TIME AND HISTORY

Critique of the Instant and the Continuum

To Victor Goldschmidt and Henri-Charles Puech
Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to 'change the world', but also – and above all – to 'change time'. Modern political thought has concentrated its attention on history, and has not elaborated a corresponding concept of time. Even historical materialism has until now neglected to elaborate a concept of time that compares with its concept of history. Because of this omission it has been unwittingly compelled to have recourse to a concept of time dominant in Western culture for centuries, and so to harbour, side by side, a revolutionary concept of history and a traditional experience of time. The vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogeneous continuum has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history: it has become the hidden breach through which ideology has crept into the citadel of historical materialism. Benjamin had already warned of this danger in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. We now need to elucidate the concept of time implicit in the Marxist conception of history.

Since the human mind has the experience of time but not its representation, it necessarily pictures time by means of spatial images. The Graeco-Roman concept of time is basically circular and continuous. Puech writes:

Dominated by a notion of intelligibility which assimilates the full,
authentic being to what is in him and corresponds to him, to the eternal and the immutable, the Greek regards movement and becoming as inferior degrees of reality, where correspondence is at best only understood as permanence and perpetuity, in other words as return. Circular movement, which guarantees the unchanged preservation of things through their repetition and continual return, is the most direct and most perfect expression (and therefore the closest to the divine) of the zenith of the hierarchy: absolute immobility.

In Plato’s *Timaeus* time is measured by the cyclical revolution of the celestial spheres and defined as a moving image of eternity: ‘The creator of the world constructed a moving image of eternity, and, in ordering the heavens, from eternity one and unshifting he made this image which ever moves according to the laws of number and which we call time.’ Aristotle confirms the circular nature of time in these terms:

... and so time is regarded as the rotation of the sphere, inasmuch as all other orders of motion are measured by it, and time itself is standardized by reference to it. And this is the reason of our habitual way of speaking; for we say that human affairs and those of all other things that have natural movement ... seem to be in a way circular, because all these things come to pass in time and have their beginning and end as it were ‘periodically’; for time itself is conceived as coming round; and this again because time and such a standard rotation mutually determine each other. Hence, to call the happenings of a thing a circle is saying that there is a sort of circle of time ...

The first outcome of this conception is that time, being essentially circular, has no direction. Strictly speaking, it has no beginning, no middle and no end – or rather, it has them only in so far as its circular motion returns unceasingly back on itself. A singular passage in Aristotle’s *Problemata* explains that from this point of view it is impossible to say whether we are before or after the Trojan War:

Do those who lived at the time of the Trojan War come before us, and before them those who lived in an even more ancient time, and so on to infinity, those men most remote in the past coming always before the rest? Or else, if it is true that the universe has a beginning, a middle and an end; that what in ageing reaches its end to find itself therefore back at the beginning; if it is true, on the other hand, that
the things that are closest to the beginning come before, what then prevents us from being closer to the beginning than those who lived at the time of the Trojan War? ... If the sequence of events forms a circle, since the circle has indeed neither beginning nor end, we cannot, by being closer to the beginning, come before them any more than they can be said to come before us.

But the fundamental character of the Greek experience of time – which, through Aristotle's *Physics*, has for two millennia determined the Western representation of time – is its being a precise, infinite, quantified continuum. Aristotle thus defines time as 'quantity of movement according to the before and the after', and its continuity is assured by its division into discrete instants [*tò nyyn*, the now], analogous to the geometric point [*stigmē*]. The instant in itself is nothing more than the continuity of time [*synécheia chrónou*], a pure limit which both joins and divides past and future. As such, it is always elusive, and Aristotle expresses its paradoxically nullified character in the statement that in dividing time infinitely, the now is always 'other'; yet in uniting past and future and ensuring continuity, it is always the same; and in this is the basis of the radical 'otherness' of time, and of its 'destructive' character:

And besides, since the 'now' is the end and the beginning of time, but not of the same time, but the end of time past and the beginning of time to come, it must present a relation analogous to the kind of identity between the convexity and the concavity of the same circumference, which necessitates a difference between that with respect to which it bears the other.²

Western man's incapacity to master time, and his consequent obsession with gaining it and passing it, have their origins in this Greek concept of time as a quantified and infinite *continuum* of precise fleeting instants.

