Chapter 3

One Eye Forward, One Eye Back: Multiple Temporalities, Community, and Social Change in the Culture History of the Southern Urals, Russian Federation (2100–1300 BC)

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Despite the fact that the title of this volume, *Fitful Histories and Unruly Publics*, evokes images of sporadic ruptures and the potential for violent imaginaries in the pre/history of Eurasia, the goal of the chapter is not to provide a rupture with what is currently known about the social changes involved in the Middle to Late Bronze Age transition in the southern Urals of the Russian Federation, ca. 2100 – 1300 BC. Rather, it seeks to reconsider the nature of social change in these time periods and geographic region through a critical examination of the spatial and temporal logics that underwrite Bronze Age pastoral communities. To do this, this chapter reconciles the culture history-based explanations of the demographic shift from nucleated Middle Bronze Age Sintashta period (ca. 2100–1700 BC) settlements to dispersed communities in the Late Bronze Age (1700–1300 BC) with a focus on the multiple, relational temporalities of social change.

As a starting point, there is a problematic and exclusionary relationship between history and such totalities as culture and community to be unpacked; that the historical conditioning of social totalities remains steeped in temporal logics that deny or actively avoid engagements with futurity and contingency. I suggest through the course of this chapter that there are relational temporalities that need to be accounted for not only in the culture history of the region, but also in the socio-political dynamics assumed for the Bronze Age of the southern Urals. I explore the implications of these temporalities and their relationality through the emergence of concurrent material and spatial practices of remembrance and avoidance as examples of Husserl’s protentional-retentional strategies related to demography and material culture in the Bronze Age southern Urals. I begin with a critical interrogation of the problematic relationship between social totalities and history as their primary structural force.
History as Panacea? Reconceptualizing the Whole, or the Future of History

History is the primary lens through which archaeological events are determined and subsequently interrogated. John Barrett states that “we could go further and say that interpretation precedes data collection for the simple reason that the expectations which structure our observations of data are expectations about the operation of history.”¹ This is usually what is meant by ‘historically conditioned’ or ‘historically contingent’ or their numerous derivatives. Such terms have become increasingly commonplace in the archaeological literature.² It is not that history has no impact on events in the present, but rather there seems to be a problem to be resolved between how history, event, and contingency are inter-related. Indeed, there is an over-reliance on history as the key structural, legitimizing force used by those who lived in the past as well as those who investigate the past.

In his recent but much lambasted book, Imprisoned by History, Martin Davies casts a skeptical, reflexive eye towards the now long-running use of history as a legitimizing force for examining past social action.³ Such uses have led to the rampant use of tautologies in history. Davies states:

> History is the ultimate form of coercion. That it always does impose itself as dogma, that it always does incarcerate us in its comprehensive designs, testifies to its persuasiveness. After all, if what happens can't be explained historically how can it be explained? If history doesn't represent the accumulated reality of humanity, what does?⁴

For Davies, history has yet to come to terms with its own failings, or at the very least, its limitations. He suggests this is because of two primary components of historical thought that relate to process and identity, and how the wording for each is established and propagated. Davies contends that for process, historians fall back on a limited arsenal of words, a vocabulary of categorical coordinators, including causality (making, shaping) and growth (accumulating, layering, generations, evolution, progress).⁵ Identity, as Davies suggests, is

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¹ Barrett 1994: 156.
³ Davies 2010.
⁴ Davies 2010:4.
⁵ Davies 2010:50.