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## On the Disposability of History

Before dealing with the problem at hand, a story (*Geschichte*) must be told. In the year 1802, a morally zealous Briton, the Reverend John Chatwode Eustace, travelled through Italy. He sought, together with an aristocratic companion, to deepen his classical education at firsthand. Ten years later he published the results of his travels.

The Reverend Mr. Eustace had found Italy to be a victim of the French Revolution and was unsparing of learned quotations that should provide his readers with a historical attitude. To this end he offered them long-term perspectives. He cited Scipio who, seated on the ruins of Carthage, foresaw the coming fall of Rome. Naturally enough, he also declaimed Homer's lines from the *Iliad*: *εσσεται ημαρ*, the day that would come when Holy Troy itself collapsed. Drawing directly on an old topos, he argued that the "Empire" had since moved toward the West. Whoever might today consider the "dominions" of Great Britain and their great extent might claim without presumption that the imperium had now fallen to Great Britain. But, added the Reverend, the imperium was moving on; whether back toward the East or onward into transatlantic regions he did not know. No matter; the days of Britannia's glory were also numbered, and their end approached inevitably. This was the view of our witness in the year 1813, when Great Britain was about to rise to the peak of its maritime power. In days to come, the inhabitants of the British Isles, just as the sons of Greece or Italy, would lie at the feet of victorious enemies for whose sympathy they would beg in recognition of the greatness of their predecessors.

With such thoughts in his head, our traveller brought his sympathy to the inhabitants of Italy, a sympathy which did not, however, extend

to their notions of hygiene. All the same, the Italians were descendants of those masters of the earth, those “Lords of humankind,” the Romans, in the course of whose fame they were in actuality the predecessors of the Britons: *Terrae dominantis alumni*.<sup>1</sup>

If we had posed to our classically educated Reverend the question of whether fate still existed, he would have scarcely understood the question. He might have rejected it as a hybrid. History as “to and fro,” as “up and down” in the unfolding of power: this was fate for him, whether conceived classically and fatalistically or in the spirit of Christian providentialism. If we had further asked him if it was possible for history to be made, he might perhaps have referred, as he in fact unfailingly did, to the chaos that the French had in his view just created in Italy. This is our story from 1802 and the report of it made in 1813.

We have already broached the issue to be discussed. It will be dealt with in two sections. First, it will be demonstrated when and in what manner the idea arises that one can make history. Here the discussion will be confined to sources in the German language. Second, we will seek to identify the boundaries which are set to such “makeability” by a properly conceived history.

Allow me to add a word here to those of our English witness from a contemporary who was younger than the Reverend at that time and who certainly cannot be suspected of being a partisan of modernity or even of revolution. Freiherr von Eichendorff once said in passing: “The one makes history, the other writes it down.”<sup>2</sup> This formula appears to be clear and unambiguous. There is the actor, the doer, the perpetrator; and there is the other one, the writer, the historian. If you like, this involves a kind of division of labor that Eichendorff has outlined, in which it clearly is a matter of the same history which is made on the one side and written down on the other. 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.

We are far from hanging such a significant conclusion on Eichendorff’s casual wordplay. It is nevertheless important in studying our problem to know that Eichendorff was able to speak in terms of one

being able to make history. We use the expression readily enough today in the constantly repeated semiquotation from Treitschke, according to which it is supposedly men who make history.<sup>3</sup> Under the influence of Napoleon it appeared quite evident that there was someone who had made history. Nonetheless, to say that someone “makes” history is a modern usage which could not have been formulated before Napoleon or in any case before the French Revolution. While for over two thousand years it was a property of Mediterranean and occidental culture that *Geschichten* were recounted, as well as investigated and written up, only since around 1780 was it conceivable that *Geschichte* could be made. This formulation indicates a modern experience and even more, a modern expectation: that one is increasingly capable of planning and also executing history.

