



# From a Phenomenology of the Subject to a Phenomenology of the Event: Reconstructing the Ontological Basis for a Phenomenological Psychology

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## Abstract

In this paper I make the argument that being phenomenologically faithful to human experience means broadening the scope of the phenomenological method to not only include subjective experiences. Instead of reducing the psychological study of phenomena to the subject who 'has' an experience and who makes sense of this experience according to his or her own goal-directed plans, I will introduce the idea of starting our research from an understanding of an experience that is more original than the subject who 'has' it, since it both happens to this subject and transforms this subject in the process of happening to it. This understanding of experience, which is based in part on insights from the later Heidegger and the work of Jean-Luc Marion, takes the phenomenological reduction beyond what this or that experience meant to a particular subject (a psychological reduction) and looks instead at how this particular subject came into being as part of an experiential event that allowed it to become the subject that it is. I will call this new phenomenology a 'phenomenology of the event' and will seek to develop the implications of situating the study of psychological phenomena within such a paradigm.

## Keywords

phenomenology, event, existential, subjective experience, method, natural science, intentionality, Heidegger, Jean-Luc Marion

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## Introduction to a Phenomenology of the Event

According to Martin Heidegger (1938/1999), the event (*Ereignis*) is an original moment of making two things into what they are by virtue of each other. According to this idea, the subject (or the person) does not possess its own ground, but achieves its individuation only through a happening with the environment which first allows it to become this or that particular experiencing self.

Instead of the existential-phenomenological viewpoint that seeks to anchor this interchange between self and environment in the self as an *ec-static* being that becomes itself through its interactions, I want to start squarely in the *inter* of the interaction itself, privileging neither the self nor the environment. Instead I want to start from a *thirdness* of the ever elusive event that only shows itself by means of how it brings subject and object together into the always only temporary *gathering* of a particular experience. As Heidegger (1936/1993b) says about the artist and the work of art, in support of this position, “The artist is the origin of the work and the work is the origin of the artist. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work *are* each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both . . .” (p. 143).

It is this third thing that I intend to offer as the starting point of a new phenomenology of experience. Instead of offering an existential phenomenology rooted in the experience of “the person” or the “subject” as granted a priori, I wish to root the experience of personhood and subjectivity in what I shall call a *phenomenology of the event*.

The event is really not a thing at all since it is the conditioning of all things—the ever elusive *noumenon* behind every phenomenon (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 222). It designates a pure activity that has the nature only of that which it brings about and it is for this reason that I designate it by the name of the event, for the event *is* only through its happening—its coming to pass.

A phenomenology of the event opens up a new field of study for psychology, in which experiences emanate not from a subject, but from a situation or an encounter. In this context, the individuation of discrete experiences is moved out of the purview of the subject who projects meaning onto things. Instead individuations take place between people, or between self and environment, and belong to no one or no thing, but to the event

itself. The phenomenology I am proposing thus makes it possible to study experiences from a new vantage point that will allow us to explain how it is that I can become different through an experience and not simply remain its unfettered master.

A phenomenology of the event opens up a field of phenomenality pertaining to what Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1987, note 33, pp. 540–1) have referred to as *haecceities*: the individuations belonging to the wind, the weather, a time of day, a happening. In fact my claim will be that when we are fully living, our lives consist of being swept up in such happenings in which we only discover who we are by means of who we have been or were made to be and do not possess ourselves a priori. It is this phenomenality which contemporary phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion (2007) speaks to in his formulation of the erotic phenomenon when he states: “my desire speaks me to myself by showing me what arouses me” (p. 108). Here, what I desire and who I therefore am in this particular moment arrives at me from elsewhere and first shows me who I am.

In the paper that follows I would like to develop the philosophical basis for such a new phenomenological understanding of experience. I would like to do so by radicalizing the existential phenomenological position which largely holds sway in those psychology departments where the phenomenological research stance is endorsed at all.

Before developing this position further, however, I would first like to tip my hat to the impetus that has driven the attempt by psychologists to develop the existential phenomenological position. Fundamentally I agree with the basic stance of phenomenological psychologists who have argued that the study of psychology should be the study of the human being at a level appropriate to the complex and holistic reality of a living breathing person whom we could imagine having coffee with and can recognize in ourselves.

### **Existential-Phenomenology as a Corrective to a Natural Science Psychology**

The basic thrust of existential phenomenology is to study the human being as *existing*. This means studying the human being not simply as determined or driven by mechanisms of nature, but as faced with the task of making sense of the world, of choosing between different courses of actions, and of

being led by values and purposes that far transcend the simple automatism of the machinery of the organism and its cognitive apparatus.

This commitment to capturing the reality of an actual person sets existential-phenomenology apart from the more traditional natural scientific underpinnings of psychology. In most psychological studies, memory, sensation, perception, reasoning and so forth are treated as if they are separate processes that can be abstracted from the total situation of an integrated person. Parts of the human being are abstracted in order to study the natural mechanisms behind each of them. Yet, the human being is then no longer studied as “a person” whose main reality consists of the fact that he or she always senses, perceives, remembers, and thinks within the context of a unique life (an existence) in which these processes help the person carry out goals, enter into relationships, and find meaning and purpose in the world.

Remembering, for example, as I have shown in a different article (Mølbaek, 2007) is not some abstract mechanism, but is always experienced as a particular instance of remembering. I may be trying to remember where I placed the key so I can get into my house, or I may be reminiscing about an ex-girlfriend as a temporary escape from a current unsuccessful love life. The process of remembering is thus never devoid of a meaning and a purpose that can only be understood in terms of how remembering in each particular moment helps a person realize a possibility of existing. The idea that we can isolate the process of remembering (understood abstractly as the retrieval of information) from its life context and study it as an isolated phenomenon in a simplified and artificial experimental setting is thus fundamentally flawed. While we end up studying remembering in a controlled setting that now allows us to quantify its mechanisms and confirm probable correlations, the phenomenon we are in possession of is no longer *human* remembering, but remembering reduced to a meaningless order of natural reality. As R. D. Laing (1982) writes in support of this position, “There is no experience or meaning *in* the objective order because the objective order is the way the world appears, subtracted of meaningful experience” (p. 33).

By isolating different mental processes and behavioral responses, the natural science psychologist is able to study different aspects of the human machinery that accounts for the fact that we can experience the world the way we do. Yet the totality of that subjective personal experience that defines the person as an agent of meaningful and purposive action in the world cannot be pasted together of such separate automatic processes.

