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Narrative Symbolic Form, and the Phenomenology of Revolutionary Time

Abstract:

This article traces how the modern experience of historical time, as crystallized in the French Revolution, reconfigures the relation between subjectivity, collective memory, and political appearance. Through Koselleck, I describe how the widening gap between experience and expectation becomes a lived horizon in which history is no longer inherited but projected. Following Carr, I show how this horizon allows a collective “we” to emerge narratively, not as a fixed entity but as a temporal form sustained through narrative. Yet, I argue that narrative alone cannot account for the sensuous presence of this “we.” Drawing on Carlo Severi, I highlight the constitutive role of symbols, rituals, and chimeric images, which do not supplement narrative but actively stabilize a contingent present through forms of appearance that exceed language. This article challenges logocentric models of political temporality and shows that modern national identity is stabilized not only narratively but also through chimeric symbolic techniques.

Keywords:

phenomenology, narrative, political temporality, collective memory, French Revolution

On July 14, 1789, a crowd in Paris stormed the Bastille. Almost immediately, the event exceeded its military meaning and became a model for political time: anniversaries, commemorations, and festivals made “the people” visible to themselves. In the decades that followed, revolutionary politics increasingly learned to stabilize a shifting present by inventing repeatable forms of collective memory. How did the modern re-temporalization of history, crystallized in Koselleck’s shift from the “space of experience” to the “horizon of expectation,” enable the mass rituals, symbols, and spectacles of nationalism to forge national identity?

While existing accounts demonstrate how modern political communities employ narrative to stabilize themselves over time, they do not fully address the symbolic techniques through which such stabilization is achieved. By foregrounding the importance of an iconographic and anthropological perspective on the constitution of group identity, this article seeks to deepen the phenomenological narrative account of collective temporality by introducing an iconographic and anthropological interpretation of group identity.

In the first section, following Koselleck, I examine how the French Revolution ruptured the shared horizon of meaning, widened the gap between “experience” and “expectation,” and rendered political temporality performative. The second section turns to the work of David Carr to explore the phenomenological constitution of collective subjects within this transformed temporal horizon. Here, I analyze how narrative and coordinated practice enable the formation of a “we” that transcends immediate communities. The third section critiques the limitations of these frameworks, arguing they risk leaving the specifically symbolic mechanics undertheorized by treating rituals and images as mere historical effects, rather than as active techniques. To address this gap, I draw on Carlo Severi’s *The Chimera Principle* to demonstrate how words, images, and gestures converge in rituals to stabilize memory and make national unity sensuously present.¹

1) This does not imply a collapse of Koselleck’s account of modern rupture into an ahistorical anthropology. Koselleck’s categories of experience and expectation are formal and anthropological; what changes in modernity is their constellation (see Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 257–58). Severi’s account of symbolic and techniques of imagination is therefore mobilized here not to deny historical rupture, but to explain how such ruptures become imaginable, memorable, and collectively inhabitable.

The main thesis is that phenomenological narrative accounts of political temporality remain implicitly logocentric. Only by integrating Severi's theory can we more adequately account for the sensuous enactment and stabilization of modern forms of "we-ness."

1. A New Experience of Time

On January 21, 1793, in front of thousands of mobilized military guards, King Louis XVI of France was led to the *Place de la Révolution*, where he would soon be executed. With his neck placed beneath the guillotine, and moments before the blade symbolically and physically severed the king from the body politic, Louis, "uttered a frightful cry as the blade fell. Sanson's son grabbed the royal head out of the basket and held it up for the crowd ... 'Long live the Republic! Long live liberty! Long live Equality!'"² The question "What died under the guillotine that day?" has served as the starting point for many political philosophers. For my purposes, however, the more interesting question is: why did the king have to die? Why did the king have to be killed in front of thousands of people? A good place to start is a remark made by Maximilien de Robespierre, just weeks before Louis's execution: "Louis must die ..." he said, "...because the *patrie* must live."³ The claim that the "*patrie* must live" points to a shift from embodied sovereignty to a form of legitimacy that must be publicly asserted.

