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Theory formation and the politics of history. Historical memory in the work of Reinhart Koselleck

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Elaborazione teorica e politica della storia. La memoria storica nell'opera di Reinhart Koselleck

Gli studi di Koselleck su memoria e politica della commemorazione hanno ottenuto ampia attenzione a livello internazionale. Sebbene dagli anni Novanta egli abbia affrontato con crescente frequenza tali questioni, non elaborò mai una teoria specifica della memoria. Questo articolo vuole esaminare in dettaglio l'interpretazione koselleckiana della memoria storica, analizzando da vicino la sua relazione con il concetto di esperienza; e poi considerare il passaggio dal livello individuale a quello collettivo, assai più difficile da delineare negli scritti dello studioso. Infine, l'attenzione sarà rivolta al nesso tra i dibattiti teorici e gli interventi politici di Koselleck.

PAROLE CHIAVE: REINHART KOSELLECK; POLITICA DELLA STORIA; MEMORIA STORICA; ELABORAZIONE TEORICA; CATEGORIA DI ESPERIENZA.

Koselleck's studies on memory and the politics of commemoration have received wide international attention. Although since the 1990s he increasingly addressed these issues, he never developed a specific theory of memory. This article aims to examine in detail Koselleck's interpretation of historical memory, analyzing closely its relationship with the concept of experience; and then to consider the transition from the individual to the collective level, which is much more difficult to delineate in the scholar's writings. Finally, attention will be directed to the connection between Koselleck's theoretical debates and his political interventions.

KEYWORDS: REINHART KOSELLECK; POLITICS OF HISTORY; HISTORICAL MEMORY; THEORY FORMATION; CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE.

In the early 1930s, in the face of dramatic political changes in Europe, the British cultural theorist Arnold J. Toynbee noted that it was often the experience of failure that mobilized nations and set historical agency in motion¹. He called this mechanism the “stimulus of blows”

1 I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and criticism. Unless otherwise indicated, Koselleck's translations are by the author.

(Toynbee [1934] 1951, 100), drawing attention to a cause-and-effect relationship that Wolfgang Schivelbusch later echoed in his study *The Culture of Defeat* (Schivelbusch 2003), which emphasized failure as a fundamental principle of development. Losses, setbacks and retreats sometimes release powerful energies that can be a driving force for the defeated and humiliated in the long run. In this context, Reinhart Koselleck's observation that historical research tends to benefit more from the explanatory needs of the losers than from the short-lived triumph of the victors is apt. History is made by the victors in the short run, perhaps maintained over a middle-range span, but never controlled for a long time (Koselleck [1988] 2002, 76; Traverso 2017). The victors tend to attribute the sequence of events teleologically to their own achievements and superiority, which does not do justice to the complexity of the causal structure. The experience of the defeated, on the other hand, demands a deeper explanation of what went wrong. They want to know why things turned out differently than they had thought and intended. So, while history may initially be written "by the victors, historical gains in knowledge stem in the long run from the vanquished" (Koselleck [1988] 2002, 76). Is this someone speaking from personal experience?

The obvious temptation to relate Koselleck's ideas to his personal experience of war and captivity between 1941 and 1946 should be resisted here, as should the tendency to overestimate the historical significance of the undoubtedly intuitive winner-loser dynamic. Instead, the keyword "defeat" will be used to shed more light on another event in Koselleck's biography. In his last interview, conducted in 2005 but published only after his death, he replied to the question about the real impact of public criticism by saying that his historical-political commitment against the "miserable cult of the dead that the Germans have developed in the *Neue Wache* and also in the *Holocaust Memorial*" had fizzled out. He had "completely failed", along with the associated intention "that we should remember the dead in a more just way than with a hierarchy of the dead that we cultivate – I have failed in this respect". This defeat was due, on the one hand, to a manipulated public debate in which self-appointed experts "cut off in time" or suppressed profound counter-arguments. On the other hand, scientific critics were confronted with a political style

“that breeds political correctness, which is nothing but cowardice” (Koselleck 2010b).