As Harry Guntrip (1973) says in his critique of biological reductionism in psychoanalysis, “We cannot see persons as parts assembled into a reliably working whole whose behavior can be predicted” (p. 181). What this means is that the natural scientific study of memory, sensation, and reason does not a person make, for even if we add them all together, all we are left with is a composite of machine-like processes that fall short of attaining the reality of what we understand to be the human reality of the living and breathing person we are in our everyday lives. There is simply a qualitative difference of levels between the organic and mechanistic processes of life and the reality of the human being as a person who has to live on the basis of such processes and can only do so in the sphere of meaning, values, and responsibilities. If the psychology of the human being is studied exclusively through a natural scientific approach, we lose out on what specifically makes a human psychology different from an animal psychology of natural mechanisms and instincts. This means that we leave out the study of a whole array of human motivations that achieve their significance only within the sphere of meaningful existence. As R. D. Laing (1982) summarizes, “A few of the other modes of existence outside the investigative competence of natural science are love and hate, joy and sorrow, misery and happiness, pleasure and pain, right and wrong, purpose, meaning, hope, courage, despair, God, heaven and hell, grace, sin, salvation, damnation, enlightenment, wisdom, compassion, evil, envy, malice, generosity, camaraderie and everything, in fact, that makes life worth living” (p. 34). Of course the natural science psychologist would say she already studies these phenomena, but fact of the matter is that she studies pheromones, not the human experience of love; and she studies the correlation of body mass index with attractiveness ratings, not the full-fledged human experience of falling in love, and so forth. What makes the experiences listed by R. D. Laing fully human is lost through such a reductionism to mechanisms and biological substrates.

### **Intentionality as the Starting Point of a Phenomenological Study of the Person**

The concept of “the person” which serves as the starting point of the existential-phenomenological approach in psychology, as endorsed for example by Amedeo Giorgi (1970, 1997, 2009), is a concept of the experiencing individual considered in its totality as a unified whole and not as broken down into

separate automatic processes. To study the psychological from the perspective of “the person” is to study memory, perception, reason and so forth as part and parcel of the same unified person who makes use of these faculties in order to carry out his or her existential goals or projects. From this perspective, remembering, reasoning, and perceiving are always subordinated to the accomplishments of an acting individual that first gives meaning and purpose to these activities. From the perspective of the person who lives his or her existence, perception is not the perception of stimuli presented in a laboratory, for example, but perception of possible ways of relating to things, of doing something with them, of using them to further a personal goal, and so forth. Perception is here always tied to an existential project. It is primarily a looking around (*circumspection/Umsicht*) (Heidegger, 1927/1996) rather than a detached “on-looking.” Perception, just as is the case with remembering and thinking, is thus never separate from an existential possibility of being a person.

Stated differently, for an existential-phenomenologist every mental process is directly tied to a world purpose or a way of existing towards things in the world. In phenomenology this fundamental characteristic of the psychology of the person is referred to as *intentionality*. Intentionality points to the fact that there can be no perception that is not a perception “of something.” Brentano (1874/1995) makes this early definition of intentionality clear in his book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, when he writes:

Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on (p. 41).

Although this idea might initially seem very simple, its implications are profound, for it means that we can no longer divorce the psychological from the world of a concrete existence, but must consider both together as indispensable for each other. The world needs the subjective processes of remembering, thinking and perceiving, while remembering, thinking and perceiving need the world to become a memory, thought or perception of something. As Husserl writes in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929/1969), “Psychological experience, including internal experience, is an experience of something worldly; it is intimately combined in its intentionality, with experience of Nature” (p. 284), and as he writes in *Ideas* (1913/1962), “The

experiencing Ego is still nothing that might be taken *for itself* and made into an object of inquiry on its *own* account. Apart from its ‘ways of being related’ or ‘ways of behaving’, it is completely empty of essential components, it has no content that could be unraveled, it is in and for itself indescribable: pure ego and nothing further” (p. 214).

Dutch phenomenologist, J. H. Van den Berg (1972) states this fact in more concrete existential terms when he writes:

A person who, in the morning after a restless night, finds himself ill and decides to stay in bed for the day can, if invited to do so, report on his condition by stating how he feels subjectively: tired, nauseated, without appetite and with a headache—data which seem subjective but which, in reality, can hardly be called that. For one feels tiredness in legs and head, nausea in the throat, no appetite in relation to a cracker, etc. To express a strictly subjective complaint, a complaint pertaining to the subject and not to the body or its environment, is beyond our powers. He who complains, complains about things there, in the body or in the objects there (p. 44).

In existential phenomenology this realization of the inseparability of subject and object, or psyche and soma, raises the study of psychological processes to the study of the person’s ways of both creating and being created by the world. I create the world by providing a purpose for things that first make them meaningful in some way: If I am going to the gym, for example, the bicycle becomes an exercise bike, whereas if I am going to the grocery store, it becomes a means of transportation. At the same time, however, the bicycle by virtue of its functionality first allows me to become a rider who can get his shopping done so he can cook a meal, or an athlete whose exercising will help him feel fit and admired by others. Self and bicycle, subject and object, here each lend support to the other, creating the disclosure of one and the same unified experience.

### **From Intentionality as a Characteristic of the Subject to Intentionality as an Event of the Bringing Together of Subject and Object**

The dialectic between the person and the person’s environment, is often interpreted by existential-phenomenologists as a fundamental characteristic of the human being’s mode of being. To most existential-phenomenologists the human being has no set nature of its own but discovers its nature

through things, and it is this fact about our existence that accounts for the intentional dialectic between subjective processes and worldly objects. Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1992) made this clear by defining subjectivity as a no-thingness that both annihilates objects and makes it possible for them to show themselves *for* a subject. This idea is also contained in Heidegger's early works. In *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (1922/2001a), for example, Heidegger writes:

I encounter myself in the world, in that which I live and in that which engages me, in my successes and failures, in my environment, in my surrounding world, in my shared world. I encounter myself in a world which acquires and takes its determinate meaningfulness from my own self, but in which the self 'is' not there qua self, and where 'from my own self' is neither reflectively given nor explicitly placed on stage within this reflection (p. 72).

Another phenomenological psychologist, Stephan Strasser (1963) also seems to express this principle of the non-essential self when he writes that, "Man depends on something which he is not [...] To acquire experiences, his finite consciousness has to address itself to 'something.' In doing so, it opens itself and lets itself be determined by that which it experiences" (p. 84). In Strasser's example, the human being is thus not a thing that perceives another thing by initially standing outside experience as a "thinking thing." Rather, as Van den Berg (1987) has also pointed out, the person "evaporates into a void, when we [...] take his world away from him" (p. 61).

