THE NEW ANNALISTIC: A SKETCH OF A THEORY OF HISTORY

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"Allein die annalistische Geschichtsschreibung existierte unter irgendeiner Gestalt zu allen Zeiten, existiert noch und wird immer existieren."

G. G. Gervinus, Grundzüge der Historik (1837)

ABSTRACT

This article argues for the establishment of a new, "annalistic" model of history and historical investigation. This implies a new concept of historical event: instead of being seen as an element within a historical narrative, the historical event is defined as the common reference point of many narratives that can be told about it. The annalistic model also implies a new concept of historical change: instead of being defined as the change of an "object" within a set of given historical parameters, historical change has to be perceived as the change of parameters related to a given historical object. A new concept of history follows from the annalistic model: instead of history being a metaphysical unity of space and time (the destiny of mankind, the positivist's world of facts), in which everything is linked to everything, it is instead the product of historical judgment carried out by those who design stories about their own past, present, and future. To the "annalist" a world is imaginable in which no history has existed, exists, or will exist.

The article analyzes three aspects of the concept of historical time: it demonstrates the huge variety of temporal structures in history; it argues for the foundation of the representation of historical time in linguistic concepts; and it discusses the relationship of fictionality and reality in historical discourse. Finally, the annalistic model is compared to the traditional concept of history established by historicism in the nineteenth century.

There was a time when historians who composed "annals" only wrote down the particularly remarkable events of the year being recorded. In these annals the events appeared in strict chronological order, like pearls threaded on a chain, but without any other inner connection. Modern theorists of history like to refer to these annals when pointing to the progress of western historiography in the last centuries.[1] For as a rule, these records failed to say how the recorded events came about or what followed from them. They fell short of presenting the general context within which and from which past events first attained their historical mean-

1. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London, 1987), 11ff.

ing.[2] The following reflections have led me to the conclusion that it is necessary to reestablish a modern version of the old annalistic paradigm. Starting from an analysis of the deficits and limitations of the modern idea of history I will attempt to develop a concept of a "new annalistic," which, I hope, will maintain the advantages of history as progress, while discarding its problematic theological implications.[3]

I. HISTORY AND EVENT

According to prominent theories of narrative history, the main advantage of the historical narrative compared to the chronicle is the broad development of its plot structure.[4] The plot on which the historical narrative is based consists of at least three elements: a starting constellation, which determines the conditions for the development of the story; a final constellation, which differs significantly from the starting constellation and includes the results of the story, and a middle part, the turning-point, in which the starting constellation is changed into the final one. This insight suggests that every event within a story is bound to a general discursive context which imparts meaning to it. Or, to say it in another way: the historical meaning of an event consists in telling how it came about, and what followed from it.

Thus the historical narrative undoubtedly satisfies a specific historical curiosity and can therefore be counted as the historical explanation of the event in question. However, such an explanation is truly satisfying only in the case of fictional events—events that are nothing more than elements of a story. In the case of real events, which the historical narrative can refer to only as elements of a nonliterary world, a set of problems arises:

1. Every real, as opposed to fictitious, event of the past must be understood as an element not of one but of many, and in the end even of an infinite number of histories. In realizing this it is irrelevant whether we take "history" as a historical fiction or as the real context of past events. For in both cases the event exists not only as an element of a particular story. Rather, numerous stories or contexts can be imagined, within which the event might figure as a possible element. However, if an event is placed on the "crossroads" of a potentially infinite num-

2. Following my argument it will become clear that the term "meaning" covers more than the semantic quality of a name or concept. Rather it includes the significance or importance of an event in history as well. The German expression *Bedeutung* may better represent this semantic ambivalence than the English expression "meaning," an ambivalence which is very important for my argument.

3. The reader may observe that all the historical examples chosen to back up my theoretical considerations are taken from twentieth-century German history. Apart from the fact that as a German historian I know these examples particularly well, it should be recognized that twentieth-century German history makes special demands on the development of a theory of history which accommodates its numerous and fundamental breaks in continuity.

4. Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, Eng., 1965); Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récits* (Paris, 1983); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1973); White, *The Content of the Form*.

ber of stories, its historical meaning turns out to be ambiguous and indeed inexhaustive.

2. Yet the modern concept of history is based on the assumption that in the end all historical narratives or combinations of events are but parts of an all-encompassing context, of "History" itself.[5] This is a metaphysical hypothesis which seems to solve the problem of the inexhaustive ambiguity of events while in fact not doing so. For the historical meaning ascribed to an event can be claimed to be true only for a certain time—that is, as long as a wider and deeper understanding of it is not found. Conversely, the true and all-encompassing meaning of the event can only be discerned at the end of time. But as long as we have not come to this point we can only grasp those parts of history lying behind us; the meanings which the future may ascribe to a past or present event necessarily remains hidden from us.[6]

Thus the meaning of real events in the past escapes enduring historical definition. The historical meaning we ascribe to them is nothing but the importance we give to them either in the context of present necessities and interests or, insofar as we can look beyond the present, in the context of an open-ended number of stories. The strength of the modern concept of history can be seen in the fact that historical events gradually acquire an astonishing wealth of meaning through the compilation of all these stories. This leads to a reversal of the relationship between history and events: While the event at first seemed to be definable only as part of one and then of many stories, it now appears to be the only lasting element over and above all transitory historical interpretations. This is the paradox of every revision of existing historical interpretations: However much the stories we tell may change, the telling merely underlines the very existence of those past events on which they are based.

