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Time Layers or Time Regimes

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Abstract

In this article, I examine Koselleck's vision on time layers and the forward-looking view they entail. According to me, both its future orientation and its division into time layers are debatable, given his Kantian approach to concepts and his misappropriation of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. My research is quite urgent since several authors are following in his footsteps. Hartog does this by distinguishing between three time regimes, the second being based on Koselleck's future-oriented time. Lucian Hölscher prefers Koselleck's empty time to an embodied one. Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and Marek Tamm started a project in 2021 called 'Historical Futures,' in which they propose a time regime that decouples the past and present from the future. They have concluded it with a plea for an open future. In this way they hope to have a better starting point for dealing with the issues of the Anthropocene. Unfortunately, all of them sharpen Reinhart Koselleck's vision of a forward-looking time and thus also reinforce its shortcomings. Hartog's time regimes would have been a better choice. Thinking ahead and disconnecting the past and present from the future cannot solve our current time out of joint. A more balanced view of time is a better way out.

Keywords

Empty time. Embodied time. Simultaneity of the non-simultaneous

Introduction

The Anthropocene is the most important issue of our time. It is a time "out of joint," manifesting itself in rapidly growing climate change, environmental pollution, and an ever- widening gap between the rich and the poor. Rainer Koselleck, together with the fractured time perspectives of his followers, thinks that future orientation is the best choice to tackle these issues. I think that a balanced experience of time, in which the past, present, and future come into their own, is a better option. This means an embodied time that contrasts with Koselleck's empty temporality.

Koselleck's time is empty, as it consists of time accelerations and the associated *Gegenwartsschrumpfung* (contraction of the present). There is hardly any room for an autonomous past and present. The origin of his empty time, earmarked by Lucian Hölscher, must be found in the Enlightenment with its future-orientation. The result is that Koselleck's time layers rush forward at different speeds. Unfortunately, they do not allow integrative time regimes to emerge, in which interaction takes place between past, present, and future. Time regimes are characterized by a balanced, coherent, and concrete view of the past, present, and future, with no priority given to any of these three.

Looking ahead can be done from an optimistic or pessimistic perspective, but both are tunnel perspectives. Such a perspective not only hinders the openness of the future, but also of the past and present. As a result, the past and the present are burdened by an exclusive focus on the future. An open past requires an open future. The reverse is also true: an open future requires an open past; without this balance, we risk failing to fully grasp the issues before us.

My argument goes as follows. I first discuss how a time out of joint manifests itself in the work of authors such as François Hartog, Rainer Koselleck, and Lucian Hölscher. Hartog notes an imbalance, as priority is given to the past before 1800, the future from 1800 to 1980, and the present after 1980. The empty time of Koselleck and Hölscher with its almost exclusive attention for the future, also contributes to a time out of joint. (section 2).

Zolán Boldiszsar Simon and Marek Tamm certainly want to exchange time layers for time regimes, but they still maintain the forward orientation. They do this by underscoring a future that is separate from the present and past. It is an isolated future that demands almost all our attention and thus devours the past (section 3). In their more recent article, "The Opening of Historical Futures," they maintain their position that the past must be viewed from the expectations inherent in it (Simon and Tamm, 2024), despite their plea for an open future. Although the opposite, a past devouring the future, seems just as objectionable, Thomas Piketty's view of it provides

insight into our contemporary time regime. He attempts to make us aware of the real issues of the Anthropocene (section 4).

As mentioned earlier, a time regime is a concept of coherence, as well as of experiential and historical concreteness, being thus capable of functioning as a heuristic device to trace the issues of a given period. The next two sections show the ontology of an empty and an embodied time. The first lacks both coherence and concreteness and thus does not support time regimes, whereas the second does the opposite. In the sixth section, I introduce a new version of Hartog's time regimes, which differ from the three I discussed in the second section. It becomes clear that temporal regimes imply discontinuity but certainly not disconnection. Given their coherence, together with their concreteness, they offer heuristic capabilities (section 5 and 6).

In sections 7 and 8, I examine the consequences of the different ontologies for their epistemological and thus heuristic functions. An ontological empty time creates an epistemology in which form and matter are separated and in which temporal layers of social history and conceptual history move at different speeds, without intermingling (8). The epistemology of embodied time allows for a concept of time based on Robert Brandom's position on concepts. His vision is characterized by the idea that the Kantian gap between form and content must be abolished. Such a concept of time paves way for an autonomous past and future in the present. It brings temporal regimes closer to reality, as it implies not only coexistence but also friction between the three temporalities (9). This leads to simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, which contrasts with the consequences of an empty time, visible in the non-synchronicity of the synchronous (10). In the penultimate section, I underline why I prefer time regimes over time layers (11). In the conclusion, I return to my adage that an open past requires an open future, and also vice versa: an open future demands an open past.

"Time is out of joint."[1]

William Shakespeare's statement from the sixteenth century remains relevant in the twenty-first century. It provides the lens through which to view many issues in current historiography and theory of history related to the Anthropocene. As Ethan Kleinberg would say,

1 William Shakespeare, The Tudor Edition of William Shakespeare. The Complete Works, (ed. Peter Alexander; London, Glasgow,: Collins, 19642), 1038, Hamlet Act 1, Scene 5, verse 188-189.

it prompts us to ask who has spoiled the "tapestry of temporality" (Kleinberg 2021, 454).

Who has recognized an unbalanced perception of time as a problem? It might have been François **Hartog**. In his book *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time* (Hartog 2015), he distinguishes between three different regimes of time: a future-oriented regime that dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a past-dominated regime before 1800, and a present-oriented regime that has prevailed since 1980 (Hartog 2015, xvi). The future-oriented regime is based on the idea of progress, that since the end of the eighteenth century dominates European culture. Before that era, Europe was embedded in tradition, thus past-dominated. After 1980, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, history seems to end, as Fukuyama states in his *The End of History and the Last Man*. He argues that the world has since been won over by democracy and can enjoy its benefits. In his view, we no longer need progress and thus no future-oriented time. This optimistic idea turned into pessimism at the beginning of the twenty-first century due to climate change, pollution of the environment, and the fear of human extinction. However, the feeling that only the present matters persists, as we have to solve these problems, here and now. Hartog rejects this pessimistic presentism, stating that it is characterized "by the tyranny of the moment and the treadmill of an infinite now" (Hartog 2015, xv). It exists at the expense of both the future and the past.

Hartog's regimes of historicity show a fragmented time, as none of the three time regimes display a balance between past, present, and future. Even the present time is out of joint "since it has neither a past nor a future, ... while privileging the immediate" (Hartog 2015, 113). Nevertheless, his *regimes d'historicités* remain important because, *from a different point of view*, they can help solve the issues of a flawed temporality. That is what I want to show below.

