

CAPTURING THE PRESENT IN NORTHWESTERN EUROPE (1348–1648)

A Cultural History of Present Before the Age of Presentism

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.0. Introduction

Time has been one of the main preoccupations of historians as well as many other specialists in the humanities and social sciences for almost half a century (*cf.* 2.4). As a result, we can now rely on a large number of rich and varied studies in the so-called cultural history of time. However, the question of the present in the pre- and early modern period has remained largely unexplored.

This Sinergia project wants to fill that gap by concentrating on the manner in which the present was defined, theorized and lived in Northwestern Europe during that period. This region offers the perfect heuristic context to examine the way the present was constructed as a new temporal category, in a theoretical and practical sense, in a diversified, heterogenous, competitive and sometimes conflictual territory. This part of the continent, including the Netherlands and their direct political and cultural neighbours (West Germany, Northern France and Southern England) was the scene of numerous political, economic, religious and artistic changes between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern period. It saw the assertion of different political regimes, from kingdoms with absolutist tendencies or parliamentary rule in France and England, to the difficult conciliation of the imperial sovereignty and the German principalities, and the evolution of the Burgundian Principality into the United Provinces and the Spanish Netherlands under Habsburg rule. The region was also characterized by a great variety of languages, including Dutch, French, English and German, as well as Latin in certain contexts. We aim to understand the cultural specificities of this particular region, marked by a high level of urbanization, social mobility, trade with other parts of Europe and the rest of the world, as well as novel political, cultural, religious and artistic practices. This study will correct the historiographical balance in favour of Northwestern Europe and do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon we wish to examine on the European scale.

Based on the research and methodologies of different disciplines – history, art history, literary history, linguistics, media studies, anthropology and political science – this project focuses on three main research axes from a historical and cultural-comparative perspective. The first axis frames the present as a historical construct within the chronological scope of the period between 1348 and 1648; the second addresses the cultural specificities of Northwestern Europe within that construct; the third centres around the variety and complexity within the process of individualization of the present. These three transversal axes serve as a thread throughout the whole project and will be addressed in all three work packages, which have been designed to examine: the manner in which discourses and images capture the moment (WP1); the consideration given to events and the way they were displayed (WP2); and the efforts to master newness, especially on political and ideological levels (WP3) (*cf.* 2.1).

AXIS 1: THE PRESENT AS A HISTORICAL CONSTRUCT – THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF THE PERIOD 1348–1648

The first research axis foregrounds how the formation of a modern sensibility and culture of time in pre- and early modern Europe took shape within a period of three hundred years (1348–1648). This period is marked by an extraordinarily high number of disruptions: political assassinations, accidental deaths, dramatic divorces, technical innovations, religious reforms or conquests. All these changes, so many and so intense, have in their own way caused

a crisis in the experience of the present. They may be punctual (a specific event) or more persistent (phenomena of a moderate or long duration). The invention of the printing press, for example, led to the widespread and sometimes startling proliferation of information in a world that was becoming less obviously intelligible (Blair 2010). Faced with the unprecedented radicalness and multiplication of such changes, the idea of the continuity between past, present and future was being called into question. The very preservation of reassuring traditions was challenged.

With the aim to demonstrate the variability and relativism of time perception, the chronological benchmarks 1348 and 1648 express both the difficulty for historians to qualify changing times as well as to identify moments of rupture that are measured in terms of immediate reaction and not according to their a posteriori impact on the course of history (Frantzwa 2020). Two specific disruptions have been selected to demarcate this period. The first is related to the beginning of the Black Death pandemic, which decimated between a third and half of the European population within a period of five or six years (Herlihy 2000; Benediktow 2004; Byrne 2004; Sloane 2011). The year 1348 is undoubtedly viewed as a moment of disruption by medieval historians, as it marked an event that, at last, emerged as a significant occurrence within the northern chronicles. This prominence was evident even in the immediate years following the plague. Preceded by a massive storm that devastated the county of Hainaut on August 14, 1347, and an earthquake that shook a part of Europe on January 25, 1348, the plague epidemic was perceived as just another disaster (Labbé 2017) and an element in one of the lamentation speeches written by Guillaume de Machaut (Zink 1991). However, the second wave of the plague (1360–1362) was not met with the same detachment, as the dreadful experience of the previous one had left a lasting impression. The endpoint of our project is defined by the disruption resulting from the ratification of the Treaties of Westphalia, which brought an end to the catastrophic Thirty Years' War and led to a significant reconfiguration of political Europe. In 1648, the Peace of Münster ended the Thirty Years' War and the Eighty Years' War. It was celebrated with festivities that were captured, in turn, by painters like Bartholomeus van der Helst, who made a collective portrait of the civil guard drinking to the announcement of peace in Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum). However, it took more time to profoundly understand and feel the impact of the originality of the intricate Westphalian system and the innovative character of these negotiations (Blin 2006). The peace that it established granted France, but especially the Dutch Republic and Great Britain, the military respite to increase demographically and gain significant economic power and wealth through trade and investments. It also meant that people started to imagine their relation to the present in different ways (Blanc 2019a).

AXIS 2: THE PRESENT AS A CULTURAL CONSTRUCT – A NORTHERN SINGULARITY?

The second research axis aims to underline the historical and cultural specificities of Northwestern Europe in terms of the manner in which the present was represented and conceptualized, by contrasting it with Southern Europe. Questions of renewal and change have been widely explored in the Italian “laboratory of history” (Gaille-Nikodimov, Girard & Remaud 2005). Our goal is not only to readjust the historiographical balance for the benefit of the “North”, but to identify the parameters of the construct of cultural time of a specific region, according to its own dynamics. In Renaissance Italy, humanism could be considered a turning point willed by intellectual circles “glorifying” the present as a new golden age of antique knowledge (Revest 2013). In Northwestern Europe, by contrast, it was the Protestant Reformation that created an unprecedented shift that forced people to re-examine their set of values and their relation to their own time. This milestone is the most crucial, but not the only one marking this region. Moments of rupture that directed people to reshape their perception of present were numerous. In 1529, Cornelis Everaert blamed the Time of Nowadays (*Tyd van Nu*) for the Bruges economic crisis (Mareel 2008; 2011). Likewise, the Utrecht antiquarian Aernout van Buchel complained in his diary, written during the Dutch Revolt in the 1620s, about the uncertainty of his time (Pollmann 1999). Long before him, during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Jan van Hulst regretted the loss of love and friendship (“broederlicke minne”) at the time of factional strife in Bruges

(Dumolyn 2010). These instances should not be merely regarded as manifestations of conservatism and nostalgia. Instead, they serve as evidence of the dynamic performative literary communities unique to this region, such as *rederijkers*, *puy*s, *Inns of Court* or *Meistersingers* (Ramakers 1996; Van Bruaene 2008; Van Dixhoorn & Speakman 2008). They hint at how people of that time gradually became aware of change and how they lived (in) the present. Throughout the three centuries examined in this project, a combination of historical factors, such as religious disputes, political events, the emergence of a commerce culture linked to political and religious ideologies, and continuous warfare, marked collective and individual perceptions of the present. Despite these challenges, artistic creativity and economic growth persisted, further shaped by the appearance of new diseases (Blockmans 2010; Blondé, Boone & Van Bruaene 2016). Our project aims to demonstrate that a true cultural *koinè* existed in the Northwestern part of the continent, constituted by certain shared values regarding the present that were distinctly different from those prevalent in the world of the Southern “Renaissance”.

AXIS 3: THE PRESENT AS COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE – A TIME OF DIFFERENCES

The third and last research axis aims to demonstrate the existence of a plurality of nuances and individual ways of thinking and living the present in the region and time examined in this project. While the cultural history of time regarding the geographical and chronological scope of the project has privileged questions of memory, with some rare studies about the future in the context of millenarianism, this project will examine societies in Northwestern Europe both in their daily life as well as in their deepest aspirations. Its aim is to understand how people inhabited present between 1348 and 1648. The reconstruction of a broad and collective history of the present lived and thought in a specific region over a long period makes it possible to capture the originality of the shared culture in Northwestern Europe. An ontological approach (the focus on the perception of the present) occasionally informed by anthropological (Gras 1985), philosophical (Zawadski 2008) and sociological studies (Paillard 2008), will highlight cultural answers specific to the Low Countries and its neighbours.

Capturing the construction of present by actors from the past requires taking seriously what Florence Dupont (2013) called “*écarts*” that separate historians from the phenomena they seek to describe, that is, the significant differences between categories and experiences of the present and those that prevail in our contemporary society (Blanc 2022). To bridge these “gaps”, it is necessary to develop a new historical object shaped from ground level (Blanc 2013b). The appraisal of time in general, and of the present in particular, stems both from a subjectivity specific to every human being and from an objectivity favoured by technological inventions that, for example, make clocks into tools that were used and appreciated all over Europe (Van Dyck 2018). Nonetheless, assessing the immediate, the ephemeral, the transitory, and more generally the individual positioning in the *hic et nunc*, which challenges the order of the world, depends on cultural habits and lifestyles at the origin of “time communities”.

With this Sinergia project, we would like to implement and evaluate a new research methodology, which we call “differential history” (*cf.* 2.5). This method traces the various ways in which the present has been appropriated by different individuals and social groups. It examines how the contemporary, emerging as a new concept in the mid-fifteenth century, served as a shared point of reference and, in some instances, a truly unifying force. Moreover, it frames the new position of individuals in a world challenged by the acceleration of time, the discovery of new places and, finally, the introduction of a controversial and new scientific explanation questioning the idea of a Creation, willed by God. A specific attention to words (their use and evolution) to express the idea of present in the different languages used in this part of Europe (Dutch, English, French, German, Latin) will form the core of a shared database fuelled by an abundant variety of sources. Because the conception of time varies depending on the nature of sources, it is crucial to not only explore different types of documents but to compare our results. A synergetic approach makes it possible to seize the multiplicity of presents of one single man, who could be a father (in his diary), a merchant (in

his account book), a traveller (in his correspondence), a devout believer (in the book of the confraternity he belongs to), and an image fixed for all eternity in the portrait he commissions. The project benefits from a wealth of high-quality sources, including private writings, municipal registers, guild and confraternity registers, news and communication media, political material, chronicles, religious treatises, and images (*cf.* 2.5.4). These sources, carefully selected to address each research axis, provide exceptional material to uncover the construction and experiences of the present. The methodical and precise examination of this new historical subject (the present), by means of a diversified analysis of terminologies, rituals, procedures, practices, ideas, will lead to new queries about fundamental balances essential to humanity between life and death, sacred and secular, legacy and aspiration. Put more plainly, the project will offer fresh insights into Northwestern Europe during a period of significant change, as historians have not previously viewed this time as a succession of distinct “presents” marked by the wheel of Fortuna.

2.1. Goals of the project

This project has been divided into three distinct work packages, each focusing on a particular aspect of defining and experiencing the present. The first work package (WP1) delves into the concept of the moment by analysing discursive and visual representations of the present. The second work package (WP2) scrutinizes events how events were considered as milestones on an individual as well as a collective level. The third work package (WP3) investigates how Northwestern Europe navigated novelty within legal, technical, and political contexts.

N.B. The names of the four principal investigators (PIs) are displayed **in bold**, those of the collaborators involved in the project (doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, scientific collaborators) **in bold and italics**, and the names of the associated partners *in italics*.

2.1.1. WPI: FIGURING MOMENTS – DISCURSIVE AND VISUAL FORMS OF THE PRESENT (DIR. J. BLANC & E. DOUDET)

This first work package will address the different ways in which discourse and images have contributed to the paradoxical construction of the present. By definition and at least since St. Augustine, the present is the temporal mode of the ephemeral and the unpredictable (Koselleck 1979 [ed. 2000]: 178). This leads to the necessity to preserve, think and reflect on it by means of different kinds of discursive or visual forms. In the context of this work package, we therefore focus on the main “forms of the present” and on what they can tell us about the ways in which the present was perceived and experienced. We will do so by means of two approaches: the ways in which the present took shape in words and discourse and in images.