Before history could be grasped as something that was disposable and constructible, the conceptual field of history itself underwent a far-reaching semantic change. I would like to outline this linguistic shift.<sup>4</sup>

Our contemporary concept of history, together with its numerous zones of meaning, which in part are mutually exclusive, was first constituted towards the end of the eighteenth century. It is an outcome of the lengthy theoretical reflections of the Enlightenment. Formerly there had existed, for instance, the history that God had set in motion with humanity. But there was no history for which humanity might have been the subject or which could be thought of as its own subject. Previously, histories had existed in the plural—all sorts of histories which had occurred and which might be used as exempla in teachings on ethics and religion, and in law and philosophy. Indeed, history (*die Geschichte*) as an expression was plural. In 1748 it was stated, “History is a mirror for vices and virtues in which one can learn through alien experience what one should do and what should be left undone.”<sup>5</sup> Through repeated use of such reflections, this plural form was modified into an objectless singular. One of the conceptual achievements of the philosophy of the Enlightenment was enhancing history into a general concept which became the condition of possible experience and possible expectation. Only from around 1780 can one talk of “history in general,” “history in and for itself,” and “history pure and simple,” and as all elaborations on this theme indicate, there was an emphasis on the departure of this new, self-referring concept from the traditional histories in plural.

If anyone had said before 1780 that he studied history, he would have at once been asked by his interlocutor: Which history? History of what? Imperial history, or the history of theological doctrine, or perhaps the history of France? As said earlier, history could only be conceived together with an associated subject that underwent change or upon which change occurred. The new expression, “history in general,” was thus initially suspected as being modish, and the degree to which it was considered dubious is illustrated by the fact that Lessing, in his historicophilosophical outline of the education of the human species, avoided the expression *die Geschichte*, not to speak of the use of “history in general” without an article. The surprise that the new concept, soon a slogan, could give rise to is illuminated by a scene at the court in Berlin.<sup>6</sup> Biester once replied thus to Frederick the Great’s inquiring after what he was doing: he occupied himself “famously with history” (*vorzüglich mit der Geschichte*). The king stopped short at that and asked whether that meant the same as *Historie*—because, Biester supposed, the king was unfamiliar with the expression *die Geschichte*. Of course Frederick knew the word *Geschichte*, but not the new concept: history as a collective singular without reference to an associated subject or, alternatively, an object determined by narration.

One may ask the meaning of such semantic analyses that are presented here in such a schematic and abbreviated fashion. It might be recalled that historical events and their linguistic constitution are folded into each other. The course of historical occurrences, the manner in which they are made possible linguistically, and the way in which they can then be worked over do not coincide in a simple fashion, such that, for example, an event only enters into its own linguistic registration. Rather, a tension prevails between these two poles that undergoes continual historical change. It is thus all the more important that we investigate the peculiarities of the way in which a given set of past events were articulated or anticipated. Stated another way: what is actually at stake when one talks of “history” that can, for instance, be “made”?

My first, historical thesis is that history first appeared to be generally at the disposition of men; that is, conceived as makeable, following the emergence of history as an independent and singular key concept. The step from a plurality of specific histories to a general and singular history is a semantic indicator of a new space of experience and a new horizon of expectation.

The following criteria serve to characterize the new concept:

1. "History pure and simple" was a collective singular that collected together the sum of all individual histories. "History" thereby gained an enhanced degree of abstraction, allowing it to indicate a greater complexity, which capability has since made it necessary for reality to be generally elaborated in a historical manner.

2. The by-now familiar Latin expression *Historie*; that is, the concept designating knowledge and the science of things and affairs was at the same time absorbed by the new concept of history (*Geschichte*). Put another way, history as reality and the reflection upon this history were brought together in a common concept, as history in general. The process of events and of their apprehension in consciousness converged henceforth in one and the same concept. To this extent one could characterize this new expression as a kind of transcendental category: the conditions of possible historical experience and of their possible knowledge were subsumed under the same concept.

