Europe at Different Speeds: Asynchronicities and Multiple Times in European Conceptual History

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Over the last ten years or so we have become used to the idea and the formulation of ‘Europe at different speeds’, in terms of a conceptual and rhetorical response to the fact that the process of European integration, towards the goals of a common constitution, a common monetary system, a common foreign policy etc. have not unfolded in as a homogenous, linear and synchronous way as planned. The idea was a reaction to the unwelcome fact that some of the European countries were unwilling or indeed unable to keep up with the pace of integration set by some of the core countries.¹ The global financial crisis of 2008, the Greek debt crisis, and most recently, the refugee or migration crisis, which hit Europe in the fall of 2015, have contributed to unveiling the multiple and often conflicting tempi and rhythms, the delays and accelerations in the Eurozone and turned them into a challenge that the EU can no longer ignore. In reaction to a speech by the British Prime Minister David Cameron, in which he announced a revision of Great Britain’s membership in the EU, the Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt warned: ‘Flexibility sounds fine, but if you open up to a 28-speed Europe, at the end of the day there is no Europe at all. Just a mess.’²

In other, less politically loaded contexts, this ‘mess’ is called historical contingency, or simply history. The phrase ‘Europe at different speeds’ is not just a rhetorical device, but corresponds to a fundamental historical reality: that the European countries have indeed never moved at the same speed, or, in other words, they have never been completely synchronous in their social and political development. On the contrary, the history of Europe, including the history of Europe’s relationship to the world at large, has always been a history of temporal differences, of forwardness and backwardness, relative to a given goal, of lagging behind and catching up, relative to a perceived avantgarde. Europe has ‘multiple modernities’, to use a term from S.N. Eisenstadt, or, with an even more general argument, is less dependent on the

highly ambiguous idea of ‘modernity’: Europe has ‘multiple temporalities’. Often these various political and social times are even recognized and given labels, such as the German Sonderweg, the Nordic model, British insularity, or they are documented, for instance in the EU progress reports.

1. Multiple Times and Conceptual History

To map how this multiplicity of temporal experiences and horizons, synchronicities and asynchronicities, structures of repetition, moments of acceleration etc. manifests itself at the level of language is a central task of conceptual history. In the introduction to Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe Koselleck famously claims that concepts are both ‘indicators’ and ‘factors’ of historical change. In other words, concepts both indicate the speed and rhythm of historical movement specific to a community and contribute to accelerating and slowing down the same movement. At present, the most striking example in a European context is the concept of ‘crisis’. On the one hand, ‘crisis’ indicates to what extent Europeans feel exposed to rapid and accelerating political and social changes that can no longer be anticipated or planned other than in terms of ‘risk’ and ‘risk management’. On the other hand, ‘crisis’ has also become a factor in bringing about and accelerating the very same changes by evoking both, ideas of non-reversible change and imminent catastrophe about to change the face of Europe forever, and ideas of a permanent condition of crisis fast becoming the new and future condition of normality in Europe. For example, the more economists and financial analysts kept warning against a looming financial collapse, prophesized in the concept of ‘crisis’, the more the collapse itself was accelerated, due to the increasing lack of trust in financial markets. Rhetorically as well as temporally, the advent of the global financial crisis at the beginning of the 21st century can be understood as analogous to the political crisis of the French Revolution almost two hundred years earlier. In both cases, the use of a specific language, to which the concept of ‘crisis’ belongs, made the collapse of the existing political, social, and economic

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order more or less unavoidable, or at least much more imminent.\textsuperscript{5} Specific usages and meanings of ‘crisis’ in different European countries prior to and during the financial crisis, the Greek debt crisis, or the current migration crisis indicate different levels of urgency and immediacy as well as a larger historical narrative, framing the specific moment of crisis. In this way the concepts serve as prisms of asynchronic relations between national and regional histories, but also between different social or political communities, or between different fields and practices of knowledge.

