The Event, the Phenomenon, and the Revealed

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I. What Shows Itself and What Gives Itself

Every phenomenon appears, but it appears only to the extent that it shows itself. Heidegger convincingly demonstrated that the phenomenon is defined as what shows itself in itself and from itself. Still, he left the question of how to think the self at work in what shows itself largely undetermined.¹ How in fact can a phenomenon claim to deploy itself, if a transcendental I constitutes it as an object placed at the disposition of and by the thought that fully penetrates it?

In such a world—the world of technical objects, our world for the most part—phenomena can only reach the rank of objects. Thus their phenomenal-ity is merely borrowed, and it is as if they are derived from the intentionality and the intuition that we grant to them. To admit the contrary, that a phenomenon shows itself, one would have to be able to acknowledge it to be a self that initiates its manifestation. The question is, then, to know whether and how such an initiation of manifestation can befall a phenomenon. I have proposed the following response: a phenomenon can show itself only to the extent that it gives itself first—nothing can show itself unless it gives itself first. Still, as we
will see, the reverse is not necessarily true, since what gives itself need not show itself—the given² is not always phenomenalized. How, then, to get a bearing on what gives itself? The givenness of self cannot be seen directly, since what can be seen must have shown itself already—or at least, in the case of objects, it must have been shown. If manifestation perhaps proceeds from the given, then the given has to precede it; the given is therefore anterior to manifestation. In other words, the given is not yet implicated in the space of visibility and so, strictly speaking, is unseen. Therefore, we could not access the given, the movement through which the phenomenon gives itself, by outlining the visibility of what possibly shows itself there—assuming, of course, that a non-objective phenomenality could manifest itself that way. Only one solution remains: to try to locate, in the very space of manifestation, the regions where phenomena show themselves, instead of simply letting themselves be shown as objects. Or, to isolate regions where the self of what shows itself testifies indisputably to the thrust, the pressure, and, so to speak, the impact of what gives itself. The self of what shows itself would then manifest indirectly that it gives itself in a more fundamental sense. This same self, located in the phenomenon showing itself, would come from the original self of that which gives itself. Better: the self of phenomenalization would then manifest indirectly the self of the given, because the one would employ the other and ultimately coincide with it.

Yet, how can we detect such an ascension from the phenomenalizing self to the giving self? Which phenomena retain the trace of their donation in them, to the point that their mode of phenomenalization not only gives access to their originary self, but also renders it incontestable? Consider the following hypothesis: the phenomena in question have the character of an event. In fact, though the event seems to be a phenomenon like any other, it can be distinguished from objective phenomena in that it is not a result of a process of production. The event is not a product, determined and foreseen, predictable on the basis of its causes, and reproducible through the repetition of these causes. On the contrary, in happening the event testifies to an unpredictable origin, arising due to largely unknown or even absent causes, causes that are at least unassignable, such that one does not know how to reproduce it, for its constitution has no sense. Still, it could be objected that such events are rare, that their very unpredictability renders them unsuitable for analyzing manifestation—in short, that they provide no solid ground for an inquiry into the given. Can this seemingly obvious objection be challenged? I shall try to do so, choosing a most trivial example: this room, the Salle des Actes of the Catholic Institute, where today’s academic meeting is being held.

Even this auditorium appears in the mode of an event. Do not protest that it lets itself be seen in the manner of an object—four walls, a false ceiling hiding a balcony, a podium, a certain number of seats, all available in the manner of permanent and subsistent beings that exist, waiting for us to inhabit
them and use them or for us to certify their subsistence. For, curiously, this permanence in waiting signifies the opposite of objective availability.

**a. According to the Past**

As always already there, available for our arrival and usage, this hall imposes itself on us as preceding us, being without us even if for us. It appears to our view as an unexpected, unpredictable fact, originating in an uncontrollable past. The surprise of this unexpected appearance does not apply only to the rooms of this particular Romanesque palace, often passed by in the walks about town of an ignorant tourist or in the hurried march of a blasé inhabitant of the Eternal City, but which sometimes, in response to an exceptional invitation, on entering we suddenly discover in all its unpredictable and, until now, unknown splendor. The surprise applies equally well to the Salle des Actes—already there, emerging from a past of which we are unaware. Redecorated many times thanks to now forgotten restoration projects, weighed down with a history exceeding our memory (could it be a converted cloister?), it forces itself upon me when it appears. It is not so much that I enter this room as that the room itself comes to me, engulfs me, and imposes itself upon me. This “already” testifies to the event.

**b. According to the Present**

Here, the nature of the event of the phenomenon of this hall shines forth. For it is no longer a question of the Salle des Actes as such, in general, subsisting as an indifferent vacuity between this or that occasion that fills it with an undifferentiated public. It is a question of this Salle this evening, filled for this occasion, to hear these speakers on this topic. This evening, the Salle des Actes becomes a hall—in the theatrical sense of a good or bad hall. It becomes a stage—in the theatrical sense that this or that actor can first fill it, then keep the attention of the audience. Finally, it is a question of a hall, where what comes to pass is neither the walls nor the stones, neither the spectators nor the speakers, but the intangible event that their words will take hold of, making it understood or spoiling it. This moment will certainly be inserted among other academic meetings, other conferences, other university ceremonies, but it will never be repeated as such. This evening, devoted to this topic and not any other, among us and no others, an absolutely unique, irreproducible, and largely unpredictable event, is being played out—after all, at the precise moment that I say “the precise moment,” neither you, nor the presiding dean, nor I, none of us knows yet whether it will turn out to be a success or a failure. What appears at this precise moment under our eyes escapes all constitution: having been organized with clear, friendly, intellectual, and social intentions, it shows itself of itself from itself nevertheless. The self of that which gives itself announces itself in this “self” of its phenomenality. The “this time, once and for all” testifies then also to the self of the phenomenon.
c. In the Future

