

“RIDING THE DEVIL’S STEED”. POLITICS AND HISTORICAL ACCELERATION IN AN AGE OF REVOLUTIONS¹

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“gripping the mane of politics, of that runaway horse which is plunging the country at a dizzy speed into a bottomless abyss, from revolution to reaction, men, institutions, systems and parties have lived without rest years within hours, like Pecopin on the devil’s steed”.

Gaspar Núñez de Arce, 1860

THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS: A NEW TIME OF ACCELERATED CHANGE

In 1826, an obscure Spanish essayist addressed a private letter to King Ferdinand VII, in which, amongst other things, he said the following:

Sir, in 1784 [the year of the King’s birth] there existed in the world only one constitutional monarchy and one republican government; but, in 1826, there are thirteen representative governments and as many republics again. In 1784, only two countries enjoyed the benefits of security, liberty and the institutions guaranteeing these; whereas, in 1826, thirty different nations enjoy them, whilst others strive to obtain these benefits. Finally, in 1784, liberty reigned over but a small portion of the

earth and a few million souls, whilst in 1826 liberal institutions govern three quarters of the world and over half its population (Olavarría, 2007 [1826]: 103).

Juan Olavarría, conspiring in exile against the absolutist Fernandist government whilst attempting to convince the monarch of the need to undertake certain reforms from the top, exaggerated considerably. The political changes which the world had undergone during these four decades, though highly significant, were from a quantitative point of view by no means as spectacular as he claimed. But the significance lies less in the veracity of the speech than in the speech itself. Without a doubt, the aim of Olavarría's rhetoric was very specific: to persuade Ferdinand VII –even via thinly disguised threat– of the convenience of adapting to the “spirit of the century” and re-establishing in Spain a constitutional system in keeping with that unstoppable movement of ideas, of political practice and institutions to which his correspondent referred sometimes globally with the expression “universal liberalism” (a system comparable to that which Spain had known on two occasions in recent years, and which Ferdinand VII had twice aborted, first in 1814 and subsequently in 1823). And to this end he clearly felt that the best means was to stress time and time again that –as he did not tire of repeating in his letter– “the world is marching towards liberty” at brisk pace, leaping over every single obstacle. A type of speech tending towards the historicisation of liberalism, and one which, far from being an isolated case, was extraordinarily frequent in the Hispanic world, particularly between the second decade and the middle of the 19th century (Fernández Sebastián, 2006: 162-163).

Exaggeration aside, the fact is that the world was changing very quickly. Since the late 18th century, political situations had been so fluid that the vicomte de Chateaubriand wrote that very year: “often I had to erase at night the picture I had sketched during the day; events moved faster than my pen” (Chateaubriand, 1826: xxiii; Peres Costa, 2010).

Some years earlier, another Spanish emigrant had addressed Ferdinand VII in similar terms. From his London exile, Álvaro Flórez Estrada

also predicted in 1818 that "public opinion" would soon gain ground, in Spain and everywhere, with the irresistible force of an overwhelming torrent, breaking every chain as it passed: "if opinion has not triumphed", he concluded with absolute certainty, "triumph it will" (Fernández Sebastián, 2004: 370). The strength of public opinion –or of the "spirit of the century"–, claimed Estrada, would very soon prevail over absolute monarchies and against every kind of obsolete institution. That same year, Spanish diplomat Santiago Jonama wrote his *Lettres à M. de Pradt* from Amsterdam, in response to the book which had just been published by the former archbishop of Malinas entitled *Des Colonies et de la révolution actuelle de l'Amérique* (1817). In one of these letters of reply, Jonama offered a concise review of the "great events" that the world had witnessed since the 16th century, concluding that such events, and above all the "advance of reason" prompted by the discovery of the New World, occurred "with ever increasing speed" (Jonama, 1992 [1818]: letter IV, 34).

Barely a couple of years later, events seemed to prove Flórez Estrada right. On January 1, 1820, lieutenant colonel Rafael del Riego, in command of an expeditionary army sent to crush the Creole rebellion in Spanish America, proclaimed the liberal Constitution of 1812 in Las Cabezas de San Juan (Sevilla). After a few weeks of uncertainty, the uprising triumphed, and Ferdinand VII was forced to accept the very same constitutional system which the monarch had rejected upon returning to his country from French captivity in 1814.

In the light of such unexpected events, in Bordeaux, poet Pérez del Camino greeted with enthusiasm the good news coming from beyond the Pyrenees, praising in epic style "the grandeur of these memorable times" and the inexorable progress of liberal opinion, which the Spanish writer regarded as the real force behind the extraordinary happenings that had taken place in the West during these past decades which had seen "civilization marching with giant strides". "In thirty years", he exclaimed, "we have lived twenty ages" (Pérez de Camino, 1820: 7 and 8).

Three years later, however, the Peninsular's second constitutional experience would be stifled once again, this time by a French military

intervention led by the Duke of Angoulême. So, in 1823, several thousand Spanish liberals –including the aforementioned three– were forced into exile once more. The star of liberty was eclipsed in Europe again, and above all in Spain, under the rule of the Holy Alliance. It was hardly surprising when, that very year, the Guayaquilean Vicente Rocafuerte, who was now living in the United States after a period in Madrid and in Havana, categorically stated in his writings that the Promised Land for “true liberalism” would henceforth be the American continent. For this enlightened cosmopolite, disillusioned with the constitutional monarchy, experiencing republicanism first-hand and a staunch defender of American independence from Spain (Rodríguez, 2008: 51 ff.), the New World not only satisfied all the necessary conditions –geographical location, ease of communications, variety of natural resources, etc.– for the establishment “of a government as new as it were admirable”, but “the annals of history [describe] no People which in so short a space of time has extended the horizon of its liberal doctrine and its happiness to such a degree as has the American People” (Rocafuerte, 1823: 27-28; see also Rocafuerte, 1823b: iv). Rocafuerte, who considered himself “a true American”, when speaking of *America* was of course referring to the whole continent, north, central and south, and in particular to Hispanic America.

The texts quoted from Flórez Estrada, Jonama, Pérez del Camino, Olavarría and Rocafuerte are only a handful of testimonies representative of the sentiments of a generation of liberals who witnessed, year after year –sometimes, almost daily–, a succession of ever more incredible and disconcerting political events. Ever since, during the last quarter of the 18th century, first the North American and later the French revolution began a cycle of major political and social upheavals, the Atlantic world had entered into a state of feverish agitation which in the mid-1820s showed no sign of abating. And, to use the words of historian Claude Morange, many at the time shared “that sensation of living an age of exceptionally fast and profound changes, both cultural and political”. An age of exceptional dynamism, of wars and revolutions, whose starting point the authors of the time tended vaguely to situate in the 1770s and 80s

when they referred in general to the broad Euro-American horizon, but which they established with more precision as corresponding to the years 1776, 1789 and 1808, respectively, when they spoke of North America, Europe or the Hispanic world in particular. An age, indeed, whose most evident characteristic was "the awareness of all the actors, reflected by every source, that they were embarking upon a new era, forging a new man, a new society and a new politics" (Guerra, 2000 [1992]: 13)².

