historiography break free from all forms of determinism with regard to the past and individual decisionism in relation to the future, and remain truly open. Similar to Kleinberg's anti-decisionist proposal that we may not like the past that emerges, we may also dislike the future evolution of the rules of writing and reflecting on history. The difference is that Kleinberg's proposal attempts to imagine an instance that would serve as a compass, while the idea of methodical practices subject to constant micro-negotiation and micro-contentions has, in itself, no direction. Be that as it may, this is the price to be paid if we are to welcome a historiography that renounces the claim to a predetermined future direction as a regulative principle for the present.

And, finally, back to *Summer Interlude* and its (happy) ending. Although Coppelius's words capture Marie's state of mind perfectly and give voice to the ghosts that inhabit her, they are not decisive enough. When the old ballet master leaves the scene, Marie is still sad. Only by sharing her ghosts with her partner David, with whom she has so far failed to form a genuine bond, will she succeed in banishing them. How does she do this? Not by telling *her* story, but *the* story. Marie tells her partner nothing about Henrik's tragic end. She

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29 Elsewhere, I have presented Hans Blumenberg's reflection on the evolution of myths and metaphors – a blind evolution, i.e., one without a predetermined direction – as a disempowering strategy to counter all forms of philosophical decisionism applied to history. Cf. Lisa Regazzoni, *Selektion und Katalog. Zur Narrativen Konstruktion der Vergangenheit Bei Homer, Dante und Primo Levi* (Munich: Fink, 2008), esp. 57–80. Cf. furthermore Lisa Regazzoni, "And If History Were to Turn Its Back on the Future? A Thought-provoking Interjection," *Geschichtstheorie am Werk,* June 28, 2022, URL: https://doi.org/10.58079/pcxj

simply hands him Henrik's diary and asks him to read it. The material relic that has unexpectedly resurfaced from the past, foreshadowed and accompanied by the smell of thick air, becomes the medium that makes it possible to share the past. How David *interprets* the diary entries, which end just before Henrik's tragic death, is not shown. This relic from the past allows Marie to now live with her lover's specter. As Derrida wrote with reference to Marx's *Manifesto*: "What manifests itself in the first place is a specter [...], as powerful as it is unreal, a hallucination or simulacrum that is virtually more actual than what is so blithely called a living presence."[30] Having entrusted David with the diary, Marie's expression turns to one of joy for the first time in thirteen years as she exclaims: "I'm actually happy!"

In this sense, I am taking up the challenge of Ethan Kleinberg's thought-provoking and demanding essay and turning it into a question both to him and to ourselves: How do we – as scholars and historians – write history with *différance* in mind if we *want* to act in communities, if we *want* something to share, to contest, to inherit, in a word, something to matter? What do we share, and how do we share it?

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30 Cf. footnote 4 above.

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A Compass that Promises Overcoming Uncertainty and Facing the Future

Kristin Platt

Can history play a role in the search for a compass that gives us certainty in a world that locates itself at "the end-time of truth," a world in which knowledge no longer has authority, a world in which a profound rupture exists between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" (two categories that are among the most familiar concepts of Reinhart Koselleck's writings)?

Ethan Kleinberg suggests that the role of history as a compass in navigating this unstable world is broken. Until now, Kleinberg states that the compass has been used with ahistorical directional markings, "dominated by the presence of the present which reaches back to tell the past what to be." Rather than a directional indicator that no longer functions, Kleinberg proposes a compass that, while not radically outside of time, nevertheless opens up to a "logic of anachrony." In today's socio-political climate, history could still play a guiding role in times of uncertainty. The historian should finally abandon the traditional understanding of the past as hermetic and static – an understanding that seems to have regained strength in modern historiography, because thinking about world history is often based on shared spaces of events and thus on a generalized temporality. The compass is supposed to point to altered paths of history, but also to altered truths. In order to do this, the compass must be taken out of the atemporal position in which historiography often still believes itself to be. To accept the temporality of history is to become part of temporality.

With the concept of "the Surge," Kleinberg introduces a mode of history that makes it possible to look at the prolific possibilities of the present and to underline that not every present option follows a linear deduction from the past. This approach is antithetical to traditional Western historiography and accepts that there are multiple and competing logics of time and ways of organizing the past. Therefore, Kleinberg challenges the historian to construct a new compass of history that does not seek to locate directions, but instead "detects the Surge" and guides us at the end-time of truth through a multipolar understanding of the world, its past and future.

Kleinberg describes the Surge as a mode of history characterized by a "total other without logic, order, or time". The Surge is void of spatial and temporal ordering of the past, and therefore, the Surge detector is tasked with identifying the junctions where past themes recur and con-

nect with the present. Locating historical moments at these points is important because the "multiple and conflicting logics of how we encounter, account for, and recount the past" are revealed. Even if the Surge detector is consequently built as an atemporal mechanism for understanding the past, it is undoubtedly a measuring instrument that is held up to the events, that is, it touches the events. For it is the historian's hand that guides this new compass and thus predetermines what it measures as "the past." Should the compass be associated with the idea of reaffirming or regaining an "objectivity" of historical research because the Western historian does not want to give up locating himself in an "objectivity" outside the event?

Subsequently, a crucial question is whether the Surge detector is a new invention. With its intended ability to indicate a direction from the stream of events, the detector follows a more traditional view of historiography and the tasks ascribed to it. It is also worth noting that Kleinberg's detector does not measure time, but identifies places: It "points to sites where the past surges into the present unexpectedly, touching us and connecting with our concerns not only for the present but also the future."

Toward the end of his reflections, Kleinberg refers to a study by Aleida Assmann, who discussed how up to modernity, historiography had guaranteed the promise of the future. Steeped in the modernist belief in progress, history traditionally provided an opportunity to hope for something better and greater. With the waning of the belief in history's ability to guide people to a greater future, so has the confidence in history as a discipline. The invalidation of a universal narrative of history for future humanity, especially the particularization of event narratives, would have resulted in the intensification or multiplication of social and political conflicts.

Do we really have to assume a close connection between loss of the future, conflict, and violence? Kleinberg contradicts this somewhat cautiously by arguing that the promise of the future is only valid for those who believe in it. Nevertheless, he does not discuss in detail whether the "Surge detector" can also detect places of discourse between the present and the future.

On further reflection on the role of the narrative of the future, it is essential to highlight three contradictions. First, the interest of modern Western historiography in the "future" has never been universal but national. Second: the argument of the "loss of future" or the risk of the "future becoming uncertain" is a discursive figure that has helped legitimize political radicalism and violence in modernity. Readiness for violence arises not from uncertainty, but from the narrative that this uncertainty must be overcome. We can formulate a third contradictory consideration: In the current figure of speech of the "rupture of time" or "end of time," in the contemporary public discourse about the crisis of the present, hardly any of the world's real crises receive attention. Whether Mali, Burkina, Niger, Haiti, Kenya, Congo, Yemen, Karabakh, or Sudan, when describing the consequences of the crises, the actual political conflicts are not

considered. Remarkably, while contemporary discourses refer to recent social and political conflicts, they become detached from social and political events regarding their consequences. The public is currently led to believe that the individual's options are limited. Institutions no longer suffice, the argument goes, politics is incapable of action, and social divisions between generations, genders, political parties, rich and poor are unbridgeable. The idea of political and historical crisis is currently firmly linked to arguments about the limitation of the self.

