



Department of History and Civilization

**Beyond utopianism and relativism:
History in the plural in the work of Reinhart Koselleck**

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my academic projects and to remind me that the most important dimensions of the human *Miteinandersein* and *Miteinandersprechen* lie outside of academia.

1. Introduction

This study examines the work of the German historian Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006). Its aim is to provide an inter-textual and contextual interpretation of Koselleck's scholarly production. While a variety of articles, reviews, opinion-pieces and obituaries offer valuable insights into his work, there is as yet no monographic study examining Koselleck's oeuvre in a comprehensive manner.¹ The present investigation addresses this lacuna. Instead of highlighting one aspect of his historical writing on behalf of others (and presenting Koselleck simply under one label, e.g. as a 'conceptual historian', a 'social historian', a 'historian of memory' or as a 'theoretician of history', as other commentators have done), it draws a full thematic, theoretical and biographical – or instead intellectual – profile that takes into account Koselleck's entire scholarly production and the intellectual and social contexts in which it emerged. The study not only reinterprets known and uncovers unknown aspects of his work; it also offers a new overall interpretation of Koselleck's entire scholarly production. It describes a set of recurrent motifs and discursive features in Koselleck's texts that reveal the contours of a unifying pattern and a common objective in his varied and multi-faceted body of work.

Reinhart Koselleck entered the academic scene in the 1950s with his dissertation *Kritik und Krise* in which he traced the birth of modern political thought to the Enlightenment. He achieved his *Habilitation* in 1965 with the social-historical work *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*.² Three years later he became professor in Heidelberg, where, in the so-called *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*, he played a key role in the development of modern German conceptual history. Koselleck's name is furthermore, inextricably linked with the monumental encyclopaedia *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, a work based on a set of original hypotheses on how the transition to the modern world can be described through changes in

¹ The most comprehensive interpretation of Koselleck's work is found in Kari Palonen: *Die Entzauberung der Begriffe. Das Umschreiben der politischen Begriffe bei Quentin Skinner und Reinhart Koselleck*, Münster 2004. While this study draws considerably on interpretations from Palonen's book, it leaves aside the central argument of the book: that Koselleck's and Skinner's way of studying politics, language and concepts can be traced back to Max Weber. This argument is compelling as an element in a theoretical construction, in which Weber is portrayed as the discoverer of the notion of 'politics of an activity' that Koselleck and Skinner have developed analytical frameworks to study. However, the argument becomes problematic if it is read into Palonen's parallel attempt at providing an intellectual and contextual understanding of the authorship. Even if Skinner in various writings has referred to Weber, it is difficult to connect his work to a Weberian point of departure or standpoint, and it is well-known that Koselleck never mentioned Weber among his sources of inspiration. See Bo Stråth: Review of *Die Entzauberung der Begriffe*, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 8, 2005, p. 530-532.

² Reinhart Koselleck: *Kritik und Krise. Eine Untersuchung der politischen Funktion des dualistischen Weltbildes im 18. Jahrhundert*, 1954 (the dissertation was published with a new subtitle in 1959 – *Ein Beitrag zur Pathogenese der Bürgerlichen Welt*, Freiburg 1959); *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution. Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung und soziale Bewegung von 1791 bis 1848*, Stuttgart 1967.

the meanings and uses of social and political concepts during the period between 1750 and 1850.³

From the beginning of the 1970s, when he became a professor at the University of Bielefeld, until his death, in numerous essays, Koselleck illuminated a range of different themes – such as the relation between language and social history, political iconography, issues related to historical time, to the human historical consciousness, to theoretical-methodological matters, and to fundamental ontological and epistemological questions of what history is, how it is created and how it can be studied. These essays, of which many have been republished in the collections *Vergangene Zukunft* (1979), *Zeitschichten* (2000) and *Begriffsgeschichten* (2006),⁴ are characterized by the use of a wide range of source material, including paintings, dreams and war memorials, and the mastery of theories and methods of not only the historical discipline, but also of linguistics, sociology, law, philosophy and art history. It is from this background that, over the course of the later half of the twentieth century and into the beginning of the twenty-first, Koselleck reflected on the role of history, historical writing and the historian in modern society and diagnosed the political conditions and scientific challenges of his time, without committing himself to a fixed mode of historical writing or to a clearly defined ideological camp.

As a result of his inclination to constantly go beyond the boundaries of mainstream historical writing, Koselleck has been labelled an ‘outsider’ and a ‘loner’ vis-à-vis the profession.⁵ To be sure, his work is in many respects more akin to the work of German literary scholars, such as Hans Robert Jauss, to the work of the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer and the jurist and political thinker Carl Schmitt, who belonged to his sources of inspiration, or to the work of scholars abroad, such as Hayden White, Michel Foucault or Quentin Skinner, than with the work of his colleagues in the German historical profession. Like these figures, Koselleck was a thinker striving for individuality and originality, and if he won a degree of international fame unusual for a German historian after 1945,⁶ it is because he invented research projects, approaches and an analytical vocabulary that is known to be distinctly Koselleckian. *Sattelzeit, Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont, Verzeitlichung*

³ Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland, Bd. I-VIII*, Stuttgart 1972-1997.

⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*. Frankfurt am Main 1979; *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*. Frankfurt am Main 2000; *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main 2006.

⁵ See first of all Rudolf Vierhaus: “Laudatio auf Reinhart Koselleck”, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 251, 1989, p. 529.

⁶ Koselleck’s writings have been translated to many languages, including English, French, Spanish, Italian and Danish.

and *Zeitschichten* are among the notions and keywords from his writings that in the last 30 years have been applied in and inspired several different research programs across disciplinary and national boundaries. Koselleck has gained status not only as one of the most important theorists of history and historiography of the last half century, but also as an advocate of ‘grand theory’ in whose work scholars are searching for meta-theories of history and politics and of how these phenomena should be studied.

Key questions for this research included the following; what, if any, are the overarching themes, arguments and theoretical-methodological features that hold together Koselleck’s multifaceted historical writing? How and in which social, intellectual and political contexts did he develop his work? And what, more specifically, was innovative about it?

Field – theme – approach

This study connects to three research fields. Firstly, it connects to the field of German historical writing in the nineteenth and twentieth century, which has grown substantially in the past forty years. A large proportion of this scholarly work has been in the form of investigations of individuals, and of specific approaches to and conceptions of historical writing. Contributions to the field have given us both broad and detailed insights into several dimensions of German historical writing from the age of Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) to the Second Empire, the Weimar and Nazi periods, and until the period between 1945-1960, when the experience of National Socialism demanded a reconstruction of the profession, and social history was established as a separate and increasingly popular field of study.⁷ The intention of this project is to move the study of the German historical writing after 1945 forwards in terms of chronology, by focusing on one of the most prominent representatives of the profession from the 1960s until today.⁸

⁷ The list of literature is too long to be listed here. For other recent studies focusing on individuals in the twentieth century, see David Thimme: *Percy Ernst Schramm und das Mittelalter. Wandlungen eines Geschichtsbildes*, Göttingen 2006; Jan Eckel: *Hans Rothfels: Eine intellektuelle Biographie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2005; Eduard Mühle: *Für Volk und deutschen Osten: Der Historiker Herman Aubin and die deutsche Ostforschung*, Düsseldorf 2005; Jens Nordalm: *Erich Marcks (1861-1938) in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft*, Berlin 2003; Christoph Cornelissen: *Gerhard Ritter. Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert*, Dusseldorf 2001; Thomas Etzemüller: *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte. Werner Conze und die Neuorientierung der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, München 2001; Thomas Hertfelder: *Franz Schnabel und die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft. Geschichtsschreibung zwischen Historismus und Kulturkritik (1910-1945)*, Göttingen 1998. An overview of the subject matters informing the studies in the field appears in Jan Eckel, Thomas Etzemüller: "Vom Schreiben der Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung", Jan Eckel, Thomas Etzemüller (Hg.): *Neue Zugänge zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Göttingen 2007, p. 7-26.

⁸ For other studies that include analysis of issues in the period after 1960, see for example Martin Sabrow, Ralph Jessen, Klaus Grosse Kracht (Hg.) *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte: große Kontroversen seit 1945*, München

Secondly, in doing so, it connects to the German and international reception and discussion of Koselleck's works that has been going on for almost three decades, especially in the field of *Begriffsgeschichte*. More concretely, this study contributes to what has recently been labelled a shift in the reception of Koselleck's works, "away from the more disciplinary and methodological issues of *Begriffsgeschichte*, towards a broader, more theoretical and philosophical reading."⁹ The aim with this change of focus is to provide an interpretation of Koselleck's work that is broader, more comprehensive and in many ways different than the interpretations that have emerged from the discussions of *Begriffsgeschichte*.

Thirdly, by focussing on the theoretical and philosophical dimensions of Koselleck's texts, the study connects to the field of research that is concerned with the question of how historical writing is produced.¹⁰ In other words, by examining the ways in which Koselleck systematically reflected on the role of history, the historian and of historical writing in modern society, the analysis wants to open up new perspectives on the complex activities involved in the making of historical knowledge.

The study draws on interpretations and themes from all three fields, but its analytical framework is also inspired by ideas and notions that have been developed in other contexts. It proceeds from the assumption that Koselleck's scholarly production cannot be understood

2003; Klaus Grosse Kracht: *Die Zankende Zunft: historische Kontroversen in Deutschland nach 1945*, Göttingen 2005.

⁹ Helge Jordheim: "Thinking in convergences – Koselleck on language, history and time", *Ideas in History*, vol. 2 nr. 3, 2007, p. 69. As examples of this shift, Jordheim refers to John Zammito: "Koselleck's Philosophy of Historical Time(s) and the Practice of History", *History and Theory*, nr. 43, 2004, p. 124-135; Hayden White's foreword to the collection of essays, Reinhart Koselleck: *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford 2002; Jeppe Nevers: "Spørgsmålets politik – Kari Palonen og den nyere begrebshistorie", *Slagmark: Tidsskrift for Idéhistorie*, nr. 48, 2007, p. 123-139; Reinhart Koselleck: *Begreber, erfaring, tid*, translated by Jens Busck and with an introduction by Jeppe Nevers and Niklas Olsen, København 2007; Niklas Olsen: En partisan i kamp for historier i flertal: Reinhart Kosellecks alternativ til historiefilosofien", *Slagmark: Tidsskrift for Idéhistorie*, nr. 48, 2007, p. 105-122; Kari Palonen: 2004; and Helge Jordheim: *Lesnings vitenskap: utkast til en ny filologi*, Oslo 2001. To Jordheim's list, we might add the contributions to Neithart Bulst, Willibald Steinmetz (Hg.): *Reinhart Koselleck 1923-2006: Reden zur Gedenkfeier am 24. Mai 2006, Bielefelder Universitätsgespräche und Vorträge*, 9. 2007 and Stefan Weinfurter (Hg.): *Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006). Reden zum 50. Jahrestag seiner Promotion in Heidelberg*, Heidelberg 2006; Helge Jordheim: "Die 'Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen' als Konvergenzpunkt von Zeit und Sprachlichkeit. Zu einem Topos aus dem Werk Reinhart Kosellecks", *Divinatio*, nr. 2005, p. 79-90; Willibald Steinmetz: "Nachruf auf Reinhart Koselleck (1923 - 2006)", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Jg. 32, 2006, p. 412-432; Ute Daniel: "Reinhart Koselleck", Lutz Raphael (Hg), *Klassiker der Geschichtswissenschaft, Bd. 2: Von Fernand Braudel bis Natalie Z. Davis*, München 2006, p. 166-194; Friedrich Wilhelm Graf: "Ein Theoretiker unaufhebbarer Differenzenerfahrungen. Laudatio auf Reinhart Koselleck", *Das Jahrbuch der deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung*, Jg. 1999, 2000, p. 139-145; and Rudolf Vierhaus: 1989. The present study is both inspired by and will attempt to revise some of the interpretations presented in these texts. These interpretations will be used and discussed in the various chapters.

¹⁰ For recent studies in this field (and for further literature), see the contributions to Niklas Olsen, Henning Trüper: "Cultural sites of historical writing. Perspectives on rhetoric, practice and politics", *Storia della Storiografia*, 53, 2008 and Henning Trüper: *Topography of a Method: François Louis Ganshof and the Writing of History*, 2008 (PhD-thesis, European University Institute, Florence).

from one single perspective. Instead of portraying method, theory, politics, personal experiences, institutional factors, questions of identity, or narrative arrangements as *the* epistemological centre of the production of historical writing, the investigation addresses all of these perspectives and the relation between them. To do so, the analysis focuses on *processes of reception*.¹¹ The analytical ambition is to illuminate how the construction of historical writing always takes place in such processes. More concretely, the analysis will show how, in these processes, the historian positions himself within, takes up and transforms various discourses, vocabularies and ideas, and how the historian's mode of reception is shaped by specific personal experiences, social constraints and political factors.

To illuminate the processes of reception, the study will follow a methodological principle of continuously placing Koselleck's 'ideas in context'.¹² It will, in other words, continuously sketch out the (for Koselleck) various available discursive fields (consisting of intellectual-political vocabularies, themes, arguments, theories, methods, assumptions, ideas, narrative modes etc.), as articulated by earlier and contemporary actors in various academic disciplines and on the social-political scenes, and engage in close comparisons of texts. The idea is not only to analyze how and why Koselleck drew, reworked or distanced himself in relation to the various discursive fields, but also to analyze the processes in question as mixing elements of deliberate appropriation and involuntary formation. This approach will not only serve to illuminate how his writings came into being, it will also help to discern the innovative features of these writings.

Koselleck's texts (books, articles, review, memory pieces, letters and interviews) are full of clues about his intellectual interaction with different discursive fields. These texts reveal the way in which he defined and positioned his work with reference to a wide range of different persons, 'schools' and traditions in German and European history from the sixteenth century onwards. Secondly, he often paid special recognition to his various teachers and sources of inspiration – both by referring to and using their ideas, arguments and concepts and by describing a number of incidents relating to their intellectual and personal relationships, of which some unfolded and developed over long periods.

¹¹ Reception-theory is commonly associated with the work conducted by literary scholars such as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser at the University of Konstanz from the 1960s onwards. See Paul de Man's introduction to Hans Robert Jauss: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Minneapolis 1982. The dynamics of reception has also received much attention in the field of research into the origins of books and texts, the practices of reading and writing and the dynamics of reception and reconstruction, as practiced by scholars such as Carlo Ginzburg, Roger Chartier and Kevin Sharpe. For an overview of the field, see Kevin Sharpe: *Reading Revolutions. The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England*, London 2001, p. 3-62.

¹² This methodological principle has been described by Quentin Skinner: "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory*, 8, 1969, p. 3-53.

Against this background, it is not difficult to conclude that Koselleck was ‘inspired’ and ‘influenced’ by various different persons or schools and in various different ways.¹³ The challenge is rather to establish how his interpretation and appropriation of discourse was driven by individual expectations, desires and aims, and how, in his activity of reading and writing, he changed, modified and combined discursive elements, which were often different in origin and meaning, to fit specific situations and problems. Indeed, Koselleck’s scholarly production should not be viewed as a stable entity, but as something that constantly underwent a process of being shaped and reshaped. It consisted of many different discursive layers. Certain of these layers appeared in the majority of his writings, whereas others were applied less frequently or gradually disappeared from his analytical vocabulary.

The study is based on the belief that the construction of meaning not only takes place on a textual level, but also involves social contexts and lived experience, and it thus attempts to illuminate the relations between historical experience and historical writing in Koselleck’s work. More concretely, it situates his writings in time and space and analyzes how his experiences of social and political contexts shaped and set limits to the ways in which he appropriated discourses and constructed texts, that is, how, in his historical writing, he reacted to the conditions and problems of his time – including World War II, the Cold War, the societal changes in the 1950s and 1960s, the student revolts around 1968, the educational-political changes in the 1960s and 1970s, the reconstruction of national identities in the 1980s and 1990s – and to the social and institutional settings in which he moved.

While the portrayal of Koselleck’s intellectual profile is consequently comparable to a scientific biography, the ambition is, to be sure, not to explain all biographical facts in his life. It is rather to use the available sources to clarify those parts of Koselleck’s history that might contribute to an understanding of his work. The intention is to interpret the construction of meaning on both a textual and a contextual level and to regard social experience, reading and writing as one intertwined and dynamic activity. More specifically, I aim to clarify *what* Koselleck read, as well as *how*, for *what purposes*, on the basis of which *experiences* (not least of other texts) and in which *contexts* he read, and *how* this reading affected his thinking.

This approach involves a perspective on what has been referred to as the *making of the*

¹³ Since such diffuse and contested notions as ‘inspiration’ and ‘influence’ are used in the investigation, as a minimum they will follow an analytical set of rules that have been described by Quentin Skinner. When influence from one person (A) to another (B) is suggested, it entails “(i) that there [is] a genuine similarity between the doctrines of A and B; (ii) that B could not have found the relevant doctrine in any other writer than A; (iii) that the probability of the similarity being random should be very low.” Quentin Skinner: 1969, p. 26.

historian.¹⁴ This phrase refers to how the construction of historical writing goes hand in hand with the construction of the historian, that is, to how an individual learns to think and speak as a historian – and how becoming a historian involves creating scholarly identities and positions. The making of the historian takes place within given societal and institutional norms and practices in a dialogue with which individuals define their ideas of what history is and how and why it should be written. Becoming a historian is thus a process in which – by adapting to, repudiating or challenging the given institutional and societal structures, and by choosing alliances and antipodes – the historian constructs a certain intellectual habitus and identity, which shapes, justifies and gives meaning to his/her texts and projects. However, becoming a historian is also about being interpreted, defined and positioned by other actors in the field, who contribute to the shaping of the historian directly or indirectly, through processes of reception, in ways that elude individual intention or control.

This study demonstrates that this was also the case for Koselleck, and by analyzing *the making of the historian* alongside *the processes of reception*, it takes into account both his intellectual ‘development’ and his social life/academic career in drawing his profile. The aim is not only to provide new perspectives on Koselleck’s scholarly production. It is also to contribute to the discussion of how theoretical-methodological innovation takes place in historical writing and to outline new dimensions of the intellectual-cultural history of the Federal Republic.¹⁵

Pluralism against utopianism and relativism

The overall interpretation of Koselleck’s work takes its point of departure in the characterization of Koselleck as a ‘partisan for histories in plural against history in singular’ that the philosopher Jakob Taubes (1923-1987) put forward in a commentary in the early 1970s.¹⁶ Taubes referred to the critique of modern philosophies of histories that Koselleck began in *Kritik und Krise* and to his contemporary ambition of outlining an alternative

¹⁴ See first of all Thomas Etzemüller: “How to make a historian. Problems in writing biographies of historians”, *Storia della Storiografia*, 53, 2008, p. 46-57, whose approach draws on Ludwik Fleck, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu.

¹⁵ The field of the intellectual-cultural history of the Federal Republic has grown rapidly in the last fifteen years. For some contributions to the field, see Stephan Schlak: *Wilhelm Hennis. Szenen einer Ideengeschichte der Bundesrepublik*, München 2008; A. D. Moses: *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, Cambridge 2007; Jens Hacke: *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit. Die liberalkonservative Begründung der Bundesrepublik*, Göttingen 2006; Clemens Albrecht, Günter C. Behrmann, Michael Bock: *Die intellektuelle Gründung der Bundesrepublik. Eine Wirkungsgeschichte der Frankfurter Schule*. Frankfurt am Main 1999; Dirk van Laak: *Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens. Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik*, Berlin 1993.

¹⁶ Jacob Taubes: “Geschichtsphilosophie und Historik. Bemerkungen zu Kosellecks Programm einer neuen Historik“, Reinhard Koselleck, Wolf-Dieter Stempel (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik V. Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, München 1973, p. 493.

concept of history: in opposition to the historical-philosophic ideas of history as one, unified and progressive project, which human beings can program and direct towards a final aim, he wanted to thematize and theorize a mode of historical writing that presented history as composed by a plurality of histories that can never be shaped entirely according to human desire.

Taubes's partisan-metaphor has received little attention in the literature about Koselleck.¹⁷ This study nevertheless maintains that the argument comprised in the partisan-metaphor is, to a considerable extent, valid as a useful means of interpreting Koselleck's historical writing. It thus argues that his entire scholarly production can be interpreted as a series of attempts to deconstruct ideas of history in singular and at theorizing histories in plural. It portrays in detail the scientific positions, the political concerns and the theoretical-methodological components, as well as the changes and transformations, which were involved in Koselleck's partisan-activities from the 1950s to the 2000s.

In so doing, the study will unfold a more specific key argument about Koselleck's work that will be briefly described in the following. The argument begins from the assumption, encapsulated in the partisan-metaphor, that Koselleck's historical writing is characterized by an unbending ideological critique of all utopian and idealistic inclinations to understand and approach history as a progressive and unified totality that has an inherent meaning and can be understood, planned and realized according to overarching schemes and models. This study certainly shares the assumption that Koselleck sought to deconstruct scientific-political utopianism and its foundations in historical-philosophical ideas of history in the singular. At the same time, it emphasizes that Koselleck's critique of historical philosophies also contained a critique of historical relativism as a notion based on the very same conceptual assumptions: history in the singular. Just as the utopian, teleological conception of history that he identified as underlying most historical writing from the 18th century onwards, historical relativism presupposed the idea that one could formulate a coherent theoretical position on history as a totality. Koselleck believed that utopianism and relativism alike were based on theoretically-methodologically naïve and politically dangerous assumptions of history and politics that ignored or misunderstood the basic conditions of what is humanly possible. This is why he subjected both ideas of history to ideological and epistemological critique.

This leads us to the key argument of the study: Koselleck's partisan-activities were always

¹⁷ It was, however, brought up in an interview conducted by the philosopher Carsten Dutt, in which Koselleck was asked to look back on his critique of modern historical philosophy and the categories with which he had theorized history in the plural. Carsten Dutt: "Geschichte(n) und Historik. Reinhart Koselleck im Gespräch mit Carsten Dutt", *Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 2, 2001, p. 257-271.

driven by the ambition to establish understandings of and approaches to science and politics that go beyond utopianism and relativism. The crucial point is that Koselleck insisted that history must be plural, and that it must be written from viewpoints that are also plural. From this perspective of pluralism and in contrast to relativism, he wanted to carve out a stable, common viewpoint from which historical change could be described and a parameter of judgment on the basis of which the past and the present could be discussed, without falling into the pitfalls of utopianism.

This ambition is visible in Koselleck's work already in the early 1950s, at which point he outlined a set of anthropological categories in order to redefine what history is and how it can be analyzed. Instead of portraying history as a totality, or as composed by a set of unique events that unfolds in an entirely random fashion, in a purely formalistic fashion these categories were supposed to describe the basic dynamics and frames that create, constitute and structure all human history, or rather: all human histories. More concretely, while Koselleck sought to sketch out basic characteristics of human nature that must be considered in every historical analysis, he argued that history consists of and unfolds in the interaction between a plurality of heterogeneous and non-convergent histories that are created as the categories are continuously filled out by human agents. In other words, he claimed that the categories offer to us a possibility of understanding our past(s) and influence our present(s) and future(s), but at the same time comprise limits to human history and politics that can never be done away with or shaped entirely according to our wishes.

As such, the categories of possible history that Koselleck continued to elaborate over the following half a century were articulated as a scientific-political antidote and alternative to the positions of relativism and utopianism. With its emphasis on pluralism, this alternative was meant to be neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but realistic and responsible in its view on human history and politics.

However, this is not to say that Koselleck devoted his career to writing a range of minor-scale and unrelated histories and abandoned the idea of writing a mode of history that deals with one historical theme over long time-spans. To be sure, Koselleck regarded himself as a generalist in the field, rather than a specialist on one age or period, and he excelled in the writing of grand narratives that treated themes and problems that appear in all human history from Ancient Greece to the Cold War. The point is rather that he wanted to integrate, theoretically as well as empirically, the plurality of histories into narrative forms of writing history that include generalizations and grand interpretations, without relying on historical philosophical notions of unity, progress and meaning.

It should be emphasized that this was an ambition that Koselleck pursued with shifting degrees of clarity, consistency and coherence in his argumentative framework. Perhaps more importantly still, these attempts met with variable degrees of success. In line with this, it should also be emphasized that Koselleck's historical writing was always in flux and never integrated into a fixed theoretical-methodological system with a clear periphery and centre, or a fixed number of analytical features. On the contrary, he continually elaborated on and added to his analytical categories, statements and hypotheses, and these were always aimed at empirical research rather than at forming a definite analytical framework. In fact, as he rarely explained the more exact relation between his analytical features, Koselleck's historical writing has a somewhat unsystematic character to it.

This lack of theoretical system can be explained with reference to Koselleck's intellectual temperament, but it also relates to his endorsement of theoretical-methodological plurality in historical writing. For Koselleck, historical writing was not about establishing one analytical model that leads to a state of certain knowledge about the human past, present and future. To aim at such a model was his eyes utopian and absurd. It was rather about developing a plurality of theories and methods with which historians can in the best possible way illuminate the specific themes and problems at stake. This is not to say that Koselleck in relativistic terms regarded all theories and methods as equally well-founded and valid. But while he offered a range of analytical platforms and approaches that he found indispensable and productive for all historical writing, he never recommended one theoretical model according to which all historical research and writing ought to be practiced. Instead, he believed that every historian must come to their own understanding about how best to approach his/her topic and reflect on the possibilities and the limits of the chosen theoretical and methodological framework. This plea for theoretical-methodological plurality and self-reflection is described as an integral part of his partisan-activities.

Material and structure

The investigation is primarily based on published texts: books, articles, reviews, interviews, research programs, newspaper articles and memory pieces. A key source are the fifty three letters dating from the period from 1952 until 1983 that Koselleck wrote to the German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt, who from around 1950 until the early 1960s functioned as one of Koselleck's intellectual sparring partners with whom he discussed and tested scientific questions and hypotheses and also communicated political perspectives and personal

experiences.¹⁸

About half of Koselleck's letters to Schmitt were written between 1952 and 1962. In these letters, we follow Koselleck through his exams in Heidelberg; his experiences at the University of Bristol in England, where he held a lectureship in 1953-1954; and his simultaneous search for a more permanent position. We also read of how, in 1954, Koselleck became an assistant to Kühn in Heidelberg, and how this period saw him attempt to conceptualize a project for his *Habilitation*, which ended with the social historical work *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, written under the supervision of Werner Conze. After Koselleck secured himself a professorship, first at the department of political science in Bochum in 1966, then at the department of history in Heidelberg in 1968, and finally in Bielefeld in 1974, the frequency of his letter writing to Schmitt slowed down. There is thus relatively little about the processes in which he conceptualized his writings on historical time and on war experience, historical memory and identity.

While Koselleck's letters to Schmitt (and other material) offer insights that are useful in the drawing of his intellectual profile, it should be emphasized that archival material and Koselleck's personal papers are not included in the investigation.¹⁹ Consequently, there are many aspects of his scholarly production, which the study can not shed light on, first of all in relation to the contextual and biographical dimensions of his work. The available material contains, for example, only very little information about the first twenty years of Koselleck's life. Here, the contextual part of the analysis has to rely on information found in memory pieces and interviews that were published during the last 15 years of his life.

One of the consequences that issues from the constraints on the available material is that the investigation will refrain from probing Koselleck's private life in the attempt to sketch his intellectual profile. Moreover, in many instances, the analysis describes the relation between historical experience and historical writing in his work by analyzing the discourses in which he interpreted and dealt with his experiences. This is the case in the sections in chapter two that deal with his experiences during his childhood and in World War II. Rather than giving a detailed account of Koselleck's experiences in the 1930s and 1940s, these sections reflect on how he interpreted and wrote his experiences into set of autobiographical, generational and academic discourses with which he shaped his self-representation, his academic identity, and his way of understanding and writing history. These discourses were deeply imbedded in what

¹⁸ The letters are located in Schmitt's 'Nachlass' in Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (registration number: RW 265).

¹⁹ The material is currently being registered at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

we call the processes of reception and the making of the historian in Koselleck's career. In what follows we will see them illuminated as vital dimensions of his intellectual profile.

The study is made up of seven chapters. It opens with a background chapter that includes a biographical view of the first three decades of Koselleck's life and broadly illuminates the intellectual, cultural and political contexts in which his dissertation *Kritik und Krise* originated. The background chapter is followed by six chapters that highlight various dimensions of Koselleck's intellectual profile. These chapters are organized and ordered pragmatically in a compromise between chronology and themes. This is the most cogent way of pursuing the main discursive features of Koselleck's work, the unifying patterns as well as the diverging aspects, through different texts and periods of his long and fruitful career.

2. Family – war – university: the various educations of Reinhart Koselleck

The present chapter describes Koselleck's intellectual formation in a broad sense: a process of the formation of a scholarly individual, defined in part by habitus and in part by a specific set of intellectual aims, in his interrelations with a given variety of historical contexts. Attention is paid to background and to a perspective on Koselleck as an agent of his own formation, by means of the interpretations through which he attempted to grasp what was happening to himself. While Koselleck was made, he was also making himself. The concept of 'generation' is of particular importance in this respect, as it expresses this negotiation between the inexorable forces of context and the agency of the scholar in the making.

The organizing themes of the chapter are: Koselleck's family background in the German *Bildungsbürgertum*; his experiences during World War II and captivity, and the way in which he used these experiences as an instrument for constructing a generational as much as a personal identity; and post-war academic life and the discipline of history as the prime environments in which his education was completed and his identity staged, with the monumental characters of Koselleck's teachers as temporary protagonists. The contexts covered in this chapter, then, are somewhat diverse; yet in the case of Koselleck they were bound together by temporal coherence and by their function as stages in a unified process. What emerged as the result of this process were the contours of a peculiar scholarly persona and his intellectual program.

Family background

Reinhart Koselleck was born on 23 April 1923 in Görlitz, then in the Prussian province of Lower Silesia (now located in Saxony, on the border to Poland), one of three sons of Arno Koselleck and his wife Elisabeth. Embodying a typical blend of Prussian patriotism, liberal Republicanism and Protestantism,²⁰ his family formed part of that influential section of German society, the *Bildungsbürgertum* (roughly, a segment of the middle class distinguished by its devotion to education), which emerged from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards and became the primary carrier of scientific and humanistic scholarship, cultural life, and some parts of state service.²¹

²⁰ The phrase is borrowed from Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman: "Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006): The Conceptual Historian", *German History*, 24, 2006, p. 477.

²¹ Koselleck has described his family background and upbringing in Reinhart Koselleck: "Formen der Bürgerlichkeit: Reinhart Koselleck im Gespräch mit Manfred Hettling und Bernd Ulrich", *Mittelweg* 36, *Zeitschrift des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung*, 12. Jg, 2003, p. 63-82. For descriptions and discussions of the history and the characteristics of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, see first of all Werner Conze, Jürgen Kocka, Reinhart Koselleck, Rainer M. Lepsius (Hg.): *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, 4 Bd., Stuttgart 1985-

Most of his immediate forebears were academics, primarily university professors, doctors and lawyers with careers in state administration.²² His father was a historian and a professor of a teacher training college; his mother had studied French, geography and history, and had, moreover, studied the violin. Koselleck grew up – as he has vividly described it – in the famous *Bildungsbürgerliche* traditions of “house music, reading and more reading, visits to concerts and museums, pride in the family history and in letter writing.”²³ Goethe, Schiller and Kleist were read, both alone and aloud; poems, drawings and melodies were composed for individual and common pleasure.

Koselleck in many ways identified himself with, took pride in and attempted to maintain certain of the social practices, values and norms of his family background.²⁴ To a large extent focused on the literary canon, art and aesthetics, and of course the *Bildungsbürgertum*, Koselleck’s choice of academic topics testifies to this view.²⁵ The same can be said of his *habitus* as a historian. Koselleck was never a scholar who carried out his research in isolation from his colleagues. On the contrary, his was an academic persona, which deeply appreciated intellectual exchange, and he was known for his ability to listen to and discuss with his colleagues and students in a liberal and open-minded fashion. “He was a *Bildungsbürger* and a learned man“, a former colleague said of Koselleck, “but he also had bohemian traits. He enthused and influenced students. He loved conversation, discussion, dispute, even polemic, but he never intended to hurt anyone.”²⁶

1992; Ulrich Engelhardt: “*Bildungsbürgertum*“: *Begriffs- und Dogmengeschichte eines Etiketts*, Stuttgart 1986. See also Manfred Hettling, Bernd Ulrich (Hg.): *Bürgertum nach 1945*, Hamburg 2005; Wolfgang J. Mommsen: *Bürgerliche Kultur und politische Ordnung. Künstler, Schriftsteller und Intellektuellen in der deutschen Geschichte 1830-1933*, Frankfurt am Main 2000; Hans-Jürgen Puhle (Hg.): *Bürger in der Gesellschaft der Neuzeit: Wirtschaft, Politik, Kultur*, Göttingen 1991; Lutz Niethammer (Hg.): *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland: historische Einblicke, Fragen, Perspektive*, Frankfurt am Main 1990.

²² His parents, however, came from different societal backgrounds: “Meine Familie ist ein Zusammenschluß einer über anderthalb Jahrhunderte hinweg etablierten akademischen Bürgerfamilie hugenottischer Herkunft mütterlicherseits mit der Aufsteigerfamilie meines Vaters. Er war in der dritten Generation Aufsteiger, über die Stufen Handwerker, Kaufmann, Akademiker. Insofern führt die Vorgeschichte der Familie aus dem Bürgertum heraus.“ Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit“, 2003, p. 68.

²³ Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit“: 2003, p. 68.

²⁴ See Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit“: 2003. In the interview, Koselleck portrayed the cultural self-understanding of his family between the two world wars and in the early Federal Republic. He moreover listed a number of events, occurrences and decisions in his life and academic career, which he ascribed to the norms, structures and networks of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Among these are his release from the captivity in Russia; his admission to study at the University of Heidelberg; and the lectureship he subsequently earned at the University of Bristol. We shall later return to all of these issues.

²⁵ See for example Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): *Bildungsgüter und Bildungswissen*, Stuttgart 1990; Reinhart Koselleck, Klaus Schreiner (Hg.): *Bürgerschaft: Rezeption und Innovation der Begrifflichkeit vom Hohen Mittelalter bis ins 19. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1994; Werner Conze, Jürgen Kocka, Reinhart Koselleck, Rainer M. Lepsius (Hg.): Stuttgart 1985-1992

²⁶ Jürgen Kocka: “Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit“, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 6/2-2006. See also the description of Koselleck’s *habitus* as a historian and as a teacher in Willibald Steinmetz: “Nachruf auf Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006)“, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Bd. 32, 2006, p. 414. Lucian Hölscher: “Gedenkvorlesung an

Similar to other (but certainly not all) members of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, he made himself known as a teacher committed to educational ideals (*Bildung*) and a politically engaged citizen, who continually commented on the times in which he lived. His social-political engagement was first of all expressed in historical writing and in public debates, but he also habitually captured his impressions of the world around him in caricature-drawing.²⁷

In fact, as a young man, Koselleck wanted to pursue his talent for drawing by attending the academy of arts, but his father wanted him to study ‘something reasonable’ and pushed him into a scientific career.²⁸ Arno Koselleck had been active in the movement of educational reformers of the 1920s. Starting out as a history teacher, in 1928 he became director of the Heilig-Geist-Gymnasium zu Breslau, and two years later, in 1930, he founded die Pädagogische Akademie in Kassel. The academy was closed shortly after the Nazis came to power in January 1933. According to his son, Arno Koselleck was dismissed at the same time owing to his republican views, and he remained unemployed for three years, before finding a provisional job as a professor in historical didactics in Saarbrücken.

Arno Koselleck’s dismissal was one of many effects that the rise of National Socialism had on Koselleck’s family – and for the bourgeois (*bürgerliche*) layer of German society more generally. Already in a process of disintegrating, the social-cultural status and traditions of the German bourgeoisie were facing serious challenges during the Weimar Republic, characterized as it was by political instability and cultural crisis. Many members of the bourgeoisie reacted to the societal developments by adopting National Socialism as a political solution. This solution – it has been said – “seemed on the one hand to promise the continuity of certain elements (for example private property), but on the other hand it included the individual in a larger collective and thus reinstated a vanished orientation, though the price was a loss of individual independence and bourgeois freedom.”²⁹

Reinhart Koselleck. 6. Februar 2006“, <http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/lehrstuhl-ng3/dozenten/hoelscher/gedenkvorlesung.doc>, February 2006 (accessed online in February 2006); Jörg Fisch: “Die Suggestivkraft der Begriffe“, *Tagesanzeiger*, 6/2-2006; Michael Jeismann: “Geschichte und Eigensinn. Zum siebzigsten Geburtstag des Historikers Reinhart Koselleck“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23/04-1994.

²⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit”, 2003, p. 69-73.

²⁷ As described in Rudolf Vierhaus: 1989, p. 530. Some of Koselleck’s drawings have been published in the collection *Vorbilder – Bilder, gezeichnet von Reinhart Koselleck. Eingeleitet von Max Imdahl*, Bielefeld 1983. The drawings depict, among other things, teachers and friends from the University of Heidelberg, scenes and impression from the processes of re-education and German and international politics from 1947 until 1980.

²⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit”, 2003, p. 69-73. See also Eric A. Johnson, Reinhart Koselleck: “Recollections of the Third Reich“, *NIAS Newsletter*, 22, 1999, p. 14, where Koselleck mentions that he also considered becoming a medical doctor.

²⁹ Manfred Hettling: “Bürgerlichkeit in Nachkriegsdeutschland“, Manfred Hettling, Bernd Ulrich (Hg.): *Bürgertum nach 1945*, Hamburg 2005, p. 15. This was of course not the case for the considerable number of Jewish members of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Generally, it is difficult to find evidence to how the

Still according to his son, Arno Koselleck was “republican and liberally minded” (*Republikaner und liberal gesinnt*), and although his unemployment led to a lower standard of living for his family, he was not among those who were attracted to Nazism. He did, however, with certain reservations, sympathize with the contemporary “Pan German-national-anti-semitic” (*großdeutsch-national-antisemitisch*) ideas, and during the late 1930s he adapted to the regime, among other things, by joining the Reiter-SA.³⁰ More enthusiastic about National Socialism was Koselleck’s older brother. Initially unhappy with the compulsory transfer from one of the German youth movements to the Hitlerjugend, within a period of three months he was promoted to the rank of Hitlerjugendführer in Dortmund, where Koselleck and his family were living at the time.³¹ Reinhart Koselleck entered the Hitlerjugend in 1934, when he was 11 year of age, and, when the family eventually moved from Dortmund to Saarbrücken, he joined the equestrian Hitlerjugend.³²

Due to the geographical moves necessitated by his father’s career and the unstable societal-political situation in Germany in general, over the course of his childhood Koselleck lived in five different cities and went to eight different schools. The last of these was the Ludwigsgymnasium in Saarbrücken.³³ While at the gymnasium in Saarbrücken, at the age of nineteen, Koselleck volunteered along with his entire class for duty in the German army, and soon after – in May 1941 – he was drafted.³⁴

It is difficult to provide a more detailed description of Koselleck’s reasons for going to war and his reactions to growing up during National Socialism – to its ideology, organizations, and foreign policy achievements, and to its impact on his family – as he never commented directly on these issues in his published writings, memory pieces and interviews.³⁵ In these

Bildungsbürgertum reacted on the social-political challenges in the Weimar-Republic and to the rise of National Socialism. Some perspectives can be found in references in note 1.

³⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit”, 2003, p. 70. According to Koselleck, his father, who served as a lieutenant in World War I, did this primarily to protect his students. In the 2003, Koselleck mentions that his father made other ‘concessions’ around 1937-38 without specifying these.

³¹ According to Koselleck, his brother’s enthusiasm for National Socialism caused tension with his father. See Reinhart Koselleck: “Glühende Lava, zur Erinnerung geronnen”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6/5-1995.

³² He never joined the Nazi party. When asked in a 1999 interview whether he thought about joining the party, he answered: “It was beyond my imagination, because I was eighteen years old and had become a soldier by then.” See Eric A. Johnson, Reinhart Koselleck: 1999, p. 9.

³³ See Rudolf Vierhaus: p. 530. See also the curriculum vitae (*Lebenslauf*) in Reinhart Koselleck: 1954.

³⁴ According to Koselleck, the decision to volunteer for duty did not necessarily imply that they were all National Socialists; rather “daß man sich für seine Vaterland einsetzen wollte.” Only one catholic in the class did not volunteer. When they joined the army, Koselleck and his classmates were awarded the baccalaureate. Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit”, 2003, p. 71-73.

³⁵ As witnessed in the following example, Koselleck’s few direct accounts of his experiences of the political turmoil in Germany as a child were recalled with the retrospection of the historian: “Meine erste politische Erfahrung war ja das Desaster des parlamentarischen Systems 1930 folgende gewesen, mit dem ich aufgewachsen war, inklusive der Schlägereien in der Volksschule bei der Reichspräsidentenwahl. Kommunisten gegen Konservative. Ich stand abseits und schaute zu, schon damals war ich sozusagen Historiker.“ Reinhart

texts, however, next to growing up in the enjoyable family traditions of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, Koselleck described societal disintegration, conflict and uncertainty as some of the key experiences of his childhood. As such, he linked this period of his life to the key theme of his autobiographical texts: his experiences of World War II and his attempts to deal with these experiences in his historical writing. One example of how Koselleck linked the two periods appears in a 2004 speech:

“In my childhood, I experienced – very closely in the brawls in elementary school – the breakdown of the Weimar Republic. The liberals were gone. What followed, in my youth, was the rise of the National Socialistic movement (...); and then, while I was a soldier, war, total bombing, multiple death; then intensification and at the same time a dissolving of the totalitarian system; finally, breakdown and Russian captivity.”³⁶

But what, more exactly, did Koselleck experience in the war – and how did he relate these experiences to his historical writing?

War and captivity

Koselleck first served in the German artillery in the Soviet Union in 1941/42. After an accident in which he hurt his foot as the army advanced towards Stalingrad, he was transferred to service in Germany and France. As part of a radar company, he became responsible for the electronic instruments which supplied the German anti-aircraft and aircraft with information. He ended his military participation in World War II as an infantry soldier on 1 May 1945 at Oderberg in Mähren where he was captured the Soviet Army.³⁷

Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit”, 2003, p. 82. His most explicit recollection of his childhood during Nazism is found in Eric A. Johnson, Reinhart Koselleck: 1999. Somewhat more explicit about why young men like himself and Koselleck joined the German army in the early 1940s was Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997), a famous scholar of Romance languages and reception, an outspoken liberal, who, in 1996, gave a full-page interview with *Le Monde* after it became public that he had joined the Waffen-SS in October 1939 at the age of 17. Downplaying the role of political ideology, Jauss, whom Koselleck befriended in Heidelberg, said: “What made me join the Waffen-SS was actually not an act of support to the Nazi ideology. As a son of a schoolteacher belonging to the petty bourgeoisie, I was a young man, who wanted to adapt to the *Zeitgeist*. My reading of Spengler’s book *Das Untergang des Abendlandes* – he was prohibited by the Nazis – had actually made me sceptical of the Hitler-Reich. But in common with other future historians – I am thinking of my friends Reinhart Koselleck and Arno Borst – I was determined not to be too far from the events: you had to be where history unfolded by participating in the war. In our eyes, the opposite would have been an escape, a way of locking oneself into an aesthetical attitude, while our classmates put their lives at risk.” See Hans Robert Jauss, interview by Maurice Olender: “L’étrangeté radicale de la barbarie nazie a paralysé une génération d’intellectuels; Maître de l’école de Costance, Hans Robert Jauss fut officier dans la Waffen-SS”, *Le Monde*, September 6, 1996.

³⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: “Dankrede am 23 November 2004”, Stefan Weinfurter (Hg.): Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006). *Reden zum 50. Jahrestag seiner Promotion in Heidelberg*, Heidelberg 2006, p. 58.

³⁷ Basic facts about Koselleck’s whereabouts before and during the war can be found in the curriculum vitae in *Kritik und Krise*: 1954. For the more detailed and vivid accounts of his experiences, see Reinhart Koselleck: 6/5-1995; Reinhart Koselleck: “Vielerlei Abschied vom Krieg“, Birgitte Sausay, Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Rudolf von Thadden (Hg.): *Vom Vergessen vom Gedenken. Erinnerungen und Erwartungen in Europa zum 8. Mai 1945*“, Göttingen 1995, p. 19-25; Eric A. Johnson, Reinhart Koselleck: 1999; Reinhart Koselleck: “Die Diskontinuität

On 8 May, under Soviet command, Koselleck and his fellow German soldiers started on a long walk that ended in Auschwitz, where for some weeks he carried out working duties,³⁸ before being transported to a Soviet prisoner camp in Karaganda (Kazakhstan) in central Asia.³⁹ Koselleck spend 15 months there. He was released with the help of a friend of his family, a German doctor, who cited Koselleck's foot injury to diagnose him unable to do anymore work, but able to survive the four weeks of transportation via train to Germany. At the end of 1946, Koselleck arrived in Germany and returned to the family's apartment in Saarbrücken, where his mother lived.⁴⁰

In many later interviews and writings, Koselleck not only described his whereabouts, but also his reactions and emotions during and especially after the war. Among the central elements in these accounts is the immense fear that he and his fellow German soldiers felt during and after their capture by the Soviets in May 1945; the state of existential insecurity during the demanding walk to Auschwitz; the shocking confrontation with the – at first unbelievable – information about the German mass killings that had taken place there; the renewed fear when transported to the Soviet Union; and the conditions of hunger and suffering in the camp in Karaganda. Koselleck's accounts of these experiences are narrated as a long series of extreme experiences, which made a deep and permanent impression on his mind. "There are experiences" – he once said of his war experiences – "that flow into the body like red-hot lava and petrify there. Irremovable, they can be retrieved at any time without changing."⁴¹

In line with this, Koselleck often emphasized how his decision to study history, as well as his scientific interests and beliefs, were deeply influenced by what he experienced in World War II and in Russian captivity between 1941 and 1946.⁴² That is to say, he presented his

der Erinnerung", *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 47, nr. 2, 1999, p. 213-214; Reinhart Koselleck: "Ich war weder Opfer noch befreit. Der Historiker Reinhart Koselleck über die Erinnerung an den Krieg, sein Ende und seine Toten", *Berliner Zeitung*, 7/5-2005.

³⁸ Koselleck worked with disassembling the IG-Farben industrial complexes. Reinhart Koselleck: 7/5-2005.

³⁹ The camp was a part of the GUPVI system of camps for prisoners of war which had been established already in 1939 and which functioned until 1960. See Andreas Hilger: *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der Sowjetunionen, 1941-1956. Kriegsgefangenenpolitik, Lageralltag und Erinnerung*, Essen 2000; Stefan Karner: *Im Archipel GUPVI. Kriegsgefangenschaft und Internierung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1956*, München 1995.

⁴⁰ His father was at that time in Hannover. On their reunion, Koselleck's father allegedly failed to recognize his son, who had been away for more than five years. Reinhart Koselleck: "Formen der Bürgerlichkeit", 2003, p. 73. While Koselleck had been away, his older brother had died as a soldier in the war, his younger brother had died during the Allied bombings, and his aunt on his mother's side, had been murdered by the Nazis in the 'euthanasia-action'.

⁴¹ Reinhart Koselleck: 6/5-1995.

⁴² For examples of how Koselleck's friends, colleagues and students have also related his war experiences to his historical writing, see Rudolf Vierhaus: 1989, p. 530 – "Diese Ereignisse, Kriegsdienst und russische Kriegsgefangenschaft – erfahrene Geschichte also – wurden ihm (...) zum Anlaß, die Geschichte zum Gegenstand des Nachdenkens und des Handelns als Forscher, akademischer Lehrer, Hochschulpolitiker und Schriftsteller zu

work as personally motivated attempts to grasp the historical background of the modern world, in particular World War II, including how it was experienced, and how it could be understood and coped with. With reference to these experiences, he also explained his fixation on topics such as crisis, conflict and death, his aversion to pathos-ridden notions such as ‘nation’, ‘fatherland’ and ‘heroism’, as well as his skepticism regarding all talk of progress in modern society, its politics, and its science.

One of many examples of this is found in a 2005 interview, where, faced with the question of how his experiences of the war had influenced his historical writing, Koselleck replied: “Anyone who has been deluded in his expectation of victory, must search for reasons, he/she did not have before, to explain the defeat. And the achievement of significant historians is to have transferred these reasons into methodological approaches (...). A minimum of skepticism is so to say the professional disease from which a historian has to suffer. Taking into account that condition, I would say that my experience of war determined my entire course of study. My stance was that of skepticism as a minimal condition to deconstruct utopian surplus.”⁴³

With statements as these, Koselleck positioned himself within a larger generational discourse that was articulated by a group of German academics and intellectuals, who in the post-World War II years to various degrees and in various ways defined their identities, interests and beliefs with reference to their experiences of National Socialism, war and captivity. Like many of his contemporaries, Koselleck conceived of himself as a member of what the sociologist Helmut Schelsky once labeled ‘the skeptical generation’.⁴⁴ According to Schelsky, ‘the skeptical generation’ included all young German men, who grew up in post-war Germany, after experiences of National Socialism, Hitlerjugend, war, captivity, assisting

machen.“; Friedrich Wilhelm Graf: “Die Macht des Schicksals entschuldigt gar nichts”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 1/11-1999 – “Seine subtilen geschichtsmethodologischen Distinktionen spiegeln den Versuch eigene Leidenserfahrungen und miterlebte Schrecken zu bewältigen.“; Ulrich Raulf: Der Geist ist ein Wühler. Klio dichtet im Verborgenen: Dem Historiker Reinhart Koselleck zum achtzigsten Geburtstag“, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23/4-2003 – “Der Krieg ist für ihn ein Labor, ein grausame Schule gewesen“; Lucian Hölscher: February 2006 – “Sie [the experiences of World War II] boten ihm immer wieder den Lackmusest für moralische Aufrichtigkeit, historische Wahrhaftigkeit. Wie viele seiner Generation lebte er im Bewusstsein, dass er einer von nicht vielen Überlebenden war, dass viele, oft die Besten im Krieg gefallen oder sonst wie, im Widerstand, auf der Flucht und in Gefangenschaft umgekommen waren. Ihnen, ihrer Erinnerung – im doppelten Sinne ihrer eigenen Erfahrungen und unseres Gedenkens – fühlte er sich verpflichtet.“; Christian Meier: “In den Schichten der Zeit“, *Die Zeit*, 10/2-2006 – “Es liegt in der Konsequenz eigener Erfahrung von Krieg, Gefangenschaft, dem Euthanasiemord an seiner Tante, dem Bombentod des Bruders, daß Erinnerung und der Umgang damit ihn beschäftigen. So das Interesse für die Kriegerdenkmäler (...); Michael Jeismann: “Das Jahrhundert unter der Haut“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6/2-2006 – “Der verwundete fuß, so sagte er einmal, sei auch eine Art erworbener Reflexionsform. So zeichnete ihn und viele der prägenden Intellektuellen und Akademiker der jüngeren Kriegsgeneration eine geistige Intensität aus, die seitdem nicht wieder erreicht werden.“

⁴³ Reinhart Koselleck: 7/5-2005.

⁴⁴ Helmut Schelsky: *Die skeptische Generation: Eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend*, Düsseldorf-Köln 1957.

in the defense against the allied bombings or of the total breakdown in May 1945.⁴⁵ Due to their experiences – Schelsky argued – members of ‘the skeptical generation’ were characterized by a critical, skeptical and distrustful attitude towards political ideology and long term societal planning, yet they gradually developed a more pragmatic, functional and largely democratic attitude towards politics and life.

In broad terms Schelsky’s label of a ‘skeptical generation’ fits Koselleck’s generational self-conception. Using the concept of generation as a *Selbstthematierungsformel*,⁴⁶ Koselleck often stated that his age-related experiences led him to conceive of the world in different terms than members of other generations – including those, who were too young to experience World War II and captivity, and those, who perhaps experienced World War II and captivity, but for whom World War I, the upheavals in the Weimar Republic and the National Socialist takeover in 1933 were their formative experiences. Habitually, he viewed himself as more skeptical and disillusioned than the younger generation and less skeptical and more pragmatic than the older generation.⁴⁷

At the same time, the generational identity, and the interest and beliefs, which Koselleck articulated with reference to his war experiences, differed distinctly from certain other

⁴⁵ In fact, Schelsky included all those, who were between 14 and 25 years old in the years between 1945 and 1955, that is, all those who were born between 1920 and 1941. For a historicization of Schelsky’s book, see Franz-Werner Kersting: “Helmut Schelskys ‘Skeptische Generation’ von 1957. Zur Publikations- und Wirkungsgeschichte eines Standardwerkes“, *Vierteljahreshft für Zeitgeschichte*, Jg. 50, 2002, p. 465-495. For an overview of the field of generational-research, see Ulrike Jureit: *Generationenforschung*, 2006 Göttingen and Ulrike Jureit, Michael Wildt: “Generationen”, Ulrike Jureit, Michael Wildt (Hg.): *Generationen. Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs*, Hamburg 2005, p. 7-26. For studies that probe the relation between generational belongings and historical writing in 20th century German historiography, see Jan Eckel: Göttingen 2005; Christoph Cornelissen: “Historikergenerationen in Westdeutschland seit 1945“, Christoph Cornelissen, Lutz Klinkhammer, Wolfgang Schwentker (Hg.): *Erinnerungskulturen. Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, p. 139-152; Paul Nolte: “Der Historiker der Bundesrepublik. Rückblick auf eine ‘lange Generation’“, *Merkur*, Nr. 53, 1999, p. 413-432. For how the experience of National Socialism and World War II was dealt with by the generation of intellectuals known as the ‘forty-fivers’ in the Federal Republic, see A. D. Moses: “The Forty-Fivers. A Generation between Fascism and Democracy“, *German Politics and Society*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1999, p. 94-126 and A. D. Moses: 2007. To the ‘forty-fivers’, Moses counts all those who experienced 1945 as a ‘turning point’ in their life; that is, all those born between 1922 and 1932, for whom ‘the collapse of the Nazi regime and beginning of liberal freedoms was the turning point of their lives and the beginning of their own (and Germany’s) intellectual and emotional (*geistige*) reorientation’. The latest attempt to provide a generational perspective on the intellectual history of the Federal Republic is found in Stephan Schlak: München, 2008, p. 22-23. Schlak briefly describes how, in their political thinking, all German intellectuals born in 1923 (which includes Koselleck) remained oriented towards their experiences of ‘disorder’, ‘crisis’ and ‘revolution’ that they had experienced in the Weimar Republic. The classic study of how experiences of National Socialism have been dealt with among various generations in the Federal Republic is Heinz Bude: *Bilanz der Nachfolge: die Bundesrepublik und der der Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt am Main 1992, p. 65-92. See also Rolf Schörken: *Die Niederlage als Generationserfahrung. Jugendliche nach dem Zusammenbruch der NS-Herrschaft*, München 2004 and Rolf Schörken: *Jugend 1945. Politisches Denken und Lebensgeschichte*, Frankfurt am Main 1994.

⁴⁶ For the more precise implications of this notion, see Ulrike Jureit: 2006, p. 7-19. Koselleck also used the concept of generation as an *analytical category* in his writings, a point to which we return below.

⁴⁷ Examples will be given in chapter 7 within the context of his reactions to the student revolt in the late 1960s.

generational discourses that have been constructed by members of the ‘skeptical generation’ in the Federal Republic. Most importantly, it diverged on crucial points from the generational discourse found in the work of a group of historians born around or after 1930, including Hans Ulrich Wehler, Gerhard A. Ritter, Hans and Wolfgang Mommsen and Helmut Berding.⁴⁸ Some of these figures belong to the generation of the so-called *Flakhelfer*, who were too young to participate in the war outside of Germany, but assisted in the defense of Germany at the end of the war and experienced the total breakdown, while others were too young to be *Flakhelfer* and emphasize instead the allied bombings or the confusion in the immediate postwar years as the formative experiences of their childhood.⁴⁹

What unites these historians is a common generational discourse that viewed German cultural and political traditions as totally discredited after National Socialism and wanted to implement fundamental political and also scientific changes using measures from outside Germany, especially from the USA. Scientifically, these historians developed their approach in opposition to what they understood as a theoretically weak, anti-normative and power-glorifying tradition of German historical writing, which became known as ‘historicism’.⁵⁰ More concretely, as a reaction to the way in which a line of mostly conservative historians from Leopold von Ranke to Gerhard Ritter (1888-1967) had connected the strong German State and its success in foreign policy, especially during the reign of Bismarck, to a distinct German spirit and development, or *Sonderweg*, the historians born around of after 1930 criticized what they described as a special German *Sonderweg* into modernity in theoretically informed analyses of the authoritarian societal structures during the Empire and the Weimar Republic.

This shift of focus from *Außenpolitik* to *Innenpolitik* was explained with reference to the experience of National Socialism, that is, to the need to illuminate and warn against the specifically German elements that led to Hitler’s rise to power. From a political position that has become known as ‘left liberal’, this is how the generation of historians born around or after 1930 has energetically tried to defend and improve the democratic structures underpinning the German Federal Republic since the 1960s.

⁴⁸ The following draws on Paul Nolte: 1999.

⁴⁹ For biographical information on Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Hans and Wolfgang Mommsen, Heinrich August Winkler and Jürgen Kocka, see Rüdiger Hohls, Konrad H. Jarausch (Hg.): *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart 2000. For how generational belongings are not a product of common experiences, but of a common discourse, see Ulrike Jureit: 2006. Against this background it makes sense that Paul Nolte includes Heinrich August Winkler and Jürgen Kocka in his description of the above-mentioned generation even though they were born in 1938 and 1941 respectively.

⁵⁰ We shall later discuss in depth the numerous different meanings that have been attached to the term ‘historicism’.

One of the most important common features of the two ‘skeptical generation’-discourses as articulated by Koselleck and the ‘left liberals’ has been described by A. D. Moses in his recent study *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*. Renaming the ‘skeptical generation’ the generation of ‘forty-fivers’, that is, the generation of German intellectuals born between 1922 and 1933, Moses writes: “The generational question of the forty-fivers was how and why National Socialism could come to power; its mission was to ensure that the Federal Republic would succeed.”⁵¹ To this, Moses adds: “The task was to identify and root out those intellectual traditions, discourses, ideologies, and political languages that had led to the German catastrophe” in order to keep the Federal Republic on the right track in the present and the future.⁵²

While these features indeed fit both generational discourses at issue, there are – as mentioned – also crucial differences between these discourses. Nowhere are these differences more evident than in the comparison between Koselleck and Hans-Ulrich Wehler; the prototype of the *Flakhelfer*. Where, with reference to his generational experiences, Wehler has emphasized “moral against distance, enlightenment against skepticism, linearity and progress against pluralism and decentralization”,⁵³ Koselleck focused on the possibility of crisis, conflict and war, on change and contingency, and he nurtured a much deeper skepticism towards every kind long-term planning, morality and belief in societal progress.

Against this background, the generational identity, concern and aim informing Koselleck’s scholarly production and intellectual activities is much closer to the so-called ‘liberal conservatives’. The ‘liberal conservatives’ has been described as yet another subgroup within the ‘skeptical generation’.⁵⁴ It encompasses a group of scholars, including the philosophers Odo Marquard, Hermann Lübbe and Robert Spaemann and the jurists Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde and Martin Kriele, who in the 1950s and 1960s all gathered around the philosopher Joachim Ritter in Münster.⁵⁵

Driven by a profound skepticism towards utopian ideology, the ‘liberal conservatives’ have not followed a plan of realizing a certain societal vision. As *Verfassungspatrioten* they have instead attempted to defend and improve the liberal-democratic pillars of the German Federal Republic by emphasizing “responsibility against attitude, institutionalized decision

⁵¹ A. D. Moses: 2007, p. 66.

⁵² See A. D. Moses: 2007, p. 66.

⁵³ The citation is taken from Paul Nolte: 1999, p. 427, who uses it to contrast Wehler to the historian Thomas Nipperdey (1927-1992); another of Wehler’s antagonists, with whom Koselleck shared many scholarly interests and positions, as we will return to in chapter 7.

⁵⁴ The following is based on Jens Hacke: Göttingen 2006, p. 11-34.

⁵⁵ Koselleck knew and co-operated on several occasions with Marquard, Lübbe and Böckenförde.

against ideas of a discourse free of domination, tradition and ethics [*Sittlichkeit*] against idealized reason and morality.”⁵⁶ In addition, they have tried to compensate for the consequences of the accelerated processes of modernization by referring to lessons of historical experience and by arguing for a critical preservation of tradition, focusing especially on certain bourgeois (*bürgerliche*) values and practices.

In line with this, the ‘liberal conservatives’ are known to primarily move within a nationally defined intellectual context that comprises a variety of scholars including Kant, Hegel, Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt. And while ‘liberal conservatism’ has nothing to do with the conservative-antidemocratic ideas that were articulated in the interwar writings of figures such as Heidegger and Schmitt, with the aim of solving problems and outlining possibilities in the social-political areas of the German Federal Republic, the ‘liberal conservatives’ are moreover known for their attempts to ‘formalize’ and ‘liberalize’ theories from these intellectually-politically compromised figures.⁵⁷

Arguments for a critical reuse of certain German traditions is one of the many ‘liberal conservative’ features that can be found in the writings of Koselleck, whose work to a large degree must be understood within the framework of his generational discourse and identity. It must also be understood against the background of the intellectual inspiration that he gleaned from various teachers and intellectual sparring partners during his time as a student in Heidelberg at the end of the 1940s and in the beginning of the 1950s.

As A. D. Moses has pointed out, generations always depend on preexisting political (and scientific) languages in coming to terms with their circumstances.⁵⁸ Hence, according to Moses, what the ‘forty-fivers’ who began their studies after experiences of National Socialism, war and captivity would make of their experiences and which lessons they would draw from the past was greatly influenced by the concepts and categories they learned at the university,

⁵⁶ Jens Hacke: 2006, p. 14. The concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* describes the identification of a citizen with the political culture of a democratic constitution. It was originally coined by the political scientist Dolf Sternberger and is often associated with the famous left liberal philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who in many ways can be viewed as an intellectual antithesis to the ‘liberal conservatives’. When Jens Hacke appropriates the concept in his description of the ‘liberal conservatives’, it was to emphasize that the ‘liberalization’ of the Federal Republic is not primarily a leftist project, but a result of the activities of many different intellectual orientations and practices, including those of the ‘liberal conservatives’. Jens Hacke: 2006, p. 11-16. We shall return to Habermas in the following chapter.

⁵⁷ It is on account of their different attitudes towards the German past that, in *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, A. D. Moses places scholars belonging to the ‘left liberals’ and the ‘liberal conservatives’ in two different camps of ‘forty-fivers’: the ‘Non German Germans’ and ‘German Germans’ (to be sure, Moses does not use the categories of ‘left liberals’ and ‘liberal conservatives’ in his work). According to Moses, these camps are proponents of two different languages of republicanism: respectively ‘redemptive’ and ‘integrative’ republicanism; “the former expressing the Non German German wish for a republic divorced from corrupted national traditions, and the latter articulating the German German imperative for positive, national continuity.” See A. D. Moses: 2007, p. 9-10. Moses also places Koselleck in the camp of ‘German Germans’ (p. 109.).

⁵⁸ See A. D. Moses: 2007, p. 53, 57 and 72.

most often from charismatic teachers. These teachers offered the intellectual tools with which the ‘forty-fivers’ interpreted and freed themselves from the National Socialist past and made their own way in processes during which they continued and developed the political (and scientific) languages at their disposal.

University studies

When Koselleck returned to Germany in the autumn of 1946, it was to a country that had been badly destroyed by the war. The vast majority of the Germans were deeply affected and disoriented by the events of the recent past, and, while living in material hardship, they felt confused, uncertain and pessimistic about what the future might bring.⁵⁹

The occupying powers soon set out their own plans concerning German politics, economy, culture – and de-nazification. One of Koselleck’s encounters with these plans took place at a castle near Dannenberg in Lower Saxony, where he participated in a re-education course arranged by the British. Here he met (and drew a caricature of) the later famous English historian Eric Hobsbawm. To the latter Koselleck must have appeared a peculiar young man: extraordinarily cultivated, intelligent and open-minded, but at the same time deeply affected and disillusioned by his experiences in the war and in Russian captivity and skeptical of the prospects of once again having to be subjected to political ideological ‘education’.⁶⁰

Parallel to the political measures taken by the occupying powers to re-educate the Germans, German intellectual life underwent a process of reconstruction in the immediate post-war years.⁶¹ Old discussion groups were resumed, new ones were established, and the various universities were one by one reopened – including the University of Heidelberg.

Unlike most other German cities, Heidelberg, which did not hold major bombing targets and never became a battleground, was largely intact after the war. Its university had been closed on 1 April 1945, and since its professorate had been extensively involved with National Socialism, the American occupying power subjected the institution to a process of de-nazification, before it was reopened in January 1946. However, the American initiatives

⁵⁹ For the most recent book on this period, see Sven Reichardt, Malte Zierenberg: *Damals nach dem Krieg. Eine Geschichte Deutschlands 1945 bis 1949*, München 2008. For broader overviews, see Konrad Jarausch: *After Hitler. Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*, New York 2006, p. 3-71; Edgar Wolfrum: *Die geglückte Demokratie. Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Stuttgart 2006, p. 20-41; Manfred Görtemaker: *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Von der Gründung bis zur Gegenwart*, Frankfurt am Main 2004, p. 24-43.

⁶⁰ See Eric Hobsbawm: *Interesting Times. A Twentieth-Century Life*, London 2002, p. 179. In an interview Koselleck spoke of how, along with other members of his age-group, he was given an ‘Amnestie-Schein’ by the Americans, which he received with contempt. See Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit”, 2003, p. 81. We shall later elaborate on his skepticism towards the political ideologies of communism and liberalism.

⁶¹ For this process, see first if all Dirk van Laak: 1993

were met with strong resistance by most of the faculty, and they were consequently limited in scope and severity. Not only were most of the compromised professors allowed to teach again; no organized efforts were made to bring about the return of Jewish scholars who had been dismissed.⁶²

Soon the University of Heidelberg gained the status of one of the most important universities in the western zone of Germany, among other things by hosting a great number of respected and established scholars, who were active and influential in the political and intellectual debate of postwar Germany.

On the one hand, the university also hosted figures such as the sociologist Alfred Weber and Max Webers' widow Marianne, the jurist Gustav Radbruch, the political scientist Dolf Sternberger, the philosopher Karl Jaspers and the psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich. Each of these figures were known for having been critical of National Socialism,⁶³ some of them had been persecuted by the regime. They were known for their liberal-democratic attitudes and were on the American's so-called 'white list'. On the other hand, the university also employed scholars, who had been close to, if not directly involved with National Socialism, such as the jurists Hans Schneider and Ernst Forsthoff, who was ousted from his chair in Heidelberg in 1945, but allowed to return in 1950.⁶⁴

Koselleck entered the university in the summer of 1947 through some influential friends of his mother's, who had stayed in his family's apartment in the months after the war.⁶⁵ Once accepted at the university, Koselleck did not have to pay study fees due to his father's status as a professor, which, in addition, earned him 110 Marks each month.⁶⁶

⁶² See Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg myth: the Nazification and denazification of a German University*, Cambridge 2002. For broader perspectives on the history of the University of Heidelberg, see Eike Wolgast: *Die Universität Heidelberg 1386-1986*, Berlin 1986; Karin Buselmeier, Dietrich Harth, Christian Jansen (Hg.): *Auch eine Geschichte der Universität Heidelberg*, Mannheim 1985. For a political history of the city of Heidelberg in the postwar years, see Friederike Reutter: *Heidelberg 1945-1949. Zur politischen Geschichte einer Stadt in der Nachkriegszeit*, Heidelberg 1994.

⁶³ For discussion of the fact that the political attitudes of Mitscherlich in the 1930s were shadier than many presumed in the post-war period, see Martin Dehli: *Leben als Konflikt. Zur Biographie Alexanders Mitscherlichs*, Göttingen 2007.

⁶⁴ See Steve P. Remy: 2002; Dirk van Laak: p. 186-191, 240-245. We shall later return to Forsthoff with whom Koselleck took exams and collaborated with on different occasions.

⁶⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: "Formen der Bürgerlichkeit", 2003, p. 73-74.

⁶⁶ In this respect, Koselleck was very privileged. First of all, it was difficult to be accepted at university in the immediate post-war years (in the autumn of 1945, between 25000 and 45000 applicants for university places were turned down). Secondly, the students who had taken their baccalaureate after 1942 were usually obliged to retake this or pass other forms of exams before entering university. Thirdly, many of the post-war students, of whom presumably more than 90 % had served in the army during the war, were financially dependent on their parents or had to work in order to raise at least 100 Marks, which was the minimum sum required to survive as a student. See Waldemar Krönig und Klaus Dieter Müller: *Nachkriegs-Semester: Studierende und Studienbedingungen nach Kriegsende*, Stuttgart 1990. For the number of applicants and students, see p. 158. The

Koselleck has retrospectively described how his privileged position as a student made him feel obliged to pass all the second semester tests which were necessary to receive the normal scholarship. However, as reported by his contemporary fellow students Nicolaus Sombart and Ivan Nagel, Koselleck enjoyed his reunion with and felt at home in the world of culture and books. Working his way through huge piles of books, he was “the most solid, untiring and thorough worker”⁶⁷ – “his brain was reflecting, critical, penetrating, and always at work.”⁶⁸

The reason for Koselleck’s energetic program of study undoubtedly also had a generational dimension to it. For many students, the university offered itself as a sanctuary from the upheavals, the disappointments and the violence that they had experienced in the preceding years of National Socialism, war and captivity. Studying was often perceived of as a kind of self-protection from and reworking of these experiences – it was a way of regaining a normal existence. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for the students to investigate why the world had collapsed before their eyes.⁶⁹ This was undoubtedly also Koselleck’s aim as he entered the University of Heidelberg.

Studying not only history, but also philosophy, political science (*Staatslehre*) and sociology, Koselleck enjoyed the liberal academic atmosphere and the relatively free curriculum at the university.⁷⁰ In the curriculum vitae, which he submitted along with his dissertation in 1954, he reported that he had especially followed seminars and lectures with thirteen professors, who represented a mix of people from the compromised and the formerly persecuted side: the jurists Walter Jellinek and Ernst Forsthoff, the philosophers Hans-Georg Gadamer, Karl Löwith and Franz-Josef Brecht, the historians Johannes Kühn, Fritz Ernst, Hans Schäfer, Walther Peter Fuchs and Hans Rothfels, the pre-historian Ernst Wahle, the sociologist Alfred Weber and the scholar of Greek literature Ernst Voigt.⁷¹ These experiences

average student at the University of Göttingen in the autumn of 1945 (p. 119) was 25 years old and 98 % had spent around four or five years in military service.

⁶⁷ Nicolaus Sombart: ‘Rendezvous mit dem Weltgeist’. *Heidelberger Reminiszenzen 1945-1951*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 265-266. We shall return to Sombart below.

⁶⁸ Ivan Nagel: “Der Kritiker der Krise“, Stefan Weinfurter (Hg): *Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006): Reden zum 50. Jahrestag seiner Promotion in Heidelberg*, p. 27.. Nagel and Koselleck befriended in the early summer of 1951, when Nagel was almost twenty and Koselleck twenty-eight years old. Shortly before, Nagel had left his native Hungary (Budapest) to study in Heidelberg. After his studies, Nagel began a successful career as a critique and dramatic advisor, occupying posts at several famous cultural institutions around the world.

⁶⁹ Waldemar Krönig und Klaus Dieter Müller: 1990, p. 63-119.

⁷⁰ The liberal milieu at the University of Heidelberg in this period is also described in Hans Robert Jauss: “Antrittsrede vor der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften”, *Jahrbuch der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1982, p. 71-75.

⁷¹ Reinhart Koselleck: “Lebenslauf” (1. p.), *Kritik und Krise*, 1954. Koselleck also studied in the summer semester of 1950 at the University of Bristol. In 1952, he was ex-matriculated in Heidelberg in order to finish his dissertation *Kritik und Krise*. Two detailed autobiographical accounts of Koselleck’s encounters with various scholars during his time as a student in Heidelberg can be found in Reinhart Koselleck: 2003 and Reinhart Koselleck: 2006.

undoubtedly helped Koselleck to develop his remarkably broad intellectual horizon in which insights from philosophy, sociology, anthropology, law and history were to be combined.

Five scholars seem to have made an extraordinary impression on Koselleck during his time as a student in Heidelberg and must be regarded as highly important for the way in which he developed his thoughts about history and historical scholarship, especially during the early years of his career. These five scholars – whom Koselleck referred to in his writings, frequently spoke of in interviews and/or honored through Festschriften, obituaries and forewords – were the historian Johannes Kühn, the jurist Carl Schmitt and the philosophers Karl Löwith, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger.⁷² Formed by different personal experiences and characterized by different personalities and political convictions, they shared a deep and personal engagement with their academic projects; an interest in the fundamental and existential questions of life and science; and an interest in world historical perspectives, characterized by a skeptical and critical attitude towards aspects of the modern world – an attitude that in the work of Schmitt and Heidegger was articulated in a distinctly anti-modern stance.

Below there follow five sketches that describe the careers and the work of these scholars and outline perspectives on the inspiration Koselleck drew from them in more detail. These sketches are not exhaustive. Rather, the aim is to introduce information on persons, writings and themes, which are central for an understanding of Koselleck's intellectual profile and scholarly production, and which are elaborated in the various chapters.

Johannes Kühn and historical method

Johannes Kühn (1887-1973) grew up in a Protestant vicarage and went to high school in Silesia, before he started his university studies in Breslau, Munich and Leipzig. He was known as an extremely learned man, who investigated all fields within the discipline of history – including the history of ideas, history of religion, historical theory, social history, agrarian history and political history – with the aim of merging these into a larger structural history.⁷³ His most famous work was his habilitation on *Toleranz und Offenbarung* from 1923

⁷² Heidegger was the only one out of the five scholars that Koselleck never honoured in writings or interviews. On the contrary, as we shall see, Koselleck kept a distinct intellectual distance from Heidegger. Koselleck's *Doktorvater* Werner Conze is not mentioned above, it is because Koselleck first met him in the late 1950s, when Conze arrived at and Koselleck returned to Heidelberg. Conze will be introduced in chapter 4.

⁷³ See Eike Wolgast: "Die neuzeitliche Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert", Jürgen Miethke (Hg.): *Geschichte im Heidelberg. 100 Jahre Historisches Seminar, 50 Jahre Institut für Fränkisch-Pfälzische Geschichte und Landeskunde*, Berlin 1992, p. 147-149; Detlef Junker: "Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft am Historischen Seminar der Universität Heidelberg im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert", Jürgen Miethke (Hg.): *Geschichte im Heidelberg. 100 Jahre Historisches Seminar, 50 Jahre Institut für Fränkisch-Pfälzische Geschichte und*

in which he investigated the various forms of tolerance and intolerance in Protestant churches and sects between the Reformation and the Enlightenment with a conceptual approach.

In 1945, due to his involvement with National Socialism, Kühn was suspended from his professorial chair at the University of Dresden,⁷⁴ but soon after acquired a position at the University of Leipzig. Once he had left Leipzig in 1949, at the age of 62, to take up the professorial chair in modern history in Heidelberg,⁷⁵ Kühn added little to his scholarly production. According to the sympathetic obituary that Koselleck wrote on the occasion of his death in 1973, his authority as a historian during his time in Heidelberg was built upon his ethos of embodying “a life of intensive work and the highest intellectual concentration (*Sammlung*)”. Kühn’s work was – still in the words of Koselleck – devoted to reflections on nothing less than “the Being (*das Sein*) and the enigma (*die Rätsel*) of history”,⁷⁶ and he possessed the special gift of reducing worldviews, historical philosophies and utopias to their political core.

First his doctoral student and later his assistant, Koselleck worked beside Kühn (who was in fact also his godfather) at very close range in the University of Heidelberg over a period of about 10 years. How deeply he sympathized with Kühn’s *habitus* as a historian and approach to history is indicated in the obituary. With a few changes, it might be read as Koselleck’s scholarly manifesto.

One of the more direct ways in which Koselleck acknowledged the inspiration that he found in Kühn’s work was by describing him as one of the ‘fathers’ of his approach to conceptual history on account of the methodological insights that emerged from his (Kühn’s)

Landeskunde, Berlin 1992, p. 71. Reinhart Koselleck: “Zum Tode von Johannes Kühn“, *Ruperto Carola*, Bd. 51, 1973, p. 143-144.

⁷⁴ For how Kühn after 1933 propagated anti-Semitic theory and supported Hitler’s wars – and how his writings on these issues were recorded in the diaries of Kühn’s former colleague Viktor Klemperer – see Eberhard Demm: “Alfred Weber und die Nationalsozialisten”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, Nr. 47, 1999, p. 232. See also Steve P. Remy: 2002, p. 228. Demm’s account disproves the verdict of Eike Wolgast: 1992, p. 148, footnote 119, that Kühn did not compromise himself during National Socialism. Kühn’s political past seemingly never became a public issue in his lifetime. However, in his memoirs Nicolaus Sombart attacked Kühn for having been a ‘radical anti-Semite’, who – Sombart stated – had participated in projects related to the Nazi’s population and extermination policies in the east. Sombart’s attack prompted Koselleck to defend his godfather in a 2006 speech, where he stated that Sombart’s account of Kühn’s past was blatantly wrong and made up. See respectively Nicolaus Sombart: 2000, p. 265 and Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 50-51.

⁷⁵ Kühn took over the professorial chair from Willy Andreas (1884-1967), who was discharged from his chair by the military government in February 1946 because of his affiliation with National Socialism. Andreas was in 1947 deemed *unbelastet* by the *Spruchkammer*, but was later the same year awarded the status of emeritus upon his own proposal. For information on Andreas and about the circumstances in which Kühn acquired Andreas’ chair, see Eike Wolgast: 1994, p. 146-147 and Eike Wolgast: “Geschichtswissenschaft in Heidelberg 1933-45”, Hartmut Lehmann, Otto Gerhard Oexle (Hg.): *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften. Bd. 1. Fächer – Milieus – Karrieren*, Göttingen 2004, p. 166-168. For further perspectives on the history of the department in the twentieth century, see the references in the previous notes and Werner Conze, Dorothee Mussnug: “Das historische Seminar”, *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, Bd. 57, Jg. 1979, p. 133-152.

⁷⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: 1973, p. 143.

method of reading texts.⁷⁷ In line with this, Koselleck's fellow student in Heidelberg, Nicolaus Sombart, recalls in his vivid memoirs that it was from Kühn that Koselleck learned the 'serious trade of the historian'; a method of source criticism, which, according to Sombart, informed Koselleck's way of working with texts. "He was", Sombart writes, "not a paranoid hermeneutic, but had, as a historian, learned to approach historical sources in a critical manner. He did not hesitate to accept texts in their literal meaning, as plain text, but he required that they be scrutinized regarding their authenticity."⁷⁸

It was from this belief in historical method – Sombart continues – that Koselleck became: "the ideological-critical historian for whom the reality of life has not dissolved into signs and interpretations, but for whom facts and persons still exist, and who eased out his dissatisfaction with the possibilities of knowledge by saying: 'What you have on black and white, you can confidently take home with you.'⁷⁹

Sombart's description of Koselleck's convictions and working habits is apt in many ways – he was an ideological-critical historian, who constantly reflected the limits of his field, without taking a relativistic position – and Sombart is undoubtedly right that Kühn was a key inspiration for Koselleck in forming his approach and identity as a scholar, although Koselleck was never so elaborate concerning the inspiration he found in Kühn.

When Koselleck described Kühn as one of the 'fathers' of conceptual history, it was most often with reference to the conceptual approach that Kühn had practiced in *Toleranz und Offenbarung*. However, Koselleck also turned the central theme of this book – 'the historical problem of tolerance' – into a key theme of his work. He first dealt with the theme in his dissertation, which he wrote under Kühn's supervision, and which was partly motivated by Kühn's suggestion, in relation to a course the latter gave in the winter semester of 1949/50 on the History of historical philosophy (*Geschichte der Geschichtsphilosophie*), to investigate the history and the characteristics of modern utopias.⁸⁰ Like Kühn, Koselleck was of the opinion that 'tolerance' is never pre-given, but always the result of concrete social-historical

⁷⁷ [Reinhart Koselleck]: "Begriffsgeschichte, Sozialgeschichte, Begriffene Geschichte. Reinhart Koselleck im Gespräch mit Christof Dipper", *Neue politische Literatur*, Nr. 2, 1998, p. 187.

⁷⁸ Nicolaus Sombart: 2000, p. 265.

⁷⁹ Nicolaus Sombart: 2000, p. 265.

⁸⁰ "Von Kühn wurde ich angeregt, – vermittelt durch meine Referate über die Begründung des Kommunismus im kommunistischen Manifest oder zur Begründung des ewigen Friedens in der einschlägigen Schrift von Kant – , den neuzeitlichen Utopien auf die Spur zu kommen: Ausgangsfrage und Thematik meiner Dissertation, die sich auf die Suche begab nach der utopischen Ladung auch in Kants drei Kritiken". Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 51. For the title and the period of the seminar, see Brigitte Altemos: "Lehrende und Lehrprogramm. Kontinuität und Wandel der Heidelberger Historie unter personellen Gesichtspunkten", Robert Deutsch, Heilwig Schomerus, Christian Peters (Hg.): *Eine Studie zum Alltagslebens der Historie. Zeitgeschichte des Faches Geschichte an der Heidelberger Universität 1945-1978*, Heidelberg 1978, p. 71.

constellations, and he made it one of his scientific ambitions to show that the modern world's idealistic demands for tolerance have recurrently developed into new and more radical forms of intolerance and provide the foundations for what he understood as more realistic and less dangerous forms of tolerance.

Karl Löwith and *Meaning in History*

Another central feature in Koselleck's scholarly production is the conception of modern historical philosophy as so-called *secularized eschatology*. Koselleck came across this conception during his time as a student in Heidelberg through readings of the renowned expert in historical philosophy; the German Jewish philosopher Karl Löwith. (1897-1973).

A volunteer in World War I, Löwith was badly wounded and spent time in Italian captivity, before he in 1917 returned to München, where he soon after began his university studies in biology and philosophy. During his studies at the University of Freiburg, Löwith met the philosopher Martin Heidegger, and after following him to the University of Marburg, he was awarded his habilitation under Heidegger's supervision in 1928. In the 1930s, Löwith was about to begin a promising academic career in Germany, when, because of his Jewish origins, he was prohibited from teaching and publishing after the National Socialist's rise to power. He therefore immigrated – first to Italy, later to Japan and finally to the USA.⁸¹ Once the war was over, in 1952, with the help of Hans-Georg Gadamer, he returned to Germany to take up a chair in philosophy at the University of Heidelberg, where he became Koselleck's second supervisor on *Kritik und Krise*.

Immediately before Löwith returned to Germany, Koselleck had acted as co-translator of what is often regarded as Löwith's most important work; his 1949 *Meaning in History*.⁸² Here, Löwith argued that the cultural and intellectual preconditions of the European catastrophe were to be found in the rise of modern historical philosophy. By the term historical philosophy, Löwith meant “a systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with

⁸¹ See Löwith's memoirs from 1940, which were published posthumously, in 1986, with a foreword by Reinhart Koselleck – Karl Löwith: *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933, Ein Bericht mit einem Vorwort von Reinhart Koselleck und einer Nachbemerkung von Ada Löwith*, Stuttgart 1986. For introductions to Löwith, see Richard Wolin: “Karl Löwith: The Stoic Response to Modern Nihilism”, Richard Wolin: *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*, Oxford 2001, p. 71-100. Burckhard Liebsch: *Verzeitliche Welt. Variationen über die Philosophie Karl Löwiths*, Würzburg 1995; Wiesbrecht Ries: *Karl Löwith*, Stuttgart 1992; ; Jürgen Habermas: “Karl Löwiths stoischer Rückzug vom historischen Bewusstsein“, Jürgen Habermas: *Philosophisch-politische Profile*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, p. 195-216; Manfred Riedel, “Karl Löwiths philosophischer Weg”, *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, Nr. 14, 1970, p. 120-133. For focused perspectives on *Meaning in History*, see Jeffrey Andrew Barsch: “The Sense of History: On the Political Implications of Karl Löwith's Concept of Secularization”, *History and Theory*, vol. 37, nr. 1, 1998, p. 69-82; W. Emmerich: “Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte”, *Sinn und Form*, Bd. 46, 1994, p. 894-915.

⁸² Karl Löwith: *Meaning in History: the theological implications of the philosophy of history*, Chicago 1949.

a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning”,⁸³ and he argued in *Meaning in History* that all modern philosophies of history are merely forms of secularized eschatology.

More concretely, tracing the theological implications of modern historical philosophy from the writings of Jacob Burckhardt back to the Bible, Löwith explained how the rise of modern historical philosophy had to do with a change in historical awareness, and especially in the perception of time, which took place from the period of the Ancient Greeks to the 19th century. Where, according to the Greek view of life and the world, everything moves in recurrent and eternal life-cycles, the Christian conception about the world was based on the teachings about the coming of the end of World. Yet the belief in the Kingdom of God also involved an expectation of salvation in history: the expectation of an eschatological future. Hereby a new temporal horizon was opened.

According to Löwith, modern historical philosophy was created in the moment where the eschatological idea was secularized – as man placed himself in the position of God and started to believe that he was capable of and responsible for creating and directing history towards a future and ultimate goal within this world. In this process, as modern man sought to remove himself from all ontological constraints, including the finitude of human temporal existence, he projected his demand for meaning onto history and conceived of all his actions as mere preparations for the historical final aim: a new and better world.

Detecting the first proponents for full-blown and all-encompassing philosophies of history in writings of Hegel and Marx, Löwith’s view on modern historical consciousness was characterized by a profound skepticism. While refuting the idea that history has any inherent meaning or direction, in the preface to *Meaning in History*, he announced that his analysis did not offer any constructive results. In a tone of resignation, he added that “[mans] planning and guessing, his designs and decisions, far-reaching as they may be, have only a partial function in the wasteful economy of history which engulfs them, tosses them, and swallows them”.⁸⁴

Meaning in History continues to stand as a masterpiece in the studies of philosophies of history. The book also made a deep impression on Koselleck, who retrospectively described how, over the course of his life, he rarely learned so much as during the quarter of a year when he translated the last three chapters and the annotations in Löwith’s book.⁸⁵

⁸³ Karl Löwith: 1949, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Karl Löwith: 1949, p. vi.

⁸⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: 2003, p. 77. The main translator was Koselleck’s friend Hanno Kesting, who had been recommended for the job by Carl Schmitt. Dirk van Laak: p. 272. After having translated the text, Kesting sent the manuscript to Schmitt, expecting Schmitt to ‘add the last polish’. See Jan-Werner Müller: *A dangerous*

The result is evident in most of Koselleck's writings from *Kritik und Krise* onwards. Not only did Koselleck make use of the idea of modern historical philosophy as secularized eschatology in his analysis of the roots of modern political thought. He repeatedly criticized and warned against ideas that view history as one, progressive project, which human beings can easily program and direct towards a final aim, since such ideas – as Koselleck saw it – had proved to have disastrous consequences for societal-political planning and decision-making ever since the French Revolution. But, in contrast to Löwith, Koselleck attempted to develop an antidote and an alternative to the historical philosophies; an alternative that aimed at a more realistic and responsible way of conceptualizing history.

Carl Schmitt and his 'students': modernity, revolution and civil war

The jurist and political thinker Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) was born in Plettenberg, Sauerland, in a family with strong Catholic traditions.⁸⁶ Schmitt was educated as a jurist and taught at several universities, and he worked as juridical advisor first for the Weimar governments and after 1933 for the Nazis.

In the twenties and thirties, Schmitt rose to fame, as he formulated a series of critiques of the liberal incapacity to respond to the crisis that had emerged in the classical sovereign state and inter-state system. His critique of liberalism stemmed from the fact that in his view, it avoided the very essence of politics: taking responsibility and making decisions. His major concern in his main contributions to legal and political theory was to provide theories capable of upholding law and order in national as well as international affairs, and, in order to avoid the false universalism and political anarchy that liberalism supposedly brought with it, he continually advocated a strong state and an international political system consisting of classically sovereign states.

It was consequently with the aim of establishing clear criteria for political decisions that Schmitt developed his controversial definition of 'the political' in his most famous work *Der Begriff des Politischen* from 1932.⁸⁷ With the concept of 'the political', he introduced a criterion for making decisions by reducing all political actions and motives to a distinction

mind: Carl Schmitt in post-war European thought, New Haven 2003, p. 109 and footnote 26. Schmitt's interest in *Meaning in History* is also seen in his review of the English edition. Carl Schmitt: "Drei Stufen historischer Sinnggebung", *Universitas*, 5, 1950, p. 927-931. For perspectives on Schmitt's review, see Reinhard Mehring: "Karl Löwith, Carl Schmitt, Jacob Taubes und das 'Ende der Geschichte'", *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 48, 3, 1996, p. 234-238.

⁸⁶ For excellent introductions to Schmitt, see Reinhart Mehring: *Carl Schmitt zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2001; Gopal Balakrishnan: *The enemy: An intellectual portrait of Carl Schmitt*, New York 2000.

⁸⁷ Carl Schmitt: *Der Begriff des Politischen*, München 1932. The book was an elaborate version of a text that Schmitt had already published in 1927 in the journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik*.

between 'friend' and 'enemy'. Another example of the concise and bold political-juridical definitions that were Schmitt's area of expertise is found in the first sentence of *Politische Theologie*, published ten years before *Der Begriff des Politischen*. Here Schmitt defined sovereignty with the following words: "Sovereign is he who decides upon the exception."⁸⁸

Schmitt was primarily a legal and political theorist, but he also wrote a variety of essays and books on different topics including the history of ideas; geopolitics; forms of government; the relation between church and state; and international relations. Common to all his writings is a focus on concepts. Schmitt conceived politics as a battle between concepts and their worldviews, and he pursued a method of uncovering how during their birth in the transition to the modern world liberal key concepts had attained certain 'insufficient' and 'dangerous' qualities. He contrasted the former with concepts that he argued guaranteed more clarity, order and permanence. The aim of his conceptual investigations was unequivocal: to establish and fight contemporary intellectual and political positions.⁸⁹

During the twenties and thirties, Schmitt was a controversial, but also a widely read and respected scholar. He not only influenced numerous legal theorists, but also a variety of other scholars right along the political spectrum. However, on account of his energetic attempt to become the 'Crown Jurist' of the Third Reich, after the war he was banned from teaching and was intellectually-politically denounced in the public debate. At the same time, however, he became a celebrated figure in academic and political discussion groups at universities and in more private settings.⁹⁰

Koselleck came into contact with Schmitt through the seminars given by the sociologist Alfred Weber. Weber attracted a circle of students, who, like Koselleck, had returned from the war and captivity, and who then developed a special interest in the conflicts of modernity. Among these students, of whom many found an intellectual sparring partner in Schmitt, were Hanno Kesting and Nicolaus Sombart.⁹¹ In the eyes of Kesting, Sombart and Koselleck,

⁸⁸ Carl Schmitt: *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, Berlin 1922, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Thus the title of a collection of Schmitt's essays: Carl Schmitt: *Positionen und Begriffe im Kampf mit Weimar-Genf-Versailles 1923-1939*, Berlin 1940. For a lucid perspective on the possibilities and the limits of Schmitt's conceptual history, see Christian Meier: "Zu Carl Schmitt's Begriffsbildung – Das politische und der Nomos", Helmut Quaritsch (Hg.): *Complexio Oppositorum*, Berlin 1988, p. 537-556.

⁹⁰ Dirk van Laak: 2002; Jan-Werner Müller: 2003.

⁹¹ For Kesting, born in 1925, and a member of the *Hitlerjugend* in the 1930s, the experience of the violent battle of Normandy, followed by four years of imprisonment, led to an extremely pessimistic view of life. After finishing his dissertation in Heidelberg, he began an academic career that started at the *Sozialforschungsstelle* in Dortmund and ended with a position as an *Ordinarius* at the Department of Political Science at the University of Bochum. He died in 1975 after an operation. For Sombart, the son of the famous economic historian Werner Sombart, the transition from the safe surroundings of his childhood to the role of corporal in the German army, and ending the war in British imprisonment, resulted in a feeling of loss and existential despair, although

Schmitt seemingly appeared as a fascinating personality, who possessed not only admirable intellectual capacities, but also a firm conception of the world and an insight into some of the realities of the past and the present that were allegedly about to be forgotten at the post-war German universities, with their focus on re-education and American social science.⁹²

Due to Koselleck's immediate intellectual fascination with Schmitt, the latter soon became his informal mentor while he was working on his dissertation *Kritik und Krise*. Koselleck later recalled his encounter with Schmitt in the following way:

"I have rarely been asked so clever questions; I have rarely had as inspiring conversations as back then. I had just translated Hobbes for my dissertation. Schmitt asked, what I wanted to do with Hobbes, and then I spelled out my thesis: the rise of the utopia from the imbalanced relation to political responsibility in the absolutist system. He then asked me questions systematically and repeatedly encouraged me to stick to the structure of my thesis, which I presented in three chapters in my dissertation; I should not let myself be influenced by professors, who might be of the opinion that one should write more or different things."⁹³

The meeting between Koselleck and Schmitt also resulted in a personal acquaintance that lasted until Schmitt's death. The reason for Koselleck's interest in Schmitt in the 1950s is probably not only to be found in his intellectual fascination of his mentor, but also in their common personal *habitus* of defeat after the war. In this period, Schmitt felt a need to reflect on the war, its causes, and not least his own role in it. This he did, among other places, in the apologetic book *Ex Captivitate Salus* in which he suggested that extraordinary history is written not by the "winners" but by the "vanquished".⁹⁴

Koselleck never shared Schmitt's self-pity, his apologetic attitude or his political positions. However, his self-understanding was in this period influenced by Schmitt's aphorism – he too felt like one of the 'vanquished' in history.⁹⁵ In fact, as is discussed in more detail further on, Koselleck later developed Schmitt's reflections into a theory of how the 'vanquished', in their attempt to rework and understand their negative experiences, are those who develop new methodological tools and thereby reveal new insights into history.⁹⁶

For German students in the post-war period, it was not unusual to look for a teacher or a

apparently not for long. Not long after finishing his dissertation, Sombart went to Strasbourg to pursue a long career in the European Council. Dirk van Laak: 2002, p. 266-276. Nicolaus Sombart: 2000, p. 268-276.

⁹² Sombart knew Schmitt from his youth in Berlin in the 1940s, and he introduced Koselleck to Schmitt. For Sombart's account of his meetings with Schmitt in his parent's home in the 1940s, see Nicolaus Sombart: *Jugend in Berlin: Ein Bericht*, München 1984.

⁹³ Reinhart Koselleck: "Formen der Bürgerlichkeit": 2003, p. 76.

⁹⁴ Carl Schmitt: *Ex Captivitate Salus*, Köln 1950, p. 25.

⁹⁵ See Ivan Nagel: 2006, p. 26.