Even after the event, no witness, however knowledgeable, attentive, and backed up by documents as he or she might be, can describe what is happening at the moment. The event of this public oral presentation, made possible by a consenting audience and a benevolent institution, engages not only material means—itself impossible to describe exhaustively, stone by stone, epoch by epoch, attendee by attendee—but also an undefined intellectual framework. After all, I must explain what I say and what I mean to say, from where I say it, with what presuppositions I begin, from what texts, from what personal and spiritual problems. It would also be necessary to describe the motivations of each listener: their expectations; their disappointments; their agreements, masked in silence or exaggerated by polemic. Then, in order to describe what kind of event has happened in this “hall,” this Salle des Actes, it would be necessary to follow the consequences for the individual and collective evolution of all the participants, the main speaker included—which, fortunately, is impossible. Such a hermeneutics would deploy itself without end and in no defined network. No exhaustive and reproducible constitution of an object can be at work here. The “without end” shows that the event arose from itself, that its phenomenality arose from the self of its givenness.

This opening analysis, precisely because it is based on a phenomenon that is, at first sight, simple and banal, assures us that showing-itself can give indirect access to the self of that which gives itself. The event of this “hall,” the Salle des Actes, makes a phenomenon appear before us that not only neither arises out of our initiative, nor responds to our expectations, nor can ever be reproduced, but which above all gives itself to us from its own self, to the point that it affects us, changes us, almost produces us. We can never stage an event (nothing would be more ridiculously contradictory than the supposed “organization of the event”); rather, it stages us out of the initiative of its own self by giving itself to us. It stages us in the scene opened by its givenness.

II. The Event as the Self of the Given Phenomenon

This analysis, however rigorous it may be, encounters a difficulty, or at least something strange: it considers as an event what at first sight is an object—in this case, the hall. On what basis can an object be interpreted as an event—a hall as a “hall”? If we follow that line of thinking, in the end could not every object be described as an event? Should not a more reasonable distinction be maintained between these two concepts? And what is gained from such an interpretation? After all, the object certainly belongs to the sphere of phenomenality, yet it is not evident that the phenomenon still comes under it.

To answer these sensible objections, one must undoubtedly turn the question around and ask, on the contrary, how can the essential and original event character of phenomena (even of the most banal type, like the one that I have
just described) grow blurred, attenuate, and disappear, to the point that it appears as no more than an object? One should not ask, Up to what point can one legitimately think the phenomenon as an event? Instead, the question is, Why can one miss phenomenality by reducing it to objectivity?

To reply to this question, we can find inspiration in Kant. The first of the four headings that organize the categories of understanding, and so impose onto phenomena the quadruple seal of objectivity, refers to quantity. Kant points out that to become an object, every phenomenon must possess a quantity, a magnitude. Given this magnitude, the totality of the phenomenon equals and results from the sum total of its parts. From this follows another decisive feature: it can and must be possible to anticipate the object on the basis of the sum of the parts that compose it, such that it is always “intuited in advance [schon angeschaut] as an aggregate (the sum of parts given in advance [vorher angeschaut])” (A163; B204). That certainly signifies that the magnitude of the phenomenon can, by right, always be modeled in a finite quantity, and so be inscribed in a real space or be transcribed (by means of models, parameters, and encoding) into an imaginary space. It signifies above all that the phenomenon is inscribed in a space that we can always know in advance by summing its parts. This hall has a quantity that results from the sum of its parts—these walls delimit its volume and also indicate other nonextended parameters (its fabrication and maintenance cost, occupancy rate, etc.) that specify budgetary costs and its pedagogical use. In principle, no place is left in it for the least surprise: what appears will always inscribe itself in what the sum of these parameters already permits us to foresee. The hall is foreseen before it is actually seen—confined in its quantity, defined through its parts, brought to a halt, so to say, by the measurements that precede it and await its empirical execution (its construction). This reduction of the hall to its foreseeable quantity turns it into an object, before and in which we pass as if there were nothing else to be seen in it, nothing other than what can already be envisaged on the basis of its construction plan. The same applies to all technical objects: we no longer see them—we no longer need to see them, since we foresee them far in advance. And we succeed in using them all the better if we can foresee them without being preoccupied with seeing them. We only need to begin to see them when we can no longer or do not yet foresee them—that is, when we can no longer or do not yet use them (in other words, when they break down or when we are learning to use them). Within the limits of typical technical usage, we thus have no need to see objects; it suffices for us to foresee them. We thus reduce them to the rank of second order, common law, phenomena, deprived of full—that is, autonomous and disinterested—appearance. They appear transparent to us, in the neutral light of objectivity. Of what is a phenomenon foreseen and not seen, turned into an object, deprived?

When we style it a foreseen phenomenon, is it not this very foresight that disqualifies it as a full phenomenon? What does foresight mean here? That in the object everything remains seen in advance, that nothing unexpected will
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turn up—costs, occupancy, utility, and so on. The object remains a phenomenon that has expired because it appears as something that has always already expired: nothing new can happen to it, since, more radically, under the regard that constitutes it, it appears as what cannot happen at all. The object appears as the shadow of the event that we deny in it.

