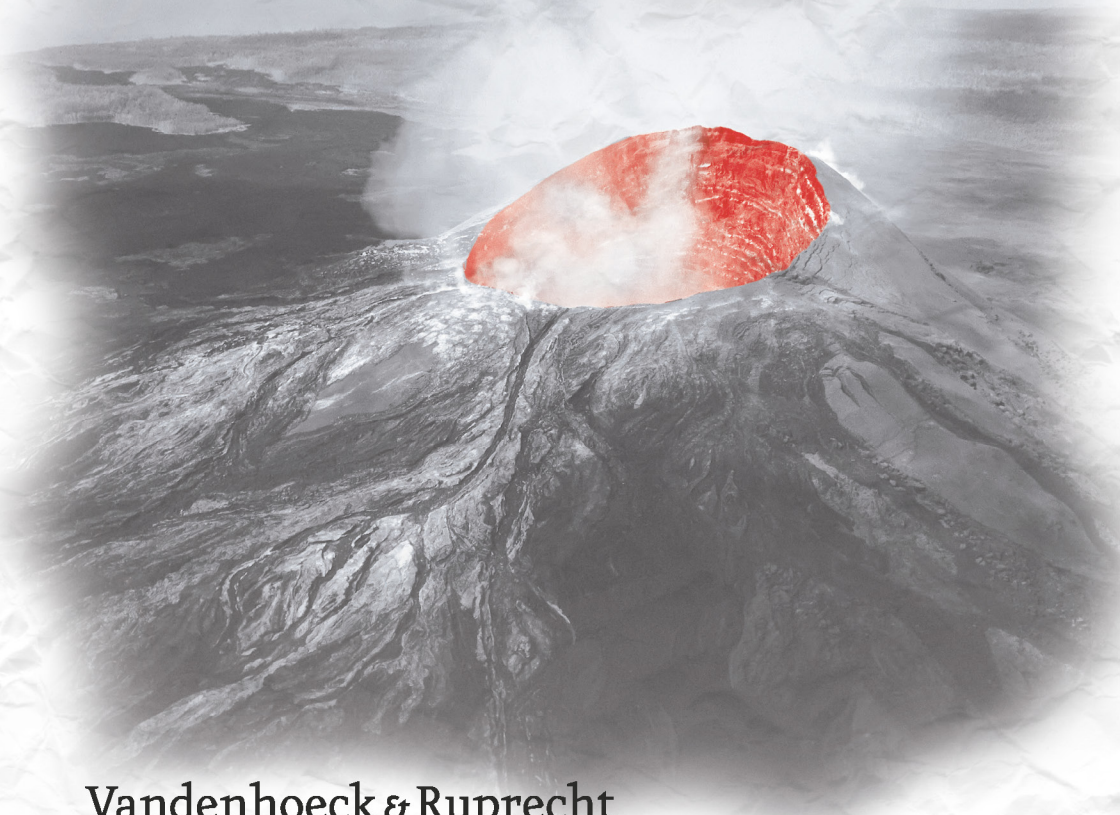
Chris Lorenz
Berber Bevernage (Eds.)

Breaking up Time

Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future

FRIAS SCHOOL OF HISTORY



Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz

Breaking up Time – Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future. An Introduction

> For three centuries maybe the objectification of the past has made of time the unreflected category of a discipline that never ceases to use it as an instrument of classification.[1]
>
> *Michel de Certeau*

> The past is never dead. It's not even past.[2]
>
> *William Faulkner*

> Die Zeit ist ein Tümpel, in dem die Vergangenheit in Blasen nach oben steigt.[3]
>
> *Christoph Ransmayr*

Historians have long acknowledged that time is essential to historiography. Marc Bloch famously called history the 'science of men in time'.[4] Similarly, Jacques Le Goff labels time the 'fundamental material' of historians, and Jules Michelet once described the relationship between time and history with the words '*l'histoire, c'est le temps*'.[5] Many historians have also recognised the importance of the distinction between different temporal scales and rhythms – think of Fernand Braudel and Reinhart Koselleck, for example. Surprisingly, however, very few have investigated the subject of historical time in depth.[6]

1 Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis, 2006), 216.

2 William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York, 1951), 92.

3 Christoph Ransmayr, *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 158.

4 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien* (Paris, 1997), 52.

5 Jacques Le Goff, *Histoire et mémoire* (Paris, 1988), 24. Michelet, cited in Albert Cook, *History/Writing: The Theory and Practice of History in Antiquity and in Modern Times* (Cambridge, 1988), 11.

6 As Peter Burke remarks, the notion of the future was placed on the historian's agenda only relatively recently, when it was pioneered by Reinhart Koselleck in the latter half of twentieth century. Peter Burke, Reflections on the Cultural History of Time, *Viator* XXXV, 2004, 617–626, 620. There are, of course, important exceptions to the general absence of reflections on historical time. See, for example, Robin George Collingwood, Some Perplexities about Time: With an Attempted Solution, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* XXVI, 1925–26, 135–150; Wolfgang Von Leyden, History and the Concept of Relative Time, *History and Theory* II, 1963, 3, 263–285; Siegfried Kracauer, Time and History, *History and*

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At least this was the case until recently. In the last couple of years a number of historians and philosophers have addressed the problem of historical time in an increasingly sophisticated way. Following in the footsteps of Koselleck, several historians – in particular Lucian Hölscher, François Hartog and Peter Fritzsche[7] – have started historicising time-conceptions previously taken for granted. In the philosophy of history, the relationship between past and present recently moved to center stage in debates about 'presence', 'distance', 'trauma', 'historical experience', etc.[8] Independently, postcolonial theorists and anthropologists have added momentum to the growing interest in time by deconstructing the 'time of history' as specifically 'Western' time.[9]

1. Questions Raised

This book aims to fill in the gaps in the all too fragmental literature on historical time and the temporal distinctions between past, present and future.[10]

Theory VI, 1966, 65–78; Pierre Vilar, Histoire marxiste, histoire en construction. Essai de dialogue avec Althusser, *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* XXVIII, 1973, 1, 165–198; Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979); John R. Hall, The Time of History and the History of Times, *History and Theory* XIX, 1980, 2, 113–131; Krzysztof Pomian, *L'ordre du temps* (Paris, 1984); Nathan Rotenstreich, *Time and Meaning in History* (Dordrecht, 1987); Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago, 1987); Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit* (Paris, 1985); David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington, IN, 1991); Elisabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History*: *Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton, 1992); Jean Chesneaux, *Habiter le temps*: *Passé, présent, futur: esquisse d'un dialogue politique* (Paris, 1996); Lucian Hölscher, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999); Jean Leduc, *Les Historiens et le Temps*, *Conceptions, problématiques, écritures* (Paris, 1999); Jörn Rüsen, *Zerbrechende Zeit. Über den Sinn der Geschichte* (Cologne, 2001); *Daedalus* (theme issue on time), 2003; Friedrich Stadler/Michael Stöltzner (eds.), *Time and History* (Kirchberg am Wechsel, 2005).