3. Within this convergence, which initially was purely semantic, there was an implied renunciation of an extrahistorical level. The experience or apprehension of history in general no longer required recourse to God or nature. In other words, the history which was experienced as novel was, from the beginning, synonymous with the concept of world history itself. It was no longer a case of a history which merely took place through and with the humanity of the earth. In Schelling's words of 1798: man has history "not because he participates in it, but because he produces it."

We will not continue here with further definitions of the new concept. We have already reached a position from which history can be conceived as disposable.

History that is history only to the extent that it is recognized is naturally bound more strongly to men than a history that overtakes men in the form of a fate that takes place. It is the conception of reflexiveness that first opens up a space for action within which men feel compelled to foresee history; to plan it; in Schelling's words, to "produce" it and ultimately to make it. Henceforth, history no longer means a simple concatenation of past events and the account of such events. The narrative meaning instead was diminished, and since the end of the eighteenth century, the expression has opened up social and political planes for planful activity that point to the future. In the decade before the French Revolution history, then promoted by the

revolutionary upheavals, became a concept of action, even if not exclusively so.

It is certainly possible to regard the sequence of foresight, planning, and making as a basic anthropological determinant of human action. What is novel in what confronts us is the reference of this determination of action to the newly conceived “history in general.” This seems to place on the agenda no more and no less than the future of world history, and even to make it available.

To elaborate, an outcome of so-called modernity (*Neuzeit*) was that at the end of the eighteenth century the idea of a “new time” was constituted. The concept of progress, which at that time was largely coincident with “history,” encapsulated a form of historical time which was subject to constant renewal. The common achievement of both concepts was that they renewed and extended the horizon of future expectation.

Roughly speaking, until the mid-seventeenth century, expectation of the future was bounded by the approach of the Last Judgment, within which earthly injustice would find its transhistorical settlement. Fate was to this degree both unjust and merciful, and it was taken for granted that even then men had to exercise foresight and behave accordingly. The art of political prognosis in particular was developed from the sixteenth century on and became a part of the business of all men of state. Such practice did not, however, fundamentally transcend the horizon of a Christian eschatology. Precisely because nothing fundamentally new would arise, it was quite possible to draw conclusions from the past for the future. The inference from previous experience to anticipated future made use of factors whose structure was quite stable.

This changed for the first time during the eighteenth century, as the impact of science and technology appeared to open up an unlimited space of new possibilities. “Reason,” said Kant in 1784, “knows no bounds for its designs.”<sup>8</sup> Here Kant points to the shift whose theoretical definition concerns us, notwithstanding the numerous empirical factors this shift produced in the West somewhat earlier and in Germany somewhat later.

In his *Anthropology*, Kant spoke of the “capacity of foresight” as being of greater interest than other capacities: “for it is the condition of all possible practice and the goal to which man directs the use of his powers.”<sup>9</sup> But a prediction that basically anticipated similitude—

and here he distinguishes himself from his predecessors—was for him no prognosis. Inference from past experience to expectations about the future would at most lead to “immobility” (*Tatlosigkeit*) and cripple all impulse toward action.<sup>10</sup> Above all, however, this conclusion contradicted Kant’s expectation that the future would be better because it ought to be better.

All of Kant’s efforts as a philosopher of history were directed toward translating the latent natural plan, which seemed set to force humanity onto the course of unlimited progress, into a conscious plan of the rationally endowed man. “How is a history possible a priori?” Kant asked, and answered: “when the soothsayer himself makes and organizes the occurrences which he announces in advance.”<sup>11</sup> Semantically we can see at once that Kant does not simply state that history can be made; rather, he speaks of occurrences that a soothsayer himself brings about. In fact, Kant wrote this passage, today freely cited with agreement and praise, in an ironic and provocative spirit. It was directed against the prophets of decline who themselves created and promoted the predicted Fall, as well as against those supposedly realistic politicians who, shy of the public realm, fomented unrest through their fear of the Fall. Nevertheless, with his question concerning a priori history, Kant established the model of its makeability.