Beyond the Hispanic world, John Adams wrote in 1815 that "the last twenty-five years of the last century, and the first fifteen years of this may be called the age of revolutions and constitutions". The *age of revolutions* and of constitutions, however, was far from over, despite what the ex-President of the USA appeared to believe. In the Iberian world, in fact, it would continue for a good few years more. In 1829, the German historian B. G. Niebuhr, from a Eurocentric perspective that revealed scant sensibility towards the North American Revolution, proposed that the history of the previous four decades should be christened the "age of revolution" (Howe, 2004: 53; Koselleck, 2004: 58; see also Armitage and Subrahmanyam, 2010).

This was the advent of a new epoch which, as Koselleck indicated, was accompanied by a new conception of time, associated with the brand new concepts of history, progress and revolution. A new era in which every person's life cycle seemed to be inscribed within a formidable "process which transcends and encompasses the times of life and the times of generations, and incorporates individuals within it" (Blumenberg, 2007 [1986]: 205). A perception which on occasions filled with enthusiasm those members of the elites who experienced this time at first-hand, on others caused them considerable disquiet, to the extent that sometimes they felt themselves unfortunate puppets in the hands of an inexorable destiny.

My aim in this chapter is to give an account of some of the reactions of the Hispanic elites to the extraordinary events through which they were living, showing their efforts to comprehend a disrupted time which appeared to have entered into a period of unusual acceleration. An ac-

celeration met sometimes with hope and sometimes with concern, panic even; hardly ever with indifference.

I would also like to illustrate, via a case study like this, that the new conception of time brought about by the revolution had its semantic correlative in the dislocation of the frameworks of social intelligibility and the internal temporalisation of concepts. These processes constituted two of clearest manifestations of the profound politicisation of time and the temporalisation of politics which characterise the modern world. All in all, the celerity of time was to a certain extent the result of the premeditated political action of the revolutionary leaders, action an important part of which was constituted by certain speech acts and language-games typical of that transition period.

My intention with this work is to pay intellectual homage to Reinhart Koselleck, who often insisted upon the importance of the new historical awareness of temporal acceleration as “the common denominator of all the experiences of the new generation” [in reference to those who lived through the revolutions of the early 19th century], and the fundamental characteristic of modernity (Koselleck, 2003: 37-71; 1989: 290; and 2000; see also Escudier, 2008).

A BREAKDOWN IN LANGUAGE AND TIME. LABILE MEANINGS AND TEMPORAL COMPRESSION IN THE HISPANIC ATLANTIC

The sensation of experiencing an age of accelerated change would be accompanied by the no less acute impression, shared by a good many contemporaries, of witnessing a moment of drastic transformation and transvaluation of the most important notions which structured their political and social world (Fernández Sebastián, 2008; 2010 and forthcoming).

Suddenly, certain crucial words became the centre of dispute: their value and meaning were questioned time and time again. One might say that in this case the crisis of time and the crisis of language burst onto

the social scene together. *Crisis of time*: generalised sensation that the pace of events has accelerated considerably and the future anticipated by all with such expectation has become decidedly opaque, unpredictable and uncertain³. *Crisis of language*: reflected in the complaint of many contemporaries that, given that their meanings have become volatile and debatable, the words available can no longer guarantee adequate understanding between speakers. In particular, something serious and unusual appeared to be occurring in that area of vocabulary which was employed to deal with social and political issues⁴.

Whilst these processes spread euphoria amongst those groups of revolutionaries who felt able to shape the way people understood the world and the political future to their own liking, the alarming irruption of contingency in two essential political resources like time and language prompted all kinds of fears amongst a broad section of the elites (particularly, though not exclusively, in conservative ranks). Jovellanos (1992 [1811]: II, 29), Martínez Marina (1996 [1813]), Quintana (1809) and Blanco White (*El Español* [1810]: vol. 5, reproduced in the *Gaceta de Buenos-Ayres* 31 [10 Jan. 1811]), to name but a few, complained during the early decades of the 19th century about the "varied meaning" and "misunderstanding" of words and even maintained, as did Lista, that if one managed "clearly to establish their meaning (...) the arguments would end once and for all" (*El Censor*, 58: 236 [8 Nov. 1821]). One can detect in these opinions the desire, the daydream of the *ideologues*, to construct a scientific, transparent and unequivocal language, resistant to any kind of logomachy, but also apparent is the growing concern regarding the permanent political instability brought about by the "turbulence of times". Early in the 1840s, in one of his articles published in the Madrid press, Nicomedes-Pastor Díaz advocated the "need for an incontrovertible principle of government", a fixed point capable of putting a stop to the political turmoil unleashed by the "sovereignty of insurrection". According to this politician and liberal writer, it was necessary to find a firm foundation upon which solidly to build the new institutions: "a fundamental truth of legislation, which might never be touched or altered, irrespective of the degree to which other laws (...)

and other principles (...) would necessarily be subject to the movement of time (...) and to the instability of the opinions and interests of men” (*El Conservador*, 23 [1841] in Díaz, 1996: 90-96).

This kind of requirement reveals the anxiety of the conservative elites at the irruption of contingency into the field of politics as a result of the revolutions. Faced with chronic instability and that endless transition characteristic of modernity, even the most lukewarm liberals felt the need to preserve an intangible normative nucleus to which might be anchored the ship of State.

A few years earlier, Donoso Cortés, identified at the time with doctrinarism, had produced a penetrating analysis of the mutations in language “in times of turmoil and civil unrest”. “The most notable symptom in this social period was a radical change in the meaning of words, the existence of two contending dictionaries”. One, he adds, is the “dictionary of the people”, attached to the traditional values of words; on the other hand, the “dictionary of the demagogues” is characterised by the inversion of the usual meaning of many terms, describing, for example, as “freedom” the most heinous despotism, as the Jacobins did in France (“Semejanza de voces; confusión de ideas”, in *El Porvenir* [30 June 1837]).

Subsequently reflecting upon the elasticity of time, this author observes that in a single time span there sometimes occurs nothing of significance, whilst on other occasions a series of decisive events come one after another. Donoso Cortés then employs a physical analogy between historical time and material states, and suggests that revolution is nothing other than a form of compressing time. The success of revolutionaries stemmed from their capacity to force, courtesy of a selective use of violence, a kind of historical acceleration as a result of which “what for a long time took years to come about, occurs in a matter of days with revolutions, *which are the condensation of the times*” (*Discurso sobre la restitución de los bienes de la Iglesia* [14 March 1845], in 1970: II, 109, emphasis added).

If we compare both theses, we see that, for Donoso, the crisis of language and the crisis of time go hand in hand; in other words, revolu-

tionaries transgress the normal rules of semantics, provoking "a complete change" in meanings; a change which, in turn, forces the pace of social, political and legislative transformation. War of words and strong-willed pressure to accelerate historical events would thus be two kinds of phenomena which reinforce one another.