In contrast to this self-assessment, which no doubt reflects years of accumulated annoyance and various slights, Koselleck’s studies on the politics of commemoration have received widespread international attention. Today his writings, especially on the theory of historical time and conceptual history, are more read, translated, debated and appropriated across disciplines than twenty years ago (last: Hettling and Schieder 2021; Hoffmann 2023; Jureit 2023; Regazzoni 2023; Koselleck 2023). Koselleck’s legendary contributions *On the Need for Theory in the Discipline of History* (Koselleck [1972] 2002), *Transformations of Experience and Methodological Change* (Koselleck [1988] 2002) and *Time and History* (Koselleck [1982] 2002) are available in several languages, and many of his relevant works have also been translated into Italian since the 1970s (Imbriano 2015; Chignola 2002). In Italy, Koselleck is considered the most important German conceptual historian, while his other areas of research have only recently attracted more attention. But the Bielefeld historian not only worked on the theory of time and history for decades, he has also been involved with historical-political issues since the 1980s, particularly in debates on the *Neue Wache* and the establishment of a central memorial in Berlin. Although Koselleck addressed these themes more frequently from the 1990s onwards, he did not develop a specific theory of memory. Indeed, the concept of memory plays a relatively minor role in his entire oeuvre. Given his vehement criticism of some projects of history and memory culture, one could almost say that the concept is surprisingly unimportant. Nevertheless, his statements on the subject deserve a closer look, not least because of their connection to his political ambitions.

The following article will therefore first examine Koselleck’s understanding of historical memory in detail, which necessarily involves a closer analysis of its relationship to the more theoretically developed concept of experience. Secondly, the transition from the individual to the collective level, which is much more difficult to grasp in his writings, needs to be considered. And finally, the focus will be on the connection between the theoretical debates and Koselleck’s political interventions, asking what conclusions can be drawn from this, apart from Koselleck’s subjectively perceived failure.

Historical Memory

I know myself to be factually within a generative framework, in the unitary flow of a historical development in which this present is mankind's present and the world of which it is conscious is a historical present with a historical past and a historical future (Husserl [1936] 1970, 253).

As early as 1936, Edmund Husserl used this wording to describe the interdependence of experience and expectation as a temporal structure that would become fundamental to Koselleck's theoretical thinking (for Karl Mannheim's influence see: Laube 2004; Jureit 2025). The interconnection of a historical present with a no less historical future and an equally historical past is a figure of thought to which he repeatedly referred, for example, to state the fundamental fact that "there is no history which could be constituted independently of the experiences and expectations of active human agents" (Koselleck [1976] 2004, 256). These two categories establish both history and the knowledge of it, "by demonstrating and producing the inner relation between past and future or yesterday, today, or tomorrow" (258). On this basis, Koselleck sketched out a historiography that, on the one hand, attempted to outline a theory of historical time and, on the other, addressed the conditions, forms and transmission of its representability. Because

histories primarily come from the experiences of those who are involved or concerned, the possibility of their narration and thus also the possibility of narrating foreign experiences, the analysis of which is predominant in modern historiography, is presupposed (Koselleck [1988] 2002, 50).

In the transition from the gain of experience to the narrability of what has been perceived, experienced and adopted, Koselleck also located what is usually called historical memory. Experience is "the present past whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered" (Koselleck [1976] 2004, 259). His definition of the relationship between present, past and future, as he repeatedly expressed it in different variations, probably referred to Saint Augustine. In the *Confessiones* we read the following:

Nor is it properly said, [...] there be three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future. For these three do exist in some sort, in the soul, but elsewhere do I not see them; present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation (Saint Augustine [400] 1900, 248f.).

In addition, Koselleck regularly referred to Novalis, whom he read extensively and with great pleasure. In his novel fragment *Henry of Ofterdingen*, Novalis had described memories as “pleasant companions”, and this “the more, in proportion as our view of them is varied; a view which now first discovers their true connexion, their significance, and their occult tendency”. The true sense of human history develops late,

and rather through the silent influence of memory than by the more forcible impressions of the present. The nearest events seem but loosely connected, yet they sympathize so much the more curiously with the remote. And it is only when one is able to comprehend in one view a lengthened series, neither interpreting too literally, nor confounding the proper method with capricious fancies, that he detects the secret chain which binds the past to the future, and learns to rear the fabric of history from hope and memory (Novalis 1802).