The following sections elaborate on the "contradictions" mentioned above, critiquing the argument that the modern universal promise of history is broken. The remarks ultimately support Kleinberg's observation that discourses contain topographical logics deployed through temporal figures, but they show, by introducing the aspect of positionality of historical thought, that the question of the promise of history is not a scientific, but rather a political question. The considerations outlined here also venture to suggest that it should not be the historian's task to give directions, but to accept different pasts.

The historian who searches for the multiple nodal points of the past and present to determine the future must not overlook the fact that they do not encounter the flow of events, but instead the narratives about the events. It is the discourses about the events that flow to the historian. Accepting the flow of narratives means that the historian must understand the existence of diverse experiences at these nodal points of history. Seeking directions means trying to impose authoritative readings or perpetuating the validity of particular readings.

Historical, social, and human sciences do not focus on finding causes, but on the connections discovered in processes, i.e. on interrelations and the effects of interrelated social, political, and human factors. Cultural and social scientists, for example, do not ask why the sun sets, but try to understand the traditions and translations, the cultural emotions and intergenerational narratives of sunsets, their social significance and political echoes. Historical research has only recently – perhaps since the challenges posed by the writings of Hayden White – moved away from the assumption that they clarify the actual, "true" causes of events. Historical "truth" is not the truth about the causes and developments of events, but a prefiguration and refiguration of narratives about events based on mediated knowledge, disciplinary concepts, social positions, agreements, and assumptions about the driving forces of occurrences. Kleinberg reminds us that historical sciences have yet to accept that the flow of events is a social figuration and that historical research is a strategy of knowledge communities.

This also relates to the discovery that time has a specific temporality. The assumption that past and present have *speed* was closely connected with the idea that by influencing the temporality, the times themselves could also be changed: By intervening in the present and thereby altering the past, the future should be saved. These figures of discourse are firmly anchored in 19th-century German historiography.

Decoupled Temporality

Strategies of temporalization[1] can be understood as strategies for changing the relationship between the places and times in which we live and our cultural practices, experiences, and identities. The narrative which accompanied this figure was that time had become uncertain because the present crisis was so comprehensive, so general, that the crisis also affected all concepts of meaning and, ultimately time itself. The time that had become uncertain was discovered in German historical philosophy at the beginning of the 19th century. It was rediscovered in the philosophy of the 1920s, particularly in the writings of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876–1925) and Oswald Spengler (1880–1936). However, it would be far too short-sighted to single out only the representatives of a young conservative school of thought. Philosophical, historical, and political writings printed in Germany after World War I contended that a rupture had occurred between time and space, and that time itself had become alienated precisely because of the loss of connection to space.

In the face of crisis, the argument that time is being detached from space goes back to the nationalist imagination that links identities to a connection to place, language, heritage, culture, and not least, "time." Its formation can be directly traced to the writings of Humboldt, Herder, Fichte, or Ernst Moritz Arndt, which addressed the unity of history and the fulfilment of national identity framed in a historical time. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the argument emerged that time and space needed to be reunited to overcome political crises.

In a speech about the "Views of Germany's Future in the Present," theologist, university teacher, and later President of the University of Marburg and Breslau Ludwig Wachler (1767–1838) refers to a decisive hour – this hour, however, is not temporal, it is an extra-temporal threshold, "against time." The hour is a "place;" it has (as a threshold) a certain spatial extension. Wachler explains that the future can be seen directly – by those who want to see it. His concern is not to miss the hour to strengthen its effect and recognize the need to act. The political goal should not be to merely assume the pace of time in order to return to time itself. Rather, the goal should be to change the temporality and dynamics of time to increase its effectiveness: "[I]t seems to be a duty against the time in which we live, and a duty against ourselves [...]."[2]

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1   For this, cf. also: Kristin Platt, Keep going: *Territorialized and deterritorialized temporality in writings of the 1920s* (in print).

2   Ludwig Wachler, *Teutschland's Zukunft in der Gegenwart.* Ansichten (Breslau: bei Willibald August Holäufer, 1817), 3. In the original: "es scheint Pflicht zu seyn gegen die Zeit, in welcher wir leben, und Pflicht gegen uns selbst, um mit Liebe und besonnener Kraft über die von uns ausgehende Wirksamkeit zu walten, [...]."

Wachler closely relates the reflections on "people" and "time." Thus, the new time must be shaped as a "rebirth." The threshold of a "new time" has to do with seed and grain. It is about the greatness of Germany, about a strong "self-awareness" and last but not least, about a new generation. The historical threshold that Wachler calls for must be realized by those who act in the new era: It is the people who must become the movers and shakers of the times. "Self-awareness" is another new political key: a cognition that integrates the feeling of the times with the sense of national identity.

In the year of his doctorate exam under Hegel at the University of Heidelberg, philosopher and later politician Joseph (1788–1871) speaks of the potential promise of the future in his text "On the Unity of Time." "German bravery and moral strength" had succeeded in freeing itself from "enslavement," Hillebrand wrote in his reflections. Only now, man stands there, "in the middle of time," and must recognize his duty to change its course. Only once man understands that "the past is the birth of reality, which in turn carries the seeds of a future, that the bond of time wraps itself around everything and unites all events and phenomena into a picture of the infinite" will it be possible to build a future.[3]

The political writings of German intellectuals of the so-called "pre-March era" ("Vormärz"), the period leading up to the revolutions of March 1848, is often referred to as the period of "romantic nationalism" (1814–48). Remarkably, no other political generation is cited so frequently in the political writings of the 1920s. The studies of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Ernst-Moritz Arndt, in particular, saw a stream of new editions after World War I and became influential references. Indeed, central concepts emerge during this pre-March period: a conception of "people" ("Volk"), which becomes the new seminal category by being tied to a historical realization. The setting of this new political force was not only dependent on linking the political idea of the people with characteristics of life, cultural greatness, and historical endurance but, above all, to the requirement of still having to be formed.

Historian Ernst Moritz Arndt already assumed a mutually dependent relationship between man, time, space, and history, which would lead to a catastrophe if man did not recognize his power to shape history and to change the course of history: "Time passes through man, without him it would stand still."[4]

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3   Joseph Hillebrand, *Ueber die Einheit der Zeit und den Zusammenhang der Ereignisse in derselben. Eine Rede* (Heidelberg: neue akademische Buchhandlung von Karl Groos, 1818), 14. In the original: „daß die Vergangenheit die Geburt der Wirklichkeit, diese wiederum den Keim einer Zukunft in sich trägt; daß um Alles sich das Band einer Zeit schlingt und alle Begebenheiten und Erscheinungen zu einem Bilde eines Unendlichen vereint."