The changes in the structure of time and conceptual innovation may be seen as two indissociable facets of revolution, and also as symptoms of the intensification of experiences which characterised the modern world. But in addition, from another point of view, it is worth insisting upon the constructive and productive dimension of political language (a dimension of which, as we have seen, certain figures of the time were well aware). Precisely because, as Koselleck pointed out, concepts are not merely indices which reflect political and social change, but also fundamental factors in the construction and transformation of social reality, the use of language by actors, and in particular by the more active revolutionary minorities, often reveals that redefining and projective dimension. The quest for redescription and re-evaluation is apparent not only at a lexical level, but also in the symptomatic use of certain grammatical forms and rhetorical figures charged with illocutive power, such as, for example, the predominance of the future tense in many of the manifestos and proclamations of those early decades of the 19th century. The protagonists of the Hispanic revolutions were very mindful of the fact that changing the meaning and value of certain crucial words, investing them with great expectations, was an extremely effective way of changing the world (Fernández Sebastián, 2010: 164 ff.).

Conscious of the astuteness of their adversaries, the most lucid leaders in the conservative ranks tend to question this transgressive dynamic. Thus, a few days after Donoso Cortés delivered the aforementioned speech, Díaz echoed his words in the sense that "the years take their toll, [and that] five years, in the revolutionary times we have experienced, are five centuries in another age". "Therein lies", he added, "their violence and their character (...). That is why revolution, which despises time, and commends to the action of one day the execution of its works, has dam-

aged so many interests” (Díaz, 1996b [1845]: 340-342). Shortly before, the same author had sarcastically commented upon the French revolutionary song *Ça ira!*, which the Spanish moderate translated as “¡Esto marcha!” [“this is going well!”], and interpreted as a premonition of disaster:

Yes, this is advancing; this is advancing apace, with giant strides. This will advance; the revolution is advancing, [...] you cannot stop it. This is advancing: the State, towards its ruin; the tyrant, towards his end; society, towards its total dissolution; you, towards the precipice; all of us, towards the abyss, whence emerge to call to you and to call to us these fatal words; these words which we too repeat, with pain and with truth, with bitterness and despair: *ça ira!* (*El Conservador*, 17 [1841] in 1996: 74-75).

Words which –irrespective of their greater or lesser appropriateness to describe the Spanish situation to which they refer– bring to mind an oft-quoted fragment from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, by Hannah Arendt. I refer to the passage where, examining the ideological roots of terror, the German author notes that “total terror [is] the essence of totalitarian government”, in that “it is supposed to provide the forces of nature or history with an incomparable instrument to accelerate their movement”. Terror should be understood, then, as “a device (...) not only to liberate the historical and natural forces, but to accelerate them to a speed they never would reach if left to themselves” (Arendt, 1979 [6th. ed.]: 463; see also below XXX).

Returning to the Hispanic revolutions, both the temporalisation and politicisation of political concepts and the new conceptions of historical time are more easily understood if we consider some important changes that were then taking place in the sphere of the circulation of the word, be it spoken, written or printed. The birth of the political press and the wide dissemination of all things printed –newspapers, pamphlets, manifestos, proclamations, political catechisms, engravings, caricatures, satirical dictionaries...– via new points of social reunion (Guerra, Lampérière *et al.*, 1998; Forment, 2003; Alonso, 2004; Fernández Sebastián and

Chassin, 2004), as well as the increase in political rhetoric and ever more heated discussions en juntas, town councils and congresses, produced major changes in cultural habits and linguistic usage. From this point of view, the revolution may be seen as an avalanche of words, symbols and political images, in part contradictory, which, with the increase in occasions and venues for debate in the public sphere, exponentially multiplied the occurrence of a series of metaphors and concepts (representation, sovereignty, constitution, freedom, equality, separation of powers, public opinion, and so forth) that had previously been highbrow terms, rarely employed. Terms which had certainly never been submitted to public scrutiny in a broad debate. And a debate that was anything but academic, held not exactly in the tranquil studies of the elite *République des lettres*, but rather in the hectic arena of incipient public opinion, where a host of journalists, political orators and hacks struggled to impose their opinions, their passions and their interests.

On the one hand, the ideological battles between newspapers that competed against one another and often maintained conflicting opinions accustomed readers to the fact that the words of politics could be employed in a highly contentious manner and with very different objectives. The press, which played such an important role in the revolutions, brought the language of politics within reach of large numbers of readers, direct or indirect. The use of the same key terms by opposing politicians and journalists contributed significantly to the homogenisation of vocabularies, whilst, on the other hand, it multiplied the meanings, the uses and the evaluative bias of these words to the extent that they became contested and controversial concepts.

Moreover, as had occurred during the revolutions in France and in the Anglo-American world, the increase in the rate of production of newspapers and constant bombardment with surprising and unexpected news generated in the public an insatiable demand for novelty. All of this contributed towards dramatically raising expectations and sharpening awareness of contemporaneity amongst readers, whilst the deluge of information gave them the impression that time and space were becoming

more and more compressed (Hale, 2009). In this sense, the press made a significant contribution to the formation of nations as “imagined communities”, nations which were also conceived as “communities of time” (Anderson, 1991; on the case of the US, Allen [2008] and Wilson [1967]; on the role of print culture, Loughran, 2007).

The lack of consensus regarding the interpretative frameworks which made sense of events was accompanied by the instability of the meanings attributed to words, a phenomenon that had already been felt in the Hispanic world in the final third of the 18th century (Fernández Sebastián, 2008, and forthcoming), but which intensified dramatically during the crisis of the monarchy in 1808. As Ramón de la Sagra shrewdly observed four decades later, “in the absence of a *criterion* to determine the value of expressions, [terms like *freedom and equality*] became indeterminate, and therefore subject to the fluctuating and variable dominion of opinions”. De la Sagra probable overestimated the extent of secularisation. The relegation of religious beliefs as a basis for social and political order was perhaps not as advanced as he supposed. But he was not deceiving himself in suggesting that “nominalism, or the utterance of words with no specific value” is a characteristic trait of modern society (Sagra, 1849: 17 and 29). In short, with their revolutions, Europe and America had embarked upon an era of labile and fluctuating meanings.

The systematic criticism of the “abuse of words” by political actors of every hue did not prevent all of them from resorting all the time to various techniques of rhetoric –and in particular to evaluative redescription or paradiastole (Skinner, 1996: 139-180)–, thus prompting a multitude of meanings and contradictory evaluations which many likened to a new tower of Babel. The same word, loaded with different experiences and expectations, could in fact transmit very different connotations and meanings, and galvanise actors into action in one direction or another (Fernández Sebastián, 2010, and forthcoming).

Whilst it is true that the apparent duration of events which affect us depend on psychological factors, in such a way that, from the perspective of cognitive science, “temporality derives not from objective properties

of events and the relations between them, but rather constitutes a subjective response to such events” (Evans, 2004: 21), it is clear that the awareness of acceleration may in this case also be seen as a shared experience, intersubjective, to a large extent generational. Surprising, in this sense, is the substantial number of witnesses, not only in the Hispanic world, but throughout the Atlantic world during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, who coincided in their affirmation that the major social and political transformations succeeded one another in ever shorter periods of time. The frequency with which assertions of this nature appear, not only in pamphlets and newspapers, but also in correspondence, is indicative of just how widely-held this feeling was.

