

Rethinking the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous. Reinhart Koselleck's approach



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Abstract

The analysis of the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous formulates myriad aspects for the philosophy of history. The simultaneous presence of numerous dimensions of times provides us with the possibility of reformulating our relationship with historicity and therefore, the ways in which we read past events. In this essay we aim to explore this core notion proceeding in three steps. Firstly, we will introduce the main theoretical basis, which comes to the foreground in Koselleck's work. Secondly, in order to grasp the *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, we will track its connotations. Thirdly, we will distill the most significant implication of the concept in order to suggest both that this term demonstrates an interwoven between the *Begriffsgeschichte* and the *Historik*, trying to explore its possible uses.

Keywords

Koselleck
contemporaneity of the
noncontemporaneous
conceptual history
prognosis

Repensando la contemporaneidad de lo no contemporáneo. La mirada de Reinhart Koselleck

Resumen

El análisis de la contemporaneidad de lo no contemporáneo formula prolíficos aspectos para la filosofía de la historia. La presencia simultánea de numerosas dimensiones temporales nos otorga la posibilidad de reformular nuestra relación con la historicidad y por lo tanto, con los modos en que leemos los eventos pasados. En este trabajo buscaremos explorar esta noción central mediante tres pasos. En primer lugar, introduciremos la principal base teórica en la que interviene el trabajo de Koselleck. En segundo lugar, rastreadremos las connotaciones de la no contemporaneidad en su obra. En tercer lugar, analizaremos sus implicancias más relevantes, para sugerir que este término muestra una copertenencia entre la historia conceptual y su *Historik*, al tiempo que buscaremos explorar sus posibles usos.

Palabras clave

Koselleck
contemporáneo de lo no
contemporáneo
historia conceptual
prognosis

I. Introduction

Reinhart Koselleck reconsiders the concept of the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* (the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous) in many of his works, aiming to affirm the coexistence of various present times and the possibility that men have of inhabiting more than one simultaneously. Within this framework, Koselleck, founder of the *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history), proposes a theory comprised of three points, which we will here seek to explore. First, in his strong criticism of progress as a vector. His analysis of the distinction between the terms *Historie* and *Geschichte* allows him to delve deeper into the notion of linearity, associated with history. The formula itself *Philosophie der Geschichte* (philosophy of history) is strongly marked by a directionality capable of organizing events according to their temporal succession. Since the influence of German idealism, and more specifically of Hegelianism, the direction that would drive that deployment was placed in the center of the scene. In contrast, and as a reaction, Koselleck affirms not only a nonsensical history, but a *Sinnlosigkeit* (meaninglessness), an idea that constitutes a critique and a deep displacement in the ways historicity is formulated.

Secondly, the simultaneity of the non-simultaneity comes to the foreground in the methodological program of conceptual history. In his acclaimed book *Vergangene Zukunft* [*Futures Past*], Koselleck asserts that concepts are not just tracers of historical conditions that belong to different moments, but also adequate parameters to anticipate possible experiences. That is to say that by creating linguistic realities, they operate on the extra-linguistic. Through both functions it is therefore possible to record temporary mismatches in situations that may or may not be linguistically articulated and that may or may not have social support. Thus, we can access the identification of social struggle where reappropriations of the meanings of words take place.

Finally, in an anthropological study of experiences, Koselleck proposes to think of temporality by means of the *Zeitschichten* (time strata). This category involves a theoretical anticipation that provides us with the opportunity to place on the same plane diverse contents from multiple periods. Instead of excluding repetition and directionality, the layers of time integrate them. Giving place to an alternative that contemplates a variety of speeds and coexistences, this geological metaphor offers an alternative to the ways in which we can be oriented in and by history.

But which role does this notion play in his theoretical proposal? Does it have an actuality? This essay will deal with this triple approach so as to characterize Koselleck's contribution to the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*. In order to achieve this, we will proceed in three steps, which will allow us to claim that the aforementioned concept unfolds a necessary relationship between conceptual history and the theory of historical times. First, we will offer a set of conceptual definitions useful to understand the theoretical grounds of the noncontemporaneous. Second, we will distill Koselleck's references to this idea in his publications and we will describe this phenomenon in two sections. Finally, we suggest that this *Denkfigur* can help us to analyze both sides of Koselleck's theoretical point of view that will raise new ways in which this concept can perform a political productivity. In brief, this article moves on to indicate that the articulation of his *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) and his *Historik*, a general theory of history, helps us not only to analyze the implications of the semantic events, but also the experiential conditions that make possible the emergence of certain terms.

II. Brief Conceptual Definitions

Two texts can help us introduce the main theoretical premises from Koselleck's work, essential to understanding the context in which the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* take place, namely: *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit des Geschichtswissenschaft* [*On the Need for Theory in the Discipline of History*], which is an important and much quoted chapter of *Zeitschichten* and the introduction of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* [GG, *Basic Concepts in History: A Historical Dictionary of Political and Social Language in Germany*], published in the first volume of the dictionary in 1972.¹ The first thing we need to know is that Koselleck make a plaidoyer for a theory in which historical investigation must rely. Actually, the entire project of a *Begriffsgeschichte* cannot exist without it. These theoretical reflections entail certain methodological advantages; for instance, they avoid the isolation of history in relation with other disciplines and therefore, displays the specificity of history:

In other words, only a theoretical anticipation that uncovers a specific time period can open the possibility of working through certain readings and transposing our dictionary from the level of positivistic recording to that of a conceptual history. Only theory transforms our work into historical research (Koselleck, 2002a: 6).

