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Transformations of the Modern Time Regime

'The limits of a theory are defined by the succeeding theory.
We must be wary not to naturalize the ontologies of a theory.'

Jürgen Audretsch

'The weakness of progress is marked by its loss of power to
abolish the past in a sufficient degree.'

Rudolf Schlögl

Graham Swift writes in his novel *Waterland*: 'Once upon a time, in the bright sixties, there was plenty of future on offer.'¹ His book was published in 1983. After only two decades the future of the sixties had already lost much of its glamour. The future, as historians have instructed us in the meantime, has its own history. While it had been generally assumed that the working domain of historians is the past, they discovered in the 1970s that this past also included different futures. Reinhart Koselleck developed this idea in an influential book entitled *Futures Past*.² That the future is no longer what it used to be is an insight that is accessible to anyone with a long enough memory. There was indeed plenty of future on offer in the bright sixties. Let us take as an example the speech that philosopher Ernst Bloch delivered when he received the so-called *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels* (Peace Prize of the German Book Trade) in the Frankfurt Paulskirche in 1967. In his acceptance speech, Bloch declared: 'A map on which you cannot find the land Utopia is not even worth looking at.'³ For Bloch, 'utopia' was a metaphor for a vision of a future in which those who have been notoriously exploited and humiliated in the past are given a just place in a better world. His notion of utopia entailed the conviction that the way to a better future was to be paved and enforced by 'justified revolutions' (*menschenfreundliche Revolutionen*). For Bloch, they were the opposite of wars that are fought to conquer and

1 Graham Swift, *Waterland* (New York, 1983), 20.

2 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004 [German edition, 1979]).

3 Ernst Bloch, *Widerstand und Friede: Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels, Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels 1967*, http://www.boersenverein.de/sixcms/media.php/806/1967_bloch.pdf, 15.

gain or maintain power. Humane revolutions have instead the function of midwives assisting in the birth of a better and more just world. Bloch explicitly mentioned in his speech the Russian Revolution of 1917. 'This revolution in particular was in no way like a war propelled by the greed for power but a maieutic breakthrough bringing about a society that is no longer torn by antagonisms.'⁴

1. Futures Past

From the point of view of our historical reality today, Bloch's bright vision of the future has found its place in the imaginary museum of 'futures past'. His vision collapsed in 1989 together with the Berlin Wall, which had neatly separated the different futures of the West and East during the Cold War. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, this future collapsed in Russia together with its past. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was downgraded by Putin to a *coup d'état*, and the central commemoration day of 7 November was wiped out of Russian memory culture. It was replaced by 4 November, a recent fabrication of Putin's historians, who conjured up an unknown (and perhaps largely fictional) event from the seventeenth century to offer the population a new date in temporal proximity to their long-cherished national holiday.⁵

Much of the future that had been on offer in the bright sixties went extinct also in the country of the other Cold War superpower at the end of the bipolar tension of this period. In October 2011 an announcement was published to the effect that the United States had dismantled its last nuclear bomb, which contained hundreds of times the destructive capacity of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. According to the director of the American Department for Nuclear Security, the B53 had been developed 'at another time for another world'. The event was acclaimed in the media as a milestone in the nuclear disarmament program of President Obama. Before he brought an end to this future and relegated it to the past, Obama prolonged another future that had also been offered during the bright sixties. In 2010, at the NASA Space Centre in Florida, he announced his determination to send a manned mission to Mars. He proclaimed that by 2035 an American astronaut was to put his foot on the red planet, adding: 'And I expect to be around and see it!' At the same time, he treated the venture of landing on the moon as a story of the past: 'We have already been there. There is much more to discover!'⁶

⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵ Jutta Scherrer, Russlands neue-alte Erinnerungsorte, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament XI: Russland*, 2006, 24–28.

⁶ Obama will Marsmission im Jahr 2035, FAZ 15. 4. 2010, www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/weltraumprogramm-obama-will-marsmission-im-jahr-2035-1964515.html.

These are a few examples of how futures can be either prolonged or dismissed and transferred into the past for technical or political reasons. In this essay, I am concerned, however, with a much more general problem. Experience teaches that not only specific visions of the future have crumbled, but that even the concept of the future as such has changed beyond recognition. In many areas such as politics, society and environment, the future has lost its lure. It can no longer be used indiscriminately as the vanishing point of wishes, goals and projections. Why did this happen? Why have the shares of the future fallen in the stock market of our value system? There are obvious answers that immediately come to mind: The resources of the future have been eroded by a number of new dramatic challenges such as the ongoing ecological pollution that accompanies the development of our technological civilisation, demographic problems such as overpopulation and aging societies, the scarcity of natural resources such as fuel and drinking water, and climate change. Under these premises, the future can no longer serve as the Eldorado of our hopes and wishes, rendering also the promise of progress more and more obsolete. Change is no longer automatically assumed to be a change for the better. The future, in short, has become an object of concern, prompting ever-new measures of precaution.

