

## PROGRESS AND ACTUALITY:

### Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte* and Benjamin's Historical Materialism

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**R**einhardt Koselleck can be seen at once as both an outsider to conventional circles of historical investigation and a key figure in the examination of history itself, as an object of philosophical inquiry, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his theorizing of modern history, and what it means to engage in the practice of studying history, Koselleck developed what he termed “*Begriffsgeschichte*,” a conceptual history. Through his understanding of both the temporal and linguistic boundaries of human experience, Koselleck develops a meta-historical basis for the experience of modern history. By so doing, he outlines a break which while not occurring simultaneously across all areas of human life, definitively identifies a gulf between a modern and pre-modern understanding of history and as such a transition in human experience writ large, politically, socially and culturally. In his work *Futures Past*, a collection of essays on the subject, Koselleck attempts to describe the historical ground from which the term history (as *Geschichte*) first rose to prominence and assumed new meaning. His *Begriffsgeschichte* was an attempt to illuminate the structure of this new historical mode, through which history itself becomes an object of understanding and study and to discuss the implications of such an understanding for the discipline of history.

Koselleck's conceptual work is meticulous and

his exegesis of the historical period beginning in a transitional time (*Sattelzeit*) and culminating in *Neuzeit*, a dramatically new time, is exemplary in the almost effortless way he interweaves historical empirical fact and potentiality into a structural history. The historically structuring meta-concepts of experience and expectation provide fertile ground within which to understand how dominant politics and modern understandings are directly related to this hegemonic historical consciousness. However, while opening up much in terms of the discipline of history's own self-understanding and providing insight to the interrelationship between history and a dominant modern political mode, his work as a whole possesses certain blind spots that deaden history, to the extent that it rebuffs alternative modes of historical appropriation that political philosophies contesting a specific historical moment might espouse. Thus at the same time that Koselleck accentuates the inherent possibility and potentiality within history there is a structural narrowing of the understanding of the temporal plane. For all of his conceptual complexity and the constant interplay of the temporal relationship between the past and future, the effect produced is one where the politics of time and history become a matter of better or worse navigation of a fixed historical structure. In short, politically this translates into an implicit understanding in

Koselleck's work that differences in political ideology and approach occur in content, but are locked into attempting to manipulate and operate within what becomes a fixed "modern" historical understanding. This structure appears, if one is to accept Koselleck's argument, as tied to the condition of human historical understanding itself. The problem here becomes a question of whether this meta-historical structural understanding of history is itself politically influenced and in turn supportive of a *particular* political and historical experience, which is by no means necessary. Further, whether history, when viewed as such, becomes limited in its view of the political contestations of time itself, and the other ways in which history is understood in different modern contexts.

In this paper I will review Koselleck's argument based on the period of time that leads to what is now the modern understanding of the term "History" and how the conceptual framework that he extends from this analysis is formative and structuring of modern historical experience as a category of examination. Following this, I will draw attention to the political blind spots of this investigation and offer some brief discussion of Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history as alternative to some of the political and social implications that are inherent within Koselleck's work.

### Neuzeit – The Temporalization of History

Koselleck's insights into the modern study of history are directly linked to a shift in the concept's meaning which for him occurs over a period of time beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Koselleck's historico-

theoretical work involves what he calls the emergence of true *Geschichte*, a specifically modern phenomenon that does not mark the first time humans think historically *per se* but which for the first time gives a different perspective on history as a discipline, history in the general and conceptual sense. Noting the qualitative difference between the arrangement and comprehension of the experience of history in pre and modern historical eras, he discusses

a pre-modern context which never organized itself in terms of "history in general" but which had developed against the grain of all potential individual histories. What we today call history was certainly discovered, but history was never explained in terms of history. The naturalistic attachment of historical process in the world of Greek cosmology or in the theological *ordo temporum* of the Judeo-Christian salvational doctrine involved historical knowledge which could be attained only turning away from history as totality. (Koselleck 103)

Koselleck's examination of the shift from specific nodes of historical meaning, whose lessons echo through time, to a history of totality, focuses specifically on the eternal character of pre-modern time in opposition to the infinite character of linear progressive time.

This is expertly dealt with in his essay *Modernity and the Planes of Historicity*, which takes Altdorfers' *Alexanderschlact* as its focal point. Koselleck remarks that for all its historical depth and attention to detail, one remarkable fact that is conspicuous through its absence is the date. Koselleck uses this detail as an example of a common theme within a pre-modern historical understanding. Pre-modern history, it appears, is both contemporary and eternal (Koselleck 10). The importance of the temporal distance between events was diminished in light of a historical approach

that saw history as a cyclical series of a relatively limited number of possible events. What this translates to, is that in Koselleck's analysis a future was directly linked to its past and foreclosed in its possibility through the weight of experience, which until that time, could be said to have changed so slowly generationally as to instill a sense of continuity and dependability into time.

Koselleck defines this transitional time as a period between 1500-1800 where, in his words "there occurs a temporalization [*Verzeitlichung*] of history" (11).

In his analysis, Koselleck wishes to draw out the marked distinction between the two temporal epochs which stand divided by a period that contains the rapid acceleration of technological, philosophical, social and political changes that was comprised largely of what we would now refer to as the transformative historical periods of the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment. This substitution of constant change for what was once constancy disintegrates the repetitive structure of former experience and its hold on politics of the present moment. In short, the timelessness of Altdorfer's painting in his own time becomes dated when viewed historically from our own understanding of our time. Rather than deriving some sense of our own present from the masterpiece now, instead it stands as a testament to its own time, in which it is firmly and conspicuously rooted.

Temporal difference prior to modernity was largely encompassed within an eschatological framework that effectively transported ideas of absolute change into the afterlife, rather than the future. In combination with the dominance of the church, which held down a position as arbiter and protector of the present against the evils and sins of the

world until its "End" or "Parousia," (identified with the second coming but in fact meaning something more akin to fulfillment)<sup>1</sup> the moment of the present was considered an additive extension of past history, forestalling or heading towards apocalypse or rapture. Politically, this eschatological framework worked hand in hand with the Church's power structure, which through intimidation and use of force, assumed the role of preserver of the stability of the present itself. As Koselleck notes:

The stability of the Church was not to be endangered; its unity, like the existence of the empire itself, was a guarantee of order until the End of the World came. Correspondingly, the future of the world and its end were made part of the history of the church... (13)

The supplanting of the church by the state that occurred during this transitional time, in which the state assumes its own role in extending the present peace and holding off what importantly now become identified as worldly (read: human and secular) threats as opposed to spiritual, marks the major political shift to the modern era.<sup>2</sup>