That said, Koselleck develops specific terms to elucidate the birth of concepts. This happens between 1750 and 1850 with a series of mutations that forged the foundations of Modernity, when key changes for political thought occurred. At this very point take place the struggles for the meaning of concepts and after the *Sattelzeit* (saddle period)² or the *Schwelienzeit* (threshold period), the modern sense of a number of terms was set. In Koselleck words:

Concepts registering this change became 'Janus-faced': facing backwards, they pointed to social and political realities no longer intelligible to us without critical commentary; facing forward to our own time, concepts have taken on meanings that may not need further explication to be directly intelligible to us. From this point on, we understand and conceptualize simultaneously (Koselleck, 2011: 9).

The attention is hence focused on a crisis, on the basis of which anachronisms are derived. As a consequence, the category of Modernity can be, as Peter Osborne stated, functional to periodization because on the one hand, it shows the chronological change between two moments, and on the other, it indicates a new way of dealing with historical time which, *eo ipso*, according to the author, unveils central significance:

This differential forms the basis for the transformation, in the late eighteenth century, in the meaning of the concepts of 'progress' and 'development', that makes them the precursors of later, twentieth-century concepts of modernization. For it is the idea which thus develops, of the noncontemporaneity of geographically diverse but chronologically simultaneous times that in the context of colonial experience, becomes the basis for 'universal histories with a cosmopolitan intent' (Osborne, 1992: 75)³.

The arrival of the *Neuzeit* (Modernity) reveals also a distance between the *Erfahrungsraum* (space of experience) and the *Erwartungshorizont* (horizon of expectation).⁴ Both metahistorical categories do not offer a historical characterization but keep their denomination in suspense because they are not tied to any particular reality. Based on a confessed Heideggerian existential anthropology, these two categories "help to give purchase on the paradoxes latent in the dimensions of time -present, past and future- as well as to underwrite interpretative 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer) with the radically alien" (Zammito, 2004: 128). However, they seem to have a particular

1. Translations in English are available. See Koselleck (2002a) and Koselleck (2011).

2. There is a broad discussion above this concept, where Koselleck answers to Pocock's critics. See Pocock (1996) and Koselleck (1996). There are as well many comments of renowned specialist over the concept of *Sattelzeit*. See G. Motzkin, (2005) and Jordheim (2011b). In his last work, Palti (2017) offers a critical point of view as well: "In this way, his *Begriffsgeschichte* overlooks the series of profound and radical conceptual changes that occurred both before and after the *Sattelzeit*, providing a rather flat picture of both the premodern and the modern period. Even more importantly, it also precludes the correct understanding of the conceptual break he analyzed, that is, what really changes at that moment (the *Sattelzeit*) and how the kind of rupture it brought about was possible" (2-3).

3. The relationship of Koselleck's proposal with periodization is also analyzed by Jordheim (2012) and Pérez López (2018).

4. For a sharp comment on the definition and the emergence of Modernity, see Hunt (2008), where the author also takes into account Koselleck's portrayal. An interesting survey is also offered by Osborne (1992), who reconstructs the abstract definition of the *Neuzeit* formulated by Koselleck distilling also some of the debates of Perry Anderson's 'Modernity and Revolution'.

connection with each other, since there is no possible experience without expectation or possible expectation without experience. At the same time, both refer to “the universal human condition,” due to a specific particularity: without them it is not possible to think of history. The links forged by memory and hope evidence the implication between the historical representation and the past; that is to say that they indicate a variable temporality between past and present, and present and future. Koselleck’s hypothesis describes this relationship, mediated by the idea of prognosis, by maintaining that both tend to not coincide in Modernity.

The intersection point between a future full of hope and the tradition from which our experiences come from brings changes in the perceptions of the world. These mismatches in the ways in which people’s hopes and utopias are represented and their concrete practices highlight a variety of alterations. Our author summarizes them in four: the *Demokratisierung* (democratization), the *Verzeitlichung* (temporalization), the *Ideologisierung* (ideologization) and the *Politisierung* (politicization). The first one expresses that there is an expansion in the use of terms, in the sense that they are, from that time on, extended to new sectors of the population. The second discloses the influence of the character of the non-static processes in which concepts are deployed. The third one points to the openness to abstract meanings that imposes singular form rather than plural for some nouns such as “freedom” and “history.” The fourth suggests that the manifestation of the use of concepts with political connotations as weapons in certain conflicts.

In parallel, a semantic battle emerges over the meanings of concepts, an operation that Koselleck denominates *Kampfbegriff*. These conflicts represent the encounter of antagonistic powers disputing the hegemony of concepts, which, by the way, do not to carry any kind of neutrality. In relation to this point and the work of the historian, Koselleck states the following:

If the historian transforms these residues into sources providing testimony for the history he seeks knowledge of, then he is operating on two levels. He either investigates circumstances that have at one time been articulated in language; or he reconstructs circumstances which were not previously articulated in language but which, with the assistance of hypotheses and methods, he is able to extract from the relics (Koselleck, 2004: 255).

This demonstrates a range of transformations of historical experience with a counterpart at a conceptual level in two ways: not only because concepts reflect innovations, but also because they impact experience. So concepts are both *Indikatoren* (indicators) of historical and social contexts, and *Faktoren* (factors) of historical change (Koselleck, 2004)⁵. This implies that concepts record historical struggles but also operate on the political and social experiences, participating in “semantic civil wars.” Concepts are therefore defined by their uses, their connection with expectations and the evolution of experiences. This means that the timing of concepts and historical events do not always coincide, a phenomena that becomes intelligible thanks to a new theory of history.