Hartog is not alone in his vision of a time out of joint. His forward-looking time of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is borrowed from the work of Reinhart **Koselleck**. This historian started a project in the late 1960s, leading to the great German lexicon of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (1997). This study of basic historical concepts forms the foundation for his views on history and especially on its temporal aspects. He formulates it in his famous expression that history exists in the tension between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. Notably, this statement must be seen as "characterized by the fact that the difference between experience and expectation has increased" (Koselleck 2002, 129). The "weight of experience and the weight of expectation has shifted in favor of the latter" (Koselleck 2002, 128). This view can be demonstrated with the concept of "*res publica*." It is an age-old, neutral concept of "the common good" that in the Enlightenment turns into an anti-monarchist republicanism. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, republicanism transformed even further into far-reaching politically charged

concepts such as democratism, liberalism, socialism, communism, and fascism (Koselleck 2002, 128). Koselleck, on this phenomenon, highlights that "at the time these concepts were created, they had no content in terms of experience" (Koselleck 2002, 129). He underlines this by stating that "republicanism meant a concept of movement that achieves for political action what progress promised to achieve for history in general" (Koselleck 2002, 128).

The qualification of the time as 'modern' is not meant positively because Koselleck regrets that it is a time that is constantly advancing and accelerating. Nevertheless, he maintains it as a paradigm for examining the past. Koselleck introduces the concept of 'past futures,' in which the past is examined considering its views towards the future. His future-orientation is reminiscent of what is known in the Anglo-Saxon world as the Whig interpretation of history. Herbert Butterfield published a book of the same name in 1931, in which he notes that it is impossible to maintain an optimistic future orientation towards history since the battlefields of the First World War (Butterfield 1973). Koselleck breathes new life into the forward-looking approach to the Whig interpretation of history, albeit with further theoretical sophistication and in a more or less dystopian rather than utopian form.

Koselleck's forward-looking view takes the form of different time layers, with the consequence that history consists of a multitude of histories. He labels this history as a collective singular: collective because of the multiplicity of histories, singular because of the unique Christian era, on which all separate histories are based. The different time layers present another effect. They move faster and faster into the future, letting go of past experiences at an ever-increasing pace. As a consequence, it leads to *Gegenwartsschrumpfung*, a contraction of the present (Koselleck 2002, 2004). This results in a time with no real past and a steadily diminishing present, in which only its future matters. That is why I call it an empty time.

Lucian **Hölscher**, in his *Zeitgärten. Zeitfiguren in der Geschichte der Neuzeit* connects time with space into a framework that not only includes eras, chronologies, years, and dates, but also time patterns (*Zeitfiguren*). They form the infrastructure of historiography. He distills the time figures from an analysis of 20 German and 4 non-German authors. It concerns patterns such as progress, acceleration, and discontinuity, which form the building blocks of a philosophy of history based on a distinction between an empty and an embodied time. He recognizes embodied time with a multitude of histories and prefers the empty time as a structure and spatial instrument to give coherence to historiography.

On that basis, he rejects Koselleck's idea of history as a collective singular, as it encompasses a multitude of histories without any coherence. Such a loose conglomeration of singular histories evaporates reality into a metaphysical construction (*ein metaphysisches*

Konstrukt; Hölscher 2015, 68). Hölscher sees his empty time as a framework that should hold together the multitude of histories mentioned (Hölscher 2020, 280–287). Although he adds time figures to chronology in this empty temporality, I still do not see its integrating function. (Jansen, 2022, 493).

More importantly, he ignores the main problem of Koselleck's conception of time, which is to lose sight of the fact that the past in historiography has a past of its own. In that case, an embodied time is a better option. Therein lies a balanced time, which forms the ontological basis for Hartog's "regime of historicity." Such a regime is a metaphysical construct equipped with a balanced relationship between past, present, and future. This gives history, as a collective singular, a patchwork of time regimes that together form one colorful blanket. Research must determine their content and interrelationships.

While a view of the past is partly determined by the present and the future, an embodied time considers that past and present also have their own past. I will come back to this below.

A future devouring the past

Zoltán Boldizsár **Simon** and Marek **Tamm**, in an article titled "Historical Futures", also corroborate Shakespeare's judgment (Simon and Tamm 2021, 7). In their article, they defend a time that, in my view, is characterized by a variation on Hartog's statement: "It is as though there were nothing but the [future], like an immense stretch of water restlessly rippling" (Hartog 2015, 18).[2] They published it as a call to start a series of articles about a future that is *disconnected* from past and present. Simon and Tamm have an ambiguous affinity for Koselleck's work. On the one hand they endorse his "time of the modern" whose future-oriented aspects form the basis of Western "conceptualization of history" (Simon and Tamm 2021, 11). On the other hand, they believe that "Koselleck's categories are no longer instructive for newly emerging futures" (Simon and Tamm 2021, 11). Simon and Tamm not only criticize Koselleck's forward-thinking, but actually reinforce it. They reject Koselleck's "futures past" because it does not "entail a *disconnection* between past experiences and imaginaries of unfathomable futures" (Simon and Tamm 2021, 11). Their own "historical futures" are meant to decouple the future from past and present, as they want to leave the current time regime and establish a new one (Simon and Tamm, 2021, 7).

Thus, they want to change Koselleck's time layers into time regimes. This is inferred from their intent to "capture a host of complex interrelationships of time dimensions as they

2 I changed "present" to "future"

appear in coexisting practices" (Simon, Tamm 2021, 13). This points to time regimes, which is corroborated by their claim to compare their "historical futures" to Hartog's regimes of historicity (Simon, Tamm 2021, 12-13). As a result, they seem to deviate from Koselleck's forward-looking view and accelerating time. They do this by "the 'coexistence' of many ways of understanding the relationship between past assumptions and the configuration of the expected future" (Simon, Tamm 2021, 12). Despite sounding nice, they do not say how such a configuration is possible if they disconnect past and present from the future at the same time.

They reiterate their claim that they "understand the specificity of these new, disconnected futures within a complex web of historical futures, old and new" (Simon, Tamm 2021, 7–11). This is also not a configuration of the future with a self-identical past and present. In my view, the vision of Simon and Tamm on time regimes remains at odds with their radical future orientation. If they really want the time regime approach, they should have given the past and the present a serious place in their time thinking.

They go very far in their forward thinking. Even the future "we" may not be the same as the "we" of past and present. They refer to a future of a "more than human" humanity and a life that is more "planetary" than "terrestrial" (Simon and Tamm, 2021, 8). Therefore, they keep their ear to the ground of Elon Musk's observation: "history is going to split in two directions. One path is that we will stay on Earth forever and then there will be a final extinction event. The other path is a multiplanetary civilization, which makes it possible to escape extinction" (Simon and Tamm 2021, 18). Other themes are nanotechnology and the replacement of ordinary people by "biocultural beings" (Simon and Tamm 2021, 8). Changes in technology and computing power must be seen as exponential, and alterations in ecology and climate as unprecedented (Simon and Tamm 2021, 16).

