Journal of Historical Geography 84 (2024) 27–36

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Historical Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhg

Where is the past? Time in historical geography

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 30 October 2023
Received in revised form
20 March 2024
Accepted 22 March 2024

Keywords:
Onto-epistemology
Past
Time
Specious present
Historical geography
Presentism
Practice

ABSTRACT

Despite human geography's sophisticated analyses and overwhelming focus on space, time in its various guises has certainly not been absent in the literature. The same cannot be said for historical geography, which is particularly interesting as its main concern is purportedly with space and place in and across other times. In response, this paper examines the ontology and epistemology of time in "modern" historical geography since the early 2000s and does so in discussion with recent developments in theory and philosophy of history, specifically the notion of 'new presentism'. An idea which broadly posits that the past and the future do not exist as separate categories but are always projections of specific presents, they exist as the present's own immanent modes. This is achieved by adopting Robert Dodgshon's concept of the 'specious present' in order to (1) affirm, albeit on different epistemological grounds, the partiality, situatedness and contingency of historical geographies as well as the embodied and performative nature of archival labour; (2) offer an accessible conceptual tool in thinking about the role of time in the practice of future historical geography research; and finally (3) suggest that thinking historical geography as a practice in and through the 'specious present' makes questions of ethics, accountability, and politics of knowledge production both central and inevitable, as opposed to just being examples of "good practice" or worse still, being completely sidestepped by virtue of an imagined spatio-temporal distance between the bygone past and the present moment of research.

> Time *means* more to historical geographers than to most other geographers.[1]
> *Hugh Prince, 1978*

In one of the most evocative opening lines of twentieth century English literature, J.P. Hartley writes: 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there'. To what extent the past *really* is foreign, is for my purposes beside the point; what I am more interested in, is the implication contained in that endlessly cited sentence, that the past is not simply elsewhen, but also elsewhere.[2] Often when the past is invoked in everyday speech or popular culture, it is figured and imagined as a particular place one goes to, or a space in which something or someone was, or indeed still is. It is surely no coincidence that to *go* back or forward in time, be it in Doc Brown's souped-up DeLorean or H.G. Wells' part nickel, part ivory contraption, one must travel to get there.[3] Apart from, perhaps the Tardis (though even the famous blue police box is in fact a space*craft*), or its more recent incarnation in the form of a Hot Tub, the time machine is in western imagination often constructed as some sort of moving vehicle that ultimately does the job of temporal transportation. In Terry Gilliam's 1981 adventure tale *Time Bandits*, the technology used by the time travelling dwarfs is literally a map. In these spatio-temporal imaginings of the world, the past is to be understood as spatialised time, ontologically separate from the now and thus traversable.

Putting the wonderfully generative time travel fiction aside, the question I want to ask in this paper is: where is the past in historical geography? The short answer I offer, it is in the here

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[1] Hugh Prince, 'Time and Historical Geography' in *Timing space and spacing time*, ed. by T. Carlstein, D. Parkes and N.J. Thrift (London: Edward Arnold, 1978) p. 17. Emphasis in the original.

[2] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[3] In English at the very least. Interestingly, while most European languages stay close to the English formulation of 'time' and 'machine', e.g., 'Stroj času' in Czech, 'tijd machine' in Dutch, 'Zeitmaschine' in German, 'macchina del tempo' in Italian and 'machine à remonter le temps' in French, my native Croatian opts for 'vremeplov', a compound of two nouns: 'time' and 'sailing', or alternatively the verb 'to sail', thus doubly foregrounding the spatial element of time travel.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2024.03.010

and now; but I do so through a consideration of historical time, to argue that how we understand the relationship between past and present (and ultimately the future) is primarily determined by our understanding of time. In other words, this paper examines the ontology and epistemology of time in "modern" historical geography since the early 2000s and concomitantly, the sub-discipline's relation to what the French historian François Hartog calls the 'regimes of historicity' – the ways in which the past, present, and future are conceptualised (explicitly or otherwise) as part of their investigations.[4]

Despite geography's sophisticated analyses and overwhelming focus on space, time in its various guises has certainly not been absent in the literature.[5] While these debates have by now "trickled down" so to speak, into some subdisciplines such as social geography, the same cannot be said for historical geography.[6] This is particularly interesting as historical geography's main concern is purportedly with space and place in and across other times or as *The Dictionary of Human Geography* defines it: 'a sub-discipline of human geography concerned with the geographies of the past and with the influence of the past in shaping the geographies of the present and the future'.[7] Apart from Matthew Kurtz's chapters in the *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, the question for the most part remains unattended.[8]

What makes my question all the more relevant is that ever since the late 1980s there have been calls to 'bring history back' to human geography with some arguing that doing so would even mean putting into question any kind of distinction of historical geography as a separate subdiscipline.[9] While it might be argued that such calls have been to greater or lesser extent answered, scholars today still seem to be making similar pleas. As recently as a couple of years ago, Van Sant, Hennessy, Domosh and others called for geography's increased attention to the 'theories and methods involved in historical analyses', asking specifically what is at stake in our understanding of the relationship between history and the present.[10] Surely then, geographers in a subdiscipline for whom 'time means more' than to others, and which have traditionally been concerned with the 'historical dimension in geography', should be best placed to offer some answers, and yet they have so far remained silent on the issue – at least as far as time is concerned.[11] It is to this invitation that the paper is responding and does so in conversation with recent developments in the theory and philosophy of history.[12] Specifically, I engage with ideas surrounding the notion of new or progressive 'presentism' which broadly posit that 'the past and the future do not exist as separate categories but are always projections of specific presents, they exist as the present's own immanent modes.'[13]

This is achieved by building on Robert Dodgshon's arguments on the speciousness of the present that acknowledges that 'all pasts, like all futures, are never imagined outside their moment of narration.'[14] I do so for three reasons, wherein lay the paper's main contributions. One, to affirm, albeit on different onto-epistemological grounds, the partiality, situatedness and contingency of historical geographies as well as the embodied and performative nature of archival labour (both on the researcher's and the archivist's part) that goes into their production – a set of ideas that have by now become commonplace in historical geography. Second, I present it as an accessible conceptual toolkit in thinking about the role of time in the practice of future historical geography research without the immediate sematic burden that is carried by a reappropriation of the traditionally suspect term that is presentism. And finally, I suggest that thinking historical geography as a practice in and through the 'specious present' makes questions of ethics, accountability, and politics of knowledge production both central and inevitable, as opposed to being examples of "good practice" or worse still, being sidestepped by virtue of an imagined spatio-temporal distance between the bygone past and the present moment of research.

In terms of structure, after offering a brief overview on the purchase of time in human geography more widely, I start the paper by following Kurtz's account to map out the ways in which historical geography specifically treated time since its establishment in the inter-war years of the early twentieth century.[15] I then move onto a discussion of the archive as the quintessential place of modern historical-geographical knowledge production, and which has received considerable critical reflection across the subdiscipline over the past twenty years. I do so to sketch out some of the reasons, I believe, historical geography neglected time in favour of power (or more precisely, spatialised power) for its critique of the

[4] François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (Columbia University Press, 2015).