Teleology has guided historical investigation over centuries. This explains the trust in a meaning through which we can find an orientation for future actions and explanations for past events. This leads nevertheless into a trap: “Whoever gets involved in causal explanations will always find reasons for what he wishes to demonstrate. In other words, causal derivations of events do not themselves contain any criteria for the correctness of the statements about them” (Koselleck, 2002a: 11). That is the reason why Koselleck proposes that thinking in a *Sinnlosigkeit* (meaninglessness) is better than in a *Unsinn* (no sense).

5. For an analysis of the Koselleckian conception of the concept, see Palti (2011) and Schmieder and Müller (2016).

The distance that Koselleck institutes from the *historia magistra vitae* was certainly parallel to reformulations in the philosophy of history. Alternatives to the sequential order that was in the core of the historical progress were strongly questioned, and since then the approaches to the past respond no longer to a single vector. This allows us to think of different readings of history based on the assumption that social concepts vary over time. As a consequence, the abandonment of progress leaves us devoid of a guide to sort events. This renews the ways in which we imagine the future, which from now on seems to be unpredictable.⁶ Occurrences no longer fit in a before or after register, they burst into possible coexistences. This methodological distinction prevents us from using history as an alibi, something that is exemplified by a history of a falsification of letters from soldiers from Stalingrad (Koselleck, 1997: 10). But, in order to avoid the binomial linearity-circularity with which historians have interpreted time, Koselleck proposes a theoretical alternative focused on *Zeitschichten* (layers of time) that, instead of excluding repetition and directionality, commits both. The benefits of this theory is the possibility of conceiving different speeds to measure accelerations or delays that reveal the great complexity of time. It becomes imperative at this stage to anticipate a strong affinity with this concept and the one we aim to analyze:

Also the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous, one of the most revealing historical phenomena, is brought together with the layers of time [*Zeitschichten*] as a common concept. What it does not situate at the same time, which emerges both diachronously and synchronously from completely heterogeneous life contexts (Koselleck, 2000: 9)⁷.

In sum, a new theory of history would be able to furnish an output to the agony of the philosophy of history, leaving behind the conception of *historia magistra vitae*, and incorporating a theory of the conditions of historical experiences. This will include, among other axes, the basis for a new approach to the history of concepts that changed the status not only of historical and philosophical, but also political and linguistic knowledge. In the next section, we will explore the presence and meanings of the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous.

III. References in overview. Theoretical legacies and the appliance of the concept

The concept of the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* can be identified as much in the texts dealing mainly with conceptual history as from the ones focused on the theory of historical times.⁸ These publications include a variety of concerns regarding historical phenomena and, of these, the two books that contain the most important allusions are probably *Zeitschichten* and *Vergangene Zukunft*. While the former mentions the concept five times, in the latter mentions it twelve times.⁹ There is also one reference in *Von Sinn und Unsinn der Geschichte*, in the introduction of the GG, and in an article that takes part of a book edited by Reinhart Herzog and Koselleck, *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert als Beginn der Neuzeit* [The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of the Modernity].

All these quotations can be classified under different subjects. Grasping the application of this term brings us to the next question, that is to say, which matters are implicated every time we find it in the text. Although the references are several and vary as per their respective context, there are yet some specific ideas that can help us to understand this *Denkfigur*: i. the relationships between synchronic and diachronic aspects that involve changes in temporal structures, such as progress or acceleration; ii. the representation of a nonhomogeneous time getting along with references to certain epochs; iii. theoretical heritages coming from other authors and historical examples.

6. The dimension of the future in our historicity is analysed by Hölscher (2016), under a Koselleckian perspective.

7. The translation is mine, the original states: "Auch die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen, eines der aufschlussreichsten historischen Phänomene, wird mit Zeitschichten auf einen gemeinsamen Begriff gebracht. Was er eignet sich nicht alles zu gleicher Zeit, was sowohl diachron wie synchron aus völlig heterogenen Lebenszusammenhängen hervorgeht".

8. In "Does Conceptual History Really Need a Theory of Historical Times?" Helge Jordheim (2011a) offers an instructive perspective on the possible reasons of the uncouple of the history of the concepts and the theory of historical times in Koselleck's work.

9. The editions of the books in other languages do not always translate the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* in the same way. Actually, sometimes, the concept ends up being omitted. It is therefore always recommended to use the German editions. For example, while in *Vergangene Zukunft*, there is a paragraph that says: "Begriffe belehren uns nicht nur über die Einmaligkeit vergangener Bedeutungen, sondern enthalten strukturelle Möglichkeiten, thematisieren Gleichzeitigkeiten im Ungleichzeitigen, die nicht auf die Ereignisabfolge der Geschichte heruntergestimmt werden können" (Koselleck, 1989: 126), in *Futures Past* the translation skips the mention: "Concepts not only teach us the uniqueness of past meanings, but also contain structural possibilities, treating the concatenations of difference invisible in the historical flow of events" (Koselleck, 2004: 91).

