

ARTICLE

THE TIME OF POLITICS, THE POLITICS OF TIME, AND POLITICIZED TIME: AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRONOPOLITICS

FERNANDO ESPOSITO AND TOBIAS BECKER¹

ABSTRACT

Time is so deeply interwoven with all aspects of politics that its centrality to the political is frequently overlooked. For one, politics has its own times and rhythms. Secondly, time can be an object and an instrument of politics. Thirdly, temporal attributes are used not only to differentiate basic political principles but also to legitimize or delegitimize politics. Finally, politics aims at realizing futures in the present or preventing them from materializing. Consequently, the relationship between politics and time encompasses a broad spectrum of phenomena and processes that cry out for historicization. In our introduction to this *History and Theory* theme issue on chronopolitics, we argue that the concept of chronopolitics makes it possible to do this and, in the process, to move the operation of rethinking historical temporalities from the periphery toward the center of historiographical attention as well as to engage in a dialogue with scholars from a wide range of disciplines. To this end, we propose a broad concept of chronopolitics by discussing existing definitions, by distinguishing between three central dimensions of chronopolitics (the time of politics, the politics of time, and politicized time), and by systematizing possible approaches to studying chronopolitics.

Keywords: chronopolitics, time/temporalities, politics/power, historicism

Time is so deeply interwoven with all aspects of politics that its centrality to the political is frequently overlooked. Politics has its own times and rhythms: there is the voting age and the filibuster, but there are also terms of office, campaigning periods, election days, and presidential tenures and royal reigns.² Time can be an object and an instrument of politics, as the introduction of Greenwich Mean Time and of daylight saving time, the regulation of working hours, and the French

1. This introduction has profited greatly from discussions with Christina Brauner, who conceptualized and organized the conference “Chronopolitics: Time of Politics, Politics of Time, Politicized Time” (on which this theme issue is based) with us. Many thanks to her as well as to the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History, the German Historical Institute London, the Arbeitskreis Geschichte+Theorie, and the Thyssen Foundation, who made the conference possible.

2. See Elizabeth F. Cohen, *The Political Value of Time: Citizenship, Duration, and Democratic Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) and François Hartog, *Chronos: The West Confronts Time*, transl. S. R. Gilbert (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 197ff.

Republican calendar and the Fascist revolutionary calendar demonstrate.³ Temporal attributes are used to differentiate basic political principles, but they are also used to legitimize or delegitimize politics, for instance, when differentiating between conservatives and progressives or when constructing “primitives” existing outside of “modern” time(s) as objects of civilizing missions and development projects. More generally, politics aims at realizing futures in the present or—as in the case of the United Nations Climate Change Conferences—to prevent them from materializing. The politics of time is strongly connected to the question of how change is understood and managed, and, even more fundamentally, to the question of whether change is assumed to be possible at all.

As the above panorama indicates, the relationship between politics and time—the concept of *chronopolitics*—encompasses a broad spectrum of phenomena and processes that cry out for historicization. Initially, however, it was not historiography but other disciplines that turned their attention to the politics of time. The first to conceptualize or to provide pioneering analyses were sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers such as George W. Wallis, Johannes Fabian, Paul Virilio, and Peter Osborne.⁴ Our introduction begins by giving a cursory overview of existing approaches and suggests some trajectories that might help to build a bridge across the divide that too often separates the history and theory of historical times from “mainstream” historiography’s focus on politics and society.⁵ Following this, we systematize possible dimensions of chronopolitics by differentiating between the *politics of time*, the *time of politics*, and *politicized time*.

The latter especially presents a particular challenge for historians, as basic and seemingly innocent historiographical practices are, in fact, chronopolitical practices: temporalization, historicization, and periodization are central to what Dipesh Chakrabarty has called the “politics of historicism.”⁶ One need only think of the border fences between the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern or of the controversy regarding “presentism” and the role of historians as “border patrol” between the past and the present to see that historical times are never neutral

3. See E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present* 38 (December 1967), 56–97, and Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

4. George W. Wallis, “Chronopolitics: The Impact of Time Perspectives on the Dynamics of Change,” *Social Forces* 49, no. 1 (1970), 102–8; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, transl. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006); Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995).

5. On the growing interest in the history and theory of historical times, see Marcus Colla, “The Spectre of the Present: Time, Presentism and the Writing of Contemporary History,” *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 1 (2021), 124–35; A. R. P. Fryxell, “Time and the Modern: Current Trends in The History of Modern Temporalities,” *Past and Present* 243, no. 1 (2019), 285–98; and Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier, “Introduction: Rethinking Historical Time,” in *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, ed. Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 1–20.

6. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6–11; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Muddle of Modernity,” *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011), 663–75.

but rather are a highly politicized affair.⁷ The same is true with regard to the urgent need to connect geobiological or planetary time and the time of human history.⁸

Thinking more systematically about chronopolitics and studying them *historically* means acknowledging historians' own roles as chronopolitical actors and thus calls for a self-reflexive historiography.⁹ Historians and other humanities scholars (re)produce and legitimate the hegemonic images and understandings of the past, present, and future; they undergird the predominant regime of temporality and historicity, but they can also question these regimes, thereby contributing to transforming or revising them. Historiography in general and historicizations of temporality and historicity in particular are "performative interpretations"—that is, interpretations that transform the very thing they interpret.¹⁰ Although we should by no means overestimate historians' impact, making chronopolitics an object of study can itself be understood as a chronopolitical act, and perhaps it needs to be.¹¹ The concept of chronopolitics enables us both to move the operation of rethinking historical temporalities from the periphery toward the center of historiographical attention and to engage in a dialogue with scholars from a wide range of disciplines.

CONCEPTUALIZING CHRONOPOLITICS: A CURSORY OVERVIEW

Against the backdrop of the ongoing discussion of both the concept and praxis of *biopolitics*—think only of the COVID-19 pandemic—and the heightened attention to *geopolitics* since the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine, a remote term has come to the fore: whether in political science, anthropology, archaeology, or art, the term "chronopolitics" appears to be on the rise.¹²

7. Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz, "Breaking Up Time—Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future," in *Breaking Up Time: Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future*, ed. Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 22. See the recent debate sparked by James H. Sweet's "Is History History? Identity Politics and Teleologies of the Present," *Perspectives on History*, 17 August 2022, <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/september-2022/is-history-history-identity-politics-and-teleologies-of-the-present>. For an overview, see David Armitage, "In Defense of Presentism," in *History and Human Flourishing*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 44–69.

8. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021); François Hartog, "Chronos, Kairos, Krisis: The Genesis of Western Time," transl. Samuel Gilbert, *History and Theory* 60, no. 3 (2021), 425–39; and Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, transl. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

9. See Matthew S. Champion's "The History of Temporalities: An Introduction," *Past and Present* 243, no. 1 (2019), 247–54, and "A Fuller History of Temporalities," *Past and Present* 243, no. 1 (2019), 255–66.

10. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, transl. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2011), 63.

11. For an eloquent warning against scholarly navel-gazing and an insightful plea for including the nonprofessional actors and activities involved in producing history, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 19–22 passim.

