

"HELLO YESTERDAY! WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT TOMORROW ANYWAY?" COLLAPSING SOME PAST UNCERTAINTIES VIA ANTICIPATORY HERMENEUTICS

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Geschichte ist ihrem Ursprung nach ein ständiges improvisierendes und darin gestaltbindendes Verdichten, dass sich in seinem Wirklichwerden als 'durch Antizipationen geleitet' zeigt.

Gerhard Hauptner¹

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the most remarkable recent manifestations of the past meeting the future was the celebration of the advent of the Year 2000, which took place globally on 31 December 1999.² Historically the event, which presented itself as a series of fractured ceremonies in various time zones across the globe, told the story of human existence in anticipation of the future.³ It was an important celebration of the past - an acquiescence or general acceptance of the Gregorian calendar - and also a celebration of the future. For the critical observer it appeared as if global society was paying homage to the past millennium, and celebrating the advent of the next (future) millennium simultaneously. On the surface the event was marked by a sense of continuity. Circumstantial evidence however suggests there are perhaps just as many past-future discontinuities. One example puts the case to rest -

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¹ G Hauptner, *Verhängnis und Geschichte: Ein Geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch* (Verlag Anton Hain, K.G., Meisenheim, 1956), p. 163.

² The fact that the new millennium would only officially start, according to chronologists, after 31 December 2000, did not dampen the worldwide enthusiasm to celebrate the transition from the past into the future. For a discussion on the matter, see U.S. Naval Observatory, Astronomical Applications Department, "The 21st Century and the 3rd Millennium - When Will They Begin?" <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/AA/faq/docs/millennium.html>.

³ See for example, "CNN - U.S. welcomes year 2000 with spectacular celebrations", January 1, 2000, <http://www.cnn.com/1999/US/12/31/us.2000.03>; "ASIANOW - Sydney rocks with music and light" - December 31, 1999, <http://www.cnn.com/1999/ASIANOW/australasia/12/31/sydney2000/>.

the failed July 2000 South African bid for the 2006 Football World Championship.⁴ The shock of not being accorded the privilege of hosting an event scheduled to take place in six years' time, was a setback of substantial proportions for South Africans in search of a common sense of national destiny and pride. Apparently it did not only have an impact on the future and the past of South African society but, according to observers, asserted an influence on the way South Africans perceive themselves in the present.⁵ Discontinuities of this nature justify the statement of Niklas Luhmann:

As never before, the continuity from past to future is broken in our time.⁶

The "our time" referred to can be transferred back to the eighteenth century Enlightenment where, according to Koselleck, history as modern science had its origins where the qualitative break in tradition took shape between the past and the future.⁷ Since then it has been accepted that the truth of history can change with changed time (different time). In other words the historical truth can be overtaken.

At the present moment it is generally agreed that recent developments in communications, transformed culture and new traditions have put the fabric of social character to the test. Nowhere else is this more evident than in the field of education and research. The intellectual revolution in technology has even affected the discipline of history. There has, for example, been a call by fellow historians for the reconsideration of what we traditionally know and understand to be historical time.⁸ What is more, the present entrepreneurial nature of human existence in a globalising world places constraints on the academic discipline of history. In South Africa historians, like other social and human scientists, have been forced to make their discipline more appealing in a marketplace where the impression persists that professional opportunities for graduates in history should take pride of place in all academic planning. These circumstances literally force historians to look at the future. Co-operation across disciplinary borders and the redefinition of certain methodological approaches are the order of the day. Moreover it is apparent that

⁴ See for example "The South African bid 2006", <http://www.southafrica2006.org/>.

⁵ J Matshikiza, "A rainbow nation of Boers" in *The Mail & Guardian*, 14 July 2000. <http://www.mg.co.za/mg/za/features/matshikiza/000714-matshikiza.html>; C Jeffreys, "Weer probeer is SA se beste geweer" in *Beeld*, 8 Julie 2000, p. 2; D de Vynck en M Mitner, "Slegte sokkernuus tref markte hard. Moeilike dae lê weer vir die rand voor" in *Sake Beeld*, 7 Julie 2000, p. 1; E Gibson, "Mbeki moes die kop hoog hou toe almal verslae staan" in *Beeld*, 7 Julie 2000, p. 3.