Monarchy therefore exceeds the ruler's biological body: the issue at stake is the visibility of legitimacy, not merely the elimination of a ruler.⁴ When the monarch no longer embodies sovereignty, the symbolic fusion between power and legitimacy is broken. This "empty space of power," as Claude Lefort argues, is the foundation of political temporality.⁵ Moreover, because any attempt to close this empty space would result in totalitarianism, it must remain permanently open and contestable through

2) Jordan, *King's Trial Louis XVI*, 220.

3) Robespierre, "Robespierre (3 December 1792)."

4) Hence, the phrase "the king is dead, long live the king!"

5) It is important to clarify that the term "foundational" is not intended here as an affirmation of Lefort as a foundational thinker in the traditional sense. Rather, as Stavrakakis observes, Lefort provides "clearly the boldest attempt to institute a political order on the lack of ultimate foundations (and total enjoyment) characteristic of a modernity worthy of its name." Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left*, 262.

democratic institutions.⁶ Legitimacy can therefore no longer be secured by embodiment; the symbolic unity of power and legitimacy must be made visible and believable by other means.

1.1. Between Past and Future

Both Koselleck and Lefort locate the emergence of modern political temporality in the execution of Louis XVI. For Koselleck, however, this historical rupture marks the moment at which the relation between experience and expectation is no longer contained within a theological or teleological order, but becomes historically open.⁷ Experience and expectation, Koselleck argues, exist in a tension that in “ever-changing patterns ... generates historical time.”⁸ Historical time is therefore structured by a dynamic relation in which past events continue to shape new possibilities. As Koselleck notes, “the execution of Charles I ... revealed, over a century later, [Turgot’s] *horizon of expectation* ... [when] he urged upon Louis XVI reforms which should preserve him from the same fate.”⁹ In the case of Louis, it becomes clear that human actions never occur in a vacuum; they always unfold within the tension between lived experiences and anticipated futures.¹⁰

Before modernization, the tension between experience and expectation was embedded within the world of the church through the eschatological “end of days.” This *telos* functioned as an end goal that ordered expectations and experiences.

6) The modern democratic revolution is best recognized in this mutation: there is no power linked to a body (i.e., the monarch MvB). Power appears as an empty place and those who exercise it as mere mortals who occupy it only temporarily or who could install themselves in it only by force or cunning. Lefort, *Political Forms of Modern Society*, 303.

7) According to Koselleck, the academically dominant historical empiricist view falsely denies the relation between human embodied experience and historical events. This view, Koselleck argues, misses the point that history is always a residue of past subjective experience. Moreover, this empiricist stance places the historian outside their own historical situatedness. Therefore, Koselleck argues for another way of inquiry that does not risk the empiricist fallacy. He instead argues for an “anthropological” distinction between expectation and experience.

8) Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 262 (my emphasis).

9) Ibid., 258.

10) Ibid.

Koselleck shows that processes of modernization – which he relates, among other things, to the rise of Martin Luther and the Reformation – call this embodied “end of time” into question.¹¹ Similarly, this becomes evident in the king’s beheading. Since the king is regarded as the embodiment of power and legitimacy, his elimination also nullifies the symbolic anchor point of that order. Once that role disappears, the tension between expectations and experiences becomes explicit: what previously lay fixed within a shared framework now lies open as a historical problem.

Building on Augustine’s notion that the past remains alive as a “present past,” Koselleck argues that expectation (hope or anxiety) and experience (memory) are co-original, in a manner that parallels Husserl’s claim that every *now* is structured by horizons of “protention” and “retention.”¹² History, within this new constellation, is never merely a record of what happened. Especially in modernity (*Neuzeit*), this relation becomes a methodological starting point: historical meaning is not extracted from facts alone, but from the ways human beings inhabit time through these horizons.

Koselleck treats experience and expectation as formal categories of historical temporality, though in modernity their relation is radically reconfigured. Because this horizon can no longer rely on inherited paradigms, perspective itself becomes fundamentally reoriented. The French Revolution renders this shift particularly visible. When Robespierre declares that it is “upon each to realize his own destiny” and appeals to the “progress of human reason” as the basis of the Revolution, he assigns historical responsibility to individual subjects rather than to tradition or divine order.¹³ This appeal exemplifies the process of individualization that accompanies modern political temporality.