It is well known that Koselleck took up Novalis’s pair of words, hope and memory, and transformed them. He replaced hope with expectation and memory with experience. One could argue about the expressiveness of these linguistic shifts. As a justification, Koselleck writes that he prefers the concept of experience because, in his view, it “goes deeper” (Koselleck [1976] 2004, 258) than memory. While, according to this understanding, remembering tends to describe the actualization as such, experience seems to refer to the present, albeit provisional, result of a process of remembering and interpreting. The deeper impact thus refers back to a supposed divergence between the actualization and the coming to terms with past experience. This distinction, however, is vague, since dealing with the past in a linear understanding of experiencing, learning, remembering and narrating does not work at all, but should rather be understood as a complex reworking process based on accumulation, embedding and reinterpretation. What is clear from these comments, however, is that Koselleck said very little about memory in his related writings on the processing of experience until the mid-1980s. Memory

as a theoretical concept was still largely of no interest to him at that time, so that he pushed it aside relatively quietly when it seemed useful to him. At best, it had a certain relevance when it came to the methodically reflected procedures of historiography. The acquisition of experience that should be remembered is “the historical place of the historical method in its most general sense”. Although experiences are also “transposed into narratives” without methodological reflection, “something that is generally the case in everyday life”, Koselleck only intends to identify insights “if specific questions propel the procedures of investigation in order to acquire knowledge that cannot otherwise be gained”. To ensure that experience is not only remembered but also transformed into insights, “minimal modes of research are required, which go beyond the mere acknowledgment of facts” (Koselleck [1988] 2002, 57).

A reconstruction of Koselleck’s critique of sources and methods would take us too far at this point. For the question at hand, it is primarily important to consider that the determination of the relationship between experience and memory depends on at least two premises. On the one hand, both forms of processing are fundamentally tied to the linguistic conditions of communication. For everything that happens to each individual person, or is perceived, experienced or appropriated beyond that, is primarily conveyed in speech or in writing, even if non-linguistic and prelingual elements must be considered (Koselleck [1986] 2006, 18). Every event is reproduced in its linguistic processing and articulation, even if there is a difference “between an event that happens and its linguistic enabling. No speech act is the act itself, which it prepares, initiates and executes” (15). The difference between language and facts, which must be considered analytically, is even more pronounced in the representation of the past. Therefore, language has an “anthropological priority [...] for the representation of happened history” and in this sense Koselleck gives it an epistemological status (18). Only the symbolic, usually linguistic, representation of events creates meaning that remains memorable. Without language as the primary form of symbolization, neither memory nor scientific research would be possible (19).

The second premise for defining the relationship between *experience* and *memory* is already apparent here; it is related to the first in that it concerns the transformation of linguistically and symbolically

recorded events into historical sources, as well as their collection and interpretation. In this process, historians have to contend not only with incomplete records or an excess of surviving documents, but also with the fact that each source refers to a history “which is either more, less, or in any case, something other than the remnant itself”, since a history “is never identical with the source that provides evidence for this history” (Koselleck [1977] 2004, 150). In a handwritten lecture manuscript from 1979, Koselleck speaks of a methodological short-circuit when history is reduced to the sequence and effectiveness of linguistic expressions. Important “as these are, history is always more or less, in any case, something other than the words, sentences or speeches that are spoken or written in the process of history” (Koselleck 1979b, 3). In order to resolve this dilemma productively, theoretical approaches are needed which, on the one hand, help to reflect the difference between event and language, and which, on the other hand, also enable the transition from the situation-bound remnant to the structural argument. Beyond the veto right of the sources, which does not dictate what can be said but only specifies what cannot be proven by the sources, it is the theory-driven transfer of experience into narrated, transmitted and/or scientifically examined histories that constitutes the core of Koselleck’s historic (Koselleck [1977] 2004, 148–151). In this spirit, memory is not only directly intertwined with individual and collective processes of coming to terms with experience; it is also, of course, shaped by linguistic-symbolic forms of communication and representation. For a long time, however, placing memory in this conceptual context did not prompt Koselleck to draw the obvious and necessary conclusion that memory should be reflected upon more theoretically. A more detailed examination only occurred when he began to comment publicly on historical-political projects at the end of the 1980s.

