Representation, Event, and Structure

Epistemologically, the question of representation—arising from the narrative properties of historical description—involves a diversity of temporal extensions of historical movement.[1] The fact that a "history" exists as an extralinguistic entity does not only set limits to representational potential but also requires the historian to pay great attention to the nature of source material. This itself contains a variety of indices of temporal orders. Seen from the historian's point of view, therefore, the question can be reversed: we have here a variety of temporal layers, each of which necessitates a different methodological approach. But there is a preliminary decision contained in this for the historian. In the process of representation, distinct communicative forms emerge, for, as in Augustine's words, "narratio demonstrationi similis (est)."[2] To anticipate my thesis: in practice, it is not possible to maintain a boundary between narration and description; in the theory of historical temporalities there is no complete interrelation between the levels of different temporal extensions. For the sake of clarifying this thesis, I initially assume that "events" can only be narrated, while "structures" can only be described.

1. Events that can be separated *ex post* from the infinity of circumstances—or in relation to documents, from the quantity of affairs—can be experienced by contemporary participants as a coherent event, as a discernible unity which can be narrated. This explains, for instance, the priority of eyewitness accounts which were regarded, up until the eighteenth century, as a particularly reliable primary source of evidence. This explains the high source value placed on a traditional *Geschichte* that recounts a once-contemporary occurrence.

It is initially natural chronology that provides the framework within which a collection of incidents join into an event. Chronological accuracy in the arrangement of all elements contributing to an event is, therefore, a methodological postulate of historical narrative. Thus, for the meaning of historical sequence, there is a *threshold of fragmentation*[3] below which an event dissolves. A minimum of "before" and "after" constitutes the significant unity which makes an event out of incidents. The content of an event, its before and after, might be extended; its consistency, however, is rooted in temporal sequence. Even the intersubjectivity of an event must, insofar as it is performed by acting subjects, be secured to the frame of temporal sequence. One need only recall the histories of the outbreak of war in 1914 or 1939. What really happened in terms of the interdependence of what was done and what was neglected, was shown only in the hours that followed, in the next day.

The transposition of once-direct experience into historical knowledge—even if it is an unexpected meaning released as the fragmentation of a past horizon of expectation gains recognition—is dependent upon a chronologically measurable sequence. Retrospect or prospect as stylistic devices of representation (for instance, in the speeches of Thucydides) serve to clarify the critical or decisive point in the course of a narrative.

The before and after constitute the semantic dimensions of a narrative—"veni, vidi, vici"—but only because historical experience of what constitutes an event is always constrained by temporal sequence. Schiller's dictum that world history is the tribunal of the world can also be understood in this way. "What is left undone one minute / is restored by no eternity." Whoever hesitates to assume the consequence of Schiller's statement, and permit eschatology to enter into the processual course of history, must nevertheless make the sequence of historical time the guiding thread of representation, rendering "narratable" the irreversible course of event in politics, diplomacy, and civil or other wars.

Natural chronology is, of course, empty of sense with respect to history, which is why Kant demanded that chronology be arranged according to history and not history according to chronology.[4] The establishment of a historical chronology requires "structuration." This involves the unfamiliar form of a diachronic structure. There are diachronic structures which are internal to the course of events. Every history testifies to the fact that the acting subjects perceive a certain

duration: of inauguration, high points, peripeteia, crises, and termination. It is possible to recognize internal determinants for successions of events—the distribution of possibilities, the number of adversaries, and, above all, the limitation or opening up of definite tempi—which all contribute to the structuring of diachrony. Consequently, it is possible to compare sequences of revolutions, wars, and political constitutions at a definite level of abstraction or typology. Besides such diachronic structures for events, there are also longer-term structures, which are more familiar today.

2. The dictates of a sociohistorical problematic have recently caused the word "structure" to penetrate history, in particular as "structural history."[5] "Structure," here, concerns the temporal aspects of relations which do not enter into the strict sequence of events that have been the subject of experience. Such structures illuminate long-term duration, stability, and change. The categories of "long term" and "medium term" formulate in a more demanding fashion what was in the past century treated in terms of "situations" (*Zustände*). The semantic trace of "layering"—a spatial conception tending toward the static—is summoned up metaphorically through an expansion of "structural history."