Within this transformation, Koselleck identifies an inversion in the horizon of expectation: the future is no longer anticipated as the continuation of past experiences

11) Although Martin Luther was the instigator, he did not reject the eschatological aspects of the church. Indeed, he exposed the underlying temporal structures embodied in the church. The hegemonial Christian conception of history, prior to Luther’s famous theses functioned eschatologically by delaying the arrival of the Final Judgment. Across various approaches, a clear temporal structure emerges – creation, incarnation, and an eschatological end. *Ibid.*, 13–14.

12) Husserl, *Inner Time Consciousness*.

13) Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 12.

but as something to be actively produced.¹⁴ Acceleration does not merely describe this temporal change; it intensifies contingency and thus generates a demand for forms capable of stabilizing meaning, even if only temporarily. Here, personal experience and the individual's perception of time begin to dominate over inherited temporal frameworks. The future, with its horizon of expectation, is now something each person navigates rather than a collective mythic destiny handed down through ritual.

The political consequences of this temporal transformation extend beyond the individual's horizon of expectation. They also change the circumstances in which collective identities can be formed and sustained. Therefore, social connectedness, such as national identity, must be experienced through a form of self-representation: a "shared history" in which the subject experiences unity through an externalized entity. The emergence of mass citizenship ushers in what George L. Mosse describes as a secular religion.¹⁵ Instead of viewing the nation as an externally constructed entity, it is now seen as an immanent projected transcendence, evident through national parades, and commemorations. In this context, history becomes a medium through which horizons of expectation are projected.

This section has argued that the French Revolution generated a new political-temporal structure. This temporality reconfigured subjects into citizens and displaced history from a pre-given framework to a shared point of reference through which collective identity is articulated. What remains to be shown, however, is how this temporal structure is lived and articulated as a form of collective "we-ness." Addressing this question requires moving beyond the structural account developed here and turning toward a phenomenological analysis of the narrative constitution of "we-ness."

2. Narrative

If modern political temporality no longer derives from an external teleological order but unfolds as an experiential horizon, then it becomes necessary to ask how collective existence is constituted and sustained within that horizon. It is here where David Carr's account of narrative becomes important.

14) Ibid.

15) Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 8.

In *Time, Narrative, and History* Carr shows how narrative and coordinated practice generate a “we” that can persist through time. Much like Koselleck, Carr argues that people are entangled (*verwebt*) in history. As such, history constitutes the horizon of the lifeworld within which the past is lived and made meaningful.¹⁶ Therefore, if history is the means through which our communities are constructed, there has to be a constitutive element.

According to Carr, narrative is the primary means through which the experience of time is organized. Drawing on Husserl’s schema of inner-time consciousness (primal impression, retention, and protention), Carr suggests that immediate experience becomes meaningful only within a structured temporal horizon, formed by prior experience and ongoing anticipation.¹⁷ A simple example is music: while I hear independent sounds, my experience of the composition depends on retaining the sounds I have just heard. The same applies to the future, for instance in the unpredictability of atonal music.¹⁸ The point is that within our temporal experience, there is always a residue of the past that shapes our anticipation of what is to come. When we try to reconstruct these fleeting experiences after the fact, narration becomes the only way to do so.¹⁹

If I, through the use of narration, can reconstitute something I have experienced, there should also be an account of the potentiality of constitution. For Carr, following Heidegger, temporality is not merely a form of experience but an ontological structure of *Dasein* itself. Through “*Entwurf*,” existence is always “being-ahead-of-itself,” projecting possibilities that already shape action before it occurs.²⁰ For instance, when I am driving a car, my actions are already engaged with a situation that has yet to come. My being is therefore already projected beyond the *now*. In this way, narrative is possible because experience is structured by projective temporality.

Carr adds that, underlying both the agentic and the experiential dimensions, temporal existence presupposes a “world.” This world is affirmed in the encounter with

16) Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 3.