4   Ernst Moritz Arndt [1806], *Sämtliche Werke. Achter Band: Geist der Zeit I* (Leipzig: Pfau, 1909), 52.

For Arndt, the "crisis" manifests itself not only by being processual but also by accelerating:

> "The era is on the run, passing its major images by us in rapid succession, but the contemporaries marvel and gawk, standing motionless in wonder, unable to comprehend anything. But this rapid succession gives them, as it were, a feeling of an endlessness of time that unravels before them, and all the more, since they, the frozen ones, do not keep pace with it and thus no longer have a measure of time. Time is on the run, the wiser among us have long known it. Monstrous things have happened, the world has silently and loudly suffered great transformations, in the silent pace of days and in the hurricanes and volcanoes of the revolutions; monstrous things will happen, greater things will be transformed."[5]

The crisis is not only a political and social experience, but also a formation that became fundamental for modern knowledge. The argument that a crisis reveals the distance between actual time and the time of the present can be understood as an indication of a particular political grammar. The concepts of time and temporality can be related to worldviews and social beliefs as cultural constructs. There are four interconnected levels: the argument of a disoriented time is convincing on the semantic level, it carries meaning on the discursive-communicative level, but also on a cognitive-cultural level, and last but not least, it brings together the discourses of different political generations on an argumentative level. The figure of time is used here as an interpretative pattern for political contexts. It is also used as an allegory for a superordinate destiny. It can point to movements and dynamics, but it can also symbolize the continuity of cultural distinctiveness. This peculiarity, that the figure of time can also be symbol and allegory, that on the level of political discourse, it can point to the continuity of one's own as well as to the loss of one's own, is a design that goes back precisely to the writings of the pre-March generation. "Time" thus becomes a topological figure of political discourse because it does not itself raise the question of meaning, but rather "anchors" (or precisely locates) political ideas. Thus, in the 1920s, the arguments of the time ("Zeit") that

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5   Arndt, *Sämtliche Werke,* 54. In the original: „Das Zeitalter ist auf der Flucht und führt seine bedeutenden Bilder in einem so schnellen Wechsel vorbei, die Zeitgenossen aber sind die Staunenden und Gaffenden, welche unbeweglich stehen und anstaunen und nichts begreifen können. Aber der rasche Wechsel gibt ihnen gleichsam das Gefühl einer endlosen Zeitenlänge, die sich vor ihnen abrollt, und desto mehr, da sie, die Erstarrten, nicht mit fortgehen und also gar kein Maaß von Zeit mehr haben. Die Zeit ist auf der Flucht, die Klügeren wissen es lange. Ungeheure Dinge sind geschehen, große Verwandlungen hat die Welt still und laut, im leisen Schritt der Tage und in den Orkanen und Vulkanen der Revolutionen erlitten; Ungeheures wird geschehen, Größeres wird verwandelt werden."

must be recovered, as well as the time from which the contemporary ("Zeitgenosse")[6] had fallen out, became relevant again.

In his work *The Logical Problem of the Philosophy of History* ("Das logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie"), German cultural philosopher Ernst Troeltsch argued that a distinction should be made between two concepts of time: a concept that describes the causality of historical becoming, which is linked to space, and a concept that is linked to meaning and memory and allows for the attribution of "sense."[7] Troeltsch fundamentally distinguishes between natural scientific and historical scientific rationality. The respective causalities are not only determined by principles of rationality, but also by the units of meaning ("Sinneinheiten") that affect them.[8] Historical continuity does not result from stringing together events or from interrelations of events. Troeltsch speaks of a "unit of emergence" to clarify that the continuity of the historical does not lie in the causality of events:

> "[T]he continuous genesis of historical things, as far as it is truly continuous, cannot be represented in a purely causal relation to a series of distinguishable individual processes, but [...] the individual processes are fused in an unit of emergence which pervades them, makes them dissolve into each other, and thus continuous, which is very difficult to describe logically, but it is the essence of the historical sense to see and to feel them."[9]

Historical development and historical progress result only from the mutual relatedness of the objects and matters acting in society and from the fusion of units of meaning. The continuity of meaning is guaranteed by collective memory, which can connect past and present and must be understood as a

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6   Arndt, *Sämtliche Werke,* 52.

7   Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme. Erstes Buch: Das logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Tübingen: C. B. Mohr, 1922), 56.

8   Cf. Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme,* 54.

9   Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme,* 55. In the original: „Darin liegt aber die wichtige logische Folge, daß das kontinuierliche Werden historischer Dinge, soweit es in Wahrheit kontinuierlich ist, nicht in einer Zusammenreihung abgrenzbarer Einzelvorgänge rein kausal dargestellt werden kann, sondern daß die Einzelvorgänge verschmolzen sind in einer sie durchziehenden, ineinander auflösenden und dadurch kontinuierlich machenden Werde-Einheit, die sich logisch sehr schwer beschreiben läßt, die aber zu sehen und zu fühlen das Wesen des historischen Sinnes ist. Wenn man von diesem fast als einem besonderen Erkenntnisorgan spricht, so ist es eben diese Fähigkeit, nicht zusammenfügend im Sinne kausaler Einzelvorgänge, sondern zusammenschauend im Sinne der Verschmelzung und Verflüssigung zu einer Werde-Einheit die Vorgänge zu verstehen, womit dann freilich auch das Gefühl für deren Brechungen, Knickungen, Ablenkungen und allenfalls Verwirrungen verbunden sein muß.“

space of meaning ("Sinnraum"). For Troeltsch, the rhythm of time is a "flow;" the temporality of historical continuity is the temporality of movement and change. The investigation of the scientific "contexts of emergence" can therefore only be based on the acceptance that the continuity of meaning ("Sinn-kontinuierlichkeit")[10] lies in the processes themselves and is shaped in the spatio-temporal relations. In the historical-philosophical writings of the 1920s, questioning the constitution of modern history cannot be detached from the meaning of the world's overall events and the fate of Germany's future. That "space" moves into these fields of reference follows as well from the importance of space in nationalist discourse, but also from new theories of space that had prevailed since the 1890s, and not least from an idea of the modernity of spatial knowledge. The temporality of spatialized time directly reflects the notion of existence and is drawn from the contexts of crisis.

The question of how temporality is explicitly thematized in figurations of history, which has only been touched on very briefly in this excursus, led to the discovery that nineteenth-century German works on the philosophy of history developed an idea of "time" that was alienated from nation and history. The theme of this alienated time in nationalist works was intended, not least, to underline a political call to action. In any case, working with figures of time and making a case for certain temporalities is firmly integrated into the works on the emergence of modern historiography. Where are we today, what concepts of time are used to describe the present, which Kleinberg calls for to achieve time-figures that allow for desynchronized, multi-layered temporalities?

Time and Crisis

There is a close connection between the discourse figures of time and crisis and time and violence. At present, the connection between time and crisis is being challenged, in particular by historians of Eastern European Studies. Thus, there is an intense debate about whether today's war is a reason to rethink the foundations and direction of historical research on Eastern Europe. On the one hand, some researchers firmly say "no," that there is no need to rethink, that the "extent of a war" is "no scientific criterion for a revision," that one should not make oneself "slaves of the event" by exploring the foundations of a subject based on current events.[11] On the other hand, historians call for critically examining the discipline's past involvement in shaping political opinion. The cooperation between academia and politics is still not

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10   Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme,* 56.

11   Stefan Plaggenborg, "Russlands Krieg in der Ukraine. Müssen die Osteuropa-historiker umdenken?" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 69, no. 4 (2021): 549–556, here 551.

sufficiently addressed in many fields, especially in Oriental and Eastern European Studies.

This excursus is significant for the relevance of the "Surge detector" because the detector proposed here does not work if it is not understood as a knowledge-theoretical or knowledge-critical instrument.