Still, we could invert the analysis and move from the object, the transparent phenomenon deprived of any ability to happen, to its original phenomenality, governed part and parcel by eventiality [l’événementialité]—following the rule of essence that what truly shows itself must first give itself. We have in fact already accomplished this move from the object to the event by describing the common-law phenomenon—this “hall” that is precisely not the Salle des Actes—as a triple event, according to the “already” of its facticity, the “this time, once and for all” of its realization, and the “without end” of its hermeneutics. It remains, then, to return to the description of the evential character of phenomenality in general, referring from now on to phenomena that can unquestionably be thematized as events. First, collective phenomena are called by the title of event (“historical”: political revolution, war, natural disaster, cultural or sport event, etc.), and they satisfy at least three requirements.

a. They cannot be repeated identically, and thus they show themselves to be identical only to themselves: irreproducibility, hence irreversibility.

b. They can be assigned neither a unique cause nor an exhaustive explanation; the number of causes and possible explanations is indefinite and increases in proportion to the hermeneutic that historians, sociologists, economists, and others can develop to their purposes—exceeding the number of effects and facts of any system of causes.

c. They cannot be foreseen, since their partial causes not only remain insufficient, but are discovered only after the effect has been accomplished. It follows that their possibility, impossible to foresee, remains, strictly speaking, an impossibility with regard to the system of previously classified causes.

Importantly, these three requirements do not refer exclusively to collective phenomena; they also define private or intersubjective phenomena.

Let us analyze an exemplary and yet banal case, that of Montaigne’s friendship for La Boétie. The canonical determinants of a phenomenon as an event, which I have developed elsewhere, can be found in it. Friendship with another forces me, first of all, to have regard toward him, a regard that does not follow my intentionality toward him, but submits itself to the point of view that he has toward me, thus placing me at the exact point where his own intention awaits to expose me. This anamorphosis is described precisely by Montaigne: “We looked for each other before we saw one another.” To look for each other means that, like rivals who provoke and eye each other up and down, each tried to place himself where the look of the other could come to rest on him. In other words, “It is the I-don’t-know-what quintessence of this union that, hav-
ing seized my will, made it plunge and lose itself in his.” I take for myself his point of view on me, without reducing it to my point of view on him; and thus it happens to me. Second, the event of this friendship happens all at once, unforeseen and without warning, in the shape of an unexpected and syncopated arrival: “At our first meeting, we found ourselves so absorbed, so familiar, so committed one to the other, that nothing appeared to us so close as the other.” Thus it is an always “already” accomplished fact that its facticity, “by chance during a great feast and city festival,” renders it irreversible rather than weakening it. Third, the phenomenon that gives itself gives nothing other than itself; its ultimate meaning remains inaccessible because it is reduced to the accomplished fact, to its incidence. This accident does not indicate any substance; if it signifies more than itself, the surplus remains as unknowable as the “order from heaven” that alone inspires it. From this follows the last feature that characterizes most perfectly the eventiality of the phenomenon: we can assign it neither cause nor reason; or, rather, no reason or cause other than itself, in the pure energy of its unquestionable happening: “If pushed to say why I loved him, I feel that nothing could express this but saying, because it was him, because it was me” (Montaigne 139). The phenomenon of friendship thus shows itself only insofar as, as a pure and perfect event, its phenomenality forces itself upon the mode of being of the event so that it gives itself without question or reserve.

In this way, the eventiality governing every phenomenon, even the most objective in appearance, demonstrates without exception that what shows itself can do so only in virtue of a strictly and eidetically phenomenological self, which guarantees only that it gives itself and that, in return, it proves that its phenomenalization presupposes its givenness as such and from itself.

III. The Time of the Self

Consider the result: the self of what shows itself—that is, the phenomenon—that testifies, by its universal and intrinsic evential character, that it gives itself originarily. Does that not lead to a banal conclusion that every phenomenon, even the intuitively poor or common-law object, is temporal? In that case, would we not simply return to a position that is, quite classically, Kantian? Undoubtedly—if we were to accept two inadmissible corollaries of Kant’s critique.

First, this one: temporality serves only to permit the synthesis of phenomena as objects, thus working to assure permanence in presence. Now, my analysis establishes exactly the contrary: temporality originarily brings about the happening of occurrences as accomplished fact, with neither reason nor cause and by imposing an anamorphosis. In short, it allows phenomenality to be understood under the mode of event, contrary to all objectivity, which becomes at best a residual case, provisionally permanent, illusorily subsistent.
Temporality does not work for the sake of objects, but in favor of the event, which undoes and overdetermines the object, which, to repeat, is simply the illusion of an atemporal event.

The other corollary: temporality as internal sense belongs to sensibility and operates only by orienting the subject toward the synthesis of known objects; still, the transcendental \( I \), the operator of this synthesis (of syntheses), even though it puts temporality to work in a masterly manner, is not itself defined strictly as such according to this temporality. Even if we suppose that phenomena temporalized as objects preserve a trace of eventiality (which is open to question), still the transcendental \( I \) itself, however temporalizing it might be, absolutely does not phenomenalize itself as an event. And it does not for a reason that is absolutely determinative: it never phenomenalizes itself, does not appear amongst other phenomena, as it is excluded from the phenomenality that it produces. Having said this, we cannot overcome the Kantian objection with only negative arguments. To truly overcome it, it will be necessary to identify phenomena temporalized eidetically as events; temporalized in such a way that they provoke the ego to phenomenalize itself according to this unique eventiality. Can we adduce such a phenomenon?