With the imperative of his practical reason, Kant sought to realize the optative mood of a progressive future that broke with the conditions of all previous history. As can be detected in a coded form of his Job allegory of 1791, it is “practical reason in possession of power . . . as it is proffered without further cause in legislation” that is capable of delivering an “authentic theodicy.”<sup>12</sup> The meaning of creation is likewise taken up and transposed into the work of man as soon as practical reason assumes power, without being able thereby to lose its moral integrity.

The dark “foreboding” of a “fate which might be hung over us” thus becomes, in Kant’s words, “a chimera.”<sup>13</sup> Fate gives way to the autonomy of a ruling practical reason.

It is certain that the model presented here does not exhaust Kant’s historical philosophy, which is replete with reservation serving to prevent an overflow into a utopia dispensing with all previous experience. But without a doubt the impulse derived from ethics, that conceives the design of the future as the task of a moral imperative, conceiving history as a temporalized house of correction for morality, deeply

impressed itself on the coming century. A criticized and a vulgarized Kant initially had a greater influence than had Kant as a critical philosopher.

This can be seen, for example, in Adam Weishaupt, not unknown as the leader of the Illuminati in Bavaria.<sup>14</sup> Weishaupt crossed the threshold on the path to the constructibility of history, for he was the first to attempt to transfer the capacity of foresight, the ability to make long-term prognoses, into maxims for political action that derive their legitimation from a general history. According to Weishaupt, the most important vocation that existed (but which unfortunately had yet to become established) was that of philosophers and historians; that is, of the planful historical philosopher.

The straightforward transposition of goodwill into action had never been sufficient to justify a desired future, even less so to attain it. Thus, Weishaupt supplied (and here, he was advanced but not alone) a voluntaristic historical philosophy. It took the form of a reassurance. Weishaupt's political intention to undermine the state and render it redundant was imputed to nothing other than the work of a history which would sooner or later have its effect. Insofar as the future that was to be brought about was announced as the imperative of objective history, one's own intentions assume an impulsive force which is all the greater by virtue of its simultaneous supply of the guarantee of one's innocence. Future history whose outcome is foreseen serves in this way as a relief—one's will becomes the executor of transpersonal events—and as a legitimation which enables one to act in good conscience. In precise terms, history constructed in this way becomes a means of strengthening the will to hurry the advent of the planned future.

It is quite clear that it is only possible to outline such a history after the consolidation of "history" into a concept of reflection and action that renders fate manipulable; or, put another way, that also appears to make the distant consequences of one's action predictable.<sup>16</sup> The voluntaristic association of history with one's planning obscures the potential for the surplus and surprise characteristic of all history. As it is known, Weishaupt foundered upon the reaction of the Bavarian princes. His theoretical naïveté was a contributory factor and ended his plan before it had a chance to be realized. Subsequent events, however, teach us that theoretical naïveté is no protection against success.



The structure of argument that we can demonstrate in the case of Weishaupt has formally survived, notwithstanding the social, political, and economic diagnoses introduced into their prognoses on the part of Liberals, Democrats, Socialists, and Communists. Wherever the “makeability” of history might be implied, it was lent redoubled emphasis as soon as the actor invoked a history which, at the same time, objectively indicated the path he should take. This process of reassurance conceals the fact that such a design is not and cannot be anything more than the product of situationally and chronologically determined insight which goes no further than these limitations. Makeability thus for the most part remained only an aspect of a history whose course continually escaped the intentions of its agents, as is confirmed by experience. For this reason, the idea that history could be made did not become common property but rather was initially used within distinct social groupings and was associated with the decay of the society of orders.

Considered socially-historically, those who invoked the idea that history could be made were, for the most part, groups of activists who wished to establish something new. To be part of a history moving under its own momentum, where one only aided this forward motion, served both as personal vindication and as an ideological amplifier which reached out to others and caught them up.