7 Hölscher, *Entdeckung der Zukunft*; François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris, 2003); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*: *Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); *The American Historical Review* CXVII, 2012, 5, *Forum: Histories of the Future*, 1402–1461.

8 Eelco Runia, Presence, *History and Theory* XLV, 2006, 1, 1–20; Forum on 'Presence', *History and Theory* XLV, 2006, 3, 305–375; Historical Distance: Reflections on a Metaphor, theme issue of *History and Theory* L, 2011, 4; Holocaust und Trauma: Kritische Perspektiven zur Entstehung und Wirkung eines Paradigmas, *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* XXXIX, 2011.

9 See, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: *Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000); Ashis Nandy, History's Forgotten Doubles, *History and Theory* XXXIV, 1995, 2, 44–66.

10 This book originated in a workshop (7–9 April 2011) organised by the editors and hosted by the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS). We would like to express our gratitude to FRIAS and especially to Jörn Leonhard for his comments.

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We have invited some of the world's foremost experts on these subjects to address a series of questions that we feel are highly relevant and that have not yet received the attention they deserve.

The *first* question we raised was the following: How do cultures in general, and historians in particular, distinguish 'past' from 'present' and 'future', and how are their interrelationships constructed and articulated? Although since the birth of modernity history presupposes the existence of 'the past' as its object, 'the past' and the nature of the borders that separate 'the past', 'the present' and 'the future' until very recently have attracted little reflection within the discipline of history. This 'omission' is remarkable because cultures and societies have fixed, and still do fix, the boundaries between past, present and future in quite different ways. Moreover these differences also vary depending on the context in which this distinction is made. In the modern West, for instance, legal time functions differently from historical time and both are different from religious time.[11]

It has been argued that cultures also have different dominant orientations in time. 'Traditional' cultures are generally supposed to be characterised by a dominant (political, ethical, cultural, etc.) orientation to the past, while 'modern' cultures characteristically have a dominant future-orientation.[12] 'Postmodern' cultures, however, are supposedly characterised by a dominant orientation towards the present. Yet, how these temporal orientations have changed – and whether they simply succeed each other or coexist – has not been analysed in depth. It is symptomatic that François Hartog's thesis that Western thinking about history is characterised by a succession of three 'regimes of historicity' – from a past-orientation until the French Revolution, to a future-orientation until the 1980s, and then a present-orientation in the years since – has hardly been empirically tested.[13] Therefore, the questions about the unity, the dominance, the spatial extensions, the transfers and the transformations of 'time regimes' (are there no competing or overlapping 'sub-regimes'?) are badly in need of further conceptual and empirical analysis.

The *second* question raised in this book is: Is distinguishing between past, present and future rather a matter of 'observing' distinctions that are 'given',

11 The difference between historical time and religious time was addressed in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*: *Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1996), 40–42, and in William Gallois, *Time, Religion and History* (London, 2007). The focus on 'legal time' is central in criticisms on legal positivism. See especially Drucilla Cornell, Time, Deconstruction, and the Challenge to Legal Positivism: The Call for Judicial Responsibility, *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities*, 1990, 2, 267–297.

12 For a classical discussion of the past-orientation of 'traditional' cultures, see Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* (Paris, 2001 [1949]).

13 Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité*.

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or does it involve a more *active* stance in which social actors create and recreate these temporal distinctions? Usually 'the past' is somehow supposed to 'break off' from 'the present' on its own by its growing temporal distance or increasing 'weight' – like an icicle. Although few probably would hold that temporal distinctions are directly and unambiguously 'given', even fewer have paid attention to the ways in which the distinguishing of the three temporal modes can be analysed as a form of social action connected to specific social actors.

The question of the historian as (social or political) actor has recently figured prominently in the debate on so-called 'commissioned history', as it manifests itself, for example, in the work of government-appointed historical commissions and truth commissions. Yet the issue in this case is of a more general and fundamental nature. It belongs to those characteristics of 'doing history' which have traditionally been repressed.

Even when all appearances are against them, professional historians traditionally claim to occupy (or to strive after) the position of the *distant, impartial observer* and *not* the position of the *active participant*. The notion of an ever-increasing temporal 'distance' as automatically breaking up past and present has been of central importance for safeguarding this distinction between the 'involved' actor and the 'impartial' observer.[14]

The American historian Elazar Barkan recently addressed this problem when he argued in favour of an 'engaged' historiography in the service of 'historical reconciliation'.[15] The problem with pleas for engaged history is that participation in 'historical reconciliation' smacks of 'activism', 'partisanship' and 'presentism', all of which professional historians usually regard as deadly sins. Yet according to Barkan, 'this is all beginning to change', because historians are beginning to understand 'that the construction of history continuously shapes our world, and therefore has to be treated as an explicit, directly political activity, operating within specific scientific methodological and rhetorical rules'.[16]

14 The stress on the importance of temporal distance was especially prominent in debates on the emerging field of contemporary history. See, for example, Gerhard Ritter, Scientific History, Contemporary History, and Political Science, *History and Theory* I, 1961, 3, 261–279. Also see Rüdiger Graf/Kim Christian Priemel, Zeitgeschichte in der Welt der Sozialwissenschaften. Legitimität und Originalität einer Disziplin, *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* LIX, 2011, 4, 1–30, and Kiran-Klaus Patel, Zeitgeschichte im digitalen Zeitalter: Neue und alte Herausforderungen, *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* LIX, 2011, 3, 331–351.