17) *Ibid.*, 4.

18) *Ibid.*, 28.

19) “Passive temporal experience has as a crucial component this protentional forward reference in virtue of which present and past are experienced as a function of what will be” (*Ibid.*, 29).

20) *Ibid.*, 39.

the other: “The other is in *my* world, but as a consciousness he is also *for* the world and the world for him as well as for me.”²¹ These situation-bound groups, emerging in fleeting moments, are what Carr calls the “intrusion of circumstances”; the very act of witnessing a terrible event can itself generate a temporary collective among those present.

Moreover, Carr’s intrusion of circumstances explains how a minimal, situation-bound “we” can arise. But revolutionary politics depends on more than such fleeting formations. It requires a collective subject that claims unity and legitimacy on a national scale. In this context, Rousseau’s *volonté générale* names a problem of manifestation: how can “the people” appear to itself as one agent? Mosse suggests that this presupposes a sacralization of the body politic: the worship of the people indicates the worship of the nation, and modern politics expresses this unity through a political style that functions, according to Mosse, as a “secularized religion.”²² The general will, in this view, cannot remain an abstract principle. It needs performativity, forms of public appearance that let individuals experience themselves as part of a “we.”

The question of the general will is, in a certain sense, a question of identification with the nation. In this respect, Carr’s account follows the idea that members of a group identify with the group both in attitude and in action, thereby giving rise to a collective “we.”²³ Carr explains that “in saying ‘we,’ the individual identifies himself with the group and this, in a Husserlian sense of the world, constitutes the group as comprising those who similarly, in the relevant context, say ‘we.’”²⁴ Since, by means of *Dasein*’s orientation, action already presents itself as a projection, it can be stated that the utterance “we” refers to a structure that is not exhausted by language. The paradox of the “we” is that it is uttered by a singular speaker, while referring to a plural form of being. A schema is therefore needed that can clarify the phenomenological structure underlying the “we.” Carr argues that beneath the group there lies a pre-thematic “we.” This pre-thematic “we,” sedimented through shared historical experience, functions as an implicit horizon through which groups operate.

21) Ibid., 131.

22) Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 4.

23) Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 134.

24) Ibid., 133.

These shared historical events are not constantly present as a theme within groups; they often remain implicit and are only actualized episodically, enabling meaningful forms of “we”-contact. It is precisely in practices of collective reflection (*Besinnung*) that such layers of shared past are reinforced and renewed. Through rituals and public forms of appearance, the group is, as it were, reconstituted. One example is the commemoration of the Second World War, in which ritual repertoires bring the past into the present and allow individuals to experience themselves as participating in a larger “we.” Carr shows how shared stories and practices sustain a pre-thematic “we,” but he leaves undetermined the symbolic elements that allow a “we” to manifest itself. This suggests that collective reflection does not always rely on explicit meaning construction but can also be generated through ritual design. Yet this narratively constructed “we” still lacks a body: it explains how groups understand themselves, but not how this unity becomes sensuously present and ritually binding. This is where symbolic form and Severi’s chimera principle become indispensable.

3. Symbolic Forms and Chimera

What remains unclear in Carr’s account, however, is how such formations become sensuously present. This section, therefore, broadens his narratological perspective by incorporating an iconographic dimension. Such an approach is necessary because it helps us to understand how symbols and rituals function in the formation of groups. If group formation involves both a linguistic element, articulated through the utterance “we,” and an iconographic element, manifested in symbols and ritual practices, then we gain a fuller understanding of how political communities are constituted. This is especially important because, within this fragile constellation, symbolic forms can also be instrumentalized for political ends.

Carlo Severi’s *The Chimera Principle* offers a paradigm for understanding the interplay between word and image. A central aspect of his book concerns the interaction between image and mnemonic techniques. According to Severi, methods and theories that treat narration as the primary model for memorization are incomplete. He asserts that they falsely assume that language passively mirrors reality, thereby misrepresenting social, historical, and epistemological processes.²⁵ This problem of

25) Severi, *The Chimera Principle*, 26–27.

logocentrism gives rise to a paradoxical situation in which philosophy remains methodologically open to investigating the experiential, ontological, and non-linguistic dimensions of being, while access to these dimensions at the level of reflection and justification nevertheless depends on linguistic mediation.

