

NATURAL-HISTORY AND HISTORY

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ABSTRACT: For Adorno, the only possibility for understanding history is to relate it to the natural through his idea of natural-history. Agreeing with Whitehead, for Adorno the natural lacks temporal existence and can only be accessed through a temporally affective sense – which can be illuminated through Charles Hartshorne’s distinction between existence and actuality – in Adorno’s 1932 article *Idea of Natural History*. Adorno’s conception is related to the historical by demonstrating how standard interpretations of history, which can be cast within three broad approaches, are not historical since they fail to acknowledge the significance of ‘second nature’. Given that demonstration, it can then be shown how ‘all history is natural’ by employing Walter Benjamin’s notion of a constellation. A return can then be made to Hartshorne’s distinction to show how a past event’s existence can be related to Benjamin’s claims by means of his ‘dialectics at a standstill’

KEYWORDS: Natural-history; History; Adorno; Heidegger; Whitehead; Hartshorne

INTRODUCTION

Understanding history requires interpreting the idea of Natural-History. Initially, the idea of nature will be articulated contrasting the way it is actualized as opposed to grasping nature in-itself, a metaphysical form of inquiry. That term actualized is then contrasted with existence, so as to claim that while nature is actualized in different manifestations, it has no existence temporally. Again, although a past event does have an existence in the past, it never has a specific actuality or re-actuality – the latter indicating an actuality different from a previous one – where both are constructed out of a visionary form of experience.

Adorno's idea of Natural-History will be defended. Two aspects of it will be examined: namely that actual accepted history is not history because it is created out of what he analyses as 'second nature' and his further claim that all history is natural because of its transitoriness. Three traditional ways of forwarding historical inquiry will be considered so as to show how Adorno's and Benjamin's approach differs from them. That can be done by exploring the claim that these three approaches arise out of what Adorno casts as 'second nature'. Finally their agreed conception as to how historical understanding is possible will be applied to a recent controversy in the philosophy of history. In this way it becomes possible to explain how the idea of a temporal continuum undermines an idea of historical time. Thereby the notion that past events have an existence but no specific actuality can be established.

2.0 ACTUALIZATIONS OF NATURE AND NATURE IN-ITSELF

Consider the following passage from Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

"Nature" is not to be understood as that which is just present-at-hand, nor as the *power of Nature*. The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind 'in the sails'. As the 'environment' is discovered, the 'Nature' thus discovered is encountered too. If its kind of Being as ready-to-hand is disregarded, this 'Nature' itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this happens, the Nature which 'stirs and strives', which assails us and enthralls us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist's plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow; the 'source' which the geographer establishes for a river is not the 'springhead in the dale.'¹

In reading this passage it does not seem inappropriate to claim that the affective actualizations of "Nature" in regard to natural existents enjoy a reality for human beings, whereas Nature in-itself does not exist. So a number of different actualizations can emerge in experiencing the natural world: i) 'Nature' discovered as something objective, an array of products – rock, forest timber, minerals, water; ii) the power of Nature exercised by water, wind or sun or as protection from these in the case of a mountain or a wood; iii) Nature as that which enthralls us. Fourthly, "Nature" regarded ontologically "in the widest sense" presumably cannot be identified with any one of these three alone but

¹ M. Heidegger *Being and Time* tr. by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell 1978 p. 100

might refer to all such ahistorical dimensions² and that is because it does not exist temporally.

Since Nature in-itself cannot exist temporally it cannot be articulated in language. If that be so then for Adorno, it would be a case not of “--- incorporating the non-conceptual, but of comprehending it in its non-conceptuality.” Otherwise, if there is only a concern for what can be conceptualized, then “the non-conceptual, that to which the concept refers to” will be excluded from philosophical inquiry “from the outset.”³ Whitehead, of course, takes such a stance seriously too but offers an atemporal sense of Nature cast as something metaphysical – in distinguishing Nature understood in a limitless sense – by referring to “any discussion of the how (beyond nature) and of the why (beyond nature) of thought and sense-awareness”, where the term nature here refers to nature in its limited sense.⁴ Elsewhere Whitehead’s limitless sense emerges in his claim that the “notion of nature as an organic extensive community omits the equally essential point of view that nature is never complete. It is always passing beyond itself. This is the creative advance of nature”;⁵ whilst the limited conception generates a false dichotomy between “Nature and Man. Mankind is that factor *in* Nature which exhibits in its most intense form the plasticity of nature.”⁶