[5] Mike Crang, 'Time: Space', in *Spaces of Geographical Thought: Deconstructing Human Geography's Binaries*, ed. by P.J. Cloke and R. J. Johnston (Sage Publications, 2005) pp. 199–220; Mike Crang, 'Time', in *The Sage Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, ed. by J. Agnew and D.M. Livingstone (London: SAGE, 2011) pp. 331–43; J. D. Dewsbury, 'Embodying Time, Imagined and Sensed', *Time & Society*, 11 (2002), 147–54; Robert A. Dodgshon, 'Geography's Place in Time', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 90 (2008), 1–15; Robert A. Dodgshon, 'In What Way Is the World Really Flat? Debates over Geographies of the Moment', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 26.2 (2008), 300–314; *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, ed. by J. May and N. Thrift (Routledge, 2001); Doreen Massey, 'Space-Time, "Science" and the Relationship between Physical Geography and Human Geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 24 (1999) 261–76; D. Massey, *For Space* (SAGE Publications, 2005); Allan Pred, 'Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time- Geography of Becoming Places', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 74 (1984) 279–97.

[6] Ho, E., 'Social Geography I: Time and Temporality', *Progress in Human Geography,* 45 (2021) 1668–1677.

[7] Michael Heffernan, 'Historical Geography', in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, ed. by D. Gregory and others, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 332.

[8] Matthew Kurtz, 'Time and Historical Geography' in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. by R. Kitchin and N. Thrift, (Elsevier, 2009), pp. 259–265. Matthew Kurtz, 'Time and Historical Geography' in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. by Audery Kobayashi, (Elsevier, 2020), pp. 265–269.

[9] Felix Driver, 'The historicity of human geography', *Progress in Human Geography,* 12 (1988) p. 497.

[10] Van Sant, L., Hennessy, E., Domosh, M., Arefin, M. R., Hennessy, E., McClintock, N., Mollett, S. Historical geographies of, and for, the present. *Progress in Human Geography* 44 (2020) p. 169.

[11] Alan R. H. Baker, *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 3.

[12] This is not to ignore similar debates taking place across the humanities and the social sciences, be it in conversation with philosophy, feminist new materialist thinking or quantum physics. Narrating my argument in relation to history as a discipline specifically is intended to build on as well as complicate the traditional arguments and conversations that seem to have been a staple of historical geography throughout the twentieth century. For a good overview of these debates see: Nikki Fairchild, 'Multiverse, Feminist Materialist Relational Time, and Multiple Future(s): (Re)configuring Possibilities for Qualitative Inquiry' *Qualitative Inquiry* (2023) online first; Andrea Doucet, '"Time is not time is not time": A feminist ecological approach to clock time, process time, and care responsibilities', *Time & Society* 32 (2023) 434–460.

[13] Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier, 'Introduction: Rethinking Historical Time', in *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism,* ed. by Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier, (Bloomsbury, 2019) p. 2.

[14] Dodgshon, 'In what way is the world really flat?', p. 302.

[15] While placing the birth of the subdiscipline in the twentieth century ignores the importance of "proto-historical" geographers from the preceding century, the latter ones were undoubtedly distinct in their objectives, methods and style as well as owing 'their allegiance to this discipline as teachers in newly-established university departments of geography.' Michael Heffernan and Karen M. Morin, 'Between History and Geography', in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Geography,* ed. by M. Domosh, M. Heffernan and C.W.J. Withers, (SAGE, 2020) p. 26.

'blunt, matter-of-fact worldview' of Historical inquiry that contrary to Carolyn Steedman's claim, still believes that the past does, in fact, live in the record office.[16]

In the fourth section, I reach out to the literature in the philosophy and theory of history to locate the above moment within wider interdisciplinary trends which sought to rethink the nature of historical analysis more broadly and historiography specifically. Some like Hartog have seen this recent movement towards presentism as a pathological excess of memory studies that begun in the 1980s, eventually inscribing a 'trauma-time' wherein historically marginalised groups – the victim/witness – keep the past afloat in the now.[17] All this happens, we are told, at the cost of erasing the temporal distance that ought to stand at the core of the professional historian's identity, and their (or more precisely and unsurprisingly *his*) claim to authority. Instead, I opt for the politically more progressive understanding of presentism which sees it as an onto-epistemology that has the potential to open up new ways of experiencing time, and thus fold the past, present and future in liberating, if unsettling ways.[18] Finally, I bring the discussion back to historical geography to offer a critical reflection on the practicalities and stakes of adopting some version of this progressive-presentist approach to historical-geographical inquiry.

Before proceeding further, a quick note is warranted regarding my deployment of the terms ontology, epistemology, and their collapsing into onto-epistemology. Within the context of the paper and building on the work of, among others, poststructuralist and new materialist feminist thinkers such as Karen Barad, I use the term onto-epistemology as a way of acknowledging that reality, or what exists (as the traditional concern of ontology) is not simply observed and pre-given but is in fact relationally constructed through, or entangled with, the very processes of knowledge production, or how we can know (as the traditional concern of epistemology) this reality. Where the two terms are used separately, this is to acknowledge that other authors might approach similar questions but through the prism of one or the other.[19] Indeed, the collapsing of the two is partly a consequence of the type of specious approach to the present that the paper ends up advocating for.

What time human geography?[20]

If one delves into the literature on time, regardless of discipline, you quickly learn that it is customary to start with a quote from St Augustine's *Confessions*: 'What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it … I do not know'. Written sometime between 397 and 400 CE, the intent is to pithily demonstrate that time has been a philosophical concern for millennia as well as that despite seeming obvious, time is notoriously difficult to make sense of. This is perhaps partly the reason why, at least according to Crang, human geographers have for the most part treated time 'over-simply'.[21] While this might well be the case, there has certainly been no shortage of recent attempts to re-conceptualise time, in or outwith its onto-epistemological relationships to space. Most prominently, one can think of the work by Doreen Massey, Nigel Thrift, David Harvey, and others, surrounding the conceptual usefulness of holding together notions of time-space and/or space-time from the 1990s and early to mid-2000s; whether to move away from the fixed and rigid understandings of Euclidian and Newtonian space/time or think about particular ways of bringing into dialogue human and physical geographers.[22]

Indeed, Dan Clayton's comprehensive critical overview in the *SAGE Handbook of Human Geography* from only a few years hence is somewhat more forgiving than Crang. Using the multifarious concept of 'transformation' Clayton surveys the conceptual and empirical developments across human geography since the Second World War to map out the multiplicity of ways through which 'questions of time and history have been taken up' in the discipline. What's more, he goes on to detail how 'tussles over the roles of time and space, and the past and present' have a much longer history in the discipline, arguably harking back to such figures as Vidal de la Blanche at the turn of the century. Ultimately, Clayton concludes with a view that not only are history, time and change integral to the study of human geographies, but also that when the relationship between these three is being debated it is done so with an acute appreciation that they can be 'conceived, combined and pulled apart' in a great variety of ways.[23] This certainly rings true to me and it is fair to say that in the ten or so years following Crang's original appraisal in 2005, human geographers started to take time more seriously. Not least because the Anthropocene and our inevitable stride towards climate catastrophe demands a fundamental revaluation of the time-spaces we occupy or indeed hope for in the future. For example, in a recent introduction to a special issue in the *Annals of the AAG* on futures and socioecological transformation Bruce Braun argues that the Anthropocene necessitates a new comprehension of time that encompasses the notion of the past which exerts a lasting influence on the present while also recognizing that time moves in a direction that brings the future closer to the present.[24]

What time historical geography?