I. Now speak: articulating the present in words

a) Revolutionizing tenses: linguistic theories and practices. — During the period addressed in this project, the grammar systems of the Spanish (1492), French (from 1530 to 1632), German (1535), Dutch (1576) and English (1586) were taking shape (Fournier 2001; Buijs, Jacquinod, Lallot & Rijksbaron 2011; Swiggers 2013). We will study the first linguistic theories of the present tense developed within these systems from a systematic review of treaties and language usage manuals (prescriptive and doctrinal sources), as well as the analysis of discursive practices (uses) based on case studies to be identified within the sources at the conclusion of the project’s first year. For a long time, this verbal tense (*praesens*) was considered indivisible and therefore impossible to be thought. Consequently, it was discredited in favour of the past and future tense (Fournier 2013: 14). Nevertheless, the tense gains ground and starts to be used in justifiable ways, whether to indicate to an interlocutor what is present, as well as to represent a past event, as an “eternal present” (Antoine Oudin, *Grammaire française* [1632]). In addition, this sub-project will reflect on the use of temporal adverbs (*maintenant, jetzt, now, nu*) and other available ways to indicate the present, such as the perfect tense – this “strange tense” that talks of “past things that we wish to appear present” (Fournier 2013: 23). This terminological, grammatical and semantic enquiry will be supervised by **Estelle Doudet**

(Université de Lausanne; hereafter: UNIL), in collaboration with *Jean-Marie Fournier* (CNRS/Sorbonne Nouvelle) and the UNIL team of linguists.

b) *Imminent disasters: catastrophe explored.* — Originating from the Aristotelian vocabulary of theater (Tonaki 2016: 68), the notion of catastrophe becomes central to tragedy (Leblanc 1972: 94; Goyet 1990: 303; Okubo 2007: 434; Doudet 2011: 48–51; Griffin 2019). It subsequently appears in vernacular language, popular literature (Jensen 2019), visual arts (Juneja-Schenk 2014; Kenichi 2018), and music (Alexander 2007). It signifies a synonym of “disaster”, “desolation” and the “reverse of fortune” (Koselleck 1979 [ed. 2000]: 217–218; Webb 2007) at a time when catastrophes of natural (epidemics, floods, celestial occurrences) and human (assassinations, deaths, arrests, financial debasements and military defeats) origin multiply in Northwestern Europe (Krusenstjern & Medick 1999; Van Asperen 2019). Several historians have observed that the genre of tragedy was codified in Northwestern Europe, stemming from a pessimistic perspective on the contemporary world (Cunningham 1951). This outlook also fostered the growth of sceptical and cynical thoughts from Erasmus to Charron (Schmitt 1993; Popkin 1995 [ed. 2019]; Clément 2005; Neto & Paganini 2009; Zerba 2012; Denery, Ghosh & Zeeman 2014). Additionally, there was an increased emphasis on emotional expression, as evidenced by the *Mémoires* of Jean de Serres (1570) (Gallier 1873; Delumeau 1978; Esser-Drees 2016; Soens 2018; Jensen 2020). Within this sub-project also involving *Lotte Jensen* (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen; hereafter: RU), specialist on the discourse of catastrophe in the early modern period, **E. Doudet** will supervise a doctoral thesis (*PhDI*) exploring environmental disasters and disturbances (floods, droughts, storms, animal hybridization, etc.) and their significance as “markers of time” in Northwestern Europe (late 14th to mid-17th c.).

II. Now is the time: tracing dates in texts and artworks

The increased frequency of natural, political, and economic crises, along with the emergence of modern capitalism (stock exchange, interest rates, life insurance), the “discovery” of the New World, and early reformers’ desire to reassess the relationship with time, called for more accurate methods to measure time. These new approaches went beyond the existing chronologies, which were rooted in a providential perception of history (Wilcox 1987; Grafton 1993; Richards 1998; Grafton 2004; Piron 2004; Grafton & Rosenberg 2010; Inglebert 2014). Punctuality becomes an economic and moral value (Engammare 2004). The invention and subsequent refinement of instruments to measure time (sun dials, clocks and portable watches) leads to a necessity to “fix” the present of important events in official documents, correspondence, and ego-documents of members of the urban and rural bourgeoisie (Buchholz 1942 [ed. 1983]; Dekker 1995 [ed. 2001]; Larsson & Myrdal 1995; Amelang 1998; Dekker 2002; Lorenzen-Schmidt & Poulsen 2002; Mouysset 2007; Blaak 2009; Baggerman, Dekker & Mascuch 2011), as well as in artworks – e.g. the famous inscription “Johannes de Eyck fuit hic 1434” in the so-called *Arnolfini portrait* (Binstock 2017). Within the context of this manner of “establishing dates” or indeed “establishing the present”, a group of researchers composed by **Jan Blanc** (Université de Genève; hereafter: UNIGE), **Thalia Brero** (Université de Neuchâtel; hereafter: UNINE) and a postdoctoral researcher (*PostdocI*), will constitute and examine a corpus of texts and artworks from Northwestern Europe (14th–17th c.) in which a date is referenced. Thus far, researchers have focused on signatures (Russo 2005; Rubin 2006; Schapiro 2006).

III. Now in focus: unveiling the visual forms of the present

a) “*Naer het leven*”. — Visual artists in Northwestern Europe start to account for the present in their artistic practice by working “after life” (*naer het leven*). This practice consists of imitating nature “in the moment”, *de visu* and *in situ* (Swan 1995; Felfe 2013; Bakker 2011; McTighe 2011; Balfe, Woodall & Zittel 2019). In contrast to the Italian conception of *disegno*, heuristic phenomena such as chance, accidents, approximation, serendipity, and improvisation play a significant role (McGee 2003; Bertinetto 2017; Hellemans & Nelson 2018). These elements

become sources of legitimate knowledge in both the artistic and scientific domains (Dijksterhuis 1924; Franklin 2001; Smith 2004; Schmidt & Smith 2007; Cook, Meyers & Smith 2014; Coelho & Polk 2016; Smith 2019; Cooter & Luckin 2020). The study of this aesthetic and epistemological revolution will be conducted by **J. Blanc**, in collaboration with *Koenraad Jonckheere* (Universiteit Gent; hereafter: UGent), who has explored these issues with regard to early-seventeenth-century Dutch art.

b) “Contemporain”. — Artists in the region and period addressed in this project do not just practise increasingly “in the moment”, they also start considering their present in a broader sense. This sub-project will focus on the notion of the contemporary in the visual representation of the present. In French, the word *contemporain*, is used for the first time in 1454 by George Chastelain, the official historiographer of the Burgundian court (Small 1997; Doudet 2005), who offers a vernacular form to the Latin *cum tempore*, in line with notions such as “epoch”, “period” and “century” (Molinier 1901–1906: IV, 186; Guenée 1980: 81). Whereas – cultural, artistic, but also moral – models used to be derived from the biblical and historical past, the contemporary period now becomes a reference in the “miroirs des princes” (Antonio Beccadelli’s *De dictis et factis Alphonsi I regis Arragoniae libri IV* [1485]), the lives of saints (Jean Gielemans, *Novale Sanctorum* [1483–1485]) and chronicles (Guenée 1973; Doudet 2005: 234–236). In these texts, sovereigns and saints are taken as examples, while the increased numbers of portraits, landscapes and scenes of everyday life (including religious artworks) confront the spectator with the reality of their own world (Adams 2013). Portraits in particular are no longer abstract images of persons represented by symbols, but instead show individuals captured in *their* time – which is both fixed and ephemeral. As if to reinforce this visual presentism, artists, moreover, represent in their portraits and scenes of everyday life the pleasure of gambling (Jessen 2021) – condemned by the Catholic Church and reformed sects, but appreciated by people from all layers of society (Huizinga 1938 [ed. 1951]; Coumet 1965; 1970; Meskens 2013). In the context of this theme, a doctoral student (**PhD2**) will work on a thesis on the emergence of “presentist portraits” in textual and visual arts, under co-supervision of **J. Blanc** and **E. Doudet**.

c) Everyday life. — Daily life is another modus of thinking and determining the present (Lüdtke 1989 [ed. 1994]; Nadau 1990; Lipp 1995; Lepetit 1998; Eckert & Jones 2002). Significantly, everyday life is not the same for everyone or all times. This specific temporality is characterized by a consistent pattern of actions, practices, mental habits, and communal rituals. It is influenced by factors such as age, nature, health, religion, society, and work. Examples include life stages, seasonal changes, religious observances, and societal events, as well as developments in labor and leisure (Vickers 1990; Kolfin 2005; Champion 2007; Shove, Trentmann & Wilk 2009; Maitte & Terrier 2014; Vilar 2017). The study of calendars, a kind of production which becomes the specialism of certain editors (Simon Vostre, Léonard Gaultier, Marten de Vos), allows us to distinguish the regimes of historicity typical for the Catholic and reformed communities (i.e. the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1582) (Richards 1998: 5–7; Engammare 2004). The almanacs, which appear in Northwestern Europe in the middle of the fifteenth century, contain information (weekdays, religious holidays, zodiac, moon phases and tides, schedules of transportation, cooking recipes, predictions and anecdotes) that contributes to the reorganization of the present (Biémont 2000). This theme will be explored by **J. Blanc**, **Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin** (Université de Lille; hereafter: ULille), a scientific collaborator (**ScColl**) focused on art works, and *Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci* (UNIGE). They will investigate how texts and images convey the self-evident aspects of everyday life and related temporal experiences. Examples include the series of months and seasons or shepherds’ calendars, which grew in popularity in Northern manuscripts and paintings from the fifteenth century onwards.

2.1.2. WP2: DISPLAYING EVENTS – INTERNATIONAL, COLLECTIVE AND PRIVATE MILESTONES (DIR. T. BRERO)

This second work package focuses on the events that structure the human conception of time, whether they are considered as beginnings, intermittent phases or endings. The timeframe of our project proves to be particularly fertile to capture this process. As the written words and its various forms and supports become more accessible, dates start to be indicated and remembered, for example in the *libri rationis* in which families noted their expenses as well as the main events of family life. Moreover, the circulation of news intensifies, accelerated by the first large conflicts on a European scale (the Hundred Years' War, the Italian wars and the Thirty Years' War) and the human intermingling that they caused, as well as the confessional divide resulting from the Protestant Reform (Roth 2022). In turn, innovations like the printing press and the establishment of the first postal networks also contributed to the diffusion of news. This work package aims to define what the men and women of this period considered an event to be (Dosse 2010; Belin & Ferran 2018) and how these emanations of the present transform into milestones in the conception of time (Farge 2002; Bertrand 2010). In order to reach this objective, this work package consists of three research themes, covering a spectrum ranging from the collective to the individual – from significant international political moments to decisive instants in private life – and showing the encapsulation of events – in text as well as in space.