⁹⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: "Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel. Eine historisch-anthropologische Skizze", Christian Meier und Jörn Rüsen (Hg.): *Historische Methode*, München 1988, p. 27-57.

mentor, who was interested in discussing with the students, and who might perhaps serve as an ideal, a point of orientation or a source of inspiration.⁹⁷ However, Schmitt's status among the Heidelberger trio of Koselleck, Kesting and Sombart was probably a somewhat unusual case, in that, according to Sombart's memoirs,⁹⁸ the three friends planned to found a journal devoted to studies in topics that originated from Schmitt's writings: *Das Archiv für Weltbürgerkrieg und Raumordnung* (The Archive for World Civil War and Spatial Order).

The title embodied central lines of a worldview that centered round a theory of modernity, which Schmitt developed in his post-war writings, and which the three students picked up on and refined to their own uses. According to this view, as outlined by Sombart,⁹⁹ the modern world was born in a moment of crisis, during the civil wars of the French Revolution, and the condition of crisis, revolution and civil war had never come to an end: it constituted in fact the very characteristic of the modern world. Hence the contemporary Cold War between Russia and USA was nothing but a civil war on a worldwide level: a World Civil War (*Weltbürgerkrieg*) – in which the historical philosophies of liberalism and communism provided the central and legitimizing weapons.

In order to end the crisis-condition, Sombart, Kesting and Koselleck defined it their task to study the laws, dynamics and immanent structure of history. Sombart writes: "In the forefront of these future solutions, we experienced our present, which did not begin in 1945, but in 1789, as *Époque de transition* – as crisis. Sociology as a crisis-science should help us to

⁹⁷ See Waldemar Krönig und Klaus Dieter Müller: 1990, p. 67-80. In Göttingen, for example, a group of students, who had returned from war and captivity or spent time in German working- and concentration camps found in the philosopher Helmut Plessner a teacher in whom they sought inspiration to come to terms with the disasters of the immediate past with the aim of preventing similar events in the future. Helmut Plessner had as 'half-Jew' been forced to emigrate to Holland in 1933 and returned to take up a position as a professor in sociology in Göttingen in 1933. Carola Dietze: *Nachgeholtes Leben. Helmut Plessner: 1892-1985*, Göttingen 2006, p. 376-378. Some groups of students who returned from war and captivity in the post-war period preferred to discuss with each other instead of with their teachers or the younger students. The words of the historian Rudolf Vierhaus concerning his time as a student in University of Münster in the 1950s are illustrative: "Wir älteren Studenten und Doktoranden, die Krieg und Gefangenschaft hinter sich hatten, wurden von ihnen [the teachers] sehr viel anders als junge Studenten behandelt und vielfach gefördert. Wir waren in den Tat – obwohl oft mangelhaftem Schulunterricht und langen Unterbrechungen unserer Kenntnisdefizite bewusst – unabhängiger, keine Schüler mehr, und die Professoren für uns nicht schon durch die Amt Autoritäten. Schließlich: Wichtiger als das Gespräch mit den Professoren wurde für uns das Gespräch unter 'uns', das heißt: den Doktoranden, Assistenten, Habilitanden sowohl in eigenen Fach wie über die Fachgrenzen hinaus." Rudolf Vierhaus: "Ich stellte fest, dass ich die pathetische Sprache von Nation, Vaterland, Heldentum nicht mehr sprechen wollte", Rüdiger Hohls, Konrad H. Jarausch (Hg.): *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 80-81.

⁹⁸ Concerning the journal plans and the friendship between Sombart, Kesting, and Koselleck, see Nicolaus Sombart: 2000, p. 268-276. Together labelled as the "urdeutsche Dreigespann von Faust, Mephisto und Wagner", Sombart portrays himself as a happy, liberal and positive "Weltkind"; Kesting as the pessimist, who represented the "Kult des Negativen"; and Koselleck as the "etwas grauen" figure, who stood in the shadows of the other two, while being a fully accepted member of the group. The validity of these descriptions is of course difficult to assess.

⁹⁹ Nicolaus Sombart: 2000, p. 268-276.

understand and end the crisis.“¹⁰⁰

All three dissertations were inspired by this worldview – Koselleck and Kesting’s more than Sombart’s – although Koselleck was the only one to openly acknowledge this inspiration in the introduction by thanking Schmitt” who in conversations helped me to ask questions and find answers.”¹⁰¹ Also in many of Koselleck’s subsequent writings, not least in those dealing with conceptual history, there are several references to Schmitt’s work. Koselleck’s reception of Schmitt was, as we will see, always double-sided: in framing his partisan activities, he on the one hand drew on and reworked thematic, methodological and theoretical features from Schmitt’s work, while he on the other, he distanced himself from and tried to counter its political implications.

Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger: hermeneutics, time and finality

The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) grew up and studied in Breslau under Richard Höningwald, but soon moved to Marburg to study with Paul Natorp and Nicolai Hartmann. After defending his dissertation in 1922, he went to Freiburg to study with Martin Heidegger with whom he defended his doctorate in 1929. He spent most of the early 1930s lecturing in Marburg, before he acquired a professorial chair in Leipzig in 1939, where he became rector in 1945. In 1948, he moved to the University of Frankfurt, and in 1949 he arrived at the University of Heidelberg, where he took over the chair of Karl Jaspers.¹⁰²

Koselleck has explained how, when Gadamer arrived at Heidelberg, he was largely unknown to the students due to the fact that he had published very little. However, because of the personal and intellectual qualities that Gadamer displayed in the seminars, he was at once deeply respected and appreciated.¹⁰³

It was partly through these seminars that Gadamer’s finished his famous main work: the widely acclaimed *Wahrheit und Methode* from 1960.¹⁰⁴ Gadamer’s project in the book was to uncover the nature of human understanding and awareness through a concept of philosophical hermeneutics, which Martin Heidegger had initiated but never dealt with in depth, and which was based on notions of language and of human temporal consciousness. Gadamer argued in

¹⁰⁰ Nicolaus Sombart: 2000, p. 271-272. Where Sombart and Kesting submitted their dissertations at the department of sociology, Koselleck submitted his to the department of history, but – as we shall return to – he viewed his study as a sociologically framed analysis of history.

¹⁰¹ Reinhart Koselleck: ”Vorwort”, 1959. Koselleck also thanked Johannes Kühn, his father, and his friends Gerhard Hegt, Hanno Kesting and Nicolaus Sombart.

¹⁰² For Gadamer’s life and work, see Jean Grondin: *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A biography*, New Haven 2004.

¹⁰³ Reinhart Koselleck: ”Er konnte sich verschenken – Hans-Georg Gadamer gedenkend, des Lehrers und Freundes, der vor einem Jahr Starb“, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 16/3-2003.

¹⁰⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen 1960. See Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 45.

Wahrheit und Methode that ‘truth’ and ‘method’ were at odds with one another and took issue with two approaches within the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). On the one hand, he criticized the modern approaches to humanities that are modeled on the natural sciences and their rigorous methods. On the other hand, he criticized the traditional German approach to the humanities, represented for example by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, for believing that correctly interpreting a text meant recovering the original intention of the author who wrote it.

In contrast to these positions, Gadamer stated that all human understanding and interpretation takes place through language and that people have an ‘effective-historical consciousness’ (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*), meaning that they are always embedded in the particular history and culture that shape them and their understanding of the world. To interpret a text or work of art thus involves a fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) between the horizon of the text and that of its interpreter. With these and other reflections, in *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer did not intend to launch a programmatic statement about a new method of interpreting text. Rather he sought to describe what we always do, and what happens, when we interpret things.

That the role of language and processes of reception became revolving points in Koselleck’s analysis of how human beings understand and act in the world, clearly owed much to his encounters with Gadamer in Heidelberg. From the beginning, Koselleck’s approach to history was deeply hermeneutical, and his entire oeuvre displays a profound interest in classical aesthetic topics in the hermeneutic tradition, but he seems to have explored Gadamer’s hermeneutics more systematically only from the 1960s onwards. Here, as we shall see, Koselleck first of all turned the Gadamerian hermeneutics in the direction of analyzing collective experience and larger social-historical dynamics and processes, and, on his way to developing and articulating his analytical assumptions and framework, he tried to outline a concept of history that is less bound to language than Gadamer’s.

Gadamer was unquestionably among Koselleck’s academic role models. Koselleck not only admired his teacher’s intellectual capabilities, but also his tolerant and un-dogmatic attitude and his readiness to always engage in a dialogue with colleagues and students.¹⁰⁵ In Koselleck’s eyes, these were qualities that distinguished Gadamer from two other famous philosophers that formed part of the intellectual milieu in post-war Heidelberg: Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).

¹⁰⁵ See Reinhart Koselleck: 16/3-2003.

Already appointed as a professor in philosophy in Heidelberg in 1916, Jaspers was a widely read and respected scholar, before he was dismissed as a university teacher in 1933 and later prohibited from publishing because his wife was Jewish.¹⁰⁶ When Jaspers reassumed his position as a prominent figure in the German intellectual and cultural debate in the postwar period, it was largely due to his speeches – published in 1946 as *Die Schuldfrage*¹⁰⁷ – in which he made one of the most famous attempts in Germany to master the National Socialist past. Jasper’s reflections centered round questions of personal, collective and national responsibility in relation to National Socialism. In summary, he argued that the Germans should not only discuss, but also accept responsibility for the crimes committed during National Socialism, and he called for a German renewal along democratic lines. The negative reactions to these pleas in the German public – as well as among certain of his colleagues in Heidelberg, who allegedly neglected his personal experiences and problems – led Jaspers to accept a call to the University of Basel in 1948.¹⁰⁸

Jaspers is mentioned here, not because Koselleck found in him an important source of intellectual inspiration or academic role model, but rather because he represented features that Koselleck consciously avoided in shaping his work and academic *habitus*. Whilst Koselleck attended Jaspers’ seminars in Heidelberg, neither Jasper’s personality nor his philosophy appealed to the younger man. As a person, Koselleck found Jaspers morally ‘stiff’, too self-confident and vain. As a philosopher, he thought him too aloof and in a certain sense also dangerous, as he viewed Jasper’s philosophy to be deeply impregnated with historical philosophical traits. More precisely, Koselleck believed it to be impregnated with what he labelled “the classical tradition of liberal historical philosophy, which sees freedom as a future goal that can be achieved through practical reason.”¹⁰⁹

Koselleck was no less critical towards Martin Heidegger.¹¹⁰ Like Schmitt, due to his

¹⁰⁶ For a variety of perspectives on Jasper’s life and work, see Werner Schüssler: *Jaspers zur Einführung*, Hamburg 1995; Jeanne Hersch (Hg.): *Karl Jaspers. Philosoph, Arzt, politischer Denker. Symposium zum 100. Geburtstag in Basel und Heidelberg*, München 1986.

¹⁰⁷ Karl Jaspers: *Die Schuldfrage: ein Beitrag zur deutsche Frage*, Zürich 1946.

¹⁰⁸ Thus Jasper’s recollections of these events in Karl Jaspers: “Von Heidelberg nach Basel“, Peter Süß (Hg.), 1945. *Befreiung und Zusammenbruch. Erinnerungen aus sechs Jahrzehnten*, München 2005, p. 60-69.

¹⁰⁹ See Reinhart Koselleck: “Jaspers die Geschichte und die Überpolitische“, Jeanne Hersch (Hg.): *Karl Jaspers. Philosoph, Arzt, politischer Denker. Symposium zum 100. Geburtstag in Basel und Heidelberg*, München 1986, p. 298. For Koselleck’s reservations towards Jaspers, see also Reinhart Koselleck: 16/3-2003 and Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit”, 2003, p. 77-78, in which Koselleck expressed reservations towards about Jasper’s reflections in *Die Schuldfrage*. He said: “Ich habe den text gelesen, damals jedoch nicht so stark genommen wahrgenommen, wie ich ihn heute eher anerkennend einschätze. Die Differenzierung zwischen Schuld, Verantwortung, und metaphysischer Schuld ist vielleicht ein bißchen zu weit gegriffen, doch bleibe die Einteilung hilfreich, denn moralische Schuld und politische Verantwortung muß man in jedem Fall trennen.“

¹¹⁰ Tellingly, Koselleck drew ridiculing caricatures of both. See Reinhart Koselleck: 1983, p. 31 and 101 (ridiculing respectively Jasper’s vanity and work) and 105 (ridiculing Heidegger’s jargon of *Eigentlichkeit*).

notorious affiliations with National Socialism, Heidegger was banned from teaching in the immediate postwar years. However, his work remained widely read and discussed. This was also the case at the University of Heidelberg, where Heidegger's famous 1927 work *Sein und Zeit* – according to Koselleck – assumed status of a 'book of initiation' (*Initiationsbuch*) among the students. Koselleck first became familiar with the central categories of the book in seminars given by Franz-Josef Brecht and in Gadamer's seminar, where Heidegger occasionally appeared as a guest.¹¹¹

Heidegger made a deep impression on Koselleck. On the one hand, he found Heidegger's 'schoolmasterly' appearance unappealing, and he held strong reservations towards a certain normative pathos and a certain notion of history as unfolding in the eschatological sense with movements of descent and decay that he detected in *Sein und Zeit*. On the other hand, the same book provided inspiration for two of his most important scholarly projects that were both aimed at deconstructing history in the singular and thematizing history in the plural. The first project concerns an anthropologically based assumption of what history is, how it is created and can be understood; the other project concerns a theory of historical time in which individual and collective self-understanding and action is analyzed through historical actor's conceptions about time and finality. This accounts for Koselleck's statement in an interview that central dimensions of his work should be understood within the dynamics of Heidegger-reception that he entered during his studies in Heidelberg.¹¹²

In the following chapters we will see in more detail how Koselleck referred to the work of his teachers as he shaped his scholarly projects and presented himself to the disciplinary field. What is worth noticing is that, during his time as a student in Heidelberg, Koselleck primarily found intellectual inspiration in scholars, who were either on the fringes of or outside of the historical discipline, and not by any of its prominent and celebrated figures. This does not mean that Koselleck was unfamiliar with the work of these figures; rather that he was deeply skeptical towards and sought to break with the discursive features they represented. We shall end the chapter with a brief description of these discursive fields and Koselleck's attitude towards them.

¹¹¹ Martin Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, Halle 1927. Concerning the seminars given by Brecht, see Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 44; concerning *Sein und Zeit* as a 'book of initiation', see Reinhart Koselleck: "Formen der Bürgerlichkeit", 2003, p. 77. In a letter to Schmitt written in 1977, Koselleck mentions that he read Heidegger's book already in the third semester. RW265-8172: 3/1-1977.

¹¹² [Reinhart Koselleck] "Zeit, Zeitlichkeit und Geschichte – Sperrige Reflexionen: Reinhart Koselleck im Gespräch mit Wolf-Dieter Narr und Kari Palonen", Jussi Kurunmäki, Kari Palonen (Hg.): *Zeit, Geschichte und Politik: zum achtzigsten Geburtstag von Reinhart Koselleck*, Jyväskylä 2003, p. 9.

The historical profession in the post-war years

Two of the most famous historians of modern German and European history (the field Koselleck was entering) in the immediate post-war period were Gerhard Ritter and Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1954). For decades both had put their distinct fingerprints on the profession through occupying important scholarly and administrative positions and through extensive publications. While Meinecke was famous for his work on the history of ideas and Ritter for his work on political, diplomatic and military history, both were interested in issues related to the German state and its great personalities.

When the war ended, Meinecke was more than eighty years old, and while he enjoyed the status of a widely read and respected living classic in the discipline, he did not participate in the practical reorganization of the German historical profession in the postwar years.¹¹³ Ritter, on the other hand, as a result not only of his academic merit, but also of his reputation of having exercised a critical attitude and being involved in active resistance against the Nazis, came to play an important role in the reorganization of the profession.¹¹⁴

In spite of widespread adaptation to and cooperation with National Socialism among the German historians, Ritter used his authority to secure a strong continuation in the profession – both in terms of approaches, persons and institutions.¹¹⁵ This continuation was effected smoothly. Around 1950, the institutions of the historical profession were practically recovered; the departments at the universities had started teaching, the *Historikerverband* had been reestablished; important research-institutions such as the *Historische Kommission* at the *Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* and the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* were continuing their activities; and the historical journals were again being published. The processes of de-nazification had little impact on the personal at these institutions, and there were few examples of internal sanctions against compromised scholars. Hence, the profession continued to be dominated by a group of national-conservative and nationalistic historians, who, spearheaded by Ritter, attempted to marginalize the few catholic, liberal or marxist scholars in the profession, and to maintain the traditional approach of the discipline with its focus on a political and diplomatic history of events, without any explicit appeals to theory.

It was not until the late 1950s, after the rise of a number of new research-institutions (including the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in München and the *Arbeitskreis für moderne*

¹¹³ Meinecke's life and work will be introduced in more detail in chapter 4.

¹¹⁴ For Ritter and his key role in the reorganization of the discipline after World War II, see Christoph Corneliussen: Dusseldorf 2001.

¹¹⁵ For lines of continuation in the profession, see Jan Rothfels: 2006, p. 269-272; Winfried Schulze: *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, München, 1989; Ernst Schulin (Hg.): *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: 1945-1965*, München 1989.

Sozialgeschichte in Heidelberg) that various alternatives to historical writing gradually gained influence. During the 1960s, a period discussed in more detail in chapter 6, the profile of the discipline was challenged in a considerably more direct fashion as the generation of younger, so-called 'left-liberal' scholars combined a critique of the values informing the traditional approach to historical writing with an attempt to redefine the theoretical-methodological fundament of the discipline. More concretely, the 'left-liberals' launched a model of historical writing that was not only supposed to be more theoretically nuanced, but also more politically responsible than the approach to history that they found in the work of Ritter and Meinecke and which they labeled 'historicism'. In the opinion of this later generation, Meinecke had taken refuge from the rise of Nazism in idealistic and naïve ideas of eternal progress in history, while the national conservative Ritter had done little to counter the fascination with political power and pathos that had led to and shaped National Socialism, the 'left-liberals' aimed at an approach that would relate history to social reality and be unambiguously committed to political democracy.

In many ways Koselleck anticipated their critique of 'historicism' since from the very beginning of his scholarly career he expressed a deep skepticism towards Meinecke's understanding of history. Similar to the 'left liberals', he detected in this a theoretically weak and politically dangerous variant of 'historicism'. More concretely, according to Koselleck, Meinecke's analytical framework was both relativistic and utopian, as it combined a supposedly anti-normative position vis-à-vis history with an overtly positive belief in its progressive course and development, which altogether prevented him from interpreting history in a realistic and responsible way. Working from this basis, he made it one of his earliest and most important ambitions as a historian to construct an approach to history that would account for the flaws that he saw in Meinecke's work.

This ambition was already present in the dissertation *Kritik und Krise*, in which Koselleck interpreted the rise of the modern world with reference to the various contexts that he came from: the bourgeois society and the literary classics; the conflict, crisis and wars of the twentieth century; and the work of his teachers at the University of Heidelberg.

3. Explaining, criticizing and revising modern political thought

The initial objective of Koselleck's dissertation was to investigate the origins of modern utopian thought via readings of Kant's three critiques.¹¹⁶ Soon, however, the project developed into a broader analysis of the birth of modern political thought in the Enlightenment. Koselleck just managed to submit the dissertation in October 1953, as was the precondition for his taking up the position he had accepted as a lecturer at the University of Bristol from the beginning of 1954. According to Koselleck, the pressure of time forced him to submit the text without its footnotes. Moreover, it was this pressure which caused what he called "the slightly mannered strictness in the line of argumentation."¹¹⁷

In the dissertation, Koselleck nevertheless displayed several thematic, stylistic, argumentative, theoretical and methodological features that reappear in many of his subsequent writings. Since the dissertation was originally published in 1959,¹¹⁸ it has been re-published several times in a German paperback version. It has also been translated into Spanish, Italian, French and English. And after achieving status as an international 'classic' not only in the discussion of the enlightenment, the French Revolution and the rise of the public sphere, but also in the field of political theory, it was recently referred to as the most successful dissertation by a German academic in the humanities of the twentieth century.¹¹⁹

However, right from the time it first appeared in the 1950s up until today, *Kritik und Krise* has also been subjected to severe criticism. While many have criticized the book for being highly one-sided and unbalanced in its treatment of the enlightenment, some have in addition argued that it should in fact be read as a conservative contribution to the postwar German political debate.

This chapter is an analysis of *Kritik und Krise*; the intellectual processes in which the dissertation was constructed; and the later reception of the book. The text will be approached from three different contextual angles.

The first angle is the context of the general debates of the period on political thought. The chapter thus begins by presenting the basic plot, structure and argumentation with which Koselleck in *Kritik und Krise* constructed what amounted to a profoundly skeptical and critical historical interpretation of modern political thought. More concretely, we will see how he described modern political thought as born around the French Revolution and as

¹¹⁶ See for example Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 51 and Reinhart Koselleck: 1988, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 52. The time pressure is also documented by a sheet later accompanying the dissertation on which Koselleck corrected the relatively many typos and errors in the manuscript.

¹¹⁸ We will later return to the reasons for the delayed publication.

¹¹⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Graf: 1999.

characterized by dangerous, irresponsible and utopian features that had created a modern world dominated by permanent crisis, revolution and civil war. This summarizing introduction to the book raises questions about the normative agenda of Koselleck's interpretation and the extent to which his account converged with, and diverged from, the work of his 'teachers'. In order to answer these questions the chapter provides an account of the arguments about the processes of secularization and about the relations between moral and politics in the study.

This discussion leads to the second contextual angle that focuses on the deeper normative and theoretical-methodological foundations of *Kritik und Krise* and the intellectual processes in which these foundations emerged. These issues are approached by analyzing a dense five page letter that Koselleck wrote to Carl Schmitt on 21 January 1953. With the letter, we enter a micro-perspective on reception processes that pursue Koselleck's thinking at work. The aim is to disclose a constructive dimension of the dissertation that has never previously been discussed in relation to *Kritik und Krise* namely, Koselleck's attempt to revise modern political thought by means of outlining a new concept of history. By focusing on his readings of Friedrich Meinecke, Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger, this part of the chapter shows how, by means of a critique of modern political thought and of the approach to history known as 'historicism', Koselleck aimed to destroy the foundations of all historical philosophies by outlining a new anthropologically-based understanding of history, premised on the idea that history must be plural. Developed with the aim of providing a purely formalistic way of understanding and containing the potential for conflict in human societies, the outline encompassed a central discursive feature in the unifying pattern and the common objective in Koselleck's writings, and it came to provide these writings with a certain analytical, thematic and argumentative unity.

The illumination of the anthropological outline opens up for the third contextual angle on the book. This angle examines the role of study in terms of the 'making' of Koselleck, that is, it reads the dissertation as a text with which Koselleck tried to construct himself as a historian and position himself within the disciplinary field. More concretely, it shows that by taking up, modifying and rejecting intellectual-political discourses articulated by Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Meinecke, Koselleck sought to construct an identity and a position as an innovator and thus as an outsider to the academic field. The analysis then uses the reception of the book to illustrate how, due to the initial reception of *Kritik und Krise*, Koselleck's eventual reputation as an outsider was shaped in ways that he neither controlled nor desired. Here the analysis first turns to a very critical review authored by the philosopher

Jürgen Habermas. Following this there is a discussion of the ways in which a number of other reviewers pointed to certain biased and problematic aspects of Koselleck's dissertation. The chapter ends with a summing up of the entire analysis of the study.

What went wrong? The twentieth century and the enlightenment

What went wrong? What are the historical preconditions of German National Socialism and of modern totalitarianism? And what lessons are there to be drawn from the past in discussions of the present and the future? These were questions that many scholars, informed by different academic backgrounds, political beliefs and personal experiences, attempted to answer in the years during and after World War II.

A number of contributions to the debate focused on the relations between the extreme political events of the twentieth century and enlightenment thought. Among these were *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944) written by the two leading proponents of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno; *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945) by the Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper; the German philosopher Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951); *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (1946) and *Europa und die deutsche Frage* (1948), the work of historians Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter, respectively; and *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1960) written by the Israeli historian J. L. Talmon.¹²⁰

This was the body of literature to which Koselleck's dissertation *Kritik und Krise* (1954) belonged. Although it was not written in direct response to any of the books mentioned above, its aims and intentions overlapped with and diverged from each of these works in crucial ways.¹²¹

To begin with, as Koselleck himself noted on several occasions, there are striking

¹²⁰ Max Horkheimer und Theodor W. Adorno: *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, Amsterdam 1947 (Horkheimer and Adorno's book was first published in New York in 1944 with the title *Philosophische Fragmente*); Karl Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies*, London 1945; Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1951; Friedrich Meinecke: *Die deutsche Katastrophe: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, Zürich 1946; Gerhard Ritter: *Europa und die deutsche Frage. Betrachtungen über die geschichtliche Eigenart des deutschen Staatsdenken*, München 1948; J. L. Talmon: *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, New York 1960.

¹²¹ Perspectives on how *Kritik und Krise* related to this body of literature and an excellent introduction to the published version of the study can be found in Jason Edwards: "Critique and Crisis Today, Koselleck, Enlightenment and the Concept of Politics", *Contemporary Political Theory*, vol. 5, 2006, p. 428-446. For another strong introduction, which – as the only existing introduction to *Kritik und Krise* – takes into account the unpublished version of the dissertation, Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 182-189.

similarities between *Dialektik der Aufklärung* and *Kritik und Krise*.¹²² Hence, similar to Adorno and Horkheimer, Koselleck argued that National Socialism was not an aberration of modern history, but instead rooted deeply in Western civilization: in a fateful and self-destructive dialectic inherent in the birth of the enlightenment. But where Adorno and Horkheimer sought to explain the problems of the modern world by illuminating how the rational and instrumental logic of the enlightenment had wiped out its mythical and emancipatory potential and caused a lack of freedom in modern society, Koselleck located the problems in how politics had been subordinated by utopian ideologies of enlightenment thought. More concretely, like Popper, Koselleck found the roots of totalitarianism in philosophical patterns of thought that culminated in the enlightenment and claimed the existence of an inevitable and deterministic pattern to history, but where Popper's book expressed a vigorous defense of liberal democracy, Koselleck's analysis was rather designed as a historical deconstruction of the contemporary political situation.

Similar to Arendt, Koselleck interpreted both Nazism and communism as totalitarian movements and traced the antecedents of totalitarianism to enlightenment thought,¹²³ however, , like Meinecke and Ritter in *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (1946) and *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, he limited the analytical focus to the enlightenment. In line with these two older historians, Koselleck thought Nazism was not a German but a broader European phenomenon, having its roots in the birth of modern European civilization, beginning with the French Revolution. However, *Kritik und Krise* was not – like *Die deutsche Katastrophe* and *Europa und die deutsche Frage* – an attempt to rehabilitate German idealism and the national political tradition.¹²⁴ Rather, like Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, it was an attempt to illuminate the dangerous relation between “terror and unquestioned political

¹²² He also stated that he in fact intended to provide his dissertation with the title *Dialektik der Aufklärung* until he discovered the 1947 edition of Adorno and Horkheimer's book (which is listed in the bibliography of the 1954 edition of *Kritik und Krise*). See for example Reinhart Koselleck: 2000, p. 34.

¹²³ Koselleck later reported how *The Origins of Totalitarianism* belonged to the books one ‘had to read’ in Heidelberg in the 1950's (since the original English edition is not listed in the 1954 edition of *Kritik und Krise*, he was presumably referring to the German translation *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft* that appeared in 1956). Reinhart Koselleck: 2003, p. 77. On another occasion, Koselleck also stated that his argumentation in the 1959 edition of *Kritik und Krise* was influenced by Arendt's book. Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 53. The only direct trace of this in the 1959 edition is found in a footnote in which Koselleck highly praised, but also criticized aspects of Arendt's Hobbes-interpretation. Reinhart Koselleck: 1959, p. 161, footnote 32. In a speech few years earlier, Koselleck described how, in 1956, he invited Arendt to Heidelberg to discuss her book that he found deeply impressive. See Reinhart Koselleck: “Laudatio auf François Furet”, *Sinn und Form*, Hf. 2, 1997, p. 297-300.

¹²⁴ For one of many portrayals of Meinecke and Ritter as *Nationalapologeten*, see Nicolas Berg: *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historikern. Erforschung und Erinnerung*, Göttingen 2002, p. 64-142. For a more positive reading of Meinecke, see Gisela Bock: “Meinecke, Machiavelli und der Nationalsozialismus”, Gisela Bock, Daniel Schönplüg (Hg.): *Friedrich Meinecke in seiner Zeit. Studien zu Leben und Werk*, Stuttgart 2006, p. 145-175.

confession (*Glaubensgewißheit*), between dictatorship and the total claim to salvation (*Erlösungsanspruch*)”, which, Koselleck agreed with Talmon, had permeated *all* political thought since the French Revolution.¹²⁵

In line with this, Koselleck was undoubtedly deeply skeptical towards Meinecke’s idealistic suggestion that the ‘German catastrophe’ should be overcome by re-establishing the best of the bourgeois traditions in the form of congregations devoted to Goethe. When Koselleck provided the published version of his dissertation with the subtitle *Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, it was in fact because he believed that the bourgeois world was born with a disease that caused its own destruction. Koselleck later stated that the metaphor *pathogenesis of the modern world* was inspired by the medical-anthropologist Viktor von Weizsäcker (1886-1957), whose seminars Koselleck followed in Heidelberg,¹²⁶ but the idea that the modern world was born with “norm-divergent” and “life-destructive” elements can be found in writings of several anti-historicist thinkers from Jakob Burckhardt to Max Weber and Carl Schmitt.¹²⁷

The original subtitle of *Kritik und Krise – Eine Untersuchung der politischen Funktion des dualistischen Weltbildes im 18. Jahrhundert* (An investigation of the political function of the dual worldviews in the 18th century) – aimed to describe the nature of the modern world’s disease. This disease was, according to Koselleck, to be found in the ‘political function of a dualistic worldview’: a worldview, which had its roots in the 18th century, and which saw in politics and morality an irreconcilable dualism. Since Koselleck’s portrayal of the dual worldview can hardly be understood without taking into account developments in the understanding of and attitude towards politics in Germany in the decade after World War II, a brief contextual perspective is needed before we begin the textual analysis.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ The quote is taken from Koselleck’s positive review of the German translation of Talmon’s book. Reinhart Koselleck: Review of Ehrenfried Muthesius: *Ursprünge des modernen Krisenbewußtseins*, München 1963, J. L. Talmon: *Die Ursprünge der totalitären Demokratie*, Köln 1961, *Neue politische Literatur*, VII. Jg. Hf. 11/12, 1963, p. 866. The entire quote is as follows: “Es bleibt T’s großes Verdienst, eine brennende Fragestellung der Gegenwart an die Französische Revolution herangetragen zu haben, die Frage nach dem Zusammenhang zwischen Terror und politischer Glaubensgewißheit, zwischen Diktatur und totem Erlösungsanspruch.”

¹²⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: 2003, p. 78; Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 35. Known as one of the founders of medical anthropology, Viktor von Weizsäcker came to Heidelberg in 1945, where he became emeritus in 1952. For introductions to and evaluations of Weizsäcker’s work, see Martin Dehli: 2007, p. 87-100; Sven Olaf Hoffmann: “Viktor von Weizsäcker: Art und Denker gegen den Strom“, *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, April 2006, p. 161.

¹²⁷ Concerning Burckhardt and Weber, see Wolfgang Hardtwig: “Jakob Burckhardt und Max Weber. Zur Genese und Pathologie der modernen Welt“, Wolfgang Hardtwig: *Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft*, München 1990, p. 189-223; Concerning Carl Schmitt, see the entry in his published diary notes on 23 September 1947: “Ich höre Kritik und kritisch und weiß und höre: Kritik, Kritik: Ich höre Urschleim und sehe das ganze 19. Jahrhundert von 1848 bis 1948.” Carl Schmitt: *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947-1951*, hrsg. Erberhard Freiherr von Medem, Berlin 1991, p. 17.

¹²⁸ Concerning these developments, see Konrad Jarausch: 2006, p. 19-147; Edgar Wolfrum: 2006, p. 181-186; Edgar Wolfrum: *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1990*, Stuttgart 2005, p. 231-242; Manfred Görtemaker:

In the immediate post-war period, when most Germans were primarily occupied with their own experiences, losses and needs during and after the war, there was a general disinterest, bordering to apathy when it came to a personal involvement in politics.¹²⁹ This pattern of reaction was presumably also caused by the fact that the political options in years preceding the war had been few. Those which had existed had been decided by the occupying powers, whose plans for re-ordering and re-structuring Germany were awaited with uncertainty, distrust and fear by many Germans.

In line with this, there was at that time in Germany a prevalent, deeply skeptical attitude towards both American ‘liberalism’ and Russian ‘communism’; the two central political ideologies behind the founding of the two German states – West Germany and East Germany – in 1949. In West Germany, the political alliance with the USA and the ‘Western powers’ in terms of foreign and domestic politics was in many circles conceived as the necessary political protection against what many Germans spoke of as the ‘evils of communism’ – drawing on a discourse, which had its roots in the empire era and had been influenced by National Socialist propaganda, by recent German experiences of the Eastern front, of Russian captivity and of the Russian march towards Berlin, and by interpretations of the contemporary political developments in Eastern Germany. In fact, during the process of ‘Westernization’ of West Germany, a strong discourse of anti-communism served as an effective integrative ideology, not least in conservative circles.¹³⁰

At the same time, until the mid-1950s, there was a prevalent skepticism among many Germans towards the ideology of American ‘liberalism’ and its pillars of technology, mass culture and political democracy. The skepticism stemmed among other things from an anti-liberal discourse going (at least) back to the Weimar-republic, from the measures taken by the Americans in the process of de-nazification, and from an extensive fear of the contemporary American military mobilization against USSR.¹³¹

The Cold War mobilization made a deep impression on many Germans, whose ‘World

2004, p. 15-327; Ulrich Herbert: “Liberalisierung als Lernprozess. Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte – eine Skizze“, (Hg.): *Wandlungsprozesse in Deutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1948-1980*, Göttingen 2002, p. 7-47; Anselm Doering-Manteuffel: *Wie westlich sind eigentlich die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 1999; Axel Schildt: *Moderne Zeiten. Freizeit, Massenmedien und 'Zeitgeist' in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre*, Hamburg 1995.

¹²⁹ See Konrad Jarausch: 2006, p. 111-120; Edgar Wolfrum: 2006, p. 183-184; Axel Schildt: 1995, p. 314.

¹³⁰ For lines of the anti-communism and the role it played in the ‘Westernization’ of Germany in the 1950s, see Konrad Jarausch: 2006, p. 103-127; Edgar Wolfrum: 2006, p. 182-183; Edgar Wolfrum: 2005, p. 233-234; Manfred Görtemaker: 2004, p. 250-260; Axel Schildt: 1995, p. 333.

¹³¹ For the scepticism against American ‘liberalism’ and how it gradually diminished, see Konrad Jarausch: 2006, p. 112-113; Edgar Wolfrum: 2006, p. 183; Edgar Wolfrum: 2005, p. 35; Manfred Görtemaker: 2004, p. 253-260; Anselm-Doering Manteuffel: 1999, p. 20-71; Axel Schildt: 1995, p. 333.

War trauma' was merged with a 'nuclear-fear', as they found themselves in the centre of a political confrontation that had divided the World, and Germany, into a bipolar order, and threatened to escalate into armed conflict. Around 1950, the year in which the Korean War broke out, about half of the German population was living in latent fear of the outbreak of a third world war between USA and USSR.¹³²

The period was dominated by a profound feeling of uncertainty, the concept of 'crisis' was one of the most frequently used catchwords in interpretations and discussions of the social-political situation.¹³³ In this respect, there were strong lines of continuation going back to the first decades of the twentieth century, where the seemingly unstoppable processes of modernization, the collapse of the German Empire, the defeat in World War I and the social-political problems of the Weimar Republic had resulted in a sweeping crisis-consciousness.¹³⁴

That the political concerns and the crisis-consciousness of the 1950s also informed *Kritik und Krise* is evident already in the opening lines of the dissertation. Here Koselleck sketched out its central question and main argument by effectively coupling Schmitt's ideal-type framework for the development of world history from the French Revolution to the present – including Schmitt's existential understanding of politics as an eternal fight for influence, power and domination – to Löwith's argument about the characteristics of modern historical consciousness:

“From a historical point of view, the contemporary crisis in World History, which is politically defined through the tensions between the two world powers, America and Russia, is a result of the European expansion over the globe. As it is the case with the globalization of bourgeois society, the present crisis is related to a historical-philosophical and largely utopian self-conception of modern man. Both phenomena, the political crisis, which, if it really is a crisis, presses for a decision, and the historical philosophies that correspond to the crisis, and in whose name we seek to anticipate the decision to, or to prevent it if it seems disastrous, is a historically unified phenomena. Their common historical root lies in the eighteenth century, and this outlines the questions we may ask from our present situation.”¹³⁵

According to Koselleck, as he specified in his introduction, the reason for the world

¹³² See Konrad Jarausch: 2006, p. 142. See also Edgar Wolfrum: 2006, p. 88; Edgar Wolfrum: 2005, p. 232; Axel Schildt: 1995, p. 308-309

¹³³ Hugo Steger: "Sprache im Wandel", Wolfgang Benz (Hg.): *Die Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Band 4: Kultur*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, p. 14-52.

¹³⁴ Concerning the experience of crisis in the 1920s, see Wolfgang Hardtwig: "Die Krise des Geschichtsbewusstseins in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik und der Aufstieg der Nationalsozialismus", Wolfgang Hardtwig: *Hochkultur des bürgerlichen Zeitalters*, Göttingen 2005, p. 77-102. See also the contributions in Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, Ernst Schulin (Hg.): *Geschichtsdiskurs 4. Krisenbewusstsein, Katastrophenerfahrungen und Innovationen 1880-1945*, Frankfurt am Main 2001.

¹³⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: 1954, p. I.

historical crisis between USA and Russia was that communism and liberalism refused to acknowledge the rules of ‘the political’; that politics is always an arcane area of conflicts and interests in which all participants strive for influence and power. Instead, guided by their moral and utopian ideologies, shaped as historical philosophies, by means of their future-oriented pursuit of better worlds USA and Russia were headed for mutual destruction, as there was simply no room for the opponent in these worlds.

The historical explanation for this development was – Koselleck specified – to be found in the Enlightenment. More specifically, it was to be found in certain changes in the relations between politics and morality that took place between the civil wars in the 16th and the 17th centuries and the French Revolution. Employing a rigorously dialectical mode of analysis, Koselleck set out to explain these changes in three chapters. First, he described the rise of the absolutist state as a political answer to the situation of the religious civil wars.¹³⁶ Secondly, he described the moral critique of the enlightenment thinkers as an answer to the situation of the absolutist state. And finally, he described how the critique created a political crisis and consequently led the way to a new civil war, in the form of the French Revolution, which was legitimized via historical philosophy and which continued to haunt the world.

The rise and the fall of the absolutist state

Koselleck’s chapter on the rise and the fall of the absolutist state drew on a sociopolitical argument that he drew from Schmitt’s *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes* from 1938. In line with Schmitt, he described the origins of the absolutist state as a reaction to the violent religious civil wars and its function as a protecting, neutral and peace-keeping power that mediated between the combating parts by monopolizing physical violence.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ The very first chapter, which functions as a prelude, is titled *Politische Kritik und moralischer Dualismus*. It describes the role of the theatre and the stage in the development of moral critique and moreover illuminates the history, meaning and role of the concept of ‘critique’ from Ancient Greek to the Enlightenment.

¹³⁷ Carl Schmitt: *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes: Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbol*, Hamburg 1938. In his chapter on Hobbes – Reinhart Koselleck: 1954, p. 20-47 – Koselleck made 13 references to Schmitt, out of a total of 15 references to Schmitt in the dissertation. Koselleck referred not only to Schmitt’s Hobbes-book, but to all six of Schmitt’s writings: *Politische Theologie*, Berlin 1922; *Der Nomos der Erde*, Köln 1950; *Die Diktatur*, 2 Aufl., München 1928; *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes*, Hamburg 1938, “Der Staat als Mechanismus bei Hobbes and Descartes”, *Archiv für Rechtsphilosophie und Staatsphilosophie*, Bd. XXX, Hf. 4, 1937; “Zu Friedrich Meineckes ‘Idee der Staatsräson’”, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik*, Bd. 56, 1926, p. 226-234. Koselleck’s use of Schmitt’s writings in the public version of *Kritik und Krise* has been discussed in a number of articles. Focused analysis of Koselleck’s reception of Schmitt’s Hobbes-book (Schmitt 1938) can be found in Jason Edwards: 2007, p. 432-434; Jan-Friedrich Missfelder: “Die Gegenkraft und ihre Geschichte. Carl Schmitt, Reinhart Koselleck und der Bürgerkrieg”, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, Vol. 58, Nr. 4, 2006, p. 310-336. More general perspectives appear in Jan-Werner Müller: 2003, p. 104-115; William E. Scheuerman: “Unsolved Paradoxes: Conservative Political Thought in Adenauer’s Germany”, John P. McCormick (ed.): *Confronting Mass Democracy and Industrial Technology: Political and Social Theory from Nietzsche to Habermas*, Durham and

It was – Koselleck wrote – the particular achievement of Thomas Hobbes to have formulated the principle on which the absolutist state was constructed: the principle of separating politics from morality. Hobbes found this separation necessary, since, because of their passions, moral convictions and will to power, human beings are always bound to conflict with each other. The inevitable result, if sufficient boundaries are not set to these inclinations, is strife, war and civil war, to which only violent death puts an end as had been demonstrated in murderous religious civil wars.

It was as an answer to this condition, with the aim of securing peace, that Hobbes confined politics to the domain of the state and morality to the private sphere of its subjects. He did so – Koselleck explained – by demanding the ‘outer’ obedience of its subjects in return for the protection of the state, while allowing the subjects their ‘inner’ freedom: a free consciousness regarding issues of religion and morality. According to Koselleck, this conceptual distinction at once successfully created the absolutist state and planted the seeds of its brutal destruction.

Koselleck explained the initial success of the absolutist state with reference to a process of secularization in which theological forms of representing and symbolizing power were made political: “Within the frames of the national church, theology was subordinated the state” – he wrote, here again following Schmitt – “and the absolute ruler recognized no other authority over himself than God, whose attributes he appropriated in the political and historical field he appropriated“ (23).¹³⁸ As a secularized god, at the same time standing above the law and being its fundament, by following a formal principle of decision-making, the sovereign decided what was right and wrong. He did not, Koselleck specified, pay attention to social interests or religious beliefs, but only to the principle of protecting his subjects: his political function was solely to provide and keep order. And as soon as the subjects decided to pledge their ‘outer’ obedience to the sovereign, the state – as the highest symbol of power, authority and sovereignty – immediately fulfilled its purpose:

“The finality, which in civil war is felt by every man due to the deadly threat from others, becomes a

London 2002, p. 221-242 [232-242]; Reinhard Mehring: “Carl Schmitt and His influence on Historians”, *Cardozo Law Review*, 2000, Vol. 21, p. 1653-1664; Michael Schwartz: “Leviathan oder Lucifer. Reinhart Kosellecks ‘Kritik und Krise’ revisited”, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, Jg. 45, 1993, p. 33-57; Anthony J. La Vopa: “Conceiving a Public: Ideas and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe”, *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 64, Nr. 1, 1992, p. 79-116. Jeremy Pompink: “The Concept of Public Opinion in the Historiography of the French Revolution”, *Storia della Storiografia*, 20, 1991, p. 77-92.

¹³⁸ The quoted sentence was followed by a reference to Schmitt’s *Politische Theologie* known especially for its opening sentence: “Alle prägnanten Begriffe der modernen Staatslehre sind säkularisierte theologische Begriffe.” On several other occasions in the chapter on Hobbes, Koselleck referred to *Politische Theologie* and *Die Diktatur* in building his argument concerning the process of secularization and the rise of ‘the political’. Koselleck’s reception of concepts from Schmitt’s ‘political theology’ is mentioned in Jason Edwards: 2007, p. 432; Friedrich Wilhelm Graf: 2000, p. 143; and Jason Edwards: 2006, p. 432.

responsibility of the state. The saving of the mortal individual is no longer effected in the afterlife through an immortal God but in this world through the protection of the state, the mortal god.” (31-32).

However, according to Koselleck, the man-made, secularized and mortal god of the absolutist state was eventually killed by the same individuals, whose lives it was created to protect and prolong. Pushed out of the ‘outer’ sphere of politics, the subjects reacted to their situation by channeling the utopian surplus of their ‘inner’ freedom into a rising public sphere, where they as individuals secretly began to discuss increasingly controversial topics on the basis of individual moral values, including the politics of the state. The result was a division between politics and morality that – Koselleck argued – proved fateful for the absolutist state.

The emergence of the public sphere – and of the bourgeoisie (*Bürgertum*)

In the second chapter, Koselleck’s analysis went beyond that of Schmitt by demonstrating how the public sphere emerged in the clubs, salons and societies of the enlightenment and how the public sphere was created in convergence with the rise of the bourgeoisie. As a new social group, manifesting itself in the “turn to modernity” (46), it brought with it a new social consciousness in which the concepts of morality and politics and their mutual relation were viewed in a new light. More precisely – according to Koselleck – the members of the bourgeoisie saw morality not only as different, but also as better and superior to politics, and, in the public sphere, they soon began to subject the politics of the absolutist state to a fierce moral criticism.

It was John Locke – Koselleck explained – who first detected the rise of a new set of moral laws among the members of the new bourgeois society, who – as individuals – began to judge what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘true’ or ‘false’, ‘reasonable’ or unreasonable’. As these judgments were applied alongside the politics of the absolutist state, the established order of “Schutz und Gehorsam” between the state and its subjects (52) was suddenly threatened, and the known criteria for political decision-making became unclear. “Which authority decides?” – Koselleck wrote – “The moral authority of the citizen or the political authority of the state? Or both of them jointly? And if both jointly, how do they interrelate?” (52-53)

According to Koselleck, the questions were left unanswered by Locke, but on the continent they soon found clear answers in the rising public sphere, where a strong critique of the absolutist state was articulated first of all among the enlightenment philosophers. As exponents of the pervasive changes taking place in European thought, the latter began to reject the authority of the state on behalf of the authority of morality, and gradually began to conceive of morality as something ‘true’, ‘authentic’ and ‘natural’, while they considered

politics as ‘evil’, since it prevented morality from unfolding. Hence, instead of seeking protection *by* the state, its subjects now sought protection *from* the state in the institutions of the public sphere, where the morality criticism had to be carried out in secrecy – and with the claim of being un-political – since it conflicted with the statutes of the absolutist state.

Koselleck explained that the system of secrecy was most radically expressed in the mysterious lodges of the freemasons in which the rule of politics was substituted by the rule of reason, taste and fashion and by demands for total equality and tolerance. However, pursuing themes from Kühn’s *Toleranz und Offenbarung*,¹³⁹ Koselleck argued that the lodges were characterized by intolerance rather than by tolerance and their members were far from equal. The lodges were thus organized along a hierarchy of knowledge and insight in which the system of secrecy became an instrument of power. Since certain members shared a greater knowledge of good taste, moral judgment and criticism than others, they saw it as their responsibility to educate their fellow members. It was in these secret societies that Koselleck recognized the chime of modern tyranny and dictatorship. “The lodges”, he wrote, “became the strongest social institution of the moral world in the eighteenth century“ (73), thus arguing that the utopian rejection of political authority instead led to an authority based on ideology, where supposedly anti-authoritarian enlightenment concepts such as ‘reason’, ‘equality’ and ‘morality’ were used as weapons of power and control.

The new society, Koselleck explained, was embedded in a fundamentally dual worldview that contrasted the absolutist state to the new society, politics to morality; a world of total evil to a world of total equality, humanity and righteousness – and its totalitarian potential truly manifested when it made a move from “protection to attack” (*Schutz zum Angriff*) (84). The new society thus began to question the legitimacy of the absolutist state and its politics more directly. Moreover, it developed indirect, but strong political visions of how to govern according to their morality principles. The result of the critique was, according to Koselleck, a

¹³⁹ Koselleck, however, made only three references to Kühn. Reinhart Koselleck: 1954, p. 7, n. 25; p. 21, n. 64; p. 27, n. 90. Three writings of the French anti-Masonic historian Bernard Faÿ also proved important for Koselleck’s investigation of the rise of public opinion in the lodges of the freemasons. These were: *La Franc-Maçonnerie et la Révolution intellectuelle du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1925; *Benjamin Franklin*, Paris 1929; *L’esprit révolutionnaire en France du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1925 – to which Koselleck referred to seven times in the chapter on the rise of the public sphere. A professor at the College de France and director of the National Library, after World War II Faÿ was sentenced to forced labor for life for having collaborated with the Germans during the German occupation of France. Having released card indexes with lists of names of Free Masons to the Vichy Government, who was convinced that Free Masons were at the heart of France’s problems, Faÿ was deemed responsible for the death of many Free Masons. Faÿ only served four years, before managing to escape to Switzerland, where he was appointed an instructorship at the *Institut de la Langue Française*. He was later forced to resign during the student protest in the 1960s. While drawing on Faÿ’s writings, Koselleck evidently did not take over the elements of conspiracy theory found in these concerning the role of Free Masons in French history.

crisis-situation, which demanded a decision between the two alternatives.

However, Koselleck added, the new society still insisted on being un-political, and, blindfolded with what he portrayed as a deeply hypocritical and self-deceptive belief in the un-political and neutral nature of its criticism, it attempted to conceal the political nature of the criticism. According to Koselleck, the hypocritical criticism launched by the bourgeoisie was based on a misunderstanding of the nature of politics and of its own role, and it did nothing but reinforce the crisis. It was in fact precisely the claim of being un-political that made the morality critique political: “The political anonymity of reason, morality, nature, and so on, defined their political character and effectiveness. Their political essence lay in being un-political.” (114)¹⁴⁰ It was thus also with a refusal to govern directly from their morality principles that the bourgeoisie soon took specific measures in an attempt to plan and create a world of total morality, equality and happiness in its own image.

The historical philosophical component and the worldwide crisis

In the third chapter, Koselleck went on to explain the source of the confidence of the members of the new society that such a world was about to be born. “It was the *philosophy of history*”, he wrote: “This was the power that the Illuminati possessed, a power they shared with the enlightenment in general.” (96) According to Koselleck, modern historical philosophy not only guaranteed the *Bürgertum* that it was capable of creating a new world; it also offered a political line of action, which was projected forwards in time and seemingly needed only to be programmed according to the latest mathematical models in order to accelerate and anticipate the future world.

Following Karl Löwith, Koselleck defined historical philosophy as a form of Christian eschatology which had been secularized through enlightenment thought and transferred to the human historical consciousness during the course of the 18th century.¹⁴¹ Koselleck, however, elaborated significantly on *Meaning in History* by arguing that modern historical philosophy originated in a specific *social-historical* situation: in connection to the rise of the public sphere in the enlightenment. It was in this process, he stated, that the theological idea of

¹⁴⁰ As pointed out by Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 188, this interpretation of how the un-political critique is deeply political follows the formula in Carl Schmitt: 1932, p. 21, according to which it is “eine typische und besonders intensive Art und Weise, Politik zu treiben, daß man den Gegner als politisch, sich selbst als unpolitisch (...) hinstellt.”

¹⁴¹ In crucial places, when explaining the growth and characteristics of modern historical philosophy, Koselleck referred to the German edition of *Meaning in History – Weltgeschichte and Heilsgeschehen* from 1953. Reinhart Koselleck: 1954, p. 9, n. 31; p. 20, n. 65; p. 46, n. 158; p. 97, n. 10; p. 97, n.12. Moreover, several implicit references to Löwith’s work are found throughout the analysis – especially in the third chapter, but also in the 9 page introduction, where Koselleck referred to ‘Geschichtsphilosophie’ more than 30 times.

salvation was transformed into a rational plan for history, and man into the “‘earthly god’, claiming the command of history” (98). Relying on the contemporary mathematical and mechanical worldview, and convinced about the idea of progress, modern man now thought it possible “to identify history as a totality and determine its entire future” (98).

It was thus from a historical-philosophical consciousness – Koselleck further explained – that enlightenment thinkers such as Turgot, Rousseau and Raynal, at first indirectly, began to predict and then legitimize civil war and revolution as a way to overthrow the state and its immoral politics on behalf of a world based on total humanity, reason and truth. According to Koselleck historical philosophy proved extremely effective and convenient as a political weapon. On the one hand, by promising a progressive design of movement, purpose and finality in history, leading to an ideal world in which politics, power and domination are abolished on behalf of absolute freedom and equality, historical philosophy not only legitimized, but even demanded the eradication of everything and everyone that might question or in other ways slow down the historical realization of the new world. On the other hand, historical philosophy made it possible for individuals to evade any direct political responsibility for such actions, since all plans and actions could be attributed to the fact that human beings were merely serving and obeying history’s inherent movement, direction and demands. Koselleck wrote:

“The necessity of planning posited by the philosophy of history relieved the planners of political responsibility. The Illuminatus is a philosopher of history to the extent that he remains politically not responsible. Thus the revolution was papered over by the structure of historical progress, but this same structure mandated the factually revolutionary aspect: the plan to occupy the state and do away with it.” (101)

As the historical-philosophical beliefs spread throughout the bourgeois society and grew into visions of a worldwide moral voiced by a so-called world bourgeoisie (*Weltbürgertum*), the utopian expectations of change, action and progress could no longer be held back. The situation simply demanded a decision. “The French Revolution”, he wrote, “was the first instance of that loan being called in.” (145)

With this ending, Koselleck emphasized that *Kritik und Krise* should be read as a critique of the historical-philosophical justification of the French Revolution and of the role that historical philosophy had come to play in the allegedly deeply self-deceptive and hypocritical processes of modern political decision-making. Since 1789 – Koselleck argued – men and societies had been unable to resolve the contradiction between morality and politics in their conduct of politics. They had, furthermore, failed to transform the enlightenment crisis-

consciousness into rational and responsible political action, where the existence of enemies is recognized and problems are dealt with in a peaceful manner. Instead, they ignored historical experience and contemporary reality and sought refuge in historical philosophical ideas of future worlds with reference to which they justified their most utopian political plans (even if these demanded the eradication of all political enemies) and at the same time acquitted themselves from the political responsibility of their actions. In Koselleck's eyes, historical philosophy had accordingly not only accelerated the French Revolution, but also, as he pointed to in the cited opening lines of the dissertation, paved the way to the later ideologically based Civil and World Wars, including the contemporary Cold War, a conflict that had the potential to wipe out the entire planet.

Koselleck's perspective on the contemporary situation was in this respect similar to those found in contemporary writings of Carl Schmitt, who similarly interpreted the Cold War as a World Civil War (*Weltbürgerkrieg*), which was fought with historical philosophies as the key weapons. Like Schmitt, Koselleck painted a picture of a modern world in which totalitarianism, revolution and war potentially belong to the daily order, and where the conditions for a durable political order are absent as long as historical-philosophical worldviews prevent the recognition of political opponents and of political responsibility.

Koselleck in relation to Löwith's secularization and Schmitt's modern world

Koselleck's use of phrases like 'world historical crisis' and his unconditional desire to address what he perceived as the burning problems of the modern world raises the question of the normative agenda pursued in *Kritik und Krise*. It further raises the question of the extent to which the book follows the scheme provided by the works of Carl Schmitt. Previous interpretations have often been reduced to a matter of whether, in his interpretation of the modern world, Koselleck merely employed a rigidly 'Schmittian' mode of analysis and shared his 'teacher's' anti-modernism and political conservatism, or whether he only used selected aspects of Schmitt to present a critique of the enlightenment that exclusively served to deconstruct the aporias of modern political thought. The present study certainly holds the second line of interpretation to be more correct than the first. However, it shifts the issue of discussion by showing that some of the most important discursive features that Koselleck found in Schmitt were of a different and more constructive kind than hitherto presumed. It also shows how, in combination with discursive features from other scholars, the latter were utilized towards an intellectual-political project and a normative agenda that ultimately had little to do with Schmitt's writings.

It is indisputable that Koselleck's profoundly sceptical interpretation of the modern world in *Kritik und Krise* was to a considerable extent constructed through concepts, figures and categories from the works of Löwith and Schmitt. Arguments about the processes of secularization played an important role in this respect. Most importantly, Koselleck followed Löwith's argument concerning modern historical philosophy as secularized eschatology and echoed his critique of modern man for taking upon him the authority of powers he does not possess. He also used Schmitt's argument concerning the secularization of theological forms of power to contrast the clear criteria of the absolutist state to the supposedly unclear criteria of the modern world. In line with this, judging the protagonists on their ability to respect politics as an eternal fight for power in which clear principles of decision-making must be followed if pure disaster is to be avoided,¹⁴² Koselleck portrayed the absolutist state as a victim of its critics, while he dealt with these critics and their 'modern' way of conducting politics in an indicting and condemning tone.¹⁴³ This biased scheme of interpretation amounted to a pessimistic *Verfallsgeschichte* that has parallels in the work of Löwith and Schmitt, but which is still more closely related to the self-destructive dialectic of the enlightenment described in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*.

Unlike Löwith and Schmitt, Koselleck did not portray the modern world as 'inferior', 'illegitimate' or 'criminal',¹⁴⁴ nor did he in any way criticize or reject enlightenment thought *per se*. Instead, he talked (in the published version) about the modern world's *pathogenesis*: of how it was born with certain problems that caused serious disease. He located the origins of this disease in an exaggerated focus on the future, overstated claims of 'rationality', 'equality' and 'freedom' and in a lack of political tolerance and responsibility that according to Koselleck was bound to have disastrous consequences for socio-political planning and decision-making.

Moreover, in his attempt to provide a cure to these ailments of the modern world, Koselleck did not follow Löwith's or Schmitt's backward looking perspectives concerning a return to earlier conditions. Thus he did not idealize the Greek idea of the cosmos, like Löwith. Nor did he like Schmitt argue for a return to a political system similar to the absolutist state

¹⁴² As phrased by Jason Edwards: 2007, p. 432: "[Koselleck] was clearly influenced by his [Schmitt's] arguments about the concepts of politics, the state and sovereignty. In particular, it was Schmitt's view of politics as centered on the friend-enemy distinction (...), and of sovereignty as the power to decide the exception (...), that informed Koselleck's view of the emerging Enlightenment public."

¹⁴³ As observed by Willibald Steinmetz: 2006, p. 417, in his comments on the published version.

¹⁴⁴ See Hans Blumenberg's critique of Löwith's and Schmitt's secularization-arguments in Hans Blumenberg: *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1966. This critique is analyzed in Frank Beck Lassen: "Tyveri! – til sekulariseringens semantik", *Slagmark*, nr. 48, 2007, p. 139-162 and in Frank Beck Lassen: "Carl Schmitt og Hans Blumenberg om sekularisering – fire replikker", *Slagmark*, nr. 43, 2005, p. 63-76.

by calling upon counter-revolutionary thinkers such as Joseph de Maistre and Juan Donoso Cortés.¹⁴⁵ While Koselleck criticized the utopian, hypocritical and irresponsible features of modern politics, he also criticized the system of absolutism for being incapable of turning its subjects into citizens by allowing them to participate in politics.

“The absolute ruler”, Koselleck wrote to illuminate this problem:

“kept his hand on each and every access to the state’s machinery of command – on legislation, police and military, and he was further embroiled in a bitter struggle with the remnants of the old estate organizations in which the new elite was represented, at least, in part and could protect some of its interests. Completely closed to it, though, was the field of foreign policy, with its decisions of war and peace. These men, who determined the cultural physiognomy or bore the burdens of the state, were not allowed to decide its fate, for it was intrinsic to the system, to the absolutist order, that there was nothing at all for them to decide; they were all subjects. The tension between their increasing social weight, on the one hand, and the impossibility of lending political expression to that weight, on the other, was defining the historical situation in which the new society constituted itself. This characteristic was to be crucial to its nature and evolution. The critical split between morality and politics, noted by the bourgeois intelligentsia, resulted from this difference and exacerbated it at the same time.” (60-61)

One of the implicit normative agendas in *Kritik und Krise* was therefore, the necessity of striking a proper relation between morality and politics. In a speech given on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th year of his *Promotion* in Heidelberg, Koselleck elaborated on this issue:

“The normative implication of my line of argumentation concerned precisely the mutual dependency of moral and politics. My critique of the utopia was based on the identified antagonism between those two fields, behind which, behind which the *mauvaise foi* or the hypocrisy lurked: The utopian visions for the future, with the realization of which the sovereign as tyrant should disappear, as there would be no more tyranny, which would also bring the wars to a permanent end – and, finally, even the state itself would be done away with by peaceful citizens (as seen in the Illuminati, in Mercier, then in Fichte, and finally in Marx and Engels): All these, which we know now, dangerous and blood-stained illusions followed the imbalances in the attempts to think and enforce morality without politics or politics without morality. Only by participation in the political power could the subjects become citizens. Only at that point could they take on political responsibility.”¹⁴⁶

In line with this, in a central chapter in the dissertation, Koselleck described how one enlightenment thinker had in fact outlined a scenario in which the politics of the state and

¹⁴⁵ This is the point where Ivan Nagel detects the main analytical divergence between Schmitt and Koselleck in *Kritik und Krise*: “[Koselleck] denkt den Staat von Hobbes aus, nicht auf Donoso Cortés hin.” Ivan Nagel: 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 56.

morality (in the form of the critical voice of the bourgeois society) co-exist in such a way that politics might be conducted in a responsible manner. This thinker was John Locke. In his description of bourgeois public opinion, Locke had not – Koselleck argued – defined the moral content of the bourgeois critique, but concentrated instead upon identifying the origins and the form of the laws prevailing in the social life (51). From this basis, Koselleck reasoned: “(...) it remained entirely possible for their [the moral laws] concretion to coincide with the laws of God or the state. Locke could simply allow the different powers to co-exist without delimiting them one against another. His choice not to perceive them as antithetical is one of the particularities of his political theory.” (53)

With this descriptive outline – Koselleck stated – Locke had provided the justification of the English form of government that had been founded in 1688 with the rising profile of the economically defined Whig bourgeois. The parliamentary interplay between leading representatives of society and the royal executive had – he argued – served to prevent intensification in the opposition between morality and politics into a domestic political clash.

This was possible, as Koselleck saw it, because Locke made a fundamental distinction between morality and political law. On the one hand, the law of the state is affected directly and on the basis of the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical power. The moral law, on the other hand, is enforced indirectly, through the pressure of public opinion. Nonetheless, the moral law does have an effect within the state, because it is carried out by citizens (and not subjects), who are responsible for validating the laws of the state by openly voicing acceptance or disapproval of these laws as well as supplementing the authority of the state by subjecting public action to its moral authority (51, 52, 54). As such, Locke had, in the eyes of Koselleck, outlined a new path to the partitioning of morality and politics; a political system in which stately politics and bourgeois morality as unfolding in the public sphere (and in the parliament) might co-exist, not in an unnecessary competition that would ultimately lead to mutual exclusion, but in a responsible and sound system of checks-and-balances.¹⁴⁷

However, according to Koselleck, the subjects of the absolutist states on the continent had been unable to make use of the possibilities outlined by Locke. In their reception of his writings, they reacted to their situation by pursuing a law of pure and direct moral authority. “Unlike Locke”, Koselleck wrote, “those citizens did not turn the subordination of politics into a coordinated, co-subordinated or correlated relation. Instead, they radicalized the antithesis, accomplishing a polarization that was to become the symptom as well as the

¹⁴⁷ For a brief perspective on Koselleck’s Locke-chapter along somewhat similar lines, see Jan-Friedrich Missfelder: 2006, p. 335-336.

instigator of the looming political crisis.” (55)

Describing the subsequent “inability of men to resolve the contradiction between morality and politics and the inability of people to transform their crisis-consciousness into rational and responsible political action”, Koselleck’s message in *Kritik und Krise* was – it has been said – that “those [utopian politicians] speaking in the name of humanity and morality should examine their real motives” and construct some sort of political system in which morality and politics is balanced in a more appropriate manner.¹⁴⁸

But how was this to be done? According to which standards and rules were rational and responsible politics to be conducted in the modern world? While *Kritik und Krise* has been interpreted as devoid of constructive answers to these questions, its entire analysis was in fact informed by a set of more concrete political reflections that were closely related to its theoretical-methodological framework.

In the book, however, this framework was only referred to in a few unelaborated sentences in the introduction. Here Koselleck explained how the ‘methodological approach’ (*methodische Zugriff*) was double-sided: “Depending on the focal point”, he wrote, “the analysis will sometimes concentrate on textual interpretation and will in other passages deal with the social context.” But, he added, “All the analyses begin nevertheless with the given, concrete situation (...).” (VI) The specific analytical aim of the method was, as stated elsewhere, to investigate “the function of bourgeois thought and action ”in its context (*Funktionszusammenhang*).” (II) For this reason, the method renounced what Koselleck labeled “*geistesgeschichtliche* abstractions.” (III)¹⁴⁹

The methodological ambition to combine interpretations of texts with social-historical context was in the analysis practiced via a conceptual approach that unfolded in long passages and notes in which Koselleck explored the history of concepts such as ‘critique’, ‘crisis’, ‘revolution’ and ‘politics’ in writings of authors from Ancient Greek to the enlightenment. Aiming to uncover the bourgeois ‘thought’ and ‘action’, the conceptual analysis was based on the theoretical conviction that historical agents use language and concepts to create history. The historical philosophy”, Koselleck wrote in the introduction, “provided the concepts to justify the rise of the bourgeoisie” (II), and in the analysis he provided several examples of how the enlightenment thinkers used their action- and future-oriented concepts to single out the absolutist state as their enemy as a way of accelerating its destruction. Their strategy was

¹⁴⁸ Quoted from Sisko Haikala: “Criticism in the Enlightenment: Perspectives on Koselleck’s *Kritik und Krise* study”, *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought*, 1997, vol. 1, p. 70 and Jan-Werner Müller: 2003, p. 107.

¹⁴⁹ He wrote: ”Es wird also bewußt auch auf geistesgeschichtliche Ableitungen verzichtet.”

to polemically de-legitimize the state by attributing to it a series of negatively loaded concepts and contrasting these to a series of positive counter-concepts. To explain how the enlightenment thus unfolded as a battle between worldviews and their concepts, Koselleck wrote:

“The series of concepts and counter-concepts that are dominant in the writings of the enlightenment philosophers and their enemies, such as reason and revelation, freedom and despotism, nature and civilization, trade and war, morality and politics, light and darkness can easily be extended, without damaging the ability of those concepts to include and exclude their counter-concepts simultaneously.”

(2)

In *Kritik und Krise*, the theoretical conviction that historical agents use language and concepts to create history was related to the assumption that the central political and societal experiences of an epoch can be deciphered through its key concepts. Central in the study is first of all the concepts of ‘critique’ and ‘crisis’. On the one hand, the concept of ‘critique’, which Koselleck labeled a ‘slogan’ (*Schlagwort*) of the eighteenth century (5, note 15), layered the epochal experience of the need to judge *everything* in dualistic terms of right or wrong, moral or immoral, real or unreal, friend or enemy (4-19, including notes 15-57).¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, the concept of ‘crisis’ embodied the perceived need of taking vital decisions for the future, which was connected to the epochal expectation of change, conflict and disintegration of the known social and political orders (91-94, 124-127, including note 101). While emphasizing that the concept of ‘crisis’ was in fact rarely used by the contemporaries (124) and never used in combination with the concept of ‘critique’ (5, note 15),¹⁵¹ Koselleck described how the practice of ‘critique’ created an experience of ‘crisis’, which again reinforced the ‘critique’. As such, in *Kritik und Krise* the two concepts assumed status of what Koselleck would later in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* term ‘leading concepts of the historical movement’.

In later interviews and writings, Koselleck explained how, when he conceptualized his dissertation, he was encouraged by Schmitt to use dictionaries and encyclopedias as a way to investigate how different historical meanings have been attached to concepts and how conceptual meanings have changed.¹⁵² However, Koselleck neither clarified in detail what it was that he found so useful in Schmitt’s conceptual approach in the early 1950s nor did he

¹⁵⁰ In these pages, Koselleck explained in detail how the concept of ‘critique’ had acquired this meaning in stages from Simon to Kant. He also provided perspectives on the histories of the word in Greek, Latin, French, English and German.

¹⁵¹ The two concepts allegedly both originated from and had been used together in the Greek medical vocabulary.

¹⁵² [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 188; Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 34. The only study that elaborates on how *Kritik und Krise* was inspired by aspects of Schmitt’s conceptual history is Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 183-184.

explain how it was in fact related to a specific understanding of history and politics that offered a solution to the ‘world historical crisis’ and a proposal as to how similar political conflicts might be avoided in the future. In order to understand these issues what follows extends the contextualizing interpretation by examining the letter that Koselleck wrote to Carl Schmitt on 21 January 1953, a few months before he finished his dissertation.¹⁵³

Scientific crisis: ‘historicism’ and the relativity of values

This letter stands out from the others in the collection because of its highly engaged tone, very clearly illustrative of Koselleck’s intellectual interests and concerns at the beginning of the 1950s. It is also distinguished by the detailed, chaotic and determined way in which Koselleck explains the assumptions behind the analytical approach in the dissertation and unfolds certain other theoretical-methodological features that came to play important roles in his historical thinking. As is discussed in more detail later on, it seems as if Koselleck, at the time of writing the letter, had only very recently developed these features. The letter thus reveals insights into a process of innovation in his historical thinking and it gives us certain clues as to how this innovation came about.

Focusing on the letter, the chapter shows how many of Koselleck’s renowned thoughts on history originated as solutions to the scientific and political crises that in his eyes marked the early 1950s. More precisely, it demonstrates how, in an attempt to solve these crises, Koselleck – with inspiration from Schmitt – deconstructed the theoretical-methodological fundamentals of what he labelled ‘historicism’, and – by reworking ideas from Heidegger – outlined a new understanding of history, embodied in a so called ‘historical anthropology’, a practise supposed to describe the basic dynamics and frames that create, constitute and structure all human history. This understanding of history originated as an answer to a specific situation and as a highly philosophical enterprise, but it came to assume great importance in Koselleck’s subsequent theoretical argumentation and empirical analysis.¹⁵⁴

Koselleck began his letter by thanking Schmitt for his hospitality during a recent visit to

¹⁵³ In a letter from 8 July 1953, Koselleck informed Schmitt that the dissertation was ‘completed’ (‘abgeschlossen’). RW265-8132: 8/7-1953.

¹⁵⁴ This so-called ‘historical anthropology’ has generally received little attention in the literature about Koselleck’s historical writing or it has been treated with suspicion, like a foreign object that does not fit with the rest of his scholarly production. One example is found in a text by Kari Palonen, who is extremely well acquainted with Koselleck’s work. Kari Palonen: “An Application of Conceptual History to History Itself: From Method to History in Reinhart Koselleck’s *Begriffsgeschichte*”, *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought*, 1997, vol. 1, p. 62. “For me”, Palonen writes, “the most irritating novelty of Koselleck’s later writings is his ‘anthropological turn’.” It should be added that Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 297-304, provides an in many ways excellent account and critique of Koselleck’s ‘anthropology’, which, however, neither reflects on its origins nor describes its full implications in his work.

Plettenberg and for Schmitt's continuous engagement in his work, which had struck Koselleck once again during their meeting. He then explained precisely what he found so useful in Schmitt's thinking:

“The difficulties of combining 'systematic' and 'historical' approaches from which present historical writing suffers – one only has to think of the separation between sociology and history! – has become increasingly clear to me, and I am thankful for your strict appeal always to trace the concepts back to their specific situation in order to clarify their meaning. There can be no doubt that this approach offers the only way out of historicism for the science of history, if it will persist at all, in so far as one understands historicism as the science of the 'relativization of values'.”

With these lines, Koselleck initiated a devastating deconstruction of what he referred to as 'historicism' at several occasions in the letter. Since its coinage at the end of the eighteenth century, this term has been assigned many different meanings in the German cultural science disciplines.¹⁵⁵ The roots of the way in which Koselleck and many of his contemporaries understood 'historicism' are to be found in a complex history of reception of the term after Friedrich Nietzsche's famous 1874 essay “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben”.¹⁵⁶ Here Nietzsche attacked the widespread tendency in the 19th century, when history became a science, to historicize all aspects of life. The problem with this tendency was, Nietzsche argued, that the focus on the past was unrelated to, and thus constrained, people's ability to act and live in the present. In his view, the preoccupation with history invalidated all values by making them merely historical and relative to a situation given in time and space, thus undermining all foundations for judgment and action.

When, in the 1920s, the German Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch, followed up on Nietzsche's critique and called attention to the 'fundamental historicization of our knowledge and thought',¹⁵⁷ he labelled this phenomenon 'historicism'. Similar to Nietzsche, Troeltsch believed that it had become impossible to think of an event from the past without subjecting it to the mechanism of 'historicism': to the idea that it could only be considered historically on its own terms and according to its own unique development. According to this idea, which had a certain influence on how historians in the Wilhelmine Era thought of the past and the present, all events had their individual characteristics, and, instead of being part of a larger,

¹⁵⁵ The first reference to 'historicism' was made by Friedrich Schlegel in 1797. The following account focus only on one line of the reception of the term and deliberately highlights certain persons and themes. It draws first of all on Annette Wittkau: *Historismus: zur Geschichte des Begriffs und des Problems*, Göttingen 1992 and Otto Gerhard Oexle: *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeichen des Historismus*, Göttingen 1996. See also Wolfgang Hardtwig: *Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft*, München 1990 and Georg G. Iggers: *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, Middletown 1968.

¹⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche: “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben”, *Werke*, Bd. 1, Berlin 1972-1997.

¹⁵⁷ Ernst Troeltsch: *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* [1922], *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1961, Bd. 3, 1922, p. 9.

coherent plan or system, they simply floated around in an aimless and uncoordinated fashion in the flow of history.

What Troeltsch detected with his observations was the problem of relativism – that is, the absence of any parameter of judgment of the past and the present – as a threatening theoretical position. The pervasiveness of historical relativism came with Troeltsch to be known as the ‘crisis of historicism’ and developed in the interwar years into a subject of complex debate in various disciplines and contexts. Troeltsch’s solution to the problem of relativism was to connect ‘historicism’ to a system of cultural values that was to be constructed around a scientific approach to history and around a so-called philosophy of history. However, Troeltsch died in 1923, and he never articulated the specific content of his system of cultural values, which he had constructed with the intention of linking history to life by providing certain objective standards of orientation in the atmosphere of cultural crisis in the wake of World War I.

In the 1930s, Friedrich Meinecke, one of Germany’s most influential historians, gave the term ‘historicism’ yet another meaning in his book *Die Entstehung des Historismus*.¹⁵⁸ Here Meinecke disconnected the problems of relativism from the term and constructed a definition of ‘historicism’ as a way of thinking of history as composed of singular events and as a matter of individualities undergoing a process of unfolding and developing in a constant interplay with the world. More specifically, identifying the tradition of ‘historicism’ with a movement of primarily German authors culminating with Goethe and Herder, Meinecke presented ‘historicism’ as a positive and, in a Hegelian sense, historically progressive phenomenon corresponding to the logic of the historical philosophy that Troeltsch had sketched out in the previous decade. Meinecke’s interpretation of ‘historicism’ had a considerable impact on the understanding of ‘historicism’ within the German historical profession. When the term was again intensely debated at the end of the 1960s and in the beginning of the 1970s, it was frequently with recourse to his interpretation of ‘historicism’ as a progressive and positive German cultural development.

Following up on the problems raised by Nietzsche and Troeltsch, and with Meinecke as his main target of critique,¹⁵⁹ Koselleck’s attempt to deconstruct ‘historicism’ once and for all was inspired by the connection of history and a very specific type of sociology via the conceptual approach, described in the passage cited above. To be sure, Koselleck did not

¹⁵⁸ Friedrich Meinecke: *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, München 1936.

¹⁵⁹ In the letter, Koselleck did not refer explicitly to Meinecke’s *Historismus*-book. However, the cited passage – as well as other passages – suggests that this book served as the starting point for Koselleck’s discussion.

disagree with the hermeneutical claim that true historical thinking must take account of its own historicity. But – he explained to Schmitt, fusing the meanings of ‘historicism’ articulated by Troeltsch and Meinecke – the ‘relativity of values’ in ‘historicism’ becomes a problem, when the role of the historian in the process of historical writing is totally ignored. It was exactly this isolation that caused Friedrich Meinecke, among others, to view: “the value(s) as something that exists ‘in itself’.” Koselleck thus drew attention to what he saw as a fatal theoretical methodological flaw in ‘historicism’. In their radical claim to historicize all values, the historians of ‘historicism’ forgot to historicize themselves and thus, more or less unconsciously, carried certain subjective, time-bound values into their analyses. It was this self-contradiction and the values connected with it that Koselleck elaborated on in the following page and a half.

The elaboration centred round two specific issues between which Koselleck ventured back and forth. First of all, he pointed to the fact that most modern values, including those of ‘historicism’, were products of history, and that their origins were rooted in the historical philosophies of the 18th century (Koselleck’s object of study in *Kritik und Krise*). According to Koselleck, these values had lost their validity as the concrete history had changed – as the historical philosophy, to which the values were linked, had been robbed of its original and concrete historical meaning. “To relate the values to history”, Koselleck concluded, “and to view them as a part of a changing process, as the historians have done (...), remains an insufficient approach as long as the tacit presuppositions of historical philosophy remain unquestioned. The so-called relativization of values through inserting them into the historical process is historical-philosophically biased and specifically unhistorical, since it is only made possible through a blurred vanishing point in the past.”

Secondly, parallel to his historicization of ‘historicism’, Koselleck elaborated on the specific characteristics of the historically-philosophically charged values that historicists carried with them from the eighteenth century and into twentieth century historical analysis. He wrote: “These tendencies and their connection to the historical ‘process’ (...) always remain tied to the linear temporal construction of history, whose evidence is mathematical and historical philosophical.” In other words, ‘historicism’s adoption of historical philosophy revealed a linear, unified and progressive view of history that is focused on the future.

The attempt to plan and accelerate history was exactly what Koselleck’s analysis had focused on in *Kritik und Krise*. As he was undoubtedly aware, Schmitt had criticized ‘historicism’ on this point, too. This was, for example, the case in *Die Buribunken* from 1918, which was essentially a mocking critique of the, according to Schmitt, exaggerated belief in

societal and scientific progress in 19th century ‘historicism’ – a critique that Koselleck wrote about in the article *Die Verzeitlichung der Utopie* 30 years later.¹⁶⁰

In Koselleck’s view, as stated in the letter, it was the ever-present possibility of conflict, crisis and war rather than steady, overarching progress that characterized modernity and his verdict on ‘historicism’ was unequivocal: “It is a residual product, that manifests the power and endurance of the bourgeois way of thinking, and not as Meinecke thinks, a genuine achievement. It is less an answer to our situation, as it is a part of the situation, since it can not conceptualize it, which would in fact be its purpose.”

It was exactly this ‘answer to our situation’ that Koselleck was looking for in his letter to Schmitt. He did not, however, find the full answer in Schmitt’s work. Instead, he found a sociological, systematic and supposedly more realistic way of thinking – based on analysis of concepts – with which he wanted to blow away the smoke that seemingly prevented him from finding the answer. This smoke was caused by what Schmitt and Koselleck understood as a theoretically, but also politically naïve and dangerous legacy of German ‘historicism’, represented by Friedrich Meinecke and his famous book *Die Idee der Staatsräson* from 1924.¹⁶¹

To understand Koselleck’s attitude towards the book, a brief introduction is needed to Meinecke, one of the most influential German historians in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶² Meinecke was born in 1862, the son of a civil servant (*Beamter*). After studies in German language and literature, history and philosophy in Berlin, under famous figures such as Johann Gustav Droysen, Heinrich von Sybel, Heinrich von Treitschke and Harry Bresslau, he took his doctorate in 1886 under Reinhold Koser. In 1887, he started working in the Prussian archives, and he habilitated in 1896 under Sybel in Berlin. From 1893 he was one of the editors, and since 1896 the main editor of the *Historische Zeitschrift*. He became professor in Strasbourg in 1901; in Freiburg from 1906, at the Berliner Friedrich Wilhelm-Universität in 1914; and in 1948 he became the first *Rektor* at Freie Universität Berlin, where the department of history in 1951 was named after him. He died in 1954 – the same year Koselleck finished his studies in Heidelberg.

¹⁶⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: “Die Verzeitlichung der Utopie”, Wilhelm Vosskamp (Hg.): *Utopieforschung*, Stuttgart 1982, p. 1-14.

¹⁶¹ Friedrich Meinecke: *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte*, München 1924.

¹⁶² See Ernst Schulin: “Friedrich Meinecke und seine Stellung in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft”, Michael Erbe (Hg.): *Friedrich Meinecke Heute: Bericht über ein Gedenk-Colloquium zu seinem 25. Todestag am 5. und 6. April 1979*, Berlin 1981, p 25-50 and Ernst Schulin: “Friedrich Meinecke”, *Deutsche Historiker*, Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Hg.), Göttingen 1973, p. 39-57. See also the contributions in Gisela Bock und Daniel Schönplflug (Hg.): *Friedrich Meinecke in seiner Zeit. Studien zu Leben und Werk*, Stuttgart 2006.

With his first famous book *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* (1907),¹⁶³ Meinecke, together with Wilhelm Dilthey und Ernst Troeltsch, had become widely respected and recognized as one of the paragons of the history of ideas. In the book, he portrayed the history of the German national state from the Prussian reforms to Bismarck as a harmonic and progressive development, and he sought to demonstrate how the thought of poets, writers, and philosophers contributed to the development of nationalism and how these ideas were reflected in the minds of the political leaders, who achieved German unification. In his next great work, *Die Idee der Staatsräson*, Meinecke turned to investigate the interests and tendencies of the great powers since the 16th century. He came to the conclusion that statesmen always have to strike a balance between dual concepts of politics – such as ‘Ethos’ and ‘Kratos’, morality and power, spirit and nature – to find the right ‘reason of state’ (*Staatsräson*).

Meinecke’s view of history and politics in *Die Idee der Staatsräson* was intensely debated among its contemporary readers, and, in a 1926 review, Carl Schmitt subjected it to a devastating criticism.¹⁶⁴ Schmitt was especially critical of what he saw as poor conceptuality and primitive opposition between power politics and morality in the book. It was, in his eyes, an opposition that justified the German philosophy of identity and affected a kind of superiority deriving from a constant change of standpoint, an eternal movement backwards and forwards, which legitimized the refusal among German historicists to take any political responsibility in the present.

Whereas Schmitt’s critique of Meinecke’s idealism was focused on the political question of *who decides?*, Koselleck was, in his letter to Schmitt, attempting to deconstruct what he conceived of as an erroneous approach to the study of history: he wanted to radicalize the project of ‘historicism’. In fact, this aim had already been present in *Kritik und Krise*, as witnessed in a long footnote in the original version of the dissertation that illuminates more closely how Koselleck drew on Schmitt’s writings and the method of conceptual history in this endeavour. In the footnote, he thus outlined precisely how he viewed the differences between Schmitt and Meinecke. “Unlike C. Schmitt”, he wrote:

¹⁶³ Friedrich Meinecke: *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat. Studie zur Genesis des Deutschen Nationalstaats*, München, 1907.

¹⁶⁴ Carl Schmitt: “Zu Friedrich Meineckes ‘Idee der Staatsräson’“ [1926], *Positionen und Begriffe im Kampf mit Weimar – Genf – Versailles 1923-1939*, Berlin 1940, p. 45-52. See also Reinhard Mehring: “Begriffssoziologie, Begriffsgeschichte, Begriffspolitik. Zur Form der Ideengeschichtsschreibung nach Carl Schmitt und Reinhart Koselleck“, Harald Bluhm, Jürgen Gebhardt (Hg.): *Politische Ideengeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert. Konzepte und Kritik*, Baden-Baden 2006, p. 33-35 and Gopal Balakrishnan: 2000, p. 79-81.

“who always elucidates the historical connection between intellectually convincing evidence and the related political and sociological structures, [Meinecke's] historical magnum opus on the question of 'morality and politics', 'Die Idee der Staatsräson', is entirely a-historical in its approach. The basic concepts Meinecke deploys: 'power and justice', 'nature and spirit', etc., are conceived of as invariable for the whole period from Macchiavelli to Treitschke. On the one hand, Meinecke uses the polemical terms of the 18th century in a historical fashion, that is to say: reconciling them by means of their mutual relativization. In this way, all findings are equivocal, unequivocal is only Meinecke's personal notion of the 'reason of state', which is for him an extra-historical magnitude.”¹⁶⁵

With this theoretical-methodological justification of his extensive use of conceptual history in *Kritik und Krise*, Koselleck left no doubt that, similar to Schmitt, he found Meinecke's approach in *Die Idee der Staatsräson* theoretically-methodologically naïve. Since it did not analyze concepts as notions that are created in historically concrete situations, by different historical actors with shifting motives and aims, but instead portrayed them as timeless and unchangeable, and moreover relativized their polemical features, Meinecke's 'historicism' was allegedly utterly incapable of explaining how concepts are created and how they function and change.

However, in the cited footnote, Koselleck not only portrayed Meinecke's approach as theoretically naïve due to its ignorance of the social historical context and significance of language. He also argued that the approach was politically dangerous, as Meinecke's 'unhistorical' interpretation of the past also made him blind to how ideas are used for specific political purposes in the present. Koselleck thus concluded his footnote with a harsh criticism of how, in an attempt to fit the turbulent political events of the Weimar Republic into an idealistic, optimistic and elastic understanding of history as a constant clash of higher moral principles and energies, Meinecke allegedly removed himself from reality and thus the possibility of taking a responsible standpoint towards contemporary events.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: 1954, p. 24, footnote 72. The footnote followed an explanation in the main text of the historically specific reasons as to why absolutist states separated politics from morality. Koselleck started the footnote by referring to Schmitt's *Die Diktatur* (München 1921, p. 9ff) to support his argument, before he ventured to compare Meinecke's approach to Schmitt's. Judged from the content of the footnote, it seems as if Koselleck's estimation was not just based on a comparison of *Die Idee der Staatsräson* to *Die Diktatur*, but on a more general assumption of the differences between the approaches of Meinecke and Schmitt. Schmitt's review of *Die Idee der Staatsräson* is listed in the bibliography of the unpublished version of Koselleck's dissertation, and it is more than likely that his assumption of the differences was inspired by this text.

¹⁶⁶ “Indem Meinecke diese Staatsräson mit dem jeweiligen 'historischen Gewalten zusammengebracht sieht' verwandelt sich der Staat selber in ein 'Amphibium' zwischen Ethik und Natur (...). Der konkrete geschichtliche Bedeutungsgehalt einer jeweiligen Entscheidung über das Verhältnis von 'Moral und Politik' wird durch das außergeschichtliche und zugleich relativierende Denken gerade verdeckt. So ist z.B. Meinecke selber, der die antistaatlichen Begriffsdualismen des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts weiterverwendet, immer noch von der moralischen Selbstgewissheit eines modernen Staates so sehr überzeugt, dass er eine Differenz zwischen Moral und Politik nur auf dem Felde der Außenpolitik für notwendig erachtet. Denn im Innern, so glaubt er 1924 und

In contrast to Meinecke, as he saw him, Koselleck wanted to position himself towards the contemporary situation, and in conceptual history he had seemingly found a method that would enable him to do so. However, Koselleck aimed at more than unearthing a method.

The limit of relativism: Heidegger's notion of 'finality'

Koselleck continued his reflections on 'historicism' in the letter by making a radical proposal: "Historicism has reached the resigned conclusion that the relativity of all historical events and values must be subjected to total 'relativity'. As far as I see, this is the starting point for every analysis of historicity. One should – through this still very historiographical insight – once and for all break through to a historical ontology, which is not merely the latest methodological approach, but the beginning of a conceptualization, which makes it possible to cut the historical philosophy off from its water supply and consequently give an answer to our concrete situation."

It was the lack of this kind of 'ontology' – and, consequently, the lack of a 'firm formation of concepts' (*Begriffsbildung*) – that prevented Koselleck from attaining a "better grip" on his analyses. Though he praised the sociologist Hans Freyer's *Weltgeschichte Europas* (1948) for having achieved a great deal "in this direction",¹⁶⁷ it is evident that Koselleck found the basis for his 'ontology' elsewhere. He wrote:

"The reduction of all intellectual expressions to the historical situation puts an end to all further

auch noch 1929, wirke einerseits 'die feinere sittliche Empfindung' einer blutigen Revolution entgegen, und andererseits trage notfalls eine Ausnahmegesetzgebung sittlichen Charakter, da die erforderliche Machtkonzentration 'legalisiert' werden könne. Die doppelten Möglichkeiten des 'amphibischen' Staates und zugleich die soziologische Funktion werden hier manifestiert." Reinhart Koselleck: 1954, p. 24, footnote 72.

¹⁶⁷ Hans Freyer: *Weltgeschichte Europas*. 2 Bd., Wiesbaden 1948, signalled the 'radical conservative' sociologist Hans Freyer's politically de-radicalized academic return to post-war German intellectual life. Describing the becoming of Europe from an epochal-geographical narrative, the book contains short sections on the nature of historiography and the role of the historian, and it was presumably to these passages that Koselleck referred in his letter to Schmitt (Koselleck had read the book when writing *Kritik und Krise*, where it is referred to in footnotes). Freyer's reflections unfold as a critique of idealism and of notions of objectivity in historical writing and are based on keywords such as 'crisis', 'existentialism' and 'decision'. His main argument is that historical writing can never be separated from existential questions. According to Freyer, the present is thus not – as believed by idealists and objectivists – merely to be conceived as a viewpoint from which we can look back on a distant past and measure how far we have come in the progressive process called history. On the contrary, the past is present as a 'heritage' – it is part of us. Hence – as Freyer perceived it – writing 'critical history' entails awareness of the existential element in historical writing and of the close relation holding between the past and the present. Moreover, since it is constantly confronted with decision taking in the present, critical historical writing is in addition fundamentally concerned with the third temporal dimension – the future. It is on this particular point, Freyer explains, that critical history differs from idealistic historical philosophy: it sees the present not as an end, but as a 'crisis': "nicht nur als Kritik der Geschichte sondern auch als Kritik der gegenwärtigen Krisis (...) Und die Gegenwart wird zur kritischen Situation, das heißt zum Ort fälliger Entscheidungen." (159) Being engaged with decision-making does not imply – Freyer adds – that critical historical writing should predict or develop fixed schemes of actions for the future. Instead, it has to establish a "Selbstbewusstsein einer geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit, die genau, wie sie in der Schuld der Vergangenheit steht, in die Verantwortung für die Zukunft gestellt ist." (160) As we shall see, the 'ontology' that Koselleck was carving out had many similarities to Freyer's 'existential', 'critical' and 'responsible' vision of historical writing. For excellent comments on Freyer's book, see Thomas Etzemüller 2001, p. 282.

relativization forwards and backwards, up and down. The finality (*Endlichkeit*) of the historical human beings should thus be the centre of attention, not in regard to individual existence (...), but with respect to history's eternal coming into being: that is, with respect to the structures of a 'situation' without which such a thing as history would not exist"

What Koselleck did in these passages was to present the foundation of what he called an 'ontology of history' by which he meant certain fundamental existential structures of the human condition – or the human 'situation' – that supposedly created and structured all human history. As revealed by the discursive features in the citation, he located this foundation in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. Leaving to one side the first part of the latter, which examined the philosophical tradition of asking about the meaning of 'being', Koselleck focused on the analysis of being's historicity that is found in the second part of Heidegger's book. Here, in an attempt to uncover the ontological conditions of human existence, Heidegger argued that, unfolding between birth and death, being is an essentially temporal and historical phenomenon – that for humans, *to be* is *to be in time* – and that any analysis of human awareness, behaviour and possibilities should begin from the fact that we are thrown into and must act in the world, which includes the possibility and the inevitability of one's own mortality or 'finality' (*Endlichkeit*).

Koselleck evidently agreed with Heidegger's belief that human existence is conditioned by the limitations and possibilities given by its temporal- existential condition, and not by any metaphysical power in history.¹⁶⁸ But Koselleck's project was different to Heidegger's. What he did in the cited passage was to present Heidegger's notion of 'finality', or death, as a (brutal) fact of human existence, which no relativity can permeate and no human life can escape. It was from this notion that he wanted to develop an 'ontological' outline of what creates, structures and shapes all human history. "History", Koselleck continued: "is not transcendent for human beings, even though people die, but because it encompasses a finality of human things, which permanently questions the historical space that every human being is assigned to. The teaching of this finality is as eschatology also to be given ontological primacy in all historical sciences."

However, to outline this 'historical space' within which all human beings move, and which delineates the basic conditions of the human possibly, Koselleck found it necessary to

¹⁶⁸ For the ways in which Heidegger also developed aspects of his work through critiques of 'historicism', see Charles R. Bambach: *Heidegger, Dilthey and the Crisis of Historicism*, Ithaca 1995; Günther Scholz: "Zum Historismusstreit in der Hermeneutik", Günther Scholz (Hg.): *Historismus am Ende des 20. Jahrhundert: eine internationale Diskussion*, Berlin 1997, p. 198-202.

go beyond Heidegger's notion of 'finality'.¹⁶⁹ More concretely, he found it necessary to add a number of further existential features, or 'facts' about the human existence to the one of 'finality'. He wrote:

"Master and slave, friend and enemy, gender and generation and all geopolitical questions belong to here. Heidegger has passed by all these phenomena in the course of his existential analysis in *Sein und Zeit*, and the result shows in his history of Being as an all encompassing construction, which is often made fun of due to the idea of an intellectual fall from grace after the pre-socratic philosophers – in a way similar to Jaspers' *Ziele und Ursprünge*, which is concerned with the ontical end of history."

With these sentences, Koselleck completed his project of, first, deconstructing the approach of 'historicism', and subsequently – revising Heidegger's notion of 'finality' and adding to it four other conceptual pairs – laying out a theoretical assumption of what creates, structures and limits all possible human history; of the conditions, or the 'situation', which human beings are always thrown into and in which they must act. These four conceptual pairs were 'friend'/'enemy', taken from Schmitt; 'master'/'slave', taken from Hegel, those of 'man' and 'woman' (that Koselleck later integrated with Hannah Arendt's concept of nativity), and the geopolitical concepts (that Koselleck in later writings specified as 'in' and 'out', taken from Hobbes).¹⁷⁰

Koselleck's stance on Heidegger's notion of 'finality' was distanced, as is demonstrated by the subtly mocking critique of Heidegger's attitude in *Sein und Zeit* towards the history of philosophical thought, a history he conceived in terms of a teleological 'total' construction following an eschatological scheme with Heidegger himself in the role of the saviour."¹⁷¹ According to Koselleck, the critical deficiency in Heidegger's analysis of being, which opened the door to such historical-philosophical traits, was to be found in its reliance of a monolithic notion of human existence, according to which human beings are born and die on their own, a notion leading to an impoverished and ultimately equally monolithic notion of human history. It was to make up for this deficiency that Koselleck added the four conceptual pairs to the one of 'finality'. With the categories, he wanted to rework Heidegger's analysis of being into a larger anthropological system of the human existence that emphasizes the importance of interpersonal and social relations in human life – or, in other words, he wanted

¹⁶⁹ When Koselleck in the cited passage spoke of 'finality' as 'eschatology' (Löwith), the intention was seemingly to state that the only 'coming' that human beings are to expect from their future is their own death.