12. See, for example, Daniel Innerarity, *The Future and Its Enemies: In Defense of Political Hope*, transl. Sandra Kingery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 77–89; *The Time of Anthropology: Studies of Contemporary Chronopolitics*, ed. Elisabeth Kirtsoglou and Bob Simpson (London: Routledge, 2020); *Not Now! Now! Chronopolitics, Art & Research*, ed. Renate Lorenz (Berlin:

The widespread perception that our times are out of joint and the subsequent academic interest in temporality has promoted the use of this more or less obscure composite.¹³ Indeed, the term “chronopolitics” might well be an indicator that we are in the midst of one of those temporal “gaps” (as François Hartog calls them, with reference to Hannah Arendt) in which “shifting landmarks throw us off balance, and the articulations of past, present, and future come undone.”¹⁴

Yet what does “chronopolitics” mean, and what phenomena does the concept encompass? One of the earliest references to the term “chronopolitics” may well be found in an article that the theologian and political scientist Alan Geyer published in *The Christian Scholar* in 1964 and wrote in the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis. To him, the heightened likeliness of a nuclear Armageddon made it necessary to distinguish “catapolitics” from “chronopolitics.”¹⁵ Geyer’s distinction is reminiscent of Günther Anders’s remarks in *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* from 1956: the catapolitical use of the bomb would result in “the explosion of the dimension of history. . . . [W]hat would remain would no longer be a historical situation.”¹⁶ Chronopolitics, on the other hand, was, according to Geyer, a continuation of “history and civilization.”¹⁷ Even if the wording itself found hardly any direct resonance at the time, it nonetheless points to an intimate connection between reflections on chronopolitics and the undoing of traditional temporalities.

The first scholar to conceptualize chronopolitics in a way useful to historians was the sociologist George W. Wallis. In a 1970 article, Wallis employed “the term chronopolitics . . . to emphasize the relationship between the political behavior of individuals and groups and their time-perspectives” and to explore politics’ dependency on underlying understandings of change and social development.¹⁸ Whether the latter are grasped “as inevitable and as part of the natural order” or “as primarily a creation of the human will” has far-reaching consequences: if “the principles of the ‘proper’ society have been established” and if the “broad outline” of the future is already decided, politics will “shift to matters of maintenance and repair,” stressing “the technicalities of adjustment.”¹⁹ If, on the other hand, the

Sternberg Press, 2014); Charles W. Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Racial Time,” *Time and Society* 29, no. 2 (2020), 297–317; and Christopher Witmore, “Which Archaeology? A Question of Chronopolitics,” in *Reclaiming Archaeology: Beyond the Tropes of Modernity*, ed. Alfredo González-Ruibal (London: Routledge, 2013), 130–44.

13. See especially François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, transl. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); and Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, transl. Sarah Clift (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

14. Hartog, *Chronos*, xx.

15. Alan Geyer, “Power and Responsibility,” *The Christian Scholar* 47, no. 3 (1964), 221–32.

16. Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, *Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: Beck, 2002), 263. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own.

17. Geyer, “Power and Responsibility,” 223.

18. Wallis, “Chronopolitics,” 102.

19. *Ibid.*, 105, 107.

present is seen as “a period of crucial decisions” on “which paths to take,” the result will be a “politics of crisis.”²⁰ Although this insight is certainly not of a paradigm-shifting nature, it must be mentioned, as Wallis was the first to define “chronopolitics” on the basis of these underlying “time-perspectives,” or varying understandings of the “time of transition.”²¹

Only a few years later, in his 1977 book *Speed and Politics*, the “dromologist” Paul Virilio took a completely different perspective on chronopolitics. Inspired by Sun Tzu, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and the *Blitzkrieg*, Virilio emphasized the close nexus of power and speed and attempted to shift the focus of the analysis of contemporary societies from the Industrial Revolution to the “dromocratic revolution,” from democracy to “dromocracy,” from geopolitics to chronopolitics.²² For Virilio, chronopolitics was “Apolitics” and thus less an active shaping of the present by political institutions than a condition of (post)modernity: “Today,” Virilio stated in 1983, “we’re in chronopolitics.”²³ Nearly two decades later, another philosopher, Peter Osborne, presented a broader and more applicable definition of the politics of time. Considering modernism, postmodernism, conservatism, traditionalism, and reaction as well as Walter Benjamin’s and Martin Heidegger’s philosophies as “interventions in the field of the politics of time,” Osborne defined the politics of time as “a politics which takes the temporal structures of social practices as the specific objects of its transformative (or preservative) intent.”²⁴

Whereas Osborne’s inquiry into the nature of historical time was inspired by the debate on postmodernism and the post-Marxist search for new guiding philosophies, Johannes Fabian’s interest in “the oppressive uses of Time” was born out of the spirit of radical critique of anthropology emerging out of the discipline’s entanglement with colonialism and development.²⁵ Contemplating anthropology’s “politics of time,” his pathbreaking 1983 book *Time and the Other* showed that “the construction of anthropology’s object through temporal concepts and devices”—“such as primitive, savage (but also tribal, traditional, Third World, or whatever euphemism is current)” —“is a political act.”²⁶ Fabian argued that “temporal distancing”—or the “denial of coevalness”—was part and parcel

20. Ibid., 105, 106.

21. Ibid., 102.

22. Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 69. The term “chronopolitics” appears in Virilio’s work, which in turn has inspired geographers to rethink geopolitics through the lens of chronopolitics. See, for example, Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, transl. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), 13; Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, transl. Mark Polizzotti and Brian O’Keeffe (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 13, 43, 128; and Ian Klinke, “Chronopolitics: A Conceptual Matrix,” *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 5 (2013), 673–90.

23. Virilio and Lotringer, *Pure War*, 119, 21.

24. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, ix, xii.

25. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 2. See also James Ferguson, “Anthropology and Its Evil Twin: ‘Development’ in the Constitution of a Discipline,” in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall M. Packard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 150–75. For a reflection on the ensuing debates and changes anthropology as a discipline has undergone since the publication of this book, see Johannes Fabian, “The Other Revisited: Critical Afterthoughts,” *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 2 (2006), 139–52.

26. Ibid., xl, 17.

of “a kind of political physics”—that is, that geopolitics had “its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*.”²⁷

Fabian’s reflections influenced Dipesh Chakrabarty’s postcolonial challenge of the “politics of historicism,” to which we return in more detail below. Moreover, they shaped concrete historiographical and anthropological case studies, such as Prathama Banerjee’s 2006 book *Politics of Time*, Nadia Altschul’s 2020 study *Politics of Temporalization*, and the 2020 edited collection *The Time of Anthropology: Studies of Contemporary Chronopolitics*.²⁸ Whereas Banerjee concentrates on the construction of the “primitive” in colonial Bengal, Altschul focuses on the “politics of the medieval/modern divide” in Ibero-America; in doing so, she shows that “temporalization” is to be understood as “a selective political device” and that “medievalization is a significant tool in its arsenal.”²⁹ Elisabeth Kirtsoglou and Bob Simpson, the editors of *The Time of Anthropology*, in turn emphasize “different political technologies of allochronism” and “chronocracy,” the latter of which they define as “the discursive and practical ways in which temporal regimes are used in order to deny coevalness and thereby create deeply asymmetrical relationships of exclusion and domination either between humans (in diverse contexts) or between humans and other organisms and our ecologies.”³⁰

Whereas postcolonial approaches have loomed large in the study of time and temporality in recent years, it also seems worthwhile to remember another strand of research into the politics of time, a strand that can be traced back to E. P. Thompson’s seminal article “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism.”³¹ To be sure, Thompson did not mention politics, let alone the politics of time, explicitly. Yet, by studying how time regimes changed and how time and its usages were regulated in the industrial age, he has undoubtedly contributed to the field of chronopolitics and prompted a new strand of research.³² In Thompson’s

27. *Ibid.*, 30, 32, 29, 144.

28. Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: “Primitives” and History-Writing in a Colonial Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Nadia R. Altschul, *Politics of Temporalization: Medievalism and Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century South America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); *The Time of Anthropology*, ed. Kirtsoglou and Simpson.

29. Altschul, *Politics of Temporalization*, 2, 8.

30. Elisabeth Kirtsoglou and Bob Simpson, “Introduction: The Time of Anthropology: Studies of Contemporary Chronopolitics and Chronocracy,” in Kirtsoglou and Simpson, *The Time of Anthropology*, 6, 3. See also Mills’s “The Chronopolitics of Racial Time,” wherein Mills defines chronopolitics as follows: “chronopolitics has to do with the multiple different ways in which power relations between groups—whether formally acknowledged in recognized systems of governance or not—affect both the representations of the relations between these groups and the world, in their specifically temporal aspect, and the material relation of these groups to the world, in their specifically temporal dimension” (299).

31. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism.” On Thompson’s theses and recent critiques of his argument, see Vanessa Ogle, “Time, Temporality and the History of Capitalism,” *Past and Present* 243, no. 1 (2019), 312–27.

32. See Fryxell, “Time and the Modern,” 287–88. Fryxell rightly mentions the following works: David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983); Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Michael O’Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of*

account, Protestant ethics, industrial capitalism, and the diffusion of timepieces were driving forces behind the rise of “disciplinary time,” as Foucault was to call it a few years later.³³ The transition from “task-orientation” to “time-orientation” was imposed and overseen by “old autocrat[s]” such as Ambrose Crowley, by the “supposedly-formidable disciplinarian” Josiah Wedgwood, by the wardens and clerks of the factory or manufactory, and, finally, by the workers themselves who internalized the industrial time regimes; yet, oddly, perhaps, the author of *The Making of the English Working Class* did not explicitly address these developments as political or their actors as political subjects.³⁴

The first to go down that road was Charles S. Maier, who has also provided one of the most useful definitions of chronopolitics available to date: “Besides suggesting characteristic images of history and temporal order, political leaders also propose different uses for time considered as a scarce social resource.”³⁵ Following Maier, then, the politics of time has two dimensions. The first one, which had already been broached by Thompson, encompasses the standardizing, regulating, allocating, and controlling of time. Yet Maier suggests that political decisions and measures can lead not only to different uses but also to varying experiences of time. Thus, a second dimension of chronopolitics pertains to politicians advancing both “characteristic ideas of how society should reproduce itself through time” and “concept[s] of how time itself is constructed as a medium for history.”³⁶ In a similar vein, J. G. A. Pocock, in his groundbreaking book *The Machiavellian Moment*, has argued that Renaissance republican theory relied on the emergence of a certain understanding or philosophy of history and a supersession of the Christian “regime of historicity” (as Hartog defined it).³⁷ In this way, both Pocock and Maier brought attention to how politics depends on prevailing notions of “history,” relying on an “epistemological habitat” that prefigures the relationship between past, present, and future and the role of the (political) subject therein.³⁸ Less interested in theorizing or conceptualizing the politics of time, Maier still demonstrated how diverging ideologies and regimes influenced

American Time (New York: Viking, 1990); and Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, transl. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

33. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 151, 159.

34. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” 81, 82. See Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, “Reworking E. P. Thompson’s ‘Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,’” *Time and Society* 5, no. 3 (1996), 275–99, esp. 277.

35. Charles S. Maier, “The Politics of Time: Changing Paradigms of Collective Time and Private Time in the Modern Era,” in *Changing Boundaries of the Political: Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe*, ed. Charles S. Maier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 152.

36. Ibid. See also Kari Palonen, “Four Times of Politics: Policy, Polity, Politicking, and Politicization,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 28, no. 2 (2003), 171–86, esp. 175.

37. See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

38. Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present*, xiii.

and shaped time in liberal, fascist, communist, and contemporary “post-liberal” societies.³⁹

More recently, Christopher Clark has followed Maier’s lead in his 2019 book *Time and Power*, which addresses “the forms of historicity appropriated and articulated by those who wield political power” in the strict sense of the term and shows how Prussian/German “regimes of power intervened in the temporal order” and “justified their comportment with arguments and behaviours that bore a specific temporal signature.”⁴⁰ Focusing not on the “agentless processes of change” of the “regime of historicity” but on the elite’s politics of historicity, Clark analyzes “temporality as an effect or epiphenomenon of power” and shows how conceptions of time and history give “‘meaning and legitimacy’ to the actions and arguments of the sovereign authority.”⁴¹ Yet, as Clark’s chapter titled “Time of the Nazis” makes evident, not even (aspiring) totalitarian regimes were able to completely enforce their politics of time. Not least because the National Socialists themselves had no “coherent ‘temporal dogma,’” their ambitious and violent project to homogenize German society failed in the face of the latter’s pluritemporality.⁴²

These multiplicities of times, temporalities, and historicities are also at the core of three other recent books on chronopolitics. Thanks in no small part to the influence of Reinhart Koselleck (and of Heidegger), German historiography seems particularly keen to historicize the politics of time.⁴³ Inspired by Lucian Hölscher’s interest in “past futures” and “futures past,” two anthologies—*Die Zukunft des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*The Future of the 20th Century*) and *Politische Zukünfte im 20. Jahrhundert* (*Political Futures in the 20th Century*)—unfold an almost bewildering panoply of utopias, forecasts, plans, and programs to which (predominantly) German political movements and parties of the last

39. Maier, “The Politics of Time,” 164–71. On fascist chronopolitics, see Fernando Esposito and Sven Reichardt, “Revolution and Eternity: Introductory Remarks on Fascist Temporalities,” *Journal of Modern European History* 13, no. 1 (2015), 24–43.

40. Christopher Clark, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 1, 10, 4.

41. *Ibid.*, 10, 14. See Alon Confino, “Why Did the Nazis Burn the Hebrew Bible? Nazi Germany, Representations of the Past, and the Holocaust,” *The Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 2 (2012), 369–400, esp. 381.

42. *Ibid.*, 172. On “pluritemporality,” see Achim Landwehr, *Diesseits der Geschichte: Für eine andere Historiographie* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2020), 43–46, and Achim Landwehr, *Geburt der Gegenwart: Eine Geschichte der Zeit im 17. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2014), 38.