The priority of the future over past and present is, as Simon and Tamm believe, necessary because of issues such as the Anthropocene and climate change, which require foresight (Simon and Tamm 2021, 7). They regret that these alterations have been reduced to the level of gradual change, which according to both authors, belongs to the sociopolitical domain, whereas rapid new forms of transition are needed, which lie in "anticipatory practices across technoscientific, ecological, and environmental domains" (Simon and Tamm 2021, 17).

These authors' ideas raise questions such as: is Musk the right guide to lead us into the future? Does this also apply to the idea of robot humans? And can the assumption that the future is disconnected from present and past aid in addressing all the concerns mentioned? Is not such a purely forward-looking, technoscientific, and ecological time perspective historically empty? Would not an embodied concept of time, in which the past, present, and future are more equitably

distributed, better address our present predicament than mere foresight? In my view, only an effort involving the whole society can solve the enormous issues we face. It is about a current society with its futures, but also with its pasts.

Although Simon and Tamm see their own "historical futures" as an alternative to Koselleck's "futures past," they mainly remain followers of the track that Koselleck has mapped out. Their "historical futures" are, in my view, merely an exaggeration of the one-sided future-orientation of Koselleck's "time of the modern." This is not surprising when we consider that Koselleck believed that since the eighteenth century, "all previous experience might not count against the possible otherness of the future" (Koselleck 2004, 267). Simon and Tamm do not distance themselves from Koselleck's forward-looking time and his view of time layers, although they should if they really want to approach history in the form of time regimes.

Let me put it differently; does the world really need an analysis in which an exclusively future-oriented time completely ignores a complete identity of the past? The twenty-first century situation is determined not only by ecological fears and biomedical and planetary prospects, but also or even more so by ideas that cling to experiences of the past. Populists dream of pasts that never happened. The war in Ukraine shows how future-thinking creates blind spots for dictators, who still exhibit nineteenth-century power politics and empire thinking. The same progressive thinking has caused many people in the West to consider it outdated in the 21st century. In the next section, I will present Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* as a more balanced alternative to Tamm and Simon's one-sided forward-looking time regime. In Piketty's time regime, the past occupies a more prominent place. Does not that mean the past can devour the future? Such an assumption is not entirely inconceivable.

"The past devours the future"

Is not a past devouring the future just as bad as its opposite? The answer to that question is affirmative if history is regarded as *l'histoire pour l'histoire*. However, Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* shows that an engaged form of historiography can also speak of a devouring past. The title of this section is taken from his book. The question then becomes how a "devouring past" can produce a time regime that is nevertheless balanced in terms of present, past, and future. That is what I want to show in this section.

Piketty argues that profits from capital grow faster than output and wages (Piketty 2014, 686). His argument is about the hideous formula $r > g$, which means that the return on capital exceeds economic growth. Figure 1 illustrates this formula (Piketty 2013, graphique 11.8). It

shows what danger is lurking. The transfer of wealth via gifts and legacies of French families in 1950–2010 mirrors that of 1860–1910, albeit at a much faster pace because it starts at a lower level. During 1860–1910, 20% of the wealth of French families consisted of assets obtained via inheritances and gifts. During that period, France develops into a society of rentiers. This is now going to happen again.

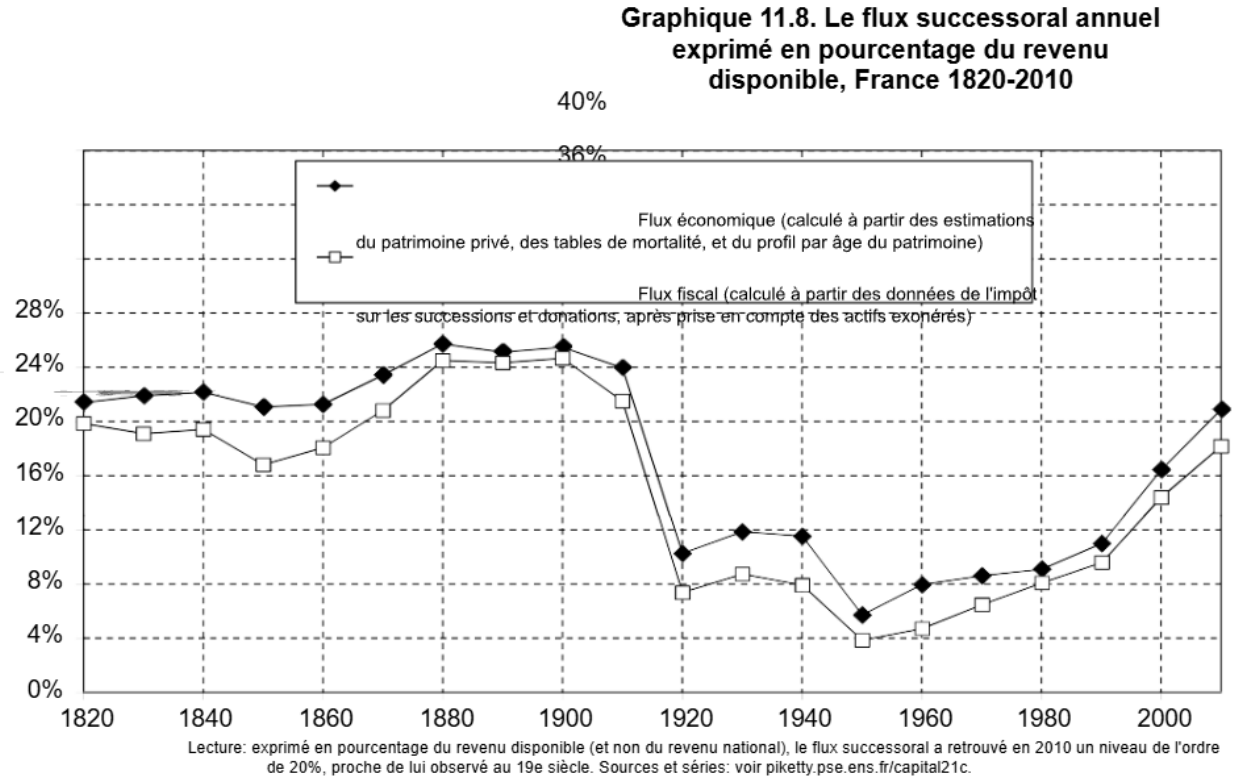

Figure 1: Annual inheritance flow expressed as a percentage of disposable income, France 1820–2010

Such a dangerous development is confirmed not only for France but for the whole world as shown by Figure 2 (Piketty, 2013, graphique 12.3). It concerns the increase in the share of big business in the private capital of the world from 1987 to 2013. It shows that the structural growth of the largest wealth is always much stronger—about doubling—than the growth of the average income and capital. Figure 2 shows that the share held by the richest twenty-millionth and one-hundred-millionth parts has more than tripled in less than thirty years.