¹⁷⁰ See first of all Reinhart Koselleck: 1985, to which we will return below.

¹⁷¹ As witnessed in the quoted passage above, in Koselleck's opinion, this was an interpretive scheme that Jaspers replicated in *Karl Jaspers: Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, Zürich 1959; a book, in which, against the background of a vision of history as universal history, as divided into four epochs, Jaspers discussed the issue of the origin and the meaning of history in the present and in the future.

to outline a 'historical space' in which humans are open to co-exist and conflict with their fellow beings. What the study of history is left with, according to Koselleck, is the 'ontology' of Being, but Heidegger's finality must, in his eyes, be supplemented with counter-concepts that he takes up from other authors, including Schmitt. By means of these concepts, Koselleck could integrate a variety of ever-contested social relations into the foundations of historical writing. Thus he was able to accommodate a Schmittian conception of an essentially political society in permanent conflict, and a normative notion of how such conflicts were to be contained, in his ideas for an 'ontology' of history. In this way, the latter became inseparably connected with the domain of political thought. This anthropological way of bringing in social considerations with the counter-concepts aimed to deconstruct the very foundation of the historical philosophies and 'historicism', the idea of a unified and universal *history*, and to replace them with an analytical framework that thematized how human history unfolds in different ways, as *histories*, within the described 'historical space'.

That the categories are supposed to emphasize the importance of social relations and conflict in human life and thereby open for a thematization of a plurality is not stated explicitly in the letter from 1953. However, from the speech the *Historik und Hermeneutik* that Koselleck gave on the occasion of Hans-Georg Gadamer's eighty-fifth birthday in 1985 we can conclude that this was the general intention.¹⁷² With the aim of outlining what he called a 'historic' (*Historik*),¹⁷³ 'the doctrines of the conditions of possible history', Koselleck echoed here (in more detail) the basic argumentative line from the letter. This included a presentation of his conceptual pairs (which he no longer called 'ontological', but 'anthropological') and an account of how these formed part of a project of elaborating Heidegger's notion of 'finality' away from a monolithic idea of history in the singular and into an idea of history in the plural; an idea that is based on a framework of anthropological counter-concepts, which are together meant to delineate a historical space in which human beings create histories by interacting and conflicting with each other.

Summing up his arguments as to how *Sein und Zeit* with its singular notion of history failed to take account of the many conflicts, contingencies and possibilities that supposedly characterize the human interaction and, so, the conditions of possible history, Koselleck wrote:

¹⁷² Reinhart Koselleck: "Historik und Hermeneutik", Reinhart Koselleck, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik und Historik: Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Heidelberg 1987, p. 9-28.

¹⁷³ In the German historical profession, the notion of *Historik* is often used to refer to the tradition among German historians, since Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884), that aimed to develop a so-called *Historik* (Historic) that defines the topics, methods, forms and aims of historical writing. As Koselleck, in his speech placed himself within this tradition, he seemingly assumed that Droysen also meant sort of a transcendental foundation of historical thought.

“There is therefore a need for oppositional definitions that push forward this temporal finality, in which tensions, conflicts, ruptures, inconsistencies appears, which can never be given an immediate solution, but a diachronic one, in which all units of political-social action must partake, whether it leads to survival or death. Friend and enemy, parents-children, generational successions, sooner or later, the tensions between high and low, as well as the tensions between inside and outside as well as between secret and public – they are all constitutive for the rise, the course and the effectiveness of histories. We have so far aimed at a theoretical outline, which is aimed at developing Heidegger’s existential analysis in a direction that Heidegger did not envision, that is, to understand what makes histories possible, where Heidegger was content with the category of historicity. This category gave the experience of relativity within historicism a durable positive interpretation, without contributing to a transcendental substantiation of the pluralities of the actual histories.”¹⁷⁴

Aiming at an analytical framework in which relativism and utopianism would be replaced by the perspective of pluralism, Koselleck also drew attention to how, in his reworking of Heidegger’s analysis of being into a larger anthropological system of possible human history, he picked up on a theme that Karl Löwith had presented in his 1928 doctorate *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*.¹⁷⁵ Löwith had written his doctorate under the supervision of Martin Heidegger, but with the latter’s *Sein und Zeit* as his main target of critique. Where Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* focused on the individual being, Löwith emphasized in *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen* how human beings must always reflect on their social relations to other beings: that a human being is always a person that exists through its social roles and is therefore defined as a (and through its) fellow human being(s).¹⁷⁶

Löwith understood his analysis of the human *Miteinandersein* and *Miteinandersprechen*

¹⁷⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: 1987, p. 21. Three features diverged from the description of the categories in the speech vis-à-vis the letter. The first is that Koselleck – as witnessed in the above quotation – to some extent elaborated on the connotations of some of the conceptual pairs: the pair of ‘Herr und Knecht’ is for instance in the speech as included in the relation of ‘Oben und Unten’. The second is that he also reworked the notion of ‘finality’ into a conceptual pair by extending the definition ‘Vorlauf zum Tode’ to ‘Totenschlagenkönnens’ and ‘Sterbenmüssens’ (p. 13). The third is that he differentiated his historic from Heidegger’s notion of being by talking of a ‘historical being’ (p. 15).

¹⁷⁵ Karl Löwith: *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen. Ein Beitrag zur anthropologischen Grundlegung der ethischen Probleme*, München 1928. Reinhart Koselleck: 1985, p. 12: “Der Mensch als ‘Dasein’ ist noch nicht frei für seinen Mitmenschen – eine Thematik von Löwith – und nicht offen in seiner Konfliktträchtigkeit mit seinesgleichen. Die Zeiten der Geschichte sind nicht identisch und auch nicht zur Gänze ableitbar aus den existentiellen Modalitäten, die an Menschen als ‘Dasein’ entwickelt worden sind. Die Zeiten der Geschichte sind von vornherein zwischenmenschlich konstituiert, es handelt sich immer um Gleichzeitigkeiten des Ungleichzeitigen, um Differenzbestimmungen, die ihre eigene Endlichkeit enthalten, die nicht auf eine ‘Existenz’ zurückführbar ist.“

¹⁷⁶ Löwith’s book not only attempted to provide a philosophical perspective on human existence that he found missing in *Sein und Zeit*, but outlined also an ethical ideal that emphasized the need for dialogue and responsibility in inter-human relations. See Helmut Fahrenbach: “Karl Löwith in der Weimarer Zeit (1928-1933): Philosophie – nach dem ‘revolutionären Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts’”, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 6, 2005 p. 851-869; Reinhard Mehring: “Heidegger und Karl Löwith: Destruktion einer Überlieferungskritik”, Dieter Thomä (Hg.): *Heidegger-Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Stuttgart 2003, p. 373-375.

as a contribution to the field of philosophical anthropology, which was a subfield expanding rapidly in the years after World War I.¹⁷⁷ In this period, due to an increasing doubt in societal progress and in the human capabilities, which converged with the changing status of philosophy in relation to the sciences, attempts were made to develop a new fundament for human self-understanding, among other things with references to biological knowledge and through comparisons between humans and animals. The works of Max Scheler (1874-1928), Helmut Plessner (1892-1985) and Arnold Gehlen (1904-1976) stood at the centre of philosophical anthropology. In spite of many differences, each of these figures were trying to rethink philosophy, in the hope that a natural science approach to philosophical anthropology would lead to a more secure knowledge about what defines the human condition, character and possibilities.

After 1945, features from this tradition of philosophical anthropology influenced many different disciplines in German academia, including psychology, pedagogics, psychiatry, philosophy and not least sociology, the discipline in which both Plessner and Gehlen acquired professorial chairs in the post-war years.¹⁷⁸ Koselleck was familiar with the tradition of philosophical anthropology through reading Gehlen during his years in Heidelberg,¹⁷⁹ and although his project differed from and was apparently not directly inspired by the works of Scheler, Plessner or Gehlen, he evidently shared their ambition to replace existing ideas of what characterizes the human condition and capabilities with anthropological categories based on concrete and empirical observations.

What the letter thus illustrates is how Koselleck developed his anthropologically based categories as a scientific-epistemological answer and practical-political cure to what he conceived as the demands and dangers of 'historicism' and modern historical philosophy. This was an answer that aimed to take account of the interpersonal and social relations existing among human beings, and which set pluralism against utopianism and relativism in

¹⁷⁷ For a historical perspective on various traditions of philosophical anthropology, see Odo Marquard: "Anthropologie", Joachim Ritter (Hg.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Bd. 1, Basel 1971, p. 362-374.

¹⁷⁸ Joachim Fischer: "Philosophischer Anthropologie. Ein wirkungsvoller Denkansatz in der deutschen Soziologie nach 1945", *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Jg. 35, Bd. 5, 2006, p. 322-447. Helmut Plessner was as 'Halbjude' dismissed from the University of Cologne in 1933, and he immigrated to the Netherlands, where he taught at the University of Groningen until 1943, when he moved underground facing the threat of being deported by the German occupiers. After the war, he regained his position in Groningen, and in 1951 he accepted a professorship in Göttingen. He became emeritus in 1962, but remained academically active until his death in 1985. Arnold Gehlen made a successful career in Nazi Germany, not least due to his cooperation with the regime. In 1947, he obtained a professorial chair at the Verwaltungshochschule in Speyer, and in 1962, he acquired a chair in sociology in Aachen. He became emeritus in 1969 and died in 1976. See Carola Dietze: 2006 and Christian Thies: *Arnold Gehlen zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2000.

¹⁷⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: 2003, p. 77.

order to understand (historically) and contain (politically) the potential conflict in human societies.

As for the practical-political dimension, the strict formalism of the categories were supposed to bypass all forms of (utopian and historical philosophical) meaning, unity or direction in history. Rather they were exclusively intended to sketch out the limits of what is humanly possible and to point out the dangers in overstepping these limits. On the one hand, they represented the idea that history can unfold in different ways, depending on how the categories are filled out by human agents; on the other hand, they were meant to point to the eternal potential for conflict, which is embedded in human nature and must be considered and contained in every planning of the present and the future, if the aim is a responsible and durable political order. In other words, the categories were supposed to comprise the *conditio humana* that can never be done away with, nor bent or shaped entirely according to human desire and ideology.

As for their scientific-epistemological dimension, Koselleck considered the categories compatible with a notion of radical historicity (the idea that human things are subject to change in time and space), but since their conceptual distinctions in a formalistic sense transcend history, he saw also in them a timeless and hence analytically stable viewpoint from which historical change could be described, explained and evaluated. With his categories, Koselleck thus tried to answer the famous request made by Friedrich Meinecke after his reading in 1923 of Ernst Troeltsch's book on the crisis of historicism: "Everything flows, show me a place where I can stand."¹⁸⁰

Koselleck, it should be added, was far from the only scholar to criticize historical philosophy and 'historicism' in the post-war period. Confrontations with moral, political and idealistic universalism, as embodied in all-encompassing and progressive ideas about the course of history, were frequently found in the writings of the older generations of scholars – including Karl Löwith, Theodor Adorno and Carl Schmitt. Then, from the late 1940's onwards, such confrontations developed into something like a common intellectual fashion among members of the generation of younger scholars, who began their studies in the first decade after the war and established their positions in German academia through a critique of traditions.

What is important to understand about Koselleck's theoretical-methodological efforts in the beginning of the 1950's is that they were not only directed towards solving a crisis within

¹⁸⁰ Friedrich Meinecke: "Ernst Troeltsch und das Problem des Historismus" [1923], Friedrich Meinecke: *Zur Theorie und Philosophie der Geschichte*, Stuttgart 1959, p. 369.

the historical discipline. They were also directed towards solving a specific political crisis.

Political crisis and the World Civil War

Directly after having presented the ‘ontology’, Koselleck explained to Schmitt how the purpose of the ‘ontology’ was heavily determined by the contemporary political situation.

“The starting point of a historical-ontological analysis”, he wrote, “must (...) be the contemporary civil war And he added:

“With the categories that lie at the basis of your ‘Nomos der Erde’, dear professor, it is certainly possible to show that the current world civil war is not an ontic or contingent event that actually should not be taking place (for the Americans), but an event deeply rooted in the ontological structures of our historicity, yet something that – given these structures – does not have to be the way it is (for the Russians).”

These passages show how, in line with Schmitt’s *Nomos der Erde*, Koselleck conceived the confrontation between the USA and the USSR as a civil war on a hitherto unprecedented scale – a ‘World civil War’.¹⁸¹ They also show how he believed that the prospect of the ‘World Civil War’ in the fifties could not only be understood but also countered through a disclosing of its historical roots. It was, in other words, possible to find ‘the answer to the situation’. This is clear from the subsequent lines in his letter to Schmitt from January 1953: “The truth of such a historical ontology should be demonstrable by means of every correct prognosis, and it must also have a prognostic character itself, inasmuch as it can devalue the historical philosophical prophesies (Whether or not it has power to do so is another question, but that is all the ‘science of history’ can achieve as a science).”

Koselleck evidently thought of the historical discipline in practical terms. Like Nietzsche, he wanted to make history useful for life. Put simply, his aim of analyzing the past was to criticize the present as a way to influence the direction of the future. He hoped to do so not by formulating specific social-political visions, programs or plans for the future, but by pointing to the anthropological conditions for history and politics as well as to the dangers in overstepping these limits. More specifically, Koselleck was hoping for a mode of political order that respect the human ‘finality’ – and in which the categories of ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ and ‘master’ and ‘slave’ are not filled out in excessively asymmetrical fashions, which

¹⁸¹ This interpretation contrasted, in Koselleck’s opinion, as stated in the citation, the American and the Russian ways of understanding of the Cold War: the American attitude to the cold war was allegedly that it should not be taking place and that the world should be the liberal-democratic utopia instead; for the Russians, with their ideology of class struggle, the cold war was class struggle and therefore part of the very historical condition of mankind. While acknowledging the point about the historical condition, by use of the anthropological analytical framework, Koselleck would in turn argue that history does not have to manifest itself in such a form of class struggle.

generate exclusion, aggression and conflict, but in ways that aim at political tolerance, recognition and plurality. Only by these measures, according to Koselleck, was the modern world to be saved from its self-destruction.

Viewed against the background of the letter, Koselleck's diagnosis of the political situation in the early 1950s evidently involved not only a critical historical deconstruction of the modern world, but also a set of constructive ideas as to how a more responsible and durable political order might be created, though he did not recommend a concrete model or ideology on which this order should be based. When some readers nevertheless interpreted *Kritik und Krise* as a politically conservative manifesto, it was partially due to a combination of two dimensions of the book. First, the normative implications were not explicitly spelled out in the analysis: it was fundamentally left to the reader to decipher Koselleck's perspective on how secular justifications for individual freedom might be handled alternatively in modern politics, that is, how the entry of morality into politics is not bound to end in totalitarianism, but can be solved in a more peaceful and pragmatic manner by striking a proper balance between the two opposites and by acknowledging the anthropological conditions of human beings. Hence, centre stage in the study is given neither to the Locke-interpretation, nor to the critique of absolutism, or to Koselleck's scientific-political project, but to the pessimistic critique of the aporias and dead-ends of the modern world that is permeated by a profound doubt in the capability and durability of political democracy.¹⁸²

Secondly, this critique was to a certain degree constructed through interpretative schemes, themes and notions that were at the time associated with the work of conservative thinkers. To be sure, in the 1950s, political pessimism, enlightenment-critique and reflections on progressive ideas of history as the vehicle of the contemporary crisis was also characteristic of leftwing and liberal thinkers such as Adorno and Löwith, but these topoi held a particular stronghold among conservative scholars and debaters, many of whom had voiced their dissatisfaction with liberal democratic forms of government and argued for the necessity for a strong state by slating the Weimar public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁸³

¹⁸² In retrospect, Koselleck conceded that the 'missing' chapter on the English constitution that was supposed to follow the section on Locke 'fed' certain 'wrong' interpretations of the book. With this, Koselleck undoubtedly first of all referred to the review by Jürgen Habermas to which we shall return. Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 56.

¹⁸³ For the topoi used to construct 'picture(s) of modernity in the post-war period' among German conservatives, see first of all Jin-Sung-Chun: *Das Bild der Moderne in der Nachkriegszeit. Die westdeutsche 'Strukturgeschichte' im Spannungsfeld von Modernitätskritik und wissenschaftlicher Innovation 1948-1962*, München 2000. Among the most famous critics of the Weimar *Öffentlichkeit* were Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger. For a history of the concept of *Öffentlichkeit* in the nineteenth and twentieth century, see Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Hg): *Öffentlichkeit: Geschichte eines kritischen Begriffs*, Stuttgart 2000. For a broader history

Among the topoi in *Kritik und Krise* that were often associated with conservative thinkers were Koselleck's interpretation of the contemporary confrontation between USA and Russia as a 'world historical crises' that had its roots in and was structured in a way similar to previous civil wars.

The idea of interpreting the political events of the twentieth century as an ongoing *Weltbürgerkrieg der Ideologien* had been used with distinct political intentions by conservative thinkers such as Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt in the years before, during and after World War II.¹⁸⁴ While, in the late 1930s, Schmitt had legitimized the Nazi wars in Europe by portraying them as a defense against the universalistic historical philosophies of liberalism and communism, in the postwar era his references to the *Weltbürgerkrieg der Ideologien* served to downplay German guilt in World War II (as it reduced National Socialism to a minor event in the age of historical philosophies) and to position post-war Germany as a victim in the ongoing ideological battle for world power between liberalism and communism that was culminating in the Cold War. In this scenario, a vision of a de-radicalized or technocratic conservatism, which was not to revolve around a charismatic leader, but around institutions and structures, appeared as a bulwark and an alternative to the destructive ideologies of communism and liberalism.¹⁸⁵ Schmitt's reference to the *Weltbürgerkrieg der Ideologien* went hand in hand with private writings in which he downplayed the German war crimes and his own activities during National Socialism, by labeling the trials in Nürnberg a product of the moral 'discrimination of the victorious powers'.¹⁸⁶

Like many other German historians at the time, Koselleck focused in *Kritik und Krise* on

of the concept, see Lucian Hölscher: "Öffentlichkeit", Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Bd. 4, Stuttgart 1978, p. 413-467.

¹⁸⁴ See first of all Jan-Friedrich Missfelder: 2006, p. 325-334.

¹⁸⁵ For interpretations of German and World History among German conservatives in the 1940s and 1950s, see for example Dirk van Laak: "'Nach dem Sturm schlägt man auf die Barometer ein...'" Rechtsintellektuelle Reaktionen auf das Ende des 'Dritten Reiches'", *Werkstatt Geschichte*, Bd. 17, 1997, p. 25-44; Dirk van Laak: "Trotz und Nachurteil. Rechtsintellektuelle im Anschluß an das 'Dritte Reich'", Wilfried Loth, Bernd-A. Rusenik (Hg.): *Verwandlungspolitik. NS-Eliten in der Westdeutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, p. 55-77; Jean Solchany: Vom Antimodernismus zum Antitotalitarismus. Konservative Interpretationen des Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland 1945-1949", *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 44. Jg. Hf. 3, 1996, p. 373-394; Axel Schildt: "Ende der Ideologien. Politisch-ideologische Strömungen in der 50er Jahren", Axel Schildt, Arnold Sywottek (Hg.): *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau: die Westdeutsche Gesellschaft in der 50er Jahre*, Bonn 1993, p. 627-635; Jin-Sung Chun: 2000. The concept of 'Weltbürgerkrieg' had a special niche in German historical writing after in the 1970s and in the so called *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, as Ernst Nolte made use of it in his attempt to explain the rise of National Socialism and its radicalization as a reaction to and shelter against communism. We return to the *Historikerstreit* in chapter six.

¹⁸⁶ Carl Schmitt: 1991. See also Reinhard Mehring: "Zu Schmitts Dämonologie – nach seinem Glossarium", *Rechtstheorie. Zeitschrift für Logik, Methodenlehre, Kybernetik und Soziologie des Rechts*, 23. Bd., 1992, Hf. 1, p. 258-271.

liberalism and communism in explaining the conflicts and the wars of the twentieth century and in constructing a theory of modern totalitarianism that did not deal directly with the role of National Socialism. However, he did not attempt to exonerate certain German traditions from the past, nor did he portray a vision of German conservatism as an alternative ‘third way’ between liberalism and communism on the contemporary political scene. He referred instead to the ‘world historical crises’ with a distinctively different agenda than Schmitt.

This agenda connected analytically to Schmitt’s ideas of the ‘World Civil War’ via the interpretation of how an apolitical bourgeois morality originated in the enlightenment that had visions of spreading its moral authority all over the world (134-145), that is, of manifesting as a *Weltbürgertum*,¹⁸⁷ When, to follow Nicolaus Sombart, “World Civil War [in *Kritik und Krise*] refers to world-bourgeoisie”,¹⁸⁸ it is because, in line with Schmitt, Koselleck argued that the traditional laws of international conflict were being fundamentally reshaped with the diffusion of a revolutionary and aggressive universalistic spirit.

The core of this argument is found in Koselleck’s Hobbes-chapter on the rise of the absolute state. With references to Schmitt’s *Nomos der Erde*,¹⁸⁹ Koselleck here described the rise of the traditional system of international law as a system – the *Jus Publicum Europaeum* – which was based on a strict separation of a state’s interior from the mutual external and political relations between states. In this system, Koselleck explained, states, like ‘persons’, possessed the same right to wage war against other states (39-45), and as free agents in the system, the sovereigns of the states were subject to their conscience alone and not to a common and institutionalized higher authority. According to Koselleck, the problem that in the field of morality only one side in the quarrel can be right was neutralised by a reality-oriented political reason (41). And while the system allowed sovereign rulers to turn the ‘inner’ tensions ‘out’ and thus avoid civil war, the mutual recognition of states and of transparent rules of international warfare created, according to Koselleck, a “European equilibrium“ (*europäisches Gleichgewicht*) (39-40), where each one understood each other as “justus hostis”, a rightful enemy (41).

¹⁸⁷ The following draws partly on Jan-Friedrich Missfelder: 2006, p. 332 and Louiza Odysseus: 2008.

¹⁸⁸ Thus Nicolaus Sombart: 2000, p. 273. Sombart remarks that the word *Weltbürgerkrieg* perhaps existed in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but that Kesting, Koselleck and he made it fashionable and brought into circulation. As pointed out by Louiza Odysseus and Jan-Friedrich Missfelder, the term had indeed been used before, among others, by Ernst Jünger. It was after a conversation with Jünger that Schmitt began to use the term – the first time in Carl Schmitt: “Die letzte Globale Linie” [1943], *Carl Schmitt: Staat, Grossraum, Nomos: Arbeiten aus den Jahren 1916-1969*, hrsg. Günther Masche, Berlin, 1995, p. 441-452. Louiza Odysseus: *Violence after the State? A Preliminary Examination of the Concept of ‘Global Civil War’*. Paper prepared for Section 25: Violence beyond the State, 6th Pan-European International Relations Conference, 12-15 September 2007, University of Torino, Italy, p. 20-27; Jan-Friedrich Missfelder: 2006, p. 328-330.

¹⁸⁹ The following chapter analyses this book in more detail.

Koselleck's interpretation of the transformation of this system was not as explicitly outlined as its origins. However, it can be deduced from the way in which he connected the moral laws of the *Weltbürgertum* to the 'world historical crises'. What replaced the 'reality-oriented', 'responsible' and 'transparent' *Jus Publicum Europaeum* was thus a 'non-defined', 'irresponsible' and 'non-transparent' system of international law, where with reference to abstract notions of moral and ideological justice states can randomly break the traditional principle of non-intervention between states, and where ideas of absolute enmity opened the way to a permanent, unbound and worldwide use of violence. It was this condition that Koselleck appealed political leaders to put an end to by reinserting a more responsible basis for political decision-making in international law; a basis that was founded on a pluralistic instead of an antagonistic understanding of politics. While taking over Schmitt's historical interpretation of the 'World Civil War', based on the idealized model of the *Jus Publicum Europaeum*, Koselleck's political agenda thus diverged crucially from Schmitt's.

Seen retrospectively, the allusions to the 'world historical crisis' in *Kritik und Krise* stand in Koselleck's work as a symbol of the analytical language that Kesting, Sombart and he developed as students in Heidelberg during their intellectual exchanges with each other and with Schmitt.¹⁹⁰

"You have so far grasped our time in concepts" – Koselleck symptomatically wrote to Schmitt not long before submitting his dissertation – "with which we from the younger generation have conceptualized this epoch."¹⁹¹ On his way into the disciplinary field, as he modified, refined and expanded his analytical language, Koselleck left behind many of the notions that he had picked up from Schmitt – including the one of *Weltbürgerkrieg*. In fact, after *Kritik und Krise*, he never again alluded to the notion.

In contrast to the notion of *Weltbürgerkrieg*, the anthropological outline that Koselleck presented in his letter to Schmitt from January 1953 became a central discursive feature in his work. The outline came first of all to provide a basic theoretical fundament, precondition and starting point for his attempts to thematize history in the plural. This is clear from several published writings, where, to counter notions of relativism and in discussion of the relation between time, language and history, Koselleck referred to the conceptual pairs as features capable of stabilizing and structuring investigations into human history.¹⁹² Most famous in

¹⁹⁰ For how their uses of the notion of *Weltbürgerkrieg* related to the social-political conditions in which Schmitt communicated with his 'associates' see Jan-Friedrich Missfelder: 2006, p. 332-334.

¹⁹¹ RW265-8132: 8/7-1953.

¹⁹² As also described by Lucian Hölscher in his talk "Language and Time in the Work of Reinhart Koselleck" given at the conference *Language and History, Remembrance and Time – Reinhart Koselleck in Perspective* at

this respect is perhaps the mentioned speech *Historik und Hermeneutik* that Koselleck gave on the occasion of Hans-Georg Gadamer's 85th birthday in 1985, but the critique of historicism, the reworking of Heidegger and the conceptual pairs also feature in the two programmatic articles *Wozu noch Historie?* and *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft* that Koselleck published in the early 1970s with the aim of outlining a new concept of history.¹⁹³

In addition, the anthropological categories came to provide a certain thematic unity to Koselleck's work, as he managed to connect his theoretical assumptions to his practical research by analyzing the themes comprised by the categories in empirical analyses. This connection is in fact already present in the dissertation: without presenting the categories in the form of an anthropological outline, the analysis fundamentally aims to investigate how the anthropologically given limits and possibilities as found in the human 'finality' and in the 'friend'-'enemy', 'master'-'slave' and 'in'-out' relations have been dealt with by different units of political action.¹⁹⁴

But – we might ask, to illuminate this issue in more depth – to what extent was the anthropological outline in Koselleck's letter to Schmitt a result of only very recent reflections? On the one hand, the intense tone and the chaotic structure of the letter strongly suggest that the outline was in a process of development when he wrote the latter. It should also be stressed that Koselleck presented his ideas after thanking Schmitt for taking an interest in his work once again during his recent visit to Plettenberg. This might indicate that he was trying to present a sort of a comprehensive plan of his new project, perhaps encouraged by his conversations with Schmitt.

In line with this, it is worth noting that Koselleck made only one reference to Heidegger's notion of 'finality' in the dissertation, and that this itself was relatively undeveloped. This is in a footnote in which he states that, in his Hobbes-interpretation, the political scientist Leo Strauss has shown that "the fear of (in particular the violent) death is for Hobbes the first

the European University Institute, 8. December, 2006 and in Willibald Steinmetz: 2006, p. 427: "Wie immer", Steinmetz writes about Koselleck's work on experience and memory, "wenn sich Koselleck neuen Themenfelder näherte, blieb er auch hier nicht bei empirischen Beobachtungen stehen, sondern versuchte schon früh im theoretischen Zugriff den Blick auf allgemeine, 'anthropologischen' Kategorien zu lenken, die zeitübergreifend von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart Vergleichbarkeit ermöglichen sollten."

¹⁹³ See Reinhart Koselleck: "Wozu noch Historie?", *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 212, 1971, p. 1-18 ; "Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft", Werner Conze (Hg.): *Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft und Praxis des Geschichtsunterrichts*, Stuttgart 1972, p. 10-28. While the mentioned issues are discussed separately and on different occasions in the first article, they are presented as part of one argumentative line on page 11 in the latter article. Chapter 6 addresses the two articles and the context in which they were launched in greater depth.

¹⁹⁴ In line with this, the analytical vocabulary in the study is to a great extent based on the anthropological categories, first of all those of 'death', 'in/out', 'friend/enemy', 'up/down'-'master/slave'.

quality of conscience and the most important expression of a sensible consciousness.”

Koselleck continues:

”If one ignores that the sharp opposition between the fear of death and the vanity that Strauss has shown in Hobbes was worked out with an eye on Heidegger’s categories in *Sein und Zeit: Eigentlichkeit* and *Verfallenheit*, there still remains a factual inner relation. Both thinkers, Hobbes and Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, proceed from anxiety (*Sorge*) to death – without stating anything about the afterlife (*Jenseits*) – to develop categories that in their apparent formality could not avoid the accusation of being immoral.”¹⁹⁵

These clues indicate that, in the early 1950s, Koselleck’s investigation into the political roots of the modern world convinced him of the need to outline an entirely new fundament for the study of history, which he did not have time to develop sufficiently to integrate it into his dissertation, and that the anthropological outline was completed after he finished *Kritik und Krise*. More concretely, this was a period during which Koselleck seems to have pursued his idea of reading Heidegger anthropologically, with Löwith and alongside Hobbes, thus expanding Schmitt’s interpretation of *Leviathan* in a philosophical direction. Seen from this perspective, Koselleck’s letter to Schmitt suggests that a breakthrough in his historical thinking took place in the period of writing.

However, in creating the anthropology, Koselleck obviously drew on notions and ideas that had been familiar to him for some time, and which he to a certain extent had already applied in the dissertation. This raises the question of whether Koselleck had in fact developed an elaborate version of the anthropology, but chose not to include it in the study. Further investigations into unpublished material are needed to answer this question. However, there can be no doubt that the anthropology and *Kritik und Krise* was created in processes in which Koselleck had to balance scientific theory, political concerns and social-institutional factors, and in which he could not openly announce the sum of his intellectual-political aims and intentions.

Here we touch upon issues related to the impact of the social situation on the content of a book that was obviously meant as a statement in the field; a statement with which Koselleck wanted to establish himself as an innovative scholar within the scholarly community. But, to speak with Löwith’s analysis of the human *Miteinandersein* and *Miteinandersprechen* in *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*, Koselleck was navigating among fellow scholars in the disciplinary field. In order to acquire a position within that field, he had to balance his individualism with a certain conformism vis-à-vis the surrounding standards, norms and

¹⁹⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: 1954, p. 31, footnote 108.

hierarchies.

In the following, we take a closer look at the processes through which Koselleck created and positioned the project (and himself) within the scholarly community. We begin with a more detailed analysis of the ways in which he drew on and deviated from the intellectual discourses that he found in respectively Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt and in the historical profession. Koselleck's dialogue with these discourses not only provides clues to how he constructed and gave meaning to his intellectual project in the 1940s, but also – as we shall see – contributes to an understanding of his scholarly production and 'intellectual' profile more generally.

The scholar as a fellow scholar

One of the striking aspects about the origins of *Kritik und Krise* and the related anthropological outline is the degree to which Koselleck constructed his understanding of the political and scientific constellations of the early 1950s through revisiting academic writings and debates from decades earlier, especially from the 1920s and the 1930s. Discussions of 'historicism' and of philosophical anthropology had peaked in this decade in which and it was also the period during which Friedrich Meinecke, Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger wrote their principle works.

Whereas Schmitt and Heidegger had attempted to define the essential problems and tasks in the spheres of politics and philosophy, respectively, in the 1920s, Koselleck used their works to conceptualize and resolve what he experienced as scientific and political crises in the 1950s.

But while drawing inspiration from Schmitt and Heidegger in his attempt to revise 'historicism' in the early 1950s, Koselleck was obviously very conscious about the difference between his and their projects. In outlining his anthropology, he cautiously picked out specific ideas, concepts and assumptions from their writings and substantially reworked these to fit his own purposes. A common feature of his reception of ideas from works such as *Der Begriff des Politischen* and *Sein und Zeit* is that he substantially *formalized* and *depoliticized* their analytical potential before he applied them to a historical analysis.

At the same time, Koselleck encountered, dealt with and used these two sources of inspiration in highly different ways.¹⁹⁶ It is worth noting that, in analytical frameworks,

¹⁹⁶ Despite biographical and intellectual parallels, Schmitt and Heidegger did not have close personal relations. See Reinhard Mehring: "Heidegger und Carl Schmitt. Verschärfer und Neutralisierer des Nationalsozialismus", Diether Thomä (Hg.): *Heidegger-Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Stuttgart 2003, p. 342-345.

Koselleck only used Heidegger's early work *Sein und Zeit*. The same was true of Löwith and with Gadamer, who re-modelled Heidegger's temporal and hermeneutic investigations into the question of being towards a history of human self-understanding and awareness.

Koselleck was later to follow Gadamer's footsteps.¹⁹⁷ However, with its focus on death, his first intellectual encounter with Heidegger, that is, his reworking of the notion of 'finality' had a more existential twist to it than Gadamer's reception of Heidegger. This difference was presumably attributable to their different generational and personal identities and experiences: unlike Gadamer, Koselleck had experienced human 'finality' at close range during and after World War II, and he subsequently constructed his scholarly work and identity around this experience.

On several occasions Koselleck has described his personal relations with Heidegger as having been very formal. One example is found in a letter to Schmitt from January 1977, where, whilst evidently deeply impressed by the intellectual capabilities that Heidegger displayed in Gadamer's colloquiums, Koselleck talked of 'the schoolmasterly manner of Heidegger'. "I have never really blamed the old man from the mountain, Koselleck added, since it was after all very instructive."¹⁹⁸ The tone of this statement recalls a remark in a 2003 interview in which Koselleck talked of his 'lecture' (*Lektüre*) of *Sein und Zeit*.¹⁹⁹

Both in the interview and in the letter to Schmitt from January 1977, the same ironic tone is present when Koselleck explained how, in the post-war years, *Sein und Zeit* presented a normative program and a pathos towards which he was deeply sceptical. In the letter, looking back at his meeting with Heidegger in Gadamer's colloquiums in Heidelberg, he recalled how he as a student had labelled *Sein und Zeit* a 'buckle-belt philosophy' (*Koppelschlossphilosophie*): " "As I returned from captivity, still marked by it, and read Heidegger, I conceived 'Sein und Zeit' as a kind of 'buckle-belt-philosophy', which is certainly not justified, when one looks at its long-term impact. I have learned as much from this book as I have learned from your Begriff des Politischen." ²⁰⁰

Koppelschloss was the German word for the belt buckles of German soldiers, which

¹⁹⁷ For a focused account of Gadamer's reception of Heidegger, see Jean Grondin: "Heidegger und Hans-Georg Gadamer: Zur Phänomenologie des Verstehens-Geschehens", Diether Thomä (Hg.): *Heidegger-Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Stuttgart 2003, p. 384-390.

¹⁹⁸ RW265: 3/1-1977.

¹⁹⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: 2003, p. 76.

²⁰⁰ RW265-8172: 3/1-1977. In the interview, Koselleck said: "Dass 'Sein und Zeit' eine Koppelschlossphilosophie enthält, wie ich damals [as a student in Heidelberg] gesagt habe, war für mich selbstverständlich. Aber darum habe ich mich doch nicht über Heidegger erhoben, weil er eine Naziphilosophie geliefert hätte. Das war für mich selbstverständlich. Ich hatte nie den Wunsch, öffentlich den Stab über Heidegger zu brechen. Das wäre mir unfair vorgekommen, weil ich so viel von ihm gelernt habe." Reinhart Koselleck: 2003, p. 76.

during World War II had been inscribed with the religious slogan *Gott mit uns*.²⁰¹ The imagery of these passages therefore served to mark an affinity between the ethos of militarism and what he interpreted as the existential, heroic and quasi-religious pathos of *Sein und Zeit*.²⁰² Returning from war and captivity, Koselleck seems to have been of the opinion that Heidegger's philosophical program, which drew on notions such as 'freedom', 'loyalty', 'people' 'authenticity', 'fate', 'destiny' and 'death' – and urged a *Freisein zum Tode* – had launched a book that from the 1920s onwards could be interpreted and used as some sort of quasi-militaristic and quasi-religious soldier's vade-mecum. Therefore, while being deeply inspired by Heidegger, Koselleck was evidently working towards a more concrete and formalistic way of thinking than he detected in *Sein und Zeit*. This included both getting rid of what he referred to as the historical-philosophical traits and the normative dimensions that he detected in the book.

One of the fundamental differences between the projects of Koselleck and Heidegger can be described using an observation made by Jacob Taubes on Koselleck's reception of *Sein und Zeit*: “[Koselleck's] historical writing will not describe a Being-Towards-Death, but instead take the sting of death away.”²⁰³ In light of our analysis, this observation might be qualified with the perspective that Koselleck drew on notion of 'finality' to draw attention to the fragile existential condition of human beings, which – according to Koselleck – was constantly put at risk in the age of modernity, where the humanly possible was either misunderstood or ignored. Instead of acknowledging the anthropologically given human limits and possibilities as encompassed in the human finality and in the 'friend'- 'enemy', 'master'- 'slave', 'man'- 'woman' and 'in'-out' relations, modern man envisioned worlds where these distinctions were envisioned as having been rooted out altogether or filled out in an excessively asymmetrical fashion. The aim to counter these attempts is the crux of Koselleck's historical writing, and his re-interpretation of the notion of 'finality' is essential

²⁰¹ *Gott mit uns* was the slogan of the Prussian royal house (from 1701) and the German emperor and a part of the Prussian (and later German) military emblem. After the monarchy, it was also used by the German army (and the *Reichswehr* between 1921 and 1935). During World War II, the members of the German army carried the slogan on their buckle-belts, while the members of the SS carried the slogan *Meine Ehre heißt Treue*. For the history of the slogan see Gerd Krumreich: “‘Gott mit uns’? Der Erste Weltkrieg als Religionskrieg“, Gerd Krumreich, Hartmut Lehmann (Hg.): *'Gott mit uns'*. *Nation, Religion und Gewalt im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2000, p. 273-283 and Peter Franz: “Gott mit uns”, Kurt Pätzold, Manfred Weißbecker (Hg.): *Kleines Lexikon historisches Schlagwörter*, Köln 2005, p. 136-138.

²⁰² For comments on Heidegger's heroic and militaristic language, see Thomas Rentsch: *Das Sein und der Tod. Eine kritische Einführung*, München 1989, s. 158-174. For a contextual interpretation of Heidegger's fascination of 'death', see Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht: “Stichwort: Tod im Kontext. Heideggers Umgang mit einer Faszination der 1920er Jahre”, Dieter Thomä (Hg.): *Heidegger-Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Stuttgart 2003, p. 98-103. After *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger only sporadically referred to 'death' in his work.

²⁰³ Jacob Taubes: München 1973, p. 497.

to this ambition.

Whereas Koselleck's reception of Heidegger derived largely from his study of *Sein und Zeit*, his entire scholarly production can be read as a constant dialogue with a whole range of Schmitt's texts and ideas. Koselleck always remained more subtle in expressing his intellectual-political deviations from Schmitt than from Heidegger. The reason was undoubtedly that Koselleck was personally closer to Schmitt. This does not mean, however, that he refrained from expressing their differences. While the most direct examples of this came in the period after *Kritik und Krise*, where Koselleck toned down his reception of Schmitt significantly, he also diverged from and went beyond Schmitt's work the dissertation, even if he tended not to emphasise this.

Nonetheless, the fact that Koselleck's deconstructive approach to politics connected the study of history to politics in a way that diverged from Schmitt's work is of key importance. Instead of placing his historical analysis in the service of political ideology, Koselleck sought to counter the ideologization of politics. It is also significant that the anthropological outline described in the 1953 letter goes beyond Schmitt's writings both theoretically and politically.

That Koselleck in the letter nevertheless presented the anthropological outline as inspired by his recent conversations with Schmitt and as to a considerable extent constructed with the use of Schmitt's categories, might indicate that there was an attempt to downplay the extent to which he in fact went beyond Schmitt. If so, this was, as we shall later see, not the last time that Koselleck was to brush over his analytical distance from or elaborations of Schmitt's work, presumably to avoid possible confrontations. When, in this particular instance, Koselleck put forward a way of thinking of history and politics, which, while he expressed admiration for and affiliation to Schmitt's work, was in fact centred round a highly independent project, it was perhaps to give the impression that he was not departing too radically from his teacher. Interpreted along these lines, the letter functioned not only a way of sharing his ideas with and expressing his gratitude to Schmitt, but also a respectful way of communicating that he was pursuing his own plans.

Koselleck was much clearer as to how the ideas of history, historical writing and the role of the historian in modern society that he presented in relation to his dissertation was meant to diverge from the predominant ideas in the German historical profession at the time. In fact, in the dissertation and in the letter, Koselleck conceived of and, to a great extent, presented himself as an outsider to the historical profession: as someone who was closer to the line of more pessimistic and supposedly more realistic thinkers, running from Friedrich Nietzsche to Jacob Burkhardt and to scholars, who were in the 1950s positioned outside or on the margins

of the disciplinary discourse – such as Karl Löwith, Johannes Kühn and Carl Schmitt – than he was to the established scholars in the field, such as Meinecke. Perhaps it was as an indirect way to express his understanding of the difference between the groups, in terms of duties and abilities, that, at the very end of his letter to Schmitt, he quoted Kant's interpretation of Job: "For, God honours Job, in that he shows him the wisdom of his creation predominantly with respect to its inscrutability. He lets him cast his looks on the beautiful side of the creation...; but also on the terrifying one, in that he specifies for him the products of his power, among which also pernicious, horrible things."

To this quotation, Koselleck added: "Hiob's friends, who strive more for the grace of the mighty than for truth, are not initiated"

The quotation shows in exemplary fashion that Koselleck's construction of historical writing went hand in hand with the making of a position and an identity within the disciplinary field, as a way of becoming a historian. This construction was attempted through playing around with the issues related to religion and authenticity informing Kant's interpretation of Job.²⁰⁴ Interpreted in a straightforward manner, Koselleck depicted the situation as if his determination to face realities, as unpleasant as they may be, and to follow his own convictions, would bring him closer to the truth than thinkers who predominantly strove for the favor of the mighty. Whereas the latter were bound to fail, Koselleck's analytical quest would be vindicated in the future, even if was depreciated in the present. This was an ironical self-portrait, the irony of which lay in the application of theological language and philosophy of religion out of context. Still, the quotation overlapped with the issues at stake in the letter in one respect: it thematized an appropriate relation to a 'source'.²⁰⁵ In this

²⁰⁴ See Immanuel Kant: "Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee", *Kants Werke, Akademie-Ausgabe*, Berlin 1902 ff., vol. VIII, p. 253-71. The passage in the letter is a quotation from page 266.

²⁰⁵ For the context and the implication of Kant's interpretation of Job, see Rudolf A. Makkreel: "The Confluence of Aesthetics and Hermeneutics on Baumgarten, Meier, and Kant", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 54, no. 1, 1996, p. 69-70: "(...) the original sense of authenticity stems from philological criticism, which is concerned to test whether a work is really the product of the author that it is reputed to be. Here authenticity literally means being an original source. But in Kant's philosophical critique, authenticity involves something more general, namely, having an appropriate relation to an original source. In this expanded sense, the author need not be the only one who can give an authentic interpretation. An authentic theodicy thus becomes possible for someone who stands in a proper respectful relation to God, but not for those who claim to approximate his omniscience. Kant points to Job as an instance of someone searching for an authentic understanding of what has befallen him and thus indirectly striving for an authentic theodicy. Job's friends give a doctrinal interpretation of his mysterious suffering by applying the generally accepted teaching that suffering is God's punishment for unknown past sins. On the basis of this pseudo-explanation of Job's suffering, they advise him to confess his sins and thus obtain relief from his suffering through God's forgiveness. Job, however, continues to declare that his suffering is inscrutable to him and rejects their advice. While recognizing his share of human frailty and the sovereignty of God's will, he relies on his own conscience, which does not condemn him. He refuses to feign contrition as a way of obtaining relief. According to Kant, Job's rejection of his friends' doctrinal interpretation is ultimately vindicated by God, who shows him "an ordering of the whole which demonstrates a wise Creator, although His ways remain inscrutable for us." What matters is "only the uprightness of the heart, not the merit of

respect, historical writing seemed to demand a commitment to 'truth' that permitted and even called for the moral and religious pathos of Kant's remarks on Job.

More concretely, with his anthropological outline and conceptual approach, Koselleck believed he had found a more appropriate relation to and understanding of historical writing than Meinecke, and the quote thus formed part of the argument and the act of a self-fashioning that he made explicit in the letter and stated implicitly in the dissertation. In his opinion, there was an urgent need to substitute Meinecke's approach to history, with its naïve notions of meaning, unity and progress, with his own sociologically-conceptually framed approach, which emphasized fragmentation, crisis and rupture in history, saw a close relation between the past and the present, and from a firmer analytical standpoint proposed a more direct and responsible role for the historian and to historical writing in debates about the present and the future. This need was seemingly not only scientific, but also political and in fact, existential.

However, it is worth noting that, when in the 1950's, Koselleck attempted to straighten out the crooked paths that history and its study had entered in the modern world, he refrained from announcing many of his arguments in public. First of all, in the published version of *Kritik und Krise*, the severe criticism of Meinecke was deleted, along with the reference to Schmitt's review of *Die Idee der Staatsräson* in the bibliography. In this version, Koselleck merely provided a considerably shorter and less controversial explanation of the theoretical-methodological framework underpinning the approach: "The applied method combines thus *geistesgeschichtliche* analyses with analyses of sociological conditions."²⁰⁶

The reason Koselleck decided to first hide and then delete the footnote is presumably to be found in considerations in respect to his future in the historical profession. To be sure, in the early 1950s, to venture into a direct confrontation with the *Nestor* of the discipline, Friedrich Meinecke might have been interpreted as an inappropriate challenge of the prevailing social structures and cultural norms of the profession. Students were supposed to treat older members of the profession with respect, if they wanted to make a career, since their prospects

one's insights, the honesty to confess one's doubts and the shunning of feigned convictions which one does not really feel." Only a genuinely felt interpretation of his situation is authentic. Generalizing from this, Kant claims that doctrinal theodicies pretending to give theoretical explanations of God's purposes in this world are bound to fail. Only authentic theodicies based on our moral conception of God are within our power. They address not our scientific knowledge of the world, but our moral faith. They contribute not some final truth, but a felt truthfulness. All that Job gains through his authentic response to his suffering is an acknowledgment of what he holds to be true (sein Fürwahrhalten)."

²⁰⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: 1959, p. 4.

were largely dependent on the goodwill and decisions of established professors.²⁰⁷ It might be added that Meinecke died in the period before the dissertation appeared as a book, and that it was perhaps even more inappropriate for Koselleck to criticize a recently deceased scholar, who was greatly missed by his colleagues and unable to defend himself.

When, along with deleting the criticism of Meinecke in *Kritik und Krise*, Koselleck refrained from introducing his social historical and conceptually framed approach and his anthropological outline until the late 1960s and early 1970s respectively,²⁰⁸ this was presumably also a choice vis-à-vis the disciplinary situation. Not only was Koselleck undoubtedly aware that his ambitions exceeded the disciplinary expectations to a dissertation. He also knew that, at the time, historical theory and social history were placed at the boundaries of the discipline, and that anyone aspiring to revolutionize the field of historical writing with a focus on these dimensions would surely have been viewed with suspicion. It is thus no coincidence that the first time Koselleck reflected on the need for a new historic in a published writing, it was ten years later and only indirectly in a review-article dealing with publications of other historians,²⁰⁹ and that his first public pleas for the necessity for analyzing the social dimensions of history via a conceptual approach were made within the ‘secure’ auspices of Werner Conze’s *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*.²¹⁰ It was, in line with this, and as we shall later return to, only after acquiring a professorship and thus becoming a ‘full’ member of the profession in the late 1960’s that he proposed reworking the approach of ‘historicism’ with theoretical-methodological features that included a conceptual approach and anthropological assumptions about what history is and how it can be studied.

The disciplinary norms and Koselleck’s choices of how to negotiate them in order to position his project had consequences for how it eventually was received and the identity he was given by other scholars in the field, as we will see in the following and final part of the chapter.

²⁰⁷ For a historical perspective on the traditions in the German academic community, see Fritz K. Ringer: *The decline of the German mandarins: the German academic community, 1890-1933*, Cambridge 1969.

²⁰⁸ In the published version of *Kritik und Krise*, Koselleck had also deleted the note that compared Hobbes’ and Heidegger’s categories of ‘death’ and suggested that a ‘historical-ontological’ interpretation could illuminate the common relation.

²⁰⁹ See Reinhart Koselleck: “Im Vorfeld einer neuen Historik”, *Neue Politische Literatur*, 1961, Hf. 7, p. 577-587. See also Reinhart Koselleck: Review of Theodor Schieder: *Begegnungen mit der Geschichte* (Göttingen 1962) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. XI, 1963, p. 295.

²¹⁰ We shall in chapter 6 deal in detail with Koselleck’s social-historical aspirations and with how ‘social history’ gradually came into fashion in the 1950s.

The reception of *Kritik und Krise*

According to Koselleck, the reason the publication of *Kritik und Krise* was delayed for five years was a lack of money. After submitting his dissertation, he received an offer from Gadamer to publish it in the series of *Heidelberger Forschungen*, but he did not have the 1000 DM required for the publication. The piece finally went to press when Conze arrived in Heidelberg in 1957 and arranged a publication at the Alber-Verlag to which Koselleck was not required to contribute financially.²¹¹

While Koselleck did not subject the plot line or the line of argumentation in the dissertation to major changes between 1954 and 1959,²¹² the intellectual-political climate in Germany underwent considerable changes in this period. Most importantly, processes of economic progress, societal stability and political democratization converged with a change in mentality that brought an end to the long period from around 1900 to 1950s in which notions such as ‘uncertainty’, ‘change’ and ‘crisis’ had dominated the social-political thought among the Germans.²¹³ Now, due to a stronger faith in the capability and durability of political democracy, they were increasingly oriented towards concepts such as ‘stability’, ‘welfare’ and ‘progress’. The easing of tensions in the Cold War likewise resulted in a different way of talking of international politics.

Today, the word crisis has almost disappeared from daily language”, a German publicist thus observed in 1959; “it has been replaced by the magic word *détente* (*Entspannung*).”²¹⁴ More generally, the 1950s was a period in which the political language of the Federal Republic changed drastically.²¹⁵

In combination with Koselleck’s choice to hide and leave important issues of the book open to the reader’s interpretation and his use of categories that were typically regarded as politically conservative, the social-political developments during the 1950s undoubtedly had an impact on the reception of *Kritik und Krise*. While most reviewers found that Koselleck’s analysis was characterized by a remarkable intelligence, lucidity and erudition, others saw

²¹¹ See Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 53.

²¹² The most substantial changes were made in the introduction and in the chapter on the absolutist state. Moreover, Kari Palonen notes that the methodological premises of the study as well as the distance to the vocabulary of Carl Schmitt are clearer in the published version. Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 182. In the speech in the occasion of the 50th year of his *Promotion*, Koselleck described these changes with the following words: “Inzwischen, das heißt zwischen Nudeldruck und Buchausgabe hatte ich freilich die Erstaussgabe leicht überarbeitet.” Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 53.

²¹³ The periodization follows Ulrich Herbert: 2002, p. 35. For broad overviews of the developments in this period, see also Konrad Jarausch: 2006, p. 1-155; Edgar Wolfrum: 2006, p. 43-187; Edgar Wolfrum: 2005, p. 78-239; Manfred Görtemaker: 2004, p. 119-328; Axel Schildt: 1995.

²¹⁴ The observation made by the publicist Fritz René Allemann is quoted from Hugo Steger: 1989, p. 23.

²¹⁵ As described for example in Paul Nolte: *Die Ordnung der deutschen Gesellschaft. Selbstentwurf und Selbstbeschreibung im 20. Jahrhundert*, München 2000, p. 20 and p. 231-235.

serious problems in Koselleck's pessimistic conception of the modern world, and some thought the analytical language and the worldview in *Kritik und Krise* outdated, reactionary and conservative and took issue with Koselleck's intellectual affinities to Carl Schmitt in the book. This was the stance, for example, of Jürgen Habermas, Germany's most famous post-war philosopher, who is known to have participated in the great majority of debates about Germany's past and political self-understanding since the sixties, and who interpreted *Kritik und Krise* as a politically conservative manifesto.

Born in 1929, Habermas served at the end of World War II as a *Flakhelfer*. In the 1950s, he went to study with Theodor Adorno at the re-founded Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, and from a 'left liberal' ideological position similar to Hans-Ulrich Wehler's, he argued for a democratic society, based on a public sphere, and for a critical attitude towards Germany's past – in particular towards National Socialism.²¹⁶

In his fight against the more politically conservative forces in German intellectual and political life that Habermas believed did not confront Germany's past to a sufficient degree, he chose first Martin Heidegger and then Carl Schmitt – including the latter's 'associates' – as his primary opponents.²¹⁷ One of Habermas's early attempts to draw the boundaries of his ideological front-line appears in a 1960 double review of *Kritik und Krise* and Kesting's dissertation *Geschichtsphilosophie und Weltbürgerkrieg* in which Kesting analyzed the role of historical philosophy in modern politics from the French Revolution until the Cold War.²¹⁸

When Habermas reviewed the two books, he was in the process of conceptualizing his famous 1962 habilitation *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.²¹⁹ Of all the books in which young German academics from the mid-1950s onwards attempted to rethink the liberal idea of the public sphere, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* was to become the most influential.²²⁰ In it Habermas presented an interpretation of the enlightenment and the rise of the modern European public sphere that simultaneously overlapped and conflicted with the interpretation

²¹⁶ For a discussion of how Habermas along with other intellectuals such as Ralf Dahrendorf argued for a further democratization of the society outside of the political institutions in the 1950s and 1960s, see Moritz Scheibe: "Auf der Suche nach der demokratischen Gesellschaft", Ulrich Herbert (Hg.): *Wandlungsprozesse in Deutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1948-1980*, Göttingen 2002, p. 245-277.

²¹⁷ On Habermas and his conflicts with Schmitt and his 'associates' or 'school', see for example Jan-Werner Müller: *German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity*, London 2000, p. 90-120.

²¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas: "Verrufener Fortschritt – Verkanntes Jahrhundert. Zur Kritik an der Geschichtsphilosophie", *Merkur*, XIV. Jg., 1960, Hf. 143-154, p. 468-477. The original title of Kesting's 1952 dissertation was *Utopie und Eschatologie: Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*.

²¹⁹ Jürgen Habermas: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Berlin 1962. For the context in which the book originated and for an introduction to its content, aim and impact, see Peter Uwe Hohendahl: "Recasting the Public Sphere", *October*, vol. 73, 1995, p. 27-54.

²²⁰ For an account of how the notion *Öffentlichkeit* in the mid-1950s became 'Das akademische Thema der Stunde', see Stephan Schlak: 2008, p. 51-54.

in *Kritik und Krise*. Habermas's theory of the public sphere, it has been said:

“(…) reworks Koselleck's narrative, using most of its building blocks: the concept of the absolutist state, the idea of the absolutist state, the idea of moral criticism as the primary weapon against the state, the dichotomy of private and public, and the understanding of the Enlightenment project as a fundamental critique of authoritarian structures. Habermas, however, coming from the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, reversed the trajectory of the narrative. Where Koselleck perceived decline (already during the eighteenth century), Habermas saw the beginning of modernity, containing the very project that was supposed to shape post-war Germany. This project he defined as the development of a postauthoritarian civil society, based on democratic political structures.”²²¹

According to Habermas, based on a bourgeois culture of coffeehouses, literary salons, and the print media, it was the rise of a such a civil society, or public sphere of rational debate on matters of political importance that had facilitated parliamentary democracy and successfully promoted Enlightenment ideals of equality, reason and justice in social-political debates. The public sphere was – he argued – guided by a norm of rational argumentation and critical discussion in which the strength of one's argument was more important than one's social belonging. Unfortunately, a variety of factors resulted in the eventual decay of the bourgeois public sphere. Most importantly, structural forces, especially the growth of commercial mass media, turned media into more of a consumer commodity rather than a tool for public discourse, and the merging of mass media into mass party politics proved to have seriously damaging effects for deliberative parliamentary politics and for rational-critical public debate. In line with this, for Habermas, “the ideal public sphere during the nineteenth century functions as an engine for progressive political development; during the twentieth century, on the other hand, this ideal serves as a reminder of what should take place.”²²²

Although Habermas also outlines a critical account of the decay of the public sphere, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* and *Kritik und Krise* evidently represent two distinctly different models and appraisals of the public sphere. Whereas Habermas constructed an enlightenment public opinion model around Kantian concepts such as rationality, morality and equality, Koselleck focused rather on how these concepts were exploited as weapons of dictatorship and his public opinion model was more in line with Rousseau's expression of the general will. Where Habermas emphasized the possibilities of openness, dialogue and consensus in processes of decision-making in the public sphere, Koselleck emphasized the existence of secrecy, domination and conflict. And where Habermas optimistically interpreted

²²¹ Peter Uwe Hohendahl: 1995, p. 31.

²²² Peter Uwe Hohendahl: 1995, p. 32.

the enlightenment public sphere as an unfulfilled promise of how a new kind of human communication can break down hierarchical power relationships, Koselleck pessimistically spoke of the ‘pathogenesis’ of the enlightenment and highlighted the destructive potential of enlightenment thought and the public sphere in modern politics.²²³ As such, the interpretations of the rise of the public sphere, the enlightenment and the possibilities of human communication in *Kritik und Krise* and *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* were fundamentally conflicting. In fact, Habermas’s account of these issues should be read as a direct response to Koselleck’s.

The intellectual-political fundament of Habermas’s response was unfolded already in his review of *Kritik und Krise* and *Geschichtsphilosophie und Weltbürgerkrieg* in which he took issue with the ideological presuppositions and aims that he believed informed Koselleck’s and Kesting’s dissertations. He began his evaluation by placing their works within a wave of so called “new conservatism” (468) emerging in the post-war era, thus positioning himself as Koselleck and Kesting’s antipode. In *Kritik und Krise*, Habermas detected a dubious tradition of conservative counter-enlightenment thought according to which individual thinking and criticism of the political order necessarily lead to the terror and civil war unless controlled by authoritarian political institutions; in *Geschichtsphilosophie und Weltbürgerkrieg*, Habermas further detected an attempt to redeem German political conservatism into a positive power that might tame the destructive forces in the ongoing *Weltbürgerkrieg*.

In line with this, Habermas attempted to undermine the alleged political conservatism in the two books by highlighting their intellectual debt to Carl Schmitt. Not only did he attack the references to the notion of ‘civil war’ by stating that, according to the logic of Schmitt’s writings, such a ‘civil war’ in modern societies can only be overcome “in the form of the totalitarian state.” (474) In the very last passage of the review, he in addition reduced the two authors to nothing but mouthpieces of Carl Schmitt: “After all, we appreciate to learn – from such competent authors – how Carl Schmitt, a specialist in this field, views the world today” (477).

In later reprints of the review, Habermas decided to delete the last passage, presumably to reduce the polemical acerbity and/or because he had begun to have a different opinion of Koselleck’s writings.²²⁴ In any event, to accuse Koselleck of being a conservative

²²³ These observations on the differences between *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* and *Kritik und Krise* are partly echo passages from Anthony J. La Vopa: 1992 and Jeremy Pompkin: 1991.

²²⁴ In any case, in several later writings, Habermas has often referred to and drawn on Koselleck’s writings without criticizing their political implications. It has also been suggested that Habermas deleted the last sentence, because his analysis in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* in fact drew on both Koselleck and Schmitt. Hence, in

'Schmittian' does not do justice to Koselleck's analysis. As we have seen, his theoretical and political project was distinctively different to Schmitt's, and he provided historical perspectives on the enlightenment and on the origins of modern political thought that are found neither in the work of Schmitt nor in Löwith's *Meaning in History*.

However, if Habermas exaggerated the affinities to Schmitt, he was more to the point in his critique of the features with which Koselleck created his dialectical account of the modern world as a phenomenon characterized by a permanent crisis, conflict and war and embedded in historical philosophies. According to Habermas, this account was made possible only by a scheme of interpretation, which was itself characterised by historical philosophical traits.

This scheme of interpretation was also observed and described in more detail in a review by the philosopher Helmut Kuhn. In Kuhn's eyes, Koselleck's dialectical and pessimistic analysis was so one-dimensional that it came close to annulling itself, since it merely substituted one historical philosophy with another. "The chimerical expectation (*phantastische Hoffnung*)", he wrote, "is replaced by implausible despair (*unwahrscheinliche Hoffnungslosigkeit*), the utopia as historical philosophical point de repère is replaced by the absolute crisis, the futurism by existentialism. But this redrawing does not change the schematizing effect: the alienation is not reduced."²²⁵

Habermas found Koselleck's dialectical and pessimistic interpretation problematic because its pessimistic scenario disregarded a human need of some belief in the feasibility of history as a means of survival,²²⁶ but also because the interpretation neglected the complexity

his chapter on the public sphere, Habermas stated that he owed many references to Koselleck's "excellent investigation" (Jürgen Habermas: 1962, p. 161, note 2), and in his analyses of models of ideal public discussion and of the underlying presuppositions of parliamentary government, Habermas referred frequently to Schmitt's writings. In the estimation of Jeremy Pomplin, 1992, p. 82 – "Habermas's whole ideal of ideal public discussion parallels Schmitt's analysis of the underlying presuppositions of parliamentary government." When Ellen Kennedy in the mid-1980s drew attention to the reception of Schmitt in Habermas's writings, it produced a larger debate, which testified to the widespread hostility towards Carl Schmitt and his writings in German academia as well as to the breadth of their reception (Kennedy also analyzed how other members of the Frankfurt-School have drawn on Schmitt's writings). See Ellen Kennedy: "Carl Schmitt und die 'Frankfurter Schule'. Deutsche Liberalismuskritik im 20. Jahrhundert", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 12. Jg., 1986, p. 380-419 and the replies of Martin Jay, Alfons Söllner and Ulrik K. Preuss in the same volume of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*.

²²⁵ Helmut Kuhn: Review in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 192, 1961, p. 668. Kuhn was from 1948 a professor in Erlange and from 1953 in München, and as a *Privatdozent* in the 1930s he had with Arthur Liebert been the editor of *Kant-Studien* and director of the *Kant-Gesellschaft*. Because of his Jewish origins, he was forced to give up his posts in 1935 and emigrated in 1937, settling in the USA. Before emigrating, he wrote a very critical review of Carl Schmitt's *Der Begriff des Politischen* – Helmut Kuhn: Review in *Kant-Studien*, Bd. XXXVIII, Hf. 1/2, 1933, p. 191-196.

²²⁶ One example of how the pessimistic tone in *Kritik und Krise* had rather been reinforced than softened in certain parts of the published version, is found in the introduction, where Koselleck outlined his gloomy perspective on the modern world with the following words: "Die Geschichte ist über die Ufer der Tradition getreten und hat alle Grenzen überflutet. Die Omnipräsenz aller Gewalten unterwirft durch die technische Kommunikation auf der unendlichen Oberfläche des Globus alles unter jedes und jedes unter alles. Zugleich

and diversity of the enlightenment. This neglect was elaborated upon in a review by the historian and theologian Heinz Gollwitzer. He wrote: “Koselleck’s book shows what the dialectical method can achieve in historical writing and what it cannot achieve.”²²⁷ It can – Gollwitzer argued – illuminate a certain problem in an acute and penetrating way, but according to its function it always evades the complexity and the diversity in history. He thus pointed to how, in constructing his dialectic interpretation of the enlightenment, Koselleck had given primacy to the old conception of France and the violent dynamics of the French Revolution as the ideal-type model nation for the European enlightenment in favor of alternative developments (not least the English), as well as neglecting many different variants of enlightenment thought, including the enlightened conservatives, the Christians and the patriots, and, how, via a severely biased reading, this reduced many of the ‘classics’ to nothing but radical revolutionaries.²²⁸

As *Kritik und Krise* gradually assumed status of a ‘classic’ in the field of enlightenment studies, the critique of its too narrow line of interpretation was frequently repeated and elaborated upon.²²⁹ On later occasions, Koselleck acknowledged this critique,²³⁰ and in his subsequent writings he substantially modified the dialectical, one-dimensionally schematic and pessimistic interpretation of the modern world in *Kritik und Krise*.

wird jenseits der geschichtlichen Räume und Zeiten der planetarische Raum erschlossen, und sei es auch nur, um die Menschheit in dem Prozeß, den sie gegen sich selber angestrengt hat, mit in die Luft zu jagen.“ Reinhart Koselleck: 1959, p. 1.

²²⁷ Heinz Gollwitzer: Review in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 11. Jg., 1960, p. 304. Gollwitzer (1908-1993) was a Evangelical theologian, author and socialist. As a student of Karl Barth, he was engaged in the Bekennende Kirche during National Socialism. Due to his critical attitude towards the regime, he was punished in various ways. Among other things, his refusal to do military service meant that he was sent to the Eastern Front as a sanitary helper. In 1950, he became a professor in theology in Bonn, and in 1957 a professor at the institute of evangetic theology at Freie Universität Berlin. In the post-war period, Gollwitzer was active in the anti-nuclear-weapons demonstrations in the 1950s and in the student revolts and the protests against the American intervention in Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For the ways in which other contemporary reviewers criticized the narrow analytical focus in *Kritik und Krise*, see for example Kurt Schilling: Review in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, Bd. XLVI, 1960, p. 147-153; Leo Franke: Review in *Philosophische Literaturanzeiger*, 14, 1961, p. 275-277.

²²⁸ On account of its biased and pessimistic view on the past and the present, *Kritik und Krise* has also been read with reserved opinions outside of Germany. In his review of the second edition, the Czech historian Bedrich Loewenstein thus called the analysis “a highly one-sided interpretation.” According to Loewenstein, with its overemphasis on the parallels between the enlightenment and the 1950s and reliance on an existential-decisionist conception of politics, *Kritik und Krise* presented an interpretation that was “not fair to the enlightenment.” Bedrich Loewenstein: Review in the *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1976, p. 122-124. The English historian T.C.W. Blanning found the 1988 English translation “elusive and insubstantial” and compared the analysis with “a minuet, in which the dancer displays much skill and grace but ends up exactly where he started.” T.C.W. Blanning: Review in *German History*, vol. 7. 1989, p. 265-266. Impressed by Koselleck’s analytical skill, John Mackrell thought only “Spengleareans (...) likely to swallow the author’s thesis whole (...)” John Mackrell: Review in *History*, vol. 74, 1989, p. 93-94.

²²⁹ An excellent appraisal of the strengths and the biases in Koselleck’s dissertation is found in Sisko Haikala: 1997, vol. 1, p. 70-86. See also Jason Edwards: 2007; Anthony J. La Vopa: 1992; Jeremy Pompkin: 1991.

²³⁰ See for example Reinhart Koselleck: 1988, p. 1-4; Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 57.

However, this does not mean that Koselleck ever theorized the ideal of a rational, informed and consensus-based practice of public politics that Habermas's sketched out in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* and which he has elaborated in many of his later works. In his perspectives on the enlightenment, the public sphere and on the conditions of human communication, Koselleck continued to focus on secrecy instead of openness, conflict instead of consensus and on the existence of 'friends' and 'enemies' rather than on equal opportunities between discussion partners, and he would often, indirectly and directly, point to how his views on these issues differed from those of Habermas as a way to delineate his viewpoints and positions.²³¹

Kritik und Krise was relatively soon taken up and recognized as a 'classic' in the field of enlightenment studies, where it has been particularly praised for illuminating the social and radical dimensions of the enlightenment.²³² In recent years, however, political theorists have in paid increasing attention to its perspective on how the meaning of politics is always defined in an ongoing conflict and contestation between political actors. What they draw from *Kritik und Krise* is inspiration for how to study the form of such contestation, the ways it changes over time, and the role of linguistic expressions in political conflict. And due to its emphasis on the historical character of politics, and the close connection between social settings and political language, they deduce from *Kritik und Krise* (and in Koselleck's later work) an understanding of politics, and of the processes and actions in which politics is made, that is different than the interpretations found in Habermas as well as in Schmitt.²³³

²³¹ One example of this is found in Koselleck's challenge of Habermas's ideal of *herrschaftsfreier Diskurs* (see Reinhart Koselleck: 1987, p. 17.): that is, the contention that we can critically evaluate political life from the perspective of a rational consensus that is attained in a 'domination-free' (*herrschaftsfrei*) practical discourse. What Koselleck specifically challenged in this ideal is its reliance on a suspension of time. According to Koselleck, temporal scarcity is always a constitutive element of the political situation, and in many instances decisions must be taken within a temporal horizon that is not infinite: due to the lack of time to reach a broad consensus, these decisions must be taken by a limited number of people and often against the desires and aspirations of other people (see the excellent comments in Kari Palonen: "The History of Concepts as a Style of Political Theorizing. Quentin Skinner's and Reinhart Koselleck's Subversion of Normative Political Theory", *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 1, nr. 1, 2000, p. 100). From this basis, Koselleck sees in the ideal of *herrschaftsfreier Diskurs* not only a disregard of the role of power struggles in politics, but also a disregard of the fundamental structures of what is possible in history and politics. Much of Koselleck's historical writing was directed against such ideals, and his challenge of the ideal of *herrschaftsfreier Diskurs* is one of among various examples of how Koselleck came to conceive of Habermas as an intellectual counterpart against whom he defined his positions and concepts after *Kritik und Krise*. To be sure, Koselleck remained the more sceptical of the two. He consistently argued that politics, science and technology do not merely run along a predestined and frictionless schemes, but that they are created by concrete people with specific aims, and that there is always an ongoing fight between 'friends' and 'enemies' involved in defining any political agenda – and the very meaning of politics.

²³² The list of studies in the field taking up themes from *Kritik und Krise* is far too long to be listed here.

²³³ For the latest examples in the Anglophone literature, see Jason Edwards: 2006; Jason Edwards: "The ideological interpellation of individuals as combatants: An encounter between Reinhart Koselleck and Michel Foucault", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12 (1), 2007, p. 49-66. The most comprehensive attempt to apply (and

In the 1960s, however, it was *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* and not *Kritik und Krise* that became the most influential theory on the public sphere in Germany, where it reflected the contemporary political atmosphere, characterized by attempts to reform practically every societal sphere in a more democratic direction. Whereas Habermas undoubtedly was satisfied with his reputation of being a democratizer, Koselleck felt misrepresented as a ‘conservative’ and ‘Schmittian’ historical-philosophical pessimist in Habermas’s review.²³⁴ Yet, because other commentators similar to Habermas connected Koselleck with a circle of people that were affiliated with Schmitt in the 1950s,²³⁵ he acquired a reputation of being a ‘Schmittian’ that was difficult to escape. In fact, according to a recent interview with Koselleck, in which he described how his acknowledgement to Schmitt in *Kritik und Krise* was met with widespread distrust in German academia, his reputation as a ‘Schmittian’ even caused him to be omitted from the list of applicants to a position in Konstanz.²³⁶

At the same time, the reviews of *Kritik und Krise* portrayed Koselleck as an outsider to the historical profession. Not because his highly independent project aimed to renew the theoretical-methodological fundament of the discipline, but because Koselleck’s narrow approach to the past, together with his strong focus on the present and his use of analytical features from scholars outside the profession, did not match the standards of ‘normal’ historical writing. In the opening sentence of his review, Helmut Kuhn thus wrote: “The book in front of us is not a piece of historical writing. One might define it as a historical-philosophical situational analysis that is based on historical erudition.”²³⁷ Estimating every chapter of the book to be greatly inspired by the ‘spirit’ (*Geist*) of Carl Schmitt (“who occasionally looks Th. Adorno over his shoulder”), Kuhn concluded: “We might judge it as the work of a promising beginner, who is still is on the path to finding his own approach.”²³⁸

The only entirely enthusiastic review of *Kritik und Krise* appeared in the journal *Das*

further develop) Koselleck’s writings in the field of political theory has been made by the Finnish political scientist Kari Palonen to whom we return in chapter five.

²³⁴ See for example the comments in Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 56.

²³⁵ We shall return to the circle around Schmitt in chapter five.

²³⁶ See Reinhart Koselleck: 2003, p. 75. As late as 1965, Koselleck is mentioned in an article by the political scientist Christian Graf von Krockow – a fierce critic of Schmitt – in which Krockow warned against the authoritarian alternative to the German democracy that Ernst Forsthoff and other ‘associates’ of Schmitt allegedly argued for in the journal *Der Staat*. Christian Graf von Krockow: “Staatsideologie oder demokratisches Bewusstsein. Die deutsche Alternative”, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, VI. Jg, 1965, p. 118-131. For more recent readings of *Kritik und Krise* as a conservative book, see for example Michael Schwartz: 1993 and Peter Uwe Hohendahl: 1995. For a reading of *Kritik und Krise* that is also very critical of Koselleck’s portrayal of the enlightenment, see Franz Leander Fillafer: The Enlightenment on Trial: Reinhart Koselleck’s Interpretation of *Aufklärung*, Franz Leander Fillafer, Edward Q. Wang (ed.): *The Many Faces of Clío: Cross-Cultural Approaches to Historiography*, Oxford 2007, p. 322-345.

²³⁷ Helmut Kuhn: 1961, p. 666.

²³⁸ Helmut Kuhn: 1961, p. 668

Historisch-Politische Buch. Considering his role in the conceptualization of *Kritik und Krise*, and the fact that he was thanked in the introduction, it is somewhat remarkable that Carl Schmitt authored the review.²³⁹ In one of the many interesting passages in the review, Schmitt described how, in contrast to the other reviewers, he saw in Koselleck's study an innovation in the study of history and in the understanding of politics:

“The book is, in spite of its excellent conceptual- and word-historical analyses, not a history of ideas in the style of Meinecke's *Idee der Staatsräson*; nor is it a materialist historical dialectic in the manner of Mehring's *Lessing-Legend*. It is much more the thoroughly concrete enforcement of the historical insight that every period, with the questions and answers of the historical situation, makes its own concept of the political, which must be understood in order to grasp or handle that period.”²⁴⁰

With these sentences, Schmitt pointed to some of the most important analytical aspects that Koselleck introduced in *Kritik und Krise* and reused, refined and elaborated on in his later work. The most important of these features can be divided into three features that are briefly outlined in the following.

The first feature concerns the ideal-type for the development of the modern world from the French Revolution onwards that portrays modernity as characterized by a dangerous, irresponsible and utopian mode of political thought. This ideal-type involves a critique of the modern world, that is, a critique of its exaggerated focus on the future, its exaggerated and destructive claims of 'rationality', 'equality' and 'freedom' and its inability to establish a political system in which politics and morality co-exist and are balanced in a responsible way.

²³⁹ Carl Schmitt: Review in *Das Historisch-Politische Buch*, Jg. VII, 1959, p. 301-302. Koselleck and Schmitt spoke about the review in their correspondence. On 3 June 1959, Koselleck wrote: “Wenn überhaupt, empfinde ich es [his acknowledgement to Schmitt in the introduction to *Kritik und Krise*] als einen möglichen Einwand gegen eine Besprechung von Ihrer Seite, dass Sie – wie jedem Leser ersichtlich – an den Genese des Buches durch die Gespräche, die ich mit Ihnen führen durfte.“ RW265: 8150: 3/6-1959. A letter written 15 days later suggests that Schmitt's reflections on the applied method in the review were prompted by a request made by Koselleck. Presumably as an answer to a question posed by Schmitt as to whether Koselleck had any specific wishes for the review, the latter wrote: “Was der Leser-Publikum der Hist.Pol.Hf.e betrifft, wo wäre ein Hinweis auf die Methode vielleicht ganz nützlich, um den sicher erfolgenden Einwänden vorzubeugen: ja, aber in Hannover oder in Schweden oder unter Joseph II war das alles ganz anders: was natürlich stimmt, aber die Fragestellung nicht berührt.“ RW265: 8151: 18/6-1959. Schmitt was a quite active reviewer in the *Das Historisch-Politische Buch* in this period. The journal originated within the framework of the *Rankegesellschaft*: a society that was founded in 1952 by staunchly national-conservative historians, who had lost their academic posts due to their involvement in National Socialism. Michael Salewski: “Der Ranke-Gesellschaft und ein Halbes Jahrhundert”, Jürgen Elvert, Susanne Krauss (Hg.): *Historische Debatten und Kontroversen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 2003, p. 124-143.

²⁴⁰ Carl Schmitt: 1959, p. 302. An excerpt of Schmitt's review was later printed on the back-page of the reprinted versions of *Kritik und Krise*. In the cited passage, Schmitt referred to the book *Die Lessing-Legende* (1882), written by the German publicist, politician and Marxist historian Franz Mehring (1846-1919). The book was directed against the patriotic school of German literary historians who tried to prove that the renaissance of German literature in the eighteenth century was due to the rise of Prussia as a European power, and that there was a close connection between the despotism of the Prussian king Frederick II and the birth of classical German literature.

The second theme concerns the theoretical-methodological approach with which Koselleck described and deconstructed this ideal-type of the modern world. This approach combines interpretations of texts with explorations of the social-historical contexts, and it is practiced in the form of a conceptual approach that is based on two theoretical assumptions. The first is that central political and societal experiences of an epoch can be deciphered through an analysis of its key concepts; the second is that concepts are notions that are created in historically concrete situations and by different historical actors that can use concepts to shape and create history.

The third theme is the deeper theoretical framework on which Koselleck's conceptual approach is based, that is, his anthropological outline of what creates and structures all possible human history. This outline was developed as a critique of and as an antidote to utopian and relativistic ideas that Koselleck argued characterize historical philosophy and 'historicism'. Combining a theory of knowledge and a practical-political dimension, it aimed to provide a purely formalistic way of understanding and containing the potential conflict in human societies. The categories encompassed in the outline became important in Koselleck's subsequent work as a theoretical precondition that he referred to in order to thematize history in the plural. And as the categories in his empirical analysis also came to serve as a reference- or meeting point from which Koselleck analyzed and estimated human history and politics, they provided his writings with a certain analytical, thematic and argumentative unity.

However, this is not to say that the outline became *the* key feature in Koselleck's historical writing. First of all, the outline certainly does not appear in all his texts, and, secondly, it is rarely introduced by itself, but most often alongside a variety of more specific theoretical-methodological frameworks and alongside other anthropological categories that Koselleck presented at a later stage of his career. Due to the many functions fulfilled by the outline and its undefined relations vis-à-vis the other theoretical-frameworks and anthropological categories in his writings, it is (as we will return to in chapter six) difficult to estimate the precise epistemological status of the outline and its relation to other epistemologies.

This difficulty also pertains to Koselleck's letter to Schmitt from the early 1950s. The letter is characterized by a very imaginative, but also a somewhat chaotic and unelaborated way of connecting strong assumptions and interpretations, which are deduced from the writings of only a few scholars that were well known to the receiver of the letter and therefore not described in depth. However, the overall intention of the letter is clear: to establish an alternative and antidote to ideas of history in the singular. It is also clear that Koselleck took

refuge from utopianism and relativism in anthropological and timeless counter-concepts that are supposed to provide a perspective on all history, whilst simultaneously bypassing universal and progressive notions of history.

Still, Koselleck's break with the historical-philosophical ideas of unity, linearity and progression in history in relation to *Kritik und Krise* was less clear than he thought. In spite of his attempt to thematize the possibilities of writing history in the plural, his interpretation of the modern world in the dissertation relied on the same conception of world history as one progressive movement that he attempted to do away with. There was here an unresolved tension in Koselleck's thought (and reception processes) between a choice for the universal narrative and one for pluralism. This tension was presumably caused by the inspiration that he found in the work of Löwith and Schmitt. Like them, Koselleck criticized historical philosophy, while he at the same time portrayed world history as composed of different, but unified epochs that succeeded each other (the Greek, the Christian and the modern in the case of Löwith; the pre-modern and the modern in the case of Schmitt).²⁴¹ Regardless of their specific origins, certain universalistic and historical-philosophical traits continued to inform many of Koselleck's writings in the 1950s and 1960s, where he refined, developed and added to the discursive features that he took with him from *Kritik und Krise*.

²⁴¹ Interesting in this respect is Hans Robert Jauss's description of how several attempts at confronting German 'historicism' and idealism among the students at the University of Heidelberg in the 1940s and 1950s often ended up in a replication of its discursive features. According to Jauss, a striking dimension of the confrontations with 'historicism' among the first generation of post-students in Heidelberg was that these confrontations were established with the use of a philosophical 'lodestars', such as Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, who in fact also represented the German idealistic tradition. See Hans Robert Jauss: 1982. Jauss also states that the confrontations with 'historicism' among the first generation of post-war students in Heidelberg rarely had practical consequences in the form of direct political engagement inside or outside of the university. This also holds for Koselleck.

4. Social history between reform and revolution

After submitting his dissertation at the end of 1953, Koselleck moved to Bristol, England, where he worked as a lecturer from 1954 until the autumn of 1955. Following some administrative delays, Koselleck returned to finish his oral exams in Heidelberg in January 1954. According to a letter he afterwards wrote to Schmitt, the exams went place in a very peaceful atmosphere.²⁴² Ernst Forsthoff, whom Koselleck had met only briefly twice before, was his examiner for constitutional law (*Staatsrecht*). The historical questions he posed on this subject resulted in “a conversation that always ended up in the contemporary situation.” In philosophy, Hans-Georg Gadamer examined Koselleck on Descartes, Leibniz and Heidegger. The majority of his questions, however, were focused on Kant, and here he let Koselleck talk freely on “the historical philosophical chord that runs through Kant’s work.” Finally, in history Koselleck ‘took a walk with’ Johannes Kühn “through World History focusing on the example of Germany and its historical motto ‘always to late’.” The two ‘magna’ and one ‘summa’ Koselleck received in history meant that in February 1954 he could look back on the oral exams with a “certain contentment.”

Koselleck had been somewhat more worried about how Johannes Kühn and the second reader Karl Löwith would react to the dissertation itself. He feared first of all possible criticisms of the applied method, for its not being neutral.²⁴³ “Professor Kühn is so tolerant a person that he acknowledges my question of interest (*Fragestellung*), but I fear that with the present work I have already reached the limits of his tolerance (...)”, Koselleck wrote to Schmitt in November 1953. However, Koselleck added, he knew that Kühn was in agreement with his verdict on Meinecke, and as for the report from his second reader, Karl Löwith, Koselleck saw no necessary contradiction (*notwendigem Widerspruch*) between his work and Löwith’s “historical philosophical skepticism.”²⁴⁴

Eventually, Koselleck received the second best grade ‘magna cum laude’ for his doctorate;

²⁴² RW-265-8135: 14.2.1954. In his speech in honour of the 50th anniversary of his dissertation, Koselleck talked in more detail about the oral exams with Gadamer and Kühn. See Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 45 and 51.

²⁴³ He wrote: “Wohl aber wird man sich auf die vermeintliche Neutralität einer wissenschaftlichen Methodik berufen können, um mir im Namen eines methodisch jeweils anderen Zugriffs Unwissenschaftlichkeit vorwerfen zu können.” RW-265-8134: 29.11.1953. These lines seem to attack the notion of ‘scientism’: the belief in a stable and neutral method. If Kühn and Löwith would ask for a ‘proper method’, Koselleck could seemingly only express a deep disagreement in response, since he was of the opinion that science is never neutral, but bound to pragmatic contexts, since one always want to do something with it – to pursue certain aims.

²⁴⁴ RW-265-8134: 29.11.1953. Koselleck wrote: “So bleibt das Referat von Professor Löwith noch abzuwarten, zu dessen geschichts-philosophischer Skepsis. wenn sie nicht der Emigration entspränge! – meine Arbeit keineswegs in notwendigem Widerspruch stehen muss.” With the sub-clause, Koselleck seemingly expressed that he regarded Löwith’s emigration as a separating, distinguishing experience that was not reletable to his own work.

his worries turned out to be unfounded.²⁴⁵ The most important criticism made by Kühn and Löwith was, as Koselleck expected, directed against the method he had employed in his dissertation, which oscillated back and forth between three academic fields: history, philosophy and sociology.²⁴⁶

In this chapter, we will see how, in his next major work after *Kritik und Krise*, the social historical habilitation *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, which he defended at the University of Heidelberg in 1965 and published in 1967, Koselleck once again applied an interdisciplinary approach, but in a way that was less controversial vis-à-vis the standards of the discipline. In fact, one of the aims of this chapter is to demonstrate how, in the years between his dissertation and *Habilitation*, Koselleck reshaped and repositioned himself from being an innovator and an outsider into a more conventional and respected scholar in the field.

The chapter proceeds by means of three sections. Each maintains a perspective both on Koselleck's intellectual production and on his attempt to navigate in the discipline. It begins by illuminating Koselleck's intellectual activities from 1953 to 1957, the period during which he first worked as a lecturer at the University of Bristol and then as an assistant to Johannes Kühn in Heidelberg. With a focus on the intellectual processes of reception, we will see how Koselleck developed a theory of the historical dynamics of political geography with which he not only substantiated his arguments concerning the need to respect the anthropological condition of human beings, but also developed an analytical framework that became an integral part of his historical thinking more generally.²⁴⁷ With a focus on the course of Koselleck's career in the 1950s, we will in addition see how the processes in which he was 'made' as a historian was to a certain extent a result of coincidences, unforeseen events and unexpected choices that he was facing and had to deal with at the time.

The second part of the chapter deals with how, under the supervision of Werner Conze in Heidelberg, Koselleck conceptualized the *Habilitation Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*. On the one hand, we will see how, in his work on the Prussian *Vormärz*,

²⁴⁵ Koselleck later explained that Kühn was in doubt whether the work should be given *summa* or *magna cum lauda*, and that it was Löwith's decision to give the *magna cum lauda*. Koselleck was happy merely with the fact that his dissertation was accepted at all. Reinhart Koselleck: 2006, p. 51.

²⁴⁶ RW-265-8137/1: 7.6.1954. Moreover, whilst approving of what he called the "geistigen Spitzenansatz", Kühn criticized what he labelled the "naive Gleichsetzung von Aufklärung und Bürgertum" and anticipated in his report much of the later criticism of the study. See Ute Daniel: 2006, p. 171. See also Koselleck's comments in his letter to Schmitt from 5 November 1954 (RW265-8131/1) in which he refers to Kühn's proposal to prepare the dissertation for publication. Kühn had two main suggestions for revisions: the first was to abandon the use of the broad notion of the *Bürgertum* (see above). The second was to get rid of the notion of dualism, since this concept belonged in the history of religion and was not applicable to the political tendencies of the 18th century. Koselleck was unsure how to replace the two words. Eventually, he got rid of the word 'dualism' in the headline, but continued to employ both words in the analysis.

²⁴⁷ This is another aspect that has only received very little attention in the literature about Koselleck.

Koselleck had to comply with the standards and norms of Conze's social historical program, even if this approach to history did not entirely fit his analytical tastes. On the other hand, we will see how Koselleck not only learned and adapted to, but also refined the approach to social history, first of all by outlining a temporal-historical framework that was related to and became crucial for his attempts at deconstructing notions of history in singular and of thematizing histories in the plural.

Finally, via an analysis of his contribution to the book *Das Zeitalter der europäischen Revolution 1740-1848* from 1969, the chapter describes the intellectual program, characterized by pragmatism, innovation and ambiguity, which Koselleck pursued in the first twenty years of his academic career.

From Heidelberg to Bristol: From land to sea

Throughout his stay in England, besides teaching, Koselleck worked hard to find a new academic topic, preferably for his habilitation, and to find the proper academic setting in which to carry out the work. "The question of what I should focus on now depends very much on my current position", he wrote to Schmitt in February 1954.²⁴⁸

Koselleck had – he added – recently been offered a second year of lecturing in Bristol. Although the position did not offer the most promising perspectives for the future, he was tempted to accept, since with a good salary, paid holidays and a reasonably amount of free time, he would be well set to work on an English theme and – possibly – be able to finish his studies in the USA by means of a scholarship.

In Koselleck's opinion, one of the advantages of staying in Bristol would be that he could continue on the path of his earlier work: "to investigate the philosophy of progress (and of circularity) of the eighteenth century with its political and historical implications." However, Koselleck did describe a range of other academic topics to Schmitt, which he had only recently started to look into, and which he hoped to pursue along the lines of, or rather to combine with his earlier work. "I do not know", he wrote, "if there is anything new to be said about this range of questions: England-Continent, Europe, America, world-unity and revolution – that goes beyond your ascertainments (Feststellungen)." He therefore listed three further topics that he considered less exhausted and on which he could work from England:

²⁴⁸ RW-265-8135: 14.2.1954. Koselleck mentioned a suggestion of Kühn's: "an einer Geschichte des Neuplatonismus in der NZ zu arbeiten, was ich bestimmt nicht tun werde, zumal [Jacob] Taubes das Feld schon weitgehend bearbeitet hat und dies wohl noch tut." Koselleck was presumably referring to Taubes's book *Abendländische Eschatologie*, Bern 1947, which Koselleck included in the bibliography of *Kritik und Krise*.

the ‘democratization’ of England; the role of the British Empire in this process; and finally, Marx and Disraeli.

Although Koselleck was to pursue some of these topics later, in February 1954, when he wrote the cited letter to Schmitt, he was very uncertain about his future academic plans. This uncertainty was further spurred on by an offer he had received from the sociologist Heinrich Popitz during the Christmas break, to possibly become an assistant at the newly founded *Dortmunder Institut für Sozialforschung*. Focusing on sociological analysis of the technical-industrial age, the institute in Dortmund was to become one of the most important centers for social research in the early Federal Republic. At the time, it already had numerous prominent sociologists connected to it, such as Hans Freyer, Günther Ipsen and the younger Helmut Schelsky.²⁴⁹ From what Koselleck knew about the institute, first of all from Hanno Kesting, who was already employed there, it was an interesting place, and as he told Schmitt, he was tempted to join it.

Koselleck’s first publication after he submitted his dissertation *Kritik und Krise* reflects both some of his academic interests and dilemmas in the mid-1950s. It was a rather remarkable fourteen page article called “Bristol, die ‘zweite Stadt’ Englands. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Skizze”, which was published in 1955 in the journal *Soziale Welt* that emanated from the *Dortmunder Institut für Sozialforschung*. In the article, Koselleck gave the impression of wanting to simultaneously fulfill the demands of the journal (of illuminating the processes of industrialization); to continue developing his earlier work (on the origins of modern political thought); as well as to include his newly acquired interest in certain Anglo-Saxon and global themes (with a focus on the democratization of England).

He did this, in a narrow sense, by focusing on the reasons for and consequences of the industrial revolution, through describing the role of a group of merchants in the city of Bristol so as to describe Bristol’s social-historical significance as the second-most important city in England from around 1200 until 1900. In addition, from a broader perspective, focusing on

²⁴⁹ Helmut Schelsky (1912-1984) belonged to most influential sociologists in post-war Germany until around 1970. Trained by Freyer in Leipzig, Schelsky moved early on within radical-conservative circles and supported National Socialism through his scholarly activities in the 1930s. In the post-war period, he trained a new generation of very different sociologists at the institute in Dortmund, and he was later the *spiritus rector* of the University of Bielefeld and subsequently a director of its *Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung (ZIF)*. When – in the end of the 1960s – attention was drawn to his activities at a student, Schelsky chose to resign from this post. In 1970, he nevertheless decided to take up a position as a professor in sociology also in Bielefeld. Günther Ipsen (1899-1984) took his doctorate (1922) and his *Habilitation* (1925) in Leipzig, where in 1926 he achieved a professorship. In 1933, he went to Königsberg, where he – as we shall return to – became one of the fathers of ‘Volksgeschichte’. In 1939, he moved to Vienna, where he was discharged in 1945. In 1951, he got the position in Dortmund, but had to leave in 1961, due to a problem-ridden relationship with his employees, not least with the two candidates for his succession, Helmut Schelsky and Richardt Behrendt. See Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 66. For information concerning the institute in Dortmund, see Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 140-144, 199-207.

the origins of liberalism and the special relation between state and society that it embraces, he described England's move into political modernity and of her role in modern world history. In order to connect these topics, Koselleck used a narrative structure rather than making a strict analysis, and he merged a social-historical approach with a somewhat peculiar geographical-mythological approach. He argued that England's historical-political development was most heavily influenced by the specific element surrounding the country: the sea. Since this interpretation rested on several discursive features that were to dominate his historical thinking in the 1950s, the text is examined in detail.

At the beginning of the article, Koselleck introduced the group of Bristol merchants. He noted that these figures had from an early stage held important wealth privileges, such as the monopoly on tax and trade, "and as such the de facto monopoly of power (*Herrschaftsmonopol*)" in the city. (362) There were strong similarities between the merchants and the enlightenment thinkers in *Kritik und Krise*. They were "modern", "individual" and "independent" (364), and they secured their interests and privileges through principles of exclusivity in their fellowships, which manifested themselves as independent societies, and by holding municipal posts.

However, the "turn to modernity" (362) took place in a very different way in England than on the continent. In England, Koselleck argued, the absolutely crucial event in this respect was what he labeled the "turn to the ocean" (*Wendung zur See*) (362): this translated to the decision, taken already in the sixteenth century, to turn to the sea and to conquer the great oceans. This move had enormous consequences not only for the merchants in Bristol, but also for the city itself and for England – and even for the course of world history.

In their attempt to set out to explore "the mysteries of the Atlantic Ocean" and "the secrets of the open West" in the 16th century, the adventurous merchants used Bristol's "advantageous geographical location" (364) and allied themselves with experts who were trained in the new geographical sciences. As such, they were prepared to play an important role in the "battle of the world seas" (365) – a conflict over the space, resources and domination of the world. According to Koselleck, this fight soon acquired its own particular characteristics: "The battle of the world seas was a battle of secrets: the secrets of nature and the secrets of the others." (365)

In the battle for the new world, he added, victory soon became more important than a clean conscience, as in their conquering of the oceans, the merchants did not restrain from solving the lack of capital in the eighteenth century through piracy – a venture that was supported financially by the English Queen in the fight between Protestantism and

Catholicism for the spaces and the treasures of the world. Moreover, after the civil war, from which they emerged relatively unscathed, the merchants allied themselves with the English government, whose main aim was to turn England into the leading sea power. This was achieved via industrial-technological developments, expansion overseas and increasing trade, the convergence of which turned England into a world power and brought profit to the Bristol merchants, who, among other things, secured themselves a leading position in the lucrative trade of gold, ivory and slaves in Africa by defending their monopolies from other interest groups.

The African trade, and the general behavior of the colonizing British Empire, was characterized by exploitation, robbery and humiliation: “It is not the place”, Koselleck wrote, “to go into all the atrocities committed by the brutal captains or the arguments with which the Bristol merchants tried to justify them: the well-being of the colonies, the economic existence of the city, and even the trade and the income of the country depended on this” (371) According to Koselleck, the merchant’s political power was thus not only based on secrecy and exclusion, but also on self-justified crime and violence.²⁵⁰

Before the nineteenth century, when the city of Bristol had, as a result of developments connected to the industrial revolution and the ‘epoch of technology’, lost its widely recognized significance, the merchants began to use the ‘outer’ power to direct their ‘inner’ activities into public religious, philanthropic and pedagogical undertakings. By changing “their open political power” into “a quiet societal power”, operating as a “political club” (374) within the state, the merchants were able to maintain their leading position in English society.