But this is only half of the answer. Today we are witnessing a ‘continental shift’ in the structure of Western temporality: While the future has lost much of its luminosity, the past has more and more invaded our consciousness. This return of the past has obviously something to do with periods of excessive violence in the twentieth century and earlier times. This burden of the past still weighs heavily on the shoulders of the present, demanding attention and recognition, urging the taking of responsibility, together with new forms of remembering and remembrance. A decade ago, Andreas Huyssen pointed to this strange shift in the structure of our temporality when he wrote:

One of the most surprising cultural and political phenomena of recent years has been the emergence of memory as a key concern in Western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity. From the early twentieth-century’s apocalyptic myths of radical breakthrough and the emergence of the “new man” in Europe via the murderous phantasms of racial or class purification in National Socialism and Stalinism to the post-World War II American paradigm of modernisation, modernist culture was energised by what one might call “present futures”. Since the 1980s, it seems, the focus has shifted from present futures to present pasts, and this shift in the experience and sensibility of time needs to be explained historically and phenomenologically.⁷

⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia*, *Public Culture* XII, 2000, 1, 21–38, 21.

So far, cultural historians have not come up with the explanation demanded by Huyssen. I know of no study that has focused on this problem systematically or investigated this recent shift in the structure of Western temporality. In order to provide a contribution to this larger project, we have to widen the scope of the question. If it is correct that we are experiencing a new configuration in the structure of Western temporality, we must first of all investigate the previous structure that was replaced or transformed in this process. What were the seminal features of this structure that formed the unchallenged basis and background of Western thinking, feeling and acting up to the 1980s? With which values and affects was it invested? And which options for decision making and acting had been supported by it?

2. Five Aspects of the Modern Time Regime

I will introduce here the term 'cultural time regime' to refer to a temporal ordering and orientation that is deeply entrenched in the culture and provides a basis for implicit values, patterns of thought and the logic of action.⁸ In the following an attempt will be made to identify central aspects of the modern time regime, which has been part of the foundations of Western culture, shaping both its epistemology and its ontology. According to its self-image and to the view from within, in modernity time had acquired the shape of an arrow that runs irreversibly from the past into the future. This shape was considered to be natural and neutral, an abstract entity and objective realm independent of cultural constructions and inaccessible to human manipulation. It was exactly this affinity to new techniques of measuring in the natural sciences that gave this time regime its emphatically modern quality. The five aspects of the modern time regime I have identified and singled out for investigation are closely interconnected and build on one another.

- Breaking up time
- The fiction of a new beginning
- Creative destruction
- The invention of the historical
- Acceleration of change

⁸ Hartmut Rosa uses the term 'historisch-kulturelles Zeitregime' in: *Jedes Ding hat keine Zeit? Flexible Menschen in rasenden Verhältnissen*, in: Vera King/Benigna Gerisch (eds.), *Zeitgewinn und Selbstverlust. Folgen und Grenzen der Beschleunigung* (Frankfurt am Main/New York, 2009), 21–39, 22.

Breaking up Time

The modern time regime deviates radically from earlier ones. Before its invention, it was the function and aim of cultural time regimes to ensure continuity and to establish connections between past, present and future. Traditions may be defined as such constructs of continuity that are designed to prevent rupture and discontinuity.⁹ Dangerous and fatal disruptions, such as the physical death of an individual, the change of generations or the shift from one dynasty of rulers to another were anticipated, prevented and 'repaired' by the binding powers of cultural traditions. The ideal of the modern time regime, on the other hand, consisted of 'throwing overboard everything that was derived from the past and impeded the total drive towards human self-regulation and self-fulfilment'.¹⁰

In the 1970s, Reinhart Koselleck launched his magisterial project on the semantics of basic historical terms. Together with his colleague Christian Meier he wrote the article on the concept of 'progress' in which they abstained from the rhetoric implied in this term and focused on the anatomy of progress as a cultural practice. In this scientific light, they defined it as a process that evolves 'in the temporal ruptures originating in continuously reproduced hiatus-experiences'.¹¹ The temporal structure of progress, in other words, depends on the constant repetition of ruptures. The term *hiatus* emphasises the activity of breaking, focussing on a constant injunction to discontinue present trends. This emphasis on rupture enforces a dynamic of constant change. On this conceptual basis Koselleck created the canonical formula defining the basic structure underlying the modern time regime. In his terminology, modern time proceeds by continually producing a radical rift (or hiatus) between 'the space of experience' (or the past) and 'the horizon of expectation' (or the future). In this way, innovation was emphasised and valued as the motor of change and progress. Koselleck explained the effect of such enforced change by referring to the decline of the old topos of *Historia magistra vitae* (of studying history as a school for life). History could serve to teach lessons relevant to problems in the present only so long as it could be assumed that acquired experience was fit to cope with new problems. The more dramatically the problems changed in quality, the more quickly experience was devalued. 'With the rift opening up between accumulated experience and future oriented expectation the difference between past and future grows, so that eventually time is experienced as a

9 Aleida Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition. Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer* (Vienna, 1999).