To the extent that concepts are both indicators and factors of historical change, they are interwoven with diverse historical processes, evoking, unfolding and projecting very different pasts and futures. To write the history of these concepts, we have to understand those processes that cannot be reduced to mere empty chronologies, ready-made frameworks for the ordering of lives and events, but have their own times, temporal structures, narratives, as well as principles of succession and causation. To these specific ‘historical times’ belong, according to Koselleck, ‘progress, decline, acceleration or delay, the not-yet and the not-anymore, the before and the after, the too-early and the too-late, the situation and the duration’.\textsuperscript{6} As opposed to the categories of chronological time, days, months, years, decades, and centuries, with which we cannot grasp the actual temporal dynamics of history, these concepts are ‘adequate to historical events and processes’ and should thus be deployed to understand historical change and the role of concepts.\textsuperscript{7}

The perspective laid out above ties in with, and spells out, certain arguments made in the chapters by Michael Freeden, Willibald Steinmetz and Henrik Stenius. In his suggestion for an expansion of the history of concepts to cover the history of ideologies Freeden proceeds from the idea that there are indeed ‘variable tempi of change’ in European history. In similar vein Steinmetz questions the idea of a single modernity, or Sattelzeit, in Koselleck’s terms, and argues that this kind of periodization cannot serve as a framework for a European Conceptual History. Rejecting the idea of a foundational phase of modernity synchronizing all European cultures and languages, he breaks down the idea of the Sattelzeit into processes unfolding at different times in different nations, thus introducing the idea of possible

\textsuperscript{5} Reinhart Koselleck, \textit{Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt} (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1973).


\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
asynchronicities. Following Koselleck in his refusal of the theory of a Sonderweg, that applies to one nation, in this case Germany, deviating from the presumed standard path of political and social self-realization for European nations, Steinmetz opens up the possibility of a Europe of multiple paths, all having their particular temporal logics and structures. Finally, the following discussion of the ‘asynchronicities’ of European history should be read in close connection with Stenius’ discussion of the asymmetries between language use in centres and peripheries, a discussion that opposes the idea of both spatial and temporal homogeneity within Europe. In many historical instances, temporal differences are indeed due to distances in space, as when we consider the time it takes for a usage or a meaning of a concept to travel from the core to the periphery.

To a certain extent, our European Conceptual History book series sets out to realize a set of ambitions central to the project of Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, which the lexicon itself was never really able to make good on. In the theoretical and methodological outlines introducing the first volume Koselleck explicitly states that one task of conceptual history is to explore the ‘synchronicity of the non-synchronous [die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen] contained in the concepts’. However, in most of the actual articles contained in the lexicon, the long diachronic perspective, ranging from Antiquity to the post-war era, and the success of the idea of the Sattelzeit, conceived by Koselleck as a mere ‘heuristic tool’, led contributors to overlook both synchronicities and asynchronicities and rather give priority to new and singular conceptual meanings and usages coming to the fore for the first time in a historical event or interval. For the European Conceptual History book series a somewhat different time span has been chosen, starting in the late Middle Ages and reaching out into the 21st century. At the same time as the time span has been changed, leaving out the origins of Western political culture and language in Greek and Roman Antiquity, the geographical and linguistic range has been expanded to include the entire European continent, both cores and peripheries. As a consequence of these revisions, the project has been given a focus that is less dominated by diachronic narratives and more interested in synchronic entanglements and networks, or to put it another way, in which there is a better balance between diachronic and synchronic

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9 Koselleck, ‘Einleitung’, at xxi.
perspectives than in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Methodologically, this means that the project will include not only the chronological succession of conceptual meanings and usages in national histories, but also the mapping of synchronicities and asynchronicities across a wide variety of national and cultural traditions and spaces on the European continent, exploring, indeed, a ‘Europe at different speeds’.

In the following I will discuss three sets of asynchronicities, or *Ungleichzeitigkeiten*: first, what we could refer to as ‘asynchronicities of meaning’ that emerge when meanings aggregated in concepts invoke different historical origins, durations, ‘spaces of experience’ and ‘horizons of expectation’, to use Koselleck’s terms;\(^\text{11}\) second, ‘asynchronicities of use’, when concepts are used in contexts that have their own inherent temporalities, or historical times, through being experienced as moments of progress or decline, of rapid change or permanence, as advanced or belated, as critical or ordinary; third and finally, ‘asynchronicities of linguistic plurality’, which are involved in both of the already mentioned categories, but demand other methodological approaches and thus need to be discussed separately.