Stepping-Over

Koselleck initially understood memory as a way of dealing with the past that is used by individuals on a more or less daily basis. Strictly speaking, as he repeatedly made clear, we can only remember what

we ourselves have experienced. According to this logic, remembering was both a psychological process and an anthropological necessity to relate to one's own life. That such a cognitive process almost inevitably includes social and thus collective references should be undeniable, not least because remembering, although it has a physical and emotional dimension, is above all a symbolic and linguistic act. The matter is much more complicated when we ask what the meaning of remembering is beyond such individual modes of processing. Koselleck used the word "remembering" in this second sense primarily when dealing with the political cult of the dead. In his programmatic text of 1979, he noted that monuments "preserve more than just the memory of the dead" because "beyond the memory, the question of the justification of this death is invoked" (Koselleck 1979a, 255f.). Throughout the rest of his argument, however, he is less concerned with remembrance in the narrow sense than with the symbolic presentation associated with violent military death in the modern era. He understood memorials as symbols of remembrance whose function is to make the identification of and for the "survivors" sensually tangible. They convey aesthetic interpretations and meanings of the founders, which may fade as political statements over the years, but aesthetically they endure and thus remain "longer than the individual case" (275). Here Koselleck conceptually separated the symbolic process of identification and meaning from the mere commemoration of the fallen soldiers.

While these two contexts of meaning are relatively easy to distinguish, things become much more confusing when Koselleck's understanding of collective memory is examined as a third variant. In principle, this and all the other modifications of remembering in his work are situated in the context of his reflections on how historical events are transformed into history, and in this framework Koselleck reflected on the reworking of individual experience into secondarily available experiential knowledge. If historiography is the analysis of the transcendental conditions of possible history, and there is no "history which could be constituted independently of the experiences and expectations of active human agents" (Koselleck [1976] 2004, 256), then memory is, so to speak, an inherent necessity of this overarching, accumulating transformation of experience. With reference to Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger, Koselleck called the transition from the fragmented,

pluralistic, accidental and non-transferable experience of the individual to the secondary, overarching and thus generally available experiential knowledge a “stepping-over” (*Überschritt*) (Heidegger 1984, 160). He used this expression regularly since the 1970s, but for a long time there was no direct reference to memory processes. This only became relevant when he began to engage with the politics of history. In 2005, for example, Koselleck responded to the rather rhetorical question of what memory can actually achieve by saying that it opens up the space

for what could be called “history”. [...] Everything that is remembered by the respective contemporary witnesses and passed on to those born later, belongs in any case to a persistent, constant transcendence of so-called history (Koselleck 2010a, 255).

Remembering is understood as part of a larger process of reworking, which Koselleck has more or less consistently defined as *Überschritt* since the mid-1990s. Individual experiences, which are not in themselves transferable, must be, as he sometimes put it lapidary, “highly aggregated” to a “somehow secondarily defined, institutionalized space of memory” (Koselleck 1999b, 215).

The fact that this “somehow” must be examined in more detail as a continuous process of transformation and reworking, seems to have prompted him to devote more attention to this topic in the last years of his life. In contrast to concepts such as acceleration, historicity and experience, on which Koselleck had worked for years and decades as part of the encyclopedia project, but also in the course of his studies on the epochal threshold since the 18th century, his preoccupation with memory emerged, on the one hand, in line with various projects on the political cult of the dead and, on the other, within the scope of his historical-political interventions since the 1990s. Most of the texts he has written on historical memory are more or less directly related to specific empirical work, so that the conceptualization, if it can be called that in this context, is in some ways more application-oriented than in other areas of research. At the same time, Koselleck never hid his skepticism about concepts of collective memory. In view of the dying witnesses, “it has become common to speak of collective remembrance or collective memory” (Koselleck 2003, 7). He routinely countered this “fashion” (Koselleck 2010a, 254) by arguing that there is no collective

subject that can remember. Nevertheless, such resolute statements did not lead to memory being defined exclusively as subjective-individual recollections of self-experienced events.