The transition from spiritual to worldly concerns also marks the beginning of a new mathematics of the future, in which the state calculated its actions through rational prognosis. This made the state far more than simply an analog for the previous church regime it replaced. Though this shift did not occur immediately and in the transition the state did reabsorb some of the methods of the church into its practice, ultimately the practice of time in the modern state became markedly distanced from its precursor. In place of an apocalyptic end that could be forestalled only through the defensive bulwarks of the church, "the end" becomes an object of political manipulation, of possibility, but ultimately (and most significantly) it

was unknown and to be determined by human agents, not divine ones. Furthermore, in reality “the end” was replaced with “the goal,” an object towards which human agents were to direct their energies to hasten its coming. Prophecy, the business of the Church, was displaced by calculability, rationalism and therefore, prognosis. This is perhaps the most pertinent difference between the modern era in which the state rules supreme and the epoch that was marked by the reign of the Holy See. As Koselleck remarks:

Prognosis produces the time within which and out of which it weaves, whereas apocalyptic prophecy destroys time through its fixation on the End. From the point of view of prophecy, events are merely symbols of that which is already known. A disappointed prophet cannot doubt the truth of his own predictions. Since these are variable, they can be renewed at any time. Moreover, with every disappointment, the certainty of approaching fulfillment increases. An erroneous prognosis, by contrast, cannot even be repeated as an error, remaining as it does conditioned by specific assumptions. (19)

The break between the eschatology of the Church and the prognostication of the modern era in its fledgling state, a historical *process* (*Prozess*) in Koselleck’s terms, inaugurated the modern era as one in which the promises of salvation, that for so long held religious men in the seats of power, were replaced by assurances of progress.

The confluence of the three terms mentioned here; process, prognosis and progress marked the genesis of an era where the future’s solid foundation in the past (projected by the repetitive nature of history and the minimal experience with anything “new”) was undone. The past became unlinked and the future became an object of calculation with the understanding that it was always to be altogether other; fundamentally unknown. Unlinked from the

cyclical pattern of tradition, the future became an open space into which one boldly attempted to assert one’s force or lose oneself in the rapidly accelerating flow of temporal change.

The phenomenon of rapid change and acceleration provided source material across various disciplines, literature, philosophy, poetry, music and others, all tackling in part the issue of the rapidly shrinking experience of the present. As Koselleck mentions:

This self-accelerating temporality robs the present of the possibility of being experienced as the present, and escapes into a future within which the currently unapprehensible present has to be captured by historical philosophy. (22)

This loss of experience of the present, combined with the replacing of the past’s exemplary nature with one that was considered to be altogether unique and thus, at the very least, less instructive, meant that modernity manifested as the disjointed experience of a once continuous and bounded temporal space of past-present-future. The observation that history could no longer predict the future, was itself a paradoxical historical observation, and turned history on itself; history became denaturalized and this turning on itself of history becomes for Koselleck the moment of history’s denaturalization (37).

It is essential to stress that it is specifically a change in the nature of the future, expanding into a multiplicity of potentialities and thus irreducibly other to the past, that shifts the understanding of history into its modern mode. Further, this alterity is directly linked to the un-bounding of time from the eschaton, the second coming, the end of the world, replaced by simple open possibility. Crucial here, is that the otherness of the past vis-à-vis future (or in other terms

the fact that the knowledge of the past in terms of its predictive potential always arrives too late) invokes an obsession with the future that is altogether modern in its nature. The future, far from being abandoned as a field of study due to its acknowledged alterity, becomes an obsession of the present, to the extent that the importance of the present pales in light of the necessity to plan and prognosticate about the future.

These plans and prognostications were in turn inspired by the possibility of a fulfilled future. Hope was transposed into the future in place of the last judgement, and a singular history became the object of human attainment that was almost assured through the very experience of rapid change that had made history come unstuck from its past events in the first place. Not simply the project of Kant and Hegel, who could be said to have been the two most significant and earliest modern proponents of fulfilled history as totality, the goal of history became an obsession for western philosophy.

For Koselleck's part, this obsession hints at the conceptual meta-history that he comes to identify as modern. By addressing history conceptually between two poles of the "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation," (Koselleck 257) there is an enframing of history. Koselleck outlines this structure. Drawing attention through first describing the formal conceptual quality the two terms have, he describes how, both categories in and of themselves describe nothing concrete. These two categories become the epistemological basis for the "possibility of a history" (Koselleck 256). This possibility is a structural necessity supporting history, as it is understood presently, but expresses nothing actual about particular historical events. It is in their absolute generality however that Koselleck finds their

conceptual utility and, in his claim, they become analogs in historical science to the categories of time and space in natural science. Koselleck assigns these two categories similar levels of import in terms of the possibility of history, to the extent that he dictates the two represent "a general human condition...they indicate an anthropological condition without which history is neither possible nor conceivable." Just as how time and space are anthropological necessities (in most estimations) for the experience of worldly phenomenon, experience and expectation enable historical cognition in its modern mode. Here is where Koselleck makes his strongest, and perhaps most contentious, claims about the structure of history.

The assertion of the essential nature of these two categories for the experience of history is undoubtedly intuitive and difficult to argue with. However, the question that might rightfully be raised is not whether these categories are structurally significant to the experience of a form of history, but whether it is indeed 'a general human condition' for the experience of history *in toto*. This begs the question of whether or not Koselleck's proposed historical structure is itself a product of its time. Does this historical structure, in Ouroborean fashion, turn back on itself and limit its own historical potential, narrowing the historico-political moment of the modern present as intractably embroiled in a moment of tension represented by a 'now' that is forever fleeting and thus in some way always already 'not now.' Koselleck seems to recognize this form of historical cognition as historically produced whilst not acknowledging its moment of enclosure. It appears that precisely at the moment of its genesis there is an erasure of its origin as historically produced in order to present itself as a complete (total) historical object for examination.

Closing the circle and dictating the historical experience proper as one of this mediation between two concepts could in fact be favouring a certain political hegemonic mode of experiencing the present that is anything but neutral and thus potentially limiting towards the registration and experience of different historico-political modes. Further this could belie the fact that it is a historical structure produced in a political moment that is conducive to furthering its own political dominance. However before falling too far into rhetorical questioning and conjecture it is worth examining in more detail the importance and function of the two concepts for Koselleck.

### Koselleck's Conceptual Ground: Experience and Expectation

Dovetailing with theoretical observations from Novalis, Koselleck notes that the original meaning of *Geschichte* was not specifically the past but rather a connection between past and future that is observed only through the mediation of memory and hope, the more ecclesiastical terms mirroring Koselleck's own. This apparatus maps over past and future and as such "are also suitable for detecting historical time in the domain of empirical research since, when substantially augmented, they provide guidance to concrete agencies in the course of social or political movement" (Koselleck 258).

