«I conclude my work with the year 1815, because everything which came after that belongs to ordinary history.»¹ From his eminence as the foreign minister of the Austrian Empire, Prince Klemens von Metternich looked back upon more than two decades of political chaos. In retrospect, he was amazed that he had managed to «withstand the storms of time», when so many of his generation had been swept away by the whirlwind of war and revolution. A witness to «the overthrow of centuries of ancient institutions», Metternich had watched France, in the space of ten years, exchange fourteen centuries of French kingship for a transient «Republic of Virtue»; he had been there when Napoleon, in 1806, dismantled a millennium of dynastic tradition by declaring the Holy Roman Empire defunct.² In late 1815, however, as the erstwhile French emperor sailed for St. Helena, exile and obscurity, the dizzying succession of events unleashed during the preceding decades seemed to have subsided. «We have fallen upon a time, when a thousand small calculations and small views on the one side, gross mistakes and feeble remedies on the other, form the history of the day.» For Metternich, the conclusion of 1815 clearly represented a transitional moment; 1816, as a consequence, was to be the first full year of the post-revolutionary era – a year in which European political life would, once again, conform to the certainties of «ordinary» historical experience. Quite what this «ordinary history» looked like, of course, remained ambiguous and undetailed in Metternich’s memoirs. And whilst recent attention has naturally focused on the bicentenary commemorations of the battle of Waterloo, the final fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna, all of which have been framed as climactic or conclusive episodes in European history, scant interest has been paid to what came next. This essay is therefore an examination of the competing visions of historical time, and the multiple meanings of «ordinary history», which would come to dominate the chronopolitical landscape of 1816.³

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² Ibid, I, xii, 243.
³ I take «chronopolitics» to mean a «term descriptive of the relation of time-perspectives to political
The events of 1815, by contrast, had emphatically not belonged to «ordinary history». Their «contents», reflected James Madison on 9 August, were «inconsistent with the ordinary calculation of dates and events», and their speed – effected «in such a space of time» – was «a wonder without an example». Even measures designed to «put an end to the French Revolution», as the Duke of Wellington later characterised the War of the Seventh Coalition, seemed to comply with the atmosphere of historical saturation. The temporal experience of the Congress of Vienna, Metternich recalled, did not belong to «ordinary times». «Many a business which under other circumstances would have required a long time for arrangement was concluded in the course of a forenoon.» In March, after scarcely eleven months of peace, and as the Congress was reaching its conclusion, Napoleon made his comeback. A bewildered Louis XVIII fled France for a second, ignominious time and the Tuileries was placed, once again, under new management. As the so-called Hundred Days began, the Congress of Vienna quickly re-convened, and the Allies, determined upon retaliation, gained a narrow but decisive victory at Waterloo. In November, as Metternich finalised the second Treaty of Paris, he reflected upon the exhausting compression of historical events: «We sign, between today and five or six days, seven treaties, all of which would, in other times, have occupied others for several years.» It seemed that the task of putting Europe back together again was, like the revolutionary energies that had destroyed it, only realisable through an immense act of human agency. Peace, in fact, had only been won by commandeering the historical forces released by the Revolution. As the Hundred Days demonstrated, then, the course of history remained dangerously susceptible to re-acceleration. «Suffice it to say», one despondent royalist wrote, «Napoleon did in twenty days what Louis XVIII had been unable to do in twenty years.»

The reverberations of revolution continued to tear at the temporal fabric of Europe. The revolutionary era, after all, was not merely a time of change – it had actually changed time. The speed and scale of the French Revolution fractured established chronologies, compressing and contorting vast historical events in mere months or weeks. By 1795,
the conventionnel Boissy d'Anglas observed that France had already «consumed six centuries in six years».

For the radical novelist Helen Maria Williams, the participants of the revolution were «not among those happy generations who live in times of which there is nothing to relate, which close upon mankind, and leave no memorial as they pass. Those barren years of history where the reader turns hastily the page, and finds no battle to relieve drowsiness, no dramatic catastrophe to amuse his attention [...]. At what a distance from such tranquillity has the largest portion of my life been passed! I, who have seen all the stupendous events that usually fill the lapse of ages, and resound through the spaces of creation, crowded into my short space, and passing before my eyes, not in a vision [...] but interwoven with every thing around me [...].»

In 1790, Williams was a witness to the Fête de la Fédération – a «triumph of human kind», she wrote, where man asserted «the noblest privileges of his nature», and the summer rain washed away centuries of injustice. By 1794, Williams was a resident of the Luxembourg prison, condemned as a Girondin conspirator, and resigned to her rendezvous with the guillotine. In the space of four years, the vortex of historical events, which had so deranged the early enthusiasm of the Revolution, now threatened to consume her too. «[H]er own fate», remarked one sour English journal, «is the best commentary on the wild doctrines she has vindicated.» In the end, survival was also a matter of timing: Williams simply managed to outlive the orchestrators of the Terror itself. A further three decades of «stupendous events» would irrevocably alter French society.

«Who could recognise the Frenchmen of Louis XIV and Louis XV», asked the moderate royalist, Honoré de Lourdoueix, in 1816, «amongst the contemporaries of Robespierre and Napoleon?»

The internecine conflict of the French Revolution has traditionally been contrasted with the fraternal harmony of its American precursor. Yet events across the Atlantic also engendered a heightened sensitivity to historical time. In his Summary View of the Rights of British America (1774), Thomas Jefferson depicted revolutionary history as «that rapid and bold succession of injuries which is likely to distinguish the present from all other...»
periods of [the] American story». When the precepts of traditional authority appeared to fracture in the face of popular revolt, the possibility suddenly arose for the colonists to «create the world anew». Political life during the last quarter of the eighteenth century was therefore rearranged according to the unforeseeable prospects of the future. Historical time had been definitively unshackled from the endless reiteration of the past, a consequence of the newly liberated agency of the people. In the American colonies, however, the speed with which the future approached seemed to «abbreviate» the spaces of historical experience, unsteadying political certainties and transforming the present into a moment of incessant rupture. The very process of history itself seemed to undergo acceleration. «Scarcely have our minds been able to emerge from the astonishment into which one stroke of parliamentary thunder had involved us», wrote a bewildered Jefferson, «before another more heavy, and more alarming, is fallen on us.»