*Yet, given this fundamental description of mutual dependency of subject and object, why is it that most phenomenological psychologists often privilege 'the person' or the subject in this dialectic between self and world? Is it not a fact that I depend on the world just as much as the world depends on me and that both subject and object therefore originate out of a thirdness?*

Most often when the existential phenomenological method is applied in psychology, this initial granting of the one to the other, which I refer to as the event, seems to be passed over. In the psychological phenomenological method of Amedeo Giorgi (1970, 1979, 2009), who was one of the pioneers in adapting Husserl's phenomenology to the study of "man as a person," experiences are studied always in relation to the subject who 'has' the experience. In order to arrive at the human essence of a phenomenon, we always pass through individual experiences by subjects whose own



subjectivity is never as such questioned as the bed rock of each experience. Giorgi chooses this interpretive framework, which he rightfully acknowledges as a ‘perspective,’ and refers to as ‘the psychological reduction,’ in order to adapt the phenomenological method to psychology as a field of study that is interested exclusively in the psychological experience of the subject. Hence, while Giorgi agrees that consciousness is a more primordial construct than the subjective experience of a phenomenon by a subject,<sup>1</sup> he uses the a priori construct of the experiencing subject as the initial framework from which any subsequent description and refinement of the essence of a phenomenon must proceed. As he states in one of his articles, for example, “Phenomenon within phenomenology always means that whatever is given, or present itself, is understood precisely as it presents itself to the consciousness of the person entertaining the awareness” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 238). The ‘person entertaining the awareness’ is here treated as a constant that is not itself produced in and through the very experience that makes up a particular situation. The person remains an “experiencer” of “the experience” just like the Cartesian subject remains a thinker behind his thoughts. In and through the psychological reduction, the subject is therefore *not* itself in question, is not itself the product of an experience, but is assumed to be the constant frame of reference from which experience must show itself.

This does not mean that the world of phenomena which Giorgi is interested in is a world of idiosyncratic subjective experiences, for subjective experiences are to Giorgi directed towards one and the same shared human reality. Hence Giorgi rightfully only uses subjective reports of experiences in order to get insight into shared human phenomena which can never be experienced in their totality by any one individual, but require an act of abstraction by the researcher who seeks to describe the constants of an experience from underneath its many possible subjective permutations. But if we are never supposed to transcend the world as it gives itself first to be seen or experienced by subjects, whose privileged access point to this reality we take for granted, the shared world of experiences we ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> “Consciousness refers to the awareness of the system, “embodied-self-world-others,” all of which (and aspects and parts of which) are intuitable, that is, presentable; and precisely as they are presented, without addition or deletion, that is the strict meaning of phenomenon.” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 238)

end up with is always going to be a world of experience *for* subjects. Hence even if the ultimate goal of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method is to arrive at an understanding of different types of experiences that make up our shared human world as an intersubjective reality, he has already made too many assumptions about this reality by assuming that this reality is the sum total of every possible subjective experience.

It will be my argument, however, that there is a whole other world beneath this inter-subjective world that is ignored and covered over by the powerful common sense that all experience essentially belongs to an "experiencing person." There is a strong tendency in our culture to ignore this other world due to a cultural prescription that we must live a consistent and chronological existence, leading to the result that we must take ultimate ownership of discrete experiences and actions as somehow indicative of the experiences and actions of one and the same consistent "person." There is a very powerful culture of subjectivism and personalization of reality which is maintained through practices that grant privilege and authority only to individuals who remain the same over time, that is, who experience the world in relation to a self that remains constant. Such practices of subjectivation are many and include events such as the issuing of birth certificates, the assigning of tax identification numbers, the personalized measuring of credit through an individual credit score, the expectation that the opinions we have should remain static over time or that our actions should correspond to our beliefs. It is therefore often difficult to admit that this shared reality of subjectified practices and experiences is not itself a given, but is in fact itself only a type of experience. Hence if we 'bracket' the psychological reduction itself, what I think the phenomenological data will oftentimes show, is that the consistency and linearity which we take for granted is often but a retroactive elaboration of experience accomplished after the fact. Subjective experience is in other words its own type of experiential event rather than a given of experience itself. It is for this reason that the 'psychological reduction' which proceeds by laying bare a shared world of experience only on the basis of the retroactive elaboration of experiences as told from the subject's point of view, can only end up giving us access to a restricted understanding of the world of phenomena in which or by which we as humans live.

The point I wish to make therefore is that while we should not ignore the subjectivation of experience, since it is indeed a part of the shared

world in which we live, nor should we confine ourselves to such a perspective and exclude the reality of experiences that would fall beneath such a threshold.

My perspective is that positing the “experiencing person” a priori, whether as an analytical perspective or an ontological commitment, is to leave out a whole host of other experiences in which the subject, or “who I am,” is itself at stake. In many situations, for example, my claim would be that experience precisely consists of taking us over and only showing us who we are after the fact. In such moments, experiences could be said to make up events that do not belong to an experiencing self insofar as they precede and first occasion such a self. In such a case, as Marion (2002) has stated, the experience “arrives to me from above; it is a fact made for me, not by me, but at my expense. It is a fact made on my account; by it, I am made. Along the same lines, intentionality is inverted. I become the objective of the object” (p. 146).

From the point of view of the experiencing person, the event might initially appear as simply the loss of subjective control as when I am passively receiving or suffering the blows of life, but this is not necessarily so. In the accounts of phenomenological philosophers it has often been recognized that it is precisely when I lose control of experiences that I am able to come into being in my freest and most life-affirming form. As Levinas (1963/1986) for example writes, in the encounter with the other person, I come up against my limit, but despite the fact that “The relationship with another puts me into question, empties me of myself, and does not let off emptying me—uncovering for me ever new resources. I did not know myself so rich . . .” (p. 351). Similarly when Marion (2007) describes the phenomenon of becoming attracted to someone or falling in love, he states that, “At this instant, in which it is precisely too late, in which it has already happened, in which I am made by the other and by my desire—I am no longer the same, and thus I am, at last, myself; individualized beyond the point of return” (p. 109). Our most meaningful and, ironically, most personal experiences are in other words often transformative experiences in which we become “other.” They are not subjective experiences, but experiences that transform us as subjects from the “ground up.” Hence, as psychoanalyst Chris Oakley (2001) has said in his paraphrasing of Hegel’s phenomenological position, “experience is not to be reduced merely to one’s subjective awareness of an event; rather [...] when I truly experience something I am

affected by it, it comes as a shock, violates my familiar view, it unsettles, it challenges, it transforms” (p. 225). Heidegger (1959/1982) points out something similar when he talks of experience as something we undergo rather than something we ‘have.’ “To undergo an experience with something—be it a thing a person, or a god,” he says, “—means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms us and transforms us” (p. 57). He goes on to say that “When we talk of ‘undergoing’ an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens” (ibid.).