II. THE HISTORICAL EVENT

Following this argument the historical event seems to be a curious hybrid between reality and fiction: On the one hand, it cannot be associated with any historical meaning if not embedded in a historical context.[7] And since these contexts are necessarily established by the tellers themselves, historical events appear partly as fictional constructions. On the other hand, historical events are also the reference point of many, to some extent entirely different accounts. Representing the identical within the multiplicity of possible contexts and the enduring within the turnover of accounts, historical events indeed prove to be

5. Reinhart Koselleck, "Geschichte," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 1972), I, 647-717; Jörn Rüsen, *Grundzüge einer Historik*, 3 vols. (Göttingen, 1983- 1989), II, 47ff.

6. Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," [1940] in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1974), Bd. 1.2, 691- 703; Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*.

7. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, 27f.

indepen- dent from a certain historical narrative. They turn out to be part of an objective reality beyond all connections we may establish between them.

The problematical character of the historical event can probably best be grasped in the moment of direct experience: We find an event to be historically significant when we spontaneously place it into the historical horizon of other possible events which we expect to occur in some future, but in fact have not yet proved to be the true historical context. Therefore in the moment when it happens, the historical event is in fact no more than the product of a particular—often multidimensional and in itself contradictory—set of expectations.[8] Ascribing historical meaning to an event thus implies the anticipation of a possible future which may be seen as the most plausible result of the preceding development but is by no means a necessary consequence of it. If the anticipated future takes place, the ascribed meaning is stabilized and we may speak of a factual historical experience. If it does not—and this is by far more often the case—the event in question falls quickly into oblivion: New experiences replace the old ones and create new expectations, which again are either fulfilled or disproved by new experiences.[9]

Let us pause for a moment in this transition from historical expectations into historical experiences: First of all, it must be remembered that what we call the historical meaning of an event is initially formed during the very instant of its occurrence. This seems to contradict the traditional view that the historical meaning of an event becomes clear only in the course of time— namely when the consequences become apparent. However, this meaning is in most cases a secondary interpretation of a historical ex- perience, which was primarily made by the contemporaries themselves. Indeed, it happens that an event attains historical significance only after a long time has passed. But usually we find that these are literary dramatizations of insignificant and casual events, such as those portrayed in Stefan Zweig's *Tides of Fortune*. They seek to give history the gleam of a metaphysical mystery, of a reason higher than that of humans. But within history one rarely *stumbles* over historical events which were not perceived as significant by the contemporaries themselves.

The significance of historical events usually lies not in the occurrence itself, but in the contemporaries' perception of it. To be clear: It is hardly surprising that an event that was experienced by contemporaries as historically significant is later regarded as such. But strangely enough, in many cases events regarded at the time as historically significant are later remembered differently from how they were first interpreted. These events break with an existing expectation. From this one must conclude that for the assigning of historical meaning it is probably not decisive that a preceding expectation is fulfilled by the occurrence of an event, but rather that an event is loaded with what I would like to call "structures

8. Annette Verhein, *Das politische Ereignis als historische Geschichte: Auslangskorrespondentenberichte des Fernsehen in historiographischer Perspektive* (Frankfurt, 1990), 19f.

9. Reinhart Koselleck, "'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont': Zwei historische kategorien," in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt, 1979, 349-375.

of anticipation," that is with particular, more or less unstable, often changeable, and sometimes even parallel anticipations of things to come.

This mechanism for ascribing meaning to historical events is independent of whether these anticipations are realized or not. Contemporaries apparently understand certain events as test-cases for their expectations, and even if these tests fail, they cling to the historical significance of the event as such by searching for new explanations for its occurrence. This can be illustrated with numerous historical events, such as the appointment of Hitler as *Reichskanzler* on January 30, 1933. For the right-wing parties in Germany, this event originally held the promise of tying Hitler down with the responsibility of government and thus calming the political situation, while it later proved to be the first fatal step toward dictatorship. What is important is the fact that the event did not lose its historical significance, but rather maintained its significance by changing its historical meaning.

Of course this is not true of all events that are expected to be significant in the future. Some events promise to be historically significant before they happen, but turn out not to be afterwards: Until the summer of 1989, for example, Erich Honecker's future resignation from the office of party and state council leader was held to be significant as a possible political turning- point in the development of the GDR. But once he had resigned by the end of October, it turned out to be only another episode in the course of the disintegration of the regime, which had barely been expected before. And instead of his resignation being a major event, other events are now found to be of much greater importance for this process of disintegration: the demonstrations in Leipzig from the 7th to the 9th of October for example, or the opening of the wall in Berlin on the 9th of November 1989. The same is true for other significant events in the past which were firmly expected by many contemporaries, but never came about: the outbreak of a socialist revolution in Germany in the 1880s for example, or the capitulation of Germany's enemies in the winter of 1914. But did not such false expectations affect the course of history as powerfully as actually occurring events?