It should be noted that as a historian, theoretical or no, the problem of studying history, the question of the historical, is Koselleck's self-assigned task. However, bearing in mind the vast importance the dual concepts of experience and expectation are given in their political influence, their ability to direct a particular historical perspective, to enforce a narrowed field of vision directed towards the future, one should

step carefully in situating the relationship of these two concepts as the only ways of conceptualizing history. Certainly a question is raised around the degree to which it *pre-determines* future political possibility.

Koselleck puts such emphasis on his conceptual framework that they become "formal determinants that disclose this process. They are indicative of the temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) of men and thus, meta-historically if you wish, of the temporality of history" (Koselleck 258).

How can it be said that the present vanishes for Koselleck, particularly when he defines his concepts in present terms, experience as present past and expectation as future present? In his words, Koselleck defines his concepts as possessing a "present-centeredness" (Koselleck 259). Despite making these claims and what the terminology might indicate, both instances are moments of the present being torn apart and subsumed, divided and conquered by the pastness and futurity of its respective moments. They are always moments disjointed in time, experience always arrive too late, expectation always scattered along the infinite extension of time. The simultaneity of the past, in which Koselleck claims the entirety of the past is available to the present's reorientation of it, acts almost as inanimate material needing to be reworked. However, the past's availability is deceptive and no longer provides the solid ground it once offered as dependable sanctuary to pre-modern historians. The past, in its paradoxical openly observable existence yet ultimately indeterminate character, differentiates itself from the immaterialized future. The never-ending retreat of the experiential horizon, despite attempts to force it into existence, means an irreducible alterity of the future that enacts a violent severing of any traditional understanding of historical being.

Others investigating Koselleck's work argue against such an interpretation as this, even to the extent of critiquing Koselleck himself. John Zammito's work, as an investigation into Koselleck's meta-history, argues that there is no otherness of the past, "but instead stratum upon stratum of the past flows in and through the present at varying velocities, and it is precisely the historical craft to "drill down" to "reach back" (133). This "drill back" extends the spatial and archeological metaphors of Koselleck dangerously close if not past their breaking point, trending towards Ranke's objective philosophical duty of the historian, despite the fact Zammito along with Koselleck (and Benjamin) explicitly reject this stance.

Anders Schinkel (2005), in his discussion of the absence of a third concept (imagination) in Koselleck's theoretical structure, argues against the very possibility of the separation of Koselleck's historical concepts. He insists that Koselleck's usage confuses experience and expectation's meta-historical status with their historical modes, and in doing so mischaracterizes what is distinctive of the modern era and fails to do justice to the continuity in history, across modern and pre-modern.<sup>3</sup> For Schinkel the dissimilarity of the modes of the concepts does not allow for their separability as they are both intrinsic to the process of history itself.

The dissimilarity of the "modes of existence" of experience and expectation for Koselleck reveals that they cannot be understood as mere counter-concepts and provides the force of conceptual tension from which "something like historical time can be inferred" (Koselleck 261).

This dissimilarity is the lynchpin of his theory, and provides the internal tension from which the system derives its force of motion. The unknowability

and unpredictability of the future in the face of the expected, means that even if one is to attempt to incorporate the unbridgeable distance between two concepts theoretically, this conceptual manoeuvre does little to improve future prognostication. The ability of the future to introduce something unique into the past totality of experience can have a reorienting ripple effect through the totality of past experiences, making them something other than what they were at the time, but still this re-transcription reveals an unrealized past as something that it also always already was. This is more shifting of conceptual vantage point than the actual re-inscription of the totality of past experience and does indeed lend itself to some comparison with Walter Benjamin's comments on the constellation-like relation between ideas and concepts in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

In Koselleck's estimation, the prognosis of the future event is the historical horizon drawn out of the space of experience itself, but not entirely. Insofar as prognoses are made they affect that which is their initial material for said prognostication. Much akin to a basic tenant of quantum physics, the prognosis affects that about which prognostication is made. Thus the prognostication of the future from past experience delimits a future space that returns a certain interpretation of past experience.

In support of Koselleck, defenders note how much of the inherent motion within the theoretical structure of Koselleck's historicism derives from his early Heideggerian influences in an attempt to maintain a certain historical reflexivity on the relationship of the historian in the present extending into the indeterminate past.

Helge Jordheim (2012) mounts an impressive and theoretically nuanced defense of Koselleck as not a

theory of periodization nor of historical stasis but rather an interpenetration of synchronic and diachronic moments that afford a 'taking place' *Geschehen* of history (Jordheim 159). However, this *Geschehen* is still structured in such a way as to limit possibility in its historical intervention in the present.

This avoidance of the present is consistent through both Jordheim and Zammito. Zammito and Jordheim rightfully argue against a reduction of Koselleck's philosophy of history to a history of periodization. In Jordheim, concerned with demonstrating the constant internal motion inherent within Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte*, the temporality of the concept itself is persistent in establishing that the theory avoids what Heidegger (a mentor and influence for Koselleck) called a *Stillegung der Geschichte* (Jordheim 163). This certainly avoids the kind of objectivist, non-interpretive positing of a history as it was, however again what is forgotten that history is not simply a history of what was but a history as a referent to both what is presently and what could have been as a possible present. The flexibility of the theory that Jordheim rightly identifies in its unleashing of history from any attempts at fixing it as it objectively was and will forever be still avoids a philosophy of history which includes a political present.

One begins to see how the actual present gets lost in this feedback loop of conceptual redoubling. The meta-historical structure, in its application towards future prognostication reduces future potential. Simultaneously expectation, by Koselleck's own definition, precludes any actual guarantee regarding the future. Thus this historical method, when applied, becomes a political cycle that feeds on political possibility, producing increasingly limiting results. This loop limits the agency of present action towards a

future whilst refusing assurances of delivering on the promise that is the cause of the limiting of the present in the first place (that being a certain degree of dependability of the wealth of the totality of past experience).

Schinkel here is useful in drawing out how imagination itself imports an agency into Koselleck's theory that appears to be lacking (Schinkel 48). However with his overemphasis on imagination as the panacea to Koselleck's theoretical contradiction he unwittingly aligns himself with Koselleck's assignation of historical motion to great actors (on which more will be said later), or those with greater imaginary capacity. However, in the case of Schinkel it is less explicable how the proliferation of imagination occurred, how it "typically became stronger, more creative, and underwrote more active ways of being" (50). Schinkel's argument places a great degree of faith and awe in the growing number of historical characters with great imaginations, ignoring the socio-political context which nurtures some intellects and allows others to wither on the vine. Occasionally this will lead Schinkel to go too far, for example claiming, "modernity began when imagination took flight;" (52) a claim that he himself tempers with the caveat that it may be a bit pompous. To this extent history turns into a space of projection of great individuals and their ideas, again Schinkel here is aligning himself, however unwillingly, with Koselleck's presentation of history as a space where those most successful individuals mediate it best. Further, Schinkel appears to reflect the same amnesia of the present that Koselleck too suffers from.