We shall begin with the last aspect. The quotations of intellectuals are so extended in Koselleck's text that his reflections on the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* turn out to be a reworking of a central theoretical heritage. The centrality of these two citations reveals his effort to redefine the work of historians coming from other contexts in relation to the ongoing developments of the theory of history. Among the existing works that link this concept with its origins, the one by Helge Jordheim (2011b) is probably the most instructive.¹⁰ In this article, thinkers such as Herder, Pinder, Husserl and Bloch are put in motion in order to approach the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous with the *Sattelzeit*, as an experience of the present and not an epoch. According to Jordheim, while the trope has a very important antecedent in Herder, its origin appears in a text of Pinder, *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*. As for the latter, the history of anonymous art can be relevant for different epochs, in which *Zeiträume* (time spaces) manifest their multidimensionality. For his part, Bloch uses in 1935 the term to denounce the breeding ground for Nazism, trying to distinguish the positive utopia of socialism from the destructive utopia of National Socialism. *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* offers an acute analysis of the strategies with which this regime approached not only the petty bourgeoisie in decline, but also the peasantry and the employees of its time, immersed in superficial distractions provided by life in the city. The Third Reich rekindled past events that refer to a greatness of the Germanic people and this revealed a use of the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous as a stepping stone to political power. More precisely, this *Ungleichzeitigkeit* must be observed not only in relation to facts, but also in attitudes, myths or traditions, capable of challenging the citizens of a society in different ways:

Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others. They rather carry an earlier element with them; this interferes. Depending on where someone stands physically, and above all in terms of class, he has his time. Older times than the modern ones continue to have an effect in older strata; it is easy to make or dream one's way back into older ones here (Bloch, 1990: 97).

Thus, Bloch analyzes a use of the past in which the asynchronous is used in favor of, perhaps, one of the most reactionary forces in history. Nazi deception can be understood by means of a montage, which allows us to interpret time as a multiversum and recognize the latencies of a non-overcome past¹¹.

Although it is true that there is a marked inheritance of these thinkers, the fact is that Koselleck does not always cite them each time he defines the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous.

In this analytical characterization of the nature of history, Koselleck resorts to a new mention of Schlegel.¹² In this framework, the author draws a conclusion about the emergence of history as a transcendental category after the Enlightenment. This assessment brings together the conditions of possible history with the condition of its awareness by mentioning an example. The comment on Albrecht Altdorfer's painting, through which the idea of anachronism is introduced, appears in the first chapter of *Vergangene Zukunft*. This image represents the Battle of Issus, in 333 B.C., when the Macedonians triumphed over the Persians. Henceforth, the epoch of Hellenism begins, which, in words of Koselleck, means that this masterpiece illustrates a *Historie* and a *Geschichte* at the same time. This interpretation of the famous *Alexanderschlacht*, where "the present and the past were enclosed within a common historical plane" (Koselleck, 2004: 10) suggests a multiplication of the time layers that enabled philosophers to "gain a distance" from their time.

10. See also the recent work of Falko Schmieder (2017) and Palonen (2012).

11. For an analysis of this concept in Bloch's perspective, see Konersmann (1982) and Morfino, V. (2011-2012).

12. In any case, if we track the allusions specifically related to our main concern here, it is possible to observe the relevance of Schlegel over Thucydides, and whenever Koselleck leans on Schlegel by sketching the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* he retrieves his meditations on progress and on the twists and turns of temporal dimensions.

A second example appears in the tenth chapter of *Vergangene Zukunft*, where Koselleck points out the relevance of the “asymmetric counterconcepts.” Against this background, the conceptual couple of Hellene and Barbarian is far from neutral. Under this distinction, the contempt for the seconds is very clear: while they were conceived as brutish and unskillful, Greeks were associated with language, art and the life of the *polis*. This polarity is informed by the noncontemporaneous:

The dualism thus assumed a historical perspective, as we say today. The present contemporaneousness of Hellene and Barbarian is perceived in terms of the noncontemporaneous of their cultural levels. Customs that changed over time were endowed with an argumentative force attributable to this elapsed time (Koselleck, 2004: 164).

The precise extension of multidimensionality of time can be illustrated by as well. The introduction to the GG states that by analyzing the life of concepts, there is a historical depth that does not always coincide with periodical subdivisions. As stated, concepts tell us something about their time as *Indikatoren* (indicators) and *Faktoren* (factors), but they also contain elements that go beyond their own moment. This means that they provide us with information about possibilities and knowledge that potentially applies. We are aware of the emergence of many signifiers during the *Kampfbegriff* that dispute the conquest of a certain concept. Moreover, we know that those that happen to lose the battle tend to remain forgotten. Still, these past contexts and social bids can be rescued thanks to the terms, which reunite and make legible the elements that constitute its history, i.e. the historical conditions that make possible the birth of a new category. In the first mention of the noncontemporaneous that appears in *Vergangene Zukunft*, Koselleck explains why this concept overcomes the variation of the diachrony and synchrony:

Begriffsgeschichte can therefore clarify the diverse strata of meaning descending from chronologically separate periods. It therefore goes beyond a strict alternation of diachrony and synchrony, and relates more to the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*) that can be contained within a concept. Put another way, it deals with the theoretical premises of social history when it seeks to evaluate the short, medium, or long term, or to weigh events and structures against one another. The historical depth of a concept, which is not identical with the chronological succession of its meanings, gains in this fashion systematic import, which must be duly acknowledged by all sociohistorical research (Koselleck, 2004: 90).

As a consequence, since not only the noncontemporaneous holds a central significance for the theories of the historical times, but also for conceptual and social history, it is actually a transverse category. This means that the definition of *Begriffsgeschichte* is highly bonded to the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* because concepts may comprise a *Mehrschichtigkeit* (multilayeredness), containing the complexity and diversity of a variety of times. Besides, the historical deepness of concepts does not always match with chronologies (Koselleck, 2011: 18). Only a research that contemplates this theoretical perspective can succeed by finding possible identifications and disidentifications between chronological events and meanings. Hence, this allows us to study more than one period at the same time.