2.1 *Applying the Existence and Actuality Distinction*

So the point of this debate can now be articulated by claiming that on the one hand Nature in-itself has no existence temporally but is affectively actualized through human beings experiences: scientifically, instrumentally, aesthetically or

² *Being and Time* p. 31. It would be a separate line of inquiry to establish that Heidegger’s sense of “Nature” might best be accessed through that “which assails us and enthrals us as landscape”. Indeed, it might be argued that the latter third way of regarding Nature – that which ‘stirs and strives’ – emerges only from the dimension of ‘Being-with’ the natural world in some way akin to being with humans, from which the other two dimensions emerge (cf. M. Gelven *A Commentary on Heidegger’s “Being and Time”* New York: Harper Torchbook 1970 p. 58). Certainly, elsewhere, Heidegger speaks of three dimensions only (*Being and Time* p. 121), an issue discussed by Joseph Fell in *Heidegger and Sartre* New York: Columbia UP 1979 pp. 118-22.

³ T.W. Adorno *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* pp. 6, 57 & 62

⁴ A.N. Whitehead *The Concept of Nature* p. 28

⁵ A.N. Whitehead *Process and Reality* (1929) corr. & ed. By D.L. Griffin & D.R. Sherburne New York: The Free Press 1978 p. 289

⁶ A.N. Whitehead *Adventures of Ideas* (1933) New York: The Free Press 1961 p. 78.

through other actualizations emerging from these three.⁷ But how can that distinction between actualities and existence be elucidated? My grandson is quite likely to be existing tomorrow, but I cannot predict what state he will exhibit, whether his actualities will emerge as anger, sadness, or happiness or some other actuality. Now it was Charles Hartshorne who hoped to be remembered for this distinction; in my grandson's case between his actualities and his existence as a person.⁸

For the natural world, three basic actualities have been delineated from which other ones can be derived as a result of human beings relating to it, but Nature in-itself has no existence temporally but only beyond the temporal. It will now be argued that this distinction between actualities and existence can be usefully applied to historical understanding by referring to Adorno's conception of natural-history. And the case to be defended is that although events in the past in some sense exist their actualities are not so much experienced, as are those arising from appreciating the natural world, but emerge cognitively so as to count as re-actualizations. In other words, whilst nature's actualities can be experienced Nature in-itself has no temporal existence, whereas historical events have an existence but they can only be understood through created re-actualizations issuing in cognitions. Before defending that latter claim something more has to be said about Adorno's conception of natural-history.

3.0 THE IDEA OF NATURAL-HISTORY

Normally the idea of natural history is defined in scientific terms: even if focussing more on observation than experimentation, so that it can be interpreted in terms of the scientific examination of plants and animals. That clearly is not the issue. Rather, to avoid misunderstanding it would be better to refer to natural-history, as has been the practice so far. The notion of natural-history appears to have made its first appearance in Adorno's 1932 paper *The Idea of Natural History*

⁷ What follows is indebted to Chapter III of *To Be Or Not To Be Philosophical* (2001) N.E. Boulting, Leicestershire: Upfront Pub. 2003, especially pp. 85-98.

⁸ "Philip drunk or Philip sober is still Philip, but obviously not the same determinate or particular actuality/" C. Hartshorne *Whitehead's Philosophy* Lincoln, USA: Nebraska UP 1972 p. 13. Of course, for Hartshorne this distinction was important for its application in the philosophy of religion. So Hartshorne remarked: "I rather hope to be remembered for this distinction." C. Hartshorne "Response to Martin" *Existence and Actuality* Chicago UP 1984, pp. 66-77, p.75

(“Die Idee der Naturgeschichte”)⁹ and can be characterized as exploring four themes: i) “all history is natural” (thereby transitory); ii) “all nature is historical” (socially produced); iii) “actual history is not historical” (but merely the production of second nature); iv) “second nature is unnatural” (since it denies nature’s historical transitoriness).¹⁰