Schinkel does not deny the differences between a modern and pre-modern period. Rather, he assigns

these historical, instead of meta-historical importance, and outlines the differences as between

a backward-looking and a forward-looking consciousness. The backward-looking consciousness is dominated by past experiences, meaning that it is not bent on forming expectations of a future that will be very different from the past. The forward-looking consciousness does not ignore past experiences—it cannot shape expectations out of thin air—but it uses its experience in order to transform it. (Schinkel 50)

Though the basis for the explosion of the potential of the modern imaginary is not fully explained, one can still observe that is the present that is lost in both perspectives, historically and meta-historically and that the question of agency looms.

Returning to deal with Koselleck directly, one can observe that a political blindness (or at least conservatism) appears in his historical theory. The historical concepts have an empty overdetermination, which structurally promises a prognosis of the future, but by necessity produces the limitation (if not elimination) of the potentiality of the present or the redress of present unfulfilled potential. Simultaneously, this theoretical presentation of historical structure necessarily involves the conceptual undoing of its promise of the future (however self-limiting) by being based on the ultimate unknowability of the future in the first place. This conceptual co-constitution makes a certain form of historical time (in Koselleck's estimation, modern historical time) possible, but this historical experience is not simply divided from political possibility. The present emerges out of this "redoubling" and itself has a prognostic structure. However, if this is what the present "is" and how it operates, the present itself is a function of temporal flux between past and present that then has no quality

of itself, but rather, becomes an echo of itself. The present lags behind itself insofar as it is a moment transcribing itself and transitioning to and adapting to a constantly shifting future.

While, in comparison, Koselleck states that pre-modern experience relied on a constancy of the present, effectively a linking of past experience to future so directly that history could not be understood as it is today, and thus could be considered an elongated present, the question becomes one of how much change is actually possible within Koselleck's new register of historical time?

In one sense his concept of historical time is a function of change. As previously mentioned, the experience of time is intricately linked to the impossibility of reducing future to past, of an absolute alterity. History divorced from nature and biology, loses its last barrier with the removal of the Christian eschaton, and becomes an indeterminate future in infinite time. This final delinking and banishment of the apocalyptic end of the world was the product of progress. The thesis that the chasm between experience and expectation has grown greater through an observable acceleration of change is intuitive and not contested here. However it is the subsumption of political (republicanism) and economic (capitalist) change by technological change and the shift of the historical incorporation of the *rate of change*, which artificially displaces the experience of the present moment, rather than change itself, that brings with it political problems. The present moment's continual turning over or reinvention of the same, is taken as "the new" or "change" thus inserting a cyclical temporal mechanism within the overtly linear historical structure of future progress. It is the argument here that the historical measure that

Koselleck proposes which is indeed an accurate description of a *form of modern historical time* replaces change with what could be called a coefficient of change (a turning over, a repetition, the energy for the historical structure derived in part from the present's constant change and restoration in place of actual change) and thus prizes a certain kind cyclical *speed* over *velocity* (to adapt even more terms from the natural sciences). History itself becomes a structure based on acceleration, and less on the registration of the present in relation to the past. This acceleration is in fact what constitutes the shifting grounds of historical time. The frenetic pace of technological change masks a broader political and economic holding pattern. The loss of historical focus caused through superficial change masquerades as real change or historical progress.

The rupture in the continuity of time was replaced with a continuity of rupture marked by constant technological change, while politically and economically the end of history has been declared as near accomplished or achieved at least as far back as Hegel and as recently as the fall of communism. As such the rate of change is the historical measure and not change itself. If the acceleration of change does not continually increase then this structure may falter.

The mindset that things are always changing reduces the responsibility of the present. A change in present conditions is unlikely because the present is merely a moment of change itself, thus not present. There is no present to speak of there is only a past that we still use to prognosticate about a future's perfectibility which reduces the historical plane in its overall scope of possibilities. This precisely is what can be observed over time as history has emerged from the *Sattelzeit*. This manifestation of history provides some

insight into Benjamin's corrective statement to Marx saying

Marx says that revolutions are the locomotives of world history. Things are entirely different. Perhaps revolutions are the human race, who is travelling in this train, reaching for the emergency brake. (Benjamin 2006b 402)

Benjamin is seemingly paradoxical in his demand to stop, or at least slow down, what is generally understood as a historical process speeding towards the future, but he is doing so in the name of revolution (a turning over in a completely different sense), in the name of change. He thus seems to be differentiating between two categories of change. There is a speed to a certain historical process that Benjamin sees as needing to be stopped in order to make any space for real political change. Koselleck's claim that the emergence of history propelled by progress cannot be dismissed as modern ideology seems limp, and defended only on the basis of progress' conceptual foundation.

Koselleck does not often speak directly about the function of politics or political action and their affect on the historical process. However one section in *Futures Past* is particularly revealing of his thoughts on the function of the political. He states:

The index of temporality contained within the anthropologically given tension between experience and expectation provides us with a standard, by means of which we are also able to register the emergence of *Neuzeit* in constitutional concepts. When considered with respect to their temporal extension, the manner in which these concepts are formed testifies to a conscious separation of space of experience and horizon of expectation, *and it becomes the task of political action to bridge this difference.*" (Koselleck 272, italics added)

Politics here is given a function that must resolve the tension created through the dissonance of Koselleck's meta-historical and anthropologically given concepts. However if this is indeed the function of politics, several problems arise. Firstly as previously mentioned this makes it incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to initiate a politics of the present, or indeed in a real sense a politics responsible to the past. The response and responsibility of a political moment to itself, a fidelity to its own present or past conditions (both real and potential) is overshadowed by its constant need for reorientation and incorporation of future expectations. In bridging this difference, politics cannot simultaneously account for shifting grounds on both sides, and thus must accept a certain expression of the totality of the past and the limitation on the scope of the future in order to produce a political present that vanishes as soon as it is produced. In fact the political moment can never last in a way that is productive or generative in its own time. It too is already too late *and* never realized and as such the political moment can only reconfirm the dominant political situation that it finds itself in. This to some extent arises from the spatial orientation of Koselleck's temporal concepts. Thus what starts as an epoch beginning historical shift leads quickly to a political, social and economic repetition based upon the assertion of dominant capitalist progressive time.