While Clayton's survey does encompass historical geography, his concern is not with the subdiscipline specifically, which is where Kurtz's abridged account comes in as a good starting point.[25] Early Anglophone historical geography was characterised by a broad distinction between diachronic approaches practiced in the United States, and synchronic ones in Great Britain. The former

[16] Hayden Lorimer, 'Caught in the Nick of Time: Archives and Fieldwork', in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography,* ed. by D. DeLyser, S. Herbert, S. Aitken, M. Crang and L. McDowel, (SAGE, 2010), p. 250; Carolyn Steedman, 'The space of memory: in an archive', *History of the Human Sciences* 11 (1988) p. 77.

[17] Chris Lorenz, 'Out of time? Some Critical Reflections on François Hartog's Presentism' in Tamm and Olivier, *Rethinking Historical time,* p. 26.

[18] Tamm and Olivier, *Rethinking Historical Time.*

[19] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway; Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning,* (Duke University Press, 2007).

[20] In a 2004 *Progress* article of the same name, Rhys Jones notes that his use of time refers not 'to various notions of time that have been used by geographers' but rather to the historical periods which have been geographers' temporal foci of investigation over the decades. I suppose my concerns are precisely the opposite, so I hope the reader won't mind me appropriating the title in this way. see Rhys Jones, 'What time human geography?', *Progress in Human Geography,* 28 (2004) p. 301.

[21] Crang, 'Time: Space'; 'Time'.

[22] David Harvey, 'Between space and time', *Annals of the AAG,* 80 (1990) pp. 418-34; Massey, 'Space-Time', Massey, *For Space*; May and Thrift, *Timespace*; D. Hornbeck, C. Earle, and C. Rodrigue, 'The Way We Were: Deployments (and Redeployments) of Time in Human Geography' in *Concepts in Human Geography,* ed. by C. Earle, K. Mathewson and M.S. Kenzer (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996) pp. 33–61. For a critical evaluation of this period's 'obsession' with time/space and all its different combinations with or without dashes and capitalisations see Peter Merriman, 'Human geography without time-space', *Trans Inst Br Geogr* 37 (2012) 13–27.

[23] Dan Clayton, 'Transformations', in *The Sage Handbook of Human Geography*, ed. by R. Lee et al. (SAGE, 2014), pp. 150, 156, 172.

[24] Bruce Braun, 'Futures: Imagining Socioecological Transformation—An Introduction', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105 (2015) 239–243.

[25] Kurtz, 'Time in Historical Geography', (2009; 2020). Also, it needs acknowledging that drawing out such boundaries between subdisciplines (either by Kurtz or myself), however porous, involves a fair bit of dragooning, which at times amounts to epistemic violence – a recognition that is, in fact, part of the argument the paper is suggesting.

started with the likes of Derwent Whittlesey in the late 1920s and were by the mid-century formalised in Carl Sauer's investigations of landscape over sequential periods of time and as resulting from both natural and cultural processes. The latter was advocated by H.C. Darby on the other side of the Atlantic. This synchronic alternative involved reconstructing a specific region during a particular time period, thus offering glimpses of geography that capture distinct moments in history, like "slices" from a continuous timeline. The two would eventually be collapsed into a single approach, advocated by Arthur H. Clark in the 1950s, a student of Sauer's. While Norton described these regional and spatial interpretations of geography that dominated the twentieth century 'essentially non-temporal', Kurtz is more generous in his appraisal. He goes on to say that this period was characterised by three 'fairly distinct' temporalities, namely, genetic, reconstructive, and evolutionary. I would on the other hand suggest that these three represented 'fairly distinct' variations on the *same* temporality i.e., while important epistemologically (in terms of how and when to locate landscape), the overall temporal structures, the ontology, stays the same: time is linear, flowing, and progressivist with a clearly defined past, present, and future.[26] Even in Prince's 'Time and Historical Geography' where the opening epigraph originates from, time is still seen as unidirectional and irreversible, within which the past inevitably 'recedes into oblivion'.[27] The real shift happens later.

By the late 1970s, the story goes, new humanism's focus on experience found its geographical expression in the work of Yi Fu Tuan who 'wrote about diverse experiences of time in relation to space as motion, and to place as a pause'.[28] Concurrently, another "less creative" strand rooted in Anthony Giddens' structuration theory manifested itself in versions of Hägerstrand's time-geography. Missing from Kurtz's account and in need of acknowledgment is also the exchange of ideas between the 'geohistorical structuralism' of the French *Annales School* and historical geography, especially the Braudelian sense of different temporalities across the scales of geography, society, and events.[29] Finally, Kurtz continues, since the boom in collective memory research across the humanities and social sciences in the 1990s, geographers have started, to invoke the work of theorists like Walter Benjamin, 'often deploying a disjunctive temporality where time is folded over on itself in lieu of simple progression through a linear continuum'.[30] While not going into too much detail, for Kurtz, the work on ruins more broadly and Caitlin DeSilvey's *Curated Decay* specifically are the most emblematic of this latter shift.[31]

Interestingly, if we take the three edited handbook-like collections that were published in historical geography over the last twenty or so years as a representation of, or at the very least, critical reflections on the state of the subdiscipline, it becomes apparent that there has been little to no engagement with time. While Graham and Nash's 2000 *Modern Historical Geographies* signalled a shift in the subdiscipline's growing interest to 'the ways in which the past is remembered and represented … and the implications which these have for the present', time has not featured in any of the otherwise important discussions, nor can it be found in the index.[32] The same is the case with Morrisey et al.'s 2014 *Key Concepts in Historical Geography,* which with its individual entries on 'development', 'race', 'gender', 'governmentality' and so on, seems like the perfect format for at least a cursory engagement, but again time is not accorded an entry, nor is it mentioned in the index.[33] The story continues even with the most recent two-volume *SAGE Handbook of Historical Geography* edited by Domosh, Heffernan and Withers and which at over a thousand pages does not offer any substantial discussion of the ontology or epistemology of time, nor again, can it be found anywhere in the index.[34]

Moving on to similar appraisals but in a different academic format, the otherwise excellent tripartite publications on 'Historical Geography' by Naylor, Offen and McGeachan from the pages of *Progress* during the same period similarly avoid time as an epistemological or ontological concern.[35] While certainly deserving of a paper in its own right, there is still some value in sketching out some of the reasons why time has for the most part been neglected in historical geography's otherwise very 'introspective' development since the turn of the millennium; if only to foreground the epistemological concerns that historical geographers did take up in its stead.[36]

As such, we might propose that this omission of time stems from much older disciplinary legacies originating in the mid-twentieth century when geographers like Richard Hartshorne made deliberate attempts to establish a clear boundary between geography as a science of 'space relations', and history as that of 'time relations',[37] a distinction that has for a while now been rejected,[38] if it was ever present on the ground. Another point that might be raised is the subdiscipline's apparent reluctance to engage with "Theory" and correspondingly questions of ontology and epistemology, favouring instead empirically heavy approaches – a view that possibly harks back to the subdiscipline's interwar estrangement from the

[26] William Norton, *Historical Analysis in Geography* (London: Logman, 1984) p. 17; Kurtz, 'Time in Historical Geography', (2009) p. 262.