⁶ N Luhmann, *Observations on modernity* (Translated by W Whobrey. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998), p. 67.

⁷ R Koselleck, "Moderne Sozialgeschichte und historische Zeiten" in P Rossi (Hrsg.) *Theorie der modernen Geschichtsschreibung* (Suhrkamp, Baden Baden, 1987), pp. 179-80.

⁸ L Höltscher, "The new annalistic: A sketch of a theory of history" in *History and Theory* 36(3), 1997, pp. 320-1.

there exists a need for more interactive research opportunities where social and human scientists may work alongside natural scientists in an effort to find answers to certain urgent problems prevalent in society. It is perhaps predominantly in the field of methodology where historians can be of substantive value to fellow researchers.

The need for intellectual positioning amongst historians is underlined in a recent forum article by CS Maier in the *American Historical Review* in which the twentieth century is considered from the perspective of periodisation and the changing nature of socio-political space.⁹ An electronic debate scheduled for September 2000 should shed substantial light on our understanding and orientation towards a period known as the twentieth century.¹⁰ The solution, he suggests, may be situated in juxtaposing structural and moral narratives in order to come to some form of understanding about historical significance and historical periodisation.¹¹

The issue up for discussion is how historians are going to interpret an era in time (the twentieth century), which is still vivid in the popular memory of contemporary global society. More important, Maier seems to suggest, is the need to subtly direct and influence future appraisals of the twentieth century.

Contemporary interpretations of the twentieth century are currently in oversupply. The steady stream of productive hermeneutic loops of interpretation on the topic is unlikely to diminish in the near future. As historians we perhaps need not concern ourselves too much with the way in which the twentieth century will be outlined and labelled for posterity in the future. Instead we need to anticipate the twenty first century on the basis of vivid recollections and sources which had their origins in the twentieth century, or even earlier for that matter. By pursuing a future orientated perspective of the past we, as historians, will be leaving more substantive traces as source material for future researchers. Interpretations of contemporary history, aimed at labelling an historical period, tend to be reminiscent of *precipitatory* hermeneutics, which could lead to irrational interpretations. What is needed instead is a sound *contemplation* of the past along with an *anticipated* sense of prospects for the future. It should provide us with the necessary sense of idealism for sustaining creativity in the present.

9 CS Maier, "Consigning the twentieth century to history: Alternative narratives for the modern era", *American Historical Review*, 105(3), June 2000, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.3/ah000807.html>

10 See *AHR Forum Essay*, "The century as a historical period", *American Historical Review*, 105(3), June 2000, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.3/ah000806.html>.

11 Maier, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.3/ah000807.html>.

OBJECTIVE

In this study the objective is to explore the potential of anticipatory hermeneutics as a methodological tool for coming to a more sustained understanding of the present. It will be argued, *inter alia*, that instead of merely trying to interpret the past in the present, we need instead to take cognisance of the past and the future in order to position our understanding of the present in a more appropriate manner.

It will also be argued that, instead of merely confining ourselves to social science methods for "predicting" the future, historians may be able to make a contribution towards understanding/interpreting the future by making use of hermeneutic strategies. It implies that the future should be anticipated by means of understanding and interpreting the past.

Furthermore an attempt will be made at replacing the concept of deconstruction - as mainstay of structuralist thinking - with that of collapse which suggests a more informal discontinuity.