Affirming that in spite of certain changes, the merchant society had kept its political function and significance, Koselleck finished his article by subtly linking the historical rise of liberalism and the formation of the English state to the present social-political situation in England. “Hence, as long as England maintains that tradition”, he wrote in the very last sentence, “the state does not break away from society.” (374)²⁵¹

Obviously, the article on Bristol evidenced a clear continuation in Koselleck’s work on the

²⁵⁰ Arguably, these notions reproduce a specific set of polemic anti-British topoi from the period of WWI, although Koselleck frees his text from the moralizing overtones of nationalist war propaganda. His recurrence to these topoi was most probably a result of his reception of Schmittian geopolitics, as we will see in the following. For the historical background, see Kurt Flasch: *Die geistige Mobilmachung: Die deutschen Intellektuellen und der Erste Weltkrieg*, Berlin 2000 and Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Hg): *Kultur und Krieg: Die Rolle der Intellektuellen, Künstler und Schriftsteller im Ersten Weltkrieg*, München 1996.

²⁵¹ In his letters to Schmitt, on the basis of personal experience, Koselleck gave the impression that in his opinion the peculiar relation between state and society was still omnipresent in England. He thus described how the university in Bristol as a “halbes Wirtschaftsunternehmen” that was led “mit pädagogischen Intentionen” fulfilled societal rather than social functions. To this he added, that it was via their particular “Klubleben” that English academics gained their “Selbstsicherheit”. RW265-8133/1: 8.7.1953.

origins of political modernity, with its focus on the relation between state and society, and on the emergence of international law seen from a global perspective. However, the article also highlights at least two new dimensions in Koselleck's historical writing as he moved from Heidelberg to Bristol – from the land to the sea. The first is the attention that he devoted to the origins of English political modernity, including the important events of the industrial-technological revolution, overseas expansion and the unusual relationship between state and society, to which he attributed the rise of the British Empire. The second change is the way that he used the striking explanatory framework to elevate geography into the vital factor for state formation, political organization – and thereby into the central vehicle of world history as such. This explanatory framework was to become central in Koselleck's historical-political thinking in the mid-1950s. But where did Koselleck find the inspiration for this? And what role did it play in his contemporary writings – and in his historical thinking more generally?

In answer to the first question, it seems clear that Koselleck again drew extensively upon the writings of Carl Schmitt. More concretely, Koselleck drew on a discourse, including a variety of themes and arguments, which since the mid-1930s Schmitt had presented in his work on international law and synthesized in *Der Nomos der Erde*; the book that Koselleck – as we already have seen – made use of in *Kritik und Krise* to conceptualize his idea of the 'world historical crisis'.

In Schmitt's *Der Nomos der Erde*, the word *Nomos* (law) is used to refer to an eternal division and order of political space. All political organization, national as well as international – so goes the basic argument of the book – must be understood as a continuous battle between political powers for the earth's spaces and resources, a constant *Nehmen-Teilen-Weiden* (meaning a constant taking, distributing and producing). Moreover, starting from the belief that nation states developed their ideals of state formation, political ethics and international warfare relating to the element surrounding them, Schmitt further argued that land and sea had long designated two distinctively different political modes of organization.

Specifically, along the same lines as Koselleck, Schmitt described how through its discovery and increasing domination of the sea in the 17th century England had created an open world of colonization, slavery and piracy, which was fundamentally opposed to the absolutist continental states that based their political organization on war, diplomacy and taxation. Without the strongly centralized kind of state that existed on the continent, England instead nurtured the dynamic activity of privateers, merchants, pirates, etc and through this was able to manifest a unique position as a power both inside and outside the European inter-state system. Furthermore, Schmitt argued, the English maritime empire had initiated and

contributed to the breakdown of the traditional European power-state and the traditional system of international law, thus paving the way for the blurry, self-justifying and discriminating concept of war promoted by liberalism.²⁵²

Written as a comment on the contemporary political situation in which USA and USSR were manifesting themselves as superpowers, Schmitt ended his book by reflecting on the consequences that the exploration of a new element, air, and the new technologies of warfare and communication would have for future international law, and modes of political power and organization. In other words, Schmitt attempted to interpret the new *Nomos der Erde*.

Geography, technology and politics

Together with his correspondence with Schmitt, Koselleck's first writings after *Kritik und Krise* show that his thoughts in the mid-1950s drew on the political-geographical discourse, ideas and arguments that he to a considerable degree derived from Schmitt's work on international law. Through their correspondence, we can follow how Koselleck continued to discuss such matters with Schmitt whilst he was in Bristol.²⁵³ They discussed the historical dynamics of political geography: the new world order that would arise from these dynamics, the relations between politics, power and technology that unfold in this order; and the consequences of these new relations. Being in Bristol and having direct access to English and American books, Koselleck kept Schmitt up to date on the latest relevant literature – either by sending books directly to Plettenberg or by providing Schmitt with lengthy abstracts in his letters.²⁵⁴ Schmitt often replied by sending Koselleck his latest publications. As we will see, in the comments on Schmitt's publications that he provided in these letters, Koselleck outlined a set of interpretations of interests that were inspired by Schmitt, but framed and developed according to individual aims and concerns.

One of the books Schmitt sent to Koselleck was *Gespräche über die Macht und den*

²⁵² According to Schmitt, liberalism always defines its own wars as 'just' and defines its opponents as 'criminals' (he uses the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations as examples), and in this process, political language is replaced by a moral language that opens a path to wars against 'enemies of humanity'. The above account of Schmitt's political-geographical analysis of international law from the late 1930s onwards is taken from Gopal Balakrishnan: 2000, p. 226-252.

²⁵³ In several of the letters, Koselleck refers to both recent and forthcoming visits to Plettenberg.

²⁵⁴ Some of these books will be mentioned in the following. In a letter from November 1953, Koselleck recommended an introduction to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* by Michael Oakeshott (London 1946) and added that he would be happy to send Schmitt the book, along with any other English book Schmitt might be interested in. RW265-8134: 29/11-1953. At a certain point, Koselleck started to send the bills for the books that he tracked down for Schmitt and ensured that the latter could pay these directly to either a Post-Check-Account or to an account of Blackwell's Booksellers in Süddeutsche Bank. RW265-8148: 28/11-1955.

Zugang zum Machthaber from 1954;²⁵⁵ Dealing with questions of the nature of and access to power, one of its central arguments is that the early modern concepts of autonomy and sovereignty had been dissolved in the transition to the modern world and that political power had been removed from the hands of human beings. More concretely, while humans were officially still in power and considered themselves powerful, they were in reality dependent on invisible and indirect forces of authority operating behind the political scene as well as on technological means of power that were beyond their control. In line with this, Schmitt argued that technology had developed into the determining factor *sine qua non* in all human affairs, including politics, and he argued that it was only possible to understand this development and to interpret the future *Nomos der Erde* by scrutinizing the dynamics of political geography.²⁵⁶

In a letter to Schmitt written in November 1954, Koselleck told him that *Gespräche über die Macht und den Zugang zum Machthaber* had made him realize “which qualitative changes of politics that have taken place via the expansion of technique.”²⁵⁷ For Koselleck, the invention of the atomic bomb represented the completion of a long technological-political process in which the conditions for exercising power, most notably between a state and its people, had been fundamentally altered. He wrote:

“The relation analyzed by Hobbes between the danger of death and the nature of politics has not only been forgotten, but has consequently been abstractly detached from the people living in a given age. In Hegel, I once read that the invention of gun powder and consequently the indirect methods of killing is the precondition for the individual’s partake in the modern state as a supra-individual unity. One can say that nuclear weapons are the ‘completion’ of this technical-political process. Power is no longer a relation between men, or a ‘force’, as it was still possible for Burckhardt to say; it is itself a potential condition of death, whose bearers are anonymous crowds. The difficulties of ending the state of things seem according to your analysis to be located in a specifically modern dialectic in which all relations of power are embedded today: power is removed from concrete human beings through the entelechy of technique, though it still is in human hands.”

The solution to the ‘problem of power’ was, according to Koselleck, to be located in the right relation that must exist “between a responsible partake in the power and its representation (...).” When this relation had been achieved, he added, the potential dangers inherent in the dialectic between direct and indirect power would be contained as far as it was humanly possible.

Directing the issue of political power to that of the “the stage of world politics of today”,

²⁵⁵ Carl Schmitt: *Gespräch über die Macht und den Zugang zum Machthaber*, Pfullingen 1954.

²⁵⁶ For a perspective on the book, and on how it was related to Schmitt’s strategy of portraying himself as having been disconnected from the circles of power between 1933 and 1945, see Reinhard Mehring: 2001, p. 90-91.

²⁵⁷ RW265-8138/1: 5/11-1954.

Koselleck argued that the two world powers had gained their supremacy through technical development, but without having to exercise actual political work or output. For this reason, he did not view their supremacy as a political achievement, comparable to that of the British Empire, but merely as a byproduct of their power. And for as long, he added, as the USA and the USSR did not acknowledge the helplessness of being only the abstract executors of their apparatuses of power, their “highflying consciousness” (*hochgeschossenes Bewusstsein*)“ has merely to be viewed as a “false consciousness.“ ”This raises the ‘old’ question”, Koselleck continued: “Is it still possible to make hidden power on the European continent apparent and visible in such a way, that the indirect impact of the world powers are reduced to their proper frames.“

However, the letters suggest that neither he nor Schmitt harboured any expectations that a power on the continent would play an important political role on the contemporary political scene. Their attention seemed in the mid-1950s instead to be directed towards Asia, Russia, the Anglo-Saxon spaces, and to the historical dynamics of political geography and political power more generally.

As a way to understand Koselleck’s take on the issue of political power, we might note that he and Schmitt were far from unique in approaching the nature of history and politics and the condition of the modern world through probing the relation between geography, space and technology. During the 1950s, technology had an increasingly pervasive impact on all levels of Western society. New weapons and communication systems transformed the modes of warfare and politics while industrial and cultural innovations altered people’s working conditions, their social relations as well their everyday lives. Human existence, it seemed, was being fundamentally revolutionized, and, whatever the attitude towards the technological development, the ‘age of technology’ was conceived as unstoppable and inevitable. This belief was also held among German intellectuals, who were busy analyzing the question of technology and its influence on modern existence. The question had already dominated many philosophical debates of the interwar period, preoccupying various different philosophical schools, among which the phenomenologists and the representatives of philosophical anthropology. It had been especially virulent in the politically right-wing intellectual milieu of those whom Jeffrey Herf labeled ‘reactionary modernists’, most prominently Ernst Jünger, Freyer, Schmitt, and Heidegger.²⁵⁸

Some of these ‘reactionary modernists’ also belonged to the most widely read authors on

²⁵⁸ See Jeffrey Herf: *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, New York 1986.

the issue in the 1950s, where they adapted their argumentative lines to suit post-World War II politics and society. This was the case with Carl Schmitt, Hans Freyer and Martin Heidegger: who expressed serious concern over the consequences of the development of technology for, respectively, the ‘political’ (Schmitt), the sphere of social relations (Freyer) and the question of ‘Being’ (Heidegger). While the majority of the scholars discussing the technological developments came from the conservative camp, the issue also caught the attention of many liberal and leftwing intellectuals. Common for the debaters, regardless of their political and generational affiliation, was a considerable skepticism towards the increasing technological impact on the human existence and a wish to contain its potentially negative consequences.²⁵⁹

Another widespread feature in the attempts made by philosophers, sociologists and political scientists to analyze the origins, character and consequences of the technological developments, conceived as a key characteristic of modernity, was the replacement of the traditional focus on national history with a global-historical perspective. This trend was also widespread among historians.²⁶⁰ Some historians, such as Gerhard Ritter, had long portrayed the contemporary world as a direct result of the long-lasting fight between geographically opposed empires, civilizations and countries.²⁶¹ Others, such as the social historian Werner Conze, argued that the revolutionary processes of the 18th century, not least the technological developments, had resulted in a historically new dimension of space and time. More concretely, as they saw it, the process triggered by the spatial discoveries and challenges in relation to the overseas expansions, technological developments had resulted in a constant acceleration of time and transgression of spatial boundaries: the result was a much smaller and increasingly united world (*Welteinheit*).²⁶² In this world, they argued, states and societies were not only subjected to permanent and interrelated changes, but also to a new global order that was based on mass politics, modern political ideology, and, in the twentieth century, the confrontation between the geographically opposed East and West.

These global-historical perspectives were applied for a variety of reasons and purposes among German scholars. For some, an emphasis on Germany’s ‘Western’ nature helped ease

²⁵⁹ For a view on the widespread skepticism towards technology in Germany in the 1950s, especially among conservatives, see Paul Nolte: 2000, p. 273-318; Axel Schildt: 1995, p. 324-350.

²⁶⁰ Fritz Fellner: “Nationales und europäisch-atlantisches Geschichtsbild in der Bundesrepublik und im Westen in den Jahren nach Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges”, Ernst Schulin (Hg.): *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg (1945-1965)*, München 1989, p. 213-226.

²⁶¹ Most famous in this respect is Gerhard Ritter: *Machtstaat und Utopie: Vom Streit um die Dämonie der Macht seit Machiavelli and Morus*, München und Berlin 1940, which in the following six years was reprinted six times with the new title *Die Dämonie der Macht. Betrachtungen über Geschichte und Wesen des Machtproblems im Politischen Denken der Neuzeit*. See Christoph Cornelissen: 2001, p. 316-326.

²⁶² Thomas Etzemüller: 2001: p. 268-296; Jin-Sung Chung: 2000, p. 85-104.

German post-war integration into the Atlantic Federation. For others, recourse to geopolitical determinants served to relieve Germany from guilt in relation to World War II and thus to portray German history in a more favourable light. Indeed, this was the case in the writings of many conservative scholars, including Carl Schmitt.

What in analytical terms distinguished Schmitt's work in this field was its particular focus on the dynamics between geography and technology in the age of modernity and the consequences of this for the nature of 'the political'. This was an issue that Schmitt investigated from the perspective of international law and approached through a particular type of analytical 'realism', as unfolded in his magnum opus in the field, *Nomos der Erde*, which emerged as one of the important German and European contributions to the contemporary discussion about the end of territoriality and visions of global order.²⁶³

Several analytical features from Schmitt's work on political geography appear in Koselleck's writings in the mid-1950s. However, Koselleck's position on 'the age of technology', and on questions of political power in the modern world, had a distinctively different political concern and purpose to it than had his mentor's. In general, Koselleck's geopolitical texts from the mid-1950s follow the anthropological and political concerns laid out in the letter to Schmitt, as discussed in chapter 3, such as the insistence on 'finality' and the preoccupation with the current 'world civil war'. The cautious dissociation from Schmittian notions also prevailed.

All these notions are spelled out in more detail in a series of reviews published in various German journals from the mid-1950s onwards. For Koselleck, who was still a young scholar in the process of finding an institution that could fund and support his work, the review-articles functioned as a media through which he used the work of other scholars to voice his own interests and views in an indirect, but nevertheless forceful fashion.

This was the case, for example, in a review-article dealing with writings of (and about) the second president of the USA, John Adams, published in the journal *Neue politische Literatur* in 1955.²⁶⁴ In the course of his introduction to Adams' writings, Koselleck not only presented a set of geopolitical perspectives on the political making and dynamics of the modern world, he also expressed a plea for a mode of political order that respected the human 'finality' and

²⁶³ The book was thus read, reviewed and referred to by scholars from many different fields and countries. For Schmitt's discussions about visions of global order with the Russian philosopher Alexander Kojève (1902-1968) and the French philosopher Raymond Aron (1905-1983), see Jan-Werner Müller: 2003. p. 87-103. For reviews of and references to *Der Nomos der Erde* in German academia, also among historians, see Dirk van Laak: 2002, p. 39, note 106 and p. 223-224. Theodor Schieder was among those writing favorable reviews of the book.

²⁶⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: "Die Wiederentdeckung von John Adams", *Neue politische Literatur*, 1. Jg., 1956, p. 93-104. For another contemporary review that deals with similar themes see Reinhart Koselleck: Review of The Political Writings of James Harrington and of Richard Peters, *Neue Politische Literatur*, 2. Jg., 1957, p. 288-293.

in power is shared between different political bodies, representing both state and society. Koselleck's broader motivation for occupying himself with Adams's political thought was twofold: to formulate a (critical) account of the origins and premises of American foreign and domestic politics, and thus to bring into focus what he perceived as the most fundamental differences between the European and American political "space of horizon" (*Erfahrungshorizont*) (95).²⁶⁵

According to Koselleck, despite being one of the most important political philosophers in the Wars of Independence, Adams did not create a philosophical system. In fact, he practiced only a *method* – that of the polemical discussion. With puritan-like self-confidence, Adams had purportedly conceptualized his entire philosophy as a series of responses to the position of his opponent, be it the democrats, merchants, the Brits, Europe or the ideological French philosophers.

As the first "conscious American" (98) – Koselleck added – Adams first of all realized that Natural Law, like any other law, can be used as an instrument of power, and, in spite of strong objections, Adams managed to include a reference to Natural Law in the Declaration of Rights (1774) with reference to which American settlers could evade the European rules of sovereignty and the colonies could achieve independence and create a new concept of sovereignty. Not long after, Adams' son, John Quincy utilized this insight in his paving of the way for the famous Monroe-Doctrine to gain political independence on behalf of the Americans. The basic premise of the Monroe-Doctrine (one of the central analytical objects in all of Schmitt's writings on international law) – Koselleck explained – is the drawing of a line of American political sovereignty along the Atlantic Ocean. Quite simply, it declares that the American territory is free from the jurisdiction of all European law, and that European law is thus inapplicable on American soil.

Koselleck described the part of Adams' writings that focused on "the principal difference between American and Europe" (a result of the different geographical locations) as full of "aggression", "ideologization" and "propaganda". (99-100) Always locating the aggressor on the other side of the ocean, Adams– Koselleck wrote – showed himself cognizant of the weapons of ideologization (*Waffe der Ideologisierung*) and of the means through which to deploy them outwards.

²⁶⁵ It is interesting that Koselleck here used the notion of *Erfahrungshorizont*, since he in the 1970s introduced the Gadamerian inspired conceptual pairs of *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont* as analytical notions in his approach. This one of the clues indicating that Koselleck did not explore and develop Gadamer's hermeneutics in systematical fashion before the 1960s, when he began to apply Gadamerian notions to analyze collective experience and tried to outline a concept of history that is less bound to language than Gadamer's. We return to the notions of *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont* in chapter 6.

At the same time, according to Koselleck, Adams was characterized by stoic confidence and humbleness, which especially dominates the second phase of his writings. In this – Koselleck explained – Adams provided a historical-sociological foundation for the liberal constitutional law, by reflecting on a constant set of political alternatives, which were first discussed by Thucydides, but which are found throughout history: the alternative between civil war and order.

To avoid a civil war, Adams allegedly proposed two things: a strong executive and an equal partake of all social forces in the legislature. While aiming at a system in which the executive could not be paralyzed by the participating forces, he also proposed a system of an upper- and lower-house, where all interests could be represented. In line with this, distinguishing between two forms of state, one in which this aim was reached, and one in which all power was one-sidedly accumulated, be it with the people, the aristocracy or the Monarch, he ultimately aimed to avoid a tyranny either from above or from below.

Since this was the background against which Koselleck praised Adam's "incorruptible and down-to earth sense of historical realities and actions" (102), he had, it seems, begun to use Adams to voice his own historical-political interests and beliefs. Adams, Koselleck continued, possessed a sense of power founded on religion, the meaning and necessity of which he never ignored, since he believed politics to be a godly science with historical experience as its guiding principle. All the same, Koselleck added, qualifying the religious attitude in Adams: "Adams uses the afterlife (*Jenseits*) as a kind of heuristic grasp to make visible the finality of everything historical. The weakness of the human race (...) prevents a constant progress. All progress is rather a temporary result of stately order." (102)²⁶⁶

By reading Adams' text against the background of the concept of 'finality', Koselleck clearly appropriated the text into his own line of anthropologically based historical-political thought. This centered round a formalistic conception of the human being as a vulnerable creature, whose existence was not naturally progressing towards a higher, better or more advanced in the age of modernity, in which the possibility of human conflict and sudden death had on the contrary been radically increased. Like Adams, Koselleck viewed politics from the alternative between civil war and order, and, in line with the protagonist of his review, he believed in progress within the domain of politics as something that could only unfold on the

²⁶⁶ In the article, Koselleck further emphasized Adam's "integre Haltung über den Parteien" as the main legacy of Adams and his family in American politics. However, according to Koselleck, the family soon lost its position in American politics due to the increasing organization of political parties. Finishing his article with a present day diagnosis, he argued that the destiny of the Adams family should be viewed as a measuring stick for the increasing democratization of USA. "Die heutige 'Adams-Renaissance', he wrote in the last sentence of the article, "wirft daher Fragen auf, die zu beantworten die amerikanischen Zukunft kennen heisst."

basis of a responsible order that respect the anthropological human condition and included the interests of both state and society. In spite of his new thematic interests, these convictions continued to be central in Koselleck's ideas about history and politics in the mid-1950s.

The continuation of Koselleck's pattern of thought was expressed even more forcefully, and in more detail, in a 1955 review of *Christianity, Diplomacy and War* written by the English historian Herbert Butterfield.²⁶⁷ In Koselleck's words, Butterfield's book addressed a new phenomenon in history caused by the "unity of the bipolar earth" (591) – a world in which the recognized boundaries between 'war' and 'peace' and between 'war' and 'civil war' had allegedly been replaced by the notion of 'war of righteousness'. The main objective of Butterfield's investigation was thus to answer the key question of the contemporary political situation: "Is a war for justice, 'the war for righteousness', justifiable or not?" (591)

Butterfield, Koselleck explained, did not deliver a material Christian historical philosophy like Arnold Toynbee. He was more of a *Fachhistoriker*, who approached the problem from the perspective of a Christian vision of history, or, as Koselleck phrased it: a Christian historical ontology. According to Koselleck, the double approach (of deciphering history from the perspective of its fundamental condition, understood from a Christian viewpoint, and the historical-scientific method) led to striking insights, but also, because of the lack of conceptual distinctions, to a certain distortions.

Since, from the Christian perspective, all wars originate from sin, and because sin can by nature never be righteous or monopolized, Butterfield conceived of the notion of a 'war of righteousness' as a fundamental contradiction. The result was a moral simplification of historical reality – in Koselleck's words: "The enemy becomes a criminal, while the self-righteous becomes a party-member as well as a judge" (592) In line with this, Koselleck explained, Butterfield pointed to another violation of theological reality that he argued has grave consequences when applied to politics: the belief that war and evil can somehow be overcome. Butterfield's stance on this issue was clear: "The world will not be made righteous by politics" (592) – the 'war to end all wars' does not lead to a more righteous world, only to more intensive wars. The only real consequences that emanate from war, Koselleck added as an elaboration on Butterfield's perspective, is the new distribution of land and of power. For Butterfield, the crucial question deduced from this perspective was simple: "In a world where we cannot eliminate war, how can we control it, and how can we maintain an international order still?" (592).

²⁶⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: Review of Herbert Butterfield in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, Nr. 41, 1954/55, p. 591-595.

According to Butterfield, Koselleck added, the problem is that ideologies had obscured the notions of ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ as well as of ‘winner’ and ‘loser’, thus paving the way for a criminalization of the enemy, leading to the total wars of the 20th century. Here Butterfield referred to National Socialism and World War II as a consequence of World War I by means of questioning whether the crimes of National Socialism would have been committed, had Germany not been labeled the exclusive criminal after World War I. The latter had resulted in a fixation on questions of guilt and complexes of inferiority which was highly relevant to the development of National Socialism in the 1920s and 1930s. In Butterfield’s perspective, there would, Koselleck explained, always be enemies: “The problem is not to have an enemy; it is rather how one sees, identifies and understands the enemy.” (593)

Butterfield’s solution to this problem was allegedly to transfer the Christian duty of learning to understand and to evaluate one’s enemy to the field of politics. In order to apply this principle to politics, and to control the forces of power, he recommended recourse to the sphere of diplomacy. His specific model was the European interstate system of the 18th century in which there was room for neutrality, where total wars were never waged. “War was not abolished – Koselleck explained – and peace war was not merely a slogan; rather a political achievement” (593)

Although he approached the issues of human nature, war and diplomacy, the past and the present from a Christian perspective, Butterfield’s stance was in many respects close to Schmitt’s and Koselleck’s lines of interpretation. At least it was read as such by Koselleck, who, in his enthusiastic review, eventually ventured to compare *Christianity, Diplomacy and War* to Schmitt’s *Der Nomos der Erde*. In this comparison, Koselleck praised Butterfield for presenting “many and subtle analyses that are worth paying attention to and which aim at making visible a political space for tolerance.” (595) Yet he detected a crucial difference between the two works. Although Koselleck was of the opinion that Butterfield’s Christian ontology was not tainted by eschatological and intolerant features, he saw a dangerous potential in his appeal to Christianity in that utopian Christian demands for equality would have grave revolutionary consequences if they were applied to real history.

Consequently, the work of Schmitt was given the last word in the article. “Carl Schmitt”, Koselleck wrote, “has in his work shown a decisive condition for the past ordering of the earth: the relative stability in Europe could only be maintained due to the engagements overseas and across the Urals, where the bulk of its accumulated energies could be displaced.” (595) Affirming that a new world was in the making (in which the role played by England would be decisive), the implicit assumption underlying Koselleck’s review of

Butterfield – and the bulk of his other texts from the mid-1950s – was that this world order could only be interpreted with the use of Schmitt’s analytical categories and conceptions.²⁶⁸

It was also from this perspective, in a letter to Schmitt from February 1954, that Koselleck criticized the work of his teacher Johannes Kühn on ‘the historical problem of tolerance’.²⁶⁹ According to Koselleck, Kühn was right to observe that “there is no ‘tolerance as such’; it is rather so that power, society and religion always tend to drift into intolerance, that is, tolerance is as such only possible due to historical constellations (...) which leave open a space for tolerance.”

However, Kühn also pointed to two other possibilities of tolerance of which Koselleck was deeply skeptical. The first concerned a “religious-universal outlook (with mythical roots); the second an idea of “a mutual consideration and recognition of the rules of the game for which he uses the subordinate concept of apparatus and machinery.” In spite of their qualities and good intentions, according to Koselleck, Kühn’s reflections were simply unfit for the challenges of modernity. He wrote:

“As today, in the age of technique, he uses this concept of machinery for a political balance, he does not find a way out of the liberal way of thinking, in spite of his fight against all utopias. Even if he sees and thinks further, he can not avoid the destiny that his words will trail off, as they are used up and will no more be heard.“

Koselleck’s comments on Butterfield and Kühn testify in an interesting way to his view on history and politics – and to his habit of positioning himself using the work of other scholars, in such a way that he to a certain extent draws on and share their ideas, but modifies or adds to these ideas as to articulate his own (and supposedly superior) understanding of an approach to the issue at stake. To be sure, Koselleck agreed with the basic line of thought outlined by Butterfield and Kühn, but, as was the case in his critique of Meinecke, he did not find their

²⁶⁸ Koselleck told Schmitt of his opinion of Butterfield’s work in their correspondence. In a letter to Schmitt from April 1955, Koselleck wrote: “Eine Besprechung des Butterfield (Christianity, Diplomacy and War) habe ich an das ARSP abgesendet und hoffe, sie Ihnen bald schicken zu können. Ich habe nicht versäumt, zweimal auf Ihr Werk ‘Der Nomos der Erde’ hinzuweisen, in dem das von Butterfield mehr Gefühlte als Aufgewiesene wirklich analysiert wird.“ RW265-8140: 20/4-1955. Koselleck had already mentioned the book to Schmitt in a letter from May 1954. Here Koselleck expressed the opinion that the book deserved a German translation and added that he planned to mention Schmitt’s work to Butterfield on a forthcoming visit he was intending to pay the latter. RW265-8136/1: 28/5-1954. Without mentioning whether the event was an outcome of the visit (or whether the visit took place at all), in a letter to Schmitt from July 1955, Koselleck reported a speech that Butterfield had recently given on the topic of *Die Rolle des Individuums in der Geschichte* at the University of Heidelberg. Once again, Koselleck raised certain criticisms of Butterfield’s historical-political interpretations, and he moreover criticized the lecturing-style of English academics: “Es kommt bei der Briten eher weniger darauf an, was sie sagen als wie sie es sagen.” RW265-8145/2: 10/7-1956. For perspectives on the reception of Butterfield among (primarily national-conservative) German historians in the Federal Republic in the 1950s and 1960s, see Martina Steber: “Herbert Butterfield, der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft“, *Vierteljahrsheft für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 55, 2007, p. 269-307.

²⁶⁹ RW265-8135/1: 14/2-1954.

ideas sufficiently radical. In his eyes, an enduring and responsible framework for politics in the ‘age of technology’ could not be established simply through applying ideas from the sphere of religion to politics or through a quasi-liberal conception of politics as a game organized around mutually recognized rules. Deconstructing their interpretations, he instead argued that the only way to master, or to provide some sort of damage control for the massive destructive potential inherent in ‘the age of technology’ was to systematically deconstruct all notions of history in the singular, by means of disclosing the eternal laws of the human nature, as originating from its ‘finality’.

However, there was still an unresolved tension in Koselleck’s thought, as he to some extent continued to replicate the account of history as one progressive movement that he attempted to do away with. It was this historically-philosophically tainted interpretation of the modern world and not a focus on pluralism that dominated Koselleck’s historical thinking in the mid-1950s, even after he finally found an institution at which he could pursue his interests.

Heidelberg, Vienna, Prussia

As well as his correspondence with Schmitt, Koselleck’s published writings suggest that at the beginning of 1955 he was hoping to construct a *habilitation* around a political-geographical interpretation of Anglo-Saxon political modernity. However, since he had not yet found an institution in which to carry out his work, his future plans were still uncertain.

In the summer of 1955, Koselleck was once again contacted by Heinrich Popitz, who was still trying to find a position for him in Dortmund. This time round the plans were more concrete, as Koselleck told Schmitt in a letter from early July 1955.²⁷⁰ First of all, Koselleck already had an appointment for an interview with Günther Ipsen, who was head of department (*Abteilungsleiter*) at the institute. Moreover, Popitz had already suggested a concrete topic for Koselleck to work on, entitled ‘Rationalisierung und Arbeitersparnis als soziologisches Problem’. Although Koselleck was interested in this “very present and ideology-overloaded” topic, he found it difficult to evaluate how far a career move to the institute in Dortmund would take him “*von der Geschichte qua Historie.*” For the moment, Koselleck added, as if to emphasize that his primary interest lay in the discipline of history, his readings were concentrated on two themes: “Prognosis and historical philosophy (as counter-concepts), and the role of America in the English 19th century.”

Koselleck’s worries about his academic future finally came to an end in the following

²⁷⁰ RW265-8141/1: 6.7.1955

month. When Koselleck returned to Bristol in August 1955 from his interview in Dortmund, he found a letter from Johannes Kühn, who asked Koselleck to become his assistant in Heidelberg.²⁷¹ This was both unexpected and surprising for Koselleck,²⁷² who, in his own words, was “forced to commit a least one error.” Eventually, however, he opted for the position in Heidelberg. Although he missed out on the chance “to become acquainted with the current developments in the very concrete context of the large scale industry”, Heidelberg was – Koselleck told Schmitt – the best move as long as had his eyes aimed at a *Habilitation* in history.

Back in Heidelberg, Koselleck was busy teaching ‘pro-seminars’ and assisting Kühn in his more specialized seminars. His enthusiastic tone in his letters suggests that he enormously enjoyed teaching and took great interest in the topics, the applied methods, and the students.²⁷³ It was also through one of his pro-seminars that Koselleck came across the topic that he initially wanted was to become the subject for his *Habilitation*: the Congress of Vienna.

Koselleck’s decision to work on the Congress of Vienna appears to have been a conscious choice to use the political-geographical discourse on modernity largely inspired by Schmitt, with which he had acquainted himself in England. It was consequently with some enthusiasm that Koselleck told Schmitt about the seminar and his reflections on the topic in a letter from July 1956.²⁷⁴ “I have begun with the geopolitical preconditions”, Koselleck wrote. And he subsequently drew attention to the ‘exchange of notes’ between the two negotiators, the English Foreign Secretary Viscount Castlereigh and the Russian Emperor Alexander I, which he found “of remarkable topicality.” The entire train of thought to be found there, as well as the vocabulary, was – he explained – echoed in the contemporary discourses of USA and Russia. “The theme of land and sea has not yet faded away”, he observed: “Likewise, the concept of ‘Nehmen-Teilen-Weiden’ remains unexcelled for the political questions of the congress.”

²⁷¹ RW265-8142: 28.7.1995

²⁷² In a letter from February 1954, he was certain that the position as assistant to Kühn was not available for him: “Die Assistentenstelle für neuere Geschichte in Heidelberg, in der mich Kühns Kollege für mittelalterliche Geschichte, Prof. Ernst – wie er mir sagte – gerne gesehen hätte, steht mir sicher nicht offen, da Kühn nichts davon sagte und zudem kurz vor seiner Emeritierung steht.” RW265-8135: 14.2. 1954.

²⁷³ Koselleck most detailed account of his teaching experiences is found in RW265-8144: 28. 11. 1955, in which he described his approach to and impressions from his pro-seminar (to which we will return in chapter six) that he taught under the auspices of Kühn and the *Übung* on the theme *Deutsche Revolution im 20. Jahrhundert* that Professor Kühn taught and in Koselleck took part.

²⁷⁴ RW265-8145/1: 10.7.1956

In addition, Koselleck intended to use the concept of 'legitimacy' (a concept that Schmitt had analyzed in several studies)²⁷⁵ in order to demonstrate the political changes that took place around the Congress of Vienna. According to Koselleck, the men of the 'ancien régime' – "Talleyrand as much as Metternich" – had realized early on that 'legitimacy' was no longer related to the 'ancien régime'. Reflecting on Talleyrand's conceptions of legitimacy, Koselleck interpreted Talleyrand's definition as follows: "In the end it all comes to this: Legitimate is what I [Talleyrand] find right." He added: "The concept of legitimacy changed with the changing circumstances, revolution was incorporated into the concept, and one might even say: the concept is located at the dividing line between historical philosophy and historicism."²⁷⁶

In other words, according to Koselleck, from being a concept with a stable and shared meaning, at the onset of modernity, 'legitimacy' was suddenly linked to the concept of revolution and in this process used functionally to fit the shifting interests of various political powers, thus constantly undergoing a change in meaning(s). Pursuing an idea which originated during his conceptualization of *Kritik und Krise*, and which he would further refine in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, he proposed to analyze the changes that took place in the epochal transition to modernity through a focus on one concept: that of 'legitimacy'.

Elaborating on his conceptual reflections by linking the past to the present, Koselleck found the Congress of Vienna "as 'modern' much more topical than the French Revolution". The catastrophe (i.e. the Revolution) had occurred, Koselleck explained, and the aim was now to control its further consequences. In this situation, he noted, "the confusion at the fronts were astonishing": even seemingly clear and generally used concepts such as 'legitimacy' and 'revolution' had turned into "interchangeable, empty phrases that had a pragmatic and effective rather than a clarifying function."

By approaching the Congress of Vienna through the relations between the concept of 'legitimacy' and historical philosophy, Koselleck seemed to have found an excellent topic through which he could use his newly acquired geo-political terminology and arguments on the origins of European political modernity and – with it – the power structures of the contemporary world. The outcome might have been a highly interesting account of World History as an attempt to explain the conditions and the characteristics of the Cold War.

However, in spite of his initial enthusiasm, Koselleck decided to stop working on the topic

²⁷⁵ See first of all Carl Schmitt: *Legalität und Legitimität*, Berlin 1932.

²⁷⁶ With this sentence, Koselleck seemingly addressed a historical transition from a universal notion (as informing historical progress etc.) to a relativist one.

not long after he wrote the above-cited letter to Schmitt. This decision was the result of the arrival of Werner Conze at the University of Heidelberg, who succeeded Kühn as a professor at the University of Heidelberg in 1957. Conze was simply not interested in the topic.²⁷⁷

Instead, he convinced Koselleck that he should work on a social-historical theme (and one for which actual archival studies and the application of the techniques of historical research were necessary) with a focus on the Prussian *Vormärz* (denoting in a broad sense Prussian history from 1815-1848). In July 1958, Koselleck thus informed Carl Schmitt that he was working in the West German archives, “to investigate the tension between state and society in the Prussian *Vormärz* by looking at the Prussian constitutional records.” “The entire theme“, Koselleck added, “comes from Professor Conze, who strongly emphasizes the social-historical direction in the seminar. He wants me to write a Habilitation (...) about the topic.”²⁷⁸

Conze’s intervention in respect to the topic of Koselleck’s habilitation evidences a continuation of longstanding cultural norms and social structures in German academia as a system in which younger colleagues and students were largely dependent on the goodwill and decisions of their professors.²⁷⁹

These norms had important consequences on the future course of Koselleck’s scholarly production. Having pursued geopolitical and global-historical themes that related to Schmitt’s idea of the *Nomos der Erde*, as a student of Conze, Koselleck now shifted his focus to a local and detailed investigation of Prussian social history, and the geopolitical and Anglo-Saxon themes, which had occupied him in the mid-1950s, were thus overshadowed in his publications and letters in the following years.²⁸⁰ The outcome was a range of new themes,

²⁷⁷ See [Reinhart Koselleck]: 2003, p. 10. In this 1999 interview, Koselleck explained how he further developed and designed his topic to revolve around a comparison of the temporal structures of the Congress of Vienna and the Treaty of Versailles Treaty.

²⁷⁸ RW-265-8148: 6.7.1958.

²⁷⁹ For a view of the norms and structures of the discipline in the era of professionalization in the 19th century, see Fritz Ringer: 1969. For perspectives on these issues that go further back in time, see William Clark: *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Modern Research University*, Chicago 2006.

²⁸⁰ Koselleck’s last text on Anglo-Saxon themes was the review-article, Reinhart Koselleck: “Zwei Denker der puritanischen Revolution [Harrington and Hobbes]”, *Neue politische Literatur*, 2. Jg., 1957, 288-293. In the following years, Koselleck wrote a number of relatively short reviews, mainly in *Das Historisch-Politische Buch*, primarily of books dealing with Prussian social history. These include Reinhart Koselleck: Review of Theodor Schieder: *Staat und Gesellschaft im Wandel unserer Zeit* (München 1958) in *The Economic History Review*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1959, p. 325-326; Review of Werner Gembruch: *Freiherr vom Stein im Zeitalter der Restauration* (Wiesbaden 1960) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. IX, 1961, p. 212; “Der neue Gebhardt”, *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. IX, 1961, p. 225-227; Review of Fritz Hartung: *Staatsbildende Kräfte der Neuzeit* (Berlin 1960) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. IX, 1961, p. 301; Review of Walter Felix Müller (Hg.): *Die Struktur der europäischen Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart 1960) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. IX, 1961, p. 311; Review of *Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter unter dem Kapitalismus* (vol. 8+9, Berlin 1960) in *The Economic History Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1961, p. 378-379; Review of Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde: *Die deutsche verfassungsgeschichtliche Forschung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1961) in *Das historisch-politische*

arguments and approaches, including a set of new discursive features that involved a shift of focus from deconstructing history in the singular to how histories in plural can be analyzed and written in practice, which he was to refer to and further develop for the rest of his career.

This is not to say that Koselleck's reflections on the relations between space, time and politics disappeared from his analytical framework. Even if few aspects of the geopolitical discourse can be found in his work on Prussia, it was layered in and became central for his historical thinking, as we will later return to. First, we will illuminate how, during his work on the Prussian *Vormärz* and in a process that lasted almost ten years, Koselleck both learned and refined the methods of structural history.

Werner Conze and structural history

It is well-known that Conze played an important role in shaping Koselleck's work on Prussia. In fact, neither Koselleck's conceptualization of *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* nor his work on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* can be understood without paying close attention to Conze, who was first the supervisor of Koselleck's *Habilitation* and subsequently became a close collaborator on the encyclopedia.

Werner Conze was born in 1910 into a family belonging to the North German Protestant *Bildungsbürgertum*.²⁸¹ He belonged to a generation whose primary political experiences were the social-political upheavals in the Weimar Republic, Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s and later war. In this turmoil, Conze sided early on with national and conservative forces.

Buch, Jg. X, 1962, p. 10-11; Review of Siegfried A. Kaehler: *Studien zur deutschen Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen 1961) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. X, 1962, p. 111; Review of Kurt Seeberger (Hg.): *Die letzten hundert Jahre. Gestalten, Ideen, Ereignisse* (München 1961) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. X, 1962, p. 111; Review of Ulrich Peter Ritter: *Die Rolle des Staates in den Frühstadien der Industrialisierung* (Berlin 1961) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. X, 1962, p. 207; Review of Theodor Schieder: *Das deutsche Kaiserreich von 1871 als Nationalstaat* (Köln und Opladen) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. XI, 1963, p. 306; Review of Siegfried A. Kaehler: *Wilhelm von Humboldt und der Staat* (Göttingen 1963) in *Das historisch-politische Buch*, Jg. XIII, 1965, p. 141. As witnessed in the footnotes and in the bibliography, Koselleck used many of these books in his conceptualization of *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*. Another two reviews from this period, which Koselleck presumably authored in relation to preparing the publication of *Kritik und Krise*, are

Reinhart Koselleck: Review of Christopher Morris: *Political Thought in England: Tyndal to Hooker* (1953), *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, Bd. XLI, 1954/1955, p. 136-137 and Reinhart Koselleck: Review of Hans Wolpe: *Raynal et sa machine de guerre* (Paris 1956) in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozial-Philosophie*, nr. 45, 1959, p. 126-128.

²⁸¹ The following is based on Werner Lausecker: "Werner Conze", Ingo Haar, Michael Fahlbusch: *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Personen, Institutionen, Forschungsprogramme, Stiftungen*, München 2008, p. 93-103; Thomas Etzemüller: München 2001; Reinhart Koselleck: "Werner Conze. Tradition und Innovation", *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 245, 1987, p. 529-543; Wolfgang Schieder: "Soziologie zwischen Soziologie und Geschichte. Das wissenschaftliche Lebenswerk Werner Conzes", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 13 Jg., 1987, p. 244-266; Jürgen Kocka: "Werner Conze und die Sozialgeschichte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland", *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, Jg. 10, 1986, p. 595-602.

As for his academic career, Conze initially studied briefly with the sociologist Hans Freyer in Leipzig and from 1934 with the ethnologist Günther Ipsen and the historian Hans Rothfels in Königsberg. He took his doctorate in Königsberg and he habilitated with Ipsen in Vienna in 1940. In Königsberg, Conze teamed up with Theodor Schieder and other researchers, who were all deeply disappointed with the liberal, constitutional republic (*Rechtsstaat*) as well as with modern industrial society, and who doubted the capability of the traditional approaches in the German sciences to respond adequately to the interests and the fate of the German people (*Volk*) in the age of modernity.

In Königsberg, where he worked on a project that was paid for by the Nazis and closely related to the German 'politics of people and population' (*Volkstums- und Bevölkerungspolitik*) in the East, Conze was trained in the tradition of the so-called *Volksgeschichte*.²⁸² This tradition concerned itself with the history of ethnically defined groups of people and drew on different academic disciplines such as ethnography, statistics and sociology, regional, social and economic history. The proponents of *Volksgeschichte* included a variety of scholars, such as Ipsen and Freyer and the historians Hans Rothfels, Hermann Aubin and Otto Brunner. These scholars were all radical nationalists, who in the 1930s pursued revanchist and annexationist objectives and explicitly conceived of their scientific activities in terms of political strife. They became pillars of academic Nazism from 1933 at the latest.²⁸³

During the war, Conze obtained a position at the *Reichsuniversität* in Posen, a newly-founded university in the annexed westernmost part of Poland staffed with ideologically reliable faculty.²⁸⁴ Due to continuous assignments as an officer on the Eastern front,²⁸⁵ however, he never taught there. Similar to Koselleck, he ended the war badly wounded and in Russian captivity. Conze entered the postwar German historical profession in 1946, working six years in a fairly unremarkable (and for a period unpaid) post as an external lecturer

²⁸² For Werner Conze and Theodor Schieder's involvement in National Socialism, see Winfried Schulze, Otto Gerhard Oexle (Hg.): *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt 2000; Rüdiger Hohls, Konrad H. Jarausch (Hg.): *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, München 2000; Ingo Haar: *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus: deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der 'Volkstumkampf' im Osten*, Göttingen 2000; Peter Schöttler (Hg.): *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft. 1918-1945*, Frankfurt am Main 1997. The classic study of the roots of social history, the field that Conze pioneered in the post-war years, is Willi Oberkrome: *Volksgeschichte. Methodische Innovation und völkische Ideologisierung in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft 1918-1945*, Göttingen 1993.

²⁸³ With the exception of Hans Rothfels: due to his Jewish descent, Rothfels immigrated in 1938 after having been sacked from his academic positions and persecuted by the National Socialists. See chapter 6, note 4.

²⁸⁴ Conze became a member of the Nazi party in May 1937 and had since March 1933 been a member of the SA.

²⁸⁵ He did service in the army from 1939 to 1945 in the predominantly East-Prussian infantry-division 291.

(*Lehrbeauftragter*) in Göttingen.²⁸⁶ In 1952, he achieved the position of an associate professor (*Extraordinarius*) at the University of Münster, where he was soon after given a full professorship in social and economic history. Finally, in 1957, he took over the professorial chair of modern history in Heidelberg (from Kühn), and he remained there for the rest of his career.²⁸⁷

In addition, it was in 1957 that Conze published what is regarded as his most detailed piece on the program of the so called structural history (*Strukturgeschichte*) – the article “Die Strukturgeschichte des technisch-industriellen Zeitalters als Aufgabe für Forschung und Unterricht”.²⁸⁸ The text was motivated by a plea to adapt historical research to historical reality. More concretely, Conze argued that historical writing should be adjusted to the separation between state and society and to the breakthrough of the technological-industrial age that took place in the eighteenth century. In terms of themes and style, recent history should not be written in the form of heroic epics, describing the dramas of great individuals and states. It was instead to be analyzed through the larger societal processes, movements and tendencies, including the technological and economical developments, which had taken place in the period under discussion.

In addition, in order to historical method to the historical reality of the modern epoch, Conze wanted to combine history and sociology (this was a mantra that Conze repeated intermittently in the 1950s and 1960s), and to employ the methods of political science and economics. Through this interdisciplinary approach, Conze aimed at substituting the topical and methodological specialization current in the historical discipline with a wider and more encompassing historical synthesis – a structural history.

In his conceptualization of structural history, Conze was heavily influenced by Hans Freyer, especially by the latter’s *Theorie des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* from 1955,²⁸⁹ which was one of the most influential interpretations of the technological impact on modern society in postwar Germany. In his book, Freyer continued his reflections from *Weltgeschichte Europas* on the problems caused by the industrial, political and social revolutionary processes

²⁸⁶ In the postwar period the University of Göttingen came to function as a kind of safety filter in particular for staff from Königsberg and Posen, who were often hired there, before moving on to other institutions.

²⁸⁷ The process through which Conze was hired is described in Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 138-144. Etzemüller mentions here that Kühn put Conze on the list of his desired successors.

²⁸⁸ Werner Conze: “Die Strukturgeschichte des technisch-industriellen Zeitalter als Aufgabe für Forschung und Unterricht“ [1957], *Werner Conze: Gesellschaft – Staat – Nation*, hrsg. von Ulrich Engelhardt, Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang Schieder, Stuttgart 1992, p. 66-85.

²⁸⁹ Hans Freyer: *Theorie des Gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, Stuttgart 1955. The intellectual relations between Freyer and Conze are described in depth in Thomas Etzemüller: 2001. The following description of Freyer’s book largely follows Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 63-65.

taking place at the end of the 18th century. Freyer now argued that the technological and social processes, which allegedly permeated human life, had become ever more autonomous and progressively more difficult to control. Because these processes did not arise from an organic order, he labeled them ‘secondary systems’ (*sekundäre Systeme*).

Freyer perceived many dangers as inherent to these systems: these included man’s increasing dependence on incomprehensible technology, as well as on the social state, leading to a loss of responsibility, duties and freedom and increased demands for social unity, leading again to a loss of individuality and to personal alienation. More generally, Freyer argued that the secondary systems divided man’s life into various mechanical functions, while at the same time reducing him to merely a part of a huge and only functionally differentiated mass. This development signaled the definitive end of man’s natural life as part of an organic entity, according to Freyer.

However, Freyer had not given up all hope for a meaningful modern existence. He put his faith in what he called ‘restraining powers’ (*haltende Mächte*) – such as history, family, authority, friendship – to stabilize the secondary systems. More concretely, Freyer hoped that the ‘restraining powers’ would provide what was missing in the secondary systems: meaning, human depth and richness. Since its systems were designed in such a way that it was possible to resist their supposed totality, he thought of the early Federal Republic as the healthier alternative in comparison to other political and societal forms such as socialism.²⁹⁰

This latter dimension of Freyer’s analysis was typical among former ‘radical conservatives’ at the time. While calling for powers to restrain, or counter the negative aspects of modernity, by emphasizing the origins, characteristics and dangers of communism, they partly attempted to divert attention away from National Socialism, including their own intellectual-political activities in the 1930s and 1940s. This argumentative strategy to some extent explains why Freyer’s diagnosis of modernity was received positively and shared widely in German intellectual life,²⁹¹ not least among his former students, colleagues and associates, many of whom regrouped in various academic settings in the Federal Republic.²⁹²

While Freyer’s activities were especially important in relation to the re-establishment of

²⁹⁰ See Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 64.

²⁹¹ Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 64-65; Paul Nolte: 2001, p. 287-290; Axel Schildt: 1995, p. 346-348; Jerry Z. Muller: *The Other God that Failed. Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*, Princeton 1987, p. 352-360.

²⁹² Jerry Z. Muller: “‘Historical Social Science’ and Political Myth: Hans Freyer (1887-1969) and the Genealogy of Social History in West Germany”, Hartmut Lehmann, James Van Horn Melton (ed.): *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s*, Cambridge 1994, p. 197-229. Jerry Z. Muller: 1987, p. 355-360.

sociology as a discipline in the 1950s,²⁹³ he also played an important role in gradually changing the track of German historical writing in the direction of structural history in the same period. At the time, neither structural history nor social history was precisely defined terms. In fact, ever since the historian Karl Lamprecht had at the end of the nineteenth century lost the so called *Methodenstreit* (in which he had challenged the primacy of political history and argued for a more encompassing social-historical approach), the label of social history had by and large been confined to the fringes of the historical discipline.²⁹⁴

It was not least through the initiatives and networks of Werner Conze and Theodor Schieder that structural history, with its distinct social-historical dimension, was established as a separate and increasingly popular field in the historical profession during the 1950s. In this process, Conze and Schieder frequently cited and in other ways drew attention to the work of Freyer and the other fathers of *Volksgeschichte*. Among other things, on the initiative of Schieder, Freyer gave a successful talk at the historian's conference in Marburg in 1951 on the need to combine "Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft". And two years later, in 1953 in Bremen, Otto Brunner gave a talk on "Das Problem einer europäischen Sozialgeschichte", on which Conze was given the responsibility to comment, and which the latter would later refer to as a huge benefit (*großen Gewinn*) for the conference.²⁹⁵

Werner Conze was also among the enthusiastic audience who, in Marburg in 1952, heard Freyer announce the main focus of historical sociology to be the bourgeois society of the nineteenth century.²⁹⁶ At one of the first meetings in the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*, which was founded in 1957 with the University of Heidelberg as its base, Conze pointed to the inspiration that he found in Freyer, as Conze announced that it was the task of the historians:

"to historically-critically substantiate or test a 'theory of the contemporary age', as it has been outlined by for example Hans Freyer; in other words to investigate the structure of the modern world in its historical depths since the emancipations and the revolutions, both in respect to the specifically new in the modern world-epoch and the continuity of endurable, pre-revolutionary traditions."²⁹⁷

But why was Koselleck attracted to the structural-historical program of Werner Conze,

²⁹³ For the re-establishment of sociology as a discipline in the 1950s, see Paul Nolte: 2001.

²⁹⁴ For the history of 'social' - and 'structural history', see Thomas Etzemüller: 2001.

²⁹⁵ As he wrote to Hans Rothfels in a letter from 18/10: 1953. In the cited sentence, Conze also commented on the talk of Theodor Schieder. Brunner's talk was originally supposed to have been given in a separate section on social history headed by Conze, but the section was after some discussion and for a variety of reasons never realized. The citation and the circumstantial information are found in Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 97, note 33.

²⁹⁶ As Theodor Schieder stated in his summary of Freyer's talk, Theodor Schieder: "Zum Gegenwärtiges Verhältnis von Geschichte und Soziologie", *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 3. Jg. 1952, p. 28; Hans Freyer: "Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft", *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 3. Jg. p. 15-20.

²⁹⁷ Conze quoted from Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 161.

who was after all some thirteen years older than him? And how did he position himself within this program? To answer these questions, we need to start by highlighting certain similarities between the two scholars in terms of historical experience and historical thinking. Due to experiences of upheaval, war and captivity – and intellectual exchange with different ‘teachers’, who conceptualized their writings in the crisis-ridden 1920s and 1930s – both men had developed a certain crisis consciousness when it came to evaluating the condition of the modern world. Indeed, their historical thinking centered to a large extent on a mode of thinking that fundamentally aimed at bringing social-political order into what they perceived as the chaos of modernity.²⁹⁸

Central for Conze and Koselleck was an understanding of the processes of modernity taking place at the end of the eighteenth century as a crucial rupture separating the ‘old’, stable world from the ‘new’ epoch of modernity in which conceptions of space, time and politics were fundamentally altered; both were interested in analyzing the consequences of these processes, not least the tensions between state and society; and while sharing a skeptical and critical view of modernity, they both hoped to find ideas and means to counter, or balance certain allegedly negative and potentially dangerous aspects of the modern world, not least those of technological developments, in order to create a more stable social-political order.

Moreover, as for their theoretical-methodological perspective, both were critical of traditional ‘historicism’ and sought to go beyond this approach by combining history and sociology (although, they undoubtedly had two different conceptions of sociology), and they both saw in conceptual history an important instrument in this endeavor, as we will see below.

However, Koselleck’s interest in and approach to studying modernity was in certain respects also very different from Conze’s. Koselleck came from a more philosophical and philological background and his main interests were first of all in *political* modernity: in questions related to political power, its forms of representation, and its semantic and temporal configurations. Conze, on the other hand, came from a background in Volksgeschichte, and inspired by his sociological training, he was more interested in societal structures and groups and in studying these with the use of methods from disciplines such as demography, ethnology and economics.

While he was in Heidelberg, Conze became known as a dynamic initiator of new

²⁹⁸ It is vital to emphasize that the parallels drawn here concern Conze’s historical thinking after 1945, when it was more or less disconnected from, modified or at least concealed, the radically un-democratic, authoritarian and violent aspects that informed his scientific contributions to the Nazi ‘Volkstum- und Bevölkerungspolitik’ before 1945. For an account of Conze’s so-called ‘order-thinking’ in the period before and after 1945, see Thomas Etzemüller: 2000, p. 268-310.

experiments, constantly attracting a wide range of both established and promising new scholars.²⁹⁹ Rather than pursuing theoretical questions, he was primarily interested in integrating themes, methods and interests through practical work. Hence, whereas, when he met Conze, Koselleck had for long attempted to theorize history, Conze never developed a theory of structural history.³⁰⁰ This is probably the reason why Koselleck later stated that meeting Conze was not an ‘eye-opening experience’ (*Erweckungserlebnis*) and that he did not find an “intellectual source of inspiration” in him.³⁰¹ What Koselleck mainly learned from Conze, then, was to view the historical processes leading to modernity from the more comprehensive perspective of structural and social history and to apply the methods required to do so. However, Koselleck did not put his theoretical reflections on hold when he entered Conze’s program. On the contrary, the field of social history provided him with a number of discursive features with which he found new ways to deconstruct history in the singular and write history in the plural.

State and society in Germany, 1815-1848

One of the first projects that Conze initiated in his *Arbeitskreis für Moderne Sozialgeschichte* was a larger investigation of the theme of state and society in the Prussian reform period. It was within this project that Koselleck developed his approach to social history, and some of his early reflections on the topic appeared already in a 1962 volume edited by Conze, entitled *Staat und Gesellschaft im deutschen Vormärz: 1815-1848*.³⁰² The volume contained contributions to the investigation of the German *Vormärz* by seven members of the *Arbeitskreis* – three established scholars (Werner Conze, Theodor Schieder and Otto Brunner) and four somewhat younger scholars (Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang Zorn, Wolfram Fischer and Erich Angermann).³⁰³

Conze’s long essay “Das Spannungsfeld von Staat und Gesellschaft im Vormärz” ended

²⁹⁹ Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 149-160; Reinhart Koselleck: 1987, p. 540-542 lists entire fifteen organizations that Conze founded, directed or influenced.

³⁰⁰ As stated by Wolfgang Schieder: 1987, p. 244-245. See also Detlef Junker: 1992, p. 169 – “(...) Conze wollte nicht theoretisch polarisieren, sondern praktisch integrieren; und seine geschichtstheoretischen Argumente für Begründung einer Sozialgeschichte schwangen zwischen geschehener Geschichte und begriffener Geschichte, zwischen Ontologie und Epistemologie, zwischen Sozialgeschichte und Strukturgeschichte hin und her, ohne je einen Ruhepunkt zu finden.”

³⁰¹ Quoted from Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 155.

³⁰² Werner Conze (Hg.): *Staat und Gesellschaft im deutschen Vormärz 1815-1848*, Stuttgart 1962.

³⁰³ The anthology was the outcome of a 1958 conference at which the contributors had presented their initial thoughts on their topics. Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 169-170.

the anthology and was designed as a general presentation and summary of the entire study.³⁰⁴ In the essay, he sketched out the main political, social and economic problems of the period – focusing on the many tensions between state and society, new social groups and older powers, liberal constitutional ideas and authoritarian forces, tradition and emancipation, reform, restoration and revolution.

The themes of Conze's essay, we might add, were not merely things of the past, but also issues that were being heavily discussed in contemporary political debates. Observing how a process that had taken more than 200 years had slowly seen the state lose its status as the sole fundament of political authority, order and organization, to societal powers, German politicians and intellectuals were discussing intensively how the state should react to the ongoing societal changes and claims, not least to the increasing influence of economic groups and political parties, including how state and society should ideally relate to each other. Should societal issues and the social order be given primacy on behalf of the political organization? And, if so, how were the conflicts between the state and the society to be solved? And which symbol, if not the state, should provide the Germans with a social-political identity?

Conze gave no specific answer to these questions, but focused strictly on a historical analysis of the relation between state and society, with a special focus on Prussia, set within what he portrayed as larger European processes of modernity. His verdict on these processes was not simply one of blunt rejection. Stating that the structural changes that occurred on the verge of modernity were not all of a very radical kind, Conze argued that the political and social problems of modernity could not be solved merely through a fundamental restoration. Acknowledging the need for political-social reform, he praised the leading role of the absolutist state in the early reform phase, not least the fact that it had warded off the revolution, while he criticized Friedrich Wilhelm IV's "conservative-romantic retreat" (247) in the 1840s for eventually having rendered the state incapable of dealing with the forces of emancipation, revolution and counter-revolution.³⁰⁵

However, Conze also drew attention to certain uncontrollable negative consequences of social-political modernity, in particular the sudden emancipation and social upheaval that he described through the notions of 'Dekorporierung', 'Disproportionierung' and 'Entsittlichung'. Together, these denoted the disintegration of the traditional social groups.

³⁰⁴ Werner Conze: "Das Spannungsfeld von Staat von Gesellschaft im Vormärz", Werner Conze (Hg.): *Staat und Gesellschaft im deutschen Vormärz 1815-1848*, Stuttgart 1962, p. 207-270. For excellent comments on Conze's essay, see Jin-Sung Chun: 2000, p. 195-198.

³⁰⁵ Werner Conze: 1962, p. 247.

This fragmentation, which had been caused by social emancipation and led to a greater social-economic inequality between societal groups, gave rise to a form of structural asymmetry in terms of various social groups and trades, leading to a permanent social insecurity and unrest, as well as the loss of traditions, norms and manners that eventually paved the way for the ‘age of ideologies’ (*Zeitalter der Ideologien*, an expression coined by Brunner). According to Conze, these problems, symbolized by the tension between state and society, remained unsolved during the reform period and triggered eventually the revolution of 1848 in the German states.

Koselleck’s article “Staat und Gesellschaft in Preußen 1815-1848” was designed within Conze’s framework. The focus of the article was constitutional history, a dimension of history which Conze, with reference to Hans Freyer and inspired also by Otto Brunner, had spoken of in 1952 as “constituted power“ (*gesetzte Herrschaft*) and incorporated as an integral part of structural-history.³⁰⁶ More concretely, Koselleck’s article focused on what he described as the “the polemical antithesis of state and society: the interrelation between administration and revolution” (79) in Prussia between 1815 and 1848.³⁰⁷ Although revolution and administration appear to be contradictory terms, they turned out, he stated, to be closely related in the case of Prussia, as the state bureaucracy promoted certain trends of the revolution, and the revolution in turn provoked a continual growth of power within the bureaucracy.

At the beginning of the article, Koselleck described how, at the end of the eighteenth century, in reaction to the French Revolution, and as an attempt to secure its existence, the Prussian bureaucracy initiated a series of reforms. While avoiding the violent and radical aspects that had been generated during the French Revolution, the bureaucracy worked towards implementing some of the more moderate and beneficial political and social dynamics towards change caused by this event. The desired model was the so-called ‘middle-way’ (*Mittelweg*) (83), which involved political, economic and social reforms but mediated between two extremes of fundamental revolution and total restoration.

Aimed at creating a “synthesis between an enlightened absolutism and a society that is still to be liberalized” (81), the first phase of reforms resulted in the so-called Prussian Code (*Allgemeines Landrecht*) of 1794. However, Koselleck explained, this set of reforms was not

³⁰⁶ Werner Conze: “Die Stellung der Sozialgeschichte in Forschung und Unterricht”, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, Jg. 3, 1952, p. 655. The work of the historian Otto Brunner was – as we shall return to – important for Conze’s focus on and approach to constitutional history.

³⁰⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: “Staat und Gesellschaft in Preußen 1815-1848”, Werner Conze (Hg.): *Staat und Gesellschaft im deutschen Vormärz 1815-1848*, Stuttgart 1962, p. 79-112. For excellent comments on Koselleck’s essay, see Jin-Sung Chun: 2000, p. 194-195.

very successful, and after the economically disastrous military defeats of Prussian by Napoleon's forces in 1806/07, a new phase of reform was initiated by officials who wanted to pursue further reform. This second phase of reform was not only more far-reaching but also more radical: its aim was to create a growth-oriented capitalist economy, more liberal social institutions and a more democratic and open social structure.

Absolutely crucial to the planning and implementation of the reform was the socially and intellectually homogenous Prussian bureaucracy; the so-called *Beamtentum*, which was constituted by professionals from the rising bourgeoisie (*Bürgertum*). In the period after 1815, at a time of confessional, linguistic and juridical pluralism, according to Koselleck, it was the bureaucracy that constituted the continuity, unity and spirit of the Prussian state. Yet, the purpose of the bureaucracy was not only to serve the state, but also to mediate between state and society, that is, to be "the body of the state – and of the society." (88)

Koselleck's somewhat idealized concept of the state as a neutral and dignified entity bore certain similarities to his description of the state in *Kritik und Krise*. In fact, with its focus on the relations between state and society, questions of political order and the rise of the bourgeoisie, Koselleck's article on the Prussian reforms appear in many ways as both a thematic and chronological continuation of his dissertation. However, the article on Prussia was in reality different in several aspects. To begin with, the article was not an investigation into the origins of political ideology – it was a study of how a concrete social-political order was constructed through juridical measures (laws) by the principally apolitical Prussian bureaucracy. Working from this basis, Koselleck did not ground his study upon a reading of the literary classics, but upon an empirical analysis of law and administration texts, and he now included economic and demographic aspects in such a way as to analyze the composition of and interaction between various social groups in the Prussian *Vormärz*. It was through this approach, within Conze's framework, that Koselleck entered a new phase of his scholarly production.

However, one of the most central dimensions of Koselleck's approach went beyond Conze's framework: the use of the concept of time as a guiding and organizing analytical tool. More concretely, in the article, Koselleck analyzed the temporal conceptions among the contemporary agents (the bureaucracy, the various social groups and individuals) as a way to understand the expectations that sparked the reforms and the direction they took. Elaborating on the conception in *Kritik und Krise* of modernity as characterized by a focus on the future and an expectation of change, he wrote: "The temporal experience of the epoch was the

‘movement’”. People constantly experienced “general acceleration” (109), and they focused on the great horizon of possibilities that was opened by the future.

Koselleck consequently argued that it was the experience and the expectation of immediate change and progress that made it inconceivable for the agents in the Prussian *Vormärz* to draw back from the demands for political and social reforms that were manifested in the period. The only possibility was to catch the dynamics of modernity and to direct them towards the specific and planned goals that the Prussian bureaucracy set itself: “Within this temporal horizon, the administration understood itself as the only institution that mediated between the extremes as to balance between the powers of the ‘reaction’ and the ‘progress’” (109)

Koselleck was, we should remember, not unique among the German academics in the 1950s and 1960s in claiming that the nineteenth century bourgeois society (and modernity as such) was characterized by a temporal focus on the future and by an expectation of rapid change. One of the most famous examples, as we have seen, appears in Löwith’s *Meaning in History*, which was influential in shaping Koselleck’s view on these issues. Another example is *Theorie des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* in which Freyer presented an idea similar to Löwith’s concerning expectations of future progress and change as a characteristic for modern societies.³⁰⁸ Echoes of Freyer can be found in Conze’s writings from the 1950s,³⁰⁹ but Conze never organized his analysis according to a temporal aspect. Neither did he produce a theory of historical time, as Koselleck eventually did. In these respects, Koselleck was original within the German historical profession, a factor to which we return below.

The way Koselleck described the temporally-motivated political project of the Prussian bureaucrats was similar to his portrayal in *Kritik und Krise* of the project pursued by the Enlightenment thinkers. The Prussian project was similarly suffused with historical philosophy: “All laws of the reform-machinery were aimed at movement; a movement that was understood in line with the idealistic historical-philosophies ideas of the fulfilling of a world-plan encompassing universal freedom and morality.” (86) In the view of the reformers, the Prussian state was involved in “a progressive world-plan” – the aim was to defeat the existing order “to release the potential powers of a future in freedom.” (86)

However, in spite of the initial optimism, in the end, the Prussian reforms turned out to be a failure, symbolized in the revolution of 1848. To use one of Koselleck’s temporal-analytical terms, the period in which successful reforms might have been implemented eventually

³⁰⁸ Hans Freyer: 1955, p. 206-220. In fact Freyer referred to Löwith’s book, as he outlined the idea (page 207).

³⁰⁹ Examples are, among other places found in, Werner Conze: [1957], p. 73; Werner Conze: 1962, p. 211-212.

‘passed’. But exactly why, and how, did the Prussian reforms fail?

The failure of the Prussian reforms: economic vs. political reforms

In brief, according to Koselleck, the failure was to be found in some of the very basic tensions that came into being while implementing the reforms. While the reformers were relatively successful at creating a liberal economic society, based on a growth-oriented capitalist economy, they were much less successful at creating parallel political and social reforms, since such reforms were strongly resisted by the existing social bodies (*Stände*), especially by the nobility.

In reaction to the reaction of the nobility, instead of creating a constitution or parliamentary institutions, the bureaucracy chose to step in as a mediator between the various social groups to solve the social-political problems created by the reforms. However, the decisions taken by the bureaucracy were not always satisfactory or fair to all parts of society. This was, for example, the case with the implementation of the massive reform of the rural agrarian constitution; ultimately it was the peasants who paid the price for the transition from natural-economy to money-economy with the lairds (*Gutsherren*) benefiting all down the line. The administration thus gradually lost its moral credit with the various social groups as the process of reform went forwards, leaving the traditional status layers and the rising capitalist bourgeoisie as the most privileged groups in their wake.

Eventually, however, ‘administration as constitution’ (*Verwaltung als Verfassung*) proved insufficient. According to Koselleck, once it began to initiate its reforms, the Prussian bureaucracy released forces hostile to its own interest and became entangled in a process over which it no longer had control – neither in temporal nor in political terms. In other words, it was constantly trying to adapt the reforms to the dynamics and developments it had unleashed, and as it lost its initiative and goodwill, it also lost its mediating position between the state and society. In addition, not only the traditional status layers, but also two newborn social groups put the bureaucracy under pressure. The first of these two groups was the capitalist bourgeoisie, which was economically extremely influential and pushed for further political influence and freedom. The second group was the proletariat, which was sheltered neither by the old status layers nor by the state, and which demanded further social and political reforms. Observing these less successful dimensions of the economic reforms, Koselleck defined liberal progress as progress of ambivalence, symbolized by the simultaneous increase of prosperity and poverty. Among other things, he noted how the rise of the proletariat witnessed the “social downside” of the “rationalization of the economy.” (99)

As pressure from the various groups in society grew, the opportunity for a written construction to be constructed in order to control and direct the social dynamics unleashed by the reforms passed. Instead, the final and disastrous outcome of the reform period was the downfall of the administration – leading to the revolution of 1848.

In drawing this conclusion, Koselleck once again left the reader with the impression that he believed that it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to handle the political and social energies let loose by the French Revolution in such a way that a responsible and durable political order could be established. This raises the question of whether Koselleck's study of the Prussian *Vormärz* was intended as a more or less direct continuation of the interpretation and the critique of modernity that he had launched in *Kritik und Krise*. A letter written to Carl Schmitt in June 1959, when the project was in its early phase, suggests that this was originally the case. In his letter, Koselleck wrote:

“The crisis in Prussia and in Austria has in reality never entirely broken out. It was cut off by Napoleon and then directed into other channels: the ignorant German national-liberalism and the jammed German reaction were perhaps only illusory fronts. The cut off Prussian enlightenment and the dead end of the German liberalism have led to a violent explosion: in Marx, who nevertheless did not find a real position in the 19th century and did not find his place at the British museum by mistake. It is the unblown traits of the German nineteenth century that are the heritage to Lenin – and Hitler. The history of the crisis since 1789 is in fact still to be written. My studies of the Vormärz will hopefully lead me one step further.”³¹⁰

Koselleck's dialectical and pessimistic account of 19th century Prussian history in the passage above is evidently similar to his account of the European enlightenment in *Kritik und Krise*. Common to both is the assumption that the dynamics unleashed around the French Revolution led to permanent tension, crisis and war, and thus prevented a stable and responsible social-political order in the modern age. However, nowhere in the article from 1962 does Koselleck portray the Prussian attempt at reform as a dialectical movement with a clear tendency towards crisis, war and disaster. On the contrary, by illuminating a variety of different aspects, actors and processes, Koselleck's picture of the transition to modernity in the article on Prussia was considerably more complex and nuanced than in the one found in *Kritik und Krise*.

Moreover, in spite of the idealistic and utopian components present in the attempt of the Prussian bureaucrats to deal with the political and social processes of modernity, Koselleck was remarkably less hostile towards the bureaucrats than he had been towards the

³¹⁰ RW265-8151/11: 8/7-1959

Enlightenment thinkers in his dissertation. Not only did he conceive of reform as unavoidable and necessary in the case of Prussia; he also sympathized with the attempt of the administrators to cope with this challenge through the measures of the 'Beamtenstaat'. Hence Koselleck was remarkably positive towards the chosen 'middle-way' and he additionally praised specific actions taken by the state – such as the attempt to improve conditions for the less privileged groups in society; the attempt to educate its subjects; and to prevent these from becoming alienated in “the technical world of labour.” (107)

Even more important is Koselleck's implication that the reforms might have developed differently if the right reforms had been implemented at the right time, and if it had not been for the unfortunate death of its charismatic leader – the Prussian Chancellor Hardenberg – in 1822. Koselleck described Hardenberg's death as absolutely central for the negative outcome of the reforms and for the course of Prussian history more generally. Indeed, according to Koselleck's account, it was with Hardenberg's death that the reformers lost control of the reform: the technically perfect machinery simply lost its political initiative and efficiency.³¹¹

Along with the lack of direct ideological critique, the indications as to how the state might have handled the demand for changes more successfully, if certain factors related to the reform had fallen out differently, suggest that Koselleck had somewhat modified his previously critical attitude towards the processes of modernity. Was that the case? And, if so, how can we explain this change?

Although no direct proof exists, it may be that Koselleck presented a modified view of the processes of modernity as a reaction to the social-political developments taking place in Germany from the early 1950s to the early 1960s. In this period, the economy had been successfully modernized and liberalized via the so called 'economic miracle' (*Wirtschaftswunder*); a successful democratic political system had been established, with a parliamentary democracy, a public sphere and a democratization of its administrative spheres; and a set of new 'Western' cultural and social norms, devoid of the authoritarian, nationalistic and militaristic traits prevalent during National Socialism, had been taken up by the Germans. Against this background, it is possible that, as a result of his having experienced fifteen relatively stable years in the Federal Republic, like many of his fellow countrymen, Koselleck had gained greater trust in political reform and in the durability of a modern, liberal-democratic political system.

³¹¹ We might note that the significance that Koselleck here assigned to one man was a feature that clearly did not fit Conze's social-historical framework.

Another reason for the lack of modernity-critique is perhaps to be found in the strong reactions to *Kritik und Krise*. Exactly how these reactions influenced Koselleck is difficult to say, but they may have convinced him not to refrain from participating directly in the political debates and from expounding any overtly negative views on modernity. The lack of ideological critique was presumably also affected by a need to adapt to certain standards within the program of structural history. Although Werner Conze and his associates were critical towards aspects of the modern world, it was not political criticism that they sought to be recognized for in the postwar period: it was for the scholarly quality of their work.

In his work on the Prussian *Vormärz*, Koselleck had to comply with the standards of Conze's program, even if this approach to history did not fit his analytical temperament, as he revealed was the case in a letter to the political scientist Wilhelm Hennis in June 1963. Giving Hennis a status report of his work on his *Habilitation*, Koselleck wrote:

"My Prussians are marching into the final version, even if the uniform that I inflicted on them does not fit as well as it did in the old days. All in all a 'neutralist' enterprise, for the current liberal and socialist critique reaches too short and the patriotic praise reaches too far, and when I appear to be 'objective', I approach a sense of boredom that overcomes me in the process. The 'social structure' is a way out, which neutralizes many things in the account, so that the specific flavor disappears. Anyway, I hope that I have not forgotten all of the old history in the grey area that lies in the direction towards social history."³¹²

In the end, Koselleck managed, as we will see, to add his individual 'flair' to his social historical study and to position vis-à-vis the other contributions to the field. However, overall, he conformed to the standards of Conze's social-historical approach; an approach that in his letter to Hennis he described as a 'neutral', 'objective' and in the end somewhat 'boring', as it disallowed political and scientific critique. While writing social history was thus perhaps not the most intellectually stimulating experience for Koselleck, he learned many things from Conze's program that he was to draw on in his later work, and by being affiliated with the program, he positioned himself as a politically and scientifically less controversial, more conventional and respected scholar within the historical profession. Conze's volume, including Koselleck's article, was not only met with positive responses among historians in Germany,³¹³ but also in the English-speaking part of the world. Having praised Koselleck's analysis, an American reviewer made the following remark on the overall study:

"Repeatedly the authors are brought back to the role of the bureaucracy. All over Germany its position

³¹² Quoted from Stephan Schlak: 2008, p. 249, note 28.

³¹³ See Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 170.

was crucial. Surely, if a definitive study of Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century is ever to be written, it will almost inevitably have to shape itself around a history of the *Beamten*. The officials were at once the intermediaries between state and society, the inheritors of the traditions of the Enlightenment state, and the most progressive part of society itself. One must agree with the majority of these scholars that both more factual information and more analysis are needed for this pivotal group.”³¹⁴

This was exactly what Koselleck presented in his *Habilitation, Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, in which he attempted to reconstruct, through archival material, a state which consisted only of its administration, as will be shown below.

The past and the present: the Prussian Vormärz and the Federal Republic

In his introduction to *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, Koselleck explained how the study temporally encompassed the period between 1791 and 1848 – from the drafting of the Prussian Law Code until the outbreak of the bourgeois revolution that brought the reforms to their end. It was for this reason that he included the concepts of reform and revolution in his title. These two concepts, Koselleck explained, not only limited but also characterized the period: in constant friction, like so-called ‘concepts of movement’ (*Bewegungsbegriffe*) (13), they had pointed towards a future, which was still to be created. Koselleck announced that his focus would be placed on the beginning of the larger societal change that the two concepts referred to: “the transition from a society that is still based on estates to an economically free society.” (13)

During his work on the habilitation, the topic of political reform had become increasingly topical in the contemporary German social-political discussions, and by the middle of the 1960s ‘reform’ had manifested as a ‘leading concept’ (*Leitbegriff*) in these discussions.³¹⁵ In this period, where a ‘reform-euphoria’ was predominant, many German politicians and intellectuals felt that they were living in a time of rapid change. Striving for and expecting reforms, they contributed what has been labeled a ‘dynamic time’ in Germany in which attempts were made to reform practically every societal sphere in a more democratic direction,

³¹⁴ Leonora O’Boyle: Review of Werner Conze (Hg.), *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 35, nr. 3. 1963, p. 299. See also the praise in Thomas T. Helde: Review of Werner Conze (Hg.), *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 23, no. 3, p. 351-352.

³¹⁵ See Silke Hahn: “Zwischen Re-education und Zweiter Bildungsreform. Die Sprache der Bildungspolitik in der Öffentlichen Diskussion“, Georg Stötzel, Martin Wengeler (Hg.): *Kontroverse Begriffe: Geschichte des öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Berlin 1995, p. 185-187; Hugo Steger: 1989, p. 24.

so that the country's political, social and cultural norms were increasingly 'Westernized'.³¹⁶

Yet, the plans for reform were strongly debated, first of all between democratically and reform-minded forces and more conservative and restorative forces.³¹⁷ And from the mid-1960s onwards, when the Adenaurian CDU-system of the *Wirtschaftswunder*-period was weakened due to economic crisis and on behalf of an increasing influence of the SPD, the debate was joined by a wave of leftist movements and activists with revolutionary political agendas.³¹⁸ While some of these primarily aimed at revolutionizing the structures of education, others, such as the infamous Baader-Meinhof group, eventually tried to overthrow the existing social-political order by violent means. This happened in the 1970s, when Germany, along with many other European countries, entered a less prosperous era, and the political optimism and euphoria disappeared.³¹⁹

The themes of reform und revolution that Koselleck dealt with in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* had certain parallels to contemporary events in Germany. However, in contrast to *Kritik und Krise*,³²⁰ Koselleck did not use the Prussian past as a means to (directly) discuss or criticize affairs in the German present. Neither did Koselleck participate in or position himself in the intense discussion of the German constitution that unfolded between the 'Carl Schmitt-school' and the 'Rudolf Smend-school' from the 1950s until the 1970s.³²¹

In the early Weimar Republic, Schmitt and Smend had both showed themselves to be critics of legal positivism and liberal conceptions of constitutional thinking. However, due to their different views on constitutional issues and because of a strained and increasingly hostile personal relationship, they gradually staged themselves as scientific antipodes from the end of the 1920s onwards. Indeed, until Smend's death in 1975, their relation was characterized by personal competition. The main differences in Schmitt and Smend's views were as follows: whereas Schmitt focused on 'decisionism' and developed his theories as polemical answers to political extremes – such as the civil war and the state of exception, the starting point for

³¹⁶ See first of all Axel Schildt: "Materieller Wohlstand – pragmatische Politik – kulturelle Umbrüche. Die 60er Jahre in der Bundesrepublik", Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried, Karl Christian Lammers (Hg.): *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften*, Hamburg 2000, p. 21-53. See also Edgar Wolfrum: 2006, p. 187-283; Edgar Wolfrum: 2005, p. 242-356.

³¹⁷ See first of all the various contributions in Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried, Karl Christian Lammers (Hg.): *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften*, Hamburg 2000.

³¹⁸ Chapter 6 deals in more detail with the broader governmental and societal changes and the student revolts at the German universities taking place in this period.

³¹⁹ See for example Edgar Wolfrum: 2006, p. 327-356; Edgar Wolfrum: 416-445.

³²⁰ Koselleck had already thematized the notions of reform and revolution together in *Kritik und Krise*. See Reinhart Koselleck: 1954, p. 91.

³²¹ The following draws on Frieder Günther: *Denken vom Staat her. Die Bundesdeutsche Staatsrechtslehre zwischen Dezision und Integration 1949-1970*, München 2004.

Smend's thinking was the vision of a peaceful and harmonic normal situation. Schmitt focused on the escalation of conflicts; Smend on how conflicts could be dissolved altogether.

In the postwar period, in their contribution to the postwar German academic and political constitutional debate, Smend and members of his school (primarily his students Ulrich Scheuner, Horst Ehmke and Konrad Esse) deconstructed the anti-liberal and conservative dimensions of Smend's earlier thinking and placed emphasis on the keywords *harmony*, *consensus* and *pluralism*. In this process, the earlier focus on the state was substituted with a focus on the constitution, which opened up to a less hierarchic and static relationship between state and society. This change had to do with the reception of 'Western' liberal-democratic constitutional thinking among the members of the Smend-school, who supported the constitution of the Federal Republic through their academic and political activities.

Central for the members of the 'Schmitt-school' remained the nineteenth-century understanding of the state as a neutral and sovereign entity and a focus on conflict and 'decisionism'. Early on, they positioned themselves as opponents of the 'Western science of democracy'. Two of the most prominent members of this strand of thinking, Ernst Forsthoff and Werner Weber, even defined themselves as "active enemies of the constitutional law" (although not in public). More generally, the academic and political activities of the 'school' were directed against countering what its members conceived of as an ongoing process of state-disintegration due to the increasing societal influence on the domain of the state.

Koselleck knew several members of the 'Schmitt-school', among them Ernst Forsthoff (1902-1974),³²² whom he had encountered during his exams at the University of Heidelberg in the beginning of the 1950s. From 1952, when Forsthoff was allowed to return to his position in Heidelberg, until he became emeritus in 1967,³²³ he concerned himself with commenting on the Basic Constitutional Law of the Federal Republic and played a central role in the debates about the concepts of *Sozialstaatlichkeit* and *Rechtsstaatlichkeit*. Moreover, in the period between 1957 and 1971, he organized the famous early summer event in Ebrach, where academics and intellectuals (of whom many had personal and intellectual affiliations to Schmitt) gathered to discuss current intellectual-political topics.³²⁴ Koselleck was a regular

³²² For Forsthoff's life and work, see Christian Schütte: *Progressive Verwaltungsrechtswissenschaft auf konservativer Grundlage: Zur Verwaltungsrechtslehre Ernst Forsthoffs*. Berlin 2006; Peter Caldwell: "Ernst Forsthoff and the Legacy of Radical Conservative State Theory in the Federal Republic of Germany", *History of Political Thought*, vol. XV, 1994, p. 615-640; Dirk van Laak: 1993, p. 240-246.

³²³ Forsthoff chose to become emeritus prematurely, since, with reference to his past, he was heavily attacked in relation to the prospect of receiving an honorary doctorate at the University of Vienna.

³²⁴ Dirk van Laak: 200-208.

participant in the early events in Ebrach,³²⁵ and he also co-operated with Forsthoff in the editorial board on the journal *Die Verwaltung. Zeitschrift für Verwaltungswissenschaft* in the period between 1970 and 1974.³²⁶

Besides a common scholarly interest in constitutional history, Koselleck shared with Forsthoff and members of the Schmitt-school a focus on moments of transition and disorder and the belief that radical societal revolutionaries should have no part in the construction of political order. However, Koselleck did not fit the ideological patterns and aims of the school nor did he join its academic-political activities. In fact with his conviction that a responsible political system is one in which powers are principally given not only to the state, but also to societal interests, he was in normative terms closer to the Smend-school.

To this, it should be added that Koselleck did not pick up on a distinctive analytical theme that formed part of the Schmittian political view of history as a series of constitutional battles: this is the focus on the role of the army in the division of power in German constitutional attempts.³²⁷ In fact, in Koselleck's work on Prussia, not a single reference can be found to Schmitt's writings on constitutional history (or to any other text of Schmitt's for that matter). Koselleck's understanding of the failure of the reforms was conceptualized along a very different axis. Taking into account his intimate knowledge of Schmitt's work this might be interpreted as a very conscious choice on Koselleck's part, as suggested by a letter from June 1976, in which he told Schmitt about the forthcoming second edition of *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*.³²⁸ Since Schmitt in an earlier letter had asked whether

³²⁵ For Koselleck's presentation in Ebrach, see *Briefwechsel Ernst Forsthoff - Carl Schmitt (1926-1974)*, hrsg. von Angela Reinthal, Reinhard Mußnug & Dorothee Mußnug, unter Mitarbeit von Gerd Giesler und Jürgen Tröger. Berlin 2007, p. 438-439 (144), 505 (292), 518 (317). Some of the Ebrach seminar-papers were published in the journal *Studium Generale*, 21-1968, 23-1970; others in the Festschrift *Säkularisation und Utopie: Ebracher Studien: Ernst Forsthoff zum 65. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart 1967.

³²⁶ They were both members of the journal's first editorial board in 1970. The other members of the editorial board were Klaus von der Groeben, Franz Meyer, Franz Ronneberger and Roman Schnur. Together with Roman Schnur, Forsthoff was editor-in-chief until his death in 1974. Koselleck left the journal in 1978 – he never contributed articles to it. The German scholar of law, Florian Meinel, has pointed to Koselleck's and Forsthoff's common interest in historical and contemporary issues of public administration and public law. He writes: "The German historian Reinhart Koselleck, another adept of Carl Schmitt and a friend of Forsthoff from their common Heidelberg days, has analysed in his classical study on Prussia in the aftermath of the French Revolution the role of a clever bureaucracy in preventing social revolt. Koselleck focussed on the time after 1789, while Forsthoff's moment of truth came in 1914. In a world devastated by war, the role and burden of the administration had to be reconsidered. For both scholars, it appeared that the administration was then expected to be the last resort of order against chaos." Florian Meinel: "Review essay – Ernst Forsthoff and the Intellectual History of the German Administrative Law", *German Law Journal*, vol. 08, nr. 08, 2007, p. 798.

³²⁷ For this view and how other associates of Schmitt adopted it, see Reinhard Mehring: "Carl Schmitt and His Influence on Historians", *Cardozo Law Review*, 2000, vol. 21, p. 1653-1664; Reinhard Mehring: "Carl Schmitt und die Verfassungslehre unserer Tage", *Archiv des öffentlichen Recht*, 120, 1995, p. 177-204.

³²⁸ RW265-8171/1: 24/6-1976. In the letter Koselleck ventured into a longer explanation of how to place the 'Heeresverfassung' in his account of the Prussian *Vormärz*. He moreover described the later course of German history as a result of the failed attempt to create a constitution around 1848.

Koselleck had read his 1934 *Staatsgefüge und Zusammenbruch* (a deeply polemical book in which Schmitt blamed the German defeat in World War I for what he called ‘the defeat of the German army by the *Bürger*’ in 1871 and in which he praised National Socialism for finally revising this erroneous path in German history),³²⁹ Koselleck seemingly felt obliged to comment on the differences between their approaches. “Gewiss ist es ein schiefer Ansatz”, he wrote,

“It is of course inadequate to deal with Prussia without emphasizing its army-constitution (*Heeresverfassung*). I have only done that in important places, without placing the army-constitution as axis of the constitutional reality. Indirectly, there is a lot about the issue in my book: especially in the chapters on the corporate (*ständischen*) constitution on the level of districts- and provinces.”

As Koselleck portrayed the lack of focus on the relation on between the army and society in his work on Prussia as a distorted approach, while he simultaneously argued that it was a central theme in the book, his real message was a different one. In tune with the larger changes of the Federal Republic in the 1960s, over the course of his work on Prussia, Koselleck’s normative stance had moved further away from Schmitt-inspired debates about, and notions of, the state and the constitution. In terms of his relations with Schmitt, Prussia’s arrival in the Federal Republic was a departure which Koselleck remained reluctant to communicate directly, but which was conscious and definite.

The conceptual approach in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*

The basic argument underlying the successes and failures of the Prussian reforms in Koselleck’s *habilitation* remained roughly the same as that discussed in his article from 1962. However, the study was amplified in terms of analytical range and depth, and the intimidating number of detailed analytical trajectories make it very difficult, if not impossible, to

³²⁹ Carl Schmitt: *Staatsgefüge und Zusammenbruch des Zweiten Reiches. Der Sieg des Bürgers über den Soldaten*, Hamburg 1934. Already in the 1920s and in connection to his plea for an existential-political juridical thinking, Schmitt had outlined a historical argument concerning what he argued was the ‘dangerous’ legacies of the recent ‘blurry’ and ‘unclear’ German constitutions, in which forces in the German society had ‘robbed’ the German state of its sovereignty. His prime example was what he referred to as the ‘non-transparent’ and ‘dangerous’ compromise that had been made in the German constitution in 1871. It was this argument that Schmitt sharpened in *Staatsgefüge und Zusammenbruch des zweiten Reiches*. His interpretation of events was severely (and courageously) criticized by the historian Fritz Hartung, who in the early 1930s became Hintze’s successor at the University at Berlin, where Schmitt was also teaching at the time. See Hans-Christoph Kraus: “Soldatenstaat oder Verfassungsstaat. Zur Kontroverse zwischen Carl Schmitt und Fritz Hartung über den preußisch-deutschen Konstitutionalismus (1934-1935)“, *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, Bd. 45, 1999, p. 275-310. On Hintze and Hartung’s reviews of Schmitt’s *Verfassungslehre* (1928), see Hans-Christoph Kraus: “Verfassungslehre und Verfassungsgeschichte. Otto Hintze und Fritz Hartung als Kritiker Carl Schmitts“, Dietrich Murswiek (Hg.): *Staat – Souveränität – Verfassung. Festschrift für Helmut Quaritsch zum 70. Geburtstag*, Berlin 2000, p. 637-661.

summarize the investigation in such a way as to do it justice. This is even more so, because the investigation merged several different topics (the transition to political and social modernity; the role of the state in creating political, social and economic changes; the origins and dynamics of class formation etc.) and because, unlike *Kritik und Krise*, it was dominated by a topical rather than a chronological design and by the constant repetition of one argument from a variety of angles rather than a progressive narrative.

What holds the study together is its constant focus on the activities of the Prussian bureaucrats; more specifically, on how the bureaucrats as main actors in the reforms sought to maneuver within the space of possibilities that had been opened up on the threshold of modernity. Against this background, the study constantly exemplifies how the bureaucracy gradually became alienated from the rising society, thereby losing its authority as well as its ability “to act above estates” (*überständigisch zu handeln*). (637)

With his focus on constitutional and bureaucratic issues, Koselleck wrote the project into two academic traditions: that of Otto Brunner, Hans Freyer and Werner Conze and into the work on Prussian bureaucratic and constitutional issues by the historians Otto Hintze and Hans Rosenberg. It should be added that the history of Prussia from 1640 had been the apogee of Protestant German historical writing in the nineteenth century, at least as far as the modern period was concerned. Luminaries of the discipline, most famously Ranke, Droysen and Treitschke, had published widely distributed multi-volume histories of state and dynasty, and the institutional and economic history of Prussia had been covered by the ‘Borussian school’ under the leadership of Gustav von Schmoller, who supervised the monumental source editions of the *Acta Borussica* and presided over his own journal, the *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preußischen Geschichte*. The biographical genre, too, was highly popular. Many prominent modernists published on the celebrated figures of Prussian political and cultural history, such as Freiherr vom Stein (Gerhard Ritter), Wilhelm von Humboldt (Siegfried Kähler), and finally Bismarck (Erich Marcks). This tradition continued well into the twentieth century. Nearly all the prominent modernists published monographs on Prussian matters. Taken as a whole, these works contributed to the enormous significance of Prussian history as a key period for a nationalist vision of German history; a vision, which was after 1945 at once continued by scholars such as Gerhard Ritter and Hans Rothfels, and at the same time undermined by scholars such as Hans Rosenberg, who located the roots of National Socialism in traditions of Prussian authoritarianism, militarism and nationalism.

Coming from a Prussian background, Conze’s interest in Prussia was undoubtedly motivated by a deep sympathy for his topic. This did not, however, result in a narrative

dominated by a Prusso-centric nationalism. The same can be said of Koselleck's narrative. Rather than reproducing the patriotic eulogies of Prussia found in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century historical writing (he considered these went too far) or echoing the devastating critique of Prussia found in the work of Rosenberg (he felt this fell short of doing the subject justice), Koselleck aimed first of all at extending and innovating the analytical framework in Conze's approach to social history. In line with this, he acknowledged the institutional support and the supervision that Conze had provided during the working process in two explicit ways. First of all, in his foreword, he thanked Werner Conze "for the stimulating thoughts and the continuing support he granted the present investigation."³³⁰ Secondly, in the introduction, he described the nature of his method using Conze's terminology:

"The applied method is, in line with the question of research, social-historical. It investigates - in a customary fashion - the given texts, but transcends them, more than biographical or political historical writing, in order to uncover supra-individual circumstances, which the texts do not always bring to words, at least never explicitly." (17)

In his search for such broader historical structures, Koselleck intended to make use of statistical data, but he also emphasized the need to subject the material to abstractions which went beyond the simply numerical, and he wanted to employ the historical-philological method in order to do so. Even statistics, he explained, do not speak for themselves. Historians always have to deal with and refer to texts – also in the case of social history. In this way, he attempted to combine a hermeneutical and a social-historical method.

This analytical project was, as we have seen, one that Koselleck had begun in *Kritik und Krise*, using conceptual history as a merging tool, and, as a continuation of this project, he stated in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* that hermeneutics and social history was to be combined "through word-, and occasionally through conceptual analysis." (17) Likewise, he once again launched his conceptual-historical framework against the approach of 'historicism' (in relation to which Koselleck presumably once again recalled Meinecke's book on *Die Idee der Staatsräson*), as he added: "It renounces *Geistesgeschichte*." (17)

It should be here added that, during the 1960s, quite a few historians had begun to criticize what they saw as thematic neglects and theoretical-methodological flaws in 'historicism',³³¹ so the distance that Koselleck expressed to *Geistesgeschichte* in *Preußen zwischen Reform*

³³⁰ Koselleck also thanked his two colleagues from the historical and juridical seminars in Heidelberg, the social historian Wolfgang Schieder and the jurist and constitutional historian Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde, for suggestions and criticism.