To recapitulate: An event acquires historical meaning through the tension between contemporary expectations and experiences, and it does so at the very instant when the historical expectation turns into historical experience. For one logical moment, so to speak, the event appears to fall out of the setting in which it is normally embedded, and turns into an objective point of reference for all imaginable stories. No historical account which refers to history as a whole can then avoid providing a plausible explanation for this event. But however great the need for its explanation, it is also true that such an event eludes any exhaustive historical explication. Thus it appears to be, historically speaking, arbitrary, that is, in the end not deducible from the conditions which are said to have made it possible.[10]

10. Johann Martin Chladenius, *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1752), S.249.

Historical events are thus of decisive importance when history is understood as an overall texture of past happenings. In disappointing or fulfilling existing expectations about the turn of events, they point to new paths of development and thus further advance them. This "progress" is not derived from a preconceived metaphysical concept of history but from human action: What drives history forward are the connections that individuals establish between their past and their future actions. What we therefore properly call history is not then the metaphysical construction of a general context of all events in the world, but the process of historical judgment carried out by those who design stories about their own past and their expected future.[11]

III. HISTORICAL TIME

Historical time can be described as the basic structure of history[12] or as the medium within which historical sense develops.[13] Yet what we call "historical time" proves upon closer inspection to embrace a complex bundle of theoretical problems. I am going to discuss three aspects which I believe to be of great importance for the present argument: 1. the problem of the unity of historical time; 2. the problem of the linguistic representation of historical time; and 3. the problem of the fictionality of historical time.

1. It was not very long ago that the concept of historical time was discovered. At the beginning of this century time was still described—by Georg Simmel for example, among other followers of Kant—as a universal form of perception, which remains neutral with respect to its contents, the many manifestations of the empirical world.[14] In this context the term "historical time" simply signified the time of history. There was very little discussion about the fact that this concept had its origin in the theological notion of God as the master of all times. Instead of questioning the logical priority and empirical independence of time, the concept seemed to open up an empirically definable space in time, a space within which every possible historical event or process found its proper "place." Chronologically divided into epochs and periods, historical time appeared to offer a scale on which every sequence of events could be located, allowing every past event its singular place, a kind of distinguished individuality, in history. The task of the historian was to il- luminate the whole cosmos of these individual events and to reveal the relationship among all of them, so as gradually to reveal the whole elaborate structure of the historical world.

In the 1930s French historians of the *Annales* school were the first to show that the assumed unity of historical time was in fact an illusory metaphysical construct, which disintegrates as soon as it is used in empirical research and histor-

11. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*.

12. Reinhart Koselleck, "Wozu noch Historie?," *Historische Zeitschrift* 212 (1971), 1-18

13. Jörn Rüsen, *Zeit und Sinn: Strategien historischen Denkens* (Frankfurt, 1990).

14. Georg Simmel, "Das Problem der historischen Zeit," in Simmel, *Das Individuum und die Freiheit: Essays* [1916] (Stuttgart, 1957), 48-60.

ical writing. Furthermore, historical time was no longer considered neutral in relation to the events and processes recorded in temporal terms. In numerous studies, *Annales* historians demonstrated that most events of the past could be assigned to differing rhythms and models of time: In the Middle Ages, for example, the rhythm of leisure and labor in the daily life of a peasant differed from that of a monk, the temporal order experienced by a merchant was different from that of the church, and so on.[15] Iterative structures of time give form and rhythm to the life of past, as to present societies, in waves of different length and quality.[16] Bringing them into relation with one another in order to establish a general social temporal order is a difficult but to some extent necessary task. For upon this the functional interdependence of all rhythmically repeating social processes depends.

However, the temporal order of societies has always been a fragile construct—and perhaps especially in the modern world. It is periodically in danger of collapsing either for a short time or permanently, as when unexpected events occur that destroy the ordinary rhythms of life, often with catastrophic consequences for those involved. It is easy to illustrate this by historical examples: Every war destroys the customary order of time within a society by, for example, suspending elections and bringing in emergency decrees, by changing the rhythms of production and leisure, by giving large numbers of people new jobs and responsibilities, and so on; in the same way every social revolution and every state bankruptcy permanently suspend the existing temporal structures of public life, bringing in new administrative and education systems, income and career structures, and so on.

In Germany the collapse of the GDR in 1989 is but a recent example that demonstrates how an unusual event may be judged by future generations as a historical turning point. By generating a new temporal order of society it proves that not all events of the past or present can be allotted to an existing order of time. Some events will always be unexpected—let us think for example of the Ides of March 44 B.C., when Julius Caesar was assassinated, or of the 14th of July 1789, when the Paris Bastille fell—and it is not surprising that such events attract the special attention of contemporaries as well as historians. To be sure, after a while they—as most "regular" events—may be interpreted within a larger historical context and be incorporated into a new temporal order: As far as the period of Caesar's death is concerned, we speak for instance of the "decline" of the Roman

15. Jacques Le Goff, "Zeit der Kirche und Zeit des Händlers" (translated from: "Au moyen âge: Temps de l'église et temps des marchands" [1960]), in *Schrift und Materie der Geschichte: Vorschläge zur systematischen Aneignung historischer Prozesse*, ed. C. Honegger (Frankfurt, 1977), 393- 414.