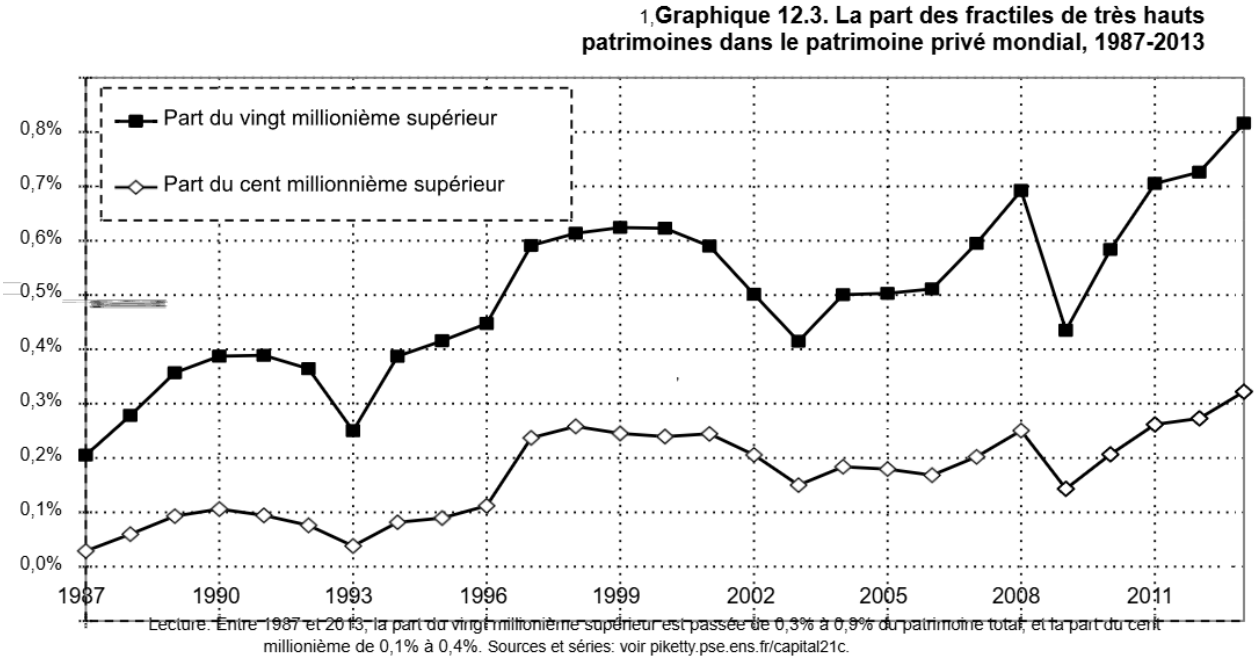

Figure 2: The share of very high wealth fractiles in global private wealth, 1987-2013

This wealth accumulation is not only caused by the light inheritance tax, but also by degressive taxes at the top of the income pyramid. It is about lowering the tax on corporate profits in order to attract or keep multinationals and large financial institutions within national borders. It also includes tax exemption based on interest, dividends and other financial income of shareholders. In general, income from capital has no progressive tax (Piketty 2014, 589). This is due to the decline of progressive taxation since 1970–1980 (Piketty 2014, 588). Thus, it becomes clear why Piketty sighs that the past devours the future. This is the result of a government-backed supply-side economy, which should be jettisoned and transformed into a demand economy of the Keynesian kind, with more aspects of durability.

Due to neo-liberal, supply-side economies, it is no wonder that the American-Mexican billionaire Jeff Bezos can buy a yacht worth 450 million euros in the Netherlands. No wonder Elon Musk can buy Twitter for 44 billion dollars. Both billionaires are also engaged in a space race. In my view, the experiential space of social inequality should be considered far more important than a future of space races, created by extravagant money lords. Moreover, this misuse of money has its origin in a current orientation, which Lebovic calls "a preference for immediate gain over

a commitment to past facts ... or long-term considerations of any kind" (Lebovic 2021, 410-411).

With more progressive taxes, especially at the top of the income pyramid, and an inversion of the r > g formula, it may become a little easier to tackle the ecological and environmental issues. These Anthropocene challenges are associated with a human system overwhelming the earth system by depleting resources and increasing sinks. It has its origins in capitalism and mass consumption. With real progressive taxation of capital gained from (inherited) wealth and reducing fast food and meat consumption, we can fight back. Fighting back is not just about the Anthropocene or wealth inequality, it is geopolitical as well. For too long we have thought that "the end of history" meant eternal peace in the future. Since the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas question, we know better. The democratic world has to put its defense system in order, which in turn costs capital. That is one more reason to introduce a new, much more progressive tax system. Piketty tackles the temporal issues adequately. He makes it clear that we need the past to see how we can have a better future.

A more balanced temporality not only shows material benefits, it can also help our minds. By getting to know the past and present better, individual traumas and past injustices can better be healed. This can lead to more cohesion in society. We now live in a time regime in which the future devours the past and the past devours the future. That is one of the reasons why it is out of joint. We have to turn it into a regime in which we have capital to fight climate change, poverty, air pollution, and all the other issues we have to solve. In that time regime, the past is researched for its own pasts, presents, and futures, not only for its future orientation. The time regime of the French rentiers in the nineteenth century is discontinuous with the current regime (in which the greatest wealth is much stronger—approximately doubling—than the growth of average income and average capital; see above). However, similarities still exist and thus the past and present are not disconnected. The similarities are that, in this case, the richest are getting richer and the investments are decreasing or are placed in less relevant sectors.

Although Koselleck is averse to all kinds of utopianism, he continues to articulate the forward-looking aspects of time. Hölscher, Simon, and Tamm belong to his tradition, as they implicitly pay "iterated attention to [the] single enduring, unfolding, mutating problem" of a future-oriented time (Marshall 2013, 17–18). I especially want to make explicit the Kosellecki an element in it: a future orientation, of which Juhan Hellerma states that "the continuous space of experience is broken apart" and that "the past can no longer shed light on the future" (Hellerma 2020, 192). This must result in an investigation of the ontological and epistemological implications of Koselleck's empty, future-oriented time. Something similar must happen with his non-synchronicity of the synchronous, which must be replaced by the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. The purpose

of all this is to provide an alternative to Koselleck's time layers in the form of *an embodied time*, which can pave the way for time regimes with a balanced relationship between past, present, and future.

An ontological but still empty time

Koselleck considers his "time of the modern" as ontological. In his view, it has its own kinetic force, which runs from the past into the future via the present. It is a time that make things happen:

> [Time] is no longer simply the medium in which all histories take place; it gains a historical quality. Consequently, history no longer occurs in, but through time. Time becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right (Koselleck 2002, 236 and 2004, 165).