History, which in the German language continued to be pervaded with a sense of divine Providence, was not transposed into the domain of makeability without a struggle. Perthes, born in 1772, hesitated as a politically active publisher even in 1822 to use the verb: he wished to publish for practical men, “for businessmen, for it is they and not the scholars who intervene in things and, so to say, make history.”<sup>17</sup> He did, however, soon afterward make a plea for a self-conscious middle class that would agitate for participation in power; and that would, through an orientation toward achievement, dispense with the doctrines of the past, the old *historia magistra vitae*: “If every party were by turns to govern and oversee institutions, then all parties would through history wish that they had made themselves become fairer and wiser. Seldom do political equity and wisdom result from history made by others, no matter how much it might be written and studied; this is taught by experience.”<sup>18</sup> The expression “making history” was employed here as a challenge and functioned as an appeal.

The expression “making history” therefore also entered into sociopolitical common language without the historicophilosophical reassurance noted above; for example, it was used by Gagern in the 1848 Frankfurt Parliament to define the great tasks laid before it. Alternatively, we can cite a *Vormärz* democrat, Wilhelm Schulz, who was one of the most influential politicians and has been unjustly forgotten:

Peoples are just beginning to achieve a sense of their meaning. They thus still have little sense of their history and will not have such sense until they themselves make history, until they are more than dead material out of which [the history] of a few privileged classes is made.<sup>19</sup>

Such liberal-democratic linguistic usage had the character of an appeal, serving to raise the consciousness of rising strata and everywhere testifying to the certainty of a linear course of progress.

Here Marx and Engels, as spokesmen of classes which were pressing forward, were in this respect at once more cautious and more certain of themselves. The oft-cited 1878 dictum of Engels on the “leap of mankind from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom” transferred the phase of sovereign disposability to the future of socialist self-organization. Only then would

the objective, alien powers which had until then dominated history . . . [come under] . . . the control of men themselves. Only from that time on will men make their history themselves in all consciousness; only from that time on will the social causes that they have set in motion begin to assume to an increasing degree the effects that they wish to bring about.<sup>20</sup>

Paraphrased according to Kant, only then will a priori history be realized. Or expressed post-theologically, only then will the distinction of foresight, plan, and execution fall away, and man will become “God on earth.”

With this we come to the second part. Where lie the boundaries that deny to a properly conceived history its makeability? If Engels were correct—that in the future, foresight, plan, and execution would coincide seamlessly—it would need only be added that in fact the end of all history had been reached. History is characterized (here is our second thesis) by the manner in which human foresight, human plans, and their execution always diverge in the course of time. By saying

that, we are chancing a structural pronouncement or formulating a view that is older than the eighteenth century. But permit the addition of a statement that is an outcome of the Enlightenment: “history in and of itself” always occurs in the anticipation of incompleteness and therefore possesses an open future. That is, in any case, a lesson of all previous history, and whoever wishes to argue the opposite will have to prove his case.

I wish nonetheless to prove my thesis, indeed, through the use of historical examples which appear to lend support to the opposing view; namely, that history can be made. I will call upon four men to whom no one in the normal course of events would deny a role in the making of history: Marx, Bismarck, Hitler, and Roosevelt.

1. Wherever he could, Marx sought to dissolve substantially conceived concepts of history and attempted to reveal such concepts as “metaphysical subjects” in the language of his opponents.<sup>21</sup> It is not possible to reduce his historicophilosophical achievement solely to utopian goals that may have provided a worldwide echo for him. His historical analyses are fed, rather, by a fundamental determination of the difference that distinguishes human action from what actually occurs in the long term. This distinction provides the foundation for his analysis of capital as well as for his critique of ideology (for example, the critique of “ideologues” whom he derided as “manufacturers of history.”<sup>22</sup> In the place where he appeared as a historian of the present after his failure of 1848, Marx outlined in an unsurpassed fashion the boundaries to the making of history: “Men make their own history, but they do not do so freely, not under conditions of their own choosing, but rather under circumstances which directly confront them, and which are historically given and transmitted.”<sup>23</sup> Marx made use of his clear insight to derive practical directives for action. It was, rather, the “makeability” of politics and not its socioeconomic conditions that he had under theoretical consideration here. It could be supposed that the practical-political influence that Marx has rests upon such formulations—on historical insights that are capable of shifting the utopian horizon of expectation ever further into the distance.<sup>24</sup> This can be proved by the route which is traversed from Bebel, Lenin, Stalin, to Tito, or Mao.