HERMENEUTICS RECONSIDERED

One of the major consequences of postmodernist theory is that historians have been forced to reconsider many of the traditional assumptions of their discipline. One myth was, for example, that it should be possible for the historian to mentally "relocate" him/herself as it were, from the present into the past. It would then be possible to understand past culture better than it understood itself.¹² We now tend to think differently on the topic. Foucault explains that we are always preoccupied with a history of the present.¹³ He elevates the concept of the narrative discourse to a new height by combining it as a means of expression with hermeneutics and semiology.¹⁴ How effective the demise of some idealist conceptions have been is evident in the observation that it currently appears to be somewhat of an illusory project to imagine that the historian can interpret the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (ist). Not only is there a consciousness of the limited information available

¹² H-G Gadamer, *Truth and method* (Translated from the German *Wahrheit und Methode*, second edition 1965, edited by G Barden and J Cumming, Sheed & Ward, London, 1965), p. 169.

¹³ According to Munslow, it is largely the result of Foucault's critique of the work of conservative reconstructionist historians. See A Munslow, *Deconstructing history* (Routledge, London, 1998) p. 33.

¹⁴ M Foucault, *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (Translated from the original *Les mots et les choses* (1966). Routledge, London, 1994), pp. 29-30.

to fill the gap between the past and its representation,¹⁵ but also an appreciation for the fact that outstanding historical scholarship lies in the creative and self-aware use of the complexities of evidence.¹⁶

THE "RECOVERY" OF HISTORY

Since the late 1970s history has been a favourite target of criticism for postmodernist theorists. However, there has been a shift of sorts amongst postmodernists. Instead of being outright opposed to conventional grand narrative strategies in historical discourse,¹⁷ and the fact that we tend to treat our language as an unproblematical transparent medium,¹⁸ the philosopher Rorty now recognises the "appropriate intellectual background to political deliberation is historical narrative rather than philosophical or quasi-philosophical theory".¹⁹ Also Edward Said tells us of a "revived interest in history", because "the world has shrunk ... and people find themselves undergoing the most rapid social transformations in history".²⁰ The most outstanding manifestation of an apparent rethink on history is the final work of J-F Lyotard (1925-98), *Signed Malraux*²¹ which is about as close as one can come to a final comment by a leading postmodernist on writing history. As a literary work Lyotard's biography of the French writer, activist and politician, André Malraux (1900-1976), is a literary and philosophical masterpiece with minor shortcomings as a work of historical scholarship.

Historians would however be under an illusion if they think that the intellectual crisis of the discipline is something of the past. There are still postmodernists, like Jenkins, who aspire to "a postmodern moment when we can forget history completely".²²

This sense of being an endangered species has given rise to a consciousness amongst practicing historians of the profound implications of the linguistic turn. It does indeed make us feel insecure about the scientific status of history as

15 R Chartier, *On the edge of the cliff: History, language and practices* (Translated by Lydia G Cochrane, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997), p. 27.

16 L Jordanova, *History in practice* (Arnold, London, 2000), p. 33.

17 J-F Lyotard, *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*, Ninth printing. (Translated from the French *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979) by G Bennington and B Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993), p. 22.

18 H White, *Figural realism: Studies in the mimesis effect* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1999), p. 5.

19 R Rorty, *Philosophy and social hope* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1999), p. 231.

20 EW Said, "Invention, memory and place", *Critical Inquiry*, 26(2), Winter 2000, p. 177.

21 JF Lyotard, *Signed Malraux* (Translated from the French *Signé Malraux* (1996) by R Harvey, University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

22 K Jenkins, "After 'history'" in *Rethinking history*, 3(1), Spring 1999, p. 7.

discipline.²³ There are even some of us who agree, more readily than before, that historians were responsible for formulating representations of the past, which favoured powerful political decision-making, which negatively affected disempowered groups in society.²⁴

More important perhaps is the fact that we are being forced in the direction of methodological, theoretical and philosophical innovation at an unprecedented rate. The relationship between the past and the future is perhaps a subject of mutual interest to historians and postmodernist theoreticians. Precisely at this juncture in time (the present) the frontier of knowledge is still open for considerable and mutually beneficial exploration.