A culture with such a representation of time could have no real experience of historicity. To state that Antiquity had no experience of lived time is, without doubt, a simplification, but there is equally no doubt that the locus in which the Greek philosophers deal with the question of time is always *Physics*. Time is something objective and natural, which envelops things that are 'inside' it as if in a sheath [*periechón*]: as each thing inhabits a place, so it inhabits time. The beginning of the modern concept
of history has often been traced back to the words with which Herodotus opens his *Histories*: ‘Herodotus of Halicarnassus here puts forth the fruit of his researches, so that time may not erase men’s undertakings...’. It is the destructive character of time which the *Histories* wish to combat, thereby confirming the essentially ahistorical nature of the ancient concept of time. Like the word indicating the act of knowledge [*eidénaí*], so too the word *historia* derives from the root *id-* , which means to see. *Histór* is in origin the eyewitness, the one who has seen. Here too the Greek supremacy of vision is confirmed. The determination of authenticity as ‘present before the look’ rules out an experience of history as what is already there without ever appearing before our eyes as such.

III

The antithesis of this in many respects is the Christian experience of time. While the classical representation of time is a circle, the image guiding the Christian conceptualization of it is a straight line. Puech writes:

In contrast with the Hellenic world, for the Christian the world is created within time and must end within time. At one end, the account of Genesis, at the other, the eschatological perspective of the Apocalypse. And the Creation, the Last Judgement, and the intermediary period between these two events are unique. This uniquely fashioned universe which began, which endures and which will end within time, is a finite world enclosed by the two edges of its history. Its duration comprises neither the eternal nor the infinite, and the events which unfold within it will never be repeated.

Moreover, in contrast with the directionless time of the classical world, this time has a direction and a purpose: it develops irreversibly from the Creation to the end, and has a central point of reference in the incarnation of Christ, which shapes its development as a progression from the initial fall to the final redemption. Thus Saint Augustine can oppose the *falsi circuli* of the Greek philosophers with the *via recta* of Christ, and the eternal repetition of paganism, where nothing is new, with Christian *novitas*, in which everything always occurs only once. The history of humanity thus appears as a history of salvation,
the progressive realization of redemption, whose foundation is in God. And in this, every event is unique and irreplaceable.

Despite its apparent scorn for ‘epoch’, it is Christianity which has laid the foundation for an experience of historicity, rather than the ancient world, attentive though it was to events. Indeed, Christianity resolutely separates time from the natural movement of the stars to make it an essentially human, interior phenomenon. ‘Supposing the lights of heaven were to cease,’ writes Saint Augustine, in singularly modern-sounding phraseology,

and the potter’s wheel moved on, would there not be time by which we could measure its rotations and say that these were at equal intervals, or some slower, some quicker, some taking longer, some shorter? Let no one tell me that the movement of the heavenly bodies is time. . . . I see time as in some way extended. But do I see it? Or do I only seem to see it? Thou wilt show me, O Light, O Truth. 3

None the less, time thus interiorized remains the continuous succession of precise instants of Greek thought. The whole of the eleventh book of Augustine’s Confessions, with its anguished and unresolved interrogation of fleeting time, shows that continuous, quantified time has not been abolished, simply displaced from the paths of the stars to interior duration. Indeed, it is precisely his preservation of the Aristotelian concept of the precise instant which prevents Augustine from reaching a conclusion about the question of time:

But the two times, past and future, how can they be, since the past is no more and the future is not yet? On the other hand, if the present were always present and never flowed away into the past, it would not be time at all, but eternity. But if the present is only time, because it flows away into the past, how can we say that it is? For it is, only because it will cease to be . . .

If we conceive of some point of time which cannot be divided even into the minutest parts of moments, that is the only point that can be called present: and that point flees at such lightning speed from being future to being past, that it has no extent of duration at all. For if it were so extended, it would be divisible into past and future: the present has no length. 4

The experience of a fuller, more original and tangible time, discernible in primitive Christianity, is thereby overlaid by the
mathematical time of classical Antiquity. With it there inevitably returns the ancient circular representation of Greek metaphysics, assimilated first through Neoplatonizing patristics, and later through scholastic theology. Eternity, the regime of divinity, with its static circle, tends to negate the human experience of time. The discrete, fleeting instant becomes the point where time intercepts the wheel of eternity. 'To achieve an image of the relation between eternity and time,' we read in Guillaume d'Auvergne's de Universo:

try to imagine eternity as an immense wheel, and within this wheel the wheel of time, so that the first touches the second at a single point. For you know that if a circle or a sphere touches another circle or another sphere, whether outside or inside, this contact can take place only at a single point. Since eternity is entirely motionless and simultaneous, as I have said, whenever the wheel of time touches the wheel of eternity the contact occurs only at a regular point in its rotation; this is why time is not simultaneous.5