10 Edward A. Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago, 1981), 43.

11 Reinhart Koselleck/Christian Meier, *Fortschritt*, in: Reinhart Koselleck et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1975), 392.

break, as a transitional period in which the new and unexpected are continuously revealed.¹²

These descriptions show that the modern time regime was not the effect of and a response to historical change, but its prime cause and motor. This emphatically modern mode of breaking up time was condensed in a popular rhetorical topos that ritually announced the ongoing 'death' of various cultural institutions and values, which had been rendered obsolete by new turns and developments. The following proclamation of the American literary critic Leslie Fiedler from 1972 captured this spirit: 'As certainly as God, i.e. the Old God, is dead, so the Novel, i.e. the Old Novel, is dead.'¹³ As the modern time regime was built not on continuity but on change and rupture, it produced at the same time a continuous crisis of orientation, that had to be compensated by the new solutions of scientific and technological experts. From the point of view of the individual, the shock implied in the abyss between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation was obscured by the fact that the unknown future was not envisioned negatively in terms of threat and danger but positively in terms of risk and chance. It is generally agreed that modern historical consciousness, the idea of irreversible progress and future-oriented action are all based on this structure of breaking up the time and cutting off the past.¹⁴

The Fiction of a New Beginning¹⁵

While pre-modern cultural time regimes create mythical origins *in illo tempore* (a world that transcends human senses and experience), the modern time regime posits a beginning in the here and now. In an influential book, Edward Said made the same distinction between 'beginning' and 'origin'; he

12 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984 [1979]), 336. Joachim Ritter spoke of a break between 'Herkunft' and 'Zukunft' in 1975. It is not unlikely that Koselleck's terms *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont* are translations of Ritter's terms. Joachim Ritter, *Subjektivität und industrielle Gesellschaft*, in: idem, *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 26.

13 Leslie Fiedler, *Cross the Border – Close the Gap* (New York, 1972), 65. In 1988 little was left of this rhetoric, which was effectively debunked by Paul Virilio in the following statement: 'Since the 19th century people have been battering our ears with the death of God, Man, Art ... it is all about nothing other than a progressive decomposition of a perceptual faith ...'. Paul Virilio, *La machine de vision* (Paris, 1988), 45–46.

14 Reinhart Koselleck, 'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont' – zwei historische Kategorien, in: idem, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 349–375.

15 Inka Mülder-Bach/Eckhard Schumacher (eds.), *Am Anfang war. Ursprungsfiguren und Anfangskonstruktionen der Moderne* (Munich, 2008). See also: Irmgard Bohunovsky-Bärnthaler (ed.), *Die Idee vom Anfang – Mythos und Folge* (Klagenfurt, 2008).

defined the latter as 'divine, mythical and privileged' and the former as 'secular, humanly produced and ceaselessly re-examined'.¹⁶ While in mythical origins the order of the world is placed outside of human time and beyond human reach, modern beginnings are rational and enabling human constructs, authorising human experience, knowledge and art. The source of inspiration is no longer to be sought in previous authorities, periods and traditions, but in the creative spirit of the human author himself. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the bold and self-assured practice of setting a new beginning was framed in many a philosophical and literary text.¹⁷ René Descartes meditated on how to radically begin anew, constructing his new ways of thinking *more geometrico* on a white sheet of paper. The most impressive scenario staging such a radical beginning is certainly Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1718). The eponymous protagonist of this novel proves that it is possible at any time to start the world and history over again. By experimenting on the island, Crusoe reinvents the accumulated history of human experience and organises his life with the help of a self-made time frame. 'A beginning,' writes Said, 'not only creates but is its own method because it has intention.'¹⁸

In its original meaning, 'revolution' was what the stars did in the firmament; it referred to their cyclic movements as part of an overarching cosmic order. The idea that revolutions are not only natural processes, but also happen in history and can be man-made, is a direct result of the modern time regime. Utopias and revolutions have been intimately linked since the period of early modernity; both are philosophical and political means to break up time, to induce a temporal rupture for the forging, staging and establishing of the 'new'.