15 See Forum – Truth and Reconciliation in History, *American Historical Review* CXIV, 2009, 4, 899–913.

16 Forum – Truth and Reconciliation, 907.

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Lucian Hölscher recently pointed to the same 'blind spot' concerning the role of historians as actors in present-day politics and attributed it directly to a blindness for the future dimension of the past. Hölscher contends that historians have to free themselves from the traditional 'prejudices' that professional history is autonomous from society and politics, and that history 'is a pure 'observing' discipline, that is not simultaneously directed at action'.[17] He thus makes clear his view that the idea that professional history stands in a distanced (observer's) position vis-à-vis politics is a misconception. On closer analysis, the professional historian's concern for the past simultaneously implies a concern for the future.

In view of the recent 'performative turn' in history and in many other human and social sciences, it is remarkable that temporal distinctions have hardly been analysed as *performative* distinctions – that is, as the results of linguistic or other forms of action. Although both historians and philosophers have emphasised the important role played by catastrophic political events – such as revolutions and major wars – in 'breaking up time', the effects of these 'transformative events' on notions of temporality have hardly been studied in a comparative perspective.

The *third* and last question concerns the *political* nature of the borders that separate these temporal dimensions. François Hartog has rightly argued that terms such as 'past', 'present' and 'future' are invariably invested with different values in different regimes of historicity.[18] When taken to its logical conclusions, this observation suggests that historians must ask whether historical time is a neutral medium or whether it is in fact inherently ethical and political.

Ulrich Raulff is one of the few historians who has pointed out the close relationship between the political allegiance of historians and the use of periodisation in historical writing. Raulff analyses the preference of the *Annales* historians for the *longue dureé*[19] and traces the origins of this preference far back into the nineteenth century. He argues that both conservative and progressive thinkers who, for different reasons, abhorred specific political events in the past – such as the French Revolution in conservative thinking and the Restoration in Marxist thinking or a lost war in nationalist thought – used periodisation for political ends. According to Raulff, the preference for long-term approaches is based on a *politically motivated* rejection of certain events. These events may be at a long or at a close 'distance' from the his-

17 Lucian Hölscher, *Semantik der Leere. Grenzfragen der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen, 2009), 146.

18 Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité*.

19 Ulrich Raulff, *Der unsichtbare Augenblick: Zeitkonzepte in der Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1999).

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torian in a chronological sense. In Braudel's case, his political rejection was of the sudden fall of France in the 1940s. He wrote his *Méditerranée* as a prisoner of war, and the *longue dureé* enabled him to discount both the French defeat and the later collaboration of Vichy-France as merely 'ephemeral' events in history. Thus the choice historians make when they focus on either 'events' or 'structures' is 'not just a choice between two modes of temporalisation, but also a choice that has aesthetic, ethical and political consequences'.[20]

Very recently Frank Bösch came to similar conclusions in a short reflection on the influence of break-ups and caesurae on periodisation in contemporary history.[21] He criticised the tendency to regard only (national) political events as borderlines of periodisation and argued that longer lasting (transnational) 'silent revolutions' – such as the oil crisis of 1973 and the economic crisis of 1979 – may have been experienced as more important by contemporaries. Therefore, claims about 'breaking events' and corresponding periods often also involve political aspects. Because of the plurality of possible points of view and their implied caesura, Bösch argues in favour of Geoffrey Barraclough's definition of contemporary history as a problem-oriented – and thus *not* period-oriented – discipline.The period which is relevant for the contemporary historian depends only on the particular present-day problem he or she is trying to clarify.[22]

Raulff and Bösch provide us with good reasons to ask whether historians too engage in a 'politics of time', as the anthropologist Johannes Fabian and the philosopher Peter Osborne held to be the case in their respective disciplines.[23] We believe it is time to start scrutinising how these politics of historical time function in practice.

As a first step toward such an analysis of the performative 'break-up' of time, we focus on the way historical time has traditionally been related to modernism and progress. We contend that this connection was recently questioned – partially under the influence of the so-called 'memory boom'

20 Ibid., 48.

21 Frank Bösch, Umbrüche in die Gegenwart: Globale Ereignisse und Krisenreaktionen um 1979, *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe, 2012, 9, http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Boesch-1–2012. According to Goschler and Graf, the very concept of contemporary history is based on the experience of unexpected ruptures in time and the need to interpret the present in the light of these ruptures. See Constantin Goschler/Rüdiger Graf, *Europäische Zeitgeschichte seit 1945* (Berlin, 2010), 15–16.

22 See Forum – The 1970s and 1980s as a Turning Point in European History?, *Journal of Modern European History* IX, 2011, 1, 8–26.

23 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*: *How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1983); Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time*: *Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London, 1995).

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and the development of new ways of dealing with the legacy of historical injustices.

Secondly, we observe that, although many historians have noticed these developments, only few have developed new conceptualisations of historical time. Even though the traditional notion of (linear) time has been heavily criticised in the decades since Einstein's relativity theories, the time-concepts of historians, as well as philosophers of history, are still generally based on an absolute, homogeneous and empty time. Not accidentally, this is the notion of time presupposed by the 'imagined community' of 'the nation', as Benedict Anderson famously suggested.[24] There are, however, some important exceptions – thinkers who *did* theorise the 'historical relativity' of time. We briefly discuss the cases of Koselleck, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Hölscher.

Next, in the third section of this introduction, we demonstrate how some historians and philosophers of history reacted ambiguously and defensively or even with outright hostility to the new forms of historical consciousness and the questioning of classical notions of historical time. By discussing the work of, among others, the French historian Henry Rousso, the Dutch historian Bob de Graaff and the German historian Martin Sabrow, we argue that claims about 'proper' and 'improper' approaches to time (or about historical and a-historical time) are used to guard the borders of the discipline of academic history. These claims are used to draw a line between 'real' and 'pseudo' history and to protect the former against 'intruders', such as memory movements and surviving contemporary witnesses, alias *Zeitzeuge*. We point out that this disciplinary 'protectionism' is typically accompanied by a taboo on the very question of how to draw the borders between past, present and future. This boils down to whisking away the performative and political dimensions of historical time.

In the last section, we argue that the cultural and political roots of the memory boom increasingly call on historians and philosophers of history to elucidate the basic assumptions that underpin their notions of time. This holds most importantly for their assumptions concerning the 'past-ness' of the past and the 'present-ness' of the present. Again we discuss some exceptional thinkers – in particular Preston King – who do reflect on the basic notions of modern Western historical consciousness. Their conceptual apparatus can be put to use in future analyses of how and why historians break up time in historical practice.

