
Preface

The question of what historical time might be belongs to those questions which historical science has the most difficulty answering. It compels us to enter the domain of historical theory more deeply than is otherwise necessary in the discipline of history. For the sources of the past, informing us of thoughts and deeds, plans and events, provide no direct indication of historical time. Preliminary theoretical clarification thus is necessary to answer a question that is posed constantly in history but which we find elusive, given the evidence that has been passed on to us.

In conducting research related to historical circumstances, the question of historical time does not have to be explicitly confronted. To arrange and recount events, only an exact dating of such events is indispensable. Correct dating is only a prerequisite, however, and does not indicate the content of what may be called “historical time.” Chronology—as an auxiliary discipline—can cope with questions of dating, coordinating the countless calendars and forms of temporal measure employed throughout history in terms of a common time calculated on the basis of the physical-astronomical time of our planetary system. This unitary, naturally governed time is equally appropriate for all the people of our globe, taking into account the inverse seasonal cycles of the northern and southern hemispheres and the progressive variation of day and night. In the same fashion, one can assume a limited variability and general similarity in the biological time of human lives, despite medical intervention. Whoever considers the relation of history and time (if there actually is something called

historical time) does not think of such natural presuppositions in our division of time.

Whoever seeks an impression of historical time in everyday life may note the wrinkles of an old man or the scars by which a bygone fate is made present; conjoin the memory of ruins with the perception of newly developed sites and ponder the visible change of style that lends to architectural contours their deeper temporal dimension; or contemplate the coexistence, connectedness, and hierarchy of variously modernized forms of transport, through which, from sleigh to airplane, entire eras meet. Finally, and above all, the seeker will think of the successive generations in his or her own family or professional world, where different spaces of experience overlap and perspectives of the future intersect, including the conflicts with which they are invested. Such preliminary observations make clear that the generality of a measurable time based on Nature—even if it possesses its own history—cannot be transformed without mediation into a historical concept of time.

Even the singularity of a unique historical time that is supposedly distinct from a measurable natural time can be cast in doubt. Historical time, if the concept has a specific meaning, is bound up with social and political actions, with concretely acting and suffering human beings and their institutions and organizations. All have definite, internalized forms of conduct, each with a peculiar temporal rhythm. One has only to think (remaining in the everyday world) of the annual cycle of public holidays and festivals, which provide a framework for social life, or of changes in working hours and their duration, that have determined the course of life and continue to do so daily. Therefore, what follows will seek to speak, not of one historical time, but rather of many forms of time superimposed on one another. In the emphatic words of Herder, which were directed against Kant:

In reality, every mutable thing has within itself the measure of its time; this persists even in the absence of any other; no two worldly things have the same measure of time. . . . There are therefore (one can state it properly and boldly) at any one time in the Universe innumerable many times.¹

If one seeks to investigate historical times, it is certainly not possible to avoid using temporal measures and unities drawn from a nature conceived according to the principles of mathematics and physics; the

dates or duration of a life or an institution; the critical moments or turning points in a series of political or military events; the speed (and its rate of increase) of means of transport; the acceleration or retardation of production; and the rapidity of weapons' discharge. All of these, to take only a few examples, can be historically evaluated only when measured and dated by a natural division of temporality.

But an interpretation of the relationships that arise out of these factors immediately transcends temporal determinations derived from natural, physical, or astronomical phenomena. Pressure of time on political decision-making, the reciprocal effect of the speed of means of transport and communication on the economy or on military actions, the durability or mobility of social forms of conduct in a zone of political or economic demands with a specific and limited span: all of these factors (and others), in their mutual interaction or dependence, force the emergence of temporal determinations which, while certainly conditioned by nature, must, however, be defined as specifically historical. Each survey of such interlinkings among events leads to the determination of epochs and doctrines of specific eras which precipitate and overlap in quite different ways, according to the particular areas under consideration. Such questions, saturated sociohistorically, are considered only occasionally in the following volume, even if it would help to focus more consideration on them.

The following essays, written in the last twenty years, have a more modest intention. They direct themselves to texts in which historical experience of time is articulated either explicitly or implicitly. To be more precise, texts that explicitly or implicitly deal with the relation of a given past to a given future were sought out and interrogated.