³³¹ In chapter six, we will deal in more depth with the critique of 'historicism' in the 1960s and 1970s..

und Revolution was less controversial than the critique he had launched at Meinecke in the early 1950s. However, the lines of critique were the same: with the method of conceptual history, Koselleck wanted to make up for certain flaws that he detected in *Geistesgeschichte*. In the introduction, he wrote: “The resignation to conceptual history (...) has the advantage of staying near social history, though tracking the dynamics specific to language, in which historical experiences are accumulated and formulated.” (17) In line with this, quite differently to Meinecke, and in line with the framework of Conze’s *Arbeitskreis*, Koselleck defined conceptual history as ‘a variant of social history’. (17)

During his work on *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, Koselleck had developed his conceptual approach substantially. However, presumably not to challenge the boundaries of Conze’s program with a too theoretical project, his description of the theoretical-methodological framework and its implications was limited to these two sentences: “The ambiguous terms such as administration and constitution, estate and class refer to fierce controversies in the social and political domain, and in the end also to the differentiation of these areas in the nineteenth century. The conscious efforts to push through, implement, or impose a new political terminology belongs to the modern social movement.” (17)

By highlighting the relation between social-political concepts and social-political contestation and change, Koselleck referred to a conceptual approach, which is usually connected to the birth of modern German conceptual history, as it was articulated in Otto Brunner’s social-constitutional studies from the 1930s and 1940s. To understand this approach, which became a central component in Conze’s structural-historical framework, an introduction to Brunner and his work is needed.

Brunner was born in Austria in 1889.³³² Trained as a historian, he finished his dissertation in 1922 and his *Habilitation* in 1929, before he acquired a professorship in Vienna, where he later became the director of the Austrian Institute for Historical Research. At the end of the Second World War, he was barred from further teaching activities in response to his institutional affiliation with, and ideological affinities to, Nazism. However, in 1954 he was hired as the successor to Hermann Aubin at the University of Hamburg and came to play an

³³² For information on Brunner, see Reinhard Blänkner: “Von der ‘Staatsbildung’ zur ‘Volkwerdung’”. Otto Brunners Perspektivenwechsel der Verfassungshistorie im Spannungsfeld zwischen völkischem und alteuropäischem Geschichtsdenken”, Luise Schorn-Schütte (Hg.): *Alteuropa oder Frühe Moderne. Deutungsmuster für das 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert aus dem Krisenbewußtsein der Weimarer Republik in Theologie, Rechts- und Geschichtswissenschaft*, Berlin 1999, p. 87-135; Gadi Algazi: “Otto Brunner – ‘Konkrete Ordnung’ und Sprache der Zeit”, Peter Schöttler (Hg.): *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft 1918-45*, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 166-204; Otto Gerhard Oexle: “Sozialgeschichte - Begriffsgeschichte - Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Anmerkungen zum Werk Otto Brunners”, *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Nr. 71, 1984, p. 305-341.

important role in the German historical profession until his retirement in 1968. Brunner was involved in founding the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*, and, until his death in 1982, he was one of the editors of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

Brunner rose to fame in the 1930s, when he pointed to the need to distinguish historically between the concepts of today and those of the past. More concretely, according to Brunner, since concepts are always created in and belong to a specific situation, it is simply impossible to use specific concepts un-translated in other historical situations. It was working from this assumption and through examples of how political and social concepts had lost their original meaning in the transition from early modern to modern times, that Brunner as a critic of 'historicism' claimed that only a 'scientific revision of the basic concepts' could reestablish a proper understanding of the political and social structures of the past.

Brunner's aim to revise basic concepts also informed his most famous book: the 1939 *Land und Herrschaft*.³³³ The book is a study of the social-political constitutional *Stände*-order in the south-eastern parts of the Old Reich from the middle ages onwards. More concretely, it investigates the law-concepts, cases and institutions, on which the public entities of power rested, from the early middle ages until the early 17th century, and which, according to Brunner, provided a stable and long-lasting basic political structure. Portraying the structure as *one* well-functioning, transparent and responsible political order, Brunner's critique of the older literature on the state in the Middle Ages revealed that his aim to revise basic concepts was not only related to scientific concerns, but also to a critique of modernity. It thus represented an attempt to eliminate what he saw as a dangerous division between state and society, caused by modern society. In this respect, he followed:

"the arguments of national socialist constitutional theoreticians like Carl Schmitt or Ernst R. Huber, who back then propagated the overcoming of the liberal way of separating (*Trennungdenken*) state and society and believed that it was possible to provide a constitutional order for a totalitarian *Volksgemeinschaft* and *Führerdiktatur*, with the concept of the concrete order."³³⁴

When Conze, making frequent references to Brunner, in the 1950s elevated the conceptual approach as a way to analyze society's social-political constitution into an essential part of

³³³ Otto Brunner: *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Südostdeutschlands im Mittelalter*, Baden b. Berlin 1939.

³³⁴ Thus Lutz Raphael: *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme: Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*, München 2003, p. 94. With reference to 'the Germanic thinking in the middle ages', which Schmitt in *Über Drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftlichen Denken*, Hamburg 1934, claimed was a 'through and through concrete order thinking', Schmitt attempted to establish a, not further defined, basic juridical thinking that the National Socialists could use without taking the existing norms and rules into account.

social history, he erased the political dimensions of Brunner's approach.³³⁵ Already in 1954, in his perhaps most famous article "Vom 'Pöbel' zum 'Proletariat'",³³⁶ Conze presented an ideal example of how the structural-historical conceptual approach should be practiced. In the article, focusing on the concepts of *Pöbel* and *Proletariat*, he sought to demonstrate a set of fundamental economic and social changes, including the origins of pauperism, which occurred in the German *Vormärz*. "Pauperism", Conze explained:

"was seen with apprehension as a new phenomenon which was something quite different from the poverty question or the existence of the property-less and laboring classes in the traditional sense. This difference which was perceived in Germany during the 1830s and 1840s became articulated at the time in the notion of 'Pöbel' or at least in the latter word being used less frequently and with a narrower application. Both terms ultimately encapsulate everything that can help to explain the evolution towards pauperism."³³⁷

Brunner's conceptual approach appealed not only to Conze, but also to the latter's students. In an interview Koselleck described how, after Conze's arrival in Heidelberg, he was directly inspired by Brunner's semantic analysis of constitutional history.³³⁸ First of all, on a general level, he found in Brunner's approach, which he would later speak of as a 'consequent historicism',³³⁹ an analytical device to counter what he regarded as unhistorical dimensions of German 'historicism'. Secondly, the inspiration from Brunner shows in a more direct way in his work on Prussia. By arguing that the entire problem of the *Vormärz* was embodied in the tensions, conflicts and fights surrounding the concept of the *Bürger*, he organized his attempt to understand the problems in drafting the Prussian social-political constitution within a conceptual analysis that was similar to Brunner's and Conze's.

More concretely, according to Koselleck, the constant ambiguity that surrounded the concept of *Bürger* demonstrates the successful implementation of certain reforms as well as the failure to implement others. The conceptual ambiguity had, he explained, begun already in the drafting of the Prussian Code, in which different concepts (inhabitant, subject, member, state-citizen – *Einwohner*, *Untertan*, *Mitglied*, *Staatsbürger*) with seemingly broad or neutral connotations were used interchangeably. These concepts pointed simultaneously to the future

³³⁵ See for example, Werner Conze: "Sozialgeschichte" [1966], *Werner Conze: Gesellschaft – Staat – Nation*, hrsg. von Ulrich Engelhardt, Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang Schieder, Stuttgart 1992, p. 86-95.

³³⁶ Werner Conze: "Vom 'Pöbel' zum 'Proletariat'. Sozialgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen für den Sozialismus in Deutschland", *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 41, 1954, p. 333-368.

³³⁷ Werner Conze: 1954, p. 336.

³³⁸ See Wolf-Dieter Narr und Kari Palonen: [1999], p. 10-11. See also Reinhart Koselleck: "Begriffsgeschichtliche Probleme der Verfassungsgeschichtsschreibung", *Der Staat. Beiheft 6. Gegenstand und Begriffe der Verfassungsgeschichtsschreibung*, 1983, p. 13.

³³⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1983, p. 13. However, in the same passages, Koselleck also commented on how Brunner forgot to historicize his own position.

and to the past: to the future, because they would liberate the Prussians as individuals; to the past, because the concepts were still in some respects bound to the old society of estates and its division of rights. Providing a typical example of the latter, Koselleck wrote: “As member of the state one was subject to the monarch, but also the holder of certain rights and duties, depending on social position.” (56)

Because it was vigorously resisted by the old estates, the reformers never managed to create a concept of *Bürger*, which could bring about equal political and social rights for everybody. Instead, a new economic man was created, or liberated: “One was not a citizen of the state as political member of the state, but instead as partaker of the free economy – the modern society. Citizen of the state was in the proper sense the homo oeconomicus; citizen of the state only to the extent to which the state was economically liberal.” (60)

When equal political or social rights were given by the Prussian state, and this was only occasionally, it was done only to serve the interest of the state – this was the case in the liberalization of access to the military, the administration and the economic sector. In the private spheres, such as the family and the household, people entered a process of emancipation that was characterized by similar dynamics: they were liberated as free individuals, but they were not elevated to the status of *Bürger* through the granting of the same political and social rights as the members of the old estates.

According to Koselleck, only one exception was made concerning the granting of political and social rights. This exception took on shape through the economic reforms and created a new capitalist bourgeoisie, which managed to buy itself access to the nobility and to gain a share in their political and social rights. Due to the fact that this did not solve the problems connected to the societal structures in the Prussian *Vormärz*, but only intensified the political fight for the right to define the concept of the *Bürger*, Koselleck described this change merely as a transition from an “*altständischen* to a *neuständischen* bourgeois society.

As such, without overtly theorizing the approach, Koselleck’s conceptual analysis of the *Bürger* was vital to his demonstration of how the Prussian *Vormärz* was characterized by an increasing opposition and tension between societal groups and between the state and society.

The temporal layers of the Prussian reforms

Similar to his introduction to conceptual historical approach, Koselleck elaborated little about what is to be considered his most original theoretical contribution to the program of structural history in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*. This contribution concerns the application of theories of historical time. Whilst to some extent they already informed the

article from 1962, during the conceptualization of the larger study Koselleck had refined, enlarged and developed his theories. This can be seen in the very beginning of the introduction, where he explains why, as reflected in the subtitle of the book, the study was divided into three parts: ‘Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung und Soziale Bewegung’. The three entities, Koselleck clarified, constituted three temporally successive phases of the reform period. However, he added, the entities and the phases were inseparable, since the Prussian Code reacted to social unrest; the administration to both; and the social movements reacted to the reforms of the administration as well as to the Prussian Code.

Koselleck’s intention was hence not to analyze the three entities separately; instead he aimed to organize the analysis along the different planes on which the historical movement took place. In a frequently quoted passage of the book, he elaborated on the consequences of this temporal conception for his investigation into the Prussian *Vormärz*:

”The account consequently does not proceed along a linear conception of time. Theoretically, the investigation deals with different layers of historical time. The diverging durations, velocities and modes of acceleration of these layers caused the tensions of the epoch and thus characterize its unity.”
(14)

Koselleck’s analysis, then, was guided by two temporal-theoretical aspects. Not only, as in the article from 1962, did he analyze conceptions of time as a way to understand the expectations that sparked the reforms in Prussia (the feeling of change, movement and acceleration). In addition, his analysis of the dynamics of the Prussian *Vormärz* was based on the theoretical presupposition that history does not unfold in *one* linear movement, but in the interaction between several different, but co-existing temporal layers (*Schichten geschichtlicher Zeit*), which are all characterized by diverse characteristics in terms of duration, speed and intensity. Since after the dissertation he made it his ambition to investigate in more depth how history – or rather histories – are created in the interaction between different layers of time, this temporal-theoretical presupposition was to be assigned a crucial role in Koselleck’s historical writing.

The presupposition was also important for the analysis in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*. It dictated not only the anti-chronological and multidimensional design of the analysis, but also connected directly to the overall argument made for the conceptual analysis of the *Bürger*, by capturing the two contradictory temporal-political layers that were condensed into the period between 1780 and 1848. One was connected to the emerging industrial and bourgeois society that, with a focus on the future and expectations of progression and change, worked for a growth-oriented economy and more democratic

political structures; the other was connected to the past, to the old regime and the traditional agrarian society, and sought to hinder the massive social-political upheavals and changes taking place in the period. According to Koselleck, it was the presence of these two temporal layers that caused the two contradictory movements within the processes of reform (the quickly-implemented and successful social-economic reforms and the much slower and considerably more problematic social-political reforms). The failure of the reforms was also rooted in the opposition between these contradictory time layers and dynamics.

The temporal-analytical framework with which Koselleck analyzed the expectations that sparked the reforms in Prussia can – as we will see in chapter six – be interpreted as an attempt to develop Heidegger’s idea of *Being* as a temporal phenomenon in a more historical-analytical context: as an attempt to analyze individual and collective self-understanding and action through analyzing historical actors’ conceptions of time and ‘finality’. However, as Koselleck rejected the idea of unified and linear view of historical time and instead argued for a plurality of different and co-existing historical times, he sought to develop a temporal-analytical framework that went beyond *Sein und Zeit*. This framework alluded to and was to some extent inspired by a set of notions about historical time that have been outlined by the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1986).

Already in 1949, in his celebrated work *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Braudel put forward a theory of three different historical layers: (1) The slow, almost imperceptible history of man in relation to his geographical and climatic surroundings; (2) the somewhat more dynamic history of economic, social and political structures; (3) the history of events, which Braudel famously described as “surface disturbances, crest of foam that the tides of history carry on its strong back.”³⁴⁰

In downplaying the traditional focus on politics, persons and events in favour of long-term structures (geographic, social and economic) as influential factors shaping history, Braudel’s view on history had points of contact with that of Conze, who, by writing a highly positive review of Braudel’s book in 1951 and inviting him to Heidelberg at the beginning of the 1960s, ensured that German historians became familiar with his work.³⁴¹

Koselleck met Braudel during his visit in Heidelberg. Although he did not provide any

³⁴⁰ Fernand Braudel: *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949, preface.

³⁴¹ Wolfgang Schieder: “Wir können keine Kommentare erzwingen, den schließlich waren wir nicht das hohe Gericht“, Rüdiger Hohls und Konrad H. Jarausch (Hg.): *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, 2000, p. 293. Thomas Etzemüller: 2000, p. 54-49; Lutz Raphael: “Trotzige Ablehnung, Produktive Missverständnisse und verborgene Affinitäten. Westdeutsche Antworten auf die Herausforderungen der ‘Annales’-Historiographie (1945-1960)“, Heinz Duchhardt, Gerhard May (Hg.): *Geschichtswissenschaft um 1950*, Mainz 2002, p. 75-80.

references to the source of inspiration of his theory of historical time in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, Koselleck retrospectively stated that he was inspired by Braudel's work on the issue.³⁴² In Koselleck's own words, his idea of the different layers of historical time is to be viewed as a continuation of Braudel's theories. Whereas Braudel worked with an ontological division between the three layers (the events, the structures and the basic surroundings), Koselleck wanted to analyze the interaction between them. This analytical ambition became a central discursive feature in the unifying pattern and the common objective in Koselleck's writings, as it served to substantiate his deconstruction of notions of history in the singular and as a very operational framework to thematize history in the plural.

Chapter six elaborates on how the framework was to occupy centre stage in his work following the habilitation, when, unconstrained by the conventions of the discipline, he declared it his aim to develop a theory of historical times. Bearing in mind that, by means of constructing and applying a theory of historical time, Koselleck went beyond the boundaries of Conze's structural history, we can move on to present another renewal that *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* brought with it. This did not concern Koselleck's theoretical-methodological approach, but his re-evaluation of the Prussian bureaucracy and of Prussian history more generally; it was, furthermore, a re-evaluation he announced only implicitly.

Koselleck vs. Rosenberg: the role of the administration

If we want to obtain a full understanding of Koselleck's interpretation of the Prussian reforms, it is necessary to compare the study to the standard work in the field at that time. This is Hans Rosenberg's *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660-1815* from 1958,³⁴³ which Koselleck referred to as a forerunner in the field in his introduction.

Born in 1904, Rosenberg was a deeply engaged Prussian-German left-liberal of Jewish origins, who was early on influenced by Eckart Kehr, a leftist student of Friedrich Meinecke. In the late 1920s, Rosenberg began to challenge the dominant methodologically and politically conservative German historiography with a focus on German foreign policy and economic systems. He habilitated with Johannes Ziekursch in 1932 in Cologne, before he was forced into American exile in the 1930s, where he devoted his academic activities to

³⁴² See [Reinhart Koselleck]: 2003, p. 11. The first direct reference to Braudel in Koselleck's work in this respect is to be found in Reinhart Koselleck: 1972, p. 23.

³⁴³ Hans Rosenberg: *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660-1815*, Cambridge, 1958.

investigating the history of the Prussian state and its political aristocracy.³⁴⁴

In his work on Prussia, Rosenberg was much more critical towards the country than his predecessors in the field had been. This was also the case in Rosenberg's perhaps most famous study, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy*, in which, using Prussia as his example, he sought to analyze the drift into political and administrative centralization and the growing importance of the professional classes in modern society. On the topic of the Prussian reforms, similar to Koselleck, Rosenberg observed that the bourgeoisie was too weak to demand democratic changes. However, compared with Koselleck he attributed less positive motives to the actions of the governmental ministers, the reform movement and not least to the Prussian administrators in the process of reform.

More concretely, according to Rosenberg, in pursuit of their interests of power and prestige, the Prussian administration had early on entered a fatal authoritarian power-triad with the Junkers (landlords) and the aristocratic army corps. The result of this alliance was, Rosenberg wrote, the triumph of "bureaucratic absolutism" (202) – of centralized and authoritarian rule exercised through a growing bureaucracy. Moreover Rosenberg argued that by maintaining their political and societal positions in the transition to industrial society, the privileged groups assured the "perpetuation of pre-industrial values in Prussia." Rosenberg spoke of these values as "the blending of civil and military administration and personnel; the excessive militarization of social life; and the emergence of 'Prussian Puritanism', allied with the political docility and social quietism of orthodox Lutheranism." (22)

Whereas Koselleck approached the reforms from the perspective of the space of possibilities which opened up at the time of their inception, Rosenberg viewed them from the perspective of 1848, and he used his critique of what he portrayed as the conservative elements in German history to explain the preconditions of National Socialism. The rise of bureaucratic absolutism, Rosenberg thus explained, paved the way for a "long tradition of obedience to authority, centralized power in the hands of self-interested groups unwilling to learn the rules of democratic cooperation" (25) and escaped "into a world of dangerous illusions and misconceptions and the immoderate use of high-sounding words" (23). Soon after, he added, the authoritarian leadership – informed by "habits of mind", crystallizing in Bismarck's nationalism and later in Ludendorff's militarism – "set out to salvage their

³⁴⁴ William W. Hagen: "Descent of the Sonderweg. Hans Rosenberg's History of Old-Regime Prussia", *Central European History*, 24:1, 1991, p. 24-50; Hans August Winkler: "Ein Erneuerer der Geschichtswissenschaft: Hans Rosenberg: 1904-1988", *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 248, Nr. 3, 1989, p. 259-252; Gerhard A. Ritter: "Hans Rosenberg 1904-1988", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Bd. 15, 1989, p. 282-302.

political fortune and traditional social position in alliance with the totalitarian Nazi movement.” (25) In this respect, according to Rosenberg, Prussia was exceptional.

By tracing the preconditions of National Socialism to the structures and dynamics of Prussian history, Rosenberg took up the argument about the *Sonderweg*, or special path in German history. With origins in German anti-Enlightenment thought, the notion of a German *Sonderweg* had in Germany embodied positive values and developments in Germany history, especially in the tradition of Prusso-centric and nationalistic historical writing, and it been utilized as a means of propaganda in the period before and during World War I. However, in line with the work of Eckart Kehr, and in a way comparable to that in which politicians and scholars in other nations evaluated what they agreed was a special path in German history, Rosenberg filled the meaning of the notion with negative characteristics and values.³⁴⁵

Rosenberg’s verdict undoubtedly belonged to the critiques of Prussian history that in Koselleck’s opinion ‘reached too short’. When Koselleck did not enter into a direct argument with Rosenberg’s depreciation of Prussia and the Prussian bureaucracy (which the latter accused for “practicing the vices of self-glorification and group arrogance” (23)), it was seemingly in order not to overstep the disciplinary rules of the *Arbeitskreis*. However, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* is easily read as an indirect answer to *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy*. What Koselleck offered in the study was a somewhat more positive evaluation of the Prussian bureaucracy and history; an evaluation, which was in all probability motivated by Koselleck’s own Prussian background.

Certainly, Koselleck did not reproduce the traditional patriotic eulogies of Prussia found in German historical writing. However, he did not attribute the collapse of the reforms to the administration’s selfish power interest, and nowhere did he draw a connection between the organization, attitudes and values of the Prussian administration, to the authoritarian, nationalistic and militaristic course of German history, culminating in National Socialism. In Koselleck’s account, the administration is portrayed in more positive terms: characterized by a necessary unity and spirit, it had made an admirable effort to mediate between the various social groups as to steer Prussia safely through the difficult transition to modernity.

But who, then, was responsible of the failure of the reforms? Although he pointed to the actions taken by the nobility, the new bourgeoisie and the proletariat to influence the reforms, in answering this question, Koselleck assigned much less guilt to specific actors than Rosenberg. Discussing this issue, an acute reviewer, Mack Walker, observed that what in

³⁴⁵ We will deal in more depth with the notion of a German *Sonderweg* in chapter six.

Koselleck's account really worked against the reforms was not to be found in specific Prussian elements, but in the historical forces of modernity let loose by the French Revolution, which nobody was able to master – not even the Prussian bureaucrats. Once they began to initiate reforms, the latter became entangled in a process, in which all of their successes were simply bound to fail in the end.

From this observation, Walker went on to make the following comment:

“Whatever the arena of reform, the pattern is so invariable as to arouse the reader's uneasiness; a lesser book might have avoided that. Something in the nature of the ‘historical forces’ was against the reform civil servants; some encompassing fate, tragic or ironic depending on the point of view, guided each alternative path to convergence in their own destruction. But again and again the author disarms – partly at least – congenial suspicion of historic forces and contradictions by that same mastery of details, for he composes his forces not with overt interpretations but with documents and with the aims and actions of believable people.”³⁴⁶

With these reflections, Walker illuminated a key characteristic of Koselleck's dissertation and *Habilitation*. In these writings, modernity is – directly and indirectly – portrayed as a unified, destructive and unstoppable force, which almost inevitably leads to tension, crisis or war. Seen from this light, Koselleck did not live up to his ambition of writing a form of history devoid of historical philosophical traits. But, as Walker also observed, Koselleck's arguments in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* are well-supported in terms of evidence and can certainly not be dismissed as pure teleology. To this we might add that by illuminating a variety of different factors from a variety of different angles, the *Habilitation* is theoretically-methodologically considerably more advanced than the dissertation.³⁴⁷ This multi-perspective was related to the theory of historical times that Koselleck outlined in the study: a theory, which, similar to the historical anthropology, is based on the idea that history can unfold in different ways, depending on the interaction between the many different temporal layers and conceptions that are always in play in the making of human histories.

Still, Koselleck's idea of history's open and pluralistic character is not thematized as explicitly in the dissertation as in a variety of his contemporary writings, such as a remarkable 1965 article titled “Geschichtliche Prognose in Lorenz v. Steins Schrift zur preußischen

³⁴⁶ Mack Walker: Review of *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 2/3, 1969-70, p. 184. It should be mentioned that Walker's view on Prussian history was somewhat different than Koselleck's. This can be seen in *German Home Towns: Community, State and General Estate, 1648-1871*, Ithaca 1971, in which Walker argued for the persistence of local institutions, traditions and regulations that remained outside the state's administrative sphere.

³⁴⁷ As stated by Willibald Steinmetz: 2006, p. 419-420.

Verfassung”.³⁴⁸ Written in relation to his work on the Prussian reform era, Koselleck’s intention with the article was seemingly to offer a set of didactic and constructive ideas on how historical-theoretical reflections can be included in political thought and planning. These reflections formed part of Koselleck’s partisan-activities in two ways. On the one hand, by means of portraying Stein as a figure who was out of tune with the times in which he lived, the article served as an argument against conceptualizing history as a temporally unified and uniform movement. On the other hand, by means of referring to the content of Stein’s texts, the article served as an appeal to rethink the fundamental conditions of possible history and historical writing.

The more specific aim of the text was to illuminate Stein’s unique historical thinking in the field of state administration, constitutional issues and historical writing, Lorenz v. Stein (1815-1890). Stein, Koselleck explained, lived in the age in which the role of history was changing in correspondence to the fundamental shift in the human conception of the relations between the past, the present and the future. More concretely, as a new future was set free, a future that was expected to be radically different from the past and to run along a progressive and singular model, history, as the lessons of the past, lost its position as the teacher of life.³⁴⁹

In this turmoil – Koselleck explained – Lorenz von Stein was one of the few who managed to combine an erudite knowledge of historical dates and facts without forgetting the urgent demands of planning the future. Instead of capitulating to the acceleration of history, he sought instead to view the present in a historical-critical perspective. According to Koselleck, Stein was aware of the need to plan and make prognosis for the future, but refrained from a type of planning and prognosis, which aimed at the totality and was based on a punctual and accumulative chronology.

According to Koselleck, it was Stein’s theory of history that enabled him to break away from the idealistic and utopian tendency of contemporary thought:

“He used it to open up all events: their enduring preconditions on the one hand, and the forces lending them motion on the other. Stein was a historical ontologist in the full and ambiguous sense of the word. He separated historical duration and historical contingency only theoretically and only to establish the uniqueness of given circumstances. This theoretical procedure has proved itself. He gained two mutually illuminating aspects without having to make either of them absolute.”³⁵⁰

Due to his focus on the conditions for human history and on the different structures of

³⁴⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: “Geschichtliche Prognose in Lorenz v. Steins Schrift zur preußischen Verfassung“, *Der Staat*, 1965, Bd. 4, p. 469-481.

³⁴⁹ We shall later return to the topos of ‘Historia Magistra Vitae’.

³⁵⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: 1965, p. 473.

historical time, Koselleck added, Stein was able to reveal the ‘movement as movement’ and indicate the possibilities of its direction. In relation to the Prussian constitutional question of 1852, he had managed to plan and to a certain degree predict the direction of future politics. And he succeeded in excluding the impossible by asking only:

“for the concrete preconditions of a constitution, its conditions of possibility. (...) Stein (...) thought historically and not in a utopian fashion; he drew conclusions from a known present for the possibilities of tomorrow, moving from diagnosis to the prognosis, and not vice versa.”³⁵¹

Koselleck evidently not only sympathized, but also identified with Stein’s historical-critical theory of the conditions of possible history, which had several similarities to the one that he himself had been developing since the early 1950s. With Stein, he staged himself as a theoretician of history, as someone who aimed to display the possibilities of the present and the future by scrutinizing the conditions of possible human history and politics. His message was a didactic and somewhat optimistic answer to how the challenges and dangers of modernity can be mastered through a structural-historical perspective. The *Habilitationsschrift* on Prussia marks, above all, the achievement of such a perspective. It was only through massive, concrete and detailed historical research that Koselleck was able to keep some of the theoretical promises that *Kritik und Krise* had made. The pluralized conception of history, as theorized already in the mid-1950s, became palpable only in relation with the ‘temporal layers’ of the Prussian *Vormärz* that Koselleck so painstakingly elaborated. The recognition of the complex and plural nature of a limited period in state and society allowed for a smooth departure from Schmittian macro-historical views that one-sidedly privileged conflict, state, and violent political action. In terms of Koselleck’s normative political stance, modern politics was not bound to end in the disasters caused by utopian thought if it remained prepared not only to theorize, but also to study and respect the limits and plural possibilities of human history. This was a belief that he was ever more to ramify and refine from the mid-1960s onwards, using the conceptual framework he had achieved through his *Habilitation*.

Revolution and modernity: political geography revisited

Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution received a remarkably positive appraisal by almost all of its reviewers, both inside and outside of Germany.³⁵² Not only did they agree that the

³⁵¹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1965, p. 476.

³⁵² I have found only found three entirely critical reviews. The first does not find Koselleck’s analysis satisfactory and penetrating enough; the second, published in a GDR-journal, denounces Koselleck from a Marxist perspective as being a proponent of bourgeois and restorative forces in West German society. Arthur

book was an unavoidable landmark in the field of 19th century history of Prussia,³⁵³ one reviewer even suggested that it was “one of the half-dozen most important historical studies to appear in Germany after 1945 (...),”³⁵⁴ thus forecasting its later impact on the field of 19th century German history.³⁵⁵

In the late 1960s, however, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* not only earned Koselleck great respect within the historical discipline – it also earned him a position. After a short period as a professor in political science at the newly established University of Bochum in North Rhine-Westphalia, in 1967, two years after defending his habilitation, Koselleck acquired a professorship in history at the University of Heidelberg. As a full member of the academic establishment, Koselleck was no longer, at least not to the same degree, required to adapt his historical writing to the norms of the historical profession or to the predominant intellectual discourses in Germany. This might explain why, in the last of his social historical texts to appear in the 1960s, Koselleck decided to revisit the political-geographical framework, as well as the more negative evaluation of modernity, which he had left behind, or toned down when he became an assistant to Conze. Although this was absent in his work on Prussia, it had been layered as an integral part of his historical thinking, as we shall see in the following.

The text referred to above was a contribution to the *Fischer Weltgeschichte* with the title “Das Zeitalter der europäischen Revolution 1780-1848”, which Koselleck wrote together with

Schweitzer: Review in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 85, no. 1, 1970, p. 158-159; Helmut Bleiber: Review in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, XIX Jg., Hf. 1, 1971, p. 112-115. On the decision to hire Koselleck at the University of Heidelberg, Bleiber made the following comment: “Es ist offensichtlich – der Staat der westdeutschen Monopolbourgeoisie wußte was er bei der Neubesetzung des Lehrstuhl für neuere Geschichte der Heidelberger Universität honorierte.“ (114) The third, published in the leftist journal, *Das Argument*, criticizes likewise the book for being an example of “bürgerliche Historiographie.“ Heiner Christ: Review in *Das Argument*, Nr. 2, 1970, p. 141-142. Quite critical is also Herbert Obenaus: Review in *Göttingischen Gelehrte Anzeiger*, 222 Jg., 1970, p. 155-167.

³⁵³ See first of all Karl-Georg Faber: Review in *Neue politische Literatur*, Nr. 3, 1968, p. 396-400; Ernst Klein: Review in *Das Historisch-Politische Buch*, XVI, 10, 1968, p. 298-299; Hans Joachim-Schoeps: Review in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, Vol. 20, 1968, p. 88-91; W. H. Simon: Review in *The English Historical Review*, vol. 84, no. 330, 1969, p. 194-195. See also Arnold H. Price: Review in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 73, no. 4, 1968, p. 1178-1179; Donald G. Rohr: Review (also of *Staat und Gesellschaft im deutschen Vormärz, 1815-1848*) in *Central European History*, 1:3, 1968, p. 285-288; Hans Herzfeld: Review in *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, 18, 1969, p. 377; Erberhard Schneider: Review in *Schmollers Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften*, Bd. 90, H. 3, 1970, p. 357-358; Jürgen Kocka: Review in *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Bd. 75, 1970, p. 121-125; Jonathan Sperber: “State and Civil Society in Prussia: Thoughts of a New Edition of Reinhart Koselleck’s ‘Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution’“, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1985, p. 278-296.

³⁵⁴ Mack Walker: 1969-70, p. 184.

³⁵⁵ Koselleck’s work has, for example, in crucial respects inspired Thomas Nipperdey’s famous *Deutsche Geschichte 1860-1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat*, München 1985. See the comments in Jonathan Sperber: “Master Narratives of Nineteenth-Century German History”, *Central European History*, 24, 1991, p. 69-91.

the two French historians Louis Bergeron and François Furet.³⁵⁶ The common aim of the three authors was to illuminate the various political, societal, technological, economical and intellectual dynamics at play in the period of the European revolutions. Considering that the publishers in the introduction characterized the period as “crisis-ridden decades” (7) and moreover stated the methodological approach as one aiming to capture the interplay between long-term structures and individual events, thus avoiding a strict chronological narrative, the framework obviously corresponded perfectly to Koselleck’s conception of history. His task in the project was to describe the continental dimension of European history from the year 1815 until the outbreak of the revolution of 1848 through four chapters on respectively the Congress of Vienna; the agrarian constitutions of Europe; the revolution of 1830; and, finally, the rise and the structures of the bourgeois world.

What makes Koselleck’s account of these events of special interest is first of all the attempt to combine several of the theoretical and methodological elements as well as the various themes, arguments and perspectives that are found in his various writings (including his letters to Schmitt) from the beginning of the 1950s until 1960. In other words, the text witnesses the high level of complexity, variety, but also unity in Koselleck’s historical writing in this period. What contributes still further to make the text fascinating reading is its remarkable narrative style. Less constrained by the scientific norms of his surroundings, but obliged to communicate to a broader audience, Koselleck was in a more free position to voice his opinion on the past and the present, but forced to do this in an easily understandable way. The result was a highly advanced, well-communicated and almost apocalyptic account of European and global processes of modernity.

In the first chapter on the Congress of Vienna, restating the exact same political-geographical themes, concepts and arguments that had fascinated him so intensely in the mid-1950s, Koselleck portrayed the congress as a geopolitical fight for the re-division and re-ordering of the territories of Europe: a new ‘ordering of space’ (*Raumordnung*) (202). Echoing his letter to Schmitt from 1956, Koselleck explained how the territorial re-ordering of Europe had been decided by the “the worldwide opposition between the maritime England and the great-continental Russia” (206), who had imposed their interests on the weaker powers, and he pointed to the persistence of the political discourses of Castlereigh and Alexander in the realm of contemporary international politics. Again he sought to demonstrate the fundamental change of politics taking place in the period through tracing the

³⁵⁶ Louis Bergeron, François Furet, Reinhart Koselleck: “Das Zeitalter der europäischen Revolution 1780-1848“, *Fischer Weltgeschichte*, Frankfurt am Main 1969.

change of the concept 'legitimacy', which was – he restated – now utilized functionally according to interests of power: "Its modernity was encompassed therein (...). As such, legitimacy unnoticeably became a historical-philosophical concept that was changeable in time. It could serve different functions depending on parties and power." (208-209)

This time around, however, Koselleck described the consequences of the Congress of Vienna for the various European constitutions in more detail. In the case of Germany, the drafting of constitutions posed considerable problems, since the legitimacy of the old Reich had disappeared and the major European powers – as well as the competition between Germany and Austria – prevented the creation of a federation led by an emperor and comprising constitutional organizations. Not least due to the motives and actions of the Austrian Foreign Minister, Klemens Wenzel von Metternich, the German constitutions ended as a problem-ridden compromise between 'new' and 'old' trends, characterized by the blurring of boundaries between territories as well as between stately and federal structures and authorities. According to Koselleck, using the example of Prussia, this compromise remained an inescapable obstacle to later attempts to draft constitutions that might have been able to master and control the political and social energies let loose at the turn of the century.

The example of the German constitutions served to demonstrate what Koselleck conceived of as a key characteristic of modern politics: the increased convergence between domestic and foreign policy. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Koselleck explained (in line with Schmitt, Freyer and Conze) Europe became a unity. When intellectual, political and social forces were let loose in one country, they were bound to affect other European countries, as had happened with the dissemination of temporal expectations of rapid change, political ideologies and revolutionary activities at the time of the French Revolution.

However, according to Koselleck, it was not only Europe, but the entire world that became united in the process of political modernity. Drawing on his earlier review of John Adams, Koselleck ended the chapter on the Congress of Vienna by pointing to how USA introduced the famous Monroe-doctrine in 1823 as a reaction to events on European soil. This move proved to be vital, or rather fatal, for the political order of the modern world. By creating the Monroe-doctrine as a reaction to the restoration in Spain imposed by the French, the USA had expressed an act of sympathy for the suppressed Spaniards; an act that stimulated the already ongoing dialectic between revolution and counter-revolution. This turned political modernity into a worldwide experience.

Having outlined these perspectives on the geographical dynamics of recent world history, in the following chapter, by describing the tensions between the old agrarian constitutions of

Europe and the emerging industrial society as known from *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, Koselleck argued that two contradictory temporal-political layers were condensed in the period between 1780 and 1848. The existence of such contradictory layers he now described with the notion: “die Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen” (285) (the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous) with which he conveyed the argument that modernity was born in the conflict between these layers.

The notion of die *Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen* became a key term in Koselleck’s attempt to describe the various different, but co-existing temporal layers allegedly present in all human history. Philosophically, the basic idea of the notion was influenced by Hegel (as a specific form of historical dialectic) and Heidegger, but it was the German Marxist philosopher and atheist theologian Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) who made the expression of ‘Ungleichzeitigkeit’ famous in his book *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* from 1935, where he referred to it as a ‘leftover from earlier times’ (*Restsein aus früheren Zeiten*).³⁵⁷ Without using the full notion of ‘die Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen’, in a way similar to Koselleck, Bloch referred to the temporal metaphor of layers (*Schichten*) to illustrate what he conceived as a basic characteristic of modernity: that social and cultural structures of the present continue to flourish in the present alongside existing ones and those pregnant with the future.³⁵⁸

Koselleck knew of Bloch’s writings and invited him in the 1960s to give a talk at the University of Heidelberg.³⁵⁹ Whether this means that Koselleck was directly inspired by Bloch is difficult to say. Yet, it is evident that Koselleck’s idea of ‘die Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen’ – like his other ideas – was not created in an intellectual void.³⁶⁰

Moving to the main theme of *Kritik und Krise*, Koselleck pointed to one of the processes

³⁵⁷ See Paul Nolte: “Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen”, Stefan Jordan: *Lexikon Geschichtswissenschaft: Hundert Grundbegriffe*, Stuttgart 2002, p. 134-136. As expression and category, the notion has its origins in the cultural sciences of the 1920s, where it was most often used to explain the different perceptions at play between generations temporally. This is for example the case in Wilhelm Pinder: *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*, Berlin 1926. See Ulrike Jureit: 2006, p. 20-21. For further perspectives on the use of the notion in the work of Bloch and Pinder, see Siegfried Kracauer: *History. The last things before the last*, Princeton, 1995 (chapter 6) and Frederic J. Schwarz: “Ernst Bloch and Wilhelm Pinder: Out of Sync”, *Grey Room*, 2001, p. 54-89.

³⁵⁸ Bloch also worked from the notion that human beings differ from animals in their ability to plan towards the future, Bloch focused on the *future* in the *present* – *forwards* rather than *backwards* in time – and on the human possibilities of anticipating the future by reflecting on the present possibilities. On these issues, Bloch’s thought had certain similarities with Heidegger’s.

³⁵⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1999, p. 213. This does not mean that Koselleck was not critical towards Bloch’s work. For example, a critique of Bloch’s idea of ‘hope’ as a central category for human existence – and an attempt to develop a number of equally relevant categories that can together compose a human ‘Handlungstheorie’ – can be found in Reinhart Koselleck: “Zur Begriffsgeschichte der Zeitutopie”, Reinhart Koselleck: *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politische und soziale Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main 2006, p. 267-268.

³⁶⁰ It should be added that the similar notion of ‘Gleichzeitigkeit des Nicht-Gleichzeitigen’ was used in post-war writings by conservative social-theorists, for examples by Hans Freyer, whose writings Koselleck was well acquainted with, See Paul Nolte: 2002, p. 134-136.

that the restorative powers were unable to prevent: the increase of societal power. As competition, prestige and influence succeeded the old structural ties of the status layers and the personal rule, Koselleck stated, towards the conclusion of the chapter, “power could appear in its naked form.” To this, he immediately added: “that power is evil in itself (Jacob Burckhardt) is a dictum of the nineteenth century.” (260) According to Koselleck, as he proceeded to demonstrate in the subsequent chapter, the ‘old European continuity’ was finally destroyed in the period between the July Revolution in 1830 and the Revolution of 1848. This period witnessed not only the intensification in the movement of modernity, but also the birth of new and dangerous features, such as nationalism and Marxism, in which Koselleck detected a hitherto unknown “historical philosophical arrogance and brutality.” (295)

The extreme historical philosophies were – Koselleck argued – a product of the modern world: a world, which was created by the bourgeoisie, the rise and structure of which he described in the fourth and last chapter of the text. Of fundamental importance, he wrote, was the emergence of a new ‘political generation’ around 1830, which brought with it a fundamental break with the societal consciousness and values of ‘old Europe’. This generation found itself living in a ‘new epoch’ (*neues Zeitalter*), in which technological developments, together with a massive rise in population, not only made the world appear smaller and more unified, but also suggested that it was increasingly possible for human beings to shape and control it. Guided by the experience of temporal acceleration and expectation of progress that crystallized in historical-philosophical catchwords like ‘emancipation’ and ‘revolution’, the new generation sought answers to the contemporary crisis through morally informed critique. According to Koselleck, this critique did nothing but reinforce the crisis.

Koselleck’s account of the way in which the unstoppable social-political crises spread and intensified, reached its climax in the final section in the chapter on the bourgeois world, which encompassed the period 1830-1848. In the very last section of the chapter (and the book), describing the situation just before the revolution of 1848, Koselleck concluded: “As such, the crisis encompassed all areas of social, intellectual, economical and political life: it was a crisis, which marked the end of the natural circularities and for the first time unleashed a historical progress which we have not yet seen the end of.” (319)

Koselleck’s intellectual program: pragmatism, innovation and ambiguity

Having re-stated the pessimistic view of modernity, which had been virtually absent in his previous social historical texts in the 1960s, Koselleck’s text on the age of European

revolution underpins the impression that this period saw him develop different but compatible layers of historical thinking, which could be employed according to the norms of different academic and political circumstances as well as to his personal preferences.

In his first 20 years as a historian, in a remarkable way, Koselleck thus proved able to combine a strategy of pragmatism with a constant exploration of new approaches, perspectives and themes. Most importantly, he had learned to master, and in certain respects refined the approaches of ‘historicism’ and of ‘social history’; he had created a historical anthropology; a theory of modernity; a theory of historical times; a conceptual-historical approach; a number of theoretical and methodological catchwords with which he studied and described the past and the present; as well as a theory concerning the role of political geography in history. He also proved capable of combining several of these perspectives in his analysis, as witnessed in the text on the ‘age of revolutions’.

Koselleck’s perspectives drew on discursive features from several intellectual traditions and scholars, such as Schmitt, Conze, Löwith, Kühn and Heidegger, but also from a number of figures, to whom he was less close in time and space, such as Fernand Braudel and perhaps Ernst Bloch. Meanwhile, he sharpened his arguments using Meinecke as a primary target of critique.

These were among the many scholars whose work Koselleck encountered in the course of his early a career; a career that might seem pretty straightforward given that he was awarded a professorship in Heidelberg, where he wrote his dissertation and *Habilitation*. However, the course of his academic career and his work in the 1950s was in no way certain or easy to predict. That Koselleck ended up doing social history in Heidelberg with Conze and not sociology in Dortmund with Ipsen, Popitz and Schelsky was to a certain extent a result of coincidences, unforeseen events and choices. On the other hand, while Koselleck’s work and career was partly formed by the dynamics and structures of his surroundings, it should be emphasized that within this process he also *chose* between different alternatives – he was thus active in choosing *where*, by *whom* and *how* he was formed. He chose for example Heidelberg and not Dortmund, since he could continue his career as a historian in Heidelberg and knew and appreciated the intellectual atmosphere there.

At the same time, as he learned and refined analytical traditions, Koselleck was able to position himself vis-à-vis his surroundings and create a form of historical thinking with unique features. For example, with his theories of historical time, which he coupled to a conceptual approach, he redefined what social history was and how it can be practiced. These theories of historical time became a key discursive feature in the unifying objective in

Koselleck's work of deconstructing notions of history in the singular and thematizing histories in plural, even if his *Habilitation* was marked by the tension in his thought between a choice for the universal and the pluralistic narrative. Another important and related discursive feature Koselleck developed in the 1950s was his ideas concerning the relation between space, time and history. These ideas never came to occupy centre stage in his writings in the form of a focused research project. Nevertheless they became an integral part of his analytical framework.³⁶¹

In the period in question, Koselleck remained focused on human 'finality' and on how the possibilities of human mass death had increased during the processes of modernity. This focus was linked to his attempt to develop the foundations for a more responsible and durable political order. As in *Kritik und Krise*, Koselleck expressed a preference for a system in which political power is not one-sidedly accumulated, but shared between different groups, representing both state and society. However, instead of outlining specific societal visions, he articulated his political positions within his theoretical project, by means of formalistic and pluralistic assumptions concerning how human life unfolds and how it can be studied.

However, in his writings on geopolitical issues and on Prussian social history from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, Koselleck's interpretation of the modern world and his theories as to how its destructive elements might be countered were unambiguously defined. In some texts, he expressed the conviction that a critical historical analysis, based on a firm theory of the conditions of human history, might control the destructive forces of modernity and frame a more responsible political order. In other texts, he portrayed modernity as a permanent and dialectic movement of disaster, which is fundamentally beyond human control and bound to trigger conflict, crisis and war.

When, during the 1960s, Koselleck nevertheless to some extent modified his view of the processes of modernity, it had presumably not only to do with social-political developments taking place in Germany in the 1960s, or with his adaptation to Conze's research-program, but also with his newly developed analytical framework about history's various temporal layers. While the temporal-historical framework was not fully unfolded in his work on Prussia, it came to occupy centre stage in his work following the *Habilitation*. The same was true of the conceptual-historical framework with which Koselleck analyzed the interaction between social history and language in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*. The following two

³⁶¹ See for example Reinhart Koselleck: "Raum und Geschichte", *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 78-96. The article is based on the concluding talk that Koselleck gave at the Historian's Conference in Trier in 1986.

chapters describe and analyze how Koselleck further developed his conceptual approach and his temporal-historical framework in relation to other scientific projects.

5. Program – project – straight jacket: the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*

In 1957 when Werner Conze was appointed as professor in Heidelberg, he approached Koselleck in order to discuss the latter's academic plans. One of Koselleck's proposals was to make a lexicon of central historical concepts. Soon the idea was taken up in Conze's *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*, where, with the support of Otto Brunner and Günther Ipsen, it was agreed upon to launch a project in which concepts were to be studied as indicators and factors of the social and political language.¹

To begin with, the lexicon-project was supposed to include only around 10 contributors, all from the University of Heidelberg. The original aim was exclusively to illuminate conceptual changes in the nineteenth century. However, the project gradually grew in terms of both scope and ambition. The final result was the enormous lexicon *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politischen-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, consisting of 119 articles collected in seven volumes, of which the first was published in 1972 and the last in 1997. Composed by no less than 109 contributors from a range of different disciplines, the articles cover the histories of social and political concepts – such as *state*, *revolution* and *democracy* – through time-spans of often more than 2000 years, from Ancient Greece to the Weimar Republic.

The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* has in many ways been a highly successful enterprise. Besides being celebrated as a supreme source of knowledge and an important attempt to renew the study of language and history, the lexicon has in the last 30 years inspired an uncountable amount of conceptual studies across many different academic disciplines and countries. Koselleck's activities in relation to the lexicon have been crucial for this development. Not only was he the central methodological, theoretical and editorial driving force behind the project; for a period of more than 40 years,² he also contributed a number of renowned articles to the various volumes.³ Consequently, Koselleck's name is inextricably linked with the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, and many regard the lexicon as his most

¹ [Reinhard Koselleck]: 1998, p. 187-188. For the origins of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, see also Christof Dipper: "Die Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Von der Begriffsgeschichte zur Theorie der historischen Zeiten", *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 279, Hf. 2, 2000, p. 281-309; Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 171-176; Melvin Richter: *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction*, Oxford 1995, p. 27-51.

² Koselleck was the only contributor to outlive the project, Brunner died in 1982 and Brunner in 1986. Conze's role as a 'science manager', providing the institutional settings, securing funding etc, was crucial for the project. Moreover, until his death, Conze was involved in editing of the various volumes and contributed to 16 entries. Brunner, on the other hand, seemingly did not contribute significantly to the editorial process, and he ended up writing only one entry to the lexicon – the one of *Feudalismus*.

³ Koselleck contributed to a total of 12 entries – *Bund, Demokratie, Emanzipation, Fortschritt, Geschichte, Herrschaft, Interesse, Krise, Revolution, Staat und Souveränität, Verwaltung, Volk/Nation*. He also spent considerable periods of time revising and rewriting the articles of other contributors.

important and innovative scholarly achievement.

The aim of the present chapter is to illuminate the dimension of conceptual history in Koselleck's scholarly production. The focus will primarily be on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. What are the central theoretical-methodological features of the conceptual approach that Koselleck outlined and practiced in relation to the lexicon? How did he develop his approach, and what were his aims with it? What are the relations between the lexicon and Koselleck's earlier work? How was the lexicon received, what conditioned the reception, and how did Koselleck's work on it influence his position and reputation in German and international academia?

This chapter is structured around two broad aims. The first is to show how Koselleck's conceptual approach in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* represents both a continuation and a renewal of his earlier work. On the one hand, the lexicon draws to a large extent on discursive features from *Kritik und Krise* and *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*. This is first of all the case with the normative aim of the lexicon-framework: to deconstruct the modern historical philosophical notions of history in the singular. On the other hand, because Koselleck developed, enlarged and systematized his analytical framework and vocabulary, the approach in the lexicon is in many ways more nuanced and advanced than the approaches in the dissertation and the *Habilitation*. Relevant to this is the way in which Koselleck reduced the tension in his work between a universal narrative and pluralism by means of a more elaborate conceptual-political approach with which he attempted to counter the so-called 'ideologization' and 'politicization' of social-political concepts.

The second aim is to demonstrate how Koselleck's involvement in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was instrumental in changing his status and reputation in the field. More concretely, we will see how, with the encyclopaedia, Koselleck not only became known as an innovative, respected and famous scholar, who moved on the theoretical-methodological forefront of the field, but also as an employer, who facilitated the careers of other scholars by means of creating something like an industry of conceptual history that came to influence research agendas in many countries, in spite of the criticism levelled against his approach.⁴

⁴ This chapter is shorter than the others; the first reason for this is that Koselleck's work on conceptual history has already received substantial scholarly attention and the thesis is weighted towards discussion of areas of his work as yet less thoroughly researched. The second reason is that some of the conceptual historical elements in his writings have been anticipated in chapters three and four. In addition to this, the detailed analysis of his theories of historical time, which play an important role in the lexicon, is postponed to chapter six, along with the broader contextualization of the institutional-intellectual settings in which Koselleck moved from late 1960s onwards.

The program articles and the guidelines

While the approach to *Begriffsgeschichte* Koselleck outlined in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was broadly in accordance with his earlier work, it differed in crucial respects from the traditional ways of practicing and defining conceptual history in Germany.

The first use of the word *Begriffsgeschichte* is often traced to Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* from 1837.⁵ However, Hegel did not speak of the study of concepts, but of any form of historical writing that refers to a certain level of abstraction in the 'transition to a philosophical world history'. Before the coinage of *Begriffsgeschichte*, the study of concepts and their form was practiced in relation to the many dictionaries that were published in the enlightenment. The intention of these dictionaries was first of all to list the various meanings and forms of words belonging to the past.

Around 1800, certain philologists and philosophers began to focus increasingly on the origins, changes and functions of words, with the hope that such reconstructions would lead to a more concise use of language. It was against this background that two famous dictionaries were published in the late nineteenth century: R. Eucken's *Geschichte der philosophischen Terminologie* (1879) and R. Eisler's *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe* (1899). During the 1920s, the philosopher Erich Rothacker (1888-1965) attempted to revise and update Eisler's dictionary, which was steeped in contemporary expectations of scientific progress and the national significance of the project, encompassed in the ambition of producing an encyclopedia that matched those produced in other countries. These traits were still present in Rothacker's project that was continued and revised in one of the two major conceptual-historical enterprises that emerged in Germany during the 1950s and 1960s, after a period in which scholars studying concepts, such as Carl Schmitt and Otto Brunner, had focused on uncovering (and asserting) what they considered the original meaning of concepts.

The most important media for the discipline in the 1950s and 1960s was the journal *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* founded by Rothacker in 1955. It was in this journal that the two conceptual-historical enterprises were announced in 1967: *das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe der Neuzeit* launched by Brunner, Conze and Koselleck and the *Historisches*

⁵ For historical perspectives on *Begriffsgeschichte*, Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht: "Pyramiden des Geistes. Über den schnellen Aufstieg, die unsichtbaren Dimensionen und das Abebben der begriffsgeschichtlichen Bewegung", Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht: *Dimensionen und Grenzen der Begriffsgeschichte*, München 2006, p. 7-36; Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 227-229; Melvin Richter: "Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Ideas", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 48, nr. 2, 1987, p. 247-263; Melvin Richter: Conceptual history (Begriffsgeschichte) and Political Theory, vol. 14, no. 4, 1986, p. 604-637; H. G. Meier: "Begriffsgeschichte", Joachim Ritter (Hg.): *Historische Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Bd. 1, Stuttgart 1971, p. 788-808.

Wörterbuch der Philosophie initiated by the philosopher Joachim Ritter.⁶

Both lexicons sought to demarcate themselves from earlier approaches in the field of conceptual history. Yet, the approach practiced in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (which was first conceptualized as a new and reworked edition of Eisler's dictionary) remained close to the tradition of history of philosophy that had emerged in Germany during the 19th century.⁷ Consequently it aimed at a history of philosophical concepts, which did not relate conceptual changes to social-historical factors, that is, to the social-political position of the users of the respective concepts or to social, political and economic processes and changes in society.

To probe the relation between social history and language was one of the fundamental ambitions of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, and this endeavor departed from the tradition of German academic philosophy, in which the analysis of the semantic developments aimed at a systematic clarification of the essential meanings of philosophical concepts. This was announced already in the 1967 program article in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* describing the project. The article was written by Koselleck, who in an introductory footnote stated that the text had been written already in 1963, following an editorial meeting between the three main editors and their initial co-operators on the project. Moreover, Koselleck proclaimed that the announced title of the lexicon – *das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe der Neuzeit* – was only a preliminary working title that was likely to change during the preparation of the first volume. This volume was expected to be ready for publication during the winter of 1967/68.

Whereas the assertion concerning the title of the lexicon proved to be correct, the expectations concerning the publication of the first volume turned out to be optimistic: when the first volume finally appeared in 1972, the lexicon had been renamed as *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politischen-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*.⁸ The revised and official program article, which is included in the first volume, shows that Koselleck and the editorial group had also changed parts of the approach.⁹ However, a close comparison of the two programs suggests that the original framework of the project had

⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: "Richtlinien für das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe der Neuzeit", *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, Bd. XI, 1967, p. 81-97; Joachim Ritter: "Leitgedanken und Grundsätze eines Historischen Wörterbuch der Philosophie", *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, Bd. XI, 1967, p. 75-80. A few years before, Ritter had presented his project in Joachim Ritter: "Zur Neufassung der 'Eisler' – Leitgedanken und Grundsätze eines Historischen Wörterbuch der Philosophie", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 18:4, 1964, p. 704-708.

⁷ For a comparison of the *HWP* and the *GG*, see first of all Melvin Richter: 1986 and Melvin Richter: 1987. Richter's article was written after 6 of the total of 13 volumes of the *HWP* and 5 out of 8 volumes of *GG* had appeared. The most comprehensive introduction to and discussion of the *GG* is Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 227-263.

⁸ The first volume covered concepts beginning with the four letters A, B, C, D.

⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: "Einleitung", *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Bd. 1, Stuttgart 1972, p. XIII-XXVII.

primarily been nuanced, modified and rearranged, rather than substantially changed in the years between 1967 and 1972.¹⁰ Outlining the analytical guidelines for the entire framework, the 1972 program firstly described the overall aim of the lexicon; the heuristic principles and hypotheses; the theoretical-methodological approach; various assumptions and definitions; the source basis; and the structure of the articles.

The overall aim of the lexicon was announced in the beginning of the article: “The primary concern (*leitende Fragestellung*)”, Koselleck wrote, “is to investigate the dissolution of the old world and the rise of the modern through the history of their conceptual framing.” (XIV) The lexicon was, he specified, to be restricted to investigations of the German language area, though set against the background of European linguistic traditions, and it was to deal only with concepts that had been changed, created or in other ways influenced by the political, social and industrial revolutions characterizing the period.

In line with this, the basic heuristic principle of the lexicon was that a change of concepts took place during what Koselleck labeled the *Sattelzeit* (saddle-period). The notion refers to how, in the period between 1750 and 1850, deep-seated societal-political changes went hand in hand with fundamental changes in the conceptual topography, so that basic political and social concepts acquired meanings that no longer need to be ‘translated’ in order to be understood today.¹¹ On the one hand, many old concepts were given new meanings, this was the case for the concept of *Revolution*, for example; on the other hand, a variety of new concepts were coined, such as *Liberalism* and *Socialism*.

Koselleck described the selected concepts as “leading concepts of the historical movement” (XIII), which as ‘factors’ and ‘indicators’ at the same time registered and effected the transition to modern world. He moreover announced that the transition to the modern world was to be described and analyzed through four working hypotheses concerning how the meaning, status and use of basic social and political concepts changed during the *Sattelzeit*.

The first of these hypotheses is labeled the democratization (*Demokratisierung*) of concepts; it refers to the assumption that concepts were no longer used only by the elite (the aristocracy, the lawyers and the learned), but spread throughout all layers of society. The second hypothesis is labeled the temporalization (*Verzeitlichung*) of concepts; it refers to the assumption that political and social change was no longer interpreted through patterns of repetition and recurrence, but through a focus on the future and expectations of change and

¹⁰ For excellent accounts of the differences between the two texts, see Willibald Steinmetz: 2006, p. 422-423 and Kari Palonen: 229-235.

¹¹ As observed by Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 247-248, the notion was in the 1967-article written with a hyphen (*Sattel-Zeit*) and designated a longer time-span: the period 1700 and 1900.

progress, and the idea that concepts in this process were structured around historical philosophical ideas of history, as a unified and progressive movement, running along a fixed scheme and towards an ultimate social-political end and meaning. The third hypothesis is labeled the ideologization (*Ideologisierung*) of concepts; it refers to the assumption that an increase of the level of abstraction in concepts made them utilizable according to interests, aims and expectations of various groups and movements. Finally, the fourth hypothesis is labeled the politicization (*Politisierung*) of concepts; it refers to the assumption that the increase in the number of people who were able to use and be mobilized by concepts, led to an increase in the use of concepts as slogans in the making of political and societal positions.

These hypotheses – Koselleck further stated – were to be tested through a specific conceptual method that is grounded in a specific ‘historical method’ and aims to make conceptual history fruitful for the historical and social sciences. Koselleck defined the approach with the following words: “This method aims neither at a history of words nor at a history of facts, events, ideas or problems, but it makes use of these as auxiliaries. The method is first of all historical-critical.” (XX)

As central components of the historical-critical method, Koselleck first of all listed a number of social historical questions concerning which concrete social-political contexts, with which specific intentions, and by whom, the respective concepts were formed, used and acquired their meanings. He also outlined a methodological principle of framing the analysis through a diachronic and a synchronic perspective: the synchronic dimension concerns the specific situation in which a writer uses a concept and the diachronic dimension involves tracing the meanings of a concept over time. With these measures, Koselleck explained, conceptual history aimed at analyzing the various temporal and social structures in history, including *die Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen* (XXI).

But how did Koselleck in fact define the focal point of the lexicon: the concept? To clarify this issue, he distinguished briefly between a word and a concept:

“A word can be unambiguous in use due to its ambiguity. The concept, on the other hand, must retain multiple meanings in order to be a concept. The concept is tied to a word, but it is at the same time more than the word. According to our method, a word becomes a concept, when the full richness of a social and political context of meaning, in which, and for which, a word is used, is taken up by the word. Concepts are thus concentrations of multiple meanings.” (XXII)

To this, Koselleck added: “The theoretical premise of our method is that history is coined into (*niederschlägt*) in specific concepts and only becomes history in the first place, and that history only can be history in the ways it is conceptualized.” (XXIII). What appears from

these passages is that, according to Koselleck, a concept is not a concrete and narrowly defined linguistic expression; rather it belongs to the epistemic sphere, though this sphere can seemingly not be separated entirely from the linguistic. In addition, the concept was for Koselleck something that is present in the mind and with the help of which the mind grasps what input it gets from the world. Basically, this notion of the concept emerges from a Kantian tradition rather than from modern linguistic thought. What is important to point about Koselleck's definition is that a concept always interrelates with broader semantic fields and with a social reality. Hence, in relation to the cited passages, he announced that conceptual history has the convergence of concept and history as its theme. This convergence should not be understood as one of identity between language and history, but as a more dynamic relation characterized by constant interaction and change: "Semantic change and social change, a change of situation and a need for redefinitions corresponds in different ways with each other." (XXIII) As such, he specified, conceptual history as practiced in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* aimed to avoid *Geistesgeschichte* both in the form of a mere history of ideas and in the form of a history of material processes: "It refers thus to the structural change of history, in so far it remains an auxiliary for the social sciences; but it is based on its own theory within the medium of concepts." (XXIV)

Having outlined the basic aim, the heuristic principles and hypotheses, the theoretical-methodological method and assumptions of the lexicon, Koselleck finished the 1972 program-article by describing the material basis and the intended structure of the conceptual analysis. In respect to the material, he listed a broad, or plural perspective comprised by three types of sources: the 'classic' writings of the philosophers, the lawyers, the literary writers; sources from everyday life (such as newspapers, diaries and letters); and standard dictionaries. As for the structure, he announced that all articles were to be composed by three parts. They were to start with a section covering the period from antiquity to pre-modernity; then move on to cover in depth conceptual changes in modernity; and finally end with a perspective on the contemporary use of language. As such, Koselleck had outlined the basic analytical framework and guidelines for the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

It is obvious that the described framework and the guidelines encompassed sociological and theoretical dimensions that went far beyond earlier traditions of conceptual history. In respect to the sociological dimensions, the aim was obviously not merely to record the variety of meanings or recover the original meaning of concepts, but to register the rise of modernity with the social-political concepts as analytical instruments. On the one hand, this involved the assumption that all social-political concepts are prone to constant change; on the other hand,

the sociological approach amounted to an analytical model according to which concepts are not only characterized by unique meanings, but also by common developmental traits. This model drew on a theoretical and interdisciplinary framework, which combined discursive features from many different disciplines, first of all from history, sociology and linguistics, and from the work of many different scholars.

Before we elaborate on the theoretical-methodological foundations of the lexicon, two examples will be provided of how a typical Koselleckian conceptual historical investigation unfolded in practice. These are drawn from two paradigmatic articles dealing respectively with the concepts of *Historie/Geschichte* and *Revolution*. Both articles were published before the first volume of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* appeared: the article on *Historie/Geschichte* was published in a 1967 Festschrift to Karl Löwith;¹² the 1969 article on *Revolution* was published in the journal *Studium Generale*.¹³ The texts should thus be considered as proclamations of how the conceptual approach was ideally to be practiced in the lexicon.¹⁴

The paradigmatic examples: *Historie/Geschichte* and *Revolution*

That Koselleck's article on *Historie/Geschichte* was published in a 1967 Festschrift to Karl Löwith is not a coincidence. The study dealt with the main theme of Löwith's scholarly production: the changes in human consciousness from the natural cosmos of Ancient Greece to the Christian certainty of salvation and to the modern secularized claims for salvation made possible by a substitution of Christian eschatology with historical philosophy.

Koselleck contributed to and elaborated on this theme via an analysis of the relation between the rise of historical philosophy and the modern concept of history. As reflected in the title *Historia Magistra Vitae. Über die Auflösung des Topos im Horizont neuzeitlich bewegter Geschichte*, Koselleck's main argument in the article was that history had lost its status and function as the 'teacher of life' in the transition to the modern world. The reason was, he explained, that (in contrast to the Greeks, who thought of life as repetitive and recurrent in its structure, and the Christians, who believed in the Apocalypse, the second coming of Christ and the final judgment) modern man began to imagine history as a

¹² Reinhart Koselleck: "Historia Magistra Vitae. Über die Auflösung des Topos im Horizont neuzeitlich bewegter Geschichte", Hermann Braun, Manfred Riedel (Hg.): *Natur und Geschichte. Karl Löwith zum 70. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart 1967, p. 196-219. The article was based on Koselleck's 1965 inaugural speech as a professor in Heidelberg.

¹³ Reinhart Koselleck: "Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff als geschichtliche Kategorie", *Studium Generale*, 22, 1969, p. 825-838.

¹⁴ Both concepts were later included in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

phenomenon that unfolds through a sequence of new and singular events. Following from this, it was no longer thought possible to draw useful pedagogical, moral and political teachings from historical examples and narratives.

According to Koselleck, this change in the human historical consciousness was symbolized by the replacement of the concept of *Historie* with that of *Geschichte*. Since the new concept of history was a construction that encompassed *all* history and was referred to both as an object and as a subject, there was no longer talk of histories in plural, but only of history in singular – *Die Geschichte*. Koselleck therefore labeled this conceptual form a ‘collective-singular’. This conceptual form, he wrote:

“The collective singular permitted yet another step. It made possible the attribution to history of the latent power of human events and suffering, a power that connected and motivated everything in accordance with a secret or evident plan and to which one could feel responsible, or in whose name one could believe oneself to be acting. This philological event occurred in a context of epochal significance: that of the great period of singularization and simplification which was directed socially and politically against a society of estates. Here, Freedom took the place of freedoms, Justice that of rights and servitudes, Progress that of progressions (*les progrès*, the plural) and from the diversity of revolutions, ‘The Revolution’ emerged.” (205)

The coinage of *Die Geschichte* and its impregnation with historical-philosophical ideas of history as a schematic and progressive movement was – Koselleck added – connected to the discovery of a specifically historical world: “This involves what one might call a temporalization of history, which has since that time detached itself from a naturally formed chronology.” (207) One result of this denaturalization of historical time was a separation of the two temporal dimensions of past and future in the historical consciousness of modern man: “It is not only because transpired events cannot be repeated that past and future cannot be reconciled. Even if they could, as in 1820 with the revival of the revolution, the history that awaits us deprives us of the ability to experience it. A concluded experience is both complete and past, while those to be had in the future decompose into an infinity of different temporal perspectives.” (208)

In line with this, Koselleck defined the human belief in the *Machbarkeit der Geschichte* (feasibility of history) as another key characteristic of modern historical consciousness: “Since the future of modern history opens itself as the unknown, it becomes possible to plan – indeed it must be planned.” (209) According to Koselleck, the separation of the past and the future and the eagerness to plan and create the future also had consequences for the writing of history. Since it no longer concerned the past, but the planning and prediction of the future, historical writing became impossible to falsify and therefore easily subjected to the utopian

ideas and aspirations of social-political groups and individuals – as was the case in the writings of nineteenth-century ‘teachers of revolution’, like Karl Marx.

Koselleck did not further pursue the issue of how the concept of *Geschichte* had been ‘ideologized’ and ‘politicized’ in the twentieth century. Instead, he ended his article with a brief discussion concerning the possibilities of developing a concept of history in which ideas about progress and the future can be considered along with experience of the past. However, Koselleck did not offer any specific ideas on this issue, and the article on *Historie/Geschichte* is thus – as will be discussed in more detail below – an example of how Koselleck’s early conceptual historical writings aimed to deconstruct notions of history in singular and to confirm the existence of histories in plural rather than theorizing how these histories might be written.

Koselleck’s study of *Historie/Geschichte* is generally regarded as one of his most important investigations in the field of conceptual history – also by Koselleck himself. He thus once remarked that his approach to conceptual history took form with his discovery of how *Geschichte* during the *Sattelzeit* changed from a plural to a singular concept – to a ‘collective singular’.¹⁵ Soon after, he began to use this discovery to describe the developmental patterns of many other social and political concepts on the threshold to modernity.

The notion of ‘collective singular’ is consequently also applied in the 1969 article on *Revolution*. Where the article on *Historie/Geschichte* focused mainly on processes of ‘ideologization’ and ‘temporalization’ taking place during the *Sattelzeit*, the *Revolution*-article focused more on the processes of ‘politization’ and ‘democratization’. “There are few words”, Koselleck began the article:

“so widely diffused and belonging so naturally to modern political vocabulary as the term ‘revolution’. It also belongs, of course, to those widely used forceful expressions whose lack of conceptual clarity is so marked that they can be defined as slogans. Quite clearly, the semantic content of ‘revolution’ is not exhausted by such sloganistic usage and utility. Instead, the term ‘revolution’ indicates upheaval or civil war as well as long term change, events and structures that reach deep into our daily life.” (825)

Revolution – Koselleck elaborated, clarifying the history of the concept – belongs to the group of already existing concepts, which acquired radically new meanings during the *Sattelzeit*. Having its roots in the Latin word *revolutio*, until the rise of the modern world, the concept referred in a political context to the natural and unbreakable circulation between the

¹⁵ [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 197. In the interview, Koselleck explains how he had already written down this discovery when he was a student, and how he later found the note on which the hypothesis was then based.

classical political systems (as in Hobbes), while in a scientific context, it referred to the circular movements of the celestial bodies, as was the case in Kopernikus's *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium* from 1542.

The enlightenment thinkers, however, gave the concept of *Revolution* a new meaning, when they used the concept to interpret all events and processes, including the domains of law, religion, politics, economy, cultural traditions, from the perspective of change and alteration. "Everything in this world is revolution" (831) – the French author Louis Sébastien Mercier exclaimed, for example, in 1772. At this time, Koselleck argued, the concept of Revolution assumed the form of a 'collective-singular': it transformed into *the Revolution*; it was loaded with the experience of acceleration; it was changed into a so-called *geschichtsphilosophischer Perspektivbegriff* (a historical-philosophical concept of perspective) that comprised the idea of *the Revolution* as an irreversible and permanent movement that will occur in the future, while the concept was elastic enough to be defined according to the political perspective of those using the concept; and it changed from referring not only to a political, but also to a social revolution that included all human beings and a total change in the social structure. According to Koselleck, these conceptual changes led to a situation in which those who managed to define the specific content of the concept acquired one of the most effective, but also one of the most dangerous weapons in modern politics.

Towards the end of the article, Koselleck ventured into a direct critique of the status and the (mis)use of *Revolution* in modern politics. He wrote:

"Applied to our present international political situation, the question arises how the hypostatized legitimacy of civil war relates to the background legitimacy of permanent world revolution. Since the end of the Second World War, our planet has seen a raging succession of civil wars, burning on between the great power-blocks. From Greece to Vietnam and Korea, from Hungary to Algeria to the Congo, from the Near East to Cuba and again to Vietnam – limited civil wars, whose awfulness is, however, boundless, stretch around the globe. We have to ask whether these numerous, regionally limited but globally conducted civil wars did not long ago consume and replace the concept of legitimate and permanent world revolution. Has not the "world revolution" been reduced to an empty formula which can be appropriated pragmatically by the most diverse groups of countries and flogged to death?" (837)

With this ending on the revolution-article, Koselleck fulfilled one of the three declared ambitions of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*: that of providing a 'semantic check' of the

contemporary use of language.¹⁶ More concretely, in the 1972 program article, he expressed the hope that the conceptual analyses in the lexicon might lead to a sharpening of consciousness, “that leads from historical clarification to political clarity.” (XIX)

The aim to provide a ‘semantic check’ of the social-political language is another feature that distinguishes Koselleck’s conceptual history in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* from earlier approaches of conceptual history and *Geistesgeschichte* in the German cultural sciences, not least those approaches of Erich Rothacker and Friedrich Meinecke. More generally, for Koselleck, as for other scholars of his generation, who contributed to the conceptual-historical projects that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, the *Arbeit am Begriff* involved what he understood as a necessary evaluation of the available scientific and social-political language. In other words, he wanted to identify and deconstruct the ideological-politically hypostatized vocabularies that had led to the ‘German catastrophe’ and to outline the contours of a plurality of semantic meanings and practices that were less destructive and more responsible. This aim represents another line of continuity in Koselleck’s historical writing from *Kritik und Krise* to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

While Koselleck once remarked in retrospect that he was not a specialized conceptual historian when he studied in Heidelberg,¹⁷ all of his early writings – including *Kritik und Krise*; his unfinished project on the Congress of Vienna; *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*; and his anthropological outline – make use of conceptual historical frameworks. And while he substantially enlarged, developed and systematized his framework in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, the lexicon drew to a great extent on theoretical-methodological features that he had discovered and developed in relation to these earlier writings.

This was first of all the case with the chief aim of the lexicon. Although *Kritik und Krise* and *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* were not designed as fully-fledged conceptual investigations, both studies focused on central or ‘leading’ concepts (respectively *Kritik/Krise* and *Bürger*) to illustrate the transition to the modern world taking place in the period between 1750 and 1850.¹⁸ Without being presented as explicit hypotheses, the analyses in the dissertation and the habilitation likewise thematize the processes of *Demokratisierung*, *Verzeitlichung*, *Ideologisierung* and *Politisierung* of the social-political language that according to Koselleck characterized the *Sattelzeit*. Moreover, the ‘historical-critical method’

¹⁶ The two other ambitions were to provide information on the history of concepts to the social and linguistic sciences and to illuminate the processes of transition to the modern world.

¹⁷ [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 187.

¹⁸ The concepts *Bürger* and *Krise* are also included in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

that he announced in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, including the ambition to study the relation between social history and language, was closely related to the conceptual approach that he had developed as critique of 'historicism' in the early 1950s.

The substantial difference between the conceptual approach in Koselleck's earlier work and the lexicon thus resides not in the basic analytical framework, but rather in the systematically developed character of the approach and the idea of framing this in a vocabulary of suggestive analytical notions, such as the four conceptual hypotheses, the notion of 'collective singular' and that of the *Sattelzeit*.

Since the 1970s, the notion of the *Sattelzeit* has been one of the most famous terms to arise from Koselleck's entire scholarly production. In retrospect, Koselleck stated that the notion was an "artificial concept" (*Kunstbegriff*) and a "catchword" (*Schlagwort*) that he first coined with the intention of raising money for the project and which then turned out to be useful to describe the fundamental structural-historical and linguistic changes taking place in the period from 1750 to 1850.¹⁹ As Koselleck was aware, the notion of *Sattelzeit* resembles notions such as *Zeitschwelle* and *Strukturbruch*, which scholars such as Schmitt and Freyer had used in the 1920s to describe the massive transformations (political, social, economical, but also mental and intellectual revolutions) taking place around 1800. But how, more precisely, did Koselleck's approach to conceptual history as practiced in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* relate to the work of other scholars? That is, in which ways did he draw upon and demarcate himself from other actors in the field in the creation of his analytical framework?

Social history and linguistics – hermeneutics, experience and time

When asked to explain the intellectual context in which his approach to conceptual history originated, Koselleck once listed four different traditions that he considered as precursors and sources of inspiration for his project.²⁰ The first was the tradition related to Otto Brunner and

¹⁹ See [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 199. In a more recent interview, Koselleck gave the following explanation concerning the origin and the meaning of the term: "First of all, concerning *Sattelzeit*, I have to tell you that I invented the term and used it for the first time in commercial advertisements created to promote the GG – to sell more issues. Although I am happy that [I] succeeded in providing the lexicon with some money, I do not particularly like the term, mainly because it is very ambiguous. As you know, one of the meanings of the *Sattel* refers to the equestrian world, another refers to the situation experienced when one climbs to the top of a mountain and from there can contemplate a larger view. But in the end it does not allude in any specific way to the acceleration of time, which is the crucial aspect of the experience of the modern world. Therefore, from a theoretical point of view, *Sattelzeit* is a very deficient term." Javier Fernández Sebastian, Juan Francisco Fuentes: "Conceptual History, Memory, and Identity: An Interview with Reinhart Koselleck", *Contributions*, 2, 2006, p. 120.

²⁰ [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 187.

Werner Conze, who founded modern conceptual history as an approach to social history. The second was the tradition related to the history of philosophy, which goes back to Hegel, and which in the twentieth century was refined by Erich Rothacker, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who all practiced a method of tracing conceptual changes back in time in writings of key philosophers. The third tradition was the conceptual approach that Koselleck's supervisor Johannes Kühn had practiced in *Toleranz und Offenbarung*. And the fourth and last tradition was the way of questioning the meaning of concepts from a political-juridical perspective as practiced by Carl Schmitt.

While it does seem possible to illuminate much of Koselleck's conceptual-historical framework with reference to these four traditions, some of these are surely easier to trace and locate than others in his texts, in terms of discursive features. Arguably, the tradition that is most difficult relate directly to the program-articles of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* is that represented by Kühn's work. To be sure, the introduction to *Toleranz und Offenbarung* contains a number of reflections on conceptual history, first of all concerning how the meanings of concepts depend on the aims and intentions of the agents using them, which are in accordance with and perhaps inspired Koselleck's approach.²¹ And the historian of German protestant theology, Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, is probably right in suggesting that the bias towards the language of Protestantism in contrast to that of Catholicism in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* also has to do with Kühn's influence on Koselleck.²² But the inspiration that Koselleck found in Kühn did not leave the same traces in the form of specific assumptions, hypothesis or theoretical-methodological notions in program-articles, as did the other traditions that Koselleck drew on.

It is, for example, much easier to detect the social-historical tradition founded by Brunner and Conze in the program-articles. These texts are first of all informed by the analytical principle practiced by Conze: that any investigation of the modern world must necessarily include perspectives on the larger societal processes, movements and tendencies in the transition to the modern world and their effect on *all* layers of society. This ambition is pursued through the hypothesis of *Demokratisierung* and through the aim of uncovering what Koselleck labeled the *Strukturwandel der Geschichte* (XXIV) in the medium of concepts.

²¹ See for example Johannes Kühn: 1923, p. 2: "Will man also ein geschichtliches Urteil über den Wert von Toleranz und Intoleranz gewinnen, so ist es nötig, von den allgemeinen Begriffen zu den bestimmten Kräften vorzudringen, die im einzelnen Fall hinter ihnen stehen. Mit anderen Worten, man muß untersuchen, was eigentlich mit Toleranz und Intoleranz jeweils gefordert und verteidigt werde. Denn eben weil sie nur Verhältnisbegriffe sind, so werden sie, wie die Geschichte beweist, nicht um ihrer selber willen gefordert oder verteidigt, sondern um jener hinter ihnen stehenden Kräfte willen."

²² See Friedrich Wilhelm Graf: 1/11-1999. To this, Graf added that the concept of *Bildung* in Koselleck's later writings was inspired by Kühn's *Bildungsprotestantismus*.

Here Koselleck obviously continued and elaborated on the conceptual historical approach that he had practiced in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* through his analysis of the concept of *Bürger*. In the *Habilitation*, Koselleck also anticipated another essential idea of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*: that of studying conceptual changes in relation to changes in the political, social and economic structures: an ambition that was based on the belief that social structures and language both condition and influence each other.

What characterized this ambition is the pragmatic approach to theorizing that Koselleck adopted at the time of the *Habilitation*. Significantly, as opposed to many of the scholars who became associated with the so-called linguistic turn in the 1960s and 1970s by means of theorizing language and narrative arrangements as crucial factors in human history, Koselleck's theoretical efforts were always aimed at, and limited to, the historical issues he wanted to investigate. Even in the 1970s, when he began to focus in more depth on theoretical issues, he remained, as Jan Ifversen has noted, more of a 'historian' than the 'theoreticians' embracing the linguistic turn. As a general characteristic of Koselleck's position towards and approach to language and social history, Ifversen writes:

"He does not work with texts *en tant que tel*, but with sources. He does not only work with the immediate contexts, but with more overarching societal contexts. He does not work with philosophical contexts or with concept that are first of all interesting from a normative political-theoretical perspective, but with concepts that have been significant for political and social change."²³

Still, Koselleck's focus on language diverged strongly from the sociologically inspired approach of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* that emerged in the same period.²⁴ As observed by the Norwegian literary scholar Helge Jordheim, in contrast to other scholars at the time, for Koselleck, the gap between language and history was a challenge to be met theoretically and methodologically, and he did this by thinking the two dimensions in convergence.²⁵ But how, more exactly, did Koselleck define these two dimensions and the interaction between them?

To answer this question, it is necessary to return to the linguistic dimensions of the framework and to the definition of the *Grundbegriff*. In the 1972 program-article, Koselleck presented these issues via discussing and introducing discursive features from the field of linguistic theory and structural linguistics (XXI-XXIII).²⁶ The latter field was at the time heavily influenced by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and his distinction between

²³ Jan Ifversen: 2007, p. 87.

²⁴ The following chapter situates Koselleck's work more closely vis-à-vis these two disciplinary trends.

²⁵ See the excellent account of Koselleck as a 'thinker of convergences' in Helge Jordheim: 2007.

²⁶ Jan Ifversen: "Begrebshistorien efter Reinhart Koselleck", *Slagmark*, nr. 48, 2007, p. 87; Helge Jordheim: 2007.

language (*langue*), which he identified as a system composed of signs that are defined by their relation to other signs, and the use of language (*parole*). From a structuralist perspective, Saussure was more interested in studying *langue* than *parole*. Hence, the historical and temporal dynamics, including the social negotiation, contestation and struggle, at play in the production of language, were downplayed in his framework.

In response to this tendency, Koselleck avoided the distinction of *langue* and *parole*, and explicitly rejected the triple distinction – then popular in structural linguistics in order to grasp the different aspects of meaning – of *Wortkörper* (the word as a form of sound), *Bedeutung* (the concept that the word expressed) and *Sache* (the object referred to) (XXII). In line with this, even if he announced the use of ‘synchronic/diachronic’ and ‘semasiological/onomasiological’ methods,²⁷ for Koselleck, it was not a primary concern to construct an elaborate and bullet-proof linguistic theory. What interested him, and what he referred to as ‘basic concepts’, was ultimately words in which a complex and diverse cluster of political and social contexts, experiences and meanings are brought to a particularly intense level of linguistic condensation.²⁸ Hence, as we have seen, he distinguished a concept from a word from the perspective of social context and not by referring to notions from linguistic theory. Besides stating that “a word becomes a concept when the full richness of a social and political context of meaning, in which and for which the word is used, is taken up in the word” (XXII), he explained that a concept “assembles the plurality of historical experiences as well as a series of theoretical and historical issues in one single whole, which is only given in the concept and which only can be experienced there.” (XXIII)

These definitions of a concept, and of how the concept relates to the linguistic system and the social context, have been criticized, especially by linguists, as unclear and inadequate.²⁹ In line with this, as stated by Jan Ifversen, the social (which is in the lexicon loosely defined via

²⁷ These terms denote respectively the study of all the meanings of a given word, term, or concept, and the study of all names or terms in a language for the same thing or concept. See page XXI-XXII.

²⁸ See the discussion in Ulrich Gumbrecht: 2006, p. 18-19.

²⁹ For lines of the critique, see Jan Ifversen: 2007. In addition, in spite of the strong contextual dimension in the program-article, several articles in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* have been criticized for reproducing the classical tradition of *Geistesgeschichte* by not relating the concepts to social-political contexts and by focusing mainly on the intellectual elite. The historian Rolf Reichardt is one of the many scholars to have criticized this aspect of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. A student of Koselleck in Heidelberg in the 1960s, Reichardt is known as one of the editors of the *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680-1820*, München, Bd. 1-19/20, 1985-2000, which was conceptualized in the 1970s and 1980s. In defining the premises of the *Handbuch*, he drew on many theoretical-methodological features from the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, but sought at the same time to evade certain weaknesses that he saw in Koselleck’s approach. Most importantly, he put a stronger emphasis on the social historical component, on popular mentality, on lexico-metri and discourse analysis, and on the so-called sociology of knowledge. See Melvin Richter: 1986 and Melvin Richter: 1987. The criticism of the biased focus on the elite and the lack of social context in the articles were first of all leveled against Koselleck’s collaborators. Even if they are rarely as detailed as the contextual dimensions in his study of the Prussian Vormärz, Koselleck’s entries are all set on various social-historical backgrounds.

a variety of shifting notions, referring to both broad and concrete social contexts, experiences and expectations and temporal structures) and the linguistic sphere represent for Koselleck “two different worlds that meet and depart”, but the question of how language and context influence each other is nowhere elaborated in his approach, except for in the abstract reference to the convergence between history and concept and the status given to concepts as both indicators and factors of historical change.³⁰

The theoretical vagueness in these aspects of the framework should partly be explained with reference to Koselleck’s pragmatism in respect to defining the status and the function of a concept; a pragmatism that was explicitly announced in the 1972 program article (XXII) and involved the blurred merging of – or oscillation between – notions from linguistic theory and the contextual perspective. Seen retrospectively, his references to linguistic theory come across as an attempt to turn conceptual history into a science with methods and theories that were acceptable for the increasingly influential field of linguistic sciences. Hence, although he gave occasional and approving references to the Romanian linguist, Eugenio Coseriu (1921-2002), who confronted Saussure’s rigid dichotomy of *langue* and *parole* by returning to Wilhelm von Humboldt’s concept of language as *energeia*, understood as the speaker’s creative activity,³¹ linguistic theory plays a very limited role in Koselleck’s work.

It is, then, no co-incidence that the notion of *Grundbegriff* is defined without the use of notions from linguistic theory in the foreword to the seventh volume of the lexicon, in which Koselleck discusses the criticism levelled against the approach since the publication of the first volume and specifies aspects of the framework. Here, he provides a purely contextual definition of the basic concept that is not only less ambiguous than the one in the 1972 program article, but also makes it more comprehensible why this phenomenon ought to be privileged over a variety of other phenomena of political language:

”In a historical context, one can speak of a basic concept, when all conflicting social layers and political parties are using it to communicate their different experiences, interests, and party-political programs Basic concepts demand their use, because they comprise those minimal similarities that are necessary for making experiences, and without which there can be neither conflict nor consensus. A basic concept is thus found, when it can be interpreted and used according to different perspectives in order to gain insight or facilitate capacity to act.”³²

This notion of a ‘basic concept’ informed the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* from the

³⁰ Jan Ifversen: 2007, p. 87.

³¹ See Helge Jordheim: 2007, p. 74-75 and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: 2006, p. 19.

³² Reinhart Koselleck: ”Vorwort”, Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland, Bd. VII*, Stuttgart 1992, p. VII.

beginning, even if it was at first defined in a less lucid way. It entailed a specific stance on linguistic matters: it claimed that there was a specific type of linguistic expression that was interconnected with the social in a privileged manner, and that it was this type of expression that mattered most historically. In this way, Koselleck sorted out the relation between language and society in a way that differed strongly from what many other proponents of the linguistic turn have put forward: he gave up the idea that language ought to be treated as a unified whole, and he insisted that there were provinces of language that were inconceivable without the social.

Koselleck's perspective encompassed context in a very broad sense, as organized in different layers. In particular, in the 1972 program article, he portrayed three of these layers as especially important. The first of these was the structural perspective on the larger changes in the political, social and economic structures, which he drew from Brunner and Conze; the second was a perspective on experience, expectation and temporality that he developed from the philosophical tradition represented by Gadamer and Heidegger; and the third was a perspective on the more concrete social contexts and contestations that he outlined in a dialogue with the work of Carl Schmitt. Each of the three contextual perspectives are embedded in a number of theoretical assumptions and principles about language that are not derived primarily from the field of linguistic science, but which instead issue from the field of hermeneutics.

One of the central hermeneutic principles was related to Koselleck's encounter with the tradition of conceptual history that he learned from Brunner and Conze. More concretely, as Koselleck stated in a 1982 article, his approach was in a theoretical-methodological perspective deeply inspired by Otto Brunner's methodological plea for "a consequent historicism",³³ that is, the need to distinguish historically between the concepts of politics and science today and those of the past. The inspiration from Brunner was forcefully expressed in a famous passage in the 1967 program article where Koselleck announced the practice of a "solid historicism". "Exactly how the social and political world before '1789' was conceived", he explained, "can only be shown, when you embark on the concepts of the period."³⁴

Koselleck's announcement of a 'solid historicism' was in epistemological accordance with Hans-Georg Gadamer's call for a 'radical historicism' in *Wahrheit und Methode*.³⁵ Drawing

³³ Thus Reinhart Koselleck: 1983, p. 13.

³⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: 1967, p. 91. In a later interview, Koselleck spoke instead of a 'reflective historicism'. [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 188.

³⁵ For an excellent introduction to these dimensions of Gadamer's thought, see Richard Bernstein: *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*, Oxford 1984, p. 109-170.

on Heidegger's analysis of being in *Sein und Zeit*, Gadamer argued that historical understanding is fundamentally conditioned by the 'finality' of human beings. More precisely, according to Gadamer, caught in their specific temporality between life and death, the specific historically-affected consciousness of human beings can never fully understand the past. A truly historical consciousness must therefore not pursue a position of objectivity, but instead recognize the otherness of the past and engage in a dialogue with historical texts on these premises. This was exactly what Koselleck emphasized in the introduction to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

In line with this, Koselleck's conceptual framework in the lexicon followed the key hermeneutical assumption that informs Gadamer's investigation into the conditions of human understanding in *Wahrheit und Methode*: that all understanding is linguistically mediated. A fundamental premise in Koselleck's conceptual history is thus that history and historical consciousness is layered in and communicated through language. Where Gadamer claimed that nothing exists except through language, Koselleck assumed that history is only what has been conceptualized. More concretely, in the program-articles, Koselleck spoke of "*Bewusstwerdung und Bewusstmachung durch Begriffe*" (XIV), of the close relation between "*Begrifflichkeit und Begreifbarkeit*" (XV), and of how concepts layer and express changes of "experience" (XV, XX) and of "expectation." (XVI).

These definitions point to a hermeneutic style of historical inquiry that focuses on the temporal structures and on the processes of linguistic reception and formation that form the self-understanding of historical actors. However, Koselleck's notion of experience differs from Gadamer's in that it comprises a way of conceptualizing social context (that is different from, but relates to social systems and structures). Melvin Richter has in relation to this observed that the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* attempted to "shift conceptual history away from a philosophical and hermeneutic method towards another sort more acceptable for historians."³⁶ This was a very conscious move on Koselleck's part. He himself underlined this on various occasions, including an interview from 2005, in which he gave a very clear reasoning for why he used a concept of history that was less bound to language than Gadamer's.³⁷ On the differences between himself and Gadamer in this respect, he made the following remarks:

³⁶ Melvin Richter: 1995, p. 35.

³⁷ As noted above, it was in Gadamer's seminar in Heidelberg that Koselleck met Heidegger, who – Koselleck once wrote to Schmitt – by comparing the concepts of Hegel and Kant and tracing concepts back to Leibniz, Thomas and Augustine to Aristotle, could make "Geschichte hörbar." See Koselleck's letter to Carl Schmitt from January 1977: RW265-8172: 3/1-1977.

“[L]anguage is always ambiguous. It is at the same time receptive and productive. On the one hand, it indicates social change and on the other hand it is an essential factor that allows us to become conscious of changes in reality. Gadamer did not accept this ambiguity in language. For him, following Heidegger’s footsteps, language implicitly contains the totality of experience. There is no doubt that in the process of transferring many concepts from Greek into German philosophy, Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy transformed language into the key to all human reality. There is a very strong argument backing up this position, but for me, as a historian, it is simply impossible to accept it as a unique and exclusive truth. As a historian, I cannot limit myself to the linguistic domain, that is, to what was in fact said, I must also occupy myself with that which could be said.”³⁸

In the quotation, Koselleck points out not only his deviation, but also his innovative contribution to the hermeneutical tradition of conceptual history. His point is that Heidegger and Gadamer tended to regard language as a form containing all possible human experience. In this way, they lost a perspective on concrete languages (or provinces of languages) and their historicity, their function as indicators and agents of historical change. This is to say, they did not regard languages as limited, as setting conditions for what was sayable at a certain time and place – and, consequently, they did not realise that such limits are changeable. Still, in Koselleck’s eyes, the changeability of these limits entails that there must be experience beyond language, and this seems to be the theoretical deviation he is trying to express in the quoted passage.

Nonetheless, this deviation may be described as a contribution to, rather than a radical departure from, the hermeneutic tradition, because it retains the basic assumptions about human historicity from Gadamer’s and Heidegger’s works. These assumptions were central for the theory of historical times that Koselleck developed from the late 1960s and for the temporal-analytical framework that he outlined in the lexicon, first of all via the hypothesis of temporalization. The hypothesis refer, as mentioned, to the assumption that political and social change was no longer interpreted through patterns of repetition and recurrence, but through a focus on the future and expectations of change and progress, and that concepts in this process became structured around historical philosophical ideas of history. Like many other features in the lexicon, this hypothesis is easily read as a series of elaborations of ideas that Koselleck had already outlined in *Kritik und Krise*, where Löwith’s book *Meaning in History* served as the central point of reference. What differentiates the lexicon from the dissertation is its more explicit character of the temporal framework, and the related series of analytical notions, such as *Verzeitlichung*, *Machbarkeit der Geschichte* and *Kollektiv-*

³⁸ Javier Fernández Sebastian, Juan Francisco Fuentes: 2006, p. 126.

Singular with which he sought to investigate the rise of modern historical consciousness.

These ideas and notions were used in relation to the set of assumptions about human historicity that Koselleck drew from the hermeneutical-philosophical tradition. These assumptions concern how, according to the hermeneutic tradition, being is a temporal and historical phenomenon: that for humans, *to be is to be in time*, as a result of which all human understanding and interpretation has an ongoing, open and changing character that ultimately depends on our conceptions of time. Where Heidegger viewed human existence and the ways in which we make sense of ourselves, of our world and our relations with others, as a temporal self-projection in the dimension of the past, present, and future, Gadamer argued that these issues depend on our variable experiences, expectations and horizons.

In line with the hermeneutical-philosophical tradition, Koselleck sought in the lexicon to focus on the human awareness of time as a way to analyze how human beings have configured and reconfigured their ways of understanding themselves and the world. While broadening the use of the hermeneutic temporal categories in the direction of analyzing how not only individuals, but also how communities and societies have conceptualized and acted in the world, he focused specifically on the changes in the relation between past, present and future and between experience, expectation and horizon taking place in the saddle-period. In doing so, in the introduction to the lexicon Koselleck anticipated the famous argument from his 1977 article “Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont” concerning how the human ‘horizon of expectation’ in the ‘saddle-period’ had been disconnected from the ‘space of experience’, so that the social-political language was no longer oriented towards the past, but increasingly loaded with future-oriented expectations.

“Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont” was written in relation to Koselleck’s ambition of developing a theory of historical time that he pursued in various texts from the late 1960s onwards. While this ambition also informs the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, it is not given centre stage in the framework and the Heideggarian and Gadamerian notions are not theorized and systematized to the same extent in the lexicon as in Koselleck’s later and more specific texts on historical time. We will therefore postpone the more detailed analysis of his reception of *Sein und Zeit* and *Wahrheit und Methode* and the role it played in his historical writings, including those dealing with conceptual history, until the next chapter.³⁹

What is important to understand about the temporal framework in the *Geschichtliche*

³⁹ The following chapter also deals with Koselleck’s idea of the various temporal layers (*Zeitschichten*) in history and temporal layers. This idea is present in the lexicon-framework, first of all in the form of the notion *die Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*, yet it was developed and applied to a much more elaborate extent during the 1970s and 1980s.

Grundbegriffe is that it served as a way to illustrate larger social-historical dynamics, processes and contexts. As such, it relied on a mode of analysis that not only viewed language as bound to time and time as bound to language, but instead portrayed social reality, time and language as three interrelated dimensions in human life. It therefore mediated between the social-historical and the philosophical tradition of practicing conceptual history.

