But in every age, there has been a past and a contemporaneity, and calling oneself a ‘contemporary’ cannot be anything but a joke. (The story is told of a little French bourgeois who put ‘Contemporary’ on his calling card; he had discovered that he was a ‘contemporary’ and bragged about it).¹

The notion of a plurality of historical times or temporalities is now established as one of the most significant recent tendencies in the philosophy and theory of history, traversing the boundaries between otherwise conflicting paradigms of research.² One feature shared by most of these approaches is a commitment to the deepening of the ‘spatialisation’ of the notion of historical time itself. Rather than a depiction of discrete events ‘punctuating’ a linear temporal continuum, organised classically according to a ‘before’ and ‘after’, the pluralisation of distinct and irreducible historical times seems to configure them in more complex spatial arrangements, in either ‘archaeological’ or ‘cartographical’ models. An archaeological reconfiguration of time is thematised explicitly in the work of Koselleck, who has provided one of the most sophisticated methodological reflections on the consequences of thinking the plurality of times with his notion of ‘temporal layers’ [Zeitschichten].³ Arguably,
however, such a three-dimensional model is also operative in one or another form in approaches as different from each other as Bloch’s study of the unevenness of German modernisation, ‘classical’ structuralism’s distinction between synchrony and diachrony, and the Annales School’s investigation of the overlaying of varying *durées*. ‘Cartographical’ models of plural temporality, on the other hand, seem to imply a dispersion of time in two dimensions, as different temporalities scattered across a plane, lying alongside each other in relations of indifference or antagonism.\(^4\) Chakrabarty’s distinction between ‘History 1’ and ‘History 2’, or histories ‘posited by capital’ and those external to or autonomous from it, but existing as ‘subaltern pasts’ within the ‘same’ time, Zerubavel’s analysis of ‘time maps’, or Hölscher’s recent proposal of the notion of ‘time gardens’ as a ‘common ground for historical narratives, for keeping history as a universal reality together’, would seem to be examples of such approaches.\(^5\)

In all these cases, however, the spatial metaphors unify just as soon as they have divided; the pluralisation of irreducible historical times without common measure encounters, in a formulation now most often associated with Koselleck, the paradoxical notion of a ‘contemporaneity of the non-contemporary’ [*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*].\(^6\) Partially anticipated by Bloch,\(^7\) but with deeper roots in the post-Hegelian German tradition, Koselleck’s formulation aims to theorise the way in which different temporal layers emerge, or ‘occur [*sich ereignen*]’, ‘at different times [*nicht alles zu gleicher Zeit*]’, ‘arising out of completely heterogeneous life contexts’\(^8\). Nevertheless, they all come to be ‘present and effective at the same time’,\(^9\) overlaying and undermining each other, just as remnants of different historical periods can be found within the time can only be made visible by means of movement in determinate units of space’ (Koselleck 2000, p. 9).

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4 In the former case of indifference, such a theory’s primary reference would be to the autonomous duration and rhythm internal to any historical time, rather than their positioning vis-à-vis other times; it could thus be regarded as similar to Herder’s suggestion (repeatedly recalled by Koselleck) that there are ‘at any one time in the universe innumerable many times’, as everything has its own immanent temporal measure (cited in Koselleck 1979, p. 323). In the later case of antagonism, the intertwining of conflicting times would give rise to what Chakrabarty, following Guha, characterises as ‘time-knots’ of multiple times, or a notion of relative temporal autonomy. See Chakrabarty 2000, p. 112.


7 On Koselleck’s relation to Bloch, see Olsen 2012, p. 152.

8 Koselleck 2000, p. 9.

9 Ibid.