It was from this revolutionary context that Metternich saw the restoration of political stability as predicated upon the termination of temporal and historical disorder. In the complimentary and contrasting contexts of post-revolutionary France and America, however, the strategies devised for the fulfilment of this stability were to become highly contested, often leading to conflicts that threatened to reignite the extraordinary events that 1815 was supposed to have concluded. The study of revolutionary temporalities, once the preserve of historical theorising, has received much recent attention. The temporal experiences in the immediate aftermath of revolution, by contrast, have remained almost entirely unnoted. What follows is therefore a history of a single year, a snapshot of this aftermath, told from the perspective of contemporary perceptions of historical time. It argues that the moment cited by Metternich, which far from represented a conclusion or hiatus in revolutionary temporality, in fact saw the historical momentum of the preceding period splinter during 1816 into a variety of other, often more protracted controversies. There was, in brief, nothing definitive about 1815. «Since that date», Metternich wrote, «the age was left to itself; it progresses because it cannot be held back», before pointedly adding: «but led it will never be again.» This was wishful thinking. If the revolutionary era had witnessed the vast mobilisation of human energy to alter the pace and passage of history, then the events of 1816 were no less influenced by temporal programmes designed to fix the parameters of historical time. This contradiction – and the chronopolitical disputes it occasioned – would make a mockery of «ordinary history».

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16 Jefferson, A Summary View, 18.
18 Metternich, Memoirs, III, 338.
1. A Climate of Foreboding

On 10 April 1815, Mount Tambora, a volcano on the island of Sumbawa, Java, belched out more than one hundred cubic kilometres of pyroclastic debris. In his journal, Sir Stamford Raffles, then Lieutenant-Governor of British Java, attributed the initial booming «to distant cannon». Soon, however, as the «air became darkened by the quantity of falling ashes» and the gathering tremors began «shaking the earth and sea violently», the scale of the seismic event revealed itself.19 The climatological impact of the Mt. Tambora eruption was global. Several months later, during the summer of 1816, a «thick haze» crept slowly across America, obstructing the sun and sending temperatures plummeting. Vermont, for example, saw eighteen inches of snowfall – in June.20 Widespread crop destruction in the east of England, meanwhile, occasioned food rioting and armed resistance, climaxing in the «Bread or Blood» march upon Ely in Cambridgeshire.21 As the miasma of ash and smog thickened further, central Europe was plunged into a mid-summer twilight. On one «celebrated dark day» in July, a group of literary dilettantes, picnicking near Lake Geneva, were forced to flee the inclement weather. Safely inside the Villa Diodati, Lord Byron, Mary Shelley (then Godwin) and John Polidori sought shelter from both the rain and the political realities of 1816. Hunched about a blazing fire, the ghost stories they told one another – tales of «vampyres», the walking dead and reanimated corpses – would form a seminal moment in the history of the gothic imagination.22 The weather continued to worsen. Byron later wrote how the sudden darkness sent confused game fowl «to roost at noon», and how «the candles lighted as at midnight». The consequences of the extreme climate, however, went beyond the mere management of livestock.23

For Byron, the weather reflected the political gloom gathering over Europe. In Manfred, a «dramatic poem» begun in 1816, Byron combined this atmosphere of darkness with his own feelings of revulsion for the Restoration. Consonant with its gothic influences, the poem depicts the character of Nemesis as a thankless resuscitator of deceased regimes. «I was detain’d repairing shattered thrones, / Marrying fools, restoring dynasties.» In Paris, Naples and Madrid, spectres of the pre-revolutionary past began reappearing, as if undead. «Shaping out oracles to rule the world», Nemesis is tasked with reviving ancient monarchies, «for they were waxing out of date.» At the Villa Diodati, the

23 On the interactions between environmental catastrophe, the rhythms of natural events, clock time and human temporalities, see: B. Adam, Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards, London 1998.
volcanic clouds that coagulated over the continent in 1816 therefore served as a pathetic fallacy for the resumption of a dark and distant past, one that would now supersede the disintegrating Napoleonic imperium. Since the disaster of Waterloo, Byron despondently wrote, «every hope of a republic is over, and we must go on under the old system». The gothic imagination had, of course, been formed in response to the unfathomable historical cataclysm of the Revolution. In his reflections upon The Monk (1796), an early supernatural novel by Matthew Lewis, the Marquis de Sade wrote: «There was not a man alive who had not experienced in the short span of four or five years more misfortunes than the most celebrated novelist could portray in a century. Thus, to compose works of interest, one had to call upon the aid of hell itself...» By 1816, gothic imagery, encouraged by geological events, was instead deployed to parody the resurrection of political phantoms. The promises of the revolutionary progress of history had simply run out of time. «Of freedom, the forbidden fruit. – Away!» Nemesis concludes, «We have outstaid the hour...»

Many of these temporal tropes found fertile ground in nineteenth-century historiographical views of the European Restoration. In his History of Piedmont, the Italian patriot Antonio Gallenga depicted the return of Victor-Emmanuel I as a retrogression of historical time. When he arrived at Turin in May 1814, the king was handed the Palma verde, the court almanac of 1798, and immediately declared his intention of governing «comme en Novant-ott». «The hands of the state-clock», Gallenga wrote, «were forced back four-and-twenty years at one sweep!» The black-cowled priests and friars so central to nascent gothic fiction «again promenaded the streets, harbingers of the return of the age of darkness». It was only when the more «retrograde» excesses of the regime were finally «thrown on the past» that Piedmont was once again «allowed to be wafted along with the tide of human progress». A century and a half of historical revision has largely discredited this metaphor of the «clock turned back». More recent attention paid to the Congress of Vienna, for example, has seen the function of stabilising, not reversing, the post-Napoleonic social order as central to its purposes. According to Mark Jarrett, the statesmen at Vienna recognised that «there could be no turning back of the clock to the days of the ancien régime, whose very imperfections had led to revolutionary upheavals.» This is not to suggest that nostalgia for the old order was scarce. The

31 Cited in M. Jarrett, The Congress of Vienna and its
Viscount Castlereagh, for example, openly longed «to restore Europe to that ancient social system which her late convulsions had disjointed and overthrown». Yet as the more hard-headed Metternich indicated, it was not a romantic attachment to the ruins of history, but rather a need to control the transformative pace of time that dictated the political programme of the Restoration. In contrast to the ungovernable and accelerative temporality of the Revolution, the progress of «ordinary history» would be sparse, uneventful and slow. By the end of the 1810s, the revolutionary era seemed to have been finally robbed of its momentum; it would now give way to a decompression of historical time. «The sea still runs high», Metternich conceded, «but it is only from the storm which has passed over.»