[27] Prince, 'Time and Historical Geography'.

[28] Kurtz, 'Time and Historical Geography', (2020) p. 268.

[29] Denis Smith, 'History, Geography and Sociology; Lessons from the Annales School', *Theory, Culture and Society,* 5 (1988) 137–148.

[30] Kurtz, 'Time in Historical Geography', (2009) pp. 262-3.

[31] Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[32] Graham and Nash, 'The making of modern historical geography', p. 2.

[33] *Key Concepts in Historical Geography*, ed. by John Morrissey, David Nally, Ulf Strohmayer and Yvonne Whelan (SAGE: 2014).

[34] Domosh, Heffernan and Withers, *SAGE Handbook of Historical Geography*. To be completely fair, neither is space accorded an index entry, which calls to mind Ann Stoler's understandings of the 'unwritten'. Stoler categorizes the 'unwritten' into three types: what is commonly known and goes without saying, what couldn't be articulated yet, and what couldn't be expressed at all. At risk of exaggeration, the omission of space might be considered as falling into the first, while that of time in the second category. Ann Stoller, *Along the Archival Grain* (Princeton University Press, 2010) p. 3. This is also not to say that the past, present, or future per se received no attention, quite the contrary, but this has mostly been done through discussions of power/knowledge, representation, evidence, (feminist and post-colonial) politics, memory and so on. What has been missing, is a concerted grappling with the onto-epistemology of the past (and present and future) as expressions of and in relation to time.

[35] Simon Naylor, 'Historical geography: knowledge, in place and on the move', *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (2005) 626–634; 'Historical geography: natures, landscapes, environments', *Progress* 30 (2006) 792–802; 'Historical geography: geographies and historiographies', *Progress* 32 (2008) 265–274; Karl Offen, 'Historical geography I: Vital traditions', *Progress* 36 (2011) 527–540; 'Historical geography II Digital imaginations', *Progress* 37 (2013) 564–577; 'Historical geography III: Climate matters', *Progress* 38 (2014) 476–489; Chery. McGeachan, 'Historical geography I: what remains?' *Progress* 38(6) (2014) 824–837; 'Historical geography II: traces remain' *Progress* 42 (2018) 134–147; 'Historical geography III: hope persists' *Progress* 43 (2019) 351–362.

[36] Brian Graham and Catherine Nash, 'The making of modern historical geography', in *Modern Historical Geographies,* ed. by Brian Graham and Catherine Nash (Pearson Education Limited, 2000) pp. 3–4.

[37] Chris Philo, 'History, Geography and the "Still Greater Mystery" of Historical Geography', in *Human Geography; Society, Space and Social Science* ed. by D. Gregory, R. Martin and G. Smith (MacMillan, 1994) pp. 255-6. See also J. M. Blaut, 'Space and Process', *Professional Geographer*, 13 (1961): 1–17.

[38] Alan Baker, 'An historico-geographical perspective on time and space and on period and place', *Progress in Human Geography* 5 (1981) p. 439.

explicitly political (read imperial) purposes of its predecessors, rooted in discredited theories of environmental determinism and scientific racialism, or indeed the more recent 'source-bound empiricism' of post-war regional geographies as well as the "quantitative revolution" that followed.[39] For example, in his 1997 reconsideration of the relationship between geography and history, Leonard Guelke is unambiguous in saying that the subdiscipline's greats such as Sauer, Darby, Clark and Meinig (all influential scholars and teachers) mostly avoided philosophy of history or wider questions of historical knowledge, in favour of what was essentially an 'empirical and nontheoretical' account of nature.[40] This explanation too however breaks down quickly, especially if we consider that since the early 1970s, and perhaps most notably with Cole Harris' 'Theory and synthesis in historical geography' the quantitative-analytical and theory-blind positivism of the subdiscipline have been put into question.[41] Another often cited turning point could be associated with the publication of Gregory's *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* in 1978, and there is no denying that the subdiscipline hence saw increasing engagement with social and critical theory, while the ensuing import of Marxist, feminist, post-structuralist and post-colonial ideas ultimately led to a subfield that has by now become 'increasingly eclectic' in its conceptual approaches and methodologies without any one prevailing orthodoxy.[42] Tellingly, already in 2001 Shein starts his introduction to a *Historical Geography* special issue on new directions and approaches by acknowledging that there has been 'no shortage of theoretical and methodological statements about the practice of historical geography', at the same time berating the naïve empiricism of those who would rather 'simply "get on" with the business of interrogating past places'.[43] Part of this might also have to do, Shein continues, with a greater increase in scholars self-identifying as historical geographers but coming from outside the "traditional" historical geography training programmes.[44] Even earlier though, this "uncanonical" diversity led some like Philo, to call for a renaming of contemporary endeavours made by historical geographers as 'geographical history', a reclamation of a term which better captured, he says, efforts to 'show the decisive works of (worldly) geography *in* (the making of) history' – a view that has since only solidified.[45]

But there is also one other, and I think more compelling reason why modern historical geography specifically avoided dealing with time; it just did not have to. And it did not have to, I suggest, because instead of time, it had power (or more precisely the power/knowledge/space nexus) as its guiding epistemological principle in navigating the relationship between past and present. In that sense, it does seem like historical geographers have over the last thirty years heeded rather well Graham and Nash's observation expressed at the turn of the millennium:

> '… instead of simply attempting to uncover or reconstruct the geographies of the past, historical research involves acknowledging the ways in which interpretation is context bound and power laden'.[46]

This becomes especially apparent in one very particular epistemic space that has received substantial conceptual, and methodological reflection from historical geographers in recent years. Cue the archive!