2. No one will wish to deny that Bismarck was a unique individual in the absence of whose diplomatic skill the lesser German Empire never would have emerged in the way that it actually did. It is for

this reason that even today he is burdened with indisputable consequences, even by those who deny the role of men who make history or at least theoretically exclude it from consideration. With this exclusion they certainly find agreement with Bismarck's own view. Bismarck always protested against the idea of making history. "An arbitrary intervention in the development of history that is made only for subjective reasons has always ended with the harvesting of unripe fruit," Bismarck wrote in an 1869 decree to the Prussian envoy in Munich, Von Werthern. "We can put the clocks forward but the time does not therefore pass any the quicker."<sup>25</sup> Bismarck certainly used his dictum against the idea of making history so that he could make politics; he wished to calm Bavarian fears of Prussia's expansionary desires so that he might conduct his own policy of unification all the more successfully. For this reason, Bismarck repeated the expression shortly afterward in a speech before the North German Imperial Assembly, for the purpose of holding back a premature constitutional change. "My influence over the events in which I have been involved is indeed substantially overestimated, but certainly no one should expect of me that I make history."<sup>26</sup> He still found confirmation for this view in his old age: "It is generally not possible for one to make history, but one can learn from it the manner in which the political life of a great people, its development, and its historical conditions are to be properly conducted."<sup>27</sup>

The renunciation of the susceptibility of historical processes to planning emphasize the differential that must be drawn between political action and long-term given tendencies. However divergent were the political goals of Bismarck and Marx, and however much their diagnoses or expectations differed, at the level of their historicotheoretical statements on the boundaries of "makeability," they are found to be astonishingly close.

3. Hitler and his followers reveled in the use of the word "history," which was complained about as fate at the same time that it was held to be available for "making." But even the inconsistency of the expressions that were constructed upon closer examination reveals their ideological content. Hitler wrote in his second book in 1928: "Only under the hammer of world history do the eternal values of a people become the steel and iron with which one then makes history."<sup>28</sup> A turn of phrase from the Lippe electoral campaign before 30 January 1933 shows that even futuristic obsessions had a secret prognostic

meaning: "It is ultimately a matter of indifference what percentage of the German people make history. The only thing that matters is that it is we who are the last to make history in Germany."<sup>29</sup> It would not be possible to formulate more clearly the self-ultimata according to which Hitler made his politics and thus believed himself to be making history. He did make history, but differently from the way he thought he had.

We need no reminder that the more Hitler placed himself under the ultimatum of having to make history himself, the more he miscalculated in assessing his opponents and the time that remained to him. The periods Hitler held to treaties he had concluded or promises he had made became ever shorter during the course of his rule, while the temporal objectives he drew up grew ever more distant. His politics was made under the compulsion of an acceleration which stood in an inverse relation to the spaces of time and to the eternity in whose name he claimed to act. Hitler thought his will greater than the circumstances: he had a solipsistic relation to historical time. Ultimately, however, for every history there exist at least two, and it is characteristic of historical time that it throws up factors that escape manipulation. Bismarck knew that and was successful; Hitler, who did not wish to believe it, had none.