24 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), 22–26.

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2. History in/and Changing Times

Philosophers of history have often remarked that academic historiography fits very well with ideas of modernism and progress. Paradoxically, scientific history flourishes in an intellectual environment that stresses the constant emergence of the new and the 'supersedure' of the past by movement towards a more advanced future. Koselleck argued that modern historical consciousness came into existence towards the end of the eighteenth century, when social and technological innovations and changing beliefs about the novelty of the future created a new 'horizon of expectation' (*Erwartungshorizont*) that increasingly broke with the former 'space of experience' (*Erfahrungsraum*).[25] According to Koselleck, the historical and the progressive worldviews share a common origin: 'If the new time is offering something new all the time, the different past has to be discovered and recognised, that is to say, its strangeness which increases with the passing of years.'[26]

Koselleck pointed out that the 'discovery' of the historical world and the qualitative differentiation between past, present and future had great methodological implications for historiography. Temporal differentiation and concomitant claims about the 'otherness' of the past allowed historiography to present itself as an autonomous discipline that required methods of its own. Although the idea of the absence of the past has often been presented (usually by empiricists) as a challenge to the epistemological credentials of historiography, historians were able to use the idea of an ever-increasing temporal 'distance' to their advantage. They did so by presenting distance as an indispensable condition for attaining 'impartiality' and 'objectivity'.

Similarly, the progressivist idea that time does not bring random or directionless change but a cumulative change directed at a more advanced future has successfully buttressed historians' claims concerning the 'surplus value' of the historical *ex post* perspective and their related claims of epistemological superiority over the perspectives of contemporary eye-witnesses (*Zeitzeugen*).

Michel de Certeau has likewise suggested that modern historiography traditionally begins with the differentiation between present and past: It takes

25 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past*: *On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004).

26 Idem, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford, 2002), 120. The claim by Koselleck mentioned here did not remain uncontested. Niklas Luhmann, for example, argues that the development of the modern time perspective started with a reconceptualisation of the present rather than the future. The 'open future', according to him, was preceded by more than a hundred years by a 'punctualisation' of the present, which gave rise to an experience of instantaneous change. Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (New York, 1982), 273–274.

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the 'perishable' (*le périssable*) as its object and progress as its axiom.[27] Although many feel uncomfortable by the idea of living in a world in which 'all that is solid melts into air' (Karl Marx) and in which the present is continuously 'contracting' – what Hermann Lübbe has called *Gegenwartsschrumpfung* – most historians simply presuppose this worldview as 'natural'.[28] The reason for their blind acceptance of this worldview may well be that precisely this (alleged) condition of an ephemeral or even contracting present has enabled historians and philosophers of history to legitimate the writing of history as a necessary form of 'compensation'. [29]

It is a matter of ongoing controversy when exactly the modernist and progressivist worldviews came into existence and whether they were ever dominant enough to legitimise claims about the existence of modernity in an epochal sense, or whether this historical category simply resulted from a self-legitimising 'politics of periodisation'.[30] This issue will be discussed in several of the contributions to this volume. Yet, whatever the periodisation and the precise historical status of modernity, two observations seem beyond dispute: That the modernist and progressivist ways of conceiving historical time and of the relationship between past and present have been fundamental and constitutive for academic history writing. However, it is also clear that these very same modernist and progressivist worldviews have been severely questioned during the last few decades – 'postmodernism' is the catchword here – and that this has important implications for historiography.

This recent questioning of progressivist worldviews in academic historiography can be fruitfully examined in relation to a similar scepticism about the nature of time which has emerged in juridical contexts in the last few decades. If there is one feature that characterises current international political and juridical dealing with the past it is the combination of an increasing distrust of progressivist notions of time and doubt about presumptions of

27 Michel De Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris, 1975), 18.

28 Hermann Lübbe, Die Modernität der Vergangenheitszuwendung. Zur Geschichtsphilosophie zivilisatorischer Selbsthistorisierung, in: Stefan Jordan (ed.), *Zukunft der Geschichte. Historisches Denken an der Schwelle zum 21. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2000), 26–35, esp. 29.

29 Hermann Lübbe, Der Streit um die Kompensationsfunktion der Geisteswissenschaften, in: *Einheit der Wissenschaften. Internationales Kolloquium der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1991), 209–233. For a fundamental critique of the 'compensation theory', see Jörn Rüsen, Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit, in: Jordan (ed.), *Zukunft der Geschichte*, 175–182. Rüsen emphasises the *orientational* function of the past vis-à-vis actions aimed at the construction of the future (*Zukunftsentwürfe*).

30 Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*: *How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia, 2008).

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'temporal distance', or about an evident qualitative break between past, present and future. Many of the salient phenomena in international and domestic politics of the last decades – reparation politics, the outing of official apologies, the creation of truth commissions, historical commissions and commissions of historical reconciliation, etc. – revolve around a growing conviction that the once commonsensical idea of a past automatically distancing itself from the present is fundamentally problematic, and that the belief that the past is superseded by every new present has been more a wish than an experiential reality.[31]

This changing experience of time is of course not confined to the spheres of jurisdiction and politics: The challenging of classical historicist conceptualisations of temporal distance is a central feature of the so called 'memory boom'[32] – that again is related to the growing recognition of universal human rights and of historical injustices[33] – and of the growing influence of memorial movements.[34] 'Since roughly the end of the Cold War,' John Torpey claims, 'the distance that normally separates us from the past has been strongly challenged in favour of an insistence that the past is constantly, urgently present as part of our everyday experience.'[35] According to Torpey this development directly relates to a 'collapse of the future', or a growing inability to create progressive political visions. As he puts it, 'When the future collapses, the past rushes in.'[36]

31 Berber Bevernage, *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice* (New York, 2012). Typically, compensation theorists such as Lübbe interpret the practice of offering apologies for historical injustices differently: as a category mistake for historians and as a ritual of repentance for politicians. See Hermann Lübbe, *»Ich entschuldige mich.« Das neue politische Bußritual* (Berlin, 2001).

32 Expression from Jay Winter, The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the 'Memory Boom' in Contemporary Historical Studies, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* XXVII, 2000, 3, 69–92; Geoff Eley, The Past Under Erasure? History, Memory, and the Contemporary, *Journal of Contemporary History* XLIV, 2011, 3, 555–573.