### 2. Asynchronicities of Meaning

Conceptual history is not interested in language as linguistic, philosophical, or even mathematical abstraction, but always in its uses, in words used in specific historical contexts by specific individuals, to achieve specific goals. But this pragmatic and rhetorical dimension, cultivated to perfection in the studies by Quentin Skinner and others working in the contextualist mode of conceptual history, only allows for one kind of time, the present of a particular moment, the absolutely synchronous present. As soon as we shift our attention to the semantic dimension of language usage, however, the synchronous present begins to break up in different rhythms, tempi, and durations. According to Koselleck, what separates a concept from a word is the plurality of meanings that have aggregated over time and can never be reduced to a single definition.\(^\text{12}\) On the one hand, these meanings belong to the ‘synchronic event’\(^\text{13}\), or, in the ubiquitous contextualist idiom, to the context, and can be accessed by means of synchronic analysis, which Koselleck compares to traditional historical

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\(^{12}\) Koselleck, ‘Einleitung’, at xxii.

Quellenkritik, ‘source criticism’. On the other hand, concepts come with their own, inherent ‘diachronic structures’, a ‘surplus of meaning’, to use Ricoeur’s term, which is also a ‘surplus of time’ in the sense that it cannot be reduced to pure synchronicity or presentism, but contains other times that reach beyond, often far beyond the immediacy of the present. In modern Europe, a concept such as ‘revolution’, for example in the case of the so-called ‘Orange Revolution’ that took place in Ukraine during the winter 2004-2005, never refers only to, or addresses, the context of usage or the situation at hand, but unfolds a ‘space of experience’ reaching back to the French Revolution and the Communist Revolutions, as well as a ‘horizon of expectation’ that extends way into a more or less utopian future to be anticipated and dreaded at the same time. Among the meanings evoked by the concept ‘revolution’, some are more than two hundred years old, for example revolution as the attempt to overthrow an all-powerful elite on behalf of something called the ‘people’, and imbue the concept with duration and stability. Other meanings, for example revolution as a conflict of generations, have a much shorter history and seem to shift, gain new and shed old semantic elements at a much faster rate.

In order to assemble and organize these multiple meanings and multiple times Koselleck has suggested the analytic term Zeitschichten, ‘temporal layers of different durations and different origins’ which are inherent in every meaning or usage of a concept, or, with a phrase from the introduction to Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, ‘the multiplicity of temporal layers dating from chronologically different times’. There is always more than one temporality at work when a concept is used and, often, these temporalities are in themselves not synchronous with each other. That a concept is asynchronous with itself, however, does not mean that it is less effective in a political or a social context. From traditional German Begriffsgeschichte we know that concepts always have more than one meaning, due to their ability of summarizing and even synthesizing long historical processes and experiences. To these multiple meanings, however, we have to add the presence of multiple temporalities. In this way we are able to approach what Steinmetz refers to as semantic change on the ‘micro-diachronic’ (situational) or synchronic (comparative) level, which in the articles of Geschichtliche

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Grundbegriffe is all but eclipsed by the long-term diachronic perspective and the emphasis on the emergence of modernity during the Sattelzeit.

In many of the concepts to be studied in this book series there are semantic elements that date back to Greek and Roman Antiquity, and that are still at work, still repeated, intentionally or unintentionally, every time a concept like ‘democracy’, ‘tyranny’ or ‘empire’ is used. However, the same concepts also hold far more recent semantic components that are subject to continuous, rapid and even accelerating changes, from one context or one rhetorical situation to another. Take for instance the semantics of toleration, both religious and political, which represents a fundamental part of the Western concept of ‘democracy’, but which for the last decade seems to have shed old meanings and taken on new ones at a very high speed – to the extent that the exact meaning and possible impact of the concept ‘toleration’ can only be grasped through an investigation of the particular rhetorical situation in which the concept is used, e.g. the struggle over the use of hijab in French schools or the fight for gay rights in Norway. At the same time, however, the prominence of such accelerating conceptual changes does not mean that the continuity or the ‘structures of repetition’ – to use another Koselleckian phrase,¹⁸ which in this case refers to the semantics of toleration inherited from the Enlightenment – disappears; on the contrary, they may be just as important and effective, only in a different mode.