Linguistically, time is then understood as a subject. It thus acquires a similar status to Hegel's *Geist*. In the same way as his all-encompassing Spirit, Koselleck's ontologically conceived time is forward-looking. However, unlike Hegel's *Geist*, which is always steeped in history, Koselleck's empty time, despite its ontological status, is almost completely detached from past experience. Ankersmit points to a similar issue of time as a subject. Such a reification of time, he argues, should be rejected because a temporal determination "always remains firmly attached to the predicate part of statements about the past. "Putting time first in historical thinking is like letting the tail wag the dog" (Ankersmit 2021, 55). Time needs to be stripped of its subject status, which is done, in my view, by means of time regimes.

The ontological form of time, as defined by Koselleck, is based on *Sein und Zeit*, albeit with a criticism of Heidegger's neglect of human interaction. To remedy Heidegger's shortcomings, Koselleck formulates a series of universal-anthropological contradictions that serve as existential, kinetic conditions for possible histories. He inventories: 1) friend and foe, with the existential stipulation that under certain circumstances people may kill each other; 2) birth and death, young and old, which determine the chain of generations, 3) master and servant, which he borrows from Hegel's paradigm of lord and slave, and 4) publicity and secrecy, including the opposition between the self and the other (Koselleck 2003, 110, note 1 and Koselleck 2018, chapter 12). As existential conditions, they form, according to Koselleck, the ontological basis of history because, equipped

with polar tensions, they set this ontology in motion (Koselleck 2002, 3). Regarding this set of contradictory concepts, Jörn Rüsen notes that despite signifying permanent change, they are still not history:

> They become history if the changes of the past have been integrated into a general idea of the temporal change in past, present, and future human life. In the framework of such an idea, the past is endowed with meaning and significance for the present; through this meaning and significance, the past becomes history. History is not the past but rather a meaningful interrelationship between the past and the present with an open future perspective. (Rüsen 2021, 79).

Rüsen sees no history in the universal anthropological determinations with permanent change, as they need "a concept of time, that combines the past with the present and gives temporal changes in the past a meaning for the present and its future" (Rüsen 2021, 79). In this sense, Rüsen observes that Koselleck's time is being robbed of an ontological *experience* of time. Ontologically, Koselleck hardly considers the past as a part of time, entitled to a relatively self-identical existence. Rüsen's analysis implies that Koselleck's time layers, in addition to experience, also lack historical concreteness and a coherence of past, present, and future.

Koselleck's empty time creates a history that repeatedly articulates the power of progress or, perhaps better, dystopian acceleration. That experience is paramount and therefore little attention is paid to the feelings that the past itself evokes. Is there room for the experiences of people who see the past as a burden, as something to justify or overcome? That would be a self-identical past with presence in the present. In this regard, Walter Benjamin's statement about Paul Klee's "*Angelus Novus*" is still current. Benjamin sees it as the angel of history and he states that "His face is turned to the past. Where we observe a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet..." (Benjamin 1974, thesis IX and Lebovic 2021, 419). This is a past that is still a burden in the present. As early as 1940, Benjamin criticized a form of history as only forward-looking: "The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (Benjamin 1974, Thesis IX).

This omission of concreteness, coherence, and experience of a self-identical past holds consequences for its epistemological use. We will discuss this not in the next, but in the subsequent section.

An ontological, embodied time

The ontology of an embodied time is experienced in its three aspects: past, present, and future. (Keep in mind that the ontology of an embodied temporality is a metaphysical assumption to clarify what lies behind historiography). Here, the past not only has its own present and future, but also its own past, as we saw in the previous section with the reference to Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*. In this sense Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his *Wahrheit und Methode*, corrects Heidegger's future orientation by drawing attention to the classics from Antiquity, to tradition and authority (Gadamer 2006, 252).[3]

In addition to focusing on the role of the past and its contingency and unexpected consequences, embodied time has two other ontological aspects, which are important for analyzing the Anthropocene: "deep" geological and "ordinary" human history. Although they should be considered different, they have been linked by developments since the Industrial Revolution (Hartog 2021, 434; Spiegel 2021, 440–443).[4] The then emerging capitalism, with its upscaling, bridges the gap and turns the Holocene into the Anthropocene or even Capitalocene (Moore 2016, passim). Since then, geological time and human time interfere.

François Hartog notes this issue and incorporates it into his (epistemological?) theory of regimes of historicity. He sees a medieval regime and a modern regime, both of which have a relationship with *Kairos*, the god of the right moment (Hartog 2021, 436). In the Middle Ages, people waited for the return of Jesus Christ on Earth. The moment of that second coming is seen as the dawn of a new time, which is named after the Greek god Kairos. The time of waiting that precedes it, is a time of *Krisis*. Although *Kairos* is a moment in the history of salvation, it takes place in ordinary human time, which Hartog calls the time of *Chronos*. The history of salvation thus interferes with human, "chronological" history.

3 Aleida Assmann criticizes Koselleck's forward-looking time by pointing to the phenomenon of cultural remembrance (kulturelle Gedächtnis) and goes on to say that we can learn from the past (Assmann 2013, 272–274). Following in the footsteps of Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage, she sees the past live on in the present through trauma (Lorenz) and the cry for justice (Bevernage) (Assmann, 2013, 272-274). Like Gadamer, Aleida Assmann considers the past an essential part of human existence. So Assmann ontologizes time holistically (Assmann, 2013, 242 and 303/4).

4 Spiegel refers, on page 441, to the discussion about the date of the start of the Anthropocene (1945) by referring to J.R. McNeil and Peter Engelke, The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), Nitzan Lebovic perceives a second phase of the Anthropocene after 1945.

According to Hartog, something similar is happening in the present time with the Anthropocene's encroachment on the "chronological time" of ordinary human history (Hartog, 2021, 438). This also results in a time of crisis whose solution lies in a 'kairotic' moment, in which we have to choose between waiting for the catastrophe on the one hand, or a moment of "epochal awareness" on the other, when we really face climate change (Hartog 2021, 435). Hartog compares a modern time regime with a medieval one, showing a discontinuity, without disconnecting them. They remain, after all, connected by the time of Kairos. This also points to the conceptualization of time regimes. In my view, these regimes have, in themselves, no ontological existence, they are "constructed by the historian" and their "value lies in its heuristic potential" (Kleinberg 2021, 454).[5] However, the underlying embodied time forms the (assumed) ontological basis of an epistemological use of time regimes.[6]

Dialectical drives are at work in time regimes, which I will clarify in Section 9. What then are the universal-anthropological drives of an embodied time, which serve as existential, kinetic conditions for possible histories? I see four ontological driving principles: the drive for power, greed, lust, and death. These are excessively amplified by the Anthropocene time regime we live in today and thus need to be brought back under control. The pursuit of power requires a democratic and constitutional system, in which the rights of minorities are respected and the independence of the judiciary is constitutionally guaranteed. Greed has degenerated into mega-capitalism, which needs a powerful welfare state based on a truly progressive and thus fair tax system as a counterbalance. Eros and Thanatos, which can take the form of a desire for freedom and belief in an afterlife, respectively, have long balanced each other, but they strengthen all driving principles in the Anthropocene era. The stricter rules to combat the excesses of the Anthropocene have strengthened the urge for freedom and the death drive. The above-mentioned counterforces are thus all the more indispensable and, for areas in which Eros and Thanatos are concerned, aesthetic sublimation and philosophical relativization can possibly serve as a counterbalance. Remember that these universal drives intermingle with their historical guises, created in the Anthropocene to keep their excesses in check. As such, they differ from Koselleck's universal-anthropological contradictions mentioned above. No history was found there, as Rüsen rightly notes.