**“THE IMPERIOUS CELERITY OF TIME”:
TOWARDS AN OPEN-ENDED FUTURE**

Throughout the 18th century, before it actually constituted a new experience of time, acceleration was more a desideratum of a few restless spirits inspired by the philosophy of progress. *Philosophes* and *Aufklärer* often expressed their desires and hopes that the speed of human progress might increase in the immediate future. In the eyes of some men of letters, reason had reached the world too late and its advance was exasperatingly slow. Voltaire cried out vehemently in defence of “regagner le temps perdu” (“making up for lost time”), and Kant hoped that “less and less time would be necessary to produce similar degrees of progress” (Blumenberg, 2007 [1986]: 187 ff.; Kant, 1795: *in fine*).

Some of those who played a leading role in the French Revolution would express themselves far more bluntly. Robespierre reminds his followers of “their duty to accelerate the progress of human reason” (quoted in Koselleck, 2003: 59)⁵ and Boissy d’Anglas, addressing the Convention in the year III, declared that in a few years, France had lived six centuries⁶.

The *topos* would be heard again repeatedly after the Restoration, particularly in the wake of the successive revolutionary episodes. It returns

many times courtesy of the pen of French revolutionaries and activists of very diverse ideological tendencies. The socialist *Considérant*, for example, justifies the urgent need for social reform with these words: “we live in times when wars, political turmoil (...) have been condensed into a very brief space of time and are invested with a terrifying intensity” (1837: I, 2).

In the Hispanic world we find similar expressions from as early as the late 18th century, but above all with advent of liberal and independence revolutions. Fully aware of the economic and scientific “delay” in their countries in comparison with their neighbours to the north, a number of enlightened Hispanic intellectuals, liberals and republicans issued repeated calls for a quickening of the pace of reform. On other occasions, they were content with acknowledging more or less enthusiastically what they perceived as an unusually dense and accelerated time. Analysis of this discourse does not always allow one to distinguish with absolute clarity intellectual, emotional, descriptive and evaluative aspects. Writers and political agents often describe a state of affairs which in essence was a form of *wishful thinking*. It is difficult to say to what extent what they perceived as momentous occasions really were such, or whether it was rather their own hypersensitivity which overestimated the historical significance of these situations. Moreover, the performativity of the language employed blurs the borders between words and actions: the concepts used, and the way of presenting facts, often constituted a clear call to action.

The Spanish ambassador to Rome, Nicolás de Azara, rejoices in the prospects afforded by the expulsion of the Jesuits in a letter of March 1768: “What a divine transformation Spain has undergone in so short a space of time!” (García Cárcel, 2002: 194). Later, following the impact of the French Revolution, the intense politicisation of some urban sectors brought the vocabulary of politics to boiling point⁷ and alarms were sounded due the unusual effectiveness of the propagandist actions of the revolutionaries. The Jesuit Hervás y Panduro was terrified by the incredible speed at which was spreading “the spirit of independence, of

insubordination and destruction of every established power on earth" leading to "the civil and religious revolution of the French" (Hervás y Panduro, 1807 [1794]: I, 4 and II, 116). From his voluntary exile in Bayonne, José Marchena called to the Spanish nation to act swiftly and shake off the yoke of despotism: "Spaniards (...), let not a moment be wasted, *Cortes, Cortes* must be the universal clamour!" (*A la nación española* [1792] in Marchena, 1990: 108-112).

The Cortes would only convene, however, two decades later, in the revolutionary situation prompted by the crisis of legitimacy of 1807-1808, the consequences of which on both sides of the Atlantic can hardly be exaggerated. From the very moment when the crisis began, the Cuban José Arango speaks of two crucial months "which encapsulate the value of a century" (Arango y Núñez del Castillo, 1808: 3)⁸, and everyone compares the reaction of the patriots against Napoleon –and in America, very soon, against the peninsular authorities– with speed of lightning, or the immediacy of an electrical movement. Alberto Lista speaks in 1808 of "imperious celerity of time", and Quintana recalls some years later "the events which rapidly succeeded one after another" (Lista, 1867 [1808]; Quintana, 1872 [1818]). We are witnessing, in short, a "time of revolution (...), in which events occur so quickly that they scarcely allow one a moment's reflection" (*Argos de la Nueva Granada* 73, [14 May 1815]; see Vanegas, 2009).

Later, the so-called Liberal Triennium (1820-1823) constituted another moment of extraordinary dynamism on the peninsula: according to the Venezuelan Pedro Gual, "the Spanish have provoked more scandals in two years than the French in the twenty years of their revolution" (letter to Bolívar [15 Feb. 1822] quoted in Rodríguez O., 2007: 65; see also 76). "Everything has moved", we read in a Guatemala newspaper. "As in the space of a year the face of the political world has undergone so many changes, it might be said that we have seen many abbreviated centuries" (*El Editor Constitucional/El Genio de la Libertad*, August 1820, quoted in Meléndez, 1993: 115). Viscount Chateaubriand, who contributed decisively to the thwarting of the Hispanic liberal experiment,

recalled years later that “the men of this peninsula had leapt across two centuries with a single jump, to match our French history; on the one side Voltaire, on the other, the Convention” (Chateaubriand, 1838: 31, quoted in Peres Costa, 2010: 15).

A decade later, upon the death of Ferdinand VII, the liberal Juan Olavarría was convinced that the solutions he proposed for the good of the nation could not wait: in a statement, utopian in tone, addressed to the queen regent María Cristina, he affirms his desire to “cure in a few years the ills of many centuries” (Olavarría, 1988 [1833-1834]: 24, 75 and 78). It was the decade of the 1830s, and the most dynamic sectors of the country were fighting quickly and definitively to establish representative government, whilst writers were abandoning neoclassicism and embracing the new romantic aesthetic. The journalist Larra acknowledged that “in Spain the transition is rather pronounced and fast. France has had half a century of revolution, while our uprisings are not even half as old (...). She however has taken half a century to complete her literary revolution, and has done it gradually (...); in our case in politics we have progressed in just a year from Ferdinand VII to the coming constituent assembly, and in literature, from Moratín to Alexandre Dumas” (Larra, 2000 [1838]: 498-499; on the general issue see Blix, 2006). The examples are numerous.

But, beyond all these declarations, what was taking place was a greater change in the perception of time and, to put it another way, in the “regime of temporality” and “historicity” (Hartog, 2003). The future was being elevated on the altar of time as a new *forma mentis*, to the extent that the present itself began to be thought of artificially from an anticipated tomorrow, whose superior viewpoint would authorise a kind of imaginary “court of the future” to judge the present moment—be it in the field of politics, science or art—according to the normative parameters of that reified tomorrow. In this way all reality was “futurised”. Very revealing in this respect is the following entry in Jovellanos’s diary (August 6, 1795), following Cardinal Lorenzana’s refusal to authorise the reading of banned books in the Asturian Institute:

What will be said about this by the generation that will follow ours, which, despite being oppressed by despotism and ignorance, will be more enlightened, freer and happier than the present one? What barriers can possibly block the avenues of light and enlightenment (Jovellanos, 1992b: 277).

Thus, for the first time on an innerworldly horizon, the present began systematically to look more towards the future than to the past, producing a widening breach between the resigned fatalism of the ancient and the radical voluntarism of the modern. In other words: the present ceased to be regarded as the mouth of the long river of the past, and was now interpreted rather as the source from which sprung the imperious torrent of the future. The present stopped being a resultant and thought of itself as the inaugural moment of an idealised and demanding tomorrow, a tomorrow the realisation of which was taken for granted: as the past of that future¹⁰.