While before and after are for narratable events absolutely constitutive, the definition of chronological determinants is clearly less crucial to the possibility of describing situations or long-term factors. This is implied within the mode of experience for structural givens, for, while such experience enters into a momentary event, it is preexistent in a sense different from that contained in a chronological precedent. Such structures have names—constitutional forms, and modes of rule—which do not change from one day to the next and are the preconditions of political action. We can also take productive forces and relations of production which alter in the long term, perhaps by degrees, whereas nevertheless determining and shaping social life. And again, it is here that constellations of friend and foe definitive of peace or war belong, which can become entrenched without corresponding to the interests of either party. Here again, considerations of space and geography are related to their technical disposition, from which arise lasting possibilities for political action and economic and social behavior. We can also consider under this heading unconscious patterns of behavior which are either induced by specific institutions or characterize such institutions, but which in any case admit or limit the potentiality for experience and action. Further, there is the natural succession of gen-

erations, containing possibilities for the creation of conflict or the formation of tradition according to their domains of experience, quite apart from actions and their transpersonal results. Lastly, customs and systems of law regulating in the long or medium term the process of social or international life should be considered here.

Without weighing the relation of one such structure against another, it can be generally stated that the temporal constants of these structures transcend the chronologically ascertainable space of experience available to the specific subjects involved in an event. While events are caused or suffered by specific subjects, structures as such are supra-individual and intersubjective. They cannot be reduced to individual persons and seldom to exactly determinable groups. Methodologically, therefore, they demand functional determinants. Structures do not in this way become entities outside of time, but rather gain a processual character, which can then enter into everyday experience.

There are, for example, long-term elements which prevail whether they are promoted or opposed. Today, when considering the rapid industrial recovery after the 1848 Revolution, one can ask whether it occurred because of or in spite of the failure of revolution. Arguments exist both for and against; neither need be compelling, but both indicate the movement that swept across the stream of political forces of Revolution and Reaction. In this case, it is possible that the Reaction had a more revolutionary effect than the Revolution itself. If, then, Revolution and Reaction are both indices of the same movement, a movement which feeds from both political camps and is propelled onward by both, this dualism obviously implies a historical movement—the irreversible progress of long-term structural change—which transcends the political bipolarity of Revolution and Reaction.

What is today a methodological reflection of structural history can belong quite well to the everyday experience of once-living generations. Structures and their transformation are detectable empirically as long as their temporal span does not reach beyond the unity of the memory of the relevant generations.

There certainly are also structures which are so enduring that they remain in the domain of the unconscious or the unknown, or whose transformation is so slow that it escapes awareness. In these cases, only social science or history as a science of the past can provide information beyond the perceptible experience of given generations.

3. Events and structures thus have in the experiential space of historical movement diverse temporal extensions; these constitute the object of history as a science. Traditionally, the representation of structures is close to description (for example, the *Statistik* of enlightened absolutism), while that of events is closer to narration (the pragmatic *Historie* of the eighteenth century). Attributing *Geschichte* to either one or the other would be to express an unfounded preference. Both levels, event and structure, are related to each other without merging. Moreover, both levels shift their valency, the relation of their mutual arrangement, according to the problem that is posed.

Statistical time series thus live on concrete individual events which possess their own time, but which gain only structural expressiveness within the framework of long periods. Narration and description are interlocked, and the event becomes the presupposition of structural expression.

On the other hand, more or less enduring, or longer-term structures, are the conditions of possible events. That a battle can be executed in the simple rhythm "veni, vidi, vici" presupposes specific forms of domination, technical disposal over natural conditions, a comprehensible relation of friend and foe, etc.; that is, structures belonging to the event of this battle, which enter into it by determining it. The history of this one battle, therefore, has dimensions of different temporal extension contained in the narration or description long "before" the effect which lends "meaning" to the event of the battle is reflected. This is a matter of structures "in eventu," to use a phrase of H. R. Jauss's, notwithstanding the hermeneutical reassurance that they will only "post eventum" become semantically comprehensible. It is such structures that provide the general basis upon which Montèsquieu can preserve the chance nature in the events of a battle which is, at the same time, decisive for a war.[6]

With respect to individual events, therefore, there are structural conditions which make possible the course of an event. Such structures may be described, but they can also be included in the context of a narrative, provided that they assist in clarifying events through their nonchronological, causal character.