IV

The modern concept of time is a secularization of rectilinear, irreversible Christian time, albeit sundered from any notion of end and emptied of any other meaning but that of a structured process in terms of before and after. This representation of time as homogeneous, rectilinear and empty derives from the experience of manufacturing work and is sanctioned by modern mechanics, which establishes the primacy of uniform rectilinear motion over circular motion. The experience of dead time abstracted from experience, which characterizes life in modern cities and factories, seems to give credence to the idea that the precise fleeting instant is the only human time. Before and after, notions which were vague and empty for Antiquity — and which, for Christianity, had meaning only in terms of the end of time — now become meaning in themselves and for themselves, and this meaning is presented as truly historical.

As Nietzsche had already grasped, with Hartmann's 'process of the world' ('only process can lead to redemption'), the idea governing the nineteenth-century concept of history is that of 'process'. Only process as a whole has meaning, never the precise fleeting now; but since this process is really no more than a
simple succession of *now* in terms of before and after, and the history of salvation has meanwhile become pure chronology, a semblance of meaning can be saved only by introducing the idea – albeit one lacking any rational foundation – of a continuous, infinite progress. Under the influence of the natural sciences, ‘development’ and ‘progress’, which merely translate the idea of a chronologically orientated process, become the guiding categories of historical knowledge. Such a concept of time and history necessarily expropriates man from the human dimension and impedes access to authentic historicity. As Dilthey and Count Yorck had observed (‘That school was by no means a historical one, but an antiquarian one, construing things aesthetically, while the great dominating activity was one of mechanical construction’), behind the apparent triumph of historicism in the nineteenth century is hidden a radical negation of history, in the name of an ideal of knowledge modelled on the natural sciences.

This leaves ample scope for the Lévi-Straussian critique, which points to the chronological and discontinuous nature of historiographical codification, and denounces fraudulent pretensions to any objective historical continuity independent of the code (with the result that history ultimately assumes the role of a ‘thoroughgoing myth’). Lévi-Strauss rejects the equation of history and humanity, which is thrust upon us with the undeclared aim of ‘making history the last refuge of transcendental humanism’.

But it is not a question of abandoning history; rather, of achieving a more authentic concept of historicity.

V

Hegel thinks of time in terms of the Aristotelian model of the precise instant. Against the Aristotelian *nýn*, he sets the *now* in correspondence; and, as Aristotle conceived the *nýn* as *stigmê*, so he conceives the *now* as a point. This now, which ‘is nothing other than the passage of its being into nothingness, and from nothingness into its being’, is eternity as ‘true present’. The conjunction of spatial representations and temporal experience which dominates the Western concept of time is developed in Hegel as a conception of time as negation and dialectical dominion of space. While the spatial point is a simple indifferent
negativity, the temporal point – that is, the instant – is the
negation of this undifferentiated negation, the overcoming of the
‘paralysed immobility’ of space in becoming. It is therefore, in
this sense, negation of negation.

Defining time in this way as a negation of negation, Hegel
cannot avoid taking to its extreme conclusion the nullification of
experience by time implicit in its determination as a continuous
succession of precise instants. ‘Time’, he writes in a passage from
the Encyclopaedia which still resonates with an – albeit subdued
and consciously assumed – Augustinian anxiety in the face of
time’s fleeting essence, ‘is the thing existing which is not when it is,
and is when it is not: a half-glimpsed becoming.’ As such, this
negative being which ‘is what is not and is not what it is’ is formally
homologous to man. Indeed, perhaps it is because Hegel thinks of
time in terms of the metaphysical model of the precise instant that
it can form such a part in his system of that ‘power of the negative’,
which he sees at work in the human spirit and makes the central
motor of the dialectic. What the Hegelian system expresses in the
formal correspondence of time and the human spirit, both of these
construed as negation of negation, is the as yet unexplored link
between the annulled experience of time for Western man and the
negating power of his culture. Only a culture with such an
experience of time could render the essence of the human spirit as
negation, and the true sense of the Hegelian dialectic cannot be
understood unless it is related to the concept of time to which it is
integral. For the dialectic is above all what makes possible the
containment and unification [dia- légesthai] of the continuum of
negative fleeting instants.