Nonetheless, despite the determination of the future-oriented philosophies of history to offer certainties and design a plausible image of the future, the future seemed to be loaded with unknowns. In particular, during the last decade of the eighteenth and the first two decades of the nineteenth century, a period characterised in Spain by war –first with France, then with England and later with France once again– and the violent pendulum swings of the monarchy’s foreign policy introduced an additional element of uncertainty. “The present era”, writes Moratín to his friend Pietro Napoli Signorelli in a letter dated 1806, “is a time of revolution and transformations and (...) nobody can ensure today what will be of tomorrow” (Fernández de Moratín, 1976: 256-257).

The *pathos* of an age in which all looked anxiously towards the future is apparent everywhere: in politics and in literature, in painting and in the theatre. The peace of Basel, received with joy in the court of Madrid, earned Godoy the title of Prince of Peace, and the right to add to his coat of arms “a Janus or two-faced image, to demonstrate the singular Prudence (...) with which he has acted in the present circumstances, as the prudent Man must have as it were two faces, so that having ob-

served things both past and future with innate wisdom (...) he sees progress, perceives its precedents (...), anticipates the future, and with subtle comprehension binds times and connects events (...), understanding the obscure, penetrating the unknown” (Royal Decree, 12 Sept. 1795; see Laparra, 2002: 148-150).

A couple of decades later, with Napoleon’s troops occupying most of Spain, while poetry was filled with hopeful expressions of confidence in a future of victory for the patriots, a play was premiered in Cadiz with the revealing title of *El templo del Destino o El tiempo futuro* [The Temple of Fate, or Future Time] one of whose characters is an old man who addresses the audience thus: “I am Time and I present to you all that which you call future” (Arriaza, 1810; see also Silva y Palafox, 1812). Finally, an allegorical painting by Goya from the beginning of the century (Fig. 1) succeeds in capturing the state of expectant anxiety predominant in Spanish society at the time¹¹. A society which awoke every day startled by ever more alarming news, caught in a dilemma between the longing for freedom and progress, concern about the future and an acute sense of history, not only as a kind of writing but also as an ongoing process.

The orientation towards the future of most political concepts, including the new concepts of movement ending in *-ism* which would be incorporated throughout the 19th century, indicates the height of temporalisation and the “futurisation” of political life, under the powerful influence of the ideas of improvement and progress (Koselleck, 1985: 248-249). One of the first political *-isms*, liberalism, still *in statu nascendi*, is described by Juan Olavarría as the party that moves in the right direction, in the direction of progress, marked by the dynamic of time itself. “Society”, he asserts, “is like an invention which is infinitely improved” and “*true liberalism consists of its constant tendency towards the improvement of governments*” (Morange, 2006: 377; Olavarría, 2007: 181, italics in the original; see Fernández Sebastián, 2006: 127-130 and 2009: 720-727)¹². Liberalism is thus identified with the steady march of modern time towards the future, a promising future marked with objectives of continuous improvement.



Fig. 1. Francisco de Goya, Truth, Time and History (National Museum, Stockholm).

LESSONS OF THE REVOLUTION: THE ADVENT OF "CONTEMPORARY HISTORY"

After the French Revolution there ensued a proliferation of declarations affirming the radical novelty of those events, which are often said to be without equal in history, and even the principles that inspired them are described as "contrary to the experience of centuries" (Hervás y Panduro, 1807 [1794]: I, 2). Something similar would happen when revolution broke out in Spain in 1808. Writer and journalist Manuel José Quintana, one of the pioneers of the first peninsular liberalism, underlines "the unique character of our revolution from the very beginning". "When eyes are

cast back on history”, he writes in 1810, “and observers contemplate the political agitation of nations, at the fore they will always see [great] men” who lead the movement; however, the uprising of the Spaniards against Napoleon was not directed or orchestrated by any eminent figure: it was “the Spanish people” en masse who rose up and conducted henceforth “this sublime insurrection”, an unusual circumstance which, according to Quintana, “impresses Europe and disconcerts the tyrant” (*Semanario Patriótico*, 33: 6-8 [22 Nov. 1810])¹³. In this instance too, then, the profound gulf between experience and expectation renders problematic the use of traditional history to illuminate the future.

“I go back from age to age up to the remotest antiquity”, Tocqueville would write years later, “but I find no parallel to what is occurring before my eyes; as the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity” (Tocqueville [1840] 1851: II, p. IV, chap. VIII).

The reading of some of the works of Benjamin Constant –especially his 1819 speech on freedom– was crucial, meanwhile, in the Spanish liberals’ reflections upon the inadequacy of ancient concepts when applied to modern societies. The idea is gradually spreading that, rather than ancient history, it is above all the study of recent events which provides useful lessons for the future. “Roman history cannot be the model for any modern nation”, we read, for example, in a text from 1820. Spanish liberal Juan Olavarría, on the other hand recommends, hearing the “cry of the French Revolution which, like the voice of the Almighty in the Sinai, rings out from the middle of time to instruct the people” (“Antiguos y modernos” [1820], Olavarría (2007: 192-194). A variety of metaphors likening revolution to a book, a school, a teacher, partially replaces the old Ciceronian adage *historia magistra vitae* (Koselleck, 1985: 66 ff.).

For centuries, the study of history had provided rulers with an accumulation of experiences from which to extract practical teachings and rules of political and moral conduct. The prince “will learn in a few

years what has been confirmed over so many centuries and is recorded in the eternal writings of the wise”, Mariana had written. “The lesson [of history]”, we read in Juan de Santa María, “teaches more in one day than was learnt by others from the experience of years” (Mariana, 1599: 513; Santa María, 1615: 94, both quoted in Fernández-Santamaría, 1986: 145 and 149).

From the late 18th century onwards we can see the emergence and progress of the argument that recent revolutionary events in a way represented a compendium of the accumulated experience of many centuries condensed into a very brief period of time (Koselleck, 1985: 59)¹⁴. One would say that the acceleration of the modern world was densifying historical experience, qualitatively transforming its nature in such a way that, from that concentration of trials and errors, people could reflect and draw useful political and philosophical conclusions to guide their courses of actions and their expectations of the future. This is how, thanks to acceleration, the history of a few decades was able to fulfill a pedagogical function analogous to the study of a series of centuries from the distant past. Instead of history, revolution would now be the master.

The consequence of this change of perspective is that *contemporary history*, which is not infrequently identified with the newspaper headlines, becomes an essential element of political education. It might even be said, as was suggested by a certain liberal Lima newspaper published under the protection of the Spanish Constitution of 1812, that *political science* and *contemporary history* –“the history of our present age”– were to a large extent two superimposable areas of knowledge (*El Satélite del Peruano*, 1 May 1812; *Aurora de Chile* 11 June 1812).

Twenty years earlier, referring to the events of the French revolution, another newspaper published in the same city had already maintained that, in an “era in which the very cause of humanity is at stake, (...) nothing should so interest nor so attract the attention of civil man as the history of the revolutions which are occurring in his times” (*Gaceta de Lima*, 1793; Rosas Lauro, 2006: 101).