A premier case of such a phenomenon presents itself: death, a phenomenon that can be phenomenalized only in *its* coming to pass, for outside of this passage it cannot properly be; it appears, then, only to the extent that it comes to pass; if it didn’t, it could never be. Death can only show *itself* by giving itself as an event. It could never let itself be seen otherwise. Still, when it happens, what does it show of itself? Is it not subject to the classical aporia according to which, as long as I am, death is not, and when it happens, I am no longer there to see it? Does it not provide only the illusion of an event, the illusion that a phenomenon gives *itself*? To reply, we must provide a somewhat more precise description and distinguish between the death of the other and my own death.

The death of the other appears to the extent that *it* comes to pass, but it consists precisely in the pure and simple passage, itself not real, from the state of a living being to that of a corpse. This passage cannot be seen directly. Unlike the two states it traverses, as a phenomenon the death of the other lasts only the instant of the passage (even if the funeral ceremony tries to make it last and does so for the very reason that the passage lasted only a moment). The death of the other shows *itself* only in a flash and it gives *itself* only in withdrawing—by removing the living other from us. It is a pure phenomenon, to be sure, yet too pure to show *itself* and so give *itself* as a perfect event. And this is even more true since this flash of event does not involve my ego, since, by enclosing me in my residual life, the death of the other bars all access to both the other and to death.

My own death involves me completely, to be sure, and it also appears only in coming to pass, and thus as an event testifying to a phenomenal givenness. However, an obvious aporia compromises its relevance: if death comes to pass upon me (supposing that a phenomenon manifests itself in this passage),
insofar as I pass away together with it, I could never see the event. Certainly, this aporia poses a threat only from the point of view of one who has not yet experienced this passage, who does not know whether it will annihilate or “change” me (1 Corinthians 15:52). Thus, this aporia of my death only matters to one who, like all of us of here, has not yet died. We are ignorant as to whether that which gives death is an event or a nihilation of phenomenality. In fact, the human condition is primarily characterized neither by death (animals and civilizations die as well) nor by the consciousness of ending in death, but by the ignorance of what happens (or shows itself) to me at the moment when death comes upon me. My death does not, then, place me before an effectivity or a passage. Rather, it places me before a simple possibility—the possibility of impossibility. And this possibility of impossibility, which will necessarily give itself, retains until the end the possibility of not showing itself, of not showing anything. Hence the event of my death, the closest, the least far away, from which only one heartbeat separates me, remains inaccessible to me by the excess in it (and it is, provisionally at least, inevitable), by the excess of its pure donation to phenomenality. There, too, we are surely dealing with a pure phenomenon, but one too pure to show itself and so to give itself as a perfect event. This phenomenon, which deserves the title of an event and which involves me in it radically because it gives itself, nevertheless withdraws as a phenomenon that shows itself.

How can we proceed? Let us return to the phenomenon itself: it gives itself in that it shows itself, yet only insofar as the manifestation occurs in it in the mode of a happening that falls before my gaze as an accomplished fact (an incident) that it appropriates (anamorphosis). Obviously, these determinations refer to time, which the event radically presupposes. Yet does the event not involve time as one of its elements or conditions? Certainly not. For time itself first happens in the mode of an event. Husserl saw that and defined time as starting from an “original impression” that, as a “source point,” continuously arises in and as the pure present, and that, precisely because it occurs, does not cease to pass into the no-longer-present, a time retained by retention before sinking into the past (Internal Time §11). The present arises as first and the first comes to pass as pure event—unpredictable, irreversible, irreproducible as such, immediately past and deprived of cause or reason. It alone escapes objectivity, even though it makes it possible, because it is absolutely excluded from all constitution: “The originary impression is a non-modifiable absolute, the original source for all consciousness and being to come” (§31). Here the movement of that which gives itself is accomplished and almost no possibility of appearing is left to that which shows itself, since the originary impression changes immediately and, as soon as it arises, lives continually in retention. Still, unlike death, this excess of givenness does not prevent an event from being effectively and even sensibly accomplished, since the originary impression does not cease to reappear from the absolute unseen, from the shadow out of which it emerges. The originary impression gives itself to be seen as a pure
event relentlessly brought to life through indefinite and unconditional birth. From the “source point,” givenness unremittingly at work, what hardly shows itself (this instant) is born from each instant of that which gives itself completely (the originary impression).

Birth—here we have a phenomenon that shows itself truly in the mode of what gives itself, the phenomenon that is properly eventual. The question is how to understand my birth showing itself as a phenomenon, since, properly speaking, I have never actually seen it with my own eyes and, in order to reconstitute it, I must rely on eye witnesses or administrative decisions. Though it takes place without me and even, strictly speaking, before me, it should not be able to show itself (if it showed itself) to anybody other than me. Still, I consider it a phenomenon, since I continuously intend it (I want to know who I am and where I come from, I search for personal identity, etc.) and I fulfill these intentions with quasi-intuitions (second-hand memories, direct and indirect testimony, etc.). My birth appears even as a privileged phenomenon, since a significant part of my life is devoted to reconstituting it, giving it sense, and responding to its silent call. Still, in principle I cannot see this unquestionable phenomenon directly. This aporia could be formalized by saying that my birth shows me precisely that my origin cannot be shown—in short, that it attests only to the originary non-originality of the origin \[l'originaire non-originelleité de l'origine\]. This must be understood in a double sense. Either my birth happens before I can see and receive it, in which case I am not present at my own origin, or my birth. My origin is in itself nothing originary but flows from an indefinite series of events and appearances \(\text{sumque vel a parentibus productus}\) (Descartes 145). However, to describe this aporia is not yet to resolve it. It remains to be understood how a phenomenon that does not show itself (and in a sense it does show itself well through numerous intermediaries) not only affects me as if it did show itself, but also affects me more radically than any other, since it alone determines me, defines my ego, even produces it. Put otherwise: if an origin cannot in general show itself, all the less can an origin be dispossessed of its originarity. How then does this originary non-originarity happen to me—since it happens to me, has happened to me, I come to it—if it remains necessarily indemonstrable? It happens to me exactly in that it happens, and happens \[advenir\] only in that it endows me with a future \[l'avenir\]. My birth is not called a phenomenon (that of the non-originary origin) because it shows itself, but because, in the very absence of any direct monstration, it comes to pass as an event that was never present and always already dated \[passé\], but never outdated \[dépassé\]—in fact, always to-come. My birth does phenomenalize itself, but as a pure event, unpredictable, irreproducible, exceeding all cause, and making the impossible possible (that is to say, my always new life), surpassing all expectation, all promise, and all prediction. This phenomenon, which is accomplished in a perfect reduction of that which shows itself, thus testifies in an exceptional and paradigmatic way that its phenomenality flows directly from the fact that it gives itself.
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We thus find what we have been looking for: all that shows itself not only gives itself, but gives itself as an event according to a temporality that is itself evential, to the point that, in exceptional cases (birth), a phenomenon directly succeeds in giving itself without showing itself.