In playing with themes of ever increasing distance between Koselleck's two main conceptual categories and also noting the inevitably permanent retreat of the horizon of experience, we find the present stuck in a position of permanent deferral<sup>4</sup> (if we are to consider the present as the merging or overlap of the two conceptual poles of expectation and experience as Koselleck seems to indicate). Following

this, the dislocation of politics that occurs through its subservience to a rhetoric of progress, which as previously shown is fundamental to a modern concept of historical time, is in no way a politically neutral re-assignment of the role of the political. Secondly, politics within this historical schema becomes a support structure to whatever form of meta-political, economic, and historical power is best suited to a form of history that is driven through a narrative of progress. This in itself becomes a temporal question of whether a hegemonic political order is hegemonic because of its navigation of a given historical structure or whether its political dominance is established through its role in positing said structure. Given the depth and meticulous nature of Koselleck's discussion of previous political manipulations of historical structures to maintain power, it again seems strange to not at least suggest a similar modern repetition of these historical manipulations that is at least self-aware.

Within a historical structural argument, political agency is subsumed under the necessity of historical ordering and adjustment, rendering actual change largely impossible, as to do so politics would be seen from within a historical sphere as largely failing in its task as defined by Koselleck above. In short a politics so assigned by Koselleck, would itself be only reactive and never fully present in time, stuck in a sense, between constant prognostication, that becomes increasingly important in modern era risk societies, and the incorporation of future expectations as they collapse into current experiences, no matter whether they are unexpected or not. In defining politics in such a way, it is already structured around a dominant (but not the only) mode of historical thinking that produces a specific accompanying political mode. This is not to

argue against the actuality of the historical concepts and structure that Koselleck describes but it is to question it on the grounds of its (independent or essential) reality.

Inklings of this predetermination of politics can be seen in the political shift from Aristotelian political categories to the binary of “despotism or republicanism” (Koselleck 273) in which despotism mars the past and republicanism offers the future promise to which one must strive. As Koselleck notes: “Republicanism indicated the principle of historical movement and it was a moral dictate for political action to push it forward...Republicanism was therefore a concept of movement which did for political action what “progress” promised to do for the whole of history” (273).

As an analog for progress, the political mode follows in its function, making the realm of politics simply a poor reflection of the dominant historical mode. The various competing political “ism”s that arose afterwards did nothing to change this structure instead

[i]t served the purpose of theoretically anticipating future historical movement and practically influencing it. The temporal difference between all previously experienced forms of rule and the constitution that was to be expected and toward which one should strive was in this way embodied in a concept that had a direct influence on political life. (Koselleck 273)

This displacement into the future of the political goal in a projected perfect and finished state however made the actual political situation of the present, secondary and pale in importance alongside the general goal of history proper. Thus, as seen in Koselleck’s conclusion, politics can only ever reflect the historical structure within which it operates.

Beholden to the emerging historical rules of Koselleck’s exposition, various relations of experience to expectation occur with different coefficients of change and differing levels of experiential substance, but structurally remain bound to produce certain political modes of being.

Koselleck traces the truth of this observation through the emergence of “republicanism, democracy and liberalism” (274) to the political present and assumes the same structure will apply to socialism and communism if they are ever to arrive. Missing in this analysis then is the possibility that the historical structure which he has laid bare is itself the impediment to the fact that communism and socialism as political modes have yet to survive and flourish in the modern era. The question of whether progress and its mediating function between the two conceptual poles is itself not simply a meta-historical given, but politically (or meta-politically) produced historical reality that pre-forms a specific political landscape limiting some potentialities while firmly establishing others, is not discussed in any length.

### The Presence-ing of the Present in History

If Koselleck can be critiqued on putting too much conceptual weight on the relationship between past and future, then Benjamin can be said to be a corrective to this theory, in so far as his historical thinking emanates out from a present, extending backwards into the past and taking a unique approach to the future.

Benjamin’s texts on history read in conjunction with Koselleck’s often present as opposites. While Koselleck goes to great rhetorical length to draw attention to motifs of motion and force in a modern age that constantly swings between the past and the

future, is constantly accelerated and thrust into ever newer situations, Benjamin demands temporal stasis, and tension that is not released into motion but rather barely contained within a present moment, temporally charged to the point of bursting and giving forth something authentically new. The perceived progressive motion of time is in fact merely additive time for Benjamin, notches along a chronological place extending infinitely. Here then the language of motion that is applied in Koselleck's conceptual observations on history becomes opposed to the politically charged historical stasis of Benjamin.

It is not simply that Benjamin opposes motion with stasis however. Upon closer reading within Benjamin one notes that many adjectives depicting movement in terms of history are modified to demonstrate an actual stasis in place of apparent motion and thus point to the cyclical moment of replication that occurs in an empty continuum of time. Benjamin splits historical understanding into historicity, into a movement of history that is actuality static, and a proper historical materialism, a static historical moment that itself is charged with energy and potential for real movement (understood as a metaphor for change).

Benjamin's critique of such notions of historical motion into the future is that these narratives of forward motion tend to disguise a deeper historical stagnation that heaps suffering upon suffering. The identification of one's own moment as a moment of flux and change, paradoxically becomes a moment of additive empty time to which events are added but one's place in history remains passive. Difference itself is rendered a constant state of things where "...the acceleration of a change which consumes experience – has since then belonged to the *topoi* characteristic of

the prevailing *neueste Geschichte*" (Koselleck 242). Again this acceleration of change *consumes* experience and leaves the present moment and produces a change that re-introduces the same. As mentioned this becomes particularly pertinent when Koselleck observes the fact that the "isms" relocate themselves within a language of movement, which through a Benjaminian analysis has the potential to turn the present into the "anteroom, so to speak, in which one could wait for the mergence of the revolutionary situation with more or less equanimity" (Benjamin 2006b 402).

These observations on movement by Koselleck, perhaps leads him into a misappropriation of Marx and Engel's *German Ideology* which aligns the meaning of the statement "real movement which abolishes the present state of things..." (Koselleck 249) with the movement of liberalism or capitalism. Here the destructive character of the movement is essential and again becomes a central theme within Benjamin's philosophy of history. However, Benjamin's destructive character differs greatly from that of Koselleck which seems to be a redirecting of historical progress rather than destruction of a political-historical mode. The mistake here is reading Marx and Engels primary claim as "claim[ing] the future for their own" (Koselleck 249) instead of recognizing the imminently present, immediate character of the claim, directing work towards the now rather than creating a place distant in space and time which will eventually be claimed by communism on the date of its victory/arrival.