33 See Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York, 2007), 121–139.

34 Another important challenge to the classical notion of historical distance, according to Bain Attwood, comes from oral history because it stresses the entanglement of 'then' and 'now' and 'because its very practice brings the historians into closer proximity with the past'. Bain Attwood, In the Age of Testimony: The Stolen Generations Narrative, 'Distance', and Public History, *Public Culture* XX, 2007, 1, 75–95, esp. 80. For the rise and fall of the *Zeitzeugen* in German history, see Wulf Kansteiner, Dabei gewesen sein ist alles, 29 Dezember 2011, *Die Zeit*, 21

35 John Torpey, *Making Whole What Has Been Smashed* (Cambridge/MA, 2006), 19.

36 Torpey, *Making Whole*, 23.

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3. Historicising Historical Time

Many academic historians have clearly sensed the trend towards a questioning of the notions of historical distance and of the break between past and present. A mere look at the frequency of expressions such as 'present pasts',[37] 'everlasting pasts,'[38] 'pasts that do not pass,'[39] 'unexpiated pasts'[40] and 'eternal presents'[41] in recent academic works gives an indication of this growing preoccupation with the ontological status of the past and the relationship between past and present. The enigmatic and paradoxical wording of some of these expressions reveals, moreover, the puzzlement that issues of time and temporal breaks continue to create.

Yet puzzlement about the ontological status of time of course goes further back than the twentieth century, at least as far back as Ancient Greece, and it is still with us today. In 2008, Lynn Hunt could still begin her book *Measuring Time, Making History* by quoting the two fundamental questions about time that Aristotle asks in his *Physics*: 'First, does it belong to the class of things that exist or to that of things that do not exist? Then secondly, what is its nature?'[42] Many historians probably would think that Hunt's question – 'Is time historical?' – is a weird one, because, as we saw earlier, they simply *identify* history with time or with temporal change and take it for granted that time is somehow 'real'.

Most historians seem to have assumed that time is what calendars and clocks suggest it is: 1. time is homogeneous – meaning every second, every minute and every day is identical; 2. time is discrete – meaning every moment in time can be conceived of as a point on a straight line; 3. time is therefore linear; and 4. time is directional – meaning that it flows without interruption from the future, through the present to the past; 5. time is absolute – meaning that time is not relative to space or to the person who is measuring it.

Stephen Hawking in his *A Brief History of Time* characterised absolute time as follows: 'Both Aristotle and Newton believed in absolute time. That is, they believed that one could unambiguously measure the interval of time between two events and that this time would be the same whoever measured it, provided they used a good clock. Time was completely separated from

37 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford/CA, 2003).

38 Eric Conan/Henry Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris, 1994).

39 Luc Huyse, *All Things Pass Except the Past* (Kessel-Lo, 2009).

40 Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness* (Oxford, 1999), 20.

41 Michael Ignatieff, Articles of Faith, *Index on Censorship* V, 1996, 110–122.

42 Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest, 2008), 4.

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and independent of space. This is what most people would take to be the common sense view'.[43] This also holds for historians.[44]

From Einstein's theory of general relativity physicists know that this presupposition of an absolute time is erroneous, because time is relative to the spatial position of the observer. Since Einstein, physicists also know that time is not independent of space. What Newton did for space – proving against Aristotle that all spatial movement is relative to the observer's position, and that therefore there are no absolute positions in space – Einstein did for time: proving against Newton that all temporal movement is relative to the observer's position. Relativity theory, however, has not yet prompted many historians to rethink their conception of absolute time.[45]

Nevertheless, since the path-breaking work of Koselleck in the 1970s, some important insight into the *historical* relativity of historical time has developed. Koselleck argued that the modern notion of historical time originated only in the second half of the eighteenth century because it was directly connected to the modern notion of history as an objective force and unified process – with, in his phrasing, *Geschichte* as a *Kollektivsingular*.

Since the end of the twentieth century, modern historical time has also been relativised by postcolonial theorists. They criticised this time conception as being fundamentally calibrated to Western history – in its periodisation, for instance – and as being inherently teleological, positing the course of the West as the implicit historical destiny of the rest of the world. This implicit teleology is, according to postcolonial critique, not only presupposed by all brands of modernisation and globalisation theory, including Marxist versions, but by the Western 'historicist' conception of history as such.[46] Thus, what is happening in the modern Western conception of time and history, according to theorists such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, is the 'spatialisation of time', meaning: the implicit connecting of space and time by di-

43 Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York, 1988), 18.

44 In Le Poidevin's words most people – including historians – are 'objectivists', meaning that they assume that time is somehow real and not an entity that does not exist independent from what clocks measure by some standard. The latter position is taken by so-called conventionalists. See Robin Le Poidevin, *Travels in Four Dimensions: The Enigmas of Space and Time* (Oxford, 2003), 5–8.

45 This question of the possibility of a 'post-Newtonian' historical time is interestingly raised in Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past*.

46 See for the inherent teleology of national history writing, Chris Lorenz, Unstuck in Time. Or: The Sudden Presence of the Past, in: Karin Tilmans/Frank van Vree/Jay Winter (eds.), *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam, 2010), 67–105, esp. 71–81. See for the argument that globalisation theories are a branch of modernisation theory, Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley/CA, 2005), 91–113.

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viding the world in regions that are ahead in time and regions that lag behind, waiting to 'catch up'.[47] So how historians measure time is apparently dependent on where they are located in space. With a bit of imagination one could regard this 'spatialisation of time' as a delayed reception of Einstein's relativity theory in history.

However this may be, Koselleck's student Hölscher has taken the historisation of time a step further by pointing out that the abstract and empty time and space that historians have taken for granted actually did not exist before the modern era.[48] Notions of empty space and of empty time developed slowly, between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. For people living in the Middle Ages, events and things had concrete positions *in* time and *in* space, but they did not have a *concept* of empty, abstract time and space *as such*. In other words: things and events had temporal and spatial *aspects*, but time and space did not exist *as realities*. Space and time referred to adjectives, not to substantives.