To be clear, unlike Paul Ricoeur, Carr does not argue for a linguistic-ontological primacy according to which temporality is constituted or disclosed only through language. Rather, he maintains that temporal understanding exceeds linguistic articulation at the level of lived experience, even though epistemologically our reflective certainty and communicable knowledge of temporality can only be achieved through language.²⁶ Severi, by contrast, proposes a new paradigm for understanding the interplay of word and image: “A combination of words and images that forms a memory technique, particularly within the context of ritual discourse, constitutes the alternative, that in many societies has prevailed.”²⁷ He terms this the *chimera principle*.

Although Carr rightly argues that narrativity is inherent in the objects of history itself, his analysis displays an implicit bias by equating this “structure of experience” too directly with a linguistic structure. More precisely, Carr assigns narrativity explanatory priority at the level of analysis, so that non-linguistic media appear mainly as supports or expressions of an underlying narrative synthesis. For Carr, language can therefore appear as the privileged organizing principle of action.²⁸ As a result, the role of non-linguistic memory images remains underexposed.²⁹ With Severi, however, we can argue that the “narrative horizon” is not purely linguistic, but is based on a complex iconography of memory. The image not only “escapes” language; it precedes it as an independent medium of meaning. On this view, mnemonic stability is often produced by assemblages of words, images, and gestures that are not reducible to linguistic narration.

26) Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 64.

27) Severi, *The Chimera Principle*, 26.

28) Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 64.

29) The dependence on language becomes problematic when enquiring into symbolism. Or as Johan Huizinga writes: “From the point of view of causal thinking, symbolism is like a mental short circuit. The mind does not seek the connection between two things along the hidden twists and turns of their causal relationship, but finds it suddenly through a leap, not as a connection of cause and effect, but as one of meaning and purpose.” Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 195.

At this point, one might object that Carr could simply reply that rituals and images are themselves readable as narratives, and that this remains within the scope of narratological analysis. This reply nevertheless misses what is distinctive about rituals. Rituals do not only tell, but also bind through repeatable, non-textual forms such as gestures, rhythms, forms, and aesthetic symbols. In other words, even if a ritual can be narrated, this narration, being conducted *ex post*, does not say something about the constitutive force with which the rituals are experienced. Severi's chimera principle captures this by treating the fusion of words, images, and gestures as a technique that stabilizes memory and makes a collective unity sensuously present.³⁰ What is at stake here is not simply the symbolic expression of a temporal order already constituted in language, but the constitutive role of symbolic forms in shaping temporal experience itself.

As I mentioned earlier, the temporal rupture described by Koselleck calls not only for a historically new form of consciousness, but also for practices that make this new temporal order visible, tangible, and shareable. In this sense, rituals and festivals function as performative media: through repeatable forms, gestures, and symbols, they translate meaning into a shared, affectively sustained experience of "we-ness." Modern temporality (*Neuzeit*) is therefore not only narratively structured, but also practically enacted and sensuously experienced. The use of festivals to produce civic unity during the French Revolution is a strong example of the "new time."³¹

3.1. Festival-Time

For a new political temporality to truly take shape, it could not remain merely at the level of ideas. It would need to manifest itself in visible, tangible, and shareable forms. This is precisely why Ozouf's analysis of revolutionary celebrations is significant: it demonstrates how the new order became tangible and sensory.

30) Severi, *The Chimera Principle*, 26–27.

31) As Mona Ozouf writes: "The festival, intended to mark an entry into a world of light, at the same time dismissed the old world," and "it is revolution that sees utopian forms as desirable and reads in them a project for a new world. It is revolution that attributes to utopia an idea that is utterly alien to it: that there are, in the course of human history, propitious and unpropitious times, and that 'good' events need to ripen just like good fruit." Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 8, 33.