16. Fernand Braudel, "Geschichte und Sozialwissenschaften: Die longue durée" (translated from: "Histoire et sciences sociales: la longue durée" [1958]), in *Schrift und Materie der Geschichte*, ed. Honegger, 47-85; Koselleck, "Geschichte, Geschichten und formale Zeitstrukturen," in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt, 1979); Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, "Zeit der Kirchen—Zeit der Händler—Zeit der Städte," in *Zerstörung und Wiederaneignung von Zeit*, ed. R. Zoll (Frankfurt, 1988), 89-119; Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *Die Geschichte der Stunde: Uhren und moderne Zeitordnungen* (Munich, 1992).

republic; in respect to the fall of the Bastille in 1789, of the decline of feudalism or, in other contexts, of the victory of the French Enlightenment. But however we incorporate such events into a wider historical context, we usually see them as the starting, the final, or the turning point of historical periods rather than as elements of a continuous process or historical structure. This shows that in history we do find various concepts of historical time ("rise" and "fall," "progress" and "decline," and so on) as well as a variety of different types of temporal concepts: continuous processes, disruptive breaks, iterative structures, unique events, and so on. In the face of them it makes very little sense to speak of historical time in terms of an abstract totality or of an all- embracing historical process.

2. Regarding the concept of historical time, it may be questioned whether historical time is part of the inner structure of past reality itself or rather of its linguistic representation in words and sentences. To ask this is new, too, and was hardly possible before the First World War. For in the nineteenth century language seemed to offer a medium more or less neutral in relation to the historical reality itself. Of course, historiography and empirical research were seen to be limited by the lack of written sources and by methodological considerations, but language as such still appeared to be suitable to represent all past events and all connections between them, however complex and strange they might be.[17] Nineteenth-century historians, for example, would have refuted either as nonsense or at least as irrelevant to the writing of history the supposition that temporal links between past events actually were part of the language in which they were portrayed and not part of the portrayed reality itself. For, according to idealistic epistemology, all reality could be experienced only through the powers of the mind, including the medium of language. A distinction between the linguistic construction of historical reality and reality itself therefore seemed superfluous to any empirical research. Under such circumstances, the problem of the linguistic nature of historical time could not arise at all.

Here again, the new approach to structural history, first elaborated by the *Annales* School in the 1920s, revolutionized the traditional concept of history by focusing on the "material" of history and particularly on the linguistic means of expression in history, that is to its sources and its historiographical presentation.[18] From this point on, the past no longer appeared— even after having passed the historical critique—in its naked "objectivity" but as a complex relationship between the historian and the observed object. All empirical knowledge about the past was now preceded by the basic recognition that for portraying the past—however objective and individual the historiographic presentation may be—it was necessary to use general syntax and semantic linguistic forms—thus at the

17. Johann Gustav Droysen, "Grundriß der Historik" [1857], in *Historik*, ed. Peter Leyh (Stuttgart, 1977).

18. Jean-Claude Chevalier, "La langue: linguistique et histoire," in *Faire de l'histoire*, ed. J. Le Goff and P. Nora (Paris, 1974), III.

same time defining and presenting the basic concepts for historical facts, ideas, structures, and so on.[19]

This produced a certain ambiguity for the concept of historical time: the temporal structures of the past could now be said either to be discovered by historians in their sources or to be underlaid to the past. Historical language is equipped with a whole arsenal of techniques, of specifically historical concepts for example, which situate the sequence of events within a particular conception of historical process—as, for example, when a set of events is described as "progress" or "decline," as "development" or "regression," as historical "differentiation" or "reduction of complexity," or, in more concrete terms, as "revolution," "reform," and "renaissance" or as "reaction" and "restitution"; or when they are brought into context by such concepts as "democratization," "industrialization," "secularization," "modernization," and so on and understood as a teleological process.[20]

Aside from these semantic means, historiography is also equipped with syntactical means, which allow the historian to elaborate the temporal order of past events. With the help of such expressions as "hence," "therefore," "because," and so on, historians either "explain" later events through earlier ones by describing how they came about, or conversely they "explain" earlier events with later ones by describing the consequence of an event or why something should not have happened. Either way, a certain order of time is created which is—in the same way as historical concepts—obviously not part of the past events, but rather subjects the events to a new, specific historical order. To put it another way: Within historical discourse, the succession of events never describes merely their objective chronology, but at the same time, by linguistic concepts, a typological connection between them which we take for the essence of historical change. By reference to particular past events we are able to confirm the reality of this connection; but in doing so, we rely on historical reason, which, in turn, depends on linguistic concepts.

3. Finally, problems related to what we call "historical time" arise in the relationship between historical reality and fiction. Whoever tells a story about real events combines facts within a fictional discourse, being convinced that they are meaningfully linked in the recounted reality as well. But the sequence of events in the discourse does not coincide with their chronological sequence in reality. Some events may have happened long before they become important in the historical discourse; others are closely linked together in the discourse, although they occurred at very diverse times. Telling the story of "real" events involves the concept of a reality—the chronological sequence of events "in reality"—which is intended to differ from the discursive sequence of events in the story. In this way, a story creates the impression of reporting about events, which are supposed to exist outside and independently of the discourse, that is, about events

19. Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte" and "Darstellung, Ereignis und Struktur," in *Vergangene Zukunft*.