In fact, a number of characteristics justify the phenomenological privilege granted to birth:

a. The phenomenon of birth gives itself directly without showing itself directly because it comes to pass as an event par excellence (an origin originally non-originary). Nevertheless, this excellence follows from the fact that it gives me to myself when it gives itself. It phenomenalizes itself by affecting me, but it affects me not only by giving me to myself, but (since without it I would not yet be there to be affected by it) by giving a myself a me, which receives itself from what it receives.8

b. From the beginning, the phenomenon of birth takes to its height the inclusion of the ego in eventiality by founding that ego in an exemplary way as the given-to:9 the one that receives itself from what it receives. The phenomenon of birth exemplifies the phenomenon in general—something can phenomenalize itself only to the extent that it gives itself. However, at the same time, it institutes the given-to (originarily a posteriori since it receives itself from what it receives), the first phenomenon (making possible the reception of all others).

c. Thus, the phenomenon of birth gives itself as a full-fledged saturated phenomenon (or paradox). In effect, its event, the first originating impression and so more originary than any other instant, makes possible an indefinite, indescribable, and unpredictable series of originating impressions to come—those that accumulate in the span of my life and that define me until the end of my life. In this way birth opens the course of innumerable temporal intuitions, for which I unceasingly, but always too late, will seek to find significations, concepts, and noeses that will inevitably remain insufficient. I will always try to find the words to tell (myself) what will happen to me, or rather, what will have already happened to me, without being able to adequately explain, understand, or constitute it when it happens. The excess of intuition over intention bursts forth from my birth on—and more over, I will speak not so much because I have intended silently, but above all after hearing others speak. Language is heard first and spoken only afterwards. The origin certainly remains inaccessible not because of its deficiency, but because the first phenomenon already saturates every intention with intuitions. The origin, which refuses to show itself, does not, however, give itself through poverty (Derrida), but through excess, thus determining the organization of all the givens to come. That is to say, that nothing shows itself unless it first gives itself.

IV. Is the Reduction to the Given Self-Contradictory?

Let us take it as granted that the phenomenon, considered in its radical evential character, reduces to the given. Such a given, especially if it is thought
in terms of my birth, insofar as it can give itself as a spectacle of which I would be a spectator (whether disinterested or not does not matter here) without showing itself directly, is accomplished as a saturated phenomenon. It is a saturated phenomenon that, in the event, strikes an ego which, under that blow [coup], becomes a given-to. In effect, such an event gives itself at a stroke [coup]: it leaves one speechless; it leaves one with no way to escape it; in the end, it leaves one without the choice either to refuse or to voluntarily accept it. Its accomplished fact cannot be discussed, or avoided, or decided. It is not even a question of a kind of violence, since violence implies something arbitrary and, so, an arbiter and an already given space of freedom. It is a question of pure phenomenological necessity: since the event always already gives itself, its givenness already bygone and necessarily contingent, as in the case of the birth phenomenon or originary impression, it makes manifest the self of that which gives itself. It testifies that this phenomenon and, by derivation, all other phenomena can give themselves in the strict sense, for it proves that, as a pure event, it makes such a self available. Not only does the event give itself in itself (canceling the retreat of the thing in itself), but it gives itself from itself and so as a self.

The stakes at risk in this analysis should not be underestimated: if the self belongs to the phenomenon, no ego can continue to pretend to claim, in first place and first instance, ipseity, the self. Does not the ego of Descartes attain its self in reply to the nescio quis that pertains to it, whether as the deceiver or, rather, as the almighty? Does not Dasein arrive at its ipseity by an anticipatory resolution that makes possible the event of nothingness, which it tears out from the ontic? I contend that the attempts, however grandiose they might be, to assign the status of the first self to the ego—in other words, to give the ego transcendental dignity—manage to do no more than to underline the radical primacy of the self of an event, whatever it is (whether an entity in the world, an entity out of the world, or the totality of entities [l'étant en totalité]) and whatever it is not. If only for the sake of being concerned, one has to recognize that if the phenomenon truly gives itself, it necessarily confiscates the function and the role of the self in the process, thus conceding to the ego only a secondary and derived me. And we explicitly draw this conclusion in challenging the claim of every I to a transcendental function or, what is the same, the claim of a possible transcendental I as the ultimate foundation of the experience of phenomena. Said otherwise: the ego, dispossessed of its transcendental purple,10 must be admitted as it receives itself, as a given-to: the one who receives itself from what it receives, the one to whom what gives itself from a first self—every phenomenon—gives a secondary me, that of reception and response. Certainly the ego keeps all the privileges of subjectivity, except for the transcendental claim of origin.