Conversely, structures are only comprehensible in the medium of the events within which structures are articulated, and which are tangible as structures within them. A trial involving labor law, for instance, can be both a dramatic history in the sense of "event" and simulta-

neously an index of long-term social, economic, and legal elements. The valency of narrated history and the form of its reproduction shift according to the problematic: it is then, accordingly, differentially classified with respect to temporality. Either the dramatic before and after of the incident, the trial, and its outcome—together with its consequences—are treated, or the history is split down into its elements and provides indices of social conditions which the course of events makes visible. The description of such structures can be even "more dramatic" than the account of the trial itself. "The perspective relevance of a transcendent narrative statement" (Jauss)—even if a *conditio sine qua non* of historical knowledge—in this case cedes its privileged position to the perspective relevance of a transcending structural analysis.

The process of upgrading and regrading can be carried through from individual event to world history. The more rigid the systematic context, the more long-term the structural aspects, the less are they narratable within the terms of a strict before and after. Similarly, "duration" can historiographically become an event itself. Accordingly, as perspective alters, medium-range structures can be introduced as a sole complex of events within a greater context; we might take, as an example, the mercantile *Ständeordnung*. There they gain a specific and chronologically ascertainable valency so that, for instance, economic forms and relations of production can be separated into appropriate epochs. Structures once described and analyzed then become narratable as a factor within a greater context of events. The processual character of modern history cannot be comprehended other than through the reciprocal explanation of events through structures, and vice versa.

Nonetheless, there remains an indissoluble remainder, a methodological aporia, which does not allow the contamination of event and structure. There is a hiatus between both entities, for their temporal extension cannot be forced into congruence, neither in experience nor in scientific reflection. The interrelation of event and structure must not be permitted to lead to the suppression of their differences if they are to retain their epistemological object of disclosing the multiple strata of history.

The before and after of an event contains its own temporal quality which cannot be reduced to a whole within its longer-term conditions. Every event produces more and at the same time less than is contained in its pregiven elements: hence, its permanently surprising novelty.[7] The structural preconditions for the Battle of Leuthen are not sufficient

to explain why Frederick the Great won this battle in the manner he did. Event and structure can certainly be related: the Frederician military organization, its system of recruitment, its involvement in the agrarian structure of East Elbia, the system of taxation and military finance built upon this, Frederick's military skill within the tradition of military history: all this made the victory of Leuthen possible, but 5 December 1757 remains unique within its immanent chronological sequence.

The course of the battle, its effects on war politics, and the relevance of the victory in relation to the Seven Years War, can only be recounted in a chronological manner to be made meaningful. But Leuthen became a symbol. The outcome of Leuthen can take on a structural significance. The event assumed a structural status. Leuthen in the traditional history of the Prussian conception of the state, its exemplary effect on the revaluation of military risk in the military designs of Prussia–Germany (Dehio): these became lasting, long-term factors that entered into structural constitutional preconditions which had, in their turn, made the Battle of Leuthen possible.

If one methodically relates the modes of representation to the temporal extensions ascribed to them in the "domain of objects" of history, three consequences follow: first, however much they condition each other, the temporal levels do not merge; second, an event can, according to the shift of the investigated level, gain structural significance; and third, even duration can become an event.

This leads us to the epistemological relation of both concepts, which has until now only been outlined in their mode of representation and their corresponding temporal levels.

4. It would be erroneous to attribute to "events" a greater reality than so-called structures, on the grounds that the concrete course of the event is bound up with an empirically demonstrable before and after in a naturalistic chronology. History would be limited if so restricted at the expense of structures which, while operating on a different temporal level, are not thereby any less effective.