Creative Destruction

The essence of the modern time regime was summed up in the mid-nineteenth century by the professional Russian revolutionary Michail Bakunin. Like all committed innovators he was convinced of his mission as a destroyer of existing structures. At the same time he did not conceive of his goal as destructive but as creative, and he brought both terms into a relation of mutual reinforcement. His famous slogan was: 'The pleasure in acts of destroying is

16 Edward Said, Preface to the 1985 edition, in: *Beginnings. Intention and Method* (London, 1997 [1st ed. New York, 1975]), xix.

17 Albrecht Koschorke et al., *Der fiktive Staat. Konstruktionen des politischen Körpers in der Geschichte Europas* (Frankfurt am Main, 2007).

18 Said, *Beginnings*, xxiii.

a creative pleasure.¹⁹ This statement is the most frank and radical expression of the modern time regime.

This impulse of the Russian anarchist is echoed a century later in the centre of capitalism, which shows that the modern time regime spans and unites antagonistic political ideologies. The economist Joseph Alois Schumpeter, who immigrated to the US in the 1930s, introduced the concept of 'creative destruction' into economic theory.²⁰ In spite of the fact that Schumpeter himself had headed a bank in the 1920s which had gone bankrupt in the time of economic crisis and inflation, he developed an optimistic theory, according to which capitalism permanently and powerfully renews itself from within by destroying previous structures and products. The concept of creative destruction is a precise description of the linear logic of replacement that propels technical evolution. In a very concrete way, this principle had already been observed and discovered by the American philosopher R.W. Emerson (who believed that it could also be applied to the dynamics of cultural progress). In an influential essay published in 1841, Emerson enthusiastically described the modern time regime as driven by an irreversible and inexorable 'fury of disappearance'²¹: 'The Greek letters last a little longer, but are passing under the same sentence, and tumbling into the inevitable pit which the creation of new thought opens for all that is old. The new continents are built out of the ruins of an old planet: the new races fed out of the decomposition of the foregoing. New arts destroy the old. See the investment of capital in aqueducts made useless by hydraulics; fortifications, by gunpowder; roads and canals, by railways; sails, by steam, by electricity.'²²

In the middle of the nineteenth century, at the height of the Industrial Revolution, Emerson pledged himself to an exclusive orientation towards the future, describing himself as 'an endless seeker with no past at my back'.²³ His ideas were highly influential in fusing the modern time regime with American culture and transforming it into a vital part of the national self-image. Beginning with the Puritan myth of a 'Promised Land' and the 'American Adam', American culture has wholeheartedly endorsed the modern time regime, affirming the break with the Old World of Europe and

19 Michail Bakunin, cited in Ernst Bloch, *Literary Essays* (Stanford/CA, 1998), 23.

20 Joseph Alois Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York, 1942), 81–86.

21 Konrad Paul Liessmann (ed.), *Die Furie des Verschwindens. Über das Schicksal des Alten im Zeitalter des Neuen* (Vienna, 2000).

22 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Circles*, in: idem, *Selected Writings*, William H. Gilman (ed.), (New York/London, 1965), 296.

23 Ibid., 304.

positioning itself at the forefront of modernisation and globalisation.²⁴ Today, this easy fusion between culture and the modern time regime has become the object of controversy and deeper reflection. A radical concept of linear progress implying the creative destruction and replacement of earlier stages in the search for ever-more advanced theories and products is now accepted only in the fields of science and technology.

The Invention of the 'Historical'

With this formula I refer to a new method of collecting, interpreting and circulating knowledge which found its palpable shape in the early nineteenth century in the new Western institutions of the archive, the museum and historical scholarship (*Geisteswissenschaften*). In all of these institutions, the past was placed in the custody of professional specialists and preserved, investigated, interpreted and exhibited without an obligation to satisfy immediate political demands. In the framework of the modern time regime the historical was synonymous with 'pastness' and 'strangeness' and thus discarded as a normative or creative resource for confronting new problems or questions of identity formation. The invention of the historical as an 'objective' dimension of research that is neatly decoupled from the demands of the present was a novelty in the nineteenth century which – to be sure – did not all of a sudden replace older time regimes. In many contexts, the past continued to be politically used and abused by the present according in both traditional and new ways of nation-building.