In this way speak numerous witnesses, from Antiquity to the present: politicians, philosophers, theologians, and poets. Unknown writings, proverbs, lexica, pictures, and dreams are interrogated, and not least historians themselves. All testimony answers the problem of how, in a concrete situation, experiences come to terms with the past; how expectations, hopes, or prognoses projected into the future are articulated into language. Throughout these essays the following question will be raised: How, in a given present, are the temporal dimensions of past and future related?

This query involves the hypothesis that in differentiating past and future, or (in anthropological terms) experience and expectation, it is possible to grasp something like historical time. It is certainly one of

the biologically determined human characteristics that, with increasing age, the relation of experience and expectation changes, whether through the increase of the one and decline of the other, through one compensating the other, or through the opening of previously unperceived interior or metaphysical worlds that help relativize the finitude of personal life. But it is also in the succession of historical generations that the relation of past and future has clearly altered.

A consistent discovery in the following studies is the fact that the more a particular time is experienced as a new temporality, as “modernity,”² the more demands made on the future increase. Special attention is therefore devoted to a given present and its coexisting, since superseded, future. If the contemporary in question detects in his subjective, experiential balance an increase in the weight of the future, this is certain to be an effect of the technical-industrial modification of a world that forces upon its inhabitants ever briefer intervals of time in which to gather new experiences and adapt to changes induced at an accelerating pace. This does not, however, establish the importance of long-term conditions that may have receded into the background and a form of oblivion. It is the task of structural history to achieve that, and the following studies are conceived as a contribution to this end.

Methodologically, these studies direct themselves to the semantics of central concepts in which historical experience of time is implicated. Here, the collective concept “History,”³ coined in the eighteenth century, has a preeminent meaning. It will become apparent that it is with History experienced as a new temporality that specific dispositions and ways of assimilating experience emerge. Our modern concept of history is the outcome of Enlightenment reflection on the growing complexity of “history in general,” in which the determinations of experience are increasingly removed from experience itself. This is true both of a world history extending spatially, which contains the modern concept of history in general, and of the temporal perspective within which, since that time, past and future must be relocated with respect to each other. The latter problem is addressed throughout this book by the category of temporalization.

Numerous concepts which complement that of history, such as revolution, chance, fate, progress, and development, will be introduced into the analysis. Similarly, constitutional concepts will be considered

for their temporal implications and the changes these undergo. Finally, scientific temporal categories and the classification of epochs by historians will be examined to determine the degree to which they register a transformation of experience and have (occasionally) promoted such a transformation.

These semantic analyses are not generally conceived in terms of a particular purpose in linguistic history. Rather, they should seek out the linguistic organization of temporal experience wherever this surfaces in past reality. Consequently, the analyses continually reach out and take up the sociohistorical context; trace the thrust in the pragmatic or political language of author or speaker; or, on the basis of the semantics of concepts, draw conclusions concerning the historical-anthropological dimension present in all conceptualization and linguistic performance. It is for this reason that I have included in this volume the study on dreams and terror; this essay involves a degree of methodological risk in considering the manner in which language is reduced to silence and the time dimension appears to become reversed.

The titles of the three parts do not imply a stringent train of thought. They are more a matter of emphases that relate to each other and, in various measure, characterize all the studies. Initially, semantic cross sections are contrasted along a diachronic path. In keeping with this, theoretical and historiographic issues take a prominent place. Finally, greater attention is paid to aspects of linguistic pragmatism and anthropology within semantics. The arrangement is not, however, without a certain expediency, for each piece is conceived as independent and complete, so that series of examples, methodological elaborations, and theoretical considerations of the relation of language and historical reality are almost a constant feature. To avoid unnecessary repetition, the texts are brought into line with each other; nearly all are abbreviated or extended by a few sentences and quotations. A few references to literature that has appeared since the original essays were published have been added.

For the most part, these studies emerged out of the planning and organization of the lexicon *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, edited by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and myself. Consequently, I would like to refer the reader to this lexicon and its contributors for further information. I would like to thank these same contributors for their numerous suggestions.

I also wish to thank Siegfried Unseld, who waited patiently for the completion of the volume during years of promises. Not to be forgotten is the memory of Frau Margarete Dank, who died quite suddenly after having prepared the manuscript for the press, leaving a painful void in the work of the faculty and lexicon.

R. K.

Bielefeld, January 1979

I

On the Relation of Past and Future in Modern History