INTERPRETING THE HISTORICAL EVENT

Anticipatorial hermeneutics as a methodological device relies to a considerable extent on the phenomenon of the historical event, rather than the historical epoch or period. This interfaces with Roberts' explanation that in the interpretation of the past a distinction should be drawn between "the interpretation of historical evidence" and "the interpretation of a historical event".²⁵ The interpretation of historical evidence has a bearing on, for example a document, an inscription, or a shard.²⁶ Its contextualisation by the grouping together of information as a rule enables us to give an outline of historical periods. Evidence is however not the only *locus* of concentration. Interpretation is also necessary in the process of signifying the event.²⁷ The critical evaluation of the event, from a methodological perspective, is on another level of interpretation and should be considered in a wider context. Maier, who is aware of the need for collapsing outdated assumptions, explains:

Histoire événementielle no longer refers to events as mere 'surface disturbances, crests of foam', atop the longue durée as Fernand Braudel's stratified model suggested; rather, events can be interpreted as themselves constituting or catalyzing 'deeper' transitions, which means even profound change can take place suddenly.²⁸

23 FR Ankersmit, "Hayden White's appeal to the historians", *History and Theory* 37(2), May 1998, p. 183; Chartier, p. 18.

24 Jordanova, pp. 91-2.

25 C Roberts, *The logic of historical explanation* (Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 1996), p. 241.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 241.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 241.

28 Maier, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.3/ah000807.html>.

A problem however arises when we consider how the event is construed to be of historical significance. Departing from conventional approaches the historian Lucian Hölscher²⁹ explains that the historical meaning of an event becomes of significance "during the very instant of its occurrence". This standpoint is substantiated on the grounds that historical "meaning is in most cases a secondary interpretation of a historical experience which was primarily made by the contemporaries themselves".³⁰ He also explains that:

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.³¹

In effect he suggests that the "historical meaning of an event consists in telling how it came about, and what followed from it".³² In addressing the significance of the future for the past, Hölscher refers to the concept of "structures of anticipation" - similar but not the same as the general principles of causality.

For Hayden White the event is a somewhat more complex phenomenon to contemplate. Historical events, he admits, really happened or are believed to have happened. They are however not directly accessible to perception.³³ Perceived from a modernist standpoint, in which realism plays an important role, the situation tends to change. White explains:

Modernism resolves the problem posed by traditional realism, namely, how to represent reality realistically, by simply abandoning the ground on which realism is construed in terms of an opposition between fact and fiction. The denial of the reality of the event undermines the very notion of fact informing traditional realism.³⁴

In practical terms the implication is that it might be possible to account in this context for the historical event being considered important at one point, then later

29 His theory has been refined in a substantive work aimed at a history of the way in which the future has been perceived since the eighteenth century. L. Hölscher, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft* (Fischer TB.-Vlg, Ffm, 1999).

30 Hölscher, p. 320.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 320.

32 *Ibid.*, "The new annalistic: A sketch of a theory of history", *History and Theory* 36(3), 1997, p. 318.

33 White, p. 59.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.

being merely ignored. Also in this respect White offers an abstract substantiation when he explains:

It is the anomalous nature of modernist events - their resistance to inherited categories and conventions for assigning meanings to events - that undermine not only the status of facts in relation to events but also the status of the event in general.³⁵

We are faced with the contextualisation of this historical event within the paradigm of signification. The allocation of a specific value brings about a situation in which the principle of interpretational abstraction plays an important role. By selecting one element in the process of narrating the event, the historian provides a synthesis of meanings into a thin line of description, which is pregnant with diverse meanings. Interpreted in an anticipatory context, the need is to point to the significance of the event and its impact on the activities to follow.

From a historical perspective, it is fairly simple to argue with the benefit of hindsight in respect of the historical event. However when it comes to a narrative construction of the present, the factor of probability starts playing a crucial and relevant role. One of the major obstacles of the present is that, like the future, it is incomplete. More important, because the individual is caught up in his/her own time and space, it is difficult to come to a firm understanding - even when interpretations are made in hermeneutic loops in respect of a history of the present. For this reason it is maintained, the historian should rather - in the case of contemporary or present history - resort to eschatological points of interpretation - the past and the future. The evident interaction will make the present event comprehensible. Luhmann explains:

The time span between past and future in which a change becomes irreversible is experienced as the present. The present lasts as long as it takes for something to become irreversible.³⁶

Chartier is also affirmative on the issue. He maintains there exists an awareness that changes in the world situation have once again forced to the forefront "individual decisions, voluntary actions, and the unexpected, unpredictable initiatory event".³⁷ We are for example, now indeed living in a world

³⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁶ N Luhmann, *Social systems* (Translated from the German *Soziale Systeme: Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie* (1984) by J Bednar (Jr) with D Baecker. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995), p. 78.