Now as far as the issues of this present paper are concerned it is the third and first themes – ‘actual history is not historical’ and ‘all history is natural’ – which require attention. And by deconstructing the former, sense can then be made of interpreting the latter. But in forwarding this task, reference will be made to the writings of Walter Benjamin since it may be that his inquiries, particularly as exemplified in his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* published in 1928, influenced Adorno’s stance. So we find Adorno speaking as though it might be Benjamin himself in 1931, where in a footnote he refers to Benjamin’s text:¹¹ “The task of philosophy is not to search for concealed and manifestations of reality, but to interpret unintentional unreality, in that, by the power of constructing figures, or images (*Bilder*), out of the isolated elements of reality it negates (*aufhebt*) questions, the exact articulation of which is a task of science---.”¹² Elsewhere a sentence can be found which Benjamin indeed could have written himself: “If the thought really yielded to the object, if its attention were on the object, not on its category, the very object would start talking under the lingering eye.”¹³ Given that consideration, reference can now be made to Adorno’s negative claim, namely that ‘actual history is not historical’ before considering his more positive claim that ‘all history is natural’. To make that former negative claim clear, it is necessary to indicate three approaches to history which he and Benjamin would reject before indicating why those approaches are inadequate, before invoking what he says about second nature to account for that rejection.

⁹ T.W. Adorno “The Idea of Natural History” *Telos* Vol. 60 1984, pp. 111-124

¹⁰ This characterization is to be found and explored in Susan Buck Morss’s *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* Hassocks, Sussex, UK: The Harvester Press 1977 p. 131

¹¹ W. Benjamin *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* R. Livingstone (tr.) London: NLB 1977 pp. 34-6

¹² “Construction out of small and unintentional elements thus counts among the basic assumptions of philosophic interpretation ---.” T.W. Adorno “The Actuality of Philosophy” B. Stone (tr.) *The Adorno Reader* B. O’Connor (ed.) Oxford: Blackwell 2004, pp. 23-39, p. 32

¹³ T.W. Adorno *Negative Dialectics* (1966) E.B. Ashton (tr.) New York: A Continuum Book 1979 pp.27-8

4.0 ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF INTERPRETING HISTORY

Collingwood's approach to historical inquiry, for example, adopts recognized authorities' statements in regard to the past which are accepted if they are of a kind which square with the kind of experience the historian may have endured or enjoys in the present. (IH 239)¹⁴ But it is "the power of thought" which can bridge a present thought to "its past object" (IH 293) which he identifies with memory. Thereby historical knowledge is constituted through "--- a special case of memory" enabling not only the present thought's power "--- to think of the past" but in addition enabling a past thought's power "--- to reawaken itself in the present." (IH 294) This claim is the root of his inspirational stance, namely his conception of history as re-enactment of past experience so that the historian is required to re-experience what has to be explained by *re-enacting it in thought*. (IH 282 ff.)

Opposed to this stance is one which focuses on historical events in need of explanation. These events are to be explained by connecting them to universal or probabilistic laws or hypotheses rendering the label '*covering law*' model for explaining the historical. Thereby this exogenous approach regards history as an empirical discipline akin to natural science, a theory as set out originally by Carl Hempel. What is true concerning scientific explanation is valid for historical explanations, given that defensible explanations can be logically connected to knowledge of laws covering law-like behaviour.¹⁵ To counter the objection that some behaviour appears not to be law-like simply implies that such behaviour has not been sufficiently analysed. In other words, given sufficient information about regularities in human behaviour, such regularities can be inferred from such covering laws which must hold even if, at present, we do not have access to those laws.¹⁶

A third stance would reject the cognitive claims of Hempel's scientific

¹⁴ IH 239 stands for R.G. Collingwood *The Idea of History* J. Van Der Dussen (revised ed.) Oxford UP 1994 page 239

¹⁵ "Historical explanation, too, aims at showing that the event in question was not 'a matter of chance', but was to be expected in view of certain antecedent or simultaneous conditions. The expectation referred to is not prophecy or divination, but a rational scientific anticipation which rests on the assumption of general laws." (C.G. Hempel "The Function of General Laws in Historical Explanation" (1942) *Theories of History* P. Gardiner (ed.) Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press 1959, pp. 345-6, pp. 348-9

¹⁶ S. Paluch "The Covering Law Model of Historical Explanation" *Inquiry* Vol. 11, 4 Winter 1968 pp. 368-87

approach and instead emphasizes the *conventions and concepts* that sustain human actions. Such a cultural approach regards the intelligibility of an historical agent's actions to be cast through relevant criteria or standards governing what s/he regarded as appropriate in some given situation. Such a stance can be regarded as developed in terms of a rational explanation in history, steering between Collingwood's re-enactment approach and Hempel's exogenous stance.¹⁷ The difficulty here, however, lies – as it does for Hempel's position – in the possibility that the standards of rationality ascribed to the historical agent may be those arising from the historian's own cultural setting thereby rendering a distorted interpretation of an original agent's situation, since what is incorporated into an historian's account of some past event fails to tally with or may even twist the original historical agent's conception of rationality.¹⁸