20. See *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 1972ff.

which are merely being "reported" in the historical narrative. However, this impression is created entirely by the means of fiction and is so able to deceive as much as to inform the reader about the real world.[21]

At this point we have to reflect on how fictitious reality and true reality can be distinguished in historical discourse at all. In discussing this question, the expression "fictitious" is understood as signifying unreal events, the expression "fictional" to describe literary incidents or events. Fictitious events, so defined, exist only in literature and not outside of it; fictional events, however, can under certain circumstances claim a non- literary existence aside from the literary one. This conceptual differentiation allows one to discuss the complex relationship between historical fiction and historical reality. On the one hand real events can be said to be fictional, because we know about them only via the medium of semiotic representation, that is through language, pictures, and gestures. However, on the other hand fictional (as opposed to fictitious) events can also be said to be real, because all fictional, and even fictitious, events are mental facts, that is, they are real at least in our minds. Therefore the fictional, constructive character of all reality and the realistic character of all fiction relate mutually to one another and, epistemologically speaking, they even imply each other. The fact that we are able to distinguish between the fictitiousness and the reality of events not only as mere opposites within the discourse is rooted in a basic anthropological factor which I can only briefly deal with here.

As Augustine demonstrated in his *Confessions* (Book XI), to remember requires a peculiar act of human cognition: The remembered event (person and so on) is imagined to have been existent, that means an object of our mind is qualified with the attribute of existence, although it doesn't exist at the point of remembering any more, as we know very well. In other words: In saying that something has existed, we maintain that it is existent (in the sense to be real) and not existent (in the sense to be present) at the same time. The mental coexistence of two *conditions/states* which rule each other out in reality is made possible by the historical sequence in which they appear to our imagination: one takes "the place" of the other—whereby what we describe as "place" in the context of human memory could also, in relation to its content, be termed "point in the outside world" (*Lebenswelt*). If we were unable to grasp circumstances which are not directly present as "past," then we would always have to believe them to be "fictitious," or rather, it would be entirely impossible to distinguish between fictitious and real events beyond what is immediately present to us. It is the act of remembering which first enables us to discern the difference between fictitious and real constellations outside of our own present experience.

Hence we can define fictitious past events, as found for example in novels, as events which in our imagination do not compete with the same world in which we find ourselves. This does not mean that fictitious events have no relation to this world; but the relation is, however defined, in any case not a temporal rela-

21. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1986).

tion. Past events, on the other hand, as real events, compete directly with the reality of the life-world in which we locate ourselves. Therefore they have to be put into relationship with one another—and this is achieved through their temporal coordination to the present as "past" events. Just as storytellers are themselves part of the story, historical individuals are always part of the past as they conceive it.

In this way, historical time defines not only the relationship between the past and the present, but at the same time, and even more fundamentally, the affiliation of both to the same dimension of human existence. Both fictitious and real events of the past are fictional in historical narratives: that is, they are mental constructions. But the construction of the real past is based on a specific performance of the mind—the certainty that a past state of affairs is replaced by a present one, that the latter takes "the place" of the former, while the construction of a fictitious past solely rests on the difference, immanent to the discourse, between narrative time and chronological time.

IV. THE ANNALISTIC MODEL OF HISTORICAL CHANGE

On the basis of these considerations, it is possible to design a simple model of historical change, which considers the different meanings we assign to past events in the course of time, and still proceeds from the idea of an objective coherence of history as a whole. Hence our considerations will adopt a new character: Up to this point we have outlined and discussed mainly theoretical premises of modern historiography. However, in the following a historiographical program will be put forward, which still has to be realized in the future. We start with the concept of "historical change."

Usually, historians define "historical change" as the change of one and the same object between two different points in time. However, this concept supposes, in a fairly "naive" manner, an objective coherence of the past, that is, that there is something like an objective transformation between two states of the object. This in fact ignores the constructive character of all such connections.[22] As soon as we have accepted that historical objects—past events for example—may appear in a different way at different points in time, historical change is to be found far more in the change of the way we observe the same object (for instance an event) at two different points in time. Such a concept of historical change can be illustrated by placing stories of the same event, as they were told at different times, in chronological order—like layers of earth which have settled on an archeological site over time and have to be removed by archeologists. In order to establish the entirety of historical meaning of a past event one has to draw a longitudinal line through all these layers right down to the original mate-

22. Chladenius, *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft*, S.267ff.; Koselleck, "Standortbindung und Zeitlichkeit: Ein Beitrag zu historiographischen Erschliessung der geschichtlichen Welt," in *Vergangene Zukunft*.

rial substratum. And only when we understand all these layers as parts of the history of the underlying object are we able to define its historical "meaning."[23]

I would like to call this, in free association with the annals of the Middle Ages, an annalistic perspective on history. In the annalistic perspective historical events are not quasi mediated by their historical context—a certain process or idea in history—but put into the very center of historical investigations. This change in our view of history is necessary because the question of what an event means in history can never be answered completely by telling a certain story about it, since there are many stories to be told about it in the course of time. In contrast to the current theory of history (which is the theory of historicism, as I shall argue later), I maintain that the meaning of an event is created at the very moment of its occurrence. It is constructed by the double perspective of the view in retrospect, oriented towards the past, and the anticipations oriented to the future. When looking back, the event is seen as the final result of past developments, when looking forward it opens up new possibilities for development. Thus history redesigns itself afresh from every new historical present— the present being the focus of historical happening. This concept of history is more closely affiliated to the annalistic writing of history in the Middle Ages than to the modern concept of historiography: From the Enlightenment onwards history as a whole could only be thought from the perspective of the future. In the annalistic concept, history centers around the present. Of course there are profound differences between the annalistic writings of the Middle Ages and the annalistic view elaborated here: In the medieval annals we miss the temporal structures which tie the events to historical processes, periods, and so on. For this reason, a theory of history which takes these temporal structures into account can only be called a "new annalistic" in loose reference to the annals of the Middle Ages.