For Christianity, time was basically biblical time, meaning that it had a clear beginning (God's creation of the Earth) and a fixed end (Judgment Day). Time was basically 'filled in' by the creation plan of God. There was no time *before* nor any *after*. Therefore, the modern notion of an infinite history, as expressed in our calendar, which extends forwards and backwards *ad infinitum*, cannot be explained as a secularised version of the Christian idea of history, as both Hans Blumenberg and Hannah Arendt have argued against Karl Löwith.[49]

4. History, Memory and Time

The reactions of historians to the problematisation of time have been ambivalent. Some have taken the changing and alternative visions of time underlying reparations politics and the 'memory boom' as a welcome opportunity to critically rethink classical notions of historical time. More often, however, historians have focused precisely on allegedly 'non-historical' or 'deviant' approaches to time in order to fence off their discipline vis-à-vis memory or reparation politics, and to support its claims to 'hegemony in the closed space of retrospection'.[50] It is remarkable how often historians

47 However, see Frederick Cooper's critique of Chakrabarty's 'homogenisation' of 'the West' in his *Colonialism in Question*, xxx.

48 Hölscher, *Semantik der Leere*, 13–33.

49 Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeut* (Frankfurt/Main, 1966); Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 2006), esp. 68.

50 Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris, 2000), 458.

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are claiming different, 'improper' temporalities as an implicit or explicit argument for the 'objectification' of memory and its presentation as 'mythical' or 'pathological' – or at least as not providing a viable alternative to 'real' history.[51]

Even an unconventional historian like Hayden White, for example, seems to pay tribute to traditional temporal divisions by subscribing to Michael Oakeshott's distinction between the 'historical' and the 'practical' past.[52] Gabrielle Spiegel, too, rejects theories that posit a reciprocal relationship between history and memory by claiming that the 'differing temporal structures' of history and memory 'prohibit' their 'conflation'. Memory can never 'do the 'work' of history' or 'perform historically' because 'it refuses to keep the past in the past, to draw the line that is constitutive of the modern enterprise of historiography.' Indeed Spiegel writes: 'The very postulate of modern historiography is the disappearance of the past from the present.'[53]

Similar claims about the proper conceptualisation of historical time and about the relationship between past and present have figured prominently in Henry Rousso's arguments against the judicialisation of history and in his refusal to function as an expert witness in the French trial against Maurice Papon. Rousso's refusal to appear in the courtroom was based, among other considerations, on his conviction that historians have to improve the 'understanding of the distance that separates [past and present]'[54] or on the

51 Martin Broszat's remark about the supposedly 'mythical' character of the – ex post – centrality of the Holocaust in 'Jewish' history writing on Nazi-Germany, as opposed to the supposedly 'distant', 'scientific' character of 'German' academic history writing, induced Saul Friedländer to compose his *opus magnum: Nazi-Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination 1939 – 1945* (New York 2007), in which linear time is supplanted by non-linear, 'modernist' time in a pathbreaking way, as Wulf Kansteiner has argued. See Wulf Kansteiner, »Success, Truth, and Modernism in Holocaust Historiography: Reading Saul Friedländer 35 Years after the Publication of *Metahistory*«, *History & Theory* 47/2 (2009), 25–53.

This tendency to stress the particularity of 'historical time' in order to institutionally defend professional history is of course not new. See Thomas Loué, Du présent au passé: le temps des historiens, *Temporalités: Revue de sciences sociales et humaines* VIII, 2008.

52 Hayden White, The Public Relevance of Historical Studies: A Reply to Dirk Moses, *History and Theory* XLIV, 2005, 3, 333–338. Typically time hardly plays any role in his *Metahistory*. Also see Hayden White, The Practical Past, *Historein* 10, 2010, 10–19. Frank Ankersmit has argued that time does not constitute a proper object for the (narrative) philosophy of history. See his Over geschiedenis en tijd, *Groniek,* 1989, 11–26.

Oakshott was clear about the temporal status of the 'practical past', which according to him was not 'significantly past' at all. Michael Oakshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1985), 39.

53 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, Memory and history: Liturgical Time and Historical Time, *History and Theory* XLI, 2002, 4, 149–162.

54 Henry Rousso, *The Haunting Past: History, Memory, and Justice in Contemporary France (*Philadelphia, 2002), 8.

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slightly, but markedly different conviction, that a good historian 'puts the past at a distance'. Rousso, however, believed that the attempts at retrospective justice in France were influenced by a politics of memory, or even a 'religion of memory' that 'abolishes distance' and 'ignores the hierarchies of time'. In contrast: 'The historical project consists precisely in describing, explaining, and situating alterity, in putting it at a distance.'[55] The historians' craft, according to Rousso, therefore offers a 'liberating type of thinking, because it rejects the idea that people or societies are conditioned or determined by their past without any possibility of escaping it.'[56] Historians must resist the role of 'agitators of memory' and the growing societal 'obsession' with memory. They must do so by allowing what many want to avoid: 'the selection of what must remain or disappear to occur spontaneously'.[57]

Similar claims about the task of historians are made by Dutch historian Bob de Graaff in a tract on the relationship of the historian to (genocidal) victimhood – a text visibly influenced by his experiences as a member of the research team that was commissioned by the Dutch government to scrutinise the Srebrenica massacre. Again, the argument focuses on proper and improper understandings of (historical) time. Victims or survivors, de Graaff claims, often live in an 'extratemporality',[58] or in a 'synchronic' rather than 'diachronic' and 'chronological' time. For them the 'past remains present', to them it seems as if atrocities 'only happened yesterday or even today'.[59] In this regard de Graaff follows Michael Ignatieff, who held that 'victim time' is 'simultaneous' and 'not linear'.[60] Of course the historian recognises the fact that the past can be 'called up' again, but in contrast to the survivor, he does this voluntarily. Moreover, he 'registers' that facts of the past are 'bygone', 'definitely lost' or have 'come to a downfall'.[61] In reality, de Graaff claims: 'Victimhood is historically determined. It comes about in a particular period. It has a beginning, but it also has an end.' In this context it is the task of historians 'to place events, including genocide, in their time, literally historicising them.'[62] The historian has to do this by trying to 'determine the individual character of particular periods/epochs and by that demarcate one period vis-à-vis the other'. To cite de Graaff once again: '[The

55 Rousso, *The Haunting Past*, 26.

56 Ibid., 28.

57 Ibid., 3.

58 Bob de Graaff, *Op de klippen of door de vaargeul: De omgang van de historicus met (genocidaal) slachtofferschap* (Amsterdam, 2006), 27. [Our translation]

59 Ibid., 28.

60 Michael Ignatieff, The Nightmare from Which We Are Trying to Wake up, in: idem, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (London, 1998), 166–190.