5 For me, the "breaches" or "gaps" are established by the historian, who makes use of time regimes. They are not found. Ethan Kleinberg doubts whether Hartog makes the same epistemological choice as I make here.

6 Kairos is not the only "time figure" that can dominate a time regime. See: Hölscher 2020 and Jansen 2022.

An empty time, epistemologically used

Koselleck's time without a self-identical past has implications for his distinction between social and conceptual history. In social history, he sees things happen via theoretically substantiated, long-term changes, discovered by quantitative research. The marriage in concept history is much more short-term and linguistically oriented, based on common law and romantic-liberal ideas (Koselleck 2002, 35). Its future-orientation mainly concerns ideas, wishes, and desires. This becomes clear when we look at the different ways in which Koselleck analyzes individual wedding ceremonies (Koselleck 2002, 37).

This distinction between a socio-historical long-term approach and a conceptual-historical short-term approach is not only a methodological matter, but also highlights a difference in time layers. The time layer of social history can have a different shape, rhythm, and speed than the time layer of conceptual history. Seen from Koselleck's empty time, their mutual relationship is not given *a priori*. Koselleck states that "What follows, for determining the relationship between social history and conceptual history, is that they need each other and relate to each other, *yet cannot ever be made to coincide*" (Koselleck 2002, 35; Koselleck 2004, 222). Seen from an embodied time, social history and conceptual history must coincide, as they do not belong to different time layers due to time regimes. In a time regime, they are always related to one another. Or even stronger: concept and social content are one, as we shall see in the next paragraph.

In the context of the difference between concept and content with regard to time, Ankersmit points to Koselleck's admiration for Chladenius (1710–1759) who stated: "*Die Geschichte ist einerlei , die Vorstellung davon ist divers und manigfaltig*" ("History is one, but representations of it are various and many." Koselleck 2004, 135, Ankersmit 2021, 54). Ankersmit concludes, following in the footsteps of Chladenius, that Koselleck breaks down time as a historical concept: conceptually it is singular, but ontologically plural. Ankersmit also point to a difference between content and form. *The Vorstellung* (representation) can have all kinds of historiographical contents; however, as a form, history is always focused on a single and chronologically conceived concept. Hölscher does something similar, as we have seen above. He presents his empty time as a structure, as a form to keep together the multitude of histories (see above), without filling that time with content. Rüsen wonders whether Koselleck "makes any reference to the content of historical thinking about what actually happened in the past, beyond discussing the temporal form..." (Rüsen 2021, 77). He answers his own question by saying, "No, he did not" (Rüsen 2021, 77). Rüsen also believes that Koselleck's time is empty in terms of content. Ankersmit, Hölscher, and Rüsen consider Koselleck's time as a concept that distinguishes between form and matter. Time as a form is future-oriented and empty. As matter it is plural and as such cannot serve as

the content of its singular form. That is yet another reason why the form of time is empty. This difference between form and matter presupposes, as we shall see, a Kantian notion of concepts.

If we want to reconcile the (supposed) ontology and epistemology of time concepts, we need a different view towards concepts. Ultimately, this means the preference for time regimes over time layers.

An embodied time, epistemologically used

Due to its separation of form and matter, the use of the concept of an empty time takes place in the light of a Kantian view. This is different for an embodied time. It is not Kant, but American pragmatism that determines its epistemological use. A comparison of the Kantian view on concepts with that of pragmatism can illustrate why an epistemology of embodied time uses time regimes, and Koselleck's empty, future-oriented time does not. American pragmatism follows in Wittgenstein's footsteps, arguing that the meaning of a concept is its use. It is not a generally established status of concepts that counts, only their function in communication. In particular, Quentin Skinner emphasizes that a history of concepts can only be about a history of the *use* of concepts (Skinner 1985, 51, Ankersmit 2021, 37–38).

Besides Skinner, Robert Brandom is currently the main representative of pragmatism. He articulates a holistic way of thinking about concepts by criticizing Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in this regard. According to Brandom, Kant splits a concept into two aspects on three issues: first, a concept is a *form* that differs from *matter*; second, a concept is something *general* differing from the *particular*; and third, the concept is the result of a *spontaneous activity*, whereas its contrast is something that is only the *product of receptivity* (Brandom 1998, 616). Brandom summarizes Kant's view: "The concepts are supposed to be the source of *structure*, while something else provides the *content* or matter" (Brandom 1998, 616).

Brandom's pragmatism assigns concepts a material inferential cross various expressions—factual statements, judgements, beliefs, and more. In such inferentially correct expressions, Kant's contrasts disappear: the form of the concept *includes* its content. Brandom illustrates this with the examples "Pittsburg is to the West of Philadelphia" and "Philadelphia is to the East of Pittsburg," explaining that the correctness of these inferences is embedded in the content of the concepts of *East and West* (Brandom 1998, 97–98 and 618). There is no contrast between concepts as *form* and something else as *matter*. Concerning judgments, Brandom asserts: "What a judgment expresses or makes explicit, its content, is conceptual all the way down" (Brandom 1998, 616).

Regarding the concept of time, this means that time plays a material inferential role

through a self-identical past, present, and future. In its clearest form, self-identity in relation to time means that past and future have presence in the present. For the past, it can mean that it is expressed in feelings of burden or nostalgia, and for the future, in the feelings of fear, worry, or responsibility. In those cases, the 'presence' of past, present, and future is the content of time. This can happen in a topological expression of (past) presence in the concept of 'Stalingrad' or (current) presence in the form of a ceremony in which the names of the victims of the Holocaust are mentioned. The question of whether the wars in Ukraine and Gaza could take the form of genocide signals a presence of the future. In this way, past, present ,and future are filled with concrete, historical data.

As we have seen above, Koselleck maintains a Kantian view on concepts. His epistemological use of concepts remains empty, for in statements and expressions using those concepts, the past has not become a self-identical part of it. Only future-orientation counts. The different time layers of social history and conceptual history confirm the emptiness of his concepts of time. In the words of Koselleck: "The totality of social history and the totality of a linguistic history can never be completely superimposed on each other" (Koselleck 2002, 23).