In this sense, any psychological approach goes astray when it attempts to confine the realm of human experience to the starting point of ‘the experiencing subject’ rather than looking at how this experiencing subject itself is accomplished in and through the happening or accomplishment of an experience. Instead, I would like to argue that the proper subject matter of a phenomenological psychology should be the very encounter or happening by means of which I become an acting or experiencing subject who, in turn, acts on, receives, or shapes experiences, until yet again becoming changed or transformed by these experiences.

Studying the psychological from the vantage point of the event does not undermine the psychological and the subjective, but merely seeks to understand it on a new and more primordial basis.

By starting from the vantage point of the event, the subject who ‘has’ an experience, who observes the event, or acts on the world, is never a subject that emanates from itself, but is always a subject that owes its beginning to an experience that has always already claimed it and installed the subject within it. I am never *not* part of an event, but am simultaneously its result *and* cause. Paraphrasing Deleuze<sup>2</sup> we can say that sometimes it is life that overwhelms me and sometimes it is I who overpower life, but always it is in the interchange between the two that both ‘I’ and life happen. Thus even the monk on the mountain top or the self-reliant cowboy on the prairie

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<sup>2</sup> “In the one case, it is my life, which seems too weak for me and slips away at a point which, in a determined relation to me, has become present. In the other case, it is I who am too weak for life, it is life which overwhelms me, scattering its singularities all about, in no relation to me, nor to a moment determinable as the present, except an impersonal instant which is divided into still-future and already-past” (Deleuze, 1969/1990, p. 151).

do not possess their subjectivity as an interiority, but owe their interiority to particular kinds of events that sustain this kind of an intimate self. This fact does not annul the agency of the subject, but merely resituates every subjective act as always already constituting a response to the world acting on me. The originating moment of any action is thus never located within me nor in the world, but in the happening of an experience that grows from the middle space between subject and object or from the ‘inter’ of every inter-action.

### Constructing a Phenomenology of the Event

In the following I will seek to describe what it means to take the event as the new ontological starting point for the phenomenological method. First, I will seek to identify what exactly we mean by the term “event,” and secondly, I will seek to define the phenomenal nature belonging to an experiential reality of events. Finally, after developing the concepts needed for what can be called a *phenomenology of the event*, I would like to make some concluding comments about the implications for future phenomenological psychological research of taking up the study of phenomena from such a perspective.

The first claim I would like to make about the event is that the event is the minimal phenomenal nature needed for an experience to take place or for something to *be*. Different from a subjective experience or an objective state of affairs, it consists of a transformation that both creates something and vanishes in the very actualization of its creation. It thus has no identifiable ground. “The event,” as Heidegger (1969/2002) also says, “expropriates itself of itself” (pp. 22–23) and it is in this becoming other than itself that it fulfills its nature. One image of this would be that of the spark that vanishes but also actualizes itself in and through the flame. The event, we can say, defines the moment of a pure transformation, such as the one psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1933/2001) attributes to the interpersonal encounter when he writes, “The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: If there is any reaction, both are transformed” (p. 49). In this example by Jung, it would not suffice to claim that I as a subject initiated or ‘had’ the experience of this transformation, for the experience consisted precisely in transforming “me” or creating me in and

through an event. The reality of such an experience must thus be said to have the phenomenal nature of a pure event that creates me at the same time as I create 'it' by receiving it. The essence of the event is thus something that sidesteps identity: it transforms the very person it is happening to and is transformed in the very process of happening to this person. In this sense we know it only in and through having become changed by it and as having re-appropriated it within a new sense of self and world.

One example of this would be the phenomenal nature belonging to music. We do not initially discover music as a phenomenon in the objectivity of its sounds, but discover it through its effects on us. We find ourselves tapping our foot to its beat, humming along to the lyrics, recoiling from its annoying effects on us, and so forth. Music thus shows itself as music only through a change in us. According to Straus (1966/1980), all things first and foremost reveal themselves in such an affective change in us, which he defines as the pathic quality of things and describes as "the immediate communication we have with things on the basis of their changing mode of sensory givenness" (p. 12). He distinguishes this pathic relation we have with things from that of a *gnostic* or knowing relation which is always only a retroactive elaboration of the former and requires an analytic separation of self from world that departs from an original synthetic unity or harmony with the things.

Heidegger finds etymological evidence of the idea that experience is the product of a happening or activity in the German expression for what exists: "*es gibt*." This German expression, which means "there is" as when we say "there is money in the bank" or "there is a woman standing in front of a door," literally translates into English as "it gives." In German there is thus a sense that the present of what *is* is something that has to be granted or given. Furthermore, the expression indicates that there is something (an "it") that does the giving. Essentially this means that what *is* (the given) always only *is* in and through a giving that brings what *is* into being. This bringing into being of the present contained in the phrase "*es gibt*" gives us further evidence of the primordially of an event by which the present becomes present.

According to Heidegger, the event (*Ereignis*) of the giving of the present can be understood as the process by which both subject and object attain to their identity in and through the other. The "*eigen*" (ownness) of the German word *Ereignis* is thus important since the giving of an event is

always a process of something coming into its proper element or being granted to itself. As Heidegger (1969/2002) also writes, “the event of appropriation brings man into its own and the thing into its own; allows them to be what they are” (p. 23).

The mutual appropriation that happens in the eventing of the present implies that the being of something present cannot itself serve as the starting point for explaining the event, for the event, as Heidegger writes, is “not simply an occurrence, but that which makes any occurrence possible” (ibid., p. 19). An occurrence would be something that takes place in time and space and would thus either presuppose a mental space or a physical space that would exist a priori. Yet, the event is the very creation of space and the very bringing into being of something in time. In this sense it transcends both something that could happen “within” time as well as something that could happen “within” space.