I. Expanding horizons: the development of printed news report

In the first place, an event is a news item that is considered sufficiently important to be disseminated outside the circle of people whom it concerns directly. Since the first implementation of the printing press, specific publications are dedicated to the circulation of recent information (Seguin 1961; 1964; Pettegree 2014; Ettinghausen 2015; Pouspin 2016). Indeed, from 1480 onwards, printed news reports spread throughout the North of Europe, transmitting the latest news, mostly from places far away. These cheap sheets, printed on low-quality paper, were accessible to a large audience (Harms, Raymond & Salman 2013; Hannu, Rospocher & Salman 2019). They can be categorized in three types: international military news (e.g. descriptions of battles, sieges and peace treaties), events regarding the royalty and noble class (e.g. reporting about births, weddings, funerals and coronations of the ruling class) and lastly sensational stories (e.g. accounts of monstrous births, exceptional meteorological occurrences or natural disasters). This editorial phenomenon, typical for Northwestern Europe – the Italian peninsula, for instance, had another kind of news network (Infelise 2002; Petitjean 2013) – developed exponentially during the Italian wars (1494–1559) in the territories of the two opposing powers: France and the German Empire. While the entire continent was trembling as a result of this war, a veritable need for information on an international scale was felt, reinforced by the Protestant Reform and the expansionist actions of the Ottoman Empire (Shaaber 1929; Layher, Scholz & Williams 2008; Raymond 2011; Molino 2016). Against this background, which events were broadcast in news reports and which were ignored? With the help of existing databases and inventories (Pettegree & Walsby 2011; *Early Modern Festival Books Database*; *Universal Short Title Catalogue*, etc.), a doctoral student (*PhD3*), directed by **T. Brero**, will map this market of information and determine which kind of news events circulated and to where, with special attention to re-editions, adaptations and translations of these reports. Eventually, this will lead to the establishment of a typology of reported events and the way they were treated (where they commented on, analysed, ridiculed, or criticized?). The results of this study will allow us to redefine our understanding of the circulation of news (Arblaster 2014; Davies & Fletcher 2014; Moxham & Raymond 2016). The expertise of *Gabriele Balbi* (Università della Svizzera italiana; hereafter: USI) from media studies and that of **E. Doudet**, leader of the *Médialittérature* SNF project, ascertain the interdisciplinary approach of this investigation.

II. Moments that matter: the role of events in crafting personal timelines

Political, military and religious events and sensational information discussed in newsletters and pamphlets were also noted in family record books, memoirs and correspondence. Together, they offer insight into the news that reached people (Buchholz 1983; Ameland 1998; Arnold, Schmolinsky & Zahnd 1999; Blaak 2009; Ulbrich, Von Greyerz & Heiligensetzer 2015). As soon as they are noted down in these private writings, they turn into temporal markers, milestones in an individual narrative. Indeed, in private texts, family events (births, weddings, deaths, the acquiring of property, etc.) are mixed with the memory of public events (coronations, battles, etc.) and those that touch entire communities (natural disasters, epidemics, etc.), together constituting a personal timeline (Dekker 1995; 2002; Baggerman, Dekker & Mascuch 2011). How do these micro- and macro-events tell a life story, together? Are they ordered to provide a gradation to the measurement of time and the appreciation of the lived present? In what way are these significant instants told and immortalized in words and memories, which become temporal markers? These questions will be examined in two projects.

a) Connected Chronicles: Uniting Private and Public Events in Personal Writings. — The first will focus on a corpus of ego-documents, like family record books and memoirs, established by means of databases like that of the *Onderzoeksinstituut Egodocument en Geschiedenis* and the *Swiss database of personal writings*. By means of establishing a typology of the public and private reported events and an analysis of the manner in which these events are described, a postdoctoral researcher (*Postdoc2*) under guidance of **T. Brero** will determine what men and women of this period considered to be an event and how this impacted their conception of the present. This typology will also be an essential tool to examine the penetration of local and international news in different layers of society (e.g. nobles, merchants, clerics) and specific communities (e.g. Catholics, Protestants, Jews). The ambition of this study is to explore the individual and intimate dimension of the present, by reconstructing these tailored timelines. This project will benefit from the expertise of *Pierre Monnet* (École des hautes études en sciences sociales; hereafter: EHESS).

b) Ego-events: the Emergence of Significant Dates and Individual Calendars. — The second study will address the subject of self-celebration. During the Middle Ages, very few people knew their birth date (Poulle 1996; Boudet 2020). In fact, that information was of little importance in Christian thought (Borst 1996; Schmitt 2010). The situation changes with the dawn of the early modern period, when a gradual secularization of society results in an increased interest in the lives of individuals (Greenblatt 1980; Schmitt 2017). The dissemination of the written word, the uniformization of the parochial records and the increased number and kinds of ego-documents contribute to an amplified awareness of the elites and bourgeoisie about dates. People start to know their birthday and age – as is visible in the numerous portraits that indicate the age of the sitter with an *Anno aetatis suae*. Indeed, the dates are not only known, but also celebrated as “ego-events”: Emperor Charles V celebrated his anniversary and urban authorities in Northwestern Europe started to highlight key moments in their recent history by organizing commemorations federating civic identity (Phythian-Adams 1972; Graf 1989; Morerod 2007; Brenner, Cohen & Franklin-Brown 2013). This research will explore these new ways of self-celebrating, at the level of individuals, but also of communities (like performative literary groups mentioned earlier [*cf.* 2.0: axis 3]); it will be conducted by **T. Brero**, in close collaboration with **J. Blanc**’s sub-project regarding the dates in artworks (*cf.* 2.1.1, Ic).

III. Chronotopes: how temporal markers define space

The interest in events that characterizes this period can also be approached from the perspective of their location, or, more precisely: of the manner in which an event is connected to a certain location and how this location shapes the temporal perception of the event. To analyse this interdependence between time and space in perceptions of the present, we will draw upon a concept coined by Mikhail Bakhtin (1937–1938 [ed. 1978]): “chronotope”. For the Russian literary historian, a “chronotope” frames a specific geographic, social and symbolic space (in the novel), such as a street, gate, forest or prison, as a marker of time dependent on the action that takes place there. Since medieval and early modern culture are characterized by a constant back and forth between fiction and reality, this semiotic concept is of great value for our enquiry (Schmitt 2016). It allows us to examine how places are marked by a collective temporality, but also by a subjective perception of time at the level of the emotions, thoughts and feelings of the individual or group that passes through that space. This interdisciplinary investigation is particularly crucial for socially complex spaces such as cities, where the monumentalization of significant moments, orchestrated by local authorities, is intended to leave a lasting impression, but may occasionally clash with individual perceptions or the perspectives of specific communities. For this reason, we will first concentrate on loud large-scale events, like large princely ceremonies – in which the exceptionality of the moment is marked by perennial as well as ephemeral artefacts such as triumphal arches, fake architecture, fireworks and dishes (Lardellier 1999; Peters 2008; Pauwels 2009) – that turn the street, neighbourhood or city gate into a marker of the present. However, the whispers of events in the familiar and daily sphere also take hold of a space and give it temporal significance occasionally misaligned with official intentions or narratives. For example, the central square of Lille has meaning because of the perennial structures that surround it, but also because it hosts the wheat market on Mondays and the horse market on Tuesdays and sometimes it is the location of executions, theatre performances and princely festivities. For each of these events, the square has a different meaning, moreover, depending on whether one is a merchant or buyer, a cleric at the beginning of a procession or a poor beggar in the margins of the parade, the victim of the executioner or a spectator of his pain. The concept of chronotope offers a tool to seize these various apprehensions of space as they are defined by the present – or indeed by the multiple presents that are assembled at the same place simultaneously – and as such contributes to the approach of differential history. The combination of practical and literary sources allows the identification of the temporal markers represented by locations in the urban space (Champion 2017; 2019a; 2019b). A doctoral student (*PhD*), supervised by **T. Brero** and **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin** will examine these urban temporal markers by means of two case studies: the city of Lille and of Bern in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The study will use the deliberation and police records, memoirs, travel journals (describing visited towns at a precise moment), chronicles, and occasionally account books (to verify other sources), as well as images that provide their own vision of these chronotopes. *Regula Schmid-Keeling* and *Olivier Richard-Trauffer* will offer their expertise with regard to the German area aspects of the project.

2.1.3. WP3: MASTERING NEWNESS – THE IMPERATIVES OF *HIC AND NUNC* IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF POWER (DIR. É. LECUPPRE-DESJARDIN)

This third work package focuses on the dynamic relationship between power and innovation and the role of the perception and conception of the present as an imperative for political decision-making at various scales. Researchers in the humanities and social sciences frequently express their concerns regarding the stunning progress of artificial intelligence and the major risk involved in governments allowing digital giants to be in charge of this force in societal transformation (Faure 2018). While this example directly relates to us and our time, history is full of similar “missed opportunities”, as well as of cases in which those in political power employ innovation for their benefit. The changes – or even disruptions – implied in innovation arouse the interest and suspicion of both governments and the people

who are governed, particularly when it comes to innovative methods of government. These issues relate to the question of the political validation of innovation as a condition of its existence, as well as its role in the evolution of governments. Recent studies questioning innovation from a socio-economic point of view have challenged the idea that medieval and more generally pre-revolutionary societies were paralysed by a systematic refusal of anything that was not a repetition of the familiar and established (Frugoni 2001; Godin 2015; Ingham 2015). Indeed, “novelty”, often synonymous in ancient languages with new taxes, became the word designating anything that disrupted the routine in a negative sense. Traditionally, newness was experienced as a negative thing, to the degree that it was considered an insult to divine creation and the Bible. From this perspective, innovation could only be acceptable if it constituted reform, which was considered a restoration of the ancient state of affairs. This is what theologians thought, but this did not prevent men from innovating in practice without saying so and introducing new tools to perfect their techniques. Employing all sorts of gimmicks to “make old with new”, societies have assumed the need to innovate to maintain the status quo, especially in times of crisis. The chronological and geographical scope of this project (*cf.* 2.0) represent a time and a place that were particularly open to technical innovation, scientific discoveries and the circulation of goods. It offers a perfect platform to consider this awareness of the present on three levels: on the local scale of the city; on the scale of the state at the time of the Burgundian-Habsburg sovereigns; and on the transoceanic imperial scale during the reign of Emperor Charles V and Philip II.

I. City time: exploring the role of the present in urban development

The city was a place of guilds, of migrations, of the clustering of knowledge and know-how. The urban space offered a breeding ground for different kinds of innovations: slow transformation of traditional uses, new creations, and exchange (De Munck 2017). The economic impact of new ways of consuming and producing has been studied extensively (De Munck & Davids 2014; Stabel 2019). Over the past ten years, several studies have been devoted to industrial secrets and patents of invention, transfers of knowledge, evolution of benefits, organization of guilds, and most recently the risk management in the maritime trade in particular (Hilaire-Pérez & Garçon 2003; Deloof & Puttevils 2017; Baudry, Blanc, Hilaire-Pérez, Ratcliff & Wenger 2021). Instead, this sub-project aims to shed new light on the cultural impact of the emergence of new technologies and new products that were inscribed in the *hic et nunc*. It leads to questions such as “how long do novelties last?”, “what is their impact on individual perception of the present?”, and especially “how did medieval and early modern municipal councils manage to introduce or regulate new practices within the world of crafts and merchants?”. There is a long-standing and thorough historiography devoted to the question of crafts in the cities of the Low Countries (i.e. Espinas 1942; Boone & Prevenier 1993; Stabel 2004). City archives have been mined extensively and researchers studied trade regulations in order to understand the corporatist mechanisms inside the city and the manufacture of products. To place these results into perspective, our ambition is to combine the sources of practice, the images that demonstrate the adoption of practical innovations in illuminated manuscripts and paintings, and the municipal ordinances allowing us to follow the decisions that accompany the evolution of the trades and the pace of acceptance of newness. The opening of a new butcher’s shop, the relocation of the fuller’s workshops, the postponement of market dates: all implied the immediacy of a request that must be validated or not, offering the local authority the opportunity to position itself in relation to these novelties. The analysis of trade regulations and their constant modifications in the margins over a long period allows us to refute the idea of a customary way of thinking that celebrates the past through a never-ending reiteration of the old. It will demonstrate, instead, an awareness of a pragmatic present that obliges municipalities to legislate and therefore show their authority in the face of innovation. A doctoral student (*PhD5*) will conduct a thesis under the direction of **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin** on the basis of an examination of the trade registers, the registers of banns, memorials, and the registers of deliberations in the rich archives of Lille, Douai and Sint-Omar. The comparison of

this legislative, consultative and judicial documentation will lead to a serial and comparative approach, ranging from the mid-fourteenth century to the early-sixteenth century. This study will make it possible to grasp the cultural context that welcomed innovation and allowed the local political authority to strengthen and position itself in relation to the lord and prince, who often rose to a position of arbitration in case of major conflicts between trades and urban authority. In addition, an image bank of depictions of innovation in cities in Northwestern Europe (14th–17th c.) will be established by **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin, J. Blanc** and a postdoctoral researcher (*Postdoc3*). A comparison with other cities will be provided by *Olivier Richard-Trauffer* (UNIFR) and *Mathieu Caesar* (UNIGE).