Today it is usual in history to change the level of proof, deducing and explaining one thing from another and by another. This shift from event to structure and back does not, however, resolve the problem of derivability: everything can be argued for, but not everything by means of anything. Only theoretical anticipation can decide which argument could or should count. Which structures provide the frame-

work of potential individual histories? Which incidents become an event, and which events combine in the course of past history?

It belongs to the historicity of our science that these various preliminary questions cannot be reduced to a common factor, and it is a methodological dictate to first clarify the question of temporal plane. For historical knowledge, event and structure are similarly "abstract" or "concrete," depending on the temporal plane on which they move. To be for or against the reality of the past is no alternative.

Two epistemological remarks can be made here: the facticity of events established *ex post* is never identical with a totality of past circumstances thought of as formerly real. Every event historically established and presented lives on the fiction of actuality; reality itself is past and gone. This does not mean, however, that a historical event can be arbitrarily set up. The sources provide control over what might not be stated. They do not, however, prescribe what may be said. Historians are negatively obliged to the witnesses of past reality. When interpretively extracting an event from its sources, an approach is made to the "literary narrator" (*Geschichtenerzähler*), who likewise pays homage to the fiction of actuality when seeking in this way to make *Geschichte* plausible.

The quality of reality of past events that are narrated is no greater epistemologically than the quality of reality contained in past structures, which perhaps reach far beyond the apprehended experience of past generations. Structures of great duration, especially when they escape the consciousness or knowledge of former participants, can even be (or have been) "more effective" the less they enter as a whole into a single, empirically ascertainable event. But this can only be the basis of hypothesis. The fictional nature of narrated events corresponds at the level of structures to the hypothetical character of their "reality." Such epistemological handicaps cannot, however, prevent the historian making use of fictionality and hypothesis so that past reality might be linguistically rendered as a condition of reality.

To do this, the historian employs historical concepts which take account both of the fullness of past events and of the need to be understood today by both historian and reader. No event can be narrated, no structure represented, no process described without the use of historical concepts which make the past "conceivable." But this conceptual quality goes further than the singularity of the past which it helps to conceptualize. Linguistically, the categories employed to

recount the unique event cannot claim the same uniqueness as the event in question. At this stage, this is a triviality. But it must be recalled to make clear the structural claim which arises on the basis of the unavoidable use of historical concepts.

Historical semantology[8] shows that every concept entering into a narrative or representation (e.g., state, democracy, army, and party, to cite only general concepts) renders relations discernible by a refusal to take on their uniqueness. Concepts not only teach us of the singularity (for us) of past meanings, but also contain structural potential, dealing with the contemporaneous in the noncontemporary, which cannot be reduced to the pure temporal succession of history.

Concepts which comprehend past states, relations, and processes become for the historian who employs them formal categories which are the conditions of possible histories. Only concepts with a claim to durability, repeated applicability, and empirical realizability—concepts with a structural content—open the way today for a formerly "real" history to appear possible and be represented as such.

5. From the diverse ordering of event and structure, and out of the long-term shifts of semantic content in historical concepts it is now possible to deduce the changing valency of *Historia magistra vitae.* A final remark can be made here:

The temporal extensions of historical circumstances, themselves varying in their susceptibility to exposition, provoke in their turn distinct historical doctrines. *Fabula docet* was always an empty term which could be filled in different ways and, as every collection of proverbs shows, provided with current directives. That concerns its contents. With respect to formal, temporal structure it can, by contrast, be asked at what level *Historie* teaches, can teach, or should teach: at the level of short-term contexts of action, with the situational moral supplied to history by the experiential model, or at the level of medium-term processes from which trends can be extrapolated for the future. In the latter case, history outlines the conditions of a possible future without delivering prognostications, or it relates to the level of meta-historical duration, which consequently is not yet timeless. Perhaps here belongs Robert Michels's social-psychological analysis of Social Democratic parties which sought the regularities within the constitution of elites, as a precautionary tale for political conduct. It is also here that the proverb "pride goeth before destruction" comes, a dictum

which simply formulates a historical possibility even if it arises only occasionally.

Where history indicates the possibility of repeatable events, it must be able to identify structural conditions sufficient for the creation of such an analogous event. Thucydides, Machiavelli, but also Montesquieu, Robert Michels, and to some extent, Guicciardini, have all, to use a modern expression, calculated in terms of such structural conditions.