At the same time, his criticism of the general chatter about the power of collective memory was intensified if collective identity was also inferred from it. Shortly after its publication, Koselleck took note of Jan Assmann's influential 1988 essay, which set the tone for this understanding. As he read, he highlighted in red Assmann's definition of cultural memory as "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (Assmann [1988] 1995, 126). Assmann's remarks on the "transition" from communicative to cultural memory are certainly crucial to the context under discussion here. Assmann writes: "Once we remove ourselves from the area of everyday communication and enter into the area of objectivized culture, almost everything changes". This "transition" is so fundamental that one has to ask ourselves "whether the metaphor of memory remains in anyway applicable" (128). Koselleck's reading copy of this text is in the Marbach Literature Archive. There you can see, that he again underlined this passage in red and also added a prominent cross in the margin, because there are indeed good reasons to doubt whether memory and reminiscence are still the appropriate terms for this transposition. As is well known, such conceptual subtleties did not impress Assmann, nor did they prevent him from going beyond the model of Maurice Halbwachs on this point. Halbwachs, Assmann assumed, "stopped at this juncture, probably because he believed that in the transition to an objectivized culture, the character of the transmitted knowledge in the sense of a *collective mémoire* is lost". Assmann, on the other hand, stressed, that his thesis "contradicts this assumption". Here, too, "we can refer to the structure of knowledge in this case as the 'concretion of identity'" (128). In doing so, he equated the assimilation of experience-based knowledge with what, according to his logic, should be called collective memory. The obvious contradiction that the processing of experience-based knowledge cannot be structurally identical to an experience-independent appropriation was not only ignored, but the semantic subsumption as memory also led to an extension of the concept of memory to other forms of processing. In

this sense, Assmann concluded, “objectivized culture has the structure of memory” (128).

The fact that, in the course of further theoretical development, a more or less synonymous use of *memory* and *remembrance* with the corresponding attributive additions resulted, will have bothered Koselleck less than the increasingly vague distinction between primary experience and secondary adoption of experience. For Koselleck, the crucial point was that I can only “strictly and literally” remember “what I myself have experienced, what I myself have lived through”. The grammatically intransitive form “to remember” (*sich erinnern*) implies that experience cannot be transferred as experience but can at best be narrated or otherwise transmitted in a symbolic form. Equating “remembering” with the various transformations that are fundamental to Assmann’s collective memory ultimately undermines Koselleck’s uncompromising distinction between what “remains bound to the body” and what becomes a “teachable and learnable and controllable memory” (Koselleck 2010a, 255). What is surprising, however, is that his writings reveal an extension of a previously more concrete concept of memory. At times, the discursive emphasis on memory even supplanted the more productive concept of experience that Koselleck had favored for decades. Instead of “space of experience”, later texts increasingly speak of “space of memory”, without any conceptual difference. Some handwritten notes from 1998 illustrate this equation of *experience* and *memory*. Here, Koselleck transfers the characteristics previously stated for primary experiences, such as being unique, personal and not generalizable, to individual memories. Since these, like experiences, are related to events, the same principles supposedly apply. By contrast, institutionalized memory is secondary and repeatable, and therefore never identical to primary experience. In a fifty-page handwritten manuscript from 1999, this shift can be traced in detail: It is no longer the experience of eyewitnesses that is “personally lived, engraved in the body” and coagulates into a “lava mass”, but rather “memory”, that “fades when put into words” (Koselleck 1999a). Linguistically, the differences between the processing of experience, the processes of memory and the various forms of symbolization are barely discernible. It is difficult to resist the impression that the ever-expanding memory discourse of the 1990s not only challenged Koselleck’s engagement

with the politics of history, but also prompted an expert in the history of concepts to conform to the generally accepted rhetoric of memory – for the context under discussion here, this is reason enough to relate Koselleck's political-historical interventions with his theoretical concepts.

P is for Professor

For some time now there has been a boom in the discussion of memory in Germany, as Koselleck pointed out in 2001, and since Nietzsche this has been linked to the question of “a life-affirming history that needs a good portion of forgetting in order to serve life” (Koselleck 2001, 19). The misuse of history is a constant problem because, as Koselleck said in the face of the seemingly endless historical debates of the 1990s, history is “sprightly destructed, constructed and reconstructed” in order to adapt it “to the respective interests”, (Koselleck 2001, 19). The actors he had in mind were variously described as “mediators”, “tradition founders” (Koselleck 2001, 21) and, on another occasion, with a cynical undertone, as “gatekeepers of meaning” (Koselleck [1992] 2018, 216). In this context, his equally mocking and oft-repeated remark about the “seven great Ps” (Koselleck 2004, 27) responsible for the creation and dissemination of collective memory has become infamous. Politicians, priests, professors, pedagogues, poets, publicists and PR specialists are the driving forces behind a memory performance that is primarily controlled by the media. The P's are therefore constantly working on the formation of overarching memories through “homogenization, collectivization, simplification, vulgarization and mediatization”. But who or what is the collectivity that is “supposedly remembering”? It is “parties, classes, associations, churches, sects, nations, religions, continents... up to mankind” (Koselleck 2004, 27) that appear or are claimed as points of reference, although these are not real communities of action, but linguistic references that lack any empirical basis. The *Überschritt* to an all-encompassing secondary memory thus proves to be a transposition that is not only extremely susceptible to indoctrination, control and manipulation, but also links the memories to collectives