II. Reform and renewal: the impact of the present in political discourse

In a region characterized by constant territorial reconfiguration, the power of local idiosyncrasies and the sovereign ambitions of the last Valois princes and the first Habsburgs contributed to the multiplication of conflicts (Boone & Prak 1995 [2021]; Dumolyn & Haemers 2005; Blockmans 2022). It also stimulated a spirit of reform – typical for the *Zeitgeist* – that took on the characteristics of a composite state facing constant warfare (Lecuppre-Desjardin 2016b; Cauchies 2019). In addition, it was in this same space that the Protestant Reformation had its greatest impact. Already before Luther’s arrival, a range of religious movements (Wycliffism, Beguines, *Devotio moderna*, Anabaptism, etc.) and echoes of conciliar activities incessantly defended the call for a reform of the Church and lay politics. These renewals opened the door for the introduction of new ways of living and expressions of faith, as well as for new considerations of the pivotal role of the present in shaping one’s own destiny.

By adopting a broad definition of the ideal of “reformation”, referring to an ambivalent concept interpretable both as a plea for a return to the past as well as the introduction of new principles of government for people and their souls, this sub-project explores the evolution of political discourse and argumentation in favour of newness. The publication of a range of primary sources of a theoretical, pragmatic and literary nature facilitates the examination of the role of the conception and perception of the present in this reform process. Indeed, to grasp the presentist dimension of decision-making, it is necessary to relate the theory of the political literature to its immediate application, as contained in the ordinances and mandates, in protest writings and on the stage (Doudet 2010; 2018). This sub-project combines textual analysis with identification and examination of the men who develop these ideas of reform or impact, in order to reveal networks, i.e. a grid of the cultural *koiné* mentioned in the introduction (*cf.* 2.0). The sub-project utilizes two databases: the *Prosopographia Curiae Burgundicae* database, hosted by the IRHiS laboratory at ULille under the direction of **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin** since 2021, and the *ManMax* database, developed by the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (hereafter: OAW) under the direction of A. Zajic, G. Vögler, and *Jonathan Dumont*. A partnership between these databases has already been established by **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin**. The ordinances, mandates, correspondences, theoretical writings, libels, plays, etc. will constitute the basis of a postdoctoral project (*Postdoc3*), leading, amongst others, to a repertory of the key vocabulary and allegorical figures in the aim to seize the evolution of the mobilized argumentation. The objective of this investigation is to identify the impact of presentism in the institutional and ideological evolution within political action. This part will be managed by **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin** and **E. Doudet** with the collaboration of *Nicole Hochner* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem; hereafter: HUU) and *Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci* (UNIGE).

III. The rise of Empire: exploring the dilatation of the present at the time of Imperial expansion

The third sub-project considers the complete change of paradigm constituted by intercontinental trade and the integration of this colonialized space into an empire whose dimensions forced a reconsideration of the geopolitical map. It will examine the process by which the territory of an imperial formation was constructed and legitimized. The imperial dynamic is that of an enterprise of domination and unification that is exercised in a relational framework (Havard 2022). Now, before the state division established in 1648, the enormous size of the Habsburg Empire

required constant institutional innovation. A glance at the title of Charles V, featuring more than forty titles, evokes the challenge of governing such a territory. While the abdication (1555) and the division of the inheritance show the failure of the undertaking, the attempts to coordinate the imperial action manifested within the chancellery and more particularly through diplomatic action, offer us a context to reconsider the question of the present – or, more exactly, of the multiple *presents* of the Empire.

In this framework, we will examine the perception of the present through the lens of alterity and temporal relativism. A doctoral student (*PhD6*), directed by **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin** in collaboration with *Jonathan Dumont* (OAW), will focus on the “trial period” limited by the reigns of Charles V and Philip II (1519–1598). In 1523, Grand Chancellor Gattinara arranged for the Council of State to meet every day at 7 a.m. in winter and at 6 a.m. in summer in order to hear all the news from the Empire and to formulate their response (Headley 2009; Riveiro Rodriguez 2005; D’Amico & Danet 2022). Lacking diplomatic tools, the imperial chancellery entrusted foreign affairs to two ministers, Don Francisco de los Cobos and Nicolas Perrenot, lord of Granvelle, who dealt with the affairs of Spain, Italy, North Africa and the “Indies”, and with the German Empire, the Netherlands, England and France, respectively. The desire to grasp the Empire in terms of the measure of a European time quickly came up against constraints that lead to the development of structures of government attached to the internal dynamics of each area (Jeanne 2008). As a result, European diplomacy could now be considered from Mexico City (Gruzinski 2008; Tinguely 2008). An examination of the control mechanism put in place by Gattinara and his successors will allow us to identify the attempts of a diplomacy forced to consider the multiple presents imposed upon it. The study will be based on correspondence and published reports and a collection of extant documents in the archives of Vienna, Brussels and Simancas. The objective of the researchers associated with this sub-project (**É. Lecuppre-Desjardin, T. Brero and Frédéric Tinguely** [UNIGE]) is twofold: to target the evolution of the imperial policy in the framework of new considerations about centres and peripheries and to observe the dilation of the present thanks to the flow of news and information coming from the New World.

2.2. Interdisciplinarity

This project would be impossible without a profoundly interdisciplinary perspective. The present and its construction as a temporal category, its perception as a lived experience and its establishment by means of law, discourse and representation, cannot be studied in a comprehensive and nuanced way without the combined use of tools and methods from the disciplines of history, art history, literary theory and history, linguistics and historical anthropology, media studies and political science. Our project is conceived to address this necessity by engaging and incorporating these different fields on a theoretical, empirical and methodological level.

In terms of theory, we incorporate principle concepts and analytical frameworks from the aforementioned disciplines. The combination of perspectives allows us to examine the manner in which political authorities and economic, cultural and social forces interact stimulate or obstruct the rise of new forms of conceptualization, experimentation and regulation of the present. In addition, we will study the way in which collectives – states, provinces, cities, families – can intervene in the promotion or dismissal of innovation. Finally, we insist on charting the processes of adaptation and dissemination of, and resistance to novel ideas and technologies that did not exist before and therefore lack a previously established authority.

On the empirical level, the project brings together a great diversity of written sources and other source material, including archival documents, literary and philosophical texts, artworks and material objects. This range of sources allows us to reconstruct the complex socio-historical context in which the present installed itself as a new kind of experience. By means of the municipal archives, guild registers, political deliberations and legislative texts we can

demonstrate how local authorities manage and regulate innovation. Literary, philosophical and theological sources offer insight into the discourse and ideas regarding presentism, change and innovation, whereas artworks, illuminated manuscripts and material objects illustrate the visual representation and the perception of the present through time and space.

Finally, with regard to the methodology, the project adopts various approaches to analyse and interpret the sources and material. Four methodologies will be adopted in particular – without excluding other approaches that are specifically adapted to certain sources: quantitative and qualitative methods; prosopography; textual criticism; and formal and iconographic visual analysis. Quantitative analysis will be used to study the data in the archives, in order to identify trends and models in the adoption and regulation of innovations. In other cases, qualitative analysis of discourses and other content will be used to examine literary, philosophical and theological texts, with the aim to capture the ideas and attitudes towards the present. Prosopography is essential to study networks and the actors implicated in the processes of transformation and social, cultural and intellectual reform, thereby demonstrating the connections and interactions between individuals and social groups. Textual criticism makes it possible to reconstruct the contexts in which ideas were formulated, the literary genres to which they belong and the rhetorical strategies that they use. Lastly, the formal and iconographic analysis of visual material can be used to explore the visual representations of the present, in particular the question of the everyday life and the contemporain – in artworks like paintings or illuminated manuscripts.

2.2.1. APPLICANTS AND ASSOCIATED PARTNERS

The four project applicants come from distinct and complimentary academic disciplines. Each principal investigator will be responsible for a work package and several sub-projects, in close collaboration with the associated partners (*cf.* 2.1). The **PIs** have previously collaborated in different conjugations on small projects (but never altogether), which is indicative of both their ability and shared ambition to unite their skills and experience. Their affiliation to universities and institutions in different parts of Switzerland (Lausanne, Geneva and Neuchâtel) and Europe (Switzerland and France) will further stimulate the exchange of ideas and knowledge that will nourish the project. The interdisciplinarity and complementarity of the project leaders in terms of specialisms, conceptual perspectives and methodological approaches are in fact major advantages for this Sinergia project, offering an opportunity to consolidate and formalize existing collaborations and to develop new research perspectives. As such, the project promotes a dynamic of cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and views, which we deem essential to mitigate complex challenges posed by the cultural and historical study of the present in Northwestern Europe between the end of the Middle Ages and the middle of the seventeenth century.

Table 1. Synthetic Overview of the Applicants and Associated Partners

Name	Discipline/Expertise	Role(s) in the project and sub-projects
Main applicant		
Prof. Thalia Brero (UNINE)	European courts and political communication (15th–16th c.)	(WP2) Displaying events – international, collective and private milestones <i>Coordination of the work package</i> (WP1, II) Now is the time (WP3, III) The rise of Empire <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Co-applicants		
Prof. Jan Blanc (UNIGE)	Northern artistic theories and practices (15th–18th c.)	(WP1) Figuring moments – discursive and visual forms of the present <i>Coordination of the work package</i> (WP2, II) Moments that matter (WP3, I) City time

Prof. Estelle Doudet (UNIL)	European public sphere and media culture (14th–16th c.)	<i>Participation in the sub-project</i> (WP1) Figuring moments – discursive and visual forms of the present <i>Coordination of the work package</i> (WP2, I) Expanding horizons (WP3, II) Reform and renewal <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin (ULille)	Urban history and political ideas in Northwestern Europe	(WP3) Mastering newness – the imperatives of <i>hic and nunc</i> in the development of power <i>Coordination of the work package</i> (WP1, III) Now in focus (WP2, III) Chronotopes <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Associated partners (alphabetic order)		
Prof. Gabriele Balbi (USI)	Media studies	(WP2, I) Expanding horizons <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Mathieu Caesar (UNIGE)	Political, economic, and religious history of late medieval Europe	(WP3, I) City time <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Dr. Jonathan Dumont (OAW)	Social and political imaginary of early modern Europe	(WP3, II) Reform and renewal (WP3, III) The rise of Empire <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Jean-Marie Fournier (CNRS/Sorbonne Nouvelle)	Linguistic theories	(WP1, I) Now speak <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Nicole Hochner (HUI)	Political sciences and cultural studies	(WP3, II) Reform and renewal <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Lotte Jensen (RU)	Dutch cultural and literary history	(WP1, I) Now speak <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Koenraad Jonckheere (UGent)	Northern Renaissance and baroque art	(WP1, III) Now in focus <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Pierre Monnet (EHESS)	Historical anthropology, Holy Roman Empire	(WP2, II) Moments that matter <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Olivier Richard-Trauffer (UNIFR)	Urban history and diplomacy during the Late Middle Ages	(WP2, III) Chronotopes (WP3, I) City time <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Regula Schmid Keeling (UNIBE)	Social and Military History of Late Middle Ages (14th–16th c.)	(WP2, III) Chronotopes <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Daniela Solfaroli-Camilloci (UNIGE)	Religious practices and gender studies	(WP3, II) Reform and renewal <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>
Prof. Frédéric Tinguely (UNIGE)	Renaissance literature and knowledge in an intercultural perspective	(WP3, III) The rise of Empire <i>Participation in the sub-project</i>

Prof. Jan Blanc is an art historian of the premodern and early modern period at the University of Geneva. He is a renowned specialist on the connection between art theory and artistic practices in Northern Europe (the Netherlands, France, Great Britain) of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He published and edited several translations of early modern texts (i.e. Blanc 2006; 2008; 2013a), as well as studies regarding artistic terminology (Blanc 2013b; 2019b), from an intercultural perspective (Blanc & Maes 2010). For about a decade, he has developed a strong interest in the cultural and artistic history of time. Between 2017 and 2022, he directed a SNF research project about the manner in which the notion of the “Golden Age” was constructed in seventeenth-century discourse in the Dutch Republic (*Un Siècle d’or? Repenser la peinture hollandaise du XVII^e siècle*). This project resulted in two monographs about the early modern period (Blanc 2021a) and seventeenth century (Blanc 2019a) and an edited volume (Blanc 2021b). Since 2023, he coordinates a SNF project about the emergence of artistic literature in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France (*Peindre et penser la peinture en France durant le premier XVII^e siècle: discours, artistes, concepts*).