The archive, power, and geographical history

Carolyn Steedman observed already towards the end of the 1990s that the archive is a place empty of the past; it contains the past's material fragments, but the past does not 'in fact live in the record office, but is rather, *gone*'.[47] Historical geographers have for a while now been operating on this principle that the archive is no longer merely a storage of history, wherein the detached and neutral researcher, through an objective and positivist inquiry conducts 'mechanistic and systematic' searches as a result of which 'data about the past is uncovered'.[48] More than simply denoting any one physical site or space, the archive becomes conceptualised (mostly via Foucault and, rightly or wrongly, Derrida) as a wider epistemological mode of *reason*, a *process* and *practice* of knowledge production, a 'verb as well as a noun', which be it state records or a museum collection, through classification and categorisation, ultimately seeks to impose order.[49] Influenced by decades of post-structuralist, feminist and post-colonial thought, the erstwhile view of the archive as a 'passive storehouse of old stuff', has been replaced by an understanding that sees it as an active site 'where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed'.[50] Power permeates the archive, all the way from the front gates to its deepest nooks and crannies, the drawers, the bookshelves, and cabinets holding the judiciously selected items. Schwartz and Cook have influentially argued that archives have the

> power to make records of certain events and ideas and not of others, power to name, label, and order records to meet business, government, or personal needs, power to preserve the record, power to mediate the record, power over access, power over individual rights and freedoms, over collective memory, and national identity.[51]

Accordingly, much of the methodological, and by extension epistemological and historiographical, discussion around archives has been dominated by considerations of absence and partiality, with the archive being figured as a space of 'fragments', 'traces',

[39] Heffernan and Morin, 'Between History and Geography', pp. 26-7; Heffernan, 'Historical Geography', p. 333.

[40] Leonard Guelke, 'The Relations Between Geography and History Reconsidered', *History and Theory* 36 (1997) p. 217.

[41] Cole Harris, 'Theory and synthesis in historical geography', *The Canadian Geographer,* XV (1971) 157–172. It is worth noting that according to Harris himself, when he was advocating for the role of theory in geographical analysis, such "Theorists" like Michel Foucault or Edward Said were not what he was thinking of. Rather, his was an approach rotted in a 'habit of the mind'; 'a habit that falls back not on models, not on technique, not on covering laws, but on creative, restless knowledgeable curiosity'. Cole Harris, 'Classics in human geography revisited', *Progress in Human Geography* 20 (1996) p. 200.

[42] Heffernan, 'Historical Geography', p. 335.

[43] Richard Shein, 'Replacing the Past?', *Historical Geography* 29 (2001) p. 7.

[44] Shein, 'Replacing the Past', pp. 9–10. Originally trained in cultural studies and critical theory and currently identifying as a cultural-historical geographer that is at the same time fairly well embedded in the subdiscipline's institutional networks, I suppose I too might be a more recent expression of the same trend that Shein and his colleagues were observing at the beginning of the 2000s.

[45] Philo, 'History, Geography'; Chris Philo, 'Review of: 130 Years of Historical Geography at Cambridge 1888–2018, Alan R. H. Baker, Iain S. Black and Robin A. Butlin', *Journal of Historical Geography* 67 (2020) p. 107.

[46] Graham and Nash, 'The making of modern historical geography', pp. 2–3.

[47] Steedman, 'The space of memory', p. 77; original emphasis.

[48] Lorimer, 'Caught in the nick of time', p. 250.

[49] Miles Ogborn, 'Archive' in *The SAGE Handbook of Geographical Knowledge* ed. by J. Agnew and D.N. Livingstone (SAGE, 2011) p. 88. On how Derrida has often been (mis)placed within this story, see Kurtz, 'Time and Historical Geography', (2009) p. 181.

[50] Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, records, and power: The making of modern memory', *Archival Science* 2 (2002) 1–19.

[51] Schwartz and Cook, 'Archives, records, and power', p. 5.

'ghosts' and 'hope'.[52] The resulting tasks were then either a political *recovery* of previously marginalised voices, or one of *animation* that attempted 'to bring these fragments to life'.[53] The latter specifically sought to 'enliven historical geographical inquiry' more broadly through a whole host of new, creative, and experimental methods, sources, and practices.[54] The ultimate result, in Forsyth's words, is that the archive becomes 'less a site for retaining the past, and more a space for creative potential in the telling of the past'.[55] As a consequence, it can be argued that the power/knowledge/space nexus (and its various expressions through memory, representation, identity and so on) came to dominate understandings of the relationship between past and present, and while it did so productively, it was still at the expense of other onto-epistemic frameworks, such as time.

There is absolutely no doubt as to the importance of these early and continued interventions, and historical geography's reckoning with the archive produced a generation of important and hugely influential work (a great deal of which I have already referenced above). However, while the emergence of the modern state in the early to mid-1800s is regularly acknowledged in the origin story of the archive, what is often left out, at least in geography's telling, is the contemporaneous development of History as an academic discipline and alongside it, the 'modern regime of historicity' i.e., the idea that time is linear, progressively developing and open-ended, within which the Historian emerges as a unique figure that can 'clarify the past to an audience in the present in the light of the future'.[56] Even in Benedict Anderson's seminal theory of the nation-state the changing apprehension of time takes a central role in the construction of this modern 'imagined community', as the new nation rejects the old Christian simultaneity of 'past and future in an instantaneous present'. Instead, having the nation as a 'sociological organism' move *through* 'homogenous, empty' time becomes sine qua non of its constitution.[57] The nation-state needs History to tell and legitimate its origin story, which in turn needs the archive to secure it practically and materially. Drawing on the work of archivist educator and theorist Terry Eastwood, the historian Stefan Tanaka is unambiguous on this point: 'The modern archive was conceived to support this new understanding of history'.[58]

In other words, leaving out the co-constitutive relationship between time and History from the origin story of the archive risks losing out on a potentially very productive onto-epistemic framework which has at least since the 2010s been central to History's reckoning with method and historiography.[59] In a similar vein, I want to (re)introduce time as an onto-epistemological concern within historical geographic research, and in what follows I proceed to flesh out some of the recent developments across theory and philosophy of history that started to question modern temporal relationships, to emphasise the potential purchase these might have for the subdiscipline going forward.

Time in history and the history of time

If one were to summarise this modern regime of historicity as succinctly as possible, then the combination of two pithy quotes from key nineteenth century historians, Jules Michelet's '*l'histoire, c'est le temps*/history is time', and Leopold van Ranke's dictum for history as a discipline that studies the past '*wie es eigentlich gewesen*/the way it really was', would be as good a start as any. According to Reinhart Koselleck's influential interpretation, this modern regime change occurred in the wake of the French revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, when History relinquished its classical role as '*magistra vitae*/life's teacher' and became more concerned with producing a transcendental knowledge within which 'all humankind can be located'. Koselleck argued that the modern differentiation between past, present, and future had significant methodological implications for historiography. This understanding of time and the acknowledgment of the distinctiveness of the past enabled history to establish itself as an autonomous discipline with its own unique methods. One of the ways it achieved this was by emphasizing the importance of temporal distance as a prerequisite for achieving 'impartiality' and 'objectivity' in historical analysis.[60]