5.0 MAKING SENSE OF 'SECOND NATURE'

It is this last issue which provides the ground for Adorno's rejection of the three approaches set out so far. That rejection emerges from his treatment of what can be called 'second nature'. It was Hegel who first distinguished natural man as 'a natural being' from man as a social individuality shaped by culture. This social creature thereby became capable of holding different attitudes – as has been articulated – rather than one of total dependence on nature, as this creature became increasingly capable of 'setting aside' its former 'natural self'.¹⁹ That originary self referred to as "first nature" characterized the human being to include a bodily existence whose physical nature emerged from first-hand experiencing to which historical development initiated destruction in the creation of a social self. Such falling away of a natural being initiates an historical being as a social self. The latter Lukacs labelled man's 'second nature' – "the nature of man-made structures" – "devoid of any sensuous valency of existence" so that the actuality of this social self "--- consists solely in the setting-aside of its natural self"; "not dumb, sensuous and yet senseless like the first: it is a complex of senses

¹⁷ W.H. Dray *Laws and Explanation in History* (1957) Santa Barbara, Calif. @ Greenwood Press 1979, Chap. 5; Cf. F.A. Olafson "The Dialectic of Action" *The History and Narrative Reader* G. Roberts (ed.) London; Routledge 2001, pp 71-106, pp. 82-6

¹⁸ Cf. N.E. Boulting "Appendix III: The Stumbling Block: The Rationality Problem" *Philosophy for Darker Times* Bradford, West Yorks.: Ethics International Press, 2022 pp. 156-65.

¹⁹ G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* A.V. Miller Oxford UP 1972 sect. 489.

– meanings – which has become rigid and strange, and which no longer awakens interiority.” Now the human being becomes estranged from nature. An attitude towards the natural world is at most one of sentimentality if the other articulated attitudes fail to materialize. Such an emotion represents a compensation for a person’s new experience within a ‘self-made environment’ realised ‘as a prison instead of as a parental home.’²⁰ Consider in this context Peirce’s remark in 1902 perhaps cast as making sense of this transformation:

But *fortunately* (I say it advisedly) man is not so *happy* as to be provided with a full stock of instincts to meet all occasions, and so is forced upon the adventurous business of reasoning, where the many meet shipwreck and the few find, not old fashioned happiness, but its splendid substitute success. When one’s purpose lies in the line of novelty, invention, generalized theory – in a word, improvement of the situation – by the side of which happiness appears a shabby old dud – instinct and the rule of thumb manifestly cease to be applicable’ (Peirce: vol. 2, para. 178).

The rationale for such a social ‘transformation of the situation’ disappears for those living after such a cultural transition. After all, wherever “--- nature was not actually mastered, the image of its untamed condition terrified.”²¹ Such a transformation makes a life – once meaningful to their forbears – no longer so for present inhabitants, especially in Western culture as that has developed following the industrial revolution. Such a ‘second nature’, generated historically, comes to be regarded as natural, unproblematic within a culture to which it is now attuned. So whereas ‘first nature’ is now to be cast merely biologically, ‘second nature’ – emerging from it – has to be seen historically but for today, socially, as more and more sophisticated technologies transform the relationship of human beings to their world. Benjamin hints at this when he claims that ‘a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye.’²² Most people go to work looking through a screen, focus on a screen at work, even if working from home, and enjoy/endure screen entertainment in the evening. None of these dimensions to everyday living puts the individual human agent in control, save the ability to choose between different screen experiences nor encourages direct firsthand experience initiating reflective thought.

²⁰ G. Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel* London: Merlin Press 1978 pp.63–64.

²¹ T.W. Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* R. Hullot-Kentor (tr.) London: The Athlone Press 1997 p. 65

²² W. Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in *Illuminations* New York: Schocken Bks. 1978 pp.217–251, p.236.