61 de Graaff, *Op de klippen,* 28, 71.

62 Ibid., 28.

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historian] brings the past to life or keeps it alive *and* kills it by letting the past become past. With that he not only creates a past but he also offers a certain autonomy to the present.'[63] 'Historisation' in this sense of 'closing an epoch by recognising its entirely individual character' is not only a professional duty of historians. There also is a social justification to 'draw a line under victimhood.' De Graaff therefore concurs with the literary author Hellema: 'It became about time to put the past in its place.'[64]

As the above examples illustrate, one could metaphorically describe historians' recent approaches to their profession as involving a kind of 'border patrol'[65] of the relationship between past and present. Yet the examples also show that, although these historians are quite clear when declaring the need for 'border guards', they are much less clear when it comes to assessing what this 'guarding' actually consists of and how it relates to the borders it claims to patrol. Indeed, although there can be little doubt that these historians oppose an 'open' border policy when it comes to relating past and present, it is not clear from their arguments whether they can best be metaphorically represented as merely observers watching over borders between established 'sovereign' states, or as activists aggressively engaged in a repatriation policy, such as the one that intends to defend the 'fortress of Europe' against 'illegal' intruders, or as implying a more straightforward, performative *setting* of borders that creates new states, such as the ones that created West and East Germany or, more recently, North and South Sudan.

When it comes to relating past and present, historians increasingly seem to waver between a merely contemplative stance and a more active one. Rousso, as we have seen, sometimes defines the role of historians as that of 'understanding' the distance between past and present, while on other occasions he describes it as one of 'distancing' past and present. On the one hand, the historian has to allow 'the selection of what must remain or disappear to occur spontaneously'; on the other, the historian's liberating potential is situated in 'putting [the past] at a distance'. It is also far from clear what the precise status is of the 'hierarchies of time' that are not respected by memory.

De Graaff's approach, despite his references to the drawing of lines, seems equally ambiguous. At first sight, his thesis that it is necessary to demarcate periods by recognising their 'entirely individual' character seems quite unproblematic, but it is amply shown in critical theory on periodisation that on a historiographical level the very notion of the individuality or particularity of periods is (at least partly) dependent on their demarcation alias

63 Ibid., 28.

64 Hellema 'Een andere tamboer', cited in: ibid., 30.

65 Expression used by Joan W. Scott, Border Patrol, *French Historical Studies* XXI, 1998, 3, 383–397.

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their 'periodisation' – which in its turn relates to a particular cultural, religious, gendered or ethico-political logic.[66] From a 'nominalist' perspective, it is indeed quite senseless to even speak about 'periods' before time is somehow periodised. Yet even from a more 'objectivist' or 'realist' perspective, it is as puzzling as it is important to know what exactly historians are doing when they are 'letting the past become past', and how historians can tell 'when' exactly 'it is time' to 'put the past in its place'. When, indeed, is this *act* 'timely' and thus 'legitimate'?

The German philosopher Hans Blumenberg argued that the question of the legitimacy of breaks in time is strongly entangled with the concept of the 'epoch' itself.[67] This quandary, for Blumenberg, was especially latent in modernity's claim to realise a radical break with tradition – a claim that, according to him, was incongruent with the reality of history 'which can never begin entirely anew'. 'The modern age,' Blumenberg argues, 'was the first and only age that understood itself as an epoch and, in doing so, simultaneously created other epochs'. Due to this performative aspect, an adequate understanding of the concept of epoch cannot be reached so long as one starts from a historicist logic of 'historiographical object definition' – which according to Blumenberg, can never transcend the longstanding dilemma of nominalism versus realism. Though Blumenberg primarily focuses on modernity (and intellectual history) his argument applies to all attempts to understand the change of epochs in 'rational categories'.

The fact that the problems of historicist logic are still very prominent today can be illustrated by Martin Sabrow's recent attempt to come to grips with the problem of time in contemporary history. Sabrow thoughtfully develops historicism to its logical end – without transgressing its borders, however.[68] Starting from the (at least in Germany) classical definition of *Zeitgeschichte* by Hans Rothfels as the 'epoch of the contemporaries and their handling by academic history', he observes that this definition does not 'fit' the current practice of contemporary historians in Germany anymore. Sabrow's argument is the fact of '1945', a 'fact' he describes as follows: 'The end of contemporaneity [*Zeitgenossenschaft*] did not succeed in bridging the epochal caesura of 1945 in German contemporary history, although this had been predicted just before the collapse of the Soviet dictatorship in 1989/90 and even more afterward.'[69] Because the criterion of having experienced the 'contemporary' past does not hold water anymore – World War One, in Sab-

66 Irmline Veit-Brause, Marking Time: Topoi and Analogies in Historical Periodization, *Storia della Storiografia* XXVII, 2000, 3–10.

67 Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt/Main, 1966). Hereafter cited in its English translation *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge/MA, 1983).

68 Martin Sabrow, *Die Zeit der Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen, 2012).

69 Sabrow, *Zeit der Zeitgeschichte*, 2.

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row's view, did not stop being part of 'contemporary' history even though the last (French) war veteran died in 2008 – Sabrow proposes a new criterion based on controversial nature and intensity of *memory*:

> The capacity to produce social meaning of counter-narratives, based on experience and memory, distinguishes contemporary history fundamentally from other periods in history. This capacity endows contemporary history with a changing temporal position, crossing over the borders of any specific period and defining its particular unity. The time of contemporary history is rather oriented by the intensity of memory or by the public confrontation with the past as a mix of memory and knowledge.[70]

So again, it is allegedly *not* the historian who decides where the borders of *Zeitgeschichte* are to be drawn because the borders, according to Sabrow, are somehow *out there* to be 'registered'. Because the failed German revolution of 1918–19, the Weimar Republic and Hitler's rise to power are no longer hotly debated, they are no longer part of 'contemporary' history. The persecution of the Jews, the Holocaust and totalitarian rule, however, are still objects of 'hot' controversies and therefore, in Sabrow's view, 'contemporary' – even though they are in part chronologically simultaneous with 'Weimar' and Hitler's rise to power.