The ego is found only in being one to whom is given, endowed with a given me and given to receive what gives itself. Among the possible objections against such a diminutio ipseitatis of the ego, one demands our attention more
than the rest because it directly puts into question the phenomenological claim of our enterprise. In fact, for all of phenomenology, the reduction functions, whether explicitly (Husserl) or implicitly (Heidegger, Levinas, Henry, Derrida), as its touchstone; it is nonnegotiable because it is not one concept among others, or a doctrine to be discussed, but an operation that redirects the appearance of appearing to the appearing of phenomena as such. Now, every reduction calls for an agency that operates it—a transcendental \( I \) or its equivalent (\( \text{Dasein} \), the face of the other, flesh). Now, the reduction of appearance to the given that we claim to accomplish deviates dangerously from the two other principal reductions that it tries to overcome. First of all, because it does not simply reduce the phenomenon to its constituted object character (Husserl) or to its being-an-entity in being (Heidegger), but ultimately to the given showing itself insofar as it gives itself—thus establishing the given as an ultimate term and irreducible by any other reduction. And it deviates all the more dangerously because this third reduction leads to the given only by reducing the \( I \) to the derived and secondary level of the given-to. This reduction of the \( I \) to the given-to would matter little if it were only a question of a new title and not of another function—the function of receiving oneself from what gives itself and no longer playing the transcendental role, in short, the function of no longer determining the conditions of possibility of experience—in other words, of phenomenality. Now, the reduction, whose task is precisely to change the conditions of the possibility of phenomenality, requires such an a priori \( I \) (or its transcendental equivalent) and so seems unable to be satisfied with a given-to, something that is by definition a posteriori. In short, the reduction of phenomenon to the givenness of what gives itself, going so far as to disqualify the transcendental \( I \) in a pure and simple given-to, becomes a performative contradiction—it is deprived of the very operator of givenness that it nevertheless claims to make manifest by reduction.

Such a difficulty cannot be resolved all at once. Still, the following needs to be said: if all reductions require an operator that takes us from the appearance of the appearing to the full appearing of the phenomena, then this operator itself is modified in an essential way by the reduction it operates. For Husserl, the phenomenological reduction (not to evoke others that would, no doubt, yield the same result) reduces things of the world to their conscious experience, in view of constituting their intentional objects; still, the \( I \) reduces itself to its pure immanence ("conscious region"), locating the ensemble of its empirical ego in the transcendence of the "world region" (\( \text{Ideas} \) 140). Thus, the \( I \) becomes transcendental in the phenomenological sense, since it gets reduced to itself and removed from the natural world by renouncing the natural attitude. For Heidegger, the phenomenological reduction of worldly objects (whether subsistent or common) to their status of beings that are seen according to their diversified ways of being can be brought about only by \( \text{Dasein} \), the only being in which there is a question of being. Not only is it necessary that \( \text{Dasein} \) accomplish itself as such, and so appropriate its unique
way of being and rid itself of the inauthentic mode (that of the “One,” which
pretends to understand itself as an intra-worldly being); the Dasein must then
reduce itself to itself—to the status of a being that transcends all other intra-
worldly beings in virtue of being itself; this is accomplished during the expe-
rience of anxiety. The disappearance of all anthropological determinations
(flesh, sexuality, ideology, etc.), with which some have naively reproached
Being and Time, attests precisely to this modification of “man” into a Dasein
that turns the reduction onto its agent.

Without trying to compare what cannot be compared, I would say, never-
theless, that the same applies to the third reduction. It is first of all a question of
reducing all that claims to appear—object, being, appearance, and so on—to a
given. For the formula “as much reduction as givenness” in fact postulates that
what the natural attitude accepts with no further ado as a given often is not
given yet; or, inversely, that what it finds problematic is in fact absolutely given.
It is a question, then, of tracing the necessary connection by which “what
shows itself must first of all give itself” and of giving all the weight to the self, by
which only can givenness validate manifestation. Yet how can we imagine that
the person, whoever it might be, who makes the reduction to the given and
takes “self-showing” back to “self-giving” by describing the phenomenon as
pure event (thus also as anamorphosis, happening, accomplished fact, inci-
dent), could leave his own identity uninterrogated, much less keep the identi-
ties that correspond so closely to the two preceding reductions? How could he
claim to define the conditions of possibility of the experience of phenomena,
to which he comes precisely by the third reduction, recognizing that they only
show themselves in virtue of their self, such that he reveals himself in the event
in which they give themselves and such that he himself establishes the proper
conditions of manifestation? If the result of the third reduction, that the phe-

omenon gives itself from itself, is to be maintained, then the ego can no
longer have any transcendental claim. The reduction is not so much compro-
mised, but the reverse. It is realized as in him whom it makes possible, the
given-to. The given-to does not compromise the reduction to the given, but
confirms it by transferring the self from itself to the phenomenon.

This argument sets a second one in motion. The given-to, fallen out of the
transcendental rank and the spontaneity or activity that it implies, does not for
that turn into passivity or into an empirical me. In fact, the given-to transcends
passivity as much as activity, because, liberated from the transcendental pur-
ple, it annuls the very distinction between the transcendental I and the empiri-
cal me.