For Metternich, the Vienna settlement would not set back, much less suspend the hand of European history, but instead seek to synchronise the temporalities of the Revolution and the revived ancien régime, slowing the former whilst rescuing the latter from the sclerosis that had condemned it in the first place. If the Restoration was to survive further shocks, it had «to set in place mechanisms capable of coping with the perpetual need for change.» The resulting accommodation of historical and temporal perspectives would, Metternich hoped, assist in «the urgent necessity of putting a brake to those principles subversive of the social order upon which Buonaparte had based his usurpation».

Guided once again by the votaries of the past, European time could be safeguarded from revolutionary re-acceleration. This vision of historical time saw the anchorage of the Restoration monarchies as a means of preventing the present from flying ceaselessly into an unforeseeable future. Over the course of 1816, however, it would become increasingly clear to Metternich that events could not simply be left to themselves; they would require constant supervision. As one worried Bourbon royalist admitted: «The present is not beautiful», but «the future would be terrible if our allies were not [...] doing everything to maintain Louis XVIII on the throne.»

Whilst Europe agonised over its past, America looked to the future. On Christmas day 1815, the Governor of Pennsylvania, Simon Snyder, told the state assembly that «at no period of our existence as a nation has our character stood so deservedly high and our prospects been so bright as at present». Buoyed by recent victory in the 1812 War, America presented a mood of confidence sharply in contrast to the gloom engulfing Europe. Beneath the surface, however, there lurked a peculiar pessimism. Looking towards 1816, Snyder warned that the «day may come, when we, like the people of France, in sack-cloth and ashes may weep over the ruins of our unhappy and dismembered country». Accord-
ing to its partisans, the momentum of the American Revolution, like that of the French, had enabled the rapid and uninhibited realisation of their ideals – namely, a republic established upon virtue, precipitated by the collapse of British imperial despotism. Yet, as Snyder saw it, the extraordinary historical motion imparted by the Revolution had not, unlike America’s forty-year quarrel with Great Britain, ceased with the peace of February 1815. «We live in an eventful age», he concluded, even if «the late war has done [much] to secure the permanence of our republican institutions.»

Conditioned by a Classical mind-set that encouraged individuals to see the signs of societal decrepitude amidst the triumphs of progress, Americans feared that the accelerated onset of the future would doom them to collapse. As the British withdrew from the continent, and as the Union flag was lowered for the last time from the ramparts of Negro Fort in 1816, the site of a delayed American victory, the historical horizon of the nascent Republic seemed as fragile and precipitous as ever. «What other changes are to follow?» asked a despondent John Adams in the autumn of 1815, «I fear the World has not grown more steady since the triumphs of the Allies. [...] The Peace is a subject of congratulation, but the duration of it, must be left to future counsels. America is not exempted from the Lot of Humanity. She has dangers enough, easy to foresee, and if she does not prepare for her own defence, she will deserve to suffer.» Adams’s political prognostications for France and America were thus entwined, although it is unremarkable that he should treat the prospects of 1816 as fundamentally unforeseeable. The «vicissitudes of the last year» had, after all, been «unexampled in the memory of man». Yet if the inexplicable return of Napoleon had been enough to occupy the private letters and public forebodings of Adams, it was nothing compared to the impact that the Hundred Days would have upon the French society.

2. Historical «Monotony» and the Hundred Days

From the window of her hôtel in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the Marquise de Montcalm looked out upon the disintegration of the first Restoration. Hunchback and house-bound, she confided in her journal: «The tranquillity which France has enjoyed for a year has been destroyed by the most singular and most terrible of all events.» In March 1815, Napoleon, tiring of exile on Elba, made his quicksilver escape. As the imperial «eagles flew from steeple to steeple» in the approach to Paris, support for the Bour-
1816 and the Resumption of «Ordinary History»

bon monarchy evaporated. Immediately anathematised at Vienna and later humiliated at Waterloo, Napoleon did not last long. The experience of the Hundred Days nevertheless demonstrated the continued susceptibility of historical events to revolutionary re-acceleration. «Our heads, ours spirits and our tongues greatly need to be calmed», Montcalm reflected in January 1816; «but, after a malady of twenty-five years, can we hope for a swift recovery, or will we be surprised to yet find some traces of folly in what would have been mad during a quarter of a century?» Despite her doubts, the Marquise correctly concluded that if Europe was to stem the destabilising effects of revolutionary time – if, «in a far-away time, we can assume that events would bring happiness» – then «only monotony can repair our misfortunes». If the European society was to resume a stable and orderly transition through time, then history would need to be rendered uneventful, even monotonous. The events of the previous spring offered scant hope that this could be realised.

«Does history embrace in so short a period changes and revolutions so wonderful?» asked one American reporter for the *Richmond Enquirer*. In the space of four short months, from March through July, France seemed to have experienced the entire history of its Revolution replayed in double-time. «How extraordinary are the events which I have witnessed within a few weeks! [...] I have seen Napoleon on the throne, surrounded by a blaze of disgusting pomp, and the next moment an insulated individual, shunned by his fellow men [...]. Then succeeded the ephemeral and nominal reign of his son. Next, the real authority of the representatives of the people, and last and least of all, the phantasmagoria, or speaking automaton, got up by a company of royal strollers and exhibiting under management at the palace of the Thuilleries.»

The rapid succession and congestion of events seemed to have made the stability of a single political regime impossible. As the Hundred Days got underway, the precedent of the past, lost amidst the wreckage of the first Restoration, once again proved incapable of ordering the course of history. In his despatches from Paris, the Duke of Wellington described the sense of ferment as neo-Jacobins and émigré aristocrats lined up to do battle. «In the Faubourg Saint Marceau a large hog was paraded through the streets, with a white bunch of flowers under his tail and two similar ones fastened to the ears. At each winehouse they stopped, drinking to the health of the ‹gros Papa!›» Elsewhere, the «King’s people» appeared outside the Palais Royal, muttering «pre-revolution, aristocratic expressions». Their favourite subject, Wellington observed, was «vengeance» –

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41 Montcalm, Mon Journal, 152.
and who could blame them? Many of the returning émigrés believed that the first Restoration would draw the «revolutionary parenthesis» to an end. In fact, it proved entirely transitory. According to François Ploux, the growing sense in 1814/15 that even this restored monarchy momentarily demonstrated «a collective experience of time totally incompatible with [the] representation of a history definitively stabilised».