Sabrow, therefore, is obliged to draw the surprising conclusion that some parts of the history of the twentieth century belong to 'contemporary' history, while others do not, and that their chronological location is *not* the deciding criterion. Only their being part of 'hot' memorial controversies is decisive. *Zeitgeschichte,* according to Sabrow, is therefore fundamentally *Streitgeschichte*. As long as that is the case, the contested parts of the German twentieth century are like 'remaining islands of contemporary history in a sea of progressing historisation'.[71]

Only after having deconstructed the temporal borders of the object of *Zeitgeschichte* does Sabrow shift his attention to the constructive activities of the *Zeithistoriker*. In this respect he is less original because he holds with the eighteenth-century German historian Johann Martin Chladenius that historians develop an organising point of view – a *Sehepunkt* – in their reconstructions, which lends an *ex post* narrative unity to temporal diversity. This unity, according to Sabrow, is fundamentally dependent on a certain 'closure' in time. Therefore clear-cut ruptures or 'break-ups' in time – as in 1945 and in 1989 – are of crucial importance for the contemporary historian. Again, according to Sabrow, the *Zeithistoriker* does not actively 'break up' time; rather he 'registers' what is 'out there'. Therefore Sabrow suggests that we think of *Zeitgeschichte* as: ' … the period or those periods that precede the latest fundamental change of the point of view and that can therefore be dis-

70 Ibid., 5.
71 Ibid., 6.

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tinguished from the succeeding period by the presence of different political, economic and cultural societal norms.'[72] In the end, therefore, Sabrow, in spite of himself, presents a new – and temporal – definition of contemporary history, beginning with 'totalitarian' Nazism in the 1930s and ending with the end of the Cold War in 1989 – which he apparently regards as the latest 'objective' break in time.[73]

What is also remarkable here is that after he has thrown the (linear) temporal borders of contemporary history out the front door, Sabrow reintroduces them through the backdoor – by assuming that epochs and breaks apparently are 'out there' and succeed each other. It is therefore only logical that Sabrow needs to introduce a new epoch and new kind of history *succeeding* 'contemporary' history – that is, after the last 'objective' break or caesura in time, the so-called 'history of the present' or *Gegenwartsgeschichte* – which in Germany begins in 1989. Its distinctive characteristic is that because this part of history is not yet 'closed' by a recognisable 'break' in time, there is no point of view to orient the historian who might wish to write it. As a result, the history-writing of the present is … impossible: 'Without a break between experiencing and understanding, which is produced by a change in point of view, the writing of history remains a speculative activity based on shifting sands of interpretation, because its parameter and storylines can change continuously.'[74] No 'objective' break in time, according to Sabrow, means no break between the experience (*Erleben*) of the contemporary eyewitnesses – the *Zeitzeugen* – and the *ex post understanding* (*Verstehen*) of the professional historian, and thus no break between 'hot' and 'cold', that is: 'real' history.[75]

With Sabrow historicism has come full circle: The arguments he formulates against the possibility of *Gegenwartsgeschichte* are identical to the arguments historicists have traditionally advanced against the possibility of *Zeitgeschichte*.[76] Again we observe the clear and typical wavering between the historian's passive 'recognising' and his active 'producing' breaks in time.

72 Ibid., 7.

73 Ibid., 8.

74 Ibid., 8.

75 Also see Martin Sabrow, Die Historikerdebatte über den Umbruch von 1989, in: Martin Sabrow et al. (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte: Große Kontroversen seit 1945* (Munich, 2003), 127. For the notions of 'hot' and 'cold' history, see: Chris Lorenz, Geschichte, Gegenwärtigkeit und Zeit, in: Dietmar Goltschnigg (ed.), *Phänomen Zeit: Dimensionen und Strukturen in Kultur und Wissenschaft* (Tübingen, 2011), 127–135.

76 See Alexander Nützenadel/Wolfgang Schieder (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte als Problem: Nationale Traditionen und Perspektiven der Forschung* (Göttingen, 2004); Zeitgeschichte heute – Stand und Perspektiven, *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 2004, 1.

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This issue also pops up when Sabrow tries to draw a border between *Zeitgeschichte* as a discipline and the rest of the *Erinnerungskultur* in which contemporary historians participate by joining in public debates. By his or her participation in public historical culture, the *Zeithistoriker/in* is not only observer but also actor according to Sabrow.[77] He insists, however, that the public activities of the *Zeithistoriker/innen* should not be conceived as political action. His main argument in this regard seems to be that historians, in contrast to other carriers of memory culture, have a 'method' and a reflected relationship to time that enables them to keep 'distance' and avoid 'partisanship' vis-à-vis the past, even when the past is very present.

> Two rules of conduct in my view are extraordinarily important. The first consists in adopting a conscious partisanship in favour of a distancing historisation of the past and against a partisan making present of the past. The task of the discipline of contemporary history is to explain the past and not to produce a normative evaluation, and even less a public advise. The second strategic rule of conduct that would guarantee contemporary history a legitimate existence within the general culture of memory instead of in opposition to it, consists of the capacity of metahistorical self-reflection. Contrary to the other 'players' in the field of 'working with the past', contemporary history disposes of an armoury of methods that enable it to create a distance to its own activities, that makes up for a lack of temporal distance with analytical distance.[78]

How exactly the 'analytical' distance of the *Zeithistoriker* compensates for a lack of temporal distance is not clarified. Apparently, a good *Zeithistoriker* – in contrast to the *Zeitzeuge* and the memorialist – just *knows*.

5. 'Past-ness' and 'Present-ness'

The cultural and political reality of the 'memory boom' has compelled historians in search of a new professional role and theoretical legitimation for history to make explicit what was previously based more often on implicit presuppositions than on formal arguments – e.g., such notions as the past-ness of the past and the present-ness of the present. As Ulrich Raulff convincingly demonstrated, novelists were well ahead of historians in problematising the relationship between the past and the present. On the basis of his study of fictional literature, he characterises the twentieth century as 'the century of the present' (*Gegenwart*) in contrast to the nineteenth century, 'the century of history' (*Geschichte*). Instead of the questions about origins that dominated nineteenth-century historical reflection, the problem of

77 Sabrow, *Zeit der Zeitgeschichte*, 20: 'Zeithistorie agiert in unserer Gegenwart notgedrungen als Beobachterin und Gestalterin zugleich.'

78 Ibid., 20–21.

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