that, according to Koselleck, do not even exist. Viewed soberly, the social struggle over interpretations could be described as a necessary and ordinary process of negotiation. However, in times of highly charged debates about national self-understanding, Koselleck found himself confronted with a level of agitation that he initially thought he could counter with scientific standards and better arguments. In the historical and political context of the 1990s, however, he soon had to learn that the lines of conflict ran in a different direction than he had assumed. For Koselleck, the seven P's embodied everything that science should never be, because, unlike the politics of history, science should ideally remain free of ideology. Other, non-rational sources of tradition, such as churches, political parties, associations and the like, as well as literature and art from a different perspective, compete with the scientific acquisition of knowledge. They all shape and form images of the past "that claim to create and preserve memory" (Koselleck 2001, 21).

Koselleck also applied his conceptual reflections on *Erinnern als Überschrift* to his own engagement with the politics of history, since, after all, one of the seven P's stands for professor. The transition from individual primary experience to institutionalized remembrance is a process that is never complete, Koselleck said, "in which we all find ourselves, and which has repeatedly brought new surprises to the primary generation, as it has to me" (Koselleck 1999b, 215). These "surprises" also included the realization, however, of how little interest the political decision-makers had in elaborate research on the theory of memorials and the cult of the dead. In any case, by this time Koselleck had already found an open ear for who or what should be commemorated in the center of Berlin. The expectation that his scholarly knowledge of history would be given special weight in the debates on national identity was met with a harsh rebuff, which Koselleck commented on no less sharply. Kohl's decision in favor of the Pietà by Käthe Kollwitz was a "relapse into penetrance", an unprecedented lack of taste and style that "horrificed" him. This "private decision" by the Chancellor was a tactical one, in order to get the SPD on board, which promptly fell for it. Compromises of this kind led to wrong decisions, which annoyed him (Koselleck 1996b, 468). His call for a negative memorial in Berlin, which includes both the victims and the perpetrators and differs from

pure victim commemoration, was often quoted in the press, but its significance for the politics of remembrance, which goes far beyond the individual case, remained completely unrecognized.

The fact that his premise that all groups of victims should be remembered in forms yet to be negotiated, even if they could not be morally equated, resulted from decades of study of iconography and the cult of the dead, did not alter the fact that the occasionally destructive discourse narrowed Koselleck's perspective on the conflicts of historical politics. In colloquia, expert committees and lectures, he often experienced the distinction between fact and judgement not as a "productive tension [...] between the theory of history and the given sources" (Koselleck [1977] 2004, 149), but as a political conflict and occasionally as a farce. The Berlin debates were not about sober, verifiable findings of historical facts, which could be verified by the veto right of the sources, but about sovereignties of interpretation with relevance for national identity. In this context, source exegesis, historical theory or the right of veto were seen by many participants as completely irrelevant. The expectation "that clever, sober essays or contributions could have an impact on the political debate" (Koselleck 2010b) proved too optimistic. The supposed sobriety sometimes gave way to an outright indignation. Koselleck was both annoyed and offended as a historian and as an eyewitness when he began to realize that his arguments were more or less kindly noted and that many participants also appreciated his expertise, but that ultimately these efforts were comparatively irrelevant to the structural decisions. *Erinnern als Überschrift* proved to be a discourse formation that, in view of the real power dynamics, not only poses a contradictory challenge to scholars, but also offers ample opportunities for self-criticism. But Koselleck could never bring himself to do so. What remained was bitterness, disappointment, a sense of failure and a great deal of contempt for the superior "know-it-alls" (Koselleck 1996a). But Koselleck's experiences point beyond the specific individual case to the structural deficits and emotional dynamics of a conflictual and often unproductive exchange between historical sciences, political elites and historical-cultural activists on what is commonly called history.

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