Such a 'second nature' is not fixed but continues to evolve as technological development advances presenting itself as embodying meaning whilst its condition is being historically produced continually: 'second nature' "-- is determinable only as the embodiment of recognized but senseless necessities and therefore it is incomprehensible, unknowable in its real substance"²³ for everyone formed by it. Thereby this 'second nature' self is unaware of itself as it becomes subject to 'the adventurous business of reasoning' in a societal context where profit is the measure of right, rendering a "--- rigidified self, internalized as sacrifice" since it "--- pays for its survival by forgetting that it has renounced itself in the process."²⁴

Benjamin too was pessimistic about the development of technology within the development of modernism, even though both he and Adorno took a positive attitude towards its relationship to the creation of art objects. But the importance of natural science, as an exogenous form of inquiry, transforms human beings through the employment of science within technological development. Indeed in employing new technological devices users have to learn how to co-ordinate their responses to the stimuli issuing from such entities to guarantee a certain uniformity of behaviour. (SW 4 p. 328)²⁵ Thereby human sensibilities are made subject to complex forms of retraining to eliminate other forms of human action and emotions associated with them: "Just as technology is always revealing nature from a new perspective, so also, as it impinges on human beings, it constantly makes for variations in their most primordial passions, fears, and images of longing." (AP 392-3: K2a 1)²⁶ Yet, at the same time, technological development, in its application of the results of scientific inquiry, has enabled the control and mastery of nature – so it is assumed – whilst, at the same time ignoring "the regression of society". (SW, 4, 393) That regression embodies such notions as the value of a thing is its price whilst profit is the measure of right informing common sense in the lives of the populace at large: "--- the expression of the economy in

²³ G. Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel* p. 62

²⁴ B. Hullot-Kentor "Introduction to Adorno's "Idea of Natural History"" *Telos* Vol. 60, 1984, pp. 97-110, p 100

²⁵ SW 4 p. 328 stands for W. Benjamin *Selected Writings Vol. 4 1939-1940* Camb. Mass.: Belknap Press, Harvard UP 2003. p. 328

²⁶ AP pp. 392-3: K 2a,1) stands for W. Benjamin *The Arcades Project* H. Eiland & K. McLaughlin (trs.) Camb. Mass.: Belknap Press, Harvard UP 1999 pages 392-3463, par. no. K 2a,1

its culture.” (AP 460: N1a, 6) For Benjamin, then “Politics attains primacy over history.” (AP 388-9: K1, 2)

Adorno considers the possibility of overcoming ‘second nature’ in the following terms: “the subject’s powerlessness in a society petrified into a second nature becomes the motor of the flight into a purportedly first nature.”²⁷ Such a flight might be illustrated by the Woodstock Festival at White Lake New York where nearly ½ Million people attended perhaps with peace and a concern for music on their minds. But despite its three day non-violent character, a return had to be made to ‘normality’ on August 19th. 1969 once the festival ended. “To presume that one can get away from it all by returning to nature is ideologically a false sense that one can grasp or contemplate that which is mediated as immediacy.” Neither by escaping somehow a present condition nor by thinking that there can be some kind of return “--- to a mythical golden age free from domination”²⁸ which probably has never existed raises the issue of how it is possible to be reconciled somehow with nature.

6.0 ADORNO’S INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

Adorno rejects thereby approaches that fail to recognize the significance of ‘second nature’. So he writes: “--- the thesis that I am propounding, that the ontological question with which we are today concerned, holds to the starting point of autonomous reason: only when reason perceives the reality that is in opposition to it as something foreign and lost to it, as a complex of things, that is, only when reality is no longer immediately accessible and reality and reason have no common meaning, only then can the question of the meaning of being be asked at all.”²⁹ So, as a result of rejecting the other three approaches to history, he comes to define history in the following terms: “history means that mode of conduct established by tradition that is characterized primarily by the occurrence of the qualitatively new; it is a movement that does not play itself out in mere identity, mere reproduction of what has always been, but rather one in which the new occurs; it is a movement that gains its true character through what appears in it as new.” So it is opposed to the idea of “conceptualizing the fact of history as

²⁷ T.W. Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* p. 65

²⁸ D.A. Burke “Adorno’s Aesthetic Rationality” *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environment Crises* Toronto UP 2011 Ch. 6, pp. 165-86, p.183

²⁹ T.W. Adorno “The Idea of Natural History” p. 112

a natural fact *toto caelo* (inclusively) under the category of historicity, but rather to retransform the structure of inner historical events into a structure of natural events.” That means that whenever “--- an historical element appears it refers back to the natural element that passes away within it.”³⁰ It now becomes possible to articulate more clearly a defence of Adorno’s more positive assertion namely that “all history is natural” so as to defend the further claim that historical events have an existence but they can only be cast through created cognitive re-actualizations. Three claims by Turgot indicate the direction of travel.