From the annalistic perspective in this modern sense, historical change consists in the sequence of stories about a past event (or a certain number of events), stories which were elaborated at different times. However, this sequence should not be conceived as a sequence of works of literature, as it is in the history of historical writing. It ought rather to be understood as the actual historical sequence of perspectives of the past, each of them being the true expression of their own present. This questions the traditional difference made between the actual happening and its fictional narrative: As soon as we grasp the historical narrative as a factor which also defines historical reality, we no longer have to deal with the metaphysical assumption of one historical reality. Rather we are faced with realities of different orders—a reality of events and facts, about which stories are told, and a reality of these stories themselves.

In order to illuminate this point, it may be helpful to remember that every historical narrative has a pragmatic dimension, insofar as it creates the coherence of past events from a particular vantage point in the present.[24] Every historical account of past events includes a particular view of the future: Expectations for

23. Cf. note 2.

24. Jörn Rüsen, *Grundzüge einer Historik* (Frankfurt, 1983), I.

the future originate in past experience (and vice versa) whether this was the historian's intention or not. This is also the case when one takes into account the modern experience that everything will be different in the future from how it was in the past.[25] First, not only past circumstances, but also past changes can be projected into the future so that not only a similar but also a changed future can be deduced from the past. Second, the belief in the unpredictability of the future does not satisfy the pragmatic need for prognoses, without which informed action in the world would not be possible. History may be a bad teacher for life, but nevertheless we need its guidance.

Every history of past events thus implicitly points beyond itself into the future, and it does so not in a contingent but in a highly substantial sense since it makes the future the test case for its truth. Numerous historical accounts have proved to be untrue in the past precisely because the implicit prognoses for the future they contained did not come about. This is just as true of the national-liberal writing of history in Imperial Germany, insofar as it focused on the *Weltgeltung* (worldwide prestige) and *Kulturmission* (cultural mission) of Germany in the twentieth century, as of the Nazi writing of history, which on the basis of the supposed superiority of the Aryan race forecasted their dominance in Europe, and eventually in the world. It is as true of communist history, which steered the history of humankind toward a classless society, as of particular approaches within the social history of politics, which assumed that the national mould of modern societies would in the long run gradually be replaced by that of class and social strata.

As much as narratives about the past may be contradicted by the course of events, they also design the future. This is because historical narratives, like all linguistic speech-acts, are not solely indicators, but also factors of historical development.[26] In historiographical terms this can be grasped whenever an unpredicted event, such as an unexpected defeat in war, discredits the previous historical self-description of a society or a social group and calls for a new historical interpretation. Here it is not necessary that only one account be involved; several historical accounts can refer, successively or simultaneously in competition with one another, to the same event or the same sequence of events.

As an example, the outbreak of the First World War in July/August 1914 may illustrate the annalistic model of historical change: it is self-evident that the history of the outbreak of war in 1914 was retold in very different ways over the years—in the autumn of 1914 for example, the winter of 1918, the spring of 1933, after 1945, and so on—as the historical constellation changed. Furthermore, of course, accounts differed according to the perspective of different nations and political parties—and this, generally speaking, all the more so the closer they were written to the related event, the outbreak of war. All these historical ac- counts are to be found in libraries and are well known to historians.

25. Koselleck, "Historia magistra vitae: Über die Auflösung des Topos im Horizont neuzeitlich bewegter Geschichte," in *Vergangene Zukunft*.

26. Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte," in *Vergangene Zukunft*.

Less well known than these ex-post are the ex-ante accounts, which were conceptualized long before the outbreak of war and, without explicitly referring to the coming war, implicitly pointed to it. Of course, in these accounts the outbreak of war is not dealt with as an event in the strict sense but rather as a possible future event (what is called a "futurible" by Bertrand de Jouvenel).[27] After 1871 it can be found implicitly in many contemporary historical interpretations: in that of the French revisionists for example, who worked for the regaining of the lost French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine; or in the political concept of Bismarck, who after 1871 directed his foreign policy mainly towards the real possibility of an alliance between the great European powers against Germany, as was then the case in 1914. Around 1900 Chancellor von Bülow based his struggle for economic autarky and "world power policy" on the serious possibility of a future world war, but already from the 1880s onwards the German Social Democrats worked with the same hypothesis.[28]

However, when war was finally declared in August 1914, the long expected event was totally different from what had been expected before: The flower of German youth, whom the Pan-Germans and many right-wing conservatives considered invincible, if for no other reason than their sheer enthusiasm, collapsed within a few months of the outbreak of the war, victims of the mechanized warfare in Flanders and in northern France. The mass of social- democratic workers who in accordance with the vow of the Second International were supposed to rise spontaneously in revolution on the outbreak of war, in fact joined in with the national chauvinism of the bourgeois parties. And later, in November 1918, when the revolution in Germany finally broke out, its course took quite an unexpected turn. Indeed, what remained of the high expectations which were bound to the First World War before and on the moment of its outbreak? In fact, nothing more than the event itself.