³⁷ Chartier, p. 124.

where events such as the genetic mapping of human beings may well prove to be one of the major historical breakthroughs in the future history of humanity.³⁸ It may, in a metaphorical sense, prepare the way for anticipated human action in the future. There is a need for us to come to a better understanding of how these and related developments have come about. Furthermore, it is of importance for us to be able to perceive in what direction further developments will take place. In brief: what are the present effects, and what would it be like in the future?

Anticipating the event, implies according it status in terms of qualitative standing and then resorting to an anticipation of signification by means of hermeneutic interpretation. By following a line of understanding acquired by means of qualitative historical insight the historian can add substantive value to the existing knowledge of the past, present and future.

RECONSIDERING TIME

Luhmann maintains that "the real problem of modernity lies in the time dimension".³⁹ No wonder postmodernists have made concerted efforts at undermining conventional conceptions of the past and the present. For the greater part of the twentieth century, the general term for describing the present, was "modern times". The first comment that comes to mind is the realisation that "modern times" are in fact a realisation or awareness of the time in which peoples are living.⁴⁰ These times may be illusory, but they are pointers to a consciousness of the past and the future, which in concert with one another manifest as a sense of difference between the past and the present.

The apparent stability in our sense of understanding (historical) time is always subject to imminent collapse. Hölischer for example maintains:

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 ... in the same way every social revolution and every state bankruptcy permanently suspend the existing temporal structure of public life, bringing in new administrative and education systems, income and career structures....⁴¹

38 Press Release, Science statement on human genomics: Science Editor-in-Chief Donald Kennedy, 26 June 2000. American Association for the Advancement of Science <http://www.aaas.org/>, <http://www.eurekalert.org/releases/aaas-ss062600.html>.

39 Luhmann, *Observations on modernity*, p. 69.

40 See for example Maier, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.3/ah000807.html>.
41 Hölischer, p. 323.

At present the local conflicts in the world do not appear to undermine our perceptions or awareness of time. We are told that the world's financial systems are in the process of globalisation. The likelihood of global collapse also (on the surface) appears to be slim. It is, after all, a process which started taking shape in the late 1960s as the nature of the bipolar political conflict between East and West took on a new character.⁴² Recent history and the prospects for the future, suggest we are currently anticipating the spatiality of a future global society. It may even be safe to anticipate that globalisation itself implies a virtual collapse of formal processes, previously related to structures of local or regional identity.

Are these assumptions correct?

What actually appears to be the order of the day when we speculate in terms of what should manifest in the future, is based on the heterological strategy which aims at getting in touch with or laying bare the "other" of history. It is considered that the otherness of the past can be felt and seen in that which it is not. It can in effect be made to be present in its absence, providing the past is read by means of an appropriate method, which is aimed at identifying the margins of historical mechanisms of representation.⁴³

If this form of historicism, which Pieters takes back to De Certeau,⁴⁴ is applied systematically, it becomes evident that by interpreting the past, and contextualising it in a historicist manner the historian evidently transcends to a level of anticipatory hermeneutics. The present time then evidently becomes that part of consciousness, which was invisible or unknown. In fact we anticipate the past - not necessarily only in a teleological sense - into the future and thereby condition our thoughts towards understanding what may be comprehended as the present.