There is a direct historical link between the invention of the historical and the French Revolution. Revolutions in general enact the modern time regime in a paradigmatic way, as they are the political medium for enforcing temporal ruptures and installing the new at the cost of the old. There are, however, different kinds of revolutions: those promoting a civil society and those that pave the way to a totalitarian regime of power. While the spokesmen of the French Revolution were eager in their zeal for the destruction of the institutions of clergy, monarchy and the *Ancien Régime*, they were reluctant to discard or totally destroy what they had abolished. As Ernst Schulz has shown, a special feature of the French Revolution consisted of the fact that it did not follow the imperative of creative destruction all the way. What was pushed off its pedestal and destroyed in the morning

24 Ulfried Reichardt, 'The "Times" of the New World: Future-Oriented, American Culture, and Globalization', in: Winfried Fluck/Thomas Claviez (eds.), *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature XIX: Theories of American Culture, Theories of American Studies*, 2003, 247–266.

was collected in the afternoon and brought into the new historical institutions of the museum and archive.²⁵ In this context, breaking up time was a performative revolutionary act that marked the end of the validity of a social and political system the revolutionaries longed to see disappear. The present was hurled into the abyss of the past, but it did not disappear without a trace 'in the inevitable pit that the creation of new thought opens for all that is old'.²⁶ Instead of the pit, new historical institutions for collection and preservation came into being to contain a former present that overnight had become a past. This was the hour of birth of a new cultural value: historical knowledge. In the process, a new form of 'afterlife' was created for materials that had lost their validity and normative value but generated now a new professional interest as historical 'sources'. This discovery of a historical that is connected with intellectual curiosity and scholarly research is radically different from the spirit of totalitarian revolutions of the twentieth century. In Germany, the National Socialists carried out book-burnings of Jewish authors; in Stalin's Russia historical sources were censored and falsified, and archives were sealed or destroyed. In his novel *1984* George Orwell describes the role of an archivist in a totalitarian state whose task is to eliminate the past or reduce it to the function of stabilizing those in the current constellation of power.²⁷ These, however, are radical deviations from the path of Western civilization, which, among other features, is marked by the invention of the historical. Virginia Woolf once defined the past as that which is 'beyond the touch and control of the living'.²⁸ For her, the first and foremost quality of the past was its having passed away. It had disappeared due to the irreversible and unchangeable character of linear time; what is over once and for all can no longer serve as a resource for the present and the future. This obvious pastness of the past is the very premise for the work of professional historians, which begins the moment the door is shut that separates the present from the past. Only what has been sealed and become inaccessible can become an object of historical research. To underline this point, Koselleck distinguished between a 'present past' and a 'pure' past. The present past is saturated with personal memories and emotions through which the living are involved in it and bound up with it. Only when these strategies of mastering the past have been dissolved can it pass over into the custody of historians, who then can start their work of reconstructing events and inter-

25 Ernst Schulz, *Absage an und Wiederherstellung von Vergangenheit*, in: Moritz Csáky/Peter Stachel (eds.), *Speicher des Gedächtnisses – Bibliotheken, Museen, Archive*, vol. 1: *Absage an und Wiederherstellung von Vergangenheit, Kompensation von Geschichtsverlust* (Vienna, 2000), 23–39.

26 Emerson, *Circles*, 296.

27 On archives in totalitarian states, see George Orwell, *1984* (New York, 1962 [1949]).

28 Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London, 1963 [1928]), 225.

preting them methodically in an unbiased way.²⁹ Thus, all that historians have to do is to wait and let 'time' do its work. Historical research is based on this premise 'that a (politically, morally, emotionally) hot present will transform itself automatically into a cold past'.³⁰ It is this temporal distance from the heat of the former present that guarantees scientific objectivity.

The invention of the historical is directly related to the modern gesture of breaking up time and is a direct consequence not only of the French Revolution, but also of the Industrial Revolution. The radical transformation of life worlds under the impact of steam engines, electricity and the railway created a nostalgia for rural areas that remained untouched by the effects of acceleration and change. The German writer Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, a contemporary of Emerson, accepted the takeover of the modern time regime as an accomplished fact, though witnessing it with less enthusiasm. In her literary description of the rural areas of her native Westphalia, she is intensely time-consciousness, articulating a prescience that what she describes is bound to disappear within a timespan of forty years.

Such was the physiognomy of the country up till now, and this will no longer be the case after forty years. Population and luxury are growing fast and together with them new desires and industry. ... The culture of the slowly growing broadleaf forest will be neglected and replaced by the more speedy gain of fir trees, and soon spruce forests and endless fields of grain will have totally transformed the character of the landscape together with that of its inhabitants who will forget their age-old rites and customs. Let us therefore sketch and preserve what is still present before the homogenizing film that is spreading all over Europe will have reached this quiet corner of the earth.³¹

Droste-Hülshoff was convinced that the world as she knew it would change beyond recognition within one or two generations. Her sense of the historical was not limited to historical events and narratives but was extended to everyday objects, customs and landscapes that were in the process of vanishing. She rescued the ephemeral specificity of the Westphalian region in her ethnographic descriptions, preserving in a literary archive the characteristics that she expected were doomed soon to disappear. Her intense sense of the

29 Reinhart Koselleck, Nachwort, in: Charlotte Beradt, *Das Dritte Reich des Traums* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 117.