This can also be discussed with Kleinberg's point about attracting conspiracy theories. Undoubtedly, to understand their appeal or effectiveness, we could consider information bubbles or the loss of a moral compass. However, the power of conspiracy theories cannot be understood by focusing on the relationship between truth and reality. At its core, conspiracy theories are not about knowledge or direction in a time of disorientation; they are about asserting one's own identity and voice in a time of diversity of identity, history and cultures. Conspiracy theories enable those who present them to portray themselves as the only ones who know the truth. Conspiracy theories are, in their essence, theories of identity. They do not emerge in the stream of events, but at the nodes where one's concepts, images, and figures are to be asserted against the Other. Conspiracy theories emerge in times of change. They offer unambiguous explanations to the interrelationality of interactions, accompanied by speakers who position themselves in a discourse space that they imagine as disordered or surging.

Thus, I suggest calibrating the Surge detector somewhat differently, namely also with regard to the junctures, the nodal points, that is to the arguments used to claim that the present is becoming too narrow, externally determined, or crisis-laden under the current of an urgent temporality.

Thus, the "end-time" with which Kleinberg begins his contribution is a figure expressed amid an event. In retrospect, the end of time is rarely diagnosed, because this would mean that the speaker, who is now in the future, no longer has any relevance. Temporal categories like "end-time" or a "turning point of time" mark a decisive spatio-temporal moment; they define a speaker's position and create pressure to act.

To call out a critical failure of the historical offers of meaning is another figure of knowledge that was formed in the 19th and in the early 20th century. From today's perspective, such a consideration points not only to a failure to reappraise the history of knowledge in one's own disciplines, but above all to the fact that a knowledge-critical approach is not easy, especially in Germany. Those who assert that historians are not slaves to events overlook the fact that they are part of the events.

Given the enormous political and social crises of the present, it is a critical task to make visible the new involvement of research in social and political knowledge processes, to consider the production of knowledge about societies, identities, law, and life, and also, against this background, to understand postcolonial transformations, new authoritarianism, and geopolitical power politics.

Those who want to rewrite history as direction to find meaning enter a problematic continuity. Wanting to write history as direction, one consciously/unconsciously puts oneself at risk of placing one's (own) account as binding and one's own proposition of meaning above the history (of others), denying the others' narratives their rightful place. Those who ask for "meaning" do not feel that there is too little "meaning" out there, but that the meaning they propose does not find enough resonance. This also makes conspiracy theories powerful because they provide such resonance from the outset, or instead, they assure that there will be resonance, no matter which way the narrative is told.

It is therefore quite remarkable that Kleinberg ascribes two levels to the consideration of recalibrating time figures and the concept of temporality: On the one hand, as a question we ask as we examine interpretations of the present, and on the other hand, as a question asked in ongoing debates with traditional models of history, such as the modernist model of progress or the nationalist narratives of time and history described above.

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Haunting Pasts and "Post-truth": from Objectivity to Solidarity

Berber Bevernage

Ethan Kleinberg has written a rich and inspiring essay, with much of which I wholeheartedly agree. Kleinberg and I share several intellectual and political interests. We are both interested in the implications of Derrida's theory of spectrality for historiography and share a skepticism about the "realist" ontological commitments of many historians. Both Kleinberg and I search for approaches to history that are emancipatory and yet remain responsive to issues of historical justice. In that context, I also agree with his claim that we need to reconceptualize historical time. Moreover, I think he is right to point out that special attention should be paid to the relationship between conceptions of historical time and conceptualizations of the "we," the "us," and the "our". A critical analysis of historicity must indeed be combined with one of sociability, since these two closely intertwine. I strongly support Kleinberg's plea to "[let] go of all the coordinates by which we find ourselves privileged owners of history, to imagine and enact an ethical relation to the past and future." I also share Kleinberg's conviction that in order to do this, we have to think of the past (or rather I would say historical "pastness") as a "dynamic site" which is never "ontologically given."

Because I share most of Kleinberg's intellectual-political concerns and aims, I will use this essay to think along with him and to raise some questions and propose some suggestions that I hope will contribute to his diagnosis of the problems he raises and help us advance towards our shared goals. I will focus, in particular, on the diagnosis of the phenomena of so-called post-truth and the haunting past. In line with many colleagues, Kleinberg seems to interpret "post-truth" as primarily an epistemic crisis. Others see the phenomenon primarily as a social crisis involving polarization and declining political trust. Kleinberg's idea of the new (anachronic) compass of history fits well with the epistemic diagnosis and indeed seems most potent in relation to ills that are primarily epistemic in nature. Yet, the question can be raised whether the notion of a new compass is equally fruitful in relation to the broader social dynamics and ills that underpin the "post-truth" crisis. Are there alternative ways of conceptualizing, relating to, and dealing with the phenomena of "haunting pasts" and historiographical parallelism that could help us address these broader social issues, as well?

One issue of concern in the search for an alternative emancipatory-yet-responsible conceptualization of history is that we should be careful not to engage in a (re-)ontologizing of the haunting past and introduce metaphys-

ical principles that are hard to defend or even have a mystical ring to them. Although certainly not a general feature of Kleinberg's essay, some of the expressions about the Surge as an "active and unstable temporal force" and Total Other, I argue below, run the risk of facilitating such a problematic reading. Similarly, I sympathize with Kleinberg's attempt to theoretically bolster a more moral relation to history. Yet, I also feel that describing the Surge as a Total Other and as the locus of a trans- or a-temporal moral call, potentially leads to a 'divining'[1] of history that re-introduces what Marcel Gauchet describes as the key religious principles of (transcendental) heteronomy and alterity.[2] Such a theoretical move may be unconvincing to those who remain skeptical about the recent post-secular turn in theory.

Another issue of concern is that a rejection of historicist temporal logics is a risky move with high intellectual stakes. The problem with historicism is that it can have malign as well as benign effects and the key question is whether and how we can keep the latter while discarding the former. How, for example, to become critically post-historicist without lapsing into some naïve a-historical worldview? Kleinberg is well aware of these dilemmas, and he recognizes embracing a logic of "anachrony" or "the unfettered intermingling of past, present, and future" can be dangerous. His essay remains relatively succinct about risks and potential side-effects, however. It would be interesting if Kleinberg could further reflect on the intellectual, socio-cultural, and political advantages that could potentially be lost by rejecting a historicist temporal logic. Can any society function while embracing anachrony or breaking with any and all temporal logics? And is this a politically desirable and responsible option?

Given these issues of concern, it is worth asking whether Kleinberg's rejection of historians' "realist" ontological commitments and his aim to theoretically defend an alternative and more morally engaged relation to history necessitate a move so politically risky as embracing the idea of the Surge and the anachrony it entails. I don't think this should be the case. Kleinberg's project does not stand or fall on this point alone. Below, I argue that the work of Richard Rorty can be helpful for Kleinberg's intellectual project because it enables a critical reconceptualization of temporal logic that no longer pretends to mirror objective history, but reconstitutes itself by embracing what Rorty has called the social logic of solidarity.

Kleinberg opens his essay with a *post-histoire*-style statement: "We have reached the end-time of truth." This grand claim comes as something of a surprise given the style of reasoning Kleinberg typically defends, revolving

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1   Jayne Svenungsson, *Divining History. Prophetism, Messianism and the Development of the Spirit* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2016).