Key to my discussion, however, is in fact what supposedly superseded this modern regime over the past forty years. If François Hartog's recent addendum to Koselleck is to be believed, we are currently living through another of these temporal *or* onto-epistemological shifts. Interestingly, in the 2020 updated edition of his account of time in historical geography, Kurtz begins the chapter by noting the cultural, political, and economic turmoil that engulfed the world since the chapter's first appearance in 2009. As a result of the great financial crisis, economic stagnation, Earth's sixth mass extinction, declining current strength in the North Atlantic, austerity, Brexit and so on, crisis has taken centre stage as a topic and/or analytic lens of investigation. Because crises are fundamentally as temporal as they are spatial phenomena, Kurtz calls on geographers, who 'tend to focus on place and the environment', to think carefully about the implications this might have for their analyses.[61] Originally published in French in 2003, Hartog's translated 2015 edition of *Regimes of Historicity,* starts with a very similar reflection, but for him the same moment of crisis is only one in a long line that is bringing about a new regime of time, that of 'presentism'. Despite some protestations to the contrary, Hartog's is a dour view. We have become, he says, 'enslaved' to the present, and cannot shake off this presentist regime, 'characterised at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of an unending now'.[62]

Hartog's is a book-length exegesis on that old pitfall of historiography which ends up writing 'history backwards'. Importantly, while accepting that some degree of presentism is inevitable, work on the historiography of geography too has warned against the evils of its

[52] Sarah Mills, 'Cultural–Historical Geographies of the Archive: Fragments, Objects and Ghosts', *Geography Compass* 7 (2013) 701–713. Though more recently, questions of dealing with abundance have also started to emerge as serious practical and methodological concerns. see Jake Hodder, 'On absence and abundance: biography as method in archival research', *Area* 49 (2017) 452–459.

[53] Stoller, *Against the grain*; Ruth Craggs, 'Situating the imperial archive: the Royal Empire Society Library, 1868–1945' *Journal of Historical Geography* 34 (2008) 48–67; Mills, 'Cultural–Historical Geographies', p. 704.

[54] Elizabeth Gagen, Hayden Lorimer and Alex Vasudevan, *Practicing the Archive: Reflections on Methodology and Practice in Historical Geography* (Historical Geography Research Series, 2007) p. 2; See also Carl J. Griffin and Adrian B. Evans, 'On historical geographies of embodied practice and performance', *Historical Geography* 36 (2008) 5–16.

[55] Isla Forsyth, 'Biography and the Military Archive' in *The Routledge Companion to Military Research Methods* ed. A.J. Williams, K.N. Jenkings, M.F. Rech, R. Woodward (Routledge, 2016) p. 45.

[56] Lorenz, 'Out of time?', p. 25.

[57] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 2006) p. 25.

[58] Stefan Tanaka, 'History without Chronology', *Public Culture* 28 (2016) p. 167.

[59] Tanaka, 'History', p. 161.

[60] Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz, *Breaking up Time – Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future. An Introduction,* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) p. 14.

[61] Kurtz, 'Time and Historical Geography' (2020) p. 265.

[62] Hartog, *Regimes*, pp. xiv-xv. Hartog is by no means the first to make this argument and for example, Nowotny with her concept of the 'extended present' that is characteristic of 'postmodern time' and Jameson's 'end of temporality' provide two other notable versions of this analysis. Helga Nowotny, *The Modern and Postmodern Experience* (Polity, 1996); Frederic Jameson, 'The End of Temporality', *Critical Inquiry* 29(4) (2003) 695–718.

'unrestrained' deployment.[63] In Livingston's *Geographical Tradition*, for example, the author leans on George Stocking when discussing the potential snares of such an approach: 'inevitably the sins of history written "for the sake of the present" insinuate themselves: anachronism, distortion, misleading analogy, neglect of context, oversimplification of process'.[64] Understood in such a way, presentism risks producing two distinct but equally undesirable narratives. The first has to do with (mis)judging the past by today's values, standards, and in service of specific political goals while the second risk falling into versions of 'Wiggish history' wherein the past follows a teleologically determined path of improvement into a glorified present.

Hartog however, goes a step further as he elevates presentism from poor historiographical practice to a whole temporal regime, an epistemology. In France at least, he goes on to argue, the memory of the Holocaust and post-colonial events can be seen as precursors to presentism. From the 1980s onwards, the field of memory studies gained momentum, largely influenced by scholars like Pierre Nora and a renewed interest in Maurice Halbwachs' ideas on 'collective memory' from the 1920s.[65] This led to the emergence of concepts such as victimhood, witnessing, and trauma dominating what was previously the historian's discourse. The witness is perceived both as a victim of past violence and as someone who carries enduring wounds that resist healing. Hartog's main argument is that all presentist-time becomes trauma-time, as the past continues to exert its influence.[66]

Consequently, the emotional and traumatized victim has displaced the historian as the authoritative figure on the past. This shift poses a threat to the autonomy and authority of history because trauma-driven perspectives represent an unhistorical, if not anti-historical, approach to understanding the past. They seek to eliminate the crucial distance between the past and the present, which is necessary for history to exist as a modernist practice that seeks truth. Presentism disregards this distance because the present itself has become the central framework for self-understanding, rendering the past and future mere extensions of the present. As a result, we all inhabit a new and somewhat one-dimensional realm of memory, where we are collectively contemporaneous – at least according to Hartog.

This is not the kind of understanding or deployment of the term I adopt and instead follow Tamm and Oliver's lead to focus on what might be called new or progressive presentism. For years now, work in the theory and philosophy of history has tried to develop an understanding of temporality that would overcome this 'modern notion of time'.[67] Even more so, they recognise but depart from Hartog's pessimist view to offer a view of time that is politically and ethically more progressive and potentially liberatory. Modern time is chronological time, it is anthropocentric time, it is colonising as well as colonial time.[68] At the risk of simplifying too much, modern time is seen as the everyday spatialised, flattened time of time travel that I started off with. It is linear, progressivist and can be mapped out across clearly distinct pasts, presents, and futures. In other words, clock time (as one of the key technologies of modernity) becomes ontic; this chronometry produces an ontological reality. Presentist time, on the other hand, is 'multitemporal or polychronic in the sense that an event does not merely occur in the present, but also simultaneously actualizes sections of the past [and I would add future] within itself'.[69] What is shared between a lot of these recent interventions in history, the way I see it, is a provocation to *think* and *use* time differently. Going beyond issues of method and historiography, Olivier and others call for a displacement of what philosopher Henri Bergson called, 'cinematic time':

> for us, historical time goes in only one direction at a time and every change over time (like every movement on the screen) is something which can be taken apart in a sequence of moments following each other, one by one, like the succession of 24 frames a second which makes it possible to recreate the movements of reality when projected in the cinema.[70]

Extending the same analogy to conditions of progressive presentism I suppose it would be about replacing the traditional 1000 feet long strip of 35 mm film reel and its 24,000 rectangular compartments with one singular exposure frame. It is then this one frame that is constantly in flux, mutating, morphing, *becoming* something different, all without leaving anything behind or anticipating something predefined ahead.[71] The change that is being sought is, to my mind, onto-epistemic. A question that arises from such a rethinking, has to do with practicality i.e., how does this all translate into the sub-disciplinary practice and what is at stake in doing so.