30 Chris Lorenz, Geschichte, Gegenwartigkeit und Zeit, in: Dietmar Goltschnigg (ed.), *Phänomen Zeit. Dimensionen und Strukturen in Kultur und Wissenschaft* (Tübingen, 2011), 127–135.

31 Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Bilder aus Westfalen, in: idem, *Werke in einem Band* (Munich, 1984), 724. 'Müssen wir noch hinzufügen, daß alles bisher Gesagte nur das Landvolk angeht? – Ich glaube, "nein", Städter sind sich ja überall gleich, Kleinstädter wie Großstädter. – Oder, daß alle diese Zustände am Verlöschen sind und nach vierzig Jahren vielleicht wenig mehr davon anzutreffen sein möchte? – Auch leider "nein", es geht ja überall so!,' *ibid.*, 760.

waning of the present into the past refers us once more to the close connection between the breaking up of time and the invention of the historical.

Acceleration of Change

'Speed is the experience of a time that is scarce and vanishing.'³² The keyword 'acceleration' is so prominent in the discourse on time that the modern time regime is often reduced to this particular feature. The term itself is ambivalent; it is not quite clear whether we are dealing with an objective fact or a mode of thinking which functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Again, we are dealing with another mode of breaking up time, with change and the enforced devaluation of the present. As Koselleck emphasised, acceleration of time is the hallmark of a specifically modern experience of time, 'in which everything changes faster than one would have expected or had expected in earlier times. Together with shortened timespans, a sense of unfamiliarity enters the everyday life-world, which can no longer be derived from any previous experience. This is what constitutes the experience of acceleration.'³³

Acceleration always takes place on different levels of experience: it occurs in the technical domain of traffic and the media of communication, it presents itself as a new rhythm of everyday life, and it becomes manifest in the shape of radical social and cultural change.³⁴ Philosopher Hermann Lübbe introduced the term 'shrinking present' to emphasise that the period of validity of what we accept as present decreases continually and dramatically.³⁵ The unrelenting increase of speed is accompanied by a sense of loss, producing a crisis of experience that is a notorious by-product of the modern time regime. Within this time frame, this crisis cannot be healed, though it can be compensated. This, according to Lübbe, is the specific function of musealisation (in a wider sense). Already at the beginning of the 1980s he wrote: 'In the flight of vanishing images of the city, the practice of musealisation has the obvious function of guaranteeing elements of recognisability,

32 'Geschwindigkeit, das ist die Zeit, die schwindet.' Georg Elwert, In Search of Time: Different Time-Experiences in Different Cultures, in: Zmago Smittek/Borut Brumen (eds.), *Zmeljevidi casa. Maps of Time* (Ljubljana, 2001), 239. Among other practices, Elwert describes different cultural time regimes by looking at the practice and value of 'waiting'.

33 Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 164.

34 The sociologist Hartmut Rosa brought these three dimensions of acceleration together in his essay: *Kein Halt auf der Ebene der Geschwindigkeit, Frankfurter Rundschau*, 3. 8. 2004, 178, 16. The German word 'Halt' in this context has two meanings: 'stop' and 'handrail'.

35 Hermann Lübbe, *Im Zug der Zeit. Verkürzter Aufenthalt in der Gegenwart* (Heidelberg, 1992).

elements of identity.³⁶ In the affective turning to historical architecture he saw a 'compensation' for the inexorable impositions of the modern time regime, especially for the loss of orientation and familiarity that is a side effect of accelerated progress in urban environments. Odo Marquard, also a 'theoretician of compensation', seconded Lübke. According to Marquard, 'the modern world began when human beings separated themselves methodically from their traditions, when their future was emancipated from their background world of belonging'. But as human beings are unable to fully adapt to the modern time regime, they have to be able to combine two worlds: 'In the modern world we must live two lives: the fast life of progress and the slow life of tradition.'³⁷ Humans develop and cherish a culture of preservation and memory in order to compensate for the frustrations of the modern world of progress. In this logic of compensation, the *homo conservator* is the *Doppelgänger* of the *homo faber*: Both coevolve within the modern time regime, and it is the dialectical function of one to temper the painful and radical effects of the other.

Compensation theorists are modernisation theorists and thus firmly anchored in the modern time regime as sketched above. They have, however, grown sceptical of that scheme's negative side effects and have started thinking about possible remedies that might help humans to better adapt to the high stress that comes with the progressive transformation of the modern world. Their compensatory counter-tendencies therefore do not challenge the principles of the modern time regime, but make it somewhat easier to live with them.