De Certeau describes the process as follows:

(H)istory is always ambivalent: the locus that it carves for the past is equally a fashion of *making a place for a future*. As it vacillates between exoticism and criticism through a staging of the other, it oscillates between conservatism and utopianism through its function of signifying a lack. In

42 Maier, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.3/ah000807.html>.

43 J Pieters, "New historicism: Postmodern historiography between narrativism and heterology", *History and Theory* 39(1), February, 2000, p. 28.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

these extreme forms it becomes, in the first place, either legendary or polemical; in the second, it becomes reactionary or revolutionary.⁴⁵

In an attempt at working towards a hermeneutical strategy for interpreting the past and understanding the future, De Certeau's heterological method might make a substantial contribution towards anticipatorial strategies.

Looking at future time from the perspective of passed time, also implies that risks have to be taken in the process of making decisions. Luhmann explains:

Modern society experiences its future in the form of the risk of deciding.⁴⁶

Risk is "an aspect of decisions, and decisions can only be made in the present".⁴⁷ By coming out in such a strong manner Luhmann offers a methodological strategy, which for want of a better term can be called "understandings". He describes it as follows:

Understandings are negotiated provisos that can be relied upon for a given time. They do not imply consensus, nor do they represent reasonable or even correct solutions to problems. They fix the reference points that are removed from the argumentation for further controversies, in which coalitions and oppositions can form anew. Understandings have one big advantage over the claims of authority: they cannot be discredited but must be constantly renegotiated. Their value does not increase but decreases with age.⁴⁸

The invisibility of past time is more than merely shuttered moments overlooked in the process of historical interpretation. Changes in time are in many respects evident only in some quarters of society. It is so because:

All statements about the future depend on the society in which they are formulated. Concepts of time are concepts of history.⁴⁹

Anticipatory hermeneutics in effect, under these circumstances, represents a mere thin line of compacted understandings exclusive to a cultural awareness

45 M de Certeau, *The writing of history* (Translated from *L'écriture de l'histoire* (1975) by T Conley. Columbia University Press, New York, 1988), p. 85.

46 Luhmann, *Observations on modernity*, pp. 70-1.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

which can under no circumstances be universally accounted for. It offers, according to Umberto Eco "a perspective that brings into play both the object and the position of the observer, and that position also has a role to play when a three dimensional object is being observed".⁵⁰

The object, for the purposes of the present discussion could quite well be time, perceived as the past, present and future.

Ultimately historians are faced with basically two strategies of coming to a better comprehension of the interaction between the past and the future. One is to contemplate the importance of reverting once again to making use of nomological strategies of analysing long duree trends. Another is the ideographic dimension of understanding. Then, however, it is worth remembering that the future has a different type of objective. First of all the formation of historical knowledge should be seated firmly in the tradition of interpretative studies. It should also not rely entirely on the past.⁵¹ It should, for purposes of anticipatory hermeneutics, seek to make disclosures on the future in order to enable us to understand the present time better. Ankersmit describes the outcome we should have in mind:

(D)e 'ware geschiedsinterpretatie' (is)... die interpretatie ... die het meest verrassend en onwaarschijnlijk lijkt maar desondanks niet op basis van bestaande inzichten weerlegd kan worden.⁵²

HOW FAR ANTICIPATORY HERMENEUTICS?

Precisely how far and how abstract the predictive nature of anticipatory hermeneutics should be is difficult to determine. In 1977 Norbert Elias made some statements on theory and sociological research, which *The British Journal of Sociology* saw fit to republish 20 years later. Arguing in favour of a qualitative theory of social processes,⁵³ Elias explained:

It is precisely when one reflects on the practical relevance of social scientific studies that one realizes how misleading a social science must be if it is emptied of its dynamics.⁵⁴

50 U Eco, *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on language and cognition* (Translated from *Kant e lórnitorínco* (1997) by A McEwan. Secker & Warburg, London, 1999), p. 352.

51 FR Ankersmit, *De spiegel van het verleden. Exploratie 1: Geschiedtheorie* (Kok Agora, Kampen, 1996), p. 107.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

53 N Elias, "Towards a theory of social processes: a translation", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 48(3), September 1997.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 370.