When Koselleck employs the geological metaphor of ‘temporal layers’ he seems to assume that older, more stable meanings, changing at a slower pace, are operating at a deeper, more hidden level in the semantic structure of a concept, whereas the more recent, even new or contemporary meanings are much more visible, prominent, and effective.¹⁹ As striking and analytically helpful as the Zeitschichten-metaphor might be, there is a risk that in using it we end up overlooking the political changes generated not by the most recent and immediately recognizable meanings, but by the oldest and presumably most hidden and unnoticeable ones. Indeed, there are many recent examples of how the oldest semantic components, going back to Greek or Roman Antiquity, or even further, resurface as rhetorically effective tools in a political situation: To understand the return of the concept of ‘empire’ as a positive self-description in American foreign policy debates at the beginning of the 21st century, or more

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precisely, in a specific kind of discourse taken up by American Republicans to confer new legitimacy on American military engagements across the globe, it is not sufficient to explore the uppermost temporal layer, in which political events and rhetorical interventions like these are usually contained. What ‘surfaces’ at that moment, I would argue, is the ancient Roman semantics of ‘empire’, a semantics that is more stable and durable than both, traditional American anti-imperialism going back to the 18th-century Wars of Independence, and Communist criticism of imperialism as the ultimate stage of capitalism. In this and other examples, the inference from Ungleichzeitigkeit to a vertical, archeological or even geological structure, where the upper layers appear as new and fast-changing, whereas the lower are seen as older and changing at a much slower pace, might prevent us from noticing what is really at work in a particular political situation. Often – as in the example of ‘empire’ – the impact of certain concepts seems to imply the inverse: that older meanings and usages of concept are neither deep nor hidden but break through the surface to dominate current discourse. An alternative to analyzing concepts according to their temporal layers is to suggest that every concept has its own temporal structure, pointing back at a specific past as well as gesturing towards an expected future in order to make sense of, and intervene in the present.

3. Asynchronousities of Use

In his path-breaking book Imagined Communities, first published in 1983, the historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson famously argues that the idea of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ is based on the experience of a shared synchronized time, emerging from the 18th century onwards in new media and genres like the novel and the newspaper. As a counterpoint to these synchronized and synchronizing experiences, however, European modernity also features radical asynchronousities between different communities: political, generational, ethnic, and professional, to mention only a few. In a similar way, we can observe asynchronousities between fields and practices of knowledge, such as medicine, engineering, theology, philology, and literature. Taking my cue from these parallel, often competing, and even conflicting temporal communities, the second set of asynchronousities I

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am going to discuss are what can be called ‘the asynchronicities of use’, by which concepts
used by specific communities or used as part of specific knowledge practices appear to be out
of step with other concepts and even with themselves.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his discourse on the arts and the sciences from 1750 already
pointed at the asynchronic relationship between the arts and the sciences on the one hand, and
morality and politics on the other. Progress in one field did not necessarily imply progress in
the other, Rousseau argued; rather the opposite. Rousseau’s somewhat ‘untimely’
intervention, to use a term from one of his avid readers and successors, Friedrich Nietzsche,
drew attention to the conflict between the innovations of the scientific or artistic avantgarde
and the struggle for political and moral order and stability, which would become one of the
characteristics of Western Kulturkritik and that is based on an experience of asynchronicity
between discourses as well as between communities. These ‘asynchronicities of use’ can be
observed at least in two different ways: on the one hand, when the same concepts are used in
different and even conflicting discourses, for example ‘progress’ or ‘future’, which seem to
contain and deploy very different temporal meanings and structures when used in the context
of art and aesthetics than in the context of social and political organization, as shown by
Rousseau; on the other hand, when discursive communities and practices, in which there are
divergent temporal horizons at work, deploy different concepts to address similar events or
experiences, for example when abortion is justified in terms of ‘freedom of choice’ by one
community and condemned as ‘infanticide’ by another.

Early attempts to conceptualize these and similar kinds of asynchronicities are found in works
by the art historian Wilhelm Pinder, the philosopher Ernst Bloch, and the sociologist Karl
Mannheim, who all evoke the trope of the Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen, ‘the
synchronicity of the non-synchronous’ in order to analyze the temporal divergences between
different groups in society. In the case of Pinder, the trope is used to conceptualize
asynchronicities in art history between generations of artists who produce their art at the same
time, but still belong to different epochs of art history, explaining why Romanticist or
Classicist art is still produced in the Modernist era. Bloch, on the other hand, evokes the idea
of Ungleichzeitigkeit to explain the rise of National Socialism, which succeeded in mobilizing
the already existing asynchronicities in German society between technological and

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22 Wilhelm Pinder, Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas (1926) (München: Bruckmann,
1961).
industrialist avant-garde and rural backwardness.\textsuperscript{23} Mannheim, finally, expanded Pinder’s analysis of generations in art history to encompass socio-cultural patterns in society and dynamics of socialization more broadly, which leave different groups or communities out of step with each other.\textsuperscript{24} None of the three authors, however, paid particular attention to language as the vehicle of conflicting temporal experiences and horizons.