43. On the crisis of historicism, see Ernst Troeltsch, “Die Krisis des Historismus,” in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15, *Schriften zur Politik und Kulturphilosophie (1918–1923)*, ed. Gangolf Hübinger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 437–55, and Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995). Regarding the thesis of a second crisis of historicism in the last third of the twentieth century, see Fernando Esposito, “Zeitenwandel: Transformationen geschichtlicher Zeitlichkeit nach dem Boom—eine Einführung,” in *Zeitenwandel: Transformationen geschichtlicher Zeitlichkeit nach dem Boom*, ed. Fernando Esposito (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 7–62.

century aspired.⁴⁴ As politics are future-oriented, they suggest, all politics are chronopolitics.⁴⁵

By contrast, in their 2020 edited collection, Dan Edelstein, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley suggest a more complex, original model for the analysis of the “mutual constitution” and interaction of power and time: adapting the ecological term “biocenosis”—which describes the complex cohabitation of a variety of organisms in a biotope—they propose the concept of “chronocenosis.”⁴⁶ “Temporal regimes,” they state,

are not merely concurrent but at once competitive, conflictual, cooperative, unstable, and sometimes even anarchic. They inhabit a complex temporal ecosystem with intricate patterns of reliance, adaptation, and violence. Within the seemingly uncontested overall movement of time—and even at times of stability—resides a volatile intersection: different claimants and groups experience time their own way, sometimes in sharp contrast to the dynamics officially on offer. Each relies on different formulations: on historicities, celebrations, narratives of past and future, accelerations and delays, durations and pulses, gaps, maps, economies and crises, tempos, resolutions, prefigurations. Each appeals to and mythologizes its own understanding of past, present, and future. Power, we have shown, traverses or underwrites each of them.⁴⁷

Chronocenosis enables us to make the “pluritemporality” of societies and the conflicts, interactions, interpenetrations, and repulsions that these complex temporal diversities generate more tangible. Edelstein, Geroulanos, and Wheatley reject the concept of the “contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous” (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*) in its original Blochian and Koselleckian historicist and modernist sense because it implied a time neatly layered into distinct epochs and because it can be used to deny people within a society or whole societies coevalness. We, on the other hand, believe that the complex “temporal biotope” that the authors attempt to circumscribe is actually best described by the paradoxical German formula because the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* literally expresses the copresence of unlike or diverging times.⁴⁸ And whereas Edelstein, Geroulanos, and Wheatley opt for an open understanding of “temporal regime” and refrain from systematizing the complex of “unlike times” it encompasses, we stress that such a systematization is needed to bring the history and theory of historical times into a closer dialogue with mainstream historiography.⁴⁹ For, given

44. See Lucian Hölscher, “Virtual Historiography: Opening History toward the Future,” *History and Theory* 61, no. 1 (2022), 27–42; *Die Zukunft des 20. Jahrhunderts: Dimensionen einer historischen Zukunftsforschung*, ed. Lucian Hölscher (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2017); *Politische Zukünfte im 20. Jahrhundert: Parteien, Bewegungen, Umbrüche*, ed. Elke Seefried (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2022).

45. See Elke Seefried, introduction to *Politische Zukünfte im 20. Jahrhundert*, 7–39, esp. 8.

46. Dan Edelstein, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley, “Chronocenosis: An Introduction to Power and Time,” in *Power and Time: Temporalities in Conflict and the Making of History*, ed. Dan Edelstein, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 4.

47. *Ibid.*, 27.

48. *Ibid.*, 8. See Caroline Arni, “‘Moi Seule’ 1833: Feminist Subjectivity, Temporality, and Historical Interpretation,” trans. Catharine Diehl, *History of the Present* 2, no. 2 (2012), 107–21, esp. 117.

49. See Edelstein, Geroulanos, and Wheatley, “Chronocenosis: An Introduction,” 24ff.

all the abstract concepts with which it deals, the study of chronopolitics and the history and theory of historical times requires a precise terminology. This is evident from the negligent use of the term “temporality” in the growing number of studies that turn to the subject to suggest their own timeliness and treat time as a subject like any other—as if the historicization of time did not have any consequences for the widespread understanding of how historiography operates.

THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF UNLIKE TIMES: A TYPOLOGY

To systematize the complex of unlike times that are simultaneously present at any given moment would require an essay in itself, so what we attempt here can be only a rough typology. Temporality is the starting point for all further analysis, as it is the fundamental concept. Temporality can be conceptualized, following Heidegger, “as the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call ‘Dasein.’”⁵⁰ While a plea for a well-defined terminology and a reference to Heidegger may be seen as a contradiction, the latter actually enables us to emphasize the existential significance of temporality: as human beings, we *are* temporal, and time is the horizon for understanding our Being.⁵¹ Let us leave it at that for now and advance through the temporal horizons in which the individual is embedded as in concentric circles and which all include specific “spaces of experience” and “horizons of expectation.”⁵² The individual’s first temporal horizon has been called “everyday time” or “the *durée* of day-to-day life.”⁵³ It encompasses, as Barbara Adam has shown, the daily routines and rhythms of eating, sleeping, breathing, using energy, digesting, perceiving, thinking, concentrating, communicating, interacting, and working.⁵⁴ As the last three activities already suggest, the individual is never alone. From the very beginning, the individual’s time overlaps with the time of others. It is essentially shared time, and because of that, it is potentially conflictual. Think only of the crying hungry infant and the sleeping, nursing mother. With this example in mind, another widespread misunderstanding can be clarified: time is both linear and cyclical, and thus it is characterized by innovation and repetition.⁵⁵ The infant’s hunger is recurring, yet it is nevertheless growing older. Contrary to modernist-historicist beliefs, there is no progression from a “primitive”

50. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 38. See Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 141.

51. If this is the case, the multiplicity of times, the chaos in the “temporal biotope,” is immediately reduced a bit, because we do not all have a personal ontology or understanding of being.

52. Reinhart Koselleck, “‘Space of Experience’ and ‘Horizon of Expectation’: Two Historical Categories,” in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–75.

53. Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, transl. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 8; Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, 144.

54. Barbara Adam, *Das Diktat der Uhr: Zeitformen, Zeitkonflikte, Zeitperspektiven* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), 71–72.

55. See Reinhart Koselleck, “Structures of Repetition in Language and History,” in *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, transl. and ed. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 158–74.

state characterized by a nature-bound cyclical time to a “modern” state defined by linear time.⁵⁶ Cyclical time and linear time are not a diachronic sequence but a synchronic pair.