Yet concepts also remain embedded in their original linguistic setting, and this cannot change with every new situation or day to day. In addition, many concepts transcend what has hitherto been experienced. They are also hypothetical projections, anticipating and opening up visions of the future. Every concept thus has its own internal temporal structure. This structure is not subsumed within a single application but

rather opens up possibilities for other applications. Although language often changes more slowly than events, it may anticipate them. Beyond any one particular usage, therefore, concepts also contain multiple possibilities for recycling themselves as well as the power to create new experiences. For this reason, the history of a concept can never be equated with so-called real history (Koselleck, 2011: 31).

Thanks to concepts, it is possible to delve not only into temporal, but also timeless dimensions articulated by two contradictory—in principle—terms: singular events and structures.¹³ The ways, speeds and rhythms in which they capture these changes vary according to the context. The historical conditions can tell us when a new concept can emerge and when it may modify its implications. This means that there is no possible formula that can detect when concepts undergo alterations. Nevertheless, we can outline a historical analysis of the social and political environment in order to sketch presumptions of further or past linguistic and extralinguistic articulations.

In short, after this brief review of examples and theoretical legacies, we can find the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* in at least three gaps: the ones between past and future events, the ones between different spheres of social and political life, and the ones between linguistic and extralinguistic realities.

IV. Temporal structures, conflicting time and the diachronic

Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen is mostly associated with conflicts in *Zeitschichten*. On the one hand, the denial of a uniformity of time entails a big *Konfliktpotential* (potential conflict) because it disrupts the experiences and expectations existing in particular levels. It all depends on the determination of a specific relationship that societies built with historicity. It contemplates periods with unique beginnings and endings not equal with each other: the time of these histories do not derive from a single criteria; it is on the contrary, inferable from struggling memories and social constructions. On the other hand, going back to Heidegger's philosophy, Koselleck avers a close interweaving of historicity with the *Dasein*.¹⁴ In spite of this theoretical influence, our author brings the idea of a *Konfliktträchtigkeit* (conflict gestation), which also describes the centrality of time strata. When reading the past, it is more profitable to register events without losing sight of conflicts. In the context of a historical investigation, this methodological approach reveals our contemporaneity with past events. Thanks to this practice, we shall find out that our experiences can be contemporaneous even to people from the Stone Age (Koselleck, 2002a: 8).

In the famous article *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Koselleck states:

Historical processes are driven forward only so long as the conflicts inherent in them cannot be solved. As soon as a conflict dissolves, it belongs to the past. A historical theory of conflicts can be sufficiently developed only by bringing out the temporal qualities inherent in the conflict (Koselleck, 2002a: 8-9).

This quotation can help us to understand at least two elements: firstly, since we are willing to study different levels of conflicts, the life of historical processes become more complex, and secondly, the limits between past, present, and future as temporal dimension are hence diluted. This represents a *Dynamisierung der Erfahrungswelt* (dynamization of the world experience) that opens not only the contests of the past, but also the ones of the future, changing the ways in which we read historical knowledge (Koselleck, 1987: 280).

13. In *Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte*, Koselleck (2002b) also develops the idea of synchronicity at the linguistic level by exploring the ways it works on structures. He relies on Saussure and proposes an inversion of his perspective. For an analysis of this articulation see Jordheim (2001a).

14. Koselleck takes five categories that determine the experience of our finitude: having to die / be able to kill, friend / enemy, in / out, up / down and the category of *Generativität*. These oppositions contain a *Ungleichzeitigkeit* insofar as they express non coexisting conditions that may exist in parallel, which according to Koselleck are the aporias of finitude (*Aporien der Endlichkeit*).

Regarding the diachronic and synchronic, Koselleck contends that multiple criteria determines the starting point of our investigations into past experiences. This occasionally means dealing with anachronisms, caused by finding compatibility between circumstances from diverse periods of time and that, with the help of a synchronic insight, show contemporaneity. Yet in the preface to the third edition of 1973 of the early writing *Kritik und Krise* [*Critique and Crisis*], this possibility is assumed:

As soon to depict structures of an historical epoch in its anthropological composeness [Verfaßtheit] that are from individual cases deduced, is achieve, results can make visible exemplary finding that are obtainable in our present. Thought its uniqueness, a pasted epoch -questioned in its structure- can contain permanent moments [*Momente der Dauer*], which are extended to our present" (Koselleck, 1976: IX)¹⁵.

Six years later, in *Vergangene Zukunft*, he clarifies that it is not new. This has been thought since antiquity, which is extremely paradoxically if we take into account that Greeks did not have even a concept of history (Koselleck, 2004: 97). Still, Koselleck quotes Thucydides with the aim of illustrating the coexistence of experiences coming from multiple temporal levels.

Furthermore, outlining the historical criteria of temporalization implies a dynamization of time that, Koselleck avers, takes place around the eighteenth century. These transformations brought about a new idea of history: *die Geschichte an und für sich* (history in and for itself)¹⁶. The image of a history, which is always contemporary, relies on the anachronisms and simultaneity of histories. This parameter can be applied on at least two levels: on the one hand, regarding individual histories, and on the other, conceiving space. Koselleck dwells on the concern about space in relation to the noncontemporaneous in the introduction of *Zeitschichten*:

We are always using concepts that were originally conceived in spatial terms, but that nevertheless have a temporal meaning. Thus we may speak of refractions, frictions, and the breaking up of certain enduring elements that have an effect on the chain of events, or we may refer to the retrospective effects of events upon their enduring presuppositions. (...) We live by naturally metaphorical expressions, and we are unable to escape from them, for the simple reason that time is not manifest (*anschaulich*) and cannot be intuited (*anschaulich gemacht werden*) (Koselleck, 2002a: 6-7).