The problem was not solely extrinsic. In fact, the first Restoration failed because it could not decide whether to forgive or to forget. Whilst the first – forgiveness – necessitated a discomforting recognition of the rupture occasioned by the Revolution, the second – forgetting – demanded an immense and ultimately incompatible act of collective amnesia. This confusion had been codified in 1814 by the promulgation of the *Charte constitutionelle*, an ostensibly modern document, which was nevertheless granted (*octroyé*) by Louis XVIII in a pseudo-medieval act of regal generosity. The preamble of the *Charte* began by assuring Frenchmen that the king would henceforth «modify» his authority «according to the difference of time». Louis had appreciated «the effects of the ever-increasing progress of enlightenment» and, though never explicitly mentioning the Revolution, acknowledged the «direction impressed upon opinion during the past half century». As the preamble continued, however, the temporal perspective of the document shifted. The *Charte* rebuked the revolutionary notion of historical rupture, and instead declared an alternative ambition: «to renew the chain of time». Having «searched for the principles of the constitutional charter» in the «venerable monuments of past centuries», the monarchy would seek to leapfrog the Revolution, instead «reunifying old and modern times».

The word *oubli* – which eventually came to define this policy – is poorly rendered into English. It typically denotes «forgetting», but in fact refers to a more all-encompassing memory-lapse: oblivion. This is certainly how the first Restoration realised *oubli* – not as mere sublimation, but as the total obliteration of the past. «We have erased from our memory», Louis declared, «as we would like them to be erased from history, all the evils which have afflicted the patrie during our absence». It also carried legal significance. Article 11 of the *Charte*, for example, prohibited all «research of opinions and votes given prior to the Restoration».

One royalist almanac, published in Lille, even attempted to write the history of the Revolution from this perspective – it was a brief undertaking: «It is the 3 May 1789, the Estates-General are open. It is the 3 May 1814, the king of France returns to his capital. What a scene! What a comparison for the observer!»


47 Koselleck refers to Restoration policies of this sort as vain attempts «to trump amnesty with amnesia»: *Futures Past*, 40.

48 Le retour des lis et celui du bonheur, étreintes dédiées à tous les Français; avec un calendrier pour l’an de grâce 1815, 19e du règne de Louis XVIII, Lille 1814, 2.
Sandwiched between the last year of the ancien régime and the first of the Restoration, the events of the previous two decades were reduced to a mere punctuation point. It was believed that by consigning the Revolution to oblivion, the restored monarchy could re-situate itself within the vast continuum of French history. Collective demonstrations of forgiveness and forgetting, meanwhile, would allow the temporal fabric of the nation, frayed at each end, to be rethreaded. In the context of European affairs, this assumption did not seem implausible. When William I returned to the Netherlands in 1813, he had framed the revival of his regime as a re-continuation of Dutch history. The memory of recent events, he assured Castlereagh, would be submerged by «un oubli total du passé», which would allow William to present the Revolutionary and Napoleonic interlude as somehow «outside» the natural course of time. The Dutch forged a connection between the act of forgetting and the process of historical deceleration, making the erosion of the past dependent upon the relative slowness of the present. Thus, seeking to retrieve «the memory» of recent history, remarked the General Commissioner of the Interior Hendrik van Stralen in 1814, would only «heighten emotions and open wounds that were starting to heal over time». In France, the abrupt advent of the Hundred Days scotched these ambitions. As one royalist pamphleteer scowled, «The sojourn of the usurper, lasted from the spring equinox until the summer solstice, barely three months», yet «this time had all the duration of a century [...]». Indeed, «one hundred days were enough to reawaken [all] the poison of revolutionary ideas».

The pace at which Napoleon could re-establish (albeit fleetingly) his Empire, demonstrated the extent to which the time of the Restoration and the time of the Revolution seemed to move at different speeds. The expiatory culture of the Restoration (which undermined the policy of oubli by encouraging an incessant remembrance of the Revolution), contributed to this perception by underlining the delegitimising slowness of the Bourbon monarchy. On 21 January 1815, exactly twenty-two years since his execution,
the remains of Louis XVI were reinterred at Saint-Denis. Watching the catafalque pass by, Chateaubriand could not help but scoff at this «new era of kings and legitimate spectres: this vain restoration of throne and tomb whose double power time had already swept to dust».56 At the cathedral, a congregation gathered to hear the expiatory funeral oration of the abbé Charles-Auguste Villefort. If the French were to be cleansed of the crime of killing their king, he explained, mouthing the skewed mantra of forgiveness, then France would need to be persistently reminded of its Revolutionary past.57 However, as Villefort recounted the final years of the late Louis, it became increasingly clear that the monarchy’s downfall was primarily a product of the unmanageability of accelerated time. Heightening the sense of historical immediacy, the abbé addressed his audience in the present tense: «Now, events gathered, crowded, piled up as it were, and we arrive at the memorable epoch of 6 October 1789», the day when the people of Paris «assaulted» their sovereign, extracted him from Versailles, marched him to Paris, and «where one atrocious night succeeded a day of massacre». «Nothing», he summarised, «can suspend the march of events [...]every day the insults, the outrages intensify».58 As the Revolution pressed ahead, the deputies of the National Convention had confidently hailed 1793 and the execution of the king, as a moment of irrevocable rupture with the past.59 Yet as Chateaubriand observed, whilst the Revolution accelerated towards the future, the Bourbon monarchy simply placed itself in suspended animation. The «legitimate race», he wrote, «strangers to the nation for twenty-three years, had remained in the hour and place where the Revolution had held them, while the nation had progressed through time and space. From there arose the impossibility of them understanding or re-joining it; religion, ideas, interest, language, earth and heaven, all were different for people and King, because they were no longer at the same point on the road [...].» This divergence was compounded by the historical compression wrought by the Revolution. The monarch and his subjects were now «separated by a quarter of a century, equivalent to many centuries». 60 Here was a king, in fact, «disabled by time, not war».61

The task of regenerating the Bourbon dynasty, then, was immense and probably impossible.62 In May 1814, as he entered the Tuileries palace for the first time in 23 years,


58 L’abbé Charles-Auguste Villefort, Oraison funèbre de Louis XVI, roi de France et de Navarre, mis à mort sur la place de la Révolution le 21 janvier 1793, prononcée à Paris le 21 janvier 1815, en l’église paroissiale de St. Vincent-de-Paul, après la restauration de Louis XVIII, Paris 1816, 28, 30.

59 Perovic, Calendar, 90–96.

60 Chateaubriand, Mémoires, vol. XXIII, 569.


Louis had privately acknowledged «some unpleasant reflexions on the progress of time». «I felt, alas!» he sighed, «that I was no longer young; there was no longer anything French about me but my heart.» When the streets of Paris, once host to his joyeuse entrée, became, within the space of a few months, the scene of pike-brandishing mobs eager to see their king swinging from a réverbère, Louis’ fears were confirmed. «I should not be able to reign, I thought, like Louis XIV and Louis XV, over a nation which wore its hair à la Titus.» The promise of dynastic history, especially the historic depth of the Bourbon line, had been its cyclicity. Premised upon the predictable framework of regal genealogy, it offered a «guaranteed futurity of the past». The Revolution, however, had fractured the shape of history, discrediting the metaphor of the circle and rendering the «traditional» claims of Bourbon kingship redundant. One royalist print, published around 1816, vainly attempted to affirm these claims by depicting the figures of Henry IV and Louis XIV crowning their descendant with a laurel wreath, thereby renewing «the chain of time». In its historical comprehension, the first Restoration, as this image illustrates, reeked of anachronism.