For Turgot, the illusion of the idea history being concerned with unassailable hard evidence is due to the fact that “no history can be traced much further back than the invention of writing”.³¹ Secondly, he seems to have a premonition of what Adorno casts as ‘second nature’: “Everything which men invent is linked only to what seems to be the truth, that is, to the opinions of the century in which the fact concerned is invented.”³² But thirdly, and this remark is what interested Walter Benjamin, Turgot claims: “Before we have learned to deal with things in a fixed position, they have already changed several times. Thus we always perceive events too late, and policy has always the necessity to foresee, so to speak, the present.”³³ For Benjamin it was exactly “--- this concept of the present which underlies the actuality of genuine historiography.”³⁴ It can be regarded as inspiring the essence of Benjamin’s and thereby Adorno’s standpoint: “It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.” This is the central assumption for

³⁰ T.W. Adorno “The Idea of Natural History” *Telos* Vol. 60, 1984, pp. 111-24, pp. 111,117 & 120

³¹ “Historical times cannot be traced further back than the invention of writing; and, when it was invented, men could at first make use of it only to record vague traditions, or a few leading events to which no dates were ascribed, and which were mixed up with myths to such an extent as to render discrimination impossible.” A.R.J. Turgot “On Universal History” (1750) *The Turgot Collection* D. Gordon (ed.) Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute 2011 pp. 347-418 p. 350

³² A.R.J. Turgot “On Universal History” (1750) p. 383

³³ “Every kind of light comes to us only through time. The slower its progress is, the further the object (carried along by the rapid movement that distances or approaches all existing things) is already distant from the place in which we think we see it. Before we have learned to deal with things in a fixed position, they have already changed several times. Thus we always perceive events too late, and policy has always the necessity to foresee, so to speak, the present.” A.R.J. Turot “Appendix: Miscellaneous Extracts: Political Doctrines Subject to Modification” 1750-1776 *The Turgot Collection* pp. 509-518, p. 510

³⁴ W. Benjamin *Selected Writings Vol. 4 1939-1940* Camb. Mass.: Belknap Press, Harvard UP 2003. p. 405

Benjamin's claim on behalf of "dialectics at a standstill." (AP p. 463; N3, 1)

6.1 *The Importance of the Dialectical Image*

So historical awareness arises when a present temporal moment is "--- filled full by now-time (Jetztzeit)."³⁵ Thereby a constellation can be grasped as a structured pattern in phenomena, delivered suddenly within experience, a structured whole in which transitory elements in experience form themselves – a grouping at a funeral, the arrangements of discarded plates at a dinner party's end,³⁶ someone's sudden gesture – to release a dialectical idea from such a monadic image of felt experience transcending the particularity of an entity's objective status: "For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent." (AP p. 462: N2a, 3) Such constellations fix phenomena for consciousness, lending a dignity to their transitoriness to incite reflection upon them. So there is no continuous time line in making sense of history as invoked by determinism; rather discontinued visions or sudden flashes within experience generate "true historical images" possessing a dialectical character. Hence the claim that Benjamin's notion of a constellation "--- presupposes a qualitative conception of time that opposes the quantitative conception"³⁷ forwarded by the idea of progress. In that way there may be some family resemblances between his conception of time and that of Whitehead³⁸ for whom there is no continuity of becomings, but rather becomings of continuity.³⁹

Lyveden New Bield's ruins in Northamptonshire might serve to illustrate the visionary⁴⁰ character of a dialectical image which can be enjoyed since, as ruins

³⁵ W. Benjamin *Selected Writings Vol. 4 1939-1940* p. 395

³⁶ "After a convivial evening, someone remaining behind can see at a glance what it was like from the disposition of plates and cups, glasses and food." W. Benjamin "One-Way Street" *Selected Writings Vol. 1* (1913-1926) M. Bullock & M.W. Jennings (eds.) Camb. Mass. Belknap Press, Harvard UP 2000 p. 472

³⁷ M.J. Cantinho "The Messianism or the history as dissidence, in the work of Walter Benjamin" *Práticas da História* Lisbon University: Nova School of Social Sciences and Humanities (NOVA FCSH) 2021, pp. 1-11, p.9

³⁸ Cf. N.E. Boulting "Conceptions of Experienced Time and the Practice of Life" *Process Studies* Vol. 51. 1 Spring-Summer 2022, pp. 46-69.