But for historical consciousness this is not so little as it seems because the disappointment of old expectations usually creates new experiences and new expectations. The new historical accounts of the war, which have since been told, drew on them. Therefore the outbreak of war was not forgotten, but rather remodeled by new interpretations in new historical accounts. Indeed, how important the event has remained is reflected in the fact that up to the present no general historical study can avoid pointing to it as the mark of an epoch. However interpreted, the outbreak of the First World War marks the threshold of a new epoch in German, European, and even world history. The contemporary expectations already included this interpretation, however differently the epoch to follow the war was anticipated before the war.

In reporting on the inner coherence of past events, historical accounts play a major part in designing the future of their tellers, who make them their own. Like

27. Bertrand de Jouvenel, *L'art de la conjecture* (Paris, 1964).

28. Klaus Vondung, *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland* (Munich, 1988); and Lucian Hölscher, *Weltgericht oder Revolution: Protestantische und sozialistische Zukunftsvorstellungen im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart, 1989).

all factors involved in the making of history they do this with variable and limited success. But in this way they still add to the construction of the historical world. It is the fatal inheritance of a now popular historical metaphysics that more recent historical interpretations- -and above all those told at present—are estimated as being more true than earlier ones. However, the truth of historical narratives cannot be measured in terms of how far they have approached the illusory ideal of a final, all-encompassing history at the end of time, but only by two criteria: 1. the standards of methodological stringency, with which the interpretation has been developed from the available sources; and 2. the prognostic and pragmatic influence of a historical interpretation on the further course of history.

V. THE TEMPORAL DEPTH OF HISTORY

At this point it is necessary to give some consideration to the history of events that are very distant in space and time. All previous examples have involved events readily available to historians of twentieth-century Europe: the influence of the Third Reich and of the First World War. Even the influences on present European society of the political and industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century are intuitively evident to us. Conversely, the same is true for the influence of present experiences on the historical interpretation of events which are still fairly recent.

However, this is not evident to the same extent for the European Middle Ages and for antiquity. The history of such temporally distant societies appears to us to have a greater inner stability and the historical accounts about them seem less influenced by the experiences of our own times. But changes in historiography can nevertheless be identified even here—and this not only by the discovery of new material sources, which continuously add to our knowledge and so alter our picture of the past. The questions historians pose in the context of such remote times and places, the interests evoked, tend to be oriented towards actual needs and actual questions. This is readily illustrated by the discovery of the cultural and economic history of the Middle Ages and of antiquity at the beginning of the nineteenth century or by the present interest in the role of women in these societies, to give but two examples. New questions usually provoke new categories and theoretical hypotheses to interpret the past; old categories, such as the “state” in the Middle Ages, lose plausibility as soon as “the state” is discovered to be a modern concept, which is properly used only for modern societies. New periodizations, such as the (partial) shift of the threshold of “modern times” from the age of Reformation into the eighteenth century and the “discovery” of totally new epochs, such as “Hellenism” by Gustav Droysen and the “Renaissance” by Jules Michelet, shift the perspective on the past. Such shifts appear to have arisen more often since the end of the eighteenth century, and they indicate an increasing revision of the historical perspective also on distant times and regions.

This evidence points to a general correspondence between the need for historiographical revision in societies and the temporal depth of their history:

Societies, which experience continual and drastic change, seem to be urged to shorten the temporal depth of their national history; conversely, societies with a strong interest in the continuity and constancy of their heritage often go back extremely far in their past. The Jewish people, being interested in a historical identity of the greatest continuity and consistency possible, illustrate the latter case in its fight for ethnic, religious, and political existence: Jewish history covers a span of almost 10,000 years. On the other hand the political history of many young revolutionary nation-states in the Third World very often does not span more than a few decades. When the French established a new calendar in 1792, they even gave their history a new beginning with the new year "one." The socialist and communist parties of the twentieth century did the same when they declared the period before the revolution—sometimes even before it had taken place—to belong to the feudal and bourgeois "prehistory" of the coming communist society and so defined it to be outside of the history of civilized humankind.

The modern industrial nations of Western Europe took a middle course during the last decades: By declaring the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries to be the threshold of the most important epoch in the history of humankind, they shortened the depth of their historical space to a few centuries. They preserved the memory of distant eras, but much like the history of societies outside of Europe, these eras were seen as alien, as the history of the "other" or of the "strange."[29] In this way the history of the Middle Ages gained new attraction, for example in producing a new interest in the long-term anthropological structures of history or in possible alternatives to present social structures, which could perhaps be partially revived at some time in the future. But on the other hand, the actual historical—the temporal—link to the present has been loosened. The break in continuity between our present conception of history and the conception presented by the historical vision of the nineteenth century is immense and unquestionable.