In one of the sessions of the Cadiz Cortes, the member of parliament Antonio Oliveros pointed out, in reference to the French revolution, that “in twenty years this nation has had all the governments seen by Rome in the seven hundred years that she lasted”.

At the beginning of his work *El Espíritu del Siglo* [The Spirit of the Century] (1835), Martínez de la Rosa admits that he would have liked to offer the reader something along the lines of “*a course in politics applied to contemporary events*”. “The history of the last fifty years”, adds the Spanish politician and writer, “contains more lessons in politics than the long series of many centuries” (Martínez de la Rosa, 1995: V, 7 and 13, italics in the original).

A certain Mexican newspaper had been even more explicit in this regard:

During the endless race of vicissitudes run by mankind, there has perhaps been no period richer in extraordinary events and terrible lessons for posterity than the first quarter of the 19th century. The history of this period is a compendium of the history of the world. Nations that come from nowhere, others which disappear; citizens who obtain the crown, monarchs who lose their head; enslaved peoples who regain their rights, free peoples who allow themselves to be chained [...]. When the century is so laden with terrible lessons; (...) Woe betide America if she does not learn from the study of *contemporary history*! (*El Iris* [1826: I, 39-42], quoted by Zermeño, forthcoming).

One might say, then, that lived history, written in the heat of the moment, largely replaced the old histories which were gathering dust on the bookshelves. The Hispanic revolutions began to be recorded very soon, as they took place, sometimes by the very protagonists of the events being narrated¹⁵. Moreover, for decades the instability of the new Latin American republics produced in many authors a sensation of provisionality little inclined to consider as closed the historical cycle of revolutions. As late as 1858 the Argentine writer Sarmiento acknowledged that

we have not yet reached definitive eras when societies have taken a seat, like the traveller who, now resting under a welcoming roof, casts retrospective glances towards the path he has trodden. *We write history as we walk* (Sarmiento, 1949 [1858]: XXI, 87, italics added).

A few years earlier, his compatriot Vicente Fidel López had emphasised in similar fashion the pre-eminent role of history in new societies:

In the age in which we live we all have an urgent need of historical studies. (...) The establishment of Representative Government has meant that history, which used to be the science of princes, is today the science of citizens (López, 1845; see on this Zermeño, 2009 and Wasserman, 2009).

And, if it was a question of learning from the great book of revolutions, important political and moral lessons could be drawn from the revolution in Spanish America. In the final pages of one of the first global histories of this kind, its author, the Spaniard Mariano Torrente, does not conceal his counter-revolutionary inclinations when proclaiming “the usefulness of learning in the great practical school of civil war in the New World the way of avoiding in the future such significant ills” (Torrente, 1829-1830: III, 614).

MILLENARIANISM AND MODERNITY: ACCELERATED HISTORY OR THE END OF TIME?

We know that various leaders of the emancipation of Hispanic America –beginning with Bolívar himself– felt deeply disappointed at the end of their days because they had been unable to establish in the new republics the type of liberal government to which they aspired. “America is ungovernable for us. He who serves a revolution ploughs the sea”, wrote *El Libertador* in one of his last letters (Letter to Flores [9 Nov. 1830], Bolívar, 1950: III, 501-502).

Nevertheless, many members of the Creole elites at the time of independence did not conceal their satisfaction when looking back on the

past. Thus, the Venezuelan Fermín Toro, whilst acknowledging that much remained to be done, referring to “the new American republics”, wrote with pride that “never before had time witnessed movements more beautiful, more uniform, more grandiose than that of an entire world proclaiming freedom; nor will we ever see again the birth of so many institutions at one time, so pure, so liberal” (“Europa y América”, *El Correo de Caracas* [1839], quoted in Congreso de la República, 1983: 81).

Similarly, the Mexican Lorenzo de Zavala highlighted the enormous “change of ideas” effected in Mexico “from the year 1808 to 1830”. “In the space of a generation (...) a respected and recognised form of government”, had been overthrown, enabling “seven million inhabitants to pass from despotism and arbitrariness to the most liberal theories”.

A lengthy revolution which has changed the face of half the world has taken place amongst us in a few years. (...) Our generation has been instantly transported to a (...) different moral sphere from that in which our parents lived. Perhaps no other example presents the history of such rapid change, except those in which the conquistadors employed force to impose obedience to their empire and adoption of their institutions (Zavala, 1831: 23, and 1832: 117 and 291).

As we see, the allusions to the sudden emergence of a new time appear over and over again in political literature and in the historiography of the region.

In Spain too, the issue of the speed of political and social transformation was one of the major topics of 19th-century journalism and literature. *Costumbristas* writers, in particular, made a cliché of the acceleration of the modern world. Mesonero Romanos, a chronicler of Madrid life, summing up “the rapid procedures of the century in which we live”, writes for example that “antiquity, in modern language, tends to be the previous decade, the previous year; and never more than now has the emblematic figure of old and flying time shown its true meaning” (Mesonero Romanos, 1854: 462). In a quite different tone, another journalist –J. Morales Santisteban– looks towards the future with boundless optimism: “civi-

lisation is developing by the minute, with every passing year the world is different (...) We live in times when art, science, society, everything is flying quickly towards perfection" (*Revista de Madrid* [1839], quoted in Fernández Sebastián, 2002: 565).

Not everything, however, was celebration and trust in progress. The celerity of the times also prompted considerable fear and apocalyptic expectations. Not in vain did various sacred texts of Judeo-Christian tradition present the shortening of time as one of the symptoms heralding the final days, curtailed by divine will to spare the chosen ones suffering. One of the most explicit texts in this respect, commented upon by Koselleck, is that of the Tiburtine Sibyl (4th century), inspired it seems by a passage from Lactance: "*And years were reduced to months, and months to weeks, and weeks to days and days to hours*"¹⁶.

If, as several authors have shown, Millenarist fears had already arisen during the revolution of the Thirteen colonies (Hatch, 1977; Bloch, 1985; Hale, 2009; see also for the English Civil War period Hill, 1972: 76 ff.), it was above all the more dramatic episodes of the French revolution which set off all the alarms. To the distressing "shortening of time" brought about by the revolutionary politics to which we have alluded above, was added early in the 19th century the rise to power of Napoleon, which was interpreted by some as nothing less than the advent of the Antichrist. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the apocalyptic expectations of the millennium grew more and more intense at the time of the Hispanic revolutions (Fuentes, 2006).

Although there is very much a family resemblance between the apocalyptic vision of the shortening of which leads straight to Parousia and the increasing speed of historical events as a result of revolutions, in several of his works Koselleck stressed the fundamental differences between both interpretations. Whilst in the first case it is divine will which abbreviates the final stages leading to Judgement Day, in the second case the acceleration is a product of human will, with a view to indefinite innerworldly progress. In such a way that, with the advent of modernity, acceleration would have ceased to be an eschatological category to be transformed

into a secularised notion which, through the new philosophies of history, served to legitimate progressive ideologies and the social and political planning of the future (Koselleck, 2003: 37-71; 1985: 22).

Nonetheless, the transition to the modern world did not take place overnight. For a long time various authors and more or less minority groups attached to Christian tradition –although certainly heterodox– applied to the revolutions an apocalyptic hermeneutics. Seen through this prism, the Atlantic revolutionary processes would have fulfilled the prophecies announced by the Scriptures.