With the purpose of clarifying this core notion, Koselleck affirms that history has a spatial connotation, which a geological metaphor helps elucidate: *Schichten* (strata) moves inside diverse rhythms and durations. This denomination should be brought together with the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* considering that the heterogeneous events that take place in history could emerge in a same time, by means of an integration of the diachronic and synchronic approaches. For instance, geographical exploration of the planet allowed for the comparison of numerous coexisting realities from different civilizations. Many levels with deep anachronisms were classified in terms of synchronic criteria. These kinds of contrast analyses were carried out according to a conception of progress relying on a homogeneous time that, in turn, can clearly identify stages of advance or setback in chronological order but also seems to require much more than chronology (e.g. an idea of modernization as a project) (Osborne, 1992: 77). This enabled *das Postulat der Beschleunigung* (the postulate of acceleration) as well, a notion utterly connected to changes that propel the openness not only to the future, but also to the past¹⁷. In few words: progress and acceleration are theoretical premises arising from the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* (Koselleck, 1997: 51). Since Modernity, the dynamization and temporalization of experience make

15. The translation is mine. The original states: "Sobald es gelungen ist, Strukturen einer geschichtlichen Epoche in ihrer anthropologischen Verfaßtheit aufzuzeigen, die sich aus den konkreten Einzelfällen ableiten läßt, können die Ergebnisse exemplarische Befunde sichtbar machen, die auch auf unsere Gegenwart beziehbar sind. Denn unerachtet ihrer Einmaligkeit kann eine vergangene Epoche - auf ihre Struktur hin befragt - Momente der Dauer enthalten, die noch in unsere Gegenwart hineinreichen".

16. In the foreword of *The Practice of Conceptual History*, Hayden White explains: "While European culture has always been characterized by a sense of history, a sense of having a history, a sense of being a historical phenomenon, only in its modern phase-sometime between 1750 and 1850 did European society begin to think and act as if it existed in history, as if its "historicity" was a feature, if not the defining feature of its identity" (White, 2002: X).

17. See the chapter *Zeitverkürzung und Beschleunigung. Eine Studie zur Säkularisation* [Time reduction and acceleration. A study on secularization], included in *Zeitschichten* (Koselleck, 2000).

it possible to think of an accessible history that contains an unfurled future. In this context, our task is to determine the way to progress, with no possibility of predicting the obstacles into which we are about to bump. Consequently, the entanglement of old traditions and innovations we are to find creates conflicting situations.

This change occurred in the eighteenth century, allowed humankind to measure possible progress in the development of the backward regions. History, thus, was understood as a continuous improvement process. In spite of the existence of relapses and detours, the Rousseauian idea of a *perfectibilité* (perfectibility) was set in the horizon of expectations, having a great influence not only in the course of the philosophy and the history, but also on the political directions of the societies:

The objectives were then transferred from one generation to the next, and the effects anticipated by plan or prognosis became the titles of legitimation of political action. In sum, from that time on, the horizon of expectation was endowed with a coefficient of change that advanced in step with time (Koselleck, 2004: 266).

This progress was certainly not uniform: Koselleck quotes Friedrich Schlegel while introducing the idea of progress, whose inequality brings us back to the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous and therefore becomes a fundamental experience in history. Still, it would be difficult to affirm an opposition between progress and the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous: "This fundamental experience of progress, embodied in a singular concept around 1800, is rooted in the knowledge of noncontemporaneities which exist at a chronologically uniform time" (Koselleck, 2004: 238). There is always a mutual belonging regarding these two concepts that leads us to think of a permanent tension in both directions¹⁸. The point is to consider a multiplicity in temporal dimensions as a theoretical tool useful to capture different historical speeds and stages that dwell together and consequently, show a contested and nonhomogeneous time¹⁹.

This latter element brings us to the next one, namely the changes in temporal structures. In *Vergangene Zukunft*, this idea is boiled down as follows:

In the same way, varying extensions of time are contained in the concept *Gleichzeitigkeit des ungleichzeitigen*. They refer to the prognostic structure of historical time, for each prognosis anticipates events which are certainly rooted in the present and in this respect are already existent, although they have not actually occurred (Koselleck, 2004: 95).

In this opportunity, our concept is presented as a *temporal Erfahrungsmodi* (mode of temporal experience), along with the irreversibility and the repeatability of events. Thanks to the combinations of these three criteria, we can get to identify, for instance, the complexity of progress or acceleration. To place events in history means to deal with multiple chronological levels that provoke temporal layers to break. In this context, dividing up time requires the consideration not only facts, but subjects of actions and their corresponding historical conditions.

Koselleck indicates that we should approach the phenomena more precisely from the anthropological point of view without ignoring the long-term circumstances in which our political decisions take place: "There are structures that endure and there are processes that persist: both necessitate and outlast the respective individual events in which history itself takes place. In other words, there are different velocities of change" (Koselleck, 2002c: 135). Once this is assumed, we must study the different rhythms of change that rule phenomena.

18. Regarding the relationship between the noncontemporaneous and progress, Helge Jordheim, alludes to the different points of view. For instance, Achim Landwehr (2012) identifies a continuity between progress and *die Ungleichzeitigkeit*.

19. See also the article entitled "'Fortschritt' und 'Niedergang' - Nachtrag zur Geschichte zweier Begriffe" Koselleck (2006).