This reading again reveals the political antipathy within Koselleck's conceptual history. These categories, as meta-historical and uncontested, are the neutral historical ground in which and *only* through

which any modern political movement can structure its self-understanding, rather than itself a politically charged structure which necessarily favoured certain political aims and historical interpretations through control of the conceptual definitions. Koselleck's multiplicity of time here forgets its own potential when he assigns it a structural role to such a degree. In recognizing the shift from ancient conceptions of time to modern, Koselleck depends on the fixity of history becoming undone. At the same time, historical events exist with a potentiality to always extend beyond their own previous interpretations, to be more than what they were, to offer something new to the present through newer and different mediations with new and politically different presents. However, within the age of modernity, Koselleck's formulation of history empirically returns the same political result, despite its potential multiplicity. While this is not, in and of itself, proof of anything, the political and economic dominance of a certain ideology during that time is at least worthy of investigation.

### The Bearing of Modern History

For Benjamin, historical materialism concerns remembering (*Eingedenken*) which as one of several German terms for memory, takes a more active position of bearing in mind, of being mindful of something as opposed to other terms such as *Erinnerung* or *Gedachtnis* which may be more akin to simple recall.

Writing in his Arcades project, he suggests that what is needed is a "Copernican revolution in historical perception" (Benjamin 1999 388) which is to be understood as a dialectical turn of remembrance. Rather than a fixed relationship between the past as "what has been" and the present, politics asserts its primacy over history:

the facts become something that just now first happened to us, first struck us; to establish them is the affair of the memory... There is a not-yet conscious knowledge of what has been: its advancement [*förderung*] has the structure of awakening. (Benjamin 1999 389)

In the dialectical movement of the truly historical moment we have what Benjamin infamously terms the dialectical image. A synchronicity of the constellation of historical images results in a "now of a particular recognizability" (Benjamin 1999 463) truth becomes charged to the 'bursting point with time.'

It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural <bildlich>. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical – that is, not archaic – images. The image that is read – which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability – bears to the highest degree the imprint of the *perilous critical moment* on which all reading is founded. (Benjamin 1999 463)

Just as the Copernican revolution destabilized and displaced the center of the known universe, so too does its temporal analogue disrupt the stability and perspective of traditionally understood historical progression. The truly historical here is the dialectical relationship of two moments brought together in an instantaneous moment of similitude.

Benjamin's historical materialism insists on an approach that addresses modern historicism as perspectively slanted towards a constant history of the victor (2006b 391) and as such suggests a focus on the accruing historical trauma that grows in silence. On

making conscious the trauma of the present, exposing historical trauma in the “now” in such a way as to address and make whole a history that is generally one-sided, Benjamin’s method blasts a moment out of linear continuous history.<sup>5</sup> In fact a truly historical position is only possible as a relation between the two traumatic moments of the past and present held together through the weak messianic power of the present towards a failed past of unfulfilled possibility. This present is at once the potential future of past intention, it becomes messianic in that it was intended by past failures and has the potential to actualize this failed potentiality. As Benjamin states, the present generation’s coming was “expected” (2006b 290). This messianic quality of the present recognizes the frailty of an unfulfilled past and its potential to be lost irrevocably in the flow of progressive time. This form of history is dangerous to the existing political historical structure and *in danger* of being subsumed. Benjamin’s “now” works through a historical understanding that involves an active remembering that is not simple reference to historical precedent but takes the past into the present in a moment where both mutually inform the other and create a truly new situation.

Thus here the ‘truth’ of the history of oppression emerges in a lightning flash and exists for this new and *singular* moment of the now, but only as fleeting truth, only useable in this moment which one must cling to. This moment of truth however, is ultimately transient, for to assert its eternal nature would be by definition atemporal (as the eternal is outside of time) and universal, as no longer particular to this specific political moment. Truth as concept here interacts in time but itself does not collapse its own multiplicity into a Platonic eternal ideal. There is something in the

historical moment that exceeds the moment, and thus necessitates its fleeting nature, for the instant we proceed into a new historical constellation our position has already shifted irrevocably. Thus Benjamin is not a proponent of metaphysical truth as commonly understood, yet there still seems to be a way in which truth can reveal or express itself in a singular moment, and this must be seized with revolutionary vigor. Truth is here transient but always related to the now, rather than timeless but transposed into the future or enframed as a relation between the historical conceptual categories. The truth is a matter of fidelity to history’s present actualization and acts as a bulwark against the subsumption of the present in past and future.

The “weak messianic power” (2006b 390) that Benjamin speaks of, which acts on the present as a demand from the past, extended from previous generations, is not the demand of progression to an eschaton but instead a demand for political actualization in a moment of the now. This present moment is one in which a past failed potentiality is fulfilled, lending it a redemptive character. Any moment can be the “small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter” (Benjamin 2006b 397). Thus it contains a strong cautionary impulse, an irreducibly central vigour, and introduces an absolute insistence upon responsibility, vigilance and vitality in resistance to the enemy from whom “even the dead will not be safe” (Benjamin 2006b 391).

This is not a progressive, teleological understanding of time but rather perhaps a utopian, fulfilment of time, and this time is present. If for Koselleck hope is to be found in future expectation, for Benjamin hope can only be recovered from the past. The theological moment of time refuses its

incorporation into the human historical temporal progression whilst remaining operative in it, not reducible to but active in. As such Benjamin suggests an attunement to the now and absencing oneself from a temporal moment of the now that is continuous with a certain past and present. It should not be assumed that Benjamin theorized this political theory unconcerned with the political costs or actions that would have to be undertaken in the “real world”. Benjamin often returns to statements that accentuate his desire that this theory be situated in a real historical moment of his present writing, for example stating in his *Theses*:

The themes which monastic discipline assigned to friars for meditation were designed to turn them away from the world and its affairs. The thoughts we are developing here have a similar aim. At a moment when the politicians in whom the opponents of fascism had placed their hopes are prostrate, and confirm their defeat by betraying their own cause, these observations are intended to extricate the political worldlings from the snares in which the traitors have entangled them. The assumption here is that those politicians’ stubborn faith in progress, their confidence in their “base in the masses,” and, finally, their servile integration in an uncontrollable apparatus are three aspects of the same thing. This consideration is meant to suggest the high price our customary mode of thought will have to pay for a conception of history that avoids any complicity with the concept of history to which those politicians still adhere. (2006b 393)

### Begriffsgeschichte and its Political Mode

If Koselleck’s objective is to elucidate a dominant historical structure that emerges out of the modern period, Benjamin’s is to address how this dominant historical structure produces a contradictory political present that promises progress but delivers catastrophe. Political blindness to the present based on the seemingly inherent characteristic of modern time’s

progressive nature is something specifically examined by Benjamin, who commented that an objective of his work in the *Arcades Project* was to

Demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress. Just here, historical materialism has every reason to distinguish itself sharply from bourgeois habits of thought. Its founding concept is not progress but actualization. (Benjamin 1999 460)

Here one at once observes the distancing of Benjamin’s focus from that of Koselleck. Koselleck describes a meta-historical structure of modernity’s temporalization, based in abstract and empty formal concepts. While he is concerned with a general history “developed against the grain of all potential individual histories” (Koselleck 103) and as such somewhat dismissive of the contingency of this general “history” Benjamin locks on to this contingency and potentiality of history as historical material proper. Koselleck’s history is then situated in a constant transitory moment between two conceptual poles, Benjamin focuses on the actualization of a political-historical present (singular) as a moment of historical recognition and (re)presentation that crystalizes in recognizable moment of the “now.” This can be viewed in myriad ways. It could be said that both are concerned with unearthing a truth of history but whereas Koselleck’s appears to be structural and deterministic Benjamin’s historical truth of the now appears tenuous, transitory and always tied to a specific moment in time. While Benjamin’s philosophy of history can perhaps be said to be lacking in content in a different way, in terms of prescriptive political guidelines, it does not sacrifice the rigour of its demands in order to obtain a kind of historical certitude.

Ultimately it is important to differentiate

Koselleck's openness to temporal multiplicity and Benjamin's approach of multiple times traversing the moment of the now. While Koselleck recognizes a certain non-linearity of history, ultimately his theorizing collapses multiple registers of time into one modern horizon of progressive history. The retroactivity of historical transcription has an affect but is subsumed into Koselleck's historical process (*Prozess*). Conversely, Benjamin's continual historical question is that of asserting moments in time where different *times* disrupt, redefine, interact but are not subsumed into the other. For Benjamin (particularly in his later works) this disruptive temporality is in part an acknowledgement of the material oppression and suffering that helps create the modern "now" and the succession of oppression that occurs through a continuum of progress. This is noticeably mentioned but conspicuously under theorized within Koselleck's work.<sup>6</sup>

While for Koselleck, the emergence of a new type of historical time testified to the revisability and co-presence of the past, for Benjamin the truth of history wasn't simply linked to this kind of relativity. It had a fragile authenticity that was continually trampled by a march of progress that constantly folded failure into a linearity of progressive time, leaving nothing but carnage and catastrophe in its wake. The only hope for the majority who were sacrificed to the ever-spinning wheel of historical progress of the victors (producing cultural artifacts that were always signposts of the history of barbarism that underwrote it) was the redemptive messianic potential which proposed a rescue of history, not a revision of it.

For Benjamin, truth and facticity are not always aligned. This is not to imply that history is fictitious, but rather that facticity is always complicit with fiction

and that the present is as much a product of non-actualized past potentiality as it is the middle point between a past and future moment. Objective history, so-called, is the reduction of complexity, the non-linear, the multiple to the simple, straightforward and the singular.

The truth of this history is intimately tied to the stance which the present stands in regard to the past. Specifically within the *Epistemo-Critical Prologue* Benjamin attacks a certain scientism of history, a tendency to conceptual systems that would attempt to "ensnare the truth as if it were something which came flying in from outside" (*Origin of German Tragic Drama* 28) and which fundamentally limits the representation of truth in history. Thus history at the metaphysical level is always at play, indeterminate in a way that sits juxtaposed to Koselleck's meta-historical conceptual history that becomes the chains that limit the extent of ones movement through a temporal landscape. These temporal chains institute a certain rigidity and make the present into a secondary transitional moment between a past that is continually fading and a future that increasingly imposes its will by casting an alternately terrifying and titillating shadow of future possibility upon the present.

Perhaps, put in different language, the Benjaminian critique of Koselleck can be found in his failed *habilitationsschrift* as the difference between 'origin' and 'genesis':

Origin [Ursprung], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [Entstehung]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is

original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight. On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and re-establishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete. There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history. *Origin, is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and their subsequent development.* (Benjamin 2009 45-6, italics added)

Origin here then has a historically reflexive quality. Koselleck, alternatively, theoretically depends on the possibility of alterity while structurally making it impossible or at least unlikely. For any change to occur a change a historical appropriation, not simply a re-establishing of his historical meta-concepts in a different political direction, but a radically different historical orientation, would be necessary.

## Conclusion

Koselleck begins with the question; “What is historical time?” (1). Undoubtedly, as mentioned previously, the project as outlined by Koselleck himself and Benjamin’s own project diverge. However what is noteworthy is that Koselleck’s work, as an important piece of (meta-)historical scholarship, is both illuminating in its elucidation of the procedural, social, political, and as he calls it “semantic” shifts from ancient times to a cognition of a different place in time and yet frustrating in its lack of political analysis. As an analysis of the separation of temporal epochs and the production of a new temporal-historical form a *neue Zeit*, it is also perhaps perilously close to a type of historical practice that Benjamin warns against: reified, agentless, a defined content with which only so much can be done and it is not so much that it

represents (for Koselleck) a contested field, as that those who recognize and actualize “real” or “concrete” history better are more successful. The present itself is difficult to locate as a historical moment. While it may be unfair to claim Koselleck’s conceptual history is agentless, it cannot be denied that agency for Koselleck is overwhelmingly found in the great historical actors and their navigation of a meta-historical given; who, rather than make history, navigate historical structures, producing a certain politically advantageous result.

While Koselleck makes the compelling argument that the looming future, weighted down upon the present as a realm of expectation forms the social and political boundaries of the present, he fails to fully acknowledge how the production of a certain prognosis of the future is part of a loop, a message from a political present and past pushed into the future only to return to the present in the form of a politically limiting demand. Despite the recognition of the non-actuality of this dictatorial future, Koselleck does not accommodate the space for the politically charged nature of his historical structure to be made apparent.

For Benjamin this must necessarily avoid dealing with the suffering (to which Koselleck gives merely a nod and then moves on) of the past generations, the ‘could have beens’ that should also be incorporated (who in fact demand their incorporation) into the movement of the present, but are filtered out through the myopic or telescopic lense of the human historical present which attempts to extend its seers gaze as far as possible into the future, itself the foundational basis of the risk society we now live in.