The “lifetime,” or the “*durée* of the lifespan of the individual,” constitutes the next wider temporal horizon that confronts us with the limited time we have on earth, with our “Being-towards-death.”⁵⁷ This finite horizon is then followed by “our time”—that is, “the time of our days, our lives, and our epoch, something that becomes clear when older people say ‘in my time things were different.’”⁵⁸ With “our time,” or generational time and the wide range of present pasts and present futures it includes, we enter the realm of historical time in the conventional sense. Yet this horizon must be complemented by further collective times. And this is where the matter gets complicated, as we must leave the perspective of the concentric temporal horizons surrounding the individual. For the latter is also embedded in a wide variety of system-specific “own times” (*Eigenzeiten*):⁵⁹ the time of the political, the economic, the legal, the religious, the educational, the scientific system, and so on, which all have their own durations, rhythms, events.⁶⁰ The time of politics, which we will discuss in more detail below, is only one of these institutional, collective, or social times.⁶¹

This finally brings us to the broadest and, at the same time, most fundamental temporal horizon, which—following Émile Durkheim and Hartmut Rosa—we could call a society’s “sacred time”:

the linkage of past, present, and future in one’s own life history is always performed against the background of the historical framework of a cultural community or a narrated world history. . . . This “holy time” over arches the linear time of life and history, establishes its beginning and its end, and sublates life history and world history in a common, higher, and, so to speak, timeless time.⁶²

Regardless of whether or not this time is secular in a literal sense, this overarching temporal horizon is “sacred” because its meaning is emanating from a society’s ontology and cosmology. It is the understanding of temporality that

56. See Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, transl. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 89–105.

57. Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 8; Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, 145; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294ff.

58. Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 8. See Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, 145.

59. See Helga Nowotny, *Eigenzeit: Entstehung und Strukturierung eines Zeitgefühls* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989).

60. See Armin Nassehi, *Die Zeit der Gesellschaft: Auf dem Weg zu einer soziologischen Theorie der Zeit* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), 299–328.

61. See Pitirim A. Sorokin and Robert K. Merton, “Social Time: A Methodological and Functional Analysis,” *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 5 (1937), 615–29.

62. Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 11. See William Watts Miller, “Durkheimian Time,” *Time and Society* 9, no. 1 (2000), 5–20. Rosa, by the way, has also provided a definition of chronopolitics that is in accordance with his theory of “social acceleration”: “The question *who* determines the rhythm, duration, sequencing, and synchronization of activities and events forms a central arena for conflicts of interest and power struggles. *Chronopolitics* is thus a central component of any form of domination, and in the historical process, as, above all, Paul Virilio never tires of postulating and elucidating, domination is as a rule the domination of *the faster*” (*Social Acceleration*, 11–12).

underlies the dominant “meaning of Being,” on the one hand, and the vision of the world, on the other—that is, Hans Blumenberg’s “world-time” (*Weltzeit*).⁶³

Again, this is only a rough cursory systematization aimed at, first, clarifying terminology. All the above-mentioned temporal horizons are shaped, but not exclusively defined, by those in power. As power and time interact on many levels, the study of chronopolitics makes it necessary to localize both the site and the reach of this interaction. Second, this systematization also serves to draw attention to the fact that *chronopolitics* consists not least in the attempt to somehow synchronize this multiplicity of times. The establishment of a calendar and of a standardized time is the most obvious case of such a synchronizing effort on the part of those in power. They need to bring forth or rely on an already existing imagined temporal community based on/aiming at harmonizing the multitude of different rhythms of the systemic *own times* and reducing the complexity of the plethora of present pasts and present futures individuals envision. The powerful—regardless of whether their weapons are swords or pens—attempt to establish and to enforce an “order of time” and thus to configure a specific relation “between the past, the present, and the future,” to make a “certain [type] of history . . . possible” while excluding others.⁶⁴ An example for this is Helge Jordheim’s contribution to this theme issue; Jordheim uses the 22 July 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway and their memorialization as a case study to discuss three central chronopolitical genres: the manifesto, the timeline, and the memory site.⁶⁵

Thus, while acknowledging the complex multiplicity of times that characterizes our own and past presents, the concept of chronopolitics reminds us of the fact that power strives for and is reliant on the establishment of “hegemony.” Following Antonio Gramsci, we can assume that “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” also pertains to the latter’s “order of time.”⁶⁶ Of course there are competing, alternative, and subversive orders, yet the muezzin calls to prayer before sunrise just as the Angelus bell does, school children need to be in school by eight, employers tell you when you have to be in the office, history books in the West are based on the Gregorian calendar, and so on. With all the justified emphasis on the temporal diversity of societies, we should not lose sight of the fact that a postmodern awareness of and inclination toward diversity has led us to discover and to project this diversity onto “the past”—as historians always and unavoidably do when they construct their “present pasts.”⁶⁷ Thus, without denying that past societies were themselves temporally much more diverse than has been assumed so far, we should not forget that they were at the same time characterized by the aspiration of the “dominant fundamental group[s]” to reduce this

63. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 38; Hans Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

64. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 17.

65. Helge Jordheim, “The Manifesto, the Timeline, and the Memory Site: The 22 July 2011 Attacks in Norway and the Chronopolitics of Genre,” *History and Theory* 62, no. 4 (2023).

66. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and transl. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 12.

67. Reinhart Koselleck, “Constancy and Change of All Contemporary Histories: Conceptual-Historical Notes,” in *Sediments of Time*, 100–16, esp. 102.

diversity by establishing an overarching sacred time, synchronizing systemic own times, and allocating the scarce social resource of their population's lifetimes and everyday times in their sense. In the process, these groups banished alternative concepts of temporality, competing sacred times, and visions of the past and the future to "the margins of history"—and they continue to do so.⁶⁸ Although this can never be fully achieved and we should by no means underestimate the agency of historical actors, it is important to recognize that chronopolitics consisted not least in the struggle for temporal hegemony.

If we refrain here from providing a concise definition of chronopolitics, it is because we believe that it is too early to curtail the term. Obviously, whether or not one regards the *Regula Benedicti* and the order of time it prescribed or Koselleck's historicization of historicism as political depends on the underlying concept of the political. Recently, A. R. P. Fryxell has argued that "the temporal experience of non-elites . . . hitherto have been overshadowed by a focus on the technologies and politics of time."⁶⁹ This observation bears witness to a widespread understanding of "politics" in terms of (state) institutions and professional brokers of power and underlines the importance of a broader understanding of politics that includes non-elites as potential subjects but that, most of all, takes into account the "tales about time"—that is, the performative temporal interpretations—that those wielding discursive power tell.⁷⁰ Thus, it seems reasonable not to restrict the "politics" in chronopolitics to the state and its institutions but to think of them in the Foucauldian sense of a "power [that] is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations."⁷¹ Such a broader definition can also help to evade the looming modern and Eurocentric baggage that traditional notions of "politics" tend to carry with them. When studying chronopolitics aims at a critique of historicism itself, it also needs to question the notion of politics that comes with it.

THE POLITICS OF TIME, THE TIME OF POLITICS, AND POLITICIZED TIME

To scrutinize the nexus between time and politics and to make the analysis of chronopolitics manageable, we propose to differentiate between the *politics of time*, the *time of politics*, and *politicized time*. Whereas the *politics of time* refers to the regulation, synchronization, and allocation of individuals' everyday-time and lifetime, the *time of politics* refers to the political system's own time, to the arena of the decision-making process, and to the changing rhythms and durations within which politics take place. *Politicized time*, in turn, is time employed as a weapon of politics, as a means of legitimizing one's own political program and of

68. Antonio Gramsci, *Subaltern Social Groups: A Critical Edition of Prison Notebook 25*, ed. and transl. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Marcus E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 1–14, esp. 1.

69. Fryxell, "Time and the Modern," 295.

70. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, transl. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 101.

71. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, transl. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 94.

challenging or discrediting political opponents or opposing political views. Such politicizations oscillate between the historical temporal horizon and the sacred temporal horizon.

In the following, we present these fields of analysis in more detail and then conclude by addressing the *politics of historicism* and the chronopolitical role of historians and scholars of other historicist disciplines, such as anthropology. We do so because, when it comes to chronopolitics, historians are not mere observers. In fact, we are entangled in society's characteristic images of history and temporal order, which we reproduce in our everyday lives and our work. At the same time, we can also contribute to their transformation, as historiography's critical potential enables us to question the seemingly given by historicizing it and thereby depriving it of its supposed naturalness. Consequently, by studying chronopolitics, we denaturalize one of our most basic categories.

First, and most obviously, chronopolitics is at play when time is the very object of political action; this is what we propose to call the *politics of time*. Such politics aim, for instance, at the regulation, synchronization, or allocation of time and thereby at one of the most basic vectors in the coordination of social life. In modern Europe, the object of such measures is an allegedly objective, physical "clock-time," whose measurement and standardization on national and global scales have lately been drawing much attention, as have debates about calendar reforms, daylight saving time, and the length of the working day.⁷² Two examples may help to substantiate this dimension of chronopolitics.

In the debates and interconfessional polemics that the Gregorian calendar reform (1582) brought forth, two issues were central: (1) whether and how the temporal mutation resonated with what was perceived as the "order of nature"; (2) who possessed the authority to promulgate a new calendar. As the reform was first proposed by the Roman Curia, it was decisive that the reform, to gain Protestant approbation, could be fashioned as a decision undertaken and realized by princely temporal powers, not by the Church.⁷³ While the calendar reform was intimately connected to the contested distinction between the religious and political spheres in early modern Europe, the new calendar was ultimately a product of the *politics* of time. And whereas the champions of the Gregorian calendar reform sought to fashion the changes they proposed as mere adjustments, revolutionary regimes from the French Revolution onward instrumentalized the establishment of new calendars as manifestations of their promise of radical political change; they ushered in new eras both literally and figuratively.⁷⁴ "Human time," the

72. Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*.

73. Edith Koller, *Strittige Zeiten: Kalenderreformen im Alten Reich, 1582–1700* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014). See also Robert Poole, "'Give Us Our Eleven Days!': Calendar Reform in Eighteenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 149 (November 1995), 95–139.

74. For more on the Fascist revolutionary calendar, see Fernando Esposito, "Era Fascista: Italian Fascism's New Beginning and Its Roman Past Future," in *Beyond the Fascist Century: Essays in Honour of Roger Griffin*, ed. Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 195–212.

historian Sanja Perovic argues, “was now the material through which a break with the religious and political structures of the past was to be accomplished.”⁷⁵

In comparison, measures such as the introduction of daylight saving time appear less radical. Yet, when daylight saving time was first proposed in the early twentieth century, it was part of broader attempts at social engineering, aiming at both the productivity and the health of the nation’s workforce, and was accompanied by the belief in the malleability of society and the future. The actual implementation of such measures, however, was brought about by rather more mundane factors: in imperial Germany, for instance, daylight saving time was first introduced in 1916 in response to fuel shortages. Moreover, the change in clock-time had to account for the persistent plurality of social times and their increasing entanglements. While the timetables of trains could be changed easily according to the reform, rural dairy farmers, dependent on the new schedule of the freight trains to transport their produce to urban markets, struggled to adjust the rhythm of milking. The reintroduction of daylight saving time in several European countries during the 1970s and 1980s, too, was less due to visions of social engineering than it was an outcome of growing international entanglements; even the GDR was compelled to adjust clock-time following the example of its Western neighbor. More recently, daylight saving time has found itself increasingly at odds with demands for individualization that partly even aim at questioning the overall legitimacy of such state-induced “chrononormativity.”⁷⁶

Second, time is not only an object of politics; politics takes place in time, and power relations are expressed through temporal practices, because political institutions come with their own times—terms of offices, durations of legislative sessions, voting age, and so on.⁷⁷ This is what we call the *time of politics*. Yet the time of politics does not only entail formalized rhythms, time-honored durations, and legally enshrined thresholds. In a broader sense, time fundamentally structures what is perceived as scope for action—most visibly so when the present is understood as a time of crisis or when the “end of times” are envisioned.⁷⁸ More often than not, such scenarios are tied to increasing “time pressure” and a seemingly unavoidable call to act *now*, as Marcus Colla and Adéla Gjuríčová suggest in their article on the Revolutions of 1989 in this theme issue.⁷⁹ In moments perceived

75. Sanja Perovic, “The French Republican Calendar: Time, History and the Revolutionary Event,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 1 (2012), 1. See also the influential reading by Reinhart Koselleck, “Hinweise auf die ‘Neue Zeit’ im französischen Revolutionskalender,” in *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000), 240–45.

76. David Kuchenbuch, “Ein Atavismus der Hochmoderne? Die Sommerzeit als ‘Social Engineering’ (1907–1980),” *Historische Zeitschrift* 307, no. 1 (2018), 1–41, esp. 2–3 and 35–36; for more on the milking question, see *ibid.*, 21–22.

77. See Palonen, “Four Times of Politics,” 177–79, wherein Palonen elaborates on the concept of the “times of politicking.”

78. Helge Jordheim and Einar Wigen, “Conceptual Synchronisation: From *Progress* to *Crisis*,” *Millennium*, 46, no. 3 (2018), 421–39; Felicitas Schmieder, “Eschatologische Prophetie im Mittelalter—Ein Mittel ‘politischer’ Kommunikation?,” in *Politische Bewegung und symbolische Ordnung: Hager Studien zur Politischen Kulturgeschichte: Festschrift für Peter Brandt*, ed. Werner Daum et al. (Berlin: Dietz, 2014), 17–31.

79. Marcus Colla and Adéla Gjuríčová, “1989: The Chronopolitics of Revolution,” *History and Theory* 62, no. 4 (2023).

as condensed or contracted, the co-constitution of time and politics emerges most clearly: political action shaping time and shaped by time—at the same time.⁸⁰

But time determines politics even in less pressing, mundane moments, as when the recess of parliament or the infamous “summer slump” in news shapes the dynamics of legislation processes and political debates. Moreover, the time of politics also includes nonaction or the deferment of action. Consider, for instance, the practice of waiting or of letting someone wait, which can be observed in both domestic party politics and modern international relations but which also played an important role in courtly diplomacy.⁸¹ Relations of early modern European diplomats frequently mentioned and carefully attended to the time spent waiting for an audience with a local prince. Being granted an audience with, for example, the *ahosu* (king) of Dahomey immediately after one’s arrival was understood as an honor and a sign of precedence over rival diplomatic agents, whereas being made to wait signified an inferior status. Whether in Europe or in Africa, letting someone wait was a demonstration of royal power and, as such, was a political act. Since the late eighteenth century, however, European diplomats who were left waiting at an African court understood this act as an expression of an—allegedly—essential and immutable “African character.”⁸² Reporting on a journey to Dahomey in 1864, Richard Francis Burton tied his observations on waiting to an outright denial of time-consciousness in Africa: “Something must be added on the score of African brain-looseness: these people have as little idea of time as of numbers.”⁸³ According to Burton, “the African keeps you waiting with an exemplary *calme*: if you keep *him* waiting he shows all the restiveness of a wild animal. This is generally the case with barbarians; I have remarked it in the South of Europe.”⁸⁴ Evidently, chronopolitics works on different yet entangled levels: Burton was no longer willing to accept his waiting as an expression of the *ahosu*’s political power; rather, he denied “the African” any time-consciousness whatsoever. In doing so, he employed a classic notion of *politicized time*.