The Hundred Days therefore discredited the possibility of establishing historical «monotony». In January 1816, from his vantage point of Monticello, Jefferson observed how «the events which have taken place in France […] have not reached their ultimate termination», and that there remained «an awful void between the present and what is to be the last chapter of that history». During the preceding year, events had continued to accumulate, stretching the future into infinitude, and rubbing the Bourbon policy of oubli and expiation, which seemed to have done little to reconnect the temporal chasm opened by the Revolution. The prospects of the forthcoming year, in consequence, far from suggesting an uneventful historical horizon, were likely «to be filled with abominations as frightful as those which have already disgraced it». France, Jefferson concluded, retained too much unruly revolutionary energy, and too much historical momentum, «to remain under its present compression».

3. Bourbon Chronopolitics and the Acceleration of Reaction

On 7 December 1816, Élie Decazes, the French prefect of police, appeared before the Chamber of Deputies. «Gentlemen», he announced, «we do not live in those ordinary or calm times, where the tranquillity of the past is an almost certain guarantee for that of the future, and where parties, formed solely by the opposing ambitions of a few men,
scarcely disturb the surface of the social order». Although the preceding months had witnessed a rallying of «all the great interests of the nation around the throne», reducing political factions and unscrupulous journalists «to silence», the restored monarchy had nevertheless failed «to eliminate all the traces of their deplorable fighting». At first, Decazes appeared to call for patience – only «inaction» would see France secure «the definitive impotence» of its agitators and internal enemies; only time would heal the wounds of recent events. But as he turned his ire upon «the unlimited liberty of newspapers», the minister suddenly shifted gear. How, Decazes demanded, could «the courts, in their slow and regular course, stop an evil which propagates itself with such rapidity?» The «pace of justice was neither flexible enough to follow the spirit of party in all its detours, nor fast enough to catch up with it before it has inflicted its blows». In his despair, Decazes identified the primary chronopolitical fault line that ran through 1816. How could the Bourbon monarchy establish an «ordinary» experience of historical time without simultaneously aping the temporal momentum established by the Revolution?

Between the victory of Waterloo and the autumn of 1816, France was dominated by the chambre introuvable, an assembly so reactionary that William Edward Frye, an Englishman in Paris, could not help but marvel at «such a set of venal, merciless and ignorant bigots and blockheads». Within months of its election, lists of traitors were drawn up, exceptions to the general amnesty declared, and even a re-imposition of the tithe demanded. One of its overlooked ambitions, however, was the enforcement of temporal discipline upon the French. In Article three of a declaration outlining the «principles of the majority of the chamber» for the session of 1816, the deputies declared: «We only look back to the past in order to draw lessons for the future, and we wish to place between the one and the other a cast iron wall; thus we recognise that all the interests created by the revolution, and which are finished, should be irrevocably assured; [...] but we no longer accept in the future the application of the principles which created these interests, and we regard them as subversive to any government.»

Whilst the «the abolition of privileges», «equal admission to professions» and the «freedom of worship» were to be maintained; the progress of revolutionary history was to be definitively halted. In March, the declaration reached the desk of the Duke of Wellington, who remained nominally responsible for public order in Paris. Horrified by its sentiments, he hastily penned a letter to the declaration’s ultra-royalist author, the Baron

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Vitrolles. «After twenty-five years of misfortune, the king has returned to govern his country. That country is France; and it is not possible for the government to place a cast iron wall between the past and the future of France.»71 Failure to establish unity across time violated the precepts of the Chartes and forfeited royal authority to the chaotic whim of political factionalism. «I am sure», Wellington explained, «that a minister of the king who promised to act in the manner of the third article of the «Declaration of Principles» could find himself in opposition to the promises of H[is] M[ajesty], and of the principles of the treaties of HM and the Powers of Europe; and that if by misfortune the troubles in France were to result from these measures, HM could find himself without the support that the Allied Powers have the intention of lending to him, so, despite the promises of HM and his sweet and paternal administration, he would again become the target of plots and efforts by the henchmen of the Revolution.»72

Far from securing France against further political aftershocks, the prospect of «a cast iron wall» erected between the revolutionary past and royalist future merely consigned the fragile monarchy to a timeless void. The «Declaration of Principles», after all, was premised upon a rhetoric of temporal rupture, one that seemed to eschew any notion of traditional or historical anchorage in favour of a complete sequestration between past and present. Wellington was particularly startled by the apparent sense of hurry, noting that «there is a great difference between the opposition given to a proposed change following the experience of centuries, and that of the desire to return to old ways after a change that was made for twenty five years».73 By proposing their own assault upon the ordering of historical time, the deputies had once again made the Bourbon monarchy a subject of chronopolitical dispute.

Throughout 1816, the chambre introuvable would pursue a political programme that served to reinforce, not arrest, the temporal experience of the Revolution. The pace was set in November 1815 by the intervention of La Bourdonnaye, deputy for Maine-et-Loire, during a debate on the law of amnesty. To punish the accomplices of the Hundred Days, «to halt their criminal basis», La Bourdonnaye fumed, would require «irons, executioners, torturers», not toleration. A swift pre-emptive strike could, he claimed, expedite the process: «Defenders of humanity, be aware that in scattering a few drops of blood we will save torrents.»74 By recalling the sanguinary excesses of the first Republic, La Bourdonnaye presented a programme of political amnesty that, in effect amounted, to a new list of suspects.75 In the months that followed, in violation of the promises of the «Declaration of Principles», the ultra-royalists encouraged the rapid eradication of the remnants of the Revolution. A White Terror, sanctioned by law, now swept like a scythe through

71 Wellington to the Baron Vitrolles (March 1816), Supplementary Despatches, XI, 314.
72 Ibid, 315.
73 Ibid.
the Midi, decimating «enemies of the state» with a fury not seen since 1793. The primary legal lever of this Terror was the cours prévôtales, which replaced ordinary courts of justice with military commissions. Operating with an alacrity reminiscent of the tribunaux révolutionnaires, these courts would come to condemn more than 6000 individuals in fewer than eleven months. «Monarchical in its forms, but revolutionary in its proceedings», observed Helen Maria Williams about the courts, «wrapt up in the dusty gloom of ancient times, but passing its irrevocable fiat with the rapidity of a Jacobin tribunal; its sentence was without appeal, and execution took place within twenty-four hours». Many of the ultra-royalists, in both the chamber and the king’s council, displayed an almost Jacobin impatience with the slowness of deliberative justice. When the Duc de Berri demanded that General Exelmans be punished immediately for his fraternisation with Joachim Murat, Louis pleaded: «My nephew, let us not move faster than justice.» As early as February 1816, then, the chronopolitical agenda of the chambre introuvable threatened to reaccelerate the perception of historical time and plunge the continent back into war. «I cannot help but see», Wellington warned the king, «that, from one day to the next, it is possible that I find myself in a situation of placing all Europe once again under arms.»