In every historical situation or context, members of different communities and participants in different knowledge practices will invest concepts with temporal structures and experiences, depending on what they want to achieve with it. These ‘asynchronousities of use’ can be made the object of analysis based on theories and methods from conceptual history. If ‘use’ is understood intentionally and in terms of speech acts, the analysis will move more in the direction of the rhetorical analysis practiced by Skinner, for whom the dominating temporal figure is \textit{paradiastole}, ‘rhetorical redescription’.\textsuperscript{25} If, on the other hand, ‘use’ is taken to refer to collective practices and shared usages within a group or a community, when a multitude of speech acts, intentions, experiences and events combine to produce meaning, the analysis will have more in common with the fundamentally hermeneutical and socio-historical approaches pioneered by Koselleck, for whom time is stretched between ‘space of experience’ and ‘horizon of expectation’. One interesting example of the latter is the use of the concept of ‘civilization’ at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Across Europe, ‘civilization’ has already for some time been a staple in pedagogical and philosophical discourses, which in the tradition starting from Rousseau and the \textit{Kulturkritik} take a critical stance on the ideologies of scientific and technological progress and evoke conservative, even nostalgic visions of an idealized past, when mankind was really civilized. At the same time, however, advances in biology and eugenics combined with a strong idea of social planning and engineering, produce another concept of ‘civilization’, which is much more future-oriented, positivist, in the Comtean sense of the term, and with a strong element of Social Darwinism, culminating in the racial state of the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{26} Contrasts and conflicts between these discourses or ideologies – which were combined and moulded together in German National Socialism – can

\textsuperscript{23} Ernst Bloch, \textit{Erbschaft dieser Zeit} (1935), erweiterte Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1985).
be analyzed in terms of semantic dislocations in the concept of ‘civilization’ brought about by ‘asynchronousities of use’.

However, as soon as we start discussing how the usages of concepts and their inherent temporal horizons vary between communities and discourses not just within the ‘imagined community’ that we are used to call ‘nation’, often evoking a concurrence of geographical, cultural and linguistic borders, but across the entire European geographic and cultural space, another element comes up, which significantly increases the possibilities for asynchronicities both of use and meaning: language, or rather linguistic plurality. In one way the ‘asynchronousities of linguistic plurality’, which is discussed in the last part of this chapter, could have been treated under ‘meaning’ or ‘use’, but partly because these asynchronicities obviously involve both semantic and pragmatic elements, combined in various ways, and partly to refer to discussions in this book about conceptual history and translation, I will treat them separately.

4. Asynchronousities of Linguistic Plurality

As we have seen, the different speeds of European conceptual history unfold in part within one and the same language, in part within a plurality of languages. As soon as we expand our horizon to include not one single national language but many, the temporal structures or, to use François Hartog’s term, the ‘regimes of historicity’ tend to multiply across the geographical and cultural spaces which make up ‘Europe’. The conceptual history of Europe does not unfold along one linear, homogenous and absolute chronology, as in the Hegelian idea of Weltgeschichte, but according to a great variety of national, cultural and regional temporalities – not necessarily in terms of different formal chronologies, but in terms of experienced time, ‘spaces of experience’ and ‘horizons of expectation’. In other words, there is no reason to assume that the concept of ‘progress’, used around 1800, synthesized the same experiences and expectations when it was employed in Germany, Scandinavia or somewhere on the Balkan peninsula. Furthermore, if we choose to study a concept such as ‘freedom’ or ‘liberalism’ we will soon recognize how these concepts, used in different linguistic contexts, are never completely synchronous, that their meanings and ways of usage do not address the

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same temporal or historical framework, hence that European conceptual histories are full of asynchronicities caused, or at least amplified, by linguistic plurality.