This can be measured not only in terms of the change in historiographical interest, but also in the breadth and width of historiographical references between the modern and the premodern epoch. Along with the "shortening" of European history in the last hundred years, the leading concepts of historical perception have fundamentally changed: The long-term continuity of Christian beliefs has been replaced by more short-term ideals, such as the human rights of the eighteenth century or the nineteenth-century postulate of social equality in modern democracies. Modern civil society derives its origin much less from ancient and medieval society than historians of the nineteenth century did. In studying the organizational and behavioral structures of premodern societies, today people are more fascinated by their different and "archaic" character than by their "modern" elements.

29. See Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–1989* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990).

All this illustrates that the perception of distant societies has been fundamentally changed in the last decades. Such changes mostly result from the network of temporal references between past and present: the division into epochs, the models of development, the evidence for the simultaneity of "non-simultaneous" constellations and processes within different countries and cultures of the world. They allow long periods of time to be bridged, and they overcome the distance of the past and of foreign regions in the present. Therefore our temporal network of references to distant historical spheres is in a certain sense rougher and looser than that to the recent past, but this does not mean it is less open to the annalistic historical perspective.

VI. HISTORICISM AND THE NEW ANNALISTIC

Since the triumphant advance of social history after the Second World War, it has become common within historical theory to distinguish the period of the new structural history approach from an older epoch, named the epoch of "historicism" and described as the dominant form of historical writing since the Enlightenment.[30] However, the differences are mainly to be found in the methodological approach to the study of historical sources and in the use of new theoretical models to explain historical facts, and less in the realm of the theory of history, that is in the underlying concept of history itself. The similarities in this between both periods of historiography are sufficiently significant so that it is possible to describe the concept of "history" used within the newer social history as a "historicist" concept.[31] But the model of annalistic history presented above differs fundamentally from this in a number of points:

1. Characteristic of the historicist theory of history is that history is taken as a metaphysical unity. In historicism the unity of history can be conceived in different ways: theologically as the "work of God," sociologically as "the changing society," or simply as a positivistic "world" of events, facts, and similar individual bits of evidence. In the annalistic perspective, in contrast to this, history appears as a kind of fabric made up of a great number of interwoven strands. Where the strands come together there are historical events, the threads which make up the fabric are the temporal structures or chronological orders, which we as historically schooled contemporaries recognize or develop between the events. In the annalistic perspective on history not everything is connected to everything else, but only when references are actually established by someone. To the annalist, a world is imaginable in which barely a temporal structure, indeed no history at all existed, exists, or will exist.

2. Similarly to its design of the world of events, the historicist theory of history also conceives historical time as a unity, that is as an abstract space-time para-

30. Georg Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, Conn., 1975); Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus: Eine Einführung* (Munich, 1992).

31. See Thomas Nipperdey, "Historismus und Historismuskritik heute," in Nipperdey, *Gesellschaft, Theorie, Kultur* (Göttingen, 1976), 59-73.

meter, in which every historical event and relation in time can be precisely defined. However, every analysis of past chronologies shows that history is made up of a huge number of totally different chronological orders: such as fast and slow change, cyclical and linear orders, those focusing on the process and the turning-point of a story, those oriented towards the present, the future, the past, and so on. From the annalistic perspective, historical time represents far more a temporary and periodic interplay between different orders and perspectives of time, which are developed as a result of the making of history itself, and not as an abstract and metatheoretical order of history.

3. The historicist perspective on history is always oriented towards the present of the historian. Just as the historicist can understand the meaning of concepts in historical sources only by translating them into his own present-day language, so too the historical meaning of past events is accessible to his intuition only in the light of his perception of the present. In contrast to this, the annalistic perspective of history is two-dimensional: it focuses on the moment of the observed past just as much as on the present of the observer. Past historical perspectives on the past, present, and future of that time (the past past, past present, and past future) are confronted with present historical perspectives (the present past, present present and present future) in such a manner that allows the specific quality of historical change to be read from the difference between them. According to the historicist, the meaning of historical events is sufficiently defined by the context in which they happen to be found within a particular historical process or circumstance, whereas to the annalist, this event appears to be a historical construct, the meaning of which cannot be sufficiently explained by any concrete historical context. In terms of historical theory the existence of the event can only be defined as a historical accident. And just as such the historical event explains the course of history to the annalist: based on the difference between the historical perspective on the past future (that is, a future relative to the moment of the event in question) and the present past (that is, a past relative to the present-day observer).

In the annalistic writing of history the focal points of actual historical change therefore encompass all those past situations, in which the perspectives on the past, present, and future fundamentally shifted under the influence of new collective experiences and modes of reflection. Not the past events themselves (as important as they may be), but their ability to change the view of historical interpretive contexts, in which we have always placed them as historical events, makes them so historically significant to the annalist observer. Thus, a general and objective context of history can be identified beyond the interpretations of history which are continually replaced over time, a context which is independent from every single historical interpretation but can only make itself valid via them. The annalistic historian reconstructs this context of history by reducing the change in historicist interpretations of history to the real events which produced them. The annalistic perspective on history thus overcomes the untenable claim of historicist writing to be objective, as much as the mental and self-imposed lim-

itations of discourse-theoretical designs of history. For both—the understanding of the discourse- dependency of all historical knowledge and its transcending by reference to an objective reality beyond all discourse—are undeniably part of a modern theory of history.

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