³⁹ D.A. Sipfle "On the Intelligibility of the Epochal Theory of Time." *The Monist*, Vol. 53, No.3, July 1969, pp. 505-518

⁴⁰ The term visionary is indebted to S.D. Chrostowska "Angelus Novus, Angst of History" *Diacritics* " 40 (1) 2012, pp. 42-68, p. 47

of an uncompleted building, they embody both a prospect of what was possible, as it was created around 1604, yet render the undoing of such a prospect within that same present construction. Its construction then expressed a future hope embodied in a Catholic consciousness at the time, but for us today it simply represents that hope in these ruins.⁴¹ So that term dialectical invokes the notion of an opposition of meanings held within the consciousness of the image. Whilst the former – the prospect – refers to something cognitive, the latter – this prospect's undoing – invokes vividness in its immediacy. In this case, the promise of a spectacular building is undone by its opposite, its incompleteness as a result of an abandonment. So the ruins both charm, yet disenchant what occurred in a profaner world where Tresham's Christian vision was negated.

Again consider a *Bath Victoria Art Gallery* visit. Inside, there is a 1643 painting by the Flemish artist Adrian de Brie. The background is depicted as in a mist whilst entertainment and buying and selling fill the foreground. A Baroque image is released: mourning for a past Classical tradition takes up at least half of this melancholy picture, obscured if one focuses only on the foreground's jollity. That melancholic vision characterizing the past, suddenly revealed, rendering such an apparition, electrifies the immediacy of a 'Now-time' in the formation of a constellation, a crystalloid as it were: "The dialectical image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast – as an image flashing up in the now of its recognisability. The rescue that is carried out by these means – and only by these – can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is already irretrievably lost." (AP p. 473: N9, 7) Such examples can be cast as illustrating the aesthetic dimension in its concentration upon the sheer qualitative elements of experience as revealed in such constellations, to make genuine philosophical activity possible. That is why Adorno remarked: "We are not to philosophize about concrete things; we are to philosophize, rather, out of these things";⁴² any "--- subjective intention is seen to be extinguished in the object."⁴³ Thereby experiences considered to be "-- merely subjective and

⁴¹ For a different way of approaching the use of those terms expression and representation see M.A. Pensky "Method and Time: Benjamin's Dialectical Images" *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* D.S. Ferris (ed.) Cambridge UP: 204 pp. 177-98

⁴² T.W. Adorno *Negative Dialectics* E.B. Ashton (tr.) New York: Seabury Press 1979, p. 33

⁴³ T.W. Adorno "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin" *Prisms* S. & S, Weber (trs.) Camb., Mass.: MIT Press 1982, pp. 229-41, p. 240

contingent are granted objectivity---”⁴⁴ yet they can awake and redeem the experiencer’s consciousness by breaking the oppressive fixation of an accepted and conformist notion of historical time to release a new, visionary alternative making it possible cognitively “--- to brush history against the grain.” (SW 4. 392) But such visionary alternatives can also be released by a literary fragment, aphorisms or a quotation; all can arrest thought processes to make “--- possible reflection on past, present and future.”⁴⁵

These visionary alternatives, however, can’t really be regarded as actualisations of what exist in the way that we can speak of the actualization of someone’s existence at a particular time. A bare historical existent is not available to the historian in the present; rather it is re-actualized in visionary form given a particular kind of experience within a present moment. It is within this context that Benjamin seeks to distinguish *Jetztsein* (waking being) – suddenly being aware and seeking to transcend the dogmas of ‘second nature’ – from *Jetztzeit* ‘the present time’s now-being since the former “--- signifies, in itself, a higher concretion” in overcoming rather than being aware of “the ideology of progress.” Thereby “--- everything past (in its time) can acquire a higher grade of actuality than it had in the moment of its existing. How it marks itself as higher actuality is determined by the image as which and in which it is comprehended.” (AP p. 392: K2, 3)

6.2 *The Existence of an historical event and its re-actualization*

A disagreement has arisen within that third cultural form of historical interpretation, rendered above, emphasizing the conventions and concepts sustaining human actions. Interestingly Danto argues against scientism: whereas science focuses upon causality, philosophy is concerned with representations or – in view of what has been claimed – actualizations or re-actualizations. But in his *Analytical Philosophy of History*, past events “--- continue to receive different description through the relations in which they stand to events later in time than themselves” so that the past is always going to be differently described but it never

⁴⁴ T.W. Adorno “Benjamin’s **Einbahnstrasse**” *Notes to Literature Vol. 2* R. Tiedemann (ed.) New York: Columbia UP 1992, pp. 322-327, p.322