The question, then, is how to proceed to study these asynchronicities, without explicitly or implicitly making one particular temporal structure or regime, unfolding within one particular cultural and linguistic nation, the ‘standard’ or ‘normal’ one, whereas all others are perceived as deviations, *Sonderwege*, following slower, or even faster historical rhythms. One suggestion would be to start from the entanglements of different national languages and cultures, in other words, the actual interconnections of a *histoire croisée*. Entanglements and interconnections are events which take place within more than one political, social and semantic framework and thus serve to establish a transnational moment of historical experience, a synchronic moment, or even a transnational rhetorical situation, in which certain concepts are used in specific ways. In the moment when transnational events, commercial exchanges, wars, diplomatic scandals, natural catastrophes etc. are conceptualized, they are assimilated into different national histories with different spaces of experiences and horizons of expectation, with different structures of acceleration, progress and decline inherent in them. In this way the synchronicity of the event transforms into a series of linguistic asynchronicities, which now can be identified as such, due to their common origin in a transnational, entangled event. In response to the disclosure of hidden USA government information by Edward Snowden, concepts such as ‘unlawful surveillance’, ‘patriotism’, ‘trust’, ‘allied nations’ and ‘global espionage’ were renegotiated across the entire Western world and reframed in other national and global narratives with their own specific temporal structures. Obviously, what was perceived by the American government, at least initially, as a set-back for global peace, was seen by others as a giant leap towards a more open global society.

Another way to study the asynchronicities of concepts across different languages in the European space is to focus on conceptual transfers, concepts on the move between various linguistic and cultural contexts. This may serve to map how a concept changes its inherent temporality when it moves – or rather, when it is being moved – from one context to another.28 Breaking with the traditional idea that conceptual history can only be practiced within a monolingual framework, because concepts are so intimately linked to the historical

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experience of the actors using them, concepts can also be seen as the product of on-going translation practices, which are not unidirectional, from one language and one culture to another, nor can they be conceived in terms of originals and copies, or semantic losses. On the contrary, to study a concept in translation means to follow that concept into a new semantic field and study how this specific field contributes to the meaning of the concept, in order to learn something not only about the concept itself, but also about the context it is introduced into, and even about the context it came from. In the process of translation the coexistence, the simultaneity of linguistic equivalents and thus of different cultures is established by means of translation practices, either written or oral. At a closer look, however, this chronological simultaneity exhibits a phenomenological and pragmatic multiplicity of times, invested in the same concept. For example, at the end of the 19th century, Norwegian dannelse, German Bildung and French civilization came into use as linguistic equivalents in contemporary debates. But the discourses of which they were part were by no means in step with each other: Whereas the German Bildung rapidly transformed into a slogan for the young German Reich, the Norwegian dannelse remained intrinsically linked to pedagogical discourse, by which a certain form of naturalist primitivism was challenged by the process of civilization, and the French civilization set out to negotiate the conflicts between civic universalism and cultural supremacism. Thus, the pasts, presents, and futures evoked by the three concepts represented obvious asynchronicities within the synchronicity of translation practices.

5. Conclusion: Tools of Synchronization

Finally, in addition to conceptual entanglements and transfers, studies in conceptual history can focus on what could be called ‘the tools of synchronization’, that is the procedures and genres used to overcome the asynchronicities between languages and cultures and to synchronize them, to give them a shared social rhythm. In a European context one of the most obvious recent examples are the many different EU-treaties signed – or not signed – by the member countries in order to set the pace and the rhythm for the development of the European Union. From the 1957 Rome treaty to the 2007 Lisbon treaty these documents were used to align political, social and economic processes in the member countries to the extent

29 Cf. Lazlo Kontler’s chapter, in this volume ###-###.
that both short-term and long-term developments should follow the same historical patterns, go through the same phases and reach the same milestones. Language, more specifically concepts in these treaties are used to bring about this temporal alignment, to overcome the asynchronicities of a Europe in which the nations naturally move at different speeds. One obvious example is the so-called ‘pillar structure’ introduced in the Maastricht treaty of 1992. In this document the semantics of ‘pillars’, more precisely ‘the three pillars of the European Union’, were adopted in order to make Europeans think in terms of synchronizing the political, social and financial rhythms of the member states, first and foremost by giving them a common, stable basis and starting point, from which no one would lag behind.

Paradoxically, the phrase ‘Europe at different speeds’ was in itself an attempt to come to terms with the asynchronicities of European integration. It was coined by the Belgian Prime Minister Leo Tindemans already in 1976, in the so-called Tindemans report, presenting some initial steps towards an institutional renewal of the EC, to counteract the looming stagnation. Envisaging an expansion of the powers of the EC’s existing institutions, Tindemans suggested the possibility of different speeds for member states, depending on their political ambitions and their practical opportunities for progress, hence on their specific national rhythms of political, social, and financial development. Even though the idea was rejected politically, it became an important feature of the European Monetary System of 1979.31 Since then, the phrase ‘Europe at different speeds’ has served as a conceptual reminder of the asynchronicities at work in European history as well as the attempts to find ways of containing them semantically.