The phenomenology of the event is thus a phenomenology that transcends anything present. It is not a phenomenology of something that is given a priori, such as the subjective categories of perception or the perceptual essences of objects. Instead it is a phenomenology of the imperceptible basis of every perceivable subjective experience and objective state of affairs. With the event, we have thus reached a new bedrock of experience that cannot be captured through traditional categories of time and space, for the event is what first brings time and space into being. Nevertheless, it is possible to speak of the event as the temporalizing of time (what Heidegger also calls *the fourth dimension of time* (ibid., p. 15)), and to speak of it as the gathering (*Versammlung*) (Heidegger, 1971/2001b) of space. It is through these two concepts that I will seek in the following to develop a phenomenology of the event and to resituate our understanding of both the subject and the object as co-participants in the event.

### *The Time of the Event*

Heidegger (1969/2000) speaks of the event as *the fourth dimension of time* (p. 15), which he defines as the time in which the past, the present and the future are given to each other.

Deleuze (1969/1990) calls this temporality of the event the time of the *Aion*. He distinguishes this time from the chronological passing away of presents, which he calls the time of the *Chronos*. The *Aion*, Deleuze says, is the time of “a present without thickness” since the “past and future [here]

divide the present in both directions at once” (p. 164). What passes in this time is thus never something identical or present but is always that of a “pure event” defined as the becoming of something “which has just happened and something about to happen” (p. 63), or something that “retreats and advances in two directions at once” (ibid.). The Aion thus designates a time in which things are simultaneously *about* to happen and have *already* happened but are never *actually* happening as such.

Gadamer (1966/1977) gives an example of this temporality when he refers to Aristotle’s philosophical question: When does an army in flight come to a stand again? In response to this question, Gadamer answers:

We cannot say that the army stands when a certain number of fleeing soldiers stops its flight, and also certainly not when the last has stopped. For the army does not begin to stand with him; it has long since begun to come to a stand. How it begins, how it spreads, and how the army finally at some point stands again (that is, how it comes once again to obey the unity of the command) is not knowingly prescribed, controlled by planning, or known with precision by anyone. And nonetheless it has undoubtedly happened (p. 64).

What is pointed out here is the fundamental temporal stretch of the event whereby something happens that is nevertheless not corresponding to itself, but is precisely both ahead of itself and before itself, happening in all three temporalities at once. The event happens in all three temporalities because it occurs as the disjunction of the past and the future that gives rise to or holds together a fleeting present. Jacques Lacan (1953/2004) has described this temporality of the event that eludes the present as “what will have been, given what is in the process of becoming” (p. 84) and Luce Irigaray (1985/2002) has referred to it as “The negation of an accomplished present, and the assertion of a non-accomplished future” (p. 62). In one of Bruce Fink’s (1996) commentaries on Lacan, he provides an example of an expression that captures this logical paradox of the 4th temporality quite well. In the expression, “The bomb was to go off two seconds later,” the explosion can both be said to already have happened and to be about to happen. The present moment of chronological time can here either be said to have been sidestepped completely or to be held together purely as the effect of opposing pulls of the past and the future. If we take the latter vantage point, then the present becomes a moment where something happens that does not happen *in the moment* as much as it brings the moment about. Understood



as Aion, the event thus becomes the creation of the temporal moment as such, which it can occasion because it *gives* time rather than itself being *given* within time.

The point I am trying to make, of course, is that all of life originally happens in the dimension of time of the Aion rather than in the dimension of objective or chronological time. Experiences are first and foremost events and not experiences of something that is present as an object. Take, for example, the experience of visiting the Eiffel Tower. Here it is quite clear that I am never at a point where I can simply make the tower present and experience it in its totality. The tower always simultaneously refuses itself and lets more to be seen. I'm always stuck in between its past and future horizons, which both robs me of its present as well as robs me of my present. I come there, for example, on a rainy day, which makes the tower appear in a dreary light and makes me predisposed to its dreary possibilities. But this attunement conceals it as much as it reveals it. I may now experience the tower as a tower of suicides or as symbol of a sad culture. I might notice its lack-luster color and the squeakiness of the elevator that carries me to the top, and as I look out from the top I may see a Paris that reminds me of the black and white movie of a French "Film Noir." But is the Eiffel Tower ever present here as a thing that shows itself as it is? Have I not only experienced it as an event that side-stepped the present and suspended me in between an always particular past and future horizon? Is the present not here defined as the difference between my being subjectively ahead of the object and my being called into a particular objectivity of the having-been? I might come back on another day and be claimed differently by the possibilities of the tower, but I could never see it all or experience it all. There could be no encounter with the tower that was not a thrown-projective encounter, an encounter that would not open it up according to certain active engagements and close it down according to certain passive attunements.

To talk of experience as an event is precisely to talk of it as something that can never be possessed or consumed since there is not a present for this to be able to happen. The event is the happening of what *is* itself, not a happening of something that already is. It is a pure creation or becoming of that which we call an experience. At the level of our most immediate experience, the present, we could therefore say, does not exist, for the idea of the present is a thought construct that seeks to fix time and to grasp it as an

object, when in reality it is not. To fix an experience in and through the concept of the present is thus much like trying to capture the essence of the river by carrying it away in buckets. As the Buddhist philosopher Alan Watts (1951/1993) has said, “If you try to capture running water in a bucket, it is clear that you do not understand it and that you will always be disappointed, for in the bucket the water does not run. To ‘have’ running water you must let go of it and let it run” (p. 23). Consequently, no experience is ever there fully in the present, but is always a thrown-projecting becoming of the Aion. It is always a “moment” that protends into a particular future and retains itself in particular moods and fore-structures. It is always a *concealing-revealing* event that continues to bring about a presencing that is irreducible to a present.

### *The Spatiality of the Event*

The example of visiting the Eiffel Tower, of course, still has a minor flaw. It privileged the subject in the sense that it was I who visited the Eiffel Tower and assumedly brought myself to France. This, however, would be a one-sided interpretation, for in order to bring myself to France I would first have to be claimed by a brochure, by a friend or by some other “thing” into a particular desire for traveling. In keeping with the idea of the event, the desire to travel did not emerge from some space inside me, but was itself evoked in and through an encounter with things. Every event is thus always a transformation of other events. The ‘I’ that visited the Eiffel Tower was not some independent agent who initiated the event, but was itself an agency emerging out of another event whose whereabouts has been forgotten and superseded by a new event. There is thus never such a thing as a first or initiating event that we can refer to as the absolute cause of an experience. The implication of this is, as Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1987) have claimed, that “we are always in the middle of a path, in the middle of something” (p. 28).