2   Cf. Marcel Gauchet, *La religion dans la démocratie. Parcours de la laïcité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

around an openness to uncertainty and a rejection of narrative closure. It also strikes me as factually questionable since many of the so-called post-truthers actually do not question the concept of Truth itself: Rather, they tend to posit their own Truth, which they often pack in a hyper-positivist or scientistic discourse. Instead of rejecting expertise or epistemic authority in general, they typically attack allegedly "mainstream" academic expertise or epistemic authority and propose their own alternative experts and sources of authority.[3] "Do your own research," the slogan goes.

This also raises the question of who are the "we" that reached the end-time of truth. Where was that end-time reached? This is a pertinent issue given Kleinberg's own plea to reflect on the discursive constitution of the "we." In his essay "Where is the now,"[4] Dipesh Chakrabarty convincingly argued that any periodizing claim or claim about the "the present," "the contemporary," or "our time" is a socio-culturally and geo-politically situated claim. Where in the world, and in which social environment, is "post-truth" being experienced? Who is thus in need of a new compass of history? Who, moreover, has the luxury to discard the ideal of progress or even temporal logic as such?

As I mentioned earlier, Kleinberg's diagnosis of the end-time of truth claim and his analysis of historiographical parallelism point primarily to epistemic causes. Kleinberg puts a lot of stress on this epistemological diagnosis, and he sees the epistemology (and ontology) of the historicist tradition as the main culprits: "both right-wing and left-wing tribalism, which characterizes 'identity politics,' are the result of a historical logic and method which came of age in the nineteenth century, designed to serve identitarian nationalism." This (onto-)epistemic diagnosis is important, because only on such basis can Kleinberg's solution be convincing. Only when post-truth and parallelism are caused by a historical logic can the rejection of that logic and an embracing of achronism seem constructive.

I am not entirely convinced by this onto-epistemic diagnosis. Undoubtedly something is happening on an epistemic level. Yet, rather than the cause of the crisis, this seems to me to be merely a symptom of a more profound problem. The deeper causes of historiographical parallelism and "post-truth," I believe, are societal fragmentation, polarization, and loss of trust in public institutions and political leadership. Not an original idea, of course. Many express similar views. Henrik Enroth, for example, argues that "post-truth" results from a crisis of socio-political authority in the particular sense Han-

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3   Cf. Tuukka Ylä-Anttila, "Populist Knowledge: 'Post-Truth' Repertoires of Contesting Epistemic Authorities," *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 5, no. 4 (2018): 356–388.

4   Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Where Is the Now?" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 458–462.

nah Arendt gave to that term.[5] Arendt differentiates authority from both coercion and persuasion. When a tyrannical leader uses brute force, it typically betrays a lack of authority. The hierarchical nature of authority also contrasts with the ideally egalitarian logic of rational persuasion. An enigmatic image thus results, in which authority becomes thoroughly relational and fragile. Leaders only have authority when this authority is recognized by followers. Authority can bind people to a leader and each other, but only to the extent that this leader convincingly presents him- or herself as the servant of, and thus as bound to, a higher principle, aspiration, or promise from which (s)he receives authority. Authority crumbles when the link to the common project or aspiration is loosened. This happens when promises are broken, or aspirations no longer seem convincing.

Enroth argues that the so-called post-truth condition is primarily caused by such a loss of authority. This loss of authority, and thus also the communal bond, in its turn results from a loss of trust in cultural institutions and political leaders due to broken promises and failed collective aspirations – most notably the promise of equality and redistribution once made by welfare states. Enroth's political diagnosis also points to a political solution. "What is needed," he argues, "is nothing less than a reconstitution of authority, which is to say, a compelling and tangible reconnection with the foundational [social, economic, legal, cultural etc.] promises on which established forms of authority rest [...]."[6]

Enroth's diagnosis and proposed remedy can be applied fruitfully to crises of regimes of historicity and the issue of historiographical parallelism. I have argued elsewhere that besides a decline of large collective projects aspiring to utopian futures, a crisis of the historicist notion of pastness can be observed in large parts of the world.[7] While once so seemingly self-evident that it hardly warranted reflection, the historicist axiom of the "pastness of the past" – in the sense of its otherness (its difference from the present) or its non-contemporaneity (its not-belonging-to-our-time) – is increasingly being challenged. Many observers note how the past has obtained a strong presence in a broad set of societal spheres. According to some, the haunting presence of the past has become so ubiquitous that it fundamentally threatens "proper" historical consciousness and indeed the historicist notion of pastness.[8] Many relate "present pasts" to an

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5   Cf. Hernrik Enroth, "Crisis of Authority: The Truth of Post-Truth," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 36, no. 2 (2023): 179–195.

6   Enroth, "Crisis of Authority," 191.

7   Cf. Berber Bevernage, "'A Passeidade do passado': Reflexões sobre a política da historicização e a crise da passeidade historicista," *Revista de teoria da história* 24, no. 1 (2021): 21–39.

8   Cf. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our broad present: Time and contemporary culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 22.

"over-valorization of affiliations"[9] and fractious identity politics whereby loyalties toward dead ancestors allegedly threaten social cohesion between the living. While critics stress negative socio-political effects, I have pointed out elsewhere that they typically reproach those who challenge the pastness of the past in onto-epistemic terms rather than political ones.[10] They criticize victims' groups for not "recognizing" the true nature of the pastness of the past (as if pastness belonged to the ontological nature of phenomena) or not knowing the difference between past and present (as if this were a matter of simple observation). This seems problematic on several levels. Mostly, however, this onto-epistemic analysis hinders our understanding of how the rejection of historicist pastness is thoroughly socio-political both in its causes *and* effects.

Clearly, there are significant differences between the views of the critics just discussed and those Kleinberg outlines in his essay. Kleinberg is certainly not nostalgic for a conventional historical consciousness that neatly divides past from present, and he positively values haunting pasts and the moral injunctions he ascribes to them. Notwithstanding these diametrically opposed views, however, Kleinberg seems to share the onto-epistemic diagnosis of the problem. Despite his own warnings not to treat the past as ontologically given, I think Kleinberg's notion of the Surge still implies, or at least threatens to reintroduce, an ontologizing of the haunting past. At moments, the past is treated as an object that can return on its own strength and has an enigmatic agency that moves us to describe it in a particular way – even if rightly stressing "there is no singular or definitive way to do this." Kleinberg "believe[s] historical constructions are ultimately 'moved by the past'," using Eelco Runia's expression. Similarly, Kleinberg sometimes seems to be falling into the trap of what Keith Jenkins once called the fallacy of the "demanding past," for example when he argues that "the past provides the call for a moral imperative in the present and for the future."

Kleinberg's argument is subtle, complex, and thought provoking. Yet, I fear that the metaphor of the "compass of history" is ultimately an infelicitous one because it can have depoliticizing effects. Kleinberg's essay can be read as reinforcing the idea that the source of politics and morality is to be situated in some external – dare I say objective, albeit non-historicist – historical force and that proper politics must be based on a more sophisticated sensitivity to that history. This is how I read the plea for a new compass as "a Surge detector that identifies the sites of political and ethical intervention when issues from the past return in ways that connect to immediate concerns." Who is to decide what are the most immediate concerns and what aspects of the past connect to, or are relevant to, those immediate concerns? Isn't the heart of politics the

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9   François Noudelmann, "Le contemporain sans époque, une affaire de rythmes," in *Qu'est-ce que le contemporain*, ed. Lionel Ruffel (Nantes: C. Defaut, 2010), 59–75, 63.