Prof. Thalia Brero is historian of the Middle Ages and Renaissance at the University of Neuchâtel. Her main research interests include the royal and princely courts at the end of the Middle Ages, in particular with regard to the great events organized in that environment, ranging from rituals connected to births, marriages and deaths of the ruling class (Brero 2017) to those very intense diplomatic moments of encounters between rulers (Brero 2021). She is interested in the written descriptions of these events and their dissemination, amongst others by means of printed reports (Brero 2019). More generally, she studies the international circulation of news in the century following the invention of the printing press (Bermudez, Brero, Carta & Palacios, forthcoming).

Prof. Estelle Doudet is historian of French literature and language between the fourteenth and sixteenth century at the University of Lausanne. Her research addresses the forms of public communication and the manner in which these media translate the visions of the society that emerged in Europe during that period, focusing on the French-speaking regions in connection with German-, English, Italian- and Dutch-speaking regions. She is particularly interested in occasional poetry (Doudet 2005), allegorical texts (Doudet 2018), political and moral writings, as well as notions and practices of early modern eloquence (*Age of Orators*, project IUF, 2016–2018). She has developed new research methodologies, like the archaeology of media for French medievalists (Citton & Doudet 2019), particularly in her project *Médialittérature* (cf. 2.2.2).

Prof. Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin is a historian of the end of the Middle Ages at the University of Lille, specialized in urban and cultural political history. Her work focuses on the Low Countries, mainly on the crossroads between urban and curial spheres. Subjects like political and symbolic communication (Lecuppre-Desjardin 2004) and the construction of the state hold her particular attention. Within this context she examines the ideological and identity base that allows political communities to affirm themselves (*Speeches and practices of innovation in Western Europe [13th–16th c.]*, Institut universitaire de France, 2018–2023). Recently, she questioned the paradigm of the Burgundian state, proposing that of the Great Principality of Burgundy (Lecuppre-Desjardin 2016b). The necessity of political reform and its conceptual ambiguity currently form the centre of her intellectual preoccupations.

2.2.2. ADDITIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Several collaborations with ongoing research projects on related themes are promising, and these partnerships can potentially create valuable synergies with our Sinergia project. The projects led by **J. Blanc**, funded by the SNF (*Peindre et penser la peinture en France durant le premier XVII^e siècle: discours, artistes, concepts*) and the Fonds d'impulsion G3 (*Paysages-catastrophes [XVI^e-XVII^e s.]*), will provide valuable insights into how early modern painters perceived their position in the history of art, both in the past and present. These projects will also examine the role of disaster as a theme in artistic expression (cf. 2.1.1). The project *Médialittérature: poétiques et pratiques de la communication publique en français (XV^e-XVI^e siècles)*, led by **E. Doudet**, will contribute to our understanding of news and current events sheets (cf. 2.1.2). Meanwhile, the project *S'en tenir aux "Faits de Jésus Christ et du pape": les imprimés évangéliques romands et les pratiques de communication religieuse à l'époque de la Réforme*, directed by *Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci* (UNIGE), will shed light on the role of reformed ideas in shaping new perceptions of the present (cf. 2.1.3). Furthermore, the Lille workshop titled *La Fabrique de l'urbain à Lille au XV^e siècle*, directed by **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin**, will also result in a collaboration centred on a digital device to represent a Lille event (cf. 2.3.4). Lastly, digital humanities researchers affiliated with Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel's team (UNIGE) will assist us in implementing innovative methods for analysing and utilizing the data from our internal database.

2.3. Relevance and impact

2.3.1. SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Both in terms of its subject and its methods our project is profoundly innovative. Firstly, it proposes a new – arguably even the first – history of the present. Historians have written a lot about the issue of time. Few have, however, touched on the subject of the present, and those who have essentially treated the contemporary period (*cf.* 2.4). In agreement with those authors, we admit that the notion of the present did not exist forever. Until the end of the Middle Ages, it is a temporal category of secondary importance in comparison with the past and, to a lesser degree, the future. We strongly disagree, nevertheless, with the idea that the present would be a recent invention (Koselleck 1979 [ed. 2000]; Hartog 2003). Our goal is to affirm that the notion of the present predates the period proposed by other researchers by several centuries. Its first occurrence was not at the beginning of the industrial era, but around the end of the fourteenth century. The attempt to detect the present in premodern societies is therefore wholly innovative and it will lead to a reconsideration of historiography with regard to the history of the present and, more in general, the history of time.

This new history of time also signifies a new history of Northwestern Europe. This region is often studied in a fragmented way by distinguishing between the countries separately despite their close relation. Between succession wars and the religious reforms that changed the West: the conception of time differs from that of the South. Rather than a revival of Antiquity, it is the birth of a new era. The Renaissance in Southern Europe has received a lot of scholarly attention. By studying the North, a space with its own coherence during that same period, our project means to establish an equilibrium between these two regions, thereby offering new comparisons and a renewed look at European history.

To obtain these objectives, we also propose a new methodology. The assumption that the present is not a fact, but a construct, has led us to develop a new innovative framework to capture time and space in an inseparable way: differential history (*cf.* 2.5.2). By considering the geographic location, the membership to a community and the specific individual context (professional background, gender, family, etc.), it is possible to grasp the coexistence of a multitude of presents. Thanks to this method and the change of focus that it implies, we can have a different understanding of the past: not only by capturing the numerous facets of the present moment, but also the different components of the context that make up a community or individual.

The powerful tool of the Sinergia grant permits us to bring together domains that usually remain separate, such as geographical areas distinguished by the languages (French, Dutch, English and German), different periods (Middle Ages, early modern period) and academic disciplines (history, art history, literature, media studies, political science, gender studies, etc.). Moreover, only a wide-ranging project such as this one makes it possible to encapsulate the vast corpus of sources that we intend to analyse. The interdisciplinarity of our project demands that we work with different sources of a literary, visual, material, practical and private nature simultaneously (*cf.* 2.5.3).

The team will organize a series of major project events: two international conferences (in the second and fourth year of the project respectively). In addition, they will present their work at conferences of their discipline. The project has several objectives in terms of publications. Firstly, certain results of the different work teams will publish articles in first-tier journals in the different disciplines. Secondly, transversal articles in which members working in different work packages will treat research questions from an interdisciplinary perspective. Two monographies are planned: one by **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin**, provisionally entitled *The Prince, Master of Time at the End of the Middle Ages*; the second will address the use of dates and is to be written by **J. Blanc** and **T. Brero**. Finally, the main output of the project consists in the *Encyclopedia of the Present in Northwestern Europe, 1348–1648*, a synthesis that unites the contributions of all the project participants, research partners, as well as external experts. This reference work

will be conceived in interaction with another book, an anthology of sources for university students (*cf.* 2.3.3). Lastly, the six doctoral theses ensuing from the project will be published.

2.3.2. DIGITAL HUMANITIES DIMENSION

We plan to develop what we call a “virtual experience” that will showcase how four individuals lived and thought his or her present. Four modules will be produced: “Imagining the present of Margareta Zum Guldin Ring, a devout woman from Basel in 1356”, “Imagining the present of Agnes van den Bossche, a painter from Ghent in 1469”, “Imagining the present of Wygand Köln, a printer in Geneva in the sixteenth century” and “Imagining the present of Peter Hagendorf, a lansquenet during the Thirty Years’ War”. The users will be able to meet these historical figures and explore their experiences of the present through different objects and events. In partnership with graphic design schools, such as the Brassart School Lille (students in 2D-3D Animation, under the supervision of Dimitri Dassonneville), and potentially HEAD (Geneva), EPFL (Lausanne) and GameLab (UNIL), we will create a digital interface that compiles texts, images, and objects that constitute the present of historical individuals, allowing users to better understand their experiences.

Furthermore, the project includes the development of an internal database containing all references to the present that have been identified by project members. The database covers various types of data such as images, literature, archival documents, news media, and material objects. A particular focus on the utilization and evolution of words to convey the notion of the present in various languages prevalent in this region of Europe (Dutch, English, French, German, and Latin) will constitute the foundation of this comprehensive database enriched by an extensive array of sources. Finally, the project aims to establish and maintain a blog to show the progress of our research and offer all those interested access to an up-to-date bibliography, project announcements regarding conferences and seminars, reports and summaries about activities of the project members and the project in general, etc.

2.3.3. EDUCATION AND TEACHING

Each principal investigator is currently in charge of one or more bachelor and master seminars. We aim to develop future topics for these courses in relation to the project’s themes, thereby involving as many students as possible from the host universities, as well as from the institutions of the researchers who have agreed to accompany the project in the form of co-supervision or co-direction. **É. Lecuppre-Desjardin**’s seminar dedicated to political cultures and ideologies (Late Middle Ages and early modernity) at the University of Lille will be devoted to the question of reform from September 2023 onwards. **J. Blanc** will also teach a master course and bachelor seminar on the manner in which French, Dutch and British early modern artists depicted the reality of their contemporary world and daily life. **T. Brero** will offer a bachelor seminar about calendars and the conception of time in the medieval period in 2023–2024, and another on political news and its circulation at the end of the Middle Ages in 2024–2025. In addition, the *Atelier* on theatrical research and creation taught by **E. Doudet** in her master’s programme, dedicated to militant theatres at the time of the Protestant Reform in 2023, will be followed by one on news spectacles. Her interdisciplinary course “The Middle Ages today” will instruct the first-year bachelor students on notions of presentism, modernization and historical imagination. Finally, the four **PIs** will organize a hybrid seminar on the subject of dates in textual and visual culture in Northwestern Europe during the pre- and early modern period. Moreover, the virtual experience described above (*cf.* 2.3.2) includes the development of educational tools, such as 2D-3D animation modules, aimed at introducing primary and secondary school students to historical or personal events through the perspective of the men and women who lived them. A third educational component will offer a sourcebook. The sources collected within the framework of the joint database will be selected to form a book for students and researchers, a *Sourcebook of Present Time in Northwestern Europe (14th–17th c.)*. Finally, the project’s blog will allow higher education students to learn about the latest results of our research, and to benefit from a bibliographic watch for their own work.

2.3.4. BROADER RELEVANCE AND PUBLIC DISSEMINATION

Our current societies are developing a sense of fear in the face of an accelerating pace that leads to what sociologists have identified as a “tyranny of emergency” (Finchelstein 2011). This examination of the Old Regime will assist in establishing a historical understanding that is more objective and impartial, allowing for a more nuanced perspective on the present and its significance. Ancient societies, just as disoriented by crises and developments as ours is, also had to face up to them. Today’s crises are not yesterday’s, but considering the present for what it is and for the perspectives it offers allows us to relativize the dominant pessimistic vision that currently leads to a general loss of confidence (Edelman Trust Barometer 2022). The project team intends to give public lectures to present this historical continuum that is a fundamental dimension of the dynamic trajectory of human societies. In addition, a better understanding of a past that is embodied in its present immediate reality – one of this project’s objectives – provides the incentive to organize conferences in conjunction with teacher training institutions (*cf.* 2.3.3) to explain the use of these new tools to an audience of instructors. At the end of the programme, two events targeting a wider public will be organized. Firstly, an event to contextualize an exhibition at the Hermitage Museum in Lausanne on the theme of human and climatic catastrophe, in collaboration with its director, Sylvie Wuhrmann (*cf.* 2.1.1). Contacts have also been established with the Espace Horloger in the Vallée de Joux (Le Sentier) to organize a smaller, secondary exhibition focused on ancient time-measuring instruments. Secondly, the launch of a digital tool visualizing a precise moment of the history of the city of Lille in connection with the project “La Fabrique de l’urbain à Lille au xv^e siècle” (*cf.* 2.2.2). The aim of this tool is to provide the tourist office with a digital device, accessible on a tablet, that allows visiting the city in light of a significant event. For example, during a city tour, the visit to the Courtrai’s Gate would be marked by a tablet animation that would bring the place to life at a specific moment in its history, i.e. 1 March 1384, the day the funeral convoy of the Count of Flanders got stuck.

