

The Sense of the Past

Matters of Historical Time in the Modern Human and Social Sciences, ca. 1780-1980

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Abstract

The project investigates the character of historical knowledge in the human and social sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) in the period of ca. 1780-1980. Other than existing scholarship on the history of historicism it goes beyond the paradigm of the formation of the nation state and instead focuses on foundational problematics of historical knowledge in the making. Emphasis is on matters of historical time and the emergence and transformation of a specific sense of the past, i.e. the importance of experience in intellectual practice. It combines methods and approaches from the history of science, historiography, and a cultural and institutional history of intellectual practice in order to provide an historical inquiry into the historical epistemology of the human and social sciences.

Its main fields of interest are: 1. the historical semantics of the notion of Geisteswissenschaften in international context; 2. the cultural and intellectual history of historical work; 3. the analysis of different epistemic surroundings of intellectual work in the humanities; 4. the relations between history and timelessness; and 5. the historical aporia of time travel. The overall goal of the project is to provide a contemporary history and theory of historical time based on an historical analysis of matters of historical time in intellectual practice of the human and social sciences since the late eighteenth century.