Unlike extensions are here involved and it is possible therefore to think of long, medium, and short term structures. According to Jordheim:

Compared to his predecessor, Braudel, who before Koselleck was the last historian to systematically think about the multiplicity of times, Koselleck has much less faith in both structuralist models and time as a universal and absolute standard. Instead he investigates how specific historical events and processes, from the Reformation and the French Revolution to Prussian legal reforms, are shot through by different temporalities, some long and slow, going back to Greek or Roman Antiquity, some short, fast, and even immediate, caught up in the decisive moment, but all of them evoking the past, anticipating the future, and intervening in the present (Jordheim, 2014: 504).

The existence of the *Wiederholungsstruktur* (structure of repetition) in the historical, legal, or linguistic level, explains that unicity is not exactly a limit. This is exemplified by an everyday situation: although every letter we receive contains a novelty, this is possible because of the regularity with which the postman comes to our homes. In other words, the return of the same and organization make possible unique events (Koselleck, 2000). But if the stability of these structures is invariable, how could we even conceive of change in history? Koselleck's answer says: structures are modified; for this reason they are not eternal structures but of long duration. So if, until now, we have said that within oneness there is repetition, we must admit that there is also oneness in repetition. This explains that the recurrence of the phenomena is always modifiable. The movement that allows Koselleck to propose a different notion of a homogeneous time goes beyond conceiving a multilayered time: it makes the noncontemporaneous the center of attention: "I would therefore like to narrow down my thesis: history conceived as ubiquitous can only exist as a discipline if it develops a theory of periodization; without such a theory, history loses itself in boundlessly questioning everything" (Koselleck, 2002a: 4).

In sum, the spatial aspect of the noncontemporaneous, the changes in temporal structures, and the articulation of the synchronic and diachronic that take place in his *Historik*, characterize this entangled concept.

V. The future dimension and the political productivity

The *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* dubs an experience that sets the horizons in which history was formulated and, at the same time, comprehends a break with directionality. This last idea expressed a natural chronology capable of organizing and classifying events according to time subdivisions. On the contrary, the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous harbors a multiplicity of time extensions that depend on agents and their historical situation. Therefore, such a concept enables us to conceive prognoses in a different and specific way: "They refer to the prognostic structure of historical time, for each prognosis anticipates events which are certainly rooted in the present and in this respect are already existent, although they have not actually occurred" (Koselleck, 2004: 95). This aspect highlights the relationship between the narratives of each individual event with history as representation, that is to say, *historia res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*. It tells us something about our future and not precisely as a horizon of expectations where we register our projects, but as a prognosis (Koselleck, 2002c)²⁰. Like Oncina Coves (2003) points when featuring secularization: in Koselleck's proposal there is a deep concern that ties the production of a diagnostic with the identification of a danger that we try to avoid. It is not about a conceptual exercise that aims just to represent

20. Koselleck dedicates to utopia a reflection that retakes theoretical and literary pieces in *Zur Begriffsgeschichte der Zeitutopie* [Conceptual History of the Utopia of Time]. There he explores its negative and positive dimensions and admits its centrality for temporality and for a non-spatiality in an articulation of the possible and the impossible in the existing world and in the conceivable worlds. The foregoing acquires a political connotation that interests the author. Utopia acquires a general political character that makes reference to possible political projects considering the ability to make them a reality and not their unrealizable character.

a picture of an epoch, but it pretends to intervene on her in order to modify its course looking for most desirable ways: "This double theoretical-practical vector, past-future, diagnostic-prognosis, already suggests a deeper epistemologically layer: the conceptual history presupposes the Historical, a transcendental doctrine of history that stands preeminently on a theory of time, or rather, from the strata of time" (17).²¹

21. The translation is mine, the original states: "Este doble vector teórico-práctico, pasado-futuro, diagnóstico-pronóstico, ya deja entrever una capa epistemológicamente más profunda: la historia conceptual presupone la Histórica, una doctrina trascendental de la historia que se erige preeminentemente sobre una teoría del tiempo, o mejor dicho, de los estratos del tiempo".

22. Koselleck analyses this concept in *Vergangene Zukunft*: "History seems to be disposable in a dual fashion: for the agent who disposes of the history that he makes, and for the historian who disposes of it by writing it up. Viewed in this way, both seem to have an unlimited freedom of decision. The scope for the disposition of history is determined by men" (Koselleck, 1994: 193).

23. The Kantian idea of prophetic history [prophetisch] described in *Ob das menschliche Geschlecht im beständigen Fortschreiten zum Besseren sei* [If Humankind is in constant progress to the Better] finds affinity with the Koselleckian prognosis. It is worth clarifying, however, that in the case of Kant, this refers to a definition that exceeds experience, in the sense that it does not seek evidence in the way that empirical history does. It points rather to the identification of a *Leitfaden* (guideline), which is part of the principle of purpose and to which a reflective teleological judgment is proper.

24. The concept appears in *Ob das menschliche Geschlecht im beständigen Fortschreiten zum Besseren sei*. See also Lyotard (2009).