Thus there is a certain frustration when reading Koselleck insofar as one gets the sense that he

understands the political underpinnings of his argument, but yet chooses to remain within a “neutral” position of the historian which allows the story of the rising of a *neue Zeit* to emerge as relatively politically empty, and its wide scale effects unseen, its contention by other historical registers unaccounted for. History as an object of study in itself cannot be abstracted from its political and social implications as cleanly as Koselleck would have it, and while he recognizes this object as itself historically produced, ultimately his analysis seems both politically blind and disempowering. His “new” history is a sea of time that exists in some sense prior to human interaction. This vast ocean of time then becomes something that has simply been better navigated by some than others, and has resulted in the history we have and the futurally oriented direction we take. However the structure history takes, for the time being, is beyond Koselleck’s reproach, or at least not investigated within Koselleck. For example, despite acknowledging a proliferation of political modes over the historical moment with which he is concerned, through his meta-historical conceptualization he immediately reduces the difference between these political experiences to different expressions of temporal mediation between the two conceptual poles, thus limiting the range within which subversion or politics themselves can be enacted. This is particularly relevant to “communism” both in its historically understood mode and in terms of a “proper” historical materialism that Benjamin proposes through his blending of Marxism and Messianism. The stakes of this should not be (and arguably are, in Koselleck) underestimated.

However, to return to Koselleck’s declared outline of his own project, it is distilled into the question: “how, in a given present, are the temporal

dimensions of past and future related?” (3). Though arguable, the statement, “given present” is already an ambiguous and slightly loaded term when one is battling over the historical presentation of that temporal moment itself, thereby, taking it for granted that the present is in fact, “given” in such a way as one could investigate the temporal conditions of its existence is already a politically misleading step. It is precisely the “given-ness” of a political present that so many political challenges to history are directed against.

For Koselleck, the essential thesis is that it is only through the differentiation of past and future that arises through various mechanisms in an era roughly inaugurated by the Enlightenment, can “historical time” as we now understand be grasped. This thesis rests on the ground that

the more a particular time is experienced as a new temporality, as “modernity,” the more that demands made of the future increase. Special attention is therefore devoted to a given present and its condition as a superseded former future. If a particular contemporary becomes aware of an increase in the weight of the future in his range of experience, this is certainly an effect of the technical-industrial transformation of the world that forces upon its inhabitants ever briefer interval of time in which to gather new experiences and adapt to changes induced at an ever-increasing pace. (Koselleck 3)

Again what Koselleck seems to avoid dealing with and what would be essential to establish in the supposed political neutrality of his conceptual history, would be to establish whether or not this technological advancement came about independently of political interaction, within a political vacuum, or again whether the “time-pressure” (*Zeitdruck*) is as much a product of a political/economic moment as it is simply a mass of humanity pushed along with an unstoppable

flow of technological development. Is history as object for Koselleck merely bourgeois history and is he thus unsuccessful in his project?

What Koselleck demonstrates as a limiting of the control of the past in determining the present and future moment, is also a delimitation of the political awareness of the conditions that lead to an emergence of that particular moment in time, conditioned by relations of power and historical narrative that are by no means entirely organic or politically neutral.

The argument here then is not that his historical shift does not occur, but rather, and somewhat ironically, this shift which is purely politically contingent is somewhat naturalized, and significant interventions elided, folded into a flow of time into the future that sweeps along any kind of political rejection, protestation, subversion, opposition, into a historical form that necessitates it understand itself in terms already contrary to its desires and political will. This is inherent in any project which creates a total, observable, history-as-object which in its totality submerges failure and potentiality into silence and indiscernibility. In this one can see the critique of Benjamin of the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century socialists, whose unreserved belief in the salvation of progress turns the entirety of the present into a stage of passive waiting. Further, one can observe why, for Benjamin, his concern with conceptualizing a modernism outside of progress was such an essential project. This infinitization of time and expectation is precisely what Benjamin views as so historically problematic. Time extended in such a way renders the present absent, irresponsible and unresponsive, and in Benjamin's conception, ironically ahistorical.

<sup>1</sup> For insight on the difference and often mistaken translation of *Parousia* see Agamben's work on St. Paul *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*.

<sup>2</sup> Koselleck specifically marks the Peace of Westphalia as a significant shifting point (15).

<sup>3</sup> Schinkel argues for the impossibility of the separation of Koselleck's historical concepts, stating that Koselleck himself mistakenly collapsed the historical and meta-historical modes of the concepts. In so doing Koselleck becomes a proponent of change and misses the meta-historical 'truth' of history's similarity across epochs. Schinkel posits imagination as the third in a conceptual triad, which situates the relation between experience and expectation and thus this relationship alters but is never separated. This argument in itself seems unconvincing. Koselleck does indeed seem to incorporate a form of imagination (in the idea of prognosis and further in progress which Schinkel admittedly deals with uncritically (46)) it doesn't appear self-evident that imagination itself is the connective tissue between the two, nor stands as a corrective to Koselleck's theoretical exposition. Despite his position, attempting to head off critique, minimizing the importance in the difference in content between concrete change and abstract change (in the modern period it is the incorporation of abstract change itself as experience, not concrete change) this shift affects the theoretical structure much more than he allows.

Thus when Schinkel asks "does, it really feel radically different to live a "normal" life now than it did a millennium ago?" stating that "There is always "normality" (53), the stakes of this question should in fact be lingered over much longer and not so glibly traversed, for a good many would argue that living the normal of abstract change displacing concrete experience would does in fact have vast affects, and it has in fact been the source of much of early modern philosophy indeed lasting into the present.

<sup>4</sup> This is particularly noticeable in the modern political joke that Koselleck notes as significant in a discussion amongst Soviet delegates about the future of communism (261).

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Freud's theory of trauma is instructive here into the kind of time Benjamin is critiquing. For Freud traumatic repetition occurs when the subject experiences the moment as continually present threat. The traumatic patient "does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action..." (Freud 150). Derrida, although wording it differently, writing on mourning post 9/11 states similarly that trauma does not emerge from the past but from "...is produced by the future, by the to come, by the threat of the worst to come, rather than by an aggression that is 'over and done with'" (Borradori 97).

The overlap, between Benjamin's writing in the Arcades and Freud's clinical observations has been notably observed. Concepts of unearthing, and

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remembrance, awakening (which for Benjamin is the great exemplar of memory) in individual clinical treatment for Freud seem easily superimposable upon Benjamin's theorizing on social consciousness. While Freud states that the appropriate treatment is to resituate the event in its proper place in the past, this is not incompatible with Benjamin. What Freud attempts is not to reduce a historical event to a causal linear understanding of time but rather to reorganize the relationship between past and present into an appropriate relationship of remembrance; a "presence-ing" of the "pastness" of an event.

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<sup>6</sup> Koselleck mentions very early on in *Futures Past* that "Historical time, if the concept has a specific meaning, is bound up with social and political actions, with concretely acting and suffering human beings and their institutions and organizations" (2). However, this suffering as historically shaping factor loses its potency within Koselleck's historical theory, which is more reliant upon observations of the great historical names (Napoleon, Frederick, Alexander) adroitly manipulating historical and social forces to impose a shape or direction onto history.

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