Unlike their revolutionary predecessors, the ultra-royalists were not interested in precipitating a utopian future. Instead, they wished to transpose an idealised, static vision of the past upon the present. This, of course, excluded the recent past, the memorabilia of which they were happy to see heaped upon state-sponsored bonfires of «forgetting». It was also largely an invention. The demographic make-up of the chambre introuvable meant that many of its members would have been too young to have witnessed the sort of past that they believed they were restoring. Youthful and reckless, the deputies were, as Bertier de Sauvigny remarks, «like that of 1789, nervous, impulsive, passionate, and often blundering». Their vision of historical time was therefore a curious hybrid. The society they wished to restore had never truly existed; it was a product of the Catholic and Romantic revival common to émigré circles during the Revolution. As John Cam Hobhouse observed, a nostalgia based upon nothing had formed a group of men predisposed to «forgetting they are not the contemporaries of Louis the Thirteenth». Yet the atemporal society that they envisaged was to be manufactured at
immense speed and within a political framework that owed much to the impatient utopianism of the Jacobin Republic. The revivification of the past – however nebulously defined – would not be achieved in days or weeks, but in years or decades. «The result that several centuries have produced», declared the Duc de la Rochefoucauld during a debate on the restoration of Church properties, «may become the work of several further centuries».  

Under pressure from the signatories to the second Treaty of Paris, the king dismissed the chambre introuvable on 5 September. The «scenes which pass in the chamber of deputies are known to all», counselled Wellington, and seemed liable to threaten «a new crisis». Two months later, a royalist pamphleteer named Jules-Georges-Antoine-Paul de Caunes argued that if the Restoration now failed to make peace with the Revolution, if it continued to subvert its legacy, the monarchy would remain hostage to the episodic re-acceleration of historical events. «If the Bourbons, in their noble generosity, manage this change themselves, they will seat their race upon the throne of France indefinitely.» Only the sort of historical synchronicity envisaged by Metternich would allow the monarchy to «eternalise» the fragile enthusiasm, «which has recalled them today». The «moment is favourable», de Caunes continued, «but if once a contrary impulse is given, it would be very difficult to stop it; the mistakes would succeed themselves in a rapid and inevitable manner». The chambre introuvable was an early demonstration – and de Caunes’ tract was an early analysis – of the historical alternation of Revolution and Reaction. Recalling the rapid supersession of temporal regimes during the Hundred Days, de Caunes warned that entirely halting the rhythm of revolutionary time had simply quickened the collapse: «Would we not encounter challenges if we also wanted to govern France without taking any account of what has just happened? What a perpetual battle we would have to establish! What a revolting, absurd and precarious compression we would need to exert! [...] We have no need to portray this sort of political situation: We emerge from it. We would return there just as easily by moving headlong against the new impulses [...].» In his counsel of foreboding, de Caunes had pre-empted the Hegelian belief that the combat of Revolution and Reaction would produce an «evil endlessness» in which «the consciousness of the agent is trapped in a finite <not yet>». If historical time was to be intermittently accelerated and halted, then the present could only be experienced as a
moment of incessant rupture. This would make the gradual progression of history – the ambition of moderate monarchists and Louis XVIII himself – impossible. «[T]he process», de Caunes cautioned, «is therefore not completed.»

In 1816, the Bourbon monarchy found itself in a bind. To merely await the onset of events – to hope that political exhaustion would re-stabilise the impetuous historical character of France – was to make the survival of the throne a plaything of chronopolitical extremes. In July, in a conversation recorded with the French ambassador to Vienna, the Duc de Caraman, Metternich acknowledged this predicament. Whilst he hoped France would «find a means of stopping or suppressing these long procedures which laboriously prolong the memories of the past, […] he compared with envy the advantages the king could acquire from the very upheaval of the Revolution, […] but he wisely judges that if [Louis] prudently seizes all that a revolution of this type can favourably offer to progress and strength, he is eminently guilty of trying to obtain these same advantages by sacrificing the force of the stability and of the empire of old customs to the hazard of innovations».  

This uneasy balance did not last long. In February 1820, as Decazes’s «feet slipped on the blood» of the recently assassinated Duc de Berri, the ultras made their decisive comeback. Determined to finally revenge themselves upon the revolutionary past, France was once again denied the opportunity to «live in ordinary or calm times». Thenceforth, all the Bourbon monarchy could do was wait: By the end of July 1830, it would be gone forever.

4. American Space-Time and the Barbadian Slave Revolt

Unlike France, where the survival of legitimate government seemed like a matter of daily speculation, America was a society that travelled seamlessly through historical time. In 1817, the congressional representative from North Carolina, Lewis Williams, had boasted about how America needed «no such battles as Waterloo to make a President, nor the aide of a revolution to form a State; events which shake other nations to the centre pass with us as an ordinary occurrence!»

Williams took particular satisfaction in the «ordinary» progress of events – a testament, as he saw it, to the chronopolitical moderation of the Republic. This was, however, a fanciful reminiscence of recent history. In 1816, many Americans gazed upon a future and the French Restoration», in: The International History Review 11 (1989), 76–83, 82.

filled not with promise but foreboding. The watershed of the 1812 War, far from eternalising the rusticity and simplicity of the early Republic, seemed to have done little to arrest the historical dynamics of the revolutionary era. The future continued to cascade in upon the present, provoking a common perception of temporal claustrophobia. As early as 1795, Samuel West had predicted that the nascent Republic would accelerate from an «active youth» through to a «vigorous manhood and feeble old age» until finally alighting upon «inevitable dissolution». If America was to postpone this life-cycle – if it was to subvert the premature ageing of its social body – then the progress of revolutionary time would need to be addressed. The temporal strategy was simple: America would seek to frustrate time by expanding through space. As 1816 would demonstrate, however, the realisation of this strategy was more complex than its mere articulation.