3. Conclusion: Irreversible and Reversible Time

We began with examples of 'futures past', focusing on the future at the time of the Cold War and its demise after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and proceeded to a more systematic anatomy of the modern time regime. At this point, we need to rephrase the question: What has happened to the future? During the last decades we have witnessed an erosion of the modern time regime in ecological, social and philosophical discourses, and together with the waning of the future a waning also of the so-called 'grand narratives'. This gap, it turns out, was quickly filled with an upsurge of memories and new images of the past. This strong new emphasis on the past has indeed be-

³⁶ Idem, *Fortschritt als Orientierungsproblem – Aufklärung in der Gegenwart* (Freiburg, 1982), 18.

³⁷ Odo Marquard, *Zukunft braucht Herkunft. Philosophische Essays* (Stuttgart, 2003), 235, 239.

come an important signature of the present time. The past that had been disposed of and largely ignored in the modern time regime is recovered now as memory and refashioned as heritage in a new cultural ordering of Western temporality.

There are different reasons and motivations for this new interest in the past and the various attempts to reinsert it into the present. The first is *nostalgia*. We have already referred to the dialectics according to which 'creative destruction' produces its other in the shape of preservation and musealisation. The more the still visible past of our built environment is devalued, discarded and destroyed, the more likely the pendulum is to swing into the opposite direction: What modernists condemned to oblivion and singled out for destruction is now revalued and cherished. The past that once had been destined to silently disappear returns in many manifestations as a cultural resource now ardently preserved and protected.³⁸

A similar theoretical background can be detected in the writings of Pierre Nora, who developed his ideas on modernism and memory in the 1970s and 1980s. His approach is clearly tinged by nostalgia as a response to historical ruptures and the acceleration of social and cultural change.

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallises and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire* because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.³⁹

According to Nora, the interest in places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) is a compensation (and fake replacement) for the loss of authentic embedded memory (*milieux de mémoire*) and as such is a logical consequence of the irreversible and unstoppable force with which modern progress hurls the present into the abyss of the past. Both the sense of the historical and nostalgia have coevolved with the process of modernisation. Nostalgia is not so much a reaction against the modern time regime as it is a vital part of it. Progress and nostalgia stabilise each other in a dialectic that has been carefully examined by compensation theorists.⁴⁰ To some extent, the modern time regime can be tempered, made more palatable or even slowed down a bit, but its fundamental structure and irreversible flow towards forgetting and annihilation remain unquestioned.

38 See also the reference to the boom of material retro-culture in Raphael Samuel, *Retrochic*, in: idem, *Theatres of Memory* (New York, 1994), 51–136.

39 Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, *Representations* XXVI, 1989, 7.

40 Svetlana Boyim, *Nostalgia and its Discontents*, *Hedgehog Review* IX, 2007, 7–18.

There is, however, another reason for the return of the past that is new and totally different from the first. This is *trauma*. Trauma as been defined as a psychic wound that does not heal. Its most obvious symptom is that the traumatised person remains tied to violent events in a past that does not go away and that has shattered the sense of self and trust in the world. Together with memory, trauma is a concept that has (re-)entered Western consciousness since the 1980s and deeply changed its insights, values and sensibility. The murderous conquests and destructive wars of Western empires and nations constitute a 'hot past' that does not automatically vanish by virtue of the sheer passing of time but stays present in the 'bloodlands' of Europe and in other places all over the world.⁴¹ When it comes to trauma, there is no divide between the realm of experience and the horizon of expectation; on the contrary, past, present and future are fused in various ways. For this reason, these crimes against humanity, as we call them today, have not silently disappeared but have reappeared in the 1980s and 1990s with an amazing impact. Together with the return of traumatic pasts we have witnessed a dramatic change of paradigm in the writing of history, in which the perspective of victims has challenged that of the victors. We now live in a world in which, all over the globe, the victims of colonialism, slavery, the holocaust, the world wars, genocides, dictatorships, apartheid and other crimes against humanity are raising their voices to tell the story from their point of view and thus to lay claim to a new perspective on history. Together with the new keyword 'trauma' and the ethics of human rights, Western nations have to a large extent adopted this perspective, whereby victims claim recognition and demand that those responsible for the injustice to which they have been exposed and the suffering that they experienced be held accountable. In this perspective of a new 'politics of regret', the past has not automatically vanished or been transferred into the aseptic realm of historical scholarship. On the contrary, it is recovered, reconstructed and reconnected to the present by various emotional, moral or legal ties as a response to past grievances and a form of taking responsibility.