10   Cf. Bevernage, "A Passeidade do passado."

struggle to define our immediate or most urgent concerns as well as the power to claim or reject connections between seemingly transtemporal concerns – or to posit transtemporal "chains of equivalence," in Ernesto Laclau's terminology?"[11] To put it differently: Does not the idea of a compass of history threaten to bring back the idea that some of us – some cultural or political *avant-garde* – have better compasses and are better navigators of the space of history than others, and thus can appropriate the privilege to say what are proper political or ethical concerns and what are not?

In order to reconceptualize historicist pastness as well as its rejection in a consistently non-ontologizing and non-metaphysical way as socio-political productions, we may take inspiration from Richard Rorty. According to Rorty, there are two different ways people make sense of reality and their place within it, which he describes as centered around "objectivity" versus "solidarity":

> "The first is by telling the story of their contribution to a community. This community may be the actual historical one in which they live, or another actual one, distant in time or place, or a quite imaginary one, consisting perhaps of a dozen heroes and heroines selected from history or fiction or both. The second way is to describe themselves as standing in immediate relation to a nonhuman reality. This relation is immediate in the sense that it does not derive from a relation between such a reality and their tribe, or their nation, or their imagined band of comrades. I shall say that stories of the former kind exemplify the desire for solidarity, and that stories of the latter kind exemplify the desire for objectivity." [12]

The dominant Western epistemological tradition embodies a desire for objectivity. Partisans of objectivity – whom Rorty calls "realists" – are searching for a universal and ahistorical truth that transcends the socially and historically positioned beliefs of the members of particular communities. "Realists" conceive of Truth as correspondence to reality and need to start from specific metaphysical assumptions. As Rorty explains: "[...] [T]hey must construct a metaphysics that has room for a special relation between beliefs and objects which will differentiate true from false beliefs. They also must argue that there are procedures of justification of belief which are natural and not merely local."[13]

Rorty is suspicious of such generalizing metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. He rejects the idea that Truth corresponds to, or mirrors, the objective nature of things, and he posits that "there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of

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11   Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London/New York: Verso, 2018), cf. esp. 74–79.

12   Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," in *Relativism. Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. Michael Krausz (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 167–183, 167.

13   Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," 169.

justification that a given society – ours – uses in one or another area of inquiry." Rorty accepts that this view can be described as ethnocentric in a specific sense, since it starts out from socially and historically situated beliefs and justifications of members of concrete communities. Yet, he strongly rejects the realist criticism that sees pragmatism as an "anything goes"-relativism or as implying cultural solipsism or isolationism. This criticism misconceives pragmatism as based on a competing epistemology or metaphysical theory of Truth. This is mistaken because pragmatism, according to Rorty, has no positive metaphysical or epistemological theory of Truth – and thus certainly no relativist one – but simply starts out from the purely negative rejection of the correspondence theory of Truth and the traditional distinction between knowledge and opinion based on it. Rather than being grounded in metaphysics or epistemology, "[the pragmatist] account of the value of cooperative human inquiry has only an ethical base."[14] Hence Rorty argues that pragmatist philosophers should best be described as partisans of "solidarity." Partisans of solidarity, just like those of objectivity, favor concepts of truth, meaning, or justice that are as broadly valid as possible. Yet, in contrast to partisans of objectivity, they argue these concepts cannot by obtained by "escaping" or denying the limitations of one's socio-cultural of historical situatedness – thus one's embeddedness in "community". Rather, such broadly valid concepts should be based on "the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of 'us' as far as we can."[15] As Rorty puts it elsewhere, partisans of solidary are driven by a desire for justice, not in the sense of some transhistorical or universal ideal, but in the sense of the largest possible loyalty.[16]

Rorty's differentiation between objectivity and solidarity is a useful tool to critically rethink historical pastness, the notion of "the contemporary," and the notion of the haunting past. A solidarity-based reconceptualization would certainly provincialize the now[17] because it rejects any universalist notions of the presence of the present and the pastness of the past. Any claims about of the pastness or contemporaneity of certain phenomena, cultural expressions, or social ideals are necessarily socio-culturally and historically situated. They are typically based on extrapolations or generalizations of relatively local observations or experiences of what is considered actual and unactual, or living and dead in a particular geographical or socio-cultural space. This also implies that generalizing statements about the pastness of the past are always

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14   Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," 170.

15   Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," 169.

16   Cf. Richard Rorty, "Justice as a Larger Loyalty," *Ethical Perspectives* 4, no. 3 (2005): 139–151.

17   I freely combine two of Chakrabarty's expressions here, cf.: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Chakrabarty, "Where Is the Now?"

potentially premature or pre-emptive. Since no full empirical description of the contemporary is feasible, and since the temporal delimitations of the present are always contestable, one always risks missing out on important historical continuities and prematurely declaring the pastness of the past. Recognizing this risk of what could be called pre-emptive historicization should help us take seriously, as Kleinberg definitely also aims to do, the claims of many activists and victims' groups who, for example, speak about the "unfinished business of apartheid," argue that "we are not decolonized yet," or more generally, see contemporary inequalities as continuations of historic injustices.

Some may be disturbed by the "lonely provincialism"[18] that follows from a rejection of a universally valid notion of the historical present or of a clear dividing line between the historical past and present. Yet, it does not mean that we resign ourselves to accepting social fragmentation, historiographical parallelism, or cultural solipsism. Even though communities and cultures (or rather individuals within them) can have different temporal experiences, they are no isolated islands or hermeneutical monads. Moreover, as Rorty rightly remarks, the differences between members of different cultures are not necessarily larger than those among members of the same culture. Even people with radically different backgrounds can come to see themselves as sharing the same experiences of contemporaneity and senses of pastness – even if it is unlikely these experiences will ever be universally shared by humanity as a whole.

Shared senses of contemporaneity and pastness, or shared temporal logics or historical orientations matter and should not be discarded as meaningless. They enable people to engage in common projects for the future, or to mourn and come to terms with aspects of what has happened. Yet, rather than being objective or natural, notions of contemporaneity and historical pastness should be seen as factually under-determined and as at least partly resulting from constructive social imagination and affective investments. This does not render them arbitrary or changeable at will. The contemporaneity of the present and the pastness of the past are social constructions that can be experienced as very tangible, durable, or even "objective." They can only be changed via repeated collective efforts, social negotiations, and counter-investments based on aspirations and promises that are convincing to as many different people as possible and that can serve as "acts of social faith"[19] on which to build shared regimes of historicity.

The advantage of reconceiving historical contemporaneity and pastness as well as the haunting of the past from the perspective of solidarity, rather than objectivity, is that it is not dependent on contestable metaphysical or epistemic assumptions. It has no need for metaphysics or for attributing past agency or the capacity to make its own moral demands. Neither do we need to assume

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18   Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," 176.
19   Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," 179.

that some people are better able to sense or be responsive to the moral claims of the past and their connection to present concerns because of a superior epistemology or more sophisticated compass for history that is better attuned to the claims raised by a surging past.