The emergence of a “new time” – in which all remnants of the old monarchical regime were to be swept away – opened up, as Mona Ozouf argues in *Festivals and the French Revolution*, a “utopian ideal” of radical beginning: “To destroy in order to renew: two operations with which everything becomes possible.”³² This utopian view, enriched by Enlightenment thought, reflects the logic of the *tabula rasa* as a deliberate erasure of the past as the condition for the emergence of a new temporal horizon.³³ What is significant here is not merely the specific contents, but the question of how it was made experientially available. Revolutionary festivals were the primary answer to this question. Through the enclosed world of the festival, the new revolutionary temporal horizon could unfold. What matters here, is less the administrative diversity of these festivals than the symbolic malleability through which they made the new political order experientially visible.

What is particularly interesting, however, is that despite their place within a revolutionary logic of rupture and renewal, these festivals were marked by an eclectic symbolic character. As Ozouf shows, the symbolism of union was assembled through an expansive borrowing of motifs, forms, and figures:

A whole symbolism of union was worked out, with much use of Concords, clasped hands, triangles whose points represented, as at Cherbourg, the Law, the King, and the People, arms supporting one another, “one with the colors of the troops of the line, the other with the colors of the National Guard.” But it was a symbolism without principles, one that borrowed from everything and everybody. From antiquity – an antiquity that was itself syncretic, in which the solidity of the Doric capital shamelessly surmounted a Corinthian column – it borrowed temples, obelisks, triumphant columns, and, plundering the funerary theme, the pyramids of false marble that flanked the altar of the fatherland. From ancient iconographic motifs, which had recently come back into fashion, it took globes and spheres. From the century’s exoticism it borrowed the Chinese pavilion, which inspired the shape of the canopy over the altars of the fatherland,

32) Ibid., 34.

33) Ibid.

and also the pomegranates and orange trees, with their “odoriferous flowers,” which spread their petals over the steps. From Christian legend it took the angels that surmounted the altars and from learned allegory the veiled women bearing branches of bay, compasses, mirrors, feathers, vases, and incense, symbols that had to be deciphered, like so many Concords, Philosophies, Histories, and Religions.³⁴

One of the most remarkable aspects of this passage is the force with which Ozouf shows how a multiplicity of heterogeneous and seemingly unrelated materials are brought together and endowed with new meaning. It is therefore striking that, although she clearly demonstrates the eclectic character of revolutionary festivals, she does not fully draw out its implications. For the revolutionary break did not produce a literal *tabula rasa* in which all inherited symbols suddenly disappeared. The death of Louis XVI may have marked a decisive political rupture, but it did not erase the symbolic world from which revolutionary actors had to work. Precisely in the appropriation and recombination of existing images, forms, and ritual elements, a different logic becomes visible, one that Ozouf describes but does not fully conceptualize.

It is precisely this eclectic aspect, described by Ozouf as a symbolism “without principle,” in which a new principle becomes visible. For this apparent disorder is not simply a sign of incoherence, nor is it unique to the French Revolution. As Severi argues, “thought, in order to become discovery and inventiveness, must always react against a tradition composed of accepted ideas.”³⁵ In this sense, symbolic invention does not arise out of nothing, but through a reworking of inherited forms. The appropriation of diverse symbols was therefore not accidental. It was necessary precisely because these symbols were already bound up with the dominant ideas and ways of thinking within the social world from which the Revolution emerged. As Severi further notes, many ideas become part of tradition not through inertia, but most forcefully where conflict is most intense.³⁶ The point, then, is that symbols are never fully closed. Their very incompleteness makes them available for recombination and reinvestment with new meaning.

34) Ibid., 52.

35) Ibid.

36) Ibid.