To analyse this change in the structure of temporality further, let us return to Ernst Bloch's speech in 1967. Bloch's impressive and passionate plea for those who had been exploited and humiliated in history was underpinned by a revolutionary spirit. He believed in the power of political revolutions such as that of 1917 to induce an irreversible change towards a better and more just world. In his Frankfurt speech, Bloch did not find it necessary to mention the enormous death toll of Stalin's regime, which had been largely the product of this revolution. When speaking for the exploited and humiliated in history, his vision was wholly future-oriented. The concept of

41 Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010).

trauma, on the other hand, which has changed the Western view of history over the last three decades, is past-oriented. It brought with it a new form of writing history that includes the point of view of the victims. While the future-directed time regime of modernity had the effect of leaving the victims of history behind, the past-oriented time regime of trauma reverses this structure, bringing them back into the present. While trauma itself stands for a specific pathology of time (the impossibility to separate past and present), it also generates a new awareness of the long-term persistence of the past within the present. This requires new forms of temporal reversibility in the realms of law, ethics and therapy. It had been an established juridical rule that the law must not look backward (the so-called *Rückwirkungsverbot*, built on the principle of *null poena sine lege*). This *Rückwirkungsverbot*, however, has been annulled in the past-oriented time-frame of trauma, because there is no statute of limitation for gross violations of human rights. Instead, there is a growing demand for a re-examination of past injustice and injuries to victims. While Bloch's political fervour was directed towards liberating the oppressed, the new juridical, moral and therapeutic practice approach to historical trauma is retrospectively directed towards revaluation, judging crimes, acknowledging suffering and providing means of material and symbolic redress. There is, to sum up, a striking difference between the fervour of political programs directed towards the future and a retrospective attention to individual human trauma based on the human rights paradigm. It is a veto against the modern time regime in that it claims that the past has not altogether passed but contains unfinished business waiting to be addressed in the present.

What is the effect of all this? Do we now – in a time of memory claims and heritage boom – have too much past and too little future? This may be a plausible reaction vis-à-vis the large and still growing number of museums, monuments, memorial sites and commemoration dates, to say nothing of popular books and films on historical themes. I will respond to this question in three steps.

The future has lost its magic power to make the present vanish into a past that is only of historical interest. The concept of trauma connected with an ethical framework has challenged the modern notion of irreversible time by reintroducing cases of reversible time. 'The assumption that the hot present will transform itself into a cold past,' writes Chris Lorenz, 'is a favourite temporal structure of those who prefer to let the past rest. Usually it is the temporal frame favoured by those who have to fear the sentence of law.'⁴² Instead of a culturally neutral time frame in which history evolves and is narrated, we prefer to speak today of a 'politics of time' that was directly linked to the

42 Lorenz, *Geschichte*, 127–135 (my translation).

project of 'nation building'.⁴³ Instead of a continual irreversible breaking up of time, this new paradigm has brought with it a new world ethos with *new forms of reversibility and accountability*. In the juridical, moral and therapeutic time frame, the arrow of time no longer flies in only one direction. The hitherto overlooked injustices and the unaddressed suffering of human beings in the past have not automatically lost their reality and significance by having passed. On the contrary, a recognition of ongoing impact of the past on the present opens the possibility of reversing much of the harm that was done by acknowledging and responding to it. As the present was built on past injustice and injuries, it therefore can and needs to be acknowledged and addressed retrospectively.

New approaches toward the past have introduced a new memory culture. During the last three decades a shift has occurred in the structure of Western temporality. After the injunction to separate the space of experience from the horizon of expectation, it has now become common to emphatically reconnect them and to bridge past and future in various ways. In the frame of memory, the future is directed by the past, but the past is also re-evaluated in the light of the future. Within this temporal framework, the past is no longer the exclusive domain of historians, nor can it be reduced to a soothing tool for compensating the negative side effects of modernisation and acceleration. The cultural uses of the past are much more vital, which does not mean, however, that they are limited to the construction and legitimisation of exclusive and aggressive religious and political identities. All cultures depend upon an ability to bring their past into the present through acts of remembering and remembrancing in order to recover not only acquired experience and valuable knowledge, exemplary models and unsurpassable achievements, but also negative events and a sense of accountability. Without the past there can be no identity, no responsibility, no orientation. In its multiple applications cultural memory greatly enlarges the stock of the creative imagination of a society.

The past and the future are in a process of being reconstructed in new ways, and none of them is dispensable. The modern time regime does not need compensation but rather correction and complementation. We need the future in order to imagine and transform what is not yet. Bloch referred to 'the vast utopian resources in the world', meaning 'what had not yet become part of consciousness, the yet to become, the new, the objectively possible'.⁴⁴ At the same time, there are incidents in the past that still demand post-traumatic after-care. Though fraught with problems and disappointments,

43 Berber Bevernage, *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice* (New York, 2011), 15.

44 Bloch, *Widerstand*, 10.

transforming violent pasts into possible shared futures has become the great project of states transitioning from autocratic regimes into democratic societies. The past has changed its quality but the notion of the future also has changed beyond recognition: It is no longer the Eldorado of hopes and wishes, but rather an object of constant care. The primary concern can therefore no longer only be: what do we want of the past and the future, but: what do the past and the future want from us?