The plea to approach pastness and the haunting past through the concept of solidarity is based, firstly, on the purely negative point that conventional historicist metaphysics – which neatly separates past from present by positing the contemporaneity of the present and pastness of the past – are problematic and self-contradictory. Pointing out the contradictions within these historicist metaphysics, and more generally, any variations of so-called "metaphysics of presence," is the strongest legacy of Derrida's deconstructive work and of his notion of spectrality that Kleinberg and I have found so inspiring. Secondly, a solidarity-based reconceptualization simply remarks that the historicist idea of pastness fails to convince many individuals and communities around the world. This has the related advantage that we do not have to pathologize those who reject historicist pastness, or engage in historiographical parallelism, as irrational or as denying the allegedly objective dividing line between past and present. Rather, historiographical parallelism appears as a logical, yet not irreversible, result of a situation wherein social promises are broken and nobody has the authority to set up ambitious but convincing social projects working toward a common future.

The modernist regime of historicity, for which many seem nostalgic, may have been based on minorities' tacit acceptance not to bring up their diverging historical experiences or historical grievances on account of some convincing utopian promises that made it acceptable to look forward and rally around the slogan "don't mourn, organize."[20] It may well be, however, that such a time never existed: that the great universalizing social promises were never convincing to all and that some groups always voiced their historical grievances, but that the modern regime of historicity was so dominant that it rendered those voices inaudible or even unintelligible. There is nothing so seemingly irrational from the perspective of the modern regime of historicity as rebelling against the clock. By seeing the pastness of the past and the contemporaneity of the present as primarily ethically driven, rather than as an onto-epistemological question, this irrationality disappears.

Since pastness, contemporaneity, and futurity are relational phenomena based on affective and existential investments, no temporal orientation is inherently emancipatory or oppressive. This should also give us some relief from some of the more alarmist observations on collapsing regimes of historicity and the decline of 'proper' historical consciousness. People can find emancipatory

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20 Cited in John Torpey, "Introduction. Politics and the Past," in *Politics and the Past. On Repairing Historical Injustice*, ed. John Torpey (Lanham/Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1.

force, utopian energy, or, to the contrary, conservative comfort in futurity, contemporaneity, and pastness alike, just as radical alterity can be found in the past and the future, as well as the present. What matters is the concrete situation and the particular socio-cultural or historical context.

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A Brief Response
to Regazzoni, Platt, and Bevernage

Ethan Kleinberg

This volume is a unique and adventurous endeavor in that it offers theory of history in the making as opposed to theory of history made. The reader catches me in the process of developing an argument for a new theory of history, which will be brought forth in my next book, *The Surge*, but began as the essay published in this volume. It was originally delivered as my Koselleck Lecture at Bielefeld in 2021, which I then revised in discussions with friends and colleagues while serving as the Reinhart Koselleck Gastprofessor (visiting professor) at the Center for Theories in Historical Research during that year. I have since continued to develop the concepts and arguments, and some of the views presented in this piece have been adjusted or changed, so the reader will see me "showing my work," as it were. Thus, the volume is a window onto a moment of intellectual instability, which certainly renders the author vulnerable, but also creates the opportunity for genuine dialogue, which is rare in a published book. The precise and forceful interventions by Lisa Regazzoni, Kristin Platt, and Berber Bevernage offer important criticisms and alternatives that I need to take up. For this, I am deeply grateful.

The respondents are each uncomfortable with the notion of an "end-time of truth," and they want to "imagine a different ending," in Lisa Regazzoni's words. For Regazzoni and Berber Bevernage, this different ending is one where we conserve history, or at least significant aspects of it, in its current disciplinary form. Regazzoni argues that "constant micro-negotiation and micro-contentions" (LR 50) to historical method can serve to restore its force and power over the long term. Bevernage is concerned by "the intellectual, socio-cultural, and political advantages that could potentially be lost by rejecting a historicist temporal logic" (BB 68). Kristin Platt is less troubled by the possibility of a different mode of history but is worried that the idea of a compass will reintroduce the notion of "objectivity" by substituting space for time (KP 56). All three have concerns about whether a "new compass of history" will overdetermine the directions we are able to go and who is granted the power to make such a decision. None of them question the precarity of our moment, but they all ask for, or offer, a different pathway to get through it. These are large, formidable issues, and while I do not have the time to address each of the respondent's concerns, I will try to tackle the ones I consider most important.

One place to start is what Bevernage describes as my "grand claim" that we have reached the end-time of truth. Bevernage is surprised by this claim, arguing that I typically reject such narrative closures in favor of an "openness to

uncertainty," but also because it strikes him as "factually questionable" (BB 69). This leads him to also question what he calls my onto-epistemic diagnosis which he sees as "merely a symptom of a more profound problem" (BB 69). Regazzoni takes issue with the postulate that "the crisis of the truth system inevitably goes hand in hand with the crisis of method and vice versa" (LR 43). It strikes me that these critical interventions are related. I suppose one could read my essay as a story of narrative closure, which would explain the desire for a different ending, but to my mind, it is a story about beginnings, openings, and possibilities, which appear when a dominant truth regime collapses. In the essay, I argue that the certainty and closure of the previous truth regime has indeed collapsed and what lies before us is the possibility of an open and thus uncertain future as well as an open and thus uncertain past.

What's more, it strikes me that the evidence Bevernage marshals to "factually question" my claim can be turned to support it. Bevernage states that "many of the so-called post-truthers actually do not question the concept of Truth itself: Rather, they tend to posit their own Truth, which they often pack in a hyper-positivist or scientistic discourse. Instead of rejecting expertise or epistemic authority in general, they typically attack allegedly 'mainstream' academic expertise or epistemic authority and propose their own alternative experts and sources of authority.[1] 'Do your own research,' the slogan goes." (BB 69) As I wrote in my essay, whether good-faith or bad-faith, these accounts rely on the view that there is a correction, which presents the event as it happened. These actors' commitment *to* the concept of "Truth" is not what is at issue, but rather the fact that *each can hold their own independent truth*, and it is indicative of the proliferation of possible truths that deactivates the possibility of a singular Truth.

Regazzoni picks up this thread to suggest: "It follows that not only the truth on which our system of knowledge is based would then reach its end-point, but history, too, in the dual sense of *res gestae*, that is, the ensemble of historical facts concluded and buried in the past, and *historia rerum gestarum*, that is, the episteme and narratives through which we grasp them." (LR 41) In my view, truth and truth regimes are historically contingent and subject to change. The truth regime in question in this case is the modern scientific one. Regazzoni and Bevernage are both correct to infer that if the scientific truth regime that undergirds the modern disciplinary understanding of history were to fail, then history as we know would likewise fail. But does not Bevernage's example above suggest that this is exactly what has happened?

I argue that it was a mistake to imagine history as beholden to scientific truth in the first place. This is to say that "the ensemble of historical facts con-

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1   Cf. Tuukka Ylä-Anttila, "Populist Knowledge: 'Post-Truth' Repertoires of Contesting Epistemic Authorities," *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 5, no. 4 (2018): 356–388.

cluded and buried in the past" were never **based** on "truth" at all but, as Benjamin suggests, based on knowledge. Such a view unburdens our relationship to the past (and the future) from the desire for a one-to-one correlation between the things done (*res gestae*) and the history of those things (*historia rerum gestarum*), thus opening the possibility of multiple and competing pasts and multiple and competing logics of history. Yes, it is the end of what Regazzoni calls "our system of knowledge," if that means the hegemony of modern disciplinary history, but I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing. It is a different thing. History is so much more than its current disciplinary iteration, and one can look to alternative and past variations with an eye toward the future of history. What's more, the longevity of the concept itself points to both the protean and stabilizing aspects that make history so important and its possibilities so powerful.