Third, *politicization of time* relates to the instrumentalization of time to challenge and discredit political opponents or to legitimize one’s own program and actions: whether advocating change or continuity, politicians invoke the past just as much as they do the future to legitimize their own politics.⁸⁵ As Benjamin Möckel argues in this theme issue, “future generations” play a crucial role in

80. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Where Is the Now?,” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004), 458–62.

81. See Helmut Puff’s plea for a “history of waiting” as “temporal poetics of everyday” in “Waiting in the Antechamber,” in *Timescapes of Waiting: Spaces of Stasis, Delay and Deferral*, ed. Christoph Singer, Robert Wirth, and Olaf Berwald (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 17–34.

82. See Christina Brauner, “Loss of a Middle Ground? Intercultural Diplomacy in Dahomey and the Discourse of Despotism,” *Comparativ* 24, no. 5 (2014), 100–104, 108, 117–18n78, and Christina Brauner, *Kompanien, Könige und caboceers: Interkulturelle Diplomatie an Gold- und Sklavenküste im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2015), 191–92, 199–200, 237–38.

83. Richard F. Burton, *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahome*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1864), 203.

84. *Ibid.*, 204.

85. See Nomi Claire Lazar, *Out of Joint: Power, Crisis, and the Rhetoric of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

current political debates—be it with regard to the social or the climate crisis.⁸⁶ He shows how politicians reference “future generations” to emphasize the importance and urgency of a particular problem and to distinguish themselves from political opponents: whereas *we* are aware of the long-term consequences of our decisions, *others* are only aiming at the short-term political gains. What’s more, the very categories by which we have continued to categorize political parties, camps, creeds, and attitudes since the French Revolution—progressive versus conservative—are fundamentally temporal ones.

Recently, Brexit, Donald Trump, and right-wing populism more generally have all been portrayed in terms of a politicized time, according to which large sections of the electorate are “stuck in the past” or nostalgically yearning for a lost golden age. Instead of analyzing why voters voted the way they did, such interpretations portray them as relics of the past and deny them “coevalness”; those making such claims thereby accentuate their own up-to-dateness.⁸⁷ When Ernst Bloch proclaimed the paradoxical formula of the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* in his 1935 book *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, he was doing the very same thing regarding the National Socialists: “Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others.”⁸⁸ In this ingenious way, Bloch got rid of the Nazis—philosophically, at least—by relegating them to a past, although, in reality, they were very much part of his present and were, indeed, a threat to his life.

The practice of “temporal distancing” (in which Bloch engages here)—or, rather, the locating of the political or colonial (and national) Other outside of the present—was part and parcel of the historicist “chronotope,” or modern “regime of temporality.”⁸⁹ The latter, as is well-known, was future-centric and revolved around the idea of progress. Where this modern regime prevailed, there began, according to the philosopher Gianni Vattimo, “the era of overcoming and of the new which rapidly grows old and is immediately replaced by something still newer.”⁹⁰ The establishment of the modern regime of historicity was thus synonymous with the beginning of “the epoch of Being conceived under the sign of the *novum*.”⁹¹ In a world where the new is valorized and the old devalued, the dichotomy between old and new, past and present, the untimely and the timely, becomes central to how politics is legitimized, as Fernando Esposito shows in his contribution to this theme issue.⁹² Temporal differentiations are

86. Benjamin Möckel, “‘What Has Posterity Ever Done for Me?’: Future Generations, Intergenerational Justice, and the Chronopolitics of Distant Futures,” *History and Theory* 62, no. 4 (2023).

87. See Tobias Becker, *Yesterday: A New History of Nostalgia* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2023).

88. Ernst Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” transl. Mark Ritter, *New German Critique* 11 (Spring 1977), 22.

89. See Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present* and Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*.

90. Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, transl. Jon R. Snyder (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 166.

91. *Ibid.*, 168.

92. Fernando Esposito, “Peasants, Brigands, and the Chronopolitics of the New Leviathan in the Mezzogiorno,” *History and Theory* 62, no. 4 (2023).

inscribed into “the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced”—that is, they are inscribed into the distinction “between friend and enemy.”⁹³ In these ways, modern politics are characterized by the temporalization of the “asymmetric counterconcepts” of friend and enemy.⁹⁴ If we understand modernity as the era in which “historical time” was “posited . . . as a measure of . . . cultural distance”—that is, as the age in which the “politics of historicism” permeated the world—the outstanding importance of studying chronopolitics becomes apparent.⁹⁵ But the close relationship between modernity and the politics of historicism also reveals the need to reflect on the chronopolitical role of the historian and the practice of periodization. For, as the distinction between the premodern and the modern and the case of medievalism illustrate, historians contributed—and continue to contribute—significantly to the “politics of historicism.” This is also the subject of Ethan Kleinberg’s contribution to this theme issue, in which he shows how historicism serves politics by presenting time as a neutral, uniform, and apolitical scale while really providing a mechanism to advance political and ideological positions under the cloak of neutrality.⁹⁶

CONCLUSION: HISTORIANS AND THE “POLITICS OF HISTORICISM”

As Dipesh Chakrabarty noted over a decade ago, temporalized terms such as “modern,” “modernity,” and their counterparts—“premodern,” “medieval,” “traditional,” “backward,” “primitive,” “uncivilized,” “underdeveloped,” and so on—“imply value judgments from which most contemporary historians want to distance themselves.”⁹⁷ This inclination, however, leads to an unavoidable paradox that historians have yet to resolve. For, on the one hand, as Fredric Jameson famously stated, “we cannot not periodize,” and we cannot not temporalize; doing so would mean ceasing to be historians.⁹⁸ On the other hand, as chronopolitically conscious historians, we are also aware that periodization and temporalization are the lifeblood of the politics of historicism.

Temporalization, or temporal differentiation, is a—if not *the*—basic *techne* of historians. If we follow, among others, Koselleck, the practice of temporalization established itself after a long prehistory during the age of European expansion during the so-called *Sattelzeit*, the period between 1750 and 1850. In the course

93. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, expanded ed., transl. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 26.

94. See Reinhart Koselleck, “The Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts,” in *Futures Past*, 155–91, esp. 160.

95. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7. Chakrabarty rightly stresses the cultural distance between the West and the non-West. But temporal distancing was common practice also within the West itself and the non-West, as the whole “modern” world was characterized by “a system of ‘nesting’ orientalisms, in which there exists a tendency for each region to view cultures and religions to the south and east [or north and west] of it as more conservative or primitive” (Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 [1992], 4).