Re-placing time in the 'specious present'

While certainly provocative, appropriating the term presentism for these more progressive, non-linear ontologies of time might cause unnecessary and potentially unproductive confusion. In response, I suggest moving back to geography and specifically Bob Dodgshon's work on the 'specious present' which is a conceptually analogue but semantically and politically more appropriate way of thinking this new presentism spatiotemporally. Bringing together institutional contingency approaches with work on non-representational performativity, and drawing on the works of Bergson, Deleuze, Adam, and Massey, he proposes the idea of the 'specious present':

> Its key feature is that our experience of *all* times-past, present, and future-has to be built up through it, whether through habit or through different forms of memory, the perception of what is immediately around us, or the anticipation of what might be. In other words, the specious present is culturally burdened with all our times since, in terms of our direct consciousness of time, we can never step outside it. This is what Adam had in mind when she proposed a distinction between what is past present, present present, and future present, a phrasing which

[63] Michiel Van-Meeteren, James Sidaway, 'History of geography' in: *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. by Audery Kobayashi, (Elsevier, 2020), pp. 37–44.

[64] David Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*, (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992) p. 5. See also David Livingstone, 'The Geographical Tradition and the challenges of geography geographised', *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers,* 44 (2019) p. 459, for his response to later reflections by Craggs and others on this element of his approach.

[65] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations* 26 (1989) 7–24.

[66] Lorenz, 'Out of time?'.

[67] Tamm and Olivier, *Rethinking Historical Time,* p. 4.

[68] Tanaka, 'History'; Manuela Rossini and Mike Toggwiler eds. 'Posthuman Temporalities', *new formations* 92 (2017); Giordano Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire* (Manchester University Press, 2012); see also 'They have clocks, we have time', *The Funambulist* 36 (2021), https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/they-have-clocks-we-have-time last accessed 20 March 2024.

[69] Tamm and Olivier, *Rethinking Historical Time,* p. 13.

[70] Laurence Olivier, 'The past of the present. Archaeological memory and time', *Archaeological Dialogues* 10 (2004) p. 208.

[71] Interestingly, the analogy of the motion picture was also used both by Hartshorne and Darby to describe the relationship between history and geography. While for the former it illustrated the impossibility of combining the two at all, for the latter it closely described the ideal practice of human geography whose aim was to capture a 'still taken out of a long film'. H. C. Darby in: Guelke, 'The Relations Between Geography and History Reconsidered', pp. 219-20.

> acknowledges *that all pasts, like all futures, are never imagined outside their moment of narration.*[72]

There are a couple of clarifications necessary to fend off some potential misunderstandings that could arise. The first has to do with a complaint of a-historicity. It took considerable scholarly and political effort across several disciplines to make "the past count", to secure a view of the present as situated and contingent on historical forces. This was perhaps most famously and influentially put forward in Michel Foucault's genealogies, what he we would end up calling 'histories of the present': a form of analysis which explores the emergence of present-day practices and institutions by examining the specific historical struggles, conflicts, alliances, and exercises of power that have often been forgotten or overlooked in contemporary discourse and bodies.[73] Whether this is explicitly acknowledged or not, there is no doubt that such a relationship with the past became pervasive, if not quite completely dominant in historical geography. Indeed, the definition of historical geography I used earlier was one that explicitly concerns itself 'with the influence of the past in shaping the geographies of the present and the future'.[74] Or in Graham and Nash's words, one of the main goals of modern historical geography was to tease out the '*interplay between* the past and the present'.[75] A version of this critique might also be likened to some of Jones' worries about non-representational geographies which in their focus on the 'present moment of practice – because that is where life happens', risk neglecting the 'trajectories of the past-into-present'.[76] In response, I would argue that the time of the 'specious present' (or moment) is not one that is deprived of, or detached from the past, in the conventional, modern understanding. Quite the contrary, it is a present from which the past cannot escape – hence Adam's nomenclature that is so key for Dodgshon: past present, present present, future present.[77] The difference is that contrary to the modern regime of historicity, the past is no longer other, elsewhen, elsewhere, be it foreign or familiar, needing to be brought back *into relation with* the now. In fact, the past *and* the future cannot help but burden the present and vice versa – hence also why I think Dodgshon's invocation of speciousness is appropriate. The past and present are therefore only ostensibly separate; their semantic distinction presents a misleading appearance of ontological distinction. In that sense the past is as 'specious' as is the present, as is the future: 'one is too few, but two are too many.'[78]

However, if we accept that the present is all there is, the second and related concern has to do with the practical and material ways in which the past can lay claim on the now; because supposedly rejecting the modern regime of historicity presumes a rejection of a linear cause-and-affect model of change more broadly and specifically the idea of provenance inscribed by the modern archive. Dodgshon provides the following answer:

> All time and all forms of embedded thought, including that accessed cognitively no less than that accessed noncognitively, are directly experienced by us only through the specious present. This means that all knowledge, embodied or disembodied, cognitive or noncognitive, is accessed through each specious present and *sustained only because society has evolved ways of carrying ever-increasing amounts of knowledge into and across the specious present in an accessible and sustainable form.*[79]

One way this could be read immediately brings to mind Bruno Latour's ANT-based ideas on reassembling the social.[80] For Latour, the social (and its supposed explanatory power) is not a single, monolithic or closed entity, 'a stabilised state of affairs' that happens to endure or exist as the backdrop of human action.[81] Rather, it is a *result*, an *effect* of a coming together of myriad human and non-human actors that performatively sustain it: bodies, habits and memory, institutional practices, papers and books, ideas, norms, guidelines and laws, hard disks, flash drives and SSDs, browsers, routers and the world wide web, bricks and mortar, architecture, and urban design and so many more. But even this reading of the interplay between past and present through networked material knowledge-making is not completely alien to the subdiscipline, and Kurtz for example acknowledges the importance Latourian ANT frameworks had on archival work that was more interested in mundane objects, documents, and other materialities than in 'immaterial discourses'.[82]

In this sense, the archival process becomes much more akin to ethnography, especially in terms of the relationship between the researcher and the source material where the physical and epistemic proximity becomes unavoidable and needs purposive accounting for – a point I expand on in the next section.[83] While not going down a strictly Latourian route this is certainly how I conceived of my own archival practice when studying the hazy and intangible atmospheric histories of smoking in Britain since the mid-ninetieth century.[84]

Accordingly, all these diverse items I've enumerated above contain "fragments of the past"; material *as well as* immaterial affordances that comprise them. The specious present is fundamentally a moment of becoming, a 'continual realisation of a potential for change within each present and in the midst of ordinary, everyday life' or in Allan Pred's formulation, an 'ever-becoming place'.[85] The question that remains is what is to be gained or indeed what is at stake for future historical-

[72] Dodgshon, 'In what way is the world really flat?', p. 302; emphasis added.

[73] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Penguin Books, 1977), trans. Alan Sheridan; see also Mark Poster, 'Foucault, the present and history' in *Michel Foucault Philosopher* ed. by T.J. Armstrong (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) pp. 303–316. Admittedly, similar arguments can be made for Marx's historical materialism, which were hugely influential in historical geography since the 1980s. see Heffernan, 'Historical Geography', p. 335.

[74] Heffernan, 'Historical Geography', p. 322.