Of course, this still leaves the question as to whether the Surge or the new compass of history are adequate or even advisable alternatives to the current mode. Regazzoni and Bevernage are both skeptical and especially worried by the reintroduction of metaphysics into the analysis. Bevernage cautions that "we should be careful not to engage in a (re-)ontologizing of the haunting past and introduce metaphysical principles that are hard to defend or even have a mystical ring to them" (BB 67f.). To my mind, historians are always in the business of "ontologizing," at least in trying to convince others that something was "there" when they conjure the past. This is why, in my hauntological view, I claim that the past i̶s̶.[2] What I don't understand is why a return to metaphysics or mysticism would be a problem here, unless the claim is that these views entail a return to unquestioned essentialism even more forceful than the current rationalist scientific mode. It strikes me that the real concern is with entering a new and different epistemological framework where the current argumentative strategies (for scholarship, for politics, for ethics) can no longer be taken for granted. To be sure, this is a new and unknown terrain, but I am no longer afraid of the metaphysical, or even the mystical. In the case of history, I think the fraying of the epistemological fabric *should* force one to reconsider the logical assumptions of the discipline that have prevailed for the last 150 years or so. To follow Paul Feyerabend in *Against Method*, it should be "rather an ever increasing *ocean of mutually incompatible alternatives*, each single theory, each fairy-tale, each myth, that is part of the collection forcing the others into greater articulation and all of them contributing, via this process of competition, to the development of consciousness."[3] We can argue about what development means in this context, but the general point is to allow for alternative logics and epistemologies, the "non-rational" in the sense Bevernage is using the term, to enter the dialogue.

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2   Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: for a deconstructive approach to the past,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), Chapter 5 "The Past that I̶s̶".

3   Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, new edition (London/New York: Verso, 2010), 14.

Regazzoni is concerned that the Surge enables the abdication of the historian's responsibility who offloads the "moral imperative in the present and for the future" to the "indeterminate and out-of-control 'Surge'" (LR 49). This is likely why Bevernage sees the Surge as having potentially depoliticizing effects and Platt worries that "the considerations outlined here also venture to suggest that it should not be the historian's task to give directions, but to accept different pasts" (KP 57). I understand the criticism and realize it is in part because my articulation of the Surge was problematic in this iteration. I now see that the Surge is not the Total Other, but a site of mediation between the historian and the actor in the past, as well as the past that surges toward that actor or actors. I do not have the time to articulate the relation between Temporal Anarchy, the Surge, and what I call the vortex here, as it is beyond the scope of the current intervention.[4] What I can say is that the Surge is an anonymous and temporally dynamic force that can be taken up by the historian(s) or actor(s) in the present to their own end. Thus, in my view, it does not dictate or determine action, ethical or otherwise, though one could say that it calls for it and does so in myriad ways. It is a different way of encountering the past as dynamic and active.[5]

Platt nevertheless appears to agree with my attempt to disrupt historicist time: "With the concept of 'the Surge,' Kleinberg introduces a mode of history that makes it possible to look at the prolific possibilities of the present and to underline that not every present option follows a linear deduction from the past" (KP 55). Platt, however, questions whether the compass of history should be the means by which to account for this temporally dynamic force. This concern is shared by Regazzoni and Bevernage. Platt contents: "With its intended ability to indicate a direction from the stream of events, the detector follows a more traditional view of historiography and the tasks ascribed to it. It is also worth noting that Kleinberg's detector does not measure time, but identifies places: It 'points to sites where the past surges into the present unexpectedly, touching us and connecting with our concerns, not only for the present but also the future.'" (KP 56) It is the prolificness that interests me, and not the stream of events or historical tasks. My contention is that the events of the past are more temporally dynamic and forceful than most paradigms allow for,

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4   For my preliminary articulation on these points, cf. "Deconstructing Historicist Time, or Time's Scribe," *History and Theory* 62, no. 4 (2023): 105–122, and "True North," *History and Theory* 63, no. 2 (2024): 151–165.

5   Lisa Regazzoni is certainly correct to call out the contradiction of employing a "historico-genealogical reconstruction" for the purpose of denouncing the "historico-genealogical way of doing historiography." But as I argue elsewhere, the historicist understanding of history is so entrenched that it can only be challenged by a deconstruction that works within its logic and method. See Kleinberg, "Deconstructing Historicist Time, or Time's Scribe," *History and Theory* 62, no. 4 (2023).

and as such, require a mode of history attuned to this temporally anarchistic force. My emphasis is not on the multiplicity of possible paths (space), but on the temporal anarchy whereby new pasts can open different futures, and new futures can open different pasts. The compass is an intermingling of time and space pointing to other ways that the past can be and other ways that past, present, and future can swirl together. This is the force that can irrupt into and disrupt the present, altering the future.[6]

Platt presciently points out that in this iteration I do not "discuss in detail whether the 'Surge detector' can also detect places of discourse between the present and the future" (KP 56), but this is a crucial aspect of the project. The new compass of history is not restrained by what has been, but attracted to what can be, pointing us toward the possibility of multiple pasts and multiple futures. Directionality is not predetermined, and what we consider to be our moral or ethical direction can change. Here, the future is not considered as a forward moment of progress, but a melee of movement in which the past intercedes into the present and the future itself can change the past. Crucially, the radically distinct ways of being and acting are not restricted to past events or actors, but also applied to the ways we organize time. This plurality of time and temporality forces us to question the currently axiomatic understanding of chronology as fused to temporality.[7]

The multiplicity of logics of history and the plurality of possible historians as well as historical actors leads me to reject the claim that "a compass of history threaten[s] to bring back the idea that some of us – some cultural or political *avant-garde* – have better compasses and are better navigators of the space of history than others, and thus can appropriate the privilege to say what are proper political or ethical concerns and what are not" (BB 72). The compass instead points to sites of contestation, and it is up to us to enter into those conversations and to reconsider the coordinates we take to be axiomatic. It is a stepping back, not a stepping over. If we take the charge of elitism or presumed superiority off the table, Bevernage and I are likely much more closely aligned.

A crucial difference, however, remains as to whether an ontic-epistemological analysis such as mine restrains us from seeing or engaging with the socio-political aspects of our moment? Clearly, I don't think it does, because in my view, such an analysis is enabling and energizing precisely because it offers something new. I would counter that some of the concerns voiced in the responses are themselves restraining us from such engagement because they look backwards for solutions and not forward. Bevernage's reliance on Rorty could tumble quickly into a Habermasian public sphere argument, Regazzoni's confidence in the incremental development of historical method necessarily

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6   Cf. Kleinberg, "True North," 11–13.
7   Cf. Kleinberg, "True North," 15.

(if unintentionally) remains caught in the trap of historicism and its seemingly unbreakable progressive teleology, and Platt's articulation of the flow of time remains beholden to the historicist conception of time. Each are indicative of the way our current relation to the sociopolitical future is one where our commitments to history *as it has been* keeps us from changing our view of what history *can be* and what sort of future could follow. In short, I see them as referring back to established models to find a different ending while my intention is to look forward toward a new beginning.

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