2.4. State of the art relevant to the project

The pioneering studies of Reinhart Koselleck (1979 [ed. 2002]) and Peter Burke (1969; 2004) placed the cultural history of time on the agenda and the subject continues to gain importance (Assmann 2003; Schmitt 2005; Sabrow 2012; Geppert & Kössler 2015; Barash, Bouton & Jollivet 2021). Time is no longer taken for granted as a category, whether from a sociological, economic, religious, philosophical, moral, political, scientific or artistic perspective, but is considered a cultural construction (Champion 2019b). As a result, scholars have started to study how, in specific periods and places, time was experienced and conceptualized by different “communities of timekeeping” (Bieri 1972; Glennie & Thrift 2009). Within this cultural history of the present, the past and future hold a central place (Bevernage & Lorenz 2013). Past events are mobilized to inform, legitimate or explain present events, whether these are framed in traditional structures (memories, genealogies, customs, chronologies) or emphasize a real or supposed modernity (Thomas 1984; Zerubavel 2003; Jouhaud 2007; Bauer 2008; Nora 2011; Marincola, Llewellyn-Jones & Maciver 2012; Deseure & Pollmann 2013). In turn, in an essentially Christian world dominated by a belief in the afterlife and in the divine blessings of Providence, the future is full of promises (Aron 1948: 182; Hölscher 2016; Oschema & Schneidmüller 2021), even outside the strict field of religion where, for merchants, the uncertainties of the present allow them to bet on the future (Puttevils 2017).

The present has, however, been singularly neglected in these studies, with the exception of reflections on of the problematic notion of “presentism” (Hartog 2003; 2020; Walsham 2017; Welch, 2017). Originally developed in the early-twentieth century by philosophers of the vitalist (Paulhan 1924), personalist (Mounier 1946: 326) and cybernetic (Ruyer 1954: 63) tradition, this notion still upholds normative value. “Presentism” is distinguished from the futurism that dominated earlier and has since vanished from the European horizon, offering a unique regime of

historicity (“régime d’historicité”) associated with modernity. It is characterized by disoriented time and uncertainty as both a mode of thought and a subject for scientific enquiry (Koselleck 1979 [ed. 2000]: 46–49, 108; Gumbrecht 2013; Mazurel 2013). As Hartog (2003: 260) states, “the present comes in fashion and, very quickly, arrives at an injunction: one should not only be of the time, but work and live in the present.” The word “present” is valued: “Never rest, be flexible, mobile, responsive to the demand, [and] innovate incessantly” are the slogans. It is the winning phase of presentism.’ (Hartog 2020: 275–76). However, this concept of presentism leads to two problems. Besides its pejorative character, which we find more elaborated in the writings of other historians, philosophers and sociologists (Ankersmit 2005; Rosa 2005 [ed. 2010]; Tomlinson 2007; Doering-Manteuffel & Lutz 2012), it is of shallow historical depth, suggesting the present is a recent invention.

Yet, there are actually many indications that the invention of the present is not such a recent historical phenomenon (Hunt 2002; Burke 2014; Olivier & Tamm 2019). Following Lucien Febvre (1956), numerous authors have noted that traumatic events such as epidemics, coups, accidental deaths, and devastating wars became more frequent towards the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period. These events not only had a direct impact on individuals and communities but also influenced how these people and social groups perceived their own present (Landwehr 2012; 2014). Moreover, such events make the idea of a simultaneously shared present questionable (Gurvitch 1958; Le Goff 1960; Brose 2004; Jordheim 2012) and that of a homogeneous whole by historians unthinkable (Champion 2019a). In contrast to the conception of the past as revived in the present and planned for the future, which was prevalent during the Renaissance in Southern Europe (Burke 1969; Nagel & Wood 2010; Revest 2013), a different approach to understanding the present emerged. This alternative perspective took root in Northwestern Europe, particularly in France, the Netherlands, England, and the Holy Roman Empire (Chapman 2007; Glennie & Thrift 2009; Schiffman 2011; Champion 2017; Jensen 2020). The evolution of forms and theories of literary fiction, theatre and poetry led authors to take an interest in the contemporary world (Doudet 2006; 2022). The acceleration caused by the changing means of communication and transportation allowed to diminish latency between events and their reception and approach the ideal of instant information (Woolf 2003; Lecuppre-Desjardin 2010; Pettegree 2014). The invention of new techniques like the printing press, watchmaking, water and wind mills, and oil paint that were first developed in Northwestern Europe and unscrupulously presented in the *Nova Reperta* print series, by Adriaen Collaert and Philips Galle (1590) (Drucker & Freeman 1999; Markey 2020) permitted the “Moderns” to assert their primacy (Blondé & Verhoeven 2014; Van Dyck 2018; Turel 2020; Blanc 2021a). Cities, especially in the Southern and Northern Netherlands, were organizing themselves to guarantee their inhabitants sufficient conditions of comfort and safety, both individual (development of private medicine, civic guards, *schutterijen*) (Carasso-Kok 1988) and collective (new architectural typologies, sewage, fire prevention and defence structures) (Prak 2018; Coomans 2021). The development of practices linked to the princely etiquette, conveyed or amplified in treatises on civility and education, is moving in the same direction: the elites need to establish formal rules on how to act appropriately when faced with the unexpected life events (Elias 1939 [ed. 2021]; Montandon 1995; Blondé, Boone & Van Bruaene 2016). The advent of the Protestant Reform, especially in the Holy Empire, the Low Countries, Great Britain and France, means a radical rupture in the religious conception of time (Krumenacker 2019). In the scientific domain, the present forms the place of experiments that are necessary for the construction of knowledge (Carton 1924; Crombie 1971; Hacking 1975; Hacking 1983; Lindberg 1983; Galison 1987; Schiffman 1991; Moutaux 1993; Steinel 1997; Daston 1998; Dacosta Kaufmann 1999; Franklin 2001; Reith 2004; Bessot, Lanier & Le Goff 2005; Keller 2005; Shakelford 2006; Langman 2010; Gorroochurn 2012; Lüthy & Palmerino 2016; Martin 2016; Terwijn 2016; Garau & Omodeo 2020; Webster 2020). The first theories of probability and scientific experiment are developed in the context of the first criticism on Aristotelian dismissal of

the accident as an object of knowledge, respectively turning chance into a research subject and arguing that laws of nature can be drawn from the study of present and empirical experience. One must hunt for the *sortes experimenti* (“experimental hazards”) and contrived events (Witmore 2001), as part of a genuine “systematization of the accident” (Blumenberg 1966 [ed. 1999]). This present, which can thus be the source of real knowledge, is no longer that of Thucydides, Xenophon or Polybius (Bedarida 2001: 153). It is not a case of telling the “most recent past, a concrete past, which has just happened” by showing that the second should resemble the first (Gehrke 2015: 319) in a state of “floating” or “dormancy” (Bloch 1939–1940: I, 117; Febvre 1942: 426–434). Instead, the present is told, shown and represented in itself. As such, the accident emphasizes the profoundly contingent dimension of the temporal category of the present.

2.5. Research approach

2.5.1. A CULTURAL HISTORY OF TIME REVISITED

To steer clear of overwhelming aporia when considering the incommensurable issue of time, historians tend to envision it either as an objective, scientific, cosmological phenomenon that became increasingly measurable over the course of the centuries, or instead as one that is experienced subjectively and is to be addressed in studies of a more psychological or philosophical nature. In his quintessential *L'Ordre du temps* (1984), Krzysztof Pomian suggested different levels of understanding: cyclical (chronometry), periodical (chronology), event-related time (chronography) time, and one directed at the future (chronosophy). This approach initiated a reconsideration of the fragmentation of history. With the same objective, addressed from a more anthropological perspective, François Hartog coined the concept of *régimes d'historicité* (“regimes of historicity”) to distinguish and qualify the manner in which societies articulate the past, present and future. This framework reinforces the conviction that pre- and early modern societies were dominated by the past, while it was only during the last decades of the twentieth century for the preponderance of the present, the so-called “presentism”, to make its appearance (Hartog 2003). In so doing, Hartog moved the cursor further back from where Reinhart Koselleck (1973; 1990) had placed it, at the time of the Enlightenment. In any case, for both Hartog and Koselleck the temporal dimension of the present did not occur in pre- and early modern societies (*cf.* 2.4).

These significant studies on the perception of time, moreover, foreground intellectual history and are largely guided by a focus on important historical events, the contributions of occidental Christian thought on temporalities, and the comparison with other regions offered by the work of early anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss. Instead of adopting a retrospective historical perspective to propose alternative historical categories, the goal of this project is to deconstruct this cultural history of time (*cf.* 2.4). It aims to decompartmentalize the “regimens of historicity” that deny pre- and early modern societies a grounding in the present and to consider this present on itself, rather than as a simple link between an omnipresent past and a future similarly conditioned by a foreshadowing past and with millennial tendencies. In other words, we will evaluate the manner in which the people from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth century in this part of Europe “live the present”. The project team intends to do this by gathering and examining testimonies by means of: 1) a new theoretical approach, 2) multiple methodological tools 3) a shared database. Points 2 and 3 are discussed in sections (*cf.* 2.5.4), and (*cf.* 2.3.2) respectively.

2.5.2. A “DIFFERENTIAL HISTORY”

This project proposes a new heuristic tool and explanatory framework for historical research to investigate the conception and perception of the present in these past societies. Inspired by Einstein’s theory of relativity, which determined that time is relative and depends on different frames of reference, this approach, which we call “differential history”, considers the lived and perceived present as a unique and multidimensional experience.

Nevertheless, the present is a personal experience shared with others in a community. This approach assumes that this experience depends on parameters that are usually studied in isolation, such as gender, social position, ages, economic power, work position, status, religion. To put it differently, a weaver from Ghent or a Burgundian prince who lived at the same time and at the same place did not experience or appreciate the present in the same way, nor did a beguine, a soldier, a mother, a Franciscan priest, a Florentine banker, a beggar or a rich widow. Our research protocol consists in isolating different perceptions of the present in their own context and according to different parameters, and to consider them together. The aim is not to give a general picture of the present, but a differential one. This innovative and unprecedented “differential history”-approach will be developed, implemented and evaluated in this project and has the potential to offer a new model for the practice of history.

Our new approach follows many historiographical trends that have contributed to forging this new way of thinking. Our generation of historians has grown up with the benefits of a range of heuristic approaches, including the linguistic and the cultural turns. Amongst these, Koselleck’s *Begriffsgeschichte* (“conceptual history”) underlines the necessity to place concepts in their temporal environment which is a first condition to develop the “differential history”. More recently, the *histoires connectées* (“connected histories”) method spearheaded by Sanjay Subrahmanyam proposes not to compare, but to connect different national histories with the aim to promote a cross-cultural approach that connects regions that are conventionally treated separately (Subrahmanyam 2022). Comparative history useful at the macro level is not sufficient to apprehend the different states of a present whose shared temporality does not necessarily lead to a unique experience that can be compared to other cultures. Temporal relativism, as briefly discussed by Norbert Elias (1939; 1984), Aaron Gourevitch (1972), Peter Burke (2004), and Jean-Claude Schmitt (2005), has yet to be thoroughly explored. Examining this concept could provide historians with a new means of addressing the “gaps” mentioned by Florence Dupont (*cf.* 2.0: axis 3) and capturing the multifaceted nature of human beings, which lies at the core of the multiplicity of historical truths.