It does not appear coincidental, in this sense, that the posthumous publication of the influential book by the Chilean Jesuit Lacunza occurred just at this time, first in Cadiz, and then in Paris and London (in the latter case under the supervision of the Buenos Aires revolutionary Manuel Belgrano (Lacunza, 1831)¹⁷. In the tragic wartime circumstances being endured by the Spanish monarchy, submitted to Bonaparte's usurpation, this work, which for over twenty years had remained unpublished, "supplied a theological framework for interpreting current events in millennial terms" (Popkin, 2007: 166).

This was not, however, a peculiarity exclusive to the Hispanic world. Despite Pocock's insistence that the civic humanism reborn in North America during the independence crisis led to the emergence of a secular time, emancipated from eschatology (Pocock, 1975: chap. 2; see on the irruption of contingency in modern political thought, Palti, 2006), the fact is that in the Atlantic revolutions one often encounters ostensible secular manifestations under which are discernable a marked theological stamp. Far from being in opposition, Providence and Progress could be reconciled without any great difficulty. In a letter from John Adams to his wife, sent from Amsterdam on December 18, 1781, he expresses his confidence that "the great designs of Providence must be accomplished. Great indeed! The progress of society will be accelerated by centuries by this Revolution" (Clark, 1994: 391; more on this in Lienesh, 1988: 184 ff.; Raynal, 1781: 85; Genty, 1787; Baker, 1988: 52 and 61). And, as P. Bénichou clearly showed, a handful of French writers –from Ballanche

to Lamennais— strove from the early 19th century onwards to create a kind of “religion of the future” in which Divine Providence seemed to watch over the progress of humanity from the supreme majesty of time (Benichou, 1977: chaps. 2-4).

The fact is that scrutinising and deciphering the “signs of the times” became quite a frequent activity amongst intellectual minorities. From very diverse ideological positions, counter-revolutionary authors like Hervás, De Maistre and many others believed that they identified in the French Revolution unmistakable signs of the end of times predicted by certain texts in the Bible. The Spanish abbot refers on several occasions to the de-Christianisation promoted by the French revolutionaries as the work of the Antichrist, announced in the “prophetic history” of the Apocalypse (Hervás y Panduro, 1807 [1794]). Years later, Joseph de Maistre writes that, while man has been “by always and everywhere trying to penetrate the future”, it was above all in recent decades when the need for that knowledge had become more acute than ever. Indeed, throughout the last century “the march of Providence (...) appear[s] (...) as having been greatly accelerated”, and everything suggests, he maintains, that soon will be occurring incredible events towards which “we are moving swiftly”. De Maistre is convinced “that several prophecies contained in the Apocalypse are related to modern times”, and for this reason “we must ourselves ready for an immense event in the divine order, towards which we are moving with an increased speed that must strike every observer” (Maistre, 1993 [1821]: 11, 68, 322, 324 and 328).

Well into the 19th century, successive revolutions would continue to inspire fervent declarations of amazement and stupor at the ever more accelerated drift of the modern world. This kind of declaration, prompted alternately by admiration or rejection, were particularly abundant in mid-century, as a result of the revolutionary movements of 1848.

“A remarkable era, Sirs, in which we live!” –exclaims the liberal conservative Nicomedes-Pastor Díaz, during some lessons given in the Ate-neo of Madrid–. “Never has the spirit of innovation displayed greater audacity [...]. Never has the world been so shaken by so much activity,

by so feverish a movement (“Los problemas del socialismo” [1848], in Díaz, 1996: 736)¹⁸.

When, some years later, the 1854 revolution broke out in Spain, a civil and military uprising which heralded the so-called Progressive Biennial (1854-1856), the insurgents once again experienced vertigo and enthusiasm in the face of events occurring with unusual speed. “Years are *minutes* for nations, as centuries are *hours* for humanity. The revolution *only has a minute*”, we read in a pamphlet published in honour of the victims of the recent revolutionary *journées* (*Mitología*, 1854: 6-7)¹⁹. A phrase clearly reminiscent of the apocalyptic prophecies of the Tiburtine Sibyl.

By then, the position of liberalism on the temporal map appeared considerably more open to debate than in the minimalist definition suggested for this movement by Olavarría thirty years earlier. In the eyes of many of its adversaries and competitors, liberalism had fallen behind in the relentless race of time, and, consequently, had ceased to embody that “*constant tendency of governments towards perfection*”. The emergence of other political movements to its left which aspired to take up the gauntlet and claimed for themselves the role of front-runner had complicated matters. Halfway through the century, basing their arguments on different philosophies of history, republican democracy or socialism regarded themselves as the true “locomotives of progress” and disputed with one another the role of essential concept-guide of modernity. With the heightened acceleration of social and political change, liberalism had been relegated a more or less centrist position on the ideological spectrum, and politico-temporal labels had become extremely debatable and relative. The minister Patricio de la Escosura, in a speech in Parliament, noted that, whilst the Carlists did not hesitate to include the moderates in the “liberal party”, the leaders of the brand-new “democratic party” labelled as “retrograde” not only moderate liberals, but even progressists. The changeability and fuzziness of the imaginary “temporal map” which each party drew of itself and of its adversaries was, once again, indissociable from the fluctuating, contentious use of ideological vocabulary.

Escosura himself, at that time one of the leaders of the progressive party, admitted that "political words are not yet and cannot yet be well defined", so terms like "liberalism and democracy are vague, broad words" and not clearly outlined (*Diario de Sesiones de Cortes*, 31 Jan. 1856).

* * *

The theme of acceleration was taken up again by Juan Donoso Cortés towards the end of his life. Impressed by the revolutionary events of 1848 in Europe, and in particular by the alarming news from Rome, returns to religious hermeneutics and maintains that "every political issue always involves a major theological issue" (Donoso Cortés, 1952 [1851]: I, chap. 1). The same author who shortly before had analysed the temporal structure of revolutions, now clings to apocalyptic rhetoric to assert that the world is witnessing "the greatest battle that men have seen and that the centuries have experienced", a struggle between revolution and the Catholic church which may lead to the "end of time".

In light of the progress of the revolution, he is quite open in considering the possibility that "[we have] arrived at those fearful apocalyptic days when a great anti-Christian empire will extend from the centre to the poles of the earth". Before such a fateful perspective, Donoso makes repeated demands for "a radical solution", which he would finally specify in his *Discurso sobre la Dictadura* [Speech on Dictatorship]. The revolutions of the modern world, he maintains, form part of a plan of divine punishment, given that "when catastrophes are universal, unforeseen, simultaneous, they are always something providential" ("Los sucesos de Roma", in *El Herald* [30 Sept. 1848] Donoso Cortés, 1970: II, 301-304); *Discurso sobre la Dictadura* (speech before the Cortes, 4 Jan. 1849; see Donoso Cortés, 1970: II, 305-323). "History", notes José M. Beneyto in his reading of Donoso's work, "becomes Eschatology without ceasing to be History" (Beneyto, 1993: 224).

"The world is in flight", declares Donoso. "All things human are heading today towards their final destiny at a miraculous pace; in their old age, God has decided to give them wings" (1970: II, 302).