Nevertheless, in Hegel the origin of time and the sense of its
formal correspondence with the spirit are not interrogated as
such. Time appears simply as the necessity and the destiny of the
unfulfilled spirit. The spirit must fall into time. ‘It is in keeping
with the concept of the spirit’, he writes in Reason in History,
‘that the evolution of history be produced in time.’ But since
time, as we have seen, ‘is the thing existing which is not when it is,
and is when it is not’, the Absolute can be true only as an
‘outcome’; and history, which is ‘the spirit alienated in time’, is
essentially Stufengang, a gradual process. As the alienation of
alienation, it is the ‘calvary’ and the ‘discovery’ of the absolute
spirit, the ‘foam’ which rises forth for him from the ‘chalice’ of
his own infinitude. 7
Like time, whose essence is pure negation, history can never be grasped in the instant, but only as total social process. It thereby remains at one remove from the lived experience of the single individual, whose ideal is happiness. ‘In considering history one can also adopt the viewpoint of happiness, but history is not the site of happiness.’ Hence the emergence, in the Hegelian philosophy of history, of the sombre figure of ‘great historical individuality’ in which is incarnated ‘the soul of the world’. ‘Great men’ are merely instrumental in the forward march of the universal Spirit. Like individuals, ‘they do not know what is commonly held as happiness’. ‘Once they have reached their goal, they sag like empty sacks.’ The real subject of history is the State.

VI

Marx’s conception of history has an altogether different context. For him history is not something into which man falls, something that merely expresses the being-in-time of the human mind, it is man’s original dimension as Gattungswesen (species-being), as being capable of generation – that is to say, capable of producing himself from the start not merely as an individual, nor as an abstract generalization, but as a universal individual. History, therefore, is determined not, as it is in Hegel and the historicism which derives from him, by an experience of linear time as negation of negation, but by praxis, concrete activity as essence and origin [Gattung] of man. Praxis, in which man posits himself as origin and nature of man, is at once ‘the first historical act’, the founding act of history, to be understood as the means by which the human essence becomes man’s nature and nature becomes man. History is no longer, as in Hegel, man’s destiny of alienation and his necessary fall within the negative time which he inhabits in an infinite process, but rather his nature; in other words, man’s original belonging to himself as Gattungswesen, from which alienation has temporarily removed him. Man is not a historical being because he falls into time, but precisely the opposite; it is only because he is a historical being that he can fall into time, temporalizing himself.

Marx did not elaborate a theory of time adequate to his idea of history, but the latter clearly cannot be reconciled with the Aristotelian and Hegelian concept of time as a continuous and
infinite succession of precise instants. So long as this nullified experience of time remains our horizon, it is not possible to attain authentic history, for truth will always vie with the process as a whole, and man will never be able concretely, practically, to appropriate his own history. The fundamental contradiction of modern man is precisely that he does not yet have an experience of time adequate to his idea of history, and is therefore painfully split between his being-in-time as an elusive flow of instants and his being-in-history, understood as the original dimension of man. The twofold nature of every modern concept of history, as res gestae and as historia rerum gestarum, as diachronic reality and as synchronic structure which can never coincide in time, expresses this impossibility: the inability of man, who is lost in time, to take possession of his own historical nature.

VII

Whether it is conceived as linear or circular, in Western thought time invariably has the point as its dominating feature. Lived time is represented through a metaphysical–geometric concept (the discrete point or instant), and it is then taken as if this concept were itself the real time of experience. Vico had observed that the concept of the geometric point is a metaphysical concept, which furnished the malignum aditum, the 'evil opening' through which metaphysics had invaded physics. Vico's words on the geometric point could also be applied to the instant as a 'point' in time. This is the opening through which the eternity of metaphysics insinuates itself into the human experience of time, and irreparably splits it. Any attempt to conceive of time differently must inevitably come into conflict with this concept, and a critique of the instant is the logical condition for a new experience of time.