On 27 December 1816, in a report to the Virginian House of Delegates, a committee on «Roads and Internal Navigation» expressed horror at the creeping decrepitude of their state. Whilst other states, it contended, were advancing beyond the mid-western frontier «with a rapidity which has astonished themselves», Virginia – «the ancient dominion and elder sister of the Union» – was fast becoming a scene of «wasted and deserted fields! of dwellings abandoned by their proprietors! of Churches in ruins!» The committee concluded that decay was the product of Virginia’s archaic network of roads and canals. While a significant proportion of «her western territory» remained barren and unpopulated, «a considerable part of her eastern» frontier, once commercially prosperous, had been allowed to «recede from its former opulence». Virginians were not alone in their anxiety. In the same year, the legislature of New York received a petition «in favor of a Canal navigation between the great Western Lakes and the Tide-Waters of the Hudson». Should the project be ignored, the petitioners argued, «[o]ur villages would become deserted; our flourishing cities would be converted into masses of mouldering ruins, and this state would be precipitated into poverty and insignificance». Unable to renew the social body through access to fresh resources of land, these communities were at risk of being left to the ravages of time.

It was triumph in the War of 1812 that finally unlocked the door to the Midwest. Since the terms of the peace rendered so many Indian confederacies defenceless, the primary obstruction to further expansion was lifted. Treaties struck with the Creeks, Chicasaws and Choctaws in the autumn of 1816 ceded millions of acres of land to the United States. Suddenly, Americans began flooding over the frontier. «The western

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95 On 1816 as the advent of modern America, see C.E. Skeen, 1816: America Rising, Lexington, KY 2003.
96 Cited in McCoy, The Elusive Republic, 170.
97 Cited in Supplement to Volume the Ninth, in Niles’ Weekly Register September (1815–March 1816), 150.
98 Ibid, 146.
country continues to rise in population and importance with unabated rapidity», reported one citizen of Chillicothe, Ohio: «This town has been, since the war, full to overflowing. [...] More houses will be built this summer than during the last three years together.»

The tempo of migration was facilitated by technology. Pioneered along the Delaware in 1787, steamboats were, by 1816, ubiquitous. They were perceived as space-killers. «Routes that formerly required weeks to travel, are now performed in about as many days», observed *Niles’ Weekly Register*: «We have heard the remark often made that steamboats have brought New-York to within thirty miles of Albany.»

The Cumberland Road, first proposed to Congress in March 1816, likewise provided a gateway to the Midwest by connecting the Potomac and Ohio Rivers. John G. Jackson, a Congressman from Virginia, excitedly predicted that the road would overcome the «chains of mountains», which «but a few years since, were supposed to present insurmountable obstacles». By the end of 1816, metaphors of speed had shifted in their descriptive detail, coming instead to connote the pace of travel *across* America, rather than the rate at which America travelled *through* history.

A determination to stem the progress of historical time was nothing new. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 was, according to its architect Thomas Jefferson, a means of multiplying the «auxiliaries» of America. As he told the inhabitants of the Indiana Territory in 1805, expansion would provide the republic with «new sources of renovation, should its principles, at any time degenerate». Despite initial optimism, however, panic slowly settled over Jefferson’s brow. Far from slowing the slide into decrepitude, the expansion of American territory instead served to augment an unresolved aspect of the Revolution: slavery. Since 1776, when Jefferson had failed to insert a paragraph in the Declaration of Independence denouncing the practice, America had temporised. The matter was again deferred during the Constitutional Convention of 1787 when the abolition of the slave trade was delayed for an arbitrary twenty years. In 1816, then, as waves of American migrants washed over the Midwest, a steady stream of indentured labour followed them. Like many of the Founding Fathers, Jefferson believed that slavery would be ameliorated «in the order of events», and with the «consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation». The Missouri Compromise of 1820, which struck a fragile balance between the admission of «slave» and «free» states to the Union, demonstrated the opposite: This hangover from the Revolution was not subsiding, but augmenting. Yet it was in 1816 – a full four years before the Compromise – that the temporal strategy mapped out by the Louisiana Purchase truly began to unravel.

100 *Niles’ Weekly Register* (8.6.1816), vol. X, 334.
101 Ibid, (3.8.1816), 381.
102 Cited in Skeen, *1816*, 100.
In May, news reached New York that Barbados was ablaze.\footnote{C. McD. Scott, «Bussa's Rebellion (1816)», in: J.P. Rodriguez, *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion*. Vol. I: A-N, Westport, CN 2007, 90–92; M. Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*, London 1982, 254–266.} The slave population on the British-controlled Caribbean colony, in defiance of their white masters, were in active revolt. The violence had begun with the lighting of fires at 8 pm on 14 April. Within six hours, the insurrection had engulfed more than seventy estates. References to the speed of the revolt therefore litter contemporary accounts.\footnote{For the speed and unexpected nature of the Barbadian rebellion compared with later American slave revolts, see: M. Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736–1831*, Champaign, IL 1992, 260–261.} According to one local militiaman, «[l]arge quantities of canes were burnt […]. Houses were gutted and the very floors taken up. The destruction is dreadful, the plundering beyond anything you can conceive could be effected in so short a time».\footnote{Cited in H. McD. Beckles, «The Slave-Drivers’ War: Bussa and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion», in: G.D. Howe / D.D. Marshall (eds.), *Empowering Impulse: The Nationalist Tradition of Barbados*, Barbados 2001, 1–33, here: 15.} The «general flame», wrote Colonel Edward Codd, commander of the imperial garrison, was spread «with a rapidity and destruction that evinced the fury of the insurgents».\footnote{Colonel Edward Codd to Sir James Leith (25.4. 1816): National Archives of the UK, Kew (CO 28/85).} As events accelerated, one white Barbadian even placed a time limit on the controllability of the colony: «I would not give a year’s purchase for any island we now have.»\footnote{Beckles, «Slave-Drivers’ War», 27.} In seeking to restore order, the Governor of Barbados reached for rhetorical gestures similar to those espoused by Jefferson of gradual slave emancipation. On 26 April, he told a nervous Assembly that slavery would only be abolished «by a wise unremitting system of amelioration by which it will gradually produce its own reformation», and «not by the attempting of a rash and destructive convulsion».\footnote{Sir J. Leith, *Memoirs of the late Sir James Leith*, London 1818, 17.} As many contemporaries attested, the primary motivation of the insurrection was not revulsion against the living conditions, which were considered comparatively benevolent, but a conscious desire «to gain independence». Had revolt become revolution in 1816, the Barbadians, mimicking their American, French and Haitian predecessors, would likely have sought to further hasten the hand of history. By taking control of events, the slaves were seeking to precipitate an idealised future. As a report later published by the select committee of the Barbados Assembly confirmed, «the minds of the slaves had been unsettled» by the thought «that the time was quickly approaching at which they were to expect their freedom».\footnote{The Report from a Select Committee of the House of Assembly, Appointed to Inquire into the Origin, Causes, and Progress, of the Late Insurrection, London 1818, 12; D. Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*, Cambridge 2005, 105–139.} By demonstrating that the island was their property and that they were the property of no one, the slaves were demanding that emancipation be instant, not gradual; that the perceived slowness of their transition towards freedom be accelerated – and by revolutionary means if necessary. In attempting
to overthrow the white colonial elite and break the doctrine of gradualism, the indentured Barbadians were attempting to rupture the ordinary passage of historical time established on the island since the slave code of the seventeenth century.