But what third term can there be between activity and passivity, transcen-
dentality and empiricity?

Recall the definition of the given-to: that which receives itself from what it
receives. The given-to is characterized therefore by reception. To be sure,
reception implies passive receptivity, but it also requires active capacity; the
capacity (capacitas), in order to grow to the measure of the given and to
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maintain its happening, must put itself to work—the work of the given to be received, the work on itself to receive. The work that the given demands of the given-to, each time and as long as it gives itself, explains why the given-to does not receive once and for all (at birth), but does not cease to receive at the event of each given. Still, this reception can really free the given-to from the dichotomies that incarcerate metaphysical subjectivity only if we understand more clearly its proper phenomenological function. Put otherwise: if the given-to no longer constitutes phenomena, if it is content to receive the pure given and receive itself from it, then what act, what operation, and what role can it still assume in phenomenality itself?

However, in posing this objection to the given-to, we mark an essential gap, that between the given and phenomenality. I repeat what I have often glimpsed before: if all that which shows itself must first give itself, then it does not suffice that the given give itself in order to show itself, since sometimes the givenness almost obscures the manifestation. The given-to has the function precisely of measuring in itself the gap between the given—which never ceases to impose itself upon it and—and phenomenality, which can be realized only to the extent that the reception succeeds in phenomenalizing, or, rather, lets it phenomenalize, itself. This operation, phenomenalizing the given, reverts properly to the given-to in virtue of its difficult privilege of constituting the only given in which the visibility of all other givens happens. The given-to reveals the given as phenomenon.

V. The Revealed

From here on, it is a question of understanding how the given-to reveals (phenomenalizes as an event) the given—and how far it does so.

Let us consider first of all the revealed in a strictly phenomenological sense. First, the given obtained by the reduction: it can be described as that which Husserl called “lived experience,” Erlebnis. Now—and this crucial point is often forgotten—as such, the lived experience does not show itself, but remains invisible by default. For lack of better words, one can say that it affects me, imposes itself on me, and weighs on what one could dare to call my consciousness (precisely because it does not have yet a clear and distinct consciousness of whatever there is when it receives the pure given). As lived experience, the given remains a stimulus, an excitation, hardly information; the given-to receives it, even though it does not show itself at all. How does the given sometimes succeed in passing from being unseen to being seen? There is no question here of invoking physiological or psychological considerations, not only due to a lack of knowledge of these subjects, but also in principle: before explaining a process, we must first identify it, and the process wherein the visible arises out of the unseen belongs properly to phenomenology. Following that line of thought, one can take the risk of saying that the given, unseen yet received, projects itself onto the given-to (consciousness, if one
prefers) as onto a screen; all the power of that given crashes, as it were, onto this screen, immediately provoking a double visibility.

Certainly, the visibility of the given, the impact of which was invisible until then, explodes and is broken down into outlines, the first visibles. One could also think of the model of the prism, which captures the white light, up to then invisible, and breaks it down into the spectrum of primary colors, rendered light finally visible. The given-to phenomenalizes by receiving the given, precisely because it is an obstacle to the given; it stands in its way, bringing it to a halt in making it a screen and fixing it in a frame. When the given-to receives the given, it receives it with all the vigor, or even the violence, of a goalkeeper defending against the incoming ball, of a defender blocking a return of volley, of a midfielder returning a winning pass. Screen, prism, frame—the given-to collects the impact of the pure unseen given, in retaining the momentum in order to, so to speak, transform its longitudinal force into a spread-out, plane, open surface. With this operation—precisely reception—the given can begin to show itself, starting with outlines of visibility that it conceded to the given-to, or, rather, that it received from it.

However, the visibility arising from the given makes the visibility of the given-to arise as well. In fact, the given-to does not see itself before receiving the impact of the given. Deprived of the transcendental purple, the given-to no longer precedes the phenomenon, nor does it any longer “accompany” it as a thought already in place; since it receives itself from what it receives, the given-to does not precede the phenomenon, and certainly not by a visibility that pre-exists the unseen of the given. In fact, the given-to does not show itself more than the given—its screen or prism remains perfectly unseen as long as the impact of a given upon it does not suddenly illuminate it; or, rather, since properly speaking there is no given-to without this reception, the impact gives rise, for the first time, to the screen onto which it crashes, just as it creates the prism across which it is decomposed. In short, the given-to phenomenalizes itself by means of the operation through which it phenomenalizes the given.

Thus, the given reveals itself to the given-to by revealing the given-to to itself. Each phenomenalizes the other as the revealed, which is characterized by this essential phenomenal reciprocity, where seeing implies the modification of the seer by the seen as much as of the seen by the seer. The given-to functions as the revelator of the given and the given as the revelator of the given-to—the revelator being understood here in the photographic sense.11 Perhaps we could take the risk of saying that the philosophical paradox of quantum physics concerning the interdependence of the object and the observer applies, by analogy, to all of phenomenality without exception. But can we still speak here of “phenomenality without exception”? Have we not previously conceded that, though all that shows itself first gives itself, the reverse does not apply, since all that gives itself does not succeed in showing itself? In fact, far from entangling ourselves in a new aporia, we have just found a way out of it. For, if the given shows itself only by being blocked and spreading itself
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on the screen that the given-to has become for it, if the given-to must and can be the only one capable of transforming an impact into visibility, then the extent of phenomenalization depends on the resistance of the given-to to the brute shock of the given. By resistance I mean resistance in the sense, suggestive because it is ordinary, of electricity: in a circuit, when one restricts the free movement of electrons—whether by design or accidentally—then a part of their energy is dissipated as heat or light. In this way, the resistance transforms the unseen movement into phenomenalized light and heat. The greater the resistance to the impact of the given (first of all, lived experiences, intuitions), the more that phenomenological light shows itself. Resistance—the proper function of the given-to—becomes the index of the transmutation of that which gives itself into that which shows itself. The more the intuitive given increases its pressure, the greater resistance is necessary for the given-to to reveal a phenomenon. From this follows the inevitable and logical hypothesis of saturated phenomena—so saturated with given intuitions that no place is left for corresponding significations and noeses. Faced with such partially nonvisible phenomena (except in the mode of bedazzlement), only the resistance of the given-to can transmute, up to a certain point, the excess of givenness into a fitting monstration—namely, an immeasurable one.