The elements for a different concept of time lie scattered among the folds and shadows of the Western cultural tradition. We need only to elucidate these, so that they may emerge as the bearers of a message which is meant for us and which it is our task to verify. It is in Gnosticism, that failed religion of the West, that there appears an experience of time in radical opposition to both the Greek and the Christian versions. In opposition to the Greek circle of experience and the straight line of Christianity, it
posits a concept whose spatial model can be represented by a broken line. In this way it strikes directly at what remains unaltered in classical Antiquity and Christianity alike: duration, precise and continuous time. The cosmic time of Greek experience is denied by Gnosticism in the name of the world’s absolute estrangement from a god (God is the allótrios, the supreme other), whose providential work cannot be a matter of preserving cosmic laws, but of breaking them. The impetus towards redemption of Christian linear time is negated because, for the Gnostic, the Resurrection is not something to be awaited in time, to occur in some more or less remote future; it has already taken place.

The time of Gnosticism, therefore, is an incoherent and unhomogeneous time, whose truth is in the moment of abrupt interruption, when man, in a sudden act of consciousness, takes possession of his own condition of being resurrected (‘statim resurrectionis compos’). In keeping with this experience of interrupted time, the Gnostic attitude is resolutely revolutionary: it refuses the past while valuing in it, through an exemplary sense of the present, precisely what was condemned as negative (Cain, Esau, the inhabitants of Sodom), and expecting nothing from the future.

In Stoicism, too, the twilight of Antiquity seems to overcome its own concept of time. This appears as a refusal of the astronomical time of the Timaeus, image of eternity, and of the Aristotelian notion of the mathematical instant. For the Stoics, homogeneous, infinite, quantified time, dividing the present into discrete instants, is unreal time, which exemplifies experience as waiting and deferral. Subservience to this elusive time constitutes a fundamental sickness, which, with its infinite postponement, hinders human existence from taking possession of itself as something full and singular (‘maximum vitae vitium est, quod imperfecta semper est, quod ali quid in illa differtur’). Against this, the Stoic posits the liberating experience of time as something neither objective nor removed from our control, but springing from the actions and decisions of man. Its model is the cairós, the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity and life is fulfilled in the moment. Infinite, quantified time is thus at once delimited and made present: within itself the cairós distils different times (‘omnium temporum in unum collatio’) and within it the sage is master of himself and at his
ease, like a god in eternity. This is ‘the final hand’ dealt every time to life, which radically removes man from servitude to quantified time (‘qui cotidie vitae suae summam manum imposuit, non indiget tempore’).

VIII

It is certainly no accident that every time modern thought has come to reconceptualize time, it has inevitably had to begin with a critique of continuous, quantified time. Such a critique underlies both Benjamin’s ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ and Heidegger’s incomplete analysis of temporality in Being and Time. This coincidence in two thinkers so far apart is a sign that the concept of time which has dominated Western culture for nearly two thousand years is on the wane.

There moves in Benjamin that same Jewish messianic intuition which had led Kafka to write that ‘the Day of Judgement is the normal condition of history’ and to replace the idea of history developing along infinite linear time with the paradoxical image of a ‘state of history’, whose key event is always unfolding and whose goal is not in the distant future, but already present. Taking up these themes, Benjamin seeks a concept of history corresponding to the statement that ‘the state of emergency is the rule’. Instead of the nullified present of the metaphysical tradition, Benjamin posits ‘a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop’. Instead of the social democratic and historicist notion of the historical progress of humankind, which ‘cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time’, he puts forward the revolutionaries’ ‘awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode’. Against the empty, quantified instant, he sets a ‘time of the now’, Jetzt-Zeit, construed as a messianic cessation of happening, which ‘comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement’. It is in the name of this ‘full time’, which is ‘the true site of historical construction’, that Benjamin, faced with the Nazi-Soviet pact, pursues his lucid critique of the causes behind the European Left’s disastrous failure after the First World War. The messianic time of Judaism, in which every second was the ‘strait gate through which the Messiah might enter’, thus becomes the
model for a conception of history ‘that avoids any complicity with the thinking to which politicians continue to adhere’. But it is in Heidegger’s thought that the conception of precise, continuous time is subjected to a radical critique within the terms of repetition—destruction which invade Western metaphysics as a whole. From the start, Heidegger’s research was directed towards a siting of history that would overcome vulgar historicism, and in which, ‘with the thesis that “Dasein is historical”, one has in view not just the Ontical Fact that in man we are presented with a more or less important “atom in the workings of world history …”’ Thus, at the very point when they were seen to be inadequate, he took up Dilthey’s efforts towards a historical foundation for the human sciences independent of the natural sciences. But the originality of Sein und Zeit is that the foundation of historicity takes place in tandem with an analysis of temporality which elucidates a different and more authentic experience of time. At the heart of this experience there is no longer the precise, fleeting instant throughout linear time, but the moment of the authentic decision in which the Dasein experiences its own finiteness, which at every moment extends from birth to death (‘A Dasein which no longer exists … is not past, in the ontologically strict sense; it is rather having-been-there’), and, throwing itself forward in care, it freely assumes the destiny of its primordial historicity. Man does not fall into time, ‘but exists as primordial temporalization’. Only because he is in his being both anticipatory and having-been can he assume his own thrownness and be, in the moment ‘of his own time’.