Why is Brandom's approach important? The unity of form and content in concepts, as Brandom identifies in practical inferences, gives, via their concrete and cohesive content, presence to the past, present, and future. See, for example, what Piketty did with the rentiers in France on the eve of the twentieth century, by linking them to the Anthropocene present time regime. The same can be done with the future in the present by pointing out its possible climatic doom. Koselleck's different time layers, such as those of social history and conceptual history, make it impossible to view history from this totality. A similar problem arises when we look at what Koselleck calls *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*.

Non-synchronicity of the synchronous or simultaneity of the non-simultaneous

Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen can have two different meanings: "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*) and "non-synchronicity of the synchronous" (Ungleichzeitigkeit des Gleichzeitigen). The latter means that there is no interaction between the three different temporalities, the former implies that there is interaction and thus a dialectical relationship.[7] Although he often speaks of *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*,

7 Simultaneity of the non-simultaneous can be replaced by synchronicity of the non-synchronous and non-synchronicity of the synchronous by non-simultaneity of the simultaneous, but here I have used the opposition as

Koselleck uses that term only in the context of the non-synchronicity of the synchronous. (Koselleck 2002, 8, Koselleck 1989, 125, 137, 223–225, 323-325, 336, 363–367).[8] Koselleck's use of non-synchronicity has its origins in his view of time as progressive, with a diminishing experience of the past and a focus on an inexperienced future.

What non-synchronicity of the synchronous means can be shown by the following analogy. Imagine two or more train tracks next to each other. A train runs on each rail, with the same station as its departure point, but at different speeds. The train with the highest acceleration is ahead of the other ones. But each train remains on its own track. When all the trains have to stop at the same time on a sudden whistle, we can see, from a bird's eye, a non-synchronous situation of trains, each standing at a different point of the adjacent rails. This example comes close to Koselleck's intentions: see his explanation that "it is after all, part of our own experience to have contemporaries who live in the Stone Age" (Koselleck 2002, 8, Ankersmit 2021, 43 note 27). [9]

Why does not Koselleck use the *topos* of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous? Koselleck connects his concept of non-synchronicity with the synchronous to the idea of progress in the eighteenth century and its acceleration. As a consequence, this progressive and accelerating time increasingly loses touch with past experiences and focuses on expectations. Consequently, there is hardly any room for interaction between the past, present, and the future. More importantly, this is mainly due to Koselleck's perception of time layers (Hellerma 2020, 192–197). These layers function like trains moving on different tracks. In my view, Olsen and Jordheim are right in interpreting Koselleck's time of the modern as consisting of ontological layers with varying rhythms and speeds (Olsen 2012, passim, Jordheim 2012, 166 and 170; see also Koselleck 1989, 323-327).

Something similar applies to another example, which shows that Koselleck is only talking about a non-synchronicity of the synchronous. It concerns an analogy between his time layers and those of geology. "Like its geological model, 'layers of time' refer to the plurality of time planes, each with varying durations and diverging origin, that are nevertheless simultaneously present and effective" (Koselleck 2003, 9; Hellerma 2020, 194). Although Koselleck argues that

established in the title of this paragraph.

8 See: "...in der Erkenntnis des Ungleichzeitigen das zu chronologisch gleicher Zeit geschieht." (Koselleck 1989, 324).

9 Koselleck non-synchronicity of the synchronous is applied to his "time of the modern," which concerns the temporality after 1800. It does not apply to the temporality of the Hellene and the Barbarian in Antiquity (Koselleck 2004, 164 and Koselleck 1989, 223 and 324–325). Koselleck there creates a dualism between barbarian and civilized times, which can change character (such as the barbarian who turns into the noble savage, Koselleck 1989, 225), but as contrasting concepts they also do not interact.

there is a simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, I only see different geological time layers lying on the top of each other, without diachronical movement and interaction. Hellerma sees the same and rejects Koselleck's geological metaphor (Hellerma 2020, 195).

It demonstrates that Koselleck has no sharp image of what "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" means. This becomes also clear when he contextualizes a singular wedding with a diachronic series of weddings. Simultaneity of the non-simultaneous is only there when a specific wedding is replaced by a simultaneous cross-section of weddings. Ankersmit rightfully notes this by saying: "In sum, the individual wedding (...) is not synchronic; a certain set of such weddings is" (Ankersmit 2021, 46).

Above I quoted Ankersmit's comment that Koselleck's view of time is characterized by its origin in the eighteenth century. At that moment, time was forward-looking, as Lorenz and Bevernage show in their statement: "'Civilized' societies in Europe today (meant is the eighteenth century) could be imagined as the future of 'primitive' societies elsewhere" (Lorenz, Bevernage 2013, 32). Because he locates the origins of modernity in the eighteenth century, he also derives, from that century, the non-synchronicity of the synchronous.

"Simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" involves the interaction of the future with the past in the present. Not the eighteenth, but the nineteenth century creates this. Alexis de Tocqueville, the French nineteenth century historian, highlights this by an analysis of none other than the eighteenth century itself. According to him, the society of the Ancient Regime was a mixture of aristocratic elements from the past, which were evolving unevenly into future democratic elements. The Enlightenment philosophers, with their message that "it was necessary to substitute simple and elementary rules, based on reason and natural law, for the complicated and traditional customs that governed society in their time," created a simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. (Tocqueville 1856, Chapter XIII, 171). The aristocracy used to be the leader of opinion, but lost much of its social and cultural power and prestige to the eighteenth-century philosophers. In the form of a rhetorical question Tocqueville wondered: "How did it happen that, instead of lying buried in the brain of philosophers, as it had done so often, it became so absorbing a passion among the masses, that idlers were daily heard discussing abstract theories on the nature of human society, and the imaginations of women and peasants were fired by notions of new systems?" (Tocqueville 1856, Chapter XIII, 171). Here, the future has a presence in the present of the eighteenth-century.

Thinkers about the future are changing places with the powers of the past, albeit in a still-existing aristocratic society. The italic part of the sentence is important, as the philosophers influence an aristocratic society more than the aristocrats would like, but without fundamentally changing it; that would require a revolution. This is what the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous

does. It brings the future into a present that is still dominated by the past. With his argument, Tocqueville creates a temporal regime that differs from the non-synchronicity of the synchronous that Lorenz and Bevernage mention as characteristic of the eighteenth century. (Jansen 2020, Chapter 6, 103–148).[10] It considers the burden of the past, something Koselleck does not do.

It is precisely an interaction between past, present, and future that materializes time and makes a new time regime visible. It results in a simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, characterized by a future-oriented time acting on a present, which is still dominated by the past. The reverse can also be true. A slower time than the most modern can hinder the latter. This creates all kinds of unforeseen circumstances and unexpected consequences, aspects that make an embodied time historical.