This opens a place for a phenomenological theory of art: the painter makes visible as a phenomenon what no one has ever seen, because, in each case he is the first to succeed in resisting the given enough to make it show itself—and then in a phenomenon accessible to all. A great painter never invents anything, as if the given were missing. On the contrary, he resists this excess, until it gives up its visibility to him (as one makes restitution). Rothko resists what he received as a violent given—too violent for anyone but him—by phenomenalizing it on the screen of spread-out color: “I have imprisoned the most utter violence in every square inch of their [the paintings’] surface” (qtd. in Breslin 358). What is true of art is true of literature and of all speculative thinking: the immense effort to resist the given as long as the given-to can endure it, in order to phenomenalize the given. Genius consists only in a great resistance to the impact of the given. In every case, the phenomenon, which has the character of an event, takes the shape of the revealed—that is, it phenomenalizes the given-to through the same movement by which the given-to forces that which gives itself to show itself a bit more.

The revealed is neither a deep layer nor a particular region of phenomenality, but the universal mode of phenomenalization of that which gives itself in what shows itself. At the same time, it establishes the originary eventual character of every phenomenon insofar as it gives itself before showing itself. The time has come, then, to raise a final question: does not the universality of the phenomenon as event, and so as a given brought to manifestation as revelation by and for a given-to, definitively abolish, de jure if not de facto, the caesura that metaphysics has unceasingly hollowed out between the world of supposedly constituted, producible, and repeatable—and thus exclusively
rational—objects, on the one hand, and the world of the revealed of Revelation, the world of events neither constitutible, nor repeatable, nor immediately producible and so supposedly irrational, on the other? This caesura was imposed at the moment when the doctrine of the object attempted (successfully) to reduce the question and the field of phenomenality to purely apparent phenomena, deprived of the self, devalued as a being and equally as a certitude. As soon as phenomenology knew how to reopen the field of phenomenality, to include in it objects as specific cases of phenomena (impoverished and common law) and surround them with the immense region of saturated phenomena, this caesura was no longer justified. Or, rather, it becomes a denial of phenomenality, itself irrational and ideological. If we admit that this caesura has no right to be, what consequences follow? That the givens retrieved by Revelation—in this instance, the unique Jewish and Christian Revelation—must be read and treated as legitimate phenomena, subject to the same operations as those that result from the givens of the world: reduction to the given, eventuality, reception by the given-to, resistance, saturated phenomena, progression of the transmutation of what gives itself into what shows itself, and so on. Undoubtedly, such a phenomenological place of theology necessitates (and already has) very particular protocols, conforming to the exceptional phenomena that are in question. For example, the event can have the form of a miracle, the given becomes the election and the promise, resistance of the given-to is deepened in the conversion of the witness, transmutation of what gives itself into what shows itself requires theological virtues, its progressivity is extended in the eschatological return of the Ruler, and so on. I have neither the authority nor the competence to follow up on these. But I have the right to call them to the attention of theologians. They must cease to reduce the fundamental givens of Revelation (Creation, Resurrection, miracles, divinization, etc.) to objectifying models that more or less repeat the human sciences. For the same phenomenality applies to all givens, from the most impoverished (formalisms, mathematics), to those of common law (physical sciences, technical objects), to saturated phenomena (event, idol, flesh, icon), including the possibility of phenomena that combine these four types of saturation (the phenomena of Revelation).

Translation by Beata Starwaska

NOTES

1. [Ed.: Here and throughout, Marion italicizes the neuter reflexive pronoun. As he makes clear in the next paragraph, he does this to draw attention to the fact that he is exploring what it means to speak of the self-givenness of the phenomenon.]

2. [Ed.: In most places, la donation is translated as “the given.” Sometimes, however, it is translated as “the donation” or “givenness.”]

3. One realizes already that even the interpretation of a banal phenomenon as given not only does not prohibit hermeneutics, but requires it. This is my reply to the objections of Grondin (43–44) and Greisch.
4. [Ed.: “Il nous met en scène,” literally “it puts us on the (theatrical) stage.”]
5. [Ed.: Material in German in brackets is in the original. Material in French was inserted by the translator or editor.]
7. Following the excellent formulation of Romano (96).
8. Let it be noted that I say “by giving a myself a me,” and not “by giving it to me,” since at the moment it gives it (to me), I am precisely not there yet to receive it.
9. [Ed.: “The given-to” is the translation for the neologism l’adonné, a past participle form.]
10. [Ed.: The French is pourpre transcendantalice, a play on words: pourpre cardinalice is an expression referring to the symbolic color associated with high church officials, as well as royalty and aristocracy.]
11. [Ed.: In French, the developer, a chemical used to make the image on photographic paper visible, is called le révélateur—literally, “the revelator.”]

WORKS CITED