Seen in relation to the common objective of his partisan activities, Koselleck's conceptual history, as it was practiced in relation to the lexicon, is to a certain extent informed by the notion of world history as composed by different, but unified epochs that succeed each other, which he outlined in *Kritik und Krise*. The generalizing definition of the modern world, and of how it diverged from the pre-modern world, is an indispensable part of the analytical framework, which points back to the worldview shared by the three editors in the 1960s, when the lexicon was conceptualized. However, as we have seen, Koselleck softened up his schematic picture of the transition to modernity during the 1960s, and in his conceptual historical writings there is less of a tension between a choice for the universal narrative and one for pluralism than in his earlier work. This is because, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he boosted the plural dimensions and connected these more successfully to his ambition of deconstructing history in the singular, as we will elaborate on below.

The sociology of concepts and the conceptual-political intention

More specifically, what Koselleck aimed at in his conceptual analysis was to deconstruct the linguistic components of the modern utopian, future-oriented and historical-philosophical ideas of history by means of demonstrating the plural, diverse and contested nature of all language and politics. In this respect, Koselleck thus attempted to inscribe a perspective on the more concrete social contexts and contestations in the framework. For this purpose, he continued his dialogue with, and demarcation from, the tradition of conceptual history as practiced by Carl Schmitt.

It is well known that, in most of his writings, Schmitt used concepts as a medium to understand the past and the present with a focus on how the meaning of juridical and political concepts changed during the transition from early modern times. The aim of his conceptual investigations was unequivocal: to establish and fight contemporary intellectual and political positions.⁴⁰ It is also well known that Schmitt's writings played an important role for the arrival of conceptual history in mid-20th century German historical scholarship, as it was

⁴⁰ Thus the title of a collection of Schmitt's essays: Carl Schmitt: Berlin 1940. For a lucid perspective on the possibilities and the limits of Schmitt's conceptual history, see Christian Meier: 1988, p. 537-556.

articulated in Otto Brunner's work in the 1930s and 1940s, and that their respective wishes for a 'revision of the basic concepts' in history (Brunner) and a 'concrete order thinking' in the field of law (Schmitt) were rooted in a critique of modernity, representing an attempt to eliminate what they saw as a dangerous division between state and society that had been caused by modern society.

On the one hand – as we will see below – Koselleck found great inspiration in Schmitt's and Brunner's conceptual approaches. On the other hand, from the beginning he demarcated his approach from the normative, static and decisionistic traits in their approaches to concepts. There are thus not only, as we will return to below, differences in the values with which Koselleck charged concepts, but also in the way he viewed the concepts. Instead of conceiving of concepts as units of meaning with an original core and essence that can be discovered and recovered, Koselleck analyzed them as contentious and transforming, changing with social powers and social conflicts.⁴¹ Thus, he rejected the idea that conceptual frameworks simply mirrored the structure of the world and in this manner approached a constructivist position regarding the stock of concepts of which a society disposes at a given time. This also means that he decoupled, localized and historicized the conflicts inherent in conceptual oppositions from those basic dichotomies he continued to accept as a universal foundation of the anthropological conditions of human existence. Koselleck's attempt to bring in social reality, struggle and changeability, it should be added, was not only aimed against the essentialism in Schmitt's approach to concepts. It was also indirectly aimed at Heidegger's essentialist views on language as the frame of all human existence and at Gadamer's related views on language as the key to all human reality. At the end of the day, this was a crucial dimension in the conceptual set-up of Koselleck's pragmatic historical approach to language, diverging from that of his sources of inspiration at a very basic level.

Beyond the conceptual issues of framing conceptual history, Schmitt was a source of inspiration on other levels. It was Schmitt who initially spurred Koselleck to use dictionaries and encyclopedias to subject political and social concepts to a historical analysis. Koselleck also drew several other theoretical-methodological assumptions from Schmitt to develop a

⁴¹ See Bo Stråth: Review of Futures Past, *European Journal of Social Theory*, nr. 8 (4), 2005, p. 528. These are also among the reasons why in an article about the lexicon Christof Dipper has asserted that the "Schmittsche bzw. Brunnersche Erbe tatsächlich auf die Titelgebung des Lexikons beschränkt [ist]", that is, to the label of the basic concept (*Grundbegriff*). Christof Dipper: 2000, p. 287. Dipper knew the framework very well, as he had contributed to the entry on 'liberty' in the second lexicon-volume. See Christof Dipper: "Freiheit, IV: Ständische Freiheit – Iura et libertates", Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Bd. 2, Stuttgart 1975, p. 446-456.

conceptual approach to history that should account for the flaws in the traditional ‘historicist’ approach to the history of ideas, as practiced by Friedrich Meinecke, who in Koselleck’s eyes had removed himself from historical reality. Following Schmitt, Koselleck worked from the assumption that it is necessary to analyze ideas and concepts in relation to concrete human action and social-political contexts, and in Schmitt’s writings he found various theoretical-methodological features that helped him in this endeavour.

In addition, Koselleck often drew attention to Schmitt as one of the intellectual fathers of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and once spoke of his work as “methodologically brilliant” conceptual history.⁴² This situation has been explored in a recent article by Reinhard Mehring, who has convincingly shown that Koselleck was to a large degree inspired by Schmitt’s theoretical and methodological approach to concepts.⁴³ According to Mehring, Koselleck drew inspiration first of all from Schmitt’s fundamental theoretical notion: that entire periods, or epochs, can be understood and interpreted through what Schmitt in *Politische Theologie* spoke of as the sociology of concepts (*Begriffssoziologie*).⁴⁴ The idea encapsulated in the sociology of concepts is that an entire epoch’s political and in certain cases also religious, intellectual and societal thinking can be deciphered through a focus on the key concepts of the respective epoch. Schmitt took this idea to its extremes in his famous 1929 essay *Das Zeitalter der Neutralisierungen* by arguing that the European *Zeitgeist* during the past four centuries has moved through four stages in which the human consciousness has been permeated by respectively a “theological”, a “metaphysical”, a “humanitarian-moral” and a “economic” concept.⁴⁵

That the theoretical fundament in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* is similarly based on the sociology of concepts is clear first of all from its aim to study ‘the dissolution of the old and the rise of the new world within the history of their conceptual origins and structure’. The focus on ‘lead concepts in the historical movement’ in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was – as we have seen – already present in *Kritik und Krise* in which Koselleck used the concepts ‘critique’ and ‘crises’ to decipher the *Zeitgeist* of the enlightenment. “The expression of ‘crisis’”, Koselleck wrote in the book, “is through its diagnostic and prognostic content an

⁴² [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 187. See also Reinhart Koselleck: 1983, p. 33.

⁴³ Reinhard Mehring: 2006, 31-50. The following pages are based on Mehring’s excellent article, but add a number of new examples.

⁴⁴ Carl Schmitt: 1922. The book focuses on the relation between theological and political concepts. Schmitt argued that the metaphysical conception of a certain epoch corresponds to its political organization and he described the ‘sociology of concepts’ as the key to decipher the ‘metaphysical picture’ of an epoch.

⁴⁵ Carl Schmitt: 2002, p. 79-95.

indicator of a new consciousness.”⁴⁶

In *Kritik und Krise*, Koselleck moreover drew on another idea characterizing Schmitt’s conceptual analysis: the idea that historical agents can use concepts to create and shape history. This idea is elaborated upon in the program-article of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* that presents a methodological focus of political conflict and polemical counter-concepts, including the friend/enemy relation. “Concepts”, Schmitt once wrote, are constituted through “concrete oppositions”: all “political concepts” are thus “polemical” concepts: they acquire their “intellectual force and historical significance” through the meeting with an “enemy”, a “concrete antithesis”, a “counter concept”.⁴⁷ In the methodical programs of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Koselleck echoed this train of thought with his focus on “the situational given context that gives the concept its social and political force” and by arguing that concepts can only be understood through “counter concepts”, that is, through a sociological analysis of the individuals and groups that use and position themselves via a certain concept. “Does the speaker include or exclude himself, when he uses a certain concept?” – Koselleck moreover asked – “Who is it aimed at?”⁴⁸ Strikingly similar ideas concern the importance of studying in which contexts and by whom concepts are used can be found in several of Schmitt’s writings, including *Der Begriff des Politischen*: “Words such as state, republic, society, class, as well as sovereignty, constitutional state, absolutism, dictatorship, economic planning, neutral or total state, and so on, are incomprehensible if one does not know exactly who is to be affected, combated, refuted or negated by such a term.”⁴⁹

How Koselleck’s ambition to analyze ideas, concepts and language in relation to concrete social context and interaction was inspired by Schmitt (and in demarcation to Meinecke) is an issue that we have already dealt with in relation to his historical anthropology. In respect to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, it is, as pointed out by Reinhard Mehring, of great importance to emphasize that Koselleck in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* distanced himself in a more explicit manner from what Mehring labels Schmitt’s *conceptual-political intention*. Whereas Schmitt used concepts with a clear polemical and ideological intention, Koselleck’s conceptual history was primarily knowledge-oriented. He recognized with Schmitt the latent totality and escalation of ‘the political’. But with an eye for the dangerous potential of language, he used conceptual history to plea for a reflective and careful use of language.

⁴⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: 1959, p. 134.

⁴⁷ Carl Schmitt: *Hugo Preuss. Sein Staatsbegriff und seine Stellung in der Deutschen Rechtslehre*, Tübingen 1930, p. 5.

⁴⁸ See Reinhart Koselleck: 1967, p. 87; Reinhart Koselleck: 1972, p. XX.

⁴⁹ Carl Schmitt: 2002, p. 31.

A striking example of this is found in Koselleck's famous 1975 article *Zur historisch-politischen Semantik asymmetrischer Gegenbegriffe*, which is constructed as a historical investigation of the friend/enemy-dimension from the anthropological outline.⁵⁰ The article begins with the statement article that all concepts have a counter-concept and that some concepts are asymmetrical in such a way that they exclude mutual recognition. If, for example, *Arbeitgeber* (employer) and *Arbeitnehmer* (employee) are substituted with *Ausbeuter* (exploiter) and *Menschenmaterial* (human material), the conceptual pairs have become asymmetrical. Koselleck then proceeds to exemplify this statement by investigating three asymmetrical counter-concepts that have claimed to embody the whole of humanity at different times in history – those of Hellene/Barbarian, Christian/Heathen and human/nonhuman – and, even if the article does not investigate one single concept, the analysis of these counter-concepts is in many ways typical of the way in which he studies language and history.

Here four factors are especially important. The first is the integration of a Schmittian conception of an essentially political society in permanent conflict, (and a normative notion of how such conflicts can be contained). In line with this, the second is the concrete social historical perspective: the idea that concepts must be studied as changeable entities that are shaped in specific historical situations through the interaction between social and political units of action. The third is that all concepts acquire a history of reception that survives the original situation in which they were coined. One of the arguments of the article is thus that argumentative forms of filling out asymmetrical counter-concepts survived from Antiquity into the era of Christianity and that Christian discursive features determined parts of the horizons of modernity. Hence, Koselleck uses the conceptual approach to thematize and measure what he calls *die Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*.

The fourth dimension is the plea for a semantically controlled language that aims at pluralism, recognition and tolerance instead of exclusion, intolerance and exaggerated friend/enemy relations. This dimension relates to the main purpose of the article, which is to demonstrate how, in contrast to the earlier concepts 'Hellene/barbarian' and 'Christian/Heathen', the concepts of 'human' and 'humanity', from the enlightenment, and their dichotomies 'un-human' and 'non-human', undermined the possibility of mutual recognition and respect between political groups. The consequences of this development, Koselleck argues, reached their most extreme point in National Socialism's ideologization of

⁵⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: "Zur historisch-politischen Semantik asymmetrischer Gegenbegriffe", Harald Weinrich (Hg.): *Positionen der Negativität. Poetik und Hermeneutik VI*, München 1975, p. 65-105.

‘rationality’, leading to euthanasia and genocide.

Towards the end of the article, to propose a way out of the modern destructive ideologization of dichotomies, Koselleck brings into play Schmitt’s ‘friend/enemy’ dichotomy. Schmitt’s “scientific achievement”, Koselleck writes, is to have provided a “formalistic” political antithesis without filling out the categories beforehand by means of the dichotomy of “friend” and “enemy”. If the contesting groups want peace, Koselleck argues, this can be reached by filling out Schmitt’s dichotomy in such a way that mutual recognition and respect between the political groups is established.⁵¹ In this formalistic redefinition of the ‘friend/enemy’ dichotomy, we touch simultaneously upon a fundamental similarity and difference in Koselleck’s and Schmitt’s understandings of and approaches to history and politics. On the one hand, they both viewed the presence of ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’ as a primary existential condition for man’s existence and made the dichotomy a cardinal point in their scientific analysis. On the other hand, whereas Schmitt continually attempted to ideologize and politicize the dichotomy, Koselleck tried to counter the ideologization and politicization of all social-political concepts.

The reception of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*

Zur historisch-politischen Semantik asymmetrischer Gegenbegriffe shows on a more general level how Koselleck’s attempt to historicize the conflicts inherent in conceptual oppositions was related to his ambition of providing a ‘semantic check’ of the contemporary language and how the analytical framework thematized not only issues of the past, but also of the present. In the 1960s and the 1970s, when the lexicon-project was launched, an intense and highly ideological battle to define the social-political vocabulary was raging in the German academic and public debates. Here conceptual history as practiced in the lexicon offered itself as a scientific style of inquiry with which the dynamics of semantic struggle could be analyzed and discussed without the scholar necessarily having to identify with one of the opposed parts in the debate. Postponing the presentation of these debates, and Koselleck’s position in them, what follows illustrates how the anti-ideological or neutral potential of conceptual history provides one of the reasons for its remarkable success in German academia.

The lexicon was from the beginning very positively received in post-war German academia (apart from an early critique of the lexicon launched by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, also

⁵¹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1975, p. 103-104. It should be added that in *Nomos der Erde* Schmitt had already outlined a shorter, but similar analysis of the characteristics and dynamics at play in the coinage and use of the asymmetrical counter-concepts that Koselleck deals with in his article. See Carl Schmitt: 1950, p. 71-75.

discussed in the following chapter). This positive reception, it seems, was the result of a variety of factors, or conditions. The first is that Koselleck and his fellow editors had simply managed to create an innovative and interesting project that appealed to and attracted other scholars. Some of the attractive features were pointed out in the enthusiastic reviews of the first lexicon-volumes that appeared in the 1970s, where the fundamentals and limits of the historical profession were at debate. The reviewers emphasized three achievements of the lexicon in particular.⁵² Firstly, the lexicon was praised for the fact that the huge amount of information it contained provided a new kind of interdisciplinary work not only for historians, but also for “sociologists, political scientists, philologists, linguists, philosophers, lawyers, and theologians.”⁵³ Secondly, the interdisciplinary ambitions of the project were seen as a much needed attempt at “overcoming the often deplored theoretical deficit in the historical discipline.”⁵⁴ And, finally, the conceptual approach in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was interpreted as a new form of ideological critique, which – in contrast to other forms of ideological critique – embraced the possibility “to unfold historically the dialectic between the social and the conceptual sphere.”⁵⁵

As a result of the fact that they had launched a project that seemed to offer a way out of the theoretical-methodological and political deadlocks of the discipline and which promised to reassert the study of history as relevant vis-à-vis the other disciplines, Koselleck and his fellow editors managed to attract a remarkable number of established and upcoming scholars for their lexicon.⁵⁶ Among these was the rising literary scholar, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who has vividly described the allegedly euphoric atmosphere that surrounded the various conceptual historical projects in the 1960s and 1970, as well as how he experienced his participation in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (and in other conceptual historical lexicons that emerged in this period) as a crucial and honourable step on his way to becoming a respected scholar.⁵⁷

⁵² See for example: Peter von Polenz: Review in *Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik*, Bd. 1, 1973, p. 235-241; Dieter Dowe: Review in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, Bd. XIV, 1974, p. 720-722; Thomas Wüttenberger: Review in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, Bd. LXI/4, 1975, p. 589-591; Helmut Berding: “Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte“, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 223, 1976, p. 98-110; Wolfgang Zorn: Review in *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, Bd. 59, 1977, p. 243-247; Michael Stürmer: “Begriffsgeschichte oder der Abschied von der schönen neuen Welt, *Der Staat*, 17, 1978, p. 272-270; Joachim Rohlfes: “Das Lexikon ‘Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe’“, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, Bd. 21, 1980, p. 525-530.

⁵³ Dieter Dowe: 1974, p. 720.

⁵⁴ Helmut Berding: 1974, p. 99.

⁵⁵ Michael Stürmer: 1978: p. 279.

⁵⁶ For the authors’ fields and institutional affiliations, see Christof Dipper: 2000, p. 291-292.

⁵⁷ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: 2006, p. 8. Gumbrecht contributed to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* with the article Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: “Modern, Modernität, Moderne”, Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in*

Gumbrecht's remarks here point to the second condition that facilitated the emergence of lexicon as a successful enterprise in post-World War II academia: the institutional facilities provided and the funding secured by the editors, first of all by Conze, that enabled them to host conferences, hire contributors and publish the volumes, that is, to carry out the project and to turn the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* into an academic industry in which scholars' careers were made by means of acquiring academic recognition, merits and contacts. In launching the lexicon, Koselleck not only secured his reputation as an innovative scholar, but also as a potential employer of his fellow scholars, whom he and the editorial group would contact if they were considered capable of contributing to the lexicon.

Wilhelm Hennis was one of the many scholars, who were contacted by the editorial group already in the 1960s.⁵⁸ During the 1950s Hennis had published a number of eminent writings on issues related to the state, sovereignty and the public sphere, and he was consequently invited to attend the first meetings and conferences in the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte* in which the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was conceptualized in the early 1960s. In a letter from Conze in 1962, Hennis was soon assigned the prominent concepts of *Moral*, *Politik* and *Öffentlichkeit*, and he wanted, to begin with, to author a number of further entries. However, Hennis soon abandoned these plans, as he lost interest in writing of articles devoted exclusively to concepts. In a letter to Koselleck from November 1962, he gave up the concept of *Moral*, and, after suggesting to co-author the entry on *Politik* with Koselleck, he eventually gave up that too, along with the entry on *Öffentlichkeit*. However, Hennis was full of praise of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, when it was finally launched in the 1970s. In a letter written to Koselleck in October 1977, Hennis reported how he had made an “enthusiastic commercial” (*eifrig Reklame*) for the lexicon at the New School in New York, where Hennis was a guest professor at the time. “I really think that both enterprises [the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*] belong to the most impressive achievements of the German historical discipline in recent years. And the real engine behind the entire project was of course, next to Conze, nobody else than you.”⁵⁹

Hennis's letter to Koselleck illuminates how the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* won Koselleck a new position and reputation in the German historical profession in the 1970s. Instead of being known as an outsider, as had been the case in the 1950s, or as someone

Deutschland, Bd. 4, Stuttgart 1978, p. 93-131. Since 1989 Gumbrecht has been a professor in literature at Stanford University. However he studied in Europe and held his first professorships in Germany. He has long been a proponent of an approach to the study of language inspired by Hans Blumenberg's *Metaphorologie*.

⁵⁸ The following is based on Stephan Schlak: 2008, p. 61-62.

⁵⁹ Cited from Stephan Schlak: 2008, p. 61.

working within the framework of his *Doktorvaters* program, as in the early 1960s, he now became known as a scholar who had launched an innovative and promising research project and possessed the institutional resources to carry it out.

In line with this, when conceptual history as practiced in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* became a subject of interdisciplinary discussion in Germany in the 1970s, it was partly because Koselleck established contact with scholars from other disciplines in order to discuss certain theoretical-methodological features and problems in the approach. Most importantly, Koselleck began a dialogue with the linguists, who showed interest in the project, even if – as mentioned – they found his definition of a concept and its relation to the linguistic system and the social context insufficient and unclear.⁶⁰ It has been said that these issues in Koselleck's framework issues are characterized by a "pragmatic insecurity".⁶¹ Arguably, this pragmatic insecurity characterizes not only the lexicon-framework, but Koselleck's attitude towards theoretical-methodological issues more generally. On the one hand, he was deeply interested in discussing and applying theoretical-methodological features in his historical writing. On the other hand, he was not interested in establishing a theoretical-methodological system with a fixed number of analytical features that were all defined in a definite and mutually ordered fashion and could be applied in a straightforward way to any historical analysis. While he reflected carefully on the strengths and the limitations of the theoretical-methodological features that he applied in his frameworks, his analysis did not begin from such a system, but from a number of related and compatible hypotheses, assumptions and notions that seemed to open new ways of investigation the past and its relations to the present. In this sense, as to be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, Koselleck was theoretically-methodologically eclectic and pragmatic.

However, his pragmatism did not result in a rejection of the approach. Instead, it was instrumental in facilitating a discussion between scholars from many different disciplines concerning the problems and possibilities of conceptual history. This discussion has now been going in more than three decades during which several German scholars have moreover found inspiration in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* in the construction of other conceptually focused projects and writings. Among these scholars belong the students of Conze and Koselleck: Otto Dann, Christof Dipper, Jörg Fisch, Lucian Hölscher and Horst Stuke, who contributed to the lexicon the 1970s and 1980s and pursued conceptual-historical themes in their dissertations and *Habilitationen* with reference to the lexicon-framework or to

⁶⁰ See for example Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): *Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte*, Stuttgart 1979.

⁶¹ Dietrich Busse: *Historische Semantik. Analyse eines Programms*, Stuttgart, 1987, p. 54-55.

Koselleck's later writings in the field.⁶² As a result of the contributions of these and other scholars during the field has experienced further growth and institutionalization. The field of conceptual history has branched into many different directions is no longer associated exclusively with the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* or with Reinhart Koselleck.⁶³ However, until his death Koselleck remained a key figure, who was habitually referred to and consulted when new projects or discussions were launched in the field. He was therefore for a long time known primarily as a 'conceptual historian' among his colleagues.

This was also the case abroad, where, from the late 1980s onwards, the reception of Koselleck's conceptual history has been substantial, first of all in the Netherlands and in Finland, but also in Italy and Spain,⁶⁴ and in the various Scandinavian countries.⁶⁵ It was the American historian of ideas, Melvin Richter, who was the first to make the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* known to an international audience, when he published a series of articles in American journals in the mid-1980s.⁶⁶ Richter's aim was to introduce the lexicon to Anglo-Saxon scholars and to compare Koselleck's approach to the theories and methods of the so called 'Anglophone' approach to the study of political thought. Richter identified this approach with the work of the historians Quentin Skinner and John Pocock, who are known for their studies of the rise of republican political thought and for studying linguistic expressions as part of a broader discursive context.

Richter's proposal to merge perspectives from the two approaches has been pursued both in the Netherlands and in Finland in different ways. In the Netherlands, a larger research project among other things resulted in anthology *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives* from 1998, which contains focused conceptual studies as well as discussions and comparisons of the 'German' and the 'Anglophone' approach.⁶⁷

In Finland, the reception of Koselleck and the institutionalization of conceptual history have

⁶² See the details and the references in Christof Dipper: 2000, p. 290-291.

⁶³ For perspectives on the reception of Koselleck (first of all among his students) and on the current conceptual-historical tendencies in Germany, see Jeppe Nevers: "Træk af den nyere begrebshistorie", www.erslev-andersen.dk/Begrebshistorie.pdf, accessed 10/11-2008, p. 5-10

⁶⁴ Sandro Chignola: "History of Political Thought and the History of Political Concepts: Koselleck's Proposal and the Italian Research", *History of Political Thought*, vol. XXIII, no. 3, 2002, p. 617-541; Javier Fernández Sebastian, Juan Francisco Fuentes (ed.): *Diccionario Político y Social del Siglo XIX Español*, Madrid 2002.

⁶⁵ One of the earliest attempts to introduce Koselleck to a Scandinavian audience was made by the Swedish historian Bo Stråth, who invited Koselleck to a conference in Kungälv in 1989 and published the volume Bo Stråth (ed.): *Language and the Construction of Class Identities. The Struggle for Discursive Power in Social Organization: Scandinavia and Germany after 1800*, Göteborg 1990. Stråth moreover organized a conference with Koselleck in Hässelby in 1990 and continued to invite Koselleck on a regular basis to the European University Institute, where Stråth in between 1997 and 2007 held a chair as professor in contemporary history.

⁶⁶ See first of all Melvin Richter: 1986 and Melvin Richter: 1987.

⁶⁷ Ian Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans, Frank Van Vree (ed.): *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives*, Amsterdam 1998.

been even stronger, not least due to the activities of the political scientist Kari Palonen.⁶⁸ Together with Richter, in 1998 Palonen established the international network *History of Political and Social Concepts Group*, which has its own journal, *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, and in 1995 began a summer school in conceptual history that is currently in the process of becoming an independent research school. Palonen also contributed to the renaming of the *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* into *Re-descriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History*; he contributed to the Finnish lexicon of political concepts that appeared in 2003;⁶⁹ and he has in several writings tried to develop the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of political language with a focus on concepts.⁷⁰

Similar to Richter, Palonen's aim is to merge perspectives from writings of Koselleck and Skinner as a way to develop a new approach to the study of language and concepts, and with the book *Die Entzauberung der Begriffe* from 2004, he has provided the most convincing attempt to compare and connect the two approaches to date.⁷¹ Palonen detects a basic similarity in their opposition to all a-historical and a-political understandings of concepts: according to Palonen, they both emphasize that all concepts have a history; that they are prone to change; and that there will always be a fight to define their meaning. The main difference between the two is, Palonen argues, that Skinner studies conceptual changes through a focus on how historical agents – often famous political philosophers – with changing intentions perform so called 'rhetorical re-definitions' of certain concepts, whereas Koselleck studied concepts in a more structural perspective, often with the aim of discerning the beliefs, experiences and expectations of societies and epochs in a temporal perspective. Palonen concludes that Skinner and Koselleck's perspectives on conceptual change are respectively 'rhetorical' and 'temporal'.

The comparisons with Skinner certainly boosted Koselleck's international reputation from the 1980s onwards. However, the reception of his conceptual history in the English-speaking part of the world, including the 'Anglophone' scholars, has been rather limited – and vice versa. In fact, the dialogue between the protagonists of the two approaches, Koselleck and

⁶⁸ See Jeppe Nevers: 2007, p. 123-137.

⁶⁹ Palonen was also involved in the Festschrift to Koselleck – Jussi Kurunmäki, Kari Palonen (Hg.): *Zeit, Geschichte und Politik: zum achtzigsten Geburtstag Von Reinhart Koselleck*, Jyväskylä 2003.

⁷⁰ See Jeppe Nevers: 2007.

⁷¹ Kari Palonen: 2004. Palonen also highlights a list of further similarities that suggests the two, whilst very different historians in terms of temperament and personality, may well be more closely related than hitherto presumed. Among these are the critique of the increasing de-politization of politics; sympathy for the lost, the forgotten and the demarcated in history; and the perception of history as a continuous *Umschreiben der Geschichte*.

Skinner/Pocock, were for the most part characterized by mutual criticism and demarcation. For example: whereas Skinner and Pocock stressed the differences rather than the similarities between the approaches, questioned an approach to the study of language with an exclusive focus on concepts, and categorically rejected the idea that the experience of modernity as found in the ‘German’ approach holds any relevance for their objects of study, in an interview a few months before his death Koselleck labeled Skinner a “conventional historian” with an “excessively normative” approach to the study of language.⁷² It is difficult to estimate whether these mutual reservations were the result of different theoretical-methodological convictions, academic interests, personal temperaments or political norms – or rather a mixture of all these dimensions. What is certain is that the reservations have set limits to the reception of Koselleck’s conceptual history in the English-speaking part of the world.

Still, to speak of the Koselleck’s approach to conceptual history (and the conceptual historical projects that emerged from the 1960s onwards) as an intellectual trend of the past that disappeared without having realized its grand ambitions, as Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht recently did,⁷³ does not hold in the light of the many ongoing discussions, projects and institutions inspired by and connected to the approach. The issue is rather in what form, or forms, investigations of conceptual history will take in the future. Hence, in response to Gumbrecht, Helge Jordheim has pointed out that the reception of Koselleck’s work has moved away from the methodological and disciplinary issues of *Begriffsgeschichte*, as it was outlined in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, and towards a focus on the more theoretical dimensions of Koselleck’s writings.⁷⁴ This shift of interest from methodological to theoretical concerns in Koselleck’s work has been documented by Kari Palonen,⁷⁵ but Koselleck himself also thematized the shift by pointing to that it would be wrong to view his conceptual approach to history as a stable and unchangeable entity. In a speech in the beginning of the 1990s, reflecting on his work in the field since the conceptualization of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, he stated:

“Publication of that lexicon has been going on for two decades by now and, for me at least, its theoretical and methodological presuppositions, first formulated some twenty-five years ago, have grown into an intellectual straightjacket. While it was necessary to maintain these suppositions in relatively unchanged form in order to be able to proceed with the collaborative project of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, my own approach has kept changing. It should therefore not surprise

⁷² Javier Fernández Sebastián, Juan Francisco Fuentes: 2006, p. 109.

⁷³ See Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht: 2006. It likewise seems somewhat strange that Christof Dipper recently stated that the lexicon has been “wenig wahrgenommen”. See Christof Dipper: 2000, p. 308.

⁷⁴ Helge Jordheim: 2007, p. 67-70.

⁷⁵ See Kari Palonen: 1997.

you, if the positions I shall be defending in this paper are somewhat different from the one that originally inspired *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Indeed, it would be dreadful and depressing if years of reflection had not led to significant change in my approach to conceptual history.”⁷⁶

The citation brings us to conclude the chapter by means of pointing to a paradoxical element in respect to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. On the one hand, the lexicon helped Koselleck position himself intellectually and institutionally in German and academia, and it is regarded by many as Koselleck’s most innovative scholarly achievement. On the other hand, the lexicon was not as innovative as often assumed, as it relied to a great extent on discursive features that he had already outlined in his earlier work, and its rigid theoretical and methodological presuppositions made it impossible to a further innovation of the framework.

At the end of the day, as a work that was to be accomplished by a group of authors rather than by Koselleck alone, the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* did not fit well with the individualized, continuously emerging oeuvre he was pursuing simultaneously. In a way, the nature of the lexicon as a communal work seems to have fit badly with Koselleck’s habit of dwelling on the margins of the discipline and his bent towards constant innovation. Although the achievement of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was a major success for Koselleck as a science manager, it is characteristic of the pattern of his career and of his self-image, that his position as an outsider to the mainstream of the discipline ultimately prevailed.

⁷⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: ”Some reflections on the temporal structure of conceptual change”, Willem Melching, Wyger Welema (Hg.): *Main Trends in Cultural History: Ten Essays*, Amsterdam 1994, p. 7.

6. Theorizing historical time and historical writing

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was widespread talk of an identity-crisis in the German historical discipline. This identity-crisis was related to developments both inside and outside of the profession. The gradual disintegration of the traditional profile of the discipline, with its focus on great ideas, politics and personalities, spurred an internal discussion about how the disciplinary profile should be defined after the demise of ‘historicism’. However, when the discussion developed into a fundamental questioning of what history is and why it should be practiced, this was because extra-disciplinary developments – such as the student revolts, the expansion of the social sciences and broader societal changes – prompted the members of the profession to describe their craft and give reasons for its relevance outside of the academic sphere.⁷⁷

These developments took place against the background of a series of political changes in the Federal Republic during the 1960s. In this decade, due to economic recessions and changes in the political climate, the Adenaurian CDU-system of the *Wirtschaftswunder*-period was weakened in favour of an increasing influence of the SPD. Having spent the entire post-war period in opposition, in 1966 the SPD joined a grand coalition led by Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger (CDU) and in 1969 formed a new government with the FDP. This government was led by Chancellor Willy Brandt (SPD). Its promotional slogan was ‘dare more democracy’ (*Mehr Demokratie wagen*). One of its aims was to reform the educational systems, which were perceived as perpetuating a veritable ‘disaster’ (*Bildungskatastrophe*) of authoritarianism and social exclusivity. The ensuing call to enlarge and restructure the various educational institutions was justified both with reference to the necessity to improve the country’s competitiveness and to the right for equal societal opportunities.

As education was assigned a key role in the processes of economic and social reform, large sums were invested to expand and modernize the university system.⁷⁸ One of the results was the founding of numerous new universities of which the first six were established already in the 1960s: Bielefeld, Bochum, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Konstanz and Regensburg. At some of the new universities, first of all at those in Nordrhein-Westfalen (Bielefeld, Bochum, Dortmund, and Düsseldorf), where an SPD-FDP coalition came to power already in 1966,

⁷⁷ For overviews of the discussions related to the ‘identity-crisis’, see first of all Arnold Sywottek: *Geschichtswissenschaft in der Legitimationskrise. Ein Überblick über die Diskussion um Theorie und Didaktik der Geschichte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1969-1973*, Bonn-Bad Godesberg 1974; Günter Heydemann: *Geschichtswissenschaft im geteilten Deutschland. Entwicklungsgeschichte, Organisationsstruktur, Funktionen, Theorie- und Methodenprobleme in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der DDR*, Frankfurt am Main 1980.

⁷⁸ The following is based on Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 328-335.

there were also substantial moves towards structural changes of the university system. Most importantly, the old ‘professor-university’ was substituted by a model of ‘group-university’ according to which the university was supposed to be run in cooperation between the academic and the non-academic staff and the students. It was also in Nordrhein-Westfalen that the contemporary plans of establishing so-called *Gesamthochschulen* were pursued most extensively, when, in 1972, as part of a practical reform-model, five new *Gesamthochschulen* were established in Duisburg, Essen, Paderborn, Siegen and Wuppertal. In line with the overall educational aim of the Federal State this model aimed: to democratize the entry requirements at the universities; to create an integrative, organizational unity between universities, *Fachhochschulen* and *Pädagogische Hochschulen*; to integrate the various programs of study in broad departments; to integrate teaching and research; and to integrate the scientific personnel (teachers and researchers) into a functional unity. This program was imitated in other federal states with SPD-led governments and came to be identified with the progressive potential of the party. It created a novel system of political lines of contestation that dominated the educational system in Germany for decades.

The processes of university expansion and reform were important for the discipline of history in several respects. First of all, they stimulated discussion of the purpose, relevance and identity of history in modern society. Secondly, and in relation to this, the idea that society could be reformed through education spawned a flood of plans, theories and programs as to how the university system, including the history curriculum, could be modernized through institutional and educational restructuring. Thirdly, the reforms resulted in a huge rise in the number of historians (professors as well as students) and in the creation of institutional space where new approaches could be cultivated within the overall spirit of reform.

One of the ambitions of the present chapter is to illuminate how Koselleck as a historian and a university professor reacted to and manoeuvred within the various changes and challenges facing the historical profession in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first part of the chapter accordingly illuminates how Koselleck responded to the self-questioning and the redefinition of the discipline of history by introducing one of the most famous themes in his scholarly production; the project of developing a theory of historical time. In the analysis of how he pursued this project, attention is first paid to how, from the 1950s to the 1980s, Koselleck began to focus less on deconstructing history in the singular and more on how histories in plural can be written.

In relation to the disciplinary debates and changes, the chapter also deals with his attempts, in a variety of essays, written from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, to describe various

theoretical-methodological characteristics and conditions of historical writing.

The intention is not only to illuminate the distinctive discursive features of this dimension of Koselleck's work, but also to uncover a trait that is characteristic for all of his writings. This is the somewhat unsystematic character of his analytical framework. While he found theoretical reflections indispensable, Koselleck never aimed at developing a systematic analytical framework with a clearly defined centre and periphery or a fixed relation between its various elements. His lack of theoretical systematic went, as we will see, hand in hand with a plea for a plurality of perspectives in historical writing and with a position that can be labelled cautiously constructive in its attitude towards theoretical-methodological matters. On the one hand, he argued valuable and usable knowledge can be reached by studying history; on the other, he argued that there are clear limits as to what we can know about the human past and to how we can apply our historical knowledge in the present and the future.

The second part of the chapter deals with Koselleck's intellectual and institutional activities at the University of Bielefeld, as a hub of the upheavals of educational reform, and the academic-social constellations he entered there. The aim of this part of chapter is to show how, through his affiliation with a large number of institutions, projects and network, during his time in Bielefeld, Koselleck became an increasingly established scholar, while at the same time, due to being positioned and positioning himself in the field, becoming somewhat marginalized at the department and in the historical profession more generally. At the end of the chapter, it in addition becomes clear that, in spite of his eventual manifestation as a famous and influential scholar, both in Germany and abroad, Koselleck continued to think of himself as an academic outsider.

The chapter begins with a view on the reconfigurations of the German historical discipline beginning in the 1960s. This brings us to Koselleck's activities in the working group *Poetik und Hermeneutik* and at the University of Heidelberg in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where he launched his project of developing a theory of historical time.

***Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, '68 and the historical discipline in the late 1960s and early 1970s**

One indicator and factor for changes taking place in the disciplinary profile during the 1960s and 1970s was the rise of a new generation of scholars, including the social historians Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka, the historian of National Socialism Hans Mommsen, the theoretician Jörn Rüsen, and historians whose work are more difficult to subsume under one label, such as Wolfgang Mommsen, Wolfgang Schieder and Heinrich-August Winkler. None of these historians had been trained by the older generation of German historians to which

Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter belonged, but by the middle-generation, first of all by Werner Conze and Theodor Schieder. And while they for various reasons refrained from confronting Conze and Schieder with their activities in the period between 1933 and 1945,⁷⁹ the new generation of historians were severely critical towards both the political dimensions and the (lack of) theoretical-methodological features in the historical writing of the older generation.⁸⁰

The new generation of German historians followed partly the footsteps of Fritz Fischer (1908-1999), who was the first to attack a number of the fundamental assumptions and beliefs in the German historical profession. In his famous *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (1961) Fischer had argued that Germany had deliberately launched World War I in an attempt to become a world power. He had furthermore suggested that there was continuity in the German foreign policy aims from Wilhelm II to Hitler, thus indicating that Germany was responsible for both world wars.⁸¹ For many German historians at this time, it was acceptable to believe that Germany had caused World War II, as World War I was widely regarded as a war forced upon Germany or resulting from a complicated process in international politics in which all participating governments were equally guilty. Fischer's work caused deep controversy in the German historical profession and inspired other historians, such as Gerhard Ritter and Karl-Dietrich Erdmann (1910-1990), to write books and articles in response to his arguments.⁸²

Although Fischer's work challenged traditional interpretations within the historical profession, his method did not challenge the one of traditional *Diplomatiegeschichte*. *Griff nach der Weltmacht* was a work of narrative history, focusing on political events and without any explicit appeals to theory. However, the controversy aroused by Fischer's work made it easier for the younger historians, who entered the profession in the period of university-expansion in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to formulate approaches that combined a critique of the traditional nationalistic historical writing with attempts to redefine the theoretical-

⁷⁹ See first of all Rüdiger Hohls, Konrad H. Jarausch (Hg.): 2000.

⁸⁰ The exception is Hans Rothfels (1891-1976), who had close relations to some of the young students in Tübingen in the 1950s, such as Hans Mommsen. A conservative and nationalist historian, in 1926 Rothfels became a professor in Königsberg, where he was a mentor to Schieder and Conze. Because of his Jewish descent, in 1934 he was banned from teaching and in 1938 he immigrated, first to England and then to the USA. When Rothfels returned to Germany in 1951, he came to play a leading role in reorganizing the German historical profession. By founding the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* and the *Vierteljahrsheft für Zeitgeschichte*, he had a great influence on the founding of German contemporary history, and he was also very active in supporting the institutionalization of Conze and Schieder's structural-historical approach. See Jan Eckel: Göttingen 2005.

⁸¹ Fritz Fischer: *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914-18*, Düsseldorf 1961. After Fischer died in 1999, it was revealed that he deceived the public about his past. After World War I, he had been a member of a right-wing military *Freikorps*; in 1932, he joined the SA, in 1937, the NSDAP, and he was briefly associated with Hans Frank's 'Reich Institute for the History of the New Germany'.

⁸² See Klaus Große Kracht: 2005, p. 47-67.

methodological fundament of the discipline.

The most famous and comprehensive attempt in this direction was launched by a group of social historians headed by Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka. Similar to members of the ‘middle-generation’, such as Conze, these historians aimed to substitute the traditional focus on politics, personalities and ideas with a focus on social structures and processes. However, their comprehensive and programmatic research program, often referred to as *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*,⁸³ encompassed a variety of theoretical-methodological features and societal-political values that are not found in Conze’s program. Among these features were an explicit normative binding to the social-political values of the ‘West’ (as well as to the social democratic reform agenda); a commitment to combine historical writing with ‘political pedagogic’ and ideological critique; a theoretical-methodological approach based on a merging of Weberian sociology with American social science and with the work of the two exiled German left-wing social historians Eckart Kehr and Hans Rosenberg; and a focus on the so called *Sonderweg*-thesis about a special German path into modernity that deviates from a presumed Western European model, which included a ‘critical’ examination of the specific German elements that lead to Hitler’s rise to power.⁸⁴

In the discussion about the disciplinary profile, from the late 1960s onwards, Wehler and Kocka actively promoted *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* as a properly scientific and empirical approach that was superior to and ought to replace the unscientific and ideologically tainted ‘historicism’ of previous generations.⁸⁵ The *Gesellschaftshistoriker* enjoyed a considerable success, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s when they achieved a certain discursive dominance and constructed one of the most powerful institutional networks of the

⁸³ Sometimes other labels were used to name the approach. Wehler for example often spoke of his approach as a *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, while Kocka spoke of his as *Sozialgeschichte*.

⁸⁴ See Thomas Welskopp: “Westbindung auf dem ‘Sonderweg’. Die deutsche Sozialgeschichte vom Appendix der Wirtschaftsgeschichte“, Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, Ernst Schulin (Hg.): *Geschichtsdiskurs. Band 5. Globale Konflikte, Erinnerungsarbeit und Neuorientierungen seit 1945*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 191-237. Welskopp outlines all in all ten characteristics of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. The first is the ‘normative binding to the West’: the appreciation of and commitment to the social-political values of the ‘West’. The second is a specific political interpretation of the enlightenment in which openness, rationality and critique are presented as the principles on which modern society should be based. The third is a commitment to a type of ideological critique, which requires the explication of one’s own position. The fourth is a strong orientation towards theory. The fifth and the sixth is an analytical focus on societal structures and systems, inspired by American sociology, the German structural-historical approach manifesting in the 1950s, and the work of the two exiled left-wing German historians, Eckart Kehr and Hans Rosenberg. The seventh is a meta-perspective on modernization, understood as the economic, societal and political processes leading to industrial society, representative democracy and the social intervention state. The eighth is the use of analytical methods from the social sciences, such as demography and statistics. The ninth is the orientation towards synthesis, and the tenth is the reliance on the so called *Sonderweg*-thesis concerning the unique character of German history since the 19th century.

⁸⁵ Wehler also engaged in a direct polemic against Conze, especially against what he saw the latter’s insufficient conception of society and social history. See “Geschichtswissenschaft Heute”, Jürgen Habermas (Hg.): *Stichwörter zur Geistigen Situation der Zeit*, Bd. 2, Frankfurt Am Main 1979, p. 714-726 (in the footnotes).

discipline. This was because in different ways their approach had been in tune with changes taking place both inside and outside the historical discipline from the late 1960s onwards.⁸⁶ Most importantly, it was in accordance with the broader societal developments and expectations in the direction of reform and modernization. It was compatible with research agendas of many other historians, both inside and outside of Germany, who similarly wanted to substitute the traditional disciplinary focus with a more interdisciplinary and theoretical approach that takes into account social structures and processes in history.⁸⁷ It matched the most fashionable contemporary trend within the social-political disciplines: the projects launched at the Frankfurt School to create a critical theory that should enable human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination.⁸⁸ And it was, in line with this, not alien to the demands for theoretical reflection, societal emancipation and ideological critique launched by the new generation of students that emerged at universities all over the world in the late 1960s: a generation, that retrospectively became known as the ‘68ers’.⁸⁹

At several German universities, in the late 1960s and early 1970s the 68ers took part in protests against what they considered a ‘paternalistic, ‘reactionary’ and ‘repressive’ educational and societal system. In their attempts to gain influence in the processes of university reforms, the student activists not only used verbal argumentation, they also launched demonstrations, strikes and rallies, and took other kinds of physical action. Many humanities and social science departments at German universities were consequently taken over by students. This was the case in Berlin and in Frankfurt, where, in accordance with a set of leftwing societal-political beliefs and visions, the inaugurations of the ‘critical’ and ‘political’ university were respectively proclaimed.⁹⁰ It should be added that the 68ers not only mobilized in protest against the contemporary educational and societal system, but against social, political and economic structures, and the authority of the state more generally, as well as against the Vietnam War and the brutal police strikes against demonstrators that

⁸⁶ To be sure, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* never became *the* paradigm in the German historical profession. In addition, the promotion of the approach had no effect on an institutional level, since no professorial chairs devoted to *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* were ever established.

⁸⁷ For the international expansion of social history between the 1950 and the 1980s, see Christoph Conrad: “Social History”, N. J. Smelser, P. B. Baltes (ed.): *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, vol. 21, Oxford 2001, p. 14299-14306; Lutz Raphael: *Geschichtswissenschaft in Zeitalter der Extreme. Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*, München 2003, p. 173-195.

⁸⁸ For the Frankfurt School, see first of all Rolf Wiggershaus: *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, Cambridge, 1995 and Martin Jay: *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research 1923-1950*, Berkeley 1996.

⁸⁹ For German and international perspectives on the 68ers, see Norbert Frei: *1968: Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest*, München 2008. For further literature on the topic, see Martin Klimke, Joachim Scharloth (ed.): *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1965-77*, New York 2008, p. 97-110.

⁹⁰ See Dirk A. Moses: 2007, p. 186-188.

climaxed in the killing of the 26-year old Benny Ohnesorg on 2 June 1967, when the Persian head of state visited West Berlin. While some of the 68ers were primarily interested in integrating social and political concerns more closely in the curriculum, others rather saw the university revolts as a platform for broader and more radical societal changes, which in their eyes necessitated various means, including violent ones. As such, the 68ers represented many different levels and directions of protest and revolt.

The leftist groups, movements and organizations became key actors in the contemporary battle to redefine the social-political vocabulary. Their attempts to define words and concepts according to left wing values and visions prompted various politicians and intellectuals, who were positioned further to the right on the political spectrum, to react with counter-measures aimed at preserving or redefining the meaning of words and concepts, so they corresponded to a more conservative ideology.⁹¹ The 68ers – and 68 as the symbol of the events, processes and conflicts unfolding in the late 1960s and early 1970s – consequently divided most scholars in German academia into opposed camps that were informed by distinctively different interpretations of the political issues involved in 68.

On the one hand, according to members of the left wing camp, 68 represented a much needed confrontation with the authoritarian and un-democratic social-political structures that continued to dominate Germany after 1945. In fact, one of the leftist aims with 68 was to make sure to end the presence of former National Socialists in the German intellectual and political elite. On the other hand, part of the right wing camp interpreted the radicalism, language and tactics of the 68ers as a continuation of the totalitarian ideological warfare that had been at the core of National Socialism and Stalinism. In between these positions were various liberal and conservative scholars, of which some sympathized with and supported the demands for social and political reform in the 1960s, although the increasing radicalism of the 68ers caused some of these scholars to move towards the political right around 68.⁹²

At this time, the 68ers had come to dominate the student bodies at the German universities, where they organized themselves in a multitude of groups informed by different (and often for the outsider indistinguishable) aims, theories and sources of inspirations. Several 68ers were steeped in the vocabulary of critical theory, dialectical marxism and psychoanalysis, as found in the work of Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and some of these

⁹¹ See Martin Vengeler: "1968' als sprachgeschichtliche Zäsur", Georg Stötzel, Martin Vengeler (Hg.): *Kontroverse Begriffe: Geschichte des öffentlichen Sprachgebrauchs in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Berlin 1995, p. 383-404.

⁹² One prominent example is the political scientist Wilhelm Hennis. See Stephan Schlak: 2008, p. 117-187. For an account of the reactions towards 68 among German scholars, see Dirk A. Moses: 2007, p. 186-218.

encountered in Habermas a young, left-liberal and theoretically minded scholar, who, to begin with, sympathized with their demands for social-political, institutional and intellectual reform.⁹³ There was no equivalent to Habermas among the historians. Here the 68ers met with different kinds of reactions, depending on generational identities, intellectual-political orientations and personal temperaments.⁹⁴ As most of the older professors had difficulties understanding and generally depreciated the 68ers, they left it to their younger professors and assistants to deal with them. One group of these assistants was made up of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Helmut Berding and Wolfgang Mommsen, who all worked as assistants to Schieder in Köln in the 1960s. They were considerably more sympathetic towards and succeeded in establishing a dialogue with the 68ers.⁹⁵

This was not the case for a group of young professors that included Thomas Nipperdey, Andreas Hillgruber and Ernst Nolte, who were a few years older and known to be more conservative than Wehler, Berding and Mommsen. They were all targeted by the student protests, and perceiving the left wing students as representatives for an antidemocratic, utopian and dangerous mode of thought, they consequently took steps to counter the public influence of their demands and activities.

Especially active were Nipperdey and Nolte, who both joined the *Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaften*; a group founded in 1970 by conservative and liberal university professors, who wanted to address what they saw as the threat towards the freedom of research and teaching, which the student movement's politicization of the university posed. The aim of the group was more specifically to defend "a positivist and technocratic university settlement (one that rejected tying scholarship explicitly to political goals), as well as affecting to speak on a wide range of educational matters pertaining to all levels of the system."⁹⁶ Eventually, the *Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaften* came to represent a distinctly neo-conservative position.

Among other things, as chairman of the group, in the early 1970s, Nipperdey wrote a critique of the Hessian guidelines for school politics together with the philosopher Hermann

⁹³ At an SDS-congress after the death of Benny Ohnesorg, Habermas characterized the voluntaristic strategies of direct actions as proposed by the student leader, Rudi Dutschke, as 'left fascism', and as such distanced himself from the radical measures taken by the 68ers.

⁹⁴ For an informative account of the developments within the discipline around 68, see Klaus Große Kracht: 2005, p. 69-90, which also provides examples of the reactions among historians towards the 68ers. The following draws to a great extent on Kracht's account.

⁹⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler: "Historiker sollten auch politisch zu den Positionen stehen, die sie in der Wissenschaft vertreten", Rüdiger Hohls, Konrad H. Jarausch (Hg.): *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 252-253.

⁹⁶ Thus Dirk A. Moses: 2007, p. 205-206. On the pages 205-209 Moses provides an excellent overview of the activities of the *Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaften*.

Lübbe.⁹⁷ The aim of the guidelines was to dissolve history as an independent subject in the high schools by integrating it in the new subject *Gesellschaftslehre*. Nipperdey and Lübbe heavily criticized this plan, along with the fact that the guidelines, with reference to the German constitution, placed a critical evaluation of societal structures in the centre of its learning targets. More concretely, they argued that an overemphasized call for criticism might lead to a pseudo-critical consciousness in which every element of societal consensus would be ignored on behalf of a focus on conflict and in which vague moral categories are misused to construct ideological societal interpretations that merely generate further criticism and conflict.

Nipperdey echoed many of his concerns towards the Hessian guidelines for school politics in his famous controversy with Hans-Ulrich Wehler, which also unfolded in the early 1970s. The controversy began when in a 1973 review of Wehler's *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich* Nipperdey took issue with Wehler's approach of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*.⁹⁸ Nipperdey criticized the approach for being too deterministic in its reliance on the *Sonderweg*-thesis and too narrow in its focus on social factors. Furthermore, he portrayed Wehler's attempt to perform a 'political pedagogic' (through a relentless criticism of various actors, institutions and traditions in German history) as a-historical.⁹⁹ Instead of creating a position 'beyond historicism', as was the aspiration of the social historians,¹⁰⁰ Nipperdey wanted to renew the hermeneutical-historicist approach, which for him meant renouncing the historian's supposed duty to carry out political-pedagogical criticism. His research projects were often theoretically-methodologically advanced and thematically broad: he found room not only for social and structural history, but also for the history of politics, mentality and art.¹⁰¹

Nipperdey's review of *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich* appeared in the first issue of the journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* in 1975. This journal was edited by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Jürgen Kocka and Wolfgang Mommsen, among others, and came to function as a publishing

⁹⁷ Between 1963 and 1969 Lübbe was professor in Bochum. From 1966, he also held a cultural ministerial post in North Rhine-Westphalia, but resigned in 1969 after his education reform proposal was amended against his will. The same year he became secretary of state at the prime minister (a position, he gave up already in 1970) and became a professor in social-philosophy at the University of Bielefeld. From 1971 until he became emeritus in 1991, he was a professor in philosophy and political theory at the University of Zürich.

⁹⁸ Thomas Nipperdey: "Wehlers 'Kaiserreich'. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 1. Jg. 1. H., 1975, p. 539-560. The following is based on Klaus Große Kracht: 2005, p. 69-90.

⁹⁹ For Wehler's announcement of his ambition of combining historical writing with 'political pedagogic', see Hans-Ulrich Wehler: 1973, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Thus Wolfgang J. Mommsen: *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus*, Düsseldorf 1971.

¹⁰¹ See Thomas Nipperdey: *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte*, Göttingen 1975. A professor in Gießen (1962), in Karlsruhe (1963), at the Free University in Berlin (1967, in München (1971), Nipperdey is today first of all remembered for his three-volume *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1918*. In spite of what is often described as a conservative outlook and affiliations, he was a member of the SPD.

platform for the *Gesellschaftshistoriker*.¹⁰² It was also in the first issue of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* that Wehler first took issue with the position of Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand, two conservative historians, who were both steeped in the classical tradition of political-diplomatic history and thus fundamentally opposed to *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Where Wehler favored the *Primat der Innenpolitik*, emphasized the need for theoretically-based research and focussed on societal issues, Hillgruber and Hildebrand defended the traditional *Primat der Aussenpolitik* approach to diplomatic history with a focus on the records of the foreign ministry and on the decision-making elite.¹⁰³

In their defence of an autonomous approach to political history, Hillgruber and Hildebrand criticized *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* for being inadequate due to its neglect of political processes. They furthermore portrayed the launching of the approach as a politically leftist claim to exclusive power in the German historical profession.¹⁰⁴ These charges were denied by Wehler,¹⁰⁵ who frequently championed his approach as ‘progressive’ and ‘democratic’ as opposed to the allegedly ‘reactionary’ and ‘conservative’ approach of his opponents. Whereas Nipperdey took the position that it is the quality of the research rather than the political background of the researcher that matters, Hillgruber bluntly denied the existence of labels such as ‘reactionary’ and ‘progressive’ within research. As such, in the discussions of whether history should be redefined into a critical *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, the various positions as roughly represented by Wehler and Kocka on the one and by Nipperdey, Hillgruber and Hildebrand on the other side, formed two opposed and fundamentally irreconcilable poles, even if Nipperdey’s research agenda was thematically considerably broader and theoretically-methodologically more advanced than Hillgruber and Hildebrand’s.

¹⁰² For the founding (and the further history) of the journal, see Lutz Raphael: “Nationalzentrierte Sozialgeschichte im programmatischer Absicht: Die Zeitschrift ‘Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft’ in den ersten 25 Jahren ihres Bestehens”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 25, 1999, p. 5-37; Olaf Blasche, Lutz Raphael: “Im Kampf um Positionen. Änderungen im Feld der französischen und deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945”, Jan Eckel, Thomas Etzemüller (Hg.): *Neue Zugänge zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Göttingen 2007, p. 104-106.

¹⁰³ These differences became already apparent in relation to the Fischer-controversy, where, in line with Fischer’s perspective of the *Primat der Innenpolitik*, Wehler charged the German elite of the period 1870-1945 for having been solely responsible for launching World War I, while Hillgruber rejected Fischer’s perspective.

¹⁰⁴ See first of all Andreas Hillgruber: “Politische Geschichte in moderner Sicht“, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 216, 1973, p. 529-552; Klaus Hildebrand: “Geschichte oder ‘Gesellschaftsgeschichte’? Die Notwendigkeit einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen“, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 223, 1976, p. 328-357.

¹⁰⁵ For Wehler’s answers to respectively Hillgruber and Hildebrand, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler: “Moderne Politikgeschichte oder ‘Große Politik der Kabinette’“, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 1. Jg. 1. Hf., 1975, p. 344-369; “Kritik und kritische Antikritik” *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 225, 1977, p. 347-387.

Koselleck in *Poetik und Hermeneutik* and at the University of Heidelberg

Koselleck also emerged as a key figure in the discussion about the historical discipline in the late 1960s and early 1970s. If placed vis-à-vis the competing programs of historical writing, there can be no doubt that, in terms of theoretical-methodological standpoints, research projects and specific interpretations, he was much closer to Nipperdey than to Hillgruber and Hildebrand or to Wehler and Kocka with whom he became colleagues in Bielefeld in 1973.

To be sure, Koselleck's work had little to do with that of Hillgruber and Hildebrand, whose research-program of a modern political history he undoubtedly found theoretically-methodologically and thematically too narrow with its strict focus on high politics, the records of the foreign ministry and on the decision-making elite. In line with this, Koselleck surely agreed with Wehler and the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* on the need to go beyond the *Primat der Aussenpolitik* and practice a more theoretical, interdisciplinary and social-historical approach that involves a broader and more critical examination of the intellectual-political conditions and discourses that led to the 'German catastrophe'. This was, broadly speaking, a type of approach that Koselleck had called for and tried to develop since the early 1950s.

However, the differences between Koselleck and the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* evidently outweighed the similarities. To begin with: Whereas Wehler and his associates found inspiration in Weberian sociology and American social science, Koselleck was more oriented towards reading (and co-operating with) philosophers, literary theorists and theologians. Whereas the former focused on social structures, Koselleck was more interested in language, mentality and in the historicity of 'the political'. In addition, whereas the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* aimed at discursive and institutional power in the profession, embraced a polemic style of argumentation and declared their position as left-liberal, Koselleck avoided identifying himself with any political direction, ideology or party, and tried to withdraw from the ideologically loaded debates of the time in order to pursue his research agendas. And even if, similar to the *Gesellschaftshistoriker*; Koselleck wanted to use lessons deduced from the past to improve social-political conditions in the present, he evidently nurtured a deeper scepticism concerning the usability of history and envisioned a less close tie between science and politics than they did. More generally, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* entailed a certain scientific claim that the more hermeneutically minded Koselleck simply renounced.

In this respect, Koselleck was in line with Thomas Nipperdey, who in the 1960s and 1970s pursued research-projects that were to some extent similar to Koselleck's. Both sought to renew the historicist-hermeneutic approach, explored the possibilities of developing a historical anthropology (although, they had two different conceptions of anthropology) and

pioneered the study of monuments and iconography.¹⁰⁶ However, their theoretical-methodological visions, research-projects and normative positions were in many respects dissimilar, and, in the debate about *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Koselleck sided neither with Nipperdey nor with Wehler/Kocka or Hillgruber/Hildebrand.¹⁰⁷

Koselleck's choice of not taking a position in the debate had not only to do with the lack of compatibility between his position and those represented in the debate or with his lack of taste for the open conflicts in the discipline. It was also a result of the fact that he appeared on the discussion scene and made his name in the discipline before the debate about *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* began. As we have seen, the limits, aims and roles of historical writing in modern society in this period were issues that had deeply interested Koselleck since he was a student in Heidelberg, and which he had been discussing in the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte* and in the interdisciplinary working group *Poetik und Hermeneutik* in the 1950s and 1960s. It was rather in forums of this kind, and not by means of polemical public exchanges, that Koselleck preferred to elaborate on his scholarly profile. It is characteristic of both forums that they pursued interdisciplinary agendas, and that they had a humanities rather than a stringent social science outlook. Both forums pursued interdisciplinary agendas. Whereas the *Arbeitskreis* (of which also Wehler and Kocka eventually became members) aimed at a social history that connected to economics, law, sociology and ethnography, *Poetik und Hermeneutik* housed scholars from the more hermeneutically oriented disciplines, such as philosophy, literature and theology.

The group was formed in the early 1960s on the initiative of the literary scholars Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997) and Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007) and the philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996). Their ambition was to break down the increased specialization within the humanities by creating a forum in which the newest literature theories should be related to classical aesthetic topics in the (Gadamerian) hermeneutic tradition and where theological, historical and philosophical questions could be discussed in relation to each other. The outcome was, it has been said, the making of a centre of the post-war (German) intellectual history in which the presumably most successful series of conferences in the humanities after 1945 took place.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ In addition, Nipperdey contributed to the first volume of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (together with Reinhard Rürup, he wrote the article on *Antisemitismus*), and his celebrated three-volume *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1914* was, as earlier mentioned, greatly inspired by Koselleck's *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*.

¹⁰⁷ It should be added that Koselleck was a specialist of the 18th and early 19th centuries, whereas all the others were 19th-early 20th century specialists and for that reason dealt with different subfields and programs.

¹⁰⁸ See Jürgen Kaube: "Zentrum der intellektuellen Nachkriegsgeschichte", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18/6-2003.

One key to the success of *Poetik und Hermeneutik* is arguably to be found in how its conferences were structured along a series of statutes that became somewhat unique in contemporary scientific culture. Among other things, instead of planning the conference themes years ahead, each conference ended with a meeting during which the theme of the next session was decided upon; instead of giving a lengthy presentation at the conferences, the participants submitted their contributions as texts beforehand, so that after a brief summary there was time for a two hour discussion of each text during the meetings (in the various conference-volumes, the discussions were published alongside the talks); and instead of finding the participants by announcement, they were found through co-option.

Koselleck participated in nine out of twelve conferences from the early 1960s until the mid-1980s, where themes related to *Nachahmung und Illusion*, *Immanente Ästhetik-ästhetische Reflexion*, *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste*, *Probleme der Mythenrezeption*, *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, and *Positionen der Negativität*, *Das Komische*, *Identität*, *Text und Applikation*, *Funktionen des Fiktiven*, *Das Gespräch* and *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewusstsein* were on the agenda.¹⁰⁹ There can be no doubt that he deeply appreciated the academic culture, the research themes and his collaborators in *Poetik und Hermeneutik*. Among these were, besides Jauss, Iser and Blumenberg, the literary scholar Karlheinz Stierle, and the philosophers Odo Marquard, Hermann Lübbe and Dieter Henrich, who all pursued projects that overlapped with Koselleck's and held his work in high esteem.¹¹⁰

This was evident already during the discussions at the first meeting, in Gießen in 1963. In the discussions here Koselleck presented his later famous argument concerning the modern

¹⁰⁹ See the published volumes: Hans Robert Jauss (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik I. Nachahmung und Illusion*, München 1964; Wolfgang Iser (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik II. Immanente Ästhetik, ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne*, München 1966; Hans Robert Jauss (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik III: Die nicht mehr schönen Künste. Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen*, München 1968; Manfred Fuhmann (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik IV. Probleme der Mythenrezeption*, München 1971; Reinhart Koselleck, Wolf-Dieter Stempel (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik V. Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, München 1973; Harald Weinrich (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik VI. Positionen der Negativität*, München 1975; Wolfgang Preisendanz, Rainer Warning (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik VII. Das Komische*, München 1976; Odo Marquard, Karlheinz Stierle (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik VIII. Identität*, München 1979; Manfred Fuhmann, Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Pannenberg (Hg.) *Poetik und Hermeneutik IX. Text und Applikation*, München 1981; Dieter Heinrich, Wolfgang Iser (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik X. Funktionen des Fiktiven*, München 1983; Karlheinz Stierle, Rainer Warning (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik XI. Das Gespräch*, München 1984; Reinhart Herzog, Reinhart Koselleck: *Poetik und Hermeneutik XII. Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewusstsein*, München 1987. According to Bernard Giesen, Koselleck continued to appear as an occasional and much appreciated guest. See Bernard Giesen: "Nachruf auf Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006)", *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, Bd. 17, 2007, 2007, p. 265.

¹¹⁰ Present at one or more of the early *Poetik und Hermeneutik*-conferences were, besides Jauss, Iser, Blumenberg, Taubes and Koselleck, among others also the *Germanist* Peter Szondi, the historians Christian Meier and Arno Borst, the art historian Max Imdahl, the philosophers Jürgen Habermas, Dieter Henrich and Odo Marquard, the sociologist Sigfried Kracauer and the theologian Wolfgang Pannenberg.

concept of history as a ‘collective singular’.¹¹¹ The relation between *Geschichten und Geschichte* was discussed in more detail at the 1970 conference that focused on *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung* and was co-organized by Koselleck. It was on this occasion, when Koselleck also presented his project of developing a theory of historical time, that Jacob Taubes labelled him a ‘partisan of histories in plural’.

The specific type of philosophical approach to aesthetics, poetics and history that Koselleck practiced in *Poetik und Hermeneutik* obviously represented an intellectual tradition that related science to politics less directly than the program of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. The members of *Poetik und Hermeneutik* did not view or profile themselves as polemics with a specific ideological-political agenda that was to be legitimated, substantiated and pursued via a scholarly analysis. Instead, they aimed at a (new) style of inquiry that allowed for a deconstruction of ideological-political vocabularies, mindsets and positions in the past and the present, without an alternative or new ideological position necessarily must be outlined.¹¹² The discussion of the relation between history and historical philosophy at the 1970 conference provides one of many examples of this. All this notwithstanding, there were certain divisions within the circle. To bracket or to bridge this was a genuine and considerable achievement. After all, *Poetik und Hermeneutik* was mainly taken up by a generation that had undergone the violent conflicts and divisions of the 1930s and 1940s in full measure, and on various sides. Arguably, the group was in part driven by a shared attachment to a tradition of scholarship in the humanities that most of the participants also recognized as tainted and compromised by its extreme ideological subservience in the Nazi period. Still, they hoped – in some cases perhaps rather despairingly – that their scholarly work would help to counter, or even depart from, the atrocious past. This basic attitude comprised a recognition of the problems raised by the past that most other debates in German historical writing and related fields lacked in the period. This might be part of the lasting appeal of *Poetik und Hermeneutik*.

By the time Koselleck took up his professorial chair in history in Heidelberg in 1968,¹¹³ on the basis of his activities in the *Arbeitskreis* and in *Poetik und Hermeneutik* he was known as a scholar who moved on the theoretical-methodological forefront of the historical discipline. In Heidelberg, he was able to draw on a substantial teaching experience, accumulated from the early 1950s onwards in Bristol and as an assistant to Kühn and Conze

¹¹¹ H. R. Jauß (Hg.): 1963, p. 187-195.

¹¹² According to Hans Robert Jauss: 1996, the group “embarked on an intellectual project that opposed any tendency to return to the idea of nationality or race as meaningful vectors in the human sciences.”

¹¹³ Koselleck succeeded Rudolf von Albertini, who in 1967 returned to the University of Zürich. Werner Conze, Dorothee Mussnug: “Das historische Seminar”, *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, Bd. 57, Jg. 1979, p. 148.

in Heidelberg.¹¹⁴ In the mid-1950s, Koselleck had complained to Schmitt that, due to being socialized during and after World War II, the young generation of (German) students was characterized by a fundamentally a-political stance and an inclination to view the study of history merely as a required university education.¹¹⁵ In contrast during his five years as a professor in Heidelberg he was to encounter a generation of students that he found *too* politicized. These students were of the generation of 68ers, which also emerged at the department of history in Heidelberg in this period.¹¹⁶

In Heidelberg, the demands of the 68ers resulted in ongoing discussions about the discipline and in an increase of courses dealing with historical-theoretical issues.¹¹⁷ However, the 68ers also launched a wave of physical activism that prompted members of the historical

¹¹⁴ In Heidelberg, Koselleck taught on topics related to the history of historical writing, history of ideas, the history of National Socialist concentration camps, conceptual history and historical theory and methodology. However, his primary focus was on issues related to conceptual history and historical theory. Among the titles of the courses that Koselleck taught were: *Einführung in die historisch-politische Begriffswelt* (SS66), *Seminar über den Fortschritt* (WS67/68), *Über die KZs* (SS69), *Historik* (SS69), *Geschichte der Historiographie* (SS70), *Zur Geschichtsschreibung vom Humanismus bis zur Gegenwart* (SS70), *Europäische Verfassungsbegriffe und Verfassungsgeschichte der frühen Neuzeit* (WS70/71). See Brigitte Altemos: 1978, p. 36-85; Werner Conze, Dorothee Mussnug: 1979, p. 148. Koselleck's activities in the field of historical theory earned him a reputation for being the "souveränste geschichtstheoretische Denker in der Geschichte des Historischen Seminars der Universität Heidelberg." Thus Detlef Junker: 1992, p. 172. During his time as a professor in Heidelberg, Koselleck had all in all 7 doctoral students.

¹¹⁵ Koselleck first described the generational difference that he detected between himself and his students in the letter to Schmitt from November 1955, where, to make his point, he referred to 'der Fall Danzig' in 1939: ('Der Fall Danzig' refers to how the Polish port town of Danzig, which after World War I had been declared a 'free city' under the protection of the League of Nations, in 1939 came to play a role in the German military aggressions leading to the invasion of Poland, as Hitler demanded that it should be returned to Germany, which Poland refused). Koselleck wrote: "Soziologisch kann man die Studierenden vielleicht in zwei Gruppen teilen. In diejenigen, die durch die Erziehung von 1945 ff. geprägt sind und die, an denen diese Erziehung bzw. Umerziehung vorübergegangen ist. Sei es durch das Elternhaus oder weil sie Flüchtlinge sind oder weil sie dauernd in alten geordneten Verhältnissen aufgewachsen sind. Jedenfalls fehlt fast allen die Erfahrung des Krieges selber. Und darin besteht der entscheidende Abstand zwischen den Studenten und mir. Der Fall Danzig gehört bei fast allen nur in den Erinnerungsraum ihrer Eltern." RW265-8144: 28/11-1955. Koselleck elaborated on the consequences of these generational differences in a letter to Schmitt from July 1956, where he was obviously somewhat irritated with the efforts of his students in the last months. Here Koselleck complained that some of the students wandered around *ziellos* and *positionslos*, merely focusing on the exam. Due to have been socialized during and after the war, Koselleck added, "Vielen Studenten fehlt völlig das soziologischen Organ und das Erbe der klassischen 'politischen' Geschichtsschreibung der vorigen Jahrhundert (...).RW265-8145: 10/7-1956.

¹¹⁶ The following description is based on Christian Peters: "Lehrangebot und Geschichtsbild. Ein Beitrag zu einer Sozialgeschichte des Faches Geschichte an der Heidelberger Universität", Robert Deutsch, Heilwig Schomerus, Christian Peters (Hg.): *Eine Studie zum Alltagslebens der Historie. Zeitgeschichte des Faches Geschichte an der Heidelberger Universität 1945-1978*, Heidelberg 1978, p. 32-33. The student movement arose relatively late in Heidelberg. Among its first aims were to lower the tram-prices (known as the Roter-Punkt-Aktion) and to secure student influence on issues related to university-administration. For (three very different) perspectives on the student revolts in Heidelberg, see Eike Wolgast: 1986, p. 182; Karin Buselmeier (Hg.): *Auch eine Geschichte der Universität Heidelberg*, Mannheim 1985; Jürgen Hoppe: "Heidelberg Sommer", Ernst Nolte: (Hg.): *Deutsche Universitäten. Berichte und Analysen*, Marburg 1969.

¹¹⁷ See Christian Peters: 1978, p. 26-27, who has divided the teaching activities at the University of Heidelberg in the period 1945-1975 into three phases: 1. a phase that runs from 1945 until around 1957 in which *geistesgeschichtliche* themes dominated 2. a phase running from around 1957 until around 1970 dominated by themes related to social and economic history 3. a phase running from 1970 until 1975 dominated by themes related to historical theory and method.

seminar to temporarily cease their teaching activities in the summer semester of 1971.¹¹⁸ A few years earlier, the most prominent member of the faculty, Werner Conze, had been a target of the student protests, when he, against the advice of his assistants, attempted to be elected as the first rector of the new 'group university' in 1969.¹¹⁹ Already in 1968, Conze had been rejected by his colleagues as a rector candidate for being too progressive, and when he (also in 1969) became rector in short transitory period to the new 'group university', he remained unpopular among his colleagues as a result of his support of the new university structure. However, Conze was even more unpopular among the left wing students, who found him reactionary. When he ran for the rector candidature, they began to dig into and expose his Nazi past and bombarded him with eggs and tomatoes during his speeches.¹²⁰ In addition, the left wing students heavily criticized his famous social historical lectures, because these circumvented any debate concerning the Marxist view of history. Conze, on the other hand, had difficulties understanding the events taking place around 1968: deprecatingly, he paralleled these with the political events leading to the breakdown of the Weimar Republic.

Koselleck took overall more of a middle-position towards the left wing students. On the one hand, he had no sympathy for and warned against the most radical assumptions, demands and activities of the 68ers. He did so by means of comparing their visions of history as a totality, and their attempts to overtly moralize and politicize historical writing, to the historical-philosophical visions and projects of the most extreme enlightenment thinkers, thus using 68 as a negative reference point against which he defined his own scientific and political positions. In response to the fact that the 68ers aimed to create societies in which all distinctions between public and private, friend and enemy, master and slave, science and politics were to be eliminated, Koselleck argued that such attempts are plain impossible and bound to have disastrous consequences. Tellingly, when, in an earlier cited interview, he moreover explained how, since his experiences of World War II, he had maintained a sceptical attitude in order to deconstruct utopian surplus, he added: "also the utopian surplus of the 68ers."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Werner Conze, Dorothee Mussnug: 1979: p. 151.

¹¹⁹ The following is based on Thomas Etzemüller: 2001, p. 338 and Hans Mommsen: "Daraus erklärt sich, daß es niemals zuvor eine derartige Vorherrschaft alter Männer gegeben hat wie in der Zeit von 1945 bis in die 60er Jahre", Rüdiger Hohls, Konrad H. Jarausch (Hg.): *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 179; Wolfgang Schieder: 2000, p. 288-289.

¹²⁰ See the picture in Karin Buselmeier (Hg.): 1985, p. 443. Conze lost the subsequent election.

¹²¹ Reinhart Koselleck: 7/5-2005. It has recently been said of the political scientist Wilhelm Hennis that he sought to put a limit (*Grenze*) to the attempts made by the '68ers' to politicize the contemporary science, language and politics. See Stephan Schlak: 2008, p. 152-153. The same can be said about Koselleck. However: where Hennis drew parallels between the 68ers and the anti-democratic forces in the Weimar-republic, Koselleck compared the 68ers to the enlightenment thinkers; where Hennis engaged in direct polemic with the 68ers,

On the other hand, Koselleck was not unsympathetic towards all demands for intellectual, institutional and social change in the late 1960s, and he once explained how his relation to the 68ers was different than Conze's in that, without being known as a leftist intellectual, he was accepted as an interlocutor by the leftwing students with whom he was willing to engage in discussions.¹²² In the interview, Koselleck explained his mediating position in the conflict unfolding in the late 1960s and early 1970s with reference to specific generational experiences and expectations that in his view always characterize and divide societies:

"As for generational relations, I believe that the issue is comparable to an accordion: sometimes they are further removed from each other. As a member of the war generation, I was for example closely associated with Werner Conze, who was born in 1910. The war still functioned like glue that was specific for those who lived through it and was based on analogous experience. However, when the student revolts and, at the same time, the radical investigation of the NS-period began, I was off the hook. Unlike Conze, who to some extent had been a convinced National Socialist, coming from the grand bourgeoisie, but supporting the Volksgemeinschaft, I had never assumed responsibilities in the Third Reich. And then the generational gap was large; suddenly the thirteen years between us marked a huge distance."¹²³

Koselleck's understanding of the generational problematic was evidently based on assumptions from his temporal thought, in that he described himself, Conze, and the 68ers, as located in different, dynamic temporal layers, as a large arrangement of *Ungleichzeitigen* that was prone to generate conflict. Koselleck was rather content to avoid conflict and his mediating position and his theoretical thought of the period represents seemingly an attempt to make things more dialogical and complex and thereby tacitly undermine the foundations of the lines of conflict at the time. This interpretation is in accordance with the ways in which friends and colleagues of Koselleck have described how the latter came to function as a mediator between the generation of predominantly conservative scholars, who had been socialized in the 1920s and 1930s, and who were commonly uninterested in theoretical questions, and the generation of theoretically interested left wing students that grew up after 1945 and which revolted against the older generation during the late 1960s and early 1970s. One example is found in a recent speech by Lucian Hölscher. Looking back at his first encounter with Koselleck, he said:

Koselleck criticized them only indirectly in his historical writing; and where, after having supported demands for societal and institutional change, Hennis around 68 dissociated himself completely from the 68ers and moved towards the political right, Koselleck tried to maintain the dialogue with the left wing students.

¹²² See Reinhart Koselleck: "Formen der Bürgerlichkeit": 2003, p. 80.

¹²³ See Reinhart Koselleck: "Formen der Bürgerlichkeit": 2003, p. 80.

“When I, coming as a member of the student institute from Freiburg, for the first time saw Reinhart Koselleck at the historian’s conference in Köln in 197[0], I was captivated by the brilliance of his concluding talk ‘Wozu noch Historie?’, but also of his human attitude (*Menschlichkeit*). The conservative board of the Association of Historians would not allow a discussion, whereon Christian Meier, back then a historian of antiquity in Köln, invited the interested students to his seminar, with his characteristic provocative frankness. Then we were 20 students discussing with Koselleck until the early morning – about what? Of course about Marx. I was far from convinced by Koselleck’s conservative way of reading Marx. (...). What nevertheless drew me to Koselleck was his way of leading a discussion: strong in his convictions, but listening; open, yet critical.”¹²⁴

While many young historians were attracted to Marxism, critical theory or *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, others, such as Hölscher, were attracted to Koselleck, who in the late 1960s and 1970s appeared as one of the few established historians with whom they could communicate and from whom they could hope for a renewal of the discipline.¹²⁵ In contrast to the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* and the Marxists, Koselleck did not stage himself as a polemicist or an ideologist, but as an open-minded and theoretically acute scholar, who was primarily interested in challenging the established assumptions within the discipline, and on these grounds he had a certain appeal, also for the left wing students. While nurturing deep reservations towards some of Koselleck’s analytical assumptions, such as his historical anthropology,¹²⁶ they evidently felt challenged and inspired by his style of thinking and arguing. In addition, they shared his conviction that history was in need of theory and should occupy itself with societal-political questions, if it was to regain its societal relevance and survive as a science. This was the key argument in two programmatic texts in the beginning of the 1970s, titled *Wozu noch Historie?* and *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft* with which Koselleck directly addressed the discussion about the identity-crisis in the historical profession.

Wozu noch Geschichte? and Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft

Wozu noch Historie? was – as mentioned by Lucian Hölscher – first presented as the final talk at the *Historikertag* in Köln in 1970 and then published in *Historische Zeitschrift* in 1971;

¹²⁴ Lucian Hölscher: 2006. Another example of Koselleck’s attempt to engage in dialogues with the 68s is found in Christian Meier: “Gedenkrede auf Reinhart Koselleck”, Neithart Bulst, Willibald Steinmetz (Hg.): *Reinhart Koselleck 1923-2006: Reden zur Gedenkfeier am 24. Mai 2006, Bielefelder Universitätsgespräche und Vorträge*, 9. 2007, p. 33: “So hat er auch mit den 68ern bereitwillig diskutiert, nächtelang, geduldig, von gleich zu gleich, hat sie Ernst genommen (gelegentlich auch verteidigt, was Kollegen ihm schwer übel nahmen), auch wenn er für ihre Utopien nichts übrig hatte.”

¹²⁵ As stated by Willibald Steinmetz: 2006, p. 421.

¹²⁶ See also Lucian Hölscher: 2006.

Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft was first presented as a talk at a 1969 conference in the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte* and then published in the volume *Theorie der Geschichte und Praxis der Geschichtsunterricht* from 1972.¹²⁷

The two articles are structured around the same basic themes, assumptions and arguments. First of all, they begin with a perspective on the contemporary crises that surrounded the discipline and manifested in the discussion concerning the relevance of history. According to Koselleck, while this discussion had intensified the so called ‘crisis of historicism’ of the 1920s and 1930s, it referred not only to the problems related to the worldview and the relativism of ‘historicism’, but also, as he wrote in *Wozu noch Historie?*, to a crisis in “history as a stringent branch of research.”(1) The crisis, Koselleck further argued, was connected to a process of de-historicization within the human and social sciences since the 1920s; a process in which history had been increasingly isolated from the other disciplines. While these disciplines had developed their own theories, objects of study and – consequently – areas of societal relevance, history had been relegated to a sub- or ancillary science, defined only by its method. What Koselleck consequently asked for in the two programmatic articles was thus a specific object of study through which history could regain its relevance vis-à-vis the other sciences and the surrounding society.

On his way to present such an object, via a recapitulation of his analysis of the relation between the rise of historical philosophy and the modern concept of history, in *Wozu noch Historie?* Koselleck listed five formal analytical criteria to characterize what historical research is and what it can achieve. He wrote:

“The turn towards concretely detail; the need to draw upon the theoretical premises of the related sciences; the alienating effect of historical declarations; the ideological-critical implications of the historical-philological method and the impossibility of gaining any immediate benefit from historical knowledge. The list can be expanded, but I believe it is sufficient for us to see a positive aspect in respect to the question: Does history still have a role to play in science and education?” (12-13)

Koselleck then returned to the issue that is missing in the list: the specific object that would allow history to regain its scientific and societal relevance. He did so by stressing what he labelled ‘the need for theory (*Theoriebedürftigkeit*) in historical science’. In an attempt to provide a new and useful theoretical fundament, he referred to concept of historicity from Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*. More concretely, on the first pages of *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft*, he proposed to develop Heidegger’s notion of historicity into a *Historik* that eschews the problems of ‘historicism’. Echoing the

¹²⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: 1971; Reinhart Koselleck: 1972.

argumentative line from his 1953 letter to Schmitt, he proposed to expand Heidegger's notion of historicity with a list of further categories in order to outline an assumption of the formalistic conditions that shape history, without delineating its content or direction. In line with this, while he recognized the difficulties in applying such meta-historical categories in actual research, Koselleck claimed that historical writing can only survive as a science if its theoretical premises are clarified.

It was against this background that Koselleck used the articles to launch his programmatic statement: that the discipline of history should concentrate on developing a specific theory – a theory of historical times. In *Wozu noch Historie?*, he wrote:

“We are simply lacking a theory, which - if possible – will distinguish our science from the theories of the other social sciences: a theory of historical times (...). The task will then be to uncover temporal structures that are shaped in accordance with the multiple kinds/types of historical change. The temporality of historical events and the structures of historical processes can thus organize historical writing – as they organize history itself.“ (15)

Such a theory of historical times, Koselleck further argued, was needed to clarify the relation between the “history as such” and the many “histories in plural” (16), to illuminate the “*Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*” (17) and to allow the application of concepts such as acceleration, progress and movement and even history within the sciences. In other words, according to Koselleck, a theory of historical times was to be regarded as *the* subject matter with which history should regain its relevance in relation to the other sciences and its societal status as *magistrae vitae*.¹²⁸

Seen retrospectively, *Wozu noch Historie?* and *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft* are both easy and difficult to place within the discussion of the historical discipline in the early 1970s. On the one hand, they provided a very accurate description of the atmosphere within the profession, where Koselleck was only one among many to identify a crisis in the discipline and to propose theory as a remedy against the crisis. In addition, by asking the question ‘what for, history?’ and by emphasizing the ‘need for theory’, he coined suggestive catchphrases that were recurrently referred to in the debate.¹²⁹

On the other hand, besides being a message for the historical profession, the articles

¹²⁸ Addressing the conference-agenda in the *Arbeitskreis*, where he gave the talk, Koselleck finished *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft* with reflections on how ‘the need for theory’ in the discipline of history should be reflected in the university curriculum, for example in the definition of professorial chairs.

¹²⁹ See for example: Jürgen Kocka: “Geschichte – wozu?“, Jürgen Kocka: *Sozialgeschichte. Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme*, Göttingen 1977, p. 112-131; Thomas Nipperdey: “Wozu noch Geschichte?“, G. D. Kaltenbrunner (Hg.): *Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit*, München 1975, p. 34-57; Willi Oelmüller (Hg.): *Wozu noch Geschichte?*, München 1977.

communicated a personal project that no other German historian was to pursue: the project of developing a theory of historical time. This was a project that Koselleck had in fact already begun in the 1960s, and which he continued to work on in the following decades. So, while the project was launched as a reaction to the educational-political situation of the late 1960s and 1970s, its origins and realization evidently transcended this situation.

In contrast to his catchphrases, Koselleck's specific theoretical program initially received limited attention. To be sure, in the early 1970's, stimulated first of all by Braudel's and Koselleck's writings, historical time was on occasion thematized in the discussions of the historical discipline. This was for example the case in a 1972 volume of essays titled *Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte*, in which Koselleck dealt with historical time in a text dealing with the relation between conceptual history and social history.¹³⁰ In his contribution to the volume, Hans-Ulrich Wehler also stressed the need for theories of historical time in the study of history, while he criticized the lack of reflections on historical time among sociologists.¹³¹ This critique was indirectly responded to in the text by the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, who made an elaborate and complex effort to theorize historical time as an analytical tool in the study of history and societal systems.¹³²

However, no other contribution to the debate of historical time reached the level of Luhmann's and Koselleck's texts,¹³³ and soon the issue disappeared from the discussions of the historical discipline. There seem to be at least two reasons for this development. First of all, the issue of historical time was simply overshadowed by other themes and projects. Secondly, many scholars did not know what to expect from Koselleck's program or where to place it in relation to the other approaches and positions in the profession. Although his theoretical ambitions were in the early 1970s frequently referred to and on occasion discussed in more

¹³⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: "Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte", Peter Christian Ludz (Hg): *Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte. Aspekte und Probleme*, Köln 1972, p. 116-131.

¹³¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler: "Soziologie und Geschichte aus der Sicht des Sozialhistorikers", Peter Christian Ludz (Hg): *Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte. Aspekte und Probleme*, Köln 1972, p. 60-80. Instead of theorizing historical time, with reference first of all to Braudel, Wehler listed four temporalities that he argued must be considered in a historical analysis.

¹³² Niklas Luhmann: "Weltzeit und Systemgeschichte. Über Beziehungen zwischen Zeithorizonten und sozialen Strukturen gesellschaftlicher Systeme", Peter Christian Ludz (Hg): *Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte. Aspekte und Probleme*, Köln 1972, p. 81-115.

¹³³ As also observed by Jürgen Osterhammel in his discussion of the role of historical time within historical sociology – Jürgen Osterhammel: "Gesellschaftsgeschichte und Historische Soziologie", Jürgen Osterhammel, Dieter Langewiesche, Paul Nolte (Hg.): *Wege der Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Göttingen 2006, p. 94, note 46. For how Luhmann used temporal theories in his analytical framework, and for how these theories overlapped with and diverged from Koselleck's, see Jens Gunni Busck: *Koselleck og Luhmann. En teorisammenligning*, unpublished MA-thesis, Roskilde University Center, 2008.

detail, both inside and outside the historical discipline,¹³⁴ the discussants found it difficult to discuss the project in depth before Koselleck had qualified his theoretical ambitions by means of (further) empirical and theoretical studies.¹³⁵ The following sections describe how Koselleck did this and in turn managed to realize his ambition of developing a theory of historical time.

Past, present, future – experience and expectation

To begin with, when discussing the place of historical time in Koselleck's scholarly production, it should be remembered that he had worked with time as an analytical tool right from the beginning of his career. This is, as we have seen, evident in both *Kritik und Krise*, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, and it was against the background of and in relation to these projects that he during the 1960s made it his ambition to develop a more elaborate theory of historical time.

In line with this, it is important to emphasize that Koselleck's theory of historical time was never based on a paradigm similar to the one of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*; that is, on an approach largely defined by one theme, one period and one method. Instead, his theory of historical times took into account many different themes, periods and methods, including methods from art history, as we will see in the chapter on his studies of war memorials.

It should finally be mentioned that Koselleck never wrote one exhaustive and overarching treatise on the topic. Instead, he wrote a number of smaller outlines, which, as contributions to his overall ambition of developing a theory of historical time, draw on a number of compatible assumptions, arguments and keywords that were rather aimed at empirical research than at forming a closed and fixed theoretical system. In fact, as pointed out by the Danish historian Jens Busck, due to the unsystematic character of his writings, it is difficult to

¹³⁴ For reactions from scholars outside the discipline, see for example Jacob Taubes: 1973; Wolfhart Pannenberg: "Erfordert die Einheit der Geschichte ein Subjekt?", Reinhart Koselleck, Wolf-Dieter Stempel (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik V. Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, München 1973, p. 478-490; M. Rainer Lipsius: "Bemerkungen zum Verhältnis von Geschichtswissenschaft und Soziologie", Werner Conze (Hg.): *Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft und Praxis des Geschichtsunterrichts*, Stuttgart 1972, p. 59-60. For reactions inside the discipline, see for example Karl-Georg Faber: *Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft. Dritte erweiterte Auflage*, München 1974, p. 227-238; Winfried Schulze: *Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft. Einführung in die Probleme der Kooperation beider Wissenschaften*, München 1974, p. 197-209; Alfred Schmidt: "Zum Problem einer marxistischen Historik", Willi Oelmüller (Hg.): *Wozu noch Geschichte?*, München 1977, p. 154-159; Gustav Heydemann: 1980, p. 116-120. See also the references to Koselleck in Karl-Georg Faber, Christian Meier (Hg.): *Historische Prozesse (Theorie der Geschichte. Beiträge zur Historik, Bd. 2)*, München 1978.

¹³⁵ See for example Karl-Georg Faber: 1974, p. 228; Jürgen Kocka: "Theorien in der Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 1. Jg., 1975, p. 22, note 22.

establish a definite list of what Koselleck subsumed under his theory of historical time.¹³⁶

Along with a number of empirical articles that exemplify the analytical framework, the most important theoretical outlines are included in the two collections of essays *Vergangene Zukunft* from 1979 and *Zeitschichten* from 2000.¹³⁷ With a focus on these two essay-collections, the following argues that Koselleck's work on historical time crystallized in two lines of research, which, in spite of their common overall ambition of deconstructing histories in singular and thematizing histories in plural, were directed towards different objectives that can be distinguished from each other via the keywords informing the respective analytical frameworks. The first line of research was especially central in Koselleck's writings from the late 1960s until the late 1970s as documented first of all in *Vergangene Zukunft* and the other became increasingly important from the 1980s onwards as documented primarily in *Zeitschichten*.

The theoretical ambition in *Vergangene Zukunft* is first of all outlined in the foreword in which Koselleck firstly discusses the possibilities of developing a theory of historical times that is not derived from nature, but from human history. In a crucial sentence, he writes: "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."¹³⁸ In investigating the possibilities of developing a theory of historical time, Koselleck's project responded to the efforts made by philosophers from Wilhelm Dilthey (1883-1911) to Martin Heidegger of reflecting on the temporal structures of the human existence in order to determine what history is and how it unfolds.¹³⁹ In particular he followed in the footsteps of Martin Heidegger, who had in 1916 questioned the distinctiveness of the concept of time within historical writing and found the answer in the difference between a quantitative concept of time within the natural science and a historical concept of time that concern the uniqueness of qualitative human time.¹⁴⁰ Hence, the theoretical- analytical framework that Koselleck further outlined in *Vergangene Zukunft* draws to a great extent on Heidegger's terminology. However, in the centre of the framework is not the notion of 'finality', but instead the related notions of 'past', 'present' and 'future' that are also found in *Sein und Zeit*. When Heidegger in the latter stated that being is essentially a temporal and

¹³⁶ See Jens Busck: 2008, p. 21.

¹³⁷ Most of the articles in the two volumes had been published before – those in *Vergangene Zukunft* in the period between 1967 and 1977 and those in *Zeitschichten* between 1982 and 1999.

¹³⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: "Vorwort", *Vergangene Zukunft*, Frankfurt am Main, 1979, p. 9.

¹³⁹ For perspectives on the German tradition of reflecting the temporal structures of human existence, see David Carr: *Time, Narrative and History*, Bloomington 1986.

¹⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger: "Der Zeitbegriff in der Geschichtswissenschaft", *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, Nr., 160, 1916, p. 173-188. See also Niklas Luhmann: 1972, p. 93, note 54.

historical phenomenon: that for humans, *to be is to be in time*, he moreover argued that human time unfolds in the interaction between three temporal dimensions of the past, the present and the future. “For Heidegger”, David Carr has written to clarify what Heidegger aimed at with his reflections on the human temporal condition:

“human existence is a temporal self-projection in which past, present, and future are understood in terms of each other. This hermeneutical circle is not merely a matter of self-understanding and self-interpretation but also ultimately one of self-constitution: our selfhood is the temporal construction of our own lives. In the process the sense we make, not only of ourselves but also of our world and our relations with others, is derived more from our projected future than from the past. The past, too, is part of what we are, but even it is something we give structure to by means of our projects. Thus for Heidegger the prime dimension of human temporality is the future: possibility has priority over actuality. In *Being and Time* Heidegger is able to draw from his theory an ironic consequence for the discipline of history. Because its subject-matter is persons and their lives and actions, it must treat what is ultimately constitutive of them as persons, their possibilities and their future. Thus the subject-matter of history is in an important sense not fact but possibility, not past but future; or, more precisely past possibilities and prospects, past conceptions of the future: futures past.¹⁴¹

Koselleck often emphasized that Heidegger’s temporal interpretation of being was important for his theories of historical time. “I have learned so much from him”, he said in a 2003 interview: “The stimulus to a historical theory of time also comes from my reading of ‘*Sein und Zeit*’.¹⁴² This shows in *Vergangene Zukunft*, where investigations of ‘futures past’ (*Vergangene Zukunft* literally means ‘futures past’ or ‘passed futures’) are placed at the centre of investigation with the aim of rediscovering the Heideggerian notions of human self-understanding, self-interpretation and self-constitution historically and empirically.¹⁴³ Koselleck pursues this aim by developing the notion of being as an essentially temporal phenomenon, unfolding in the interaction between past, present and future, into a theory of historical time that analyzes individual and collective self-understanding and action by focusing on historical actor’s conceptions about time and finality. In his presentation of the essays in the collection, Koselleck writes:

“They direct themselves to texts in which historical experience of time is articulated either explicitly or implicitly. To be more precise, texts were sought out and interrogated that, explicitly or implicitly, deal with the relation of a given past and a given future (...). All testimony answers to the problem of

¹⁴¹ David Carr: Review of *Vergangene Zukunft, History and Theory*, Vol. 26, Nr. 2, 1987, p. 198. There does not yet exist any in depth analysis of Koselleck’s use of Heidegger. However, excellent perspectives on the issue can be found in Carr’s review and in Jacob Taubes: 1973.

¹⁴² Reinhart Koselleck: “Formen der Bürgerlichkeit”, 2003, p. 76.