⁴⁵ G.I. Demiryol “Arendt and Benjamin: Tradition, Progress and Break with the Past” *Jrnl. of the Philos. of History* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2018, pp. 1-22, p. 9

changes.⁴⁶

In opposition Webermann rejects Danto's claim: "Past events are not fixed because they can become different events as a result of the fact that later events foist new properties onto earlier events."⁴⁷ Webermann considers the following case: Yigal Amir shot Yitzchak Rabin on November 4th. 1995. Such an event may have served, under the guidance of the new Prime Minister Shimon Perez, to reinforce Rabin's peace making project. Unlike Webermann's claim in 1997 that its future was uncertain, we now know that Rabin's assassination destroyed his project. So, according to Webermann's principle, "--- for an earlier event to be genuinely changed by a later event it must be the case that the earlier event is connected through a chain of causes and effects to the later event" Webermann sustains his case: "--- later developments in the Mideast peace process represent a genuine change in the Rabin assassination insofar as the assassination and the later developments are causally connected." But he does add a rider: the event of the shooting is changed as a result of what he calls "a later event" – namely the unravelling of the peace process – "--- insofar as the newly gained relational property" – 'undoing the peace process' – " --- is significant according to prevailing customs, conceptual schemes, and interests." Hence his conclusion: "-- the event picked out is now vitally different from what it once was",⁴⁸ a killing committed by Yigal Amir.

The difficulty here is that the term 'event' is doing too much work! The event exists; it can be located in the past. But it is actualized or re-actualized in the present, not through any event akin to killing someone, but as something cognitive in which the original existent is actualized or re-actualized. There is no specific standard way in which the latter takes place. So a dualism is retained. A particular event existing in the past but has no specific definite actualization in the present. Rather at any specific now-being (*Jetztzeit*), a particular actualization will occur, and an alternative one at a different now-being. In each case only a dialectical image is "genuinely historical". Thereby "while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what has been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in character but figural (*bildlich*). (AP p. 463, n3, 1) In this

⁴⁶ A.C. Danto "Historical Language and Historical Reality" *Rev. of Metaphysics* Dec. 1973, Vol. 27 No. 2 Issue No. 106 pp. 219-59, pp.230 & 258-9; cf. *Analytical Philosophy of History* Cambridge UP 1965 pp. 155 & 166-7

⁴⁷ D. Weberman "The Nonfixity of the Historical Past" *Rev. of Metaphysics* June 1997 Vol. 50 No. 4, Issue No. 200, pp. 749-68, p. 760

⁴⁸ D. Weberman "The Nonfixity of the Historical Past" pp. 765, 766 & 768

way “--- history becomes the object of a construct whose locus is not empty time but rather the specific epoch, the specific life, the specific work”, (SW 3 p. 262) the context and culture within which the killing of Rabin as an incident was made possible within a temporal and chaotic setting. And that can only be appreciated by sustaining a dual insight: the fore-history and the after-history of that original murder. As Benjamin put it in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: “That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual”; the existence of the past action of Yigal Amir’s gunshot. Indeed, “--- its rhythm is apparent” only to that dual insight.⁴⁹ In this way actualizations at a particular now-time as flashes of insight are discontinuous, so that the idea of historical continuity is rejected; progress itself indeed is a reification: “The concept of historical time forms an antithesis to the idea of temporal continuum.” (SW 4, 407)

7.0 CONCLUSION

So as to interpret the idea of the historical through Adorno’s idea of natural-history, it was necessary to show how it related to a conception of the natural. Adorno agrees with Whitehead: nature can be cast in a sense as atemporal whilst human access is only available through a temporal affective sense. After sketching this distinction, forwarded in his *The Idea of Natural History*, Adorno’s claims that usual accounts of history are not historical and that all history is natural were examined. Three approaches to understanding history were delineated, all three failing to make sense of his idea of ‘second nature’. Once done the paper’s focus moved to articulating his claim that ‘all history is natural’ by referring to remarks of Turgot at the time of the birth of the Industrial Revolution to introduce Benjamin’s idea of a constellation, presupposed by his thesis of ‘dialectics at a standstill’. Finally a return was made to Hartshorne’s distinction between existence and actuality in order to show how it can be used to relate a past event’s existence to cognitive re-actualizations at different times through Benjamin’s claim on behalf of his conception of ‘dialectics at a standstill’.

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⁴⁹ W. Benjamin *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* p. 45