“Differential history” will help to go further in the multiplicity of historical truths. This theoretical approach has been tested at a conference organized in Bologna in 2021 in a paper about the perpetuation of rumours according to the different contexts in which they are integrated (Lecuppre-Desjardin, forthcoming). Rather than inspecting past societies to find the origins of ours, the approach aims to consider the different realities of that past time without any *a priori* inherited by the passing of centuries. The synergy of the different types of expertise and disciplines, which is crucial for this totally new and ambitious project, will allow us to combine a large amount of information to be collected by means of a series of methodologies specific to the research objects (*cf.* 2.5.4), which are detailed in the description of the sub-projects (*cf.* 2.1). Amongst the team members, information will be shared by means of an internal database (*cf.* 2.3.2).

The “differential history” approach is the central theme that guides all of our research investigations. This approach allows us to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, we seek to study the various perceptions of the present amongst different communities of individuals across time, including continuous present, immediate present, and postponed present. We believe that by understanding how each individual is a part of their time, we can avoid the paradox of a contemporary timeframe that is inaccessible to its contemporaries. Secondly, by accumulating and analysing these different relative presents, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the construction of the contemporary. This hypothesis is based on the work of Agamben (2006) and seeks to identify the cultural specificities of Northwestern Europe between the mid-fourteenth and mid-seventeenth century. Thirdly, we aim to compare the results of our project with other regions and cultures, particularly through international workshops, in order to understand how cultural specificities manifested themselves in different regions. Finally, we seek to identify communities of time and challenge the periodizations imposed by historians. By

questioning historical sequences from the perspective of men and women who did not consider themselves as belonging to the Middle Ages or the modern period, but simply to an era or epoch, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical specificities of the period under investigation.

2.5.3. DATA COLLECTION

The research that we wish to conduct would not be possible without a collaborative approach and the collective dynamic offered by a Sinergia project. It is necessary to combine the expertise of the four applicants and the collaborators, as well as the sources that we want to study. It would be impossible to study the variety of these sources as an isolated researcher. This is the ambition of a “total” or indeed “differential” history (*cf.* 2.5.2). Comparative, connected or total history run into a challenge that is often thought to be insurmountable: to incorporate a large number of sources of a very different nature. This is nonetheless necessary if we want to understand the social, economic, political and cultural context over a long period and within a large territory. The work packages have been designed to accommodate this ambition and allow us to study the wide range of sources that form the foundation of our sub-projects (*cf.* 2.1). Each sub-project focuses on a well-defined corpus of sources, described here in outline, since it would be impossible to list all detailed references of identified sources and foresee which sources will be added over the course of the first year of the project (*cf.* 2.6).

Table 2. Synthetic overview of the main sources and their distribution across sub-projects

Type of sources	Subprojects
Acts of the States General	(WP3, I) City time
Papiers d’État et de l’Audience	(WP3, II) Reform and renewal (WP3, III) The rise of Empire
City administration	(WP2, III) Chronotopes (WP3, I) City time
Princely ordinances	(WP3, I) City time (WP3, II) Reform and renewal (WP3, III) The rise of Empire
Correspondence and missives	(WP2, II) Moments that Matter (WP3, III) The rise of Empire
Chronicles	(WP1, IIIb) “Contemporain” (WP2, II) Moments that Matter (WP2, III) Chronotopes (WP3, I) City time (WP3, II) Reform and renewal (WP3, III) The rise of Empire
Printed news reports	(WP1, Ia) Revolutionizing tenses (WP1, Ib) Imminent disasters (WP1, II) Now is the time (WP3, II) Reform and renewal
Theoretical and didactic sources	(WP1, Ia) Revolutionizing tenses (WP1, Ib) Imminent disasters (WP1, II) Now is the time (WP1, IIIb) “Contemporain” (WP1, IIIc) Everyday life (WP3, II) Reform and renewal
Literary and poetical sources	(WP1, II) Now is the time (WP1, IIIa) “Naer het leven” (WP1, IIIc) Everyday life (WP2, III) Chronotopes (WP3, III) The rise of Empire

Travel journals	(WP1, Ib) Imminent disasters (WP1, II) Now is the time (WP1, IIIa) “Naer het leven” (WP1, IIIb) “Contemporain” (WP1, IIIc) Everyday life (WP2, II) Moments that Matter (WP2, III) Chronotopes (WP3, I) City time
Ego-documents	(WP1, IIIc) Everyday life (WP2, II) Moments that Matter (WP3, II) Reform and renewal (WP3, III) The rise of Empire
Artworks	(WP1, Ib) Imminent disasters (WP2, I) Expanding horizons (WP2, III) Chronotopes (WP3, III) The rise of Empire

Below, we enumerate the primary categories of sources from which we will gather the crucial data for our project, specifying their relevance and providing relevant examples where appropriate. This list will evolve as a result of the progress of the research and of potential discoveries. At the end of the first year, the main case studies on which we will focus will be established, with the collaborators involved.

Acts of the States General. — These documents will mainly be consulted as modern edited and annotated editions. They allow us to capture the topics in political debate relating to the issue of the introduction of novelty between different layers of decision-making.

Papiers d’État et de l’Audience. — These sources make it possible to capture the reaction of those in power when the present requires political action. They will be consulted in the Royal Archives in Belgium and by means of modern edited and annotated editions – in particular the edicts, *ordonnances* (ordinances) and missives).

City administration. — We intend to examine carefully selected records (resolutions, ordinances, police bans, judicial documents), custom laws and professional regulations (Municipal Archives of Lille, Douai and Saint-Omer; of the department Nord de France; and the cantonal archives of Bern). The account books will be consulted to complete the information if necessary.

Princely ordinances. — These documents make it possible to follow the evolution of government decision-making and the position and response of sovereigns regarding local problems and attempts at generalizations. They will be examined in the departmental archives of Nord de France and the general archives of the Kingdom of Belgium. We will also consult modern editions.

Correspondence and missives. — Valuable because of the variety of correspondents and the level of discourse – private, intimate, formal, etc. – these sources will be gathered from the departmental archives of Nord de France, the Archivio General de Simancas (Spain), the Archivio Historico Nacional (Madrid), the Haus-, Hof und Staatsarchiv (Austria), the Municipal Library of Besançon (Granvelle), the Vatican Archives and the French National Library.

Chronicles. — These testimonies of the perception of the present and the emergence of the “contemporary” have been studied extensively in recent years, resulting in numerous modern editions. We will consult them systematically, just like the chronicles and memoirs of princedoms (Enguerrand de Monstrelet, George Chastelain, Olivier de La Marche, Jean Molinet, Jean Lemaire de Belges, Rémi Dupuis, etc.) and urban chronicles (*Cronica de Berno*, *Chronique de Konrad Justinger*, *Spiezer Chronik* by Diebold Schilling, *Chronique de l’Anonyme lillois*, etc.).

Printed news reports. — Newsletter made their appearance during the last decades of the fifteenth century, providing new audiences access to international news. Cheap and widely circulated, they give information about political and military issues, disasters and fear-inducing miscellaneous facts (i.e. the collection of Johann Jakob Wick

[1522–1588] in the Zentralbibliothek in Zurich). By the end of the sixteenth century, these documents are transformed into newsletters, the ancestors of newspapers, and into pamphlets that do not only intend to inform but to convince. This material is valuable with regard to the information they provide about the expectations of the public and its hunger for news: a market for that what happened simultaneously elsewhere was born.

Theoretical and didactic sources. — Gathered from the collections of national libraries and databases of texts, these sources will be studied by means of their old and modern editions. Our main interest lies in the domains of grammar, history (dates, mirrors of princes), politics, economics, philosophy and science (with regard to catastrophes), based on the selection of case studies.

Literary and poetical sources. — This type of source, collected by the same institutions as the theoretical and didactic sources, makes it possible to study the grammar used to indicate the present, the development of the notion “contemporary” as well as descriptions of daily life, and allegorical criticism of the government and against certain evolution. Theatre pieces, in particular allegories and tragedies, and morality plays, offer insight in the manner in which catastrophes are represented.

Travel journals. — These texts permit us to trace the differentiated uses of dates and staging of everyday life. They form an interesting counterpoint, as they focus on intercultural relations or diplomatic interaction in a faraway place. A selection from this enormous corpus, made during the first year of the project, is necessary, with the help of the expertise of *Frédéric Tinguely*, the still valid repertoire of Geoffroy Atkinson, *La Littérature géographique française de la Renaissance* (1935) and the Centre de Recherche sur la Littérature des Voyages.

Ego-documents. — From personal remarks in family bibles to the monumental autobiography *Trachtenbuch* by Matthäus Schwarz (1520–1560), the period covered witnesses an expansion of documentary genres. Memoirs, private journals, autobiographies, *libri rationibus*, certain correspondence with an intimate tone: their shared characteristic is their focus on the private sphere. These documents, ordered by geographic origin in a series of databases, make it possible to capture the present like never before by translating everyday preoccupations of their authors about daily life, where small and big histories intertwine.

Artworks. — Visual sources, including paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, illuminated manuscripts, calendars and illustrated almanacs, exist in a wide diversity in the region and period covered by our project. Their study is indispensable for the analysis of the representation of catastrophes, the practice of observation “after life”, the visualization of the everyday and contemporary world or of the inclusion of significant dates (executions, age, important life events, etc.). Because of their number, they will be gathered from numerous existing databases.

N.B. Our research makes frequent use of available databases of archival material (Prosopographia Burgundica, Universal Short Title Catalog Project), library collections (national libraries) and textual sources (Gallica, Internet Archive, Onderzoeksinstituut Egodocument en Geschiedenis, Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren, Base de données suisse d’écrits personnels, Early Modern Festival Books Database, E-codices, Centre de recherche sur la Littérature de Voyage). We will also use databases for iconographic sources (RKD, Joconde, The Index of Medieval Art, Mandragore, Bibliothèque virtuelle des manuscrits médiévaux, websites of national museums, E-codices, etc.). These databases can be used to identify case studies that is to be established during the first year of the project.

2.5.4. COMBINED METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

In order to address our hypotheses and analyse our data, the project team combines different methods and tools stemming especially from history, art history, literature and philosophy. The following table sums up the methods used in order to answer our research’s goals.

Table 3. Methods and main objectives

Methods	WP1	WP2	WP3	Main objectives
Documentary analysis	✓	✓	✓	Identify the manner in which the present is said, represented and reformed in the primary sources (dates, rules, customs).
Analysis of discourse	✓	✓	✓	Detect and analyse the discursive genres in which the category of the present is constructed. Reconstruct the linguistic and stylistic principles that form the basis for the way the present was said and its experience described.
Material culture	✓	✓		Reconstruct all material dimensions in which the present is visible in objects, ranging from the ephemeral to the durable.
Visual studies	✓		✓	Study the visual forms of the present, relating or sometimes contrasting discursive forms.
Intercultural Studies	✓	✓	✓	Compare and confront the distinct manners in which the present was thought and experienced in different communities, in time and space.
Gender studies	✓	✓	✓	Emphasize the varied ways in which the present is understood and lived, taking into account the influence of gender identity on individuals' social and intimate experiences.
Media studies		✓	✓	Reconstruct the manner in which the circulation of news and discourse about the present changed the manner in which it was perceived.
Ego-documents	✓	✓		Take inventory of the forms and functions of the present in private documents.