96. Ethan Kleinberg, “Deconstructing Historicist Time, or Time’s Scribe,” *History and Theory* 62, no. 4 (2023).

97. Chakrabarty, “The Muddle of Modernity,” 663.

98. Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2012), 29.

of the Enlightenment, the spatial juxtaposition of the classical tableaux was transformed into an order of temporal succession. Parallel to the temporalization of nature, European intellectuals began to order the social, political, economic, cultural, and sometimes physical differences that they had observed in the world according to temporal criteria.⁹⁹ The institutions of one's own and of foreign societies, their mentalities and customs, were thus given a temporal indicator, hierarchized, and placed in an evolutionist narrative and cultural stage model. This temporal taxonomy helped to master the immense complexity that the world had to offer: its disorienting variety had now become ordered in the form of temporal sequence; the progression from old to new seemed readable and measurable and, therefore, understandable.¹⁰⁰ But this temporal order also underpinned an asymmetry of power between those who claimed to be at the cutting edge of progress and those to whom they "denied coevalness." Temporal differentiation was an epistemic strategy that enabled a reduction and order of complexity and, at the same time, a means by which to justify and legitimize power.

The same applies to periodization. As Chris Lorenz has argued, "historians always periodize time because the differentiation between past and present is already a form of periodization."¹⁰¹ We constantly allocate texts, artifacts, and ideas to certain periods, be it that they have come down to us from the past (as in "an ancient papyrus," "a medieval codex," "an Enlightenment concept of liberty," "an *Art Nouveau* building") or be it that they are contemporary (as in "his views are outdated," "imperial wars are so nineteenth century," "this article might as well have been written in the 1970s"). Periodization is an attempt to define and thus to get a grip on the "absence" of the past's "presence in absentia."¹⁰² Nevertheless, periodization is neither a neutral nor an innocent act, for it has functioned as "a vehicle of power and site of contest for agents of history."¹⁰³

As Kathleen Davis's, Nadia Altschul's, and Bruce Holsinger's studies on the distinction between the modern and the premodern and on "medievalism" have shown, periodization is chronopolitics, and it is also where Eurocentrism and chronocentrism meet.¹⁰⁴ The inquiry into the chronopolitics of the medieval has

99. See Sebastian Conrad, "A Cultural History of Global Transformation," in *An Emerging Modern World, 1750–1870*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 413–663, esp. 527–82.

100. See Niklas Luhmann, "Temporalisierung von Komplexität: Zur Semantik neuzeitlicher Zeitbegriffe," in *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik: Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), 235–300, esp. 291.

101. Chris Lorenz, "'The Times They Are a-Changin': On Time, Space and Periodization in History," in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, ed. Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 120.

102. See Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 54–71.

103. Konrad Hirschler and Sarah Bowen Savant, "Introduction—What Is in a Period? Arabic Historiography and Periodization," *Der Islam* 91, no. 1 (2014), 17.

104. Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Altschul, *Politics of Temporalization; Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of "the Middle Ages" Outside Europe*, ed. Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,

led to fruitful exchanges between postcolonial and medieval studies, showing how the concept of the medieval was shaped by the intertwined processes of early modern state-building and colonialism and medievalism's relation to orientalism. The "divide between a religious Middle Ages and a secular modernity," according to Davis, has also ruled out the existence of such a thing as "premodern" chronopolitics.¹⁰⁵ Once again, one is faced with the seemingly unsolvable paradox: a systematized treatment of "premodern" chronopolitics could hardly evade the very trap of periodization itself. Scholarly reflection on the politics of historicism has so far, and rightly so, focused on dissecting modern periodization schemes and demonstrating the entanglements between knowledge production and colonialism. However, such a critique can also inadvertently lead to reinforcing the very divide it sets out to criticize, as the times before or outside of modernity are mainly discussed as products of modern periodization. If we want to go beyond the politics of historicism, we need to consider nonmodern temporalities and nonmodern chronopolitics in their own right—and their effects on contemporary practices of periodization.¹⁰⁶

A brief concluding example may help to illustrate the necessity of reflecting on the historian's role in the politics of historicism, but it may also reveal its complexity. For Koselleck, as is well-known, a specific concept of history and the divergence between experience and expectation were the defining characteristics of modernity.¹⁰⁷ His historicization of *neue Zeit* and of *Neuzeit*—that is, of modernity's understanding of "new time"—was part and parcel of the chronopolitics mentioned above, as it substantiated a temporal divide between the modern and the premodern. The rupture between the *Neuzeit* and the preceding era, which Koselleck proclaimed, reflected the experience of the contemporaries of the decades around 1800. Yet it was also the product of Koselleck's own times, of his entanglement with the war of annihilation on the Eastern front and of his experience of the catastrophic twentieth century.¹⁰⁸ The radical break between a before and an after was Koselleck's present past. But Koselleck's historicization of modernity's new time and of its conception of history not only underpinned the distinction between the modern and the premodern; it also transformed the prevailing concepts of history and temporality. Koselleck's politics of historicism—his periodization of a modernity characterized by temporalization and historicist thought—have denaturalized and relativized historicism and thus opened the door for alternative and pluralistic understandings of the times of history. His

2009); *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Bruce W. Holsinger, "Medieval Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and the Genealogies of Critique," *Speculum* 77, no. 4 (2002), 1195–1227; *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages: On the Unwritten History of Theory*, ed. Andrew Cole and D. Vance Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

105. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 1.

106. See, for instance, Shahzad Bashir, *A New Vision for Islamic Pasts and Futures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022), <https://islamic-pasts-futures.org>.

107. See Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation,'" 263ff., and Reinhart Koselleck, "*Neuzeit*: Remarks on the Semantics of Modern Concepts of Movement," in *Futures Past*, 222–54.

108. See Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Der Riss in der Zeit: Kosellecks ungeschriebene Historik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2023).

chronopolitics thus greatly contributed to the attempt, to quote Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, to “think history differently, without ceasing to think historically at all.”¹⁰⁹

Historians “make their own history,” but they do not make it as they please; they make it not under self-selected circumstances but under already existing circumstances and unquestioned traditions.¹¹⁰ Reflecting on the chronopolitical role of historians must entail both: reflecting on our own agendas and reflecting on our—perhaps even implicit or unconscious—entanglement with the “characteristic images of history and temporal order” handed to us.¹¹¹ Insofar as they are inscribed into the historiographical discipline, we can avoid them only to a limited extent. But we can also attempt to contribute to their transformation—not least by historicizing them. In short, studying chronopolitics with a self-reflective edge necessitates an assessment of the agency of historians and its limits. Periodization works its most enduring effect perhaps less through the conscious usage of temporal divisions by historians than through its institutionalization—in research fields, study programs, and scholarly associations. In order to gain critical valence for historical studies at large, future discussions of chronopolitics need to transcend these institutionalized divides. The three dimensions outlined above—politics of time, time of politics, politicization of time—may serve as a starting point for such a transepochal agenda.

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109. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Posthistoire Now,” in *Präsenz* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 24.

110. Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Political Writings*, vol. 2, *Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 146.

111. Maier, “The Politics of Time,” 152.