[75] Graham and Nash, 'The making of modern historical geography", p. 5; emphasis added.

[76] Owain Jones, 'Geography, Memory and Non-Representational Geographies', *Geography Compass* 5 (2011) p. 875. While some work in the broad non-representational-theories (NRT) tradition might indeed suffer from this 'creep of presentism' – as Jones puts it – I believe a historical NRT approach is far from being oxymoronic. This was precisely the point of the two 2019 *RGS-IBG Annual Conference* sessions on a 'A Non-Representational Historical Geography? Archives, Affects and Atmospheres', organised by Stephen Legg and myself a few years back. For an excellent example of what this kind of approach might produce in practice, see Uma Kothari, 'Seafarers, the mission and the archive: Affective, embodied and sensory traces of sea-mobilities in Melbourne, Australia', *Journal of Historical Geography* 72 (2021) 73–84; and Hayden Lorimer, '"An aid to loveliness": lavender, femininity and the affective economy of English beauty', *Journal of Historical Geography* 79 (2023) 13–25.

[77] Barbara Adam, *Time and Social Theory,* (Polity, 1990).

[78] Haraway's quip used to pithily describe the hybridity of the cyborg might equally apply here. Donna Harraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) p. 177.

[79] Dodgshon, 'In what way is the world really flat?', p. 309; emphasis added.

[80] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

[81] Latour, *Reassembling,* p. 3.

[82] Matthew Kurtz, 'Archive' in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography,* ed. by R. Kitchin and N. Thrift, (Elsevier, 2009), p. 180.

[83] See also e.g. Karen F. Gracy, 'Documenting Communities of Practice: Making the Case for Archival Ethnography', *Archival Science* 4 (2006) 335–365.

[84] Ivan Marković, *An atmospheric history of smoking in modern Britain* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2024).

[85] Dodgshon, 'In what way is the world really flat?', pp. 305-7; Pred, 'Place as Historically Contingent Process'.

geographical practice if time in the form of the Dodgshon's 'specious present' were to inform and buttress our investigations from the very start.

Towards a specious historical geography – positionality, ethics, politics

I am by no means expecting an epistemic revolution and it's important to recognise that some of the polychronic if not quite new presentist principles outlined above already found their way, explicitly or otherwise, into historical-geographic writing. The most obvious that comes to mind is, as Kurtz also points out, Caitlin Desilvey's work on ruins and decay, and it is no surprise to see a chapter of hers included in Tamm and Olivier's edited collection on *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism.*[86] Tim Edensor's recent article in *JHG*, using an example of a historical arch intertwined and entangled with a large tree in London's Hampstead Heath, is a good example of the divergent temporalities that emerge in and though heritage assemblages.[87]

Of note, and certainly unsurprising when thinking about the political potential of such reconsiderations of time, the work on black liberatory geographies has for a while now been incorporating elements of this temporal non-linearity as well as polychronicity in their analysis of contemporary social, political, and economic structures that have been built upon colonial and white supremacist legacies. Katherne McKittrick's work for example draws out these spatio-temporal interrelations explicitly in her work on 'plantation futures'. She starts her 2013 piece with a discussion surrounding the New York African Burial Ground and its unearthing in 1991 where over ten thousand black slaves were interned before the land was filled in and served as foundations for urban development from the early 1800s. As a site of 'spatial continuity between the living and the dead, between science and storytelling, and between past and present', it opens up a conversation wherein the 'plantation' as an ongoing space-time becomes a framework for understanding and connecting the past and present geographies of 'antiblack violence and death'.[88] Similarly, Kathryn Yusoff's critical historical geographies of the Anthropocene calls upon us to stop spatialising the past as separate from present and future, and does so with explicit acknowledgment of the works like Michelle Wright.[89] In *The Physics of Blackness,* Wright builds on lay discourses of quantum physics to argue that blackness has historically been interpellated through a linear space-time of progress. This in turn leads to a cause-and-effect epistemology wherein whiteness inevitably ends up being the actor and blackness the reactor. In response, she offers 'epiphenomenal time', the 'now' through which the 'past, present and future are always interpreted' and which holds the potential for a different kind of analysis.[90]

There is also no shortage of similar attempts happening outside the academy. One excellent example can be found in the interdisciplinary collaboration project called the *Black Quantum Futures Collective* started by Camae Ayewa and Rasheedah Phillips in the mid-2010s. Using an 'alternative temporal lens' the *BQF* collective employs a whole host of writing, mappings, and other art forms that focus 'on recovery, collection, and preservation of communal memories, histories, and stories'.[91] Under the umbrella of Afrofuturism and like Wright, drawing on insights from quantum physics but also African time consciousness, this sought after recovery, collection and preservation is done within a temporal understanding wherein the 'past and future are not cut off from the present' and both of which are accepted as exerting a strong influence on those lives at the sharp edge of racist/colonial legacies.[92]

Accordingly, this paper does not intend to be programmatic in any dramatic way, nor does it suggest a wholesale rejection of the historical in historical geography. Rather it should be read more as a reflective intervention into the subdiscipline.[93] Indeed, the aim is to build on the success of the field so far in tackling these and related issues, and to do so in conversation with and alongside wider interdisciplinary and activist efforts. The goal is to make space for a more concerted and sustained discussion of time in historical-geographical practice. Taking the 'specious present' seriously thus reaffirms, albeit on different conceptual grounds, the partiality and contingency as well as the embodied and performative nature of historical work but does so in a way that it makes it *impossible* epistemologically and ontologically, let alone methodologically, to hide behind the temporal distance presumed in modern understandings of time. While a similar effect can and has been achieved by means of feminist methodological reflexivity, the key is that these are no longer choices, examples of best practice. Rather forcefully, for better or worse, specious historical geography *demand*s that issues of positionality, ethics and politics are no longer seen as an option, appendage, or afterthought, but are rather inextricably linked to historical geographical inquiry. Consequently, being in the present is no longer merely a personal or historiographical bias that needs to be overcome, a necessary evil, a weakness that ought to be, as Livingstone suggests, resisted.[94] Nor is it exactly akin to a call for more 'activist' historical geography writing in the sense of being explicitly in the services of the now (though it is very much sympathetic to them).[95] Rather, in its call for the recognition of the speciousness of the present (and past), its rejection of their illusory appearance of completeness/otherness (there-and-thenness), it hopes to offer greater accountability for the types of historical geographies that emerge in the research encounter, a moment that can only ever be of, and in the present.

[86] Tamm and Olivier, *Rethinking Historical Time*.

[87] Tim Edensor, 'Heritage assemblages, maintenance, and futures: Stories of entanglement on Hampstead Heath, London' *Journal of Historical Geography* 79 (2023) 1–12.

[88] Katherine McKittrick, 'Plantation Futures', *small axe* 42 (2013) 1–15.

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Acknowledgments

I am immensely grateful to Isla Forsyth, Rachel Colls and Jake Hodder for their thoughtful comments and advice on earlier drafts of the paper. Thanks also go to the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback and very generous engagement with the paper.