Documentary analysis. — No matter the status (manuscript or printed), durability (luxury items or newsletters) or nature (city archives; parish or guild records; marriage bans; official decrees; ego-documents; publications of a historic, philosophical, linguistic, literary nature; etc.) of primary source material, it represents the historical traces that remain of the present and its uses. Its analysis is therefore indispensable for all parts of the project. Particular emphasis will be placed on the manner in which these documents tell and represent the present, by means of the way dates are included (births, deaths, baptisms, marriages and other significant events) and how the social, professional and juridical rules and customs are defined or redefined in the context of work and local, regional or state administration.

Analysis of discourse. — A particularly strong theoretical feature of our project is the emphasis on the specificity of the present in relation to the linguistic and cultural communities to which the historical actors belong. To account for these different ways of thinking, living and constructing the present, we pay specific attention to the analysis of discourse by means of a comparative study of the terminology, grammar and verbal tenses used in different languages, or theorized in texts, types of discourse (tragedies, chronicles, newsletters, etc.) or in truly presentist lexical terms like “catastrophe”, “contemporary”, “daily”, etc. The “genetic editing”, codified in the field of literary studies (Biasi 1991; Grésillon 1994; Grésillon 2006; Willemar 2007) and subsequently applied in various fields like theatre history (Budor, Grésillon & Mervant-Roux), philosophy (D’Iorio & Ferrer 2001) and art history (Pagliano 2008; 2013), constitutes another precious tool. It will be particularly insightful in the study of manuscripts and drawings, where it is easier to retrace the development of primary and instantaneous ideas until their final formalization.

Material culture. — The aforementioned documents do not only interest us for the information they contain and the discursive structures that they bring together, but also for their incredibly diverse materiality, ranging from the ephemeral (e.g. newsletters that last less than a couple of weeks) to the most precious and durable objects (e.g. commemorative medals or tomb monuments). This shifting materiality conveys something about the various ways in which the present could be approached, either by granting it its own value (ephemeral culture, through celebrations and ceremonies) or by incorporating it into a monumental history (memoirs, occasional poetry, portraits).

Visual studies. — Material studies only make sense when done in connection with an actual visual analysis of these objects. An elusive category that is difficult to say and define, the present shows itself more easily through

images stemming from its immediate capture (the portrait of a person or a place, seized “from life”) or from the natural universe (the rhythm of the seasons) or the social and historical reality (the contemporary) that they represent. Particular attention will be given to objects that connect images to discourse (portraits, hour books, almanacs, calendars) or specific events (medals, ephemeral architecture).

Intercultural studies. — The analysis of discourse and objects will allow us to approach the present as an intercultural category, nourished by local or chronological particularities as well as by exchanges between different “temporal communities” (*cf.* 2.4). For the latter, we will examine processes of translation, re-editions and adaptation, especially in the context of the diffusion of recent news (newsletters) and its frequently very different audiences in terms of social class or religious denomination, for example. This is reinforced in the cases where certain political powerhouses like the Habsburg are involved and intend on taking symbolic control of lands overseas. Special attention will be given to the circulation of ideas within Northwestern Europe and between European powers and their colonies. This focus involves examining how the elusive present challenges certain established notions (pessimism, scepticism, cynicism) or, conversely, allows for the assertion of new freedoms (individualism, Epicureanism) that distance themselves from a providential interpretation of history.

Gender studies. — Gender studies will allow us to understand the construction of the present through the lens of gender and sexuality, which are critical components of cultural identity. Gender studies offer a framework for analysing how gender roles and expectations change over time, vary across different cultures. This approach also enables us to investigate the impact of gender on different and sometimes idiosyncratic collective and individual experiences of the present.

Media studies. — Objects do not exclusively interest us for their pure materiality, but also in terms of their circulation in time and space. Therefore, the tools and methodologies of media studies are particularly useful to us. They have frequently been applied to our current world, but also to earlier periods (i.e. Biggs, Michalove & Reeves 2004; Fyfe, McDougall-Waters, Mørk Røstvik & Moxham 2022), in particular after the invention of the printing press and the advent of the Protestant Reform (Ytreberg 2016). We will examine how news content and discourse changed by the process of circulation, thereby contributing to the occurrence of temporary communities, distinguishable by means of their perception of contemporary events as well as their distance (in a geographical, social or religious sense), in the context of the so-called “media ecology” (Proulx 2008).

Ego-documents. — Personal written sources (*libri rationis*, autobiographies, family chronicles and bibles, memoirs and correspondence) take in a central place in our project. This material allows us to reconstruct the daily lives of historical actors with precision, from a position as close as possible to their experience of the present, whether in the form of truly individual (marriage, anniversary), familial (births, deaths, purchases) or contextual (coronations, battles, natural or manmade disasters) events. It is also instrumental in our quest to understand the manner in which people attribute meaning to these micro- and macro-events through text or image. For this purpose, these ego-documents are complimented by texts that are read very frequently or even daily (prayer and hour books, breviaries, missals, calendars and almanacs).

2.6. Implementation

The three work packages (WP1: UNIGE & UNIL; WP2: UNINE; WP3: ULille) are deeply intertwined and conceived to be in constant interaction (*cf.* table 4 for the schedule). Each of the **PIs** assumes the direction of a work package, supervising the doctoral and postdoctoral research under their responsibility, and commits themselves to contribute actively to the other three, whether as a co-supervisor or expert in a sub-project. This practice will ensure the interdisciplinarity of the project, as well as the synergy between different research domains. The general coordination will be in the hands of **J. Blanc** and **T. Brero**, in collaboration with a *project secretary* (25%) and an *IT specialist* (25%), who would ideally be one and the same person (*project manager*, 50%). The smooth progress of the project will be ascertained by meetings of the management team (the 4 **PIs** and the *project manager*), which will take place each semester in order to take stock of ongoing activities, programme the rest of the project – making adjustments to the initial plan when necessary – and coordinate the dissemination of the project results. An internal database will be put in place to ensure the exchange of material and information (*cf.* 2.3.3). The project team will meet and set up collaboration during an inaugural workshop (first semester). Commencing in the second semester, a hybrid research seminar will convene twice a month (*cf.* 2.3.3). It will take place at the four universities leading the project but can also be attended remotely. This research seminar will offer lectures (project members, associated partners, external guests) and research workshops, dedicated to methodological, theoretical, or practical questions related to the research. It will be open to all Sinergia members who are available and whose research fields are relevant to the topics discussed. During the first semester of the second year and the first semester of the fourth year, this seminar will be replaced by preparatory sessions for the two international conferences. Selective project members will meet to organize the main elements of the Sinergia, like the blog (*cf.* 2.3.2) and collaborative output (*cf.* 2.3.1), including the virtual experience (*cf.* 2.3.2) and the exhibition in the Hermitage in Lausanne (*cf.* 2.3.4).

2.7. Risk management

Two major risks can be identified that could potentially impede the progress of this project. The first is connected to the variety and number of sources. This risk is inherent to such a large and profoundly interdisciplinary project. In order to mitigate this risk, we propose the use of an internal database, which permits team members to access the entirety of collected data. Workshops will be organized on a regular basis (twice a month), to profit from the expertise of other participants in the project. The doctoral and postdoctoral researchers will select case studies from archival sources during the first year of investigation. By doing this, they can promptly analyse and extract relevant information from the chosen case studies, avoiding any delay or dispersion. The second major risk is related to the hypothesis of a history of the present that is specific to a period (1348–1648) (*cf.* 2.0: axis 1) and to a geographical area (*cf.* 2.0: axis 2). In order to address the supposed specificities, it is necessary to seek out the comparison with the situation in other regions, especially the Mediterranean region, in the context of project conferences. Inviting experts on those regions permits us to make this comparison and integrate our paradigm within the larger European and global context. The inclusion of researchers with expertise on France and Italy (**E. Doudet**, *N. Hochner*, *D. Solfaroli Camillocci*) and the eighteenth century (**J. Blanc**) in the project team further stimulates a transgeographical and transhistorical contextualization.

Table 4. Schedule and implementation

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two meetings of the management team – one every six months (DIR + Coord/IT) • Implementation of the internal database for data sharing (DIR + Coord/IT) • Implementation of the website and blog (DIR + Coord/IT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two meetings of the management team – one every six months (DIR + Coord/IT) • 1st semester: preparation of 1st conference (ALL) • 2nd semester: implementation of the collective book and sourcebook (DIR + Postdocs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two meetings of the management team – one every six months (DIR + Coord/IT) • Editorial direction for the collective book and the sourcebook (DIR + Postdocs) • Implementation of research dissemination strategies (DIR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two meetings of the management team – one every six months (DIR + Coord/IT) • 1st semester: Preparation of 2nd conference (ALL) • Dissemination of research results (ALL)
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st semester: inaugural workshop (ALL) • From the second semester: bimonthly research seminar (DIR + Research + certain PART depending on the subject) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of the 1st semester: 1st conference (ALL) • Bimonthly research seminar (DIR + Research + certain PART depending on the subject) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All year round: bimonthly research seminar (DIR + Research + certain PART depending on the subject) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of the 1st semester: 2nd conference (ALL) • 2nd semester: bimonthly research seminar (DIR + Research + certain PART depending on the subject)
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection – archives, databases, published sources (DIR, Research) • Review of secondary literature (DIR, Research) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of data collection (DIR, Research) • Data analysis (DIR, Research) • Preparation of 1st conference presentations (Research) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing (theses, articles, chapters and conference presentations) (DIR, Research) • Presentations at conferences (DIR, Research) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st semester: Finalization of PhD thesis writing (<i>PhDs 1–6</i>) • 2nd semester: defence of theses (<i>PhDs 1–6</i>)
Outputs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of the collective book and the sourcebook (DIR) • Writing of articles, chapters and lectures (DIR + Research) • Implementation of monographs (JB + TB; ELD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing of collective book and sourcebook (ALL) • Writing of monographs (JB + TB; ELD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of the year: finalization of the collective book, the sourcebook and the monographs (ALL) • Exhibition at the Hermitage Museum with publication of the catalogue
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars on the medieval conception of time (TB), on contemporary world and daily life in art (JB), on Reform (ELD) and on dates in Northwestern Europe (DIR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars on political news and its circulation at the end the Middle Ages (TB), on contemporary world and daily life in art (JB), on Reform (ELD) and on dates in Northwestern Europe (DIR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars on contemporary world and daily life in art (JB), on Reform (ELD) and on dates in Northwestern Europe (DIR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars on contemporary world and daily life in art (JB), on Reform (ELD) and on dates in Northwestern Europe (DIR)
Diffusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a sub-group working on the virtual experience (DIR + Coord/IT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeding of the website and blog (ALL) • Preparation of the exhibition at the Hermitage Museum (Lausanne) • Selection of documentation and writing of texts for virtual experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeding of the website and blog; research dissemination activities: public lectures and media (ALL) • Preparation of the exhibition at the Hermitage Museum • Technical implementation of the virtual experience (Coord/IT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeding of the website and blog (ALL) • Dissemination: public lectures and media (ALL) • Virtual experience broadcasting (Coord/IT)
Team (ALL) (alphabetical order of abbreviations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading team (DIR): Estelle Doudet (ED), Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin (ELD), Jan Blanc (JB), Thalia Brero (TB), • Associated partners (PART): Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci (<i>DSC</i>), Frédéric Tinguely (<i>FT</i>), Gabriele Balbi (<i>GB</i>), Jonathan Dumont (<i>JD</i>), Jean-Marie Fournier (<i>JMF</i>), Koenraad Jonckheere (<i>KJ</i>), Lotte Jensen (<i>LJ</i>), Mathieu Caesar (<i>MC</i>), Nicole Hochner (<i>NO</i>), Olivier Richard-Trauffer (<i>ORT</i>), Pierre Monnet (<i>PM</i>), Regula Schmid Keeling (<i>RSK</i>). • Recruited researchers (Research): project secretary (administrative coordinator and/or IT coordinator) (Coord/IT), six doctoral students (<i>PhD1-PhD6</i>), three postdoctoral researchers (<i>Postdoc1-Postdoc3</i>), a scientific collaborator (ScColl) 			