This future dimension is utterly connected with political projects and the noncontemporaneous, as a sense of openness to the past. If we manage to identify symptoms of political-social diseases, we can, therefore, predict the advent of catastrophic phenomena such as totalitarianism and new occurrences of fascist movements. In this sense, and once the rhythms and structures in which these events can take place have been identified, their progression can be counteracted by stopping them. This does not mean a candid attitude, which would demand a full *Verfügbarkeit der Geschichte* (disposability of history)²², but a phenomenology that points to our political responsibility. If we get to know the *Wiederholungsstrukturen* (repetitions structures) where *Einmaligkeit* (uniqueness) take place, we can then anticipate events we may be careful with. Koselleck relies on Kant in order to make clear how memories are inputs for forecasts (Koselleck, 2002: 133).²³

Neither presupposes this anticipation an art of divination that turns history into an oracle. It implies a *Theorie der historischen Zeiten* (theory of historical times) that does not go only towards the past, seeking to reconstruct what has already happened, but also towards the future. That dual look implies a negative learning: a point of view through which men can reach into the past signs that warn us of experiences of great destructive potential for our political life. We could actually borrow the use of the Kantian concept of *Geschichtszeichen* (sign of history) that capture the enthusiasm of the public with the French Revolution and its affective participation in the good [*die Theilnehmung am Guten mit Affect*] for this²⁴. In that case, the signs expressed a positive hint, but we could think of signs as well in order to identify negative experiences. Most of the times, we do not count with the certainty of what might happen in our society but instead we can watch carefully signs capable of anticipating facts.

This can be reached with a social construction of *admonitory memory* that would entrust an historical responsibility not only for researchers, but also for the entire political spectrum. What, who and how we choose to remember can encourage or dissuade the return of past experiences for the future. Through such an insight, the noncontemporaneous may gain an interesting productivity, changing the ways in which we recall the past. This transformation means the duty of studying the three historical dimensions at the same time, being able to perceive alerts. This does not mean that we may use the concept by instrumentalising the past; on the contrary we propose to deal with it as a device that must locate and contextualize social remembrances.

As we shall see, Koselleck sketches an interesting approach of the noncontemporaneous that does not go beyond a scholar characterization. To feature this concept in the way he did it has certainly the big advantage of placing new perceptions of the synchronic and diachronic, that moves on to a new historical insight. That is why we contend we shall take this theoretical frame and redouble our efforts by exploring its political productivity. Stated more concisely: the understanding of a potential use of this concept may bring about clarity regarding the relationships between the political field and the historical knowledge. That is to say, the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* would profit from a point of view that help us to diagnose symptomatic elements in specific contexts, and therefore, to guide political actions.

VI. Conclusions

Returning to the itinerary of this essay, we shall say we found at least three illuminating aspects. Firstly, through the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*, we confirmed a strong connection between conceptual history and the theory of historical times. This transversal concept plays an important role for the *Begriffsgeschichte* and the *Historik*. Concepts involve different layers of time, and that is why the performance of conceptual history is absolutely connected to the nonsimultaneous. This complex multilayeredness of numerous deepness is not identical to chronologies, and therefore it is imperative to count on a theoretical approach capable of tracking the mismatches between the behavior of the linguistic and the extralinguistic, studying side by side coexistence presents.

Secondly, by exploring the links between the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous and chronological order, we noted that there is no categorical opposition between the noncontemporaneous and periodization. Whether we are studying a temporal or a spatial experience, it is certainly difficult to disregard temporal sequences. Even though we recognize we are situated in a nonhomogeneous and contested time, when it comes to comparisons, we need a sort of criteria capable of indicating setbacks or anticipations in history. Without it, making parallels and resemblances to past events doesn't seem to be possible. In other words, conceiving the complexity of times doesn't result in dying sequential orders. It is not *atemporality*, but *transhistoricity* that would help us in this analysis. There is always a mutual belonging regarding these two concepts that leads us to think of a permanent tension in both directions.

Thirdly, since we can adopt this concept to a variety of situations, it is imperative to define more precisely when and why should we make use of it. We already said that due to the nature of time, which cannot be intuited, we must borrow categories from other disciplines, and thanks to this particularity, we may find *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* when it comes to geographical experiences. We know, in addition, that we can identify it in the life of concepts, pieces of art, or political conflicts. Besides, finding examples shows that comparisons may be done with the antiquity or in the frame of a *Sattelzeit*, recording crises and changes. As a consequence, we could claim that we can employ it, on the one hand, in many scopes, and on the other, on many levels. This brings us to the following question: are we facing an oblique or vacuous concept?²⁵ While it is true that its identification depends on the analytical point of view and on the disposability of historical knowledge, it is at risk of becoming a concept able to work with all sort of realities and therefore of losing specificity. Thus, the definition of the concept could contain a trap for itself, since if everything can express simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous, the term would lose its distinction and promote a loss of its meaning. When a notion refers to everything, it also refers to nothing. Having dissolved all controversial character, we run the risk that it maintains a banal character. Thus, the identification of an alien element to the epoch itself would appear as information of limited relevance and not as a truly disruptive aspect. We are therefore constrained to elaborate on a methodological approach suitable to our theoretical interest providing it with distinction. For instance, it could be productive to rely on it when it comes to define our political direction: the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous can highlight affinities with historical experiences, like racism and xenophobia, that we are willing to avoid and that emerge nowadays as a real danger. This could help us to build a sort of *admonitory memory*, prior to a prognosis and informed by signs of history. If we can anticipate undesired situations in this way, we could probably develop the political productivity of this concept. In sum, the review of this concept shows that Koselleck does not deliver any survey of it as a political tool. Therefore, the rethinking of the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* is an invitation to draw from Koselleck's approach and go beyond it, by developing its employment for the political directions we choose to adopt.

25. There is an interesting analysis that Melvin and Melina Richter present for the translation of the entrance *Krise* in the GG that touch upon this possibility: "*Begriffsgeschichte* can identify what Antoine Meillet once called "semantic bleaching." The loose use of a term, stretching it to encompass any and all domains beyond that of the political, can make that classification at once omnipresent, and yet lacking any distinctive meaning that might frame a situation and define it as calling for urgent and decisive action" (Richter and Richter, 2006: 353).

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