Simultaneity of the non-simultaneous differs fundamentally from non-synchronicity of the synchronous. The former creates a temporality, which is influenced by what Nitzan Lebovic calls "complicity." He relates this concept to Walter Bernjamin's "Komplizität." With this concept, the German philosopher warned against the ideology of progress. Simultaneity of the non-simultaneous creates complexity, whereas non-synchronicity of the synchronous creates simplification. In the latter guise, complexity creates its own antonym in the form of complicity with reduction. Thus, it "reduces and eliminates possible pasts, current critiques, and potential futures" (Lebovic 2021, 419). "Eliminates" in this context means that the future devours the present and the past, mutilating time. Lebovic is right about that. We have seen how, in the eighteenth century, the most civilized countries robbed other cultures of their individuality. This is done by measuring those cultures with their own past, present, and future against the yardstick of progress. I discuss the consequences of this in the next section.

Time regimes instead of time layers

Hartog's regimes of historicity present an embodied time as their basis, as he sees these regimes as 'simply a way of linking together past, present, and future" (Hartog 2015, xv). "Historicity," then, "refers to how individuals or groups situate themselves and develop in time" (Hartog 2015, xv). He contrasts "regimes of historicity" with mere "temporality" like Braudel's time of different *durées*. About these durations Hartog argues that they are "all measured against an 'exogenous,' mathematical, or astronomical time..." (Hartog 2015, xvi). Koselleck borrows his concept of time of different speeds from Braudel or, to say it with John Zammito, "Koselleck

10 More examples of Tocqueville's simultaneity of the non-simultaneous can be found in Jansen 2020. See also Chapter 7. It becomes clear in both chapters that this is a new time regime.

theorizes, what Braudel constructed" (Zammito 2004, 133). Therefore, I think that Koselleck's theory of time layers, when used epistemologically, is difficult to combine with Hartog's "régimes d'historicités."[11] The notion of forward-looking time layers makes time continuous, whereas time regimes follow each other discontinuously and have a balanced time. Discontinuity arises from their origin in contrasts. See, for example, Hartog's medieval and modern time regimes based on Kairos, as explained above. Time regimes show a strong internal cohesion and thus create discontinuities without being disconnected.

Let me illustrate this by a difference between the medieval view of God and that of the Enlightenment. In the Middle Ages, God is seen as the Redeemer, as the Messiah who is nearby. In the Enlightenment, the Redeemer changes into the Great Clockmaker, who has distanced his relationship with humanity. In the context of time regimes, Redeemer and Clockmaker are completely different concepts. The term "Redeemer" carries within itself a host of Christian ideas that come from the past. The "Great Clockmaker" bears, in itself, a whole of Enlightenment ideas. This does not mean that the idea of a supreme being, or God completely disappears. This is discontinuity, but not disconnectedness between the two ideas.

Koselleck's ontological time layers imply that there is an autonomous and temporal drive from Redeemer to Clockmaker. Such a development is a thin-layered, moving ontology of "progress" (Bouton 2018, passim, Jansen, 2020, 92). It is based on an empty, general, and autonomous development of the concept of a supreme being, without regard to the historical context. A change of time regimes happens in a discontinuous, but certainly more holistic way. In it, concepts such as Messiah and Clockmaker are more related to the social context from which they arise.

Creating discontinuities in the flow of time, as time regimes do, often involves periodization. It is significant that Koselleckian thinkers such as Olsen and Jordheim seek to erase periodization from Koselleck's ideas (Olsen, passim, Jordheim, 152). This suggests that time layers and time regimes are almost mutually exclusive. However, one must not confuse time regimes with periodization. Time regimes are constructed spaces, or better, "rooms," with a balanced relationship between past, present, and future (see above). Periods, on the other hand, do not require such a relationship and can consist of several time regimes. While time regimes can contribute to periodization due to the role of discontinuity, the reverse is not usually the case.

11 There is an exception; Koselleck starts with two inchoative time regimes. It concerns the distinction between a time in which the Christian virtue of profectus is central, because of the soon coming of the Redeemer, and a secular time in which progressus is central. This implies two different time regimes with different futures. After these first two time regimes, Koselleck does not project others, probably because then his "time of the modern" begins with its forward-looking aspects, and has, according to him, also become an established time.

Periods follow one another, whereas time regimes, as demonstrated by Hartog's example and my own, do not necessarily do that.

As heuristic tools, time regimes consist of a past, present, and future, each of which is distinct, meaning that each time element cannot be replaced by the other two. We have seen that the ideas of Koselleck and his followers rob the past of its own identity by qualifying it as either 'historical futures' or as 'futures past.' While it is true that the past can influence the present and future, this idea should not be extended to the point in which the present and future lose their individuality.

Hartog's concept of time regimes, as presented in his *Regimes of Historicity*, reveals a time that is out of joint. His later kairotic time regime, distinguishing between its medieval and modern forms, provides the solution. Hartog knows how to balance past, present, and future around Kairos, the god of the right time to act. In this way, the present retains its own quality and responsibility for the future. It also highlights that time regimes are not separate from each other; rather, they are connected by an analogous understanding of time. The relationship between time regimes is thus not disconnected but discontinuous (Cardoso 2021, passim). Discontinuity signifies that, despite differences between present and past situations, the past can provide analogies that aid us recognize the era in which we live today.

Conclusion

"What we need to grasp today is, we think, the complexities of the simultaneity of conceptions of the future and the ways in which transitions to those futures mobilize a plurality of historicities,", say Simon and Tamm in a more recent article (Simon, Tamm 2024). This implies that the assumption of a multiple, open future, from which the past(s) must be examined, nevertheless presupposes a past shaped by anticipated issues of the future. It thus becomes a future-oriented past, which can hinder its openness. Does such a past make us aware of the real issues in the present?

What we need is an open perspective on the past, in which we recognize issues not only in terms of their future implications. The Anthropocene has its roots in the past, and that past can be examined with both optimistic and pessimistic views of the future, as well as *everything in between*. Piketty presents an analysis of the contemporary time regime from this open perspective on both past and future. He identifies a growing gap between the rich and poor in the present, analyzes similar situations from the past, and uses that understanding to project solutions for the future into the present. He avoids both optimistic and doomsday scenarios, focusing instead

on the essential issues within the contemporary time regime. Is not a 'flight forward' an escape from the confrontation with the real issues? Is bridging the gap between rich and poor such an overwhelming obstacle that we prefer to discuss future scenarios instead?

Hartog does the same as Piketty. He provides insights into our current situation, describing it as a time out of joint by highlighting the conflicting elements within the time regime of Kairos. In doing so, he warns us not to wait but to face and address issues. Both Piketty and Hartog use an open past, which provides insights needed to better handle the present and future. The best approach to ensuring an open future is to reason from an open, self-identical past.

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