If these conditions change—e.g., technology, economy, or the whole society together with its form of organization—then history must, as in modernity, be able to account for such changing structures. The structures themselves prove to be mutable, in any case more than was previously the case. For, where formerly long-term processes became abbreviated through altering or even accelerating speed, the spaces of experience were rejuvenated by the continual requirement to adapt. In this fashion, the singularity of history could simply become an axiom of all historical knowledge.

The singularity of events—the theoretical premise of both historism and of the doctrine of Progress—knows no iteratability and hence permits no direct instruction. To this extent, modern "history" has dethroned the older *Historia magistra vitae*. But the doctrine of individual singularity which marks out the modern concept of history, viewed structurally, relates less to the actual novelty of events that arise than to the singularity of modern transformations themselves. It proves itself in what is now called "structural change."

However, it does not yet follow from this that the future also escapes the application of historical teaching. Such teachings instead move on a temporal level organized in a different theoretical manner. Historical philosophy and the differential prognostics which followed from it both addressed themselves to the past so they could draw from it instruction for the future. Tocqueville, Lorenz von Stein, and Marx are all proof of this. If a step is taken out of the inherited space of experience into an unknown future, an initial effort is made to conceive this experience as a "new era." From this point on, the referential character of a "history" alters. Diagnosis and prognosis can continue to build upon enduring structures of a uniform natural kind, making possible conclusions for the future from a theoretically defined iterability. But this iteratability clearly does not cover the whole space of experience existent since the French and industrial revolutions. Long-

term structural transformation and its ever-shorter periodicity give rise to forecasts which direct themselves to the conditions of a possible future, not to its concrete individual features. "It is possible to forecast the approaching future, but one would not wish to prophesy individual events."[9]

Individual history is thus no longer an exemplar of its potential iteratability, or for avoiding iterability. It assumes, rather, a valency, in terms of a structural statement, for processual occurrence. Even when the heterogeneity of ends is introduced as a constant factor of destabilization, structural-historical analysis retains its prognostic potential. No economic planning today is possible without reference to the scientifically digested experiences of the world economic crisis of about 1930, a crisis which was itself unique. Should historical science dispense with this role in favor of the axiom of singularity? History indicates the conditions of a possible future which cannot be derived solely from the sum of individual events. But in the events which it investigates there appear structures which condition and limit that scope of the future. History thus shows us the boundaries of the possible otherness of our future without having to do without the structural conditions of possible repetition. In other words, a justifiable critique of the voluntaristic self-assurance of utopian planners of the future can only be effected if history as a *magistra vitae* draws instruction not from histories (*Geschichten*), but rather from the "structure of movement" of our history.

Chance as Motivational Trace in Historical Writing

Speaking about chance in terms of historiography is difficult, in that chance has its own history in the writing of history, but a history which has yet to be written. "Chance" can certainly be adequately clarified only when the complete conceptual structure of the historian making use of a "chance occurrence" is taken into account. For example, one could examine the counterconcept that the chance sets free, or the overall concept which is relativized. For instance, Raymond Aron begins his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* with an antithesis taken from Cournot of "order" and "chance," and he concludes: "The historical fact is essentially irreducible to order: *chance is the foundation of history.*"[1] Measured against the model of a lawlike natural science, chance might constitute the essence of all history, but the influence of particular historical circumstances on such formulations is perfectly obvious. In the course of his investigation, Aron dissolves the crude antithesis, and accordingly the meaning of chance alters within his historical epistemology. An event can appear accidental or not according to the standpoint of the observer. This also does away historiographically with the idle antithesis of chance and necessity. Consideration of one set of circumstances can make an event appear accidental, but consideration of another set can make it appear unavoidable. This position is also adopted by Carr in his book on history; chance becomes a concept dependent upon perspective.[2] In this way, a level of reflection is achieved that treats chance systematically. However, this is not at all obvious, nor was it ever so.

Speaking temporally, chance is a pure category of the present. It is not derivative of the horizon of future expectation except as its