NOTES

- ¹ The text is part of the work of the Research Group on Intellectual History of Modern Politics, Bilbao, IT-384-07, financed by the Basque Department of Education, Universities and Research, as well as part of the Research Project ‘Conceptual History, Constitutionalism and Modernity in the Iberian American World: Fundamental Languages and Politico-Legal Concepts’, HAR2010-16095, financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation, Government of Spain.
- ² Vicente Rocafuerte, who writes from Philadelphia, claims that “from the memorable year of 1776” onwards began the “rapid progress” of freedom throughout the world, particularly on the continent of America, and considers the excesses of the French Revolution to be a backwards step in that brilliant process of advance (1821: 3).
- ³ The diffusion of the ideology of progress creates expectations for the future, but also uncertainty, as “accelerated time (...) abbreviated the space of experiences (...) and continually brought into play new, unknown factors” (Koselleck, 1985: 22).
- ⁴ From the final decade of the 18th century onwards, many would associate the unusual events of the revolutions with an uncertain future and with the loss of meaning of words (see Koselleck, 1985: 242, where he quotes an expressive text from a German newspaper of 1793).
- ⁵ “Terror was an effort to create through a combination of political education and political repression what is usually the slower work of political institutions. In that sense, it was an attempt to speed up time” (Hunt, 2003: 18).
- ⁶ “5 Messidor an III”, *Moniteur*, 25: 81. “One single day”, writes the counter-revolutionary Rivarol, with reference to the formation of the Assemblée Nationale on June 17, 1789, “might be said to have destroyed eight hundred years of prejudice and servitude” (*Journal politique et nacional*, 12 July 1789). See also Hunt (2003: 5-6), and Hale (2009: 195). The Spanish ambassador in Paris writes to minister Floridablanca that “the events of years take place here in days, or rather in hours” (Pérez de Guzmán y Gallo, 1910: 89).
- ⁷ The changes in these vocabulary fields, induced by the reading of gazettes, were so apparent that in an oft-quoted letter from Abbé Estala to his friend Juan Pablo Forner, dated Madrid, 1794, he told him that terms like *revolution*, *national representation*, *freedom* or *equality* were already commonplace in everyday conversation, even amongst the capital’s proletarian classes. “Everyone has thrown themselves into politics, all the talk is of news, reforms, etc.”, added Estala (Cueto, 1952: ccii; see also Álvarez de Miranda, 2008).
- ⁸ The insistence by political leaders that action be taken quickly increased throughout the Hispanic world from 1808 onwards. See, for the Mexican case, Schmidt (2007).
- ⁹ Significantly, the word *porvenir* [future] was incorporated into the *Dictionary* of the Real Academia Española in the 1817 edition. See Fernández Sebastián (2007).
- ¹⁰ “The present day is *pregnant* with the future” (Lista, 1830), italics in the original.
- ¹¹ This enigmatic canvas has been the source of different interpretations and, as a result, different titles. According to some, it is an allegory of *Truth, Time and History*; to the

ancient affiliation between Truth and Time (*veritas filia temporis*), revived by F. Bacon and represented in a painting by Tiepolo in the mid-18th century, was now added the important role of Clío (Beriain, 2008: 87-89; Glendinning, 1993: 80-84). Others employed iconological arguments to argue that it was rather a reference to *Spain, Time and History*, or even an *Allegory of the Adoption of the 1812 Constitution*, in which the great artist was greeting the arrival of a new age (Sayre, 1979; 1988 and 1996). More recent interpretations, however, based upon new documentary evidence, suggest that the allegory, commissioned by Godoy to decorate his Madrid palace, was already finished by around 1806, and that its most appropriate title would be *True Philosophy, Time and Memory* (Glendinning, 1998; see also Glendinning 1998b; López Torrijos, 1996 and above all Rose-De Viejo, 2002; a brief summary of this interpretative peripeteia in Garriga, 2010: 11-13). On the political iconography of Spain at the time, see Reyero (2010: 82-83). Some problems regarding the legibility of this painting, subject to different interpretations since the early 19th century, were a consequence of the very speed of the changes within Spanish society, and were evidence of the extreme volatility of the keys to interpreting allegories during this period of transition (Rose-De Viejo, 2002: 115). Furthermore, the fusion of the allegories of history and memory –symbolised by the young woman seated in the foreground– might be interpreted as symptomatic of the increasing power acquired during those years by the immediate recording in writing of the events of the present, in other words, by *contemporary history*.

- ¹² This was a widely-held perception in Europe at that time. Shortly before, in one of his works, Heinrich Heine had similarly linked liberalism with a supposed sense of historical future. See Koselleck (1985: 249 and 309) and Leonhard (2001: 309).
- ¹³ In the *Manifiesto a la nación*, drawn up by Quintana and published by the Junta Central on November 10, 1808, the Spanish revolution was already described as “unique in the annals of our history” (Dérozier, 1978: 386 and 389).
- ¹⁴ “Our contemporary history is a repetition of the actions and events of thousands of years, all in the briefest of possible periods. [...] One single generation is being permitted to see things which then could not even be witnessed during the life of several generations” (Rupert Kornmann, *Die Sibylle der Zeit aus der Vorzeit* [1810], Regensbrug, 1814, quoted in Koselleck, 2003: 64).
- ¹⁵ I will mention just a few authors of this type of writing: Álvaro Flórez Estrada, Francisco Martínez de la Rosa, Juan Antonio Llorente, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, Gregorio Funes, José Manuel Restrepo, the Count of Toreno, José Félix Blanco, Lorenzo de Zavala and Lucas Alamán.
- ¹⁶ “*Et minuentur anni sicut menses et menses sicut septimana et septimana sicut dies et dies sicut horae*”. See also other passages, both in the Old Testament (Sl 90, 4), and the Gospels (Mt 24, 22 and Mk 13, 20). Koselleck (2003: 37-38; 1985: 22). See also Halévy (1961).
- ¹⁷ This book was republished many times, both in Spain and beyond. Some revolutionary figures, like the abbé Grégoire or M. Belgrano, contributed to its diffusion. Amongst the abundant literature on this topic one might consult Góngora (1980).
- ¹⁸ In another passage from his dissertation, Díaz describes human beings as “molecules in time” (728).

- ¹⁹ Later, the author of this pamphlet –who makes no attempt to conceal his desire to mythify the people and the revolution– alludes to a revolutionary day on which time seems to be condensed to give rise to an enormous historical leap: “From June 27 to 28, 1854 measures *one night* in the series of times, and *an abyss* in the chronology of civilisation [...]. The night of June 27 belongs to the age of darkness, just as the dawn of the 28th belongs to the era of enlightenment” (8). And, in explicit allusion to the previous government of the moderates: “The revolution avenges the outrage committed against progress, advancing *in a day* what had retreated *in eleven years*” (9: the original italics have been retained). Contemplating the risks of excessive haste, the progressive M. P. Bayarri warned, in the Cortes of 1856, that to progress “is (not) to run wild. I believe that to progress is to walk step by step and slowly, walking in such a way that the people walk with us” (*Diario de Sesiones de Cortes* [31 Jan. 1856]: 10420-10421; quoted by Sierra, 2010: 407).

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