This observation can be considered as a signpost for historians. If we want the discipline of history to lose its dynamic elasticity, we should maintain excessive abstract theoretical description. Basic sound empirical research is in fact the only way to secure the vitality of the discipline. There should simultaneously be potential for interdisciplinary cooperation in order to make sensible disclosures on the past and the future.

In many respects the future remains an overt project for comprehension. It is a "foreign territory" for the historian. It poses numerous problems. Heller on occasion outlined it as follows:

If we knew our future we would not have a future, and if we could change our past we would not have a future, and if we could change our past we would not have a past (it would not be *our* past any longer).⁵⁵

Under the strong influence of postmodernity the same author by the 1990s took the teleological principle somewhat further when she negated Hegel's conception of internal and external teleology. For her external teleology is outdated, as a result of the external cause-effect relationship. It is now evident to her that teleology is the self-development of possibility into actuality. But if truth is the whole, and the whole is grasped (known) in the absolute science, then there is no other teleology but the internal one. Her reason for this approach is that every possibility is inherent in the Spirit at the "beginning" of its self-determination, which is, however, always a relative one. At the same time she observed that if teleology was entirely internal, how could it be not all possibilities become actuality?⁵⁶

The complexity of thinking ourselves historically into the future is overwhelming. Even Maier appears to admit it after interpreting Croce's mid twentieth century thoughts.⁵⁷ There is however no easy way out. Should we wish to think ourselves more substantively into the present, it would simply be by means of anticipating the future, via processes of hermeneutic understanding. Also it should be stressed here our focus is not predicting the future. Instead, it is aimed at understanding better the present in which we find ourselves. It requires a contemplative approach to the past and an anticipatorial attitude to the future to locate the present. The latter demands an almost existentialist sense of immediacy of the here and now. In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger describes the two extremes of

⁵⁵ A Heller, *A theory of history* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982), p. 36.

⁵⁶ A Heller, *A philosophy of history: In fragments* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993), p. 10.

⁵⁷ Maier, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.3/ah000807.html>.

being in time as birth and death.⁵⁸ It is in fact the in betweenness of existence, which gives being (sein) or being there (dasein) its significance. When we are dealing with the way in which things fit together it is the field of historical science and it is in this sphere of existence (being) where birth and death fit together inasmuch as:

Die Frage nach dem 'Zusammenhang' des Daseins ist das ontologische Problem seines Geschehens. Die Freilegung der Geschehenstruktur und ihrer existential-zeitlichen-Möglichkeitenbedingungen bedeutet die Gewinnung eines ontologischen Verständnisses der Geschichtlichkeit.⁵⁹

From an existentialist perspective this type of answer could provide a substantial basis for our comprehension of the present. The matter of being in time itself, as if suspended, suggests there is an impregnated reality to what is now and here which cannot quite be understood, but we do know that it ontologically exists. There is also a need to be able to stand squarely in the present - being conscious of the limitations of our own understanding of precisely the significance of such a state of affairs - and in fact then being aware that we are anticipating the future. Based on our knowledge of past events, the future is brought to the present and carried into the anticipated time ahead, or up front. It remains a "deficient" future.⁶⁰ The historian is unable to predict correctly and with a high degree of precision. The deficiency is not necessarily exclusively as a result of a lack of knowledge or understanding, but more as a result of the multitude of alternative ways in which the future manifests itself.

If and when we subscribe to the linear view of history, the conventional understanding of history suggests that we should only look at the past from the present on a horizontal level. On this issue Luhmann states:

Time is mirrored within time with the help of the dimensional horizons past and future. This means merely that every temporal point has its own past and future, and precisely because of this possesses uniqueness in the temporal dimension.⁶¹

58 "Allein der Tod ist doch nur das 'Ende' des Daseins, formal genommen nur das eine Ende, das die Daseinsganzheit umschließt. Das andere 'Ende' aber ist der 'Anfang', die 'Geburt'. Erst das Seiende 'zwischen' Geburt und Tod stellt das Gesichte Ganze dar." See M Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Neomarius Verlag, Tübingen, 1949), pp. 272-3.