¹⁴³ As observed by Keith Tribe: “Introduction”, Reinhart Koselleck: *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York 2004, p. XI.

how, in a concrete situation, experiences come to terms with the past; how expectations, hopes or prognoses are projected into the future become articulated in language. These essays will constantly ask: how, in a given situation, are the temporal dimensions of past and future related. This query involves the hypothesis that in differentiating past and future, or (in anthropological terms) experience and expectation, it is possible to grasp something like historical time.¹⁴⁴

The cited passage demonstrates not only the importance of Heidegger's temporal assumptions and terminology in *Vergangene Zukunft*, but points also to how, in constructing his analytical framework, Koselleck in addition found inspiration in the concepts of 'experience', 'expectation' and 'horizon' from Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*.¹⁴⁵ In the book, Gadamer defined 'horizon' as being the visual field that encompasses and constitutes everything that is visible from a certain point of view. According to Gadamer, everybody has a limited horizon, since all horizons are bound to the temporal conditions of human finality. Yet every horizon is dynamic; it is bound to constant change, to broaden or to shrink, according to our experiences. As for the notion of 'experience', Gadamer defined real experience as the point at which people become aware of their own finality as the fundamental basis of their existence and possibilities and find the limits for their rational ability to realize their 'expectations' and plans for the future.

The Gadamerian notions of horizon, experience and expectations are applied in the analytical framework in virtually all of the essays in *Vergangene Zukunft*. Yet nowhere is their importance for the theory of historical times that Koselleck developed in the 1970s sketched out as detailed as in one of the key texts of the volume: *Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont* (from 1976).¹⁴⁶ The article is linked to Koselleck's plea for 'the need for theory in historical science' in the 1970s in that it opens with the argument that historical research must always clarify and substantiate its analytical categories. With reference to Augustin, Heidegger and Gadamer, Koselleck subsequently presents experience and expectation as meta-historical categories, which as pre-linguistic and anthropological conditions create and structure all history, as the fundamental temporal distinction in human life between a sooner and later will always express itself in a difference between experiences and expectations. There can, he thus argues, simply be no history that is not constituted by the

¹⁴⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: "Vorwort", *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt am Main, 1979, p. 11-12.

¹⁴⁵ For an excellent account of Gadamer's key concepts and of how Koselleck redefined and used these for his own purposes, see Jan Ifversen: "Om den tyske begrebshistorie", *Politologiske studier*, vol. 6, nr. 1, 2003, p. 18-34. The following draws extensively on Ifversen's account.

¹⁴⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: "'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont' . Zwei historische Kategorien", Ulrich Engelhardt, Volker Sellin, Horst Stuke (Hg.): *Soziale Bewegung und politische Verfassung. Beiträge zur Geschichte der modernen Welt. Werner Conze zum 65. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart 1976, p. 13-33.

experiences and expectations of acting and suffering human beings.

Unlike other conceptual pairs, Koselleck adds, experience and expectation are not opposed or mutually exclusive categories. On the one hand, there is no experience without expectation or vice versa. On the other hand, the categories do not describe the concretely content of the specific experiences and expectations that have shaped history. However, the two categories are according to Koselleck fundamentally different. He defines experience as ‘present past’ and expectation as ‘futures projected in the past’. In other words, Koselleck describes experience as the dimension of the past that due to its presence in the present orients the interpretations and actions of human beings. When experience is directed towards future actions – he further explains – they turn into expectations. Expectations are existentially different than experiences, since they are located outside the realm of the latter. In line with this – according to Koselleck – human beings not only orient themselves towards their experiences, but also towards the unknown future. They have expectations and might produce plans and prognosis for what is to come. It is working from this theoretical premise that, towards the end of the article, Koselleck qualifies his theory of modernity: in modern times – he argues – the ‘horizon of expectation’ was disconnected from the ‘space of experience’ so that the social-political language was no longer oriented towards past experience but became increasingly loaded with future-oriented expectations.

Following the theoretical outlines in the foreword and in *Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont*, the ambition of the essays in *Vergangene Zukunft* is to decipher the changes in the relation between past, present and future and between experience and expectation during the *Neuzeit*. While some of the essays are methodologically connected through the approach of conceptual history (which Koselleck often used as an analytical component in the theory of historical time that he developed in the 1960s and 1970s), other essays follow different methodological trajectories. This is for example the case with the opening essay *Vergangene Zukunft der frühen Neuzeit*.¹⁴⁷ The latter illuminates changes in the human historical consciousness from the sixteenth century onwards with a focus on the experience of art, and it is informed by the Gadamerian perspective on the act of creating and translating a piece of art as a negotiation between different temporal horizons that is also found in Koselleck’s later studies of political iconography.

The specific object in focus in *Vergangene Zukunft der frühen Neuzeit* is Albrecht

¹⁴⁷ The article is based on Koselleck’s 1968 inaugural lecture in Heidelberg. It was first published in a Festschrift to Carl Schmitt. Reinhart Koselleck: “Vergangene Zukunft der frühen Neuzeit”, Hans Barion, E.W. Böckenförde, Ernst Forsthoff, Werner Weber (Hg.): *Epirrhosis, Festgabe für Carl Schmitt, Bd. 2*, Berlin 1968, 549-566.

Altdorfer's early 16th century painting titled the Battle of Issus. For Koselleck, the painting bears evidence of a specifically pre-modern view of history in the way it brings together different historical times. While Altdorfer carefully reconstructed the various details of the battle, such as the number of the combatants, in his painting, the Persians strikingly resemble the Turks, who the same year unsuccessfully tried to besiege Vienna. Likewise, the persons of Alexander and Maximilian, one of Altdorfer's patrons, "merge in exemplary manner." (550)

According to Koselleck, besides referring to the past and the present, in line with the pre-modern view of history, the Battle of Issus pointed to a certain vision of the future. This vision was based the belief of a battle between light and darkness, leading up to an apocalyptic struggle between Christ and Anti-Christ. Whereas there was widespread disagreement (for example between the Pope and Luther) as to who represented the Christ and the Anti-Christ, everybody shared the conviction that the future would crystallize in the day of judgement and that this event was inevitable and beyond human control.

This vision, and the fusion of different temporal horizons, was, Koselleck demonstrates, absent in the historical consciousness that Friedrich Schlegel expressed three centuries later in his reactions to the picture. What instead characterized Schegel's reaction was first of all a "historical-critical distance." (18) Where Altdorfer had merged and emphasized the sameness between the temporal dimensions of the past, the present and the future, Schlegel instead emphasized the difference between his own time, the time in which the picture was painted, and the time it represented. One of the ways in which Schlegel demarcated himself temporally from the picture was by labelling it the 'the greatest feat of the age of chivalry'. This reaction exemplifies for Koselleck how history had won a specifically temporal dimension for Schlegel that was missing in Altdorfer's time: "Formulated schematically, there was for Schegel, in the three hundred years separating him from Altdorfer, more time (or perhaps a different mode of time) that appeared to have passed for Altdorfer in the eighteen hundred years or so that lay between the Battle of Isus and his painting." (19)

Koselleck explained this temporal change with the rise of modern historical philosophy, which transformed history into something characterized by its changeability, newness and progression, so that it was no longer thought possible to learn from the stories of the past. Individuals and societies consequently tried to compensate for the lack of experience with ever-increasing expectations and plans for the future that give birth to radical fictions such as the 'Thousand-year Reich' and the 'Classless society'.

Organized around the notions of past, present and future, experience and expectation, *Vergangene Zukunft der frühen Neuzeit* and the other essays in *Vergangene Zukunft* show the

inspiration that Koselleck found in Heidegger and Gadamer in constructing the analytical framework for his theory of historical times. Furthermore, they demonstrate how he transformed, reworked and broadened their categories to fit his own project. In adapting the temporal categories from *Sein und Zeit* to a historical analysis, Koselleck not only left behind the historical-philosophical implications of Heidegger's analysis of being, but also shifted the focus from individual to social temporality: to empirical investigations of how communities and societies have conceptualized the relations between their own future, present and past.

Evidently, this shift away from the individual, the subjective, that is built into Heidegger's conceptions bears some similarity to what Löwith did in his dissertation, and should be understood as a continuation of Koselleck's project of revising Heidegger's analysis of being into a larger anthropological system of the human existence that emphasizes the importance of interpersonal and social relations in human life that he began in the 1950s. This project and shift of focus is also at play in Koselleck's transformation of Gadamer's categories of experience, expectation and horizon.¹⁴⁸ Here it should firstly be emphasized that Koselleck used the spatial metaphor 'space of experience'. He defined experience as something shared by many people, who at a given time at a given place constitute a political or social unit of action. Likewise, he viewed expectations in a social collective perspective: together, the expectations constitute a horizon, which the social actors appraise as a group. Koselleck consequently used Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to convey larger social historical arguments that are not only constructed through the study of texts and pieces of art, but via analysis of social historical dynamics, processes and events. In addition, early on Koselleck combined the categories of Heidegger and Gadamer with a variety of further analytical categories as witnessed first of all in *Zeitschichten*. The result was an attempt to theorize historical time and an analytical framework that is neither Heideggerian or Gadamerian, but distinctly Koselleckian.

Temporal layers and repetitive structures

Where many of temporal-theoretical perspectives in *Vergangene Zukunft* were anticipated in *Kritik und Krise* and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, the reflections on historical time that Koselleck unfolded in *Zeitschichten* were primarily anticipated in *Preußen zwischen Reform*

¹⁴⁸ See Jan Ifversen: 2003, p. 23-27.

und Revolution and in *Das Zeitalter der europäischen Revolution*.¹⁴⁹ Hence, where the focus in *Vergangene Zukunft* is on the temporal dimensions of the past, the present and the future, on experience and expectation, and on the singularity of the *Neuzeit*, the emphasis in *Zeitschichten* is on analytical keywords such as the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* and *Wiederholung* (repetition), *Dauer* (durability) and *Struktur* (structure).

These keywords provide the pillars of the main argument of the volume: the idea that history consists of and unfolds in the interaction between various ‘temporal layers’ (*Zeitschichten*) that are characterized by different degrees of speed, intensity and durability.

This idea was, as we have seen, already thematized in Koselleck’s writings in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, with reference to first of all the French historian Fernand Braudel,¹⁵⁰ the idea is in *Zeitschichten* developed into a more detailed and elaborate theoretical framework according to which all types of history can be studied as temporal layers or structures that are characterized by repetition as well as change. It is with the purpose of encapsulating this assumption that Koselleck employs the metaphor of *Zeitschichten*. In the programmatic article in *Zeitschichten*, which is also titled *Zeitschichten*, Koselleck explains:

”‘Zeitschichten’ refers to geological formations, which reach back in time with different breadth and depth, and which in the course of the so-called history of the Earth have changed and been moved apart at different speeds. The retranslation into the domain of human, political, or social history, as well as structural history, makes it possible to distinguish analytically between different temporal layers, where persons move and events unfold, or where their preconditions can be investigated.”¹⁵¹

As observed by Kari Palonen, due to the problems involved in grasping the ‘temporal’ and the ‘historical’ in linguistic terms, Koselleck used many and shifting analytical expressions in his attempts to define ‘historical time’.¹⁵² However, he seemed to have been particularly

¹⁴⁹ See also the theoretical articles “Geschichte, Geschichten und formale Zeitstrukturen” and “Ereignis und Struktur” that were originally published in Reinhart Koselleck, Wolf-Dieter Stempel (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik V. Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, München 1973 and later included in *Vergangene Zukunft*.

¹⁵⁰ In *Zeitschichten*, Koselleck also refers to Herder to as a theoretical forerunner in the field. See Reinhart Koselleck: “Zeitschichten”, Reinhart Koselleck: *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 20: “Herder hat gegen Kant bereits Eigenzeiten behauptet, entschieden betont, daß jedes Lebewesen seine eigene Zeit habe und seine Zeitmaße in sich trage, somit die apriorische Formalbestimmung von Kant kritisierend.”

¹⁵¹ Reinhart Koselleck: 2000, p. 19. The article was first published in 1994. Reinhart Koselleck: “Zeitschichten”, Heinrich Pfusterschmid-Hardenstein (Hg.): *Zeit und Wahrheit*, Wien 1994, p. 95-100.

¹⁵² As observed by Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 279-284, due to the problems involved in grasping the ‘temporal’ and the ‘historical’ in linguistic terms, Koselleck used many and shifting analytical expressions in his attempts to define ‘historical time’. He reflected already in “Wozu noch Historie?” (p. 16) on the need to describe the ‘temporal’ and the ‘historical’ with expressions borrowed from other fields: “Welcher grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeit die Historie dabei gegenübersteht, erhellt schon daraus, dass sie alle ihre Kategorien dem natürlichen und räumlichen Bereich entlehnen muss. Wir leben von einer naturalen Metaphorik und können dieser Metaphorik gar nicht entraten, weil die Zeit nicht anschaulich ist. Umso mehr sind wir bei unseren

satisfied with the metaphor of *Zeitschichten*. Indeed this notion became increasingly vital for his attempt to theorize historical time in the last decades of his career. This point to a more general change taking place in Koselleck's historical thinking from the 1950s to the 1980s: whereas he first focussed primarily on deconstructing histories in singular, he began to focus more on how histories in plural could be written in practice.

The analytical framework behind the geological metaphor is first of all described and exemplified in the mentioned programmatic article *Zeitschichten*.¹⁵³ Here Koselleck outlines the assumption that all history contains at least three different layers of temporal structures. The first layer is that of events, such as the revolutions of 1789 and 1989, which human beings habitually experience as *singular*. The notion of *singular* is important for Koselleck in that he conceives history as a series of *singular* events that are continuously inscribed in various levels of *recursive* structures that represents the second layer of history's temporal structures. More concretely, Koselleck argues that the *singular* is conditioned by the *recursive* or repetitive structures. This argument does not entail that history is simply repeating itself, but rather that certain *recursive* patterns provide events with certain common features, while these events are at the same time always characterized by a *singular* dimension.

To demonstrate this argument, Koselleck uses an example from everyday life: receiving a letter. On the one hand, this event can be of *singular* and decisive significance for the receiver. On the other hand, the delivery and the reception of the letter only become possible, because the mailman carries out his daily work according to the established structures of the mail services.¹⁵⁴ In this way, Koselleck argues, the *singular* and the *recursive* are related.

Next to the *singular* events and the *recursive* structures, Koselleck introduces a third temporal layer that concerns a type of repetition that is biological and anthropological in nature and goes beyond generational and individual experiences. They concern in other words the structures *transcending* history that are encompassed in his historical anthropology. What the description of these three temporal layers amounts to in *Zeitschichten* is a theoretically framed structural history that takes account of both events and changes. That is, a history that investigates the relations between the *singular* events and the different levels of movement and change within the *recursive* and *transcending* structures.

Übersetzungsversuchen, die geschichtlichen Zeiten sprachlich zu fassen, auf genuine Hypothesen angewiesen, die uns vor den übrigen Wissenschaften ausweisen.“

¹⁵³ The article was first published in 1994. Reinhart Koselleck: "Zeitschichten", Heinrich Pfusterschmid-Hardenstein (Hg.): *Zeit und Wahrheit*, Wien 1994, p. 95-100.

¹⁵⁴ In the theoretical introduction to *Zeitschichten*, Koselleck emphasized the importance of repetitive structures in more existential terms, as he stressed that without a minimum of repetition "stürzte die Menschheit von Tag zu tag in ein bodenloses Nichts." Reinhart Koselleck: "Einleitung", Reinhart Koselleck: *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 15.

The complex theory of historical times as described in *Zeitschichten* is not to be viewed as a rupture in Koselleck's historical thinking, but rather as a shift of interest that encompassed new ways of approaching and evaluating certain themes and issues. Some of these changes can be illustrated via a comparison of two articles on the same theme written in different decades. The first essay, *Neuzeit*, is written in 1977 and included in *Vergangene Zukunft*; the second essay, *Wie neu ist die Neuzeit?*, is written in 1989 and included in *Zeitschichten*.¹⁵⁵ In the first essay, Koselleck describes the *Neuzeit* as an epochal change in respect to how history and time is suddenly conceptualized as unfolding in one, singular and unique way and as oriented towards future expectations.¹⁵⁶ In the second essay, he echoes this interpretation, but at the same time relativizes the extent to which the *Neuzeit* allegedly represented a new time. For this purpose, he unfolds what he calls a semantic and a prognostic argument.

In respect to the semantic argument, Koselleck points out that the notion of *Neuzeit* is somewhat unclear and ambiguous in that it suggests that earlier epochs were not new. According to Koselleck, this suggestion is in a certain sense wrong, since all histories at all times are experienced as new by those involved. In respect to his prognostic argument, he relativizes the notion of 'new' by arguing that history not only consists of singular events, but always encompasses repetitive structures that condition all singular events. The repetitive structures are, he adds, found in all areas of human life: in time tables, in law and in language. In fact, even human prognoses are preconditioned by history's repetitive structures.

Koselleck exemplifies this argument by referring to a political prognosis made by Diderot in 1772 in which the latter asserted: that it would require nothing but a random event to set free the overthrowing of the current political system;¹⁵⁷ that the people would revolt to claim its rights, but since it had no specific aim or plan, anarchy would soon reign, only to be succeeded by two political parties in the state dividing the people in two; that whereas these parties would be distinguishable from each other only by their names, they would both be driven by ambition and greed, leading to a situation characterized first by conspiracies and plots and then by a civil war. This situation would, according to Diderot, be brought to an end by a modern sovereign to whom the people would pledge their loyalty, and the revolution

¹⁵⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: "'Neuzeit'. Zur Semantik moderner Bewegungsbegriffe", Reinhart Koselleck: *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt am Main 1979, p. 260-277 [first published in Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.) *Studien zum Beginn der modernen Welt. Bd. 20*, p. 264-299]; Reinhart Koselleck: "Wie neu ist die Neuzeit", Reinhart Koselleck: *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 225-239 [first published in a longer version in *Schriften des Historischen Kollegs*, 1989, p. 37-52 and in a version identical to the one in *Vergangene Zukunft in Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 52, Nr. 251, 1990, p. 539-552].

¹⁵⁶ Focus in this article is primarily on the notion of *Neuzeit* within the domain of historical writing.

¹⁵⁷ While Diderot's prognosis was meant as a warning against how events might unfold in France, according to Koselleck he camouflaged the context by referring to events in Sweden.

would afterwards continue along lines that he found difficult to predict.

Koselleck labels Diderot's prognosis a classical one, "that begins with with a conditional if-then sentence and reckons with past reality as structurally repeatable in the future."¹⁵⁸ According to Koselleck, Diderot's prognosis was based on a theory of the repetition of possible histories that the latter knew from his reading of Cromwell and Tacitus's reflections on resistance against tyranny and civil war. Koselleck writes: "It was this knowledge about a singular, passed reality that enabled him to extrapolate structural and repeatable possibilities into the future."¹⁵⁹

Following up his relativization of the notion of *Neuzeit*, Koselleck ends the article by explaining more exactly how the *Neuzeit* – in his eyes – after all represented a change in terms of being a 'new time'. He refers first of all to how certain temporal-structural changes taking place around the French Revolution outdated traditional interpretative and prognostic models. At this time, according to Koselleck, it for example became impossible to interpret the social-political developments through the traditional model of *Verfassungskreislauf*. The contemporaries had no problems understanding the empirical chain of events, but they struggled to comprehend the enormous acceleration of the speed with which the events unfolded. According to Koselleck, the specifically modern in the *Neuzeit* is located exactly in the temporal acceleration of the political processes. He concludes:

"We historians must therefore learn to distinguish between different layers: those, who can change fast, those, who only change slowly, and those, who are more enduring and contain recurring possibilities. Then it is possible to redefine the epoch, in such a way that the modern is recognized, but without excluding other epochs as being totally different"¹⁶⁰.

This passage demonstrates how Koselleck's theory of *Zeitschichten* not only encompassed a shift of interest, but also a substantially different conception of history. More concretely, with its assumption of history as an open, diverse and contingent process composed of various *histories*, the notion of *Zeitschichten* softened up the more schematic conception found in his early work that relied on an account of world history as composed by three successive, fundamentally different, but unified epochs (the Greek, the Christian and the modern). Koselleck thus not only enlarged his analytical framework, but also added new dimensions to his assumptions of what history is and how it can never be shaped to all kinds of human

¹⁵⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: "Wie neu ist die Neuzeit?", 2000, p. 233.

¹⁵⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: "Wie neu ist die Neuzeit?", 2000, p. 236-237. Koselleck also points to how Diderot's prognosis was based on observations of contemporary affairs sought to camouflage the French context by referring the events from a Swedish context.

¹⁶⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: "Wie neu ist die Neuzeit?", 2000, p. 238-239.

utopian thought and ideological desire.

The ideological-critical dimension encompassed in the idea of *Zeitschichten* can be seen for example in the 1994 article “Diesseits des Nationalstaates. Föderale Strukturen der deutschen Geschichte.”¹⁶¹ Focusing on *Wiederholung* and *Struktur* in history, here Koselleck points in the article to federal political structures as a dimension that distinguishes German history from the history of other European countries. He does not argue that federal structures are a unique German achievement, but rather that certain structures in Germany for a long period made federalism possible – right until these structures were discarded with Hitler’s compensatory slogan ‘One people, one Reich, one Fuehrer’. With reference to this slogan – and with an eye on contemporary and future political order in Europe – Koselleck adds that, similar to the national state, federal structures should never be understood and treated as a *telos* in history. Federalism, he claims, is rather one among several political options to be pursued within the formalistic structures, or layers of history. However, like everything else in life, these structures can never be formed entirely according to our wishes.¹⁶²

The theory of *Zeitschichten* required slight ramifications in Koselleck’s notions of historical anthropology. In his 1985 speech to Gadamer *Historik und Hermeneutik*, the historical anthropology and the temporal-analytical framework appear as two integrated features in Koselleck’s critique of Heidegger’s notion of being in *Sein und Zeit*. More concretely, Koselleck merges the anthropological outline with the temporal-analytical vocabulary in such a way that they both serve to rework the idea of human *history* in Heidegger’s analysis of being into a theory of human *histories* that can unfold in different and plural ways. As a critique of the temporal dimension of Heidegger’s analysis of being, Koselleck writes:

“The times of history are not identical with and cannot be deciphered solely from the existential modality that is developed in respect to human beings as Being. The times of history are from the outset interpersonally constituted: it is about *Gleichzeitigkeiten des Ungleichzeitigen*, about differential conditions that contains an individual finality, but can not be reduced to ‘existence’.”

¹⁶¹ The article was first published in *Transit. Europäische Revue*, Nr. 7, 1994, p. 63-76 and then included in the posthumously published collection of essays *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main 2007, p. 486-503. The normative and ideological-critical potential of the theory was already indicated in the text *Ereignis und Struktur* of 1973. After outlining the idea of *Zeitschichten*, Koselleck ended the text by stating that the justified critique of utopian planning of the future history is only possible, when history as *magistra vitae* includes reflections on the ‘structures of historical movement’ (*Bewegungsstrukturen*). Reinhart Koselleck: “Ereignis und Struktur“, Reinhart Koselleck, Wolf-Dieter Stempel (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik V. Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, München 1973, p. 571.

¹⁶² That Koselleck was in favour of European federalism is suggested in the last passage of the text: “Was immer Europa sein mag, es gibt ein föderales Minimum, das nicht nur wirtschaftlich, sondern auch politisch erreicht werden muß und das wir wahren müssen, wenn wir auf diesem Kontinent weiterleben wollen.“ Reinhart Koselleck: 2007, p. 503.

The quoted passage and the speech more generally, refer to the intricate relation between Koselleck's anthropological framework and his theory of historical times, a relation that was present already in his writings from the 1950s, as we have seen earlier. Still, the notions evolved. Both the temporal and the anthropological framework were developed departing from Heidegger's notions of temporal being and of finality, respectively. Koselleck insists, in the passage quoted here, that historical times cannot be reduced to an 'existence', the peculiar conditions of an individual being. In this way, he echoes his earlier criticism of Heidegger's notion of finality, as having to be expanded into a historical anthropology giving ample room to the social. And he brings his theory of historical times in tune with the anthropology. It seems fair to say, then, that these were different strands of thought that needed to be harmonised and did not emerge from each other – in spite of the fact that they both emerged from the reception of Heidegger.

While Koselleck early on introduced time as an analytical category, he does not seem to have pursued the task of developing a theory of historical time, or to have systematically utilized the temporal-analytical notions from *Sein und Zeit* before at some point in the 1960s. It is from the end of this decade that temporal assumptions and notions from *Sein und Zeit* (alongside temporal notions from other scholarly traditions) take centre stage in his work. One example is found in a passage in *Wozu noch Historie?* in which Koselleck states that the past, present and future is always interrelated in human life and that human self-understanding, self-interpretation and self-constitution is always constructed in the interaction between these temporal dimensions: "The past is has passed, irrevocably – and it hasn't: the past is present and contains future. It restraints and opens up future possibilities, it is preset in our language, it influences our consciousness as well as the unconscious, our attitudes, our institutions the way we criticize them."¹⁶³

In *Wozu noch Historie?* and *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft*, the anthropology and the theory of historical times were for the first time presented alongside each other: the anthropological outline is introduced as a meta-theory of the conditions of possible history required for any historical analysis and the theory of historical time as the object that is to be given primacy in historical research. In many ways this reflects how Koselleck approached the two dimensions and the relation between them in his writings from the late 1960s onwards. While he emphasized different things at different times, according to what the particular analytical situation required, the discursive features involved in the theory

¹⁶³ Reinhart Koselleck: 1971, p. 13.

of historical time were referred to and applied more frequently than the anthropological outline in Koselleck's work. This happened without apparent tensions, as temporal categories such as *Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont* or *Zeitschichten* not only connected to, but also took further Koselleck's originally counter-conceptually based attempt at reworking Heidegger's temporal analysis of being in *Sein und Zeit* into a theory of human *histories*.

Still, the precise relation between the two conceptual frameworks remains elusive. One might assume that the anthropological categories are conceived of as being conceptually prior to the temporal layers; and that thus, in a conceptual fashion, they stand outside time. Yet, this would imply that the temporal layers depend on a specific set of (counter)concepts rather than the free play of social experience, and this seems a doubtful interpretation of Koselleck's intentions. Alternatively, one might suppose that the anthropological categories are supposed to be conceptually posterior to the temporal layers, and that they constitute a specific, mostly invariant and basic layer of time. Yet, in this case the static character of the anthropological categories would be in danger of invalidating the creative force and the contingency of other layers of time, which also seems like a doubtful interpretation of Koselleck's intentions. At the end of the day, these matters are difficult even to discuss since Koselleck never clarified the issues at stake in his writings, nor did he develop sufficient conceptual tools to achieve such a clarification.¹⁶⁴

This points to an important feature characterizing his intellectual temperament and interest: for Koselleck, theory was evidently something that needed to be discussed and defined, but if the various theoretical frameworks and notions proved useful as a starting point for a historical analysis, he saw no reason to integrate the notions into a systematic and unified framework or to explain the exact relation between them.

Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit – Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel

In spite of his lack of theoretical systematic, Koselleck's attempt to develop a theory of historical time is today regarded as one of the most important and innovative contributions to the discipline of history after World War II, and his work has been instrumental in placing the issue of historical time on the agenda in German and international historiography.

However, as has been mentioned previously, in the early 1970s when the historical discipline was at debate, Koselleck's theoretical ambitions were overshadowed by other scientific projects, first of all by the attempt of the proponents of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* to

¹⁶⁴ See the discussion of these issues in Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 297-304.

redefine the discipline. In this period, as the market for history books grew, not least due to the expansion of the subject of history at the universities, in co-operation with the publisher Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, they launched no less than four publication series related to the approach: the journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, the encyclopaedia *Deutsche Historiker* and the two monograph series *Deutsche Geschichte* and *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft*.¹⁶⁵

These publications not only presented theoretical-methodological features and empirical examples of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, they also provided a history of modern German historiography that portrayed the approach as the natural successor of ‘historicism’. More concretely, the works described the emergence of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* as a necessary development from a methodologically narrow and conservative historical writing, which focused on and promoted the national state, to a more theoretical, rational and scientific form of historical writing that was to serve emancipatory, ideological-critical and democratic aims.¹⁶⁶

This line of reasoning, which continued into the 1990s,¹⁶⁷ not only neglects to discuss Koselleck’s theory of historical times, it is also devoid of references to the many essays on questions related to theoretical-methodological aspects of historical writing that he wrote from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. Similar to his theory of historical time, Koselleck’s texts on historical writing are generally difficult to place in relation to the discussions and trends in the German historical discipline in this period. This can be exemplified with reference to the earlier cited passage in *Wozu noch Historie?* in which Koselleck stressed that history holds a profound ideological-critical potential, while he at the same time argued that historical knowledge can never be immediately applied in the present. This assumption did not fit with any of the competing programs of historical writing launched by Wehler and Kocka, Hildebrand and Hillgruber, and Nipperdey. Rather it mediated between and even went beyond these programs.

Similar to his essays on historical time, most of Koselleck’s essays on historical writing were written on different occasions and then included in *Vergangene Zukunft* and *Zeitschichten*. In these essays, Koselleck did not aim to construct a theoretical-methodological system with a clear periphery and centre and a fixed amount of analytical features. Instead, he

¹⁶⁵ See Olaf Blascke, Lutz Raphael: 2007, p. 93-106.

¹⁶⁶ Contributions to this line of reasoning include also: Wolfgang J. Mommsen: 1971, Hans Mommsen: “Historical Scholarship in Transition: The Situation in the Federal Republic of Germany”, *Daedalus*, nr. 100, 1971, p. 458-508; Hans-Ulrich Wehler: 1979; Georg G. Iggers (Hg.): *Neue Geschichtswissenschaft: vom Historismus zur historischen Sozialwissenschaft*, München 1978.

¹⁶⁷ It reached its peak in Horst Walter Blanke: *Historiographiegeschichte als Historik*, Stuttgart-Cannstatt 1991.

offered something like a toolbox of related and compatible assumptions and ideas of what historical writing is and what can be done with it. While Koselleck articulated some of these ideas and assumptions in strong and powerful fashions, his texts also communicated the conviction that historical research is never a straightforward and easy definable affair, but rather an extremely complex field involving several problems and dilemmas that set fundamental limits to what historians can discover about the past and to how historical knowledge can be applied in the present. At the same time, he argued that, if realized and accepted by the historian, these dilemmas entail possibilities through which valuable and usable insights and knowledge can be reached. As such, Koselleck articulated a position on historical writing that was neither downright pessimistic nor entirely optimistic: it was rather what might be called a cautiously constructive, pragmatic and mediating position.

In order to outline some of the central assumptions and ideas in Koselleck's theoretical-methodological universe, the following sections take a closer look at two of his famous articles: "Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit" from 1977 and "Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel" from 1988.¹⁶⁸ Both articles were written in the framework of *Theorie der Geschichte*: a working group that was formed in the early 1970s on the initiative of Theodor Schieder and Reinhard Wittram and met on six occasions between 1975 and 1988 to discuss theoretical-methodological questions in historical writing. Along with Wolfgang Mommsen, Jörn Rüsen and Jürgen Kocka among others, Koselleck was a regular member of the group, and he was also present when the theoreticians first met in 1975 to discuss the relation between 'Objectivity and Partisanship'. The members of the group generally agreed that objectivity and partisanship are not mutually exclusive in historical writing, but without establishing a common consensus as to the precise relation between the two poles.

In his contribution, "Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit", Koselleck began by outlining objectivity and partisanship as two poles of a seemingly unsolvable dilemma in historical writing. "Contemporary historical science is" – he wrote – "subject to two mutually exclusive demands: to make true statements, while at the same time to admit and take account of the relativity of these statements." (128) He then ventured into historicizing the dilemma by

¹⁶⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: "Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit. Ein Beitrag zur historiographischen Erschließung der geschichtlichen Welt", Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Jörn Rüsen: *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft. Beiträge zur Historik. Bd. 1*, München 1977, p. 17-46; Reinhart Koselleck: 1988. In relation to *Theorie der Geschichte*, Koselleck moreover co-authored the introduction to the first volume Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Jörn Rüsen: "Einführung", Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Jörn Rüsen: *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft. Beiträge zur Historik. Bd. 1*, München 1977, p. 11-14 and, to a later volume, the article Reinhart Koselleck: Fragen an den Formen der Geschichtsschreibung, Reinhart Koselleck, Heinrich Lutz, Jörn Rüsen (Hg.): *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung*, München 1982, p. 9-13.

illustrating how the emergence of partisanship as historical relativism had to do with “the discovery of the modern world.” (130)

More concretely, according to Koselleck, from Antiquity until the eighteenth century, historical writing had been characterized by a “scientific postulate of nonpartisanship, in the sense of nonadherence to a party, abstinence or neutrality.” An important role in this naive-realistic approach to history had been played by the eyewitness, whose presence guaranteed authenticity and truth: “The signs of authenticity”, Koselleck wrote, “were centred on the eyewitness; whenever possible, the acting or participating agent, be it for the history of revelation, or for the continuing history of church or worldly events.” (133)

However, the status of the eyewitness changed, when, in the renaissance, the discovery of positional commitment became a precondition of historical knowledge. According to Koselleck, the eighteenth century German theologian and historian Chladenius (1710-1759) was the first to argue that the position of non-partisanship is impossible for historians. While believing in the authenticity of eyewitnesses, Chladenius made a crucial distinction between future *Geschichten* and ancient *Geschichten*. With this distinction, Koselleck explained: “It is no longer a given temporal order – for instance, a God-given order – of all history that arranges the material of history, but instead the history of the future and the history of the past are determined by desires and plans, as well as the questions, which arise in the present. The experiential space of contemporaries is the epistemological kernel of all history.” (134)

Chladenius deduced two things from his assumption that every temporal arrangement of history is dependable on the position one occupies within history: the relativity of all intuitive judgments and experience, and the perspective of later investigation and representation. Where the first dimension relativized the privileged position of the eyewitness, the other pointed to how the historian is always forced to choose the events and the metaphors with which he constructs his narrative. However, although Chladenius illustrated how positional commitment is a presupposition of historical knowledge, he did not argue that perspective necessarily led to a partisan account in which events and knowledge are intentionally obscured. According to Koselleck, he pointed instead to how the sources of the past “display a resistance and retain a weight that is not susceptible to displacement ex post through a partisan evaluation, whether positive or negative.” (36)

However, Koselleck added, this insight was lost in the 18th century. Here the modern philosophy of progress tore apart the temporal dimensions of past, present and future and impregnated historical time with a new quality of experience, so that today was conceived as distinctly different than yesterday and tomorrow as distinctively different than today. This

created a situation in which historical writing was only possible through the critical review of previous historiography and in which truth and temporal perspective were no longer separable, leading to the final exclusion of the eyewitness from its privileged position.

The notion of partisanship was, according to Koselleck, radicalized in the period around the French Revolution, where the experience of the acceleration of time made it impossible to establish any kind of viewpoint from which a history can be written that contains knowledge of the past that might be relevant in the present or in the future. To counter this development, different measures were proposed. On the one hand, the advocate for liberal politics, Gervinus, argued for a methodologically required impartiality, while nonetheless regarding the historian as a partisan of progress and freedom. On the other hand, Ranke made a plea for objectivity through a disregard of the present to reach a strictly objective science. It was, Koselleck argued, these two positions that continued to represent the dilemma in the present discussion of objectivity and partisanship.

In the third and concluding section of his investigation, Koselleck turned to offer some theoretical remarks with which he sought to make the outlined dilemma “more bearable, if not altogether dispensable.” (130) He began the section by shifting the discussion to the viewpoint of investigative practice, where – he argued – the problems inherent in the dilemma between objectivity and partisanship becomes less critical. To begin with, Koselleck explained, the historian can always, as suggested by Chladenius, rely on the historical method to ensure results that are “universally communicable and verifiable independent of the position of the historian” and as such “offers a solid barrier against arbitrary claims made by those convinced by their own certainty.” (149). It was on this background that Koselleck famously spoke of how the sources have a so called “a power of veto”, which forbids the historians to provide interpretations “that can be shown on the basis of a source to be false or unreliable.” (151)

At the same time, Koselleck argued that there is always more at stake in historical knowledge than what is contained in the sources, and that historical science is therefore always in need of a historical theory to make these sources speak: “Such a theory is implicit in all the works of historiography; it is only a matter of making it explicit” (150). With this theoretical-methodological perspective, Koselleck spoke of the formation of judgement as a “productive tension, which the historian should see himself confronting, (...) between a theory of history and the given sources” (149). He added to this a sentence that ultimately placed the dilemma in an entirely new light: “Partisanship and objectivity cross one another in a new fashion within the force field between theory formation and source exegesis. One

without the other is worthless for research.” (151)

“Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit” is in many ways typical for Koselleck’s articles dealing with theoretical-methodological questions related to the practice of historical writing. Common to these texts is the attempt to outline a mediating and constructive position between difficult dilemmas and conditions in the historian’s craft by softening up strong analytical dichotomies. This position is established partly by drawing on themes and arguments from earlier writings and partly through a habit of recovering and rephrasing arguments from largely forgotten figures, such as Chladenius, into strong hypotheses, such as *Vetorecht der Quellen*. This was a suggestive, but somewhat obtuse course of argumentation that oscillated between precision and vagueness and eschewed clear instructions regarding application as well as elaborate theoretical systematic. In this way, Koselleck offered the historian a set of platforms and starting points from which he/she could carry out his/her research with a certain confidence. In addition, he emphasized that these starting points and platforms must always be combined with theory, but he never recommended a specific theoretical model according to which all historical research and writing must be practiced. Instead, he left it to the theoretical self-reflection and thematic interest of each historian to figure out more exactly how he/she should approach his/her specific investigation. As such, Koselleck staged himself as a proponent of perspectival plurality in historical writing.

Koselleck’s pluralistic position was based on the conviction that thematic and theoretical orientation is highly dependent on individual experience and interest. This is one of the key messages in “Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel”. In common with “Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit” it aims at delineating certain conditions of historical writing through reflections on two seemingly opposed, but nevertheless related notions in historical writing: those of experience and method. Where “Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit” states that historical writing is neither exclusively composed by partisanship nor by objectivity, “Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel” argues that historical writing is neither only a matter of experience nor one of pure method. In the opening lines of the article, Koselleck wrote:

“What is sought after, found, and represented as historical truth never depends solely on the experiences that a historian has, or solely on the methods that he uses. Certainly, as a historical work is being written, experience and method interrelate with one other. However, determining their relation is difficult, first because in the course of history it has constantly changed, and second, because as yet we have neither an anthropologically grounded history of historical experience nor a comprehensive history of historical methods. The following answer is therefore a proposal that seeks more questions

than it supplies answers.” (45)

In his attempt to further probe the relation between experience and method in historical writing, Koselleck set out to investigate the conditions of human acquisition of experience and of historical writing. He then presented three different forms of experience and method. Central in his theory about experience is the assumption that histories are told and written because human beings are surprised, that is, because they experience something unexpected. Koselleck labelled this form of experience singular. However, he also pointed to how certain singular experiences demands to be told via and integrated into existing patterns of experience. According to Koselleck, these patterns represent a second form of experience: those that are stabilized, handed over and obtained via so called units of action. Common to the singular acquisitions of experience and the stabilizing structures of collective experiences is that persons can immediately relate to them. This distinguishes them from the third type of experiences introduced by Koselleck. These are the experiences that transcend persons and generations and therefore only can be recaptured retrospectively through historical reflection.

These three forms of experience are all included in the three forms of method that Koselleck subsequently listed in “Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel”. The first form of method concerns history written as an immediate recording or retelling of experiences, presenting history as a form of cognition that is fundamentally related to the experience of something singular that has to be preserved in memory through being written down and reflected upon. Since historical writing is always a reworking of experience, the question of *what happened?*, Koselleck continued, will always be connected to the question of *how could it happen?* In other words, the singular is only surprising because existing experiences and expectations are somehow challenged. And since the recording of the singular hence only makes sense in relation to the recording of something enduring, the historian cannot avoid constructing a hypothesis. According to Koselleck, in the very moment history is written and explained it thus becomes an effectual part of the experiences of later generations.

Koselleck thereby arrived to the next level of historical writing: the continuing of history. This level concerns the method through which earlier and contemporary experiences are related into a history of continuation. According to Koselleck, the confrontation between earlier and contemporary experience can also lead to the third form of method: the so-called rewriting of history. About this method, he stated: “The rewriting of history is as unique as the very first time history is written. It is certainly innovative because it moves in a conscious opposition to the previously reported or written history. It follows provisionally that this corresponds to a change of experience that amounts to a new experience.” (65)

Having thus drawn the conclusion that experience and method is fundamentally intertwined, Koselleck ended the article by reflecting on Marx' famous dictum: that history is written by the victors. His reply to Marx is that this is true in the short run, but since the victors are only interested in illuminating the immediate causes of their victory, it is left to the vanquished to analyze the long-term causes for why things did not happen in the way they had planned and hoped. He wrote: "If they [the vanquished] reflect at all, they face a greater burden of proof to explain why something happened in this and not the anticipated way." To this assumption, he added the following hypothesis: "If history is made in the short run by the victors, historical gains in knowledge stem in the long run from the vanquished." (76)

This assumption was in the last pages of the article exemplified with reference to Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, Sallust, Augustine, Machiavelli, Tocqueville and Marx, who allegedly all drew from their experiences of defeat to produce methodological innovations in the writing of history.

However, as mentioned above, the phrase "Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel" should also be read as an autobiographical statement, referring first of all to Koselleck's own experience during and after World War II and to his subsequent attempt to explain the reasons for his defeat through a revision of the existing theoretical-methodological approaches to history. Such autobiographical musing was an inseparable dimension of the reflections on theoretical-methodological issues in historical writing that Koselleck authored between the 1960s and the 1990s. The visits related to, or rather formed part of his habit of destabilizing otherwise strong hypothesis with sceptical and ironical comments, thus pointing to what he saw as the many limits, paradoxes and even absurd dimensions of history and historical writing. One instance of this appears in the very last lines of *Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel*. Here Koselleck summarized the teachings of the investigation as follows: "Historical change feeds on the vanquished. Should they survive, they create the irreplaceable primary experience of all histories: that histories take another course than that intended by those involved. This always unique experience cannot be chosen and remains unrepeatably. Yet it can be processed through the search for the causes, which last for a middle- or long-term period, and thus are repeatable. This is what distinguishes methods. They can be abstracted from the unique event; they can be applied elsewhere. Once experience has been methodologically transposed into knowledge by the vanquished – and which victor does not finally belong to them? – it remains accessible beyond all change of experience. This might offer some comfort, perhaps a gain. In practice, it would mean saving us from victories. Yet every experience speaks against it." (83)

The quoted passage illuminates that the oblique autobiographical references ultimately

point to an ethical foundation of Koselleck's notion of historical writing: in the long run, suffering and defeat are universal (though survival is not), and they are the incentives for writing and re-writing history. They are ethical incentives because they respond to something that ought not to have happened, to a disturbance, not simply of expectations, but of a moral order that is disturbed by the pretence of victory. This ethical foundation is something of a blind spot in Koselleck's theoretical writings. He did not make it explicit and distrusted it, as the last sentence indicates: here, his skeptical perspective turns against the hope of being 'saved from victories'. This perspective reached much further than the passage indicates. In a way, it turned against his theoretical course of argumentation as a whole, since it cast what the text identified as the foundations of historical writing in the light of absurdity. The quoted passage thus illuminates in exemplary fashion how, in spite of his thorough analysis of various assumptions and notions, Koselleck remained ambivalent about their status and usability. This ambivalence was symptomatic of his diffidence towards his own theorizing, leading to a certain tendency towards the paradoxical.

The quoted passage also comments on the question of the usability of historical writing. Biased in favor of modern history, Koselleck emphasizes that a certain level of abstract historical research that succeeds in identifying long-term historical conditions may have direct relevance for present-day decisions. But at the same time, he claims that this theoretical notion seems to have no precedent in historical experience of historical research; it is not spared from the degree of complexity and absurdity that characterizes all human affairs and that makes it practically impossible for the historian to arrive at insights about the human past that can be utilized to improve conditions in the present and the future.

There is, however, one issue that is never portrayed as absurd in Koselleck's texts on historical writing: that is the aim of deconstructing ideas of history in singular and to thematize histories in plural. According to Koselleck, this aim can only be pursued by means of a plurality of perspectives on historical writing. Along with the substantial degree of scepticism and relativism, this call for a plurality of perspectives is a discursive feature that distinguishes his reflections on historical writing from the reflections made by many other German historians on this topic between the 1960s and the 1980s. In fact, the plea for plurality, and for a certain scepticism and relativism, were features with which Koselleck reacted against and positioned himself outside the more scientific, unambiguousness and uniform social-historical discourses in the discipline.

This does not mean that Koselleck was in agreement with those scholars who, in relation to the linguistic turn in the 1960s and 1970s, questioned the possibility of writing a scientific

mode of history that referred to an actual past. In the broadest sense, the linguistic turn can be described as a call for a new and more varied approach to history that carries the influence of a European tradition that evolved from Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger into the work of scholars such as Hayden White, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida and that seeks to examine critically the founding assumptions of knowledge.¹⁶⁹ The scholars that have been associated with the linguistic turn are many and diverse, but all of them share a critique of positivism, canonical texts, institutionalized power and universal interpretational models, including notions of progress in human history.¹⁷⁰ Above all they focus on the role of language and linguistic representation in human affairs.

To some extent, Koselleck was also a product of some of the specific philosophical traditions and concerns that led to the linguistic turn. In light of this, it is understandable that he felt a certain affinity to some of the scholars associated with the turn – and vice versa.¹⁷¹ The key example here is Hayden White, a scholar primarily renowned for his book *Metahistory*, which was first published in 1973. *Metahistory* emphasizes the importance of narrative arrangements, modes of emplotment and tropes for all historical writing.¹⁷² From the 1980s onwards, White made a significant effort to promote Koselleck's work internationally. In 1987, he wrote an enthusiastic review of the English translation of *Vergangene Zukunft*, stating that, alongside the writings of scholars such as Paul Ricoeur, Sandy Cohen, Frank Ankersmit, Dominick La Capra and Paul Veyne, Koselleck's work pointed to a new era in the understanding of history,¹⁷³ and in the foreword to the collection of essays, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, that was translated into English in 2002, he introduced his German colleague as “one of the most important theorists of history and historiography of the last half-century.”¹⁷⁴

Already in 1986 Koselleck had written a similarly enthusiastic foreword to the German

¹⁶⁹ The description is taken from Lloyd S. Kramer: "Literature and Historical Imagination", Lynn Hunt (ed.): *The New Cultural History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1989, p. 100.

¹⁷⁰ These characteristics were shared by many scholars representing other new approaches to human history and culture that emerged from the 1960s onwards. See Lutz Raphael: 2003, p. 228-226.

¹⁷¹ As stated by Helge Jordheim: 2007, p. 74. The following draws to a large extent on Jordheim's excellent account of Koselleck's stance on the issues raised by the linguistic turn.

¹⁷² Hayden White: *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Baltimore 1973.

¹⁷³ Hayden White: Review of *Vergangene Zukunft*, *American Historical Review*, vol. 95, nr. 5, 1987, p. 1175-1176. White wrote: "Along with the work of Paul Ricoeur, Sandy Cohen, F. R. Ankersmit, Dominick La Capra, and Paul Veyne, Koselleck's work augers a new era in the conceptualization of not only what 'history' means for Western culture but also for what Western culture means for 'history'."

¹⁷⁴ Hayden White: "Foreword", Reinhart Koselleck: *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford 2002, p. ix.

translation of White's *Tropics of Discourse*.¹⁷⁵ Whereas White connected Koselleck's work to current international trends, Koselleck related White's book to a German philosophical tradition: more concretely, to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Blumenberg. This comparison is an indication of Koselleck's admiration for White's inquiries into the linguistic conditions of representing historical experience. What Koselleck found appealing about White's project was presumably not only the latter's plea that historians should question their use of language, but also his identification with an ironical mode of historical writing that allows for certain elements of absurdity and contradiction.

However, the comparison with Gadamer and Blumenberg also points to the limits that Koselleck saw in White's approach. Recalling his search for a concept of experience less bound to language than Gadamer's, in his foreword to *Tropics of Discourse*, Koselleck argued that White's strong interest in the metaphorical language of historical writing left little space for the domain of social reality. He also maintained that White's focus bypassed systematic investigations of the role of theory and method in representing historical experience. In addition, in a later interview he criticized White for ignoring source criticism as a check on historical writing (*Kontrollinstanz*) that distinguishes it from fiction. In sum, he staged himself as a more social-historically oriented and less relativistic historian than White.¹⁷⁶

However, in his foreword to *Tropics of Discourse*, Koselleck distinguished White from French poststructuralists, who, Koselleck wrote, "want to dispose of the historical texts (*historische*) text as a historical (*geschichtliche*) mediator of truth." This was a variant of relativism to which Koselleck was opposed, just as he was opposed to the rigorous claims to scientism that were articulated in the social-historical discourses.¹⁷⁷

As Koselleck stated in his 1989 article "Sprache und Ereignisgeschichte", the linguistic turn discussions that appealed to him were those that questioned "the strong dichotomy between reality and thought, existence and consciousness, history and language" and replaced

¹⁷⁵ Hayden White: *Auch Klio dichtet oder die Fiktion des Faktischen: Studien zur Tropologie des historischen Diskurses*, Stuttgart 1986. Republished in Reinhart Koselleck: "Introduction to Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse*", Reinhart Koselleck: *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford 2002, p. 38-44.

¹⁷⁶ Carsten Dutt: 2001, p. 267.

¹⁷⁷ Koselleck's opposition to radical relativism is nowhere better described than in Hayden White's foreword to *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 2002, p. xiv. In the words of White: "(...) Koselleck's insists that (...) relativism provides no ground for nihilism or a crippling scepticism. Historical relativism, he concludes, avoids Pyrrhonism by virtue of its substitution of the relative certainty of our knowledge we can have of our society and culture for the absolute certainty promised by all forms of idealism. The concept of history includes a concept of historical knowledge that knows itself to be always provisional and open to revision. As historical knowledge dissolves the myths, lies, and falsifications of history, it secures a stable base from which to assess and augment that 'space of experience' in which men build a notion of a human reality that is both always changing and ever more becoming itself."

these with milder dichotomies such as “meaning and experience” and “text and context.”¹⁷⁸ In virtually all of his research projects Koselleck attempted to think these dichotomies in convergence,¹⁷⁹ either alone or in collaboration with scholars, who neither belonged to the social science or the linguistic turn discourse. One of these scholars is the historian, Christian Meier (1929-), a long-time friend of Koselleck, to whom the cited article “Sprachgeschichte und Ereignis” is dedicated. A specialist in the Classic Athens and the late Roman Republic, Meier’s work is similar to Koselleck’s in that it combines broad thematic interests (including studies of constitutional history, ‘the political’ and parliamentary democracy) and generalizing interpretations of historical epochs with reflections on the narrative dimensions of historical writing. As a result of his theoretical-methodological and interdisciplinary curiosity, Meier was also a member of *Poetik und Hermeneutik* and *Theorie der Geschichte*, and, due to his expertise in the Classic Athens and the late Roman Republic, he became one of Koselleck’s key collaborators in relation to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.¹⁸⁰

In his attempt to navigate between what he saw as too scientific or relativistic understandings of history and historical writing, Meier was only one among several likeminded scholars that Koselleck collaborated with in various networks from the 1960s to the 1980s. However, in this period, he was arguably the representative of the historical profession in Germany (and perhaps even internationally), who most systematically tried to carve out a position that insisted on both the scientific and the relativistic character of historical writing. Interestingly, in contrast to the way in which he conceptualized most other theoretical matters, in respect to the theory of historical writing, Koselleck did not make use of his familiar household sources of inspiration, his teachers in a broad sense, ranging from Heidegger and Schmitt to Gadamer, Löwith and Conze. Instead, he predominantly referred to an entirely different range of scholars, from Chladenius to Christian Meier. Still, it is perhaps appropriate to point out that one of the group of teachers articulated views that are very similar to Koselleck’s: Johannes Kühn, who had taught him the methods of source criticism. Consider for example the following passage from Kühn’s *Toleranz und Offenbarung*: “[My] work deviates perhaps in composition and aim from other historical works of the more narrow discipline. It does not intend, though, to develop something like a ‘new method’. Besides the indispensable philological fundament, I am convinced that there is no such a thing as ‘the method’, but that the ways depart and branches out depending on whether the scholar focuses on the stage of history,

¹⁷⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: “Sprachwandel und Ereignisgeschichte”, *Merkur*, Nr. 8, 1989, p. 657.

¹⁷⁹ I am here recapitulating the convincing key argument in Helge Jordheim: 2007.

¹⁸⁰ For Meier’s many affiliations to Koselleck, see Christian Meier: 2007, p. 11. For Koselleck’s admiration for Meier’s work, see first of all the many references in *Vergangene Zukunft* and *Zeitschichten*.

its characters and its tremors, or rather on historical ‘causalities’ or general ‘trends’ or on invariable forms of historical life etc. They all have their legitimacy and their limits. It is not about finding ‘the right method’, but to remain conscious of the limits of the method that has been chosen with good reason and with respect to the subject matter and the scholarly aim.”¹⁸¹

The idea of methodical ‘tolerance’ – as one might put it – that Kühn formulates in these lines seems very akin, then, to Koselleck’s insistence on pluralism and the continuous search for conceptual models that are specifically adapted to the sources of a particular historical project. The Kühn passage lays open a subtle process of reception that marks Koselleck’s theoretical position as one of ‘tolerance’, too. For both scholars, the particular conditions and needs of particular projects called for different conceptualizations; there were no valid models of conceptual thought that all historical writing could follow, and there was no alternative to a pluralism of method.

Reinhart Koselleck at the University of Bielefeld

Whereas Koselleck’s reflections on historical writing have been increasingly appreciated and quoted by German historians since the 1980s, they were out of tune with the disciplinary discussions and developments in the 1970s. This was not least the case at the University of Bielefeld to which Koselleck transferred from Heidelberg in the beginning of the decade. Focusing on the intellectual-institutional activities and the academic-social constellations that Koselleck became a part of, the following sections illuminate the ways in which his stay in Bielefeld was important not only for his identity in the discipline and his modes of self-representation, but also for his work.

We begin with a brief introduction to the foundation of the university in the late 1960s; there then follow perspectives on his administrative and scholarly activities at the institution and on his disagreements with the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* at the department of history in the 1970s; with the closing sections offer a view on how Koselleck’s status in international academia changed from the 1980s onwards, without Koselleck changing his self-representation.

The University of Bielefeld was founded in 1969 in response to the processes of reform and enlargement of the German university sector in the 1960s and 1970s. As proposed by its *spiritus rector*, the sociologist Helmut Schelsky, and the founding commission, the purpose of the university was to practice a different form of organization and teaching than that which characterized the established universities. The main aims were to create a stronger unity

¹⁸¹ Johannes Kühn: Leipzig: 1923, p. IX.

between research and teaching, to focus on the theory of the various disciplines and to promote interdisciplinary work. The latter was to be facilitated by the so-called *Centre for Interdisciplinary Research (ZIF)* and the university architecture that encloses all faculties in one great structure, constructed in a typically 1960s mode in concrete.¹⁸²

The department of history was also to be given an innovative profile. One of the central actors in defining this profile was Werner Conze, who was a member of the founding commission from 1965 until 1968, when, due to his rector candidature at the University of Heidelberg, he withdrew from the commission. Conze was replaced by Koselleck, who also functioned as chairman of the advisory board for the department of history.¹⁸³ In a 1979 status report on the first decade of the department, Koselleck has described how the planners agreed on a disciplinary profile that was broadly in tune with the main developments in the German historical profession that had been taking place since the late 1950s:

“There was an agreement that the historical science in Bielefeld was not to be oriented towards the pure history of events, that the questions of the traditional history of politics and ideas were not to be in the centre of its research and that the traditional hermeneutic approaches were to be complemented through social-scientific methods. This was a conscious scientific-political decision that gave the faculty its profile“¹⁸⁴

With this profile as its basis, the faculty was officially founded on 17 April 1973.¹⁸⁵ It was here that Koselleck took up the at the time only existing chair in Germany in historical theory.¹⁸⁶ He stayed in Bielefeld until he retired in 1988, and his fifteen years as a professor there were in many ways successful. On the one hand, through his institutional activities, both within the department and in the *ZIF*, he was instrumental in making the department of history in Bielefeld a renowned institution in Germany and around the world. On the other hand, by means of various research projects, such as the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, his project of developing a theory of historical time and his studies of war memorials, he

¹⁸² See Peter Lundgreen (Hg.): *Reformuniversität Bielefeld: 19169-1994; zwischen Defensive und Innovation*, Bielefeld 1994, p. 9-74.

¹⁸³ The board also included Max Imdahl, Günther Kahle, Christian Meier, Gottfried Schramm and Rudolf Vierhaus.

¹⁸⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: “Geschichtswissenschaft in Bielefeld. Die neue Orientierung eines alten Faches“, Karl Peter Grottemeyer (Hg.): *Zwischenstation. Bielefeld, 1979*, Bielefeld 1979, p. 70.

¹⁸⁵ The first lectures in Bielefeld began already in November 1969 within the three faculties of mathematics, law and sociology, and soon after followed the faculties of pedagogic, philosophy and psychology (1971), linguistics, literature and physics (1972), history (1973), economics (1974), chemistry (1975), and biology (1976). The completion of the university construction in 1976 marked the end of the foundation-phase of the university.

¹⁸⁶ The first professors were hired already in 1970/1971. Koselleck did not make the final decision to take up the position in Bielefeld before 1972. Neihart Bulst in Neihart Bulst, Willibald Steinmetz (Hg.): *Reinhart Koselleck 1923-2006: Reden zur Gedenkfeier am 24. Mai 2006, Bielefelder Universitätsgespräche und Vorträge*, 9. 2007, p. 45-50.

managed to substantially enlarge and develop his scholarly production. Accordingly, together with Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, the literary scholar Karl-Heinz Bohrer and the pedagogue Hartmut von Hentig, Koselleck is today remembered as one of the most outstanding scholars in the history of the University of Bielefeld.¹⁸⁷

However, the fifteen years in Bielefeld also included many frustrating and disappointing experiences for Koselleck. This was first of all the case in respect to the processes of institutional reform and administration in the 1970s. In the beginning of the decade, Koselleck made a passionate contribution to the discussion of how the university system, including the history curriculum, could be renewed and improved.¹⁸⁸ However, at the same time, as he told Carl Schmitt in a letter from July 1973, he was uncertain what to expect from what he labelled the “the comprehensive university (*Gesamthochschule*) forced by the SPD-government.”¹⁸⁹ One of the problems that Koselleck saw in the university plans was that the increased teaching obligations might turn the professors into mere ‘schoolteachers’ (*Studienräte im Hochschuldienst*).¹⁹⁰ “During my time in Bielefeld, he consequently wrote to Schmitt, “it has come to seem more and more questionable to me, whether it will be possible to maintain the concept of a research-intensive university.”

After only a few years in Bielefeld, Koselleck saw his apprehensions on this issue justified, as he in the earlier cited status report described the increased teaching obligations as harmful for the department, since, along with the time-consuming processes of administration, they had severely undermined the dimension of research.¹⁹¹ At this time, Koselleck was moreover deeply disappointed that several of the planned institutional arrangements had been subject to change or never realized. Of the many divergences from the founding concepts, the cancellation of the planned chair in art history was purportedly the greatest blow for him.¹⁹²

While it is evident Koselleck was dissatisfied with the direction that the university reforms

¹⁸⁷ See the various reports from the conference *Was war Bielefeld?* organized by the Literaturarchiv in Marbach in February 2007 – Joachim Günther: “Bielefeld als Denkstil. Eine Tagung in Weimar”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 27/2-2007; Alexander Camann: “Weltgeist aus Ostwestfalen“, *Die Tageszeitung*, 1/3-2007; Wolfgang Stenke: “Jahrestagung der Klassik Stiftung Weimar fragt nach der geistigen Physiognomie politischer Konversion der Universität Weimar“, *dradio.de*, 25/2-2007.

¹⁸⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: “Erläuterungen zum Bielefeld Modell für das Geschichtsstudium“, *Geschichte und Sozialwissenschaften, Sonderheft 6 der Neuen Sammlung*, 1974, 36-40.

¹⁸⁹ RW265-8167: 14/7-73

¹⁹⁰ *Studienrat* is a title that schoolteachers (in the Gymnasium) acquire once they reach a certain (career st)age: Continuing his letter with the sentence: “Die Gleichheit wird dann neue Blüten treiben - die Oberstudienräte, die Oberststudienräte, Generalstudienräte, Generaloberst usw.“. Moreover, Koselleck poked fun at how the *Gleichheit*-jargon of the SPD would lead to nothing but new bureaucratic hierarchies. RW265-8167: 14/7-73.

¹⁹¹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1979. p. 78. Koselleck also occasionally complained about issues of administration in his letters to Carl Schmitt, for example in a letter from October 1975 in which he reported that he had become *geschäftsführender Direktor* of the ZIF, “was einen Rattenschwanz an Verwaltung und Streit mit der Verwaltung nach sich zog.” RW265-8170: 1.10-1975.

¹⁹² As stated by Neithart Bulst: 2007, p. 48.

took in the 1970s, it is also obvious that he was more interested in studying modern bureaucracy than being part of it. Koselleck felt much more at home as a scholar in the library, the seminar or the archive, than as an administrator in the meeting room, and in comparison with many of his colleagues, he was more interested in pursuing his own research than in designing the department according to his personal interests.

This brings us to another source of frustration for Koselleck in Bielefeld: his many disagreements with his colleague Hans-Ulrich Wehler. Koselleck had actively supported hiring Wehler as a professor with a special focus on the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the late 1960s Wehler had with some difficulties acquired his first position as a professor of American history at the Free University in Berlin. Nevertheless, when he was offered the position in Bielefeld in the early 1970s, he was happy to leave Berlin. In Bielefeld he would be able to participate in designing a departmental profile without being bound to the usual auspices of tradition.¹⁹³ In Bielefeld, Wehler teamed up with Jürgen Kocka, who in 1973 took up the chair in modern history. As they energetically attempted to redefine the profile of the historical profession, scholars in Germany and abroad soon began to associate the department of history in Bielefeld with a so called Bielefeld School of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*.¹⁹⁴

However, the department was in reality composed of several different schools, or directions. Koselleck was not considered (and never considered himself) a member of the Bielefeld School. Koselleck's initial motivation for inviting Wehler to Bielefeld was presumably that he saw in the latter a scholar, who, like himself, sought to go beyond a pure history of events and politics and practice a more theoretical, interdisciplinary and social-historical approach. However, it soon turned out that the disagreements between their scientific projects and personalities by far overshadowed the similarities and ultimately prevented close academic co-operation between the two. In fact, according to a 1998 interview with Koselleck, at the department of history in Bielefeld, he and Wehler taught separate seminars, pursued different research projects, ran different publication series, and

¹⁹³ See Hans-Ulrich Wehler: *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation. Ein Gespräch mit Manfred Hettling und Cornelius Torp*, München 2006, p. 65. Wehler earned his doctorate in 1960 with a work on *Sozialdemokratie und Nationalstaat (1840–1914)* written under of Theodor Schieder in Köln. Soon after, he obtained a position as an assistant for Schieder in the historical seminar, but travelled already in the summer of 1962 to USA to prepare his *Habilitation* on the *Aufstieg des amerikanischen Imperialismus 1865-1900*. He submitted the *Habilitation* in 1964, only to have it rejected by the jury at the University of Köln. The same was close to happening, when Wehler in 1968 submitted his second work *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*. Only after a long discussion and a marginal vote in favour, he was finally awarded his degree. See Hans-Ulrich Wehler: 2000, p. 246-248.

¹⁹⁴ For a typical example, see Roger Fletcher: "Recent Developments in West German Historiography: The Bielefeld School and Its Critics", *German Studies Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1984, p. 451-480. For a recent example, see Chris Lorenz: "'Won't You Tell Me, Where Have All The Good Times Gone?': On the Advantages and the Disadvantages of Modernization Theory for Historical Study", Franz Leander Fillafer, Edward Q. Wang (ed.): *The Many Faces of Clío: Cross-Cultural Approaches to Historiography*, Oxford 2007, p. 104-127.

worked with two largely separate groups of assistants and students.¹⁹⁵

In addition, Wehler and Koselleck did little to hide the reservations they nurtured towards each others academic activities. Most famously, at a moment Wehler was positioning himself in the discipline in 1970, he warned in his *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs* of certain dangers that he saw in the contemporary conceptual-historical projects. More specifically, relating the approach in the lexicon to that of ‘historicism’, Wehler stated that the hermeneutic approach of conceptual history problematically diverts attention away from the real problems in society, and he polemically prophesied that: ”(...) an exaggerated conceptual history, just like the history of ideas after The First World War, according to its scientific-political function will lead to a renewed escape from the real problems of history into the world of ideas. It will be a road to a cul-de-sac, of which one clearly can see the end.”¹⁹⁶

The publication of the first volumes of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* did not make Wehler change his opinion about the project: he still detected in conceptual history a scientifically old-fashioned, naïve and politically irresponsible way of historical writing. He thus republished the above-cited passage, and this time with direct reference to Koselleck and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, in Habermas’s famous anthology *Stichwörter zur geistigen Situation der Zeit* from 1979.¹⁹⁷ The aim of the anthology was to counter how the so-called *Tendenzwende* taking place in the 1970s had allegedly strengthened the conservative intellectual-political camp in West German, symbolized for instance by the influence of Carl Schmitt on the contemporary debates.¹⁹⁸ In line with this, ten years earlier, in 1969, Wehler had in an essay criticized the group of scholars, including Koselleck, who had contributed to

¹⁹⁵ [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 197-200. Koselleck was part of the editorial board that founded *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, but he never authored an article to the journal and only rarely participated in the conferences organized within its framework. See Olaf Blaschke, Lutz Raphael: 2006, p. 106 and Lutz Raphael: 2000, p. 15. The reservations between Kocka and Koselleck seem to have been of less severe character. Besides writing a positive review of *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, Kocka contributed to the first volume of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* with an article on “Angestellte”, and he later wrote a very sympathetic obituary in Koselleck’s honour. Moreover, Kocka surely saw less of an opposition between *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* and the structural-historical approach of Conze and Koselleck than Wehler. However, Kocka and Koselleck never collaborated directly on larger projects. See Jürgen Kocka: 1970; Jürgen Kocka: “Angestellter“, Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland, Bd. 1*, Stuttgart 1972, p. 110-28; Jürgen Kocka: “Wir sind ein Fach, das nicht nur für sich selber schreibt und forscht, sondern zur Aufklärung und zum Selbstverständnis der eigenen Gesellschaft und Kultur beitragen sollte“, Rüdiger Hohls, Konrad H. Jarausch (Hg.): *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 390-391; Jürgen Kocka: 2006.

¹⁹⁶ Hans-Ulrich Wehler: *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs 1871-1918*, Göttingen 1970, p. 320.

¹⁹⁷ In addition, Wehler compiled in the article a list of historians, who supposedly shared his reservations towards the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Hans-Ulrich Wehler: 1979, p. 725, n. 2.

¹⁹⁸ Jürgen Habermas: “Einleitung“, Jürgen Habermas (Hg.): *Stichwörter zur geistigen Situation der Zeit. Bd. 1*, 1979, p. 7-35.

the Schmitt-Festschrifts (Wehler called these publications a ‘scandal’).¹⁹⁹ Finally, in the 1980’s, in the first volumes of his *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Wehler had refuted Koselleck’s idea in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* that the state played a central role in shaping civil society in German in the *Vormärz*.²⁰⁰

Seen from Wehler’s perspective, the approach of ‘historicism’, Carl Schmitt and the Prussian attempt to deal with modernity all formed parts of the dangerous German *Sonderweg* from which nothing valuable could be retrieved.²⁰¹ Seen from Koselleck’s perspective, things were more complex, and he disagreed strongly with Wehler’s *Sonderweg*-thesis. In fact, this thesis constituted one of the centres of conflict between the two. To explain this conflict, we will begin with a brief history of the notion.

The term *Sonderweg* was first used in the Imperial period by German conservatives as a eulogy which described how a strong and authoritarian German state had facilitated social reforms, without waiting to be pressured by demands from below. This authoritarian type of government was seen as unique as it allegedly bypassed both the flaws of the autocracy of Imperial Russia and what was seen as the weakness, decadence and ineffectivity of Western democratic governments. After Germany’s defeat in World War II in 1945, the term *Sonderweg* gradually lost its positive connotations and acquired a negative meaning. As scholars began to probe to origins of the ‘German catastrophe’ by examining developments in different areas of German history to analyze why German democracy failed during the Weimar Republic and why National Socialism arose, many historians came to the conclusion that the failure of Germany to develop firm democratic institutions in the nineteenth century should be considered a cause of special national developments.²⁰²

In the 1960s, Wehler emerged as one of the staunchest critics of what he saw as the negative characteristics of a special German *Sonderweg*. In line with Hans Rosenberg and Eckart Kehr, he heavily criticized Prussian-German militarism and the persistent social and

¹⁹⁹ Wehler wrote: “Although Germany is an undeveloped country when it comes to shame, the two Festschrift’s written in the past year to honor Schmitt, in spite of Schmitt duties for National Socialism, are a scandal.” Hans-Ulrich Wehler: “Absoluter und Totaler Krieg. Von Clausewitz zu Ludendorff”, *Politische Vierteljahrschrift*, Jg. X, 1969, p. 236-237, note 26.

²⁰⁰ Hans-Ulrich Wehler: *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Vol. 1. 1700-1815, Vol. 2. 1815-1845/1849, Stuttgart 1987. For comments on and references to Wehler’s criticism, see Jonathan Sperber: 1991.

²⁰¹ Whereas, according to Wehler, historians practicing the approach of ‘historicism’ had been incapable of warning against the German *Sonderweg* in the first decades of the twentieth century, Carl Schmitt and other conservative scholars had contributed intellectually to the authoritarian, aggressive and militaristic dimensions of the *Sonderweg*. See for example Hans Ulrich Wehler: Göttingen 1970, p. 85-113, in which, in the chapter “Der Verfall der deutschen Kriegstheorie“, Wehler blames Hans Freyer, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, and Ernst Forsthoff for having intellectually paved the way for the “total state” and the “total war”.

²⁰² - For the characteristics of the German *Sonderweg* as articulated by German historians in the period before, during and after World War I, see Bernd Faulenbach: *Ideologie des deutschen Weges. Die deutsche Geschichte in der Historiographie zwischen Kaiserreich und Nationalsozialismus*, München 1980.

political influence of the reactionary Prussian Junkers in a rapidly industrializing German Empire. According to Wehler, unlike France and the United Kingdom, Germany had experienced only partial modernization in that industrialization was not followed by changes in the political and social spheres. Instead these spheres continued to be dominated by the pre-modern aristocratic elite, who during the empire tried to compensate for the lack of democracy and transcend deep social and political divisions by promoting popular hostility towards internal and external enemies. Wehler further claimed that these peculiarities of this German *Sonderweg* led not only to the failure of the Weimar republic in the twentieth century, but that they moreover paved the way for the authoritarian and repressive structures and the exaggerated quest for glory and power characterizing the Nazi dictatorship.

This line of interpretation developed in the 1970s into something like a new orthodoxy in the writing of German history,²⁰³ but was soon challenged from several sides. Among the staunches critiques of the *Sonderweg*-thesis are the two British historians, Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, who, in a series of books and articles from the early 1980s onwards, argued that there is no normal 'path' of social and political change: that the experience of France and Britain was not, as the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* believed, the norm for Europe.²⁰⁴ In particular Eley and Blackbourn contested *Gesellschaftshistoriker*'s idea of 'a failed bourgeois revolution', which implies that all modern societies must pass through a bourgeois revolution of the British or French type, thus suggesting a necessary connection between bourgeois domination, industrial modernization, and liberal politics. Instead, they argued that even if the liberal bourgeoisie was disempowered at the national political level, it dominated the social, economic and cultural life of nineteenth century Germany, and that this embourgeoisement of German social life was greater than in Britain and France, where aristocratic values were more widespread than was the case in Germany. At the same time, Thomas Nipperdey launched a conservative counterpart to Blackbourn and Eley's critique of the *Sonderweg*-thesis by questioning the portrayal of the German bourgeoisie as weak and feudalized and by stressing the Empire's potential for democratic and liberal reform.²⁰⁵ And finally, from the late 1970s onwards a number of scholars, including the American historian James Sheehan, sought to counter the *Sonderweg*-thesis by arguing "that the leitmotif of German history was a

²⁰³ Thus James Sheehan, Review (of Gerhard A. Ritter (Hg.): *Gesellschaft, Parlament und Regierung. Zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus in Deutschland*, Düsseldorf 1974 ; Michael Stürmer: *Regierung und Reichstag im Bismarckstaat, 1871-1880: Cäsarismus oder Parlamentarismus*, Düsseldorf 1974) in *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 48, Nr. 3, 1976, p. 567.

²⁰⁴ See first of all David Blackbourn, Geoff Eley: *The Peculiarities of German History: bourgeois society and politics in nineteenth-century Germany*. Oxford 1984.

²⁰⁵ See Thomas Nipperdey, *Religion im Umbruch: Deutschland 1870-1918*, München 1988.

persistent struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces – the former tending towards national unification, the latter reinforcing Germany’s traditional fragmentation and decentralization.”²⁰⁶

Koselleck also disagreed sharply with the interpretation of the German past that became embodied in the *Sonderweg*-thesis in the 1970s. Overlapping in some respects with the other critiques launched at the thesis, Koselleck’s disagreements were of three kinds. On the level of interpretation, he placed a much stronger emphasis on the European character of some of the most famous characteristics of modern German history, and he evaluated certain aspects of this, such as the Prussian attempt to deal with modernity, from a much more positive perspective than the *Gesellschaftshistoriker*. On a normative level, he thought it possible to salvage usable knowledge and insights from this and other experiences in recent German history, as well as from politically compromised figures such as Schmitt and Heidegger, whom the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* unequivocally denounced as products and proponents of the German *Sonderweg*. Finally, on a theoretical level, Koselleck simply disagreed with the conceptualization of history that is embodied in the *Sonderweg*-thesis. Koselleck’s disagreement with the *Sonderweg*-thesis was closely related to his temporal theorizing. One might even go so far as to claim that the *Sonderweg*-model of Bielefeld *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* provided a decisive reason for him to prioritize the theory of historical times in his research from the 1970s onwards. In this way, the landscape of polemics, centered on Bielefeld, contributed immensely to his scholarly oeuvre. However, it was only much later, in 1998, when he attacked Wehler and Kocka in an interview and in a published text, that he made this connection explicit. In the interview, Koselleck stated that, in his discussions with Wehler and the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* in Bielefeld, he simply denied the existence of a special German *Sonderweg*,²⁰⁷ and in the published text he moreover expressed his profound reservations both towards the notion and its creators, by labeling the *Sonderweg*-thesis an ‘ideology of 68’.

The text at issue is the 1998 article “Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?”²⁰⁸ As indicated in the title, the article is not structured around a direct polemic with the *Gesellschaftshistoriker*, but around a discussion of Helmut Plessner’s famous work *Das Schicksal des deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche* from 1935, which in

²⁰⁶ Cited from Abigail Green: “The Federal Alternative: A New View on German History”, *The Historical Journal*, 46, 1, 2002, p. 188.

²⁰⁷ See [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 198-199.

²⁰⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: “Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?”, Reinhart Koselleck: *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 359-380. [The article first appeared in Dutch and was later included in Reinhart Koselleck: *Europäische Umriss deutscher Geschichte. Zwei Essays*, Heidelberg 1999, p. 37-78].

1959 was republished with the new title *Die verspätete Nation. Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes*.²⁰⁹ While Koselleck praised Plessner's attempt to place German history in relation to a wider European history, he was critical of the new title of the book: *Die verspätete Nation*. More concretely, he was critical of the temporal assumptions encapsulated in the title, as he found it impossible to determine whether something occurs too early or too late, including to argue that Germany's development was belated (*verspätet*), since such a judgment presupposes the existence of a pre-given time-table, destination and aim in history, towards which the various nations always can orient themselves. Refuting the existence of such schematic and teleological ideas of history, Koselleck labelled the *belated nation* morally and normatively effective, but theoretically a weak category: "It proclaims an exclusive theology ex post, which only allows two options: completion or failure. This coerced alternative has on top of that the argumentative advantage that those who use it will always be right."²¹⁰

In his search for sociological and cultural explanations for the German development, Plessner had in fact, Koselleck argued, avoided such a teleological, normative and theoretically weak conception of historical writing. As such, his analysis had implicitly distanced itself from what Koselleck with deep antipathy labelled an ideology that "after 1968 proliferated without any criticism in Germany: the ideology of the German *Sonderweg*."²¹¹

It is following this polemic against the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* that Koselleck ventured into a harsh critique of what he saw as three fundamental theoretical-methodological weaknesses in the *Sonderweg*-thesis. He first argued that the idea German *Sonderweg* necessitates the conclusion that all national histories have followed a unique path, since all nations are characterized by chains of events that differ from those of other nations. Against this idea, Koselleck objected "The axiom of singularity that always applies on the level of events-sequences makes it impossible to proclaim one way and not another as *Sonderweg*."²¹²

Secondly, according to Koselleck, if various nations are compared in order to identify certain structural differences or similarities, the result can never be an entirely unique *Sonderweg*, as minimal structural similarities must always be presupposed to establish differences. Thirdly, the *Sonderweg*-theory is, he claimed, devoid of a theoretical imperative as to how far back in history in terms of events and personalities it is necessary to go to

²⁰⁹ Helmut Plessner: *Das Schicksal des deutschen Geistes: im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche*, Zürich 1935; *Die verspätete Nation. Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes*, Stuttgart 1959.

²¹⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: "Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?", 2000, p. 363. For a recent and similar critique of the Hegelian traits informing the program of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, see Chris Lorenz: 2007, p. 115.

²¹¹ Reinhart Koselleck: "Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?", 2000, p. 376.

²¹² Reinhart Koselleck: "Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?", 2000, p. 378-378.

construct such a *Sonderweg*. He wrote: “From a theoretical perspective, there is no mandatory beginning of a causal chain that can be constructed ex ante. For each event and for each chain of events there can be summoned as many reasons as there has been events and as there can be made connections between them.”²¹³

In the opinion of Koselleck, all these theoretical insufficiencies of *Sonderweg*-thesis amount to a fatal moral insufficiency. More concretely, according to Koselleck, while proponents of the thesis place themselves in a dubious position from which history is judged ex post on the basis of fragile theoretical-methodological standards, they to some degree free the perpetrators in modern German history from the responsibility of their actions by placing them within a causal and pre-given model of history that exclude the possibility of alternative developments and of individual agency: “As such”, Koselleck concludes, “the moral challenge that the *Sonderweg*-thesis is supposed to answer, crumbles completely.”²¹⁴

Working from these points of critique, and recapitulating the argumentative line from the earlier mentioned article “Diesseits des Nationalstaates“, Koselleck proposed in “Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?“ to replace the *Sonderweg*-thesis with a focus on federal structures as a feature that distinguishes German history, since they prevented a foundation of a national state similar to those of the neighbouring countries. This proposal, and the critique of the *Sonderweg*-thesis more generally, serves not only as a continuation of Koselleck’s ambition to replace ideas of history in the singular with an idea of history’s formalistic and pluralistic structures, but also as a line of interpretation that carves out a space for the more positive interpretation of certain aspects in modern German history that is also present in his other writings. This is to say that both articles indeed illustrate that just like Wehler and Kocka, Koselleck remained strongly focused on problems of German national history. Indeed, the entire *Sonderweg*-debate was located not beyond, but indeed still ‘on this side of the national state’. This helps account for the intense, tenacious and partly politicized character of the polemics that surrounded the issue.

However, since the article contains by far the most polemic critique that Koselleck ever launched in public against other scholars, it should presumably not only be read as an expression of his scientific or interpretive disagreements with the *Gesellschaftshistoriker*, but also as a reaction to the critiques that had been launched against his work (in particular by

²¹³ Reinhart Koselleck: “Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?“, 2000, p. 378.

²¹⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: “Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?“, 2000, p. 379. As in the earlier mentioned article “Diesseits des Nationalstaates“ (Reinhart Koselleck: 1994), Koselleck argued in “Deutschland – eine verspätete Nation?“ that the German political history had since the Middle Ages been characterized by its federal structures, which had prevented a foundation of a national state similar to those of the neighbouring countries.

Wehler) and to the more personal tensions in Bielefeld, where Koselleck in the 1970s felt marginalized by the *Gesellschaftshistoriker* and out of tune with broader disciplinary developments.²¹⁵ To this, it should be added that Koselleck contributed to construct a position that fell outside the boundaries of the more fashionable programs and positions of the period. A vital decision that he took in this respect was to downplay the dimensions of his work that connected to the more traditional forms of historical writing and to the current trends, such as the social-historical dimension as unfolded in *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, on behalf of research projects that did not connect to mainstream historical writing and hence made it difficult for other historians to communicate with him. In line with this, observing the growing gap between Koselleck's projects and the more typical historical writing during the 1970s, Christian Meier has recently questioned "if it was necessary and right to leave the entire conventional terrain of historical science due to the challenge of the social sciences in order to focus on the historical times."²¹⁶

Meier views the increasing specialization in Koselleck's scholarly production as related to a defensive position vis-à-vis the disciplinary developments in the 1970s. In line with this, it might be possible to interpret the specialization as a means with which Koselleck tried to overcome the ideological tensions and polemical confrontations of the period and cope with the disappointing experience of moving from Heidelberg, the centre of philosophy, hermeneutics and *Bildung*, to Bielefeld, where the social sciences were held in higher esteem. To be sure, as stated by Stefan Ludwig Hoffman, "Heidelberg, more than Bielefeld, remained his intellectual home for most of his life."²¹⁷

Correspondingly, it is tempting to interpret both Koselleck's later reputation as an outsider and his contemporary reflections on the role of the vanquished in history as related to his experiences in Bielefeld.²¹⁸ However, even if such links can be made, it should be emphasized that Koselleck was in fact a very established scholar in German academia in the 1970s and 1980s, where, in collaboration with a wide range of scholars, he was involved in several research projects and institutions, both in and outside Bielefeld. As for the latter, he remained a very active member of the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*, in which the

²¹⁵ According to Bernhard Giesen: 2007, p. 265, Koselleck was regarded as a 'conservative bohemian' by many of his departmental colleagues.

²¹⁶ Christian Meier: 2007, p. 22.

²¹⁷ Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann: 2006, p. 478.

²¹⁸ See for example Bo Stråth: Review of *Zeitschichten*, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 4, 2001, p. 535, who suggests that Koselleck's reflections on how the 'vanquished' in history are forced to rethink history referred not only to his experiences in the war, but also to his "experiences as something like a marginalized loser (...) at Bielefeld in the 1970s [when he] was looked down on from the victorious bandwagon of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*."

successful enterprise *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was flourishing; he continued to participate in and contribute to the conferences organized by *Poetik und Hermeneutik*; he was until 1978 on the editorial board of *Die Verwaltung*; he was in the 1970s and 1980s a member of *Theorie der Geschichte*; and together with an interdisciplinary group of scholars, including François Furet, Hans Robert Jauss, Hermann Lübke, Thomas Luckmann and Christian Meier, he edited the publication series *Sprache und Geschichte* with Klett-Cotta in Stuttgart.

In Bielefeld, Koselleck not only pursued his academic interests at the department, but also in colloquiums hosted in his villa (in the borough Stieghorst) and in the ZIF, of which he was a director from 1975 until 1979.²¹⁹ Moreover, in between 1971 and 1988, he was involved in organizing no less than 13 events within the ZIF: eight research groups, two research-years and three author-colloquiums. The first event was an author-colloquium featuring Norbert Elias in April 1971 titled *Soziologie und Geschichte* that Koselleck organized with the sociologist Othein Rammstedt; the last was another author-colloquium in June/July 1988 titled *Zeit der Geschichte – Geschichte der Zeit* that was organized by Lucian Hölscher and in which Koselleck was the protagonist.²²⁰

As for the 11 events taking place in the period between the two author-colloquiums, Koselleck either organized these alone and/or in co-operation with scholars outside of the department or outside of Bielefeld – never with his colleagues from the department.²²¹ Among his collaborators were Werner Conze with whom he in 1972 made the event *Der Beginn der Modernen Welt*;²²² the art historians Max Ihmdahl and P.A. Riedl with whom he in 1977 organized an event on *Todesbilder und Totenmale*; the natural scientists Ludwig Streit and Phillippe Blanchard with whom Koselleck in 1982 arranged an event focusing on *Die Neutronenwaffen*;²²³ and his former student Rolf Reichardt with whom he in 1985 organized the event *Die Französische Revolution als Umbruch des gesellschaftlichen*

²¹⁹ For the colloquiums taking place in Koselleck's villa, see Neithart Bulst: 2007, p. 46 and 49. For the events in the ZIF listed below, see *ZIF-gesamtliste: Liste alle ZIF-Forschungsgruppen: 1973-2007*, accessed online August 2007.

²²⁰ The two research years were *Linguistik und Geschichte* 1. November 1976 – 1. September 1977 and *Philosophie und Geschichte* that was part of the interdisciplinary research year 1978-1979. For the events and research groups in ZIF, see the *Gesamtliste ZIF Veranstaltungen zwischen 1968 und 1996*, posted online.

²²¹ In contrast to for example Wehler and Kocka, who organized four events together: *Sozialer Protest im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* 25/26-6 1976; *Arbeiterkultur im 19. Jahrhundert im europäische Vergleich* 10/11-6 1977; *Der Einfluß soziokultureller Faktoren auf den Erfolg des Industrialisierungsprozesses* 9/11-6 1978; *Angestellten Mittelschichten seit dem späten 19. Jahrhundert im europäischen Vergleich* 12/14-6 1980.

²²² See Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): *Studien zum Beginn der modernen Welt*. Stuttgart 1977

²²³ See Philippe Blanchard, Reinhart Koselleck, Ludwig Streit (Hg.): *Taktische Kernwaffen: Die fragmentierte Abschreckung*, Frankfurt am Main 1987.

Bewußtseins.²²⁴ All in all, Koselleck's many activities in the *ZIF* testify not only the broadness of the topical interests that he cultivated from the 1970s to the 1990s, but also to the way in which this period saw the extension of his academic network far beyond the department of history in Bielefeld.²²⁵

Among those colleagues at the department with whom Koselleck did collaborate was Klaus Schreiner, who held a chair in medieval history. Sharing Koselleck's interest in the history of art and language, Schreiner contributed to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and together with Koselleck, he edited the 1994 volume *Bürgerschaft*.²²⁶ The volume was part of a larger research project on the *Sozialgeschichte des neuzeitlichen Bürgertums*, which was conceptualized in the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte* and carried out in a research project under in the *ZIF* the auspices of Jürgen Kocka in 1987-1988. While Wehler and Kocka dealt with the social historical aspects,²²⁷ Koselleck and Schreiner focused on the semantics of the *Bürgertum*, and Koselleck edited in addition a volume titled *Bildungsgüter und Bildungswissen* that investigated the *Bildungsbürgertum* from the angle of history of mentality.²²⁸

Many of the students whose dissertations and/or doctorates Koselleck had supervised since the late 1960s contributed to Koselleck's volumes on the *Bürgertum* and the

²²⁴ See Reinhart Koselleck, Rolf Reichardt (Hg.): *Die Französische Revolution als Bruch der gesellschaftlichen Bewusstseins*, München 1988. The events that Koselleck organized alone are: *Geschichte und Wissenschaft. Ihr Verhältnis im Lehrgebot im Universität und Schule* 30-4/1-5 1971; *Sozialgeschichte ihre frühe Neuzeit und ihre Methoden* 24-28/3-1975; *Methodenfragen der historisch-politischen Semantik* 30/5-1/6 1975; *Methodenfragen der historisch-politischen Semantik* 18-20/6 1976; *Autorenkolloquium H. G. Gadamer* 29-30/1 1977.

²²⁵ Koselleck's network at the university included also scholars from other departments. Among these was Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, who between 1969 and 1977 held a chair at the law faculty, and Wilhelm Voßkamp, who between 1972 and 1987 held a chair in the faculty of literature, and who between 1978 and 1982 was a director of the *ZIF*. In the *ZIF*, Voßkamp organized a seminar on *Funktionsgeschichte der literarischer Utopien in den frühen Neuzeit* taking place between September 1980 and September 1981 in which Koselleck participated and later published Reinhart Koselleck: 1982. Voßkamp, on the other hand, contributed to a 1988 conference in *Poetik und Hermeneutik* that Koselleck organized with Reinhart Herzog. See Wilhelm Voßkamp: "Klassik als Epoche" and "Europäische Literatur und nationalgeschichtliche Funktion. Eine Replik auf H.R. Jaub", Reinhart Herzog, Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik 12. Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein*, München 1987, p. 493-514 and 587-589.

²²⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, Klaus Schreiner (Hg.): 1994.

²²⁷ [Reinhart Koselleck]: 1998, p. 199.

²²⁸ Reinhart Koselleck (Hg.): Stuttgart 1990. For Koselleck, the *Bildungs*-project encompassed not only a thematic interest, but also a set of values that he sought to defend against those, who, in the words of Koselleck, "from an ideological-critical or social diagnostic side" question the idea of *Persönlichkeitsbildung*. See Reinhart Koselleck: "Einleitung", Reinhart Koselleck: *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert, Teil 2, Bildungsgüter und Bildungswissen*, Stuttgart 1990, p. 46. The entire passage goes as follows: "Es gibt Strukturen der einmal auf ihren Begriff gebrachten Bildung, die epocheübergreifend wirksam bleiben. Und wenn die altzopfig klingende 'Persönlichkeitsbildung', das Postulat, sein Leben auch in der Gesellschaft verantwortlich selbst zu führen, das Postulat also, das den Bildungsbegriff einst initiiert hatte, heute ideologiekritisch oder sozialdiagnostisch in Frage gestellt wird, so sei daran erinnert, dass hinter solcher Kritik – beim Wort genommen – die Selbstaufgabe des Kritikers lauert. Das zu wissen gehört zu Bildung." The intended targets of this polemic were not specified by Koselleck, but it is clear that it was directed at those of the educational-reformers and those among his Bielefelder colleagues who held the concept of *Bildung* in low esteem.

Bildungsbürgertum. Among these were Ute Daniel, Jörg Fisch, Jochen Hoock, Lucian Hölscher, Michael Jeismann, Heinz-Dieter Kittsteiner, Josef Mooser, Martin Papenheim, Ulrike Spree, Monica Wienfort and Willibald Steinmetz. Several of these figures collaborated in various projects with Koselleck and in their dissertations and/or doctorates pursued a range of themes, methods and arguments from his work, which was met with increasing interest among scholars both in Germany and abroad during the 1970s and 1980s.

This development had to do with larger structural shifts in the cultural and human sciences. While in Germany, as well as in many other countries, historians had primarily been oriented towards the social sciences in the 1960s, the advent of the so-called linguistic and cultural turns in the 1970s meant that it became increasingly fashionable to stress the importance of language and culture in human affairs.²²⁹ The interest in topics related to language was pioneered by various scholars from different countries, such as Quentin Skinner, John Pocock, Hayden White, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. The interest in cultural history was likewise pioneered by a diverse group of scholars, who rose to fame from the 1960s onwards. This group included the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and historians such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Zemon Davis and Carlo Ginzburg, who portrayed cultural phenomena, such as rituals, symbols, so-called social capital, mentalities and world views as decisive for human thought and action.

The linguistic and cultural turns were also met with a growing interest within the German historical profession, where a new discussion began about the disciplinary fundament and boundaries in the early 1980s. The specific issue at debate was the new ethnological-anthropological framed approach known as *Alltagsgeschichte*.²³⁰

Alltagsgeschichte was a part of an international trend or movement of historical writing that began in the 1970s as a political and a scientific-critical project in history workshops. These workshops aimed at a detailed reconstruction of the social practices, beliefs and feelings, and experiences and imaginations, of those individuals and groups, primarily from the lower classes, which had neglected in the systematic research of political events and social structures. In addition, the *Alltagshistoriker* questioned universal interpretational models and notions of progress in human history. Instead of using quantitative material to establish

²²⁹ See Lutz Raphael: 2003, p. 156-271 and Georg G. Iggers: *Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, Middletown 1997, p. 97-140.

²³⁰ For introductions to *Alltagsgeschichte*, and the debates about the approach, see first of all Alf Lüdtke: "Alltagsgeschichte", Stefan Jordan (Hg.): *Lexikon Geschichtswissenschaft. Hundert Grundbegriffe*, Stuttgart 2002, p. 21-24; Alf Lüdtke (Hg.): *Alltagsgeschichte. Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen*, Frankfurt am Main 1989; Georg G. Iggers: 1997, p. 101-117; Thomas Lindenberger: "'Alltagsgeschichte' oder: Als um die zünftigen Grenzen des Faches noch gestritten wurde", Martin Sabrow/Ralph Jessen/Klaus Große Kracht (Hg.), *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, München 2003, p. 74-91.

schematic and overarching analytical explanations for historical change, they welcomed a broad return to narrative in historical writing and put an emphasis on discontinuity and contingency in history.²³¹ In these respects, *Alltagsgeschichte* was not a specifically German phenomenon, but an expression of the broader changes in international historiography taking place in the 1970s and 1980s, when the interest in social history decreased on behalf of a strong interest in themes related to the cultural and linguistic turn.

The German debate about *Alltagsgeschichte* began at the 1984 *Historikertag* in Berlin, where scholars labelled the approach an irrelevant new intellectual trend. Soon after, Wehler and Kocka criticized what they saw as both a lack of relevance, theoretical-methodological inadequacies and potential political dangers in *Alltagsgeschichte*. However, they could not prevent the end to an era of social-science oriented history in the mid-1980s, a shift that took place in Germany as in numerous other European countries.

While Koselleck was also critical towards some of the new trends, such as the radical relativism voiced by linguistic turn scholars or the unwillingness to connect micro-perspectives to broader generalizations among the historians of everyday life, he communicated better with the disciplinary changes than the programs of Wehler and Kocka, and the increased focus on language and culture helped prepare the ground for a more favourable attitude towards his work in German and international academia. His national and international reputation as an innovative scholar was consequently boosted and broadened from the late 1970s onwards, in the sense that his oeuvre was no longer merely connected to conceptual history and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

Important for this development was first of all the publication of *Vergangene Zukunft* in 1979. Even if the concerns of the book did not fit mainstream German historical writing, *Vergangene Zukunft*, it received much praise and recognition among the reviewers. And even they did not all agree with Karl-Georg Faber, who labelled the essay-collection “the most important German contribution to a theory of historical writing [Geschichtswissenschaft] in the last two decades”,²³² the book made it difficult not to count Koselleck among the most

²³¹ It should be added the trend of ‘history of everyday life’ arose concurrently with and in relation to the so-called Green politics that set focus on ecological and environmental issues, on pacifism and social justice, and tried to reach its political goals through a grass-roots participatory democracy. From the late 1970s onwards, Green politics were institutionalized in political parties: the German Green party was founded in 1979/1980.

²³² Thus Karl-Georg Faber: Review in *Neue politische Literatur*, 2, 1980, p. 621. See for example also Helmut Berding: Review in *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, Bd. 34, Hf. 3 1980, p. 461-464; Claudia Albert: Review in *Das Argument*, 127, 1981, p. 423-424; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: Review in *Poetica*, Bd. 13, 1981, p. 345-359; Rudolf Lütke: Review in *Philosophischer Literaturanzeiger*, 34/1, 1981, p. 27-31; Arno Seifert: Review in *Historischen Jahrbuch*, Jg. 101, 1981, p. 276-277; Stefan Smid: Review in *Archiv für Rechts-und Sozialphilosophie*, Bd., LXXI, 1985, p. 564-567.

important and innovative German historians of his time.