Because symbols are never fully closed, they remain open to new and heterogeneous investment. Applied to Ozouf's example, this suggests that the rupture internal to the old order created an opening in which symbols could be recombined and invested with new meanings. This helps explain how such a diverse and seemingly disordered collection of elements could be brought together within revolutionary festivals. Although this eclectic moment does not yet amount to a full stabilization of meaning, it does reveal a movement toward symbolic consolidation. What appears as chaos, in other words, is better understood as evidence of the openness of meaning itself. Severi captures this through the notion of the index: an incomplete but salient element that points to what is absent, and that, precisely through ritual repetition, can become anchored in collective memory.³⁷

The contingent character of symbolic meaning creates an openness through which symbolic constitution becomes possible. Meaning is not simply given in the symbol, but requires activation through ritual forms of inscription. Ozouf's analysis does not fully demonstrate such ritual anchorage, which is understandable given her insistence on the chaotic and eclectic nature of revolutionary festivals. This dynamic becomes clearer, however, if we return to the earlier example of World War II commemorations in Europe. In many European cities, public monuments commemorate the destruction of the war. In Rotterdam, Ossip Zadkine's "The Destroyed City" depicts a human figure with raised arms and a void in its chest. The work does not present meaning transparently; rather, its cubist fragmentation produces a visual disruption that resists immediate legibility and calls for interpretation. In Severi's terms, such an image can be understood as chimeric: it condenses multiple symbolic registers into a single perceptual form. Yet the force of the monument lies not only in its visual composition, but in the ritual repetition through which its meaning is annually reinscribed. During the May 4th commemoration, the monument becomes more than a static object of remembrance. It serves as a performative site in which the memory of wartime destruction is reactualized and linked to the reproduction of a shared civic and national identity. What the image presents as an open symbolic constellation is thus provisionally stabilized through ritual practice.

37) Severi, *The Chimera Principle*, 67.

The chimera principle allows us to see how the widening gap between experience and expectation, which Koselleck diagnoses, is processed not only linguistically, through new forms of historical narration, but also iconographically, through the constellation of symbols. Chimeric images bring heterogeneous symbolic elements together in a single perceptual figure, whose very inner tension resonates with the modern experience of an open, and contested future (i.e., tension between experience and expectation). Because such images are ritually repeated (e.g., parades) and publicly displayed, they stabilize the contingent present as a recognizable “now” without resolving the underlying temporal rupture. They make that temporal gap sensuously present. In this sense, the revolutionary festivals expose the openness of symbols, but this openness becomes fully intelligible only through the periodic ritual reinscription by which a shared temporal horizon is inhabited.



Unveiling of Ossip Zadkine's sculpture 'De verwoeste stad,' plein 1940, Rotterdam, May 15, 1953. Nationaal Archief Photo Collection, The Hague.

What is at stake here is more than the symbolic expression of a temporal order that is constituted elsewhere in language. Chimeric symbols participate in the constitution of temporal experience itself. Whereas narrative retrospectively reconstitutes temporal experience through plots and other narrative devices, symbolic constellations structure the horizon within which action and perception unfold. People live in a ritual environment structured by visual and symbolic forms such as flags, monuments, uniforms, and gestures, which shape both what they remember and what they expect. This environment is shaped both strategically, through the deliberate appropriation of symbols by political actors, and more organically through the shared practices of those who live together. Both dimensions are constitutive: they do not simply represent a pre-existing “we” in time.

Therefore, the temporal horizon is never fully linguistic. It is entangled with words and images, stories and chimeras. Political philosophers who treat political temporality as something that can be understood only at the level of discourse overlook the ways in which ritual and visual elements help organize collective experience prior to, and alongside, narration. Narrativity remains indispensable for retrospective reflection and justification, but it does not exhaust the constitution of lived historical time. That constitution also depends on symbolic practices that give collective experience rhythm, salience, and sensible presence.

Conclusion

The central thesis of this article is that modern re-temporalization, as described by Koselleck, externalizes our expectations and experiences, making it necessary to perform the new political unity rather than simply presuppose it. This constellation, demonstrated by the revolutionary festivals, produces a form of “we-ness” that is narrative, through reflection and justification, but also symbolic, through visual and chimeric elements grounded in the appropriation of existing symbols. These visual-symbolic forms are not only reconstitutive, in the sense of helping to make temporal experience intelligible like language does; they are constitutive. They actively create a shared “now” within the contingent and fleeting temporal horizon of modernity.

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