59 Heidegger, p. 375.

60 R. Witttram, "Die Zukunft in der Fragestellungen der Geschichtswissenschaft" in R. Witttram, H-G Gadamer and J Moltmann, *Geschichte - Element der Zukunft. Vorträge an der Hochschultagen 1965 der Evangelischen Studentengemeinde Tübingen* (Buchdruckerei Eugen Göbel, Tübingen, 1965), pp. 8-9.

61 N Luhmann, *Social systems*, p. 89.

Just as important is to know that "time" is "at best a chronological convention, an aggregate expression for the totality of the temporal possibilities broken open by time."⁶² Furthermore:

A horizon is not a boundary; one cannot step across it. At some time one must turn back, and the opposite horizon indicates the direction "back".⁶³

Another alternative implies looking at the past from a vertical level, anticipating the imminent future and the present in the process of transforming itself into the past. The contention in this study is that the latter is the more realistic approach in that the conventional hermeneutic tradition makes of the historian the passenger on a train moving forward. The historian is seated with his back in the direction of the forward moving train. All that can be seen is the landscape passing by - a retrospective vantage position of observation. The vertical positioning of anticipatorial hermeneutics would suggest that the observer (interpreter) views the forward motion, and in the process of anticipation is able of taking note of the passing landscape. It is so that this metaphor basically only has application, especially in respect of contemporary history. Our appraisal of contemporary history however also asserts a significant influence on our appraisal of the distant past. Raymond Aron was aware of this when he perceived history not as a panoramic vision of man's whole existence, but rather as an interpretation of present or past as linked to a philosophical concept of existence, or as a philosophical conception, which recognises itself as inseparable from the epoch which it interprets and from the future it foresees. For him the philosophy of history was an essential part of philosophy, "being both the introduction to it and its conclusion".⁶⁴

Yet, if we carefully think about it, we interpret the past with the objective of writing or reporting about it to an audience at some future time. In one context it would be possible to describe this trend of thought as a teleological process.⁶⁵ It is however an all too easy postmodernist escape route, especially in intellectual history, as Mary Poovey has found.⁶⁶ If and when we are faced with an anticipatory project of the past it is aimed at working toward an underlying future orientated discourse. Luhmann assures us:

62 Ibid., p. 90.

63 Ibid., p. 77.

64 R Aron, *Introduction to the philosophy of history: An essay on the limits of historical objectivity* (Translated from the French *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (1948) by GJ Irwin. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1961), p. 13.

65 M Stanford, *A companion to the study of history* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994), p. 207.

66 M Poovey, *A history of the modern fact: Problems of knowledge in the sciences of wealth and society* (University of Chicago, Chicago, 1998), pp. 16-26.

The time span between past and future in which a change becomes irreversible is experienced as the present. The present lasts as long as it takes for something to become irreversible.⁶⁷

At the time of interpreting the past, we also anticipate the future, which happened in the past. As historians we are more than aware of the things which happened to historical actors. Our overview of the past thus enables us to perceive the future in the past. Yet, we constantly bring to bear the present in which we find ourselves. The unique manner in which past reality presents itself to us, is the product of the present in which we operate. The construction of the fact is the collapse of uncertainty about the way in which the past fits into a sensible whole. Yet, as historians we remain sceptical of attempts at understanding this reality. Stanford is aware of this state of affairs when he observes:

(W)e do well to remind ourselves that history consists chiefly of human actions. They may now be in the past, but they were performed in the present; more than that, those past actions looked towards the future just as ours do today. Our predecessors knew no more of their future than we know of ours.⁶⁸

For us as historians there is perhaps reason to set unfounded scepticism aside and start contemplating the opportunities presented by anticipatorial hermeneutics. Using these strategies we can most certainly collapse uncertainties about the real significance of our discipline. It is after all a ray of hope in a past landscape where the art of survival is determined by our ability to be aware of what may follow in time to come.

⁶⁷ N Luhmann, *Social systems*, p. 78.

⁶⁸ M Stanford, *A companion to the study of history*, p. 23.