This was also the case outside Germany, where Koselleck's writings were read, reviewed and used by scholars from very different disciplines during the 1980s.²³³ In fact, when Koselleck turned sixty-five in 1988 and was therefore forced to retire from his professorial chair in Bielefeld,²³⁴ his work had won a degree of international reputation that enabled him to begin something like a second career as a guest professor and lecturer at academic institutions in a various countries around the world, such as USA, France and Israel.

However, in spite of his increased fame and many awards and memberships of scientific boards and societies, Koselleck continued to portray and think of himself as an outsider in the field: as someone, whose work was and had always been out of tune with that of his colleagues in the profession. This self-conception was first of all articulated in a famous 1993 talk given in the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft titled *Goethes unzeitgemäße Geschichte* and later published in an enlarged book-version.²³⁵ Although Koselleck spoke exclusively about Goethe, the talk was clearly dosed with a subtle, but nevertheless tangible autobiographical subtext that he communicated via his protagonist. Koselleck had on earlier occasions qualified arguments by bringing into play figures, such as Lorenz von Stein, with whom he felt intellectually affiliated. This time around, however, Koselleck went a step further in stressing historical parallels, using Goethe as a mirror in which he reflected himself by means of unfolding a comprehensive interpretation and evaluation of his lifelong activities as a historian.

The procedure, it should be emphasized, had a deeper cultural meaning, as with his speech Koselleck embraced a long-standing German tradition of describing oneself through analysing Goethe. This tradition was present in literature – very prominently for instance in the case of Thomas Mann – as well as in historical writing; for instance in the case of Friedrich Meinecke, whose study of *Historismus* culminated in a lengthy description of Goethe's oeuvre as the

²³³ For reviews of *Futures past*, see for example Hayden White: 1987; David Carr: Review in *History and Theory*, vol. 26, nr. 2, 1987, p. 197-204; Richard T. Vann: "Historians' Words and Things", *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 18, nr. 3, 1988, p. 465-470; Peter Burke: Review in *History of European Ideas*, vol. 8, 1987, p. 744-745. One example of a scholar outside of Germany, who drew on Koselleck's work, is Paul Ricoeur, who applied the notions of *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont* in his analytical framework. See Paul Ricoeur: *Temps et récit*, (3. vol.), Paris, 1983-1985; Paul Ricoeur *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris 2000.

²³⁴ Koselleck referred to his retirement as a *Zwangsvorgreifung*. See Michael Jeismann: "Geschichte und Eigensinn. Der Zeitmeister: Zum siebzigsten Geburtstag von Reinhart Koselleck", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23/04-1993.

²³⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: "Goethes Unzeitgemässige Geschichte", *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, Bd. 100, 1993, p. 27-39; *Goethes Unzeitgemässige Geschichte*, Heidelberg 2001. The following cites from the book-version.

culmination and achievement of historical thought.²³⁶ This was a very important tradition of identification with the enlightenment world of thought of 'classical' Germany; and it was a tradition that was very bourgeois. In the 1950s, Koselleck would presumably have been very skeptical of it. But at the time of his Goethe speech, this skepticism appears mitigated. Thus, he entirely avoided taking issue with Meinecke or with other predecessors in the field. Still, the main aim of his speech was to dissociate Goethe from all the movements, schools and directions of his time. More concretely, Koselleck sought to illuminate how Goethe had experienced, lived and understood history, in ways that were in various ways untimely (*unzeitgemäß*), that is, out of tune with the time in which he lived.

The first part of the speech focussed on the relation between Goethe's life and the history of his time, and Koselleck began this part by stating that viewed from outside it might appear as if Goethe's life story, his upbringing in the *Bürgerstand* and his successful career in the government of Sachsen-Weimar, had by and large been timely. However, according to Koselleck, because of his sceptical attitude towards the French Revolution, Goethe was soon deemed untimely by his contemporaries: "From the perspective of those, who were insignificant before the French Revolution, but grew with it, Goethe belonged to the conservative, counter-revolutionary, anti-patriotic corner. In modern terms, he was ideological-critically labeled as untimely." (11)

According to Koselleck, the contemporary judgment of Goethe as a conservative counterrevolutionary had to do with the rise of historical philosophy and the related trend of accusing people for thinking and acting in ways that was deemed wrong. Whereas other enlightenment thinkers evaluated everything by means of strong dichotomies and interpreted the present as a necessary transition phase to a better future, Goethe avoided thinking and judging in historical-philosophical terms. Instead, he viewed the contemporary developments from the perspective that every death was one death too many, regardless of the political orientation of the deceased. And since Goethe, who repeatedly uttered statements according to which all history was chaotic and absurd, refrained from teleological interpretations of history that was motivated by a particular political cause or viewpoint, it was, according to Koselleck, impossible to subject Goethe to any ideological critique. This was, he argued, one of the ways in which Goethe was untimely.

Goethe's untimely quality, Koselleck added, was related to his ability to reflect on his life

²³⁶ On the reception of Goethe in Germany, see Karl Robert Mandelkow: *Goethe in Deutschland: Rezeptionsgeschichte eines Klassikers*, Bd. 1+2, München 1980/1989. For a recent and authoritative perspective on Goethe, see Nicholas Boyle: "Geschichte und Autobiographie bei Goethe (1810-1817)", *Goethe Jahrbuch* 110, 1993, p. 163-172.

and work: “In the German language, there is hardly any other author, who has made his own life and his own work, its outer and inner conditions, to the subject of his own reflections, in such a rigorous way as Goethe.” (15) According to Koselleck, the decisive insight that Goethe drew from these reflections was that history must continually be rewritten, because changing conditions and experiences repeatedly generate new questions and answers, and because words continually change their meanings, even after they have been written down. With this insight in mind, Koselleck concluded, Goethe always aimed at controlling and questioning his own history as *Wirkungsgeschichte*.

In the second part of the speech, Koselleck turned to thematize how Goethe’s ways of interpreting and understanding of history had been untimely. Here Koselleck pointed to how, instead of developing an elaborate methodological system, Goethe embedded his *Erkenntnistheorie* in anthropological assumptions. More concretely, Goethe worked with conceptual parts that were dynamically related to each other. Among the central categories that allowed Goethe to perceive history as both singular and repetitive and thereby describe new historical constellations, without subscribing to a finalistic vision of history, were “always formal oppositional pairs: inside/outside, above/below, sooner/later, with which Goethe deciphered all conditions of possible history.” (27)

According to Koselleck, as he analyzed history on the basis of this anthropology, Goethe did not exclude the possibility of progress, but knew “neither the progress of history nor a history of progress.” (23) And when Goethe refrained from commenting on current political events, Koselleck added, it was because his anthropologically based conception of history rather focused on long durations and repetitive structures. Goethe thus uncovered social and political changes as ruptures in geological layers that encompassed repetitive structures, allowing for a prognosis for the future, but not a detailed or total prediction of later events. In line with this, driven by the ambition of going behind the level of historical events to uncover deeper mental and social structures, such as the murderous mechanisms at play during civil wars or the disintegration of bourgeois society, Goethe’s historical writing was in fact political, but in a less activist and self-assured way than his contemporaries. In Koselleck’s estimation, Goethe’s conception of historical writing was also less self-confident and more complex than the historical writing of his contemporaries. Goethe saw historical writing composed not by fundamental oppositions between fact and fiction, past and present, objectivity and partisanship, but as created in mediation between these dichotomies. This was yet another reason for why Goethe, in Koselleck’s opinion, had been untimely in comparison to his contemporaries.

Listing all Goethe's untimely qualities altogether clearly points to an interpretation of the speech as a document to Koselleck's self-conception in the early 1990s: to how he interpreted his (lack of) ideological-political position, his theoretical-methodological framework, his themes, topics and interpretations, his concern for human death, and the way he viewed the relation between historical experience and historical writing as features that had always been out of tune with the contexts in which he moved and the times in which he lived.

Although it is devoid of reflections on the many coincidences, developments and changes involved in his academic career and historical writing, Koselleck's self-interpretation in the speech seems in several ways fitting. However, his strong insistence on having been untimely comes across as somewhat striking. Hence, it would certainly be possible to argue that Koselleck was not always an untimely outsider in the German historical profession. This was for example not the case within the *Arbeitskreis* in the later 1950s and during the 1960s, where his work in fact sat well with the mainstream. Even in the 1970s, where discursive features from the social sciences were taken up in the historical profession and Koselleck felt marginalized at the department of history in Bielefeld, he had an ongoing and fruitful communication and collaboration with a huge number of scholars both inside and outside of the university and defined and influenced a number of significant research agendas. In light of this, he was not always as untimely as he later claimed.

7. Commemorating the dead: experience, understanding, identity

During the 1970s, Reinhart Koselleck added yet another theme to his scholarly production, as he began to investigate how war, violence and terror have been experienced, and how, or if, we as human beings and historians can understand, cope with and commemorate such experiences. In the following decades, using dreams, war memorials and personal experiences as his source-material, he explored this theme in various studies and contributed to pioneer the field of historical experience, memory and identity.

The ambition of this chapter is to illuminate the key discursive features in Koselleck's writings on the experience of war, violence and terror, and to position these writings within the broader spectrum of his scholarly production. For three reasons, this body of texts represents the most difficult part of his oeuvre. First, it comprises a range of composite texts that deal with very different themes and were written over a period of about thirty years. Secondly, this was an area of Koselleck's work that remained unfinished: in the introduction to *Zeitschichten*, Koselleck announced a forthcoming volume on historical memory and monuments, which was supposed to draw together the common motifs and objectives of his work in the field, but the volume is yet to appear. Thirdly, his reflections on the epistemological and moral questions in the field remained characterized by a degree of ambiguity, hesitance and incompleteness that is not found in his work in other fields.

The following analysis illustrates not only the unfinished and ambiguous aspects of Koselleck's writings on the experience of war, violence and terror. It also demonstrates that all of these texts were connected by means of a discursive feature with which he sought to deconstruct ideas of history in the singular and thematize histories in the plural from a new perspective. This perspective was based on an attempt to describe the ways in which the limits of the human condition were experienced by the victims of World War II, Nazi terror and Holocaust and on an interpretation of Holocaust as a radical break in history, which, with its extreme violence, suffering and absurdity, affected a loss of meaning and posed new challenges to how experienced reality can be mastered, communicated and understood. Constructing this interpretation by giving voice to various witnesses of war, violence and terror, Koselleck's aim was to demonstrate that human beings interpret and make sense of their most extreme experiences in different – or plural – ways, which cannot be fully understood or shared by others.

Koselleck's new perspective on the existence of histories in plural came to involve an analytical change of focus from the collective to the individual that went hand in hand with a

defense of the individual experience against overarching notions of collective memory. It also went hand in hand with a change of identity in his mode of argumentation. These changes were related; when in academic and public debates in the 1990s Koselleck argued for the ‘veto-right of the personal experience’, he argued not only as scholar, but also as a former soldier who had survived the war. As such he drew his theoretical-methodological framework and normative principles from personal experience. The following sections discuss the ways in which Koselleck’s merging of identities turned him into a partisan for personal experience and against collective memory. Furthermore, they analyze the extent to which this related to and diverged from his earlier work as a ‘partisan for histories in plural and against history in singular’.

The chapter approaches Koselleck’s writings on war, violence and terror roughly in chronological order. It begins by illuminating his texts on dreams, war memorials and caricatures written from the 1970s onwards. It then describes his interventions in the German memorial-debates in the 1990s and presents an autobiographical text from the mid-1990s in which he described his experiences in World War II. This autobiographical text leads us to Koselleck’s attempts to correct the theoretical-methodological assumptions in the field of memory-studies in the 1990s and 2000s and to a final discussion of some of the dilemmas that inform his writings in the field.

Experiences of National Socialism: communicating the incommunicable

One of Koselleck’s first texts in the field of war, violence and terror was the outline “Terror und Traum”, which he presented at various conferences from 1971 onwards and later published in *Vergangene Zukunft*.²³⁷ The text related to his contemporary texts on theoretical-methodological issues in historical writing, as it opened with reflections on a set of themes, which the so-called linguistic turn placed on the agenda in the 1960s and 1970s: the relation between history and poetry, fact and fiction, past events and our interpretations of these. However, Koselleck approached these issues from a new angle, analyzing accounts of dreams written down by persecuted Jews in Germany during the first years of National Socialism and in the extermination camps during the 1940s. His specific aim in the article was to illuminate the ways in which experiences of National Socialism and concentration camps influenced modern man’s historical consciousness and experience of time.

Due to the extreme character of the events taking place in this period, Koselleck described

²³⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: “Terror und Traum: Methodologische Anmerkungen zu Zeiterfahrungen im Dritten Reich”, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt am Main 1979, p. 278-279.

this as a difficult task. “Thus we have here experiences“, he wrote, “that are not directly communicable (...)” – “(...) what happened in concentration camps is in written form barely comprehensible, can scarcely be grasped in descriptive or imaginative language.”²³⁸ However, according to Koselleck, whereas the experiences of the camps tend to escape the usual historical methodology and written sources, dreams offer a range of metaphors and symbols through which it is possible to illuminate aspects of what happened to the human consciousness during the National Socialist terror. In the words of Koselleck, constituting a field “within which *res factae* and *res fictae* are mingled in an extraordinary fashion dramatic fashion”, dreams “testify to a past reality in a manner which perhaps could not be surpassed by any other source.”²³⁹ “Terror is not only dreamed”, he specified, “the dreams are themselves components of the terror.”²⁴⁰

More concretely, according to Koselleck, dreams contain a temporal and prognostic dimension that allows a perspective on the psychic life of the dreamer, and it was by focusing on this dimension that he unfolded one of the key arguments of the essay: whereas the dreams written down by the persecuted in the 1930s correspond to the reality experienced by most people, the dreams of the victims in the concentration camps have lost touch with reality as a consequence of their extreme experiences and sufferings. As terror surpassed reality and hence no longer could be dreamed, it was replaced by utopian camp dreams in which the usual temporal points of orientation in life were reversed, so that the dreams of the future moved in the temporal perspective of past life; they were fed by a happy memory of past life, out of which all wishes and hopes were deduced. Since these dreams became increasingly frequent among the inmates, while the chances of survival fatally decreased, Koselleck labeled them ‘precursors of death’. He wrote the following on these conditions and the brutality and absurdity of the concentrations camps in general:

“The inner evidence of the chance of survival evident in the spontaneous behaviour of the inmate and in his dreams is not commensurable with the statistical frequency with which gassing took place. In this way, those destroyed were deprived of a final meaning, that of being a sacrifice; absurdity became event.”²⁴¹

It was with reflections such as these that Koselleck in “Terror und Traum” introduced one of the discursive features that came to inform all of his writings about experiences of war, violence and terror from the 1970s onwards: the attempt to describe and reflect upon how the

²³⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: “Terror und Traum”, 1979, p. 292 and 289.

²³⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: “Terror und Traum”, 1979, p. 283.

²⁴⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: “Terror und Traum”, 1979, p. 284.

²⁴¹ Reinhart Koselleck: “Terror und Traum”, 1979, p. 293.

limits of the human condition were experienced by the victims of World War II and National Socialism. This attempt went hand in hand with the argument that the experiences of this period represent a “domain in which human understanding appears to break down, where language is struck dumb” in such a way that the “loss of reality” suffered by the victims is difficult, if not impossible to understand for others.²⁴² In other words, what Koselleck introduced in “Terror und Traum” was an interpretation of Holocaust as a radical break, or something like another *Sattelzeit* in history, which posed new and perhaps insurmountable challenges to how experienced reality can be understood, communicated and mastered.

In order to understand the implications of this discursive feature, it should be noted that Koselleck’s thematization of the Nazi terror and the Holocaust in “Terror und Traum” in itself represented a significant new feature that he introduced in his writings during the 1970s. Until then, even if the events taking place from 1933 to 1945 had motivated and indirectly been dealt with in his earlier work, similar to most other historians of his generation, Koselleck had not dealt directly with these issues.²⁴³ To be sure, his generation was not unique in this respect. Until the generational revolt in the end of the 1960s, and arguably, in a different form for a long time afterward, there was a widespread silence about these issues in German academia and society more generally.²⁴⁴

In “Terror und Traum”, Koselleck decided not only for the first time to thematize the Nazi terror and the Holocaust directly, but also to do so in a fashion that was highly unusual for the 1970s and 1980s. At this time, most scholars focused either on intellectual, social and political pre-histories and structures of the Nazi regime or on its perpetrators,²⁴⁵ while the director of the Munich Institute of Contemporary History, Martin Broszat in the mid-1980s famously argued for a historicization of the Nazi period by analyzing it as part of broader structure and larger events in German history.²⁴⁶ Koselleck’s position in “Terror und Traum”

²⁴² Reinhart Koselleck: “Terror und Traum”, 1979, p. 288.

²⁴³ On this issue, see also the comments in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: 2006, p. 29-31. For a critique of Gumbrecht’s specific argument for this silence: that *Begriffsgeschichte* was informed by ‘latent’ wish of the generation of German scholars, who had participated in World War II, to reconcile themselves with German history by means of leaving out the dimensions of history, such issues related to National Socialism, which cannot be dealt with through language, see Stephan Schlak: “Der Sound der Sentimentalität”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2/1-2007.

²⁴⁴ See Nicolas Berg: 2002 and Ulrich Herbert: “Vernichtungspolitik: Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des Holocaust“, Ulrich Herbert: *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, p. 9-66.

²⁴⁵ For the main trends in the research of National Socialism and Holocaust from the 1940s until 2000, see Nicolas Berg: 2002 and Ulrich Herbert: 1998.

²⁴⁶ For the mid-1980s debate between Broszat, who called for a historicization of the Nazi regime by writing it into the *Alltagsgeschichte* of the period, and Saul Friedländer, who contended that aspects of ‘normality’ and ‘criminality’ very much overlapped in the everyday life of Nazi Germany and that Broszat’s proposal was in danger of creating a historical distortion by ignoring the extraordinary character of Nazism that lay in its

was arguably incompatible both with the dominant research trends and with Broszat's suggestion in that he neither attempted to provide explanatory frameworks nor defended the analytical prevalence of the perpetrators, of broader parts of German history, or, for that matter, of his own war experiences. Instead, Koselleck's analysis was based on the belief that when one deals with National Socialism one has to start from the perspective of the victims of the Nazi terror and to focus on the loss of meaning and the incommunicability of their experiences. Koselleck was to maintain this belief and it became more explicit in his writings on war, violence and terror in the 1980s and 1990s.

In a set of methodological remarks, outlined in the last section of "Terror und Traum", Koselleck explained his analytical choice by arguing that in any historical analysis it "is necessary to proceed in a synchronic as well as a diachronic fashion; not only to explain *post eventum*, but also to show *in eventum* how something happened the way it did."²⁴⁷ However, in the 1980s and 1990s, he related his choice not to write a synthesis of National Socialism with reference to a reason that was not explicitly stated but undoubtedly informed the methodological remarks in "Terror und Traum". The reason was that the phenomena of National Socialism posed analytical challenges and demands that he simply did not know how to deal with. Koselleck first described the nature of these challenges and demands in a letter that he wrote to the leading historian of National Socialism, Saul Friedländer, in 1989: "I consider that the history [of the 'Final Solution'] is confronted by demands that are moral, as well as political and religious, and which altogether do not suffice to convey what happened. The moral judgment is unavoidable, but it does not gain in strength through repetition. The political and social interpretation is also necessary, but it is too limited to explain what happened. The escape into a religious interpretation requires forms of observance which do not belong either to the historical, the moral or the political domain. In my thoughts in this issue up to the present day, I did not manage to get beyond this aporetic situation. In any case, these considerations point to a uniqueness which, in order to be determined, creates both the necessity of making comparisons as well as the need to leave these comparisons behind."²⁴⁸

criminality see Peter Baldwin: *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate*, Boston, 1990.

²⁴⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: "Terror und Traum", 1979, p. 297.

²⁴⁸ Quoted from Saul Friedländer: *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, Bloomington 1993, p. 57. Friedländer brings up the letter in relation to a set of reflections on the difficulties of writing the history of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. Although Friedländer has since provided a massive (and prize-winning) account of the history of the Nazi persecution (Saul Friedländer: *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933-1939*, New York 1997, and *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945*, New York 2007) his position on the theme is in many respects similar to Koselleck's in that he believes the Holocaust to embody problems that have so far not been solved and to pose tremendous difficulties that stand in the way of understanding them. Therefore, Friedländer advocates a certain open-endedness whenever views are presented on the issue and wants to avoid a 'closure' of the argument. See Yehuda Bauer: *Rethinking the Holocaust*, New

When, in the 1999 article “Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung”, Koselleck developed these considerations into reflections on how the Nazi crimes resist all attempts to grasp them scientifically or morally, or atone for them through religion, he added that all three explanatory modes in different ways lead to “the aporia.”²⁴⁹ “And exactly this, the aporia, must be maintained in memory. Metaphorically speaking, every step leads to the door of the gas-chamber, but no step leads inside.”²⁵⁰

This line of reasoning also informs the analytical mode in “Terror und Traum”. What Koselleck aimed at in this outline was evidently not to analyze or explain the history of National Socialism, but to illuminate the way its victims experienced it. The only possibility that Koselleck saw in this respect was to give voice to the victims and to do so on their own terms, that is, by means of an introvert and reticent narrative from which both explanatory models and moralizing lessons are left out.²⁵¹

With this mode of historical writing, Koselleck both continued and diverged from the basic principles that had informing his ‘partisan-activities’ since the early 1950s. On the one hand, his insistence on giving the victims of war, violence and terror their own story can be interpreted as yet another attempt to thematize histories in the plural. On the other, by arguing that human beings interpret and make sense of their experiences in ways that cannot be fully understood or shared by others, he opened the door to a radical form of pluralism that is not found in his earlier work. This form of pluralism that came to be based on a defense of the personal memory and questioned the possibility of transforming the individually made experiences of the Nazi terror into a narrative form of writing history that included generalizations. It is within this perspective that his reflections in “Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung” should be understood and, following a view on some of the texts on war, violence and terror published in between “Terror und Traum” and “Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung”, we will return to this point.

War memorials and the justification of violent death

All of Koselleck’s texts on war, violence and terror are informed by the discursive features concerning World War II and National Socialism that are found in “Terror und Traum”. Presumably, he conceptualized these features in the late the 1960s, when, whilst in Heidelberg, he taught courses on the history of the National Socialist concentration camps and war

York 2001, p. 7-8.

²⁴⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1999, p. 219.

²⁵⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: 1999, p. 219.

²⁵¹ See also the observations in Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht: 2006, p. 30-31.

memorials. Whereas Koselleck never went on to thematize the concentration camps in a more direct fashion than he had done in “Terror und Traum”,²⁵² the theme of war memorials moved centre stage in his work from the mid-1970s onwards. Here, with the support of students and collaborators, he began to photograph a huge number of war memorials in Germany and abroad. “To go ‘hunting’ memorials with a camera and a notepad”, Willibald Steinmetz has recently written of his teacher’s immense interest in the theme, “remained since then one of Koselleck’s passions. No excursion and no trip abroad without visiting memorials.”²⁵³

In an interview, Koselleck once dated the beginning of his research on war memorials back to the student revolts in 1969/70, when he proposed a seminar on the social history of art that dealt with representations of death in revolution and war to the ‘revolutionary’ students.²⁵⁴ While the Marxists students allegedly found the topic too bourgeois, Koselleck continued his research into war memorials. In 1976, after his transfer to Bielefeld, and in collaboration with the art-historians Max Imdahl and P. A. Riedl, he gave a seminar on the topic in the *ZIF*, and, in 1979, in the *Poetik und Hermeneutik*-volume *Identität*, he finally published his first article in the field, titled “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden”.²⁵⁵

With its focus on war memorials, “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden” was influential in pioneering the field of memory-studies that was to become vastly popular among historians from the 1980s onwards. However, the article overlapped with studies in the field of national monuments and symbols that had emerged since the 1960s. The earliest and most famous German text in this field was Thomas Nipperdey’s 1968 article “Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert”.²⁵⁶ Analyzing artistic symbols of German national memorials as a way to decipher the structures of the national-movements and the national-idea in the nineteenth century, Nipperdey’s article presented five dominant memorial ideal-types of the period: the national-monarchical in which the nation-state is represented in the shape of a ruler; the monument-church (which was never built); the monuments representing the German *Bildungs- und Kulturnation*; the national monument of

²⁵² In addition, with the exception of writing an introduction to a new edition of the published protocol of dreams that he had analyzed in “Terror und Traum”, Koselleck did not pursue the study of dreams further. See Charlotte Beradt: *Das Dritte Reich des Traums; mit einem Nachwort von Reinhart Koselleck*, Frankfurt am Main 1981.

²⁵³ Willibald Steinmetz: 2006, p. 429.

²⁵⁴ [Reinhart Koselleck]: “Bundesrepublikanische Kompromisse: Die deutschen und ihr Denkmalskult. Rainer Metzger sprach mit Reinhart Koselleck“, *Kunstforum*, Vol. 136, 1996, 467-468.

²⁵⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden“, Odo Marquard, Karlheinz Stierle (Hg.): *Poetik und Hermeneutik. VIII. Identität*, 1979, p. 255-276.

²⁵⁶ Thomas Nipperdey: “Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert“, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 206, 1968, p. 529-585.

the democratically constituted nation (which was never built in its ideal form); and the national monument of the national unity or concentration.

According to Nipperdey, all of these ideal-types represent attempts at creating a national identity by means of clear and permanent symbols. More concretely, they were meant to represent and create a common identity and idea about the German nation, by means of appealing to, for example, a shared national history, loyalty, spirit, culture, suffering, greatness, honour, heroism, power, fight, enmity, aim and destiny. Reflecting on the political implications of these means of identity, Nipperdey ended his article with observations on the ways in which the German national monuments during the second empire came to be dominated by an appeal to power and heroism that symbolized the contemporary feeling of inner and outer threats. However, since his analysis stopped before the 1930s, he did not illuminate the relation between monument-types and nationalism in the Nazi-regime.

This relation was dealt with in another famous text on national monuments that appeared before Koselleck's article; George Mosse's 1975 book *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich*.²⁵⁷ In this work Mosse sought to demonstrate how, since the French Revolution, people had come to worship themselves as the nation, and how a new politics sought to express and mobilize national feeling and unity "through the creation of a political style, which became, in reality, a secularized religion."²⁵⁸ This new style was based upon a use of myths, symbols and monuments that allowed people to participate directly in national worship, and which, by fusing nationalism and mass democracy, gave rise to a visually and participatory counter-political alternative to liberal parliamentarism. According to Mosse, this new political style appealed to men's emotions and desires and not to rationality.

Mosse described the origins of the new political style as a broader European phenomenon with roots in the French Revolution. However, he focused especially on the political style that developed in Germany during the nineteenth century and reached its most radical expression

²⁵⁷ Georg Mosse: *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movement in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars of Liberation through the Third Reich*, New York, 1975. Born in 1918 into an extremely prominent and wealthy Jewish family, the owners of the Ullstein publishing empire, Mosse went to school in Berlin, before immigrating with his family to Britain in 1933. In 1936 they moved on to the USA. After a period as an early modern scholar, from the early 1960s onwards, Mosse devoted his career to study the cultural and intellectual roots and characteristics of Nazism, Nazi Germany, fascism, anti-semitism, Jewish history and later the history of sexuality. See Georg Mosse: *Confronting History: A Memoir*, Madison 2000; Steven E. Ascheim: "Georg Mosse at 80: A Critical Laudatio", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 32, Nr. 2, 1999, p. 290-312; Jeffrey Herf: "The Historian as Provocateur: Georg Mosse's Accomplishment and Legacy", *Vad Vashem Studies*, vol. XXIX, 2001, p. 7-26; James Franklin: "Mosse, Georg S.", Kelly Boyd (ed.): *The Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing, Volume 2*, Chicago, 1999, p. 841-842.

²⁵⁸ Georg Mosse: 1975, p. 2.

in the 1930s and 1940s, when National Socialism called upon the people to worship themselves in a national community of myths, symbols and monuments and thereby created a national cult. Although Mosse pointed to certain continuities in the political style from the wars of liberation against Napoleon to National Socialism, he did not seek to present *the* factor that caused the Third Reich. He was “rather concerned with the growth and evolution of a political style which National Socialism perfected” and which “provided merely one among a great variety of factors which went into the making of the Third Reich.”²⁵⁹

Koselleck’s study “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden” did not directly address Nipperdey’s “Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert“ or Mosse’s *The Nationalization of the Masses*.²⁶⁰ However, there were several analytical overlaps between the three studies, some of which point to broader analytical trends that came into fashion with the cultural turn in the 1970s. One such example was the portrayal of historical memory as a resource of symbolic power that can be marshalled as material power.²⁶¹ Like Nipperdey, Koselleck was interested in the means of political identity offered by nineteenth century memorials (of which war memorials were a subgenre). Like Mosse, he argued that the visual expressions of democratization and nationalization produced by modern war memorials through began to offer “identifications in ways that could not have been offered before the French Revolution.”²⁶²

This argument shows how “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden” connected to the aim of illuminating the transition to modernity that Koselleck had pursued since the 1950s. It was consequently also by drawing on the assumptions encapsulated in the notion of the *Sattelzeit* that he described the ways in which a process of ‘functionalization’ and ‘democratization’ of violent death changed the known shapes and functions of war memorials. In the pre-modern period, he argued, war memorials had been characterized by otherworldly references; by a differentiation by estate in the representation of the violent death; and by an absence of individual soldiers in the depiction. However, these characteristics disappeared around the French Revolution, as “the transcendental sense of death fades or is lost [and] the inner-worldly claims of representations of death grow.”²⁶³ In this process, according to Koselleck, the number of memorials increased; they were moved into open spaces; the individual soldier killed in action became entitled to a memorial; and

²⁵⁹ Georg Mosse: 1975, p. 19.

²⁶⁰ However, he referred twice to Nipperdey. Reinhart Koselleck: 1979: p. 259, note 10 and p. 262, note 13.

²⁶¹ The expression is taken from Stefan Goebel: *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany 1914-1940*, Cambridge 2007, p. 3.

²⁶² Reinhart Koselleck: 1979: p. 258.

²⁶³ Reinhart Koselleck: 1979: p. 259.

remembrance was increasingly shaped to serve political aims within this world. More concretely, when the memory of the dead soldier was shifted into an inner-worldly functional context that aimed only at the future of the survivors, death was increasingly put into the service of units of political action, who turned the practice of remembering into a pursuit of their political aims. The memorials were, Koselleck added, now supposed to “attune the political sensibility of surviving onlookers to the same cause for whose sake the death of the soldiers is supposed to be remembered.”²⁶⁴

It is on account of arguments such as these that Stefan Goebel, a younger scholar in the field of war memorials, has labelled Koselleck a representative of a so-called functionalist position; a position that is characterized by a focus on war memorial as a political tool.²⁶⁵ According to Goebel, Georg Mosse, whose 1990-book *Fallen Soldiers* is “an account of great war remembrance and its nineteenth-century precursors extending the work of Koselleck”, likewise represents the same position.²⁶⁶ Goebel contrasts the position of Koselleck and Mosse to the work of the American historian, Jay Winter, who is said to represent a so-called ‘grief school’. This is, Goebel explains, “a historiographical school which assesses the cost of war at much more intimate levels than historians interested in nationalism and identity politics” and places “emphasis on the personal instead of the political.”²⁶⁷

It is certainly true that in “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden” Koselleck analyzed war memorials as functional tools for political mobilization. However, he was also interested in the cost of war at the intimate and personal level. In general, his work joined a focus on functionalization and grief, and it did so by means of discursive features that also inform other parts of his work.

In “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden”, Koselleck first of all went beyond the functionalist position by framing his study through the use of anthropological categories. In the beginning of the article, he thus identified memorials to the dead as corresponding to “a fundamental state of being, pregiven to human beings, in which death and life intertwine in whatever ways they are referred to one another.”²⁶⁸ According to Koselleck, what separates memorials for natural death from those for violent death is that the latter (as a question of “Being toward beating to death” – a capability that “perhaps

²⁶⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: 1979: p. 260.

²⁶⁵ Stefan Goebel: 2007, p. 3-4.

²⁶⁶ Thus Stefan Goebel: 2007, p 4. Koselleck was well acquainted with Mosse’s work, since, according to Koselleck, the latter attended his seminars (presumably in Bielefeld). See Javier Fernández Sebastian, Juan Francisco Fuentes: 2006, p. 118.

²⁶⁷ Stefan Goebel: 2007, p. 2 and 3.

²⁶⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: 1979, p. 256.

constitutes the human history to an even greater extent than our fundamental destiny of having to die”) stands in need of justification and demands to be considered worthy of remembrance.²⁶⁹ Violent death must have a special reason and meaning attached to it, which offer an identity not only to the death, but also to the living in order to make their survival meaningful.

Totschlagenkönnen was one of the anthropological categories that Koselleck had developed from the 1950s onwards. The fact that it resurfaces in his writings on war memorials suggests, firstly, that this category was linked to his actual lived experience in a way different to the other anthropological categories; and secondly, this suggests that *Totschlagenkönnen* was a key element in his attempt to distinguish his ideas from Heidegger’s notion of finality. Ultimately, his insistence on the need to account for the social on the level of theory might be interpreted as a consequence of the fact that it requires at least two people, i.e. a social setting, for one person to be able to kill the other. If this interpretation is valid, this might well be one of the most direct connections between Koselleck’s war experience and his theorizing, even if he did not make it explicit in “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden”.

In the text, Koselleck instead related his perspective on *Totschlagenkönnen* to the construction of meaning that is involved in relation to violent death. This construction of meaning is, he argued, always shaped by certain anthropological constraints. Most importantly, the meanings connected to war memorials, which bond the living to the dead, will always be constructed by the survivors – never by the dead. The unavoidable result is that the survivors cannot recover the meaning that the deceased may have found in their death. In addition, according to Koselleck, during the passage of time, the intended meaning of the monuments will also elude the control of those who erected the memorials. It was with the purpose of describing this condition that Koselleck outlined the main argument that he wanted to launch with his investigation:

“The thesis that I want to demonstrate from history is this: the only identity that endures clandestinely in all war memorials is the identity of the dead with themselves. All political and social identifications that try to visually capture and permanently fix the ‘dying for ...’ vanish in the course of time. For this reason, the message that was to have been established by a memorial changes.”²⁷⁰

To illustrate this argument, towards the end of his study Koselleck described the ways in which twentieth century wars have changed the practices of commemorating violent death via

²⁶⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1979, p. 257.

²⁷⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: 1979, p. 257.

memorials. According to Koselleck, an important change in the memorial practice took place in relation to World War I, when technical mass death on an industrial scale made it impossible to find and lay the death to rest. This condition, he added, left the survivors with “an obligation to search for justifications that were hard to create with traditional metaphors and concepts.”²⁷¹ However, with its even more extreme measures of annihilation, World War II posed even greater challenges to the memorial practice. These challenges resulted in what Koselleck described as a “transformation in the iconographic landscape that also changed political sensibility.”²⁷² More concretely, the events of this period called for a new political function of monuments, which, rather than visualizing a bond or an identity between the living and the dead, concerned only the question of the meaning of death. Koselleck wrote: “Although not everywhere and not universally, a tendency has thus grown in the Western world to represent death in foreign or civil war only as a question and no longer as an answer, only as demanding meaning and no longer as establishing meaning. What remains is the identity of the dead with themselves; the capability of memorializing the dead eludes the formal language of political sensibility.”²⁷³

The discursive features in these reflections echoed the interpretation of World War II as a *Sattelzeit* in the history of human experience that Koselleck had outlined in “Terror und Traum”. However, in “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden” he expressed a deeper or more explicit scepticism about the possibilities of representing and communicating the extreme experiences and meanings attached to violent death. And he related this scepticism to an assumption on the relation between violent death, meaning and politics that is not found in “Terror und Traum”, but which came to inform his later writings in the field. This assumption is that all attempts to explain, legitimize or use modern violent death politically are doomed to fail or to express pure ideology, since the only meanings that can be recaptured from violent death are various forms of inexpressible existential suffering.

This assumption also informs the article “Daumier und der Tod”, which Koselleck published in a 1985 Festschrift for his friend, the art historian Max Imdahl.²⁷⁴ Analyzing the representation of death in the caricatures of Honoré Daumier (1808-1879), the article connected to the central themes of “Terror und Traum” and “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden”. In the beginning of the article, Koselleck thus introduced death in anthropological and epistemological terms, as “something that eludes

²⁷¹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1979, p. 273.

²⁷² Reinhart Koselleck: 1979, p. 273.

²⁷³ Reinhart Koselleck: 1979, p. 274.

²⁷⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: “Daumier und der Tod“, Gottfried Boehm, Karlheinz Stierle, Gundolf Winter (Hg.): *Modernität und Tradition. Festschrift für Max Imdahl zum 60. Geburtstag*, München 1985, p. 163-178.

human experience even though it is contained in the prospective knowledge of the fact that one has to die.” (163) According to Koselleck, what is special about the representation of death in caricatures is that the caricaturists are “forced to make allegories or symbols, signs or signals of death – not death itself – into an object of exaggeration and omission (...). Their image of death evokes laughter only to suffocate it. Thus in their work, death appears physically, so to speak.” (163)

Drawing on arguments from his studies of historical time and the rise of modernity, Koselleck explained that death in modern times poses a special case. Suddenly, it is less comic strip sequences referring to the inescapability and the justification of death, than the manner of death and conveying the situation that is of interest: “The caricature wants to expose its causes and especially its reasons – the art and ruse of, the guile and technical perfection employed for murdering, annihilating, and obliterating.” (164) In this process, as the events themselves swallowed up or overshadowed the pre-given symbolic meanings that had previously been used to structure and depict the events, an art arose that dealt with death situationally and individually. Violent death, Koselleck specified, “gained historical uniqueness and was interpreted from situation to situation as new, able to be provoked and prevented. Constant, pre-given meanings gave way to historical reasons. But these, too, are surpassable. The actuality of violence leading to death detached itself from its premises, which were formally experienced as permanent.” (165)

In Daumier’s caricatures of death in modern times, Koselleck detected a comical exposure of the traditional symbols of death depicted alongside the specific situations and conditions of death. “In its difference from historical reality”, he wrote of Daumier’s style, “the caricature comes into its own – as quasi critique of ideology.” (175) According to Koselleck, in modernity the “threat from of unreality, the production of mass death from the absolute power of human beings themselves, ensconces itself everywhere” (175), and Daumier’s achievement was to document this process. In the very last lines of the article, Koselleck thus concluded: “If anyone succeeded in capturing the constantly changing but lasting and growing power of killing in a picture for the purpose of bearing witness to it, then it was Daumier.” (176)

The cited sentence shows not only how, in his analysis of Daumier, Koselleck elaborated on the discursive features concerning war experience and violent death that he had outlined in earlier studies in the field. It also shows a new perspective on Koselleck’s enduring concern with the ways in which political ideology and technological developments were putting the lives of an increasingly larger number of people put at risk in the age of modernity. This was a concern that Koselleck shared with Daumier, and, although he worked as a historian and not

as a cartoonist, it is obvious that he understood his vocational obligation along the lines with which he described Daumier's: to document and criticize the cost of modern utopian thought. Similar to Daumier, Koselleck saw in death the limit and the anti-picture to the modern historical-philosophical ideas of progression, linearity and eternity.²⁷⁵ According to Koselleck, since it leaves us only with hopelessness, the experiences of violent death should not lead us to a search for political meaning or justification, but to illustrate and commemorate this hopelessness from a plurality of perspectives.

Koselleck's polemics against the uses of violent death for political purposes encompassed a search for commemorative practices that instead draw attention to the loss of meaning, the hopelessness and the incommunicability involved. This search also informed his introduction to the 1994 volume *Der politische Totenkult: Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne*. Here he stated that the medium of sculptural art perhaps offered a way out of what he called the "speechlessness" and "silence" of violent mass death: "It alone can sensualize (*versinnlichen*) what can no longer be said."²⁷⁶ In this respect, he referred to Rodin as someone, who, with a sculpture of a defeated soldier after the wars in 1870/71, had managed to create a memorial that was de-militarized and de-nationalized and did not refer to any political party. However, according to Koselleck, due to thematizing defeat, Rodin's sculpture nevertheless communicated themes and symbols that are prone always to generate conflict. More concretely, by referring to the anthropological given constant of 'winners' and 'vanquished', Rodin had thematized what Koselleck at the end of the introduction depicted as the fundamental and perhaps insurmountable challenges involved in the search for practices of remembering that do not functionalize violent death for political purpose:

"Only when 'winners' and 'vanquished' no more exist, would the prevailing age come to an end. But that is a utopian idea. What remain are those who have been killed. To commemorate them is the minimum, without which it is not possible to live on. Against the background of past experience, the question of whether memorials can rise to this challenge remains open."²⁷⁷

"'Winners' and 'vanquished' are a pair of counter-concepts that do not form part of the list of anthropological categories Koselleck worked with from the 1950s onwards. However, from the way he used this pair of notions in *Der politische Totenkult* and in other texts such as "Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel", it is obvious that he conceived of the pairing in a similar way and at least played with the idea of recognizing it as part of the human condition.

²⁷⁵ See Kari Palonen: 2004, p. 289-290, for excellent perspectives on this issue.

²⁷⁶ Reinhart Koselleck: "Einleitung", Reinhart Koselleck, Michael Jeismann (Hg.): *Der politische Totenkult. Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne*, München 1994, p. 20.

²⁷⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: 1994, p. 20.

Still, as the quoted passage reveals, he felt a certain longing to get rid of this particular pair of counter-concepts – a feeling towards which he took a characteristically skeptical attitude since he regarded it as utopian. Still, the normatively induced rejection of ‘winners and ‘vanquished’ sufficed to consistently exclude these notions from the list of categories that Koselleck recognized as truly anthropological. Here, there was a sense of utopian longing that was not easily dismissed – another way of departing from ‘political realism’ in the image of Schmitt. The emphatic expression of the skeptical attitude in the quoted passage from *Der politische Totenkult* and the recurrence of the motive of overcoming the dichotomy of ‘winners’ and ‘vanquished’ indicate that this matter belonged to the deep structure of Koselleck’s thought as it emerged in the post-war years. Arguably, this emergence was part of the anti-war sentiment of those years that fed in a rather direct way on something that one might label Germany’s ‘culture of defeat’ after 1945.²⁷⁸ This was a discursive arrangement that was carried by utopian affect and skepticism towards the latter, as well as by the very notions it sought to discard: the sense of defeat informed the hope to rid oneself of the notion of defeat. All this was part of a political common ground tacitly postulated by most participants of public debates in the Federal Republic. It seems plausible that Koselleck’s 1994 re-affirmation of this discursive pattern was also a reaction to the mounting debates (from 1991 onwards) about future German military engagements abroad. If this course of argument is acceptable, this was another important, though subtle, dimension of political engagement in his writings on the commemoration of the war dead, in which he wanted to retain the discursive arrangements of the ‘old’ Federal Republic.

The debates of the Neue Wache and the Holocaust Museum

During the 1990s Koselleck was to elaborate on the skepticism about the possibilities of finding appropriate ways to commemorate violent death that he had expressed in *Der politische Totenkult*. This took place both in texts written in relation to the two German memorial debates that raged during this decade, in autobiographical texts and in scholarly texts on experience and memory. The following sections take a closer look at these different types of texts and on the relation between them. We begin with Koselleck’s interventions in the memorial debates. In many ways, these interventions represent a continuation of his scholarly work in the field, as they aimed to ensure that memorials at issue represented the horrors and hopelessness of the past in appropriate ways. At the same time, they comprised a

²⁷⁸ For the ‘culture of defeat’, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch: *Die Kultur der Niederlage: der amerikanische Süden 1865, Frankreich 1871, Deutschland 1918*, Berlin 2001.

new discursive feature that is not found in Koselleck's earlier writings.

The first of the two debates concerned the plans proposed by Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his government in the early 1990s to renovate and turn the Neue Wache, a structure that was part of the surviving ensemble of classicist Prussian buildings constituting the old representative centre of Berlin, into united Germany's national memorial devoted to 'the victims of war and the rule of violence' (*die Opfer von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft*).²⁷⁹ Already in 1964, there had been constructed a small central memorial with the same dedication: a dedication, which referred not only to those who died in the two world wars and under the Nazi regime, but also to the victims of post-1945 Stalinism, which with its equation of National Socialism and Stalinism served as a political tool in the Cold War.²⁸⁰

Kohl's proposal was also politically motivated.²⁸¹ It was thus closely related to a larger strategy of conservative identity-politics, which Kohl launched in the early 1980s, and which, it has been said, was based on a language of patriotic pride, a strong rhetoric towards the East and "pursued a symbolic rehabilitation of the German identity and history that demanded a gesture of forgiveness from Western powers for the Nazi past (indeed, of forgetting it)."²⁸²

Located on the north side of Unter den Linden, the Neue Wache had been constructed between 1816 and 1818 and had already served the memorial politics of three German governments, when Kohl and his government launched their plan for the building in 1992. The proposal was to place a Pietà inside the Neue Wache. The piece had been sketched in 1937 by the socialist artist Käthe Kollwitz and portrays a mother grieving over her son's death in World War I. Kohl already had a smaller version of the Pietà placed on his office desk; it was an enlarged version of this that he wanted to use for the memorial.

²⁷⁹ For the history of and discussion about the *Neue Wache*, see Bill Niven: *Facing the Nazi past: united Germany and the legacy of the Third Reich*, London 2002, p. 197-202; Siobhan Kattago: *The Nazi Past and the German National Identity*, London 2001, p. 136-141; Peter Reichel: *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, München 1995, p. 231-246.

²⁸⁰ However, the inscription also leveled the Germans who had fallen in World War II and during the allied bombings with those who had been persecuted and murdered by the National Socialist perpetrators. And after 1980, when the memorial was moved to Bonn's north cemetery, the leveling of victims even came to include the National Socialist perpetrators, as the cemetery housed both the civilian dead of both wars, Soviet forced laborers and members of the Waffen-SS. See Bill Niven: 2002, p. 197.

²⁸¹ About fifteen years after the inauguration of the first national memorial, in 1981, the Social Democratic Chancellor Helmut Schmidt met political demands for a commemorative site by asking for 'a memorial for those who lost their lives as a result of the failings and the crimes of the Third Reich, be this in the prisons or concentration camps, in the homeland during the bombing war, or at the front of the Second World War.' Helmut Kohl, who in 1982 succeeded Helmut Schmidt as Chancellor, supported this call. While Kohl also wanted to include a reference to 'racial madness', his proposal first of all reinforced the leveling of victims and the reference to totalitarianism expressed in the first memorial and in Schmidt's proposal. The idea was dropped again in 1986, but after the unification and without parliamentary consultation, in 1992 Kohl declared his plan to make the Neue Wache into a memorial for 'the victims of war and the rule of violence'.

²⁸² Jeffrey K. Olick: "Genre Memories and Memory Genres: A Dialogical Analysis of May 8, 1945 Commemorations in the Federal Republic of Germany", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 64, 1999, p. 393.

In the months before the opening, there was an intense debate about this idea. Three aspects of the memorial were subject to extraordinary criticism.²⁸³ Some argued that it was inappropriate to re-use a memorial that had served military and memorial purposes both before 1918 and after 1933. Others argued that the Pietà did not have sufficient expression to commemorate the victims of World War II, Holocaust and other dimensions of the terror committed in the name of National Socialism. Finally, several discussants were against the inscription on the Pietà, since in their eyes it obscured the distinction between victims and perpetrators in relation to twentieth century wars and rules of violence.

The leveling of the victims was one of the issues that Koselleck commented upon, as he emerged as one of the staunchest critics of Kohl's plans for the Neue Wache in a series of newspaper articles and interviews.²⁸⁴ All his principal objections to the memorial are found in his first contribution to the debate, the article *Bilderverbot*, which was published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in April 1993.²⁸⁵ In the beginning of the article, he plainly suggested that Kohl's decision had to be revised, since, in his opinion, the two basic messages expressed by the Pietà, one concrete and the other symbolic, represented respectively inadequate and erroneous forms of remembrance for a German national memorial.

What Koselleck found inadequate in respect to the concrete message of the Pietà (the portrayal of a mother's grievance of her son's death in World War I) was the lack of reference to the extreme experiences of war and violence after 1918. That is, the experiences of World War II, National Socialism and the extermination camps, and the many different individuals and groups (including women and civilians) that were killed and died in various different ways between 1933 and 1945. According to Koselleck, these extreme and absurd experiences raised questions and demanded answers that were not referred to and reflected upon in the Pietà.

What Koselleck found erroneous in respect to the symbolic message of the Pietà was the way in which it also excluded some of the central experiences that a monument dedicated to 'the victims of war and the rule of violence' in the twentieth century should commemorate. More concretely, according to Koselleck, since, in line with the Christian tradition the work portrayed Maria with the dead Christ in her hands, the Pietà simply excluded the millions of

²⁸³ See Peter Reichel: 1995, p. 243.

²⁸⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: "Bilderverbot", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8/4-1999; "Stellen uns die Toten einen Termin?", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23/8-1993; Ulrich Schmidt: "Als Denkmal unangemessen. Ein Gespräch mit Reinhart Koselleck über den Streit um die Neue Wache", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30/10-1993; Andreas Seibel, Sigfried Weichlein: "'Mies, medioker und provinziell'. Der Historiker Reinhart Koselleck kritisiert die Gestaltung der 'Neuen Wache' als nationale Gedenkstätte der Deutschen", *die tageszeitung*, 13/11-1993.

²⁸⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: 8/4-1999.

the Jews who were killed at the hands of National Socialist terror.

In addition, Koselleck argued that the Pietà should be given a different inscription. More specifically, he pointed to how the ambiguous meaning of the German word *Opfer* (meaning both victim and sacrifice) threatened to place the suffering of the victims of National Socialistic ideology, conquest and murder on a level with the active and voluntary *sacrificium* of the soldier in the *Wehrmacht*; a leveling that gravely misrepresented past experiences.

Having pointed to the ways in which the memorial failed to meet its purpose, Koselleck ended *Bilderverbot* by calling for time to discuss a more appropriate commemorative form. However, although many other commentators criticized the memorial plan,²⁸⁶ the Kohl government neither postponed the date for the opening nor proposed any changes concerning the memorial's form. This provoked Koselleck to publish another article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* titled *Stellen die Toten uns einen Termin?* in which he not only criticized the monumental form, but also the way in which Kohl and his government had attempted to steer and accelerate the political process in order to open the memorial at a certain date.²⁸⁷

In the beginning of the article, Koselleck thus wrote: "It is never too late for the FR to give a central memorial an appropriate form." To this, he ironically added: "The dead do not run away." He then launched a direct attack on the way in which the government had directed the memorial plans without consulting the parliament or the public. "Our society does not only feel patronized", Koselleck wrote, "it is patronized and knows it." Only an open public debate, he added, could lead to a proper coming to terms with the experiences of the past. In addition, he insisted that, in line with the political traditions of the Federal Republic, the government should listen to the various interest groups and individuals and to scholarly experts instead of monopolizing and accelerating the decision-making from above. "The Federal Government seems to know, what it wants", he wrote in a tone of indignation. "Does it also know what it does? Obviously not. And does it know what it does not do? Evidently not either."

Bilderverbot and *Stellen die Toten uns einen Termin?* are typical of Koselleck's contributions to the memorial debates in the 1990s. In these contributions, he picked up on analytical themes from his scholarly work, such as the relations and the tensions between public and private, in and out, state and society, and he applied to the memorial debate his ambition to effect a semantic check of the contemporary use of language, with the hope that historical clarification would lead to political clarity. In addition, his contributions to the

²⁸⁶ Among these were the Chairman of Germany's Jewish committee, who saw in the dedication 'a levelling down of the victims'. See Bill Niven: 2002, p. 197.

²⁸⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: 23/8-1993.

debate all express a staunch defense of a democratic political culture, based on the belief that only an open, public discussion will lead to the best way of dealing with the past. As a result, Koselleck became broadly known as a classic public intellectual, a figure who voiced his opinion on societal matters devoid of specific party-political or ideological ties. Indeed, Koselleck's only aim in the debate was to ensure that the experiences of war, violence and terror were not distorted or ignored, but commemorated in an appropriate fashion.

It was with the same aim that Koselleck elaborated on his critique of the way in which the word *Opfer* in the Pietà's inscription distorted the experiences of the past by turning everyone into victims in *Stellen die Toten uns einen Termin?*: "Everyone is a victim, nobody did anything, and everybody suffered exclusively. The only action came from the anonymous war or the regime that exerted violence (as if not every regime exerts violence). The concept blurs what has happened, it sinks the brutal and absurd reality of our history into oblivion."

Koselleck therefore suggested an alternative inscription: "For the dead, fallen, killed, gassed, perished, missing." He preferred this inscription, since it commemorated not only those who died, but also how they died. "It is not only our moral and political obligation to remember the death, but also the agony of dying, the having-to-die under conditions that elude our imagination."

This passage connected directly to the attempts to give voice to the suffering of those who died between 1933 and 1945 and to the reflections on how to communicate the incommunicable that Koselleck introduced "Terror und Traum" and "Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden". However, in his contributions to the *Neue Wache*-debate, he launched a discursive feature that is not found in any of his earlier texts on war experiences; this is an argument concerning a special German obligation to commemorate victims of twentieth century terror and violence. This argument informed also *Stellen die Toten uns einen Termin?*, at the opening of which, Koselleck spoke of "the catastrophe that we Germans have caused and called upon us" and towards the end concluded: "The memorial should of course not be overburdened. It can not, as it is customary to say, master the burden and the misery of our history. However, it can show for what we have to answer for. We owe that to the dead. Therefore, for us Germans, the situation demands a minimum of demonstration and a maximum of reticence."

Koselleck repeated his argument about a special German responsibility to commemorate the crimes committed in the name of National Socialism in the debate of the Holocaust Memorial. The first initiative for this memorial was taken in 1989, when the citizen's initiative group *Perspektive Berlin*, led by the journalist Lea Rosh and the historian Eberhard

Jäckel, collected more than 10000 signatures, including those of Günter Grass and former Social Democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt in support of the project.²⁸⁸ Later the same year, *Perspective Berlin* and the newly formed *Committee for the Erection of a Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe* were granted a location for the memorial on a property between Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz, close to the buried ruins of the Third Reich.

However, the process of deciding on a memorial form was problem-ridden and took almost ten years. Eventually, in November 1997, a commission recommended two designs: one by the sculptor Richard Serra and the architect Peter Eisenmann, and one by the architect Gesine Weinmüller. Soon after, Kohl opted for the Serra/Eisenmann-proposal consisting of 4000 upright concrete slabs in steel, varying in height and length, and in June 1999, the Bundestag voted to support the construction of the Holocaust Memorial along with a museum and information center.

Besides issues related to its memorial form, two dimensions of the Serra/Eisenmann-proposal received much attention in the preceding debate. The first concerned the question of whether a central monument was necessary at all. While those in favor of the monument argued that no other site in Germany included specific references to the extermination camps in Poland and the mass murder of the European Jews, others feared that another monument in Berlin would turn the city into ‘the capital city of remorse’ and promote a ‘negative nationalism’ instead of encouraging Germans to reflect on the Holocaust or to create a German identity on positive achievements.

The second and most contested dimension of the memorial concerned whether it should be dedicated only to the memory of Jews or also to other victims of the Nazi regime. The discussion of this issue broke out in the beginning of the 1990s between Romani Rose, the chairman of the Roma and Sinti community in Germany, and Heinz Galinski and later Ignatz Bubis, who in 1992 succeeded Galinski as chairman of Germany’s Jewish community. Rose argued from the beginning that the omission of the Roma and Sinti people was an insult, because they belonged to the same category of Nazi victims as the Jews.

Whereas Habermas defended the plans of the Holocaust memorial by stressing that Germans should not abstract away from the specific significance of the Jews and of anti-semitism for German history and self-understanding, the author Günter Grass protested in

²⁸⁸ Later the same year, *Perspective Berlin* and the newly formed *Committee for the Erection of a Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe* were granted a location for the memorial on a property between Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz, close to the buried ruins of the Third Reich, including the Minister-garden and Hitler’s bunker. For the pre-history of the monument, see Bill Niven: 2002, p. 197-232; Siobhan Kattago: 2001 p. 141-151; Peter Reichel: 1995, p. 231-246.

October 1997 against the exclusion of Roma and Sinti, arguing that it would represent a continuation of Hitler's racial politics in terms of the hierarchy of victims.

This argument had already been launched by Reinhart Koselleck, who in a series of newspaper articles and interviews published between January 1997 and March 1999 emerged as the most persistent critic of a memorial devoted exclusively to the memory of the murdered Jews of Europe.²⁸⁹ Koselleck was not against the plan of a new national memorial, but hoped that the memorial could make up for the mistakes that in his opinion had been committed in relation to the *Neue Wache*. Before the opening of the latter memorial, Ignatz Bubis and the State Minister Anton Pfeifer from the CDU came to an agreement that two plaques should be placed at the entrance: one with an overview of the history of the building, and one with a text along the lines of the famous speech delivered by the President of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker on 8 May 1985.²⁹⁰ Yet, when the memorial was opened on 14 November 1993, it was given an inscription that takes virtually no account of the criticism directed against the first proposal. To begin with, encouraging the spectator to view war almost like a natural disaster, it allowed for a broad definition of victims. Moreover, although it mentions the murdered Jews, Sinti and Roma, the inscription, it has been said, "is in the first instance a tribute to those Germans who died at the front, in bombing raids, or when fleeing the eastern territories before and after May 1945", while it "in good anti-communist tradition, fails to mention the Russians and Poles."²⁹¹

This solution deeply disappointed Koselleck,²⁹² who was against the idea of only commemorating one group of victims in the Holocaust Memorial. Why, he asked in the article *Erschlichener Rollentausch* from April 1997,²⁹³ should the memorial not commemorate all the victims – including the Sinti and the Roma; the three and half million Russian prisoners of

²⁸⁹ See Reinhart Koselleck: "Vier Minuten für die Ewigkeit", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9/1-1997; "Erschlichener Rollentausch", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9/4-1997; "Die falsche Ungeduld", *Die Zeit*, 19/3-1998; "Die Widmung", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3/3-1999; [Reinhart Koselleck]: "Denkmäler sind Stolpersteine" (Interview), *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 6., 1997, p. 190-192.

²⁹⁰ Delivered on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II Weizsäcker's soon world famous speech entitled *End of the War in Europe and of National Socialist Tyranny* was the most important speech about the crimes of the Nazi era since the 1950s. In the speech, attempting to dispense with sentimentalism and manipulative public relations, Weizsäcker called May 8th a day of both defeat and liberation. This contradictory statement was meant to honor the memory of all victims of war and tyranny and also to emphasize the singularity of the Holocaust.

²⁹¹ See Bill Niven: 2002, p. 200.

²⁹² See Koselleck's remark in Andreas Seibel, Sigfried Weichlein: 13/11-1993 – "Mein persönliches Engagement erklärt sich daraus, daß ich seit 20 Jahren Kriegerdenkmäler international vergleichend untersuche. Der Vergleich mit den andere Ländern zeigt, wie andere Nationen ihren Totenkult pflegen und wie mies medioker, provinziell und sentimental bei uns die historische Wahrheit unterdrückt wird, die anzuerkennen Teil unserer Selbstbewußtsein, die uns weiterführen können."

²⁹³ Reinhart Koselleck: 9/4-1997.

war; the millions of killed non-Jewish Poles; the hundreds of thousands murdered in the Balkans, in Greece, in Italy, in the Western and Nordic countries; the millions of dead in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia; the homosexuals; the victims of Euthanasia; and those killed for political and religious reasons? In his eyes, the principle of uniqueness was applicable to several groups of victims of Nazi violence, and he saw therefore no moral or political reason to commemorate exclusively the Jews.

According to Koselleck, there were only two responsible solutions to the memorial: either to give to all groups their own memorial or to construct a single memorial for all those who were murdered by the Nazis. Koselleck preferred the latter solution and justified it by means of reasserting his belief that the German nation had a special obligation to ensure the realization of a memorial for the totality of terror during the Nazi regime was realized. In the article *Die Widmung* from March 1999, he wrote:

“As a nation of perpetrators (*Täternation*) constructing a national memorial in Berlin, we have the duty to remember everybody. And as perpetrators, we should not take upon ourselves to define a hierarchy of victims. Neither many individual memorials nor an ensemble of different memorials for various groups can provide what is needed: to found a comprehensive memorial for the totality of crimes committed by the National Socialists.”²⁹⁴

While Koselleck’s interventions did not have any influence on the 1999 decision taken by the Bundestag concerning the Holocaust Memorial, they were generally positively received in the debate as well as in the later literature about the topic.²⁹⁵ However, some of his suggestions also met with critique. This was first of all the case with his plea that Germany and the Germans should take responsibility for the victims of World War II and National Socialism upon them. The suggestion was criticized by a number of commentators, who pointed to that the majority of the Germans participating in erecting the memorial were too young to have been involved with National Socialism and thus could hardly be assigned political responsibility in a direct sense.²⁹⁶ Still, Koselleck insisted on a special German

²⁹⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: 1999.

²⁹⁵ This was especially the case with his suggestion to commemorate all victim-groups???. However, it should be remembered that Ignatz Bubis was deeply dissatisfied with the way in which Koselleck had portrayed his role and the role the Jewish community in the debate. See Ignatz Bubis: “Holocaust-Mahnmal: Eine Replik auf Reinhart Koselleck“, *Die Zeit*, Nr. 15, 1998, in which Bubis objected to how, in the article *Die falsche Ungeduld*, Koselleck had referred to a rumor that Chancellor Kohl had promised Ignatz Bubis the construction of a Holocaust memorial for the Jews in return for Bubis’ presence at the opening of the Neue Wache.

²⁹⁶ See for example Ruprecht Kampe: “Befremdliches bei Koselleck“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12/3-1999; Eduard Huber: “Koselleck macht es sich mit den Deutschen zu einfach“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13/3-1999. This point of critique was also raised against Koselleck by the historian Ernst Nolte. See Ernst Nolte: “Es war die Schuld die Ideologiestaaten“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2/9-1993, in which Nolte further argued that the origins of the ‘final solution’ lay not with anti-Semitism, but with an ideology that was supra-nationally conditioned and was taken to the extreme by one man, Hitler, who by 1940 functioned as the single

commemorative duty. Not an individual German”, he said already in an interview during the Neue Wache-debate, “but the sum of Germans, who acted under Hitler, are after all the Germans, whose legacy we have to compensate for in the Federal Republic.”²⁹⁷

With lines such as these, Koselleck not only argued against those who wanted to distinguish the Germans of the past from the Germans of the present, but diverged also from past trends that had reemerged after 2000 of dealing with the Nazi period from the perspective of the German victims, such as those who died in the Allied bombings or while fleeing the Red Army in the East. To be sure, Koselleck did not disagree with the fact that there had been many German victims between 1933 and 1945, but he continued to argue that the victims of the Nazi extermination should come in the first place, and that it is fundamentally wrong to level the Germans with this group of victims.

Primary experience vs. secondary memory

It is tempting to read Koselleck’s contributions to the memorial debates not only as scholarly based contributions to public discussions, but also as a series of direct personal attempts to cope with and rework his own experiences during and after the war. It is in this respect worth noting that his insistence on a special German responsibility to commemorate twentieth-century war and violence is better illuminated with reference to the autobiographical texts that he published in the 1990s than with reference to the scholarly texts that he published before the debate. In fact, neither his interventions in the memorial-debates nor the theoretical-methodological texts on memory and identity that he published in the 1990s can be understood without taking into account these texts. “Even when he spoke on the highest level of abstraction about forms of experience and remembrance, also in relation to historiography”, Willibald Steinmetz has written to illuminate this relation in Koselleck’s writings, “his own experience was the touchstone upon which all theory had to stand its test.”²⁹⁸

Nowhere is this relation more obvious than in Koselleck’s most famous autobiographical text “Glühende Lava, zur Erinnerung geronnen”, which he published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in the beginning of May 1995, in relation to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of May 8. This text not only connected different parts of his writings on

ruler of Germany. Nolte moreover argued that the terror and the violent death of the twentieth century cannot be explained with reference to categories such as the ‘Germans’ or the ‘Russians’, but only with reference to ‘ideology’ and ‘ideological states’. He therefore pleaded for an inscription that would refer first of all to ideological states, and which allegedly spared the Pietà from what he called Koselleck’s one-dimensionally negative national concept of Germany.

²⁹⁷ Ulrich Schmidt: 30/10-1993.

²⁹⁸ Willibald Steinmetz: 2006, p. 427.

war experiences, it also linked his identities as being a scholar in the field and a survivor of war.²⁹⁹ “Glühende Lava, zur Erinnerung geronnen” begins with a description of how Koselleck’s experience of the first days of May 1945 differed from the experiences of many other Germans. Hence, when the bells signaling peace rang on 9 May 1945, the war did not end for Koselleck, as he was in Russian captivity and soon began a long walk towards Auschwitz together with his fellow German prisoners of war. According to Koselleck, the name and the existence of the camp was unknown to him, before he arrived at the camp and was told by the Russians that millions had been gassed and killed in Birkenau. While initially, and like most of his fellow captives, Koselleck believed this information to be Soviet propaganda, he soon became spontaneously convinced that it was correct.

What convinced him was an incident in the camp with a former Polish inmate, who was now taking care of the surveillance of the German prisoners of war and urged them to work faster in the kitchen. Suddenly, he took a stool and raised it into the air, to hit Koselleck in the head, but he then stopped and said: “Why should I smash your head? – You gassed Millions” – and, full of anger, he threw instead the stool on the ground. Koselleck described his reaction to the incident in the following way: “It struck me – literally – that he spoke the truth. Gassed? Millions? That could not have taken place.”

These lines deserve attention for two reasons. First, because they connect to Koselleck’s interventions in the memorial-debates, as they seemingly describe how the issue of a special German responsibility of the crimes committed during World War II was one that he had been confronted with – and convinced about – on a very personal level. If linked to his interventions in the memorial debates, his plea to the Germans to take upon them the responsibility and in a moral way also the guilt for crimes committed in the name of National Socialism, appear as a generationally and individually conditioned and motivated attempt to master the heritage of National Socialism and reconcile Germany with the past.

Secondly, the cited lines are interesting because they serve to introduce an epistemological argument about the conditions of human experience and memory that came to occupy centre stage in Koselleck’s theoretical writings on these issues in the 1990s. He wrote:

“There are experiences that flow into the body like red-hot lava and petrify there. Irremovable, they can be retrieved at any time without changing. Few such experiences can be transformed into authentic memories; but when it happens, they are grounded in their sensorial [*sinnliche*] presence. The smell, the taste, the sound, the feeling and the visible surrounding, in short, all senses, in pleasure or pain”, are awakened and need no effort of the memory.”

²⁹⁹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1995.

Koselleck subsequently distinguished this kind of bodily experience from so-called linguistically communicated memory:

“Indeed, there are numerous memories that I have often mentioned and repeated, but whose true sensorial presence [*sinnliche Wahrheitspräsenz*] has vanished long ago. Even for me, they are merely literary stories: when I listen to myself, all I can do is to believe in them, but I can no longer vouch for their sensory-based [*sinnlichen*] certainty. However, many things belong to the unchangeable primary experience, the petrified lava.”

Summed up, what Koselleck introduced in “Glühende Lava, zur Erinnerung geronnen”, was an argument concerning a fundamental difference between a primary, bodily experience and a secondary, linguistic memory.³⁰⁰ The difference can be summarized as follows. According to Koselleck, the primary experience that is made via body impression maintains its truth-presence and absoluteness, and it can not be replaced or communicated. The linguistic memory, on the other hand, has to be maintained by means of being retold, but is bound to change and to lose its original meaning over time. As an elaboration of these differences, Koselleck again referred to Auschwitz. For him, what was experienced in Auschwitz in the early 1940s is only accessible via communicated memory, because he was not there. His primary experiences of war were made elsewhere, first of all in Russian captivity, where his body suffered the unforgettable impressions of what he described as “only hunger and constantly hunger, work and more work.”

In his theoretical-methodological writings on experience, memory and identity in the 1990s, Koselleck elaborated on this distinction between primary experience and secondary memory. This habitually took place in polemics against the notion of ‘collective memory’, which occupied a special place in field of historical memory in the 1980 and 1990s. The growth of this field in the mentioned period had first of all to do with the French historian Pierre Nora’s huge research project *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984-1993) in which Nora unfolded a theory concerning how collective memory is created and maintained within so called ‘realms of memory’ (*lieux de mémoire*).³⁰¹ In the wake the work of Nora and of scholars such as David Lowenthal, Raphael Samuel and Simon Schama, the amount of publications addressing historical memory virtually exploded. In the year 2000, the American expert in the field, Jay Winter, consequently spoke of a ‘memory boom’.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ See the excellent account of these issues in Koselleck’s article in Aleida Assmann: *Der Lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, München 2006, p. 127-128.

³⁰¹ Nora, Pierre (ed): *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3. vol, Paris 1984-1992.

³⁰² See Winter, Jay: “The generation of memory: reflections on the memory boom in contemporary historical studies,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 27, 2000, p. 69–92.

While Koselleck obviously found the study of experience and memory of great importance, he held deep reservations about the notion of collective memory. These reasons were first stated in the article “Erinnerungsschleusen und Erfahrungsgeschichten” from 1992; a text which was also informed by autobiographical experiences and concerns,³⁰³ even if these were not thematized directly. Koselleck began the text by stating that everyone is “familiar with breaking points in their biography, which seem to mark a transition to another chapter in life.”³⁰⁴ According to Koselleck, these breaks are related to the making of radically new experiences. He explained: “When such experiences are reworked, both the ways of acting and attitudes as well as the consciousness of these attitudes can change.”³⁰⁵

Koselleck then presented the two world wars as events that for many people resulted in ruptures of experience that were until then unthinkable, and he outlined a number of theoretical and methodological issues that he argued must be considered when studying the influence of the two world wars on the social consciousness. Most importantly, according to Koselleck, it is simply impossible to speak of a collective mentality or of experiences in a general sense. Instead, it is necessary to clarify the different ways in which people make their experiences and the different ways in which these experiences are subsequently reworked. In other words, to clarify to what extent experiences and memories can be shared, it is necessary to study the conditions in which they are made, structured and restructured.

For this analytical purpose, Koselleck made a distinction between so-called synchronic factors, which during a war determines the ways in which events can be experienced, and so-called diachronic factors that concern the subsequent reworking of the primary experience. In respect to the synchronic factors, he argued that historians must always pay attention both to the different ways in which human beings experience events during a war and to the different ways in which every human consciousness that afterwards reworks the experiences of war has been preconditioned beforehand. More concretely, he argued that human experiences of war depend on various preconditions such as linguistic traditions, religious and ideological beliefs, political relations, generational belonging, societal background and class-relation, all of which dispose the consciousness to different possibilities of experiencing the world. To these synchronic factors, Koselleck added the diachronic factors that concern the ways in which the

³⁰³ Reinhart Koselleck: “Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege auf das Soziale Bewußtsein“, Wolfram Wette (Hg.): *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärgeschichte von unten*, München 1992, p. 324-343 [later reprinted as “Erinnerungsschleusen und Erfahrungsschichten. Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege auf das soziale Bewußtsein“, Reinhart Koselleck, Reinhart: *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*. Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 265-286].

³⁰⁴ Reinhart Koselleck: 1992, p. 324.

³⁰⁵ Reinhart Koselleck: 1992, p. 324.

experienced events are filtrated and reworked once the war is over. Here Koselleck pointed to the question of whether a person belonged to the ‘winners’ or the ‘vanquished’ as the most important factor, but he also listed other factors by means of which experiences of war can be forgotten, reinterpreted and distorted, as new societal-political constellations are established.³⁰⁶

“Erinnerungsschleusen und Erfahrungsgeschichten” is typical of Koselleck’s attempts in the 1990s to deconstruct the notion of collective memory. These attempts represent a continuation of the mode of theorizing that Koselleck had pursued since the early 1950s. It was thus by emphasizing the anthropological and social conditions characterizing the human condition that he wanted to substitute the monolithic notion of collective memory with a definition of history as consisting of and unfolding in the interaction between a plurality of heterogeneous and non-convergent histories.

What was new in Koselleck’s writings on memory and experience in the 1990s was that his deconstruction of history in the singular, in this case the notion of collective memory, went hand in hand with and was made possible by a vigorous defense of the personal experience against overarching notions of collective memory. This was for example the case with the article “Gebrochene Erinnerung? Deutsche und polnische Vergangenheiten“ that Koselleck published in *Das Jahrbuch der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* in 2001.³⁰⁷ Elaborating on the argumentative lines from his earlier articles in the field, Koselleck stated in the text that memory encompasses a double meaning. On the one hand, memory exists as a primary and unchangeable individually made experience, which is impregnated in the body and therefore is incommunicable and irreplaceable. On the other hand, memory is often conceived as collective memory. As for the latter form of memory, Koselleck agreed that there are certain common conditions of possible experience that people can not escape, regardless of age, gender, confession, party membership or even nationality. However, he also argued that these experiences are always perceived and interpreted in different ways according to the backgrounds and dispositions of those making the experiences. In other words, according to Koselleck, in the same moment, experiences are made, a plurality of memories are made: there are consequently as many memories as there are people.

³⁰⁶ With a focus on war memorials, Koselleck finished the article with examples of the fact that death was one of the primary experiences of the two world wars that were assigned new meanings through the various practices of commemoration taking place after the wars.

³⁰⁷ Reinhart Koselleck: “Gebrochene Erinnerung? Deutsche und polnische Vergangenheiten”, *Das Jahrbuch der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung*, 2001, p. 19-32. A slightly different version of the text can be found in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 22-23/9-2001.

In line with his enduring critique of historical philosophy, Koselleck placed this perspective against the core problem that he saw in the notion of collective memory: that it requires a *Handlungssubjekt*, which must be remembered collectively, such as the idea of the people, the class, or the party, which serve to mobilize people for a certain cause. He wrote: “There is therefore a veto-right of the personal experience that blocks for any incorporation in a collective memory. And it is a part of the often (and often vainly) claimed human dignity, that every man has a right to a memory of his own. Such an entirely personal right to a memory offers protection against ideological indoctrination, against mental control and subjection.”

During the 1990s, as Koselleck frequently repeated his argument about the ‘veto-right of the personal experience’, it became increasingly clear that it was closely related to his personal past. A direct example of this is found in an interview conducted in 2005 in relation to the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of May 8, 1945. Here, with reference to his personal experiences in war, Koselleck unconditionally stated: “Every man has the right to have his own memory – that I will not allow to be collectivized.”³⁰⁸

What is interesting in Koselleck’s argument about the ‘veto-right of the personal experience’ is that it can be read as both a vital continuation of and a crucial break with his earlier work. On the one hand, it reiterated the claim to a pluralism of histories that he had pursued since the beginning of his scholarly career, and it corresponded to earlier theoretical assumptions that go in similar direction. An important issue is his insistence on the social as opposed to the linguistic, which is, at the end of the day, still an insistence on the social and not the individual, but has the same tendency to postulate a sort of authenticity and reality that is opposed to a view of the world shaped by language and linguistically induced errors. In some sense, what Koselleck expressed in all of his writings and accentuated in his texts on war experience was a deep distrust in language and discourse; a distrust that speaks to an famous tradition of modern thought (distrust in language, the insistence on the inexplicability of things, breakdown of communication) that is found in many different strands of scientific and fictional literature.

Yet because of its much more radical claim to pluralism Koselleck’s argument about the ‘veto-right of the personal experience’ can be read as a crucial break with his earlier work. This claim is first of all witnessed in his autobiographical texts such as “Glühende Lava, zur Erinnerung geronnen”. Here Koselleck expressed a wish to maintain his primary experience intact, in its original form and for himself, and he also portrayed primary experience as a more authentic, true and superior to other forms of experience. He wrote: “Today, I know more

³⁰⁸ Reinhart Koselleck: 2005.

than I could know back then, and I know things that I could not have known back then. And so it goes for later generations. But the incommunicability of knowledge made via primary experience cannot be overcome. To know is better than to know better.”

In short, when this epistemological and normative defence of the individual experience threatened to break with Koselleck’s earlier work, it is because it placed stronger, if not insurmountable constraints to the possibilities of writing a mode of history that is based on grand plots and generalized interpretations. While he continued to portray history as created in the social interaction between human beings, on the level of experience and memory, he described the outcome as something that cannot be shared or exist between human beings. That is, he described experiences and memories as histories that cannot become history and thus came close to a relativistic standpoint according to which every experience can only be considered and understood on its own terms.

However, while it is possible to decipher from Koselleck’s autobiographical writings a radical and relativist position according to which history is composed by a multiplicity of histories that cannot be related, this position is undermined, or at least blurred by a different position that he conveyed in his autobiographical writings and pursued in theoretical texts. Hence, in “Glühende Lava, zur Erinnerung geronnen”, Koselleck’s categorical distinction between primary and secondary memory was, as we have seen, accompanied by a set of reflections on the way in which some of his primary experiences of World War II had lost their exactness and authenticity, as they had been communicated and thus transformed into literary stories the certainty of which he began to be unsure of himself (“Even for me, they are merely literary stories: when I listen to myself, all I can do is to believe in them, but I can no longer vouch for their sensory-based [*sinnlichen*] certainty“). Here, as pointed out by Willibald Steinmetz, Koselleck described language as a medium by means of which primary experience will always be transformed:

“Language itself, as a repertoire of pre-given concepts, metaphors, narrative patterns and ways of speaking, does not allow an entirely individual articulation of experience: by means of the linguistic communication of experience, in the linguistic communication of experience, the individual to some extent gives up the sovereignty of the personal memory.”³⁰⁹

In his theoretical writings, Koselleck elaborated on this unavoidable merging of different modes of experiences and memories taking place through the human *Miteinandersein* and *Miteinandersprechen*. This is for example the place in “Gebrochene Erinnerung?”, in which he thematized the notion of secondary memory and its foundations in communicative

³⁰⁹ Willibald Steinmetz: 2006, p. 429.

practices. According to Koselleck, going in time and space beyond the primary experience, secondary memory is generated in schools, in families, and by historians, who can rationally check the facts of the given memory, but who are always in ongoing competition with other producers of memory such as the churches, parties, organizations, and authors and artists. “They all form and influence the pictures of a past“, he wrote of secondary memory, “that claims a making or a keeping of memory”.³¹⁰

Even if it introduced notions that described the conditions of possible history somewhat differently, this way of theorizing is compatible with Koselleck’s earlier work. Based on his fundamental idea of a historical space in which people interact and create histories, his distinction between primary experience and secondary memory and his assumptions concerning the interaction between the two might even be interpreted as a new way of thematizing the creation of history in the interaction between different temporal layers.

However, in contrast to his previous attempts to theorize the existence of *Zeitschichten*, Koselleck expressed discontent with the merging of primary experience and secondary memory. This was especially the case in his autobiographical writings and is nowhere as evident as in the earlier mentioned 1999 article “Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung”, which was based on a speech that he gave at a conference about the National Socialist dictatorship taking place at the department of philosophy the University of Heidelberg on 27 January 1999, in relation to the National Memorial Day for the victims of National Socialism.³¹¹ What is special about “Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung” is not only the somewhat chaotic fashion in which it merged basically all the points raised in his previous writings in the field and hence directly connected his autobiographical experiences to his scholarly theory. It is also the strong opinions that he passed on the memories of World War II in post-war German society and the pessimism that he expressed about the possibilities of explaining, communicating and represented what happened between 1933 and 1945.

Koselleck began the article by using his personal experiences of war to argue that every secondary memory represents a discontinuity of primary experience. With reference to this argument, he not only explained the conflict between the 68ers and their parents, but also lamented the moral critique that the children launched against parents. According to Koselleck, this critique was off the mark, since the 68ers did not understand the complex nature of the primary experience made between 1933 and 1945. Here he recapitulated his defence of primary experience using phrases that were also informed by a moral judgement:

³¹⁰ Reinhart Koselleck: 2001, p. 21.

³¹¹ Reinhart Koselleck: 1999, p. 213-222.

“To know is better than to know better. It is easy to know better. It is hard to know.”³¹²

As he then ventured into a discussion of what was known of the Nazi crimes in the period of National Socialism, he suggested that most Germans had only a fragmentary knowledge of these crimes and stated that he himself knew nothing and felt betrayed when he learned of them after the war, just as he felt discontent with the ways in which primary experiences of National Socialism and war had been reinterpreted in erroneous ways in the period after 1945. Among the examples that Koselleck mentioned in this respect was the fact that the experience of the German ‘capitulation’ had been reinterpreted into a secondary memory of a German ‘liberation’ that portrayed the Germans as victims. It was against this background that he introduced three modes of memory through which the Nazi crimes are addressed: the scientific, the moral and the religious. While Koselleck recognized the need for all the three forms of memory, he argued, as mentioned, that the crimes defy all efforts to grasp them scientifically or morally, or atone for them through religion. More concretely, according to Koselleck, the scientific explanation would be subject to permanent overexertion in order to explain the unexplainable; the moral judgment would not gain in strength through repetition; and the religious would make no sense for the non-Christians. Hence, all three explanatory modes lead to ‘the aporia’ and the obligation of remembering it, which means bypassing all models and narratives that aim to explain or make sense of the Nazi crimes.

Finally, at the end of the article, Koselleck related his discussion of the relation between experience and memory to the contemporary Holocaust Memorial-debate and argued once again for a memorial form that included all victims of the Nazi crimes and portrayed the Germans as perpetrators, and not as victims, a so-called *Tätermal*. He wrote: “A *Tätermal*, that reminds us, who has to carry the responsibility for the killings, the annihilations and the gassings. We have to learn to live with this memory.”³¹³

Evidently, these lines testify to Koselleck’s commitment in respect to finding a way to represent and commemorate the crimes of National Socialism in an appropriate way. More generally, “Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung” points to the many theoretical, epistemological, moral, political, personal and emotional issues that were involved in his writings on experience, memory and identity and to how the arguments of the scholar and those of the survivor of war were inseparable and characterized by tensions.³¹⁴

³¹² Reinhart Koselleck: 1999, p. 214.

³¹³ Reinhart Koselleck: 1999.

³¹⁴ For a detailed (and different) perspective on and critique of these tensions, see Gabriel Motzkin: “Moralische Antwort und Diskontinuität der Erinnerung, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Nr. 47, Vol. 6, 1023-1031. Motzkin’s article was related to the philosopher Schlomo Avineri’s decision to resign from the journal’s editorial

More generally, for Koselleck, to deal with National Socialism was to deal with 'negative memories',³¹⁵ and even if reflecting on the autobiographical helped him rework personal traumas, there can be no doubt that, in his writings on experience and memory he encountered a number of epistemological and moral issues that he found difficult and painful to deal with. Hence, his writings in this field remained characterized by a degree of ambiguity, hesitance and incompleteness that is not found in his work in other fields.

It should in addition be stressed that Koselleck's interest in memory matters was selective. Most of his respective writings were focused on World War II and seem to concern his own experiences and traumas. It was also in this context that his insistency of authenticity became a frequent and central motive of his writings and his diffidence regarding linguistic representations was expressed in the most uncompromising terms. It is in this respect noteworthy that he never aimed at what one might call an extensive and detailed representation, neither in the form of an academic analysis nor in the form of a comprehensive account of his personal experiences. After all, when Koselleck spoke of his war experience, he always structured his narratives around the same few, selected key events, which all took place in 1945 and 1946, thus roughly leaving out detailed perspectives on his various experiences in the years between 1941 and 1945. While it is difficult to say whether this was because of un-reworked traumas or because all his most imposing primary experiences took place after 8 May 1945, it is obvious that his war-narrative was deeply embedded in his thought as a totality and in his personality as a scholar and a public intellectual.

Accordingly, it is also worth stressing that the field of memory politics is virtually the only one in which Koselleck seriously attempted to become a public intellectual and to shape the present and influence the future, which he had defined a key ambition of his historical writing already in the 1950s. On the one hand, the strong rhetoric concerning these issues in his early writings contrasts the after all limited attempts he made at influencing social-political conditions by means of partaking directly in the public debate taking place outside the realms of academia. On the other, Koselleck's choice not to link science directly to politics was certainly in accordance with the scholarly program for which he had laid the foundations in the 1950s.

board as a reaction to its decision to publish Koselleck's article. As a reaction to Avineri's reaction, the editorial found it appropriate to find an author (Motzkin), who was willing to critically evaluate Koselleck's article. What Motzkin first of all criticizes, and what triggered Avineri's reaction, was an 'emotional stance' that they detected in Koselleck's text; an emotional stance, which, according to Motzkin and Avineri, informs the entire text without being explicitly thematized, and which in their opinion leads to a questionable moral stance.

³¹⁵ See also Reinhart Koselleck: "Formen und Traditionen des negativen Gedächtnis" Volkhard Knigge, Norbert Frei (Hg.): *Verbrechen Erinnern: Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*, München 2002, p. 21-32.

8. The foundations and the future of Koselleck's scholarly program

It has been the main assumption of this study that Koselleck's program was structured around a set of epistemological assumptions, theoretical-methodological tools and political ideals, which were aimed at deconstructing all utopian and relativist notions of history in the singular with view to a notion of history in the plural. This aim and the related analytical features were portrayed as a unifying pattern and a common objective in his varied body of work.

If, during more than half a century, Koselleck sought to deconstruct all utopian and relativist notions of history in the singular and subject these to epistemological and ideological critique, it was because he was convinced that both notions drew on theoretically-methodologically naïve and politically dangerous assumptions about history and politics that misunderstood the basic conditions of the 'humanly possible'. In short, according to Koselleck, relativism and utopianism were based on historical-philosophical visions of history as a progressive and unified totality that has an inherent meaning and can be understood, planned and realized according to overarching schemes and models.

In his lifelong attempt to establish understandings of and approaches to science and politics that go beyond utopianism and relativism, Koselleck insisted that history must be plural, and that it must be written from viewpoints that are also plural. This involved delineating (non-relativistic) stable, common viewpoints from which historical change could be described and (non-utopian) parameters of judgment on the basis of which the past and the present could be discussed. In this manner, Koselleck's program comprised at the same time a scientific-epistemological and a practical-political dimension.

Both dimensions were visible when Koselleck launched his program in the early 1950s by outlining a set of anthropological categories with which he wanted to redefine what history is and how it can be studied. His aim with these categories was to describe the basic frames and dynamics that create and structure all human history. They were supposed to sketch out fundamental and formalistic characteristics of human nature that must be considered in every historical analysis. At the same time, the categories point to the ways in which history unfolds in the interaction between plural histories that emerge as human beings realise the potential that the categories imperfectly lay out. Koselleck's program aimed to take account of the social relations existing among human beings and set pluralism against utopianism and relativism in order to understand (historically) and contain (politically) the potential conflict in human societies.

Analytically, Koselleck wanted to integrate a plurality of histories into narrative forms of

writing history that include generalizations and overarching interpretations, while bypassing historical philosophical notions of unity, progress and meaning. Koselleck pursued this ambition through a variety of different categories, statements and hypotheses, which he used with shifting degrees of clarity and consistency and with variable degrees of success in the course of his career. Not only was his historical writing constantly in flux; it also had a somewhat unsystematic character. This lack of theoretical system was partly explained with reference to his intellectual temperament and partly with reference to his belief in perspectival plurality in historical writing. While outlining a variety of platforms and starting points that he considered indispensable and productive for all historical writing, Koselleck believed that historical writing is about developing a plurality of theories and methods with which historians can illuminate the specific problems at stake in the most effective way.

The interpretation of Koselleck was carried out with an analytical focus on what was labelled the *processes of reception* and the *making of the historian*. Examining the *processes of reception* involved an analysis of how and why Koselleck positioned himself towards various discursive fields and of the ways in which his reception of these fields merged deliberate appropriation and involuntary formation. Examining the *making of the historian* involved an analysis of how Koselleck became a historian within given societal and institutional norms and practices in a dialogue through which he defined his ideas of history and historical writing. Altogether, this entailed a focus on how his experiences of intellectual, social and political contexts shaped his appropriation of discourses and construction of texts and a focus on the ways in which he was received by his surroundings.

The first analytical chapter followed Koselleck through his various 'educations' in the German *Bildungsbürgertum*, in World War II and at the University of Heidelberg and examined how he interpreted and wrote his experiences into a set of autobiographical, generational and academic discourses with which he shaped his self-representation, his academic personality, and his historical writing. Out of Koselleck's 'educations' came an cultivated, intelligent and open-minded scholar, who, due to being disillusioned by his experiences in the war and in Russian captivity, was and remained focused on the possibility of crisis, conflict and war, on change and contingency, and nurtured a deep skepticism towards long-term planning, morality and belief in societal progress.

The following chapter illuminated Koselleck's attempt in his dissertation *Kritik und Krise* to explain the roots of the modern political world and to provide solutions to the scientific and political crises that he perceived as marking the 1950s. It also demonstrated the ways in which his reception of scholars such as Karl Löwith, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger and Friedrich

Meinecke was important for his attempt to develop a new anthropologically-based understanding of history. This understanding was centred on a set of counter-concepts and premised on the idea that history must be plural; its aim was to provide a formalistic way to understand history and to contain the potential for conflict in human societies. This idea, and its related analytical discursive features, came to provide Koselleck's writings with a certain analytical, thematic and argumentative unity. The chapter also showed how Koselleck sought to construct an identity and a position as an innovator and thus as an outsider to the academic field, and how, due to the initial reception of *Kritik und Krise*, his eventual reputation as an outsider was shaped in ways that he neither desired nor controlled. All this took place without his attempt to renew the theoretical-methodological foundations of the discipline being explicitly presented to or discussed by the field.

The third chapter first showed how, in the mid-1950s onwards, Koselleck developed a theory of the historical dynamics of political geography and thus added to his arguments concerning the need to respect the 'humanly possible' and expanded his analytical framework more generally. It then examined how, when he became affiliated with, learned and refined Werner Conze's social-historical program, Koselleck reshaped himself into a more conventional and respected scholar in the field from the late 1950s onwards.

The next chapter illuminated, how, in the early 1970s, with the launching of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Koselleck gradually became known as an innovative and influential scholar; a scholar, who moved on the theoretical-methodological forefront of the discipline, and who facilitated the careers of other scholars by hiring them for his project. It also showed the ways in which Koselleck's approach to conceptual history as practiced in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* represented lines of continuation and change in his work. The most important changes concerned a reduction in the tension between history in the singular and in the plural in his work and a more elaborated conceptual-political approach with which he sought to counter the 'ideologization' and 'politicization' of the social-political language.

The fifth chapter examined how Koselleck reacted to the various developments taking place in German society and in the historical profession in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Particular attention was paid to Koselleck's attempt to develop a theory of historical times, and to the ways in which, from the 1950s to the 1980s, by pursuing a theory of *Zeitschichten*, he began to focus increasingly on the question of how histories in plural can actually be written. Moreover, it was demonstrated that Koselleck's texts on the theoretical-methodological conditions of historical writing from the same period were informed by a plea for a plurality of perspectives and by a position towards theoretical-methodological matters

that might be labelled as cautiously constructive. In addition, the chapter outlined how during his time in Bielefeld Koselleck became an increasingly established scholar, but also a somewhat marginalized outsider-figure at the department and in the historical profession. Koselleck's marginalization had to do with developments in the field and with his reactions to these developments. Finally, it was demonstrated that, even after he was broadly recognized as an influential and important scholar, also outside of Germany, Koselleck still thought of himself as an academic outsider.

The sixth and last analytical chapter dealt with Koselleck's writings on experiences of war, violence and terror written from the late 1970s onwards. It showed that his reflections on the epistemological and moral questions in the field were characterized by a remarkable degree of ambiguity and hesitance that is not found in his work in other fields. It also demonstrated that his texts in this field were connected by means of a discursive feature with which he sought to deconstruct ideas of history in the singular and thematize histories in the plural from a new perspective. This discursive feature was based on an interpretation of the Holocaust as a radical rupture in history, which, with its extreme violence and suffering, caused a loss of meaning in human history and posed new challenges to how experienced reality can be communicated and understood. In addition, it was demonstrated that his writings in this field involved a change of focus from the collective to the individual that was followed by a defense of the individual experience against notions of collective memory. This shift of focus was in turn accompanied by a merging of identities in that Koselleck began to draw his analytical framework and normative principles not only from his scholarly work, but also from his personal experiences of war and captivity.

The overall ambition of the present study was to explain Koselleck's historical writing. It was not to provide an extensive view of his life. At many points, from the presupposition that meaning is always constructed in a dynamic activity that involves social experience, reading and writing, the chapters were organized in a compromise between chronology and themes. Altogether, this mode of analysis amounted to a sort of scientific biography that focused on points of rupture as well as the unifying patterns that characterized the different texts and periods of Koselleck's long career.

Nonetheless, in a way, the present study also suggests a clear trajectory: over the course of the 1950s, Koselleck had worked on a set of problems raised by the experiences and the politics of the day as well as by the theoretical debates and preoccupations of his Heidelberg teachers. In the 1960s, he moved away from those problems under the influence of Conze and the concerns of disciplinary history, retaining but downplaying large parts of the conceptual

foundations that had been established previously. After the activities of the 1960s had assumed a rigid, nearly institutional character in the form of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Koselleck returned first towards the theoretical concerns of his earlier projects, for which the concrete historical work he had by then conducted proved highly useful. Finally, with the distance of many decades, in a careful and often still implicit fashion, he turned towards the once burning, now 'frozen lava' of his personal experiences.

Still, this apparent biographical plot-line must be treated with caution. Primarily, it is the outcome of a feature of Koselleck's intellectual projects, which were far-reaching and complex, so that they never quite reached a state of conclusion, remaining open for returns and revisions. Arguably, it was even characteristic of his ambitions that he worked in such a manner as to create a unified (though not properly systematic) intellectual biography for himself. Since the present study was predominantly based on published works and sources that related nearly exclusively to this intellectual biography, it mirrored those properties of Koselleck's intellectual activity. However, this could not be, and was not, a biographical perspective proper. Such a perspective, in his case, remains unexplored. Still, it is likely to reveal more rupture, discontinuity and fragmentation than the present study seems to imply.

While Koselleck's program, habitus and career as a scholar was in many ways unique, the main objective of his program evidently transcends his life and work. To explain (historically) and contain (politically) the latent prospects of violent conflict in human societies is a challenge that has always and will continue to occupy human beings. Still, there is no doubt that Koselleck has offered us an extraordinarily comprehensive, multi-faceted and applicable set of analytical assumptions and tools to meet this challenge via an analysis of where we come from, what our current situation is and what the future holds for us. The temporal, spatial and linguistic dimensions of the sweeping crisis-consciousness informing the global economy, the deep-seated and radical friend-enemy constellations in the Middle-East; and the increasing antagonism between the *ungleichzeitige* phenomena of increasing globalization and nationalism are just three out of many examples of burning contemporary issues that theories and methods from Koselleck's vast oeuvre might help us understand. Indeed, the occasion for a broader and more comprehensive reception and discussion of his work has far from passed; it might even be expected in the future.

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