It would be easy to show how this foundation of historicity as care in the being of man is in no way opposed to the Marxist foundation of historicity in praxis, albeit in a different area, with both located as polar opposites to vulgar historicism. Thus Heidegger, in his Letters on Humanism, was able to write that ‘the Marxist concept of history is superior to any other historiography’. It is perhaps more interesting to note that in his later writing, when Sein und Zeit’s project of conceptualizing time as the framework for understanding being was abandoned, Heidegger’s thought is focused on how, given that metaphysics had now been overtaken, human historicity could be conceived in a totally new way. This is not the place to attempt an explanation of the concept of Ereignis (Event), which designates both the centre and the extreme limit of Heidegger’s thought after Sein.
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und Zeit. From the perspective which interests us here we must, however, at least acknowledge that it allows the Event to be conceived no longer as a spatio–temporal determination but as the opening of the primary dimension in which all spatio–temporal dimensions are based.

IX

Yet for everyone there is an immediate and available experience on which a new concept of time could be founded. This is an experience so essential to human beings that an ancient Western myth makes it humankind’s original home: it is pleasure. Aristotle had realized that pleasure was a heterogeneous thing in relation to the experience of quantified, continuous time. ‘The form [eídos] of pleasure’ – he writes in the Nicomachean Ethics – is perfect [téleion] at any moment’, adding that pleasure, unlike movement, does not occur in a space of time, but is ‘within each now something whole and complete’. This lack of correspondence between pleasure and quantified time, which we seem to have forgotten, was so familiar in the Middle Ages that Aquinas could answer in the negative to the question ‘utrum delectatio sit in tempore’; and it was this same awareness which upheld the Provençal troubadours’ Edenic project of a perfect pleasure [fin’amors, joi] outside any measurable duration.

This does not mean that pleasure has its place in eternity. The Western experience of time is split between eternity and continuous linear time. The dividing point through which the two relate is the instant as a discrete, elusive point. Against this conception, which dooms any attempt to master time, there must be opposed one whereby the true site of pleasure, as man’s primary dimension, is neither precise, continuous time nor eternity, but history. Contrary to what Hegel stated, it is only as the source and site of happiness that history can have a meaning for man. In this sense, Adam’s seven hours in Paradise are the primary core of all authentic historical experience. For history is not, as the dominant ideology would have it, man’s servitude to continuous linear time, but man’s liberation from it: the time of history and the cairós in which man, by his initiative, grasps favourable opportunity and chooses his own freedom in the moment. Just as the full, discontinuous, finite and complete time
of pleasure must be set against the empty, continuous and infinite time of vulgar historicism, so the chronological time of pseudo-history must be opposed by the cairolological time of authentic history.

True historical materialism does not pursue an empty mirage of continuous progress along infinite linear time, but is ready at any moment to stop time, because it holds the memory that man's original home is pleasure. It is this time which is experienced in authentic revolutions, which, as Benjamin remembers, have always been lived as a halting of time and an interruption of chronology. But a revolution from which there springs not a new chronology, but a qualitative alteration of time (a cairology), would have the weightiest consequence and would alone be immune to absorption into the reflux of restoration. He who, in the epoché of pleasure, has remembered history as he would remember his original home, will bring this memory to everything, will exact this promise from each instant: he is the true revolutionary and the true seer, released from time not at the millennium, but now.

NOTES

2. ibid., IV, XIII.
4. ibid., XIV.
5. Guillaume d'Auvergne, *De Universo*, in *Magistrum divinale*, Orléans 1674.