4. On 11 April 1945, Roosevelt, the great adversary of Hitler, formulated his testament to the American people. "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today." The work which he sought to carry out on the morrow was "peace. More than an end of this war—an end to the beginnings of all wars."<sup>30</sup> Roosevelt was not able to make public this testament. He died the following day. He was right with his testament, but in a sense reversed from what he had intended. The end of all beginnings to war is one of the first formulations of cold war. The last war has not been terminated by a peace treaty, nor has war been declared since then. Instead, the wars which have since that time encircled our globe with misery, terror, and fear are no longer wars, but rather interventions, punitive actions, and above all civil wars whose initiation seems to occur under the pretense of avoiding nuclear war and whose end thus cannot be foreseen.

It could be that the doubt which Roosevelt sought to throw on the work of the following day was a presentiment of the fact that, in history, things tend to turn out differently from the way they were

originally planned. But it could equally well be that a simple projection of one's own hopes into the future obstructed the fulfillment of such hopes, and continues to do so. Roosevelt probably did not think of that. *Non ut si pax nolunt, sed ut ea sit quam volunt.*<sup>31</sup> Not that one avoided peace, but that each seeks his own. Peace requires two participants, at least.

We are approaching the conclusion. We should guard against completely rejecting the modern turn of phrase concerning the makeability of history. Men are responsible for the histories they are involved in, whether or not they are guilty of the consequences of their action. Men have to be accountable for the incommensurability of intention and outcome, and this lends a background of real meaning to the dictum concerning the making of history.

The decline of the British Empire, which our first witness deduced as the unavoidable outcome of the course of all previous history, has taken place in the meantime. This long-term process was only accelerated by the British victory over Germany in 1945. Who would dare attribute this to the acts and deeds of individuals? What happens among men has not been the making of individual men for a long time. In Ireland, a remnant of earlier expansion, the English confront a hangover from their past which they appear incapable of removing, no matter how hard they might try. They become responsible for situations they would not create today, even if they were able to. The costs of economic exploitation, political slavery, and religious oppression cannot voluntaristically be wound up.

Many generations, through their action or suffering, have contributed to the rise of what has been the greatest world empire; up to now there have been few able to prevent the demise of Pax Britannica on our globe. Technical and economic conditions have changed in such a manner that today it is no longer possible to steer the fates of continents from a small island, or even exercise to any effective influence. The British—with their politics, political ethics, and achievements in science and technology—have themselves taken a leading role in this change. But they did not “make” the history which has resulted, and to which we are the witnesses today. It has—contrary to all intentions and deeds, but certainly not without intentions and actions—happened.

There always occurs in history more or less than that contained in the given conditions. Behind this “more or less” are to be found men, whether they wish it or not. These conditions do not change for a long time; and when they do, they change so slowly and over such a long period that they escape disposition, or makeability.

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## Terror and Dream: Methodological Remarks on the Experience of Time during the Third Reich

### *Res factae and res fictae*

*Si fingat, peccat in historiam; so non fingat, peccat in poesin.* He who invents violates the writing of history; he who does not, violates poetic art. With this seventeenth-century statement Alsted formulated a simple opposition that had been a topos for two thousand years.<sup>1</sup> The business of *Historie* was to address itself to actions and events, to *res gestae*, whereas poetry lived upon fiction. The criteria distinguishing history from poetics involved the modes of representation, which (if we might exaggerate somewhat) were intended to articulate either being or appearance. The intertwined manner in which the rhetorical relation of history and poetry is defined cannot, of course, be reduced to such a handy couplet. Even the common concept *res* is ambiguous, for the reality of events and deeds cannot be the same as the reality of simulated actions.<sup>2</sup> Also, appearance can extend from the illusion of probability to the reflection of the true.<sup>3</sup> Until the seventeenth century, however, it is possible to derive from these extremities (notwithstanding numerous intermediate positions) two models which assign the higher rank to poetry and history, respectively.

Thus one considered the truth content of history higher than that of poetry, for whoever surrendered himself to *res gestae*, to *res factae*, had to demonstrate naked reality itself, whereas *res fictae* led to lies. It was primarily historians who used this argument, favorable as it was to their own position.

The opposing position invoked Aristotle's denigration of history at the expense of poetry. Poetry concerned itself with the possible and