The revolt kindled concern throughout the American South. Memories of the Haitian Revolution and the spectre of copycat slave revolts were confirmed by the reported confessions of a young Barbadian slave, James Bowland, who noted that «the only way» to achieve emancipation «was to fight for it [...]», the way they did in Saint Domingo».111 Perhaps more hauntingly, the rebellion seemed to recall the history of the American Revolution itself. «The insurrection of the slaves in Barbados is distressing to every generous heart», the Richmond Enquirer editorialised, «but is it possible to forget that the butchered planters are only the victims of those misfortunes which their countrymen would have brought upon us?»112 Under this reading, the white Barbadian elite were being held hostage to the anti-slavery agitations of the British Parliament, just as Lord Dunmore’s Emancipation Proclamation, issued in 1775, had threatened social revolution throughout the slave-holding south. The emancipatory logic of revolutionary historical time, which had once enabled white Americans to escape «slavery» under the British, would now need to be stemmed if America were to avert a similar re-enactment along racial lines. It was therefore the Barbadian rebellion, and not the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which represented the first controlled detonation of what William Freehling has termed the «timebomb» of American slavery.113 Whilst a full-scale explosion would be delayed for several decades, the persistence of the slave question and its capacity to destabilise the Union, nevertheless, demonstrated the way in which revolutionary temporal tropes continued to condition visions of the American future.

The misplaced confidence of Lewis Williams in the «ordinary occurrence» of history was therefore undermined by events transpiring across the Caribbean. His belief, borne by the apparently limitless spatial capacity of the American continent, remained undimmed. «The Mississippi Territory has been divided, and the western part of it admitted into the Union on a footing with the original States», thus «[o]ur Country seems destined to a rank of greatness and glory which has never been equalled!» The scope of future expansion would, if the concomitant growth of slavery were conveniently overlooked, bestow «virtue and wisdom» upon the «people of the United States, and their governmental institutions!».114 The foundations of the claim that the deleterious consequences of time could be frustrated through space were shaken, but not overturned, in

114 Cunningham, Circular Letters, 1006.
1816. And until the Civil War conclusively exploded the multiplying complications of this chronopolitical perspective, some semblance of «ordinary history» would prevail – albeit on borrowed time.

5. The End of the Beginning

The chronopolitical content of «ordinary history» was not homogeneous. Beyond Metternich’s memoirs, the term was not to become a specific feature of contemporary political discourse, although references to «ordinary or calm times», the «ordinary occurrence» of history, the «ordinary calculation of dates and events», amongst other variants, were undeniably prevalent. In France, appeals to «ordinary history» could express revulsion against revolutionary innovation or articulate a desire for reconciliation between past and present; in the United States, it exposed a deep-seated ambivalence for the onset of the future, and a simultaneous celebration of American historical exceptionalism. «Ordinary history» did, however, evoke a common set of concerns with the pattern of historical time, primarily the fear that the velocity of history – and the political and societal instability it entrained – had moved beyond human control. It therefore pointed to an inchoate yet detectable desire to address the historical rupture generated by revolution.

History during the late eighteenth century had undergone a process of temporalisation, which rendered the notion of its termination unforeseeable, if not void. It elicited a rapid proliferation of alternative, unpredictable potential futures.¹¹⁵ The events of 1816 attest to this modern idea, which emanated from the experience of revolution, that history is never finished. Many French and American post-revolutionaries therefore struggled with a historical consciousness still ill-equipped to deal with the non-synchronous flow of time. There persisted a belief, for example, that «a former future», lost in the irreversible drift of history, could be revived and made final.¹¹⁶ The past, however, had definitively shed its capacity to coordinate the future. In 1816, vain efforts to efface or rectify this experience of historical time, specifically its acceleration, were exacerbated by temporal strategies lifted directly out of the revolutionary handbook. Seeking to impose order upon history, to decelerate its progress or recapture the essence of a single point in the past, demanded a level of temporal restructuring that served to replicate – not arrest – the historical vandalism that often characterised revolution.

Whilst it is impossible to ascertain exactly what Metternich meant when he made his remarks, the category of «ordinary history» nevertheless remains a useful tool in the analysis of shifting temporal perspectives, both in the immediate aftermath of 1815 and the early nineteenth century. Soon the forward march of technological and industrial modernity would replace political revolution, which had itself replaced eschatology, as

¹¹⁵ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 38.
¹¹⁶ Ibid, 11.
an adequate means of experiencing historical acceleration. In some sense, then, the events of 1816 were akin to a collective loss of innocence. The experience of revolution had irreversibly altered the character of historical time, although it would require the erratic historical experience of 1816 to make this realisation final.

117 Ibid, 22.

ABSTRACT

1816 and the Resumption of «Ordinary History»

Writing in his memoirs, Prince Klemens von Metternich depicted the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 as a return to «ordinary history». As the chaos of revolution subsided, political and temporal order was resumed, inaugurating a perception of historical time that Metternich believed would be sparse, uneventful, stable and slow. This article examines the failure of this vision to be realised within the context of the first full year of the post-revolutionary era: 1816. The temporal strategies devised and implemented in the wake of Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna to stabilise the experience of historical time were themselves undermined by the ambiguous, often contested interpretations of what constituted the «ordinary» course of history. Although the geographic scope is transnational, stretching from Piedmont to Barbados, this article focuses primarily on France and America, and the contemporary chronopolitical disputes that saw those societies struggle to comprehend the new historical and temporal realities established by their respective revolutions. The chronopolitical controversies of 1816 were dominated by the belief that history, which was accelerated beyond control during the revolutionary era, could not be stabilised, or rendered «ordinary».

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