This undermining of an original subjective will does not entail its opposite, namely that I am completely determined from without as some passive object in a world of mechanisms. The agency of the person who went to visit the Eiffel Tower resided neither in the independent will of the person nor in the pure causality of the friend or the brochure, but in the result brought about by their shared event. Instead of talking about a subject who goes to Paris to have an impossible encounter with the Eiffel Tower, or an

object that imposes itself upon my retina or causes me to act, Deleuze would instead say that the subject enters into a becoming with the Eiffel Tower, in which the Eiffel tower helps the subject become something (“tourist”), at the same time as the subject helps the Eiffel Tower become something (“landmark”). Hence neither thing nor subject ever act alone, they receive their support from the other, which first allows them to become what they are.

Perhaps this is what is given expression to by psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden when he writes about crises in therapy, that “Crises are not events that take place between separate people. They are events in which patient and therapist are in it together” (Ogden quoted in Altman, 1995, p. 12). Such a statement points out that both therapist and client are here subjected to a crisis, which neither one single-handedly produced, yet which both have a part in constituting. The crisis is not here an objective cause nor is it the product of a subjective will. Therapist and client are both the agents and recipients of the crisis and the crisis itself nothing other than an event which defies a simple reduction to subject or object. The crisis does not exist in itself but only in this particular situation of a therapist and a client, with their particular subjectivities and the material elements that support the endeavor of therapy, such as chairs, words, and walls. The crisis manifests itself in people and things but also withdraws as the source of yet other crises involving other people and other things. The crisis, in other words, is what *gives* subject and object and, yet, it is also what hides itself beneath the givens of a particular crisis that always only show facets of the crisis as a phenomenon. The crisis does not show itself, for it does not exist in itself. It always only shows itself as a particular existential event, involving particular subjects and objects which nevertheless receive themselves *from* the crisis.

If subjects and objects are always part of an event, be it a crisis, a birthday, the writing of a paper, or flirting, we can say of them that they always exist in some way as part of an amalgam. This amalgam is what we can also refer to as a *gathering* (Versammlung) (Heidegger, 2001c). Just like the temporality of the event does not take place within time, since it is the very temporality that brings past, present and future together, so too the spatiality of the event does not take place in space, since it is the very instituting of spatial relations.

According to Heidegger, spatial relations are created in and through the way in which the thing draws itself together in the gathering of a world. In an excellent example of this provided in the essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1954/1993a), Heidegger talks of a bridge that does not exist somewhere in itself first in order to subsequently be placed somewhere between two banks. Instead:

The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge expressly causes them to lie across from each other [. . .] With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighborhood. The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream (p. 354).

[Furthermore, in doing so . . .]

the bridge initiates the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may go to other banks and in the end, as mortals, to the other side (p. 354).

Hence, the bridge can only become the bridge that it is by constituting an event that draws the banks, the stream and the possibilities of a subject into it as part of its own gathering or world. It attains its individuality not from itself but from the locale which it draws together. Its thinghood resides in the distribution of the subjective and objective elements through which it shows itself and becomes this particular event of a bridge. The bridge thus has the substantiality of a happening that can always only be defined spatially in and through the particular elements of a gathering. To say of the bridge that it has the substantiality of an event is thus to say that it has the nature of a specific belonging between subjects and objects that endures or stays for awhile. It has the kind of individuation we attribute to “a river, a climate, a day, a happening” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 261). Or, it has the quiddity of a *haecceity*, a word Deleuze & Guattari borrow from the philosopher Duns Scotus who originally used it as a designation for “this thing” (*haec*), but which also has a fruitful etymological connection to “here is” (*ecce*). The “here is” evokes parallels to Heidegger’s talk of “*da*,” “*site*,” “*locale*,” or “*gathering*,” and suggests “a mode of individuation that is distinct from that of a thing or a subject” (*ibid.*, note 33, pp. 540–1).

Heidegger (1954/1993a) goes on to differentiate the spatiality of the locale of the gathering from the space created by dividing a locale up into independently existing objects (identities) that stand in a particular measurable spatial distances to each other. As he says, “In a space that is represented purely as *spatium*, the bridge now appears as a mere something at some position, which can be occupied at any time by something else or replaced by a mere marker” (p. 357). Thus considered, space becomes completely independent of its original locale or “gathering” and comes to refer to an independently existing world-space (*spatium*) in which events can be said to happen. However, the event in its original phenomenological sense is not an event that happens *in* space, it is the happening of space itself. The event is thus not a happening involving preformed identities that already exist in space, but the gathering of elements from other events into a new event. It is therefore the event that is primary and not the elements that can be abstracted from the event as independently existing identities only after the fact.

#### *Personhood and the Event*

The perspective of the gathering as an event that brings subjects and objects into a site of proximity, raises the question of what becomes of the ‘I’ of the person that we normally designate by the proper name or the pronoun of the first person singular. To elucidate this question, Callon & Law (1997) ask what would happen to Andrew, a strategic director of a British laboratory:

...if we were to take away Andrew’s fax machine and telephones. If we blocked the reports and messages that flow across his desk. If his secretary were to disappear. If there were no longer planes or trains to Brussels. If his e-mail account were closed, and his personal computer was taken away. If the members of his laboratory began to ignore him—or, started to treat him as a porter or secretary. Would Andrew still be a strategist? (p. 176).

The answer to this question would surely be *no*, since all of Andrew’s action potentials, and therefore ways of being himself, existed only by virtue of the locale into which he was gathered and could become Andrew “the strategic director.”

Some degree of permanence, it is true, could here be assumed from the fact that Andrew is not only a strategic director, but maybe also a father to his children, and a husband to his wife. It would thus seem that Andrew exists independently of the event as someone who participates in events but who remains fundamentally unaltered by them. Yet, in each of these instances, Andrew is a name that resides not so much in the attributes belonging to a person with that name, but to a situation in which who Andrew is gets determined by the elements of a site. In reality therefore, Andrew is not simply a self-identical subject who takes on the additional attributions of being a family man or a strategic manager. Instead he is called into the name, just as he is called into being a father or being a manager. Without the support of people who call him “Andrew” and act toward him through a series of consistent expectations, such as Andrew being a hard worker, an introverted person, thoughtful, etc., Andrew could not maintain his subjective position as this particular Andrew. Andrew is thus itself, despite the illusion of referring back to a specific person with that name, the product of a collective event that resides outside any one individual in the site of the gathering itself.

The ‘I’ as a subject or an agent can thus no longer serve as some final point of reference to which we can reduce the event, for the ‘I’ is itself an event that can happen to someone as well as a term that can change its meaning in and through the support of different locales. As Michel Serres (1982/1995) has stated, “Who am I, beyond the joy coming from this shudder of awakening, the growth of this green ivy, this dancing flame, this living fire? [...] Who am I? A blank domino, a joker, that can take any value. A pure capacity” (p. 31). As can be deduced from this statement, according to Serres, the I is either a concrete event that gets determined in and through a locale, or a completely undetermined “joker” or “blank domino” waiting to take on one or the other determination through a new event.

We are in a sense truer to ourselves in those moments when we are not misrecognizing ourselves by holding fast to this or that identity and claiming an identity within a particular site as our own, but are instead allowing ourselves to be swept away by a new event that will allow us to be gathered as part of a new locale. Whereas it is easy to become identified with a particular identity and to begin to experience the world from the vantage point of this identity, this interpretation always rests on a denial of oneself as an event or a “blank domino” who has yet to be given a value from a future that has yet to arrive.

When the event is given priority over the subject in defining our nature, then who we are is always somewhere between the “me” of a particular identification and the “not me” of an experience that transforms me from the ground up; between the I of the event and the eventing of the I; or between the ‘Da’ that has been granted to me and the projections by which I take it over as my own.

What remains as the identity of our personhood is thus not an a priori self-identity, but the identity of what I *will have been* given what I am in the process of becoming. It is an identity that is neither rooted in the past nor determined by any predictable or foreseeable future. As long as I live, my past continues to be open to revisions based on the encounters in which I end up finding myself, and these encounters are not always the product of my own planning, but more often than not, the product of unforeseeable events that change me from a point outside myself and allow me to discover who I was only retroactively. The ‘I’ is thus always in abeyance; it does not describe someone or something definite, but refers to the identity of an open-ended event in which I partake and from which I am made.

### *The Object and the Event*

To speak of the event as the proper locus of my experience, which is therefore granted to me from elsewhere than from myself, is to speak of an identity of self and thing that requires the participation and activity of both subjects and objects. I can walk over to the other side of the stream only because the bridge affords me this opportunity for actualizing one of my potentials, and the bridge can be a passage way only because in using it as such I actualize this potential in it. If we took away one of these elements, the action itself would not be possible and the eventing of the bridge could not take place. Intentionality is thus neither in me nor in the object, for any action is always a zigzag movement by which “action is slightly overtaken by what it acts upon” (Latour, 2000, p. 298). What acts is thus always the product of “an actor” who is located within a whole series of actions that did not emanate from the actor. I cannot visit the Eiffel Tower, for example, without the actions of the architects who built the Tower, an airplane that can fly me there, and money to enter the premises, as it is these things that allow me to be a “visitor” of this tower. Objects are thus not just dead, inert or inactive, but actors in their own right since they can “authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid,

and so on” (Latour, 2005, p. 74). They thus allow me to come into being through particular subjective possibilities which they afford me.

One example of this agency of objects is given by Langdon Winner (1980), when he recounts the real story of a bridge that was built on a passageway leading to a beach, thus instituting a particular locale for things and human beings. The bridge gathered asphalt and cement into a particular form and function that allowed these materials to act as vehicles for transportation and decongestion. The bridge was built tall enough to allow passenger vehicles to pass through, but low enough that busses could not. In this sense the bridge effectively created a locale in which the relatively affluent people who owned their own cars could go to the beach, while the relatively poor who had to take the bus could not. The bridge, we could therefore say, was not simply a universal “thing” placed in a pre-existing three-dimensional space, but a veritable event that brought cement and asphalt into a world and both opened up and closed down particular possibilities of being a subject. The bridge itself was nothing without these elements that defined its very identity as an event, but these elements in turn were nothing if the bridge itself did not bring them together in a “site” or “gathering.” To play along with the example, the bridge as a happening does not preclude me from acting as a subject, but my subjectivity will now emanate either from the fact that I can pass under the bridge or not pass under the bridge, and thus from the fact that I am either part of a disenfranchised group of “poor” subjects or a privileged group of well-to-do subjects. Taking on one of these identities, which the bridge has constituted, can then become the basis of yet other events. Finding myself claimed by the bridge as disenfranchised, might spur me into political action to have the bridge torn down, but this would require a political event which would have to tear the bridge away from the event of being a passage way and reinstitute it in the event of an injustice.

### **Conclusion: Implications of Studying Phenomena as Events**

What has been brought about by the reduction of experience to the level of the event is a new realm of phenomenal experience that is irreducible to the actions of a subject and the causalities of an object. We have specified the nature of this experience as the happening of a time and space



(a temporalizing and a taking place) through which subjects and object can come into being as discrete identities. We have spoken of this event as having the temporality of a non-present moment and as having the spatiality of a “locale” or “gathering” between subjective and objective elements. In and through this temporality and spatiality both subjects and objects become robbed of their primacy as self-identical beings. Now instead, they always “owe” part of their identity to that elusive event that keeps bringing them into being in new ways and ultimately always deprives them of becoming stabilized things in themselves.

In this understanding of lived experience, it is impossible to make a clear-cut separation between what is objective and what is subjective. The materiality of the experience seems to reside not in subjective projections or in an objective world, but in a “middle realm” where subject and object have not yet emerged as separate. Instead, subject and object participate in the individuation of a “thirdness” which sustains them both.

To illustrate this, we can take the example of a painting, and ask: what is the painting as an event? As an event, its essence resides neither in the artist nor in the artwork, neither in the spectator nor in the visible spectacle. As an event, the painting requires both subject and object to be what it is, but it is not simply defined by them, for the painting also happens to subject and object, draws them together and individuates them as these particular subjects and objects. The reality of the painting is thus essentially that of a happening in which both subject and object partake and without which they could not be the subjects and objects they are. Subject and object are thus much like the colors of a painting. They need the canvas of the painting as the “middle” that allows the blueness of the subject to become the blueness of an ocean and the redness of the object to become the redness of a rose. Only through the amalgam of the painting does subject and object become individuated and cease to be abstract and empty concepts. Something had to come to pass *between* them that provided them with an opportunity to achieve their individuation.

In a presentation I gave at the University of Dallas, I tried to bring this point home through an example from the television series *Frasier*. In one particular episode of this show (Keenan, J. & MacKenzie, P. C., 1996), Frasier agrees to use his psychiatric understanding of the mind to help his “manager,” Bebe, break her smoking addiction. At one point, as Frasier and Bebe are sitting at the dinner table, Frasier asks her “What do you like so much

about smoking?” In response to this question, Bebe does not give a natural scientific account of the causes of her addiction. She does not mention smoking as a “positive reinforcement” and does not talk about “the reinforcement enhancing effect” of the secondary environmental enjoyments that come from smoking. She does, however, provide a description of the lived experience of smoking. As she says:

I like the way a fresh firm pack feels in my hand. I like peeling away that little piece of cellophane and seeing it twinkle in the light. I like coaxing that first sweet round cylinder out of its hiding place and bringing it slowly up to my lips, striking a match, watching it burst into a perfect little flame and knowing that soon that flame will be inside me. I love the first puff, bringing it into my lungs. Little fingers of smoke filling me, caressing me, feeling that warmth penetrate me deeper and deeper till I think I'm going to burst. Then whoosh! . . . watching it flow out of me in a lovely sinuous cloud, no two ever quite the same.

This description brings out a reality that is irreducible to the objects that cause it or make it up, *yet is it simply a subjective experience?* It is true that Bebe is the one recounting the story and the one who remembers how it has felt to smoke in the past. But is Bebe simply recounting her experience or is she *becoming someone* in and through the experience and the recounting of the experience? Does she exist first, in order to ‘have’ or recount an experience, or does she partake in an event that expresses itself through her? We can say that this is simply an insignificant question about semantics, but it makes a whole lot of difference in terms of how we study lived experience. Do we want to simply define experience through a reference to what it meant to a subject, or do we want to also trace how the subject who is ‘having’ the experience first comes into being as a future for the thing by being invited into a particular mode of being a self?

In the case of Bebe, we can say that Bebe receives herself as who she is in the experience of smoking. Smoking represents the otherness through which she can become herself by being called into one or the other horizon of the cigarette. The cigarette and Bebe here form a unique event. One without the other would not this particular experience make. The cigarette is not an object until it grabs a hold of a way that Bebe can be herself in relation to it. It shows itself only as what it allows Bebe to become. Yet Bebe cannot become this particular subject without the twinkling cellophane,

the match that lights the cigarette, and the sinuous clouds of the smoke. The experience itself, we can therefore say, exists only in the inter-action: in the way subject and object mutually appropriate each and cohere in and through a specific event or gathering.

Instead of starting from the closed circuit of subjective experience, a phenomenology of the event thus starts from the idea that to be a subject is always to receive oneself from elsewhere or from outside oneself. This outside, in relation to which I can first have an inside, always arrives at me from a future that is not exclusively my own. In other words, I do not simply project a future for things and others, but also receive my possible projects, and thus myself, *from* things and others. Hence, the thing and the other, which together represent an otherness, make impossible the attempt to recapture an experience with reference to the subject exclusively. Experience itself does not belong to the subject, for while I am instrumental in bringing it about and necessary for its actualization, I am also in it and of it. I always already owe a debt to it and can thus no longer serve as its ground. Essentially this means that who I am or who I become is always to some extent a product of certain serendipities with others and things which I do not control, but which I can, to some extent, invite.

The event, however, must not be raised to the status of its own objective order that can be thought of outside of a relation to the subject who wills, feels, thinks, and acts. It depends on a subject in order to become itself and it can therefore not be confused with a causality that acts on me from without or simply happens to me as an accident of nature. While causalities are mechanistic and predictable, the event is always a subjective transformation that is unpredictable or unforeseeable, but which always involves me to some extent. I am thus not completely subjugated to the event. I find myself within it as an agent who acts. My actions, however, become possible only from the fact that I have already been acted on and have thus been called into a situation that requires a response. The image that comes to mind here is of the action of a soccer player who is passed the ball from one of his team mates. The soccer player is not here some independent agent who acts on the world. He is called into action by the other who has made it imperative that he act. Several actions are possible to the soccer player, but they remain bound by the situation into which the soccer player has been called. While the soccer player *will* act, we can say that he did not act completely autonomously but responded to an action chain which he did

not initiate and to a situation he could not have created of his own. His action was already an inter-action. He was made into an agent by virtue of an event arriving at him and calling him into action from elsewhere.

We can see here how the event always involves an element of “surprise,” which I think we could even go as far as to include as one of its defining characteristics. The surprise is not mere happenstance, as we might define it if we were to simply presuppose an ontology of the natural world. It is not a mere accident of nature that comes completely unbidden and can be explained without reference to subjective experience and the meanings things have for a subject. The surprise is *the aion* that brings me into being from a future I could not predict. The surprise, however, is always defined in relation to a past from which I direct myself and into which I have already been re-collected, invited or claimed. I do therefore not receive the event in a completely passive way. It does not simply happen to me, I am involved in it, it calls me into action—through it, I become myself, able to think new thoughts and do new things. The surprise has the phenomenal nature of an event because no subject who is ever surprised is not also changed by the surprise, that is, either granted new horizons for being a self or bestowed a new interpretation of the past. The surprise does not happen to me as much as it happens through me, requiring as part of its ability to show itself, a change in my very subjectivity.

By defining the subject matter of phenomenology as that of the event, we have opened up a new understanding of what needs to be studied or brought into view by the phenomenological method. While we can still start from subjective descriptions of experiences, no longer do we privilege the subject as the reference point of meaning, but seek to account for how it is that the subject could come to occupy the position or the point of view allowed *by* the meaning. In reading an account of a particular experience we are thus trying to articulate the experience from the point of view of the “middle” rather than the subject or the object. This requires a reflection that transcends the perspective of the psychological reduction. Essential forms and structures now become essential forms and structures of the ways subjects and objects can come together into relatively stable, and repeatable constellations of experience. Such constellations are by necessity abstractions, since any and every event is unique and never repeats exactly the same. Nevertheless, underlying the variation of discrete instances of the event, we do indeed find a variety of underlying types of

events. If we did not, we would not be able to distinguish between an event of friendship and an event of animosity, for example, and all meaning would collapse. And yet since events are never contained within the a priori structure of a subject who 'has' an experience or a definite world of things that dictate how the subject can experience, the essence of the event remains that of an excess that will continue to bring subject and object together in new ways and can never be captured and displayed fully. Through such a perspective, which posits nothing outside of experience as an invariant frame of reference, the phenomenal